



# Access all areas

**George Hinton** tests a versatile camper perfectly tailored to indoor-outdoor living

**W**e tested a sister model to this Auto Campers Leisure Van (LV) last year. Based on a Euro 5 Ford Transit Custom, we had one or two reservations about its driveability. This year sees the introduction of uprated Euro 6 engines and an automatic gearbox option.

#### BUILD QUALITY

The standard base vehicle features Ford's Trend spec, but our demonstrator was in £2,000 optional Limited trim, which adds cab air conditioning, 16in alloy wheels and colour-coded side rubbing strakes, rear bumper, handles and mirrors. Engines offered are the 128bhp or 168bhp diesels.

For Volkswagen devotees, the LV (elevating-roof version only) can be based on the Transporter, if preferred. Costing £8,500 more,

it opens the possibility of adding four-wheel-drive, useful if you prefer basic CLs etc.

The Ford version is available as a Lo-line, Hi-line or pop-top. We're testing the latter, featuring a Reimo rear-hinged elevating roof, which opens up the option of an extra bed.

Ford's Transit Custom can be specified in eight paint colours including red, blue, silver, black and magnetic grey (as here). The body is fully insulated.

The offside furniture unit houses a metre-long kitchen and full-height storage. The rear seat/bed is a British Titan rock-and-roll design with twin integral seat belts. A wide choice of options enables you to tailor your van precisely to your requirements. Assembly is now carried out at Firth Campers near Sheffield, where conversions may also be viewed by appointment.

#### DRIVING

The car-like cab with Limited pack features cruise control, Ford SYNC with Bluetooth,





Clockwise from below: 'daytime' mode with roof up and sliding doors open; interior living space; outside access to kitchen; lounge without table

TECHNICAL RATINGS			
91%	91%	76%	77%
BUILD QUALITY	DRIVING	DAYTIME	NIGHT-TIME
69%	N/A	92%	83%
KITCHEN	WASHROOM	LIGHTING	VERDICT
£	🏠	📊	📏
Price/as tested £41,500/ £47,800 OTR	Engine 1,995cc EcoBlue Euro VI	MRO 2,495kg (49.11cwt)	Overall length 16ft 4in (4.98m)
🌂	Power 168bhp/125kW @ 3,500rpm	MTPLM 2,940kg (57.87cwt)	Overall width 6ft 10in (2.08m)
Caravan and Motorhome Club Insurance Please see quote provided in the 'Did you know?' round on this page*	Torque 299lb ft (405Nm) @ 1,500- 2,600rpm	User payload 445kg (8.76cwt)	Overall height 6ft 11in (2.11m)
	Transmission 6-speed automatic, FWD	Fuel/tank/econ Diesel/17.6gal (80l)/30.7mpg	Max internal height 7ft 0in (2.13m)

Figures from manufacturer's literature.

\*Quote is for the model as tested worth £47,800 OTR. Based on 55-year-old male living in Sheffield S13, who has no accidents, claims or convictions and keeps vehicle on drive, 3,000 miles per year, excess of £350 with 5 years NCD unprotected. Subject to underwriting. The Club's Motorhome Insurance is arranged for the Club by Devitt Insurance Services Limited, Insurance Brokers. Caravan and Motorhome Club is a trading name of The Caravan Club Limited. The Caravan Club Limited and Devitt Insurance Services Limited are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

auto lights, auto wipers, parking sensors both ends and a DAB radio/CD player. A reversing camera is optional.

The top-output engine now develops 168bhp from just two litres, while Ford's six-speed automatic comes with switchable stop-start to minimise emissions. Gear changes are slightly delayed when the vehicle is stone cold, but soon become smooth and well-timed. It doesn't perform predictive downchanges when engine-braking is desired, but it is simple enough to snick the shifter back to 'M'-for-manual, then use the side 'plus-minus' button to change down as required.

As predicted, this set-up has solved all the driveability issues we had with the Euro 5 manual version. Even economy, measured over 213 miles of mixed driving on fast and slow roads, was better at 30.7mpg. Ride quality is firm, but also very compliant when traversing drain gratings or potholes. There were no issues with steering (which is adjustable for rake and reach) or brakes,

both of which were excellent. Seats are fully adjustable with lumbar support.

