

BUYING GUIDE CITROEN DS 1955 – 1975. OCTANE MAGAZINE

INTRODUCTION

The Citroen DS became an instant classic the day it went out of production and yet interest seems to have really taken off over the last couple of years. While it's never been a cheap classic – unlike, say, a Rover P6 – a properly good DS is now worth 30 grand, while one of the rare Chapron convertibles or coupés costs as much as a 1960s Ferrari. Amazing when you remember that the DS was once the Parisian taxi of choice...

So why is a Citroen saloon, and one fitted with a pretty mundane engine at that, now fetching as much as a Mk2 Jaguar? Two reasons: style and comfort. The DS has plenty of both but it's the futuristic looks that still enthrall buyers the most, 55 years after the car was launched. A DS of any age is just a fantastic-looking car, whether whooshing along a motorway or slinking through the streets of a big city. The DS is also very usable and it's true (but sad) to say that its ride quality has never been bettered; you won't believe how a DS can float over incredibly rough roads until you experience it.

With space for all the family, good spares and specialist back-up and a wide range of models to choose from – including the enormous Safari estate – the DS is one of those rare classics that ticks the boxes for both heart and head.

MARKET VIEW

'Early cars are the most aesthetically pleasing,' says Paul Harris of DS Workshop (pictured above, on the right, with partners Jamie Piggott and 'Rad' Wojcik), 'but if you want a car to use daily you need a post-'67 so-called Green Fluid model; the red synthetic fluid used up until then is hygroscopic and needs regular changes to prevent corrosion. Holy Grail is a 1967 car: the last of the old 'frogeye' front ends but with green LHM oil-based fluid.

'Specification is also crucial to value. Pallas versions are much more luxurious and have extra sound deadening, and a RHD car is worth up to 25% more in the UK. Prices for good cars range from £10,000 for a basic 2-litre manual to £15,000-20,000 for late Pallas semi-autos; more for fully restored or low-mileage examples.

'Colour also affects values, most popular being metallics, followed by dark blue or black.'

IN A NUTSHELL

Because so much of a DS is hydraulically assisted, you need to drive a potential purchase as well as watching for fluid leaks: the car should rise up to ride height within about 20-30 seconds from cold, and it goes without saying that the ride quality should be sublime. A harsh ride indicates a need for new suspension spheres, while slightly stiff or notchy steering could indicate a rack problem – not cheap to cure.

Rust can be a killer for a DS, like any old car, but a good place to look for a snapshot of general condition is inside the boot: check the top of the inner wings below the parcel shelf, the boot floor and the rain gutters. If these areas are sound, it's a good start.

Another classic rust spot is the windscreen header rail – expose it by lifting the rubber 'screen seal with your fingers. Also inspect the metal below the headlamps – it's double-skinned here – and the door bottoms, which suffer road-rash because they overhang the sills. And while you're there, look down the side of the car and see whether the swage line is nice and crisp, or filler-laden and wobbly.

Engines are all pretty reliable, if rather noisy. Any of them will run happily on regular unleaded and they're particularly good with LPG; about 90% of the big DS population in Holland uses this fuel, and you can convert carburettored and fuel-injected engines alike. A DS will typically return anything from 20 to 30mpg, depending on circumstances.

It's worth listening out for a whining gearbox because rebuilt units aren't always satisfactory and secondhand ones are unknown quantities. Generally, the supply of new mechanical parts is good but you can buy more 'off the shelf' for later cars.

Most of a DS's brightwork is stainless steel rather than chromed, so can be repolished, and a lot of the trim – including the soft furnishings – can be bought new.

CONCLUSION

It seems there's room for the DS market to grow yet further: DS Workshop reckons a new breed of customer with more disposable income could be interested in mechanically upgraded cars, just as happened with Mk2 Jags – they're already working on a Xantia-engined DS with five-speed semi-auto 'box.

Values are not going to fall, in other words, and while you don't need to spend a fortune to own a DS (there'll always be the odd bargain to be found among privately advertised cars), it's probably best not to wait too long if you want to realise your own DS dream.

However, it's easy to spend too much on a superficially attractive but 'wrong spec' DS, which is where the experience of a specialist is invaluable. You mustn't let your heart rule your head too much...

MODEL HISTORY

1955 DS19 launched at Paris Motor Show in October: engine is old three-bearing Traction 1.9-litre but big news is hydraulic suspension, brakes, steering and semi-automatic gearbox.

