



ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN #18

Citroën DS vs NSU Ro80

Russ Smith is visited by a pair of alien saloons, but which would he prefer to abduct him?

PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



Innovation: it's the one thing that modern cars lack. For all their cleverness, everything today is just so similar, to drive and look at. Sure, we have performing cup holders and diesel engines that compete to eke out an extra 2mpg, but where's the excitement? For something today to have the same level of impact that the DS and Ro80 made back in the 1950s and '60s, it would have to be designed in Hollywood, not Turin, or be powered by Improbable Trousers Drive.

That's why both of these cars are remembered so fondly, and still cut a dash and attract the 'what is it?' brigade. They were way ahead of their time, and whether they actually changed

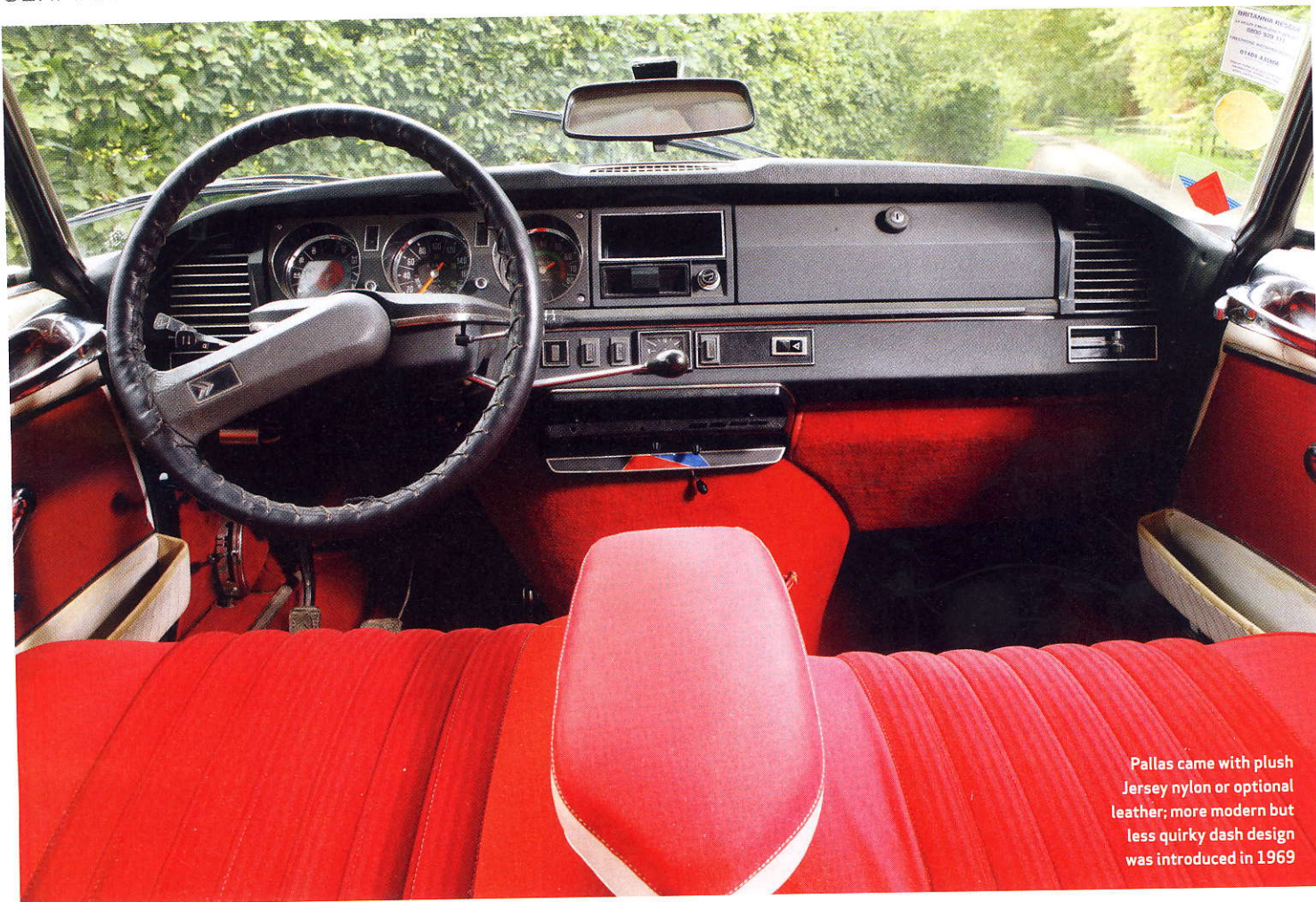
the world or not doesn't matter; they were brave leaps that made it a more exciting place to be.

