

car

MAY 1969

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We sample Peugeot's
504 coupé and convertible

LATEST TO BEAR THE PROUD emblem of Bartholdi's Lion de Belfort (nearest large town to the Peugeot factory at Sochaux) are these twins clothed by Pininfarina of Italy, a coupé and convertible based on the 1.8litre 504. They follow the precedent of the 1.6litre 404 in that the bodies are made at the Pininfarina plant in Turin, whereas parallel versions of the little fwd 204 are made by Peugeot themselves. These being prestige models of which daily production probably will not exceed 15, it is unlikely that any will be made with rhd.

Mechanically they are almost identical to the fuel injection 504 saloon. They will not be available with the carburettor engine. There are no engine mods, so the standard output of 97bhp net applies. Incidentally, Peugeot literature quotes three bhp figures—103 gross at 5600 (without air cleaner, silencer, dynamo, fuel or water pumps, and with special mixture and ignition settings): 97 net at 5500 with



the electromagnetic fan clutch disengaged; and 90 with the fan engaged, as it would not normally be on the open road.

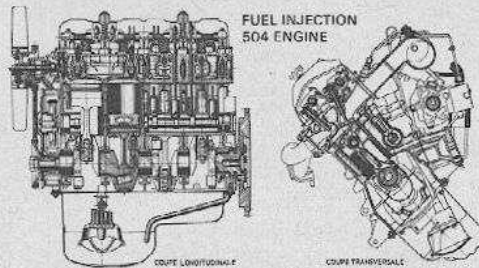
Both new cars are about 44lb heavier than the saloon: fore-and-aft distributions for the saloon and coupé, ready for the road, but without passengers, are almost identical with 51.7percent on the front wheels, whereas the convertible carries about 52.4percent forward. Thus the power/weight ratio is slightly less favourable for a given load; against this, the sporting cars stand about 4in lower and have a smaller frontal area. The wheelbase has been abbreviated by 7.5in and the overall length by about 5in. Whereas the saloon is crab-tracked (4ft 7.9in front, 4ft 5.5in rear) the new cars have the rear track widened to 4ft 7.5in. To give them a slightly higher top speed and longer legs for fast cruising, the final drive has been changed from 3.78 to 3.70, thereby raising the mph per 1000 engine rpm figure in top from 18.95 to 19.35. At 5500rpm (maximum power) this would represent only 2.2mph difference, which you would scarcely think worth bothering about.

Much more significant, as well as more perceptible to the occupants, is a change in spring rates. Front spring flexibility has been reduced from 85 to 65mm/100kg, and that of the rear springs from 26 to 22.5mm. In terms of wheel movement the figures are 70 reduced to 54mm at the

front, 57 to 52 at the rear. This considerably stiffer springing gives the car a sportier feel, but a firm of Peugeot's calibre would scarcely inflict this for that reason alone. Perhaps it was done mainly to allow the car to sit nearer the ground when unladen. The factory claims a top speed of 108mph against 104 for the saloon, but our observations suggest the obvious—that the coupé is about 3mph faster than the less aerodynamically efficient convertible, which seems to be good for about 105. There was no opportunity for accurate checking of factory acceleration figures: 18.5sec for the standing quarter-mile and 35sec for the km, saloon equivalents being 18.1 and 34.2.

Externally the bodies are neat and well-proportioned, but unimaginatively sculpted and sadly lacking in individual character or identity. But for the lion rampaging in the grille the coupé might well be mistaken for the same coach-builder's revamped Lancia Flavia. The tail panel is distinguished by triple lighting units which CAR's editor says remind him of fruit pastilles. In place of the 504 saloon's distinctive trapezoidal headlamps are paired individual rectangular ones framed within the cooling intake. Projecting above the bonnet surface, just ahead of the screen, is an unsightly matt-black intake grille for the heating.

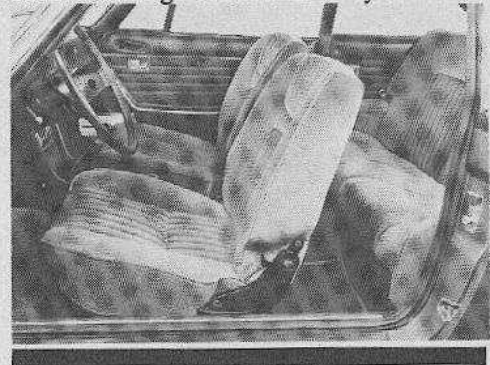
Both cars are four-seaters with restricted legroom behind, but roomier than the average 2+2. There's considerably less width in the back of the convertible because of the pockets each side into which the hood and its frame fold flush. This is very simple to lower or raise, and a built-in hood cover likewise presents no problems. Seat trim is in pleated pvc for the open car, the coupé having brightly coloured velour cloth which looks and feels surprisingly good. The front seats are comfortably shaped and have



easily adjustable backrests with locking triggers, but not the telescopic headrests of the saloon. Electrical operation of the door glasses is standard, and the hinged vents have particularly neat and practical levers with positive locking. Interior finish and décor are well executed and in good taste, but paradoxically less attractive to the eye than in the much cheaper saloon. While proper attention has been given to crash padding and so on, we noted one glaring exception—vicious-looking levers to clamp the convertible's front rail.

Heating and ventilation are comprehensive and up-to-date, but we were disappointed to find no engine tachometer. On the other hand we believe this is the first Peugeot since pre-war days to have a floor gearchange. It functions very sweetly except that unusually strong spring-loading across the gate sometimes results in top being selected when you want to drop from third to second.

Although these cars have agreeable and nicely-balanced road manners and can be hustled through bends extremely fast with-



out becoming unstuck, they are fast touring rather than sports cars in character. Being rather soft by nature, it's a pity they haven't inherited the saloon's superb ride characteristics. As it is, they suffer more disturbance than expected over mediocre surfaces, and while there's very little roll a bumpy road sometimes sets up a rocking motion about the longitudinal axis reminiscent of the old Lancia Aprilia.

Soft tops are always noisy at speed, and this one is no exception; the only way to reduce the racket would be to line and pad the hood. At high cruising speeds—and 100mph is maintained with no mechanical fuss—the convertible when closed is thus much less restful than the coupé, but one can forgive this in return for the pleasures of open-air motoring in suitable weather. In this country we are apt to forget that there are many places in the world where it would scarcely ever be necessary to drive with it closed. Perhaps inevitably there's scuttle shake—not much, but it is transmitted through the steering-wheel and more marked with the top down; tremors could also be felt through the convertible's floor.

Others who drove these cars commented on the steering-wheel's large diameter; in fact, it's slightly smaller than the saloon's at 15.75in instead of 16.5, but 15in would certainly suit most people better. We would consider it even more urgent to raise the gearing of the rack-and-pinion mechanism to reduce the present 4.5 turns.

If marketed in this country these specialised 504s would cost almost twice the price of the standard car, and on this basis they can bear no comparison with it. But in Europe, where the price differential is less, no doubt there will be more than enough customers queuing to absorb a mere 75 a week...