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NEW RENAULT MEGANE dCi PROVES THAT HYBRIDS ARE MUCH MORE COSTLY AND NO GREENER THAN A CLASS-LEADING RENAULT DIESEL ENGINE

Moves by Honda and the RAC Foundation this week to try and convince the British public that you can "save money with Honda hybrids" and that "British drivers don't understand greener cars" backfired somewhat with the revelation that Renault's new Megane range includes new dCi diesel engines which match all the low emission and fuel consumption claims made for hybrid cars whilst costing between £3,550 and £5,050 less.

"British drivers don't understand greener cars" said Honda at the launch of its new Civic Hybrid - "Yes they do" says Renault "which is why they buy thousands of Mégane dCi diesels every year giving them the same environmental CO₂, Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) and fuel consumption benefits as a hybrid". Yet with prices for a Mégane five-door Hatch dCi 86 starting at only £12,750, that's an astonishing £3,550 less than the new Honda Civic Hybrid and £5,015 less than the cheapest Toyota Prius.

The facts

The hybrid cars offered by Honda and Toyota work by offering two power units - one petrol and one electric. Petrol engines are less efficient than diesel engines which are not popular in their home country of Japan so by mating a small electric motor to a small petrol engine they can improve the environmental performance of their car.

In Europe however, many years of diesel engine development has seen turbo chargers and common rail injection improve the efficiency of diesel engines leaps and bounds to the point where a petrol/electric hybrid offers no advantage but the cost and complexity of having two power units adds greatly to the price and servicing costs.

Same VED tax band

The Government has announced new VED bands to reduce the tax for low emission cars with a £65 reduction for Band A cars emitting less than 100g/km of CO₂ and a £35 reduction for Band B for cars emitting between 101 and 120g/km.



Widely assumed to be a band for only hybrids and supermini diesels, both the Mégane dCi 86 and dCi 106 fit in this category with CO2 emissions of 120g/km compared to 109 g/km for the Honda and 104 g/km for the Toyota. Mind you, the Mégane is an exception as you will not find any other cars of this size like the Ford Focus, Vauxhall Astra or VW Golf in this VED band. Mégane is the only car in this class with emissions as low as 120g/km.

Same fuel economy

So what about the reason for the hybrid's existence - lower fuel consumption due to its electric power? Well actually it's only making up for is the less efficient petrol engine so the official combined fuel economy of the Mégane dCi 86 is 62.8 mpg and the dCi 106 is 60.1mpg compared to 61.4mpg for the Civic and 65.7mpg for the Prius.

Same Performance

So although we are talking about being "green" here, does the Mégane's performance suffer by having "only one engine" - not at all. The Mégane dCi 86 and 106 dCi have a top speed of 108mph and 115mph respectively and 0-62mph times of 12.7 seconds and 11.1 seconds compared to the Civics' top speed of 115mph and 0-62mph time of 12.1seconds and a top speed of 106 mph and 0-62mph time of 10.9 seconds for the Prius.

Much lower price

So the Mégane has the same VED tax band, the same fuel economy and the same performance as a hybrid so the only difference comes with the purchase price. Two power plants don't come free and it shows in the price. If Honda and the RAC Foundation were wondering why people don't want to buy a hybrid here's the answer. A much cheaper alternative already exists and sells very well to the enlightened British public. A Mégane Hatch dCi 86 Authentique with air conditioning costs £12,750. A Honda Civic Hybrid costs £16,300 and the cheapest Toyota Prius costs £17,760.

If you don't want to be ruled totally by economising then go on and spoil yourself by moving up to the faster but still super economical dCi 106 six speed Mégane with the more luxurious Expression trim level for £14,250 - you'll still be saving thousands.

Clio Campus, new Clio or Modus in VED band B

And you don't want to drive something as big as a Mégane but still squeeze into the VED band B then Renault offer two Clio Campus, six New Clios, and 11 Modus mini-MPV's that all use the Renault dCi 68 and 86 engines to great effect emitting less than 120g/km.

Conclusion - Hybrids don't add up against a Renault diesel

Why pay up to £5,000 more for a car that is the same size with the same end results? Hybrids are an interesting novelty but don't achieve anything that a dCi-engined Renault can't achieve. So the next time a hybrid owner boasts about the Greenness of their hybrid you can be sure that the conscience of a Mégane dCi owner will be clear as they lounge on the beach in Barbados with the money they saved.