

Renault Safrane

Featuring 2.0RT

*Safrane RN*

RENAULT SOLDIERED ON WITH THE 25 way beyond its realistic sell-by date, concentrating instead on launching the Clio, updating the 19 and refettling the Espace.

The big, executive 25 was a pleasant ride for passengers, but wasn't a great driver's car because it lacked appeal-at-the-wheel and mechanical refinement. Neither was it as roomy inside as its external size suggested.

But recently, Renault laid the old 25 to rest, replacing it with an up-to-date successor for the Granada-size class, the Safrane. The four-model range consists of three trim and equipment levels.

The engine is now mounted transversely, to the benefit of cabin space, but, like its predecessor, the Safrane remains faithful to a hatchback-only body style. Engine options are also limited, being confined to a two-litre four-cylinder or a three-litre V6; there's no diesel, yet.

Two-litre models have a five-speed manual gearbox, with automatic as standard on the three-litre or as an option on the two-litre.

The smart, spacious cabin has a neat and well laid

out facia and an easily adjustable driving position. The controls look, feel and function better than they did on the 25, too. Mid- and top-range versions have a multi-function trip computer and safety-check system. If you don't like the voice synthesiser that goes with it, you can switch it off.

This smooth and torquey two-litre produces a competitive 135bhp from its tractable, fuel-injected 12-valve engine, but the Safrane's solid, made-to-last feel comes at the expense of substantial kerb weight. The modest power-to-weight ratio tells against the stopwatch at the lower end of the scale, but even so, its 125mph top speed is quick enough, while 11sec for the 30 to 70mph dash (or over 30sec in fifth gear) indicates acceptably brisk performance.

Fuel economy isn't too bad. We averaged a respectable 29mpg overall, but expect more like the low-to-mid twenties around town or in hard driving. Fortunately, a big fuel tank allows an above-average 450 to 500 miles between refills.

Even without the top model's computer-controlled suspension, the Safrane acquits itself on the road in accomplished fashion. It's tauter than the 25 and

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PERFORMANCE

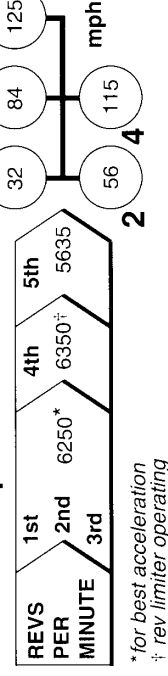
Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 3.6	0-60mph 10.9	1/4 mile 18.1
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.0	4.3	7.3	11.1
IN 5TH GEAR		7.7	15.2	22.8	31.2
IN 4TH GEAR		5.6	11.0	16.7	22.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	16.5/11.9		15.1/11.1		
		15.2/11.0		16.0/11.8	

Maximum speeds



* for best acceleration
† rev limiter operating

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

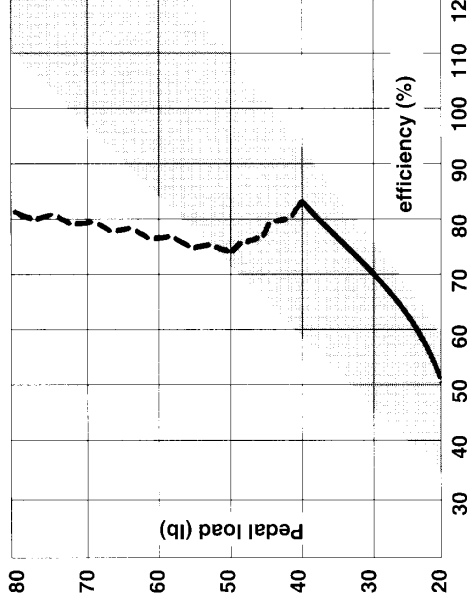
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	24-26
Brisk driving, mixed roads	28-30
Gentle driving, rural roads	32-34
Typical mpg overall	29
Realistic tank range*	75 litres/480 miles

* based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes (with ABS)

Brakes (with ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie $100\% = 1.0g$)

Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the ABS is operating.

Safety check list

Safety check list

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

Fade test

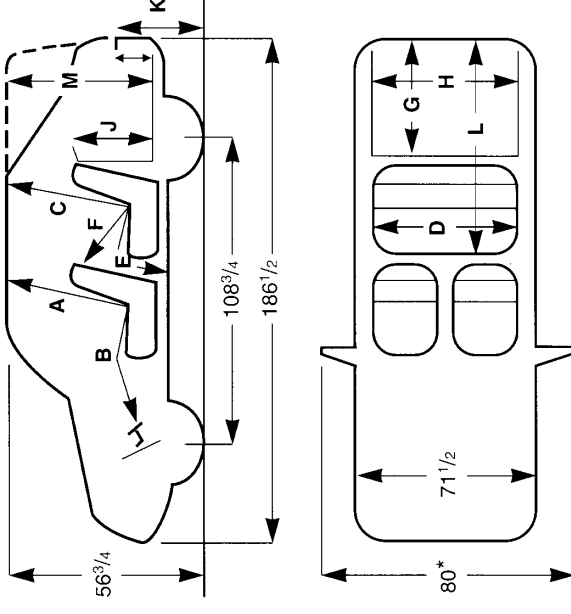
How hard use affects braking
(Ideal brakes show no change)

