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# BEHIND BOOK BARGAIN

Is this the best-looking four-seater on the road? If so, why are they so cheap? Russ Smith looks for answers – and reasons to ignore them.

## No.9: Peugeot 406 Coupé 1997-2003

**S**tylish coupé bodywork on a tough, reliable saloon platform – it's always a winning combination. Getting Pininfarina to design it not only ices the cake, but has it delivered in a presentation box by nubile wenches.

No one else does it quite as well, which is why Ferrari knocks on Pininfarina's door when they need a new shape. A car that looks this good, rides and drives as well as they do, and has a galvanised body, ought to be expensive, but 406 Coupés are not any more.

Quite apart from the Brits' traditional preference for saloons, hatchbacks and mummy-wagons, there has to be a reason why.

A lot of that reason comes down to the 406 Coupé having acquired a



reputation for a number of problems, mostly but not exclusively of an electrical or electronic nature, especially with the V6 engine. But under scrutiny, that reputation seems ill-deserved.

The motoring press must also take some blame. Despite universally praising the car's looks, it has become a mantra to

criticise the 2.0-litre for being underpowered and the V6 for its thirst. Enough of that mud has been flung for the world to sow seeds of doubt in, to mix a few metaphors.

But let's get realistic here – that 2-litre still has 137bhp, which despite the Coupé being a heavy car is enough to get it to 60mph in 10.1 seconds and on to nearly 130mph. Even though it looks faster, you don't need to make excuses for it. As for the near 150mph 3.0 V6 only getting 25-28mpg.



### Contacts

[www.406coupeclub.com](http://www.406coupeclub.com)

Peugeot Parts, W Yorks: 01977 677887; [www.peugeotparts.co.uk](http://www.peugeotparts.co.uk)

GSF Car Parts: 0208 917 3801; [www.gsfcarparts.com](http://www.gsfcarparts.com)

Euro Car Parts: 0208 956 5050; [www.eurocarparts.com](http://www.eurocarparts.com)

Thanks to Greg Lewis for providing the 3.0 SE in the photos, and David Lewis, Gazza and Johnno from the excellent 406 Coupe Forum for all their help and advice.

well that seems quite reasonable if you want to enjoy performance. For the sake of balance, it's also worth noting at this point that the engines themselves all appear almost bulletproof and very long-lasting.

Those were the two versions available at the car's launch in 1997, with the V6 putting out 194bhp and coming as standard with Brembo four-pot brake calipers to stop it. The V6's output was upped to 210bhp in 2000 thanks to variable valve timing. You can tell which is which by looking at the engine cover. The one in the photo is the VVT version; the cover on earlier V6s has three large diagonal slashes across it. Around the same time the Coupe was facelifted; earlier cars are generically called D8, later ones D9.

Peugeot added a 2.2 HDi diesel to the range in June 2001. This offered similar bhp to the petrol four-cylinder but with a lot more torque and the added benefit of 44mpg. Road tax is lower, too. Unsurprisingly these haven't suffered from the same levels of depreciation, aided by their relative rarity.

You can say the same about the 160bhp 2.2 petrol engine that replaced the manual 2.0s in April 2002 (but not the autos), perhaps in response to moaning journo's. Good for 135mph and 60 in 8.9 seconds, it's a compromise that answers all critics. Sadly the 2.2 was only built for about 18 months before 406 Coupe production ended. They are now hard to find and sell for a premium.

Two basic trim levels were offered – S and SE. The former is the basic (though not that basic) option, SE adds lots of toys, luxury and usually leather seats. From 1999, the V6 was only offered in one (high) level of trim.



## WHAT GOES WRONG

As mentioned above, on all models of 406 Coupe most problems come down to electrics, and the root cause is usually deteriorated sensors giving out the wrong messages.

Without (and sometimes even with) a Peugeot fault code reader, it can be frustrating to identify exactly which sensor is at fault – there are lots of them and the failure of some can have quite incongruous effects, but the 406 Coupe Club is very helpful on this score.

The later V6 engines suffer quite frequently from failed coil packs, and

there's one for each cylinder rather than the single robust coil pack on the earlier V6, so when you experience the tell-tale loss of power or erratic running, it can take a while to identify the offending unit, and the rear three are pigs to get at. At £25 a throw, you only want to renew dud ones, though it's useful to keep one or two handy. 406 Coupe owners also find it very useful to have a code scanner/reset tool to help with all the above. You can pick them up off eBay for around £30, the ELM 323 or u380 being specifically recommended.

Power loss or poor running on any petrol engine can also be the fault of failed coolant temperature (causes poor mpg) or manifold air pressure (MAP) sensors, but even the latter is only £50 to replace, once you've identified it's at fault...

One useful trick that has been passed around the 406 Coupe community is to reset the ECU. This can clear some spurious problems or mystery losses of power, but its main effect is to clear the ECU's memory of past and cured problems that it may still be compensating for. Simply disconnect the battery and leave it for an hour or so.

