Citroën C5 Aircross – Long Term Road Test

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Chris Adamson samples Citroën's innovative C5 Aircross during an extended road test...

(All words and photographs by Chris, except overall dashboard shot, courtesy of Citroën and taken by Matt Howell).

Six months ago I first drove the Citroën C5 Aircross and if you have been following this website will have read that I wasn't entirely convinced by the novel hydraulic suspension – but a longer period in company with the Aircross has changed my mind somewhat.

When you first get to grips with a different set-up on a vehicle it can be both intimidating

and off-putting and perhaps my immediate impressions were coloured by the fact that my everyday car has a much firmer conventional suspension layout.

However, as I also own and drive an MGF fitted with Hydragas suspension I hadn't expected the C5 to be a totally unknown quantity and now, with two months of living with the Aircross, it isn't and the ride characteristics have become the norm – so I am reappraising the C5 from a new perspective.

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Yes, the ride quality and body movement is still softer than most cars but the excessive

movement I first experienced isn't as noticeable – part of this could be the fact that for my longer test I had use of a diesel powered Aircross that is slightly heavier than the petrol alternative I first tested and therefore squats down more on the suspension.

Apart from the lurid Volcano Red colour (optional metallic paint) the Aircross isn't as extravagantly styled as many recent Citroëns and over time the items such as the lower side panel guards become part and parcel of the overall look – and they actually work at keeping door entrances clear of mud and grime.

Its tall stance and broad flat bonnet are great for forward vision, but the perspective to the front is foreshortened, making you grateful for the all-round parking sensors.

Visibility is less practical to the rear where the letterbox style rear screen gives only limited access to what is happening behind – again technology comes to the rescue thanks to the rear camera that you come to rely on when parking.

Front seating is comfortable and functional, although over time you could wish for a bit more side support and the dual leather and fabric finish looks susceptible to long-term wear.

But it does put you in a good driving position, looking out over a high and rather slab-like dashboard that is brutal in its execution. With a high and deep central console (lots of useful stowage space) this does serve to enclose front seat occupants which can, for some, feel a little claustrophobic.

Some of this is alleviated by the installation of a huge panoramic sunroof that as well as having blinds, also opens for additional ventilation.

Ahead of the steering wheel is a 12.3 inch digital instrument display that can be changed to suit the requirements of individual drivers – I rather like this personalisation function as not everyone has the same priorities for instant information.

Alongside it the eight inch central display touch screen; once mastered, is easy to use and

soon becomes very familiar, allowing quick adjustments to a variety of on-board functions.

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Back seat passengers are provided with three individual seats (this is by far my favoured layout on any vehicle) which allows for greater variation on the seating and load carrying functions.

Sadly the seats don’t fold down completely flat but there is still enough capacity (a maximum of 1620 litres or 57.21 cu.ft) to fulfill most family requirements, as a visit to my local civic amenity / recycling centre proved.

Even with the seats in place the boot is extremely deep and spacious and the two positon floor panel is a useful feature allowing the luggage area to go from 580 litres (20.48 cu.ft) to 720 litres (25.43 cu.ft).

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Accessing the boot is via a powered tailgate (fitted on Flair + models) that has a key fob remote and sensor operating function (i.e just wave your foot under the rear bumper and it opens like a magic trick). I must admit that previously I had considered this sort of system an extravagance but when your arms are full of shopping it is a boon and something you start to miss on other cars.

This is one of the extras fitted to the Flair+ specification; others include active cruise control, keyless entry and start, voice recognition for the six speaker DAB Radio, Citroën Connect Navigation, intelligent beam headlights and front fog lights with cornering function.

This is on top of standard features such as multi-function trip computer, electrically heated and operated door mirrors, electric driver seat, Bluetooth connection, Apple Carplay and Android Auto.

Distinguishing it from the outside are the gloss black rear bumper facia, gloss black grille and twin effect exhaust pipes.

On the Road

Although currently out of favour, the 1.5 litre four-cylinder high pressure direct injection common rail turbocharged diesel installed in this C5 proved to be efficient and not quite the environmental pariah diesel is being portrayed.

In operation and even on a cold start the unit is surprisingly quiet, so much so I had to keep reminding myself (especially when refuelling) that is was a diesel and at only just over 100

g/km on CO2 isn’t as polluting as imagined.

