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DS 7 Crossback SUV – Road Test

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Now on sale in the UK – DS 7 Crossback.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The all-new DS 7 Crossback arrived in the UK in March this year and was heralded as their first purpose-built DS model, not as in the past a top spec Citroën. DS Automobiles became a global brand in its own right in 2014 and before that the DS label was used for higher spec Citroën models. Of course the DS branding is even older, going back to the futuristic and iconic Citroën DS Saloons launched in 1955.

Today the DS Automobiles brand is positioned within the PSA Peugeot-Citroen Group as



their global premium label ahead of mainstream Peugeot and Citroën - now positioned to provide quirky, fun and comfortable models.

Currently in the UK the DS Automobiles range consists of the DS 3 supermini Hatchbacks and Cabrios, the mid-sized DS 4 Hatchback and the DS 5 Crossback plus now the range-topping large DS 7 Crossback. Production of the existing Citroën based DS 4 and DS 5 models ceases at the end of this year and these will be replaced in due course with purpose-built DS models.



The prices of the DS 7 Crossback premium SUV range start from £28,050 and rise through nine variants to £43,535. These on-the-road prices may rise marginally when the



manufacturer adds in the cost of the new higher VED road tax rates. This year the UK will have around 60 DS individual bespoke dealerships in operation and in keeping with its target to be considered a premium brand the emphasis will be on customer service. The ever growing numbers of premium competitor models for the DS 7 Crossback to contend with include the Audi Q3/Q5, BMW X1/X3, Range Rover Evoque, Jaguar E-Pace and Volvo XC40/XC60.

Currently the DS 7 Crossback range is available with three engine options - the new PSA Group 1.5 litre, four cylinder BlueHDi 130 hp turbodiesel with a six speed manual gearbox, the 2.0 litre four cylinder BlueHDI 180 hp turbodiesel and the 1.6 litre four cylinder PureTech 225 hp turbo petrol unit - and the latter two units are available with new eight speed automatic transmissions as standard. All versions, although classed as SUVs, are only front wheel drive but there is the £400 option of Advanced Traction Control, the DS version of PSA Group's Grip Control system. Next year a 296 hp petrol-electric hybrid version with four wheel drive will join the range.



Depending on the engine chosen there are Elegance, Performance Line, Prestige and Ultra Prestige trim and equipment levels. In addition there is the usual comprehensive list of extra cost personalisation options and trim finishes, plus an Electric Seat Pack, Night Vision Pack, Easy Access Pack, Connected Pack, Urban Pack for auto parking, plus a Modularity Pack (a two position boot floor) - and £1,000 will get you the electric opening panoramic sunroof, but that is standard-fit for the Ultra Prestige trim level.

All variants are well-equipped, in keeping with the DS premium brand ideals. The entry levels models have 18-inch alloy wheels, LED rear lights, cruise control, lane departure warning, rear parking sensors, a powered tailgate, dual zone air-con, keyless entry and an 8.0-inch touchscreen infotainment system with Bluetooth, DAB radio and smartphone



integration. The sportier Performance Line versions gain 19-inch alloys, LED headlights, electrically folding door mirrors, Alcantara upholstery, a 12.0-inch touchscreen with voice recognition and sat-nav plus a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster in front of the driver. Prestige level gains more chrome finishes for the trim and controls, front parking sensors, reversing camera, wireless phone charging, electrically adjustable ventilated and massaging front seats, Nappa leather upholstery and DS advanced safety functions. The top level Ultra Prestige spec additions include 20-inch wheels, panoramic sunroof, a Focal sound system and adaptive cruise control. Active Scan Suspension which pre-empt bumps and adjusts the suspension is standard on some models or a £1,000 option for others, but it's not available at all for the 1.5 litre 130 hp BlueHDI derivatives.

Next to specification, high on the list of must-haves for premium brand SUVs is the styling. Does it have kerb appeal, is it desirable, and is it the latest must-have motoring accessory? Fashion over function can rear its head in this sector. Externally the DS 7 doesn't look that different from the new Peugeot 5008 large SUV, and to be fair they both use similar components. However whereas the 5008 has seven seats the DS 7 has only five so that allows for added rear seat legroom for the three rear seat passengers and there is also a large 555 litre (19.60 cu.ft) boot which expands to 1,752 litres (61.87 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded down.



At the front is a large grille with an extravagant under-bumper vent, flanked by large recesses for the fog lights. It's very much of a front view in keeping with what you see with large Audi SUVs.

