DS3 Crossback – Road Test

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DS 3 CROSSBACK COMPACT SUV – STYLE AND FUNCTION AS STANDARD.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Yet another SUV recently joined the ever-growing fashionable market sector – this time it's the compact DS 3 Crossback and for those who don't know DS Automobiles is marketed as the premium brand from the PSA Group which already has Citroën, Peugeot and Vauxhall brands in its stable. In fact prior to 2015 DS was the model name given to higher specification Citroën models but now is projected as a premium brand in its own right.

Until the recent arrival of the compact DS 3 Crossback the DS Automobiles brand offered

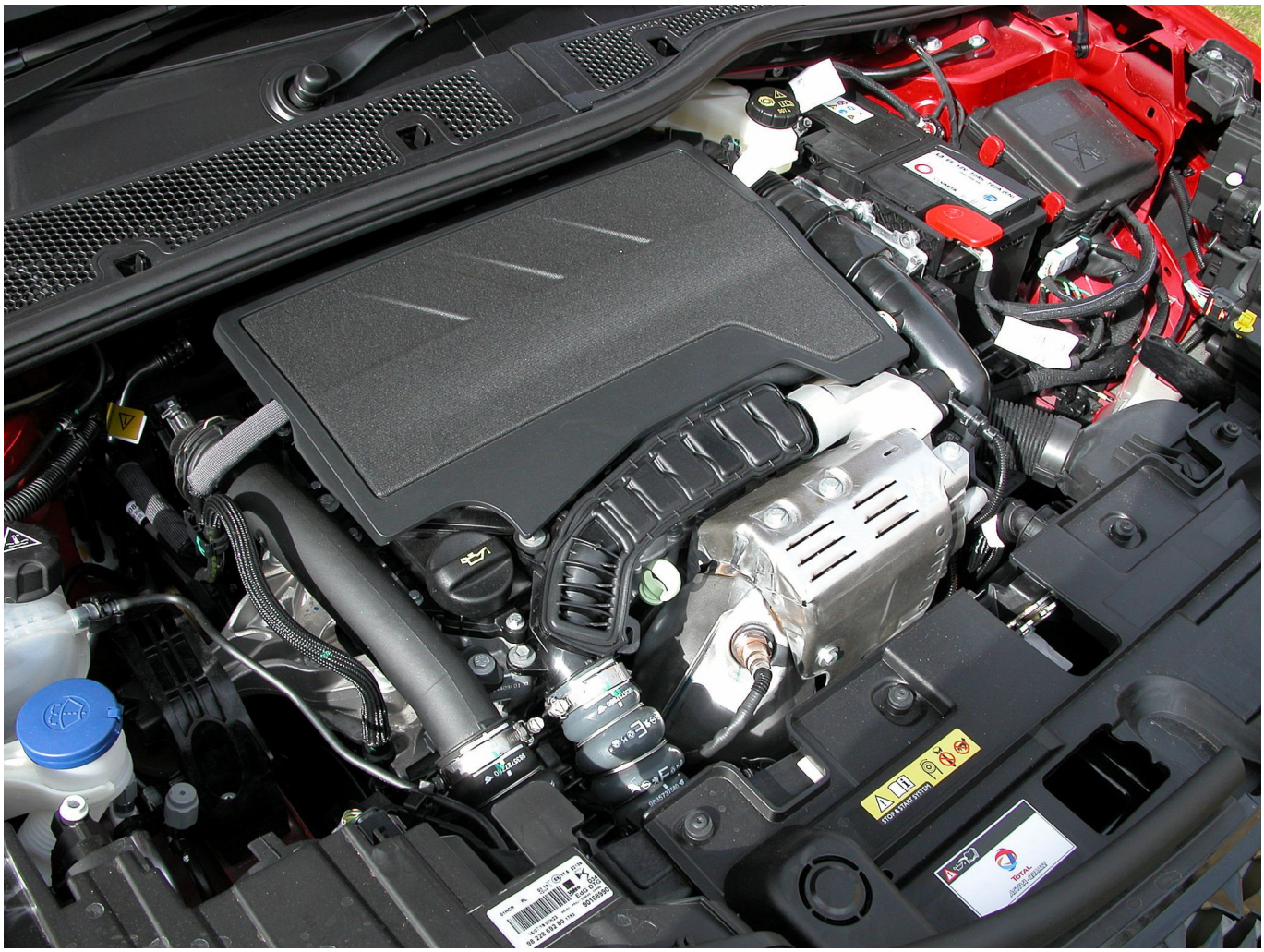
customers only the DS 3 Hatchback, DS 3 Cabrio Convertible and the DS 7 Crossback large SUV, all loosely based on other current PSA Group models. But the new DS 3 Crossback is the first product to be built using the new PSA Group's CMP Modular Platform which can accommodate petrol, diesel and hybrid powertrains and the shortly to arrive DS 3 'E-Tense' battery pure electric vehicle. This platform will also be used for the new Peugeot 208 and Vauxhall Corsa supermini hatchbacks and their conventional and electric powertrains.

