

Renault Clio

Featured model: 1.4 16v Etoile



THE CLIO HAS PROVED TO BE A best-seller throughout Europe and this latest version – a completely revised model – builds on the success of its predecessor. It's a little bigger than before and promises something for everyone; there are budget, luxury and sporting versions, thanks to an extensive "Collections" range. From its 22-model line-up, we've chosen the 1.4 16v engine in a mid-range Etoile from the more up-market Elegance collection.

This new twin-cam unit (also used in Megane and Scenic) deserves its wider audience because it's a little gem of an engine, that's not only happy to tip-toe through traffic, but also really comes alive once the open road beckons.

Although always smooth, it isn't especially lively or tractable at lower rpm, but take it beyond 3500 and it's transformed into a swift performer that loves to rev yet remains mechanically refined. It's an economical engine, too, that's complemented by a nicely weighted clutch and a deft, though not Japanese-slick, gearchange.

The suspension gives easy, flowing progress and well-rounded bump absorption without excessive roll or nervousness over bumps. Power steering is comfortably weighted, too, though it might prove low geared for keener types who could also find the safe and surefooted Clio lacking in handling sparkle at a brisker pace.

Inside the air conditioned cabin there's a feeling of solidity and quality to the neat, logical facia and well-engineered controls – pity the trip computer isn't legible in sunlight, though. Commendably, all Clios have Renault's excellent fingertip controls for the integrated hi-fi system. Seat support is much better than in earlier Clios, the driver's in this case with height and lumbar adjustment. The wheel is tilt-adjustable, too, so taller drivers are well catered for, especially as the tilt-and-slide glass sunroof (with sunscreen) is of the up-and-over kind, thereby stealing less space.

Passenger access is no problem on the five-door, but there isn't a lot of room in the back. Provided you're not too big, the seat supports well, with space for three at a pinch, all of whom have a lap and diagonal seatbelt. In fact, safety features are carefully considered throughout the car, and include two front airbags plus the option of side 'bags.

Although the boot is sensibly shaped, a transverse strengthening beam and the folded rear seat backrests form a sometimes inconvenient two-tier load deck.

VERDICT

In its earlier days (who can forget Nicole?) the Clio relied heavily on marketing hype. Not any more. It's a thoroughly proficient small hatchback that, while not exactly cutting a dash, feels so accommodating and impresses with its all-round competence.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1390cc, 4 cylinder, petrol. 98bhp at 6000rpm, 94 lb ft at 3750rpm. Belt-driven DOHC, 16 valves. Electronic multi-point fuel injection

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive. 20.0mph/1000rpm in 5th, 15.5 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: transverse torsion beam and trailing arms

steering hydraulic power assisted. 3.4 turns lock-to-lock; 10.4m diameter turning circle between kerbs (17.0m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear. ABS with EBD (optional on 1.4 16v Etoile) fitted to test car

wheels/tyres 5in steel with 165/65R14T tyres (Michelin Energy XSE on test car); full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

"dingproof" plastic front wings
plenty of handy storage spaces
flush-mounted rear seatbelt sockets
swivelling front map light

gear lever lurch on torque reversal
odometer inaccuracy (reads 4% long)
back window "flattens" following cars
rear head restraints mar vision

THE CLIO RANGE

body 3- and 5-door supermini hatchback
trim levels Freeway: Liberté, Grande, MTV. Elegance: Alizé, Etoile, Initiale Sport: Sport, Si, RSi, Renaultsport 172
engines petrol: 1.2 8v/60bhp, 1.4 8v/75bhp, 1.4 16v/98bhp, 1.6 16v/110bhp, 2.0 16v/172. diesel: 1.9D/65bhp, 1.9dTi/80bhp

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed "Proactive" automatic with torque converter optional on 1.4 16v and 1.6 16v)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★★★○					
<i>New 16v engine gives spirited acceleration beyond 3500rpm. Quicker, "cleaner" and more economical than old 8-valver, too</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	3.5	6.5	9.2	13.6	
30-50mph	4.3	6.2	8.8	13.0	
40-60mph	5.3	6.3	8.8	13.5	
50-70mph	6.9	7.0	9.2	14.5	
30-70mph	11.2	13.2	18.0	27.5	
max speed in each gear (*using 6400rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	31	55	77	100	112

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★○○○			
<i>Rear passenger space is "snug" – bettered by Corsa and Punto. Boot has a practical shape but crossbar precludes a flat load floor</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatchback)</i>			
	inside	<i>(† with sunroof)</i>	
outside	front - legroom	85-106	
length	377	- headroom 89-95†	
width - inc mirrors	194	rear - typical leg/	93/
- mirrors folded	178	kneeroom	65
height	142	- headroom	90
load sill	21/66	- hiproom	124
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		load space <i>(all seats in use)</i>	
steering		<i>(litres/cu ft)</i>	305/10.8
turns lock-to-lock	3.4	load length	57-120
turning circle <i>(metres)</i>	10.4	load width	98-112
easy to park/garage?		load height <i>(to shelf)</i>	51
	★★★★○	<i>(to top of aperture)</i>	84

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★○○○	
<i>Controls work with ease and precision. Speedo calibrated 20, 40, 60 etc and kph markings illegible – as is trip computer in sunlight</i>	
	

SAFETY ★★★★○	
<i>Safety-conscious interior includes twin airbags, three rear belts, Isofix mounts. ABS option reassuring but best stop unimpressive</i>	
braking	
pedal feel	★★★★○
in emergency	★★○○○
handbrake	★★★○○
dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with optional ABS)</i>	
pedal load	distance
10kg	33m
20kg	29m best stop
+4kg ie 24kg	29½m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Clio II not tested yet

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✗	luggage security	★★★★○
deadlocks	✗		
✓ standard	○ factory option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★○○	
<i>Lacks the poise and agility of rivals such as Fiesta, but steady drivers will find the Clio a pleasing, easy-going all-rounder</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★★○○
<i>Seats offer squidgy comfort and combine with supple suspension to give pleasant ride. Quiet cruiser. Air con, sunroof standard</i>

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★○○			
<i>Clio can't match abstemious Saxo here, but proves slightly better than the class average. Modest thirst even when driven hard. Easy-filling tank gives a generous range between fill-ups</i>			
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)		
worst (hard/urban)	34	urban	32.1
best (gentle/rural)	51	extra urban	54.3
overall mpg on test	42	combined	43.5
realistic tank capacity	43 litres	CO ₂ emissions	155g/km
typical range	400 miles	car tax band	B

HOW THE CLIO 1.4 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 (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
RENAULT CLIO 1.4 16v	4/1390/98	3490	11.2	27.5/18.0	42	29/20	106	93/65	3.4/10.4	377
Citroën Saxo 1.4	4/1360/75	3180	11.5	27.0/18.6	46½	29/27	105	91/66	3.7/10.7	372
Fiat Punto 1.2 16v	4/1242/80	3210	11.7	29.7/20.2	41	27/12	108	96/67	2.8/10.8	384
Ford Fiesta 1.4	4/1388/90	3520	11.1	28.6/18.7	41	28/16	108	92/67	2.9/10.1	383
Rover 25iS	4/1396/103	3360	11.4	32.5/22.0	38	28/14	107	97/70	3.0/10.3	399
Vauxhall Corsa 1.4 16v	4/1389/90	3620	10.0	23.8/16.1	42	28½/16	104	99/67	2.8/10.4	373