



CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

# PEUGEOT 404 AUTOMATIC

The welcome addition of a modern automatic transmission makes a nice car even nicer.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL SOLLIDAN

It is highly unlikely that anybody will ever become "Mr. Stock Eliminator" at the local drag strip driving a Peugeot 404—with or without automatic transmission. But that's about the only complaint an enthusiast might make about the old dear. Everybody who writes road tests about Peugeots feels compelled to point out that the performance "isn't too exciting," and a lot of euphemisms and weasel-words have been typed to describe this apparent flaw in the car's character.

The fact is, very few Americans drive fast enough to discover the

great performance that's really there in the 404. *C/D* staff members have probably racked up more miles in Peugeots than any similar group extant, and we can say unequivocally that they perform like mad—once you get them rolling. Accelerate, they don't. But given miles and miles of twisty, uneven, two-lane country road, the Peugeot 404 will deliver absolutely amazing performance. However, it's *European* performance, not blow-your-mind-at-the-stoplight performance.

The Peugeot doesn't go blazing off the line with shrieking tires and

clouds of smoke and whiplash injuries for all hands. In fact, it takes a shade over 19 seconds to reach 60 mph. But with the needle pointing into the big numbers on the speedometer, the car will proceed to maintain improbably high average speeds over every kind of road in every kind of weather. Its suspension sops up bumps and noise, its engine is nearly silent, and its Michelin X tires (optional at no extra cost) go straight on the straights and stay stuck in the corners. The seats, the padded carpets, the lack of outside disturbances, all conspire to

The 404 is uniquely smooth and comfortable, and its moderate price includes a swarm of special features. It's a very attractive car in spite of the fact that it really needs some more power.

make you forget that this is a small (by American standards), moderately priced (by any standard), economical-to-operate import. It is an enormously smooth and effortless car to drive on long trips.

But that's all true about every last Peugeot they bring into this country—except maybe the station wagons, which are a bit more truck than transportation. The older 403 sedan goes and handles much like the 404, but with more noise and less luxury. And when cruising down the highway, all recent variations on the 404 theme seem to impart identical sensations. Our test car differs from its fellow Peugeots in that it has an automatic transmission—a damned good automatic transmission. Thus, while it retains all those traditional Peugeot virtues on the open road, the 404 Automatic is a very different proposition in town.

The transmission is a three-speed unit, coupled to a variable-pitch torque converter, and it's manufactured by ZF. We understand it's the same one that's being used on the

BMW 2000 line, and it does its job so well that we'd like to see it on every European car built. It combines American-style smoothness with Mercedes-style mechanical efficiency, and that makes it a winner.

The 404's shift quadrant is all backwards—the Peugeot people seem to take great pride in oddball shift linkages. This tradition began years back when they added an overdrive to their standard 3-speed manual transmission, and was continued on the 404, even though that model has no overdrive. Anyway, the quadrant reads LDNRP—which might make good Gallic sense, but which is nonetheless exactly the reverse of standard practice.

In normal use, with the selector lever in Drive and the throttle only partly open, the Peugeot starts in second with maximum torque multiplication. The amount of multiplication available from the converter decreases steadily as the revs rise in each gear, reaching an approximate ratio of 1-to-1 once the car is well under way.

For maximum acceleration, or brisker response in normal driving, one should shift the unit manually. When the selector lever is moved to Low, first gear is engaged, and the box will then hold each gear to 5600 rpm (39 mph in first, 60 mph in second). One can also get first gear by flooring the throttle in Drive, but this is of no value to the driver who wants to use first, but doesn't need maximum acceleration. We preferred to shift manually, and used first gear for most of our normal starts, just as we would with a Mercedes-Benz automatic. This probably increases fuel consumption slightly, but it does help those eighty overworked French horses move the car's mass more effectively. This transmission should make the Peugeot an attractive car for a whole new segment of the American market—it's a major breakthrough for the imports.

The car is good enough, as a result of several years of development and the new addition of this automatic transmission, that all it needs to be-



The ZF automatic transmission works so well that it practically wipes out the last reasonable excuse for shifting gears manually in *any* kind of car.

come truly great is twice as much horsepower. . . or even half again as much horsepower. If it would accelerate from zero to sixty in about fifteen seconds we'd be delighted. If it would do it in twelve, we'd go mad.

