Citroën C5 Aircross – Road Test

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Fit for purpose – the new Citroën C5 Aircross SUV cum MPV...

...assessed by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The new Citroën C5 Aircross was launched in the UK in early February this year and it gave the French brand its entry into the medium-sized SUV market. But this vehicle's design comes with a twist thanks to Citroën's expertise with producing a long-line of MPV people carriers.

Whilst the exterior and front interior design is very much a modern but conventional SUV, the rear seating arrangements and load carrying space is more MPV. So it meets the need for the must-have SUV type vehicle with the more practical needs for people and load carrying combinations. It's definitely a case of fashion and function. And for good measure it also includes Citroën's Advance Comfort programme with comfy seating and cushioned suspension. Prices range from £23,830 to £32,730.

I briefly had an early test drive at the media launch of the C5 Aircross just prior to it going on sale but it is only when you get to ‘live’ with the vehicle for a longer spell can you appreciate, or not, its true capabilities and practicalities.

Whereas my first drive at the media launch was around the Windsor area, just two of us onboard with no luggage and driving on very busy traffic congested roads, in the expected best selling 1.5 litre four cylinder BlueHDi 130 hp turbodiesel unit with the mid range Flair specification and a price tag of £26,830, my very recent longer driving spell was with the 1.2 litre, three cylinder 130 hp PureTech turbo petrol unit with the current top Fair Plus spec level with the price tag of £28,330. Fully loaded with the family onboard and with all our luggage this trip to/from Cornwall was going to give the new C5 Aircross a proper workout.



With the demise in demand for diesel powered vehicles the 1.2 litre PureTech petrol engine seems the best current power option to me. It's won numerous Engine of the Year awards, it's highly rated by most of us motoring pundits and it's widely used throughout the PSA Group's range of brands and their models from hatchbacks to larger SUVs.

The Citroën C5 Aircross uses the same EMP2 platform and many of the same engines and other components as the award winning Peugeot 3008, DS7 Crossback and Vauxhall Grandland X. Other competitors in this mid-sized SUV sector include the best selling Nissan Qashqai, Ford Kuga, Kia Sportage, Renault Kadjar, Hyundai Tucson, SEAT Ateca, Skoda Karoq, VW Tiguan and moving up to premium brands – the Audi Q3, BMW X1, and Volvo

XC40. As the C5 Aircross has MPV genes then the brand's excellent C4 SpaceTourer and C4 Grand SpaceTourer five and seven seater MPVs should also be considered with the same engine options, similar spec levels and marginally less expensive prices.

For the C5 Aircross there is a choice of three specification and equipment levels – Feel, Flair and Flair Plus and numerous personalisation options, bodywork and interior colour choices plus technology packs. The EU 6.2 compliant engine choices, all with Stop/Start function, are the petrol 1.2 PureTech 130 hp six speed manual and 1.6 PureTech 180 hp eight speed auto. Diesel options are 1.5 BlueHDi 130 hp six speed manual/eight speed auto and 2.0 BlueHDi 180 hp auto. Grip Control with Descent Control for added front wheel drive traction and grippier tyres is an option starting from £395 – depending upon the size of wheels. It is only available for some auto transmission models and around 5% of buyers are expected to take up this option. A PHEV plug-in hybrid model will become available early in 2020.

Exterior styling wise the new five door Citroën C5 Aircross SUV utilises the brand's latest bold face design, high bonnet line and sleek lighting units. There is the usual SUV rising waistline side profile but the usual slab-sided body panels are given a lift by the addition of Citroën's signature Airbump protective lower door/sill panels. Personalisation options might also play a major role in differentiating the C5 Aircross from its many competitors. There are a total of 30 exterior colour combinations for the bodywork with a choice of wheel sizes and the usual roof bars add to its dynamic styling, but these are not new in this sector.

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Inside the personalisation choices continue with a variety of colour combinations and trim and material choices, it's just a matter of detail and choice. The quality seems competitive although it sets no new standards and there are some areas, like the door cards, that are less impressive for quality.

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Comfort is a high priority feature with Flair and Fair Plus versions having Citroën's Advanced Comfort seating. The three individual sliding, folding and reclining rear seats bring an element of MPV versatility to this SUV. The load space ranges from 580 to 720 litres (20.48 to 25.43 cu.ft) with the rear seats in use and up to 1,630 litres (57.56 cu.ft) with the seats folded down. There is a large panoramic opening sunroof measuring 1,120 mm (3.67 ft) by 840 mm (2.76 ft) available as an option on Flair versions and standard for Flair Plus models.

