

12,000 Miles On
RENAULT 30 TS

Reprinted from MOTOR week ending October 1, 1977
www.nosrenault30.com

12,000 Miles On RENAULT 30 TS

"It has been the most dependable, trouble-free car I have ever run". Roger Bell reports on a Renault that is still seeking recognition



THE FRENCH marketing man looked aghast, as only a Frenchman can, then dropped his defences with a shrug and conceded. "No, the 30 has not sold as well as we hoped. Eet is the image you see. The English do not associate a Renault with a big luxury car . . ." Nor, it seems, do Europeans in the numbers that Renault would have liked.

You can interpret the word 'image' how you like but I suspect it is the literal meaning of the word that accounts for the indifferent sales record of the big Renault, which notched up 1,955 sales here in the first eight months of '76, dwindling to 1,410 in the corresponding period this year. Put it alongside a VW Passat and it looks like a puffed-up Passat, which is nothing to be ashamed of but possibly a deterrent to customers with £6,000 burning a hole in their (or their firm's) bank account.

Our own impromptu consumer survey conducted recently indicated that most people don't think the 30 looks like a £6,000 car, underlining what the French marketing man had said: Renault have an image problem. The cheaper 20, which shares the same bodyshell and perhaps detracts from the prestige of its more expensive stablemate, has been much better received: its record can only improve, too, with the recent introduction of a new 2-litre engine to power it.

The big Renault's problem is that it doesn't stand out in a crowd. Nor, with its rather austere matt-grey-on-black fascia — the focal point for impressionable buyers — does it

have great showroom appeal. A pity, because the 30TS has a lot going for it in other respects. Comfort, performance, versatility and, in the case of our car, reliability head the list of virtues which make it a formidable contender that no one in the market for a classily holdall should dismiss lightly.

First impressions

It was because the Renault had shown up so well on a previous Group Test (running in convoy with a Mk1 Granada, Rover 3500 and Citroen CX 2400) that we acquired one for long-term appraisal. I was completely sold on that Group Test car which, for me, was the pick of the quartet, beating the Rover (which gave me backache) in to second place.

But, to quote from the Running Report (week-ending June 11),

"when our appropriately coloured Royal Blue long-term arrived earlier this year, the appeal of the Group Test car that had so captured my admiration was not immediately apparent. For a start there were several minor but irritating faults, the most annoying of which was an obvious malfunction in the heater (it gave a choice of hot or stifling, regardless of where the levers were set); an excessively high idling speed; and a steering wheel that had not only been put on crooked but also fouled the plastic surround so that it squeaked and creaked when turned".

All these faults were rectified at

the first free service but, even then, the car was not quite as I remembered. Initially, the gearchange was very poor, first being particularly difficult to disengage: you needed two hands sometimes. The synchromesh on second was also feeble. Brake judder and fade, of which more later, were also problems that marred the car's early life. But as the miles increased the teething troubles dwindled, though I reckon it took a couple of months to get anywhere near the state of euphoria I felt for the first 30TS I drove.



Top: lie-back seats make a passable bed but the headrests, above, are awkward to remove and replace. Below and right: comfortable, fulsome armchair seating



Likes and dislikes

The big Renault has many things going for it, not least its space-saving packaging with a compact engine/transmission slung ahead of the front wheels, leaving the rest of the car unencumbered by major mechanical intrusions. The five-door hatchback configuration, though nothing new to Renault who had popularised it years before with the 16, was to begin with a bit of a novelty for a large executive car. Since then, the Rover 3500 and Audi Avant (yet to be seen in Britain) have underlined that the hatchback concept is no longer the preserve of mini and midi cars.

The Peugeot 504 estate that I ran last year served to emphasise that the carrying capacity of even a big hatchback like the Renault is no substitute for a large estate. Although it will swallow as much luggage as you're likely to need on holiday, it is rather less successful as a goods vehicle than it is as a personnel carrier. A heavy load will sink the tail on its soft springs, cutting short the view through the mirror. Fortunately, the aim of the headlights can be adjusted to compensate for any changes in attitude by turning a knurled wheel on the steering column — a useful facility that should be adopted by other manufacturers.

