

Renault Espace 2000-1 Quadra



RENAULT'S ALL-CONQUERING ESPACE, one of the most stylish and versatile – if not, perhaps, one of the most affordable – ‘people carriers’, has been the leader in its market sector virtually from the day it was launched. MPVs (multi-purpose vehicles), as they’re now called, are a fast-growing breed, yet the Espace has remained the pick of the crop.

Following a mid-1988 facelift (when the ‘Phase 2’ Espace acquired a restyled nose, modified tailgate and mechanical revisions to improve refinement), Renault added a pair of all-wheel drive versions, sampled here as the top-of-the-range 2000-1 Quadra. However, these are really intended for all-weather safety on the road or the occasional muddy field, not as serious, all-terrain workhorses – they’re far too posh for that!

The storm clouds for Renault may be gathering on the horizon, though. Toyota has replaced its van-derived Space Cruiser with the stylish, much more

Espace-like Previa, and it’s only a matter of time before a number of other manufacturers get in on the act.

At the wheel

The Espace’s tall, upright driving position calls for a bit of a hop-up into the cabin and – slightly disconcerting at first – the base of the large, steeply-raked windscreen seems a *long* way away. That apart, the driving position isn’t too van-like, thanks to generally car-like controls and a lofty perch that provides an excellent all-round view of proceedings. The gearshift tends to be a little vague and ‘sticky’, though, and the lever is also a bit of a stretch for taller drivers; our test car’s clutch pedal was very heavy and rather creaky, too.

Electronic multi-point fuel injection makes cold-morning starts and driveaway totally free from temperament, and the Espace feels a surprisingly lively performer, with acceleration roughly on a par with a typical 1.6/1.8-litre family saloon. Flat out, it’s easily

good for the top side of 100mph, but the engine sounds rather busy and boomy when worked hard.

Nicely weighted power-assisted steering takes the sting out of manoeuvring the bulky feeling Espace, while a surefooted grip and surprisingly agile handling allow the Quadra to be hurried along twisty cross-country routes far quicker than its tall, boxy looks suggests. Mind you, such driving leads to a fair amount of body lean in corners.

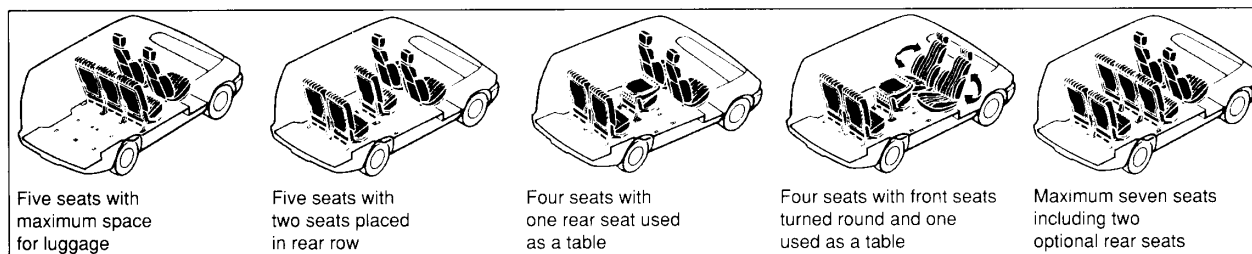
With comfortable seats and compliant, well-damped suspension, the Espace treats its occupants to generally smooth progress, marred only by the occasional rude jolt over bad bumps or potholes and a hint of 'float' over crests taken at speed.

The Quadra gains disc rear brakes (to go with ventilated discs at the front), and ours managed a better than 1g all-out stop at the test track – an impressive result no doubt aided by the viscous-coupled centre differential and permanent all-wheel drive, which largely compensate for there being no anti-lock option.

Inside story

More of a Tardis-like spaceship than virtually anything before it, the Espace's roomy, versatile interior is a real winner. Its 'one-box' cabin provides acres of space, with ample headroom despite the high-set floor. And, thanks to individual seats that locate into aircraft-style slots in the floor, the furniture can be rearranged to suit almost any occasion.

With 'captain and navigator's' front seats that swing round to face the rear, backrests that fold down to form table-tops, a huge tailgate that doubles as an awning (or an umbrella!) and a variable seating plan, the Espace is a genuine multi-purpose vehicle. It quickly transforms into a plush seven-seat minibus, a mobile mini conference centre, or, if necessary, even a hotel for the night. It's great for on-the-hoof hospitality or civilised picnics, too. With a quick tug and a lift, the individual back seats are simply left at home when you want to play at Pickfords. Not surprisingly, it's also extremely popular with TV and film crews as a mobile outside broadcast studio.



Although we've extolled the Espace's many virtues, we have a few quibbles: the additional pair of back seats are a £500 option on *all* models; to maintain their adaptability they're fitted with (inertia reel) lap belts only; and, disappointingly, folding the seats down usually leads to a fight for space with the row in front.