**Pedal load needed for
75% stop (lb)**

At start of test	28
After constant use	32
After severe use	38

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* 71³/₄ with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom (without sunroof)	37-38 ¹ / ₂	G Load length	42 ¹ / ₂
B Front legroom (min - max)	30 ¹ / ₂ -41	H Load floor width (min - max)	37 ¹ / ₂ -51 ¹ / ₂
C Rear headroom	37	J Load height (under load cover)	19
D Back seat width (between armrests)	54 ¹ / ₄	K Sill height (inner/outer)	8 ¹ / ₂ /27 ¹ / ₂
E Typical rear * legroom	39	L Load length	64 ³ / ₄
F Typical rear * kneeroom	31 ³ / ₄	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	30 ³ / ₄

* "Typical" represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

better controlled, with less of the old Gallic floating sensations over crests and dips.

Light, easy power steering is standard on all models, so making things decidedly easy around town, although the steering may be a little too light for keener drivers.

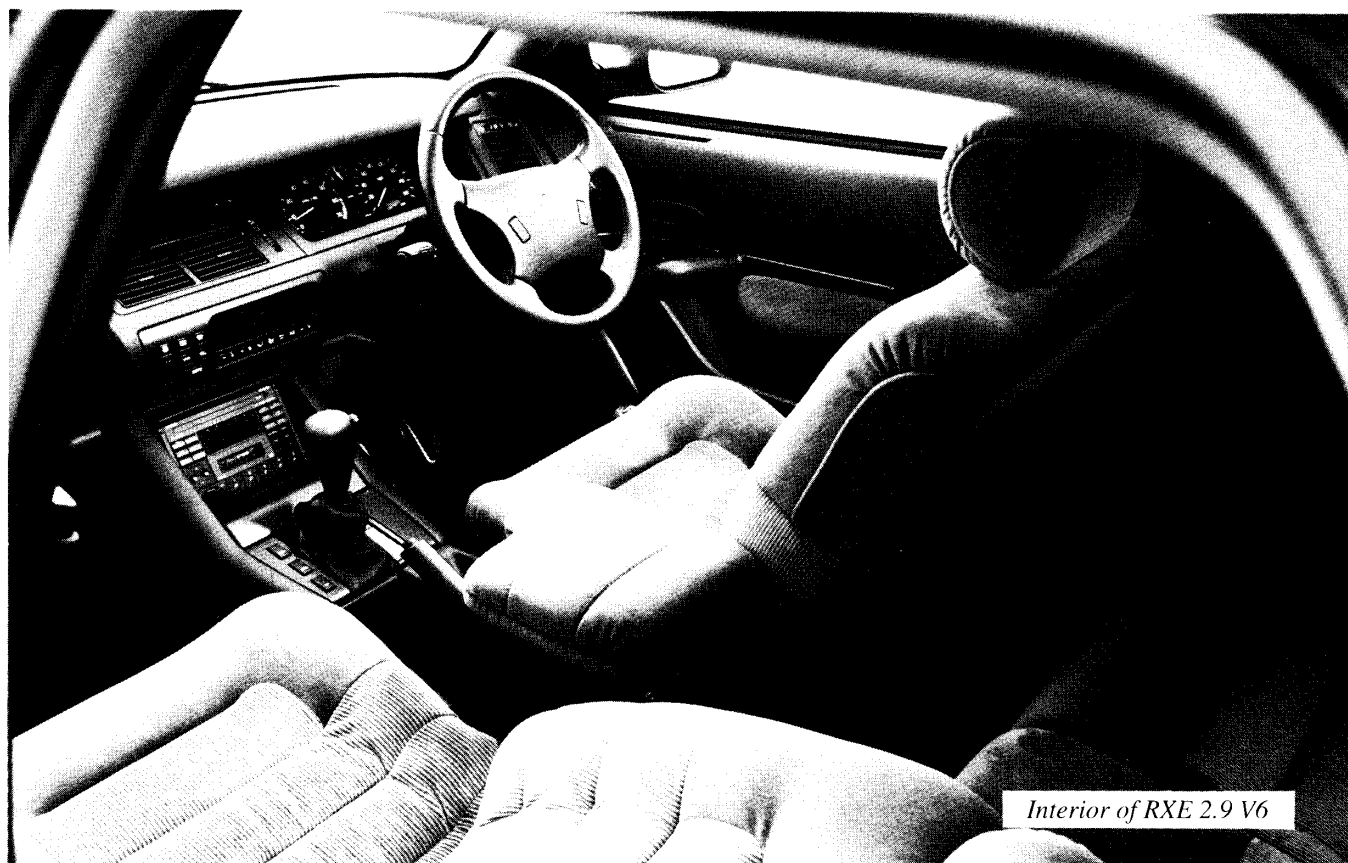
Braking is also well up to the mark, with big powerful discs at each corner, plus the reassurance of Bosch's latest-generation ABS on all models. Ultimate stopping power proved rather disappointing in our track tests, however.

