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Citroën news and latest C3 Aircross First Impressions

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David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports...

Citroën dealers around the country are opening their order books, probably now their computers, from 1 November waiting for eager customers to visit, see, try and hopefully buy the new C3 Aircross compact SUV.

But the market is awash with small, medium and large new SUVs tracking down customers who have shown their desire to own these high riding vehicles rather than the previous must-haves of B-segment 'supermini' and C-segment lower medium sized hatchbacks.

In reality the new C3 Aircross compact SUV replaces the outgoing C3 Picasso compact MPV and that's a predictable move as demand for small MPVs has almost entirely disappeared.



So combining the interior seat arrangement combinations with load space and then by adding SUV exterior styling, is potentially a smart move. A wide range of personalisation options, interior and exterior colour combinations and Citroën's new comfortable ride core feature are also likely to appeal to buyers

The C3 Aircross uses the same platform and PureTech and BlueHDi petrol and diesel engines as the Peugeot 2008 and the Vauxhall Crossland X compact SUVs which are all built at the same Zaragoza plant in Spain.

The Citroën C3 Aircross prices start at £13,995 and rise through 13 derivatives to £19,720. Specification levels follow those of the C3 Hatchback with Touch, Feel and Flair choices. Depending on the spec level chosen there is the choice of petrol PureTech 82 hp manual, turbocharged 110 hp with manual and auto gearboxes and 130 hp manual units. The choice of BlueHDi turbodiesel engines are 110 hp and 120 hp units with manual transmissions. All are front wheel drive but there is the £400 option of Peugeot- Citroën's Grip Control function with five driving modes and Hill Descent Assist.

With 85 personalisation and model combinations there is a huge choice for a small SUV. Dan Bullimore, Citroën UK's C3 Aircross product manager told the motoring media at this week's model launch that he expects to sell around 13,200 of these vehicles next year. He said to put that in context the C3 five door Hatchback, on which the Aircross SUV version is based, will achieve in the region of 15,600 sales. He anticipates 54% of sales will go to retail customers and 46% to fleet operators including Motability. Petrol engines will be the choice of 74% of users, 90.5% will choose a manual gearbox model and around 6% will choose the Grip Control option.

When it comes to which engines will be the most popular, the 1.2 PureTech 110 hp petrol unit will take 35% of sales followed by the 1.6 BlueHDi 100 hp turbodiesel. As for the choice of specification, the base Touch level is expected to take just 2% of UK sales, Feel 43% and the top spec Flair 55%.



The single best selling version of the C3 Aircross range will be the Flair with the 1.2 PureTech turbo 110 hp engine with its five-speed manual gearbox, and which is priced at £18,000.

Citroën says technology is a core theme for the C3 Aircross with 12 different technologies on offer. These include voice controlled 3D navigation, Wireless Smartphone charging, keyless entry and start button, reversing camera, lane departure warning and blind-spot monitoring, colour head-up display, speed sign recognition, intelligent beam headlights, active safety braking, and park assist - depending on the spec-level and extra cost options chosen.

The Touch spec level reflects the low range starter price and includes standard features such as 16-inch steel wheels, DAB digital radio, Bluetooth, air-con and auto headlights. The Feel spec level adds 16-inch alloy wheels, seven-inch touchscreen infotainment system including Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, a leather covered steering wheel, LED daytime running lights and front and rear aluminium effect underbody scuff plates. The top spec Flair level offers 17-inch alloys, dual zone air-con, auto wipers, rear electric windows, rear parking sensors, keyless entry and integrated sat-nav. A glass panoramic sunroof is a £950 option for Feel and Flair models.

The striking SUV design is supported by a number of personalisation paintwork options. The exterior bi-tone roof, standard on the Flair trim level and available in three colours, can be complemented by one of the four exterior colour pack options. It also features the instantly recognisable coloured light surrounds, door mirrors, wheel centre caps, rear quarter window and roof bars.

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The body design of the C3 Aircross is dominated with its raised ground clearance, elevated driving position, front and rear skid plates, large wheels and wheel arch extensions. The body styling is enhanced by other features such as touches of colour on the standard fit roof



bars, and the 'Venetian Blind' rear quarter-lights.

Inside up-front are ergonomically designed and large armchair style comfortable seats, a simple dashboard with logical controls and numerous storage spaces. The 'glassy' cabin combines with elevated seating to provide an airy environment and good all-round vision. The roomy rear interior has split folding 60/40 rear seats with adjustable seat backs. Citroën says it has class-leading boot and load space ranging from 410 litres (14.48 cu.ft) with the rear seats in their normal position, 520 litres (18.36 cu.ft) with the sliding rear bench on the Flair spec level and rising to 1,289 litres (45.52 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded down.



