

Renault Laguna II

Featured model: 1.8 16v Hatchback Dynamique



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆☆☆○○
Space/practicality	☆☆○○○○
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○○
Safety	☆☆☆☆○○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○○
Fuel economy	☆☆☆☆○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1783cc, 4-cylinder, petrol: 123bhp at 5750rpm, 125 lb ft at 3750rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 20.8 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.9 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with coil springs; telescopic dampers

steering engine-speed sensitive hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.9m diameter turning circle between kerbs (17.4m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with anti-skid and brake-assist override controls both standard

wheels/tyres 6½in pressed aluminium with 205/55R16 tyres (cast alloy – with 225/45R17 on Dynamique test car); 205/55R16 (steel) spare

LIKES ...

oddments spaces lined – so silent!
hazard lights come on in heavy braking
entire facia has soft-feel finish
no external aerial to get bent

and GRIPES

rear cushions fixed – no flat load deck
offside door mirror adjustment limited
odd-sized spare wheel
sun visors too shallow

THE LAGUNA RANGE

type and size upper medium (mid-priced) hatchback and estate

trim levels Authentique, Expression, Dynamique, Privilège, Initiale

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/110bhp; 4/1.8/123, 4/2.0(Di)/140, V6/3.0/210 diesel: 4/1.9/120, (4/2.2/145 later)

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed (petrol) and 6-speed (diesel); 4/5-speed stepped automatics, with torque converter, optional

WITH THE LATEST MONDEO getting rave reviews, is it worth considering this Gallic alternative? We think so, because the elegant Laguna not only offers "something a bit different", but it's arguably one of the safest cars in its sector. It also boasts a bunch of new electronic aids to the motoring good life.

The first of these is needed to get into the car. There are no keys, just a card, with the promise of automatic unlocking (soon) simply because you're carrying the card on you. Other unique features include being able to check your tyre pressures without having to get out and kick them, the possibility of no less than eight airbags (six on our car), plus pretensioning belts for four.

The Laguna isn't as long as the Mondeo, and it shows in the back seat area. The absence of footroom under the front seats results in a "knees-up" posture, though kneeroom is adequate. In truth, Renault has gone for style before functionality – even the rear cushion remains fixed, though the extended load area is carefully trimmed.

It's a different story up front, however; both seats have height adjusters and generally cosset well, with good legroom for both taller and shorter drivers. There are irritations in control, but they're of a minor nature, such as hard-to-see warning lights low-down and a door mirror that's not converted for right-hand drive.

When it comes to pressing the new (old-fashioned) starter button, the Laguna soon demonstrates differences from the Ford in its road manners, too.

Even in the "sporty" Dynamique, with its ultra-low-profile-tyres, the suspension is biased more towards ride than handling prowess, and its engine's unremarkable performance is delivered with affable flexibility around town and more hush at motorway pace. Nevertheless, around town the two litre, with more power, could be a good idea.

The ABS brakes have brake-assist, that reduces the effort required if you depress the pedal suddenly (as in an emergency). This sound notion is spoilt by too much servo assistance at any time – so you tend to stop more quickly than you bargain for, when there isn't a panic situation.

The Laguna's crash-safety seems beyond reproach, although our front passengers found the seatbelt socket difficult to locate. Also, we hope that all the new features designed to augment safety and security prove reliable – the previous Laguna had a patchy track record in this respect.

VERDICT

The Laguna 1.8 Hatchback is very safe and very cossetting, yet it shuns Scenic-style versatility with maximum use of space. Neither does it offer anything special in terms of acceleration or fuel economy, yet it's a very undemanding, flexible performer. Though not a "sweep-the-board" class leader, its special convenience, safety and security features nevertheless break new ground in the family car sector. Nice and reassuring.

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★☆☆○○					
<i>Variable valve timing shows in good flexibility and low-speed pulling – 35mph acceptable in top. Nice shift, but weightier clutch</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.5	9.7	13.3		
30-50mph	4.3	9.3	12.6		
40-60mph	5.4	9.2	13.2		
50-70mph	6.9	9.7	13.5		
30-70mph	11.2	19.0	26.1		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	30	54½	80	101½	119

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★☆☆○○				
<i>Like 406, rear space disappointing - in all directions. Good for short drivers, though. Flat load deck and effortless tailgate but prominent door sills</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>		inside († with sunroof)		
outside		front - legroom	82-110	
length	458	- headroom	91-97†	
width - inc mirrors	207	rear - typical leg/	97/	
- mirrors folded	179	kneeroom	71	
height (no roof bars)	143	- headroom	90	
load sill height	18/70	- hiproom	129	
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		load space (all seats in use)		
steering		<i>(litres/cu ft)</i>	490/17.3	
turns lock-to-lock	3.2	load length	91-168	
turning circle (metres)	10.9	full length to fascia	264	
easy to park/garage?		load width	101-137	
	★☆☆○○	load height (to shelf/	46-53/	
		to top of aperture)	72	
* rear acoustic sensors optional				

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★☆☆○○				
<i>Reach and rake steering plus seat height and lumbar levers. Clear, accurate displays plus unusual "card key" and tyre pressure monitor. Automatic locking – only if you want it</i>				
				

SAFETY ★☆☆○○		
<i>Servo assistance too much for our liking - undermines the good sense of brake-assist. If it comes to the crunch, however, this is the car to be in</i>		
braking		dry road stopping distance
pedal feel	★☆☆○○	<i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>
in emergency	★☆☆○○	pedal load
handbrake	★☆☆○○	distance
		gradual 10kg 31+m
		rapid 12kg 25m best stop
		+4kg ie 16kg 25m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS 1.8 tested 2001		
front impact 94%		side impact 100%
overall 97%	★☆☆○○	pedestrian rating ★☆☆○○

SECURITY FEATURES		
central locking	✓	alarm (Dynamique up) ✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser ✓
auto window closure	✗	luggage security ★☆☆○○
deadlocks	✓	
✓ standard	0 factory option	✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★☆☆○○	
<i>Dynamique grippy and happy to be hustled, but it lacks Mondeo's rapport and fine-honed responsiveness. Pleasant steering</i>	
	

COMFORT ★☆☆○○	
<i>Turns tables on Mondeo 1.8 in this respect, though it's a close thing. A shade gruff around 60mph – better at 70. Good ride and front seats. Clever air-con has a "half-on" economy position</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★☆☆○○	
<i>Pessimistic gauge but trip computer reliable – so superb range. Good to average result with reasonable thirst in warm-up phase. Easy filler</i>	
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	24½
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	31½
motorway (70mph cruising)	37
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	38
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	44
typical mpg overall	37
realistic tank capacity/range	64 litres/520 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	28.2/46.3/37.6
CO ₂ emissions 180 g/km	car tax band 3

HOW THE LAGUNA 1.8 16V COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
RENAULT LAGUNA 1.8 16v	4/1783/123	3370	11.2	26.1/19.0	37	25/12*	110	97/71	3.2/10.9	458
Ford Mondeo 1.8	4/1798/125	3170	9.8	27.4/18.9	36½	25/19*	111	108/84	2.8/11.3	473
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8	4/1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38½	24/18*	111	101/73	3.0/10.9	450
Honda Accord 1.8	4/1850/136	3380	10.2	26.2/18.9	32	26½/15*	109	100/73	3.1/11.1	459
Nissan Primera 2.0 (Auto)	4/1998/140	2600	9.1	Auto	32½	24/14*	107	99/74	2.7/12.3	452
Peugeot 406 2.0	4/1998/135	3210	10.5	27.2/17.6	32½	26½/18	113	98/75	3.1/11.2	460

*with ABS