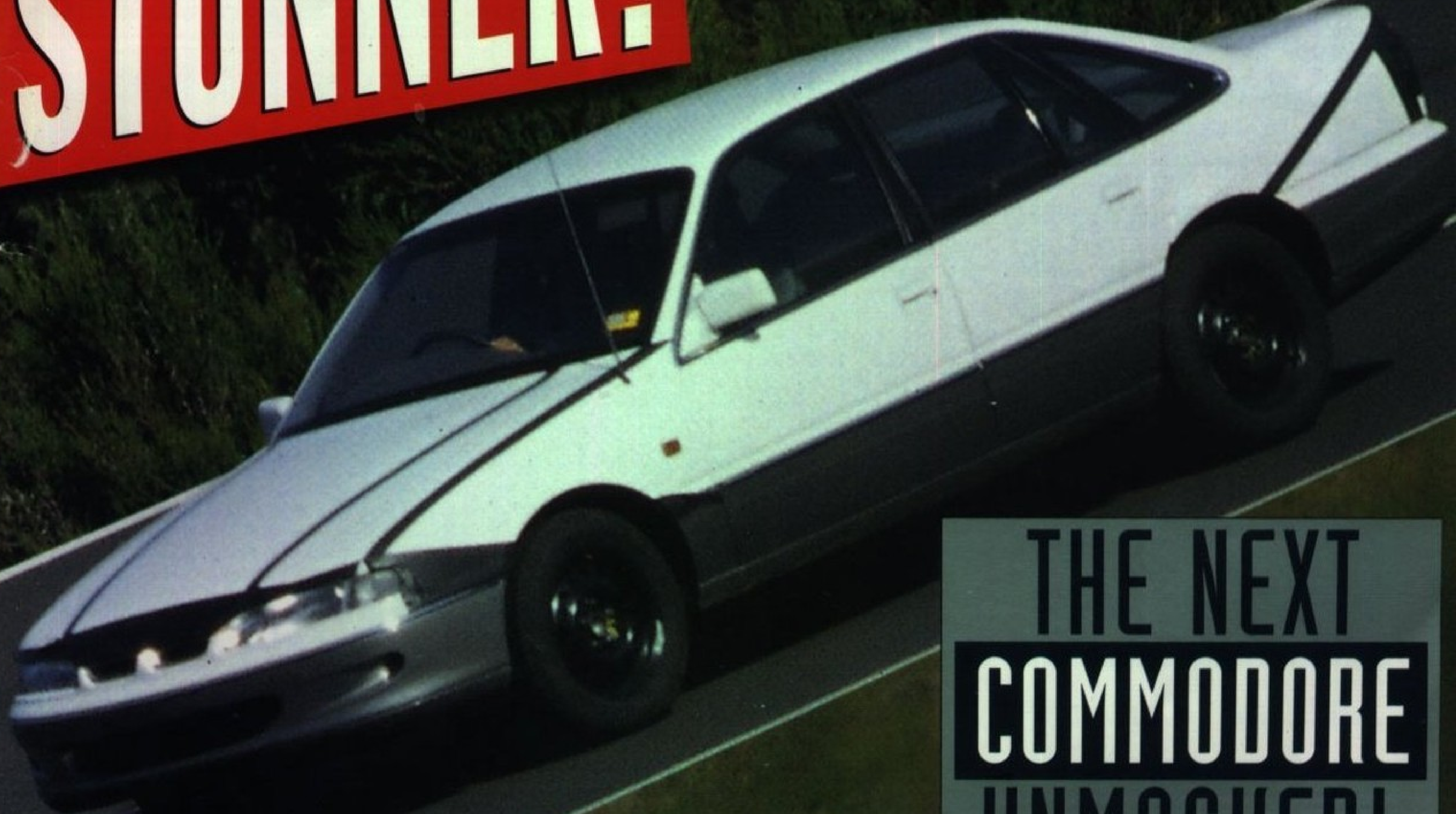


1993 FORMULA 1 GRAND PRIX GUIDE

# MOTOR

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# RIDE ON!

