

## ROAD TEST - Renault Clio 1.2 Turbo

To look at the TV advert for the new Renault Clio you would imagine that it is every motorist's dream: sports car, luxury saloon and family runabout all rolled into one. In truth it is not even a new Renault Clio, just a midlife face lift of the existing version that has been around since 2005. They've fiddled with the lights and the nose in order to make it look more like the Megane, which is a very nice looking car, but just succeeded in making it look like a fairly anonymous supermini with different lights on.

That aside, the Clio does have a fair bit going for it. Get inside and it is surprisingly spacious with room to seat five full size adults at a pinch. The seats are comfy and the new dash (the other thing they've changed) is a quality item with a nice little niche for the satnav system and soft touch plastics, at this trim level anyway. In fact, the whole car has a feeling of quality about it – it feels weighty and solid and refined, a huge step forward from earlier Clios which were tinny little things. All the controls operate smoothly and it really does have a feel of Germanic build quality. However, the true test of quality is time. The previous model had a residual value of 40% of its sale price, largely because the body and interior shows wear and tear very rapidly.

Traditionally, the engines in the Clio have not been fantastic but Renault has really got its act together for this facelift model. The 1.5 litre diesel is relatively smooth and refined and the higher output 106bhp version really provides some serious grunt in such a small car. I'd give the 1.6VVT a miss though, it's noisy and thirsty to boot and you don't need 128 horses in a car this size. The 100bhp 1.2 turbo I tried is great, really punchy from low down in the rev range, all the power you need and it makes a nice noise too. It's also very economical, I managed 48mpg and I am notoriously heavy footed.

The driving experience is all a bit so so, it's reasonably agile and hangs on well in the corners but the lifeless electrically assisted steering takes all the fun out of driving it hard. The ride is pretty good



compared to the standards of the class but you don't buy a supermini for the ride and refinement in the first place.

Really, it's hard to make out what the USP of the Clio actually is. Yes it is reasonably good value, yes it is relatively spacious and yes it is a better quality item than Renault's earlier efforts. But the supermini segment is not only one of the most crowded corners of the automotive firmament, it is also one of the most competitive. Take the latest Ford Fiesta for instance, it is better looking, better made and far better to drive, the Clio might have a few litres more boot space but that is all. The Alfa Romeo MiTo is prettier, sportier and infinitely more characterful, the Mini is a thousand times cooler and the Vauxhall Corsa is nearly as good as the Fiesta. The Toyota Yaris is better built and will hold its value better while the VW Polo is in different league in terms of quality and has that indefinable air of class that puts £1000 on the resale price. The Clio only really makes a convincing case for itself when compared to its French rivals from Citroen and Peugeot.

There is only one unassailable argument for buying a new Clio and that is called the Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup. It is a stripped out pocket rocket that goes like a Porsche, looks like a boy racer's wet dream and handles like a rally car. All this and it only costs a couple of grand more than my test car. Fantastic!

**Kit Johnson**

*Car Tested Renault Clio 1.2 Turbo Dynamique  
 £13,335 OTR*