



Renault Megane



What's new?

Restyled Megane features revised interior, upgraded equipment and safety features. There are chassis mods, too, but the significant changes are under-bonnet.

REVAMPS AND FACELIFTS ARE ALL THE rage these days. And with newer rivals like the Ford Focus, VW Golf and Vauxhall Astra rapidly gaining ground on this popular three-year old, Renault decided it was time to give its top-selling Megane a "nip and tuck". It's also used the opportunity to distance the market-dominating Scenic version from the rest of the line-up, though the pioneering mini-MPV will get its own revamp later in the year.

Contrary to first appearances, the makeover amounts to significantly more than just a grille and headlamp job to tackle the original "buck-toothed" looks. Apart from an obviously restyled nose and tail, only the doors, roof and rear wings are carried over from the old model. The interior has also been freshened up, with new, softer

trim and better quality plastics, new door panels (now trimmed up to window level) and more generous stowage bins. A revised dash houses more neatly grouped warning lamps and larger, restyled dials (now white faced on Coupé, Cabriolet and Sport versions), while all models now sport a rev counter as standard.

Safety credentials have been upgraded and there are a few chassis tweaks, too, but the most important changes lie where they were most needed – under the bonnet. A revised 75bhp 1.4-litre 8-valve engine lives on in the new range's base (Liberté) model, though with improved torque, refinement and economy. This is joined by a pair of new 1.4- and 1.6-litre 16-valvers, offering a healthy 95bhp and 110bhp, respectively. These are not only significantly more powerful than their 75 and 90bhp (8-valve) predecessors, but Renault claims they're significantly "greener" and more economical, too.

Diesel power continues in the form of a 65bhp naturally aspirated 1.9, or there's a livelier 100bhp on offer via direct-injection turbo power. Both units are carried over from the old model, though with numerous revisions and also benefiting from reduced servicing requirements.

The heavily revised range will also see the arrival of a new two-litre *direct*-injection petrol engine – the first European engine to squirt its fuel straight into the cylinders, rather than pre-mixing it with air. The 140bhp unit is offered only in Coupé and Cabriolet variants, replacing the former 150bhp two-litre, but although less powerful, its mid-range torque and economy are both substantially improved.

The 100bhp dTi diesel and 110bhp 1.6 petrol versions adopt uprated front suspension (previously used on the 2.0 16v and Scenic), with the four torsion-bar rear suspension (previously confined to the two-litre) adopted across the board. ABS, which has been standard across the line-up since 1998, is upgraded to the latest generation incorporating EBV (electronically controlled rear brake proportioning), while all versions with 100bhp or more are now fitted with larger 280mm front discs. The new range also mirrors the Laguna's switch to larger diameter road wheels, adopting 14-inch wheels in favour of the 1.4 and 1.9D's former 13-inch items, 185/60-shod 15-inch wheels for 1.6 16v and 1.9dTi models and 16-inch alloys wrapped in 195/50-sized rubber on the 2.0 16v IDE.

Fitting driver, passenger and side airbags as standard across the line-up enhances the Megane's already impressive safety record – the old model achieved a top, four-star rating (and highest score in class) in Euro NCAP crash safety tests. In addition to load-limiter and pretensioner-equipped seatbelts, airbags and close-coupled head restraints up front, the new model provides three-point, inertia-reel seatbelts for all three rear occupants (on all models), together with a trio of head restraints on most versions.

Dubbing the new line-up “a range without options”, Renault instead offers no fewer than seven different equipment levels, four body styles (Hatch, Classic saloon, Coupé and Cabriolet) and six engines (1.4 8-valve, 1.4, 1.6 and two-litre 16-valve units, plus the two diesels). These allow customers to choose the version best suited to their needs, without getting bogged down in a complicated list of options. There is *one* factory option though : metallic paint.

Base level equipment is now higher, with even the entry-level Libert e sporting ABS, four airbags, power steering, a height-adjustable steering wheel, central locking and electric front windows, and a four-speaker, remotely controlled audio set-up. Price differentials between trim levels have also been closed up, making it easier to trade up between steps in the range.

