

Gordini gives va va vroom to Clio



French blue with two white stripes can only mean one thing – Gordini; this is the latest Clio version.

Clio joins Twingo in getting the Gordini treatment

DENIS DROPPA

SOME might find the bright blue paintwork and two white stripes a trifle kitsch, but for aficionados of Renault's Gordini they're just what the doctor ordered.

The bright colour scheme might become a little more palatable when you consider that Jody Scheckter, SA's only Formula One champion, honed his skills in a Renault Gordini before heading off to F1.

Renault South Africa reintroduced the iconic Gordini name here a few months back with the launch of the smaller Twingo Gordini, and it's now made a Clio RS avail-

able wearing the same emblematic colour scheme. Apart from the iconic blue-and-white paint job that once adorned racing Renaults in the 1950s-1970s, the Clio Gordini RS gets special black-and-diamond effect 17" mags and exclusive exterior and interior detailing.

Gordini cabin treatment includes Renault Sport bucket seats trimmed in black leather with blue accents, a blue-leather steering wheel with two white stripes indicating the straight-ahead position, and various other Gordini-branded goodies.

An on-board Renault Sport Telemetry Display, that made its debut on the Mégane Renault Sport Cup, provides the driver with real-time performance and vehicle data, as well as several options to tailor the throttle and engine response.

It has improved handling thanks to a bespoke Cup chassis, in place of the more conventional Sport chassis used in the standard Clio RS, complemented by low-profile 215/45 R17 tyres. The brakes boast four-piston Brembo callipers controlling large, ventilated 312mm front discs, along with 300mm solid discs at the rear. ABS with electronic brakeforce distribution is standard.

Mechanically the Gordini version is identical to the existing Clio RS, which may disappoint buyers who expect the performance to match the clout of the colour scheme, but Renault says the 2-litre normally-aspirated engine's already in a high state of tune with its 148kW and 215Nm outputs, and squeezing extra kW out of it would have affected reliability.

The car was launched in fittingly high-adrenalin style at last weekend's Knysna Hillclimb, a Renault-sponsored event, where journalists were given the chance to race up the hill against the clock.

Although you al-

ways hanker for more power on a competitive hillclimb, the 16-valve powerplant has a nicely free-revving nature at sea level and often catches you by surprise at how briskly it runs into its 7 500rpm rev limiter.

Renault claims a sea level 0-100 km/h sprint time of just 6.9 sec and a top speed of 225 km/h, but at Gauteng altitude the car might battle to beat rivals like the turbocharged Mini Cooper S and Polo GTi.

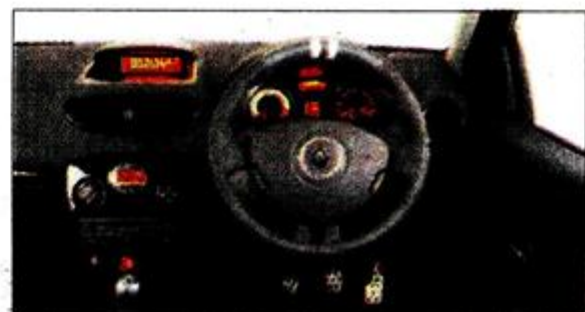
The Cup chassis is the real hero of this story, and feels like it could handle a lot more horses. Without feeling teeth-jarringly firm – which makes the Clio Gordini RS a comfortable everyday commuter – it makes for a very neutral- and predictable-handling car that scurried up that twisty hillclimb like a startled cheetah.

An Electronic Stability Programme (ESP) provides the safety net, but can be disconnected for spirited driving such as track days and hillclimbs. When I did so the car had a tendency to slight oversteer on the limits – the kind of handling true enthusiasts like, rather than the typical understeer characteristics of front-wheel drive cars. A really top job on the chassis, Renault, give yourselves a pat on the back.

The six-speed gearshift's a delight to use and I never missed a change even during the aggressive cut-and-thrust of trying to outpace my fellow journalists up the hill, and the sports seats really hug you in place.

As the range-topping variant in the Clio range, the Gordini boasts high-end features including a rain sensor, automatic headlight activation, cornering lights, cruise control with speed limiter, Renault's hands-free key and ignition card, automatic climate control and dark-tinted rear windows, and an 80-watt CD receiver with MP3 playback, a separate dashboard-mounted display and steering wheel controls, as well as Bluetooth and multimedia connectivity with USB and iPod connections.

At R279 900 the Gordini costs twenty grand more than the standard Clio RS, and comes with a standard three-year/60 000km service plan and five-year/150 000 km warranty.



All the racy bits you'd expect, and more. The blue-trimmed leather bucket seats gripped very snugly during a spirited hillclimb race.