Changes to the seating arrangement since the car's introduction have made the 30 less versatile than it was, the seat squabs folding in a rather cumbersome way to form a luggage platform that is convoluted in shape and far from flat. The high rear sill also prevents long loads from sticking out of the back. Removal of the rear deck shelves with which the contents of the boot can be hidden from sight is also a fiddly job. Those of our car have spent most of the time in the garage.

Though of limited use as a goods wagon, the Renault certainly excels when it comes to carrying people, or even bedding them down for the night. I have slept comfortably on several occasions on the lie-back seats, though getting them into the prone position entails an infuriating fight with the headrests to release



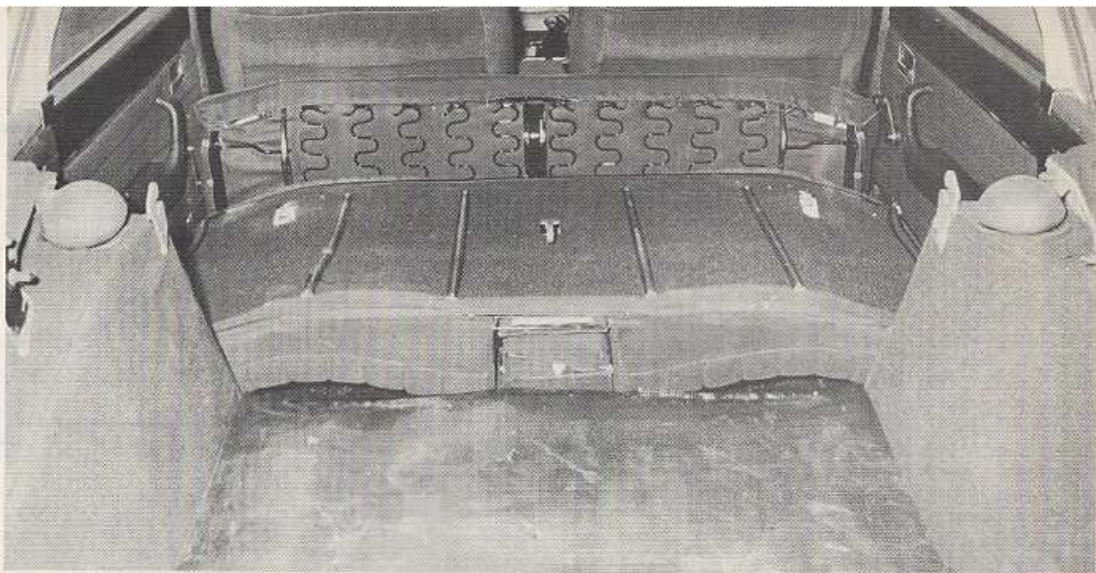
them from their awkward locking mechanism.

The armchair seats, soft and fulsome like those of most French cars, are sumptuously comfortable, and the resilient, long-travel suspension smoothes all but the worst bumps. Few cars cosset their occupants better in this respect, particularly on long motorway journeys. In complete contrast to, say, the new Granada, the ride/handling compromise of the suspension is biased very strongly in favour of the former. Not that the Renault handles badly. Far from it. The power steering, though less responsive than that of some rivals (which may or may not be an advantage, depending on your taste), makes it an easy car to handle. It can become a bit untidy when hustled along bumpy secondary roads, where the heaving and rolling may be unsettling to passengers with delicate stomachs, if not to the driver's confidence. On fast, sweeping curves, the car is impressively sure-footed and stable. The cornering powers are high enough for most people to remain well on the right side of the limit, but even doddlers are likely to discover the lamentable lack of traction when making a brisk getaway from rest, especially in the wet. The wheels spin, the tyres squeal, heads turn, the steering tugs. And you aren't even trying.

If anyone not a million miles from Dagenham should suggest that nothing better can be expected of a powerful front-wheel drive car, point them to an Audi 100 5E which has no such traction problems. Maybe the Renault's readiness to spin its wheels stems from nothing more than inadequate boots — the 175 HR 14 Michelins are a bit on the skinny side for a large car. I would not dispute the technical department's contention that the 30TS is also under-damped, which may have a bearing on the matter too.

