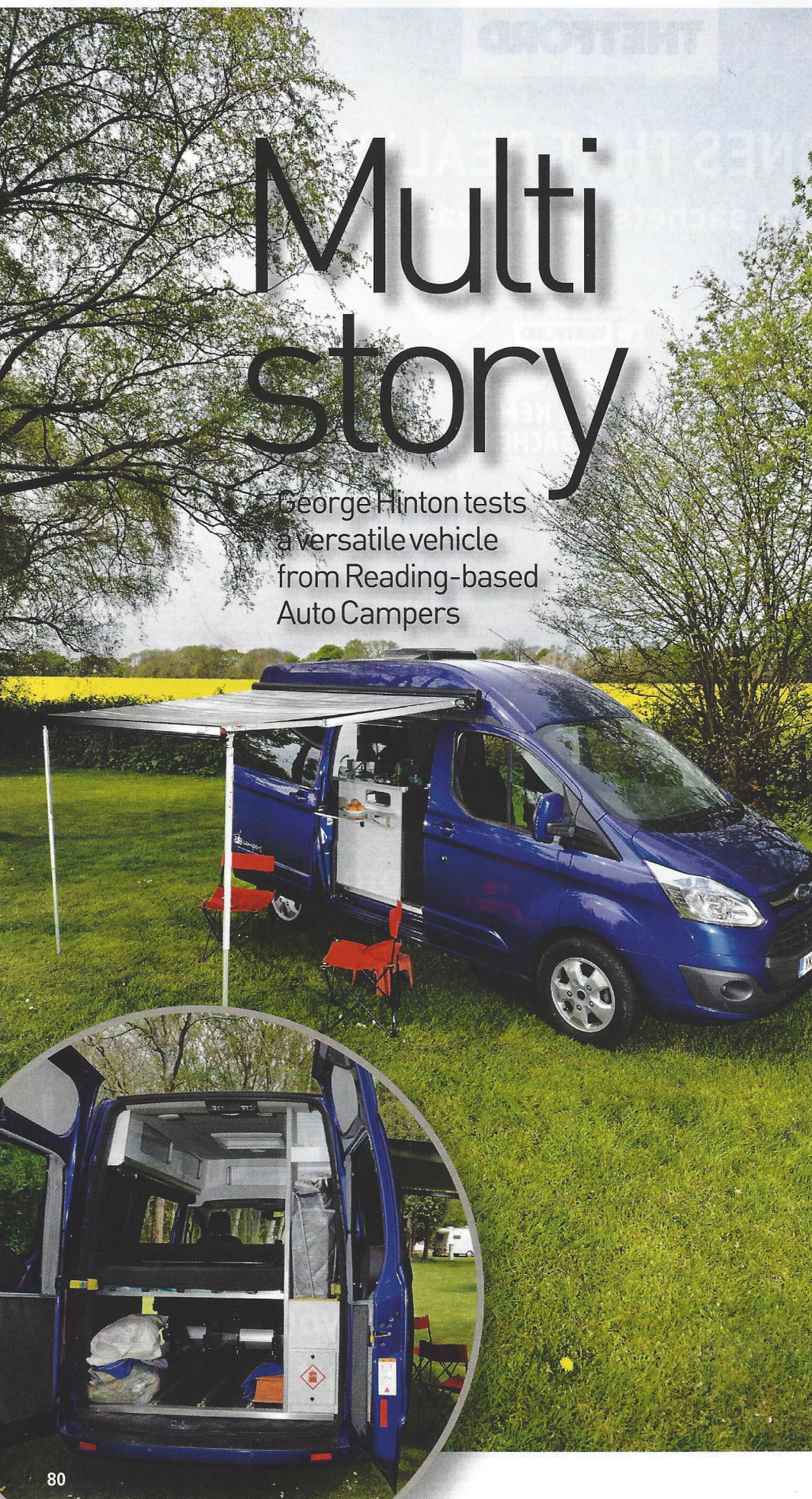


Multi story

George Hinton tests
a versatile vehicle
from Reading-based
Auto Campers



Auto Campers has been producing limited-edition camper conversions on Ford Transits for many years now, including excellent vehicles for disabled customers. The compact Transit Custom, with all its high-spec options, is the basis of a range that includes a Day Van and a camper, the Leisure Van. But the cleverest of all is the MRV – the Multi Recreational Vehicle...

CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

Essentially this is the Leisure Van with a flexible space featuring four Unwin floor rails that accept a variety of fittings including seats and bike or wheelchair clamps. The base vehicle is a Trend and you have a choice of 123bhp or 153bhp diesel Euro 5 units. Meanwhile, you can opt for a Lo-line, Pop-Top or Hi-Line model. The latter, as tested here, has an 8ft high steel roof and 5ft 8in internal headroom (with 6ft 2in under the pop-up five-way roof vent).

The high-gloss white offside furniture (green or orange options are available should you prefer) houses, front to rear, a fridge, hob with generous cutlery drawer below, and oval sink. Two lower cupboards closed by silver plastic tambour doors accommodate pots and pans and a small Dometic portable toilet.

Behind that, a tall storage area has hanging space (32in drop) and folding shelves with the leisure battery in the base. From the rear, there is access to storage sufficient for the cab window night screens and maybe a levelling block or two. A sealed gas locker at the bottom houses a large (907) Campingaz cylinder (£65 extra).

Finally, the floor area has a three-section, two-height detachable bed unit at the rear. There is space in the kitchen area to add one or two fold-flat travel seats, with the option to fit a third if you leave the bed at home. For seats you could substitute 'wheelchair', adding suitable access ramps as required.

ON THE ROAD

Ford's Transit Custom has a high specification that can be enhanced as required. The car-like cab with Trend Pack has aircon, cruise control, Ford Sync with Bluetooth for your phone, voice control, auto lights, auto wipers and parking sensors front and rear. The DAB radio/CD player and colour reversing camera are options.

I found the 153bhp engine quite easy to stall – rather than aid my driving, the electronic throttle control made it very hard to operate in stop-start traffic. That is a shame as the six-speed manual gearbox



Cab seats swivel for convenience

"Versatility is the name of the game and the Auto Campers MRV has it in buckets"

is a beauty – typical Ford – with sixth a real motorway gear pulling just 2,000 revs at 70mph. It's really quiet, too.

Ford is also brilliant at ride quality. For a van, this is really smooth and compliant. There were no issues with steering (which is adjustable for rake and reach) or brakes which were excellent.

LIVING ABOARD

Customers are talked through their requirements when ordering but can add things later if they can be retro-fitted. The van awaited our test with just one seat in the back, but, as I needed to do a school taxi run, Auto Campers' MD Steve popped in a fourth seat for me, warning it compromised access to the kitchen.

The travel seats are superb type-approved Danish models but fitting and locking them into the floor tracks is not a particularly user-friendly experience.

A set of generous tambour-doored cupboards line the roof – the overcab one is especially spacious, easily housing the cranked table leg and more.

The table top clips to the nearside sliding door. For dining, both cab seats swivel and the adjustable table is generous for two at 32½in x 17in.

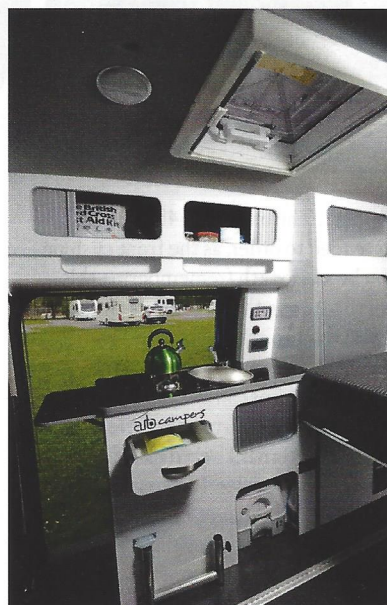
The MRV makes full use of the Custom's twin sliding side doors. The kitchen is accessible externally from the offside, including the fridge, cooker and cutlery drawer, so the awning is fitted there to facilitate summer outdoor living. You can have a Multi-rail fitted to the nearside, enabling use of 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. The waste tank is identical, with drain tap on its end plate. Optional space heating is by diesel-fired Webasto under the passenger seat.

KITCHEN

There is a simple kitchen set-up, with just two self-igniting gas burners, the flush glass hob top allowing maximum use of the one-metre length for meal preparation.

