

# CITROEN CX

From 1974-1983



## The nonconformist

By Andrew Mills

**T**AKE A look at this unusual, but supremely logical, formula for the design of a car: Start with a large comfortable lounge suite; place the three seater part sufficiently far behind the two single seats to enable plenty of stretching-out leg room in the back. Build a spacious body around the lounge suite making the body as aerodynamically efficient as possible so that it will have the low fuel consumption of a much smaller car. Suspend the body so that it completely isolates the occupants no matter how rough the going is in the remote-seeming outside world. And there you have the Citroen CX; a car so futuristic that it looks as though it will be released in 10 years time. But, believe it or not, it was first released in the early 1970's.

Hold on a second. Haven't we left out something in this interesting car formula? *Mais oui! Sacre bleu!* It has no engine or gearbox. We had better hurry up and get some mechanical parts to put in our beautiful new car.

Perhaps that last sentence may seem a bit cynical, but it really does appear that the French designers of the CX were so carried away with their otherwise superbly conceived car that they did al-

most add the engine as an afterthought. And it does, to some extent, spoil an otherwise brilliant car. The engine is of rather ancient heritage having virtually been lifted from the older model "big" Citroen D series and turned sideways to enable it to give more interior room in a car with slightly smaller exterior dimensions. The CX has front-wheel drive which is today considered to be the best way to package a car for passenger space and fuel efficiency, but it is a long way from being the first time that front-wheel drive has been used in a Citroen. That event took place more than 50 years ago, in the early 30s when Andre Citroen's company pioneered this method of driving cars. Traction Avant — front-wheel drive was around for a lot longer than most people realised when BMC "re-invented" it to use in the Mini.

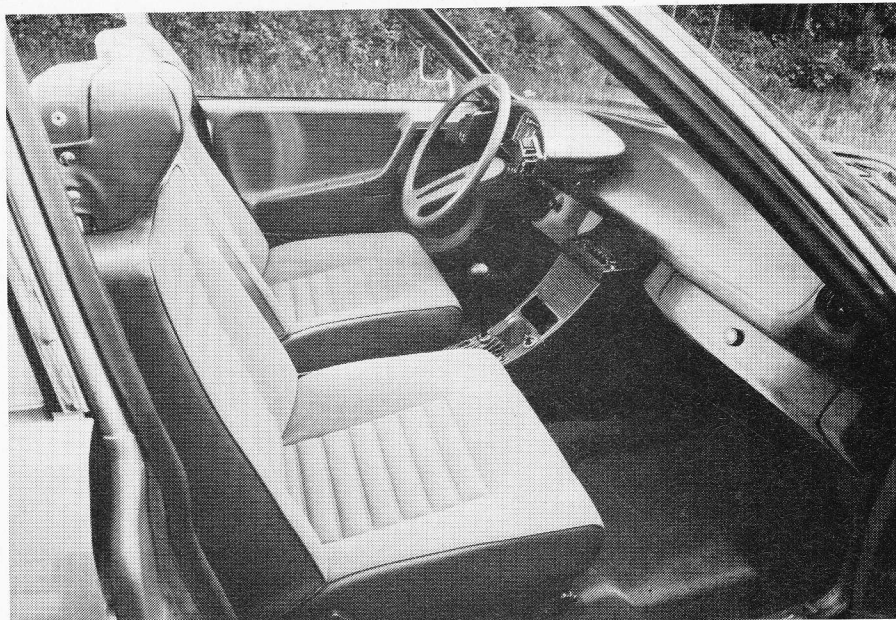
But let us get back to the CX's engine.

As well as being of pretty old design, it is also much smaller than Australians consider normal for a luxury car of this size. Four cylinders and not much over two litres may seem rather puny by our standards in a car with similar dimensions to a Fairlane. But there is a good reason — or at least the reason is good in France: the price of petrol. If you had to pay close to \$70 to fill the petrol tank of your Fairlane, would you be as happy with 5.8 litres of muscle engine up front slurping the precious liquid?

