



Renault Kangoo



JUST WHEN CITROËN THOUGHT IT HAD THE junior mini-MPV market in the UK all to itself with the Berlingo Multispace, up jumps the Kangoo.

It's Renault's van-based family holdall that sits on the new Clio platform and slots between the Clio and Scenic in size. And, as Renault never tires of telling us, size matters.

There's certainly plenty of it for all aboard the Kangoo's lofty, light and airy interior, with ample width for three in the back, lots of foot space, good kneeroom and absurdly generous headroom – the roof is almost at arm's length!

But that's only half the story. Double-fold the back seat (split 60/40 in the RXE) forward and a huge (2600-litre) load area opens up. A practical rubber mat covers the floor and access to either the back seat or the luggage deck is easy through a pair of sliding side doors. These are a big advantage over the Multispace's three-door-only arrangement – except that they rattled badly on the cars we drove. The big, high-lifting tailgate to the “tradesmen's entrance” is also a boon; it makes loading and stowing in wet weather much easier.

There's a choice of two engines : 1.4 petrol and 1.9 diesel. This diesel is 10bhp down on the petrol model and just 5 lb ft up on torque. What's more, it proves only

about 2mpg better than the 1.4 petrol alternative, according to Renault, and looks yawningly slow in its acceleration. We didn't drive this version, however, so perhaps we should reserve ultimate judgement on it.

Neither version is particularly long-striding, and the 1.4 sounds rather vocal and thrummy at higher revs, but it's a peppy performer provided you keep it spinning above 3000rpm – below this there's not much doing. Similarly it flags on gradients until you downshift a gear or two – then it's game to go. Fortunately the gearchange is reasonably slick and positive.

The ride isn't as smoothly absorbent as the Multispace's. It's certainly comfortable enough on most roads, but just feels that bit more fretful on broken surfaces. There's quite a lot of tyre noise, as well, on coarsely dressed roads. Although there's not much informative feedback through the wheel, the steering is light and positive, and the Kangoo is neat and nimble along the lanes and through traffic.

There's no steering column adjustment or seat height control, and too-thinly upholstered cushions spoil front seat comfort in the long run. Otherwise, the driver can't complain, thanks to excellent all round vision (if it weren't for the three prominent rear head restraints), convenient column stalks that take care of most

functions, clear (if basic) instruments and that invaluable Renault feature, controls for the hi-fi on the steering wheel.

The entry-level RN (the same price, incidentally, in either petrol or diesel form) comes with a driver's airbag, an engine immobiliser and metallic paint. In addition, the RXE has a front passenger's airbag, remote-control central locking, electric front windows, electric heated door mirrors and front foglamps.

Options include alloy wheels, a CD player and anti-lock brakes. Air conditioning isn't available, however (not yet, anyway), neither is an enormous sunroof, Multispace style – not even a small one is on offer.

VERDICT

The Kangoo may have a daft name, but as a mini-MPV it makes a good deal of sense for young families or as a maid-of-all-work second car. Cheeky, cheerful looks

make up for the somewhat tin-box appearance of its interior, as well as putting a smile (or is it a smirk?) on the faces of passers-by. It's so practical and versatile, it's no wonder that this and the Berlingo Multispace sell like hot gateaux on the Continent.

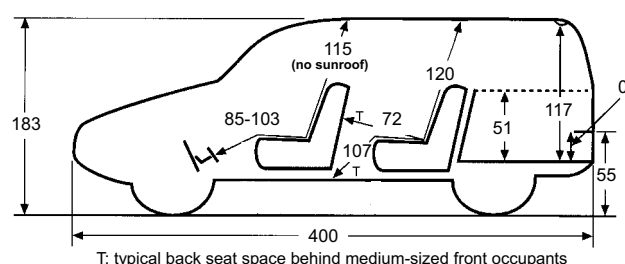
The Kangoo doesn't, however, have the Citroën's range of impressive engines and can't match its car-like ride and handling. It also lacks that enormous opening roof. On the other hand, it does have the practicality of five doors (rattles notwithstanding), boasts equally spacious accommodation and cavernous load space. It's also significantly cheaper than the Multispace – a serious consideration if you're working to a tight budget.

Perhaps the ideal holdall in this sub-class would be that non-existent amalgam of these two Gallic rivals. As things stand, you'll always lose something whichever way you jump, but you'll never be short of space.

FACTS AND FIGURES

	1.4	1.9D
BODY		
Trim levels	RN, RXE	RN
ENGINE		
Cylinders / capacity	4 / 1390cc	4 / 1870cc
Valves / fuel	single OHC 8v / petrol	single OHC 8v / indirect injection diesel
Power	75bhp at 5500rpm	65bhp at 4500rpm
Torque	84 lb ft at 4250rpm	89 lb ft at 2250rpm
TRANSMISSION		
Type	five-speed manual, front-wheel drive	
Mph per 1000rpm	18.6	20.2
CHASSIS		
Suspension - front	MacPherson coil spring/damper struts; anti-roll bar	
- rear	semi-independent trailing arms linked by torsion beam; anti-roll bar	
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance	
Wheels	5J x 14 steel (alloy optional on RXE) with 165/70R14 tyres. Full-size spare	
Brakes	ventilated discs front, drums rear. ABS optional	
PERFORMANCE		
0-62mph	14.3sec	19.5sec
Maximum speed	97mph	91mph
Mpg (government combined)	37.7mpg	39.8mpg

All manufacturer's figures



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