Such a large cabin places additional strains on the heating and ventilation systems, but the Espace still copes reasonably well. Although there are no separate

vents or ducts to the middle or back row of seats, those in the 'lounge' don't suffer too badly. Inevitably, those right at the back do least well. On warm days the 2000-l's twin glass sunroofs can be tilted (or removed altogether) to combat the 'greenhouse' effect, while on damp days the hinged rear windows can be opened to supplement ventilation or to gee-up barely adequate demisting throughput.

Of course, you need some decent music for all those aboard, too. Renault hasn't overlooked this particular requirement, either, installing an excellent Philips 4x20W hi-fi system, complete with its highly convenient satellite stalk-control, which provides finger-tip mastery of all the major functions.

The home-from-home interior is tastefully appointed, with reading/courtesy lamps all round to welcome you aboard at night, while the infra-red 'Plip' remote control central locking saves all that fumbling with keys. Electric (front) windows, alloy wheels, foglamps and *very* strident airhorns are all part of the package, too. While space for oddments isn't over-generous, we like the handy lidded boxes over the rear wheelarches, and the big, useful fascia-top recesses, although because they lack non-slip rubber mats, anything placed here tends to slide about.

Living with the Espace

While the Espace cleverly combines car-like manners and convenience with its 1001-uses interior layout, it needs more than just occasional use as a multi-purpose vehicle fully to justify its considerable capabilities – and cost.

With greater performance and the additional handicap of its all-wheel drive transmission, the Quadra proved a little thirstier than the previous model we tested (a 110bhp, carburettor-fed, front-wheel drive version – see R8608), although it still managed to return a pretty respectable 27½mpg overall in our tests. To house the additional running-gear, Quadra versions use a slightly smaller, relocated fuel tank (and a space-saver spare wheel), although this still allows 300 to 350 miles between refills.

Mounted 'north-south' within the Espace's novel glassfibre and polyester-clad galvanised steel frame, the power unit is rather tucked away beneath the droop-snoot nose; essential service points and reservoirs are all reasonably accessible, however. The non-rust bodywork and galvanised metalwork should help to ensure long-term durability of the 'hull', but some of the minor body fittings and trim seem a little flimsy and frail.

While the Espace is expensive to buy, its largely

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	1/4 mile
	3.5	11.8	18.3

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.1	5.0	8.3	12.5
IN 5TH GEAR		6.9	13.5	19.8	27.9
IN 4TH GEAR		5.0	9.8	14.9	20.7

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	14.1/10.6		12.9/9.9		14.4/10.9
		13.5/9.8			

Maximum speeds

REV'S PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	25	5700 *	5930	5000	5000
	106	74	48	105	106

* for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane unleaded

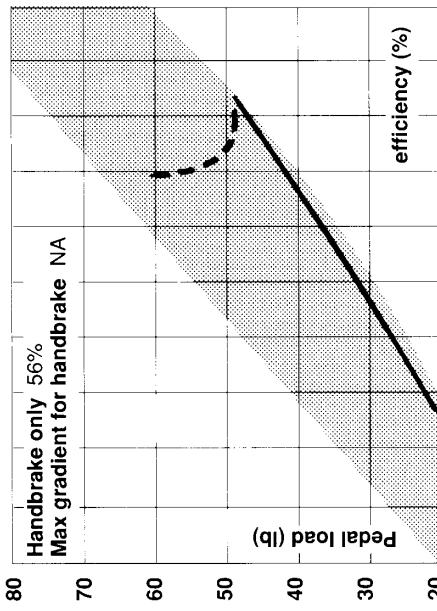
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	23
Short journeys in the suburbs	23 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	27 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	27
Gentle driving – rural roads	32
Typical mpg overall	27 1/2
Realistic tank range *	54 litres/330 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

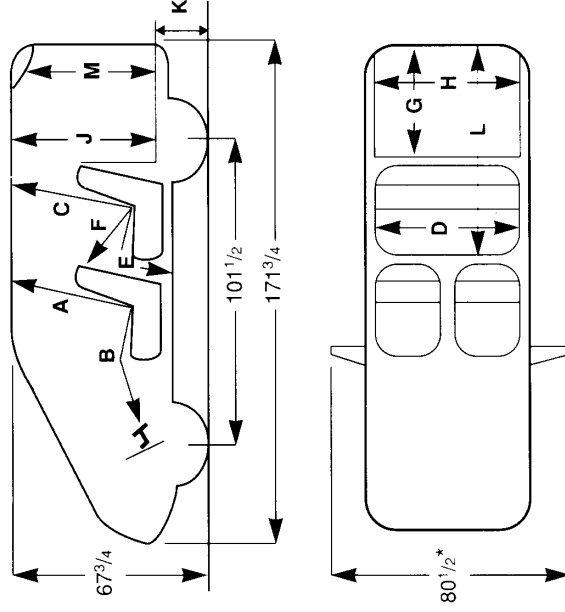
At start of test	32
After constant use	32
After severe use	36
After watersplash	NA
Number of stops to recover	NA

