

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Renault's revised Koleos has a new face,

a bunch of new features and a reworked powertrain. Logic, therefore, demands that the new car should be an improved version of itself. We find out

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RENAULT HIT PAY DIRT WITH their compact SUV, the Duster, in India some time ago. The vehicle flew off the shelves picking up both critical acclaim as well as raking in the moolah for the French manufacturers. Renault, however, have not managed to replicate the same kind of success with their other products, especially their flagship SUV, the Koleos. Although the old Koleos was not a bad product by any margin, it never really got the buyer's spending hand itching. To set things right again, so that they can hear the cash-box ringing even at this end of the price spectrum, Renault have refreshed the Koleos and attempted to give it a fresh lease of life. The 64 million dollar question is: are the changes substantial enough to change the Koleos' fortunes?

To start with, the Koleos, predictably enough, has been given a facelift. With the new face dominated by the Renault rhombus, many would say the Koleos is now a better-looking vehicle. Honestly, we came back with a bag full of mixed emotions when it came to the SUV's styling. Indeed, at certain angles like the front three-fourth or profile the vehicle looks quite handsome and then there are other angles like head-on when it didn't seem as pleasing.

Admittedly, though, looks are a matter of opinion and wouldn't really count as genuine criticism. The rear hasn't changed much and that's a good thing because the designers who penned the original lines of the Koleos had got it right the first time itself. Seen rear on, the SUV looks quite nice, especially courtesy that line denoting the split tail-gate.

Inside, the Koleos was always a well-appointed, well-crafted vehicle and it continues to be so. The dual-tone interior is finished in soft-touch plastic (even the door sills get soft-touch plastic). It looks airy and feels plush too. The front seats get multiple adjustments, all done electrically but it's only the driver who gets adjustable lumbar support, which is done manually. The seats themselves are comfortable even though for a thin person like yours truly a bit more of lateral support would have been welcome, but then again that's straying into nitpicking territory. The average person will find that the Koleos offers a very comfortable cabin. There's enough room for five adults and there's a big 450-litre boot for all their luggage as well. Other than the usual luxuries to be found in a vehicle in this price bracket, the Koleos also gets the benefit of a Bose music system. Indeed the car has been branded with the Bose name in several places. Ergonomics



Renault's 2.0-litre dCi engine is refined, except at the higher end of the rev range. Unfortunately, it suffers from lag and a lazy gearbox. Together, they result in a sensation of sluggishness

Dual tone cabin feels airy and roomy. Fit and finish and quality of materials used are high class. Ergonomics though take time getting used to

Split tail gate means that less clearance is required to open the Koleos' 450-litre boot. Rear seats split 60:40 to add convenience

The suspension set-up on the Koleos is on the softer side and is a boon at slow to medium speeds over our badly surfaced roads. It damps most bumps, ruts and potholes with a degree of dexterity. Towards the higher reaches of the speedo, however, the SUV does tend to get a bit wallowy. It's not so much that it would become downright uncomfortable, but it tells you quite clearly that this is not meant for enthusiastic driving. Rather this is a vehicle for cruising to your holiday destination with the family. Steering response is quick with the action being light enough for manoeuvring around city streets. To aid the driver around bends and turns there's ESP (of course). For the uphill or downhill journeys of life there are Hill Start Assist and Hill Descent Control for good measure. On straight empty stretches one can relax a bit with the cruise control doing its job.

Overall, the Koleos then makes for a decent offer for someone in the market for a comfortable five-seater SUV that has enough creature comforts for all members of the family. It's also a good drive for the most part. Renault's challenge, though, will be to get people to buy the Koleos at the price it's being retailed at. The Koleos we drove – the top-of-the-line 4x4 AT – commands Rs 24.97 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi). The 4x2 MT starts at Rs 21.29 lakh while the more expensive 4x4 MT will set you back by Rs 23.97 lakh. For that kind of money there's a whole range of vehicles that could spell trouble for the French, including the Hyundai Santa Fe, the Toyota Fortuner, even the Audi Q3S and the BMW X1.

are a little oddball, though, for people used to German, Japanese and Korean vehicles. So it's a generally good idea to get familiarised with all the controls, their placement and how they work before driving off.

Powering the Koleos is the same 2.0-litre common-rail diesel engine as before but it has been worked upon to now release 173 PS and 360 Nm of peak power and torque respectively. Power is transmitted to the wheels (one can select between 2WD and 4WD via a conveniently placed centre console mounted button) through a six-speed automatic gearbox in the top-of-the-line version that we drove. In lower spec versions the Koleos can also be had in manual transmission as either a 4x2 or a 4x4.

Although it is the auto transmission that is offered in the top-of-the-line car, it is also the chink in the SUV's French armour. With pedal to metal, the gearbox comes across as lazy, marring some part of the work that has been done to improve the engine. It's not as if the Koleos is a slouch. If one cares to look at the speedo needle one will notice that the needle actually climbs quite steadily, but the sensation of gathering speed is just not there. Nothing happens in an urgency. In the real world what that means is that the driver is robbed of the confidence to quickly pull out from behind a slow-moving truck, pass it and then pop back in when the traffic on the opposite side gets close. Indeed on the narrow two-lane highway from Bengaluru to Udhagamandalam (Ooty) every overtaking manoeuvre had to be carefully planned and then executed. Shifting the gear selector lever for manual mode does help a little but the transmission unit is likelier to obey your throttle inputs when it comes to gear selection. At high revs the engine sounds a bit strained and gruff as well.

NEED TO KNOW

RENAULT KOLEOS

PRICE
Rs 24.97 lakh
(ex-showroom, Delhi)

ENGINE
1,995cc, inline four, turbo-diesel

MAX POWER
173 PS at 3,750 RPM

MAX TORQUE
360 Nm at 2,000 RPM

TRANSMISSION
Six-speed automatic, four-wheel drive

The cover behind the central armrest between rear passengers can be opened to access the boot. Quite convenient

