DS 7 CROSSBACK Prestige PureTech 225 eight speed automatic – Road Test

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It's certainly suave and sophisticated, and incorporates many state-of-the-art features, but what is the 225 bhp petrol-powered DS 7 CROSSBACK Prestige like to drive and to live with?

Kim Henson gives his opinion, after a week of using the model in everyday use...

(All words and photographs by Kim).

The DS 7 CROSSBACK made its UK debut in the spring of this year, and was the first purpose-built stand-alone DS model, whereas previous DS cars of recent times had been

high specification versions of Citroën models. In fact DS Automobiles became a global brand in its own right in 2014.

Of course the original Citroën DS made history in the 1950s as one of the most innovative and stylish cars of its time. These days, within the PSA Peugeot- Citroën Group, the DS brand is positioned at the top, above both Peugeot and Citroën, and is seen as the luxury line.

The DS 7 CROSSBACK luxurious large SUV is being aimed at a very competitive market sector that is also occupied by models from (for example) Audi, BMW, Jaguar, Land Rover (Range Rover Evoque) and Volvo. So the DS 7 has to offer a great deal in order to attract buyers.

Three engine options are offered… The PSA Group's recently developed 130 hp, 1.5 litre, four cylinder BlueHDi turbodiesel, driving through a six speed manual gearbox, the firm's 180 hp, 2.0 litre BlueHDi turbodiesel, mated to PSA Group's state-of-the-art eight speed automatic transmission, and the company's PureTech 225 hp 1.6 litre turbocharged petrol engine, again in conjunction with eight speed auto transmission.

Currently all versions feature front wheel drive, but 'Advanced Traction Control' (the DS interpretation of the PSA Group's 'Grip Control System') is available as an option (costing £400).

In the spring of 2019 a new 298 hp petrol-electric plug-in hybrid version of the DS 7 CROSSBACK, with four wheel drive and designated 'E-Tense', will join the line-up.

SPECIFICATION LEVELS

Potential buyers need to decipher their desired specification level and options choices from a long list of possibilities, which some may find bewildering (including me, if I'm honest!)…

Essentially there are four trim levels, starting with 'Elegance' (with 'On the Road' prices

from £28,095), then moving up through ‘PERFORMANCE Line’ (from £33,270) and ‘Prestige’ (£37,530 upwards) to the top line ‘Ultra Prestige’ (£43,190 to £43,580).

In addition there are five road wheel choices, from 18 inch to 20 inch diameter, some optionally available at extra cost, according to the chosen trim level.

Further choices of ‘DS Collections’ are available, meaning groups of extra functions collected together into related packages including ‘Technology’, ‘Comfort and Convenience’, ‘Style’ and ‘Safety and Security’.

There’s more… ‘Stand-Alone’ options can be specified too, including those relating to (among other aspects) upholstery, driver information, lighting and visibility, and paintwork.

Further personalisation options are available in the choice of interior trim, under the ‘DS Inspirations’ heading. There are four ‘Inspirations’, including ‘BASTILLE’ (with bronze textiles and textured motifs, etc.), ‘PERFORMANCE Line (incorporating Alcantara), ‘RIVOLI’ (with a diamond-themed design and grained leather) and ‘OPERA’, this range-topping trim including Nappa leather. The ‘OPERA’ upholstery comes as standard with Ultra Prestige models (and includes interior and exterior ‘OPERA’ badging’) and is available on Prestige versions for an additional £2,750.

If you are seriously thinking of buying a DS 7 CROSSBACK, I advise close study of the company’s literature/website, plus in-depth discussions at your dealership, before you place your order.

