USED BUY: Peugeot 406 Coupé
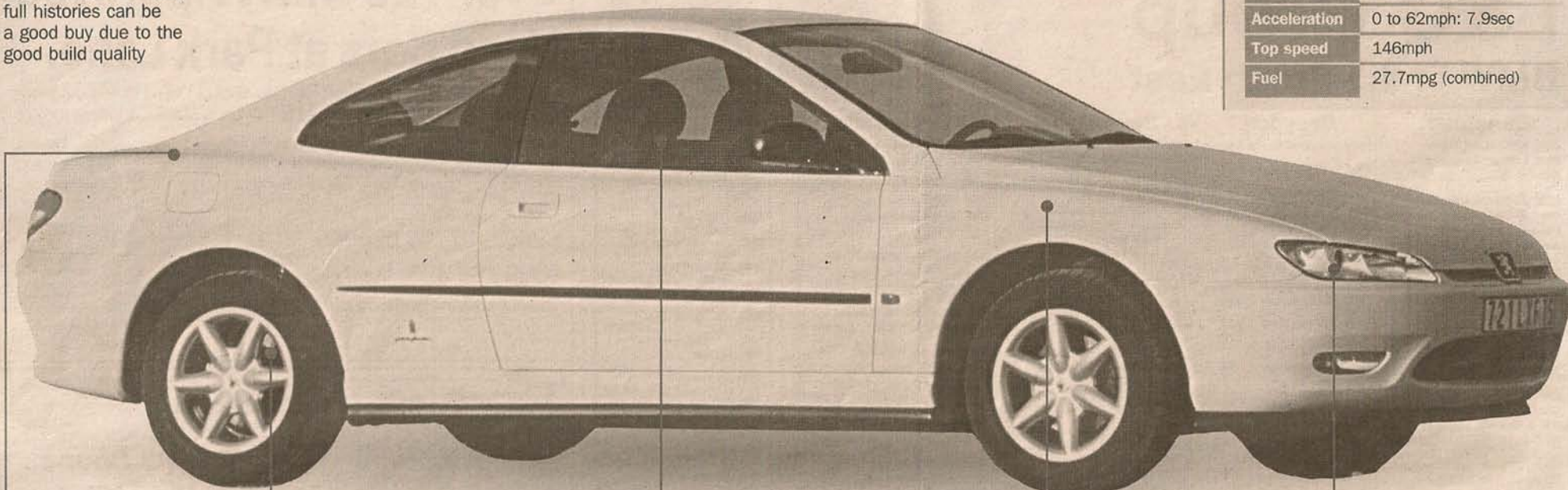
High-mileage cars with full histories can be a good buy due to the good build quality

Boot Check for a CD changer, cartridges are expensive to replace

Brakes Brembos on the 3 litre will pull the car up quickly

Inside trim Avoid wild-coloured leather interiors — mustard and red leather are an acquired taste

Security All cars have factory fitted alarms and central locking — check that they work

Lights Cars from after 1999 have slimmer headlamps and white indicator lenses

JASON DAWE

A friend of mine showed me his Philippe Starck juicer. "Looks great," I said. "Rubbish at juicing," declared my friend. Isn't that so often the case? Which is why I love the Peugeot 406 Coupé, because unlike most coupés this car delivers as much as its looks suggest.

It has a practical boot, seating for four adults and a range of unfussy engines that will not cost you an arm and a leg to maintain. Wrap this up in a stunning Pininfarina shape and you are left with one of the most practical, beautiful and cheap-to-own coupés ever.

The 406 Coupé is now five years old, which means that you can pick up a 1997 "P" for the deliciously low price of £6,500.

Early cars are available with a 2 or 3 litre petrol engine. The smaller engine car is no rocket ship but will cruise easily on the motorway. The 3 litre V6 sounds nice and responds to spirited driving. Peugeot recently added both 2.2 litre petrol and diesel engines to the line-up but used ones are still rare and prices high.

Some coupé buyers may be concerned by the Peugeot badge, preferring the safety of a used BMW or Mercedes. But do not fear, the coupé is not a chopped-down 406 saloon because not only was this car styled by Pininfarina, it was actually built and trimmed by them. That results in the quality and exclusivity that is so important in the world of coupés. This car is the real deal.

The coupé also sits lower and wider than the saloon, endowing it with sharper handling and better levels of grip. The 3 litre models even get big boy Brembo brakes, normally reserved for cars costing twice the price.

Peugeot gave the car a facelift in 1999, changing the lights and grilles, although to me the car looks no better than the original. Further changes included the fitting as standard of digital air conditioning and CD, which are both worth having. Regardless of age all cars get ABS, twin airbags, alloys, alarms and remote central locking.

Limited production when new means that used coupés are not as plentiful as the humbler saloon but you should still have a choice of cars. Visit www.peugeot.co.uk and check out the small ads to get a feel for the market.

When buying a used 406 Coupé avoid ex-press cars: they were probably thrashed to within an inch of their lives by journalists when new. The giveaway is a registration document that shows Peugeot as the first registered keeper.

Auto transmission is an option on the 2 and 3 litre petrol engines, but this hits the performance on the smaller engine. Fuel consumption is about average on the 3 litre, giving about 24 to the gallon in mixed driving; the 2 litre is a little better. Insurance groups are reasonable, 15-18, again dependent on the engine.

And finally, the car was heavily galvanised when new and came with a six-year paint and body warranty, so it should keep its Pininfarina good looks for many a year to come.

Jason Dawe is joining the BBC's Top Gear this autumn

VALUES PEUGEOT 406 COUPE			
Mileage	40,000	60,000	80,000
1997 P Trade	£5,525	£4,875	£4,300
Retail	£7,175	£6,525	£5,950
1998 R Trade	£6,225	£5,500	£4,950
Retail	£7875	£7,150	£6,575
1999 T (facelift) Trade	£7,150	£6,450	£5,875
Retail	£8,795	£8,095	£7,525

2 litre cars are priced at about £1,500 less. Add £150 for automatic transmission
Source: estimates based on CAP confidential Black Book prices. 'Trade' is what a dealer would pay to buy your car