

PEUGEOT 508 ACTIVE HDI 140



What a decent car. Okay, the overly long handbrake is clumsy and there are a few squeaks from the dashboard plastics, but in every other respect this executive car from France is excellent.

Looks-wise, the 508 is a handsome saloon, no doubt about it. The stylish exterior design is elegant and full of 'French chic', equally at home in Paris or London. The car has a solidity that reflects the aspirations of sophistication, robustness and high quality. At the front, the 508 illustrates the development of the marque's latest stylistic codes, with a single grille rendered in a 'floating' style and piercing headlamps with LED tubes visible both by day and by night. Similarly, at the rear, three red 'claws' mask three rows of LEDs.

The interior of the car combines hi-tech with the use of high quality materials. Exceptional room, a very generous boot, and good standard specification provide interior comfort and convenience of a very high level. The simple and smart style of the fascia, the materials chosen, the thorough finish, the durability and the technologies deployed (colour 'head-up display', four-zone air conditioning, 'keyless' entry and



start-up) add to the ambience of the passenger compartment.

Behind the wheel, the steering is accurate, the 0-62 mph time of 9.8 seconds feels fine and with a maximum speed of 130 mph this 1997cc oil-burner has plenty of go. The Active HDi model, on test here, delivers 140 bhp at 4000 rpm and with 236 lb/ft of max torque it makes a good towing saloon. It has a maximum braked trailer weight of 1775 kg, so it'll pull quite a load.

Returning an average MPG of 58.8 this version of the 508 is very economical too. The engine, as with all 508 engines, benefits from the latest technology including Peugeot's e-HDi stop and start system. This is the first of a new generation of stop and start systems which offers improved driveability and economy enhancements of up to 15 percent.

The Peugeot 508 not only looks credible for business, it will also serve as an excellent main family car. It'll seat four adults comfortably or five at a push. It's a very safe car as well and has been given an overall five star Euro NCAP rating.

With its high quality of build, decent design and efficient product performance, the 508 will be appreciated by all who drive it and the individual responsible for the cost of ownership, be they the owner or the business they represent.

The comfort of the surroundings, the features that are available as standard and the dynamic driving experience are all virtues that will help retain a high level of desire in the 508, for the journey ahead.

What a cute car. The Fiat 500 is funky, fashionable and nimble. In fact it's the perfect motor for nipping around town in and, with a 1.3 valve turbo diesel under the bonnet, it's just as good on longer motorway trips.

I did feel slightly annoyed when I first climbed into the Fiat and slammed my left knee against the centre console, but I'm a 6ft tall chap and it's a small car. What did I expect? Well, I didn't anticipate it to be so lush inside - that's for sure. The white leather steering wheel, comfortable seats, and body coloured dash trim soon made me forget about my aching knee. In fact I completely forgave the Fiat for causing me pain once I started her up.

The diminutive Italian car's 1.3 16v MultiJet engine packs a punch. It takes the 500 from a standing start rapidly - if you want it to - and makes cruising at 70 mph a pleasure. Mated to this engine, the Fiat is also seriously economical. It features a Stop and Start system, which further reduces fuel consumption by switching the engine off when you're stationary and not in gear - helping to give a mega-mpg of up to 72.4.

The ride can be a little too firm over bumpy road surfaces and this causes handling to become slightly jittery, but other than that the Fiat 500 does a great job. It's actually more practical than I thought it would be too. The boot managed to take the family shopping, and my wife and two little children sat quite happily as my passengers when we went on a few school and nursery runs together.



FIAT 500 16V MULTIJET LOUNGE

Reassuringly, the Fiat has a maximum 5-star rating in the gruelling Euro NCAP crash test safety programme. When it achieved this, it was the first time that a car of such compact dimensions, (3.5 metres in length), had achieved a top rating, and astonishing that a vehicle of its type had been equipped with seven airbags as standard.

In fact, the Fiat 500 offers general levels of equipment more usually associated with cars of a far higher segment, with ABS anti-lock braking, remote central locking, electric front windows and door mirrors, an MP3-compatible CD

player and electric power steering. In Lounge spec, on test here, the car also has a leather steering wheel, mobile phone connectivity, air conditioning, 15 inch alloy wheels, body coloured door mirrors, exterior chrome trim, a glass roof and a very useful 50:50 split/folding rear seat with head restraints.

What's more, the Fiat 500 personalisation programme offers a range of over 100 bespoke accessories which, generating more than 500,000 possible trim, colour and option combinations, gives you the opportunity to personalise the Fiat in ways you never thought possible!

The Optima is the all-new flagship saloon that is the latest model to be launched in Kia's design-led product offensive. It went on sale in the UK in February, bringing fantastic design, high levels of standard specification and low running costs.

The Kia Optima is a credible car for business. It looks sharp and handles any commute admirably. The steering lacks feel, so you don't get much sense of connection with the road surface, but the car is comfortable, has enough power, and is easy to live with.

It is sold only with a diesel engine - a new 134 bhp version of Kia's smooth and efficient 1.7-litre CRDi 'U2' power unit - but the Optima contains every essential for the corporate user. Features include a high-end Infinity audio system, self-parking, heated and cool-ventilated seats, cornering lights, panoramic sunroof, reverse parking camera and an automatic cabin defogging system.

The interior is sporty, and the fascia tilts towards you so that all the major controls are within your sight-line for best visibility and ease of use. Slim armrests in the doors have integral audio speakers, freeing up more storage space in the panel beneath. And in the top-of-the-range Optima 3, on test here, mood lighting in the lower part of the doors and the centre fascia adds to the cabin's already sophisticated ambience.

The Optima is based on an all-new platform



KIA OPTIMA 1.7 CRDI '3'

which ensures it has class-leading passenger space while being no larger than its competitors. The boot is also roomy, and there is a lower lip to make loading the car less strenuous.

It is a safe motor too. All versions have Electronic Stability Control (ESC) to counter any tendency of the car to skid out of control because of bad weather or over-exuberant driving. This is linked to Vehicle Stability Management (VSM), which senses when the wheels on one side of the car are on a lower-grip surface than those on the other side. VSM then stabilises the car by reducing the amount of steering assistance if you are applying too much steering effort, or increasing it you are applying too little.

To alert other motorists to sudden braking, the Optima utilises an Emergency Stop Signalling system (ESS). This flashes the brake lights rapidly to warn following drivers. In addition, the executive-focused Kia is equipped with front, side

and curtain airbags, plus active front-seat head restraints to minimise the risk of whiplash injuries.

The manual version of the Optima features Kia's EcoDynamics fuel-saving, CO2-reducing measures, including Intelligent Stop & Go and aerodynamic drag-reducing measures. The diesel engine develops similar power and torque to the 2.0-litre units in European and Japanese rivals, but from a smaller capacity. Acceleration from 0-60 mph takes 10.2 seconds, and the car can reach a top speed of 125 mph. Better still, the Optima can achieve 57.6 miles per gallon, and it only pumps out CO2 emissions of 128 g/km.

The Optima's ride provides the perfect combination of stability with refinement on the long motorway drives that are a fact of life for many business drivers. Extensive noise-reduction measures ensure minimal transmission of engine and road sound, while the low co-efficient of drag not only helps fuel economy but also minimises wind turbulence.