



Renault Clio

Featuring 1.2 RN 3-door



What's different?
Smaller (but more recently conceived)
1.2-litre engine; lower trim level and three
doors.

THE CLIO HAS ALWAYS BEEN SKILFULLY marketed, but in the past, the model's year-on-year increase in sales has not made sense to us. All image – too little substance, and with too many footling irritations, undermined its appeal.

As if the development engineers at Renault had been thinking similar thoughts, this latest version, launched last year, emerged with several of our gripes eliminated. We had already sampled the 1.2-litre engine in the old model, and last year's test centered on the £1500-dearer 1.4RT.

Now, we're back to basics although there's an even cheaper version that saves a further £700. However, it forgoes the power steering, central locking (with

handset) and tilting sun hatch that we appreciated on our car.

This Clio impressed us by the sheer quality of its interior trim and the well-engineered controls that flatter you into easy mastery at the wheel. The little gem of an engine underbonnet is all smoothness and ease – more so than the 1.4, because of its determination not to complain at town speed or on the motorway. What it can't achieve in acceleration it makes up for in both impeccable manners and abstemiousness.

The ride, handling and steering are equally well judged, giving poise and easy control without twitching, excessive roll or nervousness over the bumps. There's a fair degree of absorbency, as well – although the occasional rut or bump catches it out.

At the helm, one soon appreciates that taller types could have problems, but shorter drivers (like Nicole!) will love it. The seat support is much better than in any earlier Clio and the gearchange has a "connected to the 'box'" feel that's pleasing because it's never obstructive.

Behind, as well as up front, "size matters", as the adverts say; there isn't a lot of room, but if you're not too big, the back seat supports well, with lap and diagonal belts for three at a pinch.

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.6	6.1	10.8	18.8
IN 5TH GEAR		7.3	14.4	23.1	34.0
IN 4TH GEAR		5.0	10.5	16.6	23.5

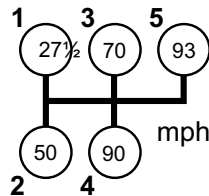
20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	14.5/10.2		15.8/11.6		
		14.4/10.		19.6/13.0	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	5800*	5800*	5800*	4775	

* for best acceleration

Gearing gives 19.4mph per 1000rpm in top gear = 3600rpm at 70mph



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - air conditioning not fitted*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	30
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	39
Motorway (70mph cruising)	43
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	45
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	54
Typical mpg overall	45

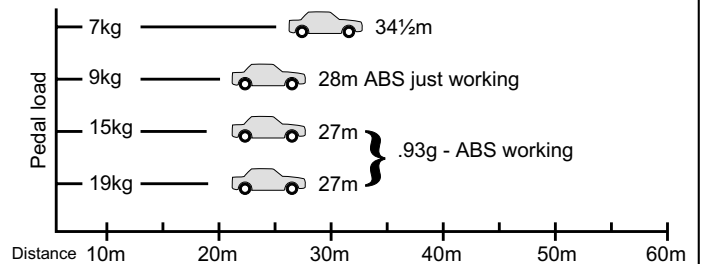
*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

BRAKES

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

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with optional ABS)

A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load



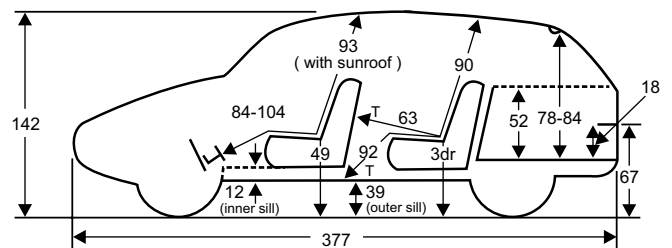
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:

6 1/2kg at start of test, 7 1/2kg at end of test (ideal brakes show no change)

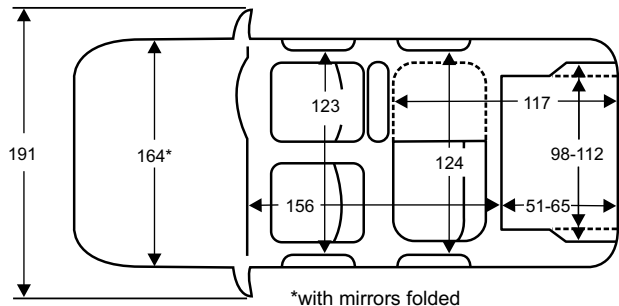
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Three-door hatchback



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



*with mirrors folded

HOW THE CLIO COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cyl/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/ knee room - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
RENAULT CLIO 1.2	4/1149/60	3600	18.8	34.0/23.5	45	27/15*	104	92/63	3.4/10.4	377
Toyota Yaris 1.0	4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26 1/2/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362
Fiat Punto 60	4/1242/58	3600	14.4	31.2/21.9	42 1/2	27 1/2/20	105	102/71	2.9/10.2	376
Rover 211i	4/1120/60	3820	17.4	36.6/25.3	39 1/2	28/16*	107	94/65	3.4/10.4	397
Peugeot 106 1.1	4/1124/60	3790	14.1	29.6/20.8	46 1/2	29/27	106	89/64	3.7/10.7	368

* with ABS

(p) all with power steering

The luggage area is still more regularly shaped and commodious than some, although that third seatbelt parked in the roof can be a nuisance if the load is really large – hence our two-figured tailgate height. The spare wheel is beneath the luggage nowadays – not cradle-mounted, as before, and a lamp is now provided in the cargo area.

Owners of older Clios will also appreciate the latest model's better wiper arcs at front and rear, improved ventilation aim and radio controls, plus a quieter heater fan. The door mirrors now fold out of the way, but are prone to losing their adjustment if the doors are slammed, while the interior mirror distorts its image so that you can't recognise the car behind!

It was very warm in our test period, but we found respite around quieter roads by lowering the driver's window fully and tilting open the sunroof – surprisingly little hair disturbance or buffeting results.

VERDICT

It's a pity about the lethargy and the restrictions in coping with the tall, because this 1.2 Clio feels so accommodating and user-friendly in so many ways. It's now the sort of small hatchback that it's no hardship to return to, perhaps after a spell in something more exotic. Its attractions no longer rely on marketing hype – it's got real merit nowadays.

