

Citroen C1 Challenge

Motorsport that *really* is value for money



A Citroen C1 may not be an obvious choice for a club racing car, but there's much more to this one-make series than first appears

By Ben Anderson, Grand Prix Editor

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Before I drove one for myself, I could see no point in racing a Citroen C1. There is no part of it that looks suitable for this pursuit. Racing is meant to be fast, exciting and cool – everything the Citroen C1 is not.

Then I spent several hours racing one around Cadwell Park, and suddenly it all made sense. Now, Cadwell Park is the finest circuit in the UK, in my opinion, so if any track is capable of showing a car in a good light, it's this one, but there's more to it than that. The Citroen C1 Challenge, in defiance of conventional logic, is right on the money.

And money is the key point here. Motorsport is endlessly and rightly criticised for being too expensive. Plenty of series talk about offering cheap racing at entry level, and wear such claims as a badge of honour, but racing rarely ends up costing less than a small fortune.

Endurance racing has long been a neat way to square the circle – splitting the singular costs of competition between several drivers. In this, the Citroen C1 Challenge is nothing ground-breaking. But the devil, as so often the case, is in the detail. Details that have been painstakingly poured over by the intrepid 2CV racers behind this venture.

"We saw costs going up in that and thought, 'Is there an alternative?'" explains Meyrick Cox, who runs the show with fellow racers Phil Myatt, Nick Paton and Caryl Wills. "We talked about converting a C1 to a race car. Caryl just put his money where his mouth was, stuck some cheap springs from eBay on it, threw the interior away, put a rollcage in, and it was just great fun.

"There appeared to be a gap in the market for low-cost endurance racing. If you built a car and did a whole season, it would cost about £10,000. You get 107 hours of racing for that, including everything apart from the cost of getting to and from the circuits."



1 2
3 4



1. Scrutineering is thorough to ensure there's no cheating
2. All of the C1 Challenge races are endurance contests
3. Cars can be driven to and from the circuit, as well as on it
4. Anderson enjoyed his stint in the C1 at Cadwell Park

contest the first season on £15,000 or less.

Split between four drivers (the race format is built around teams of this size, with three mandatory pitstops per race), that's a first season's racing for less than £4000 each, and the following years should cost £2500 per driver – including that 24-hour race at Spa – which is insanely cheap for car racing.

"For a season it should work out at about £100 an hour," adds Cox. "You'd be struggling to find some kart races at that price."

And the C1 Challenge plans to stick rigidly to its low-cost ethos. This is more than just empty words. It is enshrined in the regulations. No performance modifications are permitted. You're not even allowed data loggers, just a single GPS lap timer and a standard rev counter. You can swap the steering wheel for a removable one, but the pedals must be standard and so must the engine. The cars also must be capable of being driven to the circuit – so road legal with a valid MoT.

"In the 2CV club, we found a lot of the younger guys didn't have trailer licences," explains Cox. "It's £1500 to get a trailer licence, then you've got to get a trailer, then you've got to have something that will tow it, so we wanted a car that you could literally throw your stuff in the back of and arrive at the circuit, take it out, race, then drive it home again."

But more importantly, doing so will not be to your competitive disadvantage. That's the absolute key appeal of this series. It's not for the tinkerers, the engineers, or the big spenders. It's proper, basic, turnkey racing. If you know how to change a wheel, add fuel and check your engine's oil level – things all road users should be capable of – you can race one of these cars competitively. >>

Cox says second-hand donor cars are changing hands for "between £600 and £1000", after which you'll need a conversion kit – a rollcage and suspension mods, including driveshafts, to make the car handle, well, less like a shopping trolley, and improve tyre life. That costs £1700.

"Then you've got to get a seat, harnesses, safety kit on top," adds Cox. "So, people report costs of around £3800 and £4000 all-in to build the car if they do it themselves. If you pay someone else to build the car, people are reporting anything between £1500 and £2000 on top of that.

"For a worst case, you're looking at a build cost of somewhere around £5500 to put the car on the track. You'll need to buy spare wheels on top of that, but the wheels are just £24 each..."

Or £50 if you buy them 'race-prepped' from the club (scrubbed on a machine to reduce the depth of the tread blocks), which Cox says is a necessity to get the most from the Nankang rubber. You'll need "between eight and 12" of them to complete a 24-hour race (the rears can last the whole event), so double that if you intend to also contest the three sets of four and two-hour races that make up the British Automobile Racing Club's UK calendar. Let's call it a round £2000 for tyres.

If you're entering October's 24-hour race at Spa, for which the C1 club has pledged 40 cars to the Belgian organisers, that will set you back another £3900 (£2500 entry fee, plus £2000 running costs, minus the tyres already accounted for). That takes us over Cox's 10-grand rough sum, but not by much. Get yourself some fuel and away you go. Spare engines can be sourced for £250 on eBay, according to Cox, so even with travel costs on top it should be realistic to



Series has attracted a lot of interest in its inaugural season

The only set-up parameter to play with is tyre pressures. There is no advantage to be gained by obsessing over your car's handling and set-up. That's pointless. All you do is drive as fast as you can, then hand it over to your mate to drive as fast as they can, then park it up in the paddock and relax until the next session.

Many club championships have become deadly serious and expensive at the sharp end, as people chase performance and trophies. Not here. You have fun on track, then you go home happy. The beauty is in the simplicity.

"The four of us have got a very strong vision — we want to keep this as low-cost racing," insists Cox. "We launched at Autosport

International. Here at Cadwell we've got 14 [cars] but we've got 64 cages sold, so there are presumably 64 cars in build. It's taken us completely by surprise. To give you an example of how nervous we were, the deal we did with BARC was break-even if we had seven cars on the grid. We had no idea how many were going to turn up. It's caught some zeitgeist, what we're doing."

There are inevitable teething troubles to iron out — the fact that three different makes of suspension can be used for conversions at present creates needless inequality (a legacy of initial experimentation to find the best solution), and driving

standards will need stringent policing as the grid grows.

But there is absolute determination to homogenise the car specs, rigorously enforce driving standards — one wayward soul was ejected from the meeting after our first Cadwell race — and deter cheats with meticulous eligibility scrutineering.

"Phil and I have won 12 championships between us," says Cox. "We know how to cheat and we're good at spotting it!"

But the important thing is that the raw ingredients are

in place. Cheap cars, cheap to run, fun to drive, lots of track time for your money. This is the closest thing to arrive-and-drive endurance pro-karting you will find on fully fledged race tracks.

"It's good, cheap fun that you can get people into," says

Mazda MX-5 ace Paul Roddison. "Smiles per pound, it's the cheapest racing I've ever done."

The grid I encountered contains several experienced UK club racers, like Roddison and multiple 750MC Locost champion Declan McDonnell, enticed by a cheaper and more accessible way to go racing.

"We can bring friends in as third drivers, so there's a huge social element to it as well," says McDonnell. "Everything that Phil and Caryl are saying about the cars, the driving standards, if they can stick to that ethos I think it'll be absolutely mega." ✱

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