

Box of tricks



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When is a van not a van? When it's a Rifter. Yes, Peugeot carries on its product offensive with the launch of its new MPV – the sibling to Citroën's Berlingo. But is the model more than just a box on wheels?

Peugeot has done its best to disguise the fact that the Rifter is a van. Compared with the Citroën Berlingo, there is less of a front overhang, and then there is the prominent Peugeot grille and 'face'. There is also a ruggedness about it that is rather beguiling.

The sturdy appearance is heightened further by pronounced roof-rails and body cladding around the wheel arches. The whole package shouldn't be appealing, but it is – especially for anyone after a spacious, chunky-looking vehicle. Oh, and don't get us wrong, this Peugeot isn't an off-roader, although one might be on the way.

Space and practicality are the reasons the Rifter exists. You get 180 litres of cubbyhole storage, and this encompasses a sturdy top-loading box set into the dashboard. There is

also a compartment that folds down from the ceiling directly above the boot. The door bins are massive, too, swallowing three bottles of drink. Then there is a centre console between the front seats.

There's loads of shoulder, leg and headroom, with three seats in the back and sliding rear doors. These doors make getting in and out of the MPV a cinch. It also means you can open them in tight spaces. The rear seats are not adjustable, though, because they are fixed.

The boot is, unsurprisingly, van-like. It is accessible via a tailgate that, when raised, exposes a low loading lip. You can even open the rear windscreen, rather than lifting the tailgate.

The front passenger seat folds flat, and the rear seats fold almost flush. Doing this expands loading room to 3,500 litres. Boot capacity with all seats in place is 775-litres.

For now, we are reviewing the five-seater Rifter, but seven-seater and long-wheelbase models will be hot on its heels. These will be even more van-like with up to 4,000 litres of room available.

The MPV comes in three levels of trim: Active, Allure and the top of the range GT Line that we were handed the keys to. You get a touchscreen and air-con in all but the entry-level model, but there are no fancy materials; instead, there are slabs of dark plastic everywhere. This isn't a deal-breaker, though, because there is the odd sprinkling of colour to brighten things up a tad.

You get a magnificent view when you're behind the wheel of the all-new Rifter. The elevated driving position makes you feel the king of the road and, when you slow down to park, things are just as good. The MPV comes with reversing sensors that help hugely when you need to squeeze into tight spaces, often under pressure, in busy areas. We would also highly recommend the optional eight-speed automatic box. It takes the stress out of driving, leaving you feeling less fatigued, particularly when you are in stop-start traffic.

The Rifter has a bunch of engines on offer – and they are all diesel. So much for the death of the oil-burner, eh? The powerplants are



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shared with Vauxhall's Combo Life and Citroën's Berlingo and begin with a 110PS 1.2-litre Puretech petrol unit. There is also a trio of 1.5-litre BlueHDi diesels with 75PS, 100PS and 130PS. All Rifters come with a six-speed manual transmission, but the top diesel, that we tried, also comes with that above-mentioned smooth-shifting eight-speed automatic gearbox.

The Rifter's ride is surprisingly good and is far better behaved than the outgoing Partner Tepee. Yes, it is firmly sprung, but it copes with ruts and bumps well. And considering its functional focus, the Rifter steers with astonishing dexterity. The fact that the MPV houses the shirt-button sized i-Cockpit steering wheel, as seen in other Peugeots, helps with responsiveness.

When it comes to corners, the relatively tall Rifter soon lets you know you are going beyond its limits because body roll kicks in profusely. Traction runs out rapidly if you tackle bends hard, too. But not many people who buy or lease this Peugeot are going to want to push it to its limits, as we did, along snaking coastal routes.

More usefully, the MPV's turning circle is tight, meaning it could be the ideal vehicle for you if you do a lot of manoeuvring in car parks and busy urban areas.

Peugeot's Partner Tepee and Citroën's Berlingo weren't overly safe, achieving only three out of five Euro NCAP stars. Happily, the French motor-maker has kitted out the related Rifter with a range of up-to-the-minute safety aids. These encompass adaptive cruise control, a traction control system and automatic emergency braking. It is also fitted with blind spot monitoring, a tyre pressure monitor and an active lane departure warning system.

Additionally, the MPV uses the same platform design as the DS 7 Crossback. This model was awarded a full five-star rating, so things look promising for the Rifter. The Peugeot Partner Tepee was in insurance groups 10-18, so the Rifter should follow suit. The MPV is also useful when it comes to fuel efficiency. Peugeot claims the 1.5 BlueHDi 130 GT Line will do up to 65.7mpg.

verdict

The all-new Peugeot Rifter is solidly built, and the cabin looks like it will cope with years of abuse. Indeed, it is likely that this spacious MPV will be favoured by taxi-drivers, so it is bound to stand the test of time. In addition, Peugeot has a decent name for producing reliable cars, and it uses diesel engines that are based on reputable technology. This means the Rifter should prove dependable.

In the real world, we achieved late-50s mpg. This is still impressive, mind. CO₂ emissions for this model are 114g/km. And, despite its far from athletic looks, this variant has some decent shove, getting from 0-62mph in 10.8 seconds. Top speed is 114mph.

If you want an even thriftier model, then the 1.5 BlueHDi 75 has a claimed average fuel consumption of 68.9mpg, while emitting 109g/km of CO₂.

If you like the look of the Rifter, it's worth shopping around at your Citroen and Vauxhall dealerships. The Citroen Berlingo and new Vauxhall Combo Life are both basically the same vehicle, badge engineered. Vauxhall's Combo used to be based on the Fiat Doblo, but following PSA's acquisition of GM's European operations, the Combo is now almost identical to the Rifter and Berlingo too.

data

PRICE as tested	£24,685
WARRANTY	36 months / 60,000 miles
INSURANCE	--
VED BAND	G

performance

ENGINE	1,499cc, 4-cyl, turbodiesel
TRANSMISSION	8-speed auto, FWD
POWER	128bhp
TORQUE	300Nm
0-62MPH	10.4sec
TOP SPEED	114mph
COMBINED ECONOMY	65.7mpg
CO ₂ EMISSIONS	114g/km

dimension

LENGTH	4,403mm
WIDTH	1,848mm
HEIGHT	1,844mm
WHEELBASE	2,785mm
LOADSPACE	775 litres
FUEL TANK	53 litres