

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Citroën and Jaguar launched innovative, but very different, saloons in 1955. Malcolm McKay drives them.



Post-war austerity was easing by 1955, the colossal debts of war were receding and Europeans could finally look towards a future where – as in America – almost every family would have a car. Car makers, having endured panic-building of pre-war relics and desperate export-or-die policies, could think about what their home customers might buy in the brave new world ahead, the 1960s.

The Citroën DS19 stole the Paris Show in October 1955, a few weeks before the Jaguar 2.4 took its bow in London. The first all-new Citroën since the 2CV, it replaced the Traction Avant, which had soldiered on since 1934. Once more, the maverick marque tore up convention. For Jaguar, the 2.4 was a crucial step back into a larger-volume market it had vacated with the demise of the 1½ and 2½-litre models in

1949. Neither car would be bought by shrinking violets: the arrival of either a 2.4 or DS in the suburban street or office car park would command attention.

Jaguar sought younger buyers – successful family men who wouldn't consider a bulky MkVII. They would be attracted by the monocoque construction, the short-stroke twin-cam engine and the curvaceous, modern lines; their wives would favour the luxurious leather seats, sizable boot and quiet, comfortable ride. At its launch price of £1269, the 2.4 undercut all mid-range imported saloons and quality British marques. Cheaper than a Rover 75 or Humber Super Snipe, it cost just £20 more than a Riley Pathfinder.

The DS needed to appeal to all French family men and women – apart from the 2CV, Citroën would have no other models – but elsewhere, especially in Britain, it would be chosen by individuals who liked

to display their avant garde credentials: architects, artists, designers. By the time the DS entered production at Slough, its UK price was £1726 against the 2.4's £1430 and in 1959 the UK-assembled ID19 cost £1498 against the Jaguar's £1495. On neutral territory the tables were turned: in the USA in 1957, an ID cost just \$2695 and a DS \$3495. A 2.4 would set you back \$3795.

Anyone getting into the Citroën in 1955 could be forgiven for thinking they had entered a parallel universe. Ahead of the driver sat wacky instrumentation and space-age single-spoke steering wheel. On the floor was an accelerator pedal, a button that looked like a dipswitch (but was in fact, the brake control) and a pedal on the far left that was actually the 'handbrake'. A large hump marked the end of the engine, set far back in the engine bay, but with no other intrusions the wide flat floor with huge, square-topped sills represented

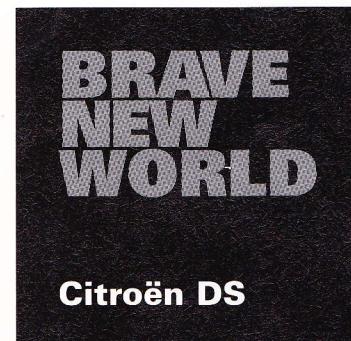




large bathtub. The foam seats, clad in something like dress material on French-market cars (but leather in Britain) were big, soft and comfortable for five or six.

Under the skin, only the four-cylinder engine was conventional: a cross-flow alloy head with hemispherical combustion chambers on the old long-stroke 1911cc block. Hydraulic pipes snaked everywhere: the DS had hydraulic control of its clutch, gearbox, steering and brakes with self-adjusting hydro-pneumatic suspension, all powered by an engine-driven 3000psi pump.

The suspension was light and simple despite front-wheel drive: parallel arms supported each front wheel while a single trailing arm each side held the back, with anti-roll bars at both ends. Inboard discs at the front were another 'first', with automatic front/rear load compensation, but the feel-less floor button caused unfamiliar drivers to stand the car on its nose.



"The DS was chosen by individuals: architects, artists, designers"

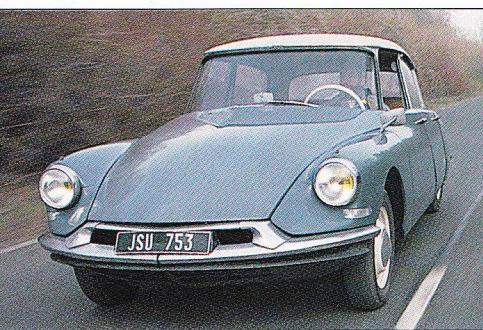
Precise and super-smooth steering was provided by power assistance with a hydraulic cushion between rack and pinion. The driver chose a gear from the four-speed gearbox using a dash-top selector, while hydraulic servos operated the clutch and selected the gear. You even pushed the gearlever forward to operate the starter.

The Citroën also incorporated a glassfibre roof – few mainstream manufacturers tried alternative materials for individual panels until the 1990s – and rear wings detached by a large exposed nut to aid wheel-changing, for which you simply raised the suspension to maximum height, propped up the relevant corner, lowered the car and unbolted the wheel. Indicators mounted at the top corners of the rear window anticipated today's high-level lights.

Recognising that the wealth of radical new equipment forced the DS into a high price sector, in 1956 Citroën



Wacky white single-spoke steering wheel greets driver of DS/ID. Some UK-market cars even had a wooden dash...



