

Renault Megane

Featured model: 1.6 16v RXE 5 door



AFTER FOUR YEARS, THE Megane range has undergone quite substantial modifications – inside, underbonnet and to the chassis components. Not that the original was slow to sell, spearheaded by the multi-activity Scenic. Indeed, here in the UK, Renault has sold more Meganas than any previous model. Yet, apart from the Scenic's trendsetting packaging and versatility, we found the model rather mediocre in our 1996 test of the ordinary five-door hatch.

This Phase 2 version of the 1.6 is an all-round improvement over its predecessor. More engine performance, accompanied by improved low-speed flexibility and uncompromised mpg, would merit undiluted praise, were it not for the growl that surfaces by 60mph and spoils motorway refinement.

The driving position is good (so long as the lumbar adjuster is set at its firmest), the major controls precise if a shade stolid, and general detailing inside improved, to keep up with (though not surpass) later rivals. Yet the Megane's generally better ride is still prone to the occasional jolt; road rumble is prevalent, as well. It corners well enough (and totally safely), but indifferent steering dampens driver-enthusiasm.

The uprated brakes come with standard ABS that only massive pedal pressure seems to engage. Respectable panic stops are attained for a "normal" stamp on the brake, however.

The back seat is nicely shaped for comfort and there's enough room for most people. The seat folds 60/40 without seatbelt hassles, and the tilted-erect cushions will remove entirely to retain full front-seat legroom or provide the ability to carry a roll of carpet, up to the fascia. Yet the backs of the rear seats and the load sill lack any trim and get scuffed.

Other irritations include poor screen demisting without the air con, which also has a minuscule warning lamp – the main-beam lamp is masked by the driver's hand.

The Megane's price isn't particularly keen at RXE level and you can't buy extras individually. The budget-aware buyer will do best with the RT, which still has a buffet-free electric sunroof.

The Megane possesses two important but less obvious virtues – it's now part-galvanised body is covered by a 12-year anti-rust warranty and in NCAP tests, this model has produced excellent crash-test results.

VERDICT

Survivability is the Megane's trump card. There are certainly plenty of other improvements any owner of a three-year old will notice, as well, but the Megane still fails to surpass later competition in its road manners or in matters of comfort and convenience. A safe if unexciting buy.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Fuel economy	★★★★○
Controls/displays	★★★○○
Handling/steering	★★○○○
Comfort	★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★○○
Safety	★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1598cc, 4 cylinder petrol; 110bhp at 5750rpm, 109 lb ft at 4000rpm. Belt-driven twin OHC, 16 valves and hydraulic tappets

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive. 21.3mph/1000rpm in 5th; 16.4 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: four transverse torsion bars, independent trailing arms. Telescopic dampers all round

steering hydraulic PAS, 3.5 turns lock to lock, 10.65m diameter turning circle between kerbs (17.9m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes solid discs front, drums rear with standard ABS

wheels/tyres 5in alloy with 185/60R 15H tyres (Continental Eco Contact on test car); full size (steel) spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

fuel cap you can't lose
easy to valet alloy wheels
clever, easy-to-use security features
auto rear wipe when reverse selected

radio always too quiet when switched on
intermittent wipe not frequent enough
limited oddments space

THE MEGANE RANGE

body lower medium 5-door hatch; 4 door saloon (Classic); 2-door coupé and cabriolet, Scenic mid-size MPV also
trim levels Liberté, standard, RT, Alizé, Sport, RXE

engines petrol: 4 cyl/1.4 8v/75bhp; 4/1.4 16v/95; 4/1.6/110; 4/2.0/140 (coupés only) diesel: 4/1.9D/65; 4/1.9dTi/100

drive front via 5-speed manual (or 4 speed automatic with torque converter in 1.6 16v and 1.9dTi)

OVERTAKING ABILITY				★★★★☆○	
<i>Lively, partly due to low gearing but note even spread of speed range times in gears – slogs well. Nicer accelerator action nowadays</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.2	8.4	11.6		
30-50mph	4.1	8.2	11.4		
40-60mph	4.9	8.3	11.8		
50-70mph	6.1	8.4	12.3		
30-70mph	10.2	16.6	23.7		
max speed in each gear (*using 6250rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	31	56½	80	102	119

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★★○				
<i>Rear passenger space merely adequate but seat folds easily. Reasonable boot but unpainted rear sill</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>				
outside	inside		<i>(† with sunroof)</i>	
length	413	front - legroom	89-107	
width - inc mirrors	198	- headroom	89-94 †	
- mirrors folded	169	rear - typical leg/	97/	
height (no roof bars)	142	- kneeroom	69	
load sill height		- headroom	91	
(inside/outside)	20/74	- hiproom	129	
steering		load space (litres/cu ft)		
turns lock-to-lock	3.5	(all seats in use)	410/14.4	
turning circle (metres)	10.65	load length	74-145	
easy to park/garage?		full length to fascia	250	
	★★★★○	load width	112/132	
		load height (to shelf)	48/	
		(to top of aperture)	77	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★★○				
<i>Major controls deliberative and stalks' turret switches confusing. Trip computer shares distance display and radio controls on wheel</i>				
				

HOW THE MEGANE 5 DOOR 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 from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
RENAULT MEGANE 1.6 16v	4/1598/110	3280	10.2	23.7/16.6	41½	26/55*	107	97/69	3.5/10.65	413
Ford Focus 1.6	4/1596/100	3150	10.8	29.1/20.1	40½	26½/15*	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	415
Vauxhall Astra 1.6 16v	4/1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
Citroën Xsara 1.8	4/1761/112	3250	9.7	24.6/15.8	36	25/23*	107	99/74	3.2/10.7	417
Skoda Octavia 1.6	4/1595/100	3510	11.3	24.8/18.1	35½	24/27*	112	97/69	3.1/10.5	451
Nissan Almera 1.5	4/1595/90	3160	12.3	33.1/24.3	39	27½/9½*	107	96/69	2.9/11.0	418

*with ABS

SAFETY ★★★★★○				
<i>Impressive crash protection (but not if you're a pedestrian). Weird brake response (best stops at impossibly heavy pedal pressure) yet little heat-fade</i>				
braking				
pedal feel	★★★★○			
in emergency	★★★○○			
handbrake	★★★★○			
		dry road stopping distance		
		<i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>		
		pedal load	distance	
		10kg	35½m	
		30kg	28m	
		55kg	26m best stop	

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (5dr tested Jan 1999)				
front impact	75%	side impact	89%	
overall	82% ★★★★★○	pedestrian rating	★★★★○	

SECURITY FEATURES				
central locking	✓	alarm	0	
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓	
auto window closure	✗	luggage security	★★★★○	
deadlocks	✗			
✓ <i>standard</i>	0	<i>factory option</i>	✗	not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★★○				
<i>Cornering is safe, obliging – and unremarkable; lacks Focus agility. Steering needs more twirling on street corners, yet rather weighty</i>				
				
COMFORT ★★★★★○				
<i>Rides quite well with or without a load. Steams up too readily with air conditioning off. Over-the-shoulder view restricted. Noisy on motorway</i>				

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★★○				
<i>Surprisingly abstemious – opting for the Scenic blunts performance and economy. Easy filler but last two litres taken more slowly</i>				
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)			
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	27½			
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	35½			
motorway (70mph cruising)	40			
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	42½			
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	49			
typical mpg overall	41½			
realistic tank capacity/range	54 litres/490 miles			
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	30.1/49.6/40.4			
CO ₂ emissions 165 g/km	car tax band B			