DS 5 Road Test

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Author: David Miles

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Smooth Driver – Rough Rider – The DS 5

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test drives the latest suave machine from DS.

DS 5 – “What’s that?”, I can hear you say. Well it’s the top of the DS range, and DS – if you remember – is the stylish premium brand arm now divorced from the Citroën line-up, but it still lives under the PSA Peugeot- Citroën roof. As of March 2017 PSA now owns GM’s Vauxhall and Opel brands, making them second in size in Europe to the VW Group of brands.

Now marketed as a premium brand in its own right the DS model line up still follows the Citroën/Peugeot ranges in donor vehicle types, with the DS3 three door supermini Hatchback, DS 3 Cabriolet, DS 4 Hatchback/Crossback and the larger DS 5 five door Hatchback. A large DS 7 Crossback SUV made its debut at this year’s Geneva Motor Show

and will be in the UK next year.

Reverting (confusingly) back to its Citroën roots, the DS initials of course come from the famous Citroën DS executive, aerodynamic series of saloons, estates and convertibles which first appeared in 1955, and production lasted for 20 years. Apart from their iconic styling the original DS was famous for its magic carpet ride qualities with its height-adjustable self-levelling hydropneumatic suspension – and this is something the new DS 5 desperately needs.

To call today's DS 5 'a hatchback' makes it sound a bit everyday cheap. It's sort of a hatchback as it has five doors, but it's posher than that with its long wheelbase, and with an elegant coupé roofline; the car is aimed as an alternative to the Audi A5 Sportback and BMW 4 Series Gran Coupé.

Last year in the UK DS new car sales doubled from the brand's first full year of registration to almost 16,000 units, thanks mainly to the popular and sporty DS 3 models. The DS 5 is very much even more of a niche vehicle and a relatively rare sight on our roads.



The latest DS 5 is available with three levels of specification, Elegance, Performance Line and Prestige. Depending on the spec level chosen there are the choice two THP turbo direct injection petrol engines with 165 or 210 hp and three BlueHDi turbodiesels with 120, 150 and 180 hp power outputs. The diesel-electric hybrid 4×4 version has been deleted from the range. Prices start from £27,450 and go up to £33,580. Those now even more important tax-cost CO2 emissions range from 104 up to 144 g/km and insurance groups range from 25E to 34E.

My test car was the top model, not by choice but by availability. It was the Prestige 2.0 litre, BlueHDi 180 hp with Stop & Start and the latest torque converter six-speed auto gearbox

which replaces the old, less smooth, electric automated manual unit. The new gearbox is fitted as standard with this engine and costs the top of the range £33,580 price. With 117 g/km of CO2 emissions the new VED road tax rates from 1 April are £160 for the First Year and then £140 for subsequent years. These have risen from £0 First Year and £30 a year after that. The company car Benefit-in-Kind tax rate has also gone up from 23 to 25%.

The first generation DS 5, wearing the Citroën brand name, was launched in 2011 and in 2015 it received various styling updates, including the new front end face of DS. Citroën chevron badges were replaced by the DS initials and so the DS standalone brand was born.

Whilst in 2011 the Citroen DS 5 impressed us with its classy styling and well-appointed interior backed up by a range of fuel-efficient PSA Group family of engines, it was let down badly by it very poor ride quality, and references were made back to the air-cushion ride qualities of the first DS. For a car wishing to be marketed as a premium product, certainly in ride comfort it didn't get smooth reviews at the time from the motoring media or customers.

In fairness DS took this criticism on-board and in time for the 2015 switch from Citroën to DS branding, and in addition to various styling, specification and equipment enhancements, they changed the suspension system to improve the compliancy of the ride. They used what they call PLV (Pre-loaded Linear Valve) shock absorbers to give a more consistent damping curve, so-say to better absorb bumps and dips on undulating road surfaces. On smooth motorway or better maintained road surfaces the ride quality and stability has been improved but the suspension still cannot absorb even light shocks from potholes. The impacts are heard and felt right throughout the cabin and it is the first thing you notice when you get into the DS 5 to drive it – just how poor the ride is compared with the competition.