**T**HERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY the new Citroen Xantia goes down a road, about the way it looks, which sets it apart from the pack. For the first time since the invention of the French firm's unique gas-over-oil suspension system nearly 40 years ago, here's a family-sized Citroen which can offer a really quiet low-speed ride and taut body control when cornering hard — as well as that ultra-soft ride quality which all bigger Citroens have possessed since the '50s.

And in a market full of neat but derivative body shapes, the Xantia introduces a Bertone design which can fairly be called both classy and distinctive, even if it isn't exactly radical. Ironically, the traditional differences between Citroens and other cars, which the firm's masters in the Peugeot group set out to reform during the '80s, look like becoming some of the firm's more dependable weapons.

Despite the strength of the opposition, Citroen has high ambitions for the Xantia. According to chief executive Xavier Karcher, it is "much more than a BX successor". Total production will soon build up, he says, to 250,000 cars a year, and it could later go as high as 300,000 if the demand is strong enough. The Citroen BX did 300,000 in its best years, the later '80s, but Citroen knows that it has already catered for some BX buyers with the smaller ZX, a car which has been put on the backburner as far as Australia is concerned until late 1994.

The new Xantia is not intended merely for non-conformists. It is different but it alienates no one. When you first see a Xantia in the flesh, it is smaller than pictures make it appear. Dimensionally, it's right in the medium-size mainstream, but the big glass area and the styling similarities to the up-market XM — long nose overhang, low bonnet, steeply raked windscreen, low belt line, complicated rear glass shape and short, high boot — make the Xantia more imposing than the average mid-ranger. The full, curvaceous sections that connect the car's rear pillars and wheelarches are particularly pretty, as is the view of the car directly from the rear.

The least successful styling aspect is the grille, which echoes the XM's rather anonymous rear-sloping slotted affair. As with the ZX, XM and even the BX, this Citroen looks better at the rear than at the front.

**THE NEW CITROEN XANTIA,  
REPLACING THE BX  
AND DUE HERE IN DECEMBER,  
FINALLY GETS IT RIGHT**

BY STEVE CROPLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STAN PAPIOR

The car will be introduced to the European market at the end of May with a choice of three injected and catalysed engines: a 77 kW 1.8-litre unit, a 92 kW 2.0-litre unit and a 115 kW 2.0-litre 16-valve unit. Before August, these will be joined by turbo and non-turbo diesels — using the same oil-burners as the ZX — and by a fleet-only 1.6-litre 67 kW petrol unit. All engines have standard five-speed gearboxes. Curiously, the 1.8 is launched — in France at least — with the option of low and high gearing. An auto option is coming for the lower-power 2.0-litre, and will eventually be available with the 1.9 diesel.

Australia, naturally, licks out on such a wide variety of engine options. When the slick Xantia makes its Aussie debut in December it will be offered with just one engine option, the 92 kW, 8-valve, 2.0-litre four-potter. However, plans call for the more desirable 115 16-valver to be brought into the range late in 1994.

For all its claims of not being typical front-drive clone car, the Xantia has many similarities to its top rivals, including its transverse front-wheel drive mechanical layout, size, engine size and power. It also follows convention with its use of two trim levels: SX and VSX, both of which will be available from the outset of Aussie sales.

The VX is well equipped, containing such niceties as power steering, a height-adjustable steering column, electric windows and central locking. The VSX models get anti-lock brakes, and a plethora of luxury items which Citroen is still in the process of listing. But, as ever, what makes this Citroen unique is its suspension, seen in higher spec models in its most developed form yet. The French have introduced a "thinking" aspect to their suspension in the top Xantia models and called the result Hydractive II. The basic versions soldier on with a simpler, non-computerised system.

As in the XM, the system uses gas-filled spheres at each wheel, plus one between each wheel pair, front and rear, to provide springing and damping. The middle sphere is brought into play according to whether soft or harder suspension is called for.

