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## the 2 CV: Citroën deux chevaux a French motoring icon



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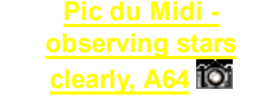
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from tractor to pump, from buggy to motorbike.

Today, this ageless little rustic car has been loved by its millions of owners. The 2CV is a true symbol and historic monument of French motoring that draws generations of supporters, with more than 300 clubs worldwide and rallies.

Now 2CVs can be seen buzzing around French towns and countryside, some beautifully restored and maintained, others dented and dull from hard use. See impecunious young people touring around France, stopping by the roadside for [picnics](#), the car complete with camping equipment on board. Or meet a farmer, bumbling along, on his way to check his maize crops with their giant irrigation systems, or off to the local farmer's suppliers for a spare part. Down at the local supermarket, a 2CV proudly renovated will disgorge a family to go for their week's shopping. The pater familias will even show off the well-thumbed parts manual, the new bible for 2CV lovers, while the family waits long suffering in a car that's now as 'good as new'.



The [deuche](#) represents France for all of an epoch. Made for forty-two years, the 2CV had been sold all over the world with a production total of more than 5 million examples.

#### a small car for the average Frenchman

Early sales were restricted to doctors and farmers, felt to be in most need of a car. At first there was only one colour, gray, to help maximise production. Many other colours followed.

Very few changes were made over the years, most being to the mechanics rather than the outer body. When, in the USA, the headlamps were changed from round to rectangular, they were then returned to round headlights after a few years. After all, an ugly duckling has round not square eyes.

The 2CV became as ubiquitous in France as the [Ford Model T](#) had been previously in the United States.



## A variety of facts, figures, specifications

- Designer: Pierre Boulanger  
 Engineer: André Lefebvre  
 Stylist: Flaminio Bertoni
- First presented in 1938 as the *Très Petite Voiture* (very small car - the TPV), but production was delayed by [WWII](#), so the 2CV was not commercially produced until 1948
- Production stopped: 27 July 1990 at Mangualde, Portugal
- 3,872,583 2CV cars and vans made. Some claims go higher than this when variations are included.

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- Empty car weight: 600kg
  - Engine: 375cc [9hp](#), 65 km/h top speed
  - 30 different [berline](#) models built
- The 2CV was also made as a van (camionette/fourgonette), and as a 4 x 4 - the Sahara - with a second engine to drive the rear axle. Only 694 of these were built.
- During its 42-year production, only technical parts like the engine, transmission and brake-system were updated - the body remained the same.

colours:

The first colour was a single choice - grey - to simplify and speed production.



The full range of 'official' colours was:

- Grey, black and white
- Three types of yellow
- Three types of blue
- Four reds
- Four greens
- an orange
- a beige
- There were also two-coloured 2CVs - the Charleston - in yellow and black, crimson and black, grey and black.

some nicknames

- the duck : from the *Ugly Duckling*, a Hans Andersen fairy story. Before World War II, Citroën had a logo with a beautiful swan on it representing the floating motor (*Le Moteur Flottant*). At the 1948 Paris Car Show, the 2CV was likened to being an ugly duckling amongst the other handsome Citroën swans on show. Another version is that the beautiful Citroën swans had given birth to the 2CV ugly duckling. This nickname appears in many languages.
- *deuche* (or *deutche*) or *deudeuche* - I think a shortening and eliding of *deux che* (*che* being the first syllable of *chevaux*). The French often double up syllables when being affectionate or talking baby-talk, thus *deudeuche* is an affectionate version
- tin snail

ripple bonnet (until late 1960, the 2CV bonnet had narrowly spaced undulating steel metal bodywork)



[Note the open vent below the windscreen wipers on the right-hand 2CV - air-conditioning 2CV style.]

- citronetta (Argentina)
- döschewo (Austria)
- likelele (Zaire)
- satka or satkakone - handmade cigarette (Finland)
- deux pattes - two paws (France)
- monpti - *mon petit*, my little one (Germany)
- mafy-be - very robust (Madagascar)
- jernseng - iron bedstead (Norway)
- chocolateiras - chocolate tin can (Portugal)
- la cabra - goat (Spain)



## specification and history

The 2CV was conceived as an economical car, both to buy and to maintain. This allowed both fast manufacture and slow general deterioration.

For a simplified manufacture, the same screw was used practically everywhere, the motor could be put in place very easily and held by four screws. The same applied for the sheet metal bodywork.

