



Renault Laguna 1.6

Featuring RT Sport



What's new?

Potent new 1.6 16-valve engine replaces the 1.8 unit in Renault's popular mid-range model. Minor changes to body, equipment and safety features, too.

WITH THE LAGUNA SELLING WELL AND buyers happy with both its appearance and its ride and handling, this was no time to mess with a winning formula. Not seriously, anyway. So this second generation - or new evolution - Laguna boasts only small but significant improvements.

Chassiswise it's unchanged, but body-coloured bumpers (lacking practical scuff protection), clear headlamp lenses and a deeper front bumper - plus round foglamps on this RT Sport - distinguish old model from new. On the estate, the exterior moulding on the tailgate is raised to bumper height, with a protective plastic insert in the bumper below.

Alterations inside include a modified facia on the passenger's side (to provide a glovebox, even when an optional airbag is fitted), longer door bins, a redesigned four-spoke steering wheel and a heat-reflecting windscreen.

The big news, however, is under the bonnet, where a new 1.6-litre, 16-valve engine replaces the previous 1.8-litre, 95bhp eight-valve power unit. This twin-cam multi-valver is unusually powerful; in fact, with 110bhp it's the most powerful 1.6-litre in its class, where 90bhp is more the norm. Yet Renault claims 13 per cent lower fuel consumption and a healthy reduction in exhaust emissions than with the old 1.8.

Like many engines with multi valves but few cc's, this one feels languorous at low revs. It's certainly tractable enough to pull from 1000rpm in fifth, but doesn't really start to get cracking until about 4000rpm. By 4500 it's well on song, by which time there's plenty of power all the way to the abrupt 6500 cut-out point. It accelerates purposefully if you keep it spinning, so you musn't be shy about using the slick, positive gearchange. In fact, the 1.6 is quicker through the gears and has a higher maximum speed than the 1.8 it replaces; it will even give the two-litre version a good run for its money.

With its gearing set up to optimise acceleration, this Laguna 1.6 isn't the most hushed or refined of "fours". It lacks ultimate "balancer shaft" smoothness, though fortunately it sounds unstrained at motorway speeds.

Higher gearing might aid fuel economy a little, as well - the Laguna can't match the long-legged Mondeo's 39mpg, for example. That said, at 36mpg overall, it's

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

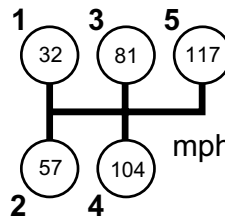
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.3	4.5	7.7	11.7
IN 5TH GEAR		6.6	13.2	20.2	28.1
IN 4TH GEAR		4.8	9.5	14.3	19.4

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		13.6/9.7		13.6/9.5	
			13.2/9.5		14.9/9.9

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6250*		6250	5630

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	25
In the country - quiet driving	43½
Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range†	57 litres/450 miles

†based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience – not nominal tank capacity

* with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 4-5% in winter and 4-8% in summer.

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse four in line with iron block and alloy head; five main bearings

Size 79.5 x 80.5mm = 1598cc

Power 110bhp at 5750rpm

Torque 109 lb ft at 3750rpm

Valves belt-driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless ignition. 66-litre fuel tank with low level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual (four-speed automatic optional); front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 20.8 in 5th, 16.6 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, L-shaped lower arms and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent transverse torsion bars and trailing arms and telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.5m between kerbs, with 16.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6½J x 15 alloys on RT Sport with 195/65R15H tyres (Goodyear Eagle Touring on test car). Full-size (steel) spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo. Electronic anti-lock control standard

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on effectiveness and convenience (the more blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Door locking

central locking? ☒

remote control? ☒

auto window closure? ☒

dead locks? ☒

Head restraints

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Interior

safety padding ●●●●○

driver's airbag? ☒

other airbags? (3) ☐

side impact protection ●●●●○

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

Alarm

engine immobilised? ☒

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●●○

☒ standard on test car

☐ factory fitted option

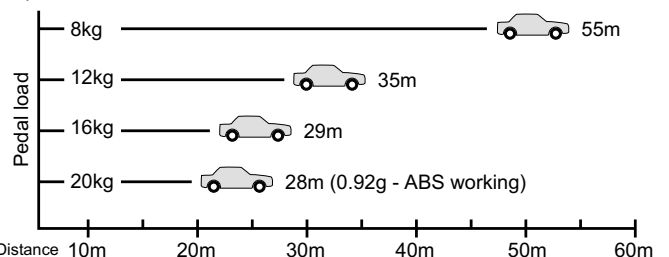
☒ not available

BRAKES

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

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

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



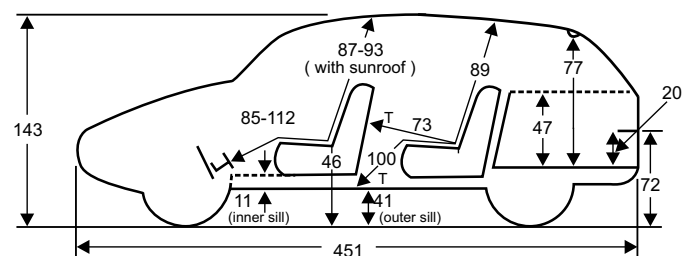
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:

13kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test (ideal brakes show no change)

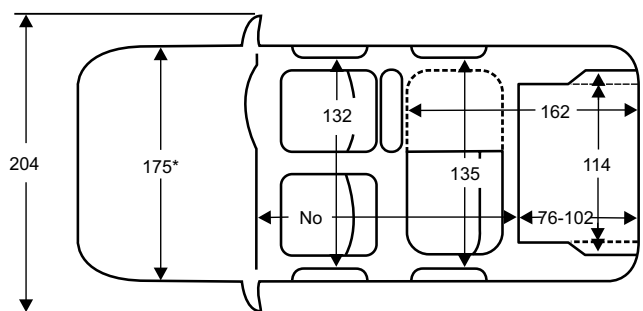
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door



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



*with mirrors folded

reasonably economical. Drive gently and 43mpg is on the cards, and the big tank gives a long range.

With no changes to the well-proven chassis, the Laguna departs itself around corners as reassuringly as ever. But the Sport in this model's title extends to nothing sportier than alloy wheels (with a steel spare) and a boot lid spoiler. Thus body roll is a bit much when cornering hard, but at least there's a fluid and nicely geared feel to the well-weighted steering (it's improved over the years), with a clean turn in. What's more, our car held its line well while being superglued to the road by its excellent Goodyear Eagle Touring tyres.

While the Peugeot 406, Ford Mondeo and Toyota Avensis continue to lead the upper-medium-car class in suspension supremacy, the Laguna rides tolerably smoothly to give unflurried progress on major roads. There's an underlying firmness and fidgeting on rougher surfaces, however, over which the weightier estate car version proves a little more absorbent.

All Lagunas now come on 15in wheels and have ABS as standard. The brakes feel reassuring - if a bit spongy - but we would prefer the pedal to be not so high and the handbrake not so low.

Shaplier seats in the Sport give the driver snug, hip-hugging side support and there are also lumbar and height adjustments. The steering wheel is adjustable for reach, too, so it's easy to get comfortably set up.

Those in the back are treated to adequate space all round, although neither kneeroom nor headroom is particularly generous. The width and angling of the 60/40 divided backrest, complete with armrest, should

please most people, though. As should the Sport's electric tilt-and-slide glass sunroof and optional air conditioning, plus - in colder weather - the excellent flow of heated air piped to the rear footwell vents.

The new Laguna 1.6 costs some £500 more than the previous 1.8, but with the price hike comes an improved specification (whether you like it or not). This means that all models (including the entry-level RN) have items such as electric front windows, electrically operated and heated door mirrors, remote control central locking and an immobiliser. Also standard is a finger-tip controlled stereo system which includes a single-disc CD player. This means that you lose the cassette player unless you pay extra for the radio/cassette/six-disc multichanger.

Safety developments include larger front airbags, optional side airbags, new load limiters in the seatbelt mechanisms and high-reach front head restraints with angle adjustment. There are also three head restraints and a trio of three-point seatbelts for back seat passengers.

VERDICT

Renault was right not to make major changes to the Laguna - you know what they say about a thing that ain't broke. The freshened-up interior, improved safety features and "added value" equipment ensure that the revised model will have a longer shelf life with stronger appeal, while the impressive and much-needed 1.6 16-valve engine gives a boost to both performance and economy. In all, the changes



HOW THE LAGUNA COMPARES	Engine Cap/power (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/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
RENAULT LAGUNA 1.6 16v	1598/110	3350	11.7	28.1/19.4	36	28/20*	112	100/73	3.2/10.5	451
Ford Mondeo 1.6	1598/90	2620	14.6	47.6/30.9	39	24/22*	110	102/76	3.0/10.4	456
Nissan Primera 1.6	1597/100	3170	12.0	31.6/20.6	35	25/19*	107	102/73	2.9/10.9	443
Peugeot 406 1.8	1761/112	3300	10.5	27.3/16.9	34½	26/18	110	99/75	3.2/11.0	456
Toyota Avensis 1.8	1762/108	3250	12.0	28.3/20.2	40½	26/28*	108	99/77	3.0/11.0	449
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8 16v	1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38½	24/28*	111	101/75	3.0/10.9	448
						*with ABS	(p) all with power steering			