

Renault Clio

Featuring 1.4RT



ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY, THE CLIO has fuelled Renault's revival in the UK, though the successful "you-know-who" television adverts no doubt played a strong subsidiary role. But now, seven years on, Papa and Nicole are seeking alternative employment, while after a mid-life facelift and four-million sales, there's an all-new version of Renault's best-selling supermini.

Understandably, given the success the Clio has brought it, Renault has resisted tinkering with the successor too drastically. Three of the engines, the transmission and the front suspension – albeit with revisions – are carried over from the outgoing model, but the 6cm-longer New Clio sports all-new (though still familiar) looks, new rear suspension and a 4cm-wider track, along with greater emphasis on smoothness, refinement and safety.

The three- and five-door line-up comprises four versions, from the entry-level 1.2 and 1.9D, via mid-range RN and RT models, to the top-of-the-shop RXE. The two petrol engines carried over from the previous model are the 1.2-litre/60bhp DIET and the 1.4-litre/75bhp (down 5bhp from a one-time 80bhp, to comply with tougher emissions targets), while the 1.6-litre/90bhp (from the Megane) replaces the 1.8 that powered the former "poor man's Williams" RSi version. A 16-valve 1.6, sporting 100bhp, will soon be added to this list, while the carry-over 1.9-litre naturally aspirated

diesel will also be joined by the *direct* injection turbo-diesel from the Megane dti.

A five-speed manual gearbox (with a slicker, short-throw action) is standard across the board, with the option of a recently added brand new, four-speed Proactive automatic transmission on the 1.6, whose computer-controlled "fuzzy logic" trickery constantly analyses and adapts shift patterns to road and driving conditions.

With a stronger body, improved safety and boosted equipment levels, the new Clio is heavier than the old one. So buyers who would have contented themselves with a 1.2 version of the old model might want to consider the 1.4 version we've sampled this time round. The 1.4 isn't especially rev-happy, but is reasonably willing and (up to the legal limit, at least) significantly more refined than it was in the old model. Beyond this, however, low gearing still unearths a boomy, vocal nature, which is also shared by the smaller power unit. The crisp, snappy gearchange is all the better for its slicker, shorter throws, though it's still a touch weighty across the gate and, ultimately, lacks Japanese-style precision.

At the wheel, the Clio now sports a much better, all-in-line driving position, with a height-adjuster (but lumbar support adjustment only on the top-level RXE) to tailor the loftier seating position. There's about 4cm more legroom for taller types, and the steering wheel now has

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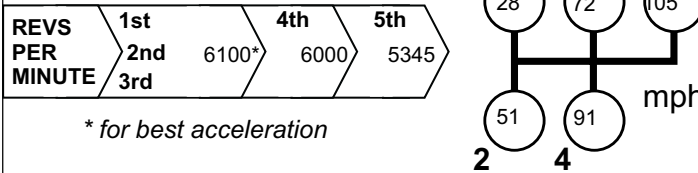
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.0	4.5	8.0	12.3
IN 5TH GEAR		6.0	12.1	18.7	27.0
IN 4TH GEAR		4.0	8.3	12.9	17.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		11.9/8.1	12.7/8.9	14.9/9.5	

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	31
In the country - quiet driving	49
Typical mpg overall	40
Realistic tank range	43 litres/380 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted, transverse four cylinder in line. Alloy block and head; five main bearings

Size 75.8 x 77.0mm = 1390cc

Power 75bhp at 5500rpm

Torque 86 lb ft at 4250rpm

Valves single (belt-driven) overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via roller rockers

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless ignition. 50-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual; front-wheel drive (automatic option on 1.6 only)

Mph per 1000rpm 19.6 in 5th, 15.2 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs and lower arms. Rear: semi-independent, trailing arms linked by transverse torsion beam. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars front and rear

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance (except 1.2 and 1.9D); 3.4 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.4m between kerbs, with 17.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5B steel with 165/70R13 79T tyres (Michelin XT-1 Energy on test car); full-size spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with vacuum servo. Electronic anti-lock control standard on RT and RXE, optional on all other models