Many 406 Coupes suffer from the notorious low brake fluid level warning – when the fluid reservoir is full. It actually means the handbrake micro-switch is faulty. Sometimes rattling the handbrake will clear this, but you'll usually wind up with the hour-long, hand-slicing job of replacing the switch.

Diesels have a particular problem with their high-tech graphite particulate (FAP) filter that's located in the main silencer. This is supposed to be self-cleaning but clogs after as little as 50,000 miles, throwing up a warning on the dash, and Peugeot will relieve you of £600 for a new one. Reconditioned

filters can be had for around £200, but owners have had much success in removing and cleaning the old one, either by burning off residue or using a pressure washer. It's still a couple of hours' work, but the money saved makes it well worth the effort. However, the same warning is also generated by the filter's differential pressure sensor, so you can either try replacing that first, or see if the warning is still there after cleaning the filter.

There's a connected issue with the diesels, which inject their own fuel additive called Cerine. There's a 4.5-litre tank of this that lasts about 40,000 miles or so. Topping up costs £25 per litre, and is another awkward job.

The timing belt is a big job on the V6 - around £400 for someone else to do it - so you often see them up for sale close to when it's due at 80,000 miles. It's another opportunity for DIYers to strike a bargain. Always change tensioners, rollers and water pump (on any of these engines) when replacing the belt.

## BUYING TIPS

There are few worries with the body, but avoid cars with bumper damage as replacement is expensive, and check panels gaps - particularly bonnet to wings and round the doors - for evidence of poor accident repairs. The nose is prone to stone chips so it's not unusual to find that's been painted. Watch for stress cracks in the doors under the mirrors.

The most important thing is to check the electrics, and that means everything. Make sure it's you who starts the car. Does the ABS light come on with the ignition then go out when the engine starts? Are there any warning lights or messages on the dash? Does the indicator switch work, and actually work the indicators? There's been a spate of problems with the stalks, especially on D8s. Does the car lock and deadlock properly from the key fob? Check the aircon, too, for both heat and cold. Original radios are notorious for their poor reception, so expect to replace that if it's not been done already. Finally, don't underestimate the odd blown dashboard bulb - the whole dash has to come out to replace them.

While you're inside, make sure all the seat-back releases work. It's common for cables to snap and expensive to have fixed. However, with a bit of fiddling you can fashion a replacement from a length of bicycle brake cable.



## PRICES & RIVALS

Never mind the others, it is surely a crime that the gorgeous 406 Coupé is valued (even slightly) below Ford's rather dud and unloved Cougar. But it is good news if you want to buy a 406. Early high-milers can be found for as little as £1,250, and that goes for both the 2.0 and the V6, though you really need at least £2,000 to start looking at nice stuff. I spotted a tempting '98/R 2.0 with 42k on the clock for £2,100.

You'll need rather more for the picks of the range - the 2.2HDI or 2.2 petrol - not least because they only came out in '01 and '02 respectively, and are much rarer. Out of 167 406 Coupés on *Auto Trader's* site, only eight were diesels and 10 were 2.2s. There was an example of the latter for £2,750, but with 155k on it. The rest start from £5,000, and you'll need £5,500-7,000 for an HDI.

	mph	mpg	'02/'51, 75k
Peugeot 406 Coupé 2.0 SE	129	34	£3,020
Ford Cougar 2.0 16v	129	33	£3,220
Volvo C70 Coupé 2.0T	130	29	£4,470
Hyundai Coupé 2.0 SE	129	35	£4,970
Toyota Celica 1.8 VVTi	131	36	£6,020
BMW 318Ci (143)	136	38	£6,695

On your test-drive, listen for knocks from the suspension. 406s are quite hard on it, but replacement parts are no more expensive or difficult



than for anything else, so it's just something else to bargain with. Don't confuse this with creaks and clunks from the driver's footwell on a V6 which means a broken engine mount. Only £25, but a pain to replace. The Brembo discs on the V6 and early HDIs often squeal. They can be improved, but you may have to live with a bit of that, though it's worth it for their effectiveness.

Leave the engine running after your test-drive and first check for smoke. Avoid such cars like the plague. You can also see whether the cooling fans cut in while you're looking for leaks from the engine or hoses. Shining a torch on the undertray can give you a start. Check the radiator for leaks and make sure the coolant hasn't gone brown. Rads can last as little as three years, and low coolant on these cars quickly leads to blown head gaskets. On that score, check the oil cap for mayo and the water reservoir for sludge.

## CONCLUSION

At these prices the case for buying is strong, for the pleasure of seeing one parked on your drive, not to mention the envious looks from friends and neighbours. None of the problems highlighted should deter a *Car Mechanics* reader, and some could be a positive advantage to help you barter the price down, or pick up one that someone's fed-up with taking to the dealer.

I'm going against all perceived 'wisdom' in recommending the 2.0 version. They are quick enough in reality, handle better than the heavier V6, the running gear goes on forever (ask a 406 saloon minicab driver!), and they've been talked down into the bargain basement.

Only 10,000 or so 406s were sold here and they're going to be classics one day. Get one while they're cheap.