

Renault Grand Scenic

Sprite Surfer

By Godfrey Castle



The more I drive the latest generation diesel engined cars the more I like them for towing. Perhaps what impresses me most is the surge in power and torque when the turbo kicks in and, most importantly, the excellent fuel economy while towing at cruising speed gives the impression that you are saving big time in fuel costs.

Just take the diesel Renault Grand Scenic for example: it has a relatively small 1.9-litre common rail diesel engine yet it develops 88 kW of engine power and a whopping 300 Nm of torque. Put simply, it translates into a most suitable vehicle for towing a caravan the size and weight of the Sprite Surfer.

Grand Scenic

The Renault Scenic is a market leader in the compact MPV sector and the new Grand Scenic is simply a stretched version (the wheel base is 5 cm longer) of this very popular vehicle.

Let's get back to that diesel engine. This 1.9 or 1 870 cm³ turbodiesel engine utilises common rail injection technology - the latest buzz phrase in motoring jargon - and it employs a variable nozzle turbo charger equipped with vanes whose angle is electronically controlled as a function of engine speed and load. The result is a maximum power output of 88 kW and peak torque of 300 Nm, at 4 000 and 2 000 r/min respectively.

In addition, there is a new six speed manual gearbox that is simply silk smooth in its operation. With a maximum torque rating of 300 Nm, the gearbox is both

strong yet light - it weighs only 47.5 kg - and a feature we liked is the fact that gear changes are short and precise and almost impossible to fluff when one is not concentrating.

As a towcar

The Sprite Surfer has a license mass of 895 kg and a GVM of 1 150 kg which is well within the license weight capacity of the Grand Scenic.

On brisk acceleration rest assured you can expect front wheel drive wheelspin, the motor develops all of its torque at a very low 2 000 r/min and before you know it you will be smokin' those front tyres. Normal acceleration can be as placid as you want it to be, we liked the clutch action and the gear changes, they are easy and smooth to coordinate.

And with all that torque at a low r/min you soon have to change to a higher

gear - second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth gear and then back to fifth as, psychologically, you have been told not to tow in fifth gear on most cars and now you have six gears!

And how does 7.1 litres per 100 km fuel consumption while towing at a steady 100 km/h sound? The Grand Scenic has an onboard computer which calculates a host of useful information including current fuel consumption figures, a feature which we really found useful.

What is disconcerting though, is the electric handbrake. Being a creature of habit one gets used to the basic principles of a motor car, which include operating a normal handbrake. The Scenic, on the other hand, has an electric handbrake which takes you out of the comfort zone of hearing a ratchet clicking when the handbrake is applied and, when you can't pull it up any more having that satisfying knowledge that the handbrake is on tight. Similarly, when one releases the handbrake all the way down it is reassuring to know that the handbrake is off. On the Scenic a light tug on a handle and the handbrake is applied electronically. To drive off, you simply drive off, but then you have to compensate by riding the clutch in order to get the vehicle going and for the handbrake sensor to automatically release itself. Give me a conventional handbrake anytime!

Good rear view mirrors

With the Grand Scenic you will be suitably happy with the existing door mirrors on either side of the vehicle. These gave us good vision, we found we could see both of the caravan's wheels as well as cars travelling behind the caravan, so you won't need extra mirrors unless you prefer a really wide, bird's eye view of the world behind you.

Another plus for the Grand Scenic is the seating position for the driver, this is such that driver and passengers are afforded excellent front, side and rear views. One has the impression that it's not a family bus yet it is just so spacious.

The rear suspension dropped by 30 mm when we hitched up the Surfer. We initially thought the towball height was a little too high at 540 mm but then the towball was placed on the highest bolt holes. After the initial 30 mm drop the



Above, a schematic diagram shows the seven seater layout and below, the seats folded flat. Seats can be folded one at a time depending on the need for space.



towball was at 510 mm, perhaps 20 mm too high, but not a problem.

No drop plate would be necessary on this combination.

Braking

All crash stops produced clouds of tyre smoke. The caravans brakes were well adjusted and, if anything, they were set to be overly sensitive. We recorded emergency braking stops from 100 km/h which took only 2.86 seconds, which is quick. It is most satisfying to know that you can stop this combination in such a short distance if need be.

Grand Scenic

The new stretched Grand Scenic was launched at the 2003 Frankfurt motorshow and it is basically 23 cm longer than the standard five seater Scenic. As such the Grand Scenic offers an additional third row of two extra

individual seats that fold into the floor should they not be needed.

In order to allow easier access to the luggage compartment without opening the rear hatch the new Scenic is fitted with an opening tailgate window, nice for when the caravan is hitched onto the rear and one needs to get access into the rear of the vehicle without the jockey wheel from the caravan preventing the door from opening.

The actual floor pan is 5 cm longer too, plus there is more rear-end overhang which, surprisingly, has no effect on overall towing stability.

Summary

Renault set the international motoring scene alight with Scenic MPV (multi purpose vehicle) and the Grand Scenic takes this vehicle a step further in being a market leader in the mini MPV category.