DS 4 First Impressions

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THE NEW DS 4, ONE MODEL WITH TWO BODY STYLE OPTIONS

First drive by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

DS, the standalone premium brand under the parentage of Citroën, is introducing their latest DS 4 range in November 2015 with two distinct and stylish five door body styles, the DS 4 Hatchback and the DS Crossback; all are front wheel drive. The latter version in terms

of styling and a 30mm (1.2 in) higher riding height leans towards the now popular Urban Crossover sales sector. DS say Crossovers now account for 30% of the premium compact hatchback market and also premium car brands account for 30% of sales in the family hatch/crossover C-segment of the new car market.

Adopting the approach of the right product at the right time at the right price, DS prices start at £19,495 for the Hatchback and £21,745 for the Crossback.

Alastair Fairgrieve, Product Manager for the DS brand in the UK, said in a full year they will sell a total of 4,000 DS models and 25% of them will be the Crossback version. This total for the two versions is, he said, a considerable increase over the 2,700 units of the outgoing DS 4 Hatchback that the company will sell this year.

He added that UK sales are expected to see a 50/50 split between retail and fleet/business customers and overall 20% of customers will choose a petrol engine model but 80% are expected to order a model with a diesel unit. When it comes to the choice of specification levels, the DS 4 Hatchback has two; Elegance which will appeal to 40% of buyers and Prestige which will be the choice of 35% of customers. Crossback has just the one high level of spec, based on the Prestige level.

Alastair Fairgrieve said the DS 4 models will compete against premium models such as the Audi A3 Sportback, BMW 1 Series, Mercedes A-Class and the Volvo V40. He expects sales for the DS 4 Hatchback will be mainly to conquest and fleet/business customers and the Crossback version will appeal to current DS 4 owners whose priorities are comfort, style and high specification.

In Europe the DS brand currently has the DS 3 chic sporty supermini sized three door Hatchback and Cabriolet models, the new DS 4 five door Hatchback and Crossback versions and the DS 5 Hatchback which is a sleekly styled executive spec. large five door Hatchback. In the UK the DS 3 models account for 18,000 annual sales and the DS 5 around 1,000 units. Next year’s annual UK DS sales will be in the region of 24,000 registrations. Notably the

UK is the largest market in the world for DS 3 sales and this country is in the top three for global DS sales after China and France.



Currently DS models are Citroën based, but in 2018 we will see the arrival of their first of six new DS standalone model ranges with the line-up being complete by 2020. Currently DS models can be bought via most of the 180 Citroën dealerships but the brand is in the process of appointing 80 to 90 DS exclusive outlets in 2016. This could be a separate part of an existing Citroën dealership, a standalone DS sales/service centre, a DS centre associated with another brand, or DS centres in high footfall outlet shopping complexes.

The standalone DS brand was founded on the 1 June 2014 with a stated ambition to revive

the tradition of premium vehicles from the French automotive industry. More than 580,000 DS vehicles have been sold since then. The DS brand takes its name from the iconic original Citroën DS saloon which was launched in 1955 – so 2015 is the 60th anniversary of the DS name.

The new DS 4 range of five door Hatchback and Crossback versions feature the new 'DS Wings' family face first introduced earlier this year with the larger DS 5 models. This signature feature includes a vertical grille with the DS monogram. New LED Vision headlights combine three LED modules with a Xenon directional module and new LED scrolling directional indicators. In total there are 84 LEDs at the front of the car. The side profile of the car retains the four passenger door coupé shape, with a rising waistline and a roof line which lowers towards the rear. The rear passenger doors are narrow and are really designed for occasional use – as are the rear seats, leg and headroom wise.

As with the previous DS 4, the windows of the rear doors do not open, a nod to its coupé layout. Care needs to be taken opening the rear doors because their oddball pointed shape in the top rear corner, which houses the concealed door handles, can clash with the person opening the door or another vehicle parked alongside.

A key buying feature for some customers will be the personalisation options and these include two-tone paintwork with a choice of four colours for the roof, rear spoiler and door mirrors. There are nine body colours and up to 38 colour combinations are available. The Crossback differs slightly from the Hatchback – by having alternative styled front and rear spoilers finished in black, and grey roof rails. The Crossback also has black door mirrors and door sills, wheelarch trims and a 30mm (1.2in) increase in ride height. Even with these changes it is difficult to differentiate the two versions at a mere glance. There is not enough to justify the extra £1,000 it costs to buy the Crossback over the similarly equipped Hatchback with Prestige specification.



