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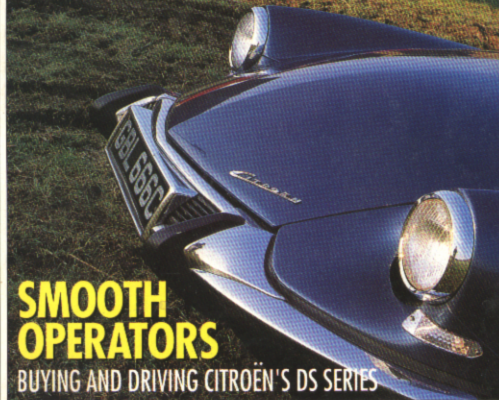
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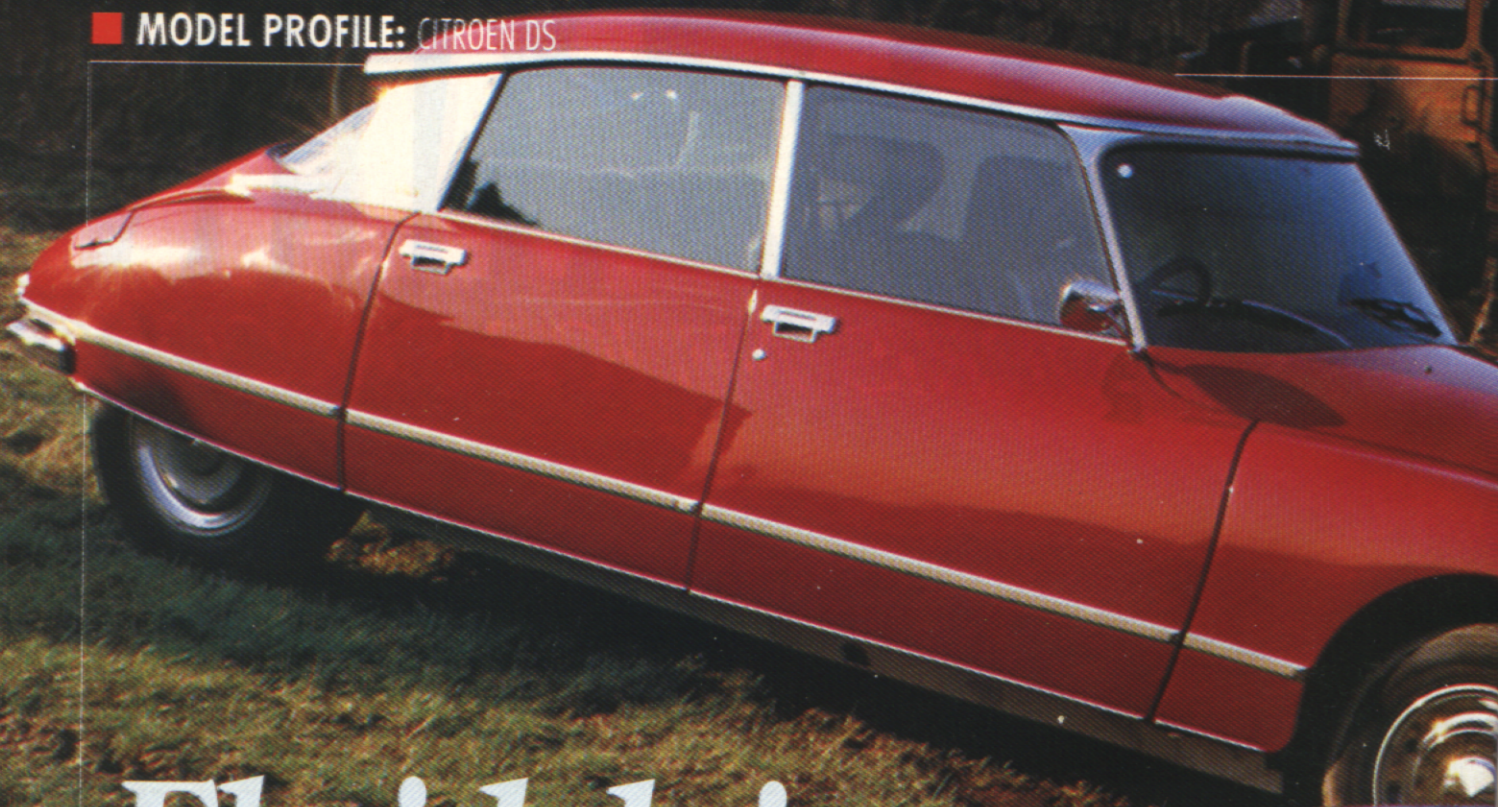


**TWO-SEAT TRIAL**

**SMOOTH OPERATORS**

BUYING AND DRIVING CITROËN'S DS SERIES





# Fluid drive

PHOTOS GARRY STUART

Citroën's remarkable D-series saloons were fairly rare in this country. James Taylor drives early and late examples and tries to work out why

**E**ven though Citroën's advanced DS was announced in the UK at the 1955 Earl's Court Motor Show, only weeks after its debut at the Paris Show, examples were never very common in Britain during the late-fifties.

