

EXCERPT FROM 'CAR' MAGAZINE NOV 74

PEUGEOT OWNERS HAVE A BRAND loyalty comparable with that of a dipsomaniac's devotion to the bottle. It's not that Peugeots have specially intoxicating qualities, but they do hook their owners into half-a-lifetime of enthusiasm. But enthusiasm for what? We borrowed a 504GL from Peugeot UK for six months of simulated brand loyalty in an effort to find out why all the owners look so damned smug.

Like all good cars, the 504 has evolved rather than just happened. Over the years its engine has grown from 1796cc to just on 2.0litres and the body and suspension have been the host to almost countless refinements. In addition to that it has been complemented by diesel-power for fleet and taxi use, by a costly coupe and drophead edition, and by the supremely useful estate and seven-seat Family models.

And the 504 has just been taken another gentle step forward with the 1975 models, which have been given automatic chokes for their engines plus a range of detail improvements.

None of them are sufficiently different to justify calling it a new model 504. Yet they are just enough to make the owner of an

older 504 to say 'Ah, that's more like it. Now I'll buy'. But the owner of the '74, like the one we hacked for half a year, will be gripped by no such urge, for the differences are not sufficiently great to warrant even a second glance. So in their way Peugeot are remaining loyal to their owners by not demolishing resale values or morale in the hope of topping some real, or imagined, opponent and to hell with the customer.

Rather, Peugeot get their new customers from the ranks of converts. And with the current international gloom those ranks are likely to be swollen by motorists who can no longer face the premature decay of normal cars, coupled to the erosion of second-hand values and the spectacular escalation of new-car prices.

But the possibility of getting some stability into one's motorised activities is not the prime attraction with the 504. Based on CAR's long-term experience with the Peugeot, the standard of reliability is comfortingly high. Our 504 came onto the scene with 6000 miles on the clock and dropped from our lives at just over 12,000 miles. In that period it never faulted or required attention of any sort, and did a

multitude of tasks competently and swiftly. Nothing came loose or fell off, its thirst for fuel was consistent if not specially light and the performance never varied. Makes pretty boring reading doesn't it?

Less tedious was the performance, handling and comfort. The 504 did marathon service between London and the editor's Norfolk address, covering the 206mile round trip with unhesitating efficiency. Take the first start of the day as an example. No room in the garage so out all night, often in thick frost; pull the choke right out, turn the key once and the engine becomes your immediate slave; warming up quickly and requiring the choke for no more than half a mile. Like Citroen, Peugeot believe more in pushrods than overhead camshafts, and unswervingly in hemispherical combustion chambers. The result is a claim of 98bhp at 5600rpm with 124.4lb/ft of torque at 3000rpm; the performance suggests that in this the manufacturers are not exaggerating. What the figures fail to show is the smoothness and ease with which the engine works. It proved to be one of the best loping 85-90mph cruisers that we have encountered for a very long time. Top speed is a little over 100mph,



Peugeot, of the double-edged loyalty

*A long-term relationship
with a friend, not a mistress*

so with that you can settle down to some serious point-to-pointing on the European motorways.

At the other end of the scale, the engine was not too keen to potter below 20mph in top. It tended to hunt a bit when asked to run at too low a speed in top or third, as if it were slightly over-advanced. The tune, in fact, may have been out of whack, for the plugs got dirty after prolonged traffic running, and needed a good heavy foot and a length of unobstructed road to clear them again. Although very mildly tuned, (8.5 to one, single double choke carburettor) the engine is nevertheless crisp and responsive; we all gained the overwhelming impression of endless, unflagging spirit. And this was verified in the 504's almost complete lack of thirst for oil; we did not put in a single drop in the entire period we had the car.

Against this, petrol consumption was slightly disappointing, at least at first glance. We found it difficult to get more than 25mpg from the car and, in fact, the average consumption—the 504 uses three-star, which is a saving in itself—was 24.6mpg. After we gave the car back to Peugeot and started looking at that figure we felt slightly

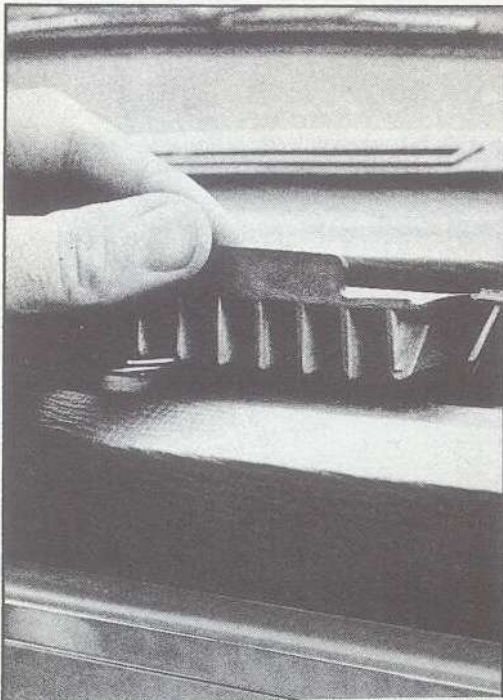
depressed; it should have been better, we thought. But gradually the truth, in the form of confession, emerged: we had all been driving the 504 quite a lot harder than most cars for the very simple reason that it felt too damned good.

