

Renault Laguna 1.6



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.

TITH 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 (without practical scuff protection), clear headlamp lenses, a deeper front bumper and round foglamps 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 airbag is fitted), longer door bins, a redesigned fourspoke 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 16-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 16-valve engines, this one feels a bit lazy at low revs. It's certainly tractable, but doesn't really get cracking until 3500rpm, when there's power aplenty all the way to the 6600rpm cut-out point. It feels really torquey in the mid range and makes for lively overtaking, particularly if you're not shy about using the slick, positive gearchange. Expect 0-60mph in about 11sec and a maximum speed of 120mph. It's not quite the most hushed and refined of "fours" we've met, but it's quick, smooth and promises to be reasonably economical (Renault quotes an official Combined figure of 36.7mpg), so three out of four isn't bad.

With no changes to the impressive, well-proven chassis, the car handles as well as ever, while the ride continues to provide fluid, unflurried progress on smooth roads, with the weightier estate car version proving a little more absorbent and better able to

soothe away the occasional fidgeting felt at lower speeds on rougher surfaces.

All Lagunas now ride on 15in wheels and have ABS as standard. The brakes feel immensely reassuring, but we wish that the pedal were not quite so high and the handbrake quite so low.

Safety developments in the new model include larger airbags (with side airbags in the back seat as an option), new load-limiters built into the seatbelt mechanisms, and high-reach head restraints.

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, and a fingertip controlled stereo system; the last includes a singledisc CD player, but means you lose the cassette player.

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 promises to give a boost to both performance and economy. In all, the changes have made the already appealing hatch and clever estate an even more desirable duo.



FACTS AND FIGURES

ENGINE

Layouttransverse four in lineCapacity $79.5 \times 80.5 \text{mm} = 1598 \text{cc}$

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

Fuel/ignition belt-driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets
electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless programmed ignition.

66-litre tank

Power110bhp at 5750rpmTorque109 lb ft at 3750rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive Wheels $6^{1/2}$ J x 15 steel with 195/65R15 tyres

 Mph per 1000rpm
 20.8 in top gear

 Rpm at 70mph
 3365