

DESERT LIONS

Peugeot picked the sandy wastes of Egypt to launch its 605. Paul Gover dodged camels and elderly Fiats to bring this preview of the car which should reach our shores later this year in V6 form.

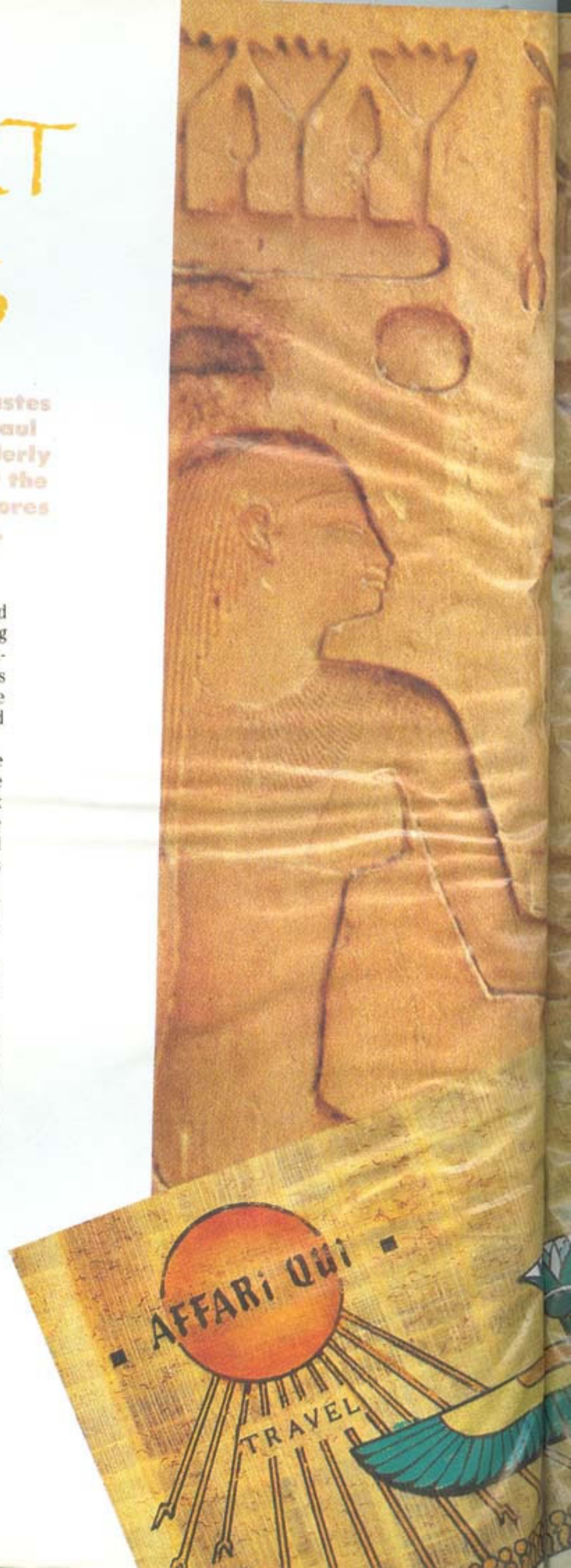
I like Poo-jo; they good car," Ahmed laughed as he whipped his scrawny nag into first place in the after-dinner coach-and-horses derby through the grubby streets of Aswan. "Not bad like Fee-at. Pah!" he spat as we cantered past an elderly dented Fiat with a flat tyre.

