

WHATCAR?

FUN 50

The most **exciting cars** on sale today – ranked and rated



Renault Mégane Cup
Renaultsport 250
£22,000 TO £30,000 WINNER
OVERALL WINNER

1ST



Renault Clio Cup
Renaultsport 200
LESS THAN £17,500 WINNER

1ST

1

Renault Mégane Cup

Renaultsport 250
Price £24,020

RENAULTSPORT ENGINEERS MUST possess special powers. How else can you explain their ability to transform a fairly average family runabout into possibly the finest hot hatchback ever built?

What's most remarkable is that the whole DNA of the Mégane seems to have changed: it's like Peter Parker being bitten by a spider, or the Incredible Hulk getting angry.

The visual makeover sets the tone. There are bulging wheelarches, splitters, spoilers, sills and big wheels, as you'd expect, but there's also an overall harmony – and menace – that the driving experience more than fulfils.

A good engine is central to any good hot hatch and the Mégane's 247bhp turbocharged 2.0-litre unit is a peach; docile at low revs, but brutally effective when you turn up the wick. The clutch pedal needs a delicate touch, but there's immense satisfaction to be gained from banging up and down through the slick six-speed manual gearbox, keeping the rev counter pointing at the big numbers.

What really sets the Mégane apart from its peers is the way it drives. From the moment you pull away you can tell it's going to be special; you feel everything that's going on through your hands – and posterior – and that sense of involvement is what makes it so enthralling. Cup trim is a must: yes, you lose some of the luxury kit of the standard car, but get stiffer, tweaked suspension and a limited-slip differential, which add to the feeling that you're surgically attached to the road. Tackle a favourite B-road and the only cars likely to keep up will cost two or three times the price. Really, it's that good.

Quick facts

0-62mph 6.1sec
Top speed 156mph
Fuel economy 33.6mpg
CO₂ emissions 190g/km



Leo Wilkinson

'From the moment you pull away you can tell it's going to be special'

1

Renault Clio Cup

Renaultsport 200
Price £16,930

SITTING BEHIND THE wheel of a Clio Cup, it's hard to believe that it's related to an affordable, everyday supermini. Sure, the dashboard looks the same, but the rev-hungry, hard-edged enthusiast's machine you're driving feels a million miles away.

That's the beauty of Renaultsport cars. These are hot hatches done properly; more like bespoke models than the sporty range-toppers that others offer.

In the Clio's case, bodywork changes including wider front wings complete with extra vents, and twin exhaust pipes turn it from urban runabout into mean and moody racer.

The way it drives is equally convincing. Central to the experience is a highly strung 198bhp 2.0-litre petrol engine. At low revs it's gutless; mash the right pedal to the floor, however, and it screams into life, gunning you forward at a frantic pace. This is what a hot hatch is supposed to be all about: getting you involved and rewarding you when you do.

That goes for the chassis, too. There's sensational grip and weighty, informative steering, as well as an unusually unflappable feel for such a small car. On twisty roads, it's a revelation; this is quicker across country than many pricier, flashier motors.

As with the Mégane, we prefer the Renaultsport Clio in Cup form. You miss out on a few fripperies, but it's hardly short of kit. Crucially, you get firmer suspension settings that keep the Clio glued to the road as tightly as possible, so it's even more exciting. It doesn't hurt that the Cup is £1000 cheaper than the standard Renaultsport Clio, either.

Quick facts

0-62mph 6.9sec
Top speed 141mph
Fuel economy 34.4mpg
CO₂ emissions 190g/km



Ivan Aistrop

'The Cup is quicker across country than many flashier motors'

1 Renault Mégane Cup

Renaultsport 250 **Price** £24,020

YES, THE HOTTEST Renault Mégane really is more fun than a £173k Ferrari.

It's all to do with usability. The Mégane is simply more fun more of the time. The opportunities to exploit a Ferrari 458 on the road will be few and far between, whereas the Mégane is a blast on snaking lanes as well as sweeping A-roads.

Every part you touch feels just right: from the sharp steering and slick gearchange to the reassuringly meaty brake pedal, the Mégane responds directly to your inputs.

Then there's the way the engine and suspension combine to devastating effect. The turbocharged engine provides addictive thrust, even from low revs, and unlike many other turbocharged units, it loves being revved mercilessly. The 250 Cup sounds great, too.

Quick facts

0-62mph 6.1sec **Top speed** 156mph

Fuel economy 33.6mpg **CO₂ emissions** 190g/km

That's the straight-line stuff taken care of, but the real fun comes in corners – and here the Mégane blows away its peers. Even severe provocation – or a savagely bumpy road – can't outwit the suspension, so the body stays flat and perfectly controlled. Dive into a bend, feel the tyres grip, then stand on the accelerator and the traction-boosting limited-slip diff deploys the engine's power to fire you out the other side. You always feel involved and in control.

There's more to the Mégane's repertoire. It's a more practical and refined car than the Mazda MX-5, yet no less thrilling on a twisty road, and although it can't quite match the steering and handling brilliance on the Evora, it has a sweeter gearchange and a far more user-friendly cabin. The Clio also runs its big brother

close, but the fact that the Mégane is quicker and can play the hooligan one moment and the long-distance cruiser the next clinches it.

That, in essence, is the Mégane's secret: it combines the blistering speed and total interaction of the most entertaining cars with everyday usability. You could have this as your only car and love every minute of it. The most fun car on sale? You bet.



Barnaby Jones

'The Mégane combines blistering speed and total interaction'

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