

Car Culture Series



# Car Tidbits

- Anecdotes about Car

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## Car Tidbits

Before each trip, one of the two Benz cars will be transported to the destination by air, so that Kim Jong Il could tack the car upon getting off the train. During his visit in Russia, besides special trains, Kim Jong Il spent most of his trip time in his own Benz car.

The railway from Pyongyang to Moscow was 10,299km in full length. It was indeed a long trip, so traffic safety was a difficulty. When the special train arrived at each stop, several thousands of soldiers would surround the train for particular protection. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> time that Kim Jong Il left his mother country. During the first two visits to China, he took train, too.

### **Presidents Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Chirac of France as Fans of Home-Made Citroen**

Can you imagine the scenes that the president of France takes a French-made car to go anywhere? As the presidents of the state, Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Chirac both have profound feelings for the home-made Citroen cars for years.

Citroen, one of the national car brands in France, was the favorite of General Charles de Gaulle. He had owned 4 Citroen cars all his lifetime: two Citroen 15SiXH11 and two DS19. Citroen cars were General De Gaulle's "war-horses", and also the official vehicles when he dealt with public and government affairs during his presidential tenure.

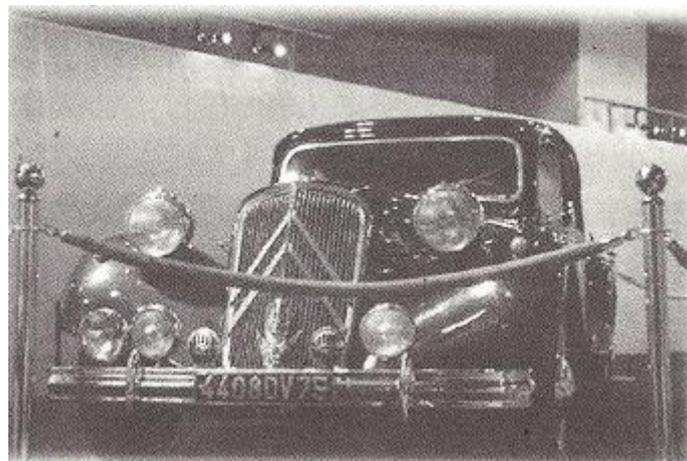


Fig. 2.6.-4 A Citroen Car Owned by President Charles De Gaulle

In 1955, Charles de Gaulle purchased his fourth Citroen car - Traction. The car took him to attend René Coty's ceremony for establishing new government held in Elysée Palace on May 29, 1958. French people could see this great general again. He, sitting in a back seat, saved the country from danger and deepened a series of political and economic reformation.





Fig. 2.6-5 Citroen Traction

During General De Gaulle's presidential term, Citroen cars played an important role when he was in danger.

On August 22, 1962, General De Gaulle in a dark grey double-breasted suit and a black tie presided over a cabinet meeting. The meeting lasted too long, from the morning till the afternoon. At the parking place, 16 black Citroen DS limousines parked there. Drivers of government ministers all gathered beside the wall in the shade. Only the driver of Citroen DS19 decorated with the pennants of French president was cleaning the car of President De Gaulle. The driver was a silent but cool-minded man with excellent driving skills. The sunset glow tinted the sky with bright colors. At 19:40, President Charles De Gaulle appeared in front of the glass door. He walked down the stairs with his wife on his arm. The equerry opened the car door for them. Mrs. De Gaulle got on the first car and sat on the left side of the back seat with Charles de Gaulle on the right. Colonel Boissieu, their son-in-law, after checking both doors of the back seat, opened the front door and sat beside the chauffeur. The president's bodyguards sat in the second car while the president's captain of the guard in the third car. The motorists in white helmets started the engines of their motorbikes and cleared the way for the president. They drove through a giant iron door. The car of the president followed closely, with the other DS-19 behind it. While the motorcade was driving out of the gate and speeding away directly towards the Clemenceau Square through avenues, a young man in a helmet was also jamming down the accelerator, kept up with the motorcade. Police in the police boxes on the way heard the harsh whistles. They knew the motorcade was near. So they were busy in giving green lights and stopping cars of other directions. The car passed through the square, driving towards another street. The young motorcyclist stopped suddenly in front of a Café. He took out a coin from the pocket, and dialed a mysterious number. On the other side of the line was the anxious killer Germain.

