



Grandchild of the bonkers Renault 5 Turbo, the V6 draws attention wherever it goes. Original car (in silver) is renowned for handling traits that are as wild as the Clio's looks. The updated 255 addresses the mk1's foibles and is one of our all-time heroes



CLIO V6

A true pocket supercar, the mid-engined Renaultsport Clio V6 can now be yours for hot hatch money. Here's all you need to know to find a good one

Every time you see a Clio V6 on the road you can't help but stop and stare. Whether it's the curvy original or the taut mk2, it makes no difference; the sheer, squat aggressiveness of the thing, the hungry-looking scoops and intake vents and those massively extended wheelarches simply demand attention. You smile at the madness of it all – and the fact that a humble Clio could be endowed with the kind of road presence only the most outlandish supercars can match.

It's hard to imagine any manufacturer other than Renault, with a back catalogue that includes the 5 Turbo and Spider, producing something as gloriously nutty as the V6. What other car maker would re-engineer a class-leading hot hatch and turn it into a mid-engined, rear-wheel-drive modern incarnation of a Group B rally car? We're just grateful that such a big player can produce something quite so feral as the V6. And the news gets even better because today you can pick up a pristine mk1 for as little as £13,000 privately and an early mk2 (properly known as the V6 255) for around 17 grand. In other words, if you're in the market for a regular front-wheel-drive hot hatch, a

secondhand V6 is now a viable alternative.

It is important to understand, however, that the changes between mk1 and mk2 run much more than skin deep; the driving experiences are significantly different, and this is explained in more detail later in the feature. In short, the first V6 had dynamic properties not dissimilar to those of an early 911, by which we mean tricky and occasionally heart-in-the-mouth handling that might take years of ownership to fully master. By the time the 255 was launched, the boffins at Renaultsport had not only got a handle on the original's sometimes wayward dynamics, they had developed it into a car that could upstage a Ferrari and give a Lamborghini and a Porsche a real scare (evo Car of the Year 2003, issue 063).

We ran a 255 for a year and its custodian, John Barker, described it as by some margin the best long-term test car he's ever had. evo contributor John Hayman has actually bought a 255, while fellow Fast Fleeter Tony Bailey had a mk1. It's fair to say, then, that the Clio V6 is a firm evo favourite and we have a detailed knowledge of the reality of owning and living with this pocket supercar. If you want to cut a dash for less than £20K and become fully immersed in a stimulating and cerebral driving experience, the Clio V6 takes some beating. ➔

Words: Roger Green | Pictures: Kenny P





Evolution

There are some press launches that are more keenly anticipated than others, and then there are those that every motoring hack selfishly and vocally volunteers themselves for. The V6 had been keenly awaited since the concept wowed the crowds at the 1998 Paris motor show and expectations rose still further with the first viewing of the production version at the same show two years later. Shortly after that, co-editor Meaden won the *evo* scramble for the press invite and flew to Nice before anyone else had a chance to whip it from his grasp. Once there he was greeted by the amazing sight of two lines of silver V6s and, having snatched a set of keys from the nearest press person, he disappeared up the fearsome Col de Turini (*evo* 026).

Apart from the race car (*evo* 007), this was the first time the world at large had had the chance to sample a Clio with a 3-litre V6 engine in the space traditionally used for rear seats and a boot. The same basic unit could be found in the Laguna, but in the Clio it had an increased compression ratio (11.4 to 1), bigger inlet ports, a lighter flywheel and



a higher, 7100rpm rev limit. It developed 230bhp at 6000rpm and 221lb ft of torque at 3750rpm. This was enough to propel it to 60mph from rest in 5.8sec, which was swift, but only a second-and-a-bit quicker than the 172, which cost £15,995. The V6 would set you back another ten grand, but to keep making comparisons between the two was to miss the point; the V6 was a completely different car, from its 17in OZ alloys upwards.

Take the dimensions, for example: the V6 was a massive 171mm wider, 66mm lower and 38mm longer in the wheelbase. And while the interior may have been familiar to Clio owners (as long as you didn't look over your shoulder), it came with a six-speed gearbox. Then there were the 330mm vented discs and AP callipers.

In total, 1630 mk1s (300 for the UK) had been produced by the time the new model went on sale in August 2003. The 255's run will continue until July this year and this time it won't be replaced.

