

Press Kit

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For 120 years Renault has been committed to making its customers' lives easier every day

Since its formation 120 years ago Renault has had three lives. That of the company's founder (1898-1944), that of the Régie Nationale des Usines Renault (RNUR), wholly owned by the French State (1945-1995), and that of Renault SA (1995-present). Nevertheless, these three lives form a single experience, the life of a car manufacturer that has always deftly adapted to changing times, changing societies, and evolving economies.

Over 120 years, Renault has stayed wholly in tune with the demands of an ever broader and more international clientele, remaining the beating heart of automotive life to fulfil those aspirations, measuring and analyzing societal changes in a mobility-loving world, where the freedom to move, to travel, to endeavor became increasingly essential. Renault's longevity was built on the understanding of lifestyles and uses, the desire to make people the defining element in the worlds of automobiles and technology.

What makes a Renault a Renault today? Looking back through history, we can see that it is a vehicle forged by values, expressed through models that combine automotive passion, exploration, discovery, family, work, recreation...and emancipation.

Driven by passion

The automobile was the inventive offspring of the second industrial revolution that transformed the 20th century, an adventure for both mankind and technology, one in which creativity and passion were given free reign and the automobile was a catalyst for progress. But engineers and mechanics were not the only soldiers in this revolution: The general public took part, transformed during that century from observers to users. For them, the automobile instantly became a passion. The thrill, first, of watching these cars go by, machines able to drive from one town to the next, faster than the train, hitherto the leading symbol of technical progress. Then imagination and projection took over, seeing oneself behind a steering wheel in the future, to experience this new love of driving, the a new craze for taking the wheel. And, most importantly, the newfound freedom, freedom to go where one pleased, when one wished with, of course, ever-increasing speed.

1898: Type A voiturette

In 1898, Renault automobiles were the product of passion. It all began with a young mechanic, Louis Renault, a man fascinated by these new machines that were changing the rules of individual locomotion. In the shed on the family property in Boulogne-sur-Seine, near Paris, he built his own car. Naturally optimistic at the tender age of 21, Louis Renault designed a different kind of machine. His intuition led him to craft a tubular chassis, lightweight and rigid, fitted with a small, 1.75-horsepower De Dion motor. His technical savvy guided him to transmission innovations, cherry-picking ideas from the many discoveries of the time. He abandoned conventional chain and belt drives for a three-speed gearbox and differential, a direct-drive transmission linked to the rear axle by a crankshaft and two universal joints. His work was a breakthrough for that day, resulting in a small car of carefully controlled weight perfectly suited to a low-power engine. The Renault Type A Voiturette was born.

Now came the time to sell the idea and share the passion. On Christmas Eve 1898, Louis Renault decided to drive to Montmartre in the Voiturette by way of the steepest street in Paris, rue Lepic. He succeeded. The many onlookers hailed his feat as a victory in both sports and innovation. This event definitively set the course for an automobile manufacturer, Renault, as the rue Lepic climb triggered demand: Orders were placed for twelve cars, including down-payments to secure their production. Renault still had neither company nor factory, but these would come soon thereafter, springboards for an extraordinary industrial adventure.



1964: Renault 8 Gordini

Though Renault had come to specialize in vehicles for the people, the maker did not ignore the automotive passion that drove a certain segment of its clientele, those who practiced heel-and-toe shifting and souped up their cars by resurfacing cylinder heads or mounting intake manifolds. The Renault models, with near-timid modesty, forged their own legend around the 4CV and Dauphine that won the Monte Carlo Rally and the Tour de Corse. The cars not only established a legacy of performance, they sparked a public passion.

To satisfy this captivated younger generation, Renault invented the Renault 8 Gordini in 1964. The small sedan was revamped by the wizard Amédée Gordini, who pulled a 95-horsepower SAE engine out of a standard 1100 cc. All that remained to be done was adding running gear and braking on a par with performance and finding a one-of-a-kind look. The Bleu de France (French Blue) that was chosen would not have filled the bill had it not been sliced by two white stripes, the work of publicist Marc Pampuzac and stylist Gaston Juchet. A legend was born, the Gordini, further embellished in 1966 in a 1300 cc version with the striking feature of four headlamps.