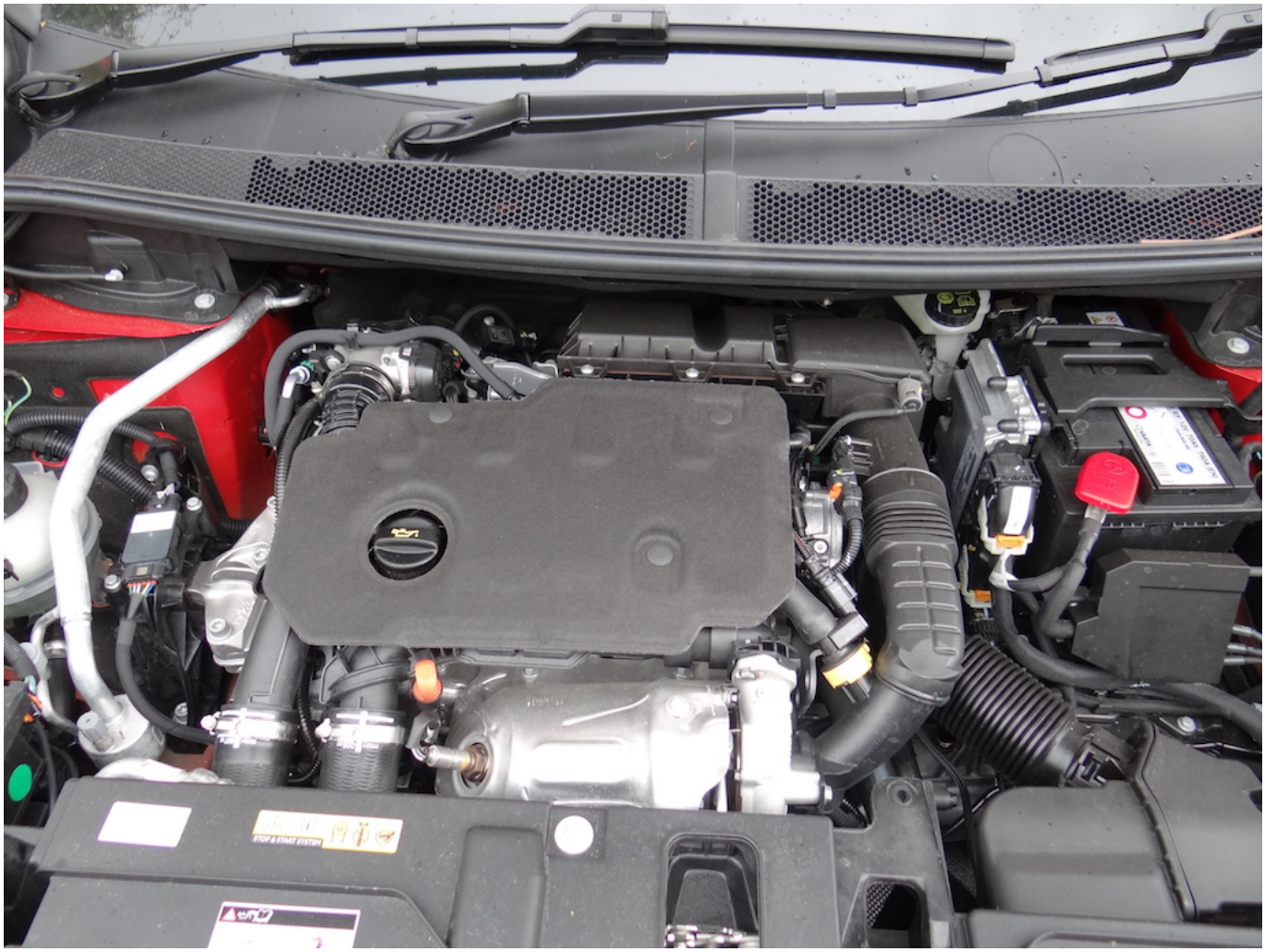
Loads of torque from relatively low revs means that it has good initial punch away from standstill and then gradually builds its performance. It’s nothing spectacular in the speed stakes but very tractable and useable in most everyday situations.

My one complaint is the rather high positioning of the gear lever in the central console which for my six foot frame made the positon a little awkward and the gear selection is a bit notchy so needs some precise positioning.

Over a wide variety of journeys, both short and long distance, urban and rural, the C5 consistently returned 50 to 51 mpg on every journey, even with the use of the economy engine setting and the automatic stop-start engine function.

A few times on route the average crept up to 58 mpg (especially on sustained motoring cruising) but fell back by the time I had eventually arrived at my destination.

These figures are very much in line with the real-world figures quoted by Citroën which is always good to discover and it’s nice to have a consistent return consumption to judge travelling distances on.



As mentioned at the start, the Aircross ride has a bit more movement in the suspension that normal thanks to the double progressive hydraulic cushions installed with the Macpherson strut front and single progressive hydraulic cushion on the independent trailing arm rear suspension.

But you get used to this very quickly and it actually becomes rather comfortable and at the end of my two months it felt perfectly normal.

With the light and variable assistance electric power steering the Aircross feels nimble despite its bulk and it has a surprisingly good turning circle (10.4 metres or 34.12 feet)

which proves invaluable in tight parking situations.

Against this, the assistance at speed loses a bit of definition and on fast flowing country lanes needs a gentle hand not to over-correct direction changes as the body dips into and out of bends.

VERDICT

My long-term experience with the C5 Aircross has proved that first impressions can be deceptive and that over time you can come to accept and adapt to the different driving characteristics of any vehicle.

The C5 Aircross isn't a perfect vehicle and I still have some niggles with it but, at the end of two months, I found I was quietly enjoying living with it and there were no arguments that it did everything that I needed of it.

It might just be on my shortlist when I next come to change cars.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Citroën C5 Aircross Flair+ Blue DHDI 130

Engine: 1499cc

Transmission: Six-speed manual

Power: 129 bhp @ 3,750 rpm

Torque: 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) @ 1,750rpm

Performance:

0 – 62 mph: 10.4 seconds

Top Speed: 117mph

Fuel Consumption:

Combined (WLTP Figures): 48.2 mpg – 55.1 mpg

Real-life figure achieved during two month test: 50 to 51 mpg (with a brief best average of 58 mpg)

CO2 Emissions: 110 g/km

Price (On the Road as tested): £29,775