The obvious styling variations on the mk2 were complemented by extensive chassis revisions, which saw 23mm added to the length of the wheelbase and 33mm to the width of the front track. The rear subframe gained in rigidity and the trailing arms were 10mm longer, while roll stiffness at the front was more than doubled and the bump stops were longer and less abrupt in their action.

The engine was also breathed on, with the valves and ports being gas-flowed and fitted with stronger valve springs and a less restrictive air filter. The result was an engine that revved higher and developed an extra 25bhp, although torque remained the same.

PRICES

Prices of both cars are massively dependent on mileage, with age being virtually irrelevant. In good condition a mk1 with fewer than 12,000 miles on the clock can still command £16,000, but the same car should be available for less than £14,000 if it has covered 25,000 miles. Similarly, a 255 with 25,000 miles under its belt will cost £17,500, while a 12,000-miler will climb to £20K.

PARTS PRICES

	mk1	mk2
Clutch	£220	£220
Brake pad set fr/rear	£281/£268	£281/£268
Brake disc pair fr/rear	£319/£319	£319/£319
Headlight unit	£87	£235
Front wing (unpainted)	£2657	£443
Bonnet (unpainted)	£222	£224
Oil filter	£9	£9
Air filter	£22	£111
Starter motor	£401	£401
Windscreen	£163	£163

SERVICING

(prices provided by Camden Motors Ltd, Milton Keynes)

12K service	£118	£118
24K service	£130	£130

(all prices include VAT but not fitting)

DRIVING THEM TODAY

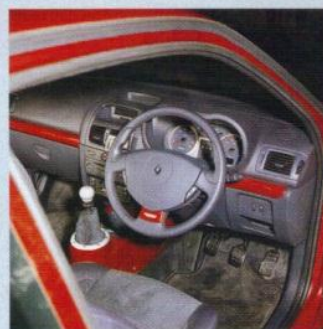
There has probably never been such a marked contrast between two versions of the same car; despite their similarity in appearance and make-up, the original car is vastly different to the later V6 255. The mk1 was thrilling and occasionally terrifying, and it hasn't mellowed with age.

Don't get us wrong, we're still fans of this Gallic handful; it feels very special and demands that you get involved every time you drive it. Yet if you relax your guard, particularly in the wet, the V6 will bite.

Drive the mk1 V6 today and it doesn't feel as quick as you might expect; 230bhp sounds enough in a car that looks small, but this one weighs 1335kg. Fret not, however, because the engine has great flexibility and sounds fantastic, especially when you're on a