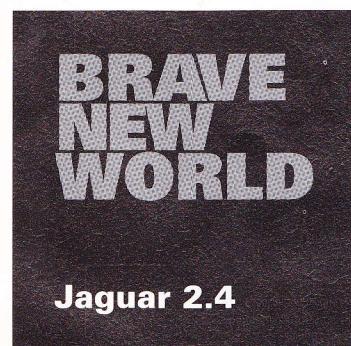
Citroën has a comfortable but wavy ride which takes some getting used to.

introduced the ID. With manual gear selection, conventional brake pedal and unassisted steering, it incorporated at a much lower price most of the best features of the DS while allowing manual control of operations that might be preferred by the spirited driver: significantly, it was an ID that won the 1959 Monte Carlo Rally.

Despite its more conventional appearance, the Jaguar's monocoque shell with thick pillars anticipated today's car bodies more closely than the Citroën punt. The 2.4 broke new ground with coil-sprung twin wishbone front suspension mounted on a detachable, rubber-insulated, subframe. Carefully developed rubber mountings could absorb road noise while providing positive location; also rubber-insulated were the cantilevered rear leaf springs. Though the rear axle was live, it was well located with radius arms and a diagonal Panhard rod, while telescopic dampers

were fitted all round. Drum brakes with servo assistance were used (front discs would later be offered as an option) and the four-speed Moss gearbox could be had with or without overdrive. A rear axle 4in narrower than the front was the only penalty of the 2.4's wonderfully smooth styling.

Jaguar had always intended to return to this market. A 2-litre four-cylinder engine was developed alongside the 3.4-litre six in the 1940s but, in the end, it was found cheaper and easier to use a chopped-down six-cylinder block with the 3.4's 83mm bore and a shorter 76.5mm stroke, which made the 2.4 well oversquare. This gave commonality of components plus the greater appeal of a smooth six; it also made the engine interesting to racers, even powering an Emeryson in Grands Prix. The potential of the 2.4 saloon was clouded by cheap'n'cheerful Solex carbs and mild camshafts, but it still had the legs of all opposition in



"The interior has a decayed charm that gives the car immense character"



Wood and leather abound in 2.4 cabin – it's reassuringly traditional, despite car's advanced engineering under the skin.

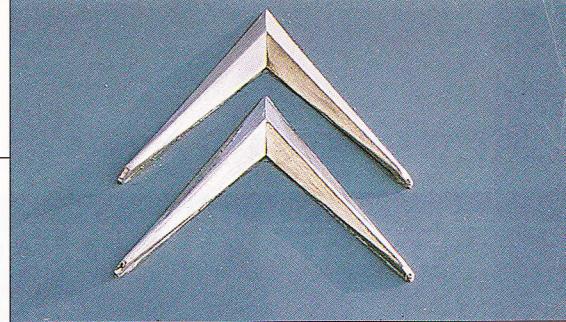


Front suspension is mounted on a rubber-insulated subframe, giving 2.4 a quiet, comfortable ride.

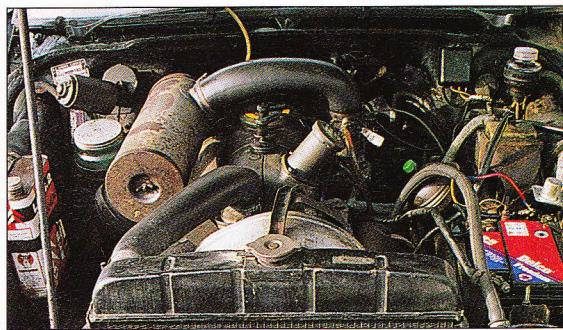




Citroën hangs on well in corners, despite its skinny Michelin X tyres.



ID engine sounds strangely agricultural – out of character in a car which is so advanced in other areas.



its class; Paul Frère gave the 2.4 its first Production Car Race win at Spa in 1956.

Martin Payne's much-loved 2.4 lay in a shed for 30 years before a budget rebuild involving new panels made from a washing machine and filing cabinets. The interior has a decayed charm that gives the car immense character and the quality of its fittings 45 years ago is clear. Walnut is everywhere, over the ample dashboard and around the door windows; instrumentation is comprehensive, though with an odd mixture of switches.

The leather seats – individual buckets in front – are supportive and comfortable, the rear compartment secluded and surprisingly spacious. You sit upright, feeling in full control with the big four-spoke wheel to grip and everything where you want it; the pillars aren't thick by modern standards but you are conscious of the small rear window in the mirror. The steering is

heavy at low speeds but quickly lightens up once moving, with plenty of feel. Radials aren't always a good idea on a car designed for crossplies, but the 2.4 proves surefooted on twisty, dry roads and its limits are high.

Jaguar enthusiasts are apt to dismiss the 2.4 as sluggish compared to a 3.4, but compared to most other cars on the road in 1955 this is a real performer with adequate torque and a sweet, free-revving engine that feels as if it would readily exceed its 5500rpm red line. The little Moss gearstick's longish throw helps it to feel precise and easy to use, while the overdrive makes a really useful fifth gear, pulling well uphill as well as down. And that smooth six is a delight to listen to; not silent, but never intrusive, with a lovely growl when pressed.