Under the skin the vehicle uses the brand's new suspension system with Progressive Hydraulic Cushions for the bump stops. Each suspension strut has a hydraulic cushion pad top and bottom. During the compression and decompression strokes of damper unit these pads help iron-out all but the worst of impacts from deep potholes and generally provide compliant and well controlled ride comfort. However with the soft riding suspension units there is a limited amount of cornering bodyroll evident – but it's not enough to upset the vehicle's handling or passengers' stomachs.

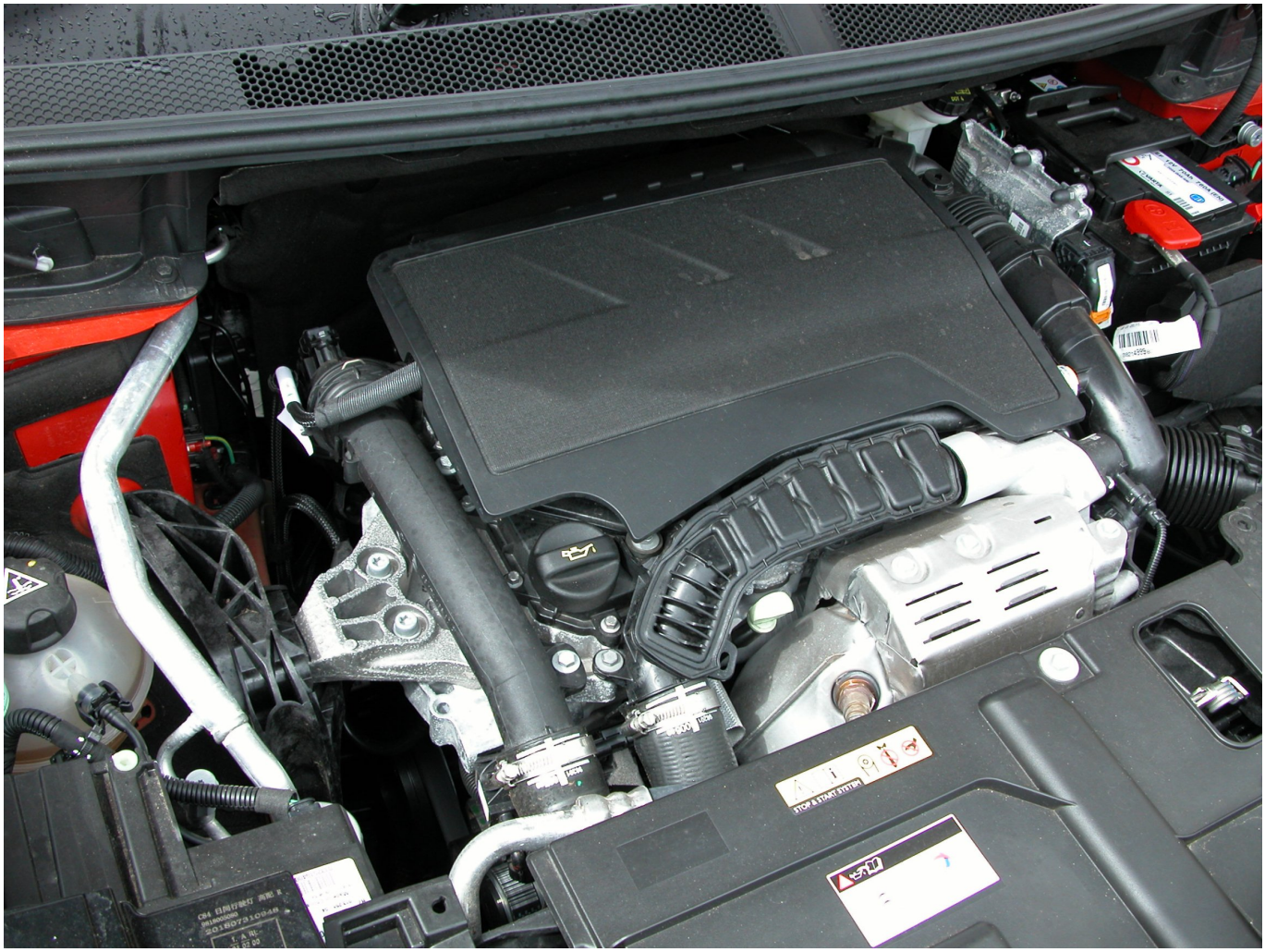
Standard on all versions is a central 8-inch touchscreen used to control the vehicle's primary functions. Unfortunately like most PSA Group models, and other manufacturers' touchscreen functions, this means that the most-used tasks such as adjusting the heating, ventilation, air-con, radio settings and more, all have to be done via the screen which is not user-friendly, convenient or potentially safe. A 12.3 inch customable TFT instrument display, active cruise control, auto dual zone air-con, rear parking sensors, Advanced Active Safety Brake, Active Lane Departure Warning, Active Blind Spot Monitoring and Collision Risk Warning are standard. Highway Driver Assist, which is a level-two autonomous driving system, Extended Traffic Sign Recognition and Speed Recommendation plus Intelligent Beam Headlights are standard on Flair Plus versions. A180 degree colour Reversing Camera with Top Rear Vision is standard for Flair and Flair Plus versions.

