

Citroen XM

Although not as unorthodox as the previous Citroen CX executive cars, the roomy XM is one of the most striking looking big saloons on the road both in 5-door hatchback and estate forms.

The XM is basically a very strong car and it doesn't rust. But it must have a service record showing Main Dealer servicing for the first three years plus oil changes every 6,000 miles after that. The LHM should have been changed every 36,000 miles and the timing belt every 72,000.

Loyal Citroen owners say that the XM is a great car for high speed, long distance driving. But it's not a relaxing car in town, especially when parking. So bear in mind how you'll use the car and investigate carefully before you commit yourself to buying.

The complex hydractive electronic suspension is excellent but needs specialist care. On the other hand it depreciates rapidly, especially the petrol versions, so it can prove a bargain.

Three generations

The XM spans three generations each updated and revised, but visually identical.

The Mark 1 was sold from October 1989 to the middle of 1993 — that's G, H and J registration, plus some on the K-plate. At first they were pretty unreliable, and early cars are now very cheap. However it's safest to avoid these unless you're a pretty competent mechanic.

The Mark 2 ran from late J registration to early L and are much more reliable than Mark 1s - as reliable as most other executive cars in fact. You can pick them out by their two spoke steering wheel - but they also have ABS brakes and Hydractive II suspension. The suspension uses a faster computer, so comfort and roadholding are improved.

However the suspension computer on the Mark III is faster still and it transforms the XM into the car it was always intended to be. Look for the XM badge on the driver's side of the boot to confirm you're looking at a Mark III which were available from about late L-reg onwards. They're also very reliable and build quality is not far removed from German levels.

Whatever the age of the XM you're looking at, it's very important to make sure the car's been properly maintained. Ask the seller for the service record and the service invoices. If the car's fairly new, only buy if there's proof that it's been serviced by a Citroen Dealer every 6,000 miles.

On older cars, look for 2 or 3 years of Dealer servicing followed by visits to a Citroen specialist every 6,000 miles. Don't worry too much if the odd service has been missed - but if there's a pattern of neglect or there's no service record, don't buy at any price.

For complete peace of mind, have a word with any Citroen specialist involved with the car — before you agree to buy. Finally, when you go through the service record, make sure the mileage adds up to what's on the clock; don't buy if there's any reason to suspect the milometer's been turned back.

Suspension



Summary of models

Equipment levels on the XM were generous at the outset, and have improved steadily since.

Even the modest carburettor engined 2.0 model had PAS, an electric glass sunroof, electric front windows, remote central locking and a rear sun blind.

The Si, the next step up, added electric mirrors, electric rear windows, metallic paintwork, front fog lamps, electric adjust-ment for the driver's seat, and Citroen's then novel steering column-mounted audio controls.

The SEi featured ABS as standard (optional on other XM models), and improved on the Si spec with leather upholstery, air conditioning, alloy wheels and an alarm.

Diesel turbo models carried SD and SED badges, being the equi-valent of the Si/SEi.

The short-lived Mk 2 kept the badging of the Mk 1; minor changes included heated electric mirrors and better velour trim on base models, and heated washer jets on Si/ SED models.

ABS across the range plus the 'Hydractive II' suspension system came in mid-1993.

June 1994 saw the launch of new 2.0 16v and 2.0 Turbo engines, and the adoption of new SX, VSX and top Exclusive equip-ment levels. Revisions included better security measures including dead-locks, body side impact protection beams, and an airbag on all models.



Checklist:

Item

Budget

To test the LHM fluid in the suspension, you'll need a hypodermic syringe minus the needle. This is the most important check on any XM so it's well worth buying one at your local chemist, before you go to look at a car. Locate the black plastic reservoir at the rear of the engine compartment on the passenger side, open it and draw up a sample with the syringe.

The LHM fluid should be a sparkling green colour like Fairy Liquid. Golden brown means it needs changing as soon as possible. If it's grey, milky or any other colour apart from green or brown, reject the car because the whole suspension system probably needs replacement.

Put a drop of LHM on the tip of your tongue, remembering to spit it out straightaway. If it tastes bitter, it's been topped up with normal brake fluid and will rot all the rubber in the system, so reject the car. If the LHM has been changed every 36,000 miles it will be fine, unless the car has done a very high mileage.

Start the engine. The engine should turn over vigorously, start first time, and settle easily into a fast idle. If it doesn't then the car's probably been neglected or has done a high mileage. In fact a warm engine that doesn't start easily should be rejected.

