

RENAULT TWIZY from David M Ross

Is it a car or is it a motorcycle? It has four wheels so it's a car, isn't it? But then, as it's a tandem two seater, it comes pretty close to being a motorcycle, or at least a scooter. Renault says neither. "It's a heavy quadricycle".



Regardless, the Zero Emissions Twizy is a genuine attempt by the French manufacturer to offer city commuters a cute, cheap, clean and entertaining way of zipping around town. With no combustion engine there's no tailpipe so nothing noxious is pumped out into the atmosphere. What Twizy relies on is a 6.1kWh lithium ion battery and a 42lbs ft asynchronous electric motor positioned ahead of the rear axle.

With a top speed of 50mph and on-paper acceleration that is anything but quick, actually Twizy is such fun to drive it never feels slow. It's agile but no racer.

But racy the wacky Twizy is not supposed to be. Look at it, at rest or on the road, and you can't help but smile – fortunately with it rather than at it. In a funny sort of way Twizy makes sense, as long as you stay within the city's confines. You can do a bit of a Gerry Rafferty, in other words go 'city to city' but your range from fully charged is no more than 65 miles. That's just 30 or so miles there as you have to get back but a full charge from a house-hold point takes just 3.5 hours so, if you're visiting friends, take your charge cable with you.



So let's take a closer look. Once past the insect-like appearance, you swing up the scissor door – that's if you have opted to buy doors, they are an extra cost option and, on my test version, there were no windows – and step in. No great problem there but the passenger has to squeeze in behind the driver. Best you know each other quite well.



It's comfortable enough and you are confronted by a normal steering wheel and all the instrumentation you need. The all-round view is not quite up to scooter standards but it's still pretty good.

Moving off is a new experience to most, including anyone walking across the front, as it's accomplished in almost complete silence. That can catch a few pedestrians out but the windscreen pillars aren't thick so you should be forewarned.

If you want to pick up speed in earnest, and I'm not sure the word speed is quite correct here, then the accelerator needs a good prod. But the Twizy does respond and it's all relatively effortless as there's no clutch or gears to worry about.

What I found disconcerting came when I encountered the first bend. Think about it. You're on a moped and you want to turn but you refuse to lean over. The result is, you just go straight on. So you have to get used to a vehicle that, with virtually no suspension travel, there is a serious degree of understeer. Gradually, I got used to it and, I believe, so would everyone else. It's quite fun really.

Comfortable? Not really, unless you are on a billiard table-smooth surface. Pot holes and speed bumps should be avoided or, at least, taken very slowly.

So what does Twizy offer a scooter can't? Well, it won't fall over when you walk away and you can be certain you'll be noticed, if that's what you want. For such a small vehicle, on-board safety is not at all bad with side impact protectors, decent frontal impact protection and seat belts for both occupants.

However, without side windows there's not much protection from the elements and, as there's no heater, Twizy might best be seen as a 'summertime special'.

One area where Twizy scores is in its available customisation as Renault claims it's possible to choose from over 70 colours and skins. And oddly, while luggage space is limited, there will shortly be a Twizy van. That should get the customers talking.



Without optional extras, Twizy will run you in for around £6,500. Not bad? Well, I have two concerns. One is that you will have to fork out between £50 and £70 per month for the battery hire and the other was that, when I got the chance to try Twizy, I had just sampled the Dacia Logan, a marvellously spacious five-door hatch that's the epitome of practicality and, even priced at only £500 more than Twizy, has luxury and comfort features Twizy can only dream of.