

Renault Clio

Featured model: 1.5dCi 65 Expression 5-door



WITH A REPLACEMENT FOR THE Clio not due for another two years, Renault needed to keep the evergreen model in contention with a lot of new rival superminis that are soon to appear or are just over the horizon. So it's got its retaliation in early. Cue Clio III ...

Immediately obvious are the new headlamp clusters and frontal styling inspired by the forthcoming, mould-breaking Vel Satis. But this is much more than a facelift – nearly half the car's body and structural components are new. What's more, with all the various engine options, equipment levels, three or five doors and a choice of transmissions, there are, it says here, more than 5100 combinations of new Clio.

Inside, too, there are major changes in style, practicality and notably finish to the "soft-feel" facia. Big, clear dials are housed in a double-arched binnacle, while the centre console has been redesigned to house a satellite navigation screen and climate control on posher models.

Our "Expression" test car didn't even have air con, but it's the underbonnet view that's special. Under there is a new 1.5 diesel with the same fuel injection/common-rail system that's also making its appearance under Ford Fiesta and Peugeot 206/307 bonnets.

This is Renault's own engine of course, and the company claims that it's the most abstemious thing on four wheels, currently available – except for hybrids like the Honda Insight.

After conducting our five mpg tests on a well run-in car, we have to disagree – in

real life the VW Polo/Lupo (or Seat Arosa) outsmarts this Clio by just over 4 per cent overall – mainly because the VW is 6mpg better when cruising at 70mph.

Nevertheless, this power unit is quite the best attribute of the Clio – it's very relaxed, once a period of mild harshness has subsided past 1500rpm.

By comparison, the model's road manners – particularly the new electric steering – reveal shortcomings compared with the later arrivals on the supermini scene.

Similarly, the interior isn't as accommodating to passengers, but the driver gets a valuable few centimetres of extra legroom nowadays. Some cabin improvements for the driver come with snags; for instance, thanks to a special linkage and multiplex control, the driver's wiper sweeps a good arc, but it screeches its protest on a merely damp screen, with no extended delay under the driver's control. It drove us to distraction.

VERDICT

Our Clio Expression's equipment was unstinting in matters of safety, but less so in terms of convenience features. These are available, but not at this version's very competitive list price. However, the 1.5/65bhp diesel (for just £700 more than the also new 1.2/75bhp petrol version) impressed us a great deal. It's the most up-to-date feature in a model that's growing old gracefully.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1461cc, 4-cylinder, diesel; 65bhp at 4000rpm, 118 lb ft at 2000rpm; belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 25.4mph/1000rpm in 5th, 19.4 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, trailing arms, coil springs

steering electric power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 10.9m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.85m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with brake-assist/ABS standard

wheels/tyres 5in steel with 165/65R14 tyres (Michelin Energy on test car); full-size spare

LIKES ...

warning lamp symbols readable when off
very good underbonnet access
rear headrests lower flush into seat
low fuel and oil warnings accurate

and GRIPES

low screenwash fluid not detectable
driver's wiper screech/no variable wipe
fifth belt impedes load height
sunroof only tilts – no sunshade

THE CLIO RANGE

size and type 3- and 5-door supermini (mid-priced)

trim levels Freeway: Authentique, Expression (+). Elegance: Privilege, Initiale. Sport: Dynamique (+), 172

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.2 litres/60bhp, 4/1.2 16v/75, 4/1.4/95, 4/1.6/110, 4/2.0/172; diesel: 4/1.5/65, 4/1.5/80 due soon

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; 4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter optional on 1.4 and 1.6 (5-speed auto-shift synchromesh 'box on 1.2/75bhp)

OVERTAKING ABILITY			★★★★○○		
<i>Feels livelier on the road than our test figures suggest, thanks to vigorous and uncomplaining low-speed response with easy overtaking on dual carriageways. Weighty clutch and gearchange, but precise action</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	4.3	8.3	14.7		
30-50mph	5.6	7.3	11.5		
40-60mph	7.4	8.1	10.9		
50-70mph	10.1	10.1	12.2		
30-70mph	15.7	17.4	23.7		
max speed in each gear (*using 4250rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	23½	42½	60	82	98

