



Test location: Pune, Maharashtra

Renault Duster AWD

Renault is launching the four-wheel drive version of its Duster. We give it an off-road welcome

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Below: AWD gets minor revisions to the cabin including restyled steering wheel. RxZ variant gets cruise control with steering mounted controls and touchscreen infotainment system



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HOW DO YOU MAKE A best-selling family SUV even better? You transform it into an all-singing, all-dancing four-wheel drive SUV. That's

just what Renault India has done with the Duster. The Duster has been a blockbuster hit for the French manufacturer, infusing its sales graph with newfound vibrancy. The Duster has won accolades for its car-like comfort, performance and handling and elevated Renault to household status in India. Now the lacuna of a four-wheel drive option has also been addressed. The four-wheel drive version was being produced and exported from the

Chennai plant but Renault is launching it here only now.

We were invited to experience the Duster AWD off-tarmac, since that's where one can truly differentiate between the two-wheel drive Duster and the AWD. They look near identical, except for minor changes (a darkened headlamps, darker-hued alloys and AWD stickers). On the road it feels no different from the two-wheel drive Duster, being endowed with the same plush ride quality. The electro-mechanical steering offers great feel and feedback as before, and the good thing is now it doesn't kick back if you hit a bump mid-corner. But I was really looking forward to the off-road courses, where the new Duster was to be put through the tricky stuff.

The Duster AWD gets all-wheel independent multi-link suspension (a segment first) to cope with the off-road stresses and aid handling, which makes for a ground clearance of 210mm (up from 205mm). Maximum wading depth is 400mm, while maximum approach angle is 30 degrees. To make all this possible,

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architecture of the engine compartment, electricals and electronics have been revised. Renault says the Duster AWD isn't meant for hardcore off-roading but is aimed at those who enjoy driving. Of course, we wouldn't expect Duster buyers to take to the serious stuff, but four-wheel drive is certainly a boon.

The AWD gets a rotary dial on the centre console to choose from three driving modes – 2WD, auto and 4WD lock. The system is best left in auto mode as it decides where the power needs to be fed depending on driving



Above: Auto mode helps the Duster manage tricky terrain. **Below:** Clocks are redesigned, and digital display on right shows real time fuel consumption

conditions. Renault's tried and tested 1.5-litre inline four-cylinder diesel engine remains unchanged, pumping out 108bhp and 248Nm of torque. The 2WD is also offered with the 84bhp version, but the AWD only gets the 108bhp version. First gear on the slick six-speed transmission is now shorter to help matters off-road and improve clutch life.

We put the Duster through a variety of terrain. It had no trouble absorbing the upheavals and turbulence of rocky terrain. The off-road courses had its share of water crossings and slush and the Duster was at ease going up and down hillocks. Even steeper inclines and deeper slush didn't deter the new Duster.

The clutch feels lighter, a welcome aspect for those who will use it in the city. A host of electronics were also at work, including what Renault calls intuitive driving technology,



which helps the Duster adapt to tricky conditions better by sensing road conditions. Then there's ESP, ASR (anti-skid resistance) and hill climb assist which prevents the vehicle from rolling backwards when taking off on an incline.

The AWD will be offered in two trims, RxL and RxZ. The RxZ, the top-of-the-line variant, gets cruise control, speed limiter, and the touchscreen infotainment system that is optional on the two-wheel drive Duster. Though slightly better, the audio controls are still under the steering wheel, and Renault doesn't plan on moving them to the wheel.

There are a few more changes inside, such as the instrument cluster which tells you real time fuel consumption. Overall, the Duster AWD ups the entry-level SUV game once again, since it is now a capable off-roader too. The four-wheel drive makes it more confident

Four-wheel drive makes the Duster more confidence-inspiring, especially on wet roads

on the road too, especially on wet roads. About pricing, we expect the AWD to cost about a lakh more than the two-wheel drive version. This should make it a steal, if you throw in an occasional off-road jaunt, or trips to your farmhouse in comfort. ☒

Specification

Engine	Inline 4-cyl, 1461cc
Transmission	6-speed manual
Power	108bhp @ 3900rpm
Torque	248Nm @ 2250rpm
Weight	1781kg
0-100kmph	NA
Top speed	NA
Price	₹12.5 lakh (est)

evo rating: ★★★★★

- ☒ Ride and comfort, engine performance, efficiency
- ☒ Quirky controls, no automatic transmission

