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FLEETWORLD

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PEUGEOT RCZ

The car that signals
Peugeot's return
to form...



THE S.W.O.T. TEAM

ALL-NEW
VEHICLE
ANALYSIS

THE TEAM...

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Peugeot RCZ (2010 on...)

Peugeot is rather excited about its new coupe, the RCZ, because it thinks that this represents zero hour – the point at which the brand resets itself and then moves forward into a glorious future of highly desirable, high-quality cars.

The car certainly looks the part, but brand defining? There have been plenty of good-looking cars in the past that nicely augment a range, rather than underpin it – its own 406 Coupe was such a car.

So what is so special about the RCZ? Peugeot wants to be seen as a benchmark for

style and green technology, and it will launch 14 new models worldwide between 2010 and 2012 including a number of diesel hybrids, while its recent 3008 and 5008 have been well received. The RCZ is the start point for that new, distinctive styling, embodying the new Peugeot.

That means its relevance to fleet is actually disproportionate to its sales, because it could provide much-needed glamour and sophistication to the brand. Easy to say though, harder to do – we ask the SWOT Team for their thoughts.

• STRENGTHS •

MW A great-looking coupe that certainly turns heads. It is well-built at the Magna Plant in Austria. The prices look attractive, especially the Sport HDi at £22,250. A simple range, just two models, Sport and GT, and two petrol and one diesel engine, and handling and performance from all engines is outstanding. Peugeot has moved away from the traditional "0" and "00" in the naming, and calling it something completely new is a great idea.

AS Peugeot has produced a great-looking coupe that is good to drive and reasonably priced. The new quality image of Peugeot shines through in the RCZ, with nice upmarket materials and neat fit and finish. The 1.6THP 200bhp model has a great engine soundtrack too.

JK The RCZ is a statement of intent for the company to be taken seriously as a brand that makes attractive and desirable niche products. With a significant nod to the iconic Audi TT, the RCZ is a real head-turner. The handling is almost as good as it looks.

MJ Stunning looks, low volumes, an OTR start point of £20,450, a great range of engines – 156 and 200bhp high tech 1.6 petrols and a 163bhp diesel – plus good performance and economy. Entry car equipment levels include 18" alloys, climate, cruise control and Bluetooth. The limited option list includes exterior personalisation opportunities. Generous boot space of 309 litres helps practicality.

• WEAKNESSES •

JK Non-premium brand coupes are far and few between. In this segment where looks are everything, brand has a big part to play. The recent arrival of the Volkswagen Scirocco will help to prise buyers away from the usual suspects, but it won't be easy. Interior quality is good, but not quite matching premium brand levels.

AS The fleet industry has been responsible over the years for tasking motor manufacturers to develop ever more durable and reliable models. Because of this we all enjoy a better standard of build quality. Some fleet decision-makers have been wary of Peugeot reliability and some are still to be convinced – my advice is to take a second look.

MJ Peugeot was considered a quality brand for many years but component quality standards slipped with 307 and recovery from that is proving a slow process.

MW The old badge thing comes up again for the French manufacturer: it's a Peugeot and that alone will put many off, despite its high build quality and it being priced sensibly. Snobbery will play a part in customer's decisions. Like all cars in this category, the room for rear passengers is very limited. With limited numbers being built in Graz, there probably won't be enough to go around.

• OPPORTUNITIES •

AS The RCZ has a chic image that should equate to predictable residual values. Peugeot has had some success in the coupe market with the 406 and 407. However this new offering moves the game on and should be a fantastic halo effect car for Peugeot.

MW There is very little choice in this small coupe segment, with only really the Audi TT, Volkswagen Scirocco, Mazda RX-8 and Volvo C30 being available. The RCZ will attract new customers into Peugeot showrooms who want a stylish coupe and who are not bothered about the badges, despite them recently being re-worked with new designs. Other opportunities come from the younger end who can just about manage with two seats, plus the occasional third and fourth, who want style, but not necessarily practicality at an affordable price.

MJ A major strategy change is underway at Peugeot. New 3008 and 5008 help illustrate the return to desirable well-built cars that drivers will choose. RCZ will help build awareness of how serious Peugeot is, before further new products arrive.

JK Keenly priced, with both petrol and diesel engines that have competitive CO₂ emission levels, user-chooser company car drivers may see the RCZ as an interesting alternative. Although described as a 2+2 (the rear seats are strictly for small children), with a decent-sized boot there is still an amount of practicality offered.

• THREATS •

JK Despite prices starting from under £20,000 (which is pretty good value), will the real competition for those spending their own money be a late used Audi TT – the car that the RCZ so desperately wants to be.

AS This is thankfully not an overcrowded sector these days and the main players are the premium brands. The coupe segment has had quite a chunk of fleet success over the last 10 years but since 2008 most have been looking at practicality, not flash and style. The saviour for this model could be the keen pricing.

MW Those two tiny seats in the back are hardly big enough for small kids, so this may put some off. It is doubtful if the already well-established players in this sector will see Peugeot as a serious player, but they will no doubt be keeping a careful eye on what the RCZ does in the market and if they see sales slipping away. Audi and Volkswagen will do all they can to keep their loyal customers and the threat for the French manufacturer is a continuing success of the Germans.

MJ The badge is not normally associated with a car of this type, so prejudice is the main threat to be faced. Peugeot UK should resist any opportunity to increase annual volumes of the Graz built car beyond the 2,750 suggested.



VERDICT

Great to drive, great to look at, great to be in. The RCZ looks like being one of the cars of the year, and if Peugeot can follow this form with further high-quality, distinctive models, then it will find itself in a very strong position indeed.



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