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Latest Renault Mégane Road Test

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Author: David Miles

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New Renault Mégane family hatchback to boost sales even more.



The latest model tested by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)...

Renault in the UK during the '66' plate registration month achieved their best sales for eight years with 17,272 registrations. And the September sales are no flash-in-the-pan success either as for the year-to-date their UK sales are up by 15% to just over 18,000 vehicles - their strongest year-to-date since 2010. This is a significant improvement for the French brand compared to the UK new car market's growth overall of just 2.5%.

Renault's electric car range of ZOE, Twizy and Kangoo ZE has grown in sales by 25% for the first nine months of this year and sales of the Captur and Kadjar compact and medium 'crossovers' have capitalised upon the increasing demand for SUV style models.

Also boosting sales in September was the arrival of their new Mégane C-sector five door family hatchback, and the Mégane Sport Tourer estate range will arrive in November. Renault's C-segment offerings will be further boosted with the arrival at the end of the year of the all new Scenic and Grand Scenic MPVs.

The all-new Mégane is the fourth generation of the model which stretches back over 20 years, and with global sales of 6.5-million. The new five door hatchback range currently has 25 variants in its line-up but that will be extended next year with the arrival of diesel-electric hybrid powered versions in addition to the current petrol and diesel powered models.

Current prices for the new models start at £16,600 and rise up to £25,500 through six trim and equipment levels. These are Expression+, Dynamique Nav, Dynamique S Nav, Signature Nav, GT-Line Nav and GT Nav. There is the choice of four engines, two petrol and two diesels. The petrol units are a 1.2 TCe 130 hp turbo with manual and EDC dual clutch auto transmissions, and a 1.6 litre 205 hp turbo unit with EDC auto for the GT Nav model. The turbodiesel units are a 1.5 litre dCi 110 hp with manual or auto transmissions or a 1.6 dCi 130 hp unit with a manual gearbox. Both diesel units have low CO2 emission levels of just 96 g/km so they are free of VED road tax and will be the high mileage company car



driver's favourite with a tax levy of 19%. Officially the 110 hp unit will return 76.4 mpg, and the 130 hp unit 68.9 mpg.



When Renault describes the Mégane as all-new they mean it; the car is built on a new generation platform shared with the recently introduced and highly praised Kadjar mid-sized SUV, and the two ranges are built at Palencia in Spain.

Unfortunately I couldn't attend the UK Media launch for the new Mégane due to a holiday, so when a test car arrived on my driveway my first thought was 'how you have grown'. It looks far more substantial, more impactful yet still retaining an athletic side profile with its rising waistline, lower roofline and longer wheelbase. The overall length is 4,359 mm (14.30



ft) and the wheelbase is 2,669 mm (8.76 ft). With its lower height of 1,447 mm (4.75 ft) the 1,818 mm (5.96 ft) of width makes the new Megane actually look wider and more muscular. At the front is the new Renault family face with its very prominent diamond-shaped logo flanked by sleek headlight and daytime running light units. Sculptured door panels lead to the tailgated rear end with a shallow rear window plus a spoiler above. The rear body is pinched at the hips over muscular haunches, making it look wide. As is commonplace the rear light units traverse both the rear corner body panels and bleed into the tailgate, giving a continuity of styling lines.

Although the Mégane might be all-new its competitors remain old foes. These include the sector sales leading Ford Focus followed by the VW Golf, Vauxhall Astra, Peugeot 308, SEAT Leon, the roomier Skoda Octavia, Nissan Pulsar, Honda Civic, Kia Cee'd and Hyundai i30.

Even the base model core specification is high with much of it swayed towards safety. Standard equipment includes ABS braking, electronic brake-force distribution, electronic stability control, traction and understeer control, cruise control with speed limiter, hill start assist, six airbags, side impact absorption and Isofix child seat mountings for the outer rear seats.

When it comes to the niceties of kit and trim, core equipment includes an Eco mode, alarm, auto locking of doors above 6 mph, halogen headlights, front fog lights, tyre inflation kit, cloth upholstery, centre armrest with storage, rear centre armrest, heated rear window, tinted windows, 16-inch alloy wheels, air con, electric front/rear windows, DAB radio and Bluetooth. Instead of the tyre inflation kit Renault does offer a space-saver spare wheel for £95 or an emergency spare wheel for £120.

