

# AMC Renault

A sensible car for the times



The Renault 18i was introduced in Europe nearly three years ago. It has undergone a number of refinements since then and should now be debugged

to the point of being an exceptionally dependable car.

For the North American market, the 18 is known as the 18i (for fuel injection) and is available as a 4-door sedan or a 5-door wagon. Also for our market, the 18i uses the optional (in Europe) 1647cc 4-cylinder as the only available engine. The AMC-imported 18i has L-Jetronic fuel injection for emissions purposes, instant starts, no warmups, overall low maintenance, and better economy.

The aluminum 4-cylinder is placed conventionally in the engine compartment and utilizes a long transaxle assembly behind it to drive the front wheels. A 5-speed manual transmission or the optional 3-speed automatic transaxle can be obtained in either body style. The engine produces 81.5 horsepower at 5000 rpm and gives an extremely satisfactory performance. Engine response runs from good to excellent, especially if each gear

is held a little long before up-shifting. At high rpm, the engine tends to be a bit noisy and produces more than normal vibration. But this could be considered a problem only if the car were consistently driven hard. The sedan's 60/40 weight bias totals to a comfortable 2263 pounds of spirited front-drive performance.

The 18i has none of the negatives normally associated with front-wheel drive. It is not heavy to steer; it has no noticeable torque steer; and the rear suspension is predictable. The car carries 9-inch front disc brakes and 7-inch rear drums. Steering is controlled with a rack and pinion, which transmits precise directional input to the 175-series radials. The suspension is independent front, with a stamped steel rear axle located with an upper link and stamped steel trailing arms. Coil springs suspend the 96-inch wheelbase chassis at 7 inches of ground clearance.

Our impression of the Renault 18i is that it is one of the most enjoyable front-drive sedans available anywhere. While not particularly fast, its 1.6-liter engine does offer acceptable throttle response and more than acceptable driveability. The car is really fun to drive. You can

feel the road under you, but this is no bone-jarring ride. The French have come up with a comfortable compromise between precise road-holding characteristics and a compliant suspension that absorbs changes in road conditions.

The interior of this Renault is convenient and comfortable. In the interior, the primary difference between the French and American versions of the 18i is the dash, which in our version is taken from the new Renault Fuego, a 2-door sports coupe also targeted for this market. The dash is modular in design, and the instruments are placed directly in the driver's line of vision. The instrument module is fully integrated, and the dials, lights, buttons, and wands are conveniently located. The Fuego steering wheel is thickly padded with an inverted-vee center section that aids in viewing the instrumentation. The dash is made of a soft-matte, nonglare plastic that conforms to the richness of the interior. A center console houses air vents, stereo, climate controls, power windows, ash tray, and cigarette lighter. All are within easy reach. The only problem we encountered was with the air conditioner. It only worked on full-fan, and

