



Renault 19



If you're thinking of buying a used Renault 19, we can help. We've delved into our breakdown, warranty and vehicle inspection service statistics covering the last few years and have come up with what you need to know if you're planning to become the second owner.

RENAULT'S LOWER-MEDIUM SIZED 19 was launched in February 1989 to replace the 9 and 11, and to do battle with the likes of Escort, Astra, Golf, Tipo and Peugeot 309.

The range comprised six trim levels, with four engines from 1.4 petrol to 1.9 diesel, followed two years later by a 1.8/137bhp 16-valve unit. December 1989 saw the introduction of a big-booted, 11¹/₂cm-longer four-door saloon, the Chamade.

In mid-1992 the 19 received a substantial facelift. These "Phase II" models offered three- and five-door hatchbacks, four-door saloons (no longer called Chamade) and a pair of attractive cabriolets, together with six different power units. The 1.4-litre engines (60 and 80bhp), 1.8 16v (137bhp) and the 65bhp diesel were carried over from the old model, but a 95bhp 1.8-litre version was a new derivative based on the previous 1.7 power unit. A lusty turbo-diesel with 93bhp was also new, and automatic transmission was available on the 1.8 and even the more powerful 1.4 models.

The latest changes freshened up a competent range of models, to make them contemporary and more appealing.

The main points to look for...

Engine and cooling system

First, look at the bonnet release security bolts, they could work loose on 1994 models and were the subject of a recall. Serious oil leaks are unlikely, but seepages and resultant messiness may be present around the cylinder head and cam cover, the sump drain plug and on the underside of the engine. All the engines are tough and reliable, though not especially sweet running. High-milers are likely to have noisy valve gear (which is acceptable if not excessive) and tired engine mountings – check for excessive rock when manoeuvring. Carburettor models can suffer from stiff manual chokes and jerky accelerators, both usually due to faulty cables. Air cleaners work loose, too, and may have misplaced air trunking. Corroded exhaust systems are commonplace, and if you can hear a rattle from down under, it could be caused by a loose catalytic converter exterior heat shield. Any misfiring or poor starting might be caused by damp spark plugs on 16-valve models; the underbonnet water scoop can corrode and let water drip on to the engine.

Listen for a worn and growly water pump and ensure that there are no coolant seepages from the radiator and hoses. Make sure, too, that the electric cooling fan isn't running continuously – the relay has been known to stick on K-reg 16v models.

Transmission

A weighty clutch and sticky gearchange are to be expected, but if the clutch action is seriously heavy a new cable is probably needed. A high pedal and a late

take-up mean that the linings are well past their prime, as well. Make sure the gear lever doesn't jump out of any of the gears and check that there's no excessive play in the gearchange; if there is, the tension spring is weak. Listen for knocks and clonks from the driveshaft constant velocity joints on acceleration and when turning on full lock, and look for oil seepage from around the gear selector shaft. Also examine the driveshaft gaiters for splits and lubrication leaks.

Suspension, steering and brakes

Our survey revealed a significant number of 19s showing uneven front tyre wear and the steering wheel not on straight. It's worth checking these because the steering geometry might need resetting, perhaps because the previous owner "kerbed" the car. A knocking on bumpy roads suggests slight wear in the steering column bushes, but if it's from the front end it's more likely to be wear in the front suspension lower swivels. Upper mounting plate cups have been known to crack and front springs to break; both of these obviously affect the car's handling. Check for wheel bearing play and listen for any rough bearing growl. While you're at it, look for any fluid leaks from the front and rear dampers.

Make sure the car pulls up all square and quietly. Older models often suffer from corroded or scored discs, as well as age-cracked or perished front brake hoses. Check for wheel and master cylinder leaks and see that the front pad wear warning-light lead is connected – many aren't. Handbrakes can suffer from sloppiness or stiffness – either can make them ineffective.

Electrics and instruments

Ensure that the starter motor operates effectively and that the alternator is charging properly (with no whine or bearing noise). Pay particular attention to the light switches, heater fan and, where fitted, central locking and electric sunroof; the last can be sluggish in action, as can the electric windows. Quite often, heated back window elements are damaged and fail to work, and sometimes the wipers don't self-park. On cars with an immobiliser, check that the isolator switch in the glovebox is tight. If it's loose it can turn in its mounting hole and short out the wiring. Also make sure the wiring to the rear foglamp is sound; it can chafe adjacent to the towing eye. Speedometers can become noisy (they tick), so listen for this, and make sure the fuel gauge works.

Bodywork

Phase II 19s originally had an eight-year anti-corrosion warranty and appeared well equipped to keep rust at bay, with liners and smoothly contoured lips in the wheelarches, anti-chip material and rubbing strips along the flanks. Even so, it's important to have a walkround, looking for any rust or paintwork flaws

that may be present. A significant number of cars we've looked at were suffering from dry, stiff or defective door locks. At the back, investigate the boot for dampness, which may be caused by a faulty lamp seal letting in water, and is the parcel shelf in place? It was missing on several of the hatchbacks we checked. In 1994 the seatbelt pretensioners were the subject of a recall on models made between April 1992 and March 1994. The suspect type carried the words Autoliv/Klippan, the replacements were marked TRW-REPA.

Costs and servicing

Renault's pricing pitched the new 19 about midway between its obvious rivals and it remains that way in the used-car market, with middle-of-the-road prices and below-average depreciation keeping it keen value. While major manufacturers like Ford and Vauxhall can boast a lot more dealers than Renault, 19 parts prices won't break the bank. Likewise, most insurance groupings are reasonable, although the 16v is a hefty Group 15. Servicing needs are pretty undemanding and routine level checks present few problems.

So to sum up...

Unless you're after the dashing 16-valve Executive or the stylish Cabriolet, don't expect too much finesse or dynamic flair from the 19. It's only as good as, but no better than, its close rivals, whether you're the driver or a passenger. That said, the 80bhp 1.4 delivers quite impressive performance and economy, so don't be too tempted to rush for the eight-valve 1.8; it offers only a comparatively small performance gain over the smaller engine and is thirstier. For economy, the lively 49mpg turbo-diesel makes a lot of sense for the higher-mileage motorist. The 19 was a model on which Renault tried hard to improve rust resistance and in most respects it has a sound feel. Indeed, the 19 is a range of competent, well-made all-rounders that represents a sensible if, for the most part, unexciting buy.

We can't tell you which model to choose, but once you've found a car 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.