
Review: 3 new electric cars arriving on Irish roads

Motoring correspondent Mark Gallivan puts three new electric car entrants – the Renault Clio e-tech, the Peugeot e-2008 and the Audi Q4 e-tron – through their paces on Irish roads.

Taking the plunge from fossil fuel into the world of all-electric car ownership in Ireland remains a brave step. You'll need the ability to charge the vehicle in your driveway. If you can't, go for a regenerative hybrid or plug-in-hybrid.

Being wooed by the promise of any BEV with the inherent environment credentials is understandable. Every BEV drives in near silence and with instance propulsion that only a performance car will match.

You will need to factor in the inconvenience and impracticality of taking a BEV on long trips with a short electric range at a moment's notice. Don't expect minimal fuss or delays compared to a small petrol or diesel engine that offers twice the battery range and can be replenished in under 10 minutes.

Three new cars with electrified promise are now on sale in Ireland - two are fully electric cars (BEVs) and one a clever regenerative supermini and all are vying strongly for your consideration. How do each of them stack up?

2021 Renault Clio E-Tech

The last time I tested the fifth-generation [Renault](#) Clio I was left befuddled by the whole experience. Thinking back, I was the outlier from an industry awash with motoring journalists praising it from the rafters.

It was improved over the fourth-generation car, alright, but lacked the solidity of a Volkswagen Polo and the rival from SEAT had keener handling. The Renault Clio was stuck somewhere in the middle of the two. Since then Renault has been making a big fuss of the Clio E-Tech's Hybrid regenerative powertrain. It was time to see if the claims held water.

Using a 1.6-litre naturally aspirated four-cylinder petrol engine is business as usual Clio. The clever bit is hooking the engine up to a duo of electric motors and a 1.2kWh battery that divides the battery function into two phases.

The bigger motor manages the starting of the car and initial drive, leaving the second battery as a booster when you accelerate. Where the Clio gets clever is having a hybrid specific injection and an exhaust gas recirculation (ERG) unit. This technology has its foundations in Formula One racing. The electrification helps the two-stage auto gearbox smoothen gearchanges to the point that they're virtually unobtrusive.

Renault says the Clio will achieve 64mpg which is the type of performance you'd be expecting from a diesel, not a small petrol engine. While I tested the car it came close enough to high fifties and easily saw 50mpg overall. This is further proof of how battery electrification could see petrol engines overtake diesels in the sales charts as a primary hybrid choice in the next few years.

Renault has fitted a clutchless multi-mode gearbox. Similar to the Porsche Taycan full-electric performance car the Clio's drivetrain has two ratios – one for the petrol engine and the other for the battery. And so? In doing this the Clio accelerates and decelerates without the jerkiness or driveline shunt you'll experience in a non-electrified car with a conventional gearbox. It's no pocket rocket but the peppy acceleration will surprise even in a car weighing 1,336kg.

The Clio's E-Tech powertrain has given it a new lease of life. In urban environments it makes things easier having an auto gearbox that zips through the two ratios like a CVT – only far smoother. Simply spot a gap, accelerate, and the Clio will surge forward. Being a regenerative hybrid you'll never have to plug it in to charge it up. The car's powertrain does all that for you, working all the time to recuperate and recycle the forward propulsion power you've created.

This is a unique offering in the supermini class segment. I also tried the car on two long trips to the south of Ireland it was refined and never felt underpowered. I did find the lack of lumbar support in the front seats of my press car induced some backache. The Clio range starts at €17,945 (Clio Expression SCe 65) with the Clio E-Tech at €29,145. CO2 emissions are 99 g/km WLTP and fuel

consumption 4.4l/100km. Electric only range is 30 miles. Renault offers a new Clio E-Tech from €364 over 36 months with €5,000 deposit with 7,000 miles ceiling a year. Likeable, convenient, economical and great fun to drive – this perky little Renault surprised me.

You'll like: Plenty – well priced, smart technology with no need to grapple with charging cables. Impressively smooth, fun and class-leading suspension comfort.

You'll grumble: Lacked lumbar support in front seats.

2021 Audi Q4 e-tron

Audi has been busy adding new cars to the car maker's all-electric sub-brand. First was the 2019 Audi e-tron SUV, followed a few months ago by the e-tron Sportback, e-tron GT and RS e-tron GT super EV saloon that shares much of the Porsche Taycan's underpinnings as Audi and Porsche are owned by VW Group.

None of these are priced for middle income earners. Yet the new Q4 e-tron BEV's pricing starts from €41,465 for the Advance 35/35kW with 335km range from the flagship Q4 e-tron S Line 40 Q4 82kW e-tron flagship at €63,525. Audi Ireland says the new mid-size SUV hopes to bridge some egalitarian aura for premium buyers.

Three different grades of spec are available – Advance, Sport and S Line. In the Q4 e-tron with 55kW the electric range is 335km with the most expensive version in S-Line trim reduces 10km off that range. Step up to the 82kW version and the range is around 510 – again the range is lowered, this time to 496. Power consumption is now the norm when talking about BEVs and works out at WLTP 17kWh/100km

Before we delve in, the Q4 e-tron shares, yet again, a VW Group platform with the less expensive Volkswagen ID.4 and Skoda Enyaq.