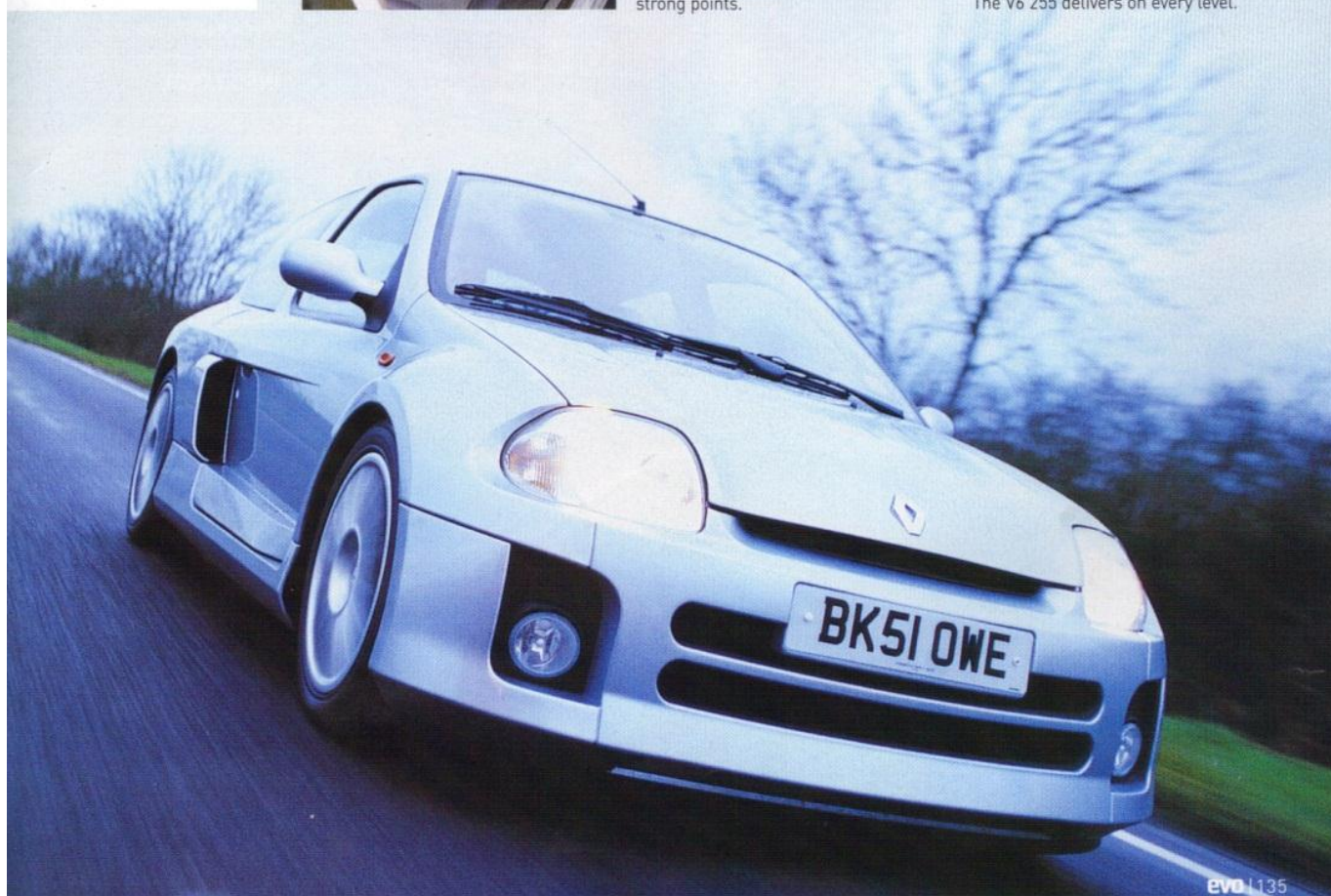
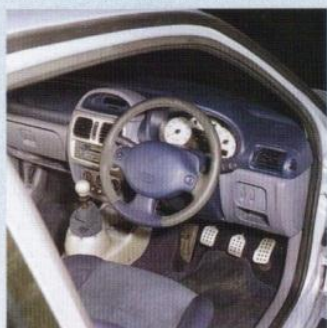
hard charge. It has the kind of sumptuous, big-chested bellow that wouldn't be out of place in a supercar. The ride still surprises with its suppleness despite the low-profile rubber and limited suspension travel, and while the rear feels a little soft, it squats under power to create superb traction. The gearbox feels a little loose and not as positive as you'd hope, but the brakes are massively strong and the pedal has all the tactility you could wish for.

In tight turns on a dry road, the level of grip is huge and it's very difficult to break traction. However, if the road is damp your hold on the tarmac disappears in an instant. Ex-Clio V6 owner Tony Bailey described it as feeling 'like the wheels had been replaced by castors'. And there's something else. High-speed cornering, even in the dry, should be approached with care. If you have to lift off or adjust your line, you'd better be ready, as momentum will send the rear arcing wide in an instant and you'll have just one brief moment to catch it. When it happens your heart will thump hard for the next few minutes and your veins will be flooded with adrenalin. It's certainly not an ideal trackday car, but on the road you can learn its ways, revel in its character and thrive on the strong points.



Climb aboard the 255 and the differences are immediately apparent. The interior is marginally improved, but it's in the hidden areas where the magic lies. The detailed suspension workover doesn't so much tame the unruly talents of the mk1 as completely revolutionise them. Roll and lift-off oversteer, along with the wet weather edginess, are banished, allowing the charisma to come to the fore. The steering also gains in weight and, more importantly, feel.

If your budget won't stretch quite far enough, the original, pugnacious V6 makes an intriguing hot hatch alternative. But the 255 is a five-star car in every way. The extra power is certainly a boon, but the newer car is so much more than that. You could own one for ten years and still be discovering new facets to its character, still be enjoying the learning process. The V6 255 delivers on every level.



JONATHAN EDWARDS – MK1

'I doubt I will ever own such a rare or obscene car; mine's a silver LHD 51-plate mk1, which has been absolutely trouble-free. Years ago I used to watch Will Gollop in his Metro 6R4 at Croft circuit. It was the most incredible sight – the rear would squat down like a little speedboat and you would hear that V6 howl. When Renault brought out this mid-engined wild child I had to get one, even if only for 12 months' ownership.

