



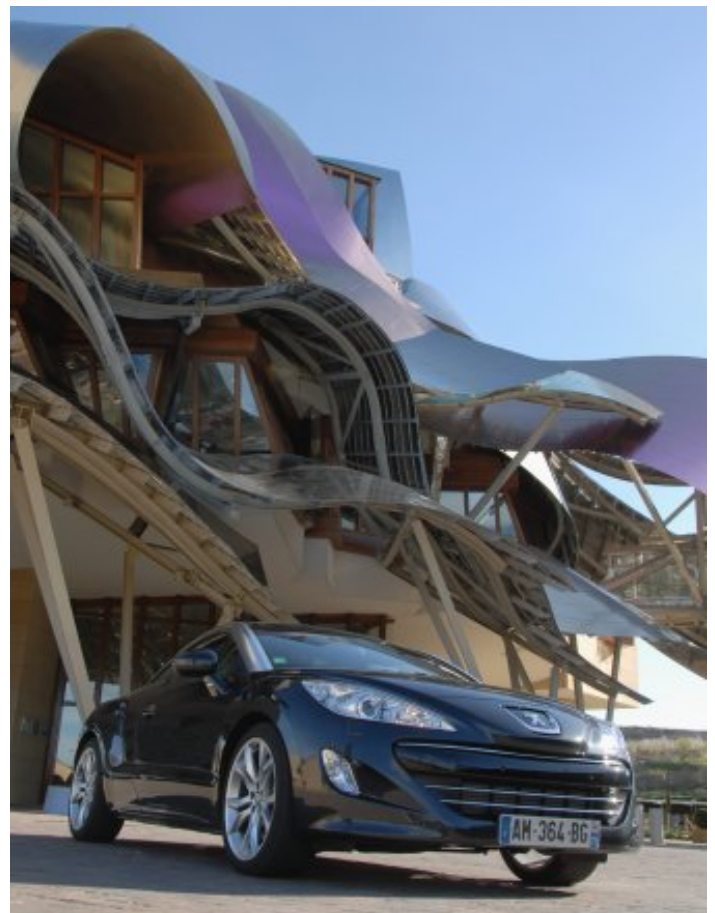
Peugeot RCZ

Bizarre or brilliant?

Review | Sometimes bizarre and brilliant are almost the same. Both dare to radically break with the standard. But the bizarre is rejected for being different. The brilliant on the other hand is admired and its ideas will eventually be copied. The Peugeot RCZ is a similar case. This car cannot be compared to anything else, so this raises the question: is the RCZ just strange or actually better than the rest?

On every car show car makers display so-called "concept cars". These are experimental, handmade cars with which a brand shows what it is capable of and what models in the distant future might look like.

Many concept cars will actually be taken into production many years after their show debut. However, these production models aren't half as exciting as the original concept. This is partly due to costs and also to make them appeal to the more conservative taste of the buyer. And this is where the Peugeot RCZ starts to be different: the actual production model looks just like the daring concept! Even the bubble roof is copied (this is based on Peugeot's Le Mans racing car).



Compared to other coupés the RCZ is more flamboyant, but at the same time more elegant. A unique combination! During the test drive the RCZ turns out to be an impressive car as well; whenever it showed up in the mirror of another car that car would immediately move over to make room for the RCZ.

Interior

The daring design isn't limited to the exterior. In the cabin the designers went to great length to make the occupants feel like they're driving a special car. In the test vehicle even the dashboard has leather upholstery, which contributes to the exclusive look. A word of advice: do choose a dark dashboard, because the light grey one in the test car reflects in the windscreen (see photo).



The standard equipment leaves little to be desired. One of those very few desires would be support for an iPod, because the audio system can only play mp3 files from a USB stick. The build quality is fair, but cannot compete to its main rival: the Audi TT. However, the latter costs several thousand pounds more.

The room in front is ample. Because the seats can be adjusted in height, even tall drivers fit very well under the low sloping roof. The low driving position and the small windows make for a secure and cosy feeling in the cabin. These small windows also cause a problem: the A-pillar (the beam between the windscreen and the side windows) obstructs the view. The large unit of the interior mirror can also obstruct the view on a roundabout.