The steering has a lot to do with it. Naturally, it's rack-and-pinion and coupled to XAS tyres provides a really sharp response to driver input without it being translated into twitch. Crosswinds made the 504 a bit wandery on motorways, specially from 85mph onwards, but below that it was stable and sure-footed.

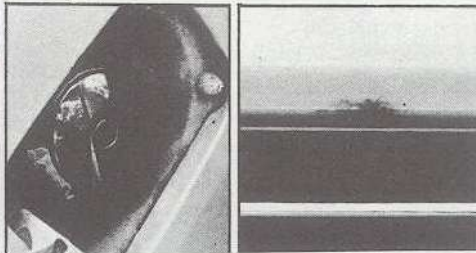
None of that is lost in corners, either. The 504 is one of those cars that reacts better to drivers who are willing to place the vehicle very accurately first time, and so precise is the steering that we found ourselves slicing very exact paths through corners, and getting personal satisfaction from doing it. But it does not come easily or early; you need 500 miles to get the best from it. In more mundane motoring, the steering won wide praise for its lightness when parking, and also for its tight (34foot) turning circle—a very positive advantage in a car that's used for slipping as unobtrusively as possible into illegal parking

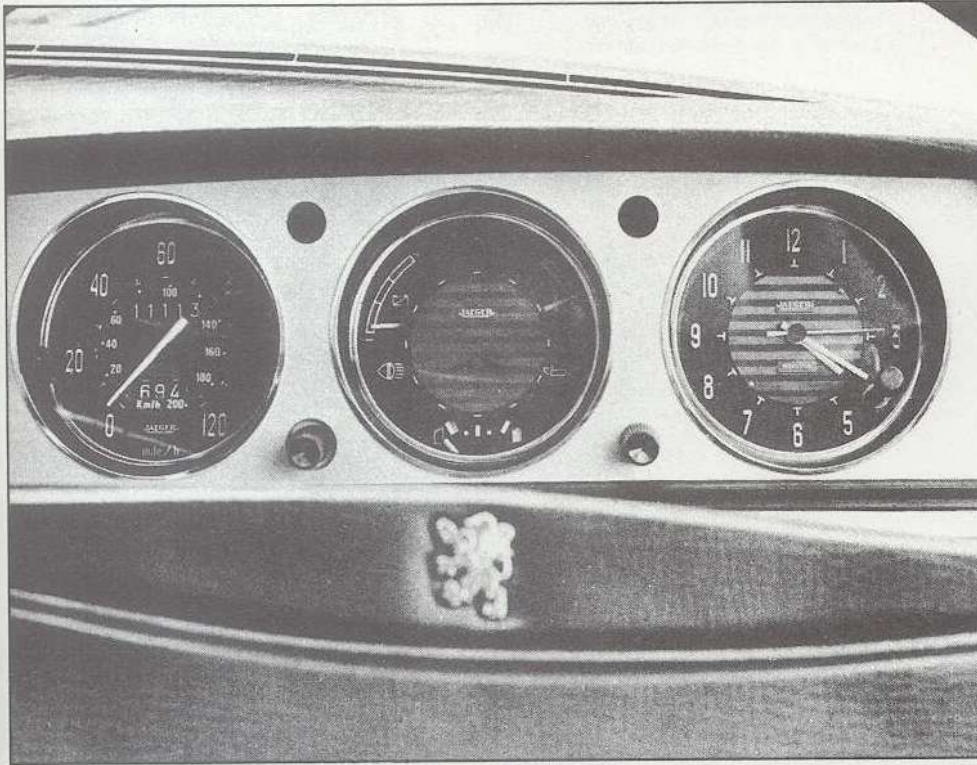
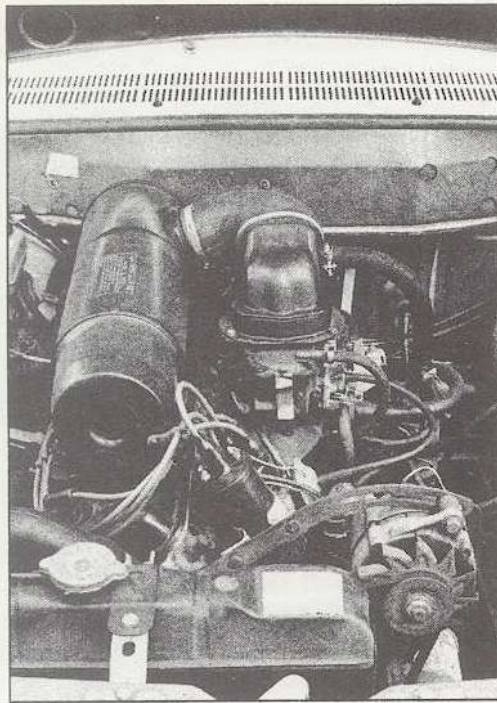
spaces during the watch-the-warden games that are necessary part of motoring in London or any big city for that matter.