John Gillard spends his life restoring Traction Avant Citroëns, but happily brings out his 1961 ID19 on his day off. In Britain for the last 15 years, this French-market car

is original and unspoiled, though the fragile trim has passed its best. John prefers the ID; the DS's hydraulic change can be a challenge in town with a tendency to creep when parking, viciously so when on choke.

Unconventional features abound inside. The indicator switch (down for left, up for right, pull to cancel) is plain quirky, but the handbrake lever that swings under the dash is superb. The spongy seats are wonderfully comfortable and the barrel-shaped interior feels vast. The door handle lock/trigger system is brilliant but the white single-spoke steering wheel is just wacky.

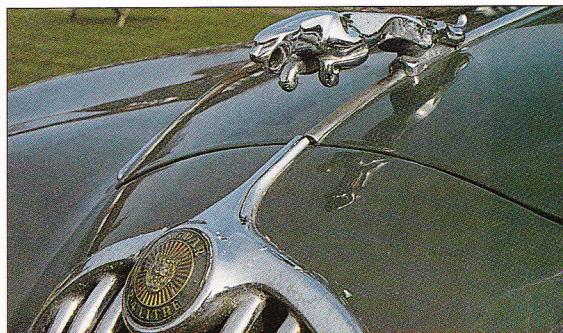
For the UK, Citroën added carpet and leather seats (even an incongruous wooden dash on some cars); the French made do with cloth and rubber mats. The slimmest of pillars, wraparound windscreen and frameless door windows surely give the best visibility of any saloon, ever. From the driver's seat, you can see ➤



Heavy unassisted steering lightens at speed, and 2.4 has high levels of grip.



Short-stroke six-cylinder XK engine revs well, but cheap Solex carbs and mild cams dent performance.



Small matters

Why the new X-type echoes the 2.4

'A new market for Jaguar', 'never before in this market', 'four model lines for the first time' – truly, today's pundits need a history lesson. The comparisons between the new X-type (below), which sparked these quotes, and the 2.4 of 1955 are remarkable. Both mark a crucial move into a



larger volume market; both appeal to younger, sportier family men; both have 2½-litre six-cylinder engines, subframe-mounted, rubber-insulated suspension and on price, both undercut a Rover 75... Both feel sportier than most competitors, have a silent, effortless ride, a luxurious interior and a curvaceous, stylish exterior. The 2.4 spawned a hugely successful family of Jaguars that lasted for 14 years: it remains to be seen if the X-type can do the same.

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	Jaguar 2.4-litre 2483cc, 6-cyl 2ohc	Citroën ID19 (DS19) 1911cc, 4-cyl ohv
Power	112bhp @ 5750rpm	66bhp @ 4500rpm (75bhp)
Torque	140lbft @ 2000rpm	98lbft @ 2500rpm (101lbft @ 3000rpm)
Performance	Top speed: 102mph 0-60mph: 14.4sec	87mph 18.7sec (23.3sec)
Fuel consumption	18.3mpg	24.2mpg (23.8mpg)
Weight	3416lb	3080lb (3136lb)
Number made	127,380 (all Mk1/2)	1,415,719 (all DS/ID)



An ID won the Monte Carlo Rally in 1959: arguably it's a better driver's car than the DS.

the curved bonnet swooping away and just make out the pips over the headlights on each wing. In the mirror, the rear window is a long way back, over a huge parcel shelf.

Once the depressingly agricultural-sounding engine is running, it's good to find that the ID's clutch is light and its column gearchange is straightforward, precise and exceptionally easy. The brakes feel heavy and uninspiring, but the steering suffers little from lacking power assistance and feels precise, though a little lacking in feel.

That hydro-pneumatic suspension is good – really good – though after all the hype, you tend to be disappointed that bumps are still there. At first the ride feels wallowy, and a left/right tweak of the steering makes the Citroën roll from side to side, but it takes hard corners incredibly well on its skinny Michelin X tyres. Period reports cite snap oversteer, but you'd have to be pretty silly to get that far.

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Jaguar 2.4

"Compared to most other cars on the road in 1955 this is a real performer"

You have to work the engine hard to make rapid progress, especially as there are big gaps between the gears. Overall gearing is high and top at 23mph/1000rpm is higher than the Jaguar's 21.9mph/1000rpm overdrive. You are far more conscious of the unsynchronised first than in the Jaguar, where it's never required except for starting. Lose speed and you may have to resort to slogging up in second even on main road hills. As confidence builds, though, you learn not to slow down for corners; then, the Citroën rewards its driver by maintaining remarkably high average speeds in comfort.

Which is best? These cars are like chalk and cheese, so different it is hard to pick a winner. The Citroën leads on innovation and comfort, the Jaguar on performance and refinement. Put the Jaguar engine in the Citroën chassis, and you would have quite a car.



Overdrive gives Jaguar an advantage, acting as an effective fifth gear – yet Citroën has higher gearing overall.



Citroën and Jaguar are chalk and cheese, but both combine innovation with classic appeal.