Move up the range and the main interior visual feature is a central touchscreen, 7-inch for the Dynamique Nav and an 8.7-inch tablet style screen for the next grade up, which was my test version – the Dynamique S Nav. Controls of the sat-nav, radio, Bluetooth and heater system fan speed are all embedded within this touchscreen which is not always user-friendly. Whilst the heater temperature controls remain knobs, to turn on the air-con and

adjust fan speed settings requires the touchscreen to be used as is the selection of the radio channel. I am not a fan of these most-used controls being operated via the touchscreen; they are not convenient and I could say safe because it requires the driver's eyes to be taken off the road. It is not just Renault that has de-cluttered their fascia layouts this way. It looks good but in reality it's not user-friendly.

In addition to the ample standard specification items, personalisation options are big selling points these days and the new Mégane has lots of these extra cost items, including hands-free parking and blind spot warning at £500 or adaptive cruise control with distance warning for £400.

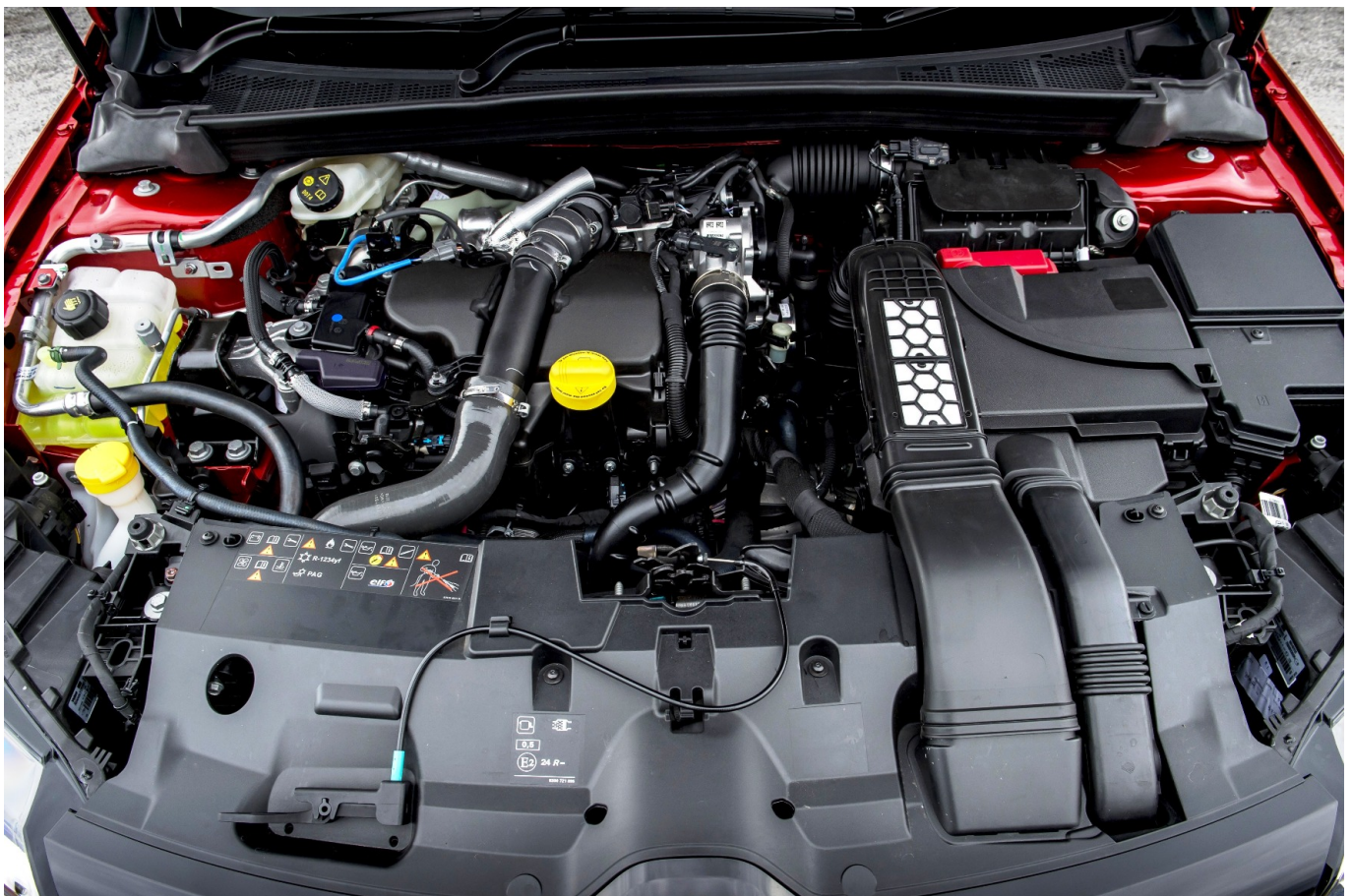


As for space the Megane's front interior is relatively roomy but rear seat legroom is not plentiful given the seemingly longer wheelbase. However seat and ride comfort is generally good. Visibility to the rear and rear quarters is restricted by the shallow depth tailgate window and high headrests of the outer rear seats. The Dynamique S Nav gets an increase in wheel size to 17-inch ones so there was more road noise than is ideal. Roadholding was generally good but not needle-sharp or as agile as a Ford Focus or VW Golf as an example, for this particular version. The steering offered consistent weight at all speeds but lacked feedback especially at higher speeds on winding country roads. In the



handling department the new Megane just didn't feel very athletic; it was well balanced but not as agile as the best in its class.

The engine of my test car was the 1.5 litre dCi, four cylinder turbodiesel which develops 110 hp, with 260 Nm (192 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm. This is the unit most likely to be chosen for business and fleet use because of its low 96 g/km of CO2 emissions. This means no road tax costs for any driver and company car users get away with 19% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Officially this unit with its six-speed manual gearbox will return 76.4 mpg, impressive on paper but in reality some way from that figure. I did see 70 mpg on the computer at one stage but a mixture of motorway, country roads and in town driving returned a real-life average of 62.7 mpg.





