


 A dark blue Renault Fluence sedan is shown from a front-three-quarter view, driving on a city street. The car's license plate is 'AJ-391-HJ'. In the background, the Grand Palais with its glass dome is visible under a clear sky. The car is in motion, as indicated by the blurred background and the 'DRIVE' header.
 **AUTOCAR
EXCLUSIVE**

In Fluence

Renault wants to start a new innings in India and its weapon is the stylish and upmarket Fluence.

STORY FORMAZO SORABIE
PHOTOGRAPHY CLEMENT CHOULOT

The Logan will no longer be a Renault in India and by the end of the year, it will wear just the Mahindra badge. The French car maker has washed its hands off the struggling Logan and the joint venture with Mahindra & Mahindra and wants to make a fresh start in the Indian market. But it's not that easy to wipe the slate clean. Though the Logan is very capable, it's seen as dull and boring and that's the perception car buyers in India have about the Renault brand.

That's a perception Renault is so desperate to change.

So it's just as well that the first car to kick off Renault's new innings in India is the Fluence. This all-new saloon sits at the opposite end of the aesthetic scale to the Logan. It's every bit as terrific to look at as the Logan is terrible and, crucially, it immediately drives home the point that Renault can also make some sexy cars.

In fact, the Fluence was designed with the objective of making it the most attractive car in its class and to appeal





Fluence doesn't like being pushed hard through corners and the emphasis is more on ride comfort.

← to customers in the status-conscious markets of Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. The main plant for Fluence production is in Turkey but it's also made by Renault Samsung in Korea where it is sold as the Samsung SMS. In India, the Fluence will be assembled from CKD kits shipped in from Turkey but you can expect a fair bit of local content too which is essential to keep costs down.

The Fluence, which was conceived as a Corolla fighter, is much bigger than even a Laura or Jetta and in fact, it's not much smaller than a Passat. Again, the Fluence's dimensions were arrived at keeping in mind the target of having class-leading passenger space. It's built on the very capable Renault-Nissan C platform which is also the base for the Megane III.

The Fluence looks terrific from almost any angle and in India will certainly stand out from the mundane and generic styling of its rivals. Put the Fluence alongside a Jetta or a Corolla and the others are unlikely to get a second look.

Unlike the Logan, which was actually a Dacia, the Fluence looks every bit a Renault. The slot-type grille, headlights which swoop into the fenders, and the sculpted bonnet with a Renault badge deeply embedded won't let you mistake it for any other brand. The pronounced wheel arches and shapely waistline, which rises up sharply towards the rear to form solid haunches, give the Fluence lots of character while the long 2702mm



Fluence has one of the best rear seats around; the small glass area at the back restricts vision for passengers.



Design flair seen in dashboard too. Cabin made of hard-wearing materials but quality not as good as German rivals.

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wheelbase gives it a well balanced stance.

The rear styling is more generic but the two-part lights allow a generous boot opening. Splashes of chrome around the door handles and fog lamp surrounds add to the upmarket feel of the car. It's fair to say that the Fluence will be one of the most stylish cars to hit the market and most car buyers will love its rakish looks.

Slide into the driver's seat and you are greeted by a chunky steering wheel, legible instrumentation and a dashboard which is uncluttered but yet full of character. The multi-layered dashboard is quite curvaceous and there's no separate centre console which makes it look quite unique. The navigation screen pops out from the top of the dash like most Renaults but I found the controls for the audio system set a bit too low. For such a big cabin, I expected some more storage space to be popping out but the door pockets and cubbyholes are big enough to hold most things and the illuminated and refrigerated glovebox is one of the biggest around.

The front seats with their generous under-thigh support are supremely comfortable and adjust (manually) in

all directions. Short drivers, however, might want a little bit more seat height adjust to comfortably clear the high-set dashboard.

Move over to the rear and you will be in for a pleasant surprise. The Fluence's back seat is one of the most comfortable with loads of legroom, great under-thigh support and a nice, upright sitting position. Neither the Laura nor the Corolla can match the Fluence for rear seat comfort. However, because of the dark trim (the Indian cars should have beige) and the small window area (eaten up by the rising waistline and swooping roof), the interiors don't feel as airy and bright as they should. Cabin quality is good with hard-wearing plastics and switches which feel nice to prod. However, the Fluence's insides don't have quite the same quality as the Germans and can't match the Jetta or even a Civic for sheer feel-good factor.

