FIRST DRIVE

# Renault Megane Scenic

HANDS UP ALL THOSE WHO WOULD love the lofty cabin, mix-"n"-match versatility and everyday practicality of an MPV, but can't justify a seven- or eight-seater's physical bulk or chunky price tag.

The solution to shoehorning a motoring quart into an affordable pint pot has arrived, though, as Renault introduces its fourth variation on the Megane platform – a highly innovative mini-MPV version called Scenic. The cute-looking five-seater joins the Coupé, five-door hatch and Classic saloon launched last year. There's also a cabriolet due in time for this summer's heatwave, but apparently we Brits won't be getting the Megane estate slated for the rest of Europe next year.

The Scenic is not, insists Renault, a niche vehicle or a slimmed-down MPV; instead, they're dubbing it MAC – a Multi Activity Car. Either way, it sits on the same Escort-sized platform and running gear as other Meganes, but by virtue of its false cabin floor and taller build, it stands about 20cm (8in) taller and just under 2.5cm (1in) wider than the hatch. This gives a bright airy feel to the cabin, as well as an extremely well conceived "office plan" which makes maximum use of the Megane's compact overall size.

Three of the hatchback's five power units are offered in the Scenic – 1.6- and two-litre petrol units producing 90 and 115bhp, plus a 1.9 turbo-diesel. Given the Scenic's increased bulk and load-carrying potential, however, Renault has wisely decided not to offer UK buyers the 1.4 petrol and *non*-turbocharged diesel variants that are available in France.

The Laguna-sourced two-litre's 115bhp gives the Scenic a lively turn of speed (Renault claims 0 to 62mph in 11.1sec and a 115mph top speed); but, as in the Laguna the eight-valve two-litre sounds a shade gruffer and more vocal than its smaller sibling. The turbo-diesel isn't short of get-up-and-go, either, with plenty of strong, willing urge. Overall, though, we reckon the 1.6 is the sweetest of the trio. Unladen, at least, it proves adequately lively in all but the traffic lights Grand Prix, with a claimed top speed of 106mph and 0 to 62mph covered in a not-too-pedestrian 13.7sec.

Despite a taller stance than conventional hatchbacks, the Scenic feels just as game for a bit of bend-swinging, with a firm but well-cushioned ride and reasonably responsive steering, though naturally there's a bit more body roll round the wiggly bits.

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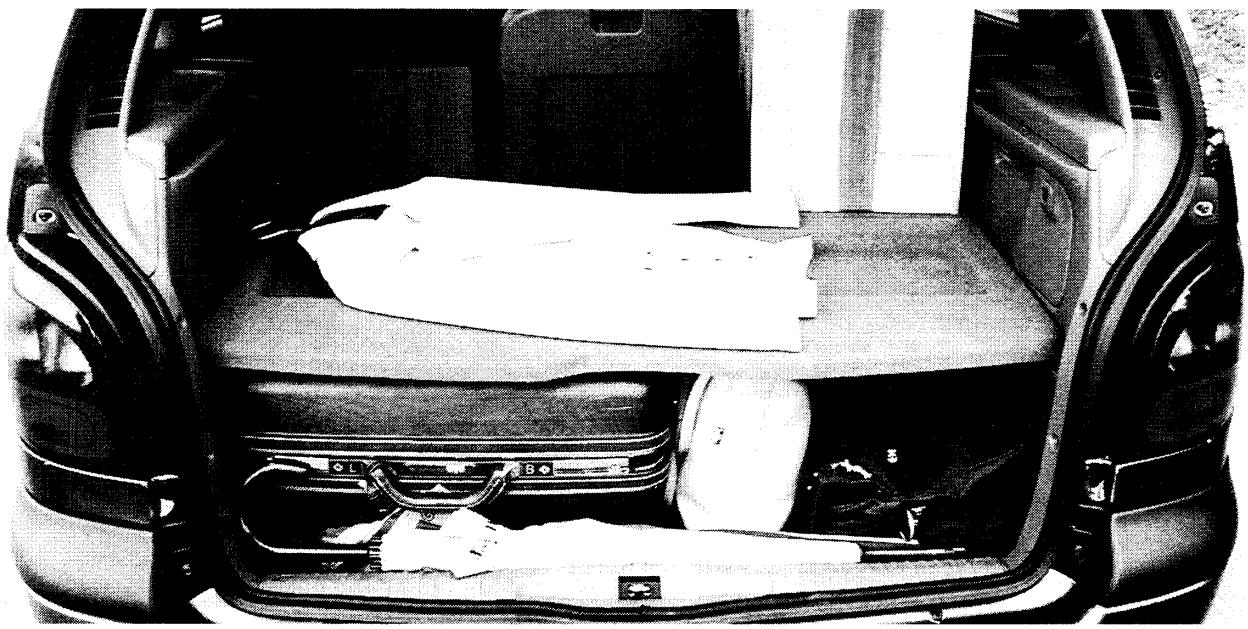
## FACTS AND FIGURES*