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	☒
Brakes	powerful? sensible effort? fade resistant?	☒ ☒ ☒
Seatbelts	front – effective? convenient? rears – effective? convenient?	☒ ☒ ☒ ☒
Head restraints	front – effective? rear – effective?	☒ ☒
Interior	thoroughly padded?	☒
Fuel	shielded filler? protected tank?	☒ ☒

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* mirrors don't fold

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

Inside (inches)		
A Front headroom	39 3/4	3027
B Front legroom (min - max)	33-39	49
C Rear headroom †	37/37	44 1/4
D Back seat width (between armrests)	57	44 1/2
E Typical rear * legroom †	43 1/2/36 3/4	21 1/2
F Typical rear * kneeroom †	33 1/2/25 3/4	77
M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	41 1/4	

* Typical represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in Middle/back row dimensions

Renault 25-based mechanicals shouldn't prove too expensive to run and maintain. Also, strong demand for more-affordable, used models should help to maintain its better-than-average depreciation score, particularly for well-kept, non-liveried private examples. Insurance is a steepish Group 6 or 7, though.

VERDICT

Hardly cheap – though you tend to get what you pay for – the Espace can be whatever you want it to be: saloon, estate car or van, office, mobile home or even a mini TV studio on wheels – versatile isn't the word!

As if its cleverly practical interior weren't enough, Renault has now given the Espace even more 'do-anything' appeal. It's done so without any

real sacrifice to its very competent on-road qualities, although ultimately, it's never going to out-Range Rover the real thing.

Being purely pragmatic for a moment, though, the Nissan Prairie, Land Rover's highly acclaimed Discovery and even the Mitsubishi Space Wagon can each carry as many people, all at a considerably lower price-tag, so make sure you really need all the Espace Quadra's capabilities before signing a substantial cheque.

With that minor hurdle dispensed with, there's simply nothing quite like the Espace – it's still a shining performer in the earth-bound 'space race', but although the Russians aren't coming, Toyota (and others not far behind) certainly are.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, longitudinal 4 in line; water-cooled. 88.0mm bore x 82.0mm stroke = 1995cc. Aluminium alloy block and head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 10.0:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating 2 valves per cylinder via rockers

Fuel system Renix electronic multi-point fuel injection fed from 58-litre (12.8-gallon) tank; low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: 97 octane/4 star leaded or 95 octane unleaded (no ignition adjustment required)

Ignition system Renix fully programmed electronic, integrated with fuel injection, via coil and distributor

Maximum power (DIN-net) 120bhp at 5500rpm

Maximum torque(DIN-net) 124 lb ft at 4500rpm (90 per cent of maximum between 2000 and 5250rpm)

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.5in diaphragm-spring, dry plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 43 lb/4¹/₂in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 4.09, second 2.18, third 1.41, fourth 1.03, top 0.86 and reverse 3.55:1

Final drive 3.78:1, 'full-time' four-wheel drive with viscous-coupling centre differential

Mph per 1000rpm 21.14 in top, 17.67 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3310 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent, double wishbones, coil springs and anti-roll bar. Rear: semi-independent, torsion beam axle located by trailing arms and Panhard rod; coil springs. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 2.7 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35³/₄ft between kerbs, with 48³/₄ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5.50J alloy (standard) with 195/65R14 89T tyres (Michelin MXT4 exclusive fitment on Quadra)

Brakes 10.2in ventilated discs front, 10.0in plain discs rear, with vacuum servo. ABS not available

HOW IT COMPARES

	(seating capacity in brackets)	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering † turns/ circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Renault Espace 2000-1 Quadra (7)		1995/120	106	12.5	27.9/20.7	27 ¹ / ₂	103/48	39	43 ¹ / ₂ /33 ¹ / ₂	2.7/35 ³ / ₄	171 ³ / ₄
Land Rover Discovery 2.5 Tdi (T-diesel) (7)		2495/111	86	23.5	38.1/25.2	28	85/50	41 ¹ / ₄	39/29 ¹ / ₂	3.7/39 ¹ / ₄	178
Mitsubishi Space Wagon 1.8GLX (7)		1755/89	95	15.2	36.0/24.4	31 ¹ / ₂	95/35	40	40/27	3.1/36 ³ / ₄	169
Nissan Prairie 2.0SLX 4WD* (5)		1974/98	98	13.7	31.1/20.3	27	100/38	40	39 ³ / ₄ /31	3.1/36 ¹ / ₄	171 ³ / ₄
Toyota Space Cruiser 2.0 (8)		1998/87	88	17.4	33.7/23.1	27	97/55	41 ¹ / ₄	35 ³ / ₄ /–	3.7/33 ¹ / ₂	168 ³ / ₄

* 7-seater version available without 4WD

† = all power assisted