



Renault Laguna



If you're thinking of buying a used Renault Laguna, we can help. We've burrowed into our breakdown, warranty and vehicle inspection service statistics covering the last few years and come up with what you need to know if you're planning to be the next owner.

RECEIVED TO ROBUST ACCLAIM WHEN launched early in 1994, the Laguna was to most eyes a significantly prettier replacement for the unlauded Renault 21. Unlike its predecessor, it offered only a five-door hatchback body to begin with, powered by 95bhp 1.8-litre and 115bhp two-litre four-cylinder engines, or a luxury three-litre V6 with automatic transmission only.

Within 12 months, a distinctive looking estate version, the 140bhp 16-valve 2.0 RTi and a 2.2-litre diesel were added to the ranks. About a year on, Renault grafted a turbo on to the diesel (boosting power from 85bhp to a heartier 115bhp) and added a new top-level Executive model to supplement existing RN, RT and RXE versions.

Towards the end of 1997, the V6 acquired a second helping of valves, boosting the flagship's power to almost 200bhp but, much to the angst of keener drivers, a manual gearbox remained off limits.

After a successful four-year run, the Laguna was given a major make-over in mid-1998, gaining smart new body-coloured bumpers, clear headlamp lenses and crystal effect rear lamp glasses, as well as improved interior details and equipment levels, plus a pleasing toning-down of the original "buck-toothed" frontal appearance. Under the bonnet, leaner and cleaner 110bhp 1.6 and 120bhp 1.8-litre 16-valve engines joined the multi-valve two-litre, while Renault progressively added Sport, Alizé and Monaco model designations to the line-up. A "Family" version of the five-door estate was also introduced at this time, further boosting the load-carrier's versatility with a foldaway rear-facing seat for children, complete with armrests, head restraints and three-point inertia-reel seatbelts.

Coinciding with the introduction of these new "second generation" models, a five-speed manual gearbox finally became standard fitment on the V6, while diesel focus shifted to a new direct-injection 1.9dTi engine. This

offers a little less power than the earlier turbo-diesel, but promises (and delivers) much better fuel economy. This almost completes the Laguna line-up, but as this is written, the short-lived dTi diesel is itself giving way to a new common-rail dCi version – promising further emissions and economy improvements.

The main points to look for...

Engine and cooling system

The Laguna's engines aren't especially noted for their smoothness and refinement, yet although the newer 16-valve units can still sound quite vocal when opened up, they offer tangible benefits over their predecessors in this respect. The newer the better as far as diesels go, too. Pick the direct-injection dTi if funds will stretch to it, but don't be too readily won over by lusty V6 power unless your skill behind the wheel, your bank balance and any points on your licence are all up to it. The Laguna's list of mechanical woes doesn't make too depressing reading, but don't be surprised to find a few things in need of attention under the bonnet. The head gasket, water pump, camshaft drive belt (or its tensioner) and fuel injection faults all put in a fair share of appearances in our survey; remember to check these areas in particular while you're giving the engine bay a general once-over.

Transmission

The good news here is that the clutch, driveshafts, constant-velocity joints and gear selector linkage all have relatively few snags. However, the clutch-release cable is a bit of a weak spot, so make sure the pedal works with a smooth, stiction-free action. Gearboxes (both manual and automatic) are the biggest *bêtes noires* here. Repair bills can easily run from £300 to £400 upwards, so ensure that all the ratios select smoothly and silently, the lever stays in gear, and that there aren't any nasty "noises off" from the driveline.

Suspension, steering and brakes

The Laguna's comfort-biased chassis acquits itself well – on later models in particular – eating up bumps and bends in a fluid, well-controlled manner. The power steering (usually only pipes and hoses, rather than the pump and rack itself) and front shock absorbers suffer from a few snags, though. Inspect the front anti-roll bar joints and bushes closely when grovelling underneath, as these are quite common trouble-spots. Brakes are generally fairly well behaved – only a few rear wheel cylinder (or caliper) problems showed up in our survey.

Electrics and instruments

Apart from a selection of alternator faults (Lagunas exhibit about twice-average unreliability for this component) and a few troublesome fuel-gauge tank senders, there are no particular black-spots as far as Laguna electrics go. However, with frequent appearance of faults on the likes of the starter, wiper and heater-fan motors, an assortment of ignition maladies, plus a few airbag system and electric window woes, our survey shows that gremlins can strike across most areas of the

electrical catalogue. So be sure to give all such components, any accessories, the radio, the central locking and so on (this last most importantly of all) a thorough work-out when making your checks of the interior. While you're at it, make sure the heater works properly with no damp patches on the carpet beneath it; we've found that a replacement heater matrix crops up quite often in warranty claims.

Bodywork

All-plastic front and rear bumpers and a lengthy eight-year anti-rust warranty give the Laguna a handy leg-up at resisting the ravages of time, but this still leaves ample scope for careless owners to leave their mark. You'll find plenty of Lagunas to pick from, so steer clear of any sorry specimens wearing graunched wheels or wheel trims, "buckshot" gravel-rash marring the nose and sills, or a bevy of battle scars along the flanks. On the estate especially, avoid examples that show signs of an overworked or generally under cared-for load area.

Costs and servicing

The Laguna comfortably holds its own in the depreciation stakes, with more highly sought after 16-valve versions, the direct-injection diesel and particularly the estate, understandably fairing better than older, high-mileage hacks or a thirsty and costly-to-insure V6 model. Servicing demands aren't too onerous, either, and parts prices are quite competitive – not as inexpensive as Ford's, but notably cheaper than prestige European or Japanese makes. Fuel economy expectations range from low-to-mid-thirties mpg for a two-litre eight-valve model (but expect more like the mid-twenties for a V6) up to the high forties – well up to par – for the dTi diesel.

So to sum up ...

The Laguna is a far more viable alternative to the likes of a Mondeo, Vectra or Peugeot 406 than was its angular, unappealing forerunner. Even though they're still inclined to sound a bit gruff as you rev them, the newer 16-valve engines are definitely the ones to aim for. You'll find loads of Lagunas that haven't been well cared for, so take time to seek out one that has, while a 1.6- or 1.8-litre mainstream model, the frugal diesel or an estate version are the ones we would have on our shopping list.

We can't tell you the exact car to choose, but once you've found one you like, we can provide reassurance by arranging a comprehensive check anywhere in the country by one of our Vehicle Inspection Engineers. Call 0345 500 610 for details of fees or to arrange an inspection. For longer term peace of mind we can also offer mechanical breakdown insurance. For further information call AA Warranty Services on 0800 269 798