If left standing for a few hours an XM will sink down but it should be back up to normal ride height within about 30 seconds of the engine starting. You'll actually see the whole car lifting. But if it takes a while to do so, particularly if there are any strange noises, get the car checked over by a Citroen specialist before you agree to buy.

The 'suspension spheres' are the most important part of the suspension because they act as the springs to keep the car level. And they act as the pressure reservoir for the hydraulic system.

The nitrogen in the spheres leaks away slowly, so budget £250 every 2 years for new spheres and new LHM, although spheres on V6s may need changing more often than that. You can get recharged spheres but reports suggest that they don't last long on the XM.

To see if the spheres need changing, check the accumulator sphere first as that's the one that needs changing most often. If you hear a hollow whirr-click noise from the front of the engine every few seconds, it's almost certainly dud. A whirr-click every 20 or 30 seconds means it's got plenty of life.

To check the other spheres, switch the suspension to 'Auto' on the panel between the seats, then drive for a few miles. If the suspension feels hard and unyielding, the spheres need changing. Don't go on with the road test and don't buy unless the seller is willing to get the spheres changed so you can check the suspension properly.

If the car appears to ride pretty well, the next thing to check is that suspension computer switches correctly between the 'Auto' and 'Sport' settings. Try to find a smooth but twisty road, select the 'Sport' setting, and drive down it at 40 to 50 mph.

On 'Sport' setting, the car should feel firm and stable, cornering with very little roll. Drive down the same road with the setting on 'Auto'. This time the car should feel softer on the straights when driven gently but under hard acceleration or if you start to corner enthusiastically or brake hard, the computer should automatically switch back to the 'Sport' setting until you're cruising again.

If you don't notice any difference, then it could be that one or more of the sensors has stopped working or the computer is faulty. When this happens, it automatically goes to 'Sport' setting. This could cost plenty to fix so rejection is the safest course.

Suspension spheres and LHM	£250
Suspension arm bearings	£300
Fit new clutch	£600
Replacement gearbox	£1500

Reject any Citroen XM if:

- LHM fluid is discoloured or dirty
 - Car rises slowly or jerkily after being left
 - Engine doesn't start easily
 - Suspension modes don't work
 - Gearbox problems
 - Servicing has been neglected
 - ABS light stays on
 - Radiator is leaking coolant
 - Second fan doesn't come on
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Also worth a look

- **FORD GRANADA & SCORPIO** – Well equipped and spacious, the original 'Granny' was tough and economical. A successful seller, parts are cheaper than average. The 2.9 V6 is the best choice with 1.8 and 2.0 models a bit sluggish.
 - **HONDA LEGEND** – Spacious, comfortable, up-market saloon and coupe that lacks the image of the German makes it's aimed to rival. Refined engines and good performance; automatics are the predominant choice.
 - **PEUGEOT 605** – Comfortable, roomy but never popular and looks like a slightly bigger 406. High depreciation makes it a bargain. V6 is smooth and swift, turbo diesels offer good fuel economy.
 - **ROVER 800** – Boxy executive saloons and hatchbacks, based on the old Honda Legend. Spacious and comfortable but pre-1991 cars were poorly built and reliability can be a problem. Cheap to buy, costly to fix.
 - **VAUXHALL CARLTON** – Comfortable and understated, better than but never as popular as the Ford Granada. Offers good handling and ride, rugged four-cylinder engines, or smooth and potent six-cylinder units. Estates are especially spacious.
 - **VOLVO 940/960** – Strong, safe and very spacious, but stodgy to drive until heavily revised in late 1994. Later models benefit from chassis redesign and improved suspension. The cavernous estate is the one to have.
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CarCheck is designed to help **YOU** pick out a

To check the suspension arm bearings, raise the car to its 'High' position. Both rear wheels should be absolutely upright. If you can see any sign of either rear wheel tilting inwards, the suspension arm bearings probably need replacing, this is confirmed if the inside edges of the tyres are worn. Budget around £300 per side at a specialist or £500 at a Main Dealer.

The steering and brakes work off the hydraulic system as well. The steering should be very light, but if it needs a noticeable amount of effort or feels notchy, probably when the engine is cold, the accumulator sphere may need replacing - though it could be several other things. If you notice heavy or notchy steering, again - seek specialist advice before making a decision.

Most XMs are fitted with anti-lock brakes so look for the orange ABS lamp in the instrument cluster that comes on when you turn the ignition on - it should then go out after about 3 seconds. If it doesn't, or it comes on during the test drive, don't buy unless the seller is willing to get it fixed because ABS can be very expensive.