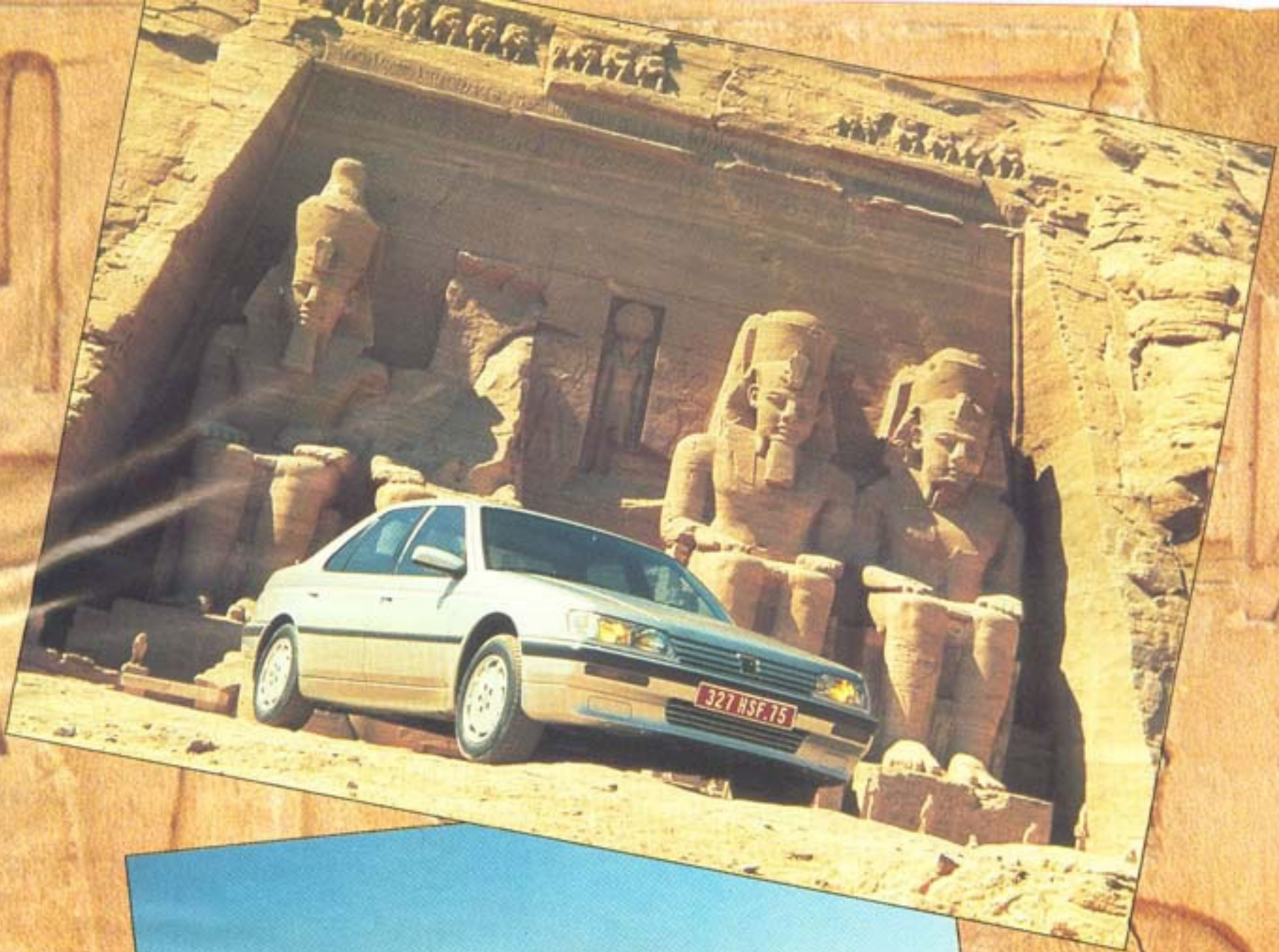
Ahmed and his world-weary rig were the perfect time-warp transportation from the colonial grandeur of the Pullman Hotel back to the modern floating extravagance of the Nile Ritz. The Pullman is the very same hotel chosen as the backdrop for Peter Ustinov's sleuthing in the Agatha Christie whodunnit, "Death on the Nile", and the Ritz is one of many floating palaces plying the tourist trade along Egypt's lifeblood.

"Baksheesh, baksheesh," Ahmed hissed over his shoulder as he reigned-in at the steps to the Ritz, indicating the traditional Egyptian claim for some back-handed pounds. But was it for his place in the coach-and-horses taxi dash or his enthusiastic support of Peugeot?