Inside, the styling is more or less the same for both versions and certainly the interiors are stylish and of seemingly good quality. Most noticeable is the large panoramic windscreen which gives great visibility and there are individual sliding rigid blinds and folding sun shields. A new 7.0-inch colour touch-screen takes centre stage of the fascia. This provides access to all vehicle functions from navigation to infotainment, requiring 12 fewer buttons on the centre console. It can also control functions such as Mirror Link that duplicates Android or iOS smartphone content to the touchscreen. DS Connect Box is also included and this includes SOS and Assistance Pack, Monitoring Pack for car functions, Mapping Pack which can send an email if the vehicles leaves a given area and a Tracking Pack in case of theft. Also available is Apple CarPlay, the first DS model to get this function. All models have electrically operated front windows, air con, on-board computer, cruise control and other items as standard or as an option including push-button start/stop, keyless entry, reversing camera and blind spot monitoring.

When it comes to engine choices the vast majority of customers are forecast to choose a 1.6 BlueHDi diesel engine. That I can understand for high mileage fleet and business users but the latest 1.2-litre, PureTech, three-cylinder THP turbocharged 130hp petrol engine is a gem and International Engine of the Year, and it powers the least expensive models in the Hatchback and Crossback ranges. This engine produces 230Nm of torque from 1,750rpm, has stop/start and a close ratio six-speed manual gearbox. Officially this unit, depending on the model chosen, will return around 55.4 mpg in the Combined Cycle and 119/120g/km of CO2 so VED road tax is £0 First Year and £30 in following years. On test around the winding country roads of Wiltshire and Berkshire this engine proved to be very responsive; smooth, quiet and fast for its size, with zero to 62mph taking 9.9 seconds in the Hatchback model with a top speed of 123mph. Our spirited test drive fuel economy was 39.1mpg overall but it was in the mid 40s when just cruising along. Impressed we certainly were and it's £1,750 cheaper to buy than the lowest priced diesel engine.

Other engine options are, depending on the model and specification level chosen, a 1.6 THP 165hp turbo petrol with auto transmission, a 1.6 THP 210hp turbo petrol with a six-speed gearbox, a 1.6 BlueHDi 120hp turbodiesel which is expected to be the best selling engine overall and has manual or auto gearbox choices, a 1.6 BlueHDi 150hp turbodiesel with a manual gearbox and a 2.0 BlueHDi 180hp, turbodiesel automatic. CO2 emissions across the range start at 100g/km for the 120hp diesel and rise to 138g/km for the new 210hp petrol unit.

We also tried the Crossback model with the expected best selling 1.6-litre 120hp turbodiesel unit with stop and start and a six speed manual gearbox. With 300Nm of torque from 1,750rpm it was responsive with linear power delivery, relatively quiet and I would suggest easy to live with. It will officially return 72.4mpg with the manual gearbox. Our test drive in town traffic and on rural country roads returned only 42.1mpg so for a diesel that seems too far away from the official figure. However CO2 emissions are low at 103g/km so VED road tax is £0 for the first year, and then £20 for year two onwards.

With softer suspension settings than the previous DS 4 the road imperfections are absorbed

to a greater extent and the ride quality has improved although deeper potholes still send shudders through the bodyshell. The Hatchback sits lower on the road so it hugs the ground, giving good cornering grip with little body roll. The Crossback though, with its higher ground clearance, is less surefooted and the ride felt firmer. The steering response for both versions had a tendency for strong self-centring which needed care during higher cornering speeds but generally it was precise although with no great feedback.

VERDICT

For: More equipment, more personalisation options, more on-board techno gadgets, plush interior, wide range of engines, potentially low running costs, very impressive 1.2-petrol engine, distinctive styling.

Against: Too little difference in exterior styling between the Hatchback and Crossback versions, 4-door coupe body design restricts rear access and rear seat space, fixed side rear windows, smallish boot with no height adjustable load floor, improved comfort but still prone to a lumpy ride.

Overall the new DS 4 models are certainly improved and different to what is on offer from mainstream premium brands. They are quirky and should appeal because of their distinctive differences to competitor models. I’m not convinced the more costly Crossback offers much advantage over the Hatchback because it is not different enough in terms of styling and interior layout to carry its Crossover label.





MILESTONES/WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF

DS 4 Hatchback, (best selling version), Prestige, PureTech THP 130hp petrol, manual

Engine: 1199cc, three cylinder THP turbocharged direct injection petrol, stop/start

Power: 130 bhp @ 5,500 rpm

Torque: 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) from 1,750rpm

Transmission: 6-speed manual

0-62 mph: 9.9 seconds

Top speed: 123 mph

Fuel consumption, Combined Cycle: 54.3mpg (39.1mpg on test)

CO2 emissions: 120g/km, VED road tax £0/£30, BIK company car tax 19%

Insurance group: 19E

Warranty: 3-years/60,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,284mm (14ft 7in), W 1,810mm (5ft 11.3in), H 1,497mm (4ft 11in) , boot/load space 385 to 1,021-litres.

Price: £20,745