New Citroën C3 Supermini Line-up – First Impressions

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Making the Difference for Citroën – The latest C3 Supermini Range.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Differentiation of the Citroën brand within the PSA Group is the current aim in separating from the Peugeot and DS brands, a hard task as they most share the same platforms, transmissions and latest fuel-efficient petrol and diesel engines.

En-route to this differentiation of models is the 3 January 2017 when the new third generation Citroën C3 ‘supermini’ sized five door hatchback goes on sale, priced from £13,745. Although quite different in its styling and customer propositions from previous

generation C3s, it will continue to compete for sales against the best selling Ford Fiesta, the VW Polo, Vauxhall Corsa, Skoda Fabia, Peugeot's own 208, the DS 3, the Hyundai i20, new Kia Rio, Suzuki Sport and looking more upmarket the MINI five door Hatch and the Audi A1 Sportback. There are lots more making the 'supermini' sector the highest selling group of cars in the UK, with close to a million registrations a year.

With Citroën differentiating itself from Peugeot and the DS brands, comfort and styling are two of its new DNAs and the new C3, whilst retaining the underpinnings from the previous car, uses PSG Group's PureTech petrol and BlueHDI turbodiesel engines. Citroën's new philosophy of what the brand stands for is "Being at the heart of the new car market but not doing what other manufacturers do." 'A People Minded Brand' and 'Be Different Feel Good' are two of their advertising themes.

The new C3's chunky, funky and fun styling takes its inspiration from the quirky Citroën C4 Cactus, which has been a significant sales success for the brand; that and their popular Picasso MPVs or people carrier models. Personalisation options and in-car communication and infotainment functions play major roles in this latest incarnation of the C3 family.

The first generation C3 was born in 2002, renewed in 2010 and in 2017 comes generation three. Globally C3 is Citroën's best-selling car with 3.6-million sold to date and 200,000 in the UK.

Interviewed at this week's media launch of the new C3 'supermini' five door hatchback range, Mike Wilson, Citroën UK's Head of Product Pricing said, "We have high hopes for the new model and we anticipate around 16,000 UK sales next year, that's approximately three times as many as the outgoing C3 will achieve in its run-out year in 2016. In addition to retaining current C3 customers we expect the growth in sales to come from conquest and younger family customers attracted by the personalisation options and the latest in on-board connected technology."

He added, "Around 60% of UK sales will go to retail customers with 72% of all buyers choosing one of the petrol derivatives. Of the three PureTech 1.2 litre three cylinder petrol engines on offer, 50% of customers will choose the 82 hp engine, 16% the 68 hp unit and 6% the 110 hp engine. As for the two 1.6 four cylinder BlueHDi turbodiesels, 19% will go for the 75 hp unit and 9% for the 100 hp engine. When it comes to choosing the specification level, up to 5% will go for the base Touch level, the mid-range Feel variants will be the choice of around 59% of buyers and the top Flair level we anticipate will account for 36% of sales".

He also added that due to the higher residual value forecast Citroën UK can offer a very attractive PCP finance packages for retail buyers. These start with a low £300 deposit and then £159 a month over three years with an annual 6,000 mile limit. Prices of the new C3 range start from £10,995.

The arrival of the new Citroën C3 takes the company in two directions at once. The French maker's legendary ride comfort and refinement returns while its forward-looking technology is projected with the availability of GPS ConnectedCam as standard on the top spec model or as a £380 option on others. It is the first known manufacturer's fitment of this technology which many drivers have added as an after-market accessory.

This is a real-time forward-facing HD camera which continually records what it sees through a very wide angle lens, ideal for use with incident claims, but which can also be operated in front of the main rear view mirror by the passenger to "snap" memorable images. What ConnectedCam captures every two minutes can be downloaded through a dedicated application to the user's smart-phone and posted onto social media.

The new C3 is very technology driven with the now familiar central console screen for info-tainment, car functions, navigation, climate control and downloadable apps to enhance driving experience. It can be touch or voice-activated.

The interior can be highly personalised and colour-coded to match taste and any of 36 exterior colour combinations. Seats are shaped to give a “sofa-style” experience even for the front pair which are cleverly curved to let more light into the back, and allow greater forward vision to those in the rear who will enjoy the extra 22 mm (nearly an inch) of legroom over the outgoing models. With five seats and five doors there is a 300 litres (10.59 cu.ft) boot behind a high sill, and the oddments room includes door bins which have lighter coloured linings to make it easier to see things in them.

There are three trim and equipment levels. The base spec includes air-con, DAB radio, Bluetooth connectivity, cruise control, lane departure warning, hill start assist, coffee break alert and remote central locking as standard. The best selling Feel model's additions include 16-inch alloy wheels, wheelarch extensions, space saver spare wheel, alarm, LED daytime running lights, front and rear electric windows and electrically adjustable door mirrors. The top Flair spec additions include auto lights and wipers, front fog lights, Airbump body mouldings, reversing camera, rear parking sensors and ConnectedCam.

