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Renault Kadjar 1.5 diesel First Impressions

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Holding fast – Kadjar exemplifies Renault’s powers of recovery...

Says Dave Randle.

French national giant, Renault’s road hasn’t always been either straight or smooth. Yet somehow it has always managed to navigate the *virages dangereux* and the *chaussées*



déformées of the industrial landscape with vision, flexibility and finesse.

It was nationalised in the first place to keep it from going off into the *paysage*, but it has never by any stretch of the imagination been a lame *canard*.

Its engineering excellence and its range of core products from innovative electric micro-cars to handsome lorry units, by way of multibadged commercials, racing cred and highly competitive range options, aided by a sagacious strategic alliance with Nissan and the brilliant management of the Dacia sub-brand have, against sometimes enormous odds, saved it from a fate worse than British Leyland.

And the key has been as much about being light on its feet as about either quantity or quality. On so many occasions its guiding spirits seem to have been able to act spontaneously as well as wisely, without too many echelons of inertia-inducing committees and debating societies.

When the true *horreur* of the situation that faced much of the automotive world a couple of years back became known, there was no time for dithering. Even signature but possibly overripe models such as Espace were dropped from the UK market without ceremony. Horns were pulled in and emphasis shifted to the pile 'em high Dacias.

And, lo and behold, the punter did do the maths, and the Duster cleaned up. (Get it? Oh, please yourself.) More importantly, the maths worked out for Renault too, so much so that they and their compatriot brands have gone from near death to radiant health.

In parallel with the *bon marché* Dusters and Logans, this has been due in no small part to the sheer class of the Renault range proper.

In my view, Captur is one of the most successful combinations of style and content on the road. It looks cracking from every angle, in which ever of its striking paint combinations and, having had the pleasure of driving one across a sizeable proportion of its native land, I can attest that it feels as good as it looks.



Although the Regie's stylists have never been constrained by existing formulae – think of Vel Satis, Avantime and even the shake-that-ass Mégane, not surprisingly, Kadjar looks like a Captur on steroids, more up for it, more pugnacious, less of a pretty face, but no broken noses or cauliflower ears.

Apparently one in every five new cars sold is a so-called crossover, so anyone who doesn't have one in their range is looking to miss out, which is why we seem to spend a lot of time driving perfectly decent cars that are much of a macho muchness on the outside while becoming ever more civilised on the inside.

Kadjar – I looked it up by the way, and it's the name of an Iranian dynasty, more usually spelt Qajar, who formerly ruled over Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia – is actually built in Spain, but very much targeted at what is not these days the quite so Far East. In Renault's two strongest markets, Europe and China, the taste for crossovers is even more pronounced, with around a quarter of all cars from the genre. A foot in each camp is excellent strategy for the company and there is no doubt that, building on the strength of Captur, Kadjar will see it pay off.

And it is the key concept of combining the usefulness of a normal motor mixed with the practicality of an estate car in a thing with the presence of a sports utility that makes the formula work for so many disparate buyers.





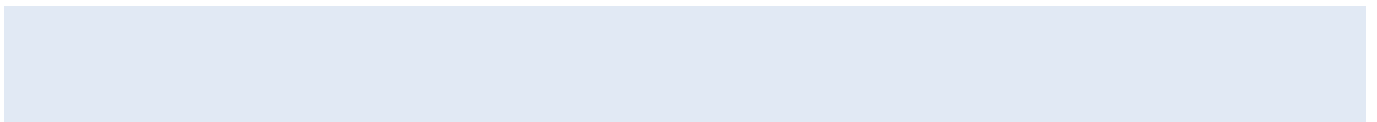
Unlike 4x4s of old, Kadjar is refined throughout, with a modern, comfortable interior and engineering built of subtle arts rather than heavy metal. Out of the 18 models, emerge numerous choices of both fours and what are now becoming known as 'enhanced' two wheel drives. In other words, the whizzo electronics do a lot of the things that would once make you think Africans and Finns had magical powers, because they could make a two wheel drive go on sand, mud and snow while you were confined to your driveway.

Many people still seem to be reassured by the extra set of shafts and gear wheels of the proper four, although the enhanced models will manage in most scenarios, if they're called upon at all.

VERDICT

The car is bigger, the spaces are greater; in a week of mixed driving, Kadjar impressed me as another car Renault got right - comfortable, well-equipped, nicely put together and finished, with one of the best engines going.

Renault and the Kadjar will be with us for the foreseeable and will find a good proportion of the teeming crossoverists captivated by the car's individual character and looks.





Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Engine: 1461 cc common rail diesel.

Transmission: Five speed manual.

Power: 110 hp.

Torque: 260 Nm (192 lb.ft) at 1,750 rpm.

Performance:

0-62mph: 11.9 seconds.

Top speed: 113 mph.

Fuel consumption: Official Combined Cycle 74.3 mpg.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 99 g/km, VED band A.

Insurance Group: 14

Warranty: 4 years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,449 mm (14.76 ft), W 2.058 mm (6.76 ft), H 1,613 mm (5.29 ft), boot/load space 251 to 959 litres (8.9 to 33.9 cu.ft), 5 doors/4 seats.

Price: £23,015.