Engines

For all XM engines, check if the engine's cool, then undo the radiator cap on the driver's side of the radiator. If the water isn't up to the level marked on the outside, don't buy as the car's either losing water or it's been neglected.

The basic 2.0 litre petrol engine with 8 valves is good for 150,000 miles if it's been well maintained, and it's the easiest XM engine to work on. There are no known additional problems with the turbo version, but insist on a meticulous service record showing oil changes every 6,000 miles, otherwise the turbo will only have a limited life.

The same applies to the latest 16 valve 2 litre XMs — the oil must have been changed religiously. On all these engines, the service record must also show that the cam belt was changed at 72,000 miles. If it doesn't, don't buy because it suggests serious neglect.

Careful owners change the cam belt at 48,000 miles, not 72,000 miles as specified by Citroen. It is also wise to have the water pump checked and a new camshaft oil seal fitted at the same time. On diesels, the fuel filter should be changed every 12,000 miles to protect the injection pump.

It's better to avoid the V6s. They're complicated, so engine or gearbox problems are very expensive to get fixed. For example, the back manifold often cracks, which leads to exhaust leaks, and this can only be fixed by removing the engine.

If you're considering a 24 valve version, only buy if a Citroen exchange engine has already been fitted — the original engines wear very quickly. Even then, the clutch on the 24-valve will probably need replacing every 25,000 miles or so at a cost of £600 or more a time.

Both diesels have turbochargers, so the 2.1 is reasonably quick, while the 2.5 is fast and very sought-after.

Ask the seller to let the engines idle for a while with the bonnet shut. On turbo-diesels and the petrol turbo, push the throttle to the floor after about 5 minutes and hold it there while the engine revs up. Don't worry if this produces a bit of black smoke, but if there's a cloud of blue/grey smoke, the turbo's on its way out so walk away.

Keep the engine idling while you look through the grille — you'll see

sound and reliable car.

We recommend that once you have found one that passes all the CarCheck tests, you then get the car checked by a professional engineer.

We also recommend that you check ownership and history with Equifax-HPI or the AA (see [Useful Numbers](#)).

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two cooling fans. First one fan will come on, and then the other. If this doesn't happen by the time the temperature gauge shows the engine's close to overheating, the switch module has probably failed. This only costs around £70 to replace but the head gasket and the cylinder head may have been damaged already, so don't buy.

Transmissions

The manual ones are pretty reliable but don't have an unlimited life. Do a test on a traffic-free stretch of road by accelerating hard in second, third and fourth gear, making a smart change up at about 4,000 revs. Then change back down again from fourth, down through third into second. If there are any crunches, or the gears won't engage easily, or there are any odd noises, reject the car.

On the diesels and the 2 litre petrol-engined XMs, they automatics are fairly reliable, but on the V6s, the automatic boxes can fail any time from 70,000 miles onwards.

As a precaution, you should do these simple tests on any auto XM, once the engine is fully warmed up. Just find somewhere quiet and put your foot hard on the brake. Then move the selector to D position. If there are any rattles or intermittent noises from under the car, the gearbox is near the end of its life. Move the selector to N, any jangling noises here also spell a gearbox on the way out.

Replacing a gearbox can cost over £1,500 at a specialist or well over £2,000 at a Main Dealer. But these symptoms don't emerge until a box is on its last legs, so any auto XM is that much more of a risk.

Mark I

With a Mark 1 XM, it's even more important to check that the car has had main dealer servicing for the first 3 years of its life, making it much more likely that the car has had the modifications devised by Citroen to improve reliability.

To check that this is indeed the case, open the bonnet and locate the front of the inner wing, just behind the headlight on the passenger side. There should be a series of electrical wires all meeting at a point. These are the earths for the electronics, the biggest problems on early cars.

If these cables push on to a round fitting bolted to the body, they haven't been modified and you should only buy if you're an experienced mechanic. On the other hand, if the cables end in metal loops and are bolted onto the earth post, the car's probably had the modifications.

Then check any electrical gadgets that happen to be fitted – for example: the electric sunroof, electric windows, electric front seat adjustment, electric mirrors, fog lamps, built-in alarm system and air conditioning.

If some of these don't work, and you've already noticed other signs of neglect, don't buy. And even if everything else checks out okay, don't buy unless the car is cheap to compensate you for the risk of possible future problems.

However even if a Mark I version passes all the tests, take your time before making a decision. Preferably go to see both the last owner shown on the registration document and the people who have done the servicing. Ask them what they know about the car's history and in most cases, they'll be happy to advise you. Reject their advice at your peril.