Most Britons — I remember, because I was one of them — gaped when they saw one of these machines on the road, because they were quite unlike anything else around at the time.

In those days, restraint and conservatism were still hallmarks of the British car industry, and, compared with a similarly-priced Rover, Jaguar or Daimler, the Citroën was downright flamboyant.

Whereas most British and European cars of the time had three-box profiles with wing-shapes pressed into the side panels, and with absolutely no aerodynamic pretensions, the Citroën was radically different. Its pointed nose with headlamps standing proud on the wing pressings, and its sharply cutaway tail gave it a sleek, two-box shape in the coupe mould.

British-market cars, built from factory-supplied kits at the company's Slough assembly plant, had been anglicised a little to suit customer preferences, but they still had a single-spoke steering wheel, strip speedometer, an odd footbrake 'button' instead of a brake pedal, and a semi-automatic clutchless transmission.

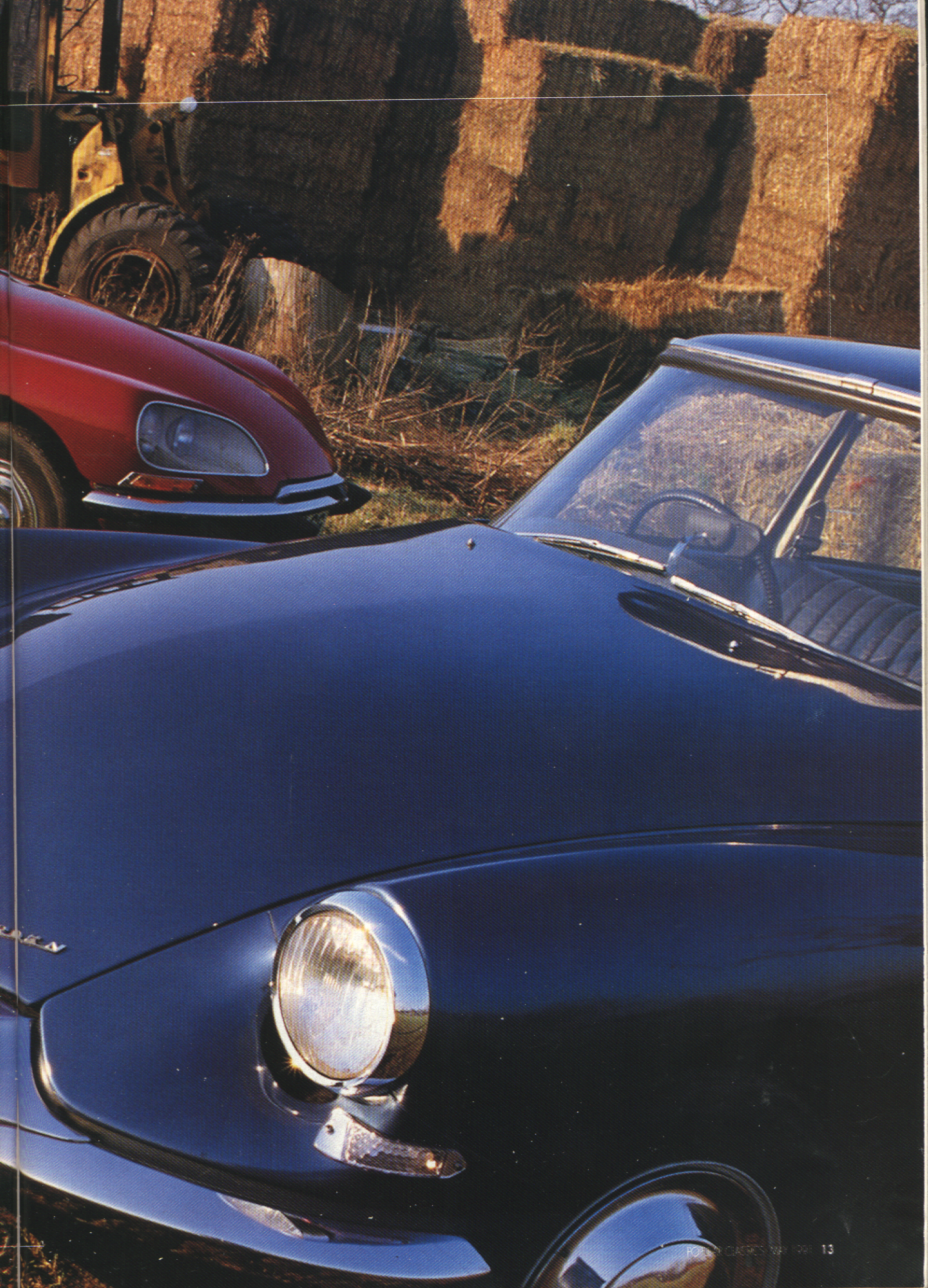
The interior was extraordinarily spacious, thanks to the long wheelbase and front-wheel drive which banished wheelarch and transmission tunnel intrusions into the passenger compartment. The seats themselves were big, comfortable and squashy.