"The cargo was on the way," the motorcyclist said.



“Well, thank you.” The killer Germain threw away the bottle down the floor. Other 11 men took their submachine guns immediately, stepped down the stairs, got on 6 cars in the backyard separately. At 19:55, Germain raised his left arm and commanded “Move!” Six cars drove away as quick as a flash. In 10 minutes, all groups came to their ambush points. Germain hold a piece of newspaper and walked to the bus station, pretended as he was waiting for the bus. The leader of the first action group leaned on a microbus on the other side of the street. As long as Germain waived the newspaper, he would immediately command the shooters sheltered inside the bush and cars to fire, while Thonex and “the cripple” would rush out to obstruct police cars. Killers had all set the safety catch of their guns to “on”, squinted and took aim at the road. It was getting dark. The motorcade of President De Gaulle was on the suburban avenue. There were few cars, so the chauffeur started to speed up. It was near 60 km/h. Two motorcycles were left behind. When they entered Leclercq Street, the chauffeur caught a glimpse of the watch. It was 20:17. At 20:18, when Germain saw the motorcade drove towards them at last at a speed of 70 km/h. He waved the newspaper at full split. However, Bernier on the other side could hardly see his action. He turned back and asked the killer in the microbus, “Did he wave or not?” Before his voice had died away, the head of president’s car had already appeared in front of him. Bernier commanded in a rush, “Open fire!” “Dah, dah, dah...”

Bullets shot the motorcade like thunderstorms. But the speed of the car was fast enough that most of the bullets only hit tail. Two tires were hit. The two high-speed-running front tires slipped on the road because of the disappearing air pressure. The car rushed towards the front. Glasses of the back window were smashed into pieces by several bullets. Charles de Gaulle turned his head angrily and shockingly saw a bullet nearly grazed his nose in few centimeters. Colonel Boissieu who sat beside the chauffeur shouted, “Get down! Get down!” Mrs. De Gaulle sobered up. She fell down into her husband’s arms. Charles de Gaulle still sat still, “What! They want to shoot me again?” The chauffeur tried his best to control the vibration of the steering wheel. The car seemed to float on the road. And the chauffeur stepped on the brake, letting the car to skid forward slowly. At the moment that the car lost all power, he stepped on the accelerator pedal again. The Citroen car rushed toward fleetingly as a falling star.

On the bystreet at the intersection, Thonex was there. The two cars in such a high speed made him give up the idea to stop them. He decided to run out of the bystreet and drove parallel to the motorcade, so that he could sweep the president. But his hesitation for a half-second made him lagged behind Charles de Gaulle’s car and run parallel to the second car. The angry cripple leaned his body out of the window, shot all his bullets to the rear of Charles de Gaulle’s car. From the broken back window, he could see the arrogant, jeering figure of the president’s back. The bodyguard of the president on the second car took out his heavy revolver. But the driver blocked the sight of him. The bodyguard could only swear indignantly and fought back reluctantly.

Ten minutes later, the motorcade arrived at their destination. They stopped the cars on the



parking apron. A helicopter had already started the engine. Officials who awaited there came to them, surrounded the car and opened the left back door. Mrs. De Gaulle was still suffering from the shock. She shook off the small shards of glass on her skirt, being lead out of the car. Charles de Gaulle got himself out from the broken door smartly. He paid no attention to others' concerns, turning directly to his wife on the other side of the car. "Come, sweetheart. Let's go home." They went straight to the helicopter.

Citroen cars accompanied another French president Jacques Chirac for over 20 years. As early as 1989, his Citroen car was no longer in production. But Chirac still refused to change another new car. However, this vehicle was indeed the favorite of some state leaders. Many state leaders were its loyal fans, including former East German leader Erich Honecker and former president of Nicaragua Anastasio Somoza García. But no foreign leaders were obsessed with Citroen as Chirac.



Fig. 2.6-6 Citroen DS19 Favored by Some State Leaders

