Improved mileage range Renault Zoe R90 Z.E. 40 First Impressions

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New Renault Zoe R90 Z.E. 40 right power-up more electric vehicle sales

David Miles (Miles Better Motor Agency) tells all.

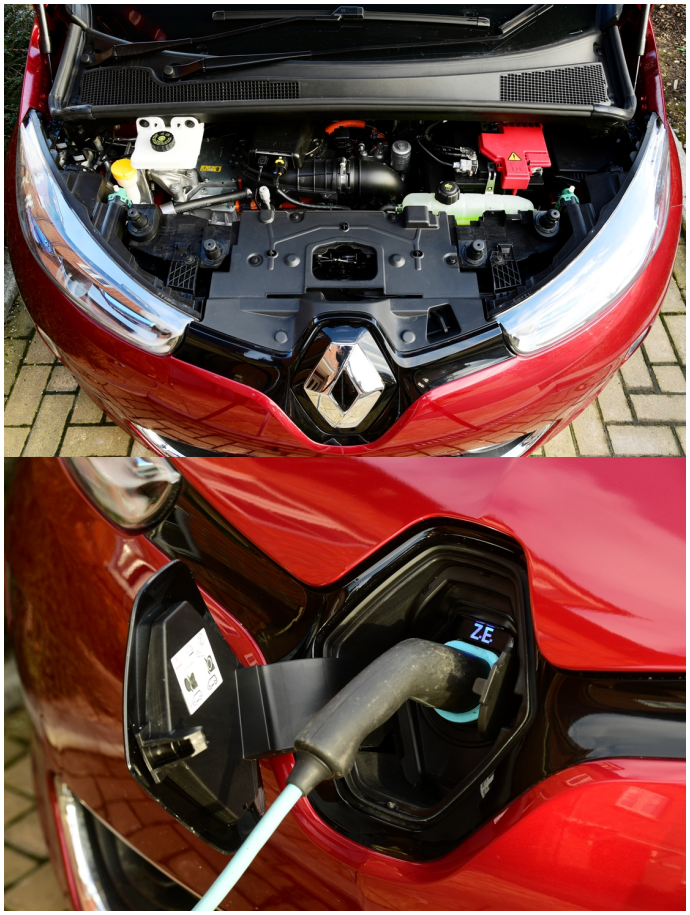
Perhaps it has been the issue over 'dieselgate' and falsified emissions of diesel cars and the demonising of diesel powered vehicles with their higher NOx emissions, or perhaps the latest electric powered cars with their improving driving range, or is it the thought of significant increases from 1 April in VED road tax charges for most vehicles that has triggered a significant charge towards electric car sales.

Sales of alternatively fuelled vehicles (AFVs) in the UK grew by 22% last year to almost 89,000 new car sales. In January this year AFV sales grew by another 20% with over 7,000 registrations.

Whilst electric powered cars currently enjoy no VED costs and low 7% company car Benefit-in-Kind taxes, they are also free of the London Congestion Charge, with their zero CO2 tailpipe emissions. Even after the 1 April tax changes for all new cars bought after that date VED road tax will remain £0 every year but BIK rises to 9%, and they remain Congestion Charge free. With the price of petrol/diesel increasing at a rapid rate, electric powered car sales should continue to charge along. However electric cars still cost more to buy than conventional combustion engine or hybrid vehicles so it's still not an obvious choice to go all-electric.

The UK's third best selling electric car is the Renault Zoe five door supermini sized hatchback and now included in its revised range are the R90 Z.E. 40 models which Renault claim have a driving range of up to 250 miles on one full charge and "the greatest range of any mainstream electric vehicle". However Renault in fairness says that the new Z.E. 41kW battery has a real-life range of between 186 miles in temperate conditions and 124 miles in extreme cold conditions. The new 2017 Zoe range still remains available with the existing 22kW battery option for the entry level Expression Nav version whilst Dynamique Nav and the new Signature Nav versions get the new Z.E. 40 battery.

Prices start from £13,995 for the 22kW Expression Nav and rise to £20,645 for the additional new Signature Nav Z.E. 40 version, and these prices include the Government's Plug-In Vehicle Grant. These prices do not include the monthly battery lease costs which range from £49 to £110 per month depending on the mileage limit and which battery is chosen, 4,500 miles with the 22kW unit and up to unlimited mileage with the 41kW battery. Buying the Zoe outright with its battery but without the monthly battery lease costs and the prices go up starting from £18,995 and ranging up to £26,245 including the Plug-In Grant.



Ben Fletcher, Renault UK's Z.E. product manager said at the media test driving day that 90% of UK Zoe customers choose the battery lease option because of the lifetime warranty replacement that the battery leasing option offers, even though the battery is covered by an eight year/100,000 miles warranty. Most customers choose the £79 a month lease period with its mileage limit of up to 7,500 miles a year for the 41kW battery models, the main selling versions, or if the 22kW battery model is chosen the monthly lease charge is £69 for the same mileage limit.

In the lease option a battery will be replaced free-of-charge if it falls below 75% of its efficiency for the lifetime of the vehicle. Ben Fletcher added that a Zoe costs around two-pence a mile to run and a full charge using a domestic electric supply will cost between £3.50 and £4.00 a charge. For public charging points the costs varies from as little as free to around £12.00 at motorway service stations.

