



UD-98-08

#81
Citroën
DS 19
(1956)

Vitesse 011

Period: 1955-1975
Built: 1,330,755

Engine: 1.9-l 4-cyl
Power: 75 PS
Top speed: 142 km/h
Price: £1,403 12s 6d

Predecessor:
Citroën Traction Avant
Successor:
Citroën CX

Date acquisition:
06/09/1998



Approx. first plate Approx. last plate
TP-16-88 **09-GL-31**



“The impact which the DS19 made at its presentation the night before the Paris Salon was opened was quite staggering”, Autocar wrote in its 14/10/1955 issue. This was a car like never seen before, of an otherworldly stunning beauty and “bristling with ingenious features”. Over the 10-day show the DS received 80,000 order deposits, a record only broken 60 years later with the Tesla Model 3. Designed by Bertone, the DS is widely considered the pinnacle of 20th-century automotive design and has accrued various nicknames, including the “goddess” in English (because DS is pronounced “déesse” in French) and “snoek” (pike) in Dutch for its low-slung profile and smooth appearance. Stand-out technical feature was the hydropneumatic suspension, an ingenious oil- and gas-based suspension system with self-levelling properties, magic carpet-like ride quality and adjustable ride height. Autocar wrote that “the suspension is superb” and “there is that curious rise, after a load has been taken aboard, when the compensating mechanism does its stuff”. Yet, it was also sceptical about how consumers might view the complexity: “The maze of hydraulic pipes with their circuits, dependent upon one belt-driven hydraulic pump, may result in some apprehension on the part of would-be purchasers, and might affect its initial commercial success”.

Eccentric design solutions include a “steering wheel of a very unusual design in that it only has one spoke, formed by bending the steering wheel over into the wheel rim”. Highly unusual were also the brakes, “the operating pedal being a plunger with a circular pad”, akin to the foot-operated taps you find in public toilets. The rear indicator lamps were mounted at the corners above the rear windscreen.

As the DS was much more expensive than the Traction Avant it replaced, Citroën introduced the more basic ID with simpler suspension two years later. From 1958, the range also included a convertible, of which only 1,368 were built, and a much more common station car called Break (see model car #299). In 1967, the DS received a major facelift which included the introduction of the iconic directional headlamps.

When production ceased in 1975, none of the DS’s futuristic design appeal seemed to have waned, but successor CX was ready to take over. Although not quite as eccentric in its design as the DS, the CX’s sleek profile and hydropneumatic suspension were reminiscent of its illustrious forebear. I bought this beautiful scale model at the 1998 classic car fair in Amsterdam. The apple green colour seen on this model was used on the launch cars displayed at the Paris Salon de l’Automobile.



British style vs. French eccentricity: due to import tariffs, in 1960 the more powerful Jaguar Mk II 2.4 (£1,534) was cheaper in the UK than the Citroën DS 19 (£1,630).



Inside the DS was as unconventional as outside.



In the 1950s the Citroën range covered the extreme ends of the market but nothing in the middle.