The boot is huge and comes with a 60:40 split for added versatility. However, in India that feature is hardly used and it's possible that split seats may not be offered in the Indian version if it saves costs.

The equipment level on the Euro-spec ➔

Renault Fluence | Drive

'The Fluence will convince Indians that Renault can make great-looking cars.'





Fluence is not particularly generous but the Indian car will almost certainly have all the bells and whistles which include Bluetooth connectivity and a keyless start among others.

The engine under the Fluence's long hood is a familiar unit. It's a more powerful version of the Logan's 1.5-litre diesel dCi engine and develops 105bhp. There are other engine options too including a 2-litre 140bhp petrol with a CVT automatic transmission and Renault may consider this model too for the Indian market.

Back to the diesel. It feels far more refined than the Logan's engine but that's to be expected given the extra insulation the Fluence can afford. The Fluence's diesel engine is reasonably quiet but pile

on the revs and the drone becomes louder. But, for the most part, when driven in a relaxed way, engine noise is hardly obtrusive.

The engine is fairly punchy and has a strong mid-range and the six-speed gearbox, which has a delightful shift, makes highway cruising with the tall fifth and sixth gear ratios quite a breeze.

However, the big disappointment is the way the Fluence drives in town and in heavy traffic. A drive through rush-hour Paris highlighted the infuriating turbo-lag. In fact, at very low speeds, the Fluence feels less responsive than the

1.5 diesel feels sluggish at low revs; massive boot space of 530 litres; Six-speed gearbox is slick.

COST CONTROL

LIKE GM HAS successfully managed to integrate its Korean subsidiary GM DAT in the development of its Asian range of vehicles, Renault too has involved its Korean subsidiary Renault-Samsung in the development of the Fluence. Developing cars outside of Europe is not just cheaper but a lot quicker too. The Fluence will also benefit from its relatively low-cost mother plant and a cheap supplier base in Turkey but huge cost savings will be achieved only when local production of engines begins.

Logan because the bigger turbo in this engine takes its own sweet time to spool up. You floor the throttle and nothing happens. Wait for a moment and suddenly whoosh – the turbo kicks in and you rocket forward. The non-linear power delivery will be cumbersome in Indian traffic and hopefully Renault will smoothen out the power delivery of the engine before launch.

The Fluence suspension has been tuned for comfort and the ride is, without a doubt, outstanding. It's hard to gauge in the Indian context, especially against cars like the Jetta and Laura which have an exemplary ride. However, driving around Paris, the Fluence felt extremely cushy and ride was just superb. The handling, however, is a bit dull. The electric power steering doesn't exactly bristle with feel and the big and soft Fluence doesn't like to be hurried through corners, so enthusiasts may be disappointed.

It's too early to announce any prices but one can expect the Fluence to phenomenally competitive and undercut cars like the Laura and Jetta by a fair margin. In fact, there are rumours that the Fluence could be priced alongside the Corolla. Pricing will be the key to the Fluence's success and Renault just can't afford to get it wrong. Not only is the Fluence a new car for Renault in India but it marks a new beginning for the company too. **AD**

'The Fluence will be bigger than the Jetta but priced closer to the Corolla.'

FACTFILE

RENAULT FLUENCE

Price	Rs 12-13 lakh (est)
Length	4638mm
Width	1805mm
Weight	1475mm
Wheelbase	2702mm
Ground clearance	120mm
Kerb weight	1277kg
Engine	4 cyls in line, common-rail turbo-diesel, 1461cc
Installation	Front, transverse, front-wheel drive
Power	105bhp at 4000rpm
Torque	24.4kgm at 2000rpm
Gearbox	6-speed manual
Suspension	MacPherson-type with lower wishbone (f), flexible beam (r)
Fuel tank	60 litres
Boot	530 litres
Tyres	205/55 R17 91 H