Renault Grand Scenic seven seater MPV Road Test

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David Miles (Miles Better News Ag… …s the new Renault Grand Scenic seven seater 'people carrier'.

Sales of MPV 'people carriers' have in recent years dropped in popularity due to the public's switch to the now more desirable but less practical people-carrying SUVs and Crossover type vehicles. MPV sales dropped a further 4.3% in the UK last year and 3.1% in Europe.

But the industry has responded by making the latest generation MPVs more stylish than just being a boxy family taxi. The latest Renault Scenic five-seater mid-sized MPV and the larger seven-seater Grand Scenic are good examples of the industry's fight back in this sector. In

the UK the MPV sector is still a worthwhile area of the market with almost 125,500 registrations last year

The fourth generation Renault Scenic and Grand Scenic MPVs on-the-road prices including the new higher rate First Year VED road tax costs start from £21,605 to £30,805 for the Scenic while the Grand Scenic starts at £23,445 and rise to £32,605.

First introduced in 1996 with updated versions arriving in 2003 and 2009, the latest incarnations see both body styles offered in familiar Renault Expression+, Dynamique Nav, Dynamique S Nav and Signature Nav specification levels. There are over 40 versions in the two body styles and the UK sales split between the two is expected to be 50-50.

It sets high safety standards as the only model in its class fitted with standard active emergency braking and pedestrian detection. They get a full five-star rating from the Euro NCAP safety tests.

But MPVs are generally bought on space and seating versatility and these new models comply well in these areas with the five-seater Scenic having a rear load area capacity of 572 litres (20.20 cu.ft) and 596 litres (21.05 cu.ft) in the seven-seat Grand Scenic. If the rearmost seats are stowed, underfloor compartments and other oddments room amounts to 57 litres (2.01 cu.ft) of extra space.

Some models get personalisation settings – as we have seen on the Mégane – to alter dynamics and comfort as well as interior ambience, more sophisticated sound systems and added luxury features, but all come with standard 20-inch wheels to give them a higher stance on the road, edging towards the looks of a more popular SUV/Crossover type of vehicle.

The new Scenic and Grand Scenic are based on the company's Common Module Family platform which is scalable for each car and the same system and used in the Kadjar SUV. The Grand Scenic has a longer wheelbase at 2,804 mm (9.20 ft) with an overall length of 4,634 mm (15.20 ft). The Scenic has a wheelbase length of 2,734 mm (8.97 ft) and is 4,406 mm (14.46 ft) long.

Currently the new ranges offers the choice of five engines, 115 and 130 hp 1.2 litre TCe petrol units, a 110 hp 1.46 litre dCi diesel, a 130hp 1.6 litre diesel and a 160 hp 1.6 litre dCi diesel with the six-speed automatic transmission. Anytime now we will see the addition of a 110 1.46 litre dCi 110 hp diesel with a 10 kw electric motor for the first hybrid in these ranges.

My test drive version was the Grand Scenic powered by arguably the most suited engine, given the extra size of the vehicle, particularly when loaded – the 1.6 litre 130 hp dCi turbodiesel unit and a six-speed manual gearbox with the most desirable Dynamique S Nav specification. This variant is priced at £28,605 but as usual a range of options such as metallic paint, full LED headlights, Parking Pack, Safety Pack, BOSE Pack and a £95 emergency space-saver spare wheel pushed the price up to £31,240, which looks expensive but check out the high equipment levels and the prices perhaps make more sense. Of course deals are there to be had in this competitive new car market in a sector that's losing its appeal.

Having said that the price looks expensive much of the specification is safety-related as you would expect for a family bus. Some of the safety spec items are pedestrian detection,

fatigue alert, lane departure warning, traffic sign recognition, auto high/low beam headlights, auto lights and wipers, electronic stability programme with understeer control and a whole host of airbags and ‘smart’ seatbelts.

