

Fast Fleet

||| LONG-TERM TESTS

gentler right foot could have closed the gap. That would have been missing the point, though...

Life with the Clio wasn't all plain sailing. Its build quality erred towards French stereotypes, with rattles and an ill-fitting glovebox. Driving in traffic wasn't much fun, either, the torque-lite power delivery seeing you frequently shuffling up and down gears while operating a fairly heavy clutch.

Perhaps the biggest bugbear seems to be a common flaw. Our car required three wheel alignment corrections (thank you, Tyres Northampton), the first tracking issue appearing after just 100 miles. It seems Britain's less-than-perfect roads are too much for the suspension to shrug off, and a slight pull to the left was present most of the time the car was with us. I had a number of emails from fellow Cup drivers reporting the same problem, while similar complaints can be found on any Renaultsport forum you care to visit. Renault says it isn't aware of any issue, nor if standard cars are affected as well.

The pull was slight enough for me to tolerate, though, and didn't take the shine off running the 200. Its big mileage was testament to its multiple, addictive talents. It provided a refreshingly old-school experience, so while the absence of an eco-friendly turbocharged engine might have put it in a high tax bracket, the Clio nearly always won Friday-night battles with newer, flashier press cars to be my



NEW ARRIVAL



Clio took on the likes of the Murciélago SV at our 2009 Car of the Year test

wheels for the weekend.

The Clio 200 still possesses the basic, driver-focused DNA of its forebears, and having now driven them all during our 'Happy Birthday Clio!' test (issue 146), it's safe to say I'm truly won over by Renault's hot hatch. The Williams, 172, Trophy and V6 are all cars that had failed to tickle my interest before, but alongside the 200, I'd now happily own them all. Which brings me to the car to the right...

Stephen Dobie

can't stop looking at it. Sad, maybe. But you can mock all you want – I'm proud of my newly acquired Williams and any opportunity for another quick glance is happily taken.

When I say 'my', I mean 'our', as it's a joint purchase between me and senior designer Adam Shorrock. We both developed a hankering for the original hot Clio after driving Renault's pristine example back in June, and after scraping together a grand each, the search began. A split in costs when the car succumbs to its old French roots is attractive; the potential punch-up over who gets to drive it less so.

Still, I think we've done rather well. We've bought a Williams 1 (naturally). It's number 0421 and has garnered just over 81,000 miles since its March 1994 registration. After some typically British haggling (i.e. polite but rubbish), we paid £3000 for the car, fully taxed

and MOT'd. That may strike you as a lot, and it's a little north of our initial budget, but after three months of hunting, and numerous test drives and poke-arounds of slightly cheaper but rusty cars, L97 JUD looked like a particularly wise buy: there's simply no rust to be seen.

We'd been close to calling off the search after seeing just how rotten similar-aged cars could be. In fact, we flirted with the idea of buying the Williams's dad – a Renault 5 GT Turbo – after test driving a particularly mint 1987-vintage car.

I'm very glad we didn't, though. Patience has paid off, and now we're finding ourselves coming up with any excuse to drive our Willy. As I write, we've had the car four days, so its mileage this month averages out at 145 per day. Each one of those has been utterly sweet, too: it rides far better than its modern-day equivalent, the



Plaque (above) shows this car is number 421 of around 500 Williams 1s. Interior (right) is tidy; wheels (below) less so





'IT RIDES FAR BETTER THAN ITS MODERN-DAY EQUIVALENT, THE CLIO 200 CUP'

RENAULT CLIO WILLIAMS

Date acquired	September 2010
Total mileage	81,723
Mileage this month	583
Costs this month	£3000 (the car), £701 (insurance)
mpg this month	34.3

Clio 200 Cup, and its 150bhp 2-litre engine feels lustier, its smaller torque figure (126lb ft v 159lb ft) delivered lower down and with more vigour, helped by the car's lighter weight.

It's a very pleasant place to spend time, too. Inside, the dashboard is unmarked, all the electrics and dials

are in full working order (bar a mildly deceptive fuel gauge) and those iconic Williams seats look as wild and feel as plush as I imagine they did new. The exterior isn't as great. There are numerous chips and scratches across the paintwork and the alloys need refurbishing, but with everything perfect we'd have had to stump up twice the money.

'We've bought a blinder!' grinned Shorrock as he clambered out after the ceremonial first drive. I'd followed behind in the Fast Fleet Suzuki Swift, and was already feeling pangs of pride just looking at our new car tacking up the road. Now a bit of exterior smartening beckons to make that pride even stronger.

Stephen Dobie

Big, big thanks to Mat Brown, Richard Northrop and Jeremy Townsend for their help in finding a top-notch car



It was while sorting out the road tax on the Insight recently that I thought it was time for another update on this odd little car.

With the Griffith having been out of action for most of this summer, I've ended up using the Honda far more than I ever expected I would, and it remains my default choice of wheels when the weather's grotty or there's an airport car park involved.

I love the way it can travel 550 miles or more on a tank of fuel, which then only costs around £35-40 to replace. This massive range means you can sail past fuel stations for weeks on end before finally stopping, and when I do, I use super-unleaded, as it seems to improve the fuel economy by 3-5mpg, just about justifying the extra price and further extending the range. It's also my little treat for the car, which otherwise I neglect horribly. But it being a Honda, this doesn't seem to matter. It always springs back into life on the first turn of the key, even after weeks of lying dormant.

The mpg has slipped a little recently, as I've decided life's too short to max the economy all the time, so I'm dipping into the VTEC zone more often and keeping pace with the outside lane – much to the amazement of others, I suspect.

HONDA INSIGHT

Date acquired	December 2009
Total mileage	43,120
Mileage this month	870
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	67.4



Above: despite sharing garage space with a Zonda, the Insight is frequently the car that Harry will take out

But the Insight has a top speed of 118mph, so it will happily cruise at highly illegal speeds...

Come to a halt in traffic, though, and the stop-start system (the best I've ever experienced, incidentally) kills the engine. And as you sit there in utter silence, it makes other cars seem ridiculously outdated.

The kids may think the Insight is uncool, but I'm not sure they're right on this one. That's why I've re-taxed it – for the princely sum of £0. Now that is cool.

Harry Metcalfe

'THE KIDS THINK IT'S UNCOOL, BUT I'M NOT SURE THEY'RE RIGHT'



Above: as a post-February 2001 hybrid, Harry's Honda qualifies for free road tax