When it comes to the choice of engines the 1.2 litre PureTech direct injection petrol units are all three cylinder offerings, the 68 and 82 hp versions being normally aspirated and the 110 version is turbocharged so it's more responsive. The 1.6 litre four cylinder BlueHDi turbodiesels offer 75 or 100 hp outputs, all with sub 100 g/km of CO2 emissions.

Citroën at the UK press launch had the 82 and 110 hp petrol units and the 100 hp turbodiesel engines for us to try. The 82 hp PureTech petrol will be the main seller due to price and with the best-selling mid-range Feel spec level it costs £13,745. Top speed is 104 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 13.0 seconds and officially it will return 60.1 mpg in the Combined Cycle. The all important CO2 emissions are 109 g/km so VED road tax £0 First Year rate and £20 for the Second Year onwards. During my test drive around the rural roads of Worcestershire the real-life fuel economy was 51.3 mpg. This engine will generally be good enough for everyday motoring but for open road or motorway driving the more powerful petrol engine will be better. The 82 hp unit is non-turbocharged so its develops a lesser amount of 118 Nm (87 lb.ft) of torque from 2,750 rpm so there is a constant need to keep changing between third, fourth and fifth gear ratios on country roads.

Whereas by comparison the 110 hp PureTech turbocharged petrol unit not only produces more power, but it also offers 205 Nm (151 lb.ft) of torque from much a lower rpm level – just 1,500 rpm – so it's much more responsive right through the acceleration range and more relaxed during higher cruising speeds. Top speed is 117 mph, and zero to 62 mph takes 9.3 seconds. But it is also more fuel-efficient, with a Combined Cycle figure of 61.4 mpg and during my test drive on the same route as the 82 hp model the real-life figure improved to 53.2 mpg as the engine works less hard. The CO2 emissions are lower as well at 103 g/km but VED tax costs are the same. It is just a choice on whether it is worth paying the extra £1,200 for this engine over the 82 hp version.

I also tried the 1.6 litre four cylinder BlueHDi turbodiesel with 100 hp and 254 Nm (187 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm. High mileage fleet customers are the most likely users of either of the diesel engines but the future of diesel powered cars is under scrutiny by national and local authorities, largely due to the VW Dieselgate scandal. Officially this engine will return 76.3 mpg in the Combined Cycle and again on my test driving over the same route it returned an impressive 68.8 mpg. With CO2 emissions of just 95 g/km VED road tax is currently free of charge. With its high torque output it is the most responsive to drive but it's £2,300 more expensive to buy than the 82 hp petrol version and £1,100 costlier to buy than the 110 hp petrol engine.

All engines come with a five speed gearbox at the moment – a six speed unit would be better for a more relaxed drive at higher cruising speeds but then the cost of the car would be higher. The 110 hp engine will be offered with a six-speed auto gearbox from next February which will add a further £1,000 to the purchase price.

No matter which engine is chosen, apart from the cheeky new styling, the colourful paint and trim finishes, the most notable new features for all versions is the softer and far more comfortable ride the new suspension offers. Ride comfort is now an important consideration by UK customers and the new C3 excels in this area. Yes there is some body roll during cornering and perhaps it is not as sharp in the handling department as a Ford Fiesta but it is far more comfortable to ride in. The noise intrusion levels are also very low and the new steering system does offer sharper cornering control and understeer is kept to a minimum.

VERDICT

Overall the new Citroen C3 is a vast improvement in all areas over previous versions – a real Christmas Cracker – and you can pull one from 3 January 2017.

For: Cheeky new styling, fun new bodywork and interior colour combinations, wide range of cost-effective personalisation options, very comfortable ride, innovative ConnectedCam feature.

Against: This engine lacks mid-range response so the 110 hp petrol unit is nicer to drive and more fuel efficient but perhaps too costly to buy for most users.

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

Citroën C3 Feel 1.2 PureTech 82 manual. (Expected best selling model).

Price: £13,745.

Engine/transmission: 1.2 litre, three cylinder non-turbo direct injection petrol, 82 hp,

118 Nm (87 lb.ft) of torque from 2,750 rpm, five speed manual.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 13.0 seconds.

Top speed: 104 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 60.1 mpg (51.3 mpg on test), CO2 109 g/km, VED £0/£20, BIK company car tax 18%.

Insurance Group: 10E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,996 mm (13.11 ft), W 1,749 mm (5.74 ft), H 1,474 mm (4.84 ft), boot/load space 300 to 922 litres (10.54 to 32.56 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.