In fact, both cars represent if not blind alleys then at least roads little travelled. Citroën still swears by it, and Rolls-Royce licensed it, but no other manufacturer has embraced the full-on oleo-pneumatic suspension experience. More's the pity, some would say, especially after having ridden in one. And the NSU's rotary engine was simply way ahead of the available technology, and has one so far insurmountable problem, that of petrol consumption. Only Mazda still uses them, and although all the reliability issues that blighted the Ro80 have been solved – and the necessary parts fitted to most survivors – there's

no getting away from the design's inherent thirst for fuel. It has been made even more marked by improvements in conventional engine design.

Yet none of that need bother us here. This should be a celebration of these cars' very existence and innovation. The limited use that most classics get makes fuel economy largely irrelevant anyway, so we can concentrate on finding out which of this eccentric pair offers the best mix of quirks and sensory pleasures.

Both of the featured cars, coincidentally, were built in '73, the same year they were compared in *Motor*. The Citroën in that road test was a DS23 Pallas EFI, too. Back then it was £400 cheaper than the Ro80. Today, the NSU is the bargain.



Pallas came with plush Jersey nylon or optional leather; more modern but less quirky dash design was introduced in 1969

Interior

★★★★☆

This top-of-the-range Pallas comes with Parisian boudoir-spec nylon covering the almost duvet-soft seats. There's masses of room in the rear, where the seats are if anything even softer – it is hard to extract yourself, or even want to – and a flat floor creates plenty of space for three abreast. In the front you get big storage bins in the doors, and another attached to the bulkhead where a centre console would usually be found.

The driver is surrounded by levers, with a long chromed one for the gearshift protruding from the column along with the usual stalks, plus more down by your left leg for the handbrake release and suspension height control, which you should take care not to confuse.

Other controls and delightful details are scattered everywhere. The big chromed doorhandle with its perfectly ergonomic thumb button release is lovely, as are the large interior lights that top each B-pillar, and the centre armrest that slides between the front seats.

Only the dash is a let-down. Matt black might have been all the rage in the 1970s, but it looks so drab compared to the painted metal, brushed aluminium and thin-rimmed steering wheels of earlier DSs. They were so much more 'Citroën'.



Luscious doorhandle; armrest folds giving room for three

Styling

★★★★★

It is hard to convey just how radical a design the DS was in 1955. You really need to consider it alongside the Standard Vanguard III and Morris Isis saloons that were launched at the same time to get some idea. It was an electric light among candles. Yet it miraculously managed not to scare the natives, and car buyers can be quite conservative folk. This is also one of few cars – the Mini also springs to mind – that finds equal appeal in male and female eyes.

All of that helps to explain why it remained largely unchanged during the 20 years that the car was on sale, and still didn't look tired in 1975. The only significant alteration, which to my eyes at least made the Citroën even more attractive, was the 1967 adoption of a sleeker front end with covered headlamps.

Note that there are no quarterlights to spoil the visual flow of the glass, and the chrome rear indicator trumpets may have been used to tidy the line from roof to rear pillar, but stand as styling icons on their own. The unnaturally far-back position of the rear wheels adds a final deft touch of balance. Perhaps the only valid criticism is of a slight slab-sidedness, though not on the Pallas, which hides it with a chunky run of side trim.



Signature 'chip cornet' indicator and turning inner lamps

THE OWNER

Rob Cooper



What inspired you to buy a DS? I lived in France for a year, in 1964, and thought they were marvellous. I even had two for my wedding in 1970. After my parents died I had some spare cash and decided it was time to own one.

