

EUROPEAN IN-FLUENCE

Attractive facelift helps link the Fluence to Renault's European cousins. There's a lot else to like too.



QUICK FACTS

Price Rs 15.49 lakh
(ex-showroom, Delhi)
On sale Now

FIRST VERDICT

Now good enough to be more than just a left-field choice.



SO GOOD

- Fantastic ride and handling
- Front seat comfort

NO GOOD

- Limited rear headroom
- Heavy clutch

WITH THE HUGELY successful Duster, Renault isn't an alien name for the Indian car buyer anymore. It's got the momentum and the confidence to take a crack at the executive segment again, and it's doing so with this, the facelifted Fluence.

The front is where most of the new styling bits are, the most distinctive being the grille with a large Renault badge. Additionally, the headlamps now feature daytime running lights, the bumper is new and the restyled 16-inch alloy wheels work well with the new contemporary look.

Renault has focussed on making the interiors feel more premium as well. The soft-touch materials on the dashboard, a lighter shade of beige, new leather upholstery and chrome accents around the air-con vents add

up to deliver the desired effect. There is dual-zone climate control on offer, the instrument cluster is digital and there is this nice blue tint around the speedometer. There's some more kit too – a nice Arkamys audio system that supports Bluetooth and iPod connectivity, button start, cruise control, parking sensors, rain sensing wipers, automatic headlamps and rear air-con vents. Safety kit includes four airbags, ABS, EBD and ESP.

As for comfort, the front seats offer good legroom and the largish seat squabs provide great support. The long wheelbase means the chauffeur-driven tone will enjoy the generous legroom, which is adequate even with the front seats pushed all the way back. The seats themselves are comfortable, have great under-tilt support and while we liked the slightly upright backrest angle, some may prefer a more reclined bench. But the sloping roofline eats into the headroom, which taller passengers will find a bit restrictive. In terms of luggage space, the 530-litre boot can fit two full-sized suitcases with a couple of soft bags thrown in as well.

Renault hasn't tinkered with the mechanicals and the updated Fluence retains the same 1.5-litre dCi diesel engine that produces 108.5bhp. Take note that Renault has withdrawn the refined 2.0-litre petrol engine. The diesel engine comes mated to a 6-speed manual gearbox, without an

automatic option. On the move, the motor still feels dull at lower revs and springs to life only after 1900rpm. This noticeable turbo lag, coupled with a slightly heavy clutch, tends to get tiring in the typical stop-and-go urban conditions. But out on the open roads, the motor's chunky mid-range is rather enjoyable and even on single carriageways, offers ample muscle for overtaking long trailers. Also impressive is the absorbent ride quality that handles our pothole-peppered roads quite well. Yes, the Octavia and Jetta have a flatter ride, but the Fluence has a more rounded feel. Also, on the twisty roads that lead to Ooty, the French sedan's road manners were thoroughly tested and it didn't even once feel ruffled, inspiring confidence with its very predictable steering.

Overall, Renault has concentrated on the factors that influence buyers in this segment. It's quite modern-looking and now offers decent levels of equipment too. But with a price tag of Rs 15.49 lakh for the top-end Fluence, it isn't exactly cheap. Yes, it is a spacious car and isn't under-equipped either, but with a 1.5-litre diesel under the hood, and a functional-looking dashboard, it isn't a package that appeals to your heart. However, if viewed as primarily a chauffeur-driven sedan, there isn't much to complain.

ADITYA BENGALI



Dash is functional, but well-finished.



Blue theme for digi speedo is new.

RENAULT FLUENCE DIESEL E4

Price	Rs 15.49 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi)
L/W/H	4618/1813/1488mm
Wheelbase	2703mm
Ground clearance	168mm
Engine	4 cyls, 1461cc, turbo-diesel
Layout	Front, transverse
Power	108.5bhp at 4000rpm
Torque	24.5kgm at 1850rpm
Gearbox	6-speed manual
Tyre size	205/60 R16
Fuel tank capacity	60 litres
Boot capacity	530 litres