Suffice to say that all versions are comprehensively equipped (and all include a vast array of state-of-the-art safety systems), with even the entry-level Elegance versions including (among many other features) such niceties as sports aluminium road wheels (in this case, 18 inch diameter), electronic stability control (ESP), Trailer Stability Control, Lane Departure Warning, a touch screen system, Speed Limit Recognition Warning, rear parking sensors, keyless starting, an ‘Auto Comfort Pack’ (automatic dual zone air conditioning, automatic screen wipers and an odour filter), a multi-function trip computer, a wealth of connectivity

systems, LED interior lighting, a height-adjustable driver's seat, and so on.

Next up the spec ladder is the PERFORMANCE Line variant, which additionally provides many more standard fittings, including 19 inch sports road wheels, a larger (12 inch) touch screen plus a 12.3 inch digital instrument display, DS Connect Nav (connected 3D navigation), LED headlights, electrically-folding door mirrors, and, on the BlueHDi 180 auto version only, 'DS ACTIVE SCAN SUSPENSION' (more of this anon.).

The Prestige trim level adds further equipment, for example in the form of heated front seats incorporating a massage function, electric adjustment for the front seats and the rear seats backrests, a dash-mounted B.R.M R180 clock, an eight speaker HiFi system, a central arm rest for the rear seat (in place of the ski flap on lower spec models), keyless entry and starting, door mirror memory (including regaining their positions when reverse gear is engaged), and a 'Modularity Boot' (with a twin level floor, lateral storage, a chromed entry sill and a 12 volt socket).

Buyers of Ultra Prestige variants additionally gain further refinements, for example 20 inch road wheels, an electrically-operated panoramic sun roof, remote tailgate opening and 'DS Connected Pilot' (Adaptive Cruise Control with Stop& Go, plus Lane Keeping Assist).

ON TEST

Our test car was a Prestige PureTech 225 version, powered by the turbocharged 1.6 litre petrol engine, developing 225 hp, and driving through an eight speed automatic transmission. The basic cost of our vehicle was £38,990, plus an additional £750 for its pearlescent Pearl White paintwork, making £39,740.

This brings it in just under the government's £40,000 price barrier; anything above this level (including options) would mean paying considerably more road tax in years 2 to 6 after registration…

With a long list of standard equipment (as indicated above) the car already has immediate and obvious appeal. In addition, looking closely around the vehicle, it is evident that great attention has been paid to achieving high quality 'fit and finish' levels.

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However, as with so many cars over many years from the ‘Citroën’ family, the clever detail built into the design adds further to the fun factor of ownership.

As just one example, the interior on our test car, trimmed with ‘RIVOLI’ leather upholstery, featured a ‘diamond’ theme throughout. This applied to the switchgear, the quilted seat and door trim coverings, and the interior lights; three above the windscreen plus two more above the rear passenger seats; all were diamond-shaped and lit up like stars in the night sky within ‘our’ DS 7!

Further lighting enhancements included the ‘puddle lamps’ shining downwards from the door mirrors to illuminate the ground below, and incorporating the stylish ‘DS’ logo.

Talking of style, most observers talked enthusiastically about the design of the vehicle and its numerous fascinating (some would say ‘quirky’ but in a positive way) exterior and interior features, all helping to make the vehicle stand out in a market where similarity seems to reign…

INTERIOR COMFORT AND PRACTICALITY

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The front seats, although firm-ish in feel, proved comfortable over long journeys, and those in the rear were also generous in accommodation terms, with plenty of leg, head and shoulder room.

The car is noticeably wide, inside and out, thereby providing a spacious passenger compartment. Slightly detracting from this is the very wide central console, which to be fair incorporates many switches for the door windows and locks (etc.) plus cup/bottle holders and a variety of storage compartments, including a generous capacity locker with twin opening lids.

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Wide opening doors, both front and rear, make entry to and exit from the car very easy for all occupants.

The luggage accommodation is impressive too; the boot is wide, long and deep, and the tailgate opens high. In addition, the boot floor runs forwards from bumper level, so loading and unloading is easy, although the rear sill is fairly high above the ground.

The rear seat backs, which are divided 2/3:1/3 and provide useful versatility, fold forward easily and quickly, instantly providing a flat-floored load compartment when required, having first unclipped the similarly well thought-out parcel shelf.