There's no shortage of creature comforts to choose from and the Safrane offers a quiet, subdued and roomy cabin in which to enjoy them. It's a very comfortable five-seater, with deep, roomy space for the luggage at the back. Access is through a wide, easy-lifting tailgate that reaches down to bumper level.

The Safrane makes a big leap forward in the area of build quality. Not only does it look and feel well screwed together, but Renault's plastic mouldings and interiors get better at each attempt. All the electronic wizardry could prove troublesome and expensive if unreliability occurs a few years down the road, though.

VERDICT

The Safrane has managed the neat trick of building on the 25's strong points, yet at the same time making big advances in refinement, build quality, styling and comfort for passengers and driver alike. Although the performance is nothing to get too excited about on the smaller-engined version, the lower-range models are certainly quite keenly priced and deserve to attract buyers a good deal more readily than the 25 ever did.



Interior of RXE 2.9 V6

HOW THEY COMPARE	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Renault Safrane 2.0RT	1995/135	125	11.1	31.2/22.8	29	83/40*	41	39/31 ³ / ₄	3.2/35 ³ / ₄ (p)	186 ¹ / ₂
Alfa Romeo 164 2.0 Twin Spark	1962/143	127	10.0	27.3/19.3	32 ¹ / ₂	95/75*	42	39/29 ³ / ₄	3.3/36 ¹ / ₂ (p)	179 ¹ / ₂
Citroën XM 2.0i	1998/128	122	10.2	24.9/15.8	30	95/30*	44	40 ³ / ₄ /32 ¹ / ₄	3/35 ¹ / ₄ (p)	185 ¹ / ₂
Ford Granada 2.0EFi Executive	1998/123	118	11.3	26.6/19.4	30	96/40*	42	43 ³ / ₄ /33 ³ / ₄	3/34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	186 ³ / ₄
Peugeot 605 2.0SLi	1998/120	121	10.8	27.6/18.6	29 ¹ / ₂	89/30*	42 ³ / ₄	41/33 ¹ / ₂	3.3/36 ³ / ₄ (p)	186
Rover 820Si	1994/134	130	9.2	23.3/15.3	32	90/70*	43	41/31 ¹ / ₂	3.2/39 (p)	192 ¹ / ₄
Toyota Camry 2.2	2165/134	124	9.3	22.0/15.5	32 ¹ / ₂	105/60*	43	41 ¹ / ₄ /29 ¹ / ₄	3.1/36 (p)	186
Volvo 850 2.0GLT	1984/143	122	9.6	26.9/18.7	30 ¹ / ₂	86/40*	43 ¹ / ₄	40/32 ¹ / ₂	3.2/34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	183 ¹ / ₂
*with ABS									(p) power assisted	



Safrane RT

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 88mm bore x 82mm stroke = 1995cc. Aluminium alloy block and cylinder head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.3:1

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

Fuel system electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser with lambda sensor. 80-litre (17.6-gallon) tank, with low-fuel warning lamp, range-to-empty function on trip computer and voice synthesiser warning. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

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

Maximum power 135bhp at 6000rpm

Maximum torque 128 lb ft at 4500rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.5in dry plate, diaphragm-spring; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 28 lb/5 1/2in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.91, second 2.21, third 1.48, fourth 1.10, top 0.90 and reverse 3.64:1

(4-speed automatic standard on 3.0 V6, optional on 2.0 litre)

Final drive 3.52:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 22.2 in top, 18.0 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3155 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower arms and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by struts, coil springs, twin transverse links/radius arm and an anti-roll bar.

Dampers: telescopic all round

(Computer Controlled Suspension: three-way adjustable damping and self-levelling standard on 3.0RXE, optional on 2.0 litre)

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35 3/4ft between kerbs, with 55 1/2ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6Jx15 steel (optional lattice pattern alloys fitted to test car) with 195/60R15 88H tyres (Pirelli P4000 on test car)

Brakes 10.3in ventilated discs front, 10.4in solid discs rear, with vacuum servo. Bosch four-channel anti-lock standard on all models