

# Renault Megane Coupé

*Featured model: 2.0 IDE Privilege +*



**N**OBODY CAN ACCUSE RENAULT of not making the most of the Megane platform. From the five distinct body styles (six if you include the estate which isn't available here), there's a model to suit most tastes. This Coupé represents the sporting end of the range, of course, and nothing in the line-up comes sportier than the 2.0 IDE.

Its 140bhp comes from Renault's direct injection petrol engine (the first European power unit of its kind) that boasts a smoother and more muscular torque curve than its predecessor. What it lacks in refinement – it's boomy mid range and at high revs – it makes up for by providing brisk initial acceleration, followed by a fiery thrust from 4000rpm onwards. Adding to the fun is a smooth and co-operative (if slightly long-throw) gearchange.

Canny engineering ensures that torque steer and transmission shunt are all but eliminated. There's only the occasional twitch as the wide, grippy Michelins "tramline", but being low-profile (50-Series) they're prone to bump-thump on potholes and cats'-eyes.

Similarly, the suspension feels firm and jiggly on broken tarmac in suburbia. The ride improves on the smoother open road, where the driver soon learns to appreciate the car's taut feel and proficient damping when pressing on. Well-weighted steering and roll resistance give cornering confidence, as well. It's fine as far as it goes, but we wish that Renault could have injected even more spirit and sparkle into the handling.

Nothing wrong with the excellent brakes in everyday use, but an emergency stop calls for a pedal load that some drivers simply couldn't muster.

Aside from white-faced instruments, there's nothing sporty about the snug, leather-trimmed, air-conditioned cabin. Nevertheless, those big, clear dials, good vision and convenient stalk controls make life easy for the driver in the shapely and supportive seat, which has both height and lumbar adjustment.

Pity any adults in the cramped back seats, though; in fact, only children need apply – headroom and legroom are minimal. For safety's sake, only the front passenger's seat has a tip-and-slide function (with a memory).

On the credit side, there's plenty of luggage space in the bigger-than-expected boot, as well as on the 60/40 split rear seatbacks when they're tipped forward. There aren't too many storage spaces up front, however.

## VERDICT

**Most people will give Renault credit for this Megane's makeover from holdall to sporty looking roadholder. It's quick, soundly built and safe, with a fair amount of driver entertainment value. Yet somehow, its humdrum origins still show. Unlike the Puma, this Megane doesn't capture the more discerning driver's total involvement or enjoyment. Colourful but not a classic.**

## AT A GLANCE

*considering size, price and rivals*

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

## SPECIFICATION

**engine** 1998cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 140bhp at 5500rpm, 147 lb ft at 4250rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves  
**transmission** 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.4 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.4 in 4th

**suspension** front: independent coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar.

Rear: transverse torsion bars, independent trailing arms, telescopic dampers

**steering** hydraulic power assistance; 3.1 turns lock-to-lock; 10.35m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.1m for one turn of the wheel)

**brakes** ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with standard anti-lock (ABS) control

**wheels/tyres** 6½in alloy with 195/50R16V tyres (Michelin Pilot Primacy on test car); steel "space-saver" temporary spare

## LIKES ...

auto rear wipe when reverse selected  
 electrically worked rear side windows  
 illuminated mirrors on sun visors  
 easy-to-clean alloy wheels  
 sunglasses holder for driver

## and GRIPES

no cool-face/warm-feet airflow setting  
 air conditioning warning light minute  
 emergency flasher switch not obvious  
 only limited oddments space  
 brakes emit rubbing noise when applied

## THE MEGANE COUPE RANGE

**size and type** two-door, lower-medium coupé (mid-priced)

**trim levels** Expression, Dynamique (+), Privilege (+)

**engines** petrol: 4 cylinder/1.4 litre/95bhp, 4/1.6/110, 4/2.0 IDE/140; diesel: not available

**drive** front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed automatic available on 1.6 models)

OVERTAKING ABILITY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>					
<i>Vigorous performance from feisty DI engine, especially from 4000rpm, but high revs create loud boominess. Not particularly tractable but smooth, meaty gearshift keeps things nicely on the boil</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ <sup>th</sup> gear	⑤ <sup>th</sup> gear		
20-40mph	2.5	7.3	9.8		
30-50mph	3.2	7.0	9.4		
40-60mph	3.9	7.1	9.6		
50-70mph	5.0	7.1	10.2		
<b>30-70mph</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>19.6</b>		
max speed in each gear (*using 5750rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	29	54	79	100	128