Confused? Again, Volkswagen owns all of the aforementioned companies and developed a single platform for the different brands to bolt their bit onto. Like Victoria Beckham, the Audi Q4 e-tron is the posh one. Audi gave us an advance briefing and a one hour's test drive of the new Q4 e-tron that contained a lot of references to kWhs and WLTP kWh consumption and just who'll likely to be buying one.

An hour's driving never unearths a comprehensive appraisal of any car. What is clear is what's missing. The Q4 e-tron is accomplished, unobtrusive, capable and a decent all-rounder in the premium mid-size SUV BEV segment. But, and this is a surprise for an Audi, the Q4 e-tron was missing the special Audi magic that pulls buyers out of the Volkswagen showroom.

Take the quality of any Audi cabin. It's at the core of their USP. Slink into an A4, the brand's compact executive car. For the price no other compact executive brand crafts a finer interior with lustrous materials like you'll recall from the old days. The Q4 e-tron's cockpit is great – a hexagonal designed wonder that could have come from Lamborghini. It has a floating centre console, a quartic shaped steering wheel with a flat top and bottom and an angled centre touchscreen. But it just felt oddly derivative like a product of another car company, not Audi. The wow factor? Maybe I missed it one this short drive.

The Drive Select button managed the torque distribution with modes ranging from Comfort, Auto, Efficiency, Individual and Dynamic and the primary benefit is not damper settings, rather extended range – the new language of BEVs that we'll all have to become familiar with. Regenerative B mode that harvests existing power when driving and in the Q4 e-tron recouping around 145kW. We'd need a longer time in this new BEV to make a final judgment on what it's like to live with and own. Accomplished and predictable for an Audi, it may be. But Audi customers expecting to be wowed like they are in the larger e-tron SUV may be left underwhelmed.

It may say Audi on the grille but nowadays in a world upside down and buyers reassessing every preconceived loyalty to brands it needed to do more. Make no mistake, the Audi Q4 e-tron will sell very well for the brand. Though, having Volkswagen or Skoda's BEVs doing the rounds with keener prices, throws up some awkward buying questions.

You'll like: 510km range. Generously spacious and practical. Swish cabin. Sensible e-crossover

dimensions for aspiring Irish urbanites.

You'll grumble: Feels derivative, lacks the expected Audi sparkle. It's all there bar a personality.

2021 Peugeot e-2008

You'll need an eagle's eye to spot the electric 2008 in Peugeot's baby crossover SUV range. There aren't many clues bar a colour-coded front grille, a few badges and that's about it. None of this takes away from the car's overall design which could have had a walk-on part in the Transformers movie - it's a stunner.

The more we see a new electric car being launched the likelihood is we'll roll our eyes. There's a depressing sameness to many of them. Not here, Peugeot has added more creases and panel slats than Lamborghini would ever dream of adding to a car twenty years ago. All of this showmanship shouldn't work in a baby BEV but it does, with aplomb.

The e-2008 is available in each of the 2008 range's four trims – Active €31,997, Allure €33,665, GT €36,060 and GT Pack €37,430 after the SEAI grants. We tested the Allure edition with an across the e-2008 range 130bhp and 50kW. CO2 is zero WLTP and €120 road tax. It uses the identical battery unit found in the e-208 supermini and is capable of 310km or 212 miles.

The fly in the e-2008's ointment is driving the car on longer motorway journeys where charging stations is a game of roulette when searching for an available charging station. On this test the constant speed drained the battery at an alarming rate. The 310km range plummeted to 250km and within 45 minutes was showing nearer 200km.

All of which highlight the dilemma of buying an all-electric car, especially ones with a city range, it's the slow rise of concern when you start glancing at the remaining battery range and having to adjust your journey likewise. This isn't a criticism of this Peugeot it's a common problem with BEVs offering less than 400km range. On one journey I had to turn back and find a charging station.

Anything else? Just one thing that infuriated us on the test, the i-Cockpit's placement of the tiny

steering wheel. It's nice to hold and accentuates the e-2008's light steering.

But once I found a suitable driving position with the seat raised to a position where I was comfortable, but the steering wheel partially blocked the 3.5" main instrument panel. That forced me to peer over the flat-topped steering wheel to read the instruments. A top tip – if you're testing the e-2008 just make sure everyone who'll be driving it can get along with this contemporary cockpit design.

Elsewhere the 3D i-Cockpit is very appealing with sensational graphics and solidly crafted organ keys under the central touchscreen. Boot space is an impressive 434-litre for a small crossover with a bank of batteries to store. The e-2008 is offered with generous standard equipment. There's a great deal to like about the e-2008. Peugeot shows a car market can deliver a crossover that looks and drives well and yet has individual flair.

You'll like: Handsome exterior, swish cabin, easy-going to drive, smooth with lively steering. Decent, if not class-best, handling.

You'll grumble: 310km range lower in real world. Long distances. The positioning of the small steering wheel

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