

# I could have done it better

While applauding the DS's visual boldness, David Woodhouse wants to play down its eccentricities

THE CITROËN DS19 IS A SUPERB ANACHRONISM – beyond its time in both its engineering and its complementary stylistic solutions, interior and exterior. For sheer bravery there have been very few automobiles as severe. Designed when the future was where everyone wanted to be, 'the Goddess' is a wonderful symbolic reflection of optimism.

The car is quite unique in being a mass-produced automotive icon of streamlining. By Citroën's own admission, 'classical streamlining' was applied – the car's external form was 'intuitive' rather than actual, scientific aerodynamics.

Much praise should be given to Flaminio Bertoni, the vehicle's designer, and the engineer, André Lefébvre, for their bravery in taking this car to production.

So, how could it have been better? My view is that the DS is a success despite itself. Under close scrutiny it disappoints – suffering from too many areas of visual oddity and strange surface work-out.

As with many automobiles, the DS appears obviously designed from side elevation. The peaked nose requires a long front overhang, totally at odds with a rear so short that it appears unfeasible to even accommodate wheels, especially at low suspension height. This I have addressed by re-proportioning – extending the rear overhang to make the vehicle more balanced.

The DS body side section, which falls outwards all the way to the sill, has been given greater 'tumblehome' or pull-in to gain 'ground read' and tension, to make the vehicle appear more lithe. The excessive depth of side glass has been reduced, forsaking a small degree of all-round vision, and the appalling wavy base of daylight opening line has been straightened across the car's front.

Some basic DS signature elements remain. The extreme, peaked bone-line on the bonnet centre and the tail-down body stance are essential. Also, the

Citroën  
DS 19



More space-age and less quirkily French

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David's association with Rover goes back some 13 years. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in 1992, he was responsible for the Land Rover 'Mega-City Cab' used in the 1995 science fiction movie Judge Dredd, with Sylvester Stallone. He has also spent time designing motorcycles for BMW in Munich. Currently he is involved with future Rover Group products

dynamic pattern of the door shut-lines, which imply forward movement, is exaggerated.

I believe that, as one of the most revolutionary of post-war saloons, the DS could have been even more visually radical. To this end, I have fully enclosed all the wheels. There is flushed-out nose chrome, tapering side ornamentation and an extreme narrowing plan to the rear, which is chopped off like that of a yacht. The three fin-like rear-lamps are an Americanism, referring to aircraft/spacecraft influence.

Gone is the pastiche of Gallic eccentricities, an obvious example of which was the high-mounted pair of lamps used to disguise a visually poor roof joint. The undefined translation of wing-line to body side section has been replaced by a continuous shoulder which runs from nose to tail, with

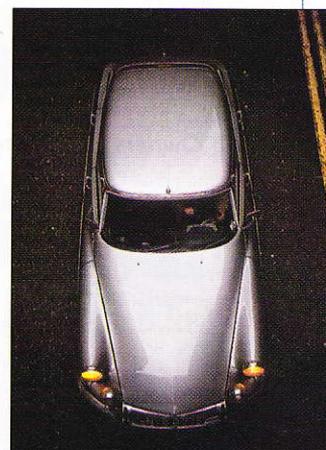
divorced headlamp 'growths' above.

Citroën has subsequently made a conscious decision to be more mainstream with its product, forsaking *vive la différence* for visual mediocrity when, in recent years, reliability and performance have become givens. But I believe there are still lessons to be learnt from the DS. Despite today's ever more stringent legislation and greater functional expectations, we should strive aggressively towards truly distinctive design. Such distinction is far more than simply 'skin-deep'; rather, it's utterly dependent upon intrinsically creative package and engineering solutions being employed and displayed.

The DS remains a great success in ideology. It demonstrates a brave marriage of style and function – disciplines often argued, by the sad and ill-informed, to be at odds. Its failing has been that its realisation resulted in a kind of 'automotive weirdo': the car was simply too visually eccentric for the taste of many people.

While my proposal is, in my opinion, an improvement – more palatable and 'straightened out' – I am the first to admit that it is certainly less French, less quirky. So, perhaps for the sake of some, this piece should be entitled, 'I couldn't have done it better, only differently'... ●

Long, 'peaked' front plan is integral part of DS charm



**“I believe that the DS could have been even more visually radical”**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER MARBLEW