Probably for his prowess with the whip and reins, we decided, as Ahmed described in broken French-list his own elderly Peugeot 504 and its superb record in the countryside around Aswan. It may have been ideal for him, but hardly a paid advertisement for Peugeot.

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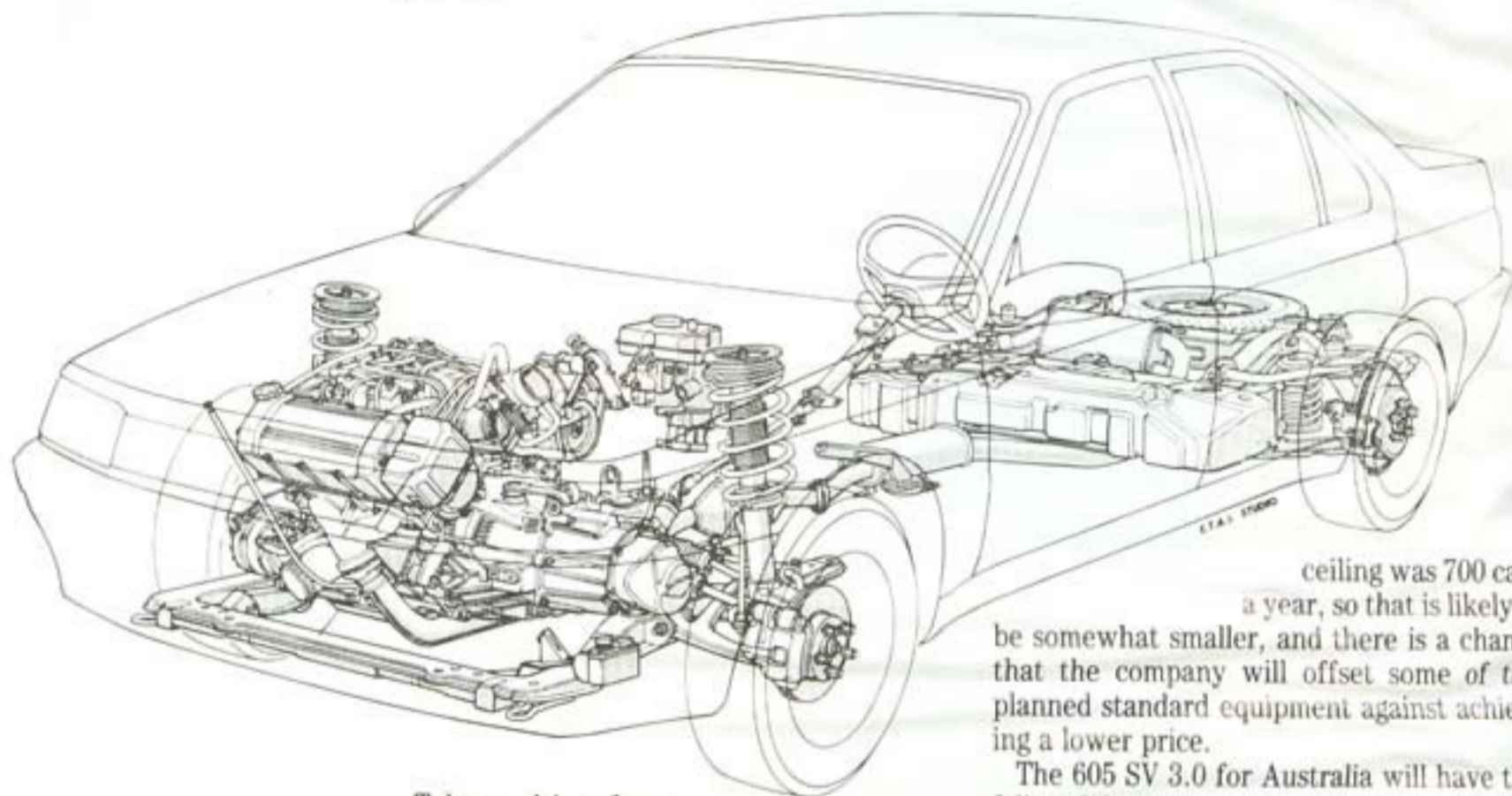




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But, then again, Peugeot is still the Lion of the Desert and a colonial power which has survived long after the sunset of the British Empire and the end of the succeeding French and Russian influence. You only have to look at the results of major desert rally raids over the past couple of years to see that the French manufacturer is unmatched in competition over the world's least-hospitable terrain.