Understandably, not all trim levels and power units are available in each body style, but even the sporty Coup e and Cabriolet versions offer four equipment levels (entry, Sport, Sport Aliz e and Monaco), while three different power units – 1.4 16v, 1.6 16v and 2.0 16v IDE – are available in the Coup e.

These changes give the new Megane a smarter, higher quality feel at the wheel, with sharper cornering manners and reduced body roll. The (unchanged) steering feels fairly direct, although keener drivers might appreciate a little more feedback, but ride quality has suffered to a small extent, feeling agreeably firmer, but now seeming just a little *too* sporty on occasions.

Power outputs for the new engines are well above par, resulting in lively performance without too much of the peakiness normally associated with 16-valve engines. Judging by the 1.4 16-valve we sampled, they're fairly refined, too. But although they're significantly smoother and more subdued than their predecessors they still sound a touch raucous when extended.

Confirming the new engines' boosted performance and economy, the 114mph 1.4 16v despatches the benchmark 0-62mph sprint in a claimed 11.8sec – two seconds sprightlier than the 1.4 8-valve carried over to the new line-up – with the 1.6 16v just cracking the briskish 10sec barrier. Going by government “combined” mpg figures, economy looks equally impressive, witnessed by the fact that the 1.6 16v (mated to Renault's Proactive four-speed automatic) is now the only hatchback model *not* to crack the 40mpg barrier. Mind you, the previous 1.6 8-valve was no slouch in the economy stakes, either; so we'll have to await a full road test to see whether the new line-up's parsimony on paper is also achieved in practice.

VERDICT

The revised line-up sports a useful catalogue of improvements, particularly where they were most needed – under the bonnet. It gives a useful boost in all-round attraction, yet without diluting any of the Megane's original appeal. Ultimately, this popular hatch still fails to dynamically equal the Astra or Focus, but by a slimmer margin now than before. With smart new looks, generous equipment, keen value and an unrivalled safety score-sheet, it's hard to see the Megane's sales success doing anything but continue – and there's still a revamped Scenic version to come.



FACTS AND FIGURES

BODY						
styles	5-door hatch		4-door saloon	3-door Coupé	2-door Cabriolet	
length x width - excl mirrors (cm)	413 x 170		440 x 170	393 x 170	403 x 170	
trim levels	seven		five	four	four	
ENGINES	1.4e 8v	1.4 16v	1.6 16v	2.0 16v IDE	1.9D	1.9dTi
	front-mounted, transverse, four-cylinder in line					
valves/fuel	8v petrol	16v petrol	16v petrol	16v direct-injection petrol	electronically controlled diesel	direct-injection diesel, with turbo
capacity (cc)	1390	1390	1598	1998	1870	1870
power (bhp/rpm)	75/5500	95/6000	110/5750	140/5500	65/4500	100/4000
torque (lb ft/rpm)	85/4000	94/3750	109/3750	148/5500	89/2250	148/2000
TRANSMISSION	5-speed manual or 4-speed auto				5-speed manual or 4-speed auto	
CHASSIS						
suspension - front - rear	independent, MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower arms and anti-roll bar trailing arms with programmed movement and four torsion bars on all versions					
steering	rack and pinion, with hvdraulic power assistance on all versions					
brakes - front - rear	259mm disc		280mm disc		259mm disc	280mm disc
	203mm drum		238mm disc		203mm drum	
ABS	standard on all versions					
tyres	175/65 R14T		185/60 R15H	195/50 R16	175/65 R14T	185/60 R15H
PERFORMANCE	5-door (auto in brackets)			3-door Coupé	5-door (auto in brackets)	
0-62mph (sec)	13.8	11.8	9.8 (12.3)	8.6	17.9	11.6 (12.2)
maximum speed (mph)	106	114	121 (116)	132	98	115 (115)
overall mpg (aov't combined)	42.8	42.8	40.4 (39.8)	37.2	46.3	54.3 (54.3)
luggage capacity (litres/cu ft)	5-door hatch 348/12.3		3-door Coupé 288/10.2	2-door Cabriolet 281/9.9	4-door saloon 510/18.0	