Currently there are 15 models in the DS3 Crossback range, not including E-Tense, with prices ranging from £21,555 to £33,955 and of course in true 'designer' fashion there are lots of extra cost options to relieve customers of more money.



The engines currently available are the award winning PSA PureTech petrol 1.2 litre, three

cylinder turbocharged petrol units with the 100 hp unit and six speed manual gearbox, the recently uprated EU 6.3 compliant 130 hp unit with an eight speed automatic gearbox and a 155 hp unit again with the eight speed auto transmission as standard. For those customers who want diesel power there is the new 1.5 litre, four cylinder BlueHDi 100 hp with a six speed manual transmission. All are front wheel drive.



The trim and equipment levels available, depending on the engine chosen, are Elegance, Performance Line, Prestige, Ultra Prestige and La Premiere.

Competitors are many and varied in the compact SUV sector but with its claimed premium brand status and pricing its most likely opposition comes from the Audi Q2, MINI Countryman and perhaps the latest Fiat 500X Sport because of its quirky appeal. The BMW

X1 can also be included but so can less costly similar sized compact/City SUVs such as the VW T-Cross, SEAT Arona, Citroën C3 Aircross, the soon to arrive Skoda Kamiq plus the established Renault Captur, Peugeot 2008 and Vauxhall MokkaX/Crossland X to name just a few others.

The DS brand majors its marketing message to the public for the unique styling inside and out, high specification and I should add exclusivity value as DS sales as an emerging brand are fairly small to date and not growing very fast in the UK. At the time of writing DS in the UK has achieved just 2,286 total sales for the first eight months of this year, fewer than for the same period last year. However DS as a global brand is becoming more popular in countries like China.

At first glance, or even a longer one, the DS 3 Crossback looks a well-proportioned five door compact/city sized SUV with an overall length of 4,118 mm (13.51 ft). It’s chunky with a wide stance and higher ground clearance with large wheels and plenty of brightwork body trim to add sparkle to its exterior appearance. At the front is a huge deep grille flanked by daytime running lights with their vertical LEDs and tapered headlights, and above those is a wide ribbed bonnet adding to its strong facial image. To the side there are sculptural lines but the oddest styling quirk is the rear side door’s waistline which has a sort of shark fin uplift to its leading edge at the B-pillar. Why I’ve no idea, it just looks clumsy and harks of trying too hard to be different.

Also different, but in a more practical way, are the flush-fitting door handles which retract into the doors once on the move or when the car is locked.



At the rear is a wide tailgate with the Crossback name across it just below the high level rear window. The deep boot and load space is a modest 350 litres (12.36 cu.ft) with the rear seats in place and just 1,050 litres (37.08 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded, but these do not fold down completely flat.



Inside the cabin the visual look is one of plush comfy seats and my mid-range Prestige model had grained leather upholstery incorporating a distinctive series of panels in the design which gives that added upmarket appearance. The seats were very comfortable with good support front and rear but the rear leg room is limited so the vehicle is more suited to singles, couples or empty-nesters without children, and who are attracted by chic fashion. The fascia panel has a prominent 10-inch touchscreen centrally positioned complete with TomTom 3D Navigation system and Wi-Fi connectivity. As with all PSG Group models the heating/air-con adjustments have to be made via the touchscreen which is not user-friendly. However other controls and short-cut buttons to various systems are centrally positioned below the touchscreen in the fascia panel and housed in a series of five diamond shaped panels with the buttons forming each of the four angles to each diamond. It’s certainly a

different styling approach but it works. Below these is the push-button start and buttons for the four electric windows are positioned within the centre console. Otherwise driving controls are similarly placed to other models in this class.