Even more than the victories of the 205 Turbo 16 and the sensational 405 Turbo 16, which have torn through the desert like a runaway Khamsin, it is the old-world Peugeots which prove the company's African pedigree.



"Egypt is not unlike the outback, although perhaps with rather more donkeys."

Take a drive from Luxor on the Nile, heading South to Aswan and then Abu Simbel along the fertile ancient plain, and you find Peugeots, Peugeots, Peugeots. Most of them are 504 Familiale taxis, but there are also 203s, 404s and 504s — in every configuration from stripped utilities to station wagons — carrying the Peugeot lion on their nose as proudly as anything Rommel or Montgomery used in the battle for North Africa.

They were all kindred spirits of a kind — not to mention slow-moving chicanes and an on-going opportunity for a major automotive disaster — when a fleet of pristine new Peugeot 605s invaded the countryside down the Nile highway.

It was no accident that Peugeot chose Egypt to show the 605 to the world's press, despite the obvious contradiction between a high-tech luxury express and one of the world's bottom-drawer countries: there are effectively no speed limits, the roads would test any car's brakes and suspension, and the weather is fine and warm when Europe is cold and wet.

For Australia, the correlation was clear too: Egypt is not unlike the outback,

although perhaps with rather more donkeys.

The 605 will definitely be added to the top of the Peugeot range in Australia, as it has been throughout the rest of the company's major markets, although plans became rather muddled in the turbulence around the Federal election. This caused JRA to miss the production "window" for the Australian 605s in June, and also upset the original marketing and cost plans because of the likelihood of the increase in luxury tax.

So now the only definite plans are that the car will be on sale in Australia very late in 1990, and that it will sell somewhere in the \$65,000 to \$75,000 range. JRA's original sales

ceiling was 700 cars a year, so that is likely to be somewhat smaller, and there is a chance that the company will offset some of the planned standard equipment against achieving a lower price.

The 605 SV 3.0 for Australia will have the 3-litre V6 engine, with 123kW and 235Nm, and a four-speed automatic transmission.

It will definitely face a tough battle in a very competitive market sector, against rivals as diverse as Volvo 760, Alfa 164, Saab 9000 and Rover Vitesse, but it is a world car which has been developed to meet any challenge.

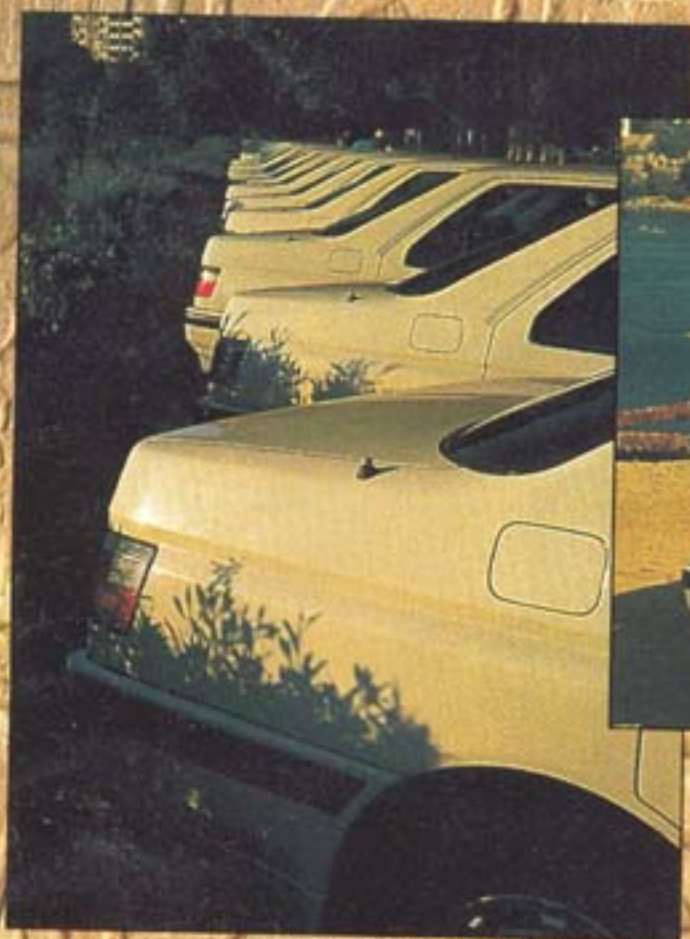
It was developed as Peugeot's top-of-the-range model, above the 405 and 205 series, and was launched at last year's Frankfurt Motor Show. Although there are similarities in size and style with Citroen's XM, last year's European Car of the Year, they only share a common gearbox and engine.

