

TG2

BUYING | RUNNING | SELLING

LIFERS

BMW 535D P174

Beneath a layer of mud lurks a cool estate car. If only Tom was in the UK long enough to clean it.



LEXUS GS P176

Adam has been unfaithful - taking a few days off in a Lexus IS - but is glad to be reunited with his Lifer.



VAUXHALL ASTRA P177

We have a new car on the fleet. And it's a bit of a lout. The new Astra VXR promises *much* fun.



406 kicks

The 'poor man's Ferrari' now caters for the truly impoverished, coming in at just £2,500



NEW CAR GUIDE



The *Top Gear* data pages. All the cars, all the specs, target prices and iPod compatibility too **Page 183**

PLUS! New car news, Euro NCAP, *Top Gear* survey, Frank Savage, *TG* Lifers



PEUGEOT 406 COUPE (1997-2003)

A practical, handsome coupe, penned by a Ferrari designer; all from just £2,500? Surely Esther Neve has lost the plot?

FACT FILE

Engines
2.0, 2.2, 3.0 V6 petrol,
2.2 HDi diesel

Performance
0-62mph:
11.9secs - 7.5secs
Max speed:
124mph - 149mph

Economy (combined)
2.0: 34mpg
2.2: 32mpg
3.0 V6: 27mpg
2.2HDi: 44mpg

Transmission
Five-speed manual
or four-speed auto

Suspension
F: Double wishbone
R: Double wishbone

Cost new
£19,975 - £26,915
(1997 - 2003)

Value now
£2,500 - £14,000
(dealer prices)

On sale
1997 - 2003

Rivals
Toyota Celica,
Hyundai Coupe

ALL TOO OFTEN IN LIFE, FASHION AND function don't mix. Myriad examples of unhappy mixtures assail us in our everyday existence - salt-stained suede boots, twist-seam jeans, Alessi cork screws... But sporadically something arrives that makes up for lesser creations, something both stylish *and* sensible - a Dyson vacuum cleaner for example, or a 406 Coupe.

Peugeot's sleek and shapely coupe has garnered many fans over the years, with some even describing it as a poor man's Ferrari. Created by the renowned Pininfarina styling house, it seamlessly blends desirability with real-world living. Yes, it may have the appearance of an expensive sports coupe, but it also has functionality to back it up.

History

Peugeot launched the four-seater 406 Coupe in 1997 before a world press which had maintained that, aside from the 205, Peugeot mostly made staggeringly dull cars. What little competition there was in the sector - the Hyundai Coupe and Toyota Celica, for example - suddenly found themselves looking at a bona fide rival.

Needing to maintain its edge, Peugeot redesigned the 406 Coupe just two years later, albeit minimally, to incorporate a different grille and changes to the lights. It stayed this way until production ceased in 2003. And now we have the 407 Coupe - a stylistic step backwards, some would argue.

Value

It wasn't only the Coupe's good looks that attracted customers, Peugeot created a no-brainer package to go with it. Even bog-standard cars had an alarm, central locking, ABS, twin airbags, alloys, sport seats and electric windows and mirrors to mention just the start of the base specification list - not bad for a car costing from £19,975. And now you can get one as a two-litre, manual P-plate for just over a tenth of its original price - a mere £2,500; and that's from a garage, private sales will be cheaper still. However, if that doesn't appeal, spend £4,250 and grab yourself a manual three-litre V6 on a '00 V-plate from

just before the facelift. If you yearn for a post-facelift example splash out anything from £7,500 for a two-litre manual on a 2002 51-plate to £12,450 for a 2.2HDi manual SE - the fully-loaded spec - on a 53-plate. All these prices are what you should expect to pay from dealer/garage; buy privately and the price will drop further.

Costs

Thanks to its saloon roots, the 406 Coupe is not an expensive car to run - unless you buy the fuel-guzzling V6. To give you an idea, a 60,000-mile service will cost just £175 inclusive, and a cambelt change on the V6 will set you back about £320; those are main dealer prices, specialists will be less.

Engine

Early cars were available with either a four-cylinder 137bhp 2.0 or a 194bhp 3.0 V6 petrol engine. The 2.0 can sound strained and lack low-rev pull when you compare it to the thirsty but smooth and spirited 3.0 V6

'It wasn't only the looks that attracted buyers, Peugeot created a no-brainer package as well'

All 406 Coupes came with a paint and body warranty, and rust shouldn't be a problem

A new headlight assembly will cost a minuscule £65 + VAT

Alloys wheels were standard, and not all as weird as these ones

Rear seats are spacious - nothing but the best for back seat drivers



PHOTOGRAPHY: LEE BRIMBLE

Pininfarina style makes the 406 Coupe a looker



- which, if you have cash to splash, takes some beating. We've also heard that the 2.0 can be a bad starter, stalling until eventually warmed through. If you're looking at one make sure you drive it from cold, just to ensure it's not going to cause you any immediate problems.

In 2002, a 160bhp 2.2-litre replaced the 2.0. It's a good compromise between economy and performance, and certainly a step forward over the 2.0. The acclaimed 136bhp 2.2 HDi diesel arrived a year earlier, in August 2001. It's clatter-free and refined, nice and punchy, and so smooth it's easy to forget you're driving an oil burner. A good choice for economy and longevity too. However, if you're looking at a diesel remember to keep an eye out for excessive smoke - it could indicate that the injectors are worn. And if the pollution light comes

on within the instrument cluster be aware it could mean a new cat is on the cards. A word of warning on all these engines, check the cambelt has been changed on schedule (ie. every 30k miles), replacement is much cheaper than repairing the damage of a broken one. And while you're checking everything else, have a look under the body... oil leaks are quite common.