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●●○○ rear ●●○○○

Door locking

central locking? ●●○○○

remote control? ●●○○○

Head restraints

front ●●●○○ rear *

*(2 standard on 1.6RXE)

auto window closure? ●●○○○

dead locks? ●●○○○

Interior

safety padding ●●●○○

driver's airbag? ●●○○○

other airbags? ●●○○○

side impact protection ●●●○○

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

Alarm (standard on RXE only)

engine immobilised? ●●○○○

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●○○

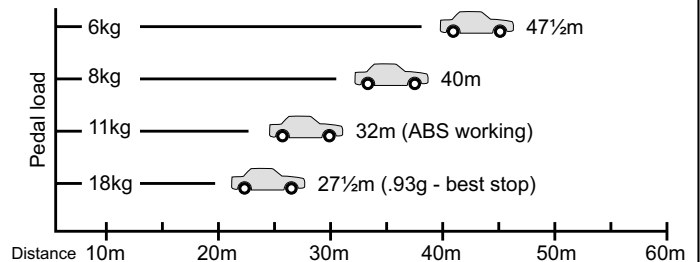
standard on test car factory fitted option not available

Euro NCAP crash test results - not available

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●○○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●○○○ Handbrake ●●○○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop with ABS is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)

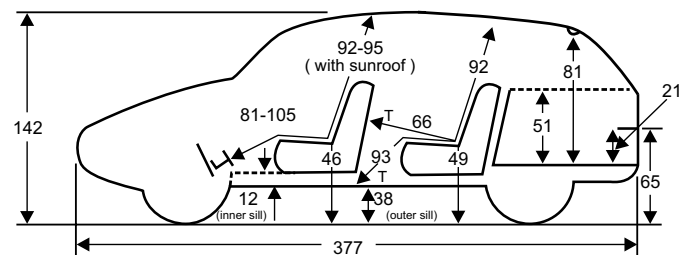


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
9kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

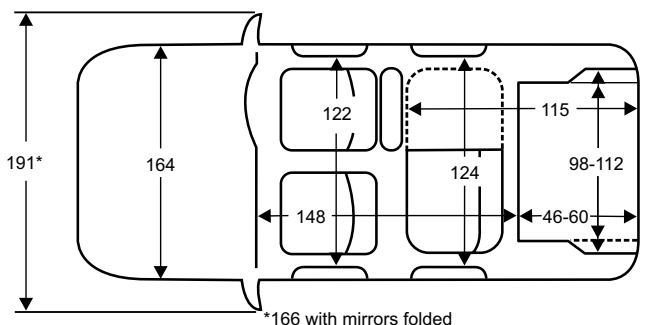
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



(limited) tilt adjustment on all models. The more supportive seats are comfortable in a squidgy sort of way, while the up-and-over tilt-and-slide sunroof preserves a class-average helping of headroom, but a touch more thigh support would be appreciated by longer-legged occupants.

Thanks to new torsion beam rear suspension, ride comfort now trails the best in this class by only a small amount, with smooth, flowing progress and well-rounded bump absorption over the lumpy bits, accompanied by lower levels of road noise. Power steering – standard on the top three models and optionally available on the 1.9D – is nicely weighted (though perhaps a little low-g geared for keener types), but cornering is neither as much fun nor as roll-free as the provision of anti-roll bars at each end might suggest. Consequently, the Clio is safe and surefooted at sensible speeds, but feels dowdy and a little lacking in sparkle at a brisker pace compared with the Fiesta, for example.

Inside, there's a new-found solidity and a well-built feel to the neater, more logical fascia, which includes clear, legible dials in the hooded instrument pod. A clever "jumping" wiper mechanism (like Mercedes uses) keeps the unswept screen pillar triangle down to manageable proportions and, commendably, all Clios share Renault's excellent remote fingertip controls for the integrated radio/cassette player. The heating and ventilation system works well and permits a tiered warm feet/cool face compromise. Airflow even extended to rear footwell ducts on our RT-spec test car, contrary to literature indicating that these are fitted only on the RXE model.