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○			
<i>Can handle long loads (eg carpet) better than lanky rear passengers. Good boot space except for crossbar on floor and fifth belt-mount; nicely trimmed, though</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>		inside	(† with sunroof)
outside		front	- legroom 89-107
length	381		- headroom 89-94†
width - inc mirrors	193	rear	- typical leg/ 94/
- mirrors folded	168		kneeroom 64
height (no roof bars)	142		- headroom 91
load sill height	19/		- hiproom 124
(inside/outside)	66	load space (all seats in use)	
steering		(litres/cu ft)	330/11.7
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	load length	60/119
turning circle (metres)	10.9	full length to fascia	218
easy to park/garage?		load width	98-112
★★★★○		load height (to shelf/	53/
* belt mount obstructs		to top of aperture)	*76-84

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★○○○	
<i>Basically good driving position with improved legroom, but not enough lower spinal support. Seat and wheel height adjustment and clear displays, but wash and wipe problems – see main text</i>	
	

HOW THE CLIO 1.5dCi COMPARES		engine cyl/cap/power (no/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 CLIO 1.5dCi/65		4/1461/65	2750	15.7	23.7/17.4	59½	27½/12*	107	94/64	2.8/10.9	381
Fiat Punto 1.9 JTD		4/1910/80	2330	14.2	25.4/17.1	52	27/12	108	96/67	2.8/10.9	384
VW Polo 1.4 TDi PD †		3/1422/75	2650	13.3	22.8/15.4	62	26/26*	108	93/66	2.9/10.1	374
Vauxhall Corsa 1.7 DTi		4/1686/75	2850	12.7	22.8/16.3	57½	24/14*	106	95/70	2.9/10.35	382
Skoda Fabia 1.9 TDi		4/1896/100	2360	10.3	20.1/13.5	55	24½/27*	102	100/72	2.8/10.25	396
Daihatsu Sirion 1.3 SL ^p		4/1298/102	3450	9.5	25.9/20.5	47	27½/13	105	93/65	3.6/9.3	368
VW Lupo 1.7 SDi		4/1716/60	2700	18.3	36.5/26.0	62	26½/18	104	92/65	2.9/9.9	353
† 2000 model year ^p petrol-powered						* with ABS					

SAFETY		★★★★○
<i>Brake-assist reduces panic-stop pedal pressure, yet it's not over-servoed in ordinary braking. No real security for luggage and no deadlocks, but nice remote handset. Good crash test result, aided by four standard airbags</i>		
braking		
pedal feel	★★★★○	
in emergency	★★★○○○	
handbrake	★★★★○	
dry road stopping distance		
from 50mph (with brake-assist/ABS)		
pedal load		distance
unhurried 10kg		33m
sudden 12kg		27½m best stop
+4kg ie 16kg		27½m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (tested Sept 2000)	
front impact 69%	side impact 83%
overall 76% ★★★★○	pedestrian rating ★★○○○

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	deadlocks	✗
remote control	✓	alarm	0
auto window closure	✗	immobiliser	✓
		luggage security	
✓ standard	0 factory option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★○○○○	
<i>Inert, weighty steering deters enterprising cornering, but it's a stable, easy-going all rounder, otherwise. This new electric steering seems a retrograde move – even the turning circle is inferior</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★○○○○	
<i>Reasonably absorbent ride with vibe-free acceleration from 1500rpm/37mph in top and subdued, relaxed progress thereafter. No rear footwell heating – Expression Plus adds this with air con</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○	
<i>Always good for 65mpg on longer runs – if cruising at 70mph is limited – see table below. Very accurate low-level lamp – don't disregard it! Terrific tank range</i>	
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	41½
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	54½
motorway (70mph cruising)	49
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	63
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	75
typical mpg overall	59½
realistic tank capacity/range	49 litres/640 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	52.3/76.3/65.7
CO ₂ emissions 119g/km	car tax band A