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'Golden Oldies'; Retrospective Road Test No. 2 – 1991 Peugeot 205 1.1 Trio S.

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Peugeot 205 – “le sacré numéro”...

In the second of our new series on Wheels-Alive, Kim Henson test drives Peugeot's 205, in this case a 1991 1.1 litre Trio S three door version.

(All words and photographs by Kim).

Note: “Wheels-Alive gives you more...” If you would like to turn back time 26 years (on a temporary basis!), at the end of this feature are direct ‘interactive’ links to enable you to see/listen to video recordings of the top three UK music singles of 1991, the year in which our Retrospective Road Test Peugeot 205 was registered.

Peugeot 205 – “le sacré numéro”... as the car was advertised in France, and this translates



into something close to “Quite a character”. It certainly was!

During the 1970s and early 1980s the market for compact, economical-to-operate hatchbacks expanded in spectacular fashion, with a variety of models arriving. These included the Ford Fiesta, which won hearts and minds in huge numbers from 1977, and Austin’s highly popular Mini-Metro, which joined the throng in 1980.

Earlier trailblazing compact hatchbacks that sold in fewer numbers in the UK (but which certainly had their own merits) included the Renault 5 (launched in 1972), the Vauxhall Chevette (from 1975), the Toyota Starlet (arriving in Britain in ‘second generation’ form in 1978), and Peugeot’s own diminutive 104 (introduced in 1979). Further competitors included the Volkswagen Polo, Datsun Cherry, Chrysler Sunbeam and Fiat 127...

In the early 1980s Peugeot needed a thoroughly modern hatchback to compete with the increasingly popular rivals, and by 1983 Fiat’s new Uno was ready for launch. Peugeot’s answer was the 205, a well thought-out hatchback to be sold in three or five door hatchback forms, and which eventually went on to sell approximately 5.3 million examples before it finally disappeared in favour of newer Peugeot models, in 1998.

There is no doubt that the 205 was a hugely significant model for Peugeot, and it is widely acknowledged that the popularity of this small but practical, economical and comfortable car helped to keep the company in business.

The vehicle was liked by motoring writers and buyers alike, and it won many awards for its overall competence.

My own first encounter with the model was in the autumn of 1983, when I was able to drive a number of different then-new examples on the occasion of the press launch, in Western Ireland, of the 205 for U.K. motoring writers. I was able to sample petrol and diesel powered versions, and what, at launch, was the fastest variant, the 205 GT. I was impressed.

Faster-still GTi versions arrived in the following years, and in the mid-1980s I enjoyed road-



testing both 1.6 and 1.9 litre examples over long distances, for 'Practical Motorist' magazine. These GTi models were fast for their time and fun to drive, but they were also practical cars with plenty of interior and luggage space for a relatively compact vehicle. Bad points? I remember that the gearchange on both GTi versions I drove felt 'rubbery' and somewhat imprecise, by contrast with competitor models such as the fast Fiestas of the time. In most other respects the 205 GTi was hailed as an excellent 'hot hatch'.

I also drove a number of lower-powered examples of the 205 as they arrived regularly at the magazine for road test assessment.

PEUGEOT 205 1.1 TRIO S (three door hatchback)



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Fast-forward more



than three decades, and it was not until the summer of 2016 that I had the opportunity to drive another 205. So how would I rate this car?

Our example was registered in August 1991, by which time the 205 was already firmly established and well liked.

Our three door Trio S is essentially a fairly basic specification model, but it is a special edition, available for just a few months in the summer of 1991, and features 'Trio S' graphics and strikingly-coloured interior trim. It is fitted with bright green/turquoise-coloured seat belts and with the same colour being incorporated into the weave of the cloth seat upholstery.

The generally austere trim level means that the car lacks such basics as a coolant temperature gauge, but does have warning lamps to indicate 'low coolant level' and 'overheating' (in truth, by the time this illuminates, engine damage could already have occurred!!). There is no tachometer either, nor even a 'trip' mileage distance recorder.

However, on the plus side the seats are very supportive and comfortable, and there's a surprising amount of room within the vehicle, for front seat occupants and even in terms of sufficient head and leg room for up to three adults to travel in reasonable comfort in the rear compartment. It also has long, narrow storage bins in each of the doors, plus two open glove pockets in the fascia.





