

Rock'n'roll is dead!



Is a rock 'n' roll bed essential in a campervan? Auto Campers doesn't think so. Its latest model, the MRV, goes for more storage and a slatted bed instead...

AT A GLANCE • PRICE FROM £32,780 • BERTHS 2 • TRAVEL SEATS 3-5 • OUR TRIP To the Chilterns and Henley-on-Thames

BERKSHIRE-BASED Roy Wood Transits has had a fairly phenomenal last couple of years with its Auto Campers range of campervans. The company, which also specialises in providing accessible Ford Transits as commercial and passenger vehicles, won Campervan of the Year at the 2015 National Motorhome Awards with its first significant foray into campervans, the highly adaptable Day Van. Then, almost before the ink was dry on the awards certificate, it produced the Leisure Van, a slightly less adaptable but possibly more comfortable sister to the Day Van.

Now from the same stable comes the MRV, designed as a crossover between the two models.

Could it follow in its illustrious forebears' footsteps? After all, the only really significant way in which the MRV differs from the Leisure Van is that it has dispensed with that vehicle's standard rock 'n' roll bed for one that rests on removable slats across the back of the Ford Transit Custom.

That may not sound enormously significant, but Managing Director, Steve Wood, son of the eponymous Roy, believes it is. He says while rock 'n' roll beds may be popular, the apparatus that makes them possible takes up a huge amount of room under the seat. Take this away and you have lots of extra boot space that can be made even larger with the bed removed.

Steve says he has already sold one MRV to a couple of paragliders. If you have ever seen paragliders up close – not when they are soaring gracefully in the air but when they are struggling uphill to their take-off point encumbered with a huge rucksack that makes them look not unlike snails – you will appreciate just how much space would be needed to take two such kits.

The MRV is adaptable when it comes to seating, too. Our test model had just one travel seat in the back but it can take up to three, and they all slide in on rails on the bonded floor – rails which can also accommodate wheelchair restraints. Steve says he chose the Unwin system over other types because in his experience it is

What motorhome MOTORHOME OF THE MONTH

Words & pictures
Peter Baber



With the bed folded up, there is oodles of space in this 'van

less prone to being undermined by grit getting in the rails. Certainly, we found our single seat very easy to move about.

ON A HIGH

Although the MRV, like its sister Auto Campers, is available in Lo-line, Hi-line and Pop-Top formats, our test model was a Hi-line (using Ford's factory high roof). Steve is very keen to stress the advantages of this particular arrangement, particularly over the Pop-Top, which costs an extra £3,000.

A rising roof may provide you with an extra double bed but, if there are only two of you, the Hi-line will provide you with extra insulation –

for year-round touring – and, more importantly, much more storage in lockers up top.

Against that, there is, of course, the extra internal height a pop-up roof gives you – something that Steve and this reviewer, both being well over six foot, can appreciate.

But Steve insists you never really need to stand up fully in a campervan, as most parts of it should be accessible without you having to get up and walk anywhere.

This is certainly true – it's one thing that makes cooking in a campervan a more pleasurable experience than in some coachbuilds, even though space is more confined. But it is occasionally nice to be able to get up to stretch

your legs. Otherwise, a few hours in a campervan can leave you with the kind of feeling you get at the end of an intercontinental flight in steerage – sorry, economy class.

OPEN ALL SIDES

Fortunately, the MRV can help there, too. Because, as with all Auto Campers models, this one comes with a sliding door on either side. So getting out for a quick stretch of the legs should never be a problem. And once you arrive on site, you have the option of putting up two awnings, providing all the height and space you need. Of course, once you've done that you've done away with the insulation advantages we said a high-top brings you... Swings,



FACT FILE

PRICE FROM £32,780

PRICE AS TESTED £40,080

EXTRAS FITTED Cab air-con (£720), 16in alloy wheels (£600), reversing camera (£300), rear door wash/wipe (£180), bonded floor track system (£1,200), fold flat single seat (£800) – with armrests (£90), third row fixed privacy glass and curtain (£360), swivel driver's seat and handbrake modification (£400), Webasto Air Top 2000 blown-air diesel heating (£1,000), 2.6m cassette awning (£600), external shower point (£150), colour-coded side moulding, rear bumpers and handle (£600), external step (£300)