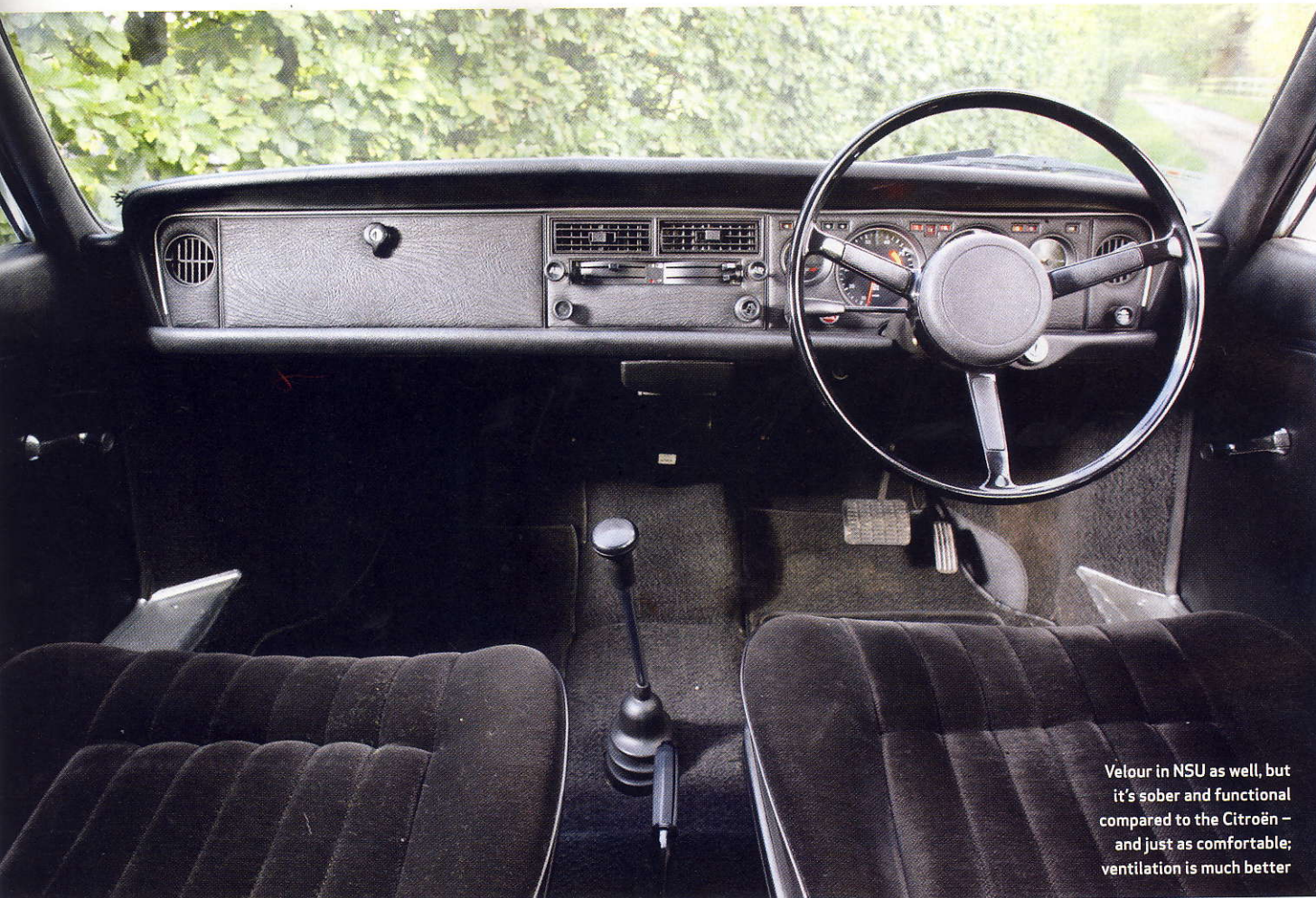
How did you come by it? That was 12 years ago. After looking at 10, a friend in the Dordogne came up with this one. It had really low mileage and had been owned by a pig farmer. I flew over and drove it back, only to break down in the Eurotunnel queue.

'It's used for rallies and weddings. Not much pleasure motoring, but it's always a pleasure to drive'

Have you had to do much to it? I had the door bottoms done. It's had two water pumps and a steering rack. That was expensive. So are the tyres. They are a unique size and £200 a pop.

How much use do you get out of it? Mostly for club rallies and weddings. Not much pleasure motoring, but it is always a pleasure to drive.

Any memorable moments? Taking it to Paris for the car's 50th anniversary in 2005. There were more than 1400 DSs – an amazing sight.



Velour in NSU as well, but it's sober and functional compared to the Citroën – and just as comfortable; ventilation is much better

Interior

★★★★☆

There's nothing wrong with the Ro80's interior, it just looks rather black, bland and Germanic alongside the DS. Only a white headlining offers any relief from the blackness, so it's just as well that the large windows throw so much light into the cabin. The shiny, thin-rimmed three-spoke wheel is nice to hold, and the padded vinyl dashboard has a heavy grain not unlike elephant hide, but that's about as exciting as things get. I must praise the ventilation system, though, which is about as efficient as in any car I've driven, of any age, that's got a roof on.

The cloth-covered seats – more black I'm afraid – are very comfortable, with prominent side bolsters in their backs that hold you snugly in place when cornering. There's less legroom in the rear than in the Citroën, but still more than enough to avoid complaint from even three passengers. What is lacking is anywhere to stow things, apart from the glovebox and small pockets on the seatbacks: no door bins, no under-dash shelf. And it was quite a surprise, as in the DS, to find that in such a high-tech executive machine you have to wind your own windows. You can forgive this to some extent because the mechanism – like everything else – feels so well made.



