



FRENCH FLUENCY

Renault have a refreshed version of their flagship Fluence sedan. We discovered how fluent it really is when it comes to driving around the 36 hairpin bends on the climb to Udhagamandalam (Ooty)

Story: Aninda Sardar Photography: Rommel Albuquerque

FOUR YEARS AFTER FRENCH manufacturers Renault drove into India with the flagship Fluence sedan, there's a refreshed version of the car. The first lot of Fluence did not really fly off the shelves as quickly as Renault would have liked, but they hope to change that with the new car. The route that the French manufacturers have chosen is of evolution rather than revolution, which is to say they have given the car a cosmetic upgrade while keeping the mechanicals and the underpinnings unchanged.

Thanks to Renault choosing to drive down the

evolutionary path, the Fluence continues to be a good-looking car. Its coupé-like roof-line, a bonnet that is slightly longer than the boot and rising shoulder-lines give it a nice sporty stance. On the whole, it's a pleasant looking car from the outside. On the inside, though, it's a bit of a mixed bag. We liked the leather-wrapped steering wheel and the funky instrument panel with its large digital white backlit speedo. The dash itself is made of clean lines and while a lot of Indian buyers seem to dig bling, we thought the aluminium insert on the dash was a bit over the top. While overall fit-and-finish and quality of plastics are good, there are some areas where the effort

seems half-hearted, particularly the cruise control button where the plastic around the button in the test car was not smoothed out.

The seats are more or less comfy but could do with a bit more under-thigh support. The cabin feels quite roomy at the front, but may feel a little less so at the back thanks to the high window sill, but overall the Fluence cabin is roomy enough for five passengers. French ergonomics in the Fluence means the average Indian will need some time getting used to since they are nothing like the German, Japanese, Korean or even Indian cars we normally drive. For instance, in typical Renault fashion the controls for the music system for the driver are mounted on a separate stalk attached to the steering column. Some of the ergonomics is baffling, though. The button for the cruise control, for example, is placed next to the handbrake on the central tunnel. Also, the engine start/stop button is placed on the passenger side of the centre console while the 12V socket is on the driver's side. As far as creature comforts and safety equipment go, the ▶

▶ Fluence cabin throws up a mixed bag. Most of it is well crafted but there are areas where there could have been greater attention to detail



▶ Gear lever operation offers short throws and slots in well enough. Cruise control button is inexplicably placed next to handbrake lever



▶ Boot is large and tail gate opens wide. Add to that a low loading lip and what you have is a cargo bay that's easy to load as well



FIRST DRIVE Renault Fluence

Fluence is comparable to any car in its segment and there's enough for most people's requirements.

Like the older car, the new Fluence continues to be a good car to drive. Its 1.5-litre dCi turbocharged common rail diesel injected engine (interestingly, Renault have now completely ditched the petrol option for the Fluence in its upgraded avatar) offers a peak 110 PS of power and a maximum torque of 240 Nm at 1,850 RPM. On paper, therefore, there's enough grunt to be eked out from under the Fluence's sculpted bonnet for most purposes. And on most occasions indeed there is. So long as you don't let the revs drop below 2,200. Below the powerband, there is just too much of turbo lag and that just mars the driving experience. As a matter of fact, around the 36 hairpins on the climb up to Ooty, we found ourselves mostly in the first gear since the revs would drop below the threshold each time we braked ahead of the turn to make way for downhill traffic. The six-speed manual transmission that the engine is mated to works quite well with decently sorted ratios. The gearbox itself is fairly slick and short throw. But again the Renault turns out to be a mixed bag since the clutch feels too heavy and springy, detracting from the shifting experience. While on the highways it may not be so much of an issue, in stop-and-go city traffic chances are you might come back with a sore left leg.

Dynamically, we found the Renault sedan to be quite well-sorted. On the straights it felt planted and stable while around corners and bends the Fluence remained

composed, holding its line quite well. Rapid changes in direction too aren't a problem with sufficient feedback coming in from the quick steering working in combination with a dynamic chassis. Where the Renault really outpaces itself is in the ride quality department. Be it the front or the back, passengers in the Fluence will be treated to a super comfortable ride. Bumps, potholes and all other forms of road irregularities are ironed out without fuss. To add icing on the cake, there's none of that wallowy tendency that often plagues other cars that offer better ride quality than handling abilities.

Even though the Fluence is equipped with disc brakes all around, we will have to reserve our judgement on braking abilities until we conduct a full road test. The brakes on the car we drove felt especially spongy and seemed to lack bite. We believe this may have been an issue with that specific unit we drove rather than an inherent problem with the vehicle.

Overall then, we return to the original question. Is the Renault Fluence a good car to include in the purchase consideration set if you're on the lookout for a comfortable and spacious mid-size sedan for around Rs 14 lakh to Rs 16 lakh? The base version of the Fluence, badged E2, retails for Rs 13.99 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi) while the top-end E4 spec car sells for Rs 15.49 lakh. In the same price range buyers will have the option of the Toyota Corolla Altis, the Škoda Octavia as well as the Hyundai Elantra, which means Renault have their task cut out. Despite the upgrade. 

NEED TO KNOW

RENAULT FLUENCE DCI E4

PRICE
Rs 15.49 lakh
(ex-showroom, Delhi)

ENGINE
1,461cc, in-line four,
turbo-diesel

MAX POWER
110 PS at 4,000 RPM

MAX TORQUE
240 Nm at 1,850 RPM

TRANSMISSION
Six-speed manual,
front-wheel drive



The Renault really outpaces itself in the ride quality department. Passengers in the Fluence will be treated to a super comfortable ride



❑ Rear AC vents add comfort for rear passengers. Controller for blower speed would have been nice. Note 12V power socket

❑ With the six-speed manual, the 1.5 dCi unit is a willing companion for the most part, except for the turbo lag that leaves you with no grunt below 2200 RPM