The 98.7 cu. in., 4-cylinder engine is strong, beautifully conceived, and extremely reliable. In Europe they sell all kinds of hop-up equipment for it, and it has won more than its share of rallies and races over the years, when properly breathed-upon. As sold in this country, however, it delivers only .82 horsepower per cubic inch. Its compression ratio is 8.3 to one, and it has a tiny, single-throat Solex carburetor through which to breathe. More of both could be added without hurting economy or reliability to any appreciable extent. All the potential is there—an aluminum cylinder head with hemispherical combustion valves, a stiff block and bottom end, and good breathing—all it needs is tweaking, and it could run the pants off the Volkos and everything else against which it must compete in this market.

But less of what it could be, and more of what it is. By running it hard, and shifting manually, the 404 Automatic can be made to move very smartly in typical U.S. traffic. And once on the open road, its near-silence and super-smoothness will make up for its want of brute power. It will cruise forever at eighty or more, and although it has very little reserve power for passing at highway speeds, veteran Peugeot drivers learn to keep a steady pace and to gauge passing opportunities very carefully and well in advance.

One staff member, a two-time Peugeot owner, found that he was able to maintain consistently better averages between, say, Detroit and Toronto in his 404 than he could in a Ferrari 250 GT—because, he reasoned, he was *always* running the Peugeot at or near its most comfortable cruising speed, while he tried to drive the Ferrari much faster and spent too much time trapped behind slow-moving traffic. This same Peugeot-ophile was often asked why he didn't replace his Peugeot with a



jazzed-up American compact. His standard reply was that no similarly priced American compact could be made to match his 404's swarm of built-in features without a lot of very expensive custom work, while the basic Peugeot only needed a little speed-tuning to be right on the money.

These no-extra-cost features are a formidable sales argument in the Peugeot's favor. It has fully reclining seats, a sliding metal sunroof, heater/defroster, automatic fan-clutch, stainless steel bumpers and trim, electric windshield wipers and washers, wheel trim rings, and a bunch of other stuff that you'd very likely pay extra for on an American car—all as part of its base price of \$2595. The ZF automatic transmission was the *only* extra cost option on our test car, and it sells for \$195. This must be very attractive to those American customers who've grown weary of battling dim-bulb car salesmen to get the selection of options they want.

Driving pleasure afforded by the 404 differs according to conditions. In town, the first-time driver is pleasantly surprised by the car's smoothness and comfort, but a little put-off by its lack of acceleration and extremely heavy steering. In

the country, he'll like the same features, but he'll also be amazed at its ability to hurry along little country roads without—apparently—any need to slow down for the bumps or the corners. Climbing a steep hill will bring back the same reservations he had in town, but going down the other side will make it all right again.

The suspension consists of a MacPherson-type independent layout at the front, with coil springs and a stabilizer bar, and a solid axle at the rear, with coil springs and a Panhard rod. The rear suspension is augmented by the Peugeot's torque-tube drive shaft, which is coupled to a uniquely-Peugeot worm-gear final drive.

Almost as unique as worm drive—these days, at least—is Peugeot's use of drum brakes on all four wheels. In spite of the fact that the car stops just as well as its contemporaries, it seems like it *ought* to have discs—after all, they *are* the thing to do. Cosmetic considerations aside, however, the vacuum-boosted drums on the 404 are plenty big enough and they do make it stop—and that's the name of the game.

The interior of the car is comfortable.  
(Text continued on page 96;  
Specifications overleaf)

## PEUGEOT 404 AUTOMATIC

**Importer:** Peugeot, Inc.  
97-45 Queens Blvd.  
Rego Park, N.Y.

**Number of dealers in U.S.:** 240

**Vehicle type:** Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger sedan, all-steel integral body/chassis

**Price as tested:** \$2846.00  
(Manufacturer's suggested retail price, plus Federal excise tax, dealer preparation and delivery charges; does not include state and local taxes, license or freight charges)