NSU looks basic inside, but is spacious and superbly made

Styling

★★★★☆

It's not as revolutionary as the DS, but the Ro80 still stood apart from the ranks of Rover P6s and Mercs that it competed against. The low bonnet line allowed by the rotary engine is largely responsible, yet designer Claus Luthe managed to combine that with a high boot without making the body look wedge-shaped, even though it is.

The masterful use of anodised aluminium brightwork around the windows does wonders to disguise the surprisingly tall 'screen, which has a touch of receding hairline in the way it flows into the roof. The bizarrely shaped (for '67) headlamps also key in with a cohesive profile that has stood the test of time superbly. Even with the car's slightly high stance, you don't see a 44-year-old design; it could be half that age. It would look younger still if you took away the telltale stalk-mounted stainless-steel door mirrors, but that would be a crime because they look so good.

Other details are more subtle, but no less important, such as the slimline doorhandles with recessed buttons, a flush-fit fuel filler door and beautifully smooth bumpers. The optional Fuchs alloys, now worn by nearly all surviving Ro80s, fill the arches better than most designs of the era and finish off the picture perfectly.



Elegant details, with round mirror and radical light cluster

THE OWNER

Stephen Chapman



What inspired you to buy a Ro80? The usual thing: I went in one at school and thought that it was fantastic. That was a snowy day in east Kent and everything else was stuck. The Ro80 just kept going.

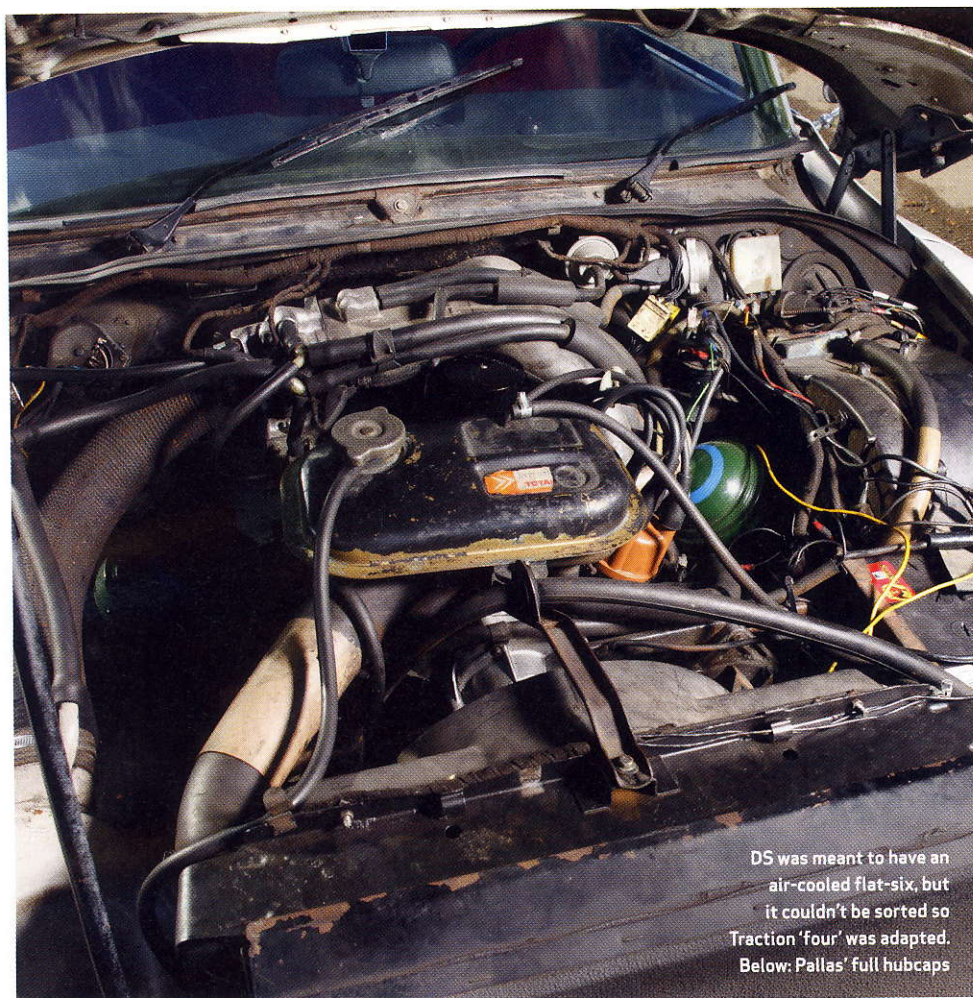
How did you come by it? It was hard to find a really good one; I looked for two or three years. Then, through the NSU Owners' Club, I talked to specialist Phil Blake, who happened to have this one for sale.

'The Ro80 is so happy to drive at any speed, unlike most cars that have sweet spots in their range'

Have you had to do much to it? No. It had a bit of rot around the sunroof, but that was done as part of the price. In the two years since it has needed just a water pump, a bulb and a fuse.

