



Renault Clio

Featuring 1.4 16v and 1.9dTi



What's different?

Two new engines expand the popular Clio range, while the choice of models is further extended by four "Collections".

RENAULT IS PROMISING SOMETHING FOR everyone with its new-for-2000 Clio Collections, which offer 10 different trim levels across three model ranges.

In a nutshell, the Freeway Collection (Liberté, Grande, MTV) offers models at affordable prices for first-time and young buyers or those looking for a second car, while Elegance (Alizé, Etoile, Initiale) is aimed at buyers seeking more luxury in a small car. The Sport Collection (Sport, Si, RSi and Renaultsport 172) speaks for itself, but offers the widest-ever range of sporting Clios, with performance from warm to scalding.

Incidentally, that Renaultsport 172 deserves a special mention, because it looks as though it could well be the new king of the hot hatches, thanks to the blistering performance provided by its 172bhp, two-litre, 16-valve engine and lowered chassis. We've driven it and will be reporting on it in due course.

This new twin-cam unit is already used in the Megane and Scenic and certainly deserves this wider application because it's a real little sweetie, whose "warm hatch" performance belies its capacity – curious that Renault insists that size matters! While happy to tip-toe through traffic, it really comes alive out on the open road. Not only is it smooth and quiet, but take it beyond 3000rpm and it's a decidedly swift performer that loves to rev yet still manages to remain mechanically refined.

Complementing the new engine are the deft gearchange and nicely weighted clutch that give added driving pleasure. Such is the way that the powertrain is mounted, however, that the gear lever gives an unseemly lurch forward as you back off the accelerator,

then lurches back the other way when you put the power on again.

With 80bhp and 118 lb ft of torque at just 2000rpm, the new 1.9 direct-injection turbo-diesel has 15bhp more than the old non-turbo indirect-injection version of the same engine. The latter is still available, but only in the five-door Grande from the Freeway Collection, whereas the new blown unit is offered only as part of the Sport Collection and at present can be found exclusively under the bonnet of the three- and five-door Si.

Unlike the Laguna diesel, this engine doesn't have common rail fuel delivery (that's coming to Clio next year) and there's no mistaking that it's an oil-burner at tickover. Neither is it the smoothest or the quietest of the diesels we've met – it's rather growly in the mid range on a wide throttle. Otherwise, though, it hums along in nicely relaxed fashion, thanks partly to its relatively long-legged top gear.

It also responds to the easy gearshift (though a somewhat weightier clutch) and shows a nimble turn of speed provided you don't let the revs drop below 3000 – the point at which the turbo seamlessly spools up in earnest. Expect 0-60mph in about 12sec and a maximum speed of 109mph. Renault also claims an average of 54.3mpg (4.7mpg better than the old 1.9D) and lower emissions. In addition, this engine benefits from reduced service intervals (minor/10,000-mile and major/40,000-mile).

Incongruously for a diesel, the Si dTi boasts a "sports handling pack", including a rear spoiler and a "quicker" steering rack together with firmer dampers that sharpen up the car's responses. With this exception (and the engine changes, of course) the Clio's ride and handling, technical specification and general accommodation remain unchanged from those described in our full Clio report R9863.

With the Collections scheme, however, the old RN, RT and RXE designations have been superseded and the specifications juggled. It's worth pointing out that Collections doesn't enable buyers to mix and match trim and equipment to their hearts' content, as Volvo lets them. It takes a lot of brochure browsing to sort things out, and even then you might not come up with your ideal Clio combination.

VERDICT

Recent Renaults have been decent cars in search of better engines. Now all that's changing, as exemplified by this latest pair of power units in the Clio. The new 16-valve engine brings a smoothness and refinement, and indeed a sparkle, to the 1.4's performance, while the turbo-diesel promise new-found briskness with superior economy and a cleaner exhaust. Together with the three new Collections, they can only increase the appeal of a deservedly popular supermini that already has much to commend it and continues to have value for money written all over it.

FACTS AND FIGURES

ENGINE	1.4 16v	1.9 dTi
Type	front-mounted, transverse four cylinders in line	
	alloy block and head	alloy block, cast-iron head
Size	79.5 x 70.0mm = 1390cc	80.0 x 92.1mm = 1870cc
Power	98bhp at 6000rpm	80bhp at 4000rpm
Torque	94 lb ft at 3750rpm	118 lb ft at 2000rpm
Valves	belt-driven double overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder	belt-driven single overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder
Fuel/ignition	electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless (four direct coil) ignition 50-litre fuel tank with low-level warning lamp	direct-injection diesel with turbocharger. Compression ignition with cold start glowplugs
Mph per 1000rpm	20.0	in top gear 25.4