For low deterioration, longevity was favoured rather than performance, which translated technically into a larger play between pieces (in thousandths of a millimetre) and, above all, simple but effective solutions to problems.

When Michelin the famous tyre maker bought out Citroën in 1935, the Michelin brothers - founders of the family business - had the idea of creating an economical car for the peasants and others with small incomes. They asked Pierre Boulanger, the new boss of Citroën, to make a market study to sound the expectations of future clients regarding such a car project.

Following this study, Boulanger wrote the specification which would be so close to the heart of the largest pre-war French car maker.

### the original specification

- “four wheels under an umbrella”

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- space for 4 adults (and tall enough to take the owner and passengers to church in their Sunday-best hats)
- big enough to carry 50kg of potatoes
- within the 2 horsepower fiscal bracket
- front-wheel drive
- maximum speed: 60km/h
- 3-speed gear box. In fact, there is also a supercharger position, which acts as a fourth gear.
- easy to maintain
- able to carry a basket of eggs over a ploughed field without breaking one of them
- 3 litres per 100km fuel consumption (about 90-95 miles/gallon)
- cheap

To transform this dream into reality, Boulanger had the services of André Lefebvre as engineer, and Flaminio Bertoni, whose nickname was gold fingers, as stylist. This team gave birth to one of the most iconic cars of the 20th century.

Pre-war prototypes from Lefebvre formed a car in thin and undulating sheet metal, with a water-cooled 375cc two-cylinder engine and suspension that allowed interaction between front and back wheels. It used expensive materials like magnesium to reduce weight. Tests were made in a top secret centre at La Ferté-Vidame, west of Paris. By May 1939, 250 examples of the newly named "Type A", were collected in the Levallois-Perret factory to be available for the Paris car show in October 1939. But the intervention of war decided otherwise.

#### world war two

On the outbreak of war, almost all of the "Types A" prototypes already assembled were dismantled. Of the cars remaining, three were hidden at La Ferté-Vidame in the lofts of the test centre, while another was hidden in the basement of the study offices of Citroën in rue d'Opéra, Paris.

During the war, the Nazis, who were up to date with the study of the [TPV](#), asked Pierre Boulanger to make available the plans of the TPV in exchange for him seeing Hitler's plans concerning the German car that would become the "Volkswagen", the people's car. The boss of Citroën remained firm and never divulged the plans.

In 1995, the three prototypes were found at La Ferté-Vidame. They "were apparently hidden under bales of straw in the roof of a barn. It needed special lifting equipment to remove them." [\[1\]](#)



Three TPVs found after being hidden for 56 years. Image credit: [citcity.citroen1.info/2cv/](http://citcity.citroen1.info/2cv/)

#### main dates of the 2CV

- 1935 : Pierre Jules Boulanger researched the car of the people -

the future 2CV

- 1937 : first prototype of the 2CV, code name : *la TrÃ©s Petite voiture* (TPV)
- 1938 : about twenty different permutations of prototype being tested.
- 3 September 1939 : the first TPV was shown to the public. War was declared and the TPV construction line was requisitioned. Almost all assembled cars were dismantled.
- 1942 : Numerous modifications were made to the car, notably changing from a single headlight, which had given the car a nickname of Cyclops. Note the ovoid style of the doors.



- 1948 : A type of grass-cutter was abandoned and its battery and electric starter are put in the now air-cooled car, presented at the Paris car show, the 35th Salon d'Automobile.
- June 1949 : 2CVA manufacture started. Four vehicles a day were made, and the demand was so great that the delivery delay was more than 18 months.
- 1950 : production of 400 cars a day.
- 1988 : end of production of the 2CV in France.
- 27 July 1990 at 16h00, the last 2CV left Mangualde factory in Portugal.

### helpful sources of information

- [ma2cv.com](http://ma2cv.com) [site in French]
- [citcity.citroen1.info/2cv/](http://citcity.citroen1.info/2cv/)



### end notes

1. *Berline* is the French name for a saloon car, carrying at least four passengers, with four lateral windows and either two or four passenger doors. (This type of car is known as a sedan in the USA.)
2. The name *deux chevaux* - two horses - refers to the taxation classification of the car, not to its physical engine power. By 1968, the 2CV had a 602 cc engine (giving 28 bhp/20.5 kWatt 7000 rpm). Officially, this classed the cars at 3CV, but the car's commercial name remained 2CV; except in Brazil, which did call these cars 3CV. In fact, the original 1948 2CV could generate 9hp power at 3500 rpm.

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