How much use do you get out of it? Not much. I drive little and have too many cars. What I do love is that it is so happy to drive at any speed, unlike most cars that have sweet spots.

Any memorable moments? I was just pleased to have one at last, though I didn't like driving it at first. It wasn't good in a Streatham jam.



DS was meant to have an air-cooled flat-six, but it couldn't be sorted so Traction 'four' was adapted. Below: Pallas' full hubcaps

The knowledge

What to pay

Top DSs are starting to look expensive. A superb DS23 Pallas recently sold at auction for £21,000, and dealers are asking north of £30k for mint restored ones. Yet you can still pick up presentable cars for around £12,000, especially if you don't set your heart on an injected Pallas. Something usable with 'patina' can be had for £6-7k, or poverty-spec IDs for two-thirds as much, and projects are c£2500.

What to look for

- Rust anywhere underneath, but particularly around the rear suspension mounts
- Rear wings come off with one bolt to get at the wheels, and a confident seller will do this on request so you can inspect the inner arches
- Check, as best you can, the rail to which the glassfibre roof is bolted (or glued on later cars) because any rot here is tricky to repair
- Check the hydraulic fluid in the reservoir is clean, and time how quickly the suspension rises from cold: 30 secs is about right
- If there is a constant ticking from under the bonnet, feel the hydraulic pump. Warm is right, too hot to handle means it needs replacing

What to read

- *Citroën DS: The Complete Story* Jon Pressnell
- *Citroën DS* Malcolm Bobbitt
- *Original Citroën DS* John Reynolds

The club

- www.citroencarclub.org.uk

Engine

★★★★☆

Once you've got your head around the Citroën's otherworldliness, finding it to be powered not by impulse drive but a four-cylinder overhead-valve lump can only come as a disappointment. It's like taking the back off your new computer only to be greeted by glowing valves... and a lot of fluff. Having an alloy crossflow cylinder head and Bosch electronic injection is about as high-tech as it gets, and the latter item was a rarity only introduced for a few top-line models from 1969.

Not that you can see much of the engine – a matter made much worse by Citroën's efforts to accommodate the injection. The 'four' is tucked right at the back of the engine compartment behind the gearbox, hidden under intake trunking and any amount of pipes and hoses. It looks as if it would be a nightmare to work on. Only the distributor cap is remotely accessible.

There's no joy in listening to it either. As I suppose befits a luxury saloon, you can barely hear the engine at all thanks to plenty of sound deadening and a well-silenced exhaust. That does a good job of disguising the engine's inherent lack of smoothness. Even at speed it remains whisper quiet and is as hard to hear coming as the most expensive of modern executive cars.



LHM fluid reservoir; one of the spheres it's pumped into



Drivetrain

★★★★☆

A five-speed column shift sounds like a recipe for disaster and, with left-hand-drive to contend with, too, it does rather prey on my mind as I jump in for a drive. In fact, it is easy to adapt to, with a normal shift pattern turned sideways that feels completely logical and is heavily sprung in the third-to-fourth gear plane. It's a long and sturdy wand, and not light in operation. You also hear a chorus of linkages clacking and clattering as you shift from one ratio to the next, but that only adds to the car's character, standing out because there's so little other noise to disturb you. There's certainly none from the transmission, because the 'box is mounted out ahead of the engine, driving the front wheels.

The clutch is more of a problem, at least at first. It has an up-and-down rather than an in-and-out motion, which, combined with an indistinct biting point, causes the embarrassment of a couple of stalled take-offs before I get used to it. The four-speed semi-auto is probably more in keeping with the whole DS experience, but if pushed I would still prefer the five-speed because the ratios are superbly matched to the engine's output, and that overdrive top gear is great for relaxed and economical cruising.



Safety padded wheel from 1969; five-speed column shift



THE EXPERT'S VIEW Andrew Brodie

"The DS is designed to be what you need rather than what marketing people thought they could sell you," says Citroën guru Brodie. "The ride surpasses anything made at the time, and most things made today. Its dynamics are a pleasure; the whole car is set up so tightly and is so fluid to drive. Just beware of rust!"

Two-rotor Wankel fed by a pair of twin-choke Solexes; earlier cars used two plugs per rotor. Below: most now sport Fuchs alloy wheels



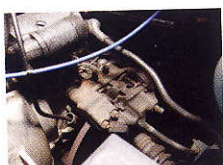
Engine

★★★★☆

However tantalisingly exotic it might sound, the rotary Wankel is no looker. This is not the sort of engine that gets polished up and mounted under glass for some laddish coffee table. Basically a drum shape with bits sticking out, it looks as if it ought to have some obscure industrial application, maybe involving the manufacture of cheese slices. But in spite of all that, and being the engine that didn't change the world, this is still a fascinating piece of kit. And with it being so small and low-mounted, you can appreciate its benefits for a car's handling and overall lightness. Access is brilliant, too, because the engine bay appears half empty, despite the low bonnet line.