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The following dimensions are all approximate, and as measured by me, but with the seat backs folded, and the front seats set approximately mid-way in terms of fore/aft adjustment, the load bed is then a very handy 170 cm or 67 inches long and wide (a minimum of 103 cm or 40.5 inches between the wheel arches). Even with the rear seats in use/occupied, the boot measures 91.5 cm or 36 inches from front to back, and the available height beneath the underside of the parcel shelf is 46 cm or 18 inches.

For the record, the luggage capacity varies from a minimum of 555 litres (19.60 cu.ft) and up to a cavernous 1,752 litres (61.87 cu.ft).

It should also be mentioned that beneath the main boot floor is an additional shallow but large ‘tray’ for extra storage, and below this again is housed a spare wheel and the requisite wheel-changing tools.

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Well done to the DS 7 designers for this very practical luggage compartment set-up, and for still providing a spare wheel (rather than an emergency ‘mobility’ kit) – lacking in so many modern vehicles.

There are numerous additional smaller storage compartments around the vehicle, including generous size bins in all the doors, a lidded glovebox (that is also cooled by the air conditioning system), elasticated pockets in the backs of the front seats, and two small compartments within the boot, one on either side.

CLEAR INSTRUMENTATION

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The large digital instrument panel incorporates cleverly-illuminated and deliberately

angular instruments depicting fuel tank contents, engine temperature, speed (shown on a linear gauge as well as in the form of a large and very clear digital readout, with the appropriate speed limit indicated just below it – excellent!), plus a rev counter. In addition, a touch on the end of the right-hand stalk brings into play the trip computer system, with its display then coming to life on the dash for a few seconds. 'Scrolling' through the three available modes activated by this switch will take you to the two 'trip' meters (each indicating average speed, average mpg and mileage covered), plus an 'instant' mpg display, which also shows the remaining mileage range available on the fuel in the tank.

As with many cars these days, most of the system controls that frequently need to be adjusted are operated via the car's large and clear to read central touch screen. Admittedly in this car there is a line-up of switches across the bottom of the screen, for the different system menus to be accessed individually (for example the sound system, heating/air conditioning, satellite navigation, etc.). However, I still maintain that it's unfortunate that (for example) the heating system controls are not separate from the screen set-up, which I feel would be less distracting and safer – especially for drivers new to the vehicle.

RIDE AND HANDLING

The CROSSBACK offers four different drive modes. For most of the time during my road test I was happy to drive the car in its 'ECO' setting, but I did also try the 'Normal', 'Comfort' and 'Sport' modes. The biggest change was evident with the 'Sport' mode engaged, when the car's dynamic responses were noticeably sharper and performance vastly enhanced (although in fact the engine responded well in all modes; more of this later).

A world first innovation, currently only offered on the DS 7 CROSSBACK, is 'DS ACTIVE SCAN SUSPENSION SYSTEM'. Standard only on the Prestige PureTech 225 Automatic (like our test car) and the Blue HDi 180 Automatic, plus Ultra Prestige versions, this system employs a camera, placed behind the windscreen, to scan the road ahead of the vehicle. The camera is linked electronically to the front and rear wheels, and analyses the imperfections in the road surface. With the aid of four height sensors and three accelerometers, the system gauges the car's reactions to speed, steering wheel angle and braking. The

information is processed by an electronic control unit (ECU) which independently governs each wheel and constantly/rapidly adjusts the suspension; this is ‘instantly’ made firmer or softer according to need.

The aim, says DS, is to create a unique, smooth driving experience.

Fair enough, it does in most situations, in which the suspension is very comfortable. However, not so smooth is its reaction when large/deep imperfections are encountered, especially if this happens on a bend, when I found that the rear wheels seemed to ‘patter’ more than I had expected.

I found too that there was some evidence of body roll when driving on bendy cross-country routes.

