

Showrooms of the Champs-Élysées – February 2016

The reason for this trip to Paris- not that a reason is really required when as appealing a city as Paris is concerned – was to go to the Rétromobile show, a report on which will be posted separately. That takes one whole day. Which leaves the best part of another day before boarding the flight back to the UK on Sunday evening. As the weekend approached, I was delighted to see that just as in the UK, the weather forecast kept changing, and that the outlook was improving, with suggestions that the Sunday would be a cold but very sunny winter's day. It seemed that this would make it perfect for wandering out the centre of the city, reacquainting myself with some of the notable landmarks, and although it was initially quite cloudy at Orly Airport, where I was staying, as the train got nearer to the centre, I could see that the sky was indeed blue and devoid of cloud. That did not last all day, but whilst the UK was being drenched and lashed by the gales of the latest named Storm, I was able to wander about the city in full tourist mode. Needless to say, I made sure to allocate some time to the Champs-Élysées area and the car showrooms which are all open on a Sunday, and which prove to be a popular tourist (and locals) attraction. As ever, there was plenty to see and visiting the five of them which feature in this report took me all morning. Here's what was on show.

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I was a little surprised to find that the display here was the same as the one which I saw when last here at the very end of September 2015. Granted that the display was newly set up at that time, but I had rather assumed it would have moved on again, but no, it was as before. The last time I saw the display in the evening, so with artificial light, whereas on this occasion, it was mid morning on a bright and sunny day. It is worth noting that of the various showrooms featured in this report, the C_42 building opens earlier than the others on a Sunday, at 10am. The showroom is right outside the entrance to the Franklin Roosevelt métro station, and even the outside is striking. I've remarked on this before, but this time finally managed to get a couple of photos to illustrate the point. Designed by Parisian architect Manuelle Gautrand, it was constructed between 2002 and 2007 as a new flagship showroom, according to a concept "intended to magnify the displayed cars in a building with strong symbolic presence". The result, as well as housing a shop for branded goods is a kind of corporate totem composed of eight vehicles stacked on platter one on top of the other. The arrangement forms a gigantic upright display around which visitors move in an ascending/descending spiral movement via flights of stairs and landings. From the top, there are superb views up and down the Champs-Élysées, over the city and across the nearby gardens and river. The cars are displayed on revolving circular platforms under a faceted mirror-ceiling that fragments and multiplies their lines and details. Besides enhancing the presence of the display models, we are told that the "effect accentuates the vertical reality of space and creates an exhilarating sense of lightness". Around this there is faceted glass which, so we are further told, plays on the distinctive shape of the Citroën logo: the chevron. At street level on the Champs-Élysées, the façade begins as a simple flat curtain wall. The double chevron soon appears, proliferating as it rises in free and inventive array right up to the summit. The glass front unfolds a gigantic origami, coloured by diaphanous white and red film that lets subdued clear light into the interior. Enough of the PR speak around the building, what of the cars?



(extrait)