

GROUP TEST

Cresta PC Estate vs DS Safari



# MATTERS OF ESTATE

Gallic eccentricity or coachbuilt British precision: which of these contrasting estates takes the load-lugging spoils?

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## Cresta PC Estate vs DS Safari

**W**hen sighting a Cresta PC Estate, I immediately hear Roy Budd's theme to *Get Carter*, for it is precisely the sort of car that the anti-hero would have dreamed of owning, once he'd finished with that unpleasant business in the North East. Any PC is a handsome machine, but the Martin Walter conversion only accentuates the Cresta's imposing and faintly menacing air. You can just see Carter, his black trench coat flapping in the wind, examining the

Vauxhall at a bomb-site car dealer's lot, appraising the smooth 'Coke Bottle' styling and the 6ft 4in (with the rear bench folded down) load bay – the latter being ideal for any non-compliant business rival.

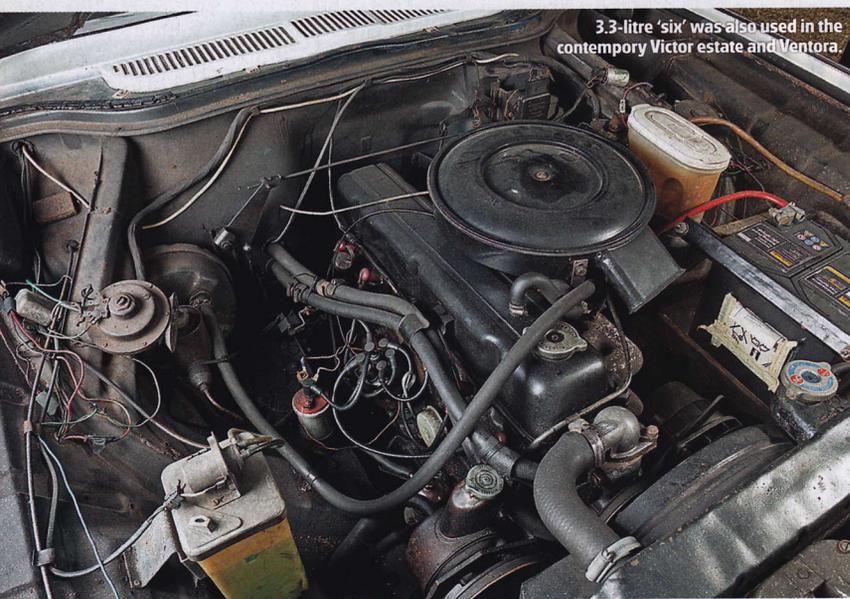
**Coachbuilt class**

The PC-series Cresta saloon commenced production in 1965, but it wouldn't be until January 1967 that deliveries commenced of the estate car version. As with the 1962-1965 PB-series models, the station wagon was converted by ▶



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Cresta is no road rocket – comfortable, steady progress is the order of the day.



## Quick Facts

Vauxhall Cresta PC Estate

**Market value**  
£600-£3500.

**Worthy upgrades**  
Fit PAS, rear seat belts and a heated rear window.

**Essential checks**  
These old Vauxhalls rust, so be wary!

**Safety**  
Quad headlamps, two-speed wipers and reversing lamps.

**Corrosion**  
Bonnet hinge boxes, wheel arches, sills, headlamp surrounds, valances, door bottoms and boot lid edges.

**Rare parts**  
Anything connected with the Martin Walter conversion, especially plastic 'wood' trim, and chromework.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The PC was the largest estate car built in Britain at that time.

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Towbar makes the Cresta even more adept at earning its keep.



### Owner's view Tony Waite

#### Vauxhall Cresta PC Estate

In 1985, Tony bought a Vauxhall Cresta Estate for everyday use and two years later he fitted Viscount power assisted steering – "I no longer had to wrestle it into parking spaces!" Today the Vauxhall is still used for occasional school runs to pick-up the grandchildren – "it always causes a stir" and various shows. Tony does his own mechanical maintenance – "I have a stock of spares and I do like to use the Cresta" and has no plans "to ever sell her." Naturally he is often approached at petrol stations by people saying "my dad had a Cresta..."

“In the pre-compulsory seat belt era, the Cresta really was a six seater machine”



Martin Walter of Folkestone and sold via Vauxhall dealers, complete with a factory warranty. Coachbuilt estates were not unusual at that time – Ford offered E B Abbot converted Corsairs and Zodiacs and FLM Panelcraft made a Rover P6 shooting brake – but for all Martin Walter's attention to detail, from the heavy duty rear suspension and the larger tyres to the rather suave appearance, the Cresta Estate was 40 per cent more expensive than the saloon. At a price of £1507 – over £50 more than the rival Zephyr 6 Farnham – the Vauxhall was simply too expensive for its intended market place and production ceased in February '68.