Access to a higher back seat presents few problems on the five-door, but passengers will need to be a bit more athletic to clamber aboard the three-door. This does its best, however, with seats that slide forward as they're tilted, and backrests that helpfully "remember" their original recline setting. Our tape measure couldn't, in all honesty, detect the additional centimetre or so of rear kneeroom that Renault claims for the new Clio, although the domed roofline does liberate a finger-width or two more headroom. At least averagely roomy for the class, the Clio has the measure of a Fiesta or Polo in accommodating lankier teenagers in the back, but as before, it still trails the Corsa and Fiat Punto when space really matters.

The new Clio provides three times the interior stowage space of the old model, claims Renault, but despite

increased overall length, there's no more boot space on offer. The boot remains a sensible shape, with 4-5cm more height under the load cover compensating for a similar reduction between the wheelarches, but a strengthening beam added behind the 60/40-folding back seats stands 5-6cm proud of the load floor, forming an inconvenient hump across the otherwise flat load deck.

It's all in the cause of safety, however, and is just one of several key improvements in this area. The new stiffer structure sports larger front airbags (passenger's side optional), improved front seatbelt pretensioners plus webbing load limiters, and revised head restraints. The Clio will also offer side impact airbags – a rare fitment so far in this class. Secondary safety features include a blind spot eliminator on the driver's door mirror, a door-ajar warning lamp and the now near-universal high-level third brake light. ABS (with electronic rear brake force regulation) is standard on the top two models and optionally available on the rest.

Despite its mid-range status, the 1.4RT comes well equipped, with those anti-lock brakes, power steering, remote-control central locking, electric front windows and an electric sunroof, all standard. Renault has finally ditched its user *un*friendly immobiliser in place of a much more convenient, embedded-transponder type, but an alarm costs extra on all but the RXE model. With increased weight over the previous model (despite the novel use of composite front wings and polycarbonate headlamp lenses), performance and economy both suffer a little. However, the 1.4 still managed to crack the 40mpg barrier in our tests – a couple of mpg down on both the class average and its predecessor.

VERDICT

It may be *au revoir* to Nicole, but let's look on the bright side; the new Clio is as cute as ever and it's significantly better *under* its skin, too. Not only does it ride better, with quieter, more-refined manners, it also feels more mature and solidly built. The new-look interior and better-sorted driving position are distinctly worthwhile, as well, although performance and economy have both suffered a little and, in 1.4 form at least, mechanical manners still leave a little to be desired. Ultimately the Clio lacks sparkle and it could be more entertaining to drive, but thanks to more equipment and a lower price, its value looks stronger than ever.

HOW THE CLIO COMPARES*	Engine Cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum Legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
RENAULT CLIO 1.4RT	1390/75	3560	12.3	27.0/17.8	40	27½/18*	105	93/66	3.4/10.4(p)	377
Citroën Saxo 1.4	1360/75	3180	11.5	27.0/18.6	46½	29/27	105	91/65	3.7/10.7	372
Fiat Punto 1.2 75	1242/75	3650	13.7	33.6/23.1	42	29/16	105	102/71	2.9/10.2(p)	376
Ford Fiesta 1.4	1388/90	3520	11.1	28.6/18.7	41	26/18*	108	92/66	2.9/10.1(p)	383
Toyota Starlet 1.3	1332/74	3540	12.4	25.5/19.2	43	30/12	103	90/60	3.2/9.8(p)	374
Vauxhall Corsa 1.4 16v	1389/90	3620	10.0	23.8/16.1	39½	28½/16	109	99/69	2.8/10.4(p)	373
VW Polo 1.4	1390/60	3180	14.5	29.9/20.4	42	29½/16	107	91/67	2.9/10.1(p)	372
*all five-door hatchbacks						*with ABS		(p)power-assisted		