The 605 is a three-box sedan with front-wheel-drive which is built at Peugeot's Sochaux plant in France, which has been substantially upgraded and converted to just-in-time planning for its upgraded role. Despite the age of the facility the 605 area is state-of-the-art, with extensive use of robots and a worker-friendly layout.

The Sochaux upgrade is part of a plan to achieve Mercedes-style quality levels on the 605, which is vital to Peugeot's plans to have a genuine presence in the medium-luxury sector.

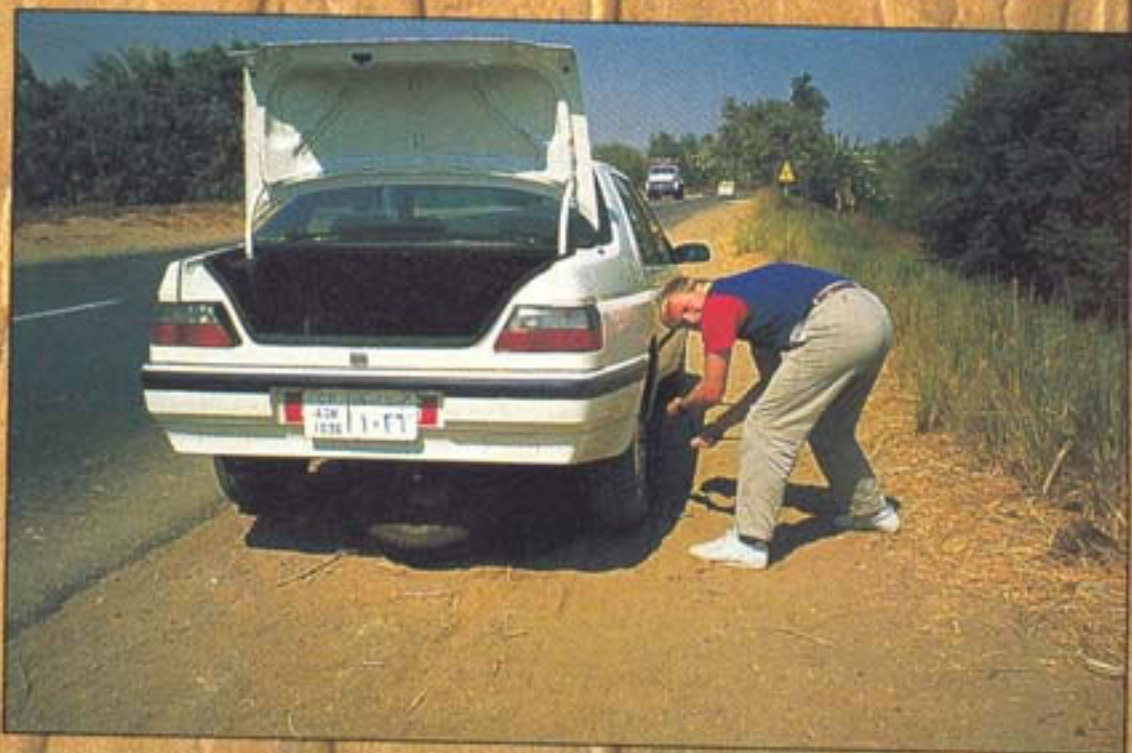
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Flat-out in the desert: the 605's good for well over 200km/h.