And this is a great pity, as the Vauxhall is such a charming example of Anglo-American motoring and late-1960s conspicuous consumption in general. The Martin Walter coachwork was based on the Cresta De Luxe, meaning that there were

four headlamps, a cigar lighter and a clock (not to mention a heater) as standard, while the front bench is so softly sprung that you actually sink into it. Even if you favour Don Draper style headgear there is still plenty of headroom, although shorter drivers will welcome the fact that the front bench can be adjusted for height via a spanner. The width of the Cresta, for in the pre-compulsory seat belt era it really was a six seater, means that the electric windows on our test car are extremely useful. These, together with the power assisted steering, were sourced from a Viscount by its owner Tony Waite and he remarks that PAS in particular is a worthwhile addition, unless you really want to develop your stamina and arm muscles when parking.

### Cossetting comfort

On the open road, the Vauxhall is a reminder of a time when businessmen (and it would have



Split-fold rear hatch makes the Safari an extremely practical machine.

“ The Citroën understeers on tight corners with the verve and aplomb of a Mini 1275GT ”

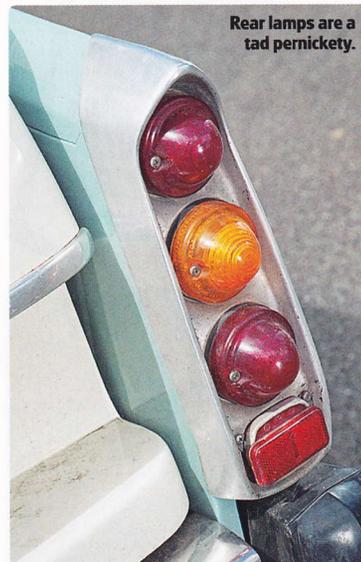
been ‘businessmen’ in 1967) expected to be cosseted as they cruised towards an expense account luncheon of Dublin Bay Prawn and Ananas au Kirsch. The Cresta never has any sporting pretensions whatsoever, but when the column-mounted selector lever is planted into ‘Drive’ and the 3.3-litre engine, fired up, you enter a world less A36 and more Route 66. The ‘Powerglide’ brand of the optional two-speed automatic transmission is a brilliantly aspirational name, even if swift changes are not really its forte.

**Imposing presence**

Asides from the big Fords, the slightly smaller Triumph 2000 or imported Australian Chrysler Valiant wagons, the Vauxhall’s closest rival in terms of practicality, style and sheer presence was the Citroën Safari. The DS range is not exactly easy to initially comprehend but, for ease and simplicity, the Safari version debuted in 1958 and was based on the lower-spec ID model; a less powerful engine, manual

steering and gearchange, but with the DS braking system and a slightly less elaborate interior. The DS engine was fitted to the Safari in 1963, but in 1965, the range was augmented with the 2.1-litre ‘21’. In 1967 the entire D-series line-up gained a faired-in nose and, for 1970 Citroëns, boasted a new dashboard – ‘with eleven warning lights’, as the brochure proudly proclaimed.

Our test car is a 1971 model which, in defiantly individualistic fashion, makes as much of an impression on bystanders as the Cresta. However, unlike the Vauxhall, the DS is wholly uninterested in impressing the neighbours with vinyl roofs and other late-period ‘Swinging Sixties’ gimmickry. There is a general dearth of excess chrome, for the emphasis here is on the practical thinking – the provision for a double number plate so that the Citroën could be driven with the lower half of the tailgate opened, the integral roof-rack, and even a starting handle bracket. The front seats



Rear lamps are a tad pernickety.



**Owner’s view**  
**Adrian Pease**  
Citroën DS21 Safari

Our DS21 Safari was provided by Adrian of Peacock Engineering. Adrian has been a devotee of the big Citroën “for many years” and for some enthusiasts our test car provides an excellent combination of power steering, power brakes (complete with the ‘mushroom’ pedal and the sweet and revvy 2.1-litre engine. As a development engineer, Adrian has been involved in making a four-door DS convertible and he is constantly working on methods to enhance and complement what is “such a versatile and enjoyable car that really is worth getting to know – its dynamic abilities make far advanced of other estates of that time.”



## DID YOU KNOW?

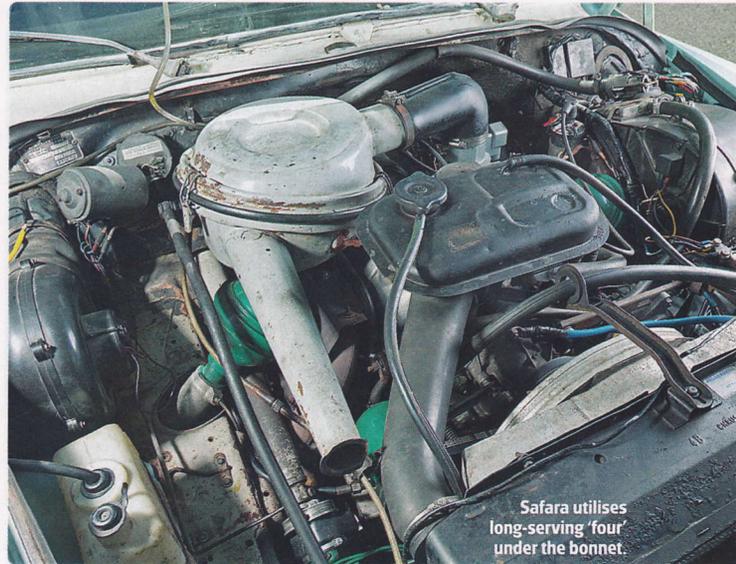
The DS was also offered as a Familiale, with three rows of seats.