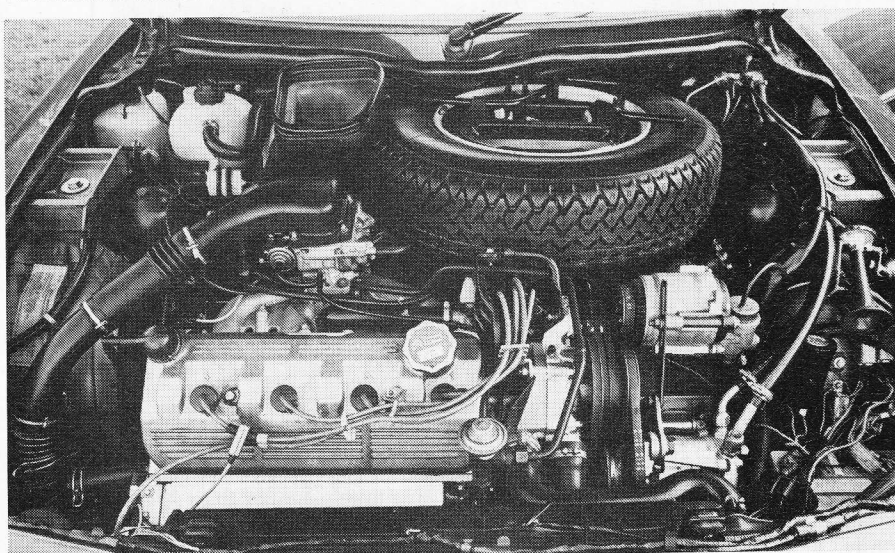
As already mentioned, the body of the CX is very streamlined (indeed the name CX is adapted from Cx which is the abbreviation used by aerodynamicists to signify the coefficient of friction) so once the big CX has been wound up to its cruising speed, it slips easily through the air with a minimum of engine power. Four cylinders are enough to keep the car moving. The trouble is that good aerodynamics are of little benefit to a car when accelerating from rest and at slow speeds. So in Oz, the land of half price petrol, the acceleration of the Citroen is pretty weak. Pity, because more than anything else, below average acceleration has turned away a lot of



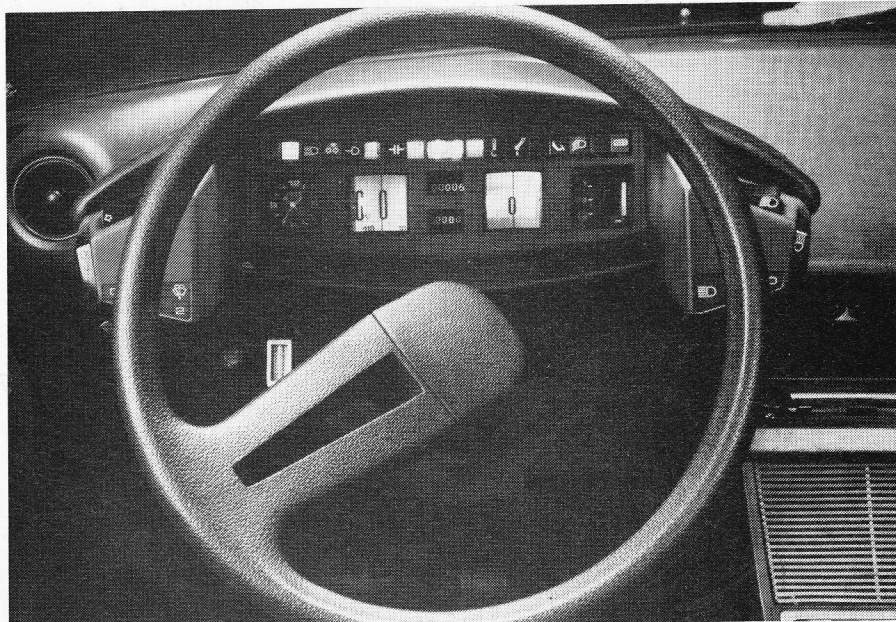
BUYING  
A  
USED  
CAR



*The futuristic interior of the CX 2200.*



*The Citroën engine is crowded but easy to work on — if you know what you're doing.*



*Citroën's instrumentation with the lens-enlarged speedo and tachometer.*

people who would otherwise have been happy with the car.