#### DAYTIME

Once you've parked up, the first thing you need to do is disable the internal alarm sensors (the dash prompts you) using the buttons on the steering wheel. Then release the retaining straps and push the Reimo roof up, followed by the gas-strutted optional roof bed.

Storage being limited in a pop-top, the wardrobe has two shelves that can be folded away if you prefer the 32in drop hanging space. The control unit/monitor for the 100W solar roof panel sits at the top, the 115Ah leisure battery living under a false floor in the base, with the cranked table leg stowed loose above it. The generously-sized table top clips to a rail inside the nearside sliding door, while both cab seats swivel for dining.

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The rear tailgate gives access to storage sufficient for the cab window night screens, levelling ramps, mains cable etc, with the steel gas locker at the bottom for a large (907) Campingaz cylinder. Behind the seat is a large storage area with the option of travelling with the bed extension horizontal or vertical as required.

The LV, like the MRV, makes full use of the Custom's twin sliding side doors. The kitchen is externally accessible from the offside, including fridge, cooker and cutlery drawer, so it's the best side to fit the optional cassette awning for summer outdoor living. You can have a multi-rail fitted nearside, enabling use of a drive-away awning and even an outside shower.

There's a 40-litre under-floor water tank, filled from the driver's step well, but no water heater. The identical waste tank has a drain tap on its end



Clockwise from left: lower bed is firm; upper bed has mesh side screens with zipped canvas covers; shower head can be used outside



**"The Leisure Van is compact, good to drive and even highly capable as a towing vehicle - what's not to like?"**

plate. Optional space heating is by diesel-fired Webasto under the passenger seat and there's a full-size steel spare wheel to keep you mobile.

**NIGHT-TIME**

Bed make-up is wonderfully easy; lift the locking bar under the front edge of the seat and pull it towards you, the backrest dropping to horizontal as you go.

If you have travelled with the rear bed extension upright, you will need to go to the back of the van to release its ratchet and lower it. The seat belts remain in place - just tuck the buckles down between the cushions. Stowing the bed is equally easy; pull the strap at the hinge point while pushing the front edge back with your leg.

The 6ft 2in by 3ft 10in bed leaves sufficient space at the cab end to undress and use the portable toilet. The cushions are firm for sleeping, so we employed our faithful air mattresses for extra comfort, powering a 12V air pump from the adjacent 12V socket.

The stretchy blackout curtains were effective, although there were small gaps where they met. The roof bed is 6ft 6in by 3ft 11in - you can specify a ladder if clambering up using the cab seats and kitchen unit is not your bag. There are the usual features of a plastic front window and mesh side screens, with zipped canvas covers.

**KITCHEN**

The kitchen is a simple set-up, with a two-burner self-igniting CAN hob inset into a flush black glass surround.

Work area is augmented by two folding surfaces, one at the fridge, a second 'outside'. The Dometic drawer-type, 50-litre electric fridge-freezer faces forwards, allowing access from inside or out. There's a generous cutlery drawer, then an oval 14in sink in polished stainless steel. Two lower cupboards, closed by silver plastic tambour doors, accommodate food, pots and pans etc.

**LIGHTING**

Lighting is excellent - there are six LED downlights in the bottom of the upper bed base, while a further two near the tailgate provide illumination for reading or assist when loading the storage area. Two LED spotlights on stalks at the front serve both the roof bed and the lower area as required.

The solar panel and leisure battery provide independence (we did not hook-up over a long weekend), while paired 12V and 230V sockets allow use of a variety of accessories.

**VERDICT**

For conventional camping, the user-friendly LV is a winner. It's compact, good to drive and even highly capable as a towing vehicle - what's not to like?

**With thanks to**

Vehicle supplied for testing by: **Auto Campers South**, 429 Reading Road, Winnersh, Berkshire RG41 5HU. Contact: auto-campers.co.uk, 01189 790202.