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Inside the DS 7 is quite different to the Peugeot 5008. It's more glitzy, perhaps garish with the Prestige spec version I tried with Tivoli quilted 'pleather' door panels and quilted leather seat upholstery - but fortunately there are other upholstery and trim designs available. The bling continues with etched chrome finishes to a number of controls and switches, a prominent B.R.M clock top centre of the fascia panel with the vehicle's start/stop button beneath it and two lines of chrome window controls positioned in the centre console



between the seats. Centrepiece of the dashboard is the 12.0-inch touchscreen and underneath that is a confusing line of buttons which in the main give short-cuts to many functions operated via the touchscreen. But as with many PSA Group vehicles too many functions such as the heating and ventilation need to be adjusted by using the touchscreen instead of simple, easy and safer to use conventional dashboard mounted controls. Stalks mounted to the steering wheel column, but hidden from view, operate the lights, indicators and cruise control. In many cases the DS 7's interior is fashion over function. It might look snazzy but will it stand the test of time as fashion of today is not fashionable tomorrow so in the end it could become dated very quickly.



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To go with the Prestige spec level my DS 7 first test drive opportunity was with the new 1.5-litre, four cylinder BlueHDi turbodiesel engine. This new 130 hp unit is the first of a range of lower emission diesels that will eventually replace the current and long servicing 1.6 litre BlueHDi 100 and 120 hp units. This new more powerful direct injection turbodiesel engine produces 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm but with lower emissions and improved fuel economy. In my test vehicle the official Combined Cycle figure is 68.9 mpg with CO2 emissions of 107g/km. This means that with the new VED road tax and Benefit-in-Kind tax changes introduced in April this year for new cars, the First Year rate is now £165 (it was £140), and the Standard rate remains the same a £140 - but BiK tax goes up to 26% instead of the previous 23% rate. During my week long test driving covering all types of journeys the figure was a modest 47 mpg, nearly 22 mpg less than the official figure so what an owner would have saved on tax costs would have been spent on more fuel.

The overall conclusion, given its only adequate performance with an official top speed of 121 mph and a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 10.8 seconds, is that this new engine is just a bit too small in capacity terms to power such a large vehicle. It just has to be worked that bit harder to propel this large 1,420 kg (3,131 lb) kerb weight, 4,570 mm (14.99 ft) long and tall SUV on motorways or cope with winding country roads. Around town traffic it was certainly more at home with the computer showing 52 mpg but cruising on open roads at 60 to 70 mph soon brought that figure down to a fairly constant 47 mpg. However the new unit felt smooth and refined and in a smaller SUV vehicle such as the Peugeot 3008 it would be less hampered by bulk. I would suggest going for the 180 hp turbodiesel engine, or if petrol power is preferred, the 225 hp unit will be more suitable and both come with an automatic gearbox as standard, which is more in keeping with a potentially premium quality SUV of this size.

In keeping with its upmarket perceived status the ride comfort was good and the handling well-balanced. The steering feedback was tuned more towards 'nice driving' than any pretences of living up to its 'Sports' labelling, as in its SUV or Sports Utility Vehicle category. It's certainly not 'Utility' either because of its lavish spec and glitzy interior design and use of trim and materials.



VERDICT

We know where the new DS 7 is being aimed at in terms of positioning in a very competitive and competent premium SUV market sector. For now, until we see proven demand, it just misses that target but time will tell.

For: Stylish exterior with upmarket kerb appeal, high specification, roomy with plenty of rear seat legroom, plenty of 'bling' and 'glitzy' interior finishes, comfortable and easy to drive, low tax costs for a large SUV.

Against: The youthful interior trim finishes might not appeal to some more conservative buyers, confusing control buttons, muddled infotainment controls, hidden control stalks, new 1.5 litre engine is not muscular enough for a vehicle of this size and weight, poor real-life fuel economy, ungenerous warranty.



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

DS 7 Crossback large SUV, 1.5 Prestige BlueHDi 130 manual.

Price: £34,435 (£37,685 as tested with options).

Engine/transmission: PSA Group's new 1.5 litre, four cylinder direct injection turbodiesel, 130 hp, 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual, 2WD.

Performance: 121 mph, 0-62 mph 10.8 seconds.



Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 68.9 mpg (47 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 107 g/km, new VED diesel road tax First Year rate £165 then £140 Standard rate, new BiK company car tax rate 26%.

Insurance Group: 23E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,570 mm (14.99 ft), W 1,895 mm (6.22 ft), H 1,625 mm (5.33 ft), kerb weight 1,420 kg (3,131, lb), boot/load space 555 to 1,752 litres (19.60 to 61.87 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.