



Renault Clio

Sweet temptation

Review | When shopping for a new compact car, one is tempted by many flavours. There's sturdy German, economical Korean, nifty Japanese, spirited Spanish and elegant Italian. This makes all cars the best in their own unique class. The Renault Clio is the latest addition to this list. Its design is more appealing than ever, and on top of that the all-new Clio promises to be the most economic of all small cars. Autozine was tempted to a test drive...

Its good looks are thanks to a new designer. Recently, Renault hired Dutchman Laurens van den Acker. At that stage the engineers had already finished the technical aspects of the car. It was up to Van den Acker to add a strong personality.

As if Renault wanted to compensate for the previous generations, the new Clio is now the most charming and daring car in its class. Look at the pictures and let the bold, playful shapes, in combination with its broad shoulders, impress you. To emphasise the lines, the Clio comes in bright colours. As far as Autozine is concerned the Clio looks best in red, so that colour was chosen for the photo shoot.



However, just asking for a "red" car isn't enough. Clients can customise items like the mirrors and the decorative stripe on the door. The chosen colour can also be mimicked in the cabin. The red dashboard in the test vehicle looks great and gives a smirk to the driver's face, even before driving a single yard.

Space

Despite the playful design, the cabin is roomy and all grown up. The large dashboard together with the huge

distance to the windscreen give the occupants the impression of driving a large car. This was the strongest point of the previous Clio, and Renault made a wise decision to copy this. There's lots of room around the front seats as well, which also adds to the feeling of driving a larger car. This certainly isn't a little box where the driver and passenger are cramped shoulder to shoulder.



The space in the rear is poor, as with most cars this size. Yet the Clio has a tiny advantage, because the shape of the rear doors makes it easier to get into the car.

The boot measures exactly 300 litres and that's above average, although not the biggest in its class. The boot lid is relatively small, making it a bit harder to load and unload luggage. The small rear window and thick C-pillars obstruct the view to the rear, making it harder to manoeuvre the car. This is why the optional rear-view camera is certainly worthwhile.



Trim level

The Clio doesn't only tempt with its cheeky looks. It also lures the customer with its price. For example: from the second spec level satnav comes as standard! This is a relatively simple system that was originally developed for the Dacia brand. However, its simple nature may be a benefit for some because the limited number of options makes it less complicated to use. The more luxurious versions of the Clio can be fitted with TomTom satnav, which offers more possibilities.

The Clio charms with some clever inventions as well. For example, the light sensor has a little lens. This way the Clio looks ahead and is therefore able to turn on the headlights even before entering a tunnel.



The loudspeakers in the doors have extra large soundboxes, which continue all the way into the dashboard for a more robust sound. Do not expect any miracles from this, but for a small car the sound quality is more than decent.

Handling

Technically, this fourth generation of the Clio is based on the third. The existing platform has been widened and lengthened, making the car roomier and more stable. The new Clio is lower than before to improve aerodynamics and thereby fuel economy.



The suspension has been carried over from the previous Clio as well. And for a good reason: the Clio

was and still is an excellent handling vehicle. Grip (read: safety) in fast corners is fine, while comfort on bad roads is sufficient at the same time. Regrettably, this doesn't mean the Clio is fun to drive. Despite its promising looks the Clio isn't an exciting or even slightly involving car to drive.



Diesel

The engines are new and it won't be a surprise to hear that Renault had the best possible combination of fuel economy and performance in mind (it would be news if a carmaker announced a car that was slower than before, yet more guzzling).

First the 1.5 litre diesel was tested. This version uses so little fuel and emits so little CO2 that it is exempt from various taxes in many European countries.

Despite its engine speed, the four-cylinder diesel always develops about the same output. This means the Clio shows very little character and never gives the driver the feeling of driving a fast car. It also means the Clio is very relaxing to drive. With the 90 PS / 220 Nm strong engine in the front, the Clio isn't fast, yet the driver never has the feeling that the car is underpowered.



Although noise levels are low, on the open road the test driver repeatedly tried to engage sixth gear (which isn't present).

To minimise fuel consumption Renault applies all common technologies like reducing internal friction, installing an idle start system, using low-resistance tyres and providing the driver with information about the fuel economy. At a push of a button engine power can be cut by 10% to reduce fuel consumption by the same amount. The oil pump does not run at a constant speed and instead only provides just the required pressure to lubricate and/or cool the engine. An extra frugal version of the Clio features a plastic boot lid which weighs significantly less, yet again benefiting economy levels.

The strongest point of the new Clio is that it is as frugal in practice as promised by Renault. The test drive comprised of twisty mountain roads full of hairpins where the car had to repeatedly brake and then accelerate again. Despite this, the trip computer noted an average fuel consumption of just 4.8 litres per 100 km (59 mpg). Continuing the drive on open roads, the average dropped to just 3.8 litres per 100 km (74 mpg); very close to the factory figure of 3.4 litres per 100 km (83 mpg).

Petrol

Of course, the Clio is also available with a petrol engine. It does not have four cylinders like most other cars, but just three. This makes a car much more frugal, but because of the rough sound and vibrations throughout the car a three-cylinder engine is less

common. Renault solved these problems by making the engine noise deeper, so it sounds less pathetic. Next, Renault installed extra sound insulation. The result is that one will only notice that the "TCe" is a three cylinder when explicitly listening for it. Those who don't know will think this is just another happy little power train.



To improve performance the air is forced into the cylinders at high pressure. A "turbo" utilises the pressure of the exhaust gasses to do so. The extra oomph of the turbo becomes apparent from around 3,000 rpm. At lower revs power is sufficient, but no more than that.

Because of this the driver will always try to keep the engine speed up. Only those who resist this temptation, will drive economically with the "Clio TCe 90". On yet another highly demanding test route the average fuel consumption was a modest 5.4 litre per 100 km (52 mpg). Some other small cars use more on a flat, straight road!



Conclusion

What a tempting car, the new Renault Clio! The temptation starts with a playful design which gives the Clio the flair and personality it lacked before. The Clio also tempts with its price. Considering the cabin space and spec levels the price tag is very modest.

The promising looks aren't matched by an involving drive. The Clio drives, steers, shifts and brakes just fine, yet fun to drive is not in its dictionary. All engines perform adequately and do not tempt with any tomfoolery. The upside of this is that the Clio isn't just frugal on paper, it is also cheap to run in daily life. That is how the temptation of the Clio can be rationalised as well. ■



Specifications

Renault Clio dCi 90 Dynamique

Size and weight



Length x width x height	406 x 173 x 145 cm
Wheelbase	259 cm
Kerb weight	1.062 kg
Trailer	570 kg
Trailer - braked	1.200 kg
Fuel capacity	40 l
Luggage space	300/1146 l
Tyre size	195/55R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1461 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/2
Max power	90 PS @ 4000 rpm
Max torque	220 Nm @ 1750 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	12 secs
Top speed	180 km/h
Average mileage	3.2 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	3.3 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	3.1 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	82 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 16,225
Price base model	Â£ 12,675