TYPE APPROVAL Individual

BERTHS 2

TRAVEL SEATS (INC DRIVER) 3 (optional 5)

DIMENSIONS 4.97m L, 2.08m W, 2.44m H

INTERIOR HEIGHT 1.74m

MAXIMUM WEIGHT 2,900kg

PAYLOAD 450kg

BED 1.75m-1.88m x 1.18m

FRESH WATER 40 litres (underfloor)

WASTE WATER 40 litres (underfloor)

GAS 1 x 2.75kg

LEISURE BATTERY 115Ah

MAINS SOCKETS 1

BASE VEHICLE

FORD TRANSIT CUSTOM TREND

ENGINE 2.2 litre, 153bhp, Euro V, six-speed manual

MPG ON TEST 29.6mpg

COOKING/HEATING

COOKING Two-burner gas hob

FRIDGE 50-litre compressor drawer-style fridge

HEATING Webasto Air Top 2000 blown-air diesel heating

MOTORHOME SUPPLIED BY

ROY WOOD TRANSITS

TEL 01189 790202

WEB auto-campers.co.uk



Even with the table in place there is plenty of legroom in the lounge

as they say, and roundabouts.

Given all that preamble, we thought the best way to try this campervan for size would be to take it away from the sprawling Reading suburbs where Auto Campers has its base.

First stop was the Hurley Riverside caravan park on a spot next to the Thames that, despite being just 12 miles from Heathrow, was so quiet on the first night that I could hear a couple of owls courting in the woods.

The nearby village of Hurley, which predates the Norman conquest, is an easy walk along the river, and, despite having the kind of houses that are so expensive you doubt anyone could afford to live in them, manages to sustain two very nice pubs – The Olde Bell and The Rising Sun. Both are worth a visit.

Unfortunately, the next morning I was awoken by what sounded like the red eye from JFK passing right over our heads. The wind must have changed direction. (A lady I met on the caravan park said she can tell whether they taking off or landing by the different pitch, but that makes the noise sound worse than it actually was.)

We were due to leave anyway, for a little spin around the Chilterns that were basking in early spring sunshine. Driving down the old A40 makes you realise just how much Britain has developed when you consider that this steep, windy two-lane road was the main route out of London to the north-west right up until the mid-1970s.

Even if the cuttings on the nearby M40 have now blended in with the landscape, it is still fun just occasionally to escape down (memory) lane,

particularly when you rediscover villages as pretty as Hambleden.

Our second overnight stop was at Swiss Farm, a campsite within walking distance of Henley but which connects directly to the Oxfordshire Way and other long-distance footpaths – I spotted a rabbit in its hole less than 200 metres from the nearest hardstanding. Swiss Farm celebrates its 70th anniversary this year. Can you believe people were motorhoming as early as 1946, when my old man was yet to be demobbed?

FAB CAB

Even on that short drive, one thing really impressed me. Auto Campers orders all its Transits for conversion with the Trend Pack. As well as body-coloured bumpers and mirrors, Trend spec gives you



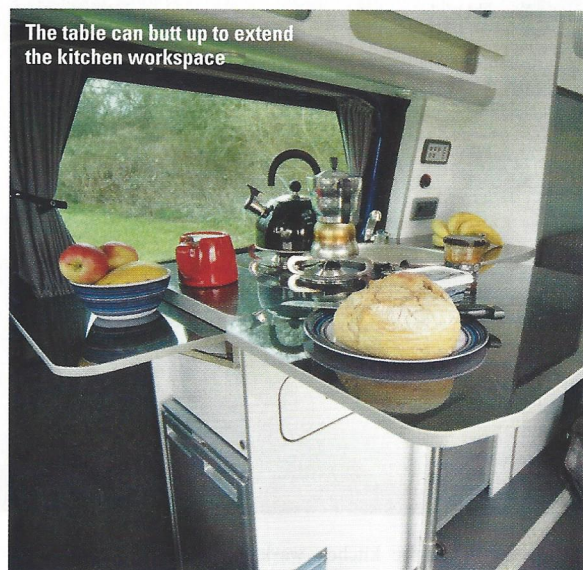
The raised hob is not to everyone's taste, but it is easy to clean



A useful flap on the outside of the galley



The table can butt up to extend the kitchen workspace



front and rear parking sensors, cruise control, rain-sensing front wipers, a leather-trimmed steering wheel and gearlever and a heated windscreen. Why doesn't Fiat offer an upgrade like this on the Ducato?