Ride and handling were something else again: the suspension was an all-independent hydropneumatic set-up, powered by an engine-driven pump to give variable ride height at the driver's whim. It gave a smooth and controlled travel unheard of in compara-



**Distinctive aerodynamic styling: could this be anything other than a Citroën?**







ble British cars. Allied to this was power-assisted rack and pinion steering — and all in 1955.

Outside, the DS had a unique structure which consisted of unstressed skin panels bolted to a steel skeleton which doubled as chassis and body frame.

Though the DS offered similar performance to bigger-engined British cars in its price range, its 2-litre four-cylinder engine was lacking in refinement. It was, after all, just the latest version of a 20-year-old design.

Some of these criticisms were answered by the ID19, introduced in 1957. Performance was worse because of a less powerful version of the same engine, but conventional controls instead of the power brakes, steering and gearchange made the car less alien to drive. The dropneumatic suspension was still specified, however.

In France, the ID19 was marketed as a stripped-out, cheaper version of the DS, and became very popular as a taxi; in this country, it was rather better-equipped, and even had a wooden fascia like the UK-market DS model.

The ID19 was never very popular in the UK, though British sales of the D range as a whole did increase over the years.

Safari estates and the delectable Chapron drop-heads (*décapotables*) swelled the UK range and attracted a

**1965 Slough-built 'DW' was an attempt at a less-complicated DS for the conservative British market**



few supporters, but most Ds in the UK were saloons with the up-market Pallas trim. From 1966, all DSs were imported direct from France.

### **SURVIVOR**

Very few of the early Slough-built big Citroëns survive, but Andrew Brodie's beautiful blue 1965 car is one of the best. Andrew, who runs Hypertronics, the North London Citroën specialists has had to do some minor work on it, but the car is largely original, and still has only 17,000 miles on the clock.

Andrew's car is representative of the later British-built

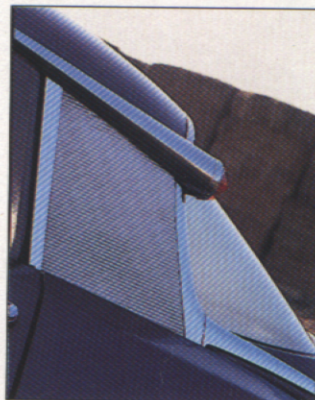
Ds. Citroën at Slough came up with a confection known as the DW, which they marketed after 1964 in an attempt to create a less-complicated DS.

Essentially, it was a DS Pallas, with the up-market trim and the all-hydraulic mechanical package, but its special feature was that it had three-pedal control, though retaining the power-assisted footbrake button.

Driving this car, it is still easy to understand what all the fuss was about. The big leather seats are extraordinarily comfortable, visibility is superb by the standards of the fifties (and even the sixties), the steering is positive and the brakes quite remarkable.

It's worth noting that, by modern standards, those brakes produce no real surprises: if you're used to a servo-assisted all-disc system, you'll be used to a car that stops this quickly.