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY <span style="float:right">★★★○○○</span>			
<i>Strictly a 2+2. Very cramped in the back except for youngsters but fold rear backrests forward and there's lots of luggage space for a touring twosome. Vertical boot opening makes loading tricky</i>			
<i>in centimetres (2-door coupé)</i>		<b>inside</b>	(† with sunroof)
<b>outside</b>		front - legroom	89-108
length	393	- headroom	86-91†
width - inc mirrors	198	rear - typical leg/	88/
- mirrors folded	170	kneeroom	59
height (no roof bars)	136	- headroom	86
load sill height	14/63	- hiproom	129
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		<b>load space</b> (all seats in use)	
<b>steering</b>		(litres/cu ft)	355/12.5
turns lock-to-lock	3.1	load length	65
turning circle (metres)	10.35	full length to fascia	No
easy to park/garage?		load width	111
	★★★★○	load height	49

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS <span style="float:right">★★★★○○</span>	
<i>Comfortable driving position – just needs finding; can't heel-and-toe, though. Some switches obscured, but trip computer, dials, warning light cluster excellent. Good vision but mirrors are small</i>	
	

HOW THE MEGANE COUPE 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 MEGANE COUPE	4/1998/140	3270	8.2	19.6/14.1	36	25½/42	108	88/59	3.1/10.4	397
Ford Puma 1.7	4/1679/123	3565	8.6	18.9/13.2	37	24½/32	109	95/67	2.8/10.3	398
Mazda MX-5 1.8	4/1839/140	3560	8.1	21.4/14.7	32½	25/20	110	NA	2.7/9.6	398
Peugeot 206 2.0 GTi	4/1997/137	3430	7.2	16.7/12.4	35	25/20	108	94/66	3.1/10.8	384
Toyota Celica 1.8 VVT-i	4/1794/140	3130†	8.1	18.0/14.1	35	25/14	113	81/66	2.9/10.6	434
Vauxhall Astra Coupé 2.2	4/2198/145	3220	8.0	17.8/13.5	32½	24½/12	109	95/73	2.9/10.5	427

† in 6th gear \* all with ABS

SAFETY <span style="float:right">★★★★○○</span>	
<i>Brakes' best stop needs a hard push, but fine in everyday driving. ABS is standard, as are front and side airbags, tilt-adjust front head restraints, blind-spot eliminating mirror and "smart" wipers</i>	
<b>braking</b>	<b>dry road stopping distance</b>
pedal feel	from 50mph (with standard ABS)
in emergency	pedal load   distance
handbrake	10kg   35m
	42kg   25½m best stop
	+4kg ie 46kg   25½+m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS <i>(Megane hatch tested 1999)</i>			
front impact	75%	side impact	89%
overall	82% ★★★★★	pedestrian rating	★★★○○○

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

HANDLING AND STEERING <span style="float:right">★★★★○○</span>	
<i>Megane lacks the Puma's irrepresible sparkle, steering less "talkative" and car feels more sober, less involving. Enjoyable, nevertheless – it handles very proficiently. Great grip, little roll</i>	
	

COMFORT <span style="float:right">★★★★○○</span>	
<i>The firm ride isn't too stiff. It's pliant on main roads but low-profile Michelins jib at broken tarmac and cats' eyes. Tyre noise prominent on coarse surfaces. Shapely front seats support occupants well</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY <span style="float:right">★★★★○○</span>			
<i>Fast or frugal: this IDE's 36mpg is an impressive overall figure, but more work is needed to combat combustion harshness. The easy filling tank gives good range between top-ups. Group 13 insurance</i>			
<b>AA test results (mpg)</b>		<b>official figures (mpg)</b>	
worst (hard/urban)	24	urban	27.7
best (gentle/rural)	46½	extra urban	46.3
<b>overall mpg on test</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>combined</b>	<b>37.2</b>
realistic tank capacity	53 litres	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	181 g/km
typical range	420 miles	car tax band	C