Hydractive II offers drivers two improved programs — Comfort and Sport — and in both of them the suspension's own "brain" now has a hand in deciding what rates are right for what road. In the broadest terms, Hydractive II offers softness as the car cruises but rapidly senses acceleration, deceleration, cornering or a

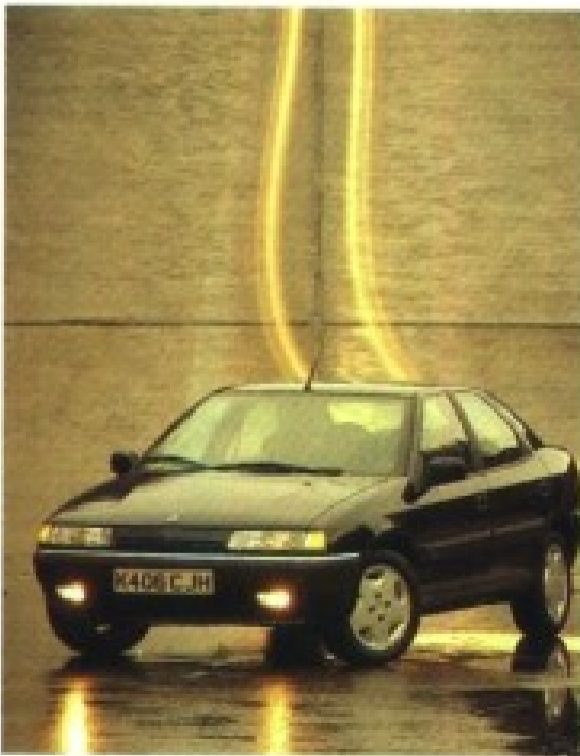
very lumpy road and stiffens the suspension accordingly. Sport mode shuts out the centre spheres more often, and makes the suspension feel stiffer in driving.

We drove the cars on a variety of roads around Seville and Cadiz in Spain; the routes varied from billiard-table motorways to long, narrow roads pock-marked with broken bitumen and complicated combinations of high-amplitude bumps.

Immediately impressive was the improved low-speed ride. We're used to 40 km/h rumble over broken surfaces in Citroens, but even the basic suspension Xantia was surprisingly quiet and supple. Better than an XM in that regard, we all agreed. In fact, the 1.8i was by a small margin the quietest riding car of all the Xantias, its steel 14-inch wheels shod with modest-section 175/70 R14 Michelin MXT tyres. The 2.0i has 165/65 R14 MXV3s and the 16v moves up again to 205/55 R15 MXV3s.

In any Hydractive II Xantia, the ride is frankly brilliant. Select Comfort mode and the car will ride like a limousine, but the electronic sensing is effective in tying the car down on bends without the driver having to ask it to. According to Citroen's engineers, Hydractive II can differentiate between a smooth road with isolated bumps and a road scattered with lots of similar-sized bumps. For the former, it maintains its soft suspension rate; for the latter it firms up.

The Sport setting delivers a more secure feeling rather than a lot of extra grip or agility, though the direct steering (exactly three turns lock to lock on the 16v; 3.2 turns on the rest) sharpens up a little when Sport is selected, and roll in



hard corners — quite well contained in Comfort — is reduced a little.

The main advantage of the Sport mode, we believe, is that it reduces suspension "float", which induces motion sickness in some rear-seat passengers. In Sport there's a little more surface patter (felt rather than heard) but the body control is significantly firmer.

In corners, the Xantia resists extremes of attitude in the long-wheelbased way that hydropneumatic Citroens have always done. Pressed hard, there is a tendency towards mild understeer, though in emergencies the car will always provide extra turn-in if asked abruptly to provide it. The trailing arm rear suspension incorporates a self-steering facility at the limit, a fashionable feature which can sometimes reduce the driver's enjoyment by refining out the car's response to throttle steering in bends. But the Xantia will tighten its nose neatly if you throttle off in mid-bend. The rear-steer facility seems most useful for helping the car to track arrow-straight on bumpy roads taken fast, always a Citroen strength.

The XU engines, familiar from a myriad of Peugeots and Citroens, are adequate rather than distinguished in the Xantia. The short-g geared 1.8 impresses with good torque (it will pull cleanly in fifth gear from below 2000 rpm) but it gets buzzy at about 5000 to 5200 rpm, and drivers will rarely approach its 6400 rpm red line. Still, it delivers fair performance considering its 1180 kg weight at the kerb. Citroen claims a 0-100 km/h time of 11 seconds (on a par with the new Ford Mondeo 1.8) and the car will top 185 km/h.