The high-quality sink's unusual shape makes it difficult to find a plastic bowl that



Simple but effective kitchen set-up

TECHNICAL

RATINGS	
CONSTRUCTION & LAYOUT	
ON THE ROAD	
LIVING ABOARD	
KITCHEN	
SLEEPING	
VERDICT	
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

RRP/as tested	£32,500/£40,285 OTR
Base vehicle	Ford Transit Custom 290 L1 H2 Trend
Engine	2,198cc 4-cyl transverse turbodiesel
Power	153bhp @ 3,500rpm
Torque	284lb ft (385Nm) @ 1,600rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, FWD
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/17.6gal (80litres)/30.8mpg
Overall length	16ft 4in (4.97m)
Overall width	6ft 10 (2.08m) excl mirrors
Overall height	8ft 0in (2.44m)
Max internal height	6ft 2in (1.88m)
MRO	2,495kg (49.1cwt)
MTPLM	2,900kg (57.1cwt)
User payload	405kg (8cwt)
Berths	2
NCC approved	No
Caravan Club insurance	The Club's Motorhome Insurance is tailored to the needs of members using our 25 years of know-how. We guarantee to beat your renewal premium by at least £25.*

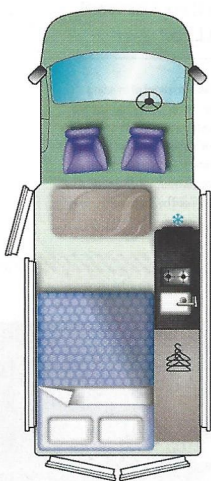
Figures from manufacturer's literature. *Premium Saving Guarantee. Subject to proof of existing renewal, including cover and price (eg a copy of your renewal notice), when cover is on a like-for-like basis. Please note, terms and conditions, eg excess(es), may vary from your current insurer. Courtesy car is subject to availability. Subject to terms and conditions and the Insurer's acceptance of the Risk. The Club's Motorhome Insurance is arranged for The Club by Devitt Insurance Services Limited, Insurance Brokers. The Caravan Club and Devitt Insurance Services Limited are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. The current average premium paid by members under The Caravan Club's Motorhome Insurance scheme is £253.



Access to storage and showerhead from rear



"The kitchen is accessible externally from the offside"



will fit and there's not much cupboard space for food. However, the vast space under the bed could swallow a plastic chest or two for your grub.

The Waeco Coolmatic CRD50 fridge is a quiet, low-consumption compressor-driven unit that won't disturb your sleep.

A 100W solar panel and 115Ah leisure battery provide independence if you're away from an electric hook-up, while two bright LED downlighters highlight your work at night. Meanwhile, paired 12V and 230V sockets allow use of a variety of accessories.

SLEEPING

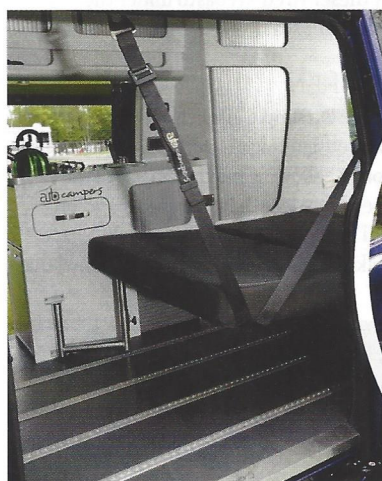
Making up the bed is easy if you have a pair of rear seats: simply fold them flat and they support the front-most bed cushion which has an 18mm plywood base inside.

Without one or more seats, there's an ingenious system featuring tubes and a nearside adjustable webbing strap that clips to two inconspicuous pegs on the inner roof rail and one on the end of the bed cushion. Simple but effective

VEHICLE SUPPLIED FOR TEST BY:

Roy Wood Transits, 429 Reading Road, Winnersh, Berkshire RG41 5HU. Call 01189 790202 or see auto-campers.co.uk.

Clockwise from above: exterior access to the fridge and cooker is a big plus point; night-time set-up; seats slot into floor tracks; a webbing strap helps support bed if seating has been removed



support. The 6ft 2in by 4ft bed can be extended to order, as the front cushion can be any length (remembering this encroaches on the floor space remaining if you want to access the toilet at night). We found the bed a little hard for sleeping, but softer foams can be specified.

The blackout curtains are effective, and there are internal silvered insulating pads for the cab windows. Lighting is excellent – the two big circular LED ceiling lamps even having blue night-lights. An LED striplight under the rear nearside roof locker and a stalk light at the offside rear provide further illumination.

VERDICT

Versatility is the name of the game, and the MRV has it in buckets. As you can specify the fit-out in detail, there's no reason why it should not suit you, but ensure you have storage for any extra rear seats when they are not needed. The fact that it was runner-up in its class in the 2016 Caravan Club Motor Caravan Design Awards is testament to its quality.



www.caravanclub.co.uk