

AUTOBIZ / Peugeot 405 GTI

IN the all-time ranking Hall of Fame discoveries, the wheel is right there up with fire! And today's much-evolved offspring of Benz's and Ford's prototypes encompass virtually everything in status statements. The set of wheels you chose to be seen driving speaks volumes of who you are, what you are and where you are heading. Autobiz will give you that extra edge in deciding your next status machine and many other useful tips of the motoring world.

A BEAUTY AND a classic. That's what the Peugeot 405 GTI is to me. This mid-range sporty-looking French model truly *ada gaya*.

The car has been seen on Malaysian roads for a while since the first CKD (completely knocked down) 405 GTX rolled out of the assembly lines. It may not have the features of cars designed for the 1990s [it does not come with anti-lock braking system (ABS), V6 or 24 valves] but it's still outstanding.

I'm continually fascinated by two things in the 405 – its design finesse achieved by the Pininfarina studios in Italy in collaboration with Peugeot's own studios in La Garenne. European car makers have traditionally had longer model runs than the Japanese. The Peugeot emphasis, therefore, is on providing a longer term value for its automobiles, rather than meeting changing market trends. And the 405 GTI is a good representation of this Peugeot priority.

Then its high-speed stability provided by a well-contoured body with sleek aerodynamic lines and a rear spoiler is also praiseworthy. The 405 never fails to put me in awe every time it passes by on the highways.

These assets did not come easy. Peugeot engineers spent more than five million hours, built 75 prototypes and road-tested them over millions of kilometres before launching this model.

With over 100 years of automobile manufacturing experience, Peugeot has produced yet another benchmark in the 405, with all the legendary hallmarks of reliability, safety, comfort and value for money intact. To Peugeot lovers, this is not just 'another car'. It's the Peugeot that has won many prestigious awards, including the coveted European Car of the Year award by record-breaking margins.

From awards, let's take a look at some of the qualities of the car.

Right from the drawing board, the emphasis was on a strong and long lasting body. Result: some 67 per cent of the 405's steel panels are either galvanised or electro-zinc plated to ensure maximum corrosion resistance. Its computer aided design (CAD) 'physique' is reputed to be one of the world's most rigid in its class. A solid car through and through.

Under the bonnet of the 405 GTI is a transversely-installed power plant, which comes from the same Peugeot XU9 engine family as the 405 GTX and the 205 CTI, and incidentally, the Citroen

BX19GT and ZX1.9. This long-stroke engine has a displacement of 1905cc and utilises the Bosch Motronic computerised engine management system to control its fuel injection system. The engine develops a decent 90kW of power when it peaks at 5,000rpm and 167Nm of torque at 4,500rpm. And a transistorised ignition system provides all-weather starting, continuous peak performance and minimal adjustments.

Suspension-wise, all four wheels are independently sprung. Up front are MacPherson struts, coil springs encircling telescopic dampers and an anti-roll bar. The springs are aberrantly aligned for lower friction while the lower wishbones helps to attenuate road noise. In the rear, there are transverse torsion bars with trailing arms. With controlled flexibility, the rear suspension sub-frame allows the wheels to automatically align with the cornering forces and track a tighter turning circle for superb cornering abilities. Disc brakes are fitted all round, and those in front are vented to keep them cooler for fade-free operation.

Moving into the interior, I must say the 405 CTI is roomy. It has good headroom, generous legroom and a large boot space (the result of a well-thought out rear suspension design and logical location of the fuel tank). There's no need to worry about the spare wheel being stolen because it is securely 'guarded' by a restraining bolt which can only be accessed when the boot is opened. Another security feature: the audio system is neatly hidden and accessible only by opening a flap that covers it – a wonderful attribute, especially in Kuala Lumpur where thefts are rampant.

The dashboard is adequate, even when compared with Japanese makes. The instrumentation is comprehensive and easy to read. There are many prominent warning lights and a 'STOP' warning is strategically located where it will catch the attention of the driver – right in the centre. This alerts the driver when the oil or coolant levels are too low as these conditions are likely to damage the engine severely. And as with all European cars (the 405 GTI is no exception), the driver will need to adjust to the positioning of the signal and wiper stalks (left and right respectively).

All the seats are ergonomically sound, even in the rear, thus making long distance travelling a pleasant and comfortable experience. The vehicle also has the tendency to go over bumps and potholes as if they weren't there, a testimony of excellence achieved by a sound suspension system. The 405 GTI has good road handling, with excellent vehicle balance and stability. As for aerodynamic efficiency, its claimed drag coefficient (Cd) of 0.31 is nothing to shout about but nonetheless creditable. Even so, the acceleration is impressive.

For approximately RM86, 000, the 405 GTI is still value for money. But if you want to take advantage of MBf-Peugeot's 30th anniversary special offer, the 405 GTX is also a bargain, minus the EFI (electronic fuel injection) of course. For the 405 GTX with manual transmission, the price is RM68, 888 and for the 405 GTX with automatic transmission, the price is RM74, 888. This special anniversary price is only valid for 100 units of the 405 GTX.

MBf-Peugeot is offering between RM5, 000 and RM6, 000 off the regular price of a car, bringing the price of the 2.0 –litre 405 down to that of other locally assembled 1.6-litre cars. So, for a solid, safe and reliable set of wheels, the 405 GTX or GTI is a good buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

Peugeot 405 GTI

Engine Location: Front Fuel: Leaded/Unleaded petrol Fuel tank capacity: 70 litres Fuel feed: Electronic fuel injection (Motronic 3.1) Capacity: 1905 cc Bore and stroke: 83 X 88 mm Compression ratio: 9.3:1 Cylinders: 4, in-line, transversely mounted Valve arrangements: SOHC, 2 valves per cylinder Cylinder head: Light alloy Cylinder block: Cast iron Maximum power: 90kW/5500rpm (DIN) Maximum torque: 167Nm/4500rpm (DIN) Ignition system: Solid state, fully electronic	Body & Chassis Bodystyle: 3-box, 4-door hatchback Claimed Cd: 0.31 Steering system: Rack and pinion, power-assisted Front brakes: Vented discs Rear brakes: Discs Performance Top speed: 191km/h 0-100km/h: 10.0 secs Fuel consumption: 9.8 km/litre Performance figures were obtained with a brand new test vehicle. Actual performance may vary, depending on mileage clocked, state of engine tune, etc.
Drivetrain Driving wheels: Front Gearbox: 5-speed manual	Price Retail: RM85, 858.05 (including 1 year of road tax and insurance premium). Warranty: 12 months, unlimited mileage Colour choices: Silver, red, white, metallic beige, metallic blue, three shades of metallic red, metallic grey and green (metallic available)