The 2.0-litre eight-valver — the linchpin of Citroen's Xantia assault in Australia — was noticeably faster, shaving a second off the 1.8's 0-100 km/h time and offering considerably better passing acceleration in the higher gears. Its gearing seemed low for highway cruising, though, and at about 130 km/h our test car emitted an annoying 4000 rpm drone which didn't disappear until the car was doing 150 km/h and about 4700 rpm.

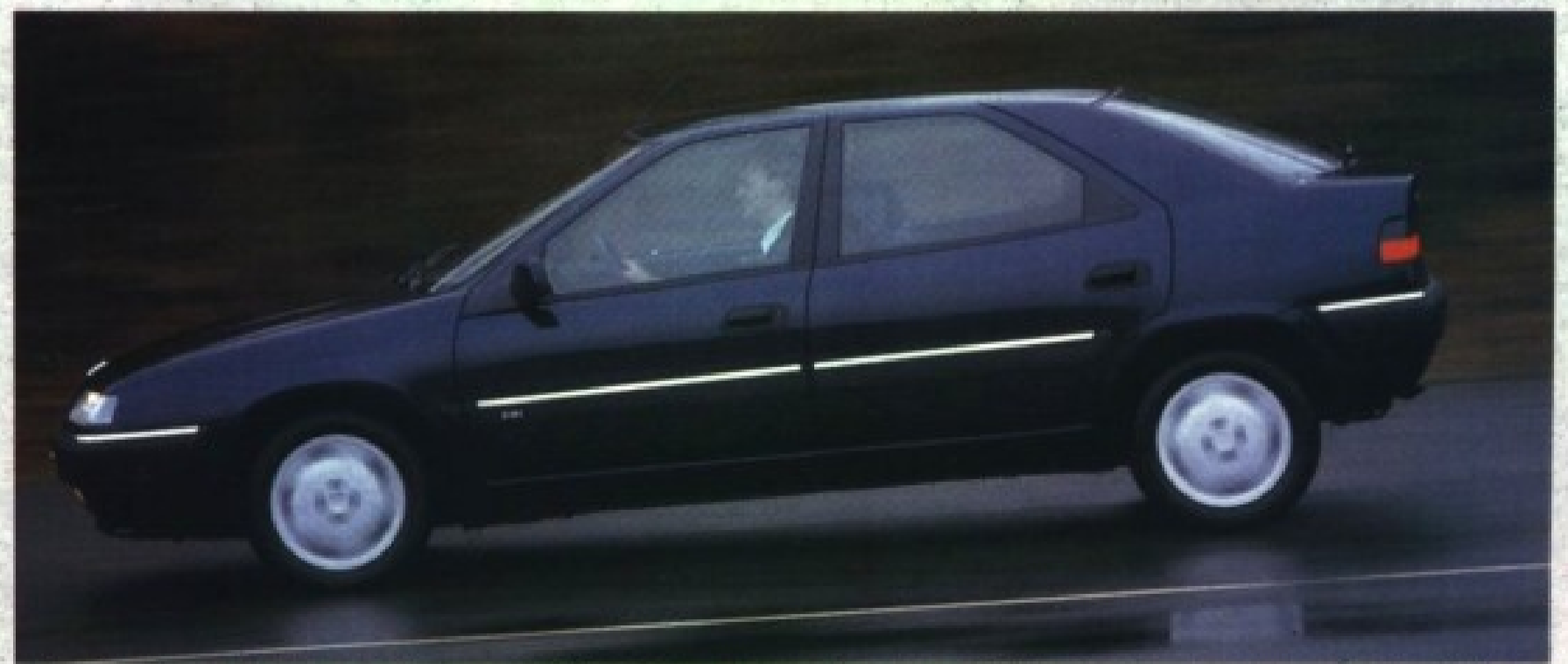
As with the 1.8, the illusion of engine noise was probably made worse by the fact that everything else was so quiet. Noise from road surface, wind, suspension, transmission and ventilation system is all well contained. In fact, Citroen claims it has made bold efforts to improve the quality of every noise the owner hears, right down to the clunk of the doors and the clicking of the handbrake ratchet. There are three things it still needs to work on:



Centre console features large, easy to use buttons and switches, and the main gauges are a model of clarity (LEFT).