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A revelation to me on re-acquaintance with the 205 as a model was the commendably light and airy interior (our car has a sun roof too) and the excellent driving position. The driver has a superb full-width view of the road ahead, and indeed all around the car, courtesy of



the fairly low windscreen, side window and tailgate window sill heights. It is very easy to gauge the positions of the extremities of the vehicle; indeed the corners of the front wings are visible from the driving seat. Reversing is easy too, helped by good rearward visibility that in fact is far better than in most of today's models.

The boot is also basic but practical, being a wide, long and fairly deep flat-floored compartment, beneath which the spare wheel is housed in a separate cradle (so, importantly, it is not necessary to remove the luggage to gain access to the wheel; how sensible!). The load sill is quite high off the ground, but not bad in this respect by comparison with so many modern hatches.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The compact arrangement of the rear suspension system helps avoid intrusion into the boot space so the luggage area is spacious for a small vehicle, and uncluttered. The rear seat back folds forward easily, when required, but on our version there is no 'split/fold' facility for the rear seat.

ENGINEUITY?

A number of different engines were used in the 205 during its production lifetime, and the differences between them can be confusing. So here's a little clarification for you (I hope!):

Early petrol-version 205s were powered by all-aluminium, single chain-driven overhead camshaft four cylinder 'X' Series (also known as 'Douvrin' or 'Suitcase') units, mounted almost horizontally within the car and jointly-developed with Renault. Their first application in Peugeot cars was in the 104 from 1972, and the 205 continued their use from launch in 1983. Buyers of the 205s driven by these units (each of which featured integral transmission assemblies sharing oil with the engine) could choose between 954cc, 1124cc or 1360cc versions, respectively designated XV, XW and XY. (Note: There was also a 1219cc variant, termed XZ, fitted to some 104s but not to 205s).



Belt-driven, single overhead camshaft TU Series petrol engines were developed from the X Series units, and were introduced in 1986 for Peugeot models. These well-respected motors served the company well for many years, and although the 205 was discontinued in the UK in 1996, the TU engines were still produced for other models for sale elsewhere until the end of 2014.

The TU motors were mounted vertically within the engine bay, and in each case the transmission units (four speed or five speed manual, or three speed automatic) were positioned on the left-hand end of the power unit.

For the 205 the TU engine choices were between 954cc (TU9), 1124cc (TU1) and 1294cc (TU2) versions.

From 1981 new belt-driven overhead camshaft XU engines were used in mid-range PSA Group (PSA Peugeot Citroën) models, including the 1580cc XU5 (in the 205 GTi 1.6) and 1905cc XU9 (205 GTi 1.9). An even more powerful twin overhead camshaft 16 valve version of the XU9 motor was also fitted in other sporting PSA vehicles.

Of course, Peugeot was also famous for its tough, reliable diesel engines as used in the 205 and other models in the 1980s/90s, but that's another story and for this feature I'll concentrate on our petrol-powered 205.

Under the bonnet of our test car is the single, belt-driven overhead camshaft, wet liner four cylinder 1124cc (TU1) unit, renowned for its smooth-running, long-term reliability and frugality. It's not hugely powerful nor torquey at low speeds, but performs willingly if it's kept buzzing - more about which anon. Our car is equipped with a four speed manual gearbox.



Our engine is fed by a single-barrel carburettor (so it has a choke control too); other 205 variants had a twin-barrel carburettor or fuel-injection.

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OUR CAR ON THE ROAD

At the start of our assessment of the 205, our test car had covered approximately 51,000 miles and for many years had been owned by an elderly lady. The car had been her pride and joy, and had been garage-maintained during her time with the car, including the installation of a new clutch assembly just before we took delivery. The interior was in excellent overall condition too, although the driver's seat, despite best efforts at cleaning, remained a little grubby-looking. Another cleaning session on this is needed!



We added another 1,000 miles or so during our year of testing.

One aspect immediately noticeable on driving the 205 is the excellent, accommodating suspension system, a typically French long-travel system incorporating MacPherson struts at the front and a compact, effective torsion bar and trailing arm set-up at the rear. This provides a magic-carpet-like smooth ride, especially commendable for a small car some 26 years old. Okay, some body roll is evident during fast-ish cornering, but certainly not to the extent of unsettling our passengers.

The car copes admirably with our pothole-strewn poor road surfaces.