The Gordini was about passion, a diminutive rebel. It embodied a young generation champing at the bit for emancipation, to whom freedom and speed were synonymous, for whom unconventionality flew in the face of ostentation. The Gordini would pull away from the blue of the blues. It drew aficionados of a less elitist sport, becoming a collective passion for both those who had driven it and those who had not. An allegory of the dream. Unveiling new road masters in the Gordini Cup, being crowned the queen of Corsica and the vixen of Turini. Though original plans were to produce just 1,000 cars, the 8 Gordini drew 11,600 customers, despite

a price close to two Renault production models and thus that of an icon. This was the Gordini's golden age, the era of Blue 418.



The advent of family car for living

A paradox had developed: The automobile was staking its claim as the best means of individual transportation, but was nevertheless the tool best suited to the needs of the most essential group, the family. Over the years, the car even modeled itself after the family. The convertible style was quickly fitted with a solid roof to shelter its occupants. The body was then given four doors, gradually becoming a family vehicle with front and back seats and, importantly, a luggage compartment. Renault, being several lengths ahead of the pack, would even design a fifth door, the hatchback, to hold everything families carried with them.

As the years passed, Renault's designs continued to evolve, creating a rear child compartment that provided both safety and comfort. From that concept, Renault was just one step away from a family cocoon, the world's first: the monospace, or minivan, itself an ever-changing vehicle as the century rolled along, to meet the needs of stepfamilies. The family car was becoming a living room on wheels.

1937: Renault Primaquatre

How could the automobile be more accessible to everyone? In France and Europe, where the repercussions of the socio-economic crisis of the 1930s were still keenly felt, this was the subject of great debate: Should we produce cars for the masses, or base decisions on the preferences of more affluent families? Louis Renault was adamant: *"The little car is everyone's dream, but isn't a profitable proposition today."* And for good reason: the lack of a middle class (it would not emerge until the 1950s) meant that automobile consumption was tied to the higher-end car market. Louis Renault put it most powerfully: *"There's only one car that's selling, and that's the 1,000-kilo car ... the car that's strong enough and spacious enough to carry four people. It's the one that serves as the foundation for all sales, which can be resold because it fundamentally satisfies the dimensions and conditions people desire."*

Renault therefore placed its faith in the Primaquatre, a family car targeting more affluent households. At 3.70 meters in length, reaching a speed of 105 km/h, and at a base price of 19,500 francs, the Primaquatre distanced Renault from the too-narrow 6-cylinder market that it had relied upon since 1929. It positioned the maker at the beating heart of the French market, the realm of 10- and 11-horsepower vehicles.



1965: Renault 16

By 1957, Renault was already trumpeting its perspective on the automobile: *“A car can no longer be just four seats and a trunk. It must be viewed as one unit.”* By introducing the Renault 4 in 1961, the brand created the first *“car for living”*, one better suited to a society on the move. But new terrain had to be explored, and the family-car concept updated. That new vision took the form of the Renault 16, a boldly styled hatchback for the mid-sized family segment. It was designed for *“families attracted by modern consumer society ... probably also that of the intellectuals”*, said its creators, CEO Pierre Dreyfus and the man behind the engineering, Yves Georges.

The Renault 16 had a versatility that no other mid-size car of the day, beyond an estate car, could match. Renault did not stop with just a hatchback and a folding bench seat: the interior space was structured around a trunk volume that was *“programmed”* to multiple configurations. The seats were designed for use in different positions, folded away, or even removed, putting an architectural wonder of movable partitions on four wheels, not only adapting to the car’s different uses, but to the real day-to-day life of the post-war boom. In the blink of an eye, the Renault 16 represented a lifestyle, designed to meet family needs, fit every vacation scenario, handle jaunts to the house in the country or shopping at the flea markets. The Renault 16 was the breakout family vehicle.



1984: Renault Espace

Having invented the *“car for living”* in the form of the Renault 4, Renault 16, Renault 6, and Renault 5, the French carmaker sought to push the envelope further still. Why not design a car with all the advantages of the sedan and all the practicality of a utility vehicle? A crossbreed creation that would boast the strengths of multiple models, like the Renault 25, the 21 Nevada, and the Trafic? In-house, there was talk of taking the *“third way”*, without really knowing where it might lead. For manufacturing reasons, Renault veered toward the Trafic, a modern utility vehicle (1981) that engineers would try to *“sedanize.”*

At the same time, and in the greatest secrecy, Matra was brainstorming about a *“French-style van.”* As life’s

unpredictability would have it, Renault and Matra met in 1983 and decided to collaborate, starting with the Matra project, which was far ahead of its time in volume concepts for a monobox design. Renault contributed its founding ideas – the flat floor, the modular cabin with 5 or 7 seats, the big 2.0-liter engine of the 25, softer styling. The Renault Espace was born.