What you have to remem-



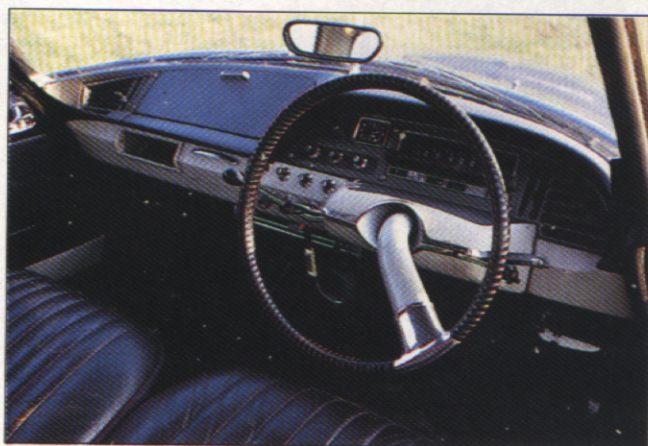
**Indicators are housed in tubes in the rear quarter panels**

ber, of course, is that any other car of the period needed a hefty shove on the brake pedal to get it to stop quickly: that the D's brake button needs only a gently caress with the ball of your foot speaks volumes for the power of the hydraulically-assisted system.

Even though the D was more than a decade old by the time our test DW was



**Rear view emphasises cut-off styling: ride height was variable**



**Futuristic interior was a revelation at the DS's introduction**



## CITROEN D-SERIES CHRONOLOGY

DS19	1955-1968	1911cc to mid-1964 1985cc thereafter	Saloon and (from 1960), <i>décapotable</i> (NB the UK-only DW model, never badged as such, was essentially a DS19 with Pallas trim and conventional gearchange)
ID19	1957-1969	1911cc to mid-1966	Saloon and (1958-1968), Safari
DS20	1968-1975	1985cc twin-choke carburettor	Saloon and <i>décapotable</i>
ID20	1968-1969	1985cc twin-choke carburettor	Saloon and (to mid-1975) Safari estate; after 1969, ID20 Safari parallels D Super specification
DS21	1965-1972	2175cc carburettor	Saloon and (to mid-1971) <i>décapotable</i>
DS21Inj	1969-1972	2175cc fuel injection	Saloon and (to mid-1971) <i>décapotable</i>
ID21	1965-1972	2175cc carburettor	Safari only
DS23	1972-1975	2347cc carburettor	Saloon and Safari
DS23Inj	1972-1975	2347cc fuel injection.	Saloon only
D Special	1969-1975	1985cc	Saloon (replaced ID19)
D Super	1969-1975	1985cc twin-choke carb	Saloon
D Super 5	1972-1975	2175cc	Five-speed 'box



**1974 DS 23 uses a 2347cc fuel injected four-cylinder engine**

made, its futuristic design ensured it was not outmoded by rivals.

From 1968, the front was restyled with four headlamps concealed behind a glass panel; on the more expensive models, these lamps were self-levelling and the inner pair turned with the wheels to light the way around dark corners.

1970 saw the first appear-

ance of electronic fuel injection, and a five-speed gearbox was added from 1971. In place of the original semi-automatic transmission, a conventional Borg-Warner three-speed automatic became optional a year later.

### COMPARISON

Andrew Brodie's other car — the red DS23 Injection

dating from 1974 — makes a fascinating comparison with the ID19.

By the time this car was built, the seats were still huge leather armchairs, but this time they had headrests with detachable cushions.

The dashboard design had changed and incorporated more conventional circular instruments and a rev counter, though there still wasn't anything conventional about driving a D.

Andrew's car has the semi-automatic hydraulic gearchange, which is very simple once the driver is used to it, but needs to be set up properly if progress isn't to be jerky.

The bigger injection engine of the DS23 feels more responsive than the elderly 1911cc type in the 1965 car, and it's easy to imagine this machine reaching the 120mph claimed for it.

By comparison, the 102mph claimed for the DW

is difficult to believe, as the car feels much lower-g geared and more sluggish.

The brakes are a lot fiercer on this car owing to the use of different pad materials, but the brake button is still there and still needs care.

While the DS23's performance is well up to that of its competitors, the engine is still busy-sounding by the standards of rival machinery.

That gearchange may have been fascinating to a lover of cars but would probably have been merely irritating to someone who was looking for nothing more than a mode of transport.

The D, even after nearly 20 years in production, was *still* so different from its contemporaries that you can begin to appreciate why it never sold in large numbers here.

### BUYING

Despite an upturn in sales in the early-seventies, Citroën didn't really make a significant impact on the big-car sector of the UK market until the D's CX successor arrived mid-decade. The result is that very few Ds survive in everyday use, and good examples like these two are hard to find.

So how *do* you buy a decent D? The most serious problem is structural rot. It isn't easy to see at first glance, but you should check very carefully when looking over a car for sale.

Bad rusting in the floorpan or the inner sill box-sections can put a car beyond economic repair. Lift up the sill



**Fluid-based suspension and long wheelbase give the big Citroëns an unrivalled ride**