However heated front seats seem to be standard fit in other mid to top spec SUVs these days but surprisingly the C5 Aircross Flair Plus version I tested doesn't have them as standard. That's no big-deal at this time of year; however given the harsh winter we have

recently endured this heated seat function is an extra cost option to the tune of £1,770. BUT it comes as part of a package which also includes full leather upholstery and a massage function for the driver's seat. Something Citroen needs to address, heated front seats as standard or at a lesser cost please.

Connectivity functions are a 'must-have' these days so the C5 Aircross obliges with

Citroën Connect Nav with the excellent and really useful TomTom Live updates for Flair and Flair Plus spec levels, Citroën Connect Box emergency & assistance system is standard for all as is Mirror Screen function, compatible with Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and MirrorLink. Wireless Smartphone Charging is optional on Flair and standard on Flair Plus versions and ConnectedCAM (dash camera) is a £200 option on Feel models but standard on Flair and Flair Plus versions.



For my family holiday living with the C5 Aircross real-life driving experience I drove the 1.2-litre 130 hp PureTech triple-cylinder petrol engine version with its standard six speed manual gearbox. With 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,750 rpm this unit is responsive providing full use is made of the gearbox keeping the unit in its optimum power delivery band. Even fully loaded it cruised effortlessly at high motorway speeds but the winding and hilly Cornish roads meant I got very familiar with lots of manual gearchanges. Third, fourth and fifth gears were close-ratios needed to keep the engine within its most user-friendly powerband whilst sixth gear erred towards an overdrive ratio which provided relaxed top speed cruising. Most noticeable was the vehicle's excellent ride comfort even over badly damaged road surfaces and its neat and agile handling even when fully loaded.

It’s a really easy vehicle to drive and very practical.



Top speed is 117 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 10.5 seconds, very much in keeping with the 1.5 litre 130 hp turbodiesel engine I tried earlier in the year at the media launch. The 1.2 litre petrol engine has official the new WLTP Combined Cycle fuel economy figures of 36.6 to 44.2 mpg and my extended spell of fully loaded family motoring returned an overall average of 39.1 mpg – but up to 42.1 mpg for the two long motorway journeys to and from Cornwall. These are really impressive real-life figures I think and very close to the new official WLTP Combined Cycle ones. With CO2 emissions of 119 g/km VED

First Year road tax costs £170 before the £145 Standard rate cost is applied. Company car drivers will pay 27% Benefit-in-Kind tax, insurance is Group 17E and warranty is an ungenerous three years/60,000 miles.

VERDICT

It’s perhaps the small differences such as comfort and versatile seating combinations that add up to a larger reason to buy the new C5 Aircross over longer serving and well established competitor models.

For: Combines SUV styling with MPV practicality, ride comfort, seat comfort, wide range of engine choices, specification levels and personalisation options, roomy with versatile three rear individual seats, excellent TomTom Live traffic updates system.

Against: Some body roll when fully loaded during cornering, too many functions have to be operated via the touchscreen, cheap feeling plastic trim around the door cards, heated front seats not standard even on this top spec version and only available as part of an expensive options pack, ungenerous warranty.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Citroën C5 Aircross Flair Plus, 130 hp, turbo petrol, six speed manual.

Price: £28,330.

Engine/transmission: 1.2 litre, three cylinder, PureTech turbo-petrol, 130 hp, 230 Nm

(170 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual, 2WD with Stop/Start.

Performance: 117 mph, 0 – 62mph 10.5 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 36.6 to 44.2 mpg (39.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, VED First Year road tax £170, Standard rate £145, BiK company car tax 27%.

Insurance Group: 17E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,500 mm (14.76 ft), W 1,859 mm (6.10 ft), H 1,670 mm (5.48 ft), boot/load space 580 – 1,630-litres (20.48 to 57.56 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,350 kg (2,976 lb), five doors/five seats.