For the first few months, sales were slow. But what else could one expect for a vehicle that refused to be pigeonholed, didn't fit into any existing category, and had a sticker price of over 100,000 francs (the price of a high-end car)? But success came at last in 1985, thanks to families who fell in love with the concept. Chosen by the kids, driven by Mom, bought by Dad, the Espace came to epitomize the “*car cocooning*” triggered by the crisis of the 1980s. The Espace long reigned, unchallenged, in a market all its own.



The thirst for discovery

The 20th century was a time when new horizons opened around the world, and the automobile was the best tool for exploring them. In America, the pioneers wasted no time trading their wagons for cars, the new machines that shifted frontiers, made it possible to go even further to conquer new lands. In Europe, the most isolated regions became accessible, completely transforming the lives of their inhabitants. Day travelers were suddenly able to discover places hitherto unknown. Artisans, merchants, and traders found new places for business, where they could buy and sell tomorrow. The road drew back the curtain on innumerable spaces. It sped the progress of discovery, eliminating insulated regions so characteristic of ancient worlds, and, with a turn of the steering wheel, reshaped a geography that had been considered immutable.

Discoveries from every era now lay beyond every turn, at the end of every road. Following the First World War and the war effort, solutions were needed to meet people's new requirements. The Type KJ1 helped democratize cars in the 1920s. As an entry-level model, it combined accessibility with high-quality technical features (electric starter, three-speed gearbox, etc.). It was available in a variety of body types, including a cloverleaf-shaped three-seater, an interior driving position, a convertible, and an open tourer to please as many customers as possible while remaining affordable.

1924: Renault 6-roues

Was the automobile the implement that made the latest great discoveries possible? Was it the only machine able to penetrate the most remote regions? In 1920, the Sahara, stretching between Algeria and French West Africa, formed a barrier that only camel safaris could cross, and slowly at that. The railroad had already given up, the airplane was still hesitant. A year after Citroën introduced its autochenille, or half-track, unveiled in 1922, Renault developed the Six-Roues, a powerful truck with twin wheels and low-pressure tires to better traverse the sand, with a rear two-axle drive to ensure off-road ability and maintain velocity.

In late December 1923, Renault set off on an initial expedition, traveling from Touggourt to El Oued in just two days! That solid success paved the way for other expeditions, including to Colomb-Béchar (1924), Lake Chad, then the Cape of Good Hope (1925), a crossing of the African continent. Renault was making and

adventure with new routes and seized upon a unique opportunity by creating a transport company, the Compagnie Générale Transsaharienne (1923), to operate a regular line between North Africa and Niger.



1996: Renault Scenic

The Scenic was a modest revolution: It was the first minivan designed for the mid-size segment. Having gained experience with the Espace, Renault gave thought to the desires and aspirations of its customers who, though not the wealthiest, were great in number. How could a late-20th-century family be characterized? What kind of car was needed by these young households with children, toddlers, or teenagers, couples in which the woman drove every day, and for whom buying a high-end vehicle was not in the cards? What were their dreams? To travel the same short routes every day, or to explore new places?

To answer all these questions, Renault invented the Scenic, the first compact minivan. Designed for the nuclear family and how they lived inside their vehicle, the Scenic cleverly used all the space to be found, with a livability and modularity worthy of a “car for living.” A sliding central rear seat that could be used as a table, tilting rear side seats, airplane tray-tables for passengers, numerous storage options under the seats and in the floor, a bottle rack – everything was designed to make life easier on the road.

The Scenic was a siren song to travel, the essential car for family weekends and long journeys when every occupant had his or her own activity to pursue. The Scenic therefore became the Espace of the middle classes, the family minivan. This visionary dimension earned the Scenic the title of 1997 European Car of the Year, a worthy heir to its mothers and grandmothers, the Clios and Renault 16s.