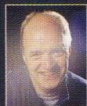
'Recently when we came out of Tesco's with the shopping there was a guy standing next to the car waiting to hear it start up, and it's not the first time this has happened. Everybody seems to point and grin. They watch while we load the shopping into the front boot and sit the rest on top of my wife in the passenger seat! She adores the car.

'The noise the Clio makes is absolutely brilliant; I've never known a standard car make such a roar. At slow speeds it's very mechanical and you can hear the gearbox whine but put your foot down and it growls and pops and crackles on the overrun when the exhaust is hot. It's definitely a 'windows down' car where acoustics are concerned.

'It handles like a 1980s 911, but this is a car that is so rewarding to drive at 30mph. In fact, if I'm honest, it is quite stressful to drive it hard. I very rarely thrash it, the complete opposite of my old 106 Rallye. You shouldn't buy it for the pace or the handling – neither are top drawer.

'As a package, though, I can't think of a more special but pain-free car for the money. For me there is no downside.'

MIKE EASLEY – MK 2



'My car was purchased to replace a Clio 172. The 172 was the best 'fun' car I'd ever had, so a V6 seemed a natural progression. In addition, the Cliosport Club provides significant added value for Clio owners, so I was hesitant about changing marques. My local Renault dealership (WA Lewis, Telford) is competent and enthusiastic, and offered a good price on a new Vee, so I ordered it last August. The car arrived on a rainy day in October 2004. It hasn't stopped raining since, but I've already enjoyed an Oulton Park trackday and a day's racing at Santa Pod.

'Clio V6 ownership is quite an experience. The car gets more attention than Kylie. Every time I return to the car it's surrounded by lads pointing their camera phones at it, and people, young and old, stop and stare in the street. It has incredible presence.

'It's a treat to drive, particularly on track, and it's less thirsty than I'd been led to believe, returning around 23mpg in everyday use. It has used two litres of oil in its first 3000 miles (normal for Renault engines, my 172 did the same). Absolutely nothing has gone wrong with the car, nothing has fallen off and it takes me safely to work every morning – it's my only car. All in all I couldn't be more pleased with it.'



'The V6 gets more attention than Kylie. Every time I return to the car it's surrounded by lads pointing their camera phones at it'

SPECIFICATION

mk 1	
Layout	Mid-engine, rear-wheel drive
Engine	V6, 2946cc
Power	230bhp @ 6000rpm
Torque	221lb ft @ 3750rpm
Suspension	Front: MacPherson struts, coils, arb Rear: Multi-link, coil springs and gas dampers
Tyres	205/50 ZR17 front, 235/45 ZR17 rear
Power to weight	175bhp/ton
0-60mph	5.8sec
Top speed	147mph
Price when new	£25,995
mk 2	
Layout	Mid-engine, rear-wheel drive
Engine	V6, 2946cc
Power	255bhp @ 7150rpm
Torque	221lb ft @ 4650rpm
Suspension	Front: MacPherson struts, coils, arb Rear: Multi-link, coil springs and gas dampers
Tyres	205/40 ZR18 front, 245/40 ZR18 rear
Power to weight	182bhp/ton
0-60mph	5.8sec
Top speed	153mph
Price when new	£27,000

INSURANCE

All quotes are fully comprehensive
Source: AA Car Insurance (www.theaaa.com)
Driver A: 35-yr-old advertising exec, living and working in Bracknell. Full NCB, 3pts (speeding), car garaged, 10,000 miles per year.
Driver B: 55-yr-old lawyer, living and working in Nottingham. Full NCB, clean licence, car garaged, 10,000 miles per year.

2001 mk1 Clio V6, value £13,500:
Driver A: £1062, Driver B: £697.
2003 mk2 Clio V6, value £17,500:
Driver A: £1085, Driver B: £708



CHECKPOINTS

■ ENGINE

Overall, the unstressed V6 unit has proved very reliable in both guises, which is a bonus because its location makes it an awkward engine to work on. You must, however, ensure you check the oil, because this again is a fiddly job and therefore something some owners don't do. Neither motor is a heavy oil user, but both need occasional top-ups in between services.

A misfire on the older cars is likely to be caused by a failing coil and can be repaired quite

economically. The 255 has had a recent recall to reprogram the engine injection computer as there is 'a possible difference between engine speed expected by the driver and the actual engine speed obtained'. Check that this two-hour job has been carried out.