There is a choice of five different interior trim options which include choices of upholstery, dashboard textures, door panel designs and touches of colour on the central console surround, steering wheel, air vents and seat backs.



The engine line-up we know from the C3 Hatchback range and other Citroën and Peugeot models. These are the PureTech three cylinder 1.2 petrol, the first being the non-turbo multi-point injection 82 hp unit with 118 Nm (87 lb.ft) of torque and five-speed manual gearbox, the turbo 110 hp unit with 205 Nm (151 lb.ft) of torque also with a five-speed manual or six-speed automatic torque converter gearbox choices and the 130 hp, 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) version with a six-speed manual gearbox. The 1.6, four cylinder BlueHDi turbodiesels are 100 hp with 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque with a five speed gearbox and the 120 hp unit with 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque with a six speed manual gearbox. All but the lowest powered petrol and diesel engines have Stop/Start as standard. The all-important CO2 emissions range from 104 to 107 g/km for the diesels and 115 to 126 g/km for the petrol units.

For the main media test drive we chose the best selling model the PureTech 1.2 turbo 110 hp petrol with the most popular Flair equipment level. For those that want even more performance the 1.2 130 hp version will be brilliant as it effortlessly already powers much larger Peugeot models such as the new 3008 and 5008 SUVs. However the 110 hp unit with its three-cylinder design is just as smooth as the 130 hp unit. It is not quite as responsive as it has marginally less torque, but it is delivered from just 1,500rpm so it responds well during acceleration from low to mid range speeds. However it misses the 'urge' or willingness to respond at mid to top range cruising speeds in fifth gear. It misses out by only having a five-speed manual gearbox although the £1,200 six-speed auto transmission option makes it generally more refined to drive and will be well-suited to Citroën's loyal Motability customers in particular. Officially this unit in manual gearbox form will return 56.5 mpg with CO2 emissions of 115 g/km so VED is £160 First Year before dropping to the Standard rate of £140. During our test drive this week over 70 miles of mixed driving conditions the real-life fuel economy figure was 42.1 mpg. If the automatic version is your choice the Combined Cycle figure is 50.4 mpg and the CO2 emissions rise to 126 g/km so the VED costs are the same.

Although across the industry the sales of diesel powered models are reducing, in particular with smaller vehicles, the 1.6 litre BlueHDi 100 hp unit should not be overlooked because of



its fuel frugality and overall it will be the second best selling engine in the line-up. Officially it will return 70.6 mpg with CO2 emissions of 104 g/km so VED road tax is £140 every year. With 254 Nm (187 lb.ft) of torque and a five-speed manual gearbox this unit felt the nicest and most responsive to drive compared to the 110 hp petrol unit - as you would expect - and the car rode better with this heavier engine. On our short test drive using country A-roads the real-life figure was 48.6 mpg. The fact that the 100 hp diesel unit costs £1,020 more to buy than the 110 hp petrol engine might dull its appeal for some lower mileage retail users but it will be less costly to run.

Overall the handling of the C3 Aircross was secure despite its tall height and longer suspension travel, and it really is very comfortable - which most users will appreciate. There was a notable amount of understeer during higher cornering speeds on open roads but it was predictable, light and easy to drive in-town, with good all-round visibility.

VERDICT

Compact size, versatile and roomy interior space, ride comfort, chic styling and lots of personalisation options should be the main selling points for the C3 Aircross in a very competitive but still growing compact SUV market.

For: Funky and distinctive exterior styling with its personalisation colour combinations, compact, easy to drive and park, comfortable seats and compliant ride, versatile seating/load carrying combinations, award winning PureTech petrol engine options.

Against: Not as dynamic to drive in terms of handling and agility as some specifically designed compact SUVs rather than this tall MPV/SUV design combination, choose options with care otherwise it becomes a small vehicle with a big price, 60,000 mile warranty is less generous than its partner brand Peugeot.



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

Citroën C3 Aircross Flair, 1.2 PureTech 110, manual. (Best selling model).

Price: £18,000 + £400 Grip Control option.

Engine/transmission: 1.2 litre, PureTech three cylinder direct injection turbocharged petrol, 110 hp, 205 Nm (151 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,500 rpm, five speed manual.



Performance: 115 mph, 0-62mph 11.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 56.5 mpg, (42.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 115 g/km, VED road tax First Year £160 then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 22%.

Insurance Group: TBC.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,155 mm (13.63 ft), W 1,765 mm (5.79 ft), H 1,637 mm (5.37 ft), boot/load space 410/520/1,289 litres (14.48/18.36/45.52 cu.ft).