Misgivings I have expressed before about the brakes must now be withdrawn. The brakes are still too light and sensitive for my taste, the result of excessive servo assistance, but the alarming way in which they used to fade during just one hard application from speed is no longer evident. Several punishing stops just before this was written failed to induce anything more alarming than a hint of roughness as the discs got cherry red. The brake judder that shook through the car early in its life has also gone. At long last it would seem that the all-disc brakes are now as good as the specification suggests they ought to be. But it shouldn't take 12,000 miles to bed the pads in, should it?

Although the all-alloy, free-breathing, overhead camshaft V6 is less powerful than the fuel-injected version used in the Volvo 264, the Renault is by far the quicker of the two. Compared with the Peugeot 604 — third member of the Franco-Swedish V6 club — there is not much in it. The Renault is deceptively fast. From rest to 60 mph takes about nine seconds (less, no doubt, if the wheel-spin could be tamed), and the car will top 115 mph and cruise effortlessly at 100 mph, even though the engine is then spinning at 5000 rpm. How-



Above: the rear seats fold forward in a rather cumbersome way to form a platform that is convoluted in shape and far from flat. Below: a long trouser-smudging reach for the backrest release, left, and the big, high-lifting tailgate, right



ever, it is not so much these figures that impress as the engine's ability to accelerate the car smoothly and vigorously in top from 20 mph when you floor the throttle. This steam engine flexibility is what sets it apart from most others, including the 2.8-litre Ford V6 used in the new Granada which is no match for the 30TS in the low and mid speed ranges. For a road car, I like a lazy slogger, especially one that will also rev sweetly, as the Renault V6 does.

The gearchange, stiff and notchy when the car was new, has loosened up considerably and is now quite slick, though still a bit clonky and inclined to chatter slightly when accelerating hard in second. The clutch, if anything, has deteriorated, very mild judder sometimes being evident when moving off.

Although at its best as a comfortable, cross-country express, fast main road driving focuses attention

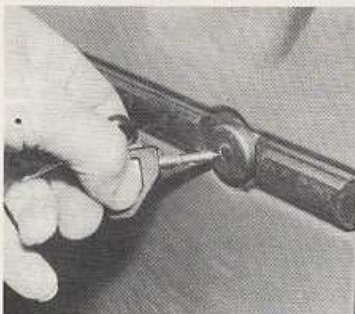
on a number of irritations which ought to have been eliminated during development testing. Wind noise is considerably amplified by hisses and whooshes from the otherwise outstanding ventilation system. Close everything up and the car will cruise in reasonable peace at 80 mph, though with all the recognised orifices shut, air rushes into the de-pressurised cabin from the window surround and anaesthetises your right ear. At anything much above 80 mph, less if there is a strong head or cross wind, the organ strikes up: about middle C on the right, E major on the left. Now I know where the lost chord went. Certainly this particular 30TS does not warrant the four-star (good) rating we gave the original press demonstrator for noise suppression.

Other dislikes? Lethargic electric windows which are no match for a quick-acting manual mechanism;

the placing of the ignition key so close to the wiper stalk that it's almost impossible to start the engine without nudging the wipers into action; the wiper delay arrangement which starts with a delay, rather than a wipe; the noisy hissing on lock from the power steering; sun visors that don't twist sideways; and gush-back from the petrol filler when there's still a gallon to go.

Other likes? The excellent central door-locking system which must soon come in to widespread use on lesser cars; the comfortable Klippan (French) inertia reel belts which never stick or pull too tight; the comfort of the back seat which passengers invariably praise; the bright spot-light illumination for the front-seat passengers; and the powerful headlights with their adjustable aim.

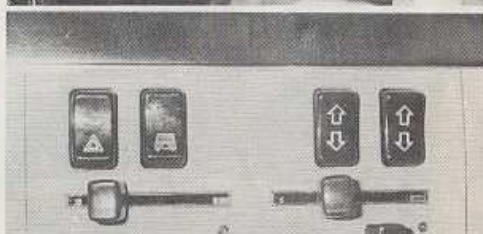
What I like best about the Renault, though, is coming back to



Left: unusual "dagger" key (handy as a defensive weapon, painful if you sit on it) works the locks of all four doors with one twist. Right: it is hard to turn the ignition key without nudging the adjacent wiper stalk. The aim of the headlights can be adjusted by knurled knob



Left: the air vents — one at each end of the fascia, two in the middle — are very effective but they whoosh and hiss when open. Right: simple but stiff heater controls, clear minor switchgear



it after driving something else. It's so relaxing to sink into those voluptuous seats and let the torque of the engine do all the work.

