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Wheels: A Van That Can Handle Ice, Snow and Moscow

By Tim Saunders

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The grip control dial lets the driver select the appropriate mode for road conditions and responds accordingly.

Editor's note: Wheels is a new section featuring car reviews.

Delivery drivers are a misunderstood breed. Imagine what their lives must be like with a never-ending list of deliveries to make to various locations within a set time frame. This is only set to increase as online shopping becomes ever more popular. Remember this demanding schedule when one pulls out in front of you without indicating.

What do these drivers do when they can't get there on time because of snow, for instance? Simple. Often, appointments are missed and rescheduled at the customer's inconvenience, in my experience, with no apology and certainly no compensation. This unhelpful and all too regular scenario is sure to have arisen many times over recent inclement weather. Without

a doubt it leads to customer disloyalty, especially when dealing with businesses that demand a reliable service to prevent a knock-on effect down the supply chain.

Peugeot Partner SE HDi 92

Price: 670,000 rubles ($21,500)
Engine: 1.6-liter diesel
Zero to 100 kph: 14.1 seconds
Top speed: 159 kph
Kerb weight: 1,315 kg
Length: 4,628 mm
Width: 2,112 mm
Height: 1,834 mm

Source: Peugeot

Wouldn't it therefore be helpful if there were a van that could handle the snow and ice — a van that is ideal for Moscow and the surrounding regions?

Well, I am pleased to report that there is such a vehicle in the form of the new Peugeot Partner all-terrain van, which is fitted with an indispensable grip control. This dial found to the left of the steering wheel allows the driver to select the appropriate mode for the conditions and responds accordingly. But I noticed that this grip control falls back to its original setting when the engine is switched off, so the driver needs to remember this when he sets off again. My test took place in Britain as the country — like Moscow in recent weeks — emerged from a heavy snowfall and rain turned to ice. Needless to say that it remained in ice-and-snow mode for the duration of the test.

The van also has ASR (anti-slip regulation) providing further sure-footedness. It makes light work of maneuvering out of an ice-covered car park while other vehicles remain stranded. With its extra 10 millimeters of height over a normal Partner van, the driver of this all-terrain model enjoys a good view of the road ahead. It feels competent on the motorway with only a mere hint of buffeting. The upgraded 195/70 R15 tires, specifically for mud and snow, give the driver added confidence that they will make their deliveries on time.

Parkers, the British car experts, says: "Peugeot's Partner is a versatile and capable city van, aimed at small businesses in need of something dependable and easy to live with. It's built alongside the Citroen Berlingo, and the two siblings rival each other at the top of the class. The trusty companion ticks all the right boxes, with some clever tricks, a hugely versatile model lineup (buyers have the pick of three engines, three payloads and two body lengths) and competitive list prices. As a result, Partner is one of the most tempting small vans on sale in the U.K."

The same could be said for Russia.

The other striking feature of this van is that it has three seats in the cabin. This opens up the possibility for my wife and daughter in her baby seat to travel in the van, too. Forward-facing child seats can be used in the front of vans but it is necessary to consult the handbook to check how far the airbag inflates. There is no problem with placing Harriett in the middle seat because there is no airbag in the center of the dash. She loves it, but we have to ensure that she does not change gear while Daddy is driving. I then have to make sure the van's seat is as far back from the dashboard as possible. It is almost a bench seat, but not quite because there is a slight gap between the driver's seat and the two passenger seats, to make room for the handbrake. When three are traveling it's relatively comfortable but snug.

It is helpful that the stereo controls are also mounted on the steering column, helping the driver remain focused on the road ahead.

Economical, it will travel more than 800 kilometers on one tank if driven sensibly, and there is a sizable amount of room in the wood-lined rear for transporting goods. Delivery drivers will appreciate the fact that the useful sliding side door and double rear doors automatically lock when the ignition is turned. This does give peace of mind.

There are plenty of cubby holes in the cabin and places to slot drinks, too. This well-designed, agile and easy to drive van could also appeal to carpenters and builders.

Other car reviews can be found at testdrives.biz

Video of the test drive.

Contact the author at bizreporter@imedia.ru

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