Personally, I also found the electrically-operated power steering a touch too sensitive/‘twitchy’ at higher speeds, and on twisty main roads it was difficult to apply smooth changes of direction. By contrast, in urban motoring it was fine, and despite the vehicle’s considerable size it was relatively easy to park and to manoeuvre in tight situations. However, as already mentioned this is a wide vehicle and therefore it needs wide spaces in which to park it, at least to provide enough room to open the doors…

Rearward visibility is not great, due to the high rear quarters of the car and its tiny rearmost side windows, but thanks to the very effective reversing camera system and a multitude of proximity sensors, it is easy to gauge exactly where the vehicle is when carrying out close manouvres.

ENGINUITY

I loved the way that the 1.6 litre four cylinder turbocharged motor performed. It was eager, refined and quiet-running at all speeds, providing rapid acceleration both from standstill and on the move. At 70 mph in top (8th) ratio, the car was quiet-running and required just 2,000 rpm.

The driving experience was helped by the smooth-changing eight speed automatic transmission. With that many ratios, combined with a powerful, torquey engine, the car always felt as if it was in the correct gear and response to accelerator commands was always ‘instantaneous’.

I did try the paddle shift system (the paddles are mounted on the steering column) for manually changing ratios. This was fun, as well as useful for engaging lower ratios to apply

engine braking when descending steep hills. However the auto box worked perfectly when left to its own devices.

The DS 7 performed well enough in ‘Eco’, ‘Normal’ and Comfort’ drive modes, with good acceleration and hill climbing evident. However, with the ‘Sport’ mode activated, its normal placid demeanour disappeared, and a different, more extrovert character emerged. The car was still quiet in operation, but sports-car like acceleration was then the order of the day, with correspondingly sharper dynamic responses from the running gear as its operating parameters were shifted. Very enjoyable.

The CROSSBACK has an engine stop/start system, cutting fuel consumption and emissions when at rest in traffic. This also worked effectively.

I’ve never been a fan of electrically-operated parking brakes, but the CROSSBACK has one, operated by a centre console mounted switch. It worked well enough and in theory you do not have to manually release the brake switch when driving off from a standing start. However, I found that a smoother take-off resulted from doing this. In addition, if the car is parked on, say, a gravel or soft-surfaced driveway and you try to pull away without manually releasing the brake using the switch, the front wheels will spin.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

I was aware that the DS 7 is fitted with an innovative lighting system, including full LED headlamps, each incorporating three rotating modules, with an animated ‘Magic 3D’ function plus a main LED projector. The lamps also include an ‘Adaptive Front System’, which has been developed to actively adapt the lighting according to road conditions, as you drive.

It is said that in each case the angle and intensity of the main headlamps and their modules vary in order to increase or reduce the range of the light beams.

I was therefore keen to drive the DS 7 on a long journey at night, and one murky, rainy evening drove 150 miles through the west country…

…and I found the system truly impressive in the way that it operated, certainly providing more effective illumination than normal headlamps, in varying situations.

For in-town motoring with ‘Town Beams’ mode applying, the projector beams offer ‘medium intensity’, with the modules turned outwards from each side of the car. This effectively widens the beam, so that potential hazards such as pedestrians, animals and so on can more easily be seen. At speeds below 30 mph, this lighting mode is activated after three seconds, and gives a beam range of 280 metres (919 feet).

By contrast, the ‘Country Beam’, which comes into play after two seconds at more than 30 mph, is of increased intensity for the projectors, and reduced intensity for the modules, and is straighter, thus illuminating the road ahead, while still being sufficiently wide to spot potential hazards at the roadside. In this case the beam range is 330 metres (1,083 feet).

For fast roads, the ‘Motorway Beam’ is activated, in which the projectors and modules create a cone of light with a raised beam (to increase the range), which is more intense than the ‘Country Beam’. This provides a beam range of 370 metres (1,214 feet), and operates after five seconds at a road speed of 70 mph.

