

# The French connection



What is French on the outside and has a Japanese filling? Ooh la la – it's a sushi-filled baguette, a cute cultural cross-over by Renault with a little help from Nissan, named Koleos. Dieter Losskarn took the 4x4 version to Franschhoek and beyond to make it feel at home.

*Coleoptera* is Greek in origin. What sounds like a rather unpleasant medical procedure in fact describes a certain kind of beetle that can crawl anywhere. The Koleos is Renault's first 4x4.

The French designed it, but it was developed by Nissan and is manufactured in Korea – by Samsung, better known as a producer of electronic products. While the current Nissan

X-Trail has a rather conservative look, Renault's first cross-over has not one edge in sight; it's rounded, dynamic and bubbly.

That Renault can do cute quite well was shown recently with the introduction of the funky Twingo (from R124500), which is a lot of fun to drive, despite its somewhat 'girly' image.



*'Renault is trying hard to compete for the strangest SUV name.'*



Renault is a latecomer on the 4x4 scene, but is the third French manufacturer to fill its baguette with sushi. Citroen and Peugeot have already co-operated with Mitsubishi to produce their respective SUVs, the C-Crosser and the 4007.

By choosing a name like Koleos, Renault is trying hard to compete for the strangest name you could possibly give an SUV. I think they've beaten Nissan's Qashqai, named after an Iranian semi-nomadic mountain tribe.

So let's see how the French beetle crawls. Inside it's comfy and spacious, with lots of room for storage. Underfloor bins in the rear, spacious

door pockets and cubby holes (including a chilled glovebox) add up to an impressive 70 litres of extra stowage, in addition to the 450 litres of boot space. With the rear seats folded down, this increases to 1380 litres.

There are even little tray tables at the back of the seats for kids with greasy fast food.

The leather driver's seat and steering wheel can be adjusted in many different ways, so everybody should find a perfect driving position.

The Koleos doesn't start with a key, but with the Renault card, which slides into an opening in the centre console, underneath the radio. Then you push the start/stop button to ignite and shut off the engine. The car remote locks are on the card as well.

On tar, especially in fast corners such as the twisty Franschoek Pass, the car body-rolls due to its rather comfy suspension, but that's typical of soft-roaders and is not dangerous. Otherwise the ride is quiet and the Nissan petrol engine is as responsive as in the X-Trail.

The acceleration (under 10 seconds from 0 to 100km/h) is among the top in its class. The alternative 2,0 litre turbo-diesel engine, however, is not borrowed from Nissan but is a genuine Renault one.

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As in the X-Trail, you can either have a six-speed manual gearbox or the so-called CVT (continuously variable transmission) which *Getaway* test drove. You basically accelerate the car all the way to top speed without any tangible gear changes, a bit like a turbine. Just in case you get bored with it, thanks to a manual/sequential mode, you can also shift

The Koleos looks terrific and makes clever use of interior spaces. It also does surprisingly well in the rough stuff.



gears yourself, which I did while overtaking those heavy fruit trucks that tend to spoil one's driving pleasure in the Cape Winelands.

After easing the Koleos's homesickness by showing it places like La Provence and Le Quartier Francais in Franschoek, I took it to Klipbokkop Mountain Resort ([www.klipbokkop.co.za](http://www.klipbokkop.co.za)) near Villiersdorp, which features some of the country's most scenic but challenging 4x4 tracks. This is where I wanted to try out the Koleos and see how the French beetle crawled on its X-Trail platform. >



The Koleos's soft looks are deceptive. In Klipbakkop's infamous quarry, it went where no other soft-roaders have been before. The X-Trail's 4x4-I system lets you choose three different settings: two-wheel drive only for the black stuff, automatic

**ABOVE:** Renault can do cute, as proven recently with the funky Twingo. **RIGHT:** The Koleos has similar design lines, with a practical and well-laid out interior.

### The low-down

#### Renault Koleos

**Price:** The Koleos entry-level model is the Dynamique 4x2 (R285 000), followed by the Dynamique 4x4 (R305 000), both with 2,5 litre, 16 valves, 126 kW 4-cylinder petrol engines and six-speed manuals. The Dynamique Premium 4x4 (R353 000) features a six-speed automatic CVT gearbox paired with the 2,5 litre petrol engine. Top of the range is the Dynamique Premium 4x4 (R369 000) with a 2,0 litre turbo diesel.