He added that since the Zoe's introduction in 2013, close to 6,000 of them have been sold, 90% to retail customers. The Zoe is the UK's third best selling all-electric passenger car behind the top selling Nissan Leaf and the specialist sports Tesla models. Zoe customers range from younger technophobes through to environmentalists but the majority buy it for its super low running costs. He said, "The more you drive a Zoe the more money you save".

Theoretically doing away with driving range anxiety, which has limited sales of electric vehicles for most people, the Zoe's Z.E. 40's extra range comes by using a new battery pack which has almost double the storage capacity through higher density cells of the standard Zoe – but it is no larger or heavier.

Renault also offers a free home 7kW fast-charger for private customers, which takes four to eight hours to charge a Zoe's battery from zero to full capacity. In addition new software for the sat-nav system allows drivers to find paid-for 43kW 1-hour to 1.40-hour charging points regardless of the power supplier – which Renault claims will make range anxiety a thing of the past.

So apart from new pricing and an additional higher powered battery pack for a longer driving range, what else is new for the 2017 Renault Zoe range?

The Expression trim level provides buyers with a comprehensive specification with a 7-inch touchscreen housing Renault's easy-to-use R-Link2 infotainment system with TomTom satellite navigation; climate control, electric windows and electric heated mirrors, cruise control, speed limiter, keycard, Bluetooth connectivity and ample storage throughout the cabin.

The Zoe Dynamique Nav adds to the Expression specification with a hands free keycard, automatic lights and wipers, rear parking sensors, rear electric windows and electrically operated, heated and folding door mirrors, 16-inch alloy wheels and a leather steering wheel and gear lever. In addition to the Z.E. Connect app, the Dynamique Nav benefits

from a one-year subscription to the Z.E. Interactive app. Via a smartphone or computer this allows you to remotely charge your Zoe and schedule charges, as well as cabin temperature pre-conditioning, in order to maximise convenience and take advantage of available off-peak electricity rates.

The new Zoe Signature Nav trim level sits at the top of the range and features leather upholstery, heated front seats, a seven speaker BOSE audio system, rear parking camera, different design 16-inch alloy wheels and driver's seat lumbar adjustment.

As for performance, depending on the model chosen, 88 to 92 hp is available, with 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque from the electric motor from just 250 rpm so acceleration is immediate –ideal for silent nippy in-town travel and pulling out at busy road junctions. On the open road that initial burst of performance quickly levels out with all models having a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 13.5 seconds and a top speed of just 84 mph, which of course is still over the UK's legal top speed. Going up hills marginally drags down speed and uses more battery power.

The ride is well balanced and generally comfortable but with its extra weight not as agile at the Renault Clio supermini sized hatchback which uses the same platform.

VERDICT – PETROL OR ELECTRIC?

And there-in lies the issue, is it better to buy a new petrol engined Renault Clio for less money, better performance, no driving range anxiety and to pay a bit more for road tax or do you opt for a Zoe? If you use your car predominately for city or town driving it has to still be the Zoe 22kW model, but if you do occasionally undertake a longer trip or want to make more shorter journeys between charge-ups then the new 41kW versions are the better choice. It is all about 'horses-for-courses' and perhaps the horsepower offered by a petrol powered new fuel-efficient Clio is still the better all-round bet.

As an example at the Renault media day we tried a mid-range new five door Clio – the Dynamique S Nav TCe 90 turbocharged three cylinder 898cc petrol model which costs

£16,265, although other petrol versions start from just under £12,000. Our test model had comparable specification and will officially return 60.1 mpg in the Combined Cycle and on the same town and country roads test route as our drive in the Zoe it returned exactly 50 mpg. Top speed is 113 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 12.2 seconds. The CO2 emissions are 105 g/km so VED road tax is currently £0 and then £20 for Year two. Company car Benefit-in-Kind tax is 18%, insurance is a low 7E and the warranty is the same as the Zoe – four years/100,000 miles.

It's make your mind-up time – for me it's the Clio petrol model, its more involving to drive, less fuss and time required to refuel it, no driving range issues and cheaper to buy, but I could be wrong!

For: Low tax costs, zero CO2 emissions at the tailpipe, well-equipped, improved real-life driving range, easy to drive.

Against: Expensive to buy and costly optional monthly battery rental.

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

2017 Renault Zoe R90 Z.E. 40 Signature Nav.

Price: £19,895 including Plug-In Grant + £59 to £110 monthly battery lease costs depending on mileage, or £25,495 outright without battery leasing charges.

Engine: Electric motor 92 bhp, 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque from just 250 rpm, single forward speed + reverse auto transmission.

Performance: 84 mph, 0–62mph 13.5 seconds, range 250 miles max.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 0 g/km, VED road tax 0%, BIK company car tax 7%.

Insurance Group: 16E.

Warranty: Four years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,084 mm (13.40 ft), W 1,730 mm (5.68 ft), H 1,562 mm (5.12 ft), boot/load space 338 to 1,225 litres (11.94 to 43.26 cu.ft), five doors; four/five seats.

For: Low tax costs, zero CO2 emissions at the tailpipe, well equipped, improved real-life driving range, easy to drive. Against: Expensive to buy and costly optional monthly battery rental.