During our test the 205 has always started instantly from cold, the engine soon warming up with minimal use of the choke required, even on cold mornings.

The engine is a smooth-running unit and feels eager to perform, however the motor needs to be revving at reasonably high revs to make best progress. With maximum torque coming in at the fairly high engine speed of 3,200 rpm, pulling power at speeds lower than this is somewhat lacking. That's not to say that the car isn't fun to drive; it is, but you do need to make good use of the gearbox. In our case this is a four speed unit, and the car's overall gearing is such that at 30 mph the car prefers third gear rather than top (fourth). This characteristic applies to many other four speed 'economy' models of the 1980s/90s.

As already pointed out there is no rev counter on this 205, but the car's happiest engine speeds are easily judged by ear and the degree of pulling power available!

I find that although the Peugeot is not fast - primarily it was intended to provide excellent fuel consumption - it doesn't take long to reach motorway cruising speeds, and seems very happy at between 60 and 70 mph for long spells. It still has plenty in reserve, even at the legal motorway limit of 70 mph.

With a full load of people and luggage on board, on long, gradual main road ascents it likes a fairly early change down to third gear to maintain momentum, but this is no problem and



on this well-maintained 205 I have always found the gearchange slick and easy to operate (I should mention that 30+ years ago, when I drove then-new GTi versions, from memory and notes I made at the time, the gearchange quality was far less impressive).

As expected, fuel consumption figures achieved during our test have proved to be excellent, with figures typically in the low to middle 40s per gallon in real-life urban use, and up to 53 mpg or so on longer runs (the car was used for a variety of short and long-distance pleasure journeys during the test period). The overall figure worked out at 47 mpg or so; brilliant for a car over a quarter of a century old.



VERDICT

This 205 is a user-friendly, 'happy' little car that seems to enjoy serving its driver and other occupants. I wasn't expecting whizzy acceleration (and didn't get it!) but its performance is willing enough and quite acceptable for everyday or modern classic motoring in the 21st Century.

Add to that a wonderfully comfortable ride quality and supportive seats, hatchback practicality with a generous boot for the size of the vehicle, and you have a great classic hatchback that has the potential to survive for many years. Many people have commented on how good the 205 looks too, especially in three door form like our car.

Incidentally, although there are paintwork blemishes on our 205, unsurprising after 26



years on the road, the body structure is exceedingly and impressively sound, and this seems to be the norm with 205s, despite their age now.

Naturally the sporty GTi versions have attracted all the limelight and their prices have shot up in recent years, but if you are interested in a 205, don't ignore the 'everyday' versions like our Trio S, which offer a great deal of character for a lot less dosh.

Incidentally, having checked various websites advising 'How many examples are left' it seems that the non-GTi versions of the 205 have survived in small numbers. So, if you fancy your own example, don't leave it too long!





Wheels-Alive Retrospective Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Peugeot 205 1.1 Trio S three door hatchback, August 1991.

Engine/transmission: Belt-drive single overhead camshaft 1124cc, four cylinder, single barrel carburettor-fed petrol. 55 bhp at 5,800 rpm, 63.5 lb.ft (86 Nm) of torque at 3,200 rpm, four speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.

Performance: 99 mph, 0-60 mph 13.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption:

Our real-life figures on test, over 12 months/1,000 miles: In-town, 40 to 44 mpg; long runs, 53 mpg. Overall, 47 mpg.

Fuel tank capacity: 11.0 gallons. Approximate range on full tank at our overall mpg figure, over 515 miles.

Dimensions:

Overall length 12ft 1.9in (3,705mm), Width 5ft 1.9in (1,572mm), Height 4ft 5.9in (1,410mm).

Kerb weight 790 kg (1740 lb)

Three doors, five seats.

INTERACTIVE SOUNDTRACK TO LIFE IN 1991 WHEN OUR 205 WAS BUILT:

During 1991, the top three best-selling singles in the UK music charts were:



No. 1 '(Everything I Do) I Do it for You' by Bryan Adams (please click [HERE](#) to play it).

No. 2 'The Shoop Shoop Song (It's in His Kiss)' by Cher (please click [HERE](#) to play it).

No. 3 'The One and Only' by Chesney Hawkes (please click [HERE](#) to play it).

COMING SOON: More Retrospective Road Tests; watch this space!