

An intuitive Drive

Ian Lamming makes friend with Renault's new Megane

CAR launches are great; not only do you get to drive the latest metal, you get to eat nice pastries and a proper lunch.

They also provide the opportunity to catch up with old friends; people who are normally spread around the country, often desk-bound with little time to chat.

Lovely PR people, in this case Renault, invite you to the region's only five star hotel, Rockliffe Hall, near Darlington, throw you the keys and say 'off you go then'. Well it would be rude not to, wouldn't it?

The official test route would have taken us in the direction of Northallerton, but being this close to Swaledale this drive is only ever going to end one way, up t' Dales.

The car in question is the new Megane and it is to its credit that initially I pay it little attention – let me explain.

Jump into a new motor and the immediate state is normally one of confusion. How do I even start this thing? Where are the controls? How? What? Why? When? But not in the new Megane which is somehow intuitive to drive.

Miles into the Dales and deep into putting the world to rights conversation-wise with my chum I think I'd better start paying attention. And it's all good.

Megane is brand spanking new, not just a cheap warm over, and so it should be as the name is celebrating a coming of age. The first Megane

appeared in 1995, so it is 21 and four generations later the world has purchased more than 6.5 million, which isn't half bad.

The latest is certainly the best looking yet thanks to bold front end, curvy coupe lines and some brilliant light signatures front and back. From any direction it looks low, squat, wide and sporty; the GT even more so.

It has grown with wider track and wheelbase and increased interior space. But it looks more manageable, mean and moody.

Inside is of the moment. There's a dash-dominating 8.7in portrait tablet with sweep and pinch functions all too familiar to a generation weened on iPads. Clocks are TFT and connectivity is off the scale.

Every electronic device in the cupboard is fitted to keep you on the right side of the road, avoiding others and safe and happy.

Test car is a 1.5 diesel, a cracking motor enjoyed by many a badge and model. The 110HP it emits is more than enough for most purposes and offers great drivability and economy.

There's also a 130HP diesel for more oomph or 1.2 litre or 1.6 litre petrols offering 130 and 205HP respectively. Choose from six-speed manual or seven cog automatic boxes.

Whatever the choice, the engine, the trim, or the power output, Megane should meet just about everyone's needs allowing you to catch up with old mates. I love car launches, me.

Fact File

- Renault Megane
- Engine: 1.5 diesel
- Power: 110PS
- 0-62mph: 11.3 secs
- Top speed: 116mph
- Combined MPG: 76.4
- Transmission: six speed manual
- CO2 g/km: 96

