

# MINIMAL CHIC

**T**HE SLIM PROFILE OF THE CITROËN CX has worn the years well (the last ones were built in 1989, the first in 1974) and, if anything, the interior, and especially the dashboard, is more radical than that of late DS models, which became progressively more 'normal'. Perhaps its day is coming as a fashionable classic like the trendy 'D'.

This left-hand-drive, base-model 2-litre was a pre-production car – one of a pair that came into this country in 1974, nine months ahead of their UK launch, for show and evaluation purposes. It was bought off the Earls Court show stand by its

first owner (who also bought the first SM in the country) but eventually found its way into a scrapyard – like most other early CXs – by the early Nineties. Luckily it was recognised by local specialists and was fully restored by Roger Bradford of the CX Centre in Cambridgeshire.

If only today's cars could dare to be as brave and futuristic inside as this. The fascia is a great sweep of brown, non-reflective, slightly mottled plastic, with everything the driver needs concentrated around an instrument pod shaped like a half-closed eye. The door panels are similarly bold, with door pulls in yielding foam that



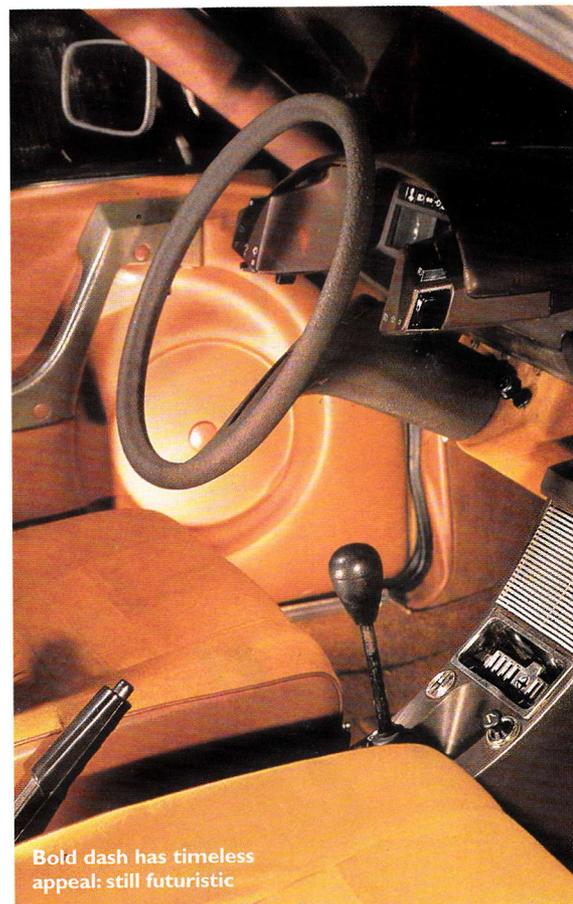
“Only now are the CX's advances over the DS being fully recognised”

sweep into armrests and feature sketchy tear-drop-shaped lock catches. There is a small cubby hole for the driver, a big, lit shin-bin for the passenger and a curiously pod-shaped ashtray plonked atop the centre console like a mutant clam shell. Speedometer and rev counter take the form of revolving yellow drums behind convex magnified glass and look like refugees from a one-armed bandit. Other than a petrol gauge and clock, all other information comes via 16 warning lights, like Blackpool's illuminations, built into the top of the pod. The centre lights are the ones to keep an eye on – hydraulic pressure, water temperature, oil pressure – as they bring on the 'stop' light urging you to halt and switch off. The other gauge is a conventional water temperature instrument, just below the steering column.

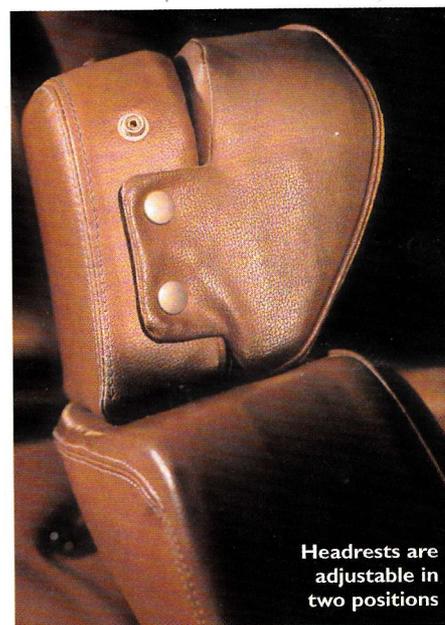
Sensibly, the lights, horn, windscreen wipers and the famous non-self-cancelling indicator controls are clustered within fingertip reach of the steering wheel on satellites either side of the main pod, an idea used on later GS models. As plasticky Seventies switchgear goes, it isn't especially satisfying to manipulate but the switches



With Jersey cloth, CX 2000 has the purest interior



Bold dash has timeless appeal: still futuristic



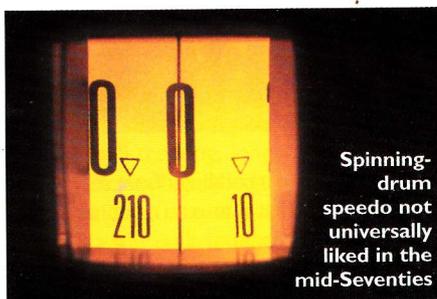
Headrests are adjustable in two positions

do the job admirably – the driver shouldn't have to take his or her hands off the wheel.

The vertically mounted radio wasn't to be found on later cars, which placed it between the seats, alongside the suspension height adjustment levers. The seats are highly stylised but deeply comfortable. Trimmed in a practical orange cloth called Jersey velour, the front seats feature headrests adjustable by the use of press-studs. The big Prestige offered the ultimate in CX legroom but the standard Citroën, with its almost-flat floor, wasn't exactly lacking either.

Certain details separate this very special CX from the rapidly thinning early CX herd. Outwardly, all you can see are the unique hub caps that were not used on the production cars and an unusual filler flap. On the inside, you'll find slow, noisy electric windows (again, not used on basic production CXs, which have manual winders set in the circular door trim cut-outs), non-production height adjustment for the front seat and a DS switch for the heated rear window.

Less desirable novelties of these early cars included the lack of power steering – almost all



Spinning-drum speedo not universally liked in the mid-Seventies

the UK cars had Vari-power steering – which makes driving the car around town something of a chore, although the diameter of the single-spoke wheel was increased to compensate.

A thrashy 2-litre transverse four-cylinder engine deploys just 105bhp through a mere four agricultural speeds for a top speed of just over 100mph and a 0-60mph time in the 12-second bracket. Torque is there though, and it will return 25mpg.

On a positive note, this early car rides better than its later siblings, almost as smoothly and softly as a good DS, as it sweeps majestically over pot-holes and cracked asphalt, yet manages aston-

ishing grip on its modest Michelin MXV rubber.

With fine aerodynamics of 0.34Cd (long before Audi began talking of such things), the CX generates little wind or road noise and is magnificently stable in side winds. As a motorway express, the CX was always difficult to beat.

However, as a piece of ground-breaking technology, the CX, in the giant shadow of the earlier DS, could not help but look slightly tame. Only now, almost a decade after its demise, are its qualities as a proper big Citroën – and its solid advances over the DS – being fully recognised. Buy now while stocks last. ●