1956 Base-spec ID19 has simpler trim, less hydraulic assistance and manual gearbox.

1963 Front end of DS revised by adding rubber-tipped overriders.

1965 Pallas luxury option added.

1966 New oversquare 1985cc and 2175cc engines introduced, with five main bearings.

1967 Suspension fluid changed from red type to green LHM.

1968 Front end restyled with fully cowled headlights.

1970 Bosch electronic fuel injection now an option; ID cars renamed D Special and D Super; new three-dial dash.

1971 Manual gearbox now has five rather than four speeds.

1973 Final DS model, the DS23, launched with up to 141bhp.

1975 DS superseded by new CX.



SPECIFICATIONS

1971 Citroen DS21 EFI Pallas

Engine: 2175cc in-line four, Bosch electronic fuel injection

Power: 139bhp (gross) @ 5500rpm

Torque: 145lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission: Semi-automatic four-speed gearbox, column change, front-wheel drive

Suspension: Hydraulically controlled gas-filled spheres, self levelling, anti-roll bars

Brakes: Discs at front, drums rear

Weight: 1280kg

Performance: Top speed 112mph; 0-60mph 11.8sec

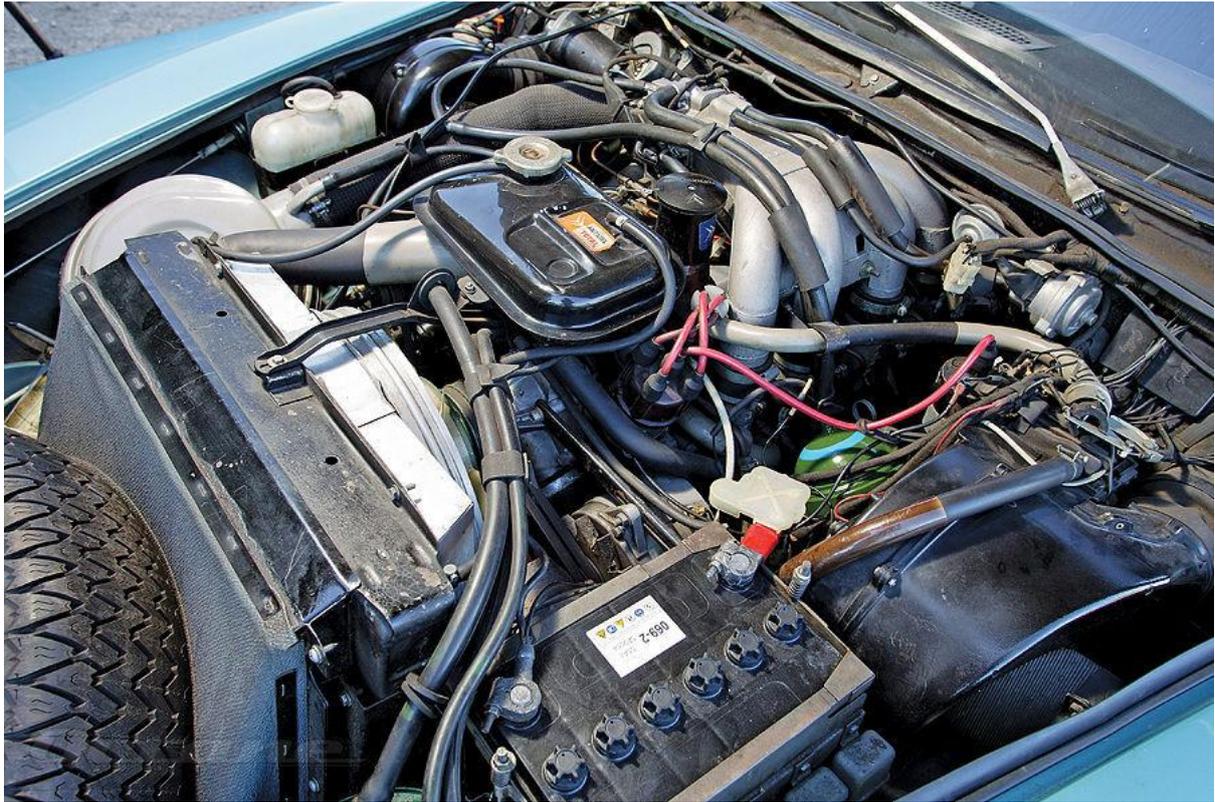




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