You also get a Ford-branded DAB radio (with Bluetooth and USB connections) which magically cuts off if you open the door – something that your neighbours on site will no doubt appreciate if you ever come back after closing time.

And the Ford reversing camera, with its screen embedded within the rear view mirror, is one of the most sophisticated I have ever seen. It gives you a clear view that shows you exactly where the vehicle is, rather than ambiguous red and yellow lines, and a dotted line down the middle to show you exactly which direction the 'van will move in if you keep reversing it at that angle.

OPTIONS FOR DINING

Once parked up, the MRV is a delight to sit in. Both cab seats swivel – you just have to get used to the idea of releasing the handbrake and putting the 'van in gear before you swivel the driver's seat.

As the passenger seat is sculpted, like the cab seats, I found it a much more comfortable place to park my behind for a couple of hours than the slab-like upright travel seats in many other van conversions. With the table still tucked away in the nearside sliding door, there is plenty of room in here to stretch your legs, too.

Even when you put the table in place, there is still room to move and enough slightly wobbly table space for at least two to eat. Thanks to the double crank mechanism in the table base that

you swing out from the kitchen unit, you will also find the table is hugely adaptable: it can swing across the cab, or along the cab, or you can even butt it up right against the kitchen unit where it provides a smooth extension to the already not inconsiderable workspace.

If there is only one of you eating, or if you are just stopping for a quick nibble, however, lifting up the flap at the end of the kitchen might be sufficient. This flap makes for a useful desk for a laptop as well.

We also liked the other flap Auto Campers has supplied on the outer edge of the kitchen unit, once you've opened the sliding door.

With the fitted Fiamma awning out, and a couple of chairs and a table outside, this provides a useful space for the chef to work on while still



WHO IS AUTO-CAMPERS?



Roy Wood Transits started life in the 1970s building F2 Superstox, although founder Roy Wood, who also had background in Formula 2 racing, found time to build a caravanette with a GRP high-roof based on a 1972 SWB Transit. Under the ownership of his son Steve, the company has specialised in building mobility and accessible vehicles, although, for the past decade, based on Steve's motorhoming experience, it has also produced campervans, more recently under the Auto Campers brand name. The Day Van was named Campervan of the Year at the 2015 National Motorhome Awards.



The second sliding door and awning increase possibilities in this 'van



With the bed in the lower position, you get full access to the wardrobe



The wardrobe's shelves can fold away to provide hanging space

having access to the kitchen worktop, cutlery drawer and the fridge.

The last is a 50-litre compressor drawer-style unit opening out of the end of the galley. As with the heated windscreen, I don't understand why drawer fridges haven't taken off in popularity – and not just in campervans. You get clear visibility of everything that is in your fridge, so you can easily make sure there is nothing quietly festering at the back.

Elsewhere in the kitchen, you get a two-burner gas hob that is flush with the worktop. Not everyone likes this exposed arrangement in a campervan, but it is much easier to clean. There is also an unusual narrow oval-shaped sink. Underneath, one sliding tambour door reveals a space that could easily hold a couple of mid-sized pans and gives you access to the water pump, while a similar space underneath this houses a

Dometic portable toilet.

Speaking of storage, what Steve says about high-tops providing you with extra storage certainly rings true here.

You get two tambour-doored lockers over the kitchen, as well as smaller shelving for spice jars and the like, two similar lockers on the other side and one over the wardrobe, and a very large tambour-doored locker over the cab.

The wardrobe itself includes two shelves that can be folded away, so that you can make use of the hanging rail if you want to. When you consider that all of this is in addition to the space under the bed, there's more than enough room for two people's gear.