Giving professionals a hand

The automobile: Was it a working tool or a recreational object? Since the automotive adventure began, manufacturers had been modifying their vehicles to make them more user-friendly in professional contexts. The automobile transported, delivered, served as a tool of the trade. Renault swiftly grasped and acted on the need to tailor vehicles to professional use, to develop models in direct relation to various trades. The utility vehicle became more firmly established, gradually moving away from the production car toward meeting specific professional needs. This further confirmed that Renault's strength lay in its ability to mold the automobile to suit the seemingly contradictory notions of work, leisure, and family – the art of crafting the car for living.

1952: Renault Colorale

In 1946, Renault began exploring designs for a “*station wagon for the countryside.*” The Colorale range comprised a number of utilitarian and family versions rolled out between 1950 and 1951, with names like Prairie, Savane, Pick-up, Taxi, and paneled and curtain-sided Fourgonnettes (vans). All these models were made specifically for rural trades. From a technical standpoint, they were robust, but rustic, with a chassis similar to the Renault truck and an engine borrowed from the carmaker's farm tractor. The Colorale's aesthetics were offbeat, indeed: 1.82 m high and weighing 1,640 kilos empty (almost the equivalent of three 4CV). The models were, however, precursors to the 21st-century SUVs, with room for seven on their bench seats and jumpseats, a 4x4 version and a pickup, a model that had no competition on the French market at the time.



1959: Renault Estafette

The utility vehicle had long taken the form of vans or trucks, depending on the volumes to be transported. But in the post-war boom, artisans and tradesmen needed something else, something very different from the van, which filled up far too quickly, or the truck, a cumbersome design for everyday use. In 1959, finding the middle ground between these two extremes, Renault invented the Estafette, a utility vehicle designed around how it was to be used. The rear was rid of any mechanical elements to provide a low, flat loading surface with maximum usable volume. In keeping with this design, Renault made the Estafette a front-wheel-drive vehicle, a first, but one that would lay the groundwork for the Renault 4 that would come onto the market in 1961.

The Estafette could be adapted to any profession. Three doors at the back for better loading, a sliding door (sidewalk side) to speed store deliveries. Lastly – and this was a major new development –, a sliding door for the driver whose job had now become that of driver-deliverer. There were five versions of the Estafette released: the Zone Bleue (for in-town parking), the 600-kilo van, the high-clearance van, the tarp-covered Pickup, and the 9-seater Microcar minibus. Soon thereafter, a string of customizations were rolled out to convert the Estafette into a shop, a workshop, an ambulance, a motorhome, and more.

Being a tad unconventional, the Estafette took the chance of being on the bulky side in design and broke free of the dull gray of sheet metal with bright, peppy colors like orange, yellow, and blue.



A celebration of leisure

Paid vacation, a major social innovation in Western Europe in the 1930s, actually changed the economy by making free time – once a luxury – available to most workers. Though the labor laws of 1936 established the first paid vacation for France and Belgium, that employee benefit would not be seen in Italy until the post-war period, and later still in Germany.

In France, however, it was the initiative of one company that guided paid holidays in that country toward today's five-week standard. Even before it became law, Renault gave its staff the third week of paid leave (1955), and then the fourth week (1962). Renault, a pioneering enterprise, shaped a leisure society that would gradually be adopted across Western Europe. Was it any surprise, then, that the manufacturer remained on the leading edge of automotive design in which versatility and mobility were synonymous, as much for work as for leisure, for weekdays as for weekends?

1961: Renault 4

When the time came to replace the 4CV (the popular car that put the French on wheels), Renault decided to closely assess the profound changes in French and European society. People everywhere were deserting the countryside, a rural exodus on a massive scale. But these new urbanites were not moving to city centers – they were choosing new urban neighborhoods that stretched and expanded into suburbs. A new world was forming, one in which the working population was densifying and a new middle class was emerging. The suburb was becoming a new living environment – part urban, part rural, almost a city out in the country.

With company president Pierre Dreyfus at the helm and very open to new ideas, Renault decided to invent the ultimate versatile automobile. But versatility did not suffice in and of itself: The car had to serve as a working tool from Monday to Friday, then, on Saturday and Sunday, become a family car for weekend getaways, not to mention a vacation vehicle. The next Renault would be the embodiment of versatility – city and country, weekdays and weekends, work and vacation, men and women. This was the "blue-jeans car" that, in 1961, became the Renault 4.

It had a flat floor and a fifth rear door to ensure easy loading. The hatchback body was born, with interior "*livability*" that could adapt to every need: Owners needed only tilt the back bench seat to turn the family car into a utility vehicle or a small car ready for vacation travel. The "car for living" was born.