The engine might be frugal with low running costs but it is not that rewarding to drive. It gets the job done and serves the purpose for high mileage business and fleet drivers. Acceleration from standstill is on the lethargic side but it brightens up edging towards mid-range speeds. The rpm for torque delivery from 1,750 rpm just seems too high by today's standards even for small capacity petrol and diesel direct injection turbocharged engines. With its gearing for optimum fuel economy and low emissions the performance lacked low down grunt, making it stodgy to drive anywhere but open roads. Once underway the experience improved and it cruised happily at 70 mph. The six-speed gearbox worked well enough but the gearchange was not as precise as some competitor models and occasionally a wrong gear could be selected. Top speed is officially 116 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 11.3 seconds so performance is modest, but remember this is a fuel economy model. Other versions will be livelier.





VERDICT

Overall the new Mégane looks bigger, bolder, has more kerb appeal, is well-equipped and with the 1.5 diesel engine, frugal on fuel with low tax costs. It just lacks that driving fluidity, composure and agility of a Focus or Golf, and the interior space of an Octavia.

For: Larger with greater road presence, well-equipped, lots of safety kit, fuel-frugal engine, low tax costs.

Against: Cramped rear seat legroom, restricted rear/rear quarter visibility, lacks the sharp handling and driving dynamics of the class leaders, too many functions are operated via the touchscreen.



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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Renault new Mégane Dynamique S Nav 1.5 dCi 110 manual.
Price: £20,400.

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, four cylinder, common rail direct injection turbodiesel, 110 hp, 260 Nm from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual.

Performance:



0-62mph: 11.3 seconds.

Top speed: 116 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 76.4 mpg (62.7 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 96 g/km, VED roads tax £0, BIK company car tax 19%.

Insurance Group: 21E.

Warranty: Four years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,359 mm (14.30 ft), W 1,818 mm (5.96 ft), H 1,447mm (4.75 ft), boot/load space 434 to 1,247 litres (15.33 to 44.04 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.