**Options on test car:** Automatic transmission (\$195.00)

### ENGINE

Type: Water-cooled 4-in-line, cast iron block, aluminum head, 5 main bearings  
Bore x stroke: 3.31 x 2.87 in, 84.2 x 72.9 mm  
Displacement: 98.7 cu in, 1618 cc  
Compression ratio: 8.3 to one  
Carburetion: 1 x 1-bbl Solex  
Valve gear: Pushrod-operated overhead valves, hemispherical combustion chambers  
Power (SAE): 80 bhp @ 5600 rpm  
Torque (SAE): 97.5 lbs/ft @ 2500 rpm  
Specific power output: 0.82 bhp/cu in, 49.5 bhp/liter  
Max. recommended engine speed: 5600 rpm

### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission: 3-speed ZF automatic plus torque converter  
Max. torque converter ratio: 2.29 to one  
Final drive ratio: 4.20 to one  
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed  
I 2.56 6.9 39 mph (5600 rpm)  
II 1.52 11.6 60 mph (5175 rpm)  
III 1.00 17.6 88 mph (5000 rpm)

### DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase: 104.3 in  
Track: F: 52.9 in, R: 50.4 in  
Length: 174.0 in  
Width: 64.0 in  
Height: 57.0 in  
Ground clearance: 5.9 in  
Curb weight: 2355 lbs  
Test weight: 2740 lbs  
Weight distribution, F/R: 56/44%  
Lbs/bhp (test weight): 34.3  
Battery capacity: 12 volts, 55 amp/hr  
Alternator capacity: 360 watts  
Fuel capacity: 14.5 gal  
Oil capacity: 4.25 qts  
Water capacity: 8.5 qts

### SUSPENSION

F: Ind., MacPherson strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar  
R: Rigid axle, torque tube, coil springs, Panhard rod

### STEERING

Type: Rack and pinion  
Turns lock-to-lock: 3.75  
Turning circle: 33 f

### BRAKES

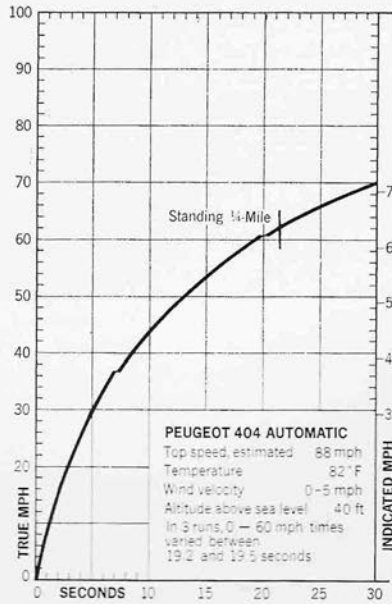
F: 11.0 x 2.56-in cast iron drums  
R: 10.0 x 1.77-in cast iron drums  
Swept area: 288.2 sq in

### WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size and type: 4.5J x 15-in, steel disc, 3-bolt  
Tire make, size and type: Michelin X 165-15 steel cord radial-ply, tube-type  
Test inflation pressures: F: 24 psi, R: 28 psi  
Tire load rating: 1045 lbs per tire @ 26 psi

### PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	5.1
40 mph	8.2
50 mph	12.9
60 mph	19.2
70 mph	29.2
Standing 1/4-mile	22.4 sec @ 62 mph
70-0 mph	2.24 ft (.73 G)
Fuel mileage	22-26 mpg on regular fuel
Cruising range	319-377 mi



## CHECK LIST

### ENGINE

Starting: Very Good  
Response: Fair  
Vibration: Excellent  
Noise: Excellent

### DRIVE TRAIN

Shift linkage: Good  
Shift smoothness: Excellent  
Drive train noise: Excellent

### STEERING

Effort: Heavy  
Response: Good  
Road feel: Very Good  
Kickback: Very Good

### SUSPENSION

Ride comfort: Very Good  
Roll resistance: Good  
Pitch control: Very Good  
Harshness control: Very Good

### HANDLING

Directional control: Very Good  
Predictability: Excellent  
Evasive maneuverability: Very Good  
Resistance to sidewinds: Very Good

### BRAKES

Pedal pressure: Very Good  
Response: Very Good  
Fade resistance: Very Good  
Directional stability: Very Good