Faults and failures

The shorter this section, the better the car. One paragraph will suffice for the Renault. It came with a few irritating delivery faults (see First Impressions), and the brakes and gearchange were once cause for concern (see Likes and Dislikes). But since the first free service nothing, but nothing, has gone wrong, fallen off or broken while the car has been in my hands. It has been the most dependable, trouble-free car I have ever run. Colleagues recently returned from a journey to Wales with tales of a sticking throttle, but there was nothing amiss when I took over again. Occasional clicks when turning sharply probably betray creaky drive joints, but that's not uncommon on a front-wheel drive car. Otherwise, there is nothing to suggest any impending trouble, and nothing else to report. Doesn't that make a change? Well done Renault!

Running costs

The 30TS has averaged 22 mpg over 12,000 miles of pretty varied driving, much of it on a commuting run to Sussex (using the length of M23) that entails little stop-start urban crawl. Driving really hard, the fuel consumption will drop to 18 mpg, driving gently it will improve to as much as 25 mpg, which is what I got during a leisurely holiday period despite a heavy load. Oil consumption between changes has been negligible.

Up to the 12,000-mile mark, I paid a total of £32.54 for servicing (at 600, 6,000 and 12,000 miles), which included labour and materials. Yes, I thought it was too good to be true as well — and it was. Due to a misunderstanding, we had been working to a 6,000-mile schedule when it should have been a 3,000-mile one; minor (oil change) attention is supposed to alternate with a more comprehensive, and expensive, diagnostic service costing, according to the agents, £30 to £50 depending on what replacement parts are needed. So had the proper schedule been adhered to, service charges would have amounted to about £100.

At a time when other manufactur-

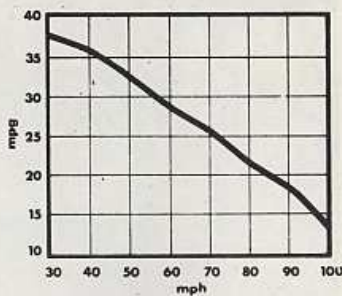
12,000 MILE TEST ● RENAULT 30TS

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEEDS		mph	kph
Banked Circuit		114.0	183.3
Best ¼ mile		115.4	185.8
Terminal Speeds:			
at ¼ mile		82	132
at kilometre		100	161
at mile		—	—
Speed in gears (at 5450 rpm):			
1st		33	53
2nd		54	87
3rd		84	135

ACCELERATION FROM REST

mph	sec	kph	sec
0-30	3.3	0-40	2.5
0-40	4.8	0-60	4.6
0-50	6.8	0-80	6.7
0-60	9.2	0-100	9.7
0-70	12.2	0-120	13.7
0-80	15.9	0-140	19.2
0-90	20.5	0-160	29.0
0-100	29.3		
Stand'g ¼	16.9	Stand'g km	31.4



ACCELERATION IN TOP

mph	sec/kph	sec	
20-40	8.0	40-60	4.9
30-50	7.8	60-80	4.8
40-60	8.3	80-100	5.1
50-70	8.7	100-120	5.9
60-80	9.4	120-140	6.6
70-90	11.1	140-160	10.9
80-100	15.4		

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Touring*	23.4 mpg
	12.1 litres/100 km
Overall	22.0 mpg
Fuel grade	98 octane
	4 star rating
Tank capacity	14.75 galls
	67.0 litres
Max range	345 miles
	555 km

*Consumption midway between 30 mph and maximum less 5 per cent for acceleration.

WEIGHT

	cwt	kg
Unladen weight*	24.7	1255
Weight as tested	28.4	1442
*with fuel for approx 50 miles		

Performance tests carried out by Motor's staff at the Motor Industry Research Association proving ground, Lindley.

Test Data: World Copyright reserved; no unauthorised reproduction in whole or part.