"Although there are similarities in size and style with Citroen's XM, they only share a common engine and gearbox."



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The car itself is not a breakthrough vehicle, but shows Peugeot's meticulous attention to detail and robust and thorough engineering.

The drag co-efficient is 0.30 and the car's dimensions are quite similar to the Alfa 161, with an overall length of 4723mm and overall width of 1799mm. It is independently sprung at all four corners – with pseudo McPherson struts with wishbones at the front and wishbones at the rear – and it also has a "reactive" adjustment system fitted to some models, although it may not come to Australia. There are also four-wheel disc brakes, probably with ABS for the local market.

Peugeot has undertaken a staggered introduction for the 605, and chose Egypt for the world launch of the latest models in the range. It included the top-line 24-valve V6 version and the automatic, as well as a diesel, but for Australians the only interest was the 3.0 automatic.

The transmission is a four-speed lock-up torque convertor and – judging from the poor and variable shift quality in the five-speed cars – Australia will do well from a gearbox which shifts smoothly and responds well to the driver's needs.

Peugeot claims a standing 400-metre time of 17.0 seconds and 0-100km/h in 9.9 seconds, which we could not verify in Egypt,

but the speedometer cranked well into the 200km/h range on a top-speed run.

Otherwise, the Egyptian driving showed that the car is very well equipped and seems extremely well built. The panel fit was good and the car was tight and quiet, as you would expect.

Standard equipment levels have not been decided for Australia, but the ABS,



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automatic air conditioning and leather seats fitted to various 605s all seemed extremely worthwhile and the power steering, electric windows and central locking were necessary accessories for the 605's market sector.

Dynamically, the car felt quite like a scaled-up 405; however, the V6 engine offers far more performance than a basic 405 and the 605 misses the super-sporty suspension of the 405 Mi16.

What emerges is a car which could handle the worst of Australian roads, with Peugeot's famed long-travel suspension, with handling which still encourages the driver to enjoy a journey.

It is always tough — and dangerous — to draw conclusions from an overseas experience but Egyptian roads are sufficiently similar to Australia, apart from the donkeys et al, to assume that the 605 will do well here.

For Peugeot it is an important car, but the 605 has been well developed to help the company step up a class from its existing model lineup. In Australia it won't be a mainstream player, but will still be a significant and worthwhile addition which will make things even tougher in the luxury market.

CAR

MODEL	Peugeot 605
BODY	Sedan
SEATING CAPACITY	Five
WARRANTY	N/A
BASE PRICE	N/A
OPTIONS FITTED	N/A
PRICE AS TESTED	N/A

ENGINE:

Location.....	Front
Cylinders.....	V6
Capacity.....	2975cc
Bore/stroke.....	93x73mm
Block.....	Cast iron
Head.....	Alloy
Valve actuation.....	SOHC
Induction.....	Multi-point fuel injection
Compression ratio.....	9.5:1
Power.....	123kW at 5600rpm
Torque.....	235Nm at 9600rpm
Specific output.....	41.3kW per litre
Power/weight ratio.....	11.9Kg per kW

TRANSMISSION:

Gearbox.....	Four-speed automatic
Driving wheels.....	Front

BODY:

Kerb weight.....	1460kg
O/A length.....	4723mm
O/A width.....	1799mm
O/A height.....	1415mm
Wheelbase.....	2800mm

Front track.....	1527mm
Rear track.....	1527mm

SUSPENSION:

Front.....	MacPherson struts stabilizer bar
Rear.....	Independent, lower arms, coils, dampers

STEERING:

Type.....	Rack and pinion
Turning circle.....	11m
Turns lock to lock.....	3.3

BRAKES:

Front.....	Ventilated discs
Rear.....	Discs

WHEELS:

Material.....	Alloy
Diameter/width.....	N/A

TYRES:

Make/type.....	N/A
Diameter/width.....	N/A

PERFORMANCE:

WEATHER	N/A
ODOMETER READING	N/A

STANDING START: (claimed)

0-100km/h.....	10.9
400 metres.....	17.5