



Dacia Sandero (2008 - 2012)

Delightfully decent

Car review | Dacia has understood it well. Not everyone is looking for a car that looks like a jewel, performs like a rocket and offers the luxury of a palace. The goal of a Dacia is to get its occupants dry and safe from A to B at minimal costs. The new Sandero promises to do so even better than ever before.

Dacia entered the Western Europe market just recently. But in its homeland Romania the brand has been building imitation Renaults for decades. The Logan was the first model on the West European market and the success of that car proved there was room for more.

The new Sandero has a modern design which should appeal to an even larger group of buyers. This time Dacia opted for a trendy hatchback instead of an old fashioned sedan.

Interior

Although the Sandero is a completely new model, the connection with Renault is still unmistakable. Even better: on the boot lid is a proud Dacia, by Renault badge. Technically the Sandero is based on a previous generation of the Renault Clio.



The whole interior reminds one of a somewhat old, basic version of a small Renault. Even the smell in the car is without a doubt a Renault scent! The layout of the Sandero is elementary, but with simple means Dacia still managed to make a nice looking cockpit. Thanks to contrasting panels the dashboard certainly does not have a depressing East-block feel to it.

The standard equipment is limited, but all necessities

are there. The Sandero knows no refinement whatsoever. All knobs are big and bulky. The optional airconditioning has two modes: nothing or a freezing pole wind.

The base model offers the best value for money. As soon as optional extras are added, the price gap with other budget cars (Kia Rio, Chevrolet Aveo) tightens. Many small quirks and ergonomic mistakes from the predecessor of the Sandero have now been fixed.



No matter what trim level, the whole Dacia feels well made. The doors close with a solid "clunk" sound. Only the boot lid closes with a cheap metal "splat". The cabin space in the front and rear is fine, especially for a car in this price range. For the price of the Sandero other brands only sell real miniatures like the Daihatsu Charade or Toyota Aygo. If you want maximum space at a minimal price, the Dacia Sandero is an excellent

choice (although the Dacia Logan MVC offers even more space per pound).

Road holding

Because the Sandero is a bit larger than most other cars in this price range, the Dacia feels more mature on the highway. Thanks to the Renault-suspension the Sandero offers more comfort and stability than smaller cars.

Road holding is fine, even in extreme situations the car responds safely and predictably. The power steering (dependent of the trim level) is not recommendable. Despite this extra, steering is still heavy. The feedback from the steering wheel is poor; the Sandero steers very indirectly.

The same goes for operating the clutch and shifting gears. All the refinement European buyers have come to expect is missing. The Sandero 1.4 requires some getting used to. During the first hours the driver is likely to pull up with a roaring engine and slipping clutch. Because all controls lack feeling, it takes some time to drive the Sandero smoothly. After that the Dacia-driver is totally used to the car and will not experience any discomfort.



Performance

The power of the 1.4 engine is no more than adequate. From a displacement of 1390 cc the Dacia

develops 75 hp / 122 and that is less than its competitors offer. This is because simplicity comes first. Dacia does not opt for advanced technology and optimum efficiency, but focusses on easy to repair mechanics. Even a simple garage in rural Romania must be able to service the Sandero.

The base model easily keeps up with traffic, but don't expect much more than that. When the car is driven faster noise levels increase significantly making the Sandero less pleasant to drive. Quickly overtaking other cars can be done, but the Sandero doesn't encourage to do so.

When driving calmly the Sandero is remarkably quiet and comfortable. Because the Sandero almost forces a relaxed driving style, the fuel consumption is actually much lower than Dacia promises!



Conclusion

Don't expect any miracles. It is easy to criticise on the new Dacia Sandero. The car isn't very refined, steering lacks feeling and performance is poor.

But when the price of the car is taken into account demands shouldn't be set that high. When judged as a basic car the Dacia Sandero is an excellent offer. The Sandero is among the cheapest cars one can buy, but offers more room and comfort than other cheap cars. It is the base model which offers the best value for money. ■