The system’s ‘High Beam’ mode can be activated at any time by the Automatic High Beam function, and independently of the Adaptive Front System functions already described. It automatically adapts according to the car’s speed and steering wheel angle.

In this mode the range and power of the beam are maximised, to effectively illuminate the length and breadth of the road ahead.

To achieve this, the modules are lifted and positioned centrally, in line with the car, and their range is increased. The beam range is 520 metres (1,706 feet).

Last but not least the ‘Adverse Weather’ lighting mode is engaged automatically at any time when the screen wipers are operated.

In this case the beam, with a range of 330 metres (1,083 feet) is wider, and the power of the modules is increased so that the driver can more easily see the white lines on the road. At the same time the intensity of the main beam is reduced to improve vision, taking into account possible reflections from the wet road.

I should add that these lights ‘see around corners’, which is also helpful…

The headlamp set-up on this car is a very clever, genuinely useful system which I found worked extremely well. Looking ahead to the practicalities of long-term ownership, I do wonder how much replacement units might cost… Most likely, quite a lot…

Among a variety of further useful lighting features of the car are ‘scrolling’ indicators, in which a line of LEDs illuminate within the lamp assembly, towards the outside of the car and in the direction of travel.

The tail lamps are effective and cleverly-styled too…

CRUISE CONTROL

The car is equipped with Adaptive Cruise Control and a speed limiter system, both operated via a short stalk to the left of the steering column. To my mind this stalk could be better positioned and is too well hidden, especially for those drivers new to the car.

ECONOMICAL?

The official Combined MPG figure for our 225 hp petrol version of the CROSSBACK is 47.9 mpg. During my week with the car, over 348 miles it returned an overall fuel consumption figure of 37.1 mpg in mixed driving conditions. This is not bad for a car of the CROSSBACK's size and power, but a long way short of the official figure.

VERDICT

Packed with technologically advanced systems and full of French character. It's not perfect, but despite my few reservations, voiced in the main text, about some aspects of the DS 7 CROSSBACK, I liked the car very much. It provides excellent, roomy accommodation for up to five adults, and its highly practical luggage carrying abilities are first class.

In addition, and importantly, its inherent 'joie de vivre' promises to deliver a more involving driving/ownership experience than many of its main rivals.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

DS 7 CROSSBACK Prestige PureTech 225 EAT8

Engine: Euro 6.2-compliant, four cylinder, 1.6 litre (1598cc), turbocharged petrol, with fuel-saving ‘stop/start’ system.

Transmission: Eight speed automatic gearbox (with steering wheel ‘paddles’ for manual control if desired); front wheel drive.

Power: 225 hp @ 5,500 rpm.

Torque: 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) @ 1,900 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.3 seconds.

Top speed: 141 mph.

Fuel consumption:

Official WLTP figures: Urban, 37.7 mpg; Combined, 47.9 mpg.

Achieved during our Wheels-Alive test, over 348 miles, average 37.1 mpg.

Fuel tank capacity: 62 litres (13.64 Imperial gallons).

Approximate range on full tank, at our actual achieved mpg on test: Over 505 miles.

CO2 Emissions: 135 g/km.

Taxation: First year, £205, standard annual rate thereafter, £140.

Company Car Benefit in Kind: 26%

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Insurance Group: 30E.

Euro NCAP rating: 5.

Dimensions: Length 4,570 mm (14.99 ft), Width (including mirrors) 1,895 mm (6.22 ft), Height 1,625 mm (5.33 ft), wheelbase 2,740 mm (8.99 ft), Kerb weight 1,425 kg (3,142 lb).

Luggage capacity 555 to 1,752 litres (19.60 to 61.87 cu.ft). (Please also see main text for length/width dimensions).

Five doors, five seats.

Price (‘On the Road’): £38,990. (plus Pearlescent Paint, £750, on our test car, making a total of £39,740).