Understandably, it sounds like nothing else, though in a nice way. There's a lot of thrum to its note, which quickly becomes an eager purr when you add some throttle and takes on a faint turbine-like whistle under hard acceleration. It's not intrusive, but unlike the Citroën this is a car that you do hear coming.

Launched before it was properly developed, this brave leap of faith caused the downfall of the Ro80 and NSU, but most of these engines have been rebuilt by specialists with modern materials, so you no longer have to be scared of them.



Inboard front discs on both cars; unit sports Wankel's name

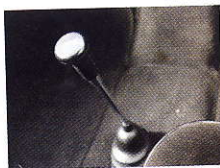
Drivetrain

★★★★☆

The Ro80's advanced semi-automatic gearbox takes some getting used to. Not in its operation, which is all wonderfully smooth and well engineered, but in reprogramming your head to get the best out of it. You change gear just as you would with a normal car, but there's no clutch pedal to push, and that makes you want to treat it like a full automatic and leave the gearstick alone once you get under way.

In fact, it has a torque converter and you treat it just like an auto to pull away: foot on the brake, slot into first – with a long throw that's fairly typical of a '60s saloon – and off you go. Then to change up you just lift off the throttle a little and slot it into the next ratio. An unnoticed electric switch in the gearknob operates the Fichtel & Sachs clutch via a vacuum, and so it goes. Though not for long: there are only three speeds, which is a little disappointing, and you have to think that an extra ratio would have aided low-down performance, not that there's any trouble keeping the engine on the boil.

You do get used to the transmission after a while, and I know that I could even grow to like it in time, it all feels so well made and pleasant to use. It becomes addictive once you get the knack.



Simple three-spoke wheel; three-speed semi-automatic

The knowledge

What to pay

It's rumoured there are only about 25 Ro80s still up and running in the UK, so they don't come up for sale that often. Try contacting Phil Blake – djphilmanns@btinternet.com

When they do, prices are still refreshingly affordable: £5-7000 should buy a good one with rebuilt engine and the right history, or you can pay less and spend more later. Projects can be found for as little as £500, but sorting one will be a real labour of love.

What to look for

- Most panels are hard to come by so don't underestimate the difficulty of fixing a shed
- Sills are vulnerable, and avoid any Ro80 with rot in the longitudinal chassis box sections
- Check for bubbles or poor repairs around the steel sunroof – it's a common rot spot
- Beware of an engine that has been warmed before you get to it. How well these cars start from cold is a good indicator of their condition
- A good vendor will show you the bill for when the engine was rebuilt, and who by. Some now have Mazda motors. This isn't a bad thing

What to read

- *NSU: The Complete Story* Mick Walker
- *NSU Ro80 1967-77 Road Test Limited Edition* RM Clarke
- *NSU-Automobile: 1905-1977* Peter Schneider

The club

- www.nsuoc.co.uk



THE EXPERT'S VIEW Phil Blake

"The NSU's smoothness is virtually unrivalled; I love the DS, but its rather agricultural engine lets it down. An Ro80 with a good engine is easy to keep that way, and I'm not suggesting they're treated gently. One driven on fast, long journeys will last well, if allowed to warm up first. Two-stroke oil in the fuel aids lubrication."



Unmistakable DS design by Flaminio Bertoni looks arguably better with post-1967 'cat's eyes' front end

Performance



I'm afraid that the Citroën's engine continues to disappoint here. Power from this top-of-the-range DS23ie ranks only as sufficient for what is after all a heavy car. It's certainly no more than that, and I imagine that one of the lower-powered versions – say anything less than a DS21 – might be quite underwhelming.

On paper it's the faster car, or at least in top speed and the 0-60mph sprint, but at no time does it ever feel quicker than the Ro80. Buried in that '73 *Motor* test is a revealing figure to explain that notion. From 30-50mph in top takes the Citroën 12.1 secs, whereas the shorter-geared NSU gets there in just 9.7 secs.

There's a nice torquey feel to the engine, and cruising at even high speeds is a relaxed and pleasant experience: the DS just doesn't want to be hurried into doing anything. And there is a small downside to travelling fast, as the Citroën reveals its age with the amount of wind noise generated around the A-pillars.

On the plus side, the brakes are superb. The button pedal shocks you once, but you quickly come around to its way of thinking. Indeed, it is quite reassuring to be rewarded with that much stopping power for so little effort.



