

AUTOCAR

THE ORIGINAL CAR WEEKLY

VW's new hot Scirocco R

FULL STORY 261bhp, £25k mega-coupé

Remember the Corrado VR6?
Well, it's coming back



LEAKED

Third generation Mini

Revealed: new look for 2011



ROAD TEST

Ford Focus RS

'The new benchmark hot hatch'



TWIN TEST

New Aston V12 vs 911 GT2

Can 190mph Vantage out-thump the ultimate?



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PLUS

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» Is Toyota in trouble?

WIN
A flat-out drive in an Audi R8!
p66



Richard Bremner
All the cars I've never bought



Peugeot 406 Coupé

Swish Italian looks – with the engine and cabin of a Parisian taxi

106

Perhaps it's too trivial an excuse for desiring a car, but there's a detail in the design of the Peugeot 406 Coupé's C-pillars that has long made me want one. What is it? Simply the elegant 180-degree return performed by the trailing edge of the rear pillars' sheet metal, which causes the rear window to sit within a modest recess that deepens as the glass nears the boot lid.

Why does this make the 406 any more appealing? Not sure I can say because beauty is hard to explain, but the Pininfarina-designed coupé enjoys a desirable slice of it. Partly that's because it barely shares a panel with the 406 saloon (though that once-popular repmobile wasn't short of the odd pleasing line itself) and partly because the coupé presents an aura of Italian sophistication that stretched it towards the pedigree end of the market.

It was a visual trick that mostly worked, because the 406 was a pretty good car in the first place. When it first appeared in 1997, Peugeot had not yet given up its one-time mission of building the best-handling mass market cars in Europe. And if the 406 didn't demolish corners with quite the dash of the previous 405, it managed pretty well. As you'd hope, the coupé was more athletic than the saloon, and without losing the comfortably supple ride for which Peugeots were famous.

The pampering ride might even have disappointed those who think a car isn't sporting unless its dashboard

quakes over potholes. But a more seriously unsporting feature was the basic, overworked 2.0-litre petrol engine, which was best reserved for the repmobile from which it came. The most alluring motor in the line-up was the 207bhp 2.9-litre V6, which bestowed on the coupé the civilised zest that you'd expect of such svelte-looking wheels. But the most surprising engine, and a bit of a pioneer, was the 133bhp 2.2 HDi diesel, introduced in late 2000.

No manufacturer had stuck an oil-burning taxi engine in a supposedly sporting coupé before (or not within living memory, at least) and some thought the decision unwise. But the 2.2's easy torque suited the 406 and produced a better-balanced car than the even heftier V6 allowed.

All of which makes this unlikely combination the most desirable version. What might put you off is that you also get a Parisian taxi interior, with too much creaky plastic and an old-school steering wheel pregnant with airbag. The tan leather option and plenty of toys do some compensating, but inside the 406 Coupé feels slightly dated and cheap.

Then again, you don't pay much any more; a grand gets you a leggy runner and around £4000 something near-collectable. Worryingly, the urge to collect one myself is decidedly less than dormant.

Next week Richard nearly buys a...
Mitsubishi Galant VR-4

'It barely shares a panel with the 406 saloon and has an aura of sophistication'

WANT ONE?

PEUGEOT 406 COUPE

REASONS TO WANT ONE

The subtle elegance of its lines; the diesel economy; its supple ride.

WHY YOU'LL RUN A MILE

The nagging thought that you should also own some slippers.

ONE WE FOUND

2002 Peugeot 406 Coupé 2.2 HDi SE, Hyperion Blue, 68,000 miles, tan leather, full service history, electric seats, £3995, pistonheads.com.

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