COMPARISONS

	Capacity cc	Price £	Max mph	0-60 sec	30-50* sec	Overall mpg	Touring mpg	Length ft in	Width ft in	Weight cwt	Boot cu ft
Renault 30TS	2664	5834	114.0	9.2	7.8	22.0	23.4	14 10	5 8.5	24.7	11.8
Audi 100GL 5E	2144	5599	113.1	9.5	9.1	22.0	—‡	15 4.3	5 9.5	23.1	14.0
BMW 520i	1990	6099	111.2	9.8	9.0	22.4	—‡	15 2	5 7	24.4	13.0
Citroen CX 2400	2347	5498	111.5	11.6	9.7	23.4	23.4	15 1	5 8	25.2	10.2
Ford Granada 2.8 iS	2792	5910	117.4	9.0	9.3	20.4	—‡	15 7	5 10.5	26.1	13.2
Peugeot 504 Ti	1971	4623	103.5	11.5	9.9	18.6	—‡	14 9	4 7.8	24.4	11.9
Peugeot 604	2664	6695	113.0	9.1	8.5	18.0	20.0	15 5.5	5 9.5	27.4	12.6
Princess 2200 HLS	2227	4320	105.4	11.8	9.8	22.2	26.2	14 7.5	5 9	22.9	12.4
Volvo 264 GL	2664	7950	103.7	11.7	4.8†	15.9	—‡	16 0.8	5 7.2	27.3	13.1

*in top gear; †automatic; ‡fuel injection; —touring consumption not possible to compute



Above: creaky drive joints and tyres that will need replacing at about 15,000 miles. The rears should last three times as long

ers are stretching the interval between major services to 10-12,000 miles, with an oil change in between, it's unlikely that our Renault is any the worse for receiving less than the prescribed attention. Besides, a 3000-mile service routine for the high-mileage driver is an intolerable inconvenience unless the garage is on your doorstep. If anything were to put me off buying the car, it would be this.

Predictably, the front tyres have worn much faster than the back ones. At 14,000 miles, the tread depth of the driving Michelins is down to 2 mm (from 8 mm). In another 2,000 miles or so, they will have reached the legal minimum and need replacing. We were quoted a price of £32.40 for tubed tyres of the same type and make. Only 2 mm has worn from the rear covers so they should be good for about 45,000 miles.

What it cost

(corrected to 12,000 miles)

Petrol ¹	409
Servicing ²	approx 100
Tyres ³	65
Road fund licence ⁴	30
	604

Basic cost per mile 5.03p

1 545 gallons for 12,000 miles at 22 mpg at current average price for 4-star petrol of 78p per gallon.

2 See text.

3 Approximate cost of wear of Michelin XAS 175 HR 14 tubed tyres. See text.

4 Approximately seven months' worth at current road fund licence cost of £50. Insurance (Group 6 — ie expensive) has not been included because it varies so much according to individual circumstances. Quotel Insurance Services Ltd (01-242 0747) from whom we sought advice, said it could be as little as £84 for a 45-year-old male with a nine-year no-claims bonus living in Cornwall, com-

prehensively covered for any driver and business and pleasure, to a staggering £988 for a 25-year-old male without a no-claims bonus living in London who wanted the same cover.

We pursued the matter further. The best six offers that Quotel found for us for the good-risk 45-year-old ranged from £84 to £108. The shock offers for the bad-risk 25-year-old ranged from £445 to £988. Had the same chap had a seven-year no-claims bonus to his credit, the premiums would have ranged from £156 to £184. All of which underlines how difficult it is to include insurance in our table of running costs, and that it pays to get someone like the Quotel organisation to shop around on your behalf.

Depreciation? We estimate that our seven month-old car, with 14,000 miles on the clock now, would fetch about £4,400 in a private sale. This compares with the £5,198 it cost when new last February, and the £5,834 it costs new now.

In Brief

Model:	Renault 30TS
When delivered:	February 22, 1977
Total mileage:	13,100
Price when new:	£5,198
Price new now:	£5,834
Value now:	£4,400
Overall mpg:	22

Faults and failures

On delivery
Crooked steering wheel fouling against plastic surround; idling speed too high; heater blowing hot all the time — new valve assembly installed; first gear difficult to disengage when cold; second gear synchromesh very weak when cold; handbrake tends to stick on — and release with thud — after cold start; brakes judder

In service

No further trouble

Conclusion

The Renault 30TS has the sort of comfort, performance, equipment and reliability that befits a well-made car costing nearly £6,000. I love it. But it doesn't impress the neighbours.