| | RN/RT | RXE | RT |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ENGINE** | **1.6** | **2.0** | **1.9dT** |
| **Layout** | front-mounted, transverse, four-cylinder | | |
| **Size** | 79.5 x 80.5 = 1598cc | 82.7 x 93.0 = 1998cc | 80.0 x 93.0 = 1870cc |
| **Valve gear** | SOHC 8-valve | | |
| **Fuel system** | electronic multi-point petrol injection | | turbo-diesel |
| **Power (bhp at rpm)** | 90 at 5000 | 115 at 5400 | 95 at 4250 |
| **Torque (lb ft at rpm)** | 103 at 4000 | 127 at 4250 | 132 at 2000 |
| **TRANSMISSION** | | | |
| **Type** | front-wheel drive | | |
| | five-speed manual or four-speed automatic | | five-speed manual |
| **Mph per 1000rpm** | 20.4/16.8 (5th/4th) man | 21.0/15.7 (5th/4th) man | 25.4/19.3 (5th/4th) |
| **CHASSIS** | | | |
| **Suspension – front** | MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower wishbones and anti-roll bar | | |
| **– rear** | trailing arms, four transverse torsion bars, telescopic dampers | | |
| **Steering** | power-assisted rack and pinion (all models), 10.7 to 11.4m turning circle | | |
| **Tyres** | 175/70R14T | 185/70R14T | |
| **Brakes – front** | 259mm ventilated disc | 262mm ventilated disc | |
| **– rear** | 228mm drum | | |
| **PERFORMANCE** | | | |
| **Maximum speed (mph)** | 106 (103 auto) | 115 (112 auto) | 108 |
| **0–62mph (sec)** | 13.7 (16.0 auto) | 11.1 (12.5 auto) | 12.9 |
| **FUEL ECONOMY (93/116/EEC)** | | | |
| **Urban (mpg)** | 25.7 (22.4 auto) | 23.0 (20.0 auto) | 31.0 |
| **Extra urban (mpg)** | 42.8 (39.8 auto) | 37.7 (35.8 auto) | 49.6 |
| **Combined (mpg)** | 34.4 (31.0 auto) | 30.4 (27.7 auto) | 40.9 |
| **Fuel tank capacity** | 60 litres (13.2 gallons) | | |
| **DIMENSIONS** | | | |
| **Overall length** | 413cm (162.8in) | | |
| **Overall width** | 172cm (67.7in) – excluding mirrors | | |
| **Overall height** | 160cm (63.0in) – excluding roof rails | | |
| **Wheelbase** | 258cm (101.6in) | | |
| **Kerb weight (kg)** | 1220/1255 (man/auto) | 1270/1300 (man/auto) | 1300 |
| **Luggage capacity** | min/max – litres (cu ft) – 410/1800 (14.5/63.6) | | |
| **Insurance groups†** | 5 | 8 | 6 |

† *same as hatchback*

* *All manufacturer's figures*



Vision is excellent, the driving position and controls are reasonably car-like and, unlike most of the larger MPVs, the Scenic's compact size and nifty turning circles make it easy to park and manoeuvre.

Inside, the Scenic's extra floor dictates more of a step-up than when getting into mainstream Meganes, but the pay-off is the lofty seating and panoramic vision that make MPVs so popular. Seating is strictly for five (two up front with three individual seats in the rear) and, as in the bigger Espace, options for rearranging them are almost limitless.

The centre rear seats folds, its backrest turning into a table-top, or it can be removed altogether. It slides fore and aft on runners, neatly allowing shoulders to overlap with a full load of passengers on board. It also has a proper, three-point seatbelt with the shoulder strap novelly mounted to the roof. On most models, the outboard seats slide, too, and with the centre one removed, the remaining pair reposition into alternative floor mounts to create a roomy four-seater. This allows the seats to slide backwards past the parcel shelf mounting ledge, to provide more rear legroom, says Renault, than in even the Safrane.

With most MPVs the luggage has to stay at home when all the seats are in use; not so in this case. There's a tall, rectangular-shaped boot (about 20 per cent bigger than the hatch's) behind the rear seats, along with dual-height mountings for the parcel shelf. The shelf is said to support up to 70kg, and allows split-level loads – pets and picnics, for example – to be carried. The load space expands to a massive 1800 litres (64cu ft) with the rear seats taken out – bigger than the Laguna Estate's, which is no mean load-carrier itself. There's a wealth of oddments space, too, with side lockers and bottle carriers on either side of the load space, a full-width trench under the rear seats and, on most models, handy under-floor stowage compartments in front of the rear passengers. In addition, there's a quartet of door pockets and a glovebox, even when the optional passenger's airbag is specified. The top 2.0RXE also comes with a useful storage tray under the front passenger's seat and seatback map pockets, but even the cheapest 1.6RN model has a full set of seats, cup-holders in the glovebox lid and aircraft-style picnic trays on the front seatbacks.

This base model is quite well equipped, too, with the likes of power steering, a driver's airbag, remote control central locking, an immobiliser, tilt-adjustable steering and remote controls for the radio cassette, all standard.

Mid-level RT trim adds an "electrics" pack comprising electric front windows and mirrors, "smart" windscreen wipers, a rev counter, an outside temperature display and dimming courtesy lights. It also brings the "touring" pack which provides those under-floor storage lockers, sliding outer rear seats and a 12-volt power socket in the rear.

RT trim also provides not just one but *two* manual tilting glass sunroofs with sunblinds, a driver's seat lumbar adjuster and a trio of rear head restraints.

Finally, the top 2.0RXE model gets the full works, with air conditioning, alloy wheels, passenger's airbag, roof rails, front foglamps and an upgraded, more powerful audio unit, while the twin sunroofs not only gain electric operation, but now slide as well as tilt. (The latter is also available as a keenly priced and worthwhile upgrade on the RT versions.)

## VERDICT

**The Megane Scenic, like the Espace before it, defines a new breed of vehicle – the MPV-style estate car. Soon, many more family-sized vehicles are going to be built this way. It's not the first time the formula has been tried, but Renault's *affordable* MPV is by far the most well thought out interpretation we've seen so far. "Got a life? Get a car to put it in", says Renault's ad. We couldn't agree more. Back home in France, half of all Meganes sold so far have been Scenics. With its cute looks, keen pricing and extremely versatile and practical nature, it's hard to believe that the same thing won't happen here.**

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