Other spec items from a very long list include a head-up colour display, rear parking camera, front and rear parking sensors, hill start assist, 20-inch wheels, panoramic sunroof and electric sunblind, sunblinds for the rear side windows, Multi-Sense driving modes, aviation style tables, 60/40 split folding and sliding middle row of three seats, fold down flat individual two third row seats, R-Link 2 multimedia system with an 8.7-inch portrait touchscreen, TomTom Live sat-nav, DAB radio and Bluetooth, hands-free keycard with walkaway lock and welcome functions, electrically operated and fold-in door mirrors, multi-position boot floor, cruise control and of course air-con.

All this is packaged up in a smart looking bodyshape stretching from its strong image Renault face front end with steeply swept back windscreen with twin A-pillars, through to the side with its rising kink at the waistline above sculptured door panels and wider SUV style wheelarches, big wheels, plus a coupé style roof with integrated sleek-looking roof spoiler over the large and wide tailgate.

Inside it looks just as modern, with a deep fascia housing all the controls and function, plus the centrally-positioned R-Link vertical tablet style touchscreen. The raised front cabin style seats provide a comfortable riding/driving position with good forward visibility. The middle row of seats are well proportioned and comfortable and the sliding function is useful and necessary for getting passengers in and out of the two rearmost seats, but these are better suited to child passengers rather than adults. The middle/third row seats can be folded at the touch of a button from the load area or the R-Link system which is clever and user-friendly.

As for the drivability, the 1.6 litre 130 hp turbodiesel engine is responsive with 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,750 rpm and the six gear ratios are well-spaced to make the most efficient and rewarding use of this engine. Only when pushed hard does the engine

tone become more audible, not exactly stressed but it lets you know it's working hard. Once at cruising speeds the engine is hushed and for its size remarkably lively in such a big vehicle. That reflects in the fuel economy with around 44 mpg being the computer-shown figure for local and country road driving. Cruising along on open roads with the ECO mode selected and the overall figure improved to close to 60 mpg, so overall 50.5 mpg was where my test drive figure ended up, which impressed me. Top speed is 118 mph with the zero to 62 mph acceleration time being reasonable 11.4 seconds. With CO2 emissions of 119 g/km the new VED road tax costs are for new cars bought after the 1 April this year, £160 First Year rate and £140 for Year Two onwards. Previously they were £0 and then £30 a year so a big change in the wrong direction for running costs. Company car drivers will now pay 25% Benefit-in-Kind tax – up from 23% pre April this year. Insurance is rated at a competitive Group 16 thanks to its safety rating and features.

The ride quality was generally good, with well balanced handling fore to aft thanks to its long wheelbase, but having a higher road stance there was some body roll during cornering on country roads, although not enough to unsettle passengers' stomachs. Impacts from potholes are felt and heard and much of that is down to the fitment of the large 20-inch wheels fitted as standard.

VERDICT

Overall the new Renault Grand Scenic does a good job of keeping modern-day MPVs relevant against the strong sales opposition of the latest fashionable trend for customers to opt for an SUV or Crossover.

For: New stylish good looks with plenty of kerb-appeal, high level of standard specification, easy to fold middle and third row seats, good visibility.

Against: Annoyingly the touchscreen has to be used to alter too many settings such as air-con, cramped third row of seats, expensive compared to the Citroën Grand C4 Picasso and VW Touran, new higher rate VED running costs.

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

All-new Renault Grand Scenic Dynamique S Nav dCi 130 manual MPV.

Price: £28,605 (£31,240 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.6 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel 130 hp, 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750rpm, six speed manual.

Performance: 118 mph, 0–62mph 11.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 61.4 mpg (50.5 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, new VED costs from 1 April £160 First Year rate and £140 thereafter, BIK company car tax 25%.

Insurance Group: 16.

Warranty: Four years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,634 mm (15.20 ft), W 1,866 mm (6.12 ft), H 1,655 mm (5.43 ft), boot 596 litres (21.05 cu.ft) with five seats in use, total load space tbc – but it's huge!

Five doors/seven seats.