Speaking of dealers, their knowledge of working on these cars can vary enormously – ask around on the forums to find the best one near you; just because they are selling these cars doesn't always mean they are experts on servicing them.

■ TRANSMISSION/EXHAUST

The gearbox may not be the sweetest part of the car – particularly on the mk1 – but the all-important reliability factor is high. If they have been subjected to abuse or just hamfisted use, then the synchromesh will have taken most of the punishment and the

'box will crunch each time you swap cogs. Avoid the car if in doubt.

The exhaust should last well and generally gives little cause for concern. However, if the car has been driven on winter roads, it may have a scruffy, pitted look, which is a shame because it is highly visible through the mesh cover.

■ SUSPENSION/BRAKES

Again there's little to trouble you here. Brake wear is obviously related directly to driving style, but in general, despite the weight of the car, you can expect the beefy stoppers to last as long as those on the 182; in other words, between 12,000 and 18,000 miles for the pads and 24,000 for the discs.

The suspension set-up is critical on both cars, so any knocks will have a profound effect. The rear bushes on a mk1 have a hard life and can need replacing at intervals

as short as 15,000 miles.

Unsurprisingly, a fair number of mk1s have been involved in 'incidents' along the way, so the cars need to be examined in fine detail. Replacing damaged bodywork can be very expensive, so crashed cars are easily written-off by insurance companies; on the plus side, it means they'll no longer be on the road and a worry to potential buyers. However, you should always run an HPI check and, if you have any doubts, get the car inspected by an expert.

■ INTERIOR/BODYWORK

Any problems with bodywork or interior will be immediately apparent. The nose is susceptible to stone chipping and you should lie on the ground to check the condition of the chin spoiler, as it's easily knocked or grounded on speed humps and the fibreglass may be gouged or even cracked.

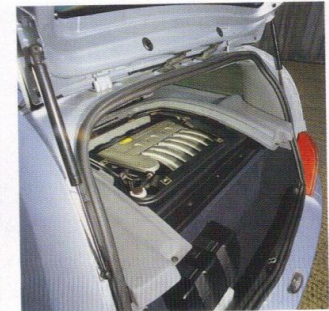
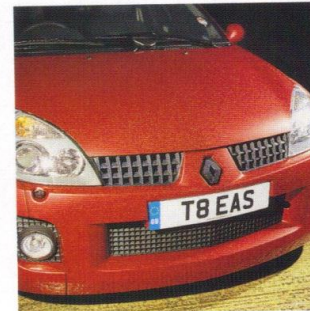
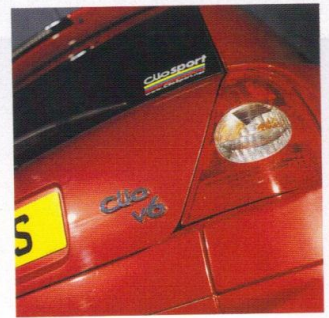
The front boot leaks and therefore the drainage holes should be kept

clear. Boot catches have been known to snap but the interior should be rattle-free. The plastics and switchgear may be quite a cheap grade, but they have always been screwed together well. If the car does squeak on the test drive, then be sure to ask some very searching questions of the owner. The doors on some mk1s have been known to drop a bit, but this is an easy fix.

■ WHEELS/TYRES

Damage to wheels should ring alarm bells, as the suspension is vulnerable to even little knocks. Tyres are very sensitive to pressure changes, so check them regularly. Tyre life is short, particularly at the

rear, where they are likely to need refreshing every 7500 miles; we recommend you stick to the original Michelin Pilot Sports. This may seem expensive, but overall running costs are very respectable for a car of this class.



WHAT WE SAID AT THE TIME

Mk1: 'What is true to say is that the Clio V6, flawed though it may be, remains one of the most desirable cars on the planet. Not even a Diablo has greater road presence. Twenty six grand won't buy you a bigger thrill' – Richard Meaden, *evo 026*

255: 'It's about more than sheer ability. It delivers enjoyment on every level, including a temporal one where you have to learn how to get the best from it over time. It feels as special and charismatic as any car we can think of under £40K' – David Vivian, *evo 057*

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.cliosport.net

www.renaultsport.co.uk

Camden Milton Keynes (sales and service) 01908 318211

SMC Guildford (sales and service) 01483 302266

West's Cambridge (sales and service) 01223 351616

Nick Dove Specialist Services 01869 277727