**Engine:** 2,5 | 4 cyl petrol, 126kW/169hp; 2,0 | 4 cyl turbo diesel, 127kW/170hp

**Torque:** 226 Nm/360 Nm

**0-100 km/h:** 9,3/9,9 sec

**Top speed:** 194/191 km/h

**Consumption/100 km:** 9,9/7,9 litres (according to Renault)

**Fuel tank:** 65 litres

**Range:** 657/823 km

**Approach angle:** 27°

**Departure angle:** 30°

**Ground clearance:** 206/188 mm

**Weight:** 1 622/1 655 kg

For a similar amount of money (R305 000 to R369 000), you could buy:

- Subaru Forester 2,5X R334 000
- Suzuki Grand Vitara R312 900
- Nissan X-Trail 2,5 SE 4x4 R342 200
- Nissan X-Trail 2,5 LE 4x4 CVT R368 100
- Nissan Qashqai 2,0 Dci Tekna 4x4 R312 000
- VW Tiguan 2,0 TSI 4Motion Tiptronic Sport & Style R389 800

with 4x4 only when necessary, meaning when there is gravel on the road and the car starts to break out, or full 4x4 mode. With hill-descent on, centre-clutch lock engaged, automatic gearbox in '1' and a careful foot on the acceleration, it really did surprisingly well on the steep stuff.

In more rugged terrain, the Koleos struggles with its ground clearance of 206 mm. The front end sometimes touches the gravel mounds, which wouldn't be a problem, if the underside protection plate were made of steel instead of plastic. After some time in the quarry, the black plastic literally started to rub off. But who would ever take a

French beauty like this into places like that?

As with the X-Trail, there is an electric panoramic sunroof with adjustable sunblinds available as an optional extra. Some of the other standard features on the Premium model are a full-size spare wheel, rain-sensor wipers, acoustic park assist and 12V power sockets in centre console and rear.

Currently, there are almost 40 compact SUVs competing in this extremely popular segment of the South African motoring market. The multi-cultural Frenchie did come late, but has a really good chance of catching up. ■



**Next month:** On Q – we take the Audi Q7's little brother, the Q5, to hell and back??

# Wheels etc



## Crossing the Rubicon

The Rubicon version of the Wrangler Unlimited is by far the most capable Jeep available at the moment. The Sahara base model isn't bad off-road, but for just a few dollars more (R20 000 to be exact), you get so much more fun. It features two push-button diff-locks in the centre console for front and rear, as well as the magic sway-bar disconnect button, enabling the vehicle to do crazy axle-twisting stunts in extremely rugged terrain. The Rubicon Unlimited 3,8-litre V6 sets you back R344 900. Web [www.jeep.co.za](http://www.jeep.co.za).



## Two hot Volksie hatches

Three magic letters can change timid family cars into exciting performers. Whether you get the GTI badge on the Polo (from R229 900) or Golf (from R297 900) doesn't matter. Both will give you great driving pleasure for a relatively good price. Despite an impressive performance – 148 hp, 8,2 seconds from 0 to 100 km/h and a top speed of 216 km/h for the Polo; 197 hp, 7,2 seconds from 0 to 100 km/h and 235 km/h for the Golf – the fuel consumption is surprisingly low. The current Polo GTI is also the most powerful since the model was introduced 30 years ago. Web [www.vw.co.za](http://www.vw.co.za).



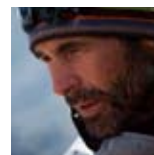
## Pangaea – Daimler's off-shore project

Over 22 000 hours of design time and years of experience and marine expertise have come together in the remarkable sailboat, *Pangaea*. Named after the supercontinent that existed 250-million years ago, South African-born explorer Mike Horn will sail it around the globe on a four-year 100 000-kilometre expedition, from the South to the North Poles, across all the oceans. Mike will kayak, walk, cycle, paraglide, ski and sail across terrains on all

the continents, including oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains, desert, jungle, tundra and icefields.

Young adults from every continent will join him on various sections of his journey, learning about environmental issues. Back in their homelands, they will be ambassadors who will share their experiences with other young people.

Mercedes-Benz is sponsoring this project as part of its True Blue Solutions strategy, which aims to achieve emission-free mobility in the near future. Web [www.mikehorn.com](http://www.mikehorn.com).



*Mike Horn  
will sail  
around  
the globe*



**ABOVE LEFT and RIGHT:** South African-born adventurer Mike Horn had his aluminium-bodied boat built in the slums of Brazil, with a little help from Mercedes-Benz.