Jaeger instruments; shape hardly changed over 20 years



Handling



If this section was being judged solely on ride comfort, the DS would walk it – or waft it, which is a far more appropriate term to use for the way that the Citroën floats along, seemingly unconnected with the road. It is truly unlike any other mode of transport, and years of driving and even owning Citroëns has done nothing to diminish my admiration. It is the perfect car for travelling long distances over imperfect roads.

But corners are another matter. That's where you find that the DS is not all that easy or natural to drive. It's hard to be as smooth as you'd like, so there's learning to do. This is not a car you throw around, because that only brings rebellion from the suspension. Sharp use of the brake or throttle pedal sets the car pitching, and you'll corner like a small dinghy in a rough sea. Try to carry too much speed into a bend and the payback is an early onset of tyre squeal combined with a large dose of plough-on understeer.

Think progressive, however, be delicate on the controls and the DS rewards you with good balance and grip, and almost neutral handling. It's a trick worth getting right, but you'll know when you've cracked it because your passengers will be smiling, too, rather than looking queasy.



DS leans but repounds best if you're gentle; ride is sublime



SPECIFICATIONS

Sold/number built 1955-'75/1,455,746
Construction steel monocoque with GRP roof and aluminium bonnet **Engine** iron-block, alloy-head ohv 2347cc 'four', twin-choke Weber or Bosch injection; 124/141bhp @ 5500rpm; 138/148lb ft @ 4000rpm **Transmission** four-speed semi-auto/four- or five-speed manual/three-speed full auto, driving front wheels **Suspension** independent, at **front** by leading arms **rear** trailing arms; hydropneumatic units, anti-roll bar f/r **Steering** powered rack and pinion **Brakes** powered inboard discs f, drums r **Wheels & tyres** 5 or 5½in steels, 185x380s **Length** 15ft 11½in (4860mm) **Width** 5ft 11in **Height** 4ft 10in (1473mm) **Wheelbase** 10ft 3in (3124mm) **Weight** 2960lb (1344kg) **0-60mph** 10.4 secs **Top speed** 119mph **Mpg** 23 **Price new** £2545 (1973)

EVOLUTION

1955 DS19 is launched at the Paris Salon. A massive 80,000 orders are taken at the show **1957** De-specced ID19 added, initially with orthodox brakes, steering and clutch **1958** Estate introduced: 'Break' in France, but wisely renamed Safari for the UK market **1961** Cabriolet (or Décapotable) goes on sale **1965** Two new engines: 90bhp 1985cc for the DS19, 109bhp 2175cc for the DS21 **1969** DS21 gets injection option that lifts power to 139bhp. The millionth DS is built. **1972** Range-topping DS23 introduced **1975** Last of the line – a metallic-blue DS23 Pallas – leaves the Quai de Javel factory on the banks of the Seine on 24 April



Claus Luthe's advanced Ro80 nearly passes for current; 0.34cd matched Sierra of 15 years later

Performance



The rotary engine feels a tad sluggish at low revs, just off idle, but it comes alive as soon as the revs pick up, with the urge growing exponentially to rate of spin. Acceleration is dulled by the gearchange – or more accurately by inexpert use of the gearchange – and the lack of ratios on offer, but this always feels much the livelier car.

As with almost everything about the Ro80, there's a wonderful smoothness to its power delivery. It not only looks as if it could be a modern car, it drives like one, too. Try one and you soon see the point of these cars, and understand why they were heaped with accolades at the launch – and feel the pain of all those who suffered from worn rotor tips, which is just about everyone who owned an Ro80 in the early days.

As it is, without imminent breakdown to worry about, this is a car that you accelerate just for the hell of it, to feel and hear the weird way in which it gains speed. It's almost like something turbocharged, but on the other hand different – much more linear and refined.

Disc brakes all round give you plenty of stopping power, and the big pedal – which is probably just a whisker too close to the accelerator – is reassuring in travel and feel.



Clear VDO gauges; Ro80 was runaway '68 Car of The Year

Handling



Alongside the Citroën, the NSU is much more sporting, but that doesn't mean heavy steering and a bum-numbing ride. Quite the opposite. The ride is uncannily good, with long-travel springs that soak up irregularities. Plus the absence of road and wind noise is remarkable in a car this old; it would bring praise in something launched tomorrow.

Which makes it all the more surprising when you discover the Ro80's remarkable cornering abilities. It is by far the easier of this pair to thread through a series of bends, and does so with some degree of enthusiasm and a lovely, assured balance. The power steering is fluid and not too light, plus its weight is completely unaffected by any loading as you get into a tighter corner. There's no tyre squeal or other fuss, even at a quite exuberant pace. The handling is so neutral that you can't tell which end is doing the driving. And that was quite an achievement for anything front-wheel drive in the 1960s.