1999: Avantime

As the name suggests, the Avantime was ahead of its time, like all the Renaults before it that made their mark on history, be it the Espace, the Scénic, or the Twingo.

Renault remained a risk-taker and was committed to anti-conformism. In an era of low-slung coupés, Renault introduced a high-set vehicle. Instead of soft lines, the design was a striking baroque sculpture. The windows were not tapered – instead, the greenhouse was composed of broad picture windows offering easy views of the world outside, along with an all-glass sunroof, flooding this loft on wheels with light. Gone was the dashboard with a plethora of counters and dials, replaced with a refined, almost minimalist console.

Before the arrival of SUVs, Avantime was the daring hybrid of a coupé and a minivan. It embodied the leisure car of the year 2000.



The embodiment of freedom

The automobile embodies freedom and emancipation. The ability to move and, more importantly, to go where you wish when you wish. It is taken for granted in Western countries, but such freedom of movement is still an uphill battle in many countries where transport is strictly controlled, or even under surveillance. What if the car were a path to greater freedom? This dream was, and still is, alive everywhere, in varying degrees of visibility, especially for young people and women seeking social equality.

Renault has long been committed to the interests of female customers. In the post-war boom, the carmaker pursued the idea of a singular, practical, elegant car, as if to better meet the needs of a woman shouldering the burden of double work: household and family responsibilities paired with work outside the home. For young people, economical cars were finally available, giving them a way to fit into the adult world, a world they would help shape through work and leisure. The automobile became a new form of freedom in society,

a trend Renault saw coming long before it happened.

1969: Renault 12

The specifications for the Renault 12 could be boiled down to three words: simple, inexpensive, and unbreakable. Renault's president had a single idea in mind: export to ensure Renault's expansion. But there was more to it than business: The automobile could help emancipate some countries, to help their populations attain greater freedom! Pierre Dreyfus believed that Spain and certain Eastern and South American countries could shake off their repressive regimes by virtue of solid economic development that would be driven, in part, by the automobile.

The fact remains that the Renault 12 was well and truly designed with international distribution in mind, to the point of being assembled outside France's borders. Much of the trialing and development of the model took place in Brazil, and it was there that Renault planned to produce the car, in the São Paulo factory that was currently assembling the Dauphine. A squad of engineers was dispatched to the site in 1967 to speed this phase. But even before being sold in Brazil, the Renault 12 found a following in Romania! Pierre Dreyfus, who dreamed of conquering the USSR market, reached into Czechoslovakia and Romania. The Renault 12 would be built in Pitesti under the Dacia brand, becoming the national car in 1969. Two years later, Renault signed an assembly contract in Turkey. The Renault 12 became a global car.



1972: Renault 5

Renault, ever attuned to societal changes, took the pulse of the Sixties and fully grasped the importance of the protest and feminist movements. In France, the events of May 1968 came as no surprise. The company understood how women's role in society was changing. It was women who fueled the rural exodus movements and, at this point in time, were now accelerating the development of the middle class. Full employment meant a second source of income, which shook up social categories and family patterns; it intensified consumption, including that of the automobile, especially since women were – at long last – being granted driving licenses.

Furthermore, expansion of the suburbs, a landscape for a thriving middle class, established the groundwork for a second-car market, one that would specifically benefit women.

Acting on these important variables, Renault designed a car for women. It would be named the Renault 5 (1972), a small vehicle with rounded shapes, a very trendy look at the time. The car had only two front doors, to ensure children were safe in the back as they were driven to school, an easy-to-lift hatchback over the trunk, so convenient for supermarket shopping, and wraparound synthetic bumpers hugging the car's shape while providing protection from minor impacts. The No. 5 from Renault became the new collection of the car for living.



And onto tomorrow

As could be expected, entering the 21st century has again shaken things up. Vital issues of environmental protection, traffic challenges, new consumer habits, car-sharing – the world is changing. To keep pace with this dizzying evolution, Renault continues to think outside the box and is already offering a wide variety of solutions meeting the needs of a globalized world: electric, connected, autonomous vehicles, and even the first robot-vehicle. As it steadily unveils its latest interpretations of the intimate relationship humans have long had with their automobiles, **Renault remains committed to making its customers' lives easier every day.**