The interior is not particularly Citroen in styling (ABOVE) — in fact, it's the same as in the latest version of the Peugeot 405 — but works well; the seat and driving position echo the XM's roomy layout (TOP MARR). The top model for Australia, the VSX, will come fully equipped with power steering, adjustable steering column, electric windows, central locking, ABS and lots more.



**"Immediately impressive was the improved low-speed ride"**



feel, and unfortunately for the engineers who have refined the car in other areas, the middle-rank petrol engines — the one's earmarked for Australia — continue as the car's Achilles' heel. And we don't believe the cars are geared correctly for relaxed cruising.

Still, with a lucrative \$100m/5 years catalytic converter export deal affording it valuable export credits, Franzcar Imports, the Aussie franchisee, has promised us competitive pricing. And given the rising image of Citroen in many of its markets and its growing ranks of happy customers, there's no reason why the svelte Xantia shouldn't carve itself an even bigger niche than the BX managed. **M**



the clattering idle of the eight-valve engines, the extremely noisy rear wiper and that motorway drone.

For now, the 115 kW 16-valver is the one to pick. Not only is its noise more acceptable at cruising speeds (though gearing is still rather too short), but it also offers a thoroughbred response to the loud pedal, even though the kerb weight has risen to 1325 kg, which makes the car portly indeed. Still, it'll do 210 km/h flat out and the 0-100 km/h sprint takes a reasonable 9.6 seconds.

The interior has strengths and disappointments. In styling, it's no more distinguished than say a Honda Accord. No attempt here to make it a Citroen cabin. On the other hand, the dials and switchgear (some familiar from Peugeots and none the worse for it) all work well.

The driving position is good, too. As you progress upward through the model range, the seats acquire more and more

modes of adjustment (the ultimate being an eight-way all-electric system) but even the basic seat echoes the XM's roomy, long-reach layout, which helps make it such a comfortable car over long distances. Rear room is average for this class of car: the seat is raised to provide a good forward view, but there is still enough headroom. Unlike the Peugeot 405, the Xantia doesn't have a big hump in the middle of the rear seat, making it a true five-seater. The seat folds down one-third/two-thirds and there is a ski hatch.

The Xantia is a clever effort. It is different from the mid-range herd, notably in styling and suspension, but not so different that it will frighten the buyer, as models in the CX/GSA era famously did. When you drive on that self-levelling, thinking suspension, it does seem to offer something extra. The interior should have been more adventurously designed, we

### Citroen Xantia VSX 2.0-litre, 5-speed manual

#### ENGINE

Location:	front, transversely-mounted
Cylinders:	four, in-line
Capacity:	1998 cm <sup>3</sup>
Valve gear:	cog-belt driven four-valves/cyl
Bore and stroke:	86.0 mm x 86.0 mm
Compression ratio:	9.5:1
Induction:	electronic multi-point fuel-injection
Power:	115 kW at 6500 rpm
Torque:	183 Nm at 3500 rpm
Maximum rpm	6500
Specific power output	57.6 kW/litre

#### GEARBOX

Gear	ratio	kmh 1000 rpm	Max Speed	At (rpm)
First	3.450	7.5	49	6500
Second	1.870	13.9	90	6500
Third	1.360	19.1	124	6500
Fourth	1.010	25.7	167	6500
Fifth	0.800	32.5	212	6500
Final-Drive	4.27			
Driving wheels				front

#### SUSPENSION

Front	Independent by MacPherson struts with hydropneumatic springs and anti-roll bar
Rear	Independent by trailing arms with hydropneumatic springs and anti roll bar
Wheels	alloy, 5.5 J x 15
Tyres:	Michelin MXV3 205/55R15

#### BRAKES

Front	ventilated discs
Rear	discs
Anti-lock	yes

#### STEERING

Type	power-assisted rack and pinion 3.2 turns lock-to-lock
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#### DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase:	2740 mm
Length:	4440 mm
Width:	1755 mm
Kerb weight:	1325 kg
Fuel Tank:	65 litres

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION (claimed)

combined city/hwy	7.2L/100 km
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#### PERFORMANCE (claimed)

0-100 km/h:	9.6 secs
Top speed:	212 km/h

#### PRICE:

List price:	n/a
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