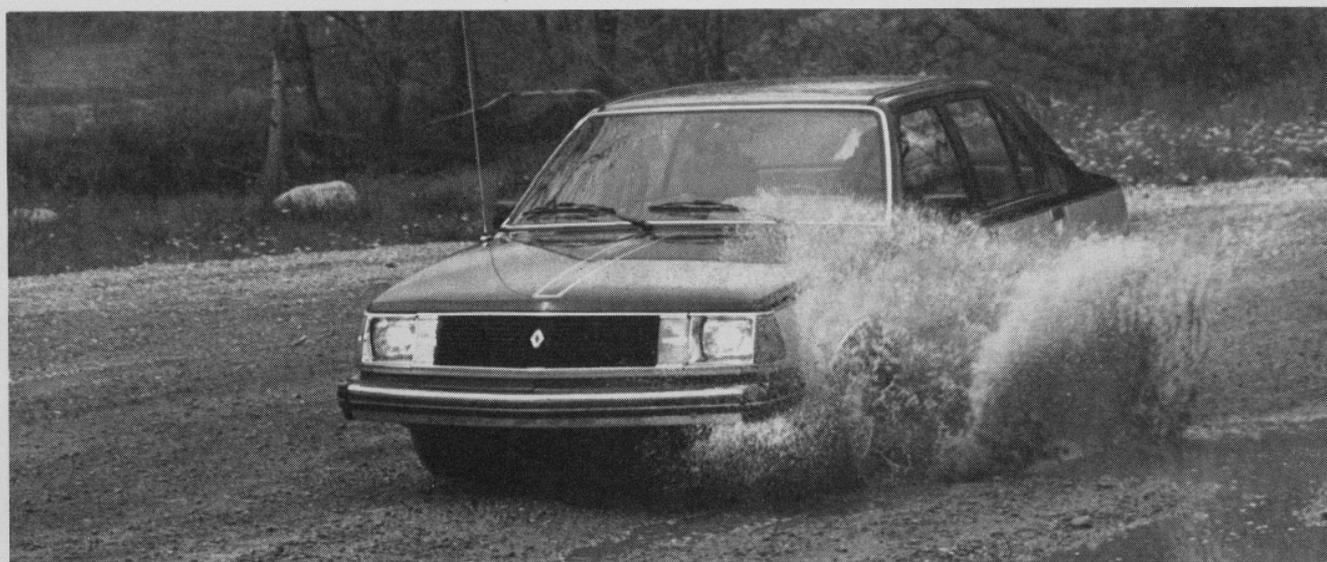
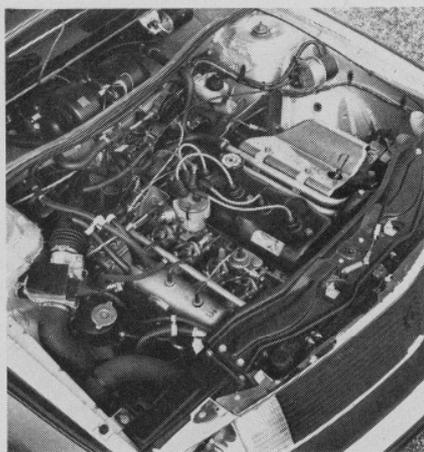
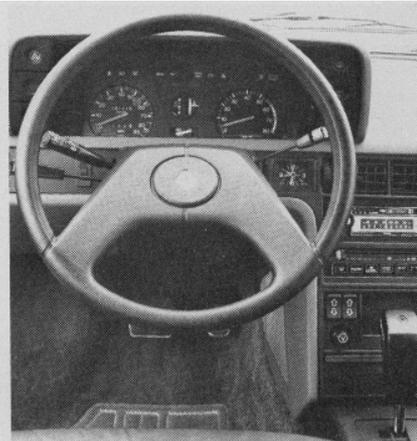
at that speed it is terribly noisy. This seems minor problem with the 18i, and one which Renault/AMC is presently endeavoring to solve.

The Bio-Form seats are simply wonderful. They are fully adjustable so any position is possible. The combination of the seats, steering wheel position, and transmission selector make driving the 18i a sheer delight. It's a command performance, with the driver

in full command. The motion of the suspension provides long vertical wheel travel and very stable handling with a minimal amount of body roll in tight cornering situations. Much of the suspension calibration for our market has been taken from the Fuego coupe, which has helped build in a quickness that even the power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering assembly has not washed away. The road feel

perserved. The steering ratio is quick, three turns lock-to-lock, but its quickness of steering does not transmit back to the driver. And all these features are wrapped in a seductive body envelope that is projected to get around 30 mpg on the EPA highway cycle.

At this writing, price has not been finalized, but will probably fall somewhere



around \$8000. We would suspect that a figure of \$10,000 will be more likely by the time a few options are tacked on. American Motors expects this car to compete against the high-dollar GM X-bodies, the VW Jetta, the high-line Chrysler K-cars, a few lower-priced Volvos, and the Audi 4000. We feel it has a pretty good shot at attracting at least a few of these potential buyers. The luxury compact market is rapidly expanding, and with this kind of product already in line, Renault should be very successful in years to come. As it stands, the 18i is a well thought out, finely executed premium car that makes good sense.

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