Peugeot's French customers prefer steering column gear changes, which may explain why the UK edition's floor-mounted lever has an over-done spring to assist the lever into the third/top position in the otherwise smooth and positive mechanism. We found that it presented no problems when we were driving the 504 every day; but following an interlude with another car, we all caught ourselves applying too little muscle against the spring and ending up in fourth gear instead of second when moving from first. However, once mastered, the lever slots through the gate effortlessly. Considering that the 504 had disc brakes all round, the handbrake on the test car was effective, although by the end of the half-year period it was in need of adjustment. The footbrake worked well and without much effort. There was a certain deadness in the pedal, however, and under some circumstances—usually medium to hard braking—the car got the shudders. This was also noticeable through the pedal and steering at low speeds, suggesting a high

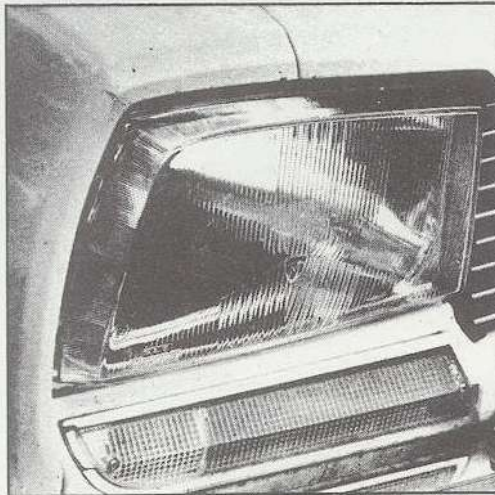


Fresh-air vents (left) look strange but work well. Lockable filler cap (below) has rubber overflow apron to protect paint. Only sign of rust (below) was tiny bleed from under chrome strip. Remarkably spacious cabin (bottom) has full reclining facilities, flush-fitting head restraints.





Engine (top) is tilted for bonnet clearance so radiator is offside of centre. Instruments (above) are simple but revealing, while clock proved outstandingly accurate. Stones chipped around edges but caused no damage to oblong headlamps (right), which were at best on high beam



spot on one of the discs. Whatever the cause it got no worse during our tenure of the 504, only more annoying.

Equally irritating and far more elusive was the occasional little bang that manifested itself in corners, as if some metal object was hanging loose in the bowels of the Peugeot and swinging against the internal panels on corners. It evaded us completely and refused to fall off or make itself heard anywhere but in corners. It reminded us of a similar noise in an Armstrong Siddeley limousine; it, too, defied all attempts to locate it. Only when the vehicle was badly damaged in a crash was the mystery solved; a bolshie worker had attached a metal weight to a piece of fishing line and left it swinging inside one of the inner box members. And so as to have the last word, he left a note: 'So, you've found it at last.'

The stone that came hurtling at the 504's windscreen was thrown up from a vehicle going in the other direction. It wasn't even specially large but it arrived with a huge bang and bounced clear, taking with it a chip of glass about as big as a little finger nail gouged from the laminated screen. Had the screen been of the toughened type, it would have been broken and the car virtually immobilised as a result. Peugeot use laminated screens in the models they send to this country, so that's one less worry to burden owners.

Rust does not seem too much of a problem, either. Our car was white, so external corrosion was easy to see; there were a couple of spots on the front of the bonnet where paint had been chipped off by flying stones, and there was a mark below the bright metal of the rear window frame from which rust was bleeding.

Predictably, there was no sign of wear in the interior, although the corded carpets proved too hard to clean, even with the aid of a vacuum cleaner.

All the instruments worked perfectly during the six months, and the clock was the best we have ever encountered in a car. It was set at the beginning of our test and remained accurate to within perhaps 15 seconds from then on. None of us was specially enthusiastic about the fascia, which looked too garish and not particularly well considered. But the instruments were easy to read and the minor controls simple and effective. The wash/wipe is incorporated in the four-station lighting stalk on the left of the steering column, with the main wiper switch on the fascia panel itself.

Our own findings about the 504 made it easier to understand owner enthusiasm for the Peugeot. It gave every indication of being the sort of car you could live with for a very long time without feeling bored or that you are driving an outdated vehicle. Peugeot have the happy knack of steering a very careful path between advanced engineering and boring practicality. The 504 is not in the front line of engineering achievement, but it is not lacking, either, as evidenced by its all-independent suspension, discs all round and the good handling and roadholding that results. Equally important is the car's quietness and the charm of the engine.

In the six months we had the 504 it really gave a convincing demonstration of what Peugeots are all about. Although it does not shout it out loud, the Peugeot simply announces its owner as a man who made the right choice and is happy to live with it. ●