The space on the back seat is minimal, the rear seats are just for show. However, the boot is above average for a coupé. The luggage capacity can even be extended by folding the rear seats!



Driving!

Enough foreplay? Then it is time to answer the big question: does the RCZ drive as well as it looks? To find the answer two test drives were made. This is because depending on the engine, the RCZ is fitted with a different suspension. Take special care of this when having your own test drive: do not settle for a "similar" vehicle, but demand a test drive with the exact car you're planning to buy.



It is important to know that the RCZ is not meant as a thoroughbred sports car. This is a sporty coupé which, thanks to its exciting appearance, should deliver a

more special experience. The RCZ is based on the Peugeot 308. For better handling the track is widened, the centre of gravity lowered (-4 cm) and the wheels are (much) larger. Despite its promising looks this is not a rear-wheel drive, mid-engined sports car; the engine is in the front and it powers the front wheels.

Diesel

The diesel engine comes with the standard suspension, standard steering and standard gearbox. In this configuration the RCZ is already remarkably lively and a joy to drive. Driving fast and cornering fast is especially rewarding.

The "2.0 HDiF" performs very well. The engine is very torquy (340 Nm) and therefore accelerates with great ease when already at high speed. Shifting isn't strictly necessary; in every gear the driver enjoys a true avalanche of extra power available at will.

A shift indicator shows the most economical moment to engage the next or previous gear. When strictly following this advice, the diesel engine consumes 6 litres per 100 km (47 mpg) in daily traffic. A more demanding driving style costs about 7 litres per 100 km (40 mpg).



Petrol

Peugeot has developed a brand new 1.6 litre turbo engine together with BMW especially for the RCZ. This engine delivers 200 PS (!) and 275 Nm of torque. Despite the impressive numbers, the RCZ "1.6 THP" isn't much faster than the two litre diesel engine, but it

is much more eager. The petrol car can accelerate fiercely, especially from 4,000 rpm. To enhance the experience at that engine speed a valve in the exhaust opens and a deep, sporty sound can be heard from the rear.

Thanks to its clever turbo technology, the petrol car doesn't use significantly more fuel than the diesel model. The average fuel consumption after the test drive was 7.3 litres per 100 km (38.7 mpg).

The "1.6 THP" petrol car was fitted with sports suspension (extra torsion beam), a smaller steering wheel and a shorter gear lever. This makes the car more direct and alert on each of the driver's commands, but not necessarily better. Handling doesn't improve much, while the driver does have to work harder.

During a race on a closed track, the RCZ with sports suspension is undoubtedly faster. But on public roads the standard suspension gives a more superior feeling because the RCZ performs with more ease.



Conclusion

Is the Peugeot RCZ a bizarre or a brilliant car? The answer: both. Although the word "brilliant" is a bit much, the RCZ does excel with its fine engines. Both the "1.6 THP" and "2.0 HDiF" perform very well while being frugal at the same time. Handling is excellent. On top of that the RCZ is very practical for a coupé. Judging by the price the car is very well specced.

The design is bizarre, flamboyant and daring, which is

admirable. This is what truly makes the RCZ an above average car. When judged purely rationally the RCZ doesn't offer a better drive than the average hot hatchback, but thanks to the radical design the Peugeot does offer a more enjoyable experience. ■



Specifications

Peugeot RCZ 2.0 HDiF

Size and weight



Length x width x height	429 x 185 x 136 cm
Wheelbase	261 cm
Kerb weight	1.370 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	500 kg
Fuel capacity	55 l
Luggage space	321/1639 l
Tyre size	235/45R18

Engine and performance



Capacity	1997 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	163 PS @ 3750 rpm
Max torque	340 Nm @ 2000 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	8.2 secs
Top speed	220 km/h
Average mileage	5.3 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	6.8 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	4.5 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	139 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 21,700
Price base model	Â£ 19,900