The other drawback of the Citroën is that its highly unconventional mechanical design makes it a bit of a nightmare to repair for anyone who has not been formally trained on the car and who does not have the specialised equipment to diagnose problems and carry out repairs. It is not that the design of the Citroën is highly complex. The design is actually much simpler than most of the car's detractors realise. It is just that the mechanicals of the Citroën are Different, with a capital D. The French as a people have a well deserved reputation for doing things in their own way, and to hell with what everyone else in the world thinks. And all Citroëns reflect the thinking of their Gallic designers in the same way that all Mercedes-Benz cars reflect the German characteristics of uncompromising functionality. In particular the hydropneumatic suspension of the CX, which not only gives the car such a superb ride but also can be adjusted from the driver's seat to raise or lower the height to suit different terrains, is so unusual that the first glance at it by an unsuspecting mechanic who is unfamiliar with it is enough to frighten the poor fellow off the car for life. Yet if he only realised just how simple it really is to check the system and replace any defective parts, he would quite possibly swear off Holdens and Falcons for evermore and set himself up as a Citroën specialist.

But that is wishful thinking. In Australia the Citroën has become something of an orphan, and like all orphan cars, the resale value has dropped pretty drastically. The CX has become an object of desire for a few enthusiasts, and an object of derision among the majority who do not know the car. So if you have a hankering for something a bit different in the automotive field, and if you like the idea of a soft, pampered ride, then the big Citroën may be just what you are looking for. Even if you are not in the market for a Citroën but are simply an interested observer of car design, you will be well rewarded by taking a close look at the Citroën designers' ideas on how a car should be built.

A word of warning before you rush out and drive a Citroën for the first time. Not surprisingly the car is unlike any other to drive. To start with, the view from the driver's seat is unusual. The instruments are set in a futuristic-looking binnacle that looks as though it would be much more at home in ET's space craft than in a car. The main instruments, speedo and tachometer, are not conventional dials, but are small rotating drums which move horizontally and carry numbers which indicate engine and car speed. The trouble is that the drums are so small that they are set behind large magnifying lenses to make them readable — the re-



sulting effect is somewhat bizarre.

The next thing you notice when driving a CX for the first time is that the steering is incredibly direct for a car of this size, if you are driving a power-assisted steering Citroen as the great majority of Australian CX's are. If the car is manually steered, it is a bit heavy and cumbersome by comparison.

Then there are the brakes. The Citroen is unique in that the brake pedal does not push directly on the brake fluid, but instead, operates a valve which progressively opens to allow more stored pressure to pass to the wheel cylinders and slow the car down. At first the brake pedal feels rather strange as it has much less movement than other cars and it feels as though nothing much is happening — that is until you realise that the big car is losing speed at a great rate.

So if you have never driven a big Citroen, now is the time to give it a go. But be sure to take it for a decent run rather than just a quick trip.

We have already mentioned that fuel consumption is very low for a car of the size of the big Citroen. Expect to use around 11 to 12 litres per 100 kilometres in metropolitan running, and as little as nine litres per 100km on a fast-paced country trip. This amazingly low consumption proves the combined advantages of high of gearing and a body with a drag coefficient of only .30, a figure which other manufacturers are still only dreaming about 10 years after the French designers had already achieved it.

## History

**August 1974:** The Citroen CX is released in France and the motoring world is astounded yet again at the ability of the French company to come up with a car which is at least two generations ahead of anything that anyone else can produce. All the first cars are produced in left-hand drive so Australian admirers can only look on in awe and wait for the day when Australian imports with right-hand drive will be possible.

