



Renault Racing 18i

The benefits of Formula 1 trickle-down.

• If racing improves the breed at all, it's generally not in ways you'd think. Few components on today's cars have descended directly from racing, simply because the demands of road and racetrack are supremely different. Racing cars are made to go fast, and if they assault your eardrums, ride like buckboards, or have no room for your two-suiter—well, those are the breaks.

Though the case for a technological rub-off is tenuous at best, there is a definite trickle-down in terms of image. Almost all of the major car companies have at one time or another engaged in racing for the excitement it brings to their showroom offerings and for the status it bestows on the company as a whole.

That's exactly what Renault is doing right now. The Régie has immersed itself in racing with religious fervor. Sedan racing, rallying, Le Mans, and Formula 1 have all fallen under the purview of the racing department. Here in the States, Renault Racing was set up in Belleville, Michigan, just minutes from our doorstep, to carry the Renault colors to U.S. racetracks—and, Renault hoped, to garner some glory for the marque. In the process, Renault Racing has built, backed, and raced cars in Showroom Stock, the SCCA's GT4 category, IMSA RS, and IMSA GTU, all to that end.

In Europe, the image fallout from Renault's corporate racing involvement shows up in the showrooms in a variety of sporting models. The list includes the R5 Turbo, 18i Turbo, Alpine 310, R5 Alpine Turbo, and more. But in the U.S. Renault's two offerings—the 18i and the Le Car—are

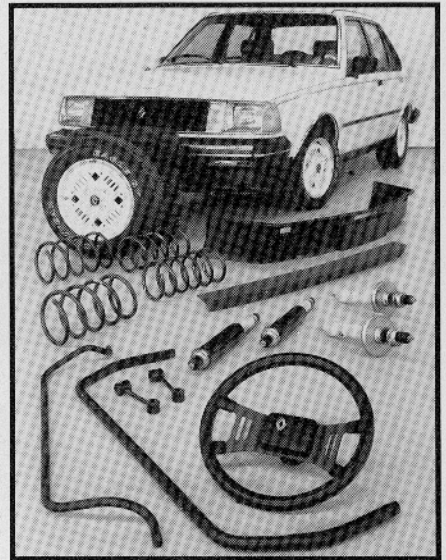
skewed far toward the gray-haired-granny end of the spectrum. (Some relief is on the way in the form of the upcoming Fuego sports coupe.)

Renault Racing (12900 Haggerty Road, Belleville, Michigan 48111, 313-699-4003) saw this dearth of enthusiast hardware in AMC-Renault emporiums as a good chance for it to spread the word to the colonies. The method is to offer a complete line of factory-engineered high-performance hardware through regular dealers, much as Chevrolet has done for years.

Though the parts catalog isn't complete as we go to press, Renault Racing's first 18i project car is. The 18i you see hunkering down here was bolted together just to give us a taste of what's being cooked up. At this point, Renault Racing plans to offer handling packages for both the Le Car and the 18i as well as thorough but streetable hop-up kits for all normally aspirated Renault engines. Various other functional and dress-up items, like leather-wrapped steering wheels, alloy road wheels, and spoilers, will be stocked as well. And for those who like to wear their marques on their sleeves, a line of Renault Racing-wear—jackets, shirts, and hats—is in the making. All this will be introduced in the next few months.

As for Racing's 18i demo—our compliments to the chef. This particular test car was fitted out primarily as a showcase for the new chassis pieces, which work a subtle transformation on Renault's little limousine.

The shopping list starts with the \$415 bolt-on handling kit. New, slightly shorter coil springs increase the spring rate 21 percent in



front and 19 percent in the rear. Specially valved Koni shocks replace the stockers and provide tauter damping. To further increase roll stiffness, a 0.75-inch front anti-sway bar and a 0.98-inch rear bar are bolted into place, replacing the stocker's 0.63-inch front and 0.55-inch rear bars.

Where the rubber meets the road, Renault went more aggressive. The stock 185/70R-13 radials and 5.5-inch-wide steel wheels were dispensed with in favor of a set of P195/60R-14 Goodyear Eagle GT tires on handsome Momo 6.0-by-14-inch cast-aluminum wheels. This wheel-and-tire combo adds \$920 to the bill.

To set off the crouching 18i, the Racing guys added a factory front air dam and a trunk-lid spoiler. Renault Racing tells us that factory wind-tunnel tests show that each of these aerodynamic aids reduces drag by 3 percent.

We can confirm that this 18i recipe is indeed tastier now. The reworked car digs into the corners with a vengeance. Even so, the new suspension calibrations come nowhere near race-car harshness. In fact, the ride is almost as supple as an Audi's. The combination of the more active chassis, serious grip (now up to 0.78 g), and racerized looks makes the 18i a true throw-around car, but one that's happy cruising down the Interstate as well.

Of course, these 18i garnishes cost, but the total price tag is still within the Audi 4000-Jetta-Scirocco range. And that's another thing about racing. It almost never makes the breed cheaper.

—Rich Ceppos

RENAULT RACING 18i SHOPPING LIST

Handling package	\$415
Momo 6.0-by-14-inch cast-aluminum wheels (4)	480
Goodyear Eagle GTs, P195/60R-14 (4)	440
Renault 18i Turbo steering wheel	82
Renault Racing front air dam	79
Renault Racing rear spoiler	68
TOTAL	\$1564

TEST RESULTS

	stock	Racing
Roadholding, 282-ft skidpad	0.74 g	0.78 g
Maneuverability, 1100-ft slalom	56.5 mph	60.0 mph