

Two Citroens by Chris Harris-Evans

I had always wanted a Citroen D series. It was French and a revolutionary machine both in styling and mechanics. My first opportunity was the simpler ID model. This had the same basic body but without all the exotic power options. It was still an advanced machine with front wheel drive, inboard front disc brakes and adjustable level hydro-pneumatic suspension. To change a tire all you had to do was raise the suspension to maximum, place a support under the body by the wheel that you wanted to remove, and lower the suspension, resulting in the wheel being lifted off the ground ready for removal. The Citroen ID was comfortable and reliable but I still yearned for a DS and my desire was realized when I discovered a really nice model that was incredibly cheap as it had a cracked gearbox casing. I snapped it up as I already knew of a source for a replacement gearbox in a local junk yard.

The Citroen DS is either a hydraulic marvel or a hydraulic nightmare depending on your viewpoint. I definitely subscribed to the marvel view. It had servo power steering with the futuristic single arm steering wheel. If you let go of the wheel it servo centered the wheels back to the straight ahead position. The power brakes were even more unusual as the brake pedal was just a button servo valve with negligible movement. The gearbox was a conventional manual unit with a clutch but it was all hydraulically operated with no clutch pedal. There was a small gear selector lever sticking out of the dash in front of the steering wheel. This selected the gears and operated the clutch and when in first gear, at idle, the clutch was feathered to hold the car on a hill. Some found it too revolutionary but I was fascinated.

Replacing the gearbox in my newly acquired DS luckily didn't require disconnection of any hydraulics as all the selectors were mounted on the top cover, so the new gearbox could be slipped in and the original cover bolted on with all the hydraulics still connected. I thought I was set but shortly after the engine lost all power and after removing the cylinder head I discovered a hole in the number two piston. Access to remove the oil pan was not easy but I noticed that the engine used wet cylinder liners that could be removed providing enough space to push out the floating gudgeon pin and replace the damaged piston. Once again I had been very lucky and from then on the DS was reliable and a pleasure to drive. There was one annoyance, the turn signal control wasn't the standard self-cancelling arm on the steering column, it was a switch on the dashboard with a timer. Invariably the time was either too long or too short requiring manual cancelling or re-selecting, I expect the French have a more "laissez faire" attitude to turn signals.

The date of our wedding in July, 1967 had arrived and the car, which we would be using for the honeymoon, was carefully concealed in a back street. Towards the end of the reception my new wife, Jean, and I went back to the house to change before returning to the reception to say goodbye. It was only a few minutes but when we returned to the car to leave, it was covered in graffiti and tin cans strung from the rear bumper. I cleaned off the windshield so that I could see, and unhooked the cans but we left advertising to the world our new married state. Once out of the city I stopped to clean off the car and noticed a peculiar smell and on opening the bonnet (hood) I discovered a well-cooked kipper (Scottish smoked herring) on the manifold. I dumped it on the side of the road and I am sure the birds enjoyed it as we continued on our honeymoon.



I am cleaning the windshield of the Citroen DS while Jean is still obscured by graffiti.