OTHER COMFORTS

Heating is provided by a Webasto Air Top 2000 diesel heater operating through one vent under the

passenger seat. This was perfectly adequate, and I found it not as noisy on the outside as the Eberspächer version, although this may be because it turns over at a more bass hum.

You are well served with lighting, too, with two LED lights in the ceiling that operate on three different settings – off, on, and a kind of night-time blue setting. Then there is ambient LED lighting for the kitchen, a useful swivel LED light by the bed, and, importantly, lights in the cab, too.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

So what about that bed? It is certainly comfortable and roomy, as you unfold it out over the collapsed travel seat and support it with the table mounting for the far corner and a seatbelt arrangement on the other.

You also get a choice of two settings: if you are



A very sophisticated cab



The Thames at Hurley Riverside



The enticing swimming pool at Swiss Farm

WHERE TO STAY

HURLEY RIVERSIDE PARK

Hurley, Berkshire SL6 5NE

OPEN 1 March – 31 October

PITCHES 123

WEB hurleyriversidepark.co.uk

TEL 01628 824493

Much of this large but very peaceful park by the Thames (reached via sat-nav through the postcode SL6 5NN) is given over to residential park homes. But it still finds room for 200 pitches, up to 123 of which can be for motorhomes. Many of these are hardstanding with 10A hook-up, while premium pitches with 16A and waste and water connections have been installed for this season. The site has three rather clinical toilet blocks in full season, as well as a disabled toilet behind the reception and a laundry. The village of Hurley (with two great pubs) is a 10-minute walk away, either along the road or the river path.



SWISS FARM TOURING & CAMPING

Marlow Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 2HY

OPEN All year

PITCHES 140

WEB swissfarmcamping.co.uk

TEL 01491 573419

This site, which, despite backing on to the Chilterns, is less than 10 minutes' walk from Henley town centre, celebrates its 70th anniversary this year. Considerable investment in recent years has seen it acquire a jolly bar and café (although this is only open for evening meals in peak season), an outdoor swimming pool (open from June to September) and a fishing lake. All bar 12 of the pitches are super pitches with hardstanding, waste and water connection and electric hook-up. The remaining 12 are grass pitches but still have hook-up. The toilet blocks are fitted around a courtyard, and so are designed to look homely, although Heart FM is piped through to them – even at 5am!



willing to give up the huge storage space under the bed you can lower it to a potentially more accessible position (where there is still a bit of storage underneath), which also gives you unencumbered access to the wardrobe.

I would recommend, however, that you choose which setting you want from the off and stick with it, as trying to change the settings en route is an elaborate process.

Those slats, even if they are made of aluminium, rather than stainless steel as originally intended, are heavy. On our test model they just fitted loosely onto the support poles, while a lever came out at the back to prevent any pillows falling through. In future models these slats will be castellated to allow them to fit more snugly.

AND TO FINISH

The MRV's sleek external lines and fetching midnight blue colour certainly helped it fit in the final morning when we ventured into posh Henley. Its blue interior is crisp and in keeping, too, although orange and green are other colour options. As it's only 4.97m long, you don't have much trouble parking (although it's too tall to fit in a multi-storey).

Henley still looks very much like the gentleman's sporting resort it was when the town first became well known. While elegant Edwardian villas still line the riverside in the town centre, further along the river you get a whole section of zinc-topped low-rise flats full of bachelor pads that are redolent of the noughties. Whether in 100 years we will look

on them with as much affection as we still do with the Edwardian villas remains to be seen.

It is a great town for shopping, too, and it now has the River & Rowing Museum, opened in 1998 when the success of UK rowers on the international stage had reached its apogee.

Since then the museum's interest has widened with a Wind in the Willows walk-through trail for kiddies. I particularly liked squeezing myself into a galley position on a Greek trireme. The museum includes an interesting video showing you how this very set-up was the foundation of Athenian – and thus all subsequent – democracy. That may be. I just found that squeezing myself into any space on a campervan, even one as comfy as the MRV, was tame by comparison.

What motorhome says ★★★★★

It's easy – as here – to get the MRV to over £40k but this innovative campervan still looks decent value and its clever bed, twin sliding doors and plentiful storage make it stand out in a busy marketplace.