

# CITROEN TRACTION AVANT 75 YEARS OF BLISS IN SA



## IMPACT ON THE WORLD.

The traction designed by André Lefebvre and Flaminio Bertoni is 75 years old. And it introduced many firsts for 1934. Its innovative drive train, its monocoque body front wheel drive and torsion bar suspension setting it way ahead of its competition. As far ahead as the ID and DS was all those years later.

These innovations that bankrupted Citroën are used by virtually every car maker today. Possibly the first car crash test was with one of these cars. The test was to push the car over a cliff to demonstrate the rigidity of the no chassis construction. Most at this time thought a car had to have a chassis.

This type of construction made the car lower and lighter than its competitors with a much better power to weight ratio and a much lower centre of gravity. All resulting in less wind resistance a flat floor pan and good fuel economy.

The suspension was very advanced using independent torsion bar front suspension. The rear was a steel beam panhard rod trailing arms and torsion bars. Imagine the difference compared to leaf springs.

It can also be claimed that because of Michelin's purchase of Citroën and the use of the Traction Avant as the test vehicle that we today have the radial tyre fitted as standard equipment to the traction.

The silent block mounting of the motor and drive train, also a first in a mass produced car resulted in a much quieter and refined behavior less vibration and harshness.

because of it being lighter than conventional designs the car in 1911 cc form was capable of 116 kph / 73 mph and 11 litres per hundred fuel 28 mpg consumption.



## **VARIANTS.**

There were very many variants on this car. Starting with a 1303cc motor then a 1529cc a 1628cc. and lastly a 1911 cc. these were the 7a, 7b, and 7c. The 1911 cc was known as the 11. Then came the 6 cylinder 2867 cc 15.

There were many variants to the body length or wheelbase and width of track of these cars.

There were the most beautiful coupe and convertible examples. There were hatchbacks open sunroof presidential saloons and commercial examples.

In South Africa we received mainly the slough built I 15. They were sold in the main centers. It was the English version of the car with leather seats wood dash and a higher trim level a few right hand drive French models were also sold as a cheaper version. Very austere with cloth seats and door panels, this was known as the 11bl.

There were also some examples of the big 15 six cylinder cars sold and even a few big bodied 4 cylinder cars made it here. Some imported privately in right and left hand drive format some like my 1954 model I 15 arrived as an immigrant from Dar es Salaam car. He drove it here overland.

Sadly no coupes or convertibles seem to have made it to our sunny shores and the two we have are owned by Steve le roux that imported and refurbished them here.

One of the agents for the marque in South Africa was Atlanta motors in downtown Johannesburg.



## **THE TRACTION TODAY.**

This is a very robust vehicle and therefore a survivor with many hundreds still going today. They make appearances at all motor shows in South Africa with as many as 15 being in attendance at the larger shows. There are also very many undergoing rebuild and are all at various stages of completion. They seem to keep coming out of the woodwork and find homes easily.

## **OUR CLUB.**

We have a very happy and well attended club in South Africa, catering for all Citroën cars. The L15, the 2CV, the ID19 and DS range as well as more modern cars.

We are well provided for when spares are requiring by Steve le roux and his knowledge on the traction and its derivatives is exceptional.

We do long distance trips and outings with few major reliability problems which prove the practicality of the cars as classics. They are enjoyed by their owners and wherever we go we hear comments such as;

My dad had one of those  
I learnt to drive in one of those  
I had my first kiss in one of those Can I hire it for my wedding?  
I was born on the back seat of one of those  
Is that the car with the gear-lever in the dash etc?

It is also incredible how we are in contact with other Citroën owners around the world.

## **THE TRACTION AVANT IN POPULAR CULTURE**

The traction features in movies with gangsters, Gestapo agents, the French resistance, communist political police, and detectives like the famous Maigrette it has become a cult car with many of them forming the background to hundreds of current wedding photos.

They are also commonly referred to as the big boot or small boot version because of the change to the cars profile by the addition of a larger boot that covers the spare wheel unlike the small boot which has a cover over the externally situated spare wheel

Our association as owners of these cars borders on obsession and without one in our lives we would need serious counselling and huge doses of medication to keep depression under false control.

## **A FEW TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS OF THE TRACTION AVANT**

Specifications are listed in imperial measurements as the English car is most common in South Africa.

### **ENGINE SPECIFICATIONS.**

4cyl ohv with wet liners.

Bore 78mm x 100mm stroke capacity 1911 cc.

Compression ratio 6.1 to 1.

Develops 58 bhp at 4200 rpm. Single downdraught solex carb. Mechanical fuel pump.

Fan water cooling.

Lucas 12v ignition, 57 amp hour battery.

### **TRANSMISSION.**

Single dry plate clutch.

Front wheel drive through side shafts with universals. Three speed gearbox with synchromesh on top two speeds. Gear ratios 4.3 – 7.3 – 13, reverse 17.5 to one.

Spiral bevel final drive.

### **SUSPENSION.**

Independent at front by torsion bars. Torsion bars and head axle at rear. Telescopic hydraulic absorbers front and rear.

12' drums in front and 10' at rear. Friction area of 97, 3 square inches. Parking brake mechanically linked to rear wheels.

### **CHASSIS.**

Chassis and body combined in stressed skin pressed steel construction.

### **MEASUREMENTS OF A LIGHT 15.**

This varied for other models e.g. The big 15. Wheelbase 9ft 6in.

Track 4ft 6in.

Length 14ft 2in. Height 5 feet.

Width 5ft 5in. Ground clearance 7in.

Unladen weight 21 cwt.

## **FUEL AND OIL CAPACITY.**

Petrol 10 gal.  
Sump 8 pints.  
Radiator 14 pints.

## **STEERING.**

Rack and pinion, turning circle 45ft. 2/3 turns from lock to lock.

## **WHEELS.**

Various style pressed disc with Michelin x radial 165 x 400 tube tires.

## **PERFORMANCE.**

0 to 30 mph 5 sec.

0 to 40 mph 7 sec.

0 to 50 mph 12.2 sec.

0 to 60 mph 18.2 sec.

0 to 70 mph 22 sec. Standing quarter mile 22 sec. Maximum speeds.

First gear 30mph. Second gear 58mph. Top gear 77 mph.

Best speed recorded 81 mph.

Speedo correction 1 mph fast at top speed. Best fuel consumption recorded 33 mph.



**COMPILED BY BRIAN GROENEWALD** using well known publications and experts input