

Green and Pleasant Van

The Renault Kangoo ZE Electric

By Jim Mc Cauley

It has been for long the talk of things to come, but electric vehicles are back in vogue with the arrival of the new Renault Kangoo ZE van. There have been many solutions along the way from the amusing Sinclair C5 to the expensive Tesla sportscar, but the first practical and affordable solution has come from Renault with an all-electric plug-in version of their successful Kangoo van range.

Test choice was the standard van version with its practical 3.5 cu metre load box featuring symmetrical rear doors and sliding side door. A larger Maxi version is also available as is a 5-seater Crew Van.



Styling-wise, the van shows no exterior peculiarities other than the charge socket above the front grille and even the electric motor is capped by a casting that bears a passing resemblance to a standard 4-cylinder internal combustion engine. Traditional associations continue on the inside with a turn-key starter switch which alerts the driver to its readiness to go by a flashing green light on the instrument panel.

Movement is an uncomplicated decision with just two directions on the select lever for forward or reverse; there is no need for a traditional gearbox in an

electric vehicle. Pedal work is also simple – an accelerator pedal to increase the speed and a brake pedal to slow and stop the vehicle. Nothing strange, nothing complicated.

The 44kW motor equates to 60HP and moves the van off silently until the tyre noise confirms that you are in fact on your way.

Standard instrumentation includes a large fuel gauge type readout to advise on battery charge giving clear indication of the potential range. Depending on driving conditions and load carried, this can stretch to over 100 miles so it reasonable to expect a comfortable range for a day's deliveries or servicing calls before an overnight charge.

Handling-wise, the Kangoo ZE is surprisingly agile with excellent steering response and quick braking – immediate



slowing down once you lift off the accelerator before you even touch the brakes. Off



the mark performance may be slower than the diesel version but a tighter turning circle by one metre over the diesel helps manoeuvring in tight spaces. Another surprise is the fact that the battery pack does not intrude into the load box and it offers the same volume of space as the diesel model as well as a good basic standard of specification and a similar list of optional extras. Standard

equipment includes anti-lock brakes, driver's airbag and electric and heated door mirrors while desirable extras include reversing sensors, air conditioning and front side airbags.

Price-wise, the range begins at £13,592 before VAT which takes account of the 20 per cent government PiVG (Plug-in Van Grant). In addition the battery is leased at anything from £62 to £105 per month depending on contract mileage, so while recharging costs will be minimal, battery leasing will feature in the overall running costs.

A high-current charging point will also be required for the overnight charge of approximately 8 hours and for the first 150 applicants to apply, the Northern Ireland 'ecar' scheme will supply and install the charging points worth up to £1,500.

Locally, two public charge points have been installed – one on the City side and one in the Waterside, with plans to have 100 installed across the Province by the end of the year.

Renault have taken the lead in the provision of electric vehicles, the Kangoo ZE van range being the first in a four-model range of vans and cars to arrive in their showrooms here this year. The lead model has so impressed a panel of European motoring journalists that it has been voted 'International Van of the Year 2012'. To emphasise their commitment to electric vehicles, Renault have trimmed back their traditional vehicle line-up to make room for them.

The vans are also available on leasing packages and are currently backed by Renault's '4+' package. This comprises four years warranty, four years servicing and four years roadside assistance, all included in the standard purchase price.