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Single spoke steering wheel became a Citroën staple.



Safari utilises long-serving 'four' under the bonnet.



Safari is 16ft 5in long, compared to the 15ft 9in saloon it's based on.



Estate configuration has surprisingly little effect on how well the Citroën drives and handles.



## Quick Facts

Citroën DS21 Safari

**Market value**  
£5000-£16,500.

**Worthy upgrades**  
Fit a rear wiper and washer, modern Continental tyres and an electronic ignition.

**Essential checks**  
Check for cracks in the alloy heads, for corroded suspension pipes and that the proper Ferodo front brake pads are fitted.

**Safety**  
Two-speed wipers, quad headlamps, dual circuit braking, side window demisters and rear child locks.

**Corrosion**  
Everywhere but especially the inner wings, door bottoms, windscreen header rail and boot floor.

**Rare parts**  
Dashboard trim, door trims and the 'cricket' seats.

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have reclining backrests and a brace of tolerant passengers can be accommodated, as there is a pair of asymmetrically arranged seats in the luggage area.

### Additional virtues

The Citroën is considerably longer than the PC (in fact it is only five inches shorter than a Jaguar MkX) but this vast machine understeers on tight corners with the verve and aplomb of a Mini 1275GT and will go exactly where the driver points it. I have already rhapsodised over the DS in a comparison with the NSU Ro80 (CM 217), but the Safari retains the saloon's good points and combines them with additional virtues of space and versatility. The overall lightness makes it a more viable town car than the Vauxhall, despite the long wheelbase; the gearchange is a model to which all column shifts should aspire to and the Citroën irons out typical B-road potholes without resorting to the Cresta's marshmallow-like ride qualities. The brakes are utterly efficient, but one area in which idiosyncrasies turn into annoyances is the handbrake position – it's impossible to reach when wearing a 1971-vintage static seat belt.

The principal difference between the DS and the Cresta lies not so

much in the Vauxhall's extremely conventional 'Big Six' and RWD approach to executive motoring, but more to the fact that the Citroën is a purpose-built estate car. The Cresta is an undeniably striking saloon conversion, but the DS is replete with careful detailing; the wide opening two-piece tailgate and the way in which the roof rack blends with those unmistakable lines. With the middle bench in place, the load bay is impressive, but with the seats folded the Safari is transformed into a 100mph two seater that is more fun to drive than many 'sports cars' and has 35 cu ft of luggage space into the bargain.

For many years I have considered the Citroën DS Safari and the Vauxhall Cresta PC to be from a highpoint of the big estate car era – a combination of looks, space and decadence. But which one will act as my own shooting brake?

## THE VERDICT

### Vauxhall Cresta PC Estate

Performance	1 2 3 4 5
Comfort	1 2 3 4 5
Style	1 2 3 4 5
Practicality	1 2 3 4 5
Space	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Total</b>	<b>22/25</b>

### Citroën DS Safari

Performance	1 2 3 4 5
Comfort	1 2 3 4 5
Style	1 2 3 4 5
Practicality	1 2 3 4 5
Space	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Total</b>	<b>25/25</b>

The score reflects my utter esteem for the Citroën – one of the truly great cars of its age – yet for all of its poise, elegance and ability, the Vauxhall will be coming home with me. A Cresta PC Estate is incredibly rare, very thirsty and there will be hours of fun in sourcing spares. But I cannot resist its air of pseudo-American glamour and its dashing coachwork and I have wanted one ever since reading an *Autocar* test nearly four decades ago. Besides, the Vauxhall is a big car and, unlike Cliff Brumby, it is in very good shape. **CM**



### TECH SPEC

Vauxhall Cresta PC Estate	Citroën DS21 Safari
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ENGINE	3294cc/S6/OHV	2175cc/S4/OHV
POWER	123bhp@4600rpm	106bhp@5500rpm
TORQUE	176lb ft@2400rpm	126lb ft@4000rpm
TRANSMISSION	Two-speed automatic	Four-speed manual
BRAKES	Discs and drums	Discs and drums
WHEELS & TYRES	7.00/14 16.5	5jx15 steels, Michelin XAS 180x380
DIMENSIONS	Length 15ft 7in, width 5ft 10in, height 4ft 10in	Length 16ft 5.5in, width 5ft 10 1/2in, height 5ft
WEIGHT	3096lb	3086lb
PRODUCTION	1967-1968	1958-1975

### Contacts

**Vauxhall Cresta Club**  
www.vauxhallcrestaclub.co.uk

**The Vauxhall Bedford Opel Association**  
www.vboa.org.uk

**Vauxhall Green Parts**  
www.vauxhallgreenparts.co.uk

**Citroën The Citroën Car Club**  
www.citroencarclub.org.uk

**DS Workshop**  
www.dsworkshop.co.uk

**Peacock Engineering**  
www.citroen-dsm.co.uk