

# The automatic choice?

**RENAULT SCALA** It is relatively inexpensive, and smooth to drive in the city. It doesn't take off if you floor the pedal. As for mileage claims, do take it with a pinch of salt

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What all do we know about automatic cars? That they do not employ gears and are thus easier to drive around in stop-start city traffic. That they are not as much fun to drive as a manual transmission car, and tend to hold on to gears for a bit too long. That they are the preferred choice in most developed markets, but since they cost significantly more than geared cars, find fewer takers in developing regions such as India.

And that — perhaps most importantly — they guzzle more fuel than their geared counterparts, which is virtually an act of crime in times like these, when a drop of gasoline is worth its weight in gold.

But have you ever heard of an automatic car that returns higher fuel economy than its manual sibling? That is the Renault Scala automatic for you. A bit later, we will get to how true is the company's claim of delivering almost 18 kilometers per litre, but a car that defies traditional logic needs to be examined in detail.

## OUTSIDE AND INSIDE

There is absolutely no change as far as the looks department is concerned. The automatic car is an identical twin to the manual version, which is, intrinsically, a Nissan Sunny beneath the surface. The strong point of the car remains the amount of leg room it offers. Of all the automatic sedans in India right now, the Scala has the maximum wheelbase. Hence, the back seat pampers you with space and it still offers a huge cargo area of almost 500 litres.

But why would you be in the back seat of an automatic car? Well, that is what makes this a confusing prospect.

Nothing exciting about the interiors otherwise. Fit and finish and quality of material are decent, but not top notch like, say, the Honda City.

## PERFORMANCE, RIDE AND HANDLING

The Scala automatic gets the manual version's 1.5 litre petrol engine that develops 99 PS of power and 134 Nm of torque. So on paper, the package looks decent but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

In the place of five gears, there is a continuously variable transmission (CVT), a first in its class. What is the big deal? Continuously variable transmissions are considered to be more refined, smooth and economical as compared to conventional torque-converter automatic systems. How?

Because it uses a wide band of gears instead of a limited 4 or 5, which change depending on the speed of the vehicle and the throttle response. So there are no jerks while shifting gears in this car, unlike all other automatic drives in this segment.

What about turbo lag? That unfor-

tunately has not been dealt with completely.

What is worse is that it creates a big racket when you floor the pedal. Especially on the highways, it is a Catch-22. Don't floor the accelerator, and the car takes its sweet time to gain momentum. Floor it, and it will oblige — but the groan is deafening. That makes it a trifle annoying, putting it mildly.

The uses of this transmission system however, are multifarious in city driving conditions.

An amble around in red light to red light conditions gives hardly anything to complain about.

The drive is hassle free, the cabin is airy and spacious and the ride quality is good. Just make sure to avoid the highways, unless you are not in a hurry to get somewhere.



## VERDICT

The big question: kitna deti hai? Renault claims the Scala will give you 17.97 kilometers to a litre. That, as we have already mentioned, is 6% more than its manual transmission version. On our drive though, the car returned a poor 9 kmpl.

There were some others who got even less.

Sure, we did flog it and tried to extract as much juice as possible. Yet, the extent of variation is surprising.

Clearly then, fuel economy is a contentious topic.

What else works? The sheer pleasure of driving an ungeared car in city traffic. But the City and the Verna offer that comfort too.

A car that offers the best leg-room and boot space. Yes, the Scala is ahead of competition here. But why would you sit at the back in an automatic car? The cheapest to own (barring the sub-4-metre Dzire).

At ₹8.99 lakh, not quite the 'offer of the year', but worth a look in if you plan to take the automatic route.

## SCALA: MAY NOT BE THE AUTOMATIC CHOICE

	MARUTI DZIRE	HONDA CITY	HYUNDAI VERNA	RENAULT SCALA
<b>Dimension</b>				
Length (mm)	3,995	4,440	4,370	<b>4,425</b>
Width (mm)	1,695	1,695	1,700	<b>1,695</b>
Height (mm)	1,555	1,485	1,475	<b>1,505</b>
Wheelbase (mm)	2,430	2,550	2,570	<b>2,600</b>
Boot space	316	506	465	<b>490</b>
<b>Engine</b>				
Capacity	1,197	1,497	1,591	<b>1,498</b>
Max power	87@6,000	118@6,600	123@6,300	<b>99@5,400</b>
Max torque	114@4,000	146@4,800	158@4,200	<b>134@4,000</b>
Fuel economy	17.4	15.6	15.74	<b>17.97</b>
<b>PRICE (₹lakh)</b>	<b>6.74</b>	<b>9.22-10.59</b>	<b>9.93-11.26</b>	<b>8.99-9.89</b>