

My Shs700,000 Citroën made me a village celebrity

Former military officer, Captain Rufino Akena, recalls how his beloved Citroën DS earned him admiration, shaped his reputation and became one of the most treasured possessions of his life.

BY GEOFFREY OYETOKWERA

Many Ugandans today aspire to own the latest rides as their first cars, but economic realities often lead them to start with modest brands. For Capt (rtd) Rufino Akena, a military man in the 1970s, popularly known as Kampanyola in Akokoro Town Council, Lango Sub-region, the story was different. His first car, a vintage Citroën DS, did not simply serve as a means of transport; it marked his entry into an elite circle at a time when owning a vehicle was a rare privilege.

Then, roads carried only a handful of vehicles, and seeing someone drive often attracted admiration and curiosity from communities where most people relied on bicycles or walked long distances.

Anyone who owned and drove a car was almost automatically regarded as successful. Among those viewed through that lens was Capt Akena, whose ability to drive his

own vehicle placed him among a small, admired class associated with achievement and influence.

For Capt Akena, the Citroën represented achievement and distinction. Today, the car remains one of his fondest memories.

Tell us about your first car

My first car was a 1970 Citroën DS, which had a sleek design and a vibrant colour. Its body was so reflective that you could practically see your own reflection in it. I bought it from a secondary school teacher for Shs700,000. At that time, that was a significant investment, but today that amount sounds almost unbelievable, as purchasing a car now typically requires millions. Owning that Citroën was not just about having a means of transport; it represented a proud milestone.

Did you have a unique name for it?

Ah, (laughs) young man, let me tell

you, that car was like a trusted friend to me. I drove it with great care because I was always afraid of losing such a treasured possession. The word that stands out most in my memory is "friend," because I truly loved that vehicle and treated it with pride, caution, and deep attachment.

How did the car impact your finances regarding repairs?

The cars we drove back then were quite different from yours, which seem to break down more frequently. The Citroën and other classics, such as the Fords, were built to endure tough roads, especially when one followed the service schedule. Most of my spending went toward fuel and routine maintenance, which was much simpler and less strict compared to what many modern brands require today.

Any embarrassing moments?

I do not remember any major challenges because the Citroën I bought performed exceptionally well on the road, and in those days, we enjoyed a real sense of freedom while driving. The confusion we now experience from boda bodas was unheard of. Only a few people rode bicycles, and they did so with much greater discipline and order on the road.