**March 1976:** At long last the CX reaches our shores officially, although a few cars have already been privately imported from Britain. Initially the Citroen CX is imported in two forms, 2200 Super and 2200 Pallas. The more luxurious Pallas, which has power steering and air conditioning as standard, is by far the most popular even though it does cost a couple of thousand dollars more than the Super. Both cars are sold only with a four speed manual transmission with a floor change.

**December 1977:** The Super is discontinued in this country and, at the same time, then engine in the Pallas is increased in capacity from 2200ml<sup>3</sup> to 2400ml<sup>3</sup>. The only transmission available with the bigger-engined Pallas at this stage is the semi-automatic Cmatic in

which the driver still does the shifting of the gear lever but the clutching takes place automatically. The smaller engined 2200 Pallas remains on our market for a few more months, but fades from the new car market halfway through 1978.

**December 1981:** Manual transmissioned CX's reappear on our market with the introduction of a new five speed transmission. This looks to be the last major change to the CX as sold in Australia because the car has been imported to our shores in increasingly smaller numbers. It is liable to disappear altogether unless some sort of a miracle takes place. There are several reasons why the big Citroen has fallen from popularity in this country: import quotas and ADRs play some part, but the main reason is that the local manufacturers, especially GM-H, have made such large strides in their car design that even the futuristic Citroen is no longer quite as far ahead of the world as it used to be.

## What to look for

As the Citroen CX is such an unusual design, it is best to play it safe when looking at a used car and stick to one which has always been serviced and repaired by a Citroen specialist, whether it be an authorised dealer or a factory-trained mechanic who has migrated to this country and set himself up in private practice.

Look over the engine for any signs of oil leaks and check that all the drive belts are in good condition and do not show any signs of slippage or overheating. Take the car for a good long drive and make sure that the engine performs without any hesitation and that the gearbox and clutch operate easily then, in a large area such as an empty car park, drive the car in a full circle first in one direction and then the other with the steering on full lock. Listen for clicking or clunking noises from the vicinity of the front wheels which could indicate that costly repairs to the driveshaft joints might be necessary.

By this time the engine should be pretty hot, so stop the car and look under the bonnet to make sure that the electric cooling fan has turned on. While the car

is stopped, move the ride-height adjusting lever to its highest setting and see how long it takes the car to rise to its full height from the ground. (Wonderful isn't it? People will come from all directions to watch the car perform its most amazing trick.) Anyhow, it should not take the car longer than about two minutes to reach its full height. If it does, then there could be problems in the suspension system — and just try taking that to your local petrol station to be fixed. The looks on the mechanics' faces will be absolutely fascinating.

All in all, this is a car which you want to be very sure about before committing yourself too deeply. So do yourself a favour and have your used car looked at either by an experienced Citroen mechanic or by an inspector from your local motoring association.

## Insurance

Insurance costs on any car which is of unusual design and construction are usually higher than average and the Citroen CX is no exception. So be sure to consult your favourite insurance company before going too far in the purchase of a used CX. There is one consolation, however, in the high cost of insuring a big Citroen. As well as being ahead of everyone else in aerodynamic design and ride comfort, the Citroen people are also in the forefront of safety car design, and the body of the CX is extremely strong and able to protect its occupants well in an accident.

## Briefly

If your tastes in life run to the exotic and you would rather be seen dead than in a Japanese tin box or a macho Australian car, then the Citroen CX with its wonderfully individualistic construction and body-pampering ride may be just the car to meet, and express, your motoring needs. But bear in mind that the very differences in design which appeal to your unconventional mind will, from time to time, cause you problems when the car does need repairs. □

**NEXT MONTH:** Datsun 240/260/280 Z

## PRICE GUIDE — Citroen CX

	2200 Super manual	2200 Pallas manual	2400 Pallas semi-automatic
6000-7000	1976	—	—
7000-8000	1977	1976	—
8000-10,000	—	1977-78	—
10,000-12,000	—	—	1978
12,000-14,000	—	—	1979
14,000-16,000	—	—	1979-80
16,000-18,000	—	—	1981
18,000-20,000	—	—	1982-83

These are approximate prices which will be asked by licensed dealers; private sales will be approximately 10-15 percent lower.