Transmission

406 Coupes came with the choice of a five-speed manual or a four-speed auto transmission - uprated to an electronically managed auto four-speeder in 1999. If you decide to go for the auto over the manual, then steer clear of the less powerful engines - it saps their power. Also, plumping for an auto will see you pay a £500-£750 premium over a manual.

Suspension

The 406 saloon rode and cornered well and, as this is the car the 406 Coupe is based on, it will come as no surprise that the Coupe handles nicely; better than the four-door, in fact, thanks to retuned dampers and springs. However, as with all 406s, keep an eye out for worn link rods at the back - not pricey to fix, but a pain. You'll be able to tell because the ride will feel a bit loose at the rear. All models have responsive steering and taut cornering, and the top versions - which came with switchable electronic damping control - ride very well. Stopping is no problem either, especially for the V6 models - they had Brembo brakes as standard.



There have been electric ignition problems with the 406 Coupe so make sure that you start it from cold when you go for a test drive - don't just leap into an already running car.

Exterior

There's a good reason people have called the 406 Coupe the poor man's Ferrari, and

It's difficult to see out of the back when reversing, so check for any scrapes

Fuel economy is especially good in the 2.2 HDi

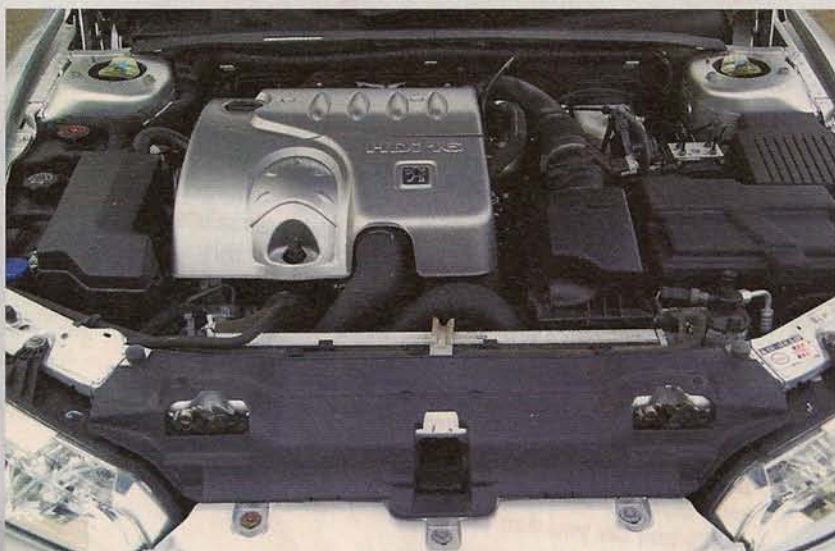
Pininfarina badging offers discrete clues to this car's pedigree

Engines are robust, but make sure the cambelt has been changed on schedule





Cabin has shades of 406 saloon about it. Oh dear



'Try to avoid lurid colour schemes - mustard is only acceptable when served with ham'

that is simply because it was designed by Lorenzo Ramaciotti - the man behind the F456 and 550 Maranello. And its looks won't fade, either, because not only was it solidly built but the bodywork was also heavily galvanised in the factory. Any signs of rust could indicate accident damage that has been patched over poorly.

Interior

Despite being penned by a Ferrari stylist, the 406 Coupe is surprisingly practical. For practical, yes, read that it does, sadly, bear too strong a resemblance to the dark and relatively cheaply trimmed saloon inside. But also read that it means there's plenty of room in the front, while two adults can sit in the rear happily and you can even fit several bags into the boot. While you're looking in the boot, check that the CD multichanger has a cassette - they can go missing. Returning to the front, play with all the electric gizmos; make sure the alarm and central locking work and, if the example you're looking at has electric seats, try them in every direction too - some can be frustratingly slow in operation when malfunctioning. Another note of caution is to avoid lurid colour schemes - mustard is only ever acceptable when served with ham. It's also worth checking you can cope with the annoyance that is reversing a coupe like this, as rear visibility is very restricted.

Verdict

For a cool, timelessly chic yet practical and affordable car, you could do a lot worse than the 406 Coupe; the 407 Coupe, for example. Thanks to its well-engineered underpinnings, the 406 Coupe offers zealous drivers the opportunity to enjoy its crisp dynamics and - in the V6's case - impressive turn of speed. Plus, it boasts the trump card of being the brainchild of a Ferrari designer. *Bella.*

STUFF YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU BUY ONE...

BEST TG TEST
Issue number 38



PARTS PRICES - DEALERSHIP

Brake pads:
(F) £44.65
(R) £44.65
Brake discs:
(F) £88.13
(R) £88.13
60,000 service: £175
O/S headlight assembly: £76.38
Cambelt change: £320
All prices include VAT

CONTACTS

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Thanks to Norton Way Peugeot (Letchworth) for the loan of this immaculate 406 Coupe. For more information on new and used cars, or parts or servicing call 01462 484141.