The use of 18-inch aluminium alloy wheels shod with low profile 235/45 tyres doesn't help as the wheels are too big and there is not enough depth in the wall of the tyres to help iron-out impacts. I had to be really careful that with the minimal depth of the side wall the alloys

didn’t get damaged hitting the sides of potholes. The DS 5 is all about premium brand luxury travel but it still misses the mark as far as ride comfort and refinement is concerned. In its sector it is usual to find adjustable suspension settings so the current DS 5 needs to be taken back to its original DS roots and adopt more of a magic carpet ride, possibly using the air suspension system from the Citroën C5.

In most other respects the DS 5 lives up to its ‘billing’ as a premium D-segment five door hatchback. Its styling is elegant with its strong front end design and coupé side profile, and the wide stance certainly has kerb appeal. In the front the fascia and seating adopt a twin cockpit design very similar to that used for higher spec Peugeot models. In the rear although the wheelbase is 2,727 mm (8.95 ft) in length the rear seat legroom isn’t plentiful, and the coupé roofline doesn’t provide enough comfortable headroom for tall adult passengers, so limits its use as a business chauffeuring vehicle. Due to the sloping design of the rear tailgate rear view visibility is not brilliant either, and the boot floor is lower than the rear sill, making loading heavy items difficult. Given this is a hatchback with fold-down rear seats I would have expected a more user-friendly approach to load carrying, such as an adjustable height floor commonplace on most hatchbacks/estates these days.

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The Prestige level of specification is high and comprehensive and includes black leather upholstery, noise reducing glass for the front windows, three part glass sunroof with blinds, electric windows, door mirrors, cruise control, air-con – the list is endless. As connectivity items are ‘big’ on the shopping list of ‘must-haves’ these days, DS 5 has Mirror Screen which uses Apple CarPlay and Android MirrorLink smartphone connectivity systems, and DS Connect Box provides an emergency automatic call 24/7. There is a wider range of options as well which includes a colour head-up display which costs £300 – but it should be standard-fit on this version.

The 2.0 litre 180 hp turbodiesel engine is a strong card in the DS 5’s pack of plus points. With an impressive 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, mated with the new six-

speed torque converter automatic gearbox, it provides strong acceleration and is flexible, docile and easy to drive in urban and stop-start traffic conditions. It makes light work of long high speed cruising journeys. Top speed is 137 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 9.2 seconds, not fast but fast enough for the car's status and handling characteristics.

Officially this engine/gearbox pairing has a Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure of 62.8 mpg and my test drive overall figure using all types of roads for long and short journeys was a modest 44 mpg. The CO2 figure is 117 g/km so under the new VED road tax rates in operation for new cars bought from from 1 April 2017 the cost is £160 for the First Year and then £140 for every other year. It used to be £0/£30 so like so many other current new cars the new VED costs are not kind to this model.



VERDICT

Whilst the styling of the DS 5 stands out, with lots of kerb appeal, unfortunately overall it’s not outstanding in its class.

For: Stylish design inside and out, lots of kerb appeal, high spec, strong engine, smooth new automatic gearbox.

Against: Firm uncompromising ride, limited rear seat leg and headroom, limited rear visibility, new higher tax costs.

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

DS 5 Prestige BlueHDi 180 turbodiesel, automatic.

Price: £33,580.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel 180 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six speed automatic.

Performance: 137 mph, 0-62 mph 9.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 62.8 mpg (44 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 117 g/km, new VED from 1.4.17 costs £160 First Year then £140 thereafter, BIK company car tax 25%.

Insurance Group: 33E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,530 mm (14.86 ft), W 1,871 mm (6.14 ft), H 1,539 mm (5.05 ft), boot/load space 465 litres (16.42 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,500 kg (3,307 lb), five doors/five seats.