### CONTROLS

Wheel position: Very Good  
Pedal position: Good  
Gearshift position: Very Good  
Relationship: Very Good  
Small controls: Good

### INTERIOR

Ease of entry/exit: Very Good  
Noise level (cruising): Excellent  
Front seating comfort: Excellent  
Front leg room: Good  
Front head room: Very Good  
Front hip/shoulder room: Very Good  
Rear seating comfort: Very Good  
Rear leg room: Fair  
Rear head room: Good  
Rear hip/shoulder room: Very Good  
Instrument comprehensiveness: Fair  
Instrument legibility: Good

### VISION

Forward: Excellent  
Front quarter: Excellent  
Side: Excellent  
Rear quarter: Excellent  
Rear: Excellent

### WEATHER PROTECTION

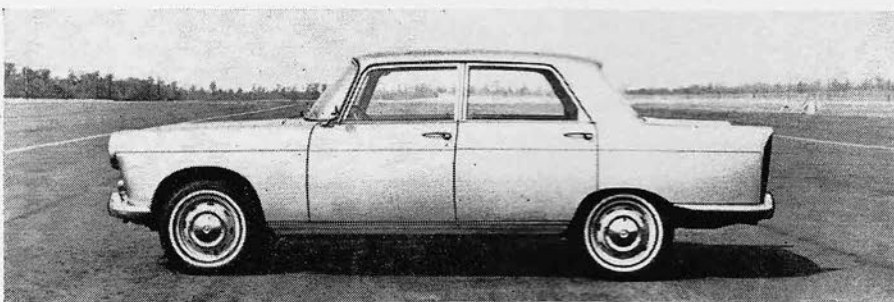
Heater/defroster: Fair  
Ventilation: Very Good  
Weather sealing: Very Good

### CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

Sheet metal: Very Good  
Paint: Good  
Chrome: Very Good  
Upholstery: Good  
Padding: Fair  
Hardware: Fair

### GENERAL

Headlight illumination: Very Good  
Parking and signal lights: Very Good  
Wiper effectiveness: Fair  
Service accessibility: Very Good  
Trunk space: Fair  
Interior storage space: Fair  
Bumper protection: Very Good



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## PEUGEOT 404 AUTOMATIC

(continued from page 63)

able and pleasant. The adjustable front seats are great, and the rear has a folding armrest. The controls are all just about where you'd put them yourself. Visibility is sensational in every direction, and the absence of front vent windows is a great help in that regard. The fresh-air-gathering role of the vent windows has been taken over by a pair of adjustable plastic air outlets in the instrument panel, a system far superior to the roar and whistle of the old triangular panes of glass. Instrumentation is fair, and the small controls are easy enough to get sorted out. The panel itself is done in a crackle finish paint that looks a little too utilitarian for our taste, but it's probably practical. Things like armrests, door handles, window cranks work well.

The clean, crisp lines of the 404 are just as striking today as they were seven years ago when the Pininfarina designed body was first introduced. But the total effect is somewhat spoiled by the high rear end, a fact of life when torque tube rear suspensions are used. Both the handling and looks could be improved with a different arrangement.

The Peugeot 404 has never taken off in this market the way we thought it would. Although there was never any product connection between Peugeot and Renault, the two cars were generally sold by the same dealers in the U.S., and Renault's downward spiral has had its adverse affect on Peugeot. The Peugeot 403 was on its way to being a great success until the collapse of the imported car boom in 1960, and the more sophisticated 404 should have been a real rouser. Unfortunately, in addition to everything else, the early 404s had more than their share of troubles, and all this combined to hurt the car very badly at a crucial point in its attack on the American market.

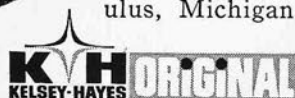
Today the Peugeot organization has pulled back and retrenched, and this latest 404 is about as bug-free as any car can be. It does need more horsepower, but it's loaded with special features to offset that single weakness. The excellence of the ZF automatic transmission alone puts the 404 in a class by itself among low-to-medium-priced imported sedans. It's a car more Americans should try. We like it. Hell-fire, columnist Warren Weith has been driving the same Peugeot for seven years now, and any car that can survive an ordeal like that must be a fine car indeed.

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