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The driving position is very good with good visibility front and side but due to the bulky rear/rear quarter design visibility in those areas was limited and given its premium brand supposed status a rear view camera and dipping rear view door mirrors when reversing should be a standard fit, although it does have front and rear parking sensors.

Other than those missing nice-to-have items the specification was good with 17-inch alloy wheels, automatic air conditioning, auto lights and wipers, cruise control, electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors, dark tinted rear windows, black perforated leather steering wheel and central armrest, aluminium sports pedals and door sill entry guards. Of course there are the usual latest driving safety support and alert systems and connectivity functions.

What cannot be seen, but is certainly heard and felt is the acoustic quality with the cabin well insulated from exterior noises, with only the thrum of the three cylinder engine audible if pushed hard. Impacts and road noise are also well insulated from the passengers, and the ride compliancy (thanks to the more expensive multi-link rear suspension used rather than the cheaper beam axle type) was one of its most noticeable first impressions, that and the interior styling. True it’s not an agile handler such as an Audi Q2 or MINI Countryman, but for the sort of affluent customers who are likely to venture down the DS 3 Crossover route ride comfort is more of a priority. The steering is light but still well-weighted and reasonably precise holding a line whist cornering. There is a small amount of bodyroll during higher cornering speeds but again nothing that is going to be a deal-breaker. Whether its main use will be City, country or motorway travel the DS 3 Crossback will please more people than it offends.

My test drive model had the latest EU 6.3 compliant 1.2 litre PureTech award winning 130 hp turbocharged direct injection petrol engine, a unit we know very well and widely used throughout the PSA Group brands. It is mated as standard with the Group's new eight speed torque converter automatic gearbox and with 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,750 rpm there is more than enough 'grunt' to allow the numerous ratios to do their job as and when called upon.

Top speed is 124 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 9.2 seconds.

As for fuel economy the new WLTP Combined Cycle figures are 42.2 to 47.1 mpg and my week of driving covering most types of journeys recorded 44.3 mpg, well within the official guidelines. The CO2 emissions are 117 g/km so the petrol rate First Year VED cost is £170 before the £145 Standard rate is applied and the BiK company car tax is 27%.

Insurance is Group 20E and Warranty is the usual ungenerous three years/60,000 miles.

VERDICT

Overall the new DS 3 compact SUV is an interesting alternative in its crowded SUV segment. It makes more of a case for itself as a functional, comfortable riding SUV with an excellent engine and transmission combination. It is perhaps less convincing as a premium offering with its quirky styling elements and 'blinged-up' interior. It's all a matter of personal taste.

For: Plenty of 'bling' and chic fashion elements for those who like that sort of image, eye catching kerb appeal, very comfortable ride, reasonably well equipped, excellent engine/auto gearbox driveability.

Against: Its interior quirky styling will divide opinions – it's all a matter of personal taste, heating/ventilation controls are via the touchscreen, relatively small boot/load space, limited rear seat legroom, ungenerous warranty, a premium priced vehicle but is DS really yet established in the UK as a premium brand worthy of their premium prices?



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

DS 3 Crossback Prestige PureTech 130, eight speed auto, compact SUV.

Price: £27,995.

Engine/transmission: EU 6.3 compliant 1.2 litre PureTech 130 hp, 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) three cylinder turbocharged petrol engine, eight speed automatic as standard, front wheel drive.

Performance: 124 mph 0–62 mph 9.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 42.2 to 47.1 mpg (44.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 117 g/km, VED First Year road tax £170 then £145 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 27%.

Insurance Group: 20E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,118 mm (13.51 ft), W 1,791 mm (5.88 ft), H 1,534 mm (5.03 ft), wheelbase 2,558 mm (8.39 ft), boot/load space 350 to 1,050 litres (12.36 to 37.08 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2,645 lb), five doors/five seats.