There is a fair amount of body roll – as you can see – but however dramatic things look from the outside, it doesn't feel that way from the driver's seat. There's an air of calm capability about the car that makes you trust it implicitly.



NSU has sharper handling, yet rides almost as well as DS

SPECIFICATIONS

Sold/number built 1967-'77/37,204

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron and alloy twin-rotor, swept volume 2x497.5cc, two Solex 18/32 twin-choke carbs; 115bhp @ 5500rpm; 118lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission three-speed semi-automatic, driving front wheels **Suspension** independent, at front by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar rear trailing arms and struts

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, inboard at front, with servo

Wheels & tyres 5x14in alloys, 175x14s

Length 15ft 10in (4826mm)

Width 5ft 9in (1753mm) **Height** 4ft 7½in (1410mm)

Wheelbase 9ft (2743mm)

Weight 2675lb (1213kg)

0-60mph 12 secs **Top speed** 112mph

Mpg 19 **Price new** £2949 (1973)

EVOLUTION

1967 NSU launches the Ro80 at the Frankfurt Motor Show in the autumn to much acclaim.

Series production starts in October

1968 Ro80 is European Car of The Year. Sadly, at around the same time problems start to come to light about wear in the rotor-tip seals

1969 Beset by crippling warranty claims for new engines, NSU merges with Audi

1973 Higher-backed front seats with headrests and velour upholstery are fitted (with leather as a rarely specified option)

1976 Rear end revised with larger tail-lights and a brushed-aluminium rear panel

1977 Ro80 build – and the Neckarsulmer Stricken Union badge – ends in April

**NEXT UP
AC ACE vs
LANCIA AURELIA**

Two of the most seductive soft-tops do battle as Tojeiro's divine roadster meets the Torinese masterpiece




DS and Ro80: the timeless travellers – but do the Citroën's Gallic charms and laid-back character have the edge over the super-smooth Neckarsulm saloon?

The verdict

The Ro80 has always intrigued me. It was a car that you noticed on the street, but I grew up at a time when their Wankel engines were being denounced as witchcraft and replaced by – dear God, it hurts to recall – abominable V4s from Ford Transits. However cheap they became, you just wouldn't buy one, for the stigma attached to either engine. They rusted quite well, too.

Then again, so did the DS, another car that stood out and fuelled schoolboy fantasies. The complexity and potential cost of a suspension system that's hard to comprehend has put me off owning one so far, along with prices that are quite rightly above average for classic saloons, and continue to rise. This test has only strengthened my resolve to own a DS one day, though it would have to be a 21 or 23. Driving one is too special an experience for any car enthusiast to go through life without ticking that particular box on their 'to do' list. There's a retirement dream: floating along less-travelled country roads to a small *gîte* in Provence for a long holiday.

But if I may jerk your attention back to the present day for a moment, there's still the small matter of deciding which one I prefer from this pair of truly inspired saloons that dared to be different. And that is the Ro80. Even the blandness of the interior wasn't enough to put me off. This was the one that I kept feeling drawn to, and wanting another few miles in. The way that it drives is bewitching, and I know that if I owned one, a 3000-mile classic insurance policy would be no good to me. It would be hard to use such a car so infrequently. 

SWAP SHOP

Owners exchange keys

Ro80 OWNER CHAPMAN ON THE DS

"It feels like the soul of France, really special. I like the visibility and high seating position, and the ride is so fantastic. I have Cadillacs and this is much better. The engine sounds old, but in a nice way. Very French: 'This is what you get,' with a shrug. Performance doesn't come easily, but it will do it. There's nothing sporting about the car, and it's all the better for that."



DS OWNER COOPER ON THE Ro80

"It's easy to drive and very smooth, a real pleasure. It doesn't have any vices apart from the gearbox, which takes a bit of getting used to. I don't like the steering wheel. It feels like it is, plastic and insubstantial. My big foot kept catching both pedals, too. But the ride is lovely, the car handles beautifully, it holds the road well and would be nice on a long journey."

The alternatives



ROVER P6 3500S

Sold/no built 1971-'76/19,896

0-60mph 8.1 secs **Top speed** 122mph **Mpg** 23

Price new £2207 **Price now** £600-£6500

This is as radical an executive saloon as Britain had to offer. It has an excellent ride, is quicker than this pair, but is nothing like as roomy.



PRINCESS 1800/2200

Sold/no built 1975-'81/148,210

0-60mph 13.5 secs **Top speed** 105mph **Mpg** 27

Price new £2237 **Price now** £100-£1500

Worth a mention for its Hydragas suspension and vast, lounge-like cabin. Not as bad to drive as you think, and even the best survivors are really cheap. Just watch out for rampant rust.