

# THE AGE OF ELEGANCE

**Bürstner I-Elegance 660 on Fiat Ducato-Al-Ko 2.8JTD**

*Dave Hurrell discovers style and substance in a good looking A-class from Germany*



A-class motorhomes are very much a love 'em or hate 'em kinda thing. Voluminous boxy bodies, and seemingly strange driving positions behind tall windscreens, can put some people off, while others see them as the pinnacle of motorhome ownership. The advantages of the A-class are many-fold, with a cab area that is wide enough to become part of the living space and the ubiquitous instant double bed that descends from the roof above. More recently, permanent rear double beds (more usually found in low profile models) have made an appearance in A-class designs and, whether they're above a garage or at a lower level, they have the advantage of adding two more instantly available berths and massive storage to boot.

The I-Elegance range exhibits all the traditional qualities of the type and the 660 is one of two in a ten-model range to offer a fixed, longitudinal, double berth. The presence of forward-facing belted travel seats in the rear makes this a genuine and convenient four-berth motorhome.

As far as looks are concerned I'll use one word - stunning. A not-too-deep windscreen is nicely raked and underpinned by a truly desirable nose with up-to-the-minute four-headlight system and minimalist twin-bar grille. Two-tone grey valance and coordinated side skirts



*If I ever get to meet the design team at Bürstner I'll gladly buy 'em all a stein of Germany's finest.*



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*The wide A-class cab combines with swivel cab seats to provide plenty of room to eat and relax.*

complete this superb look. In short, if I ever get to meet the stylists from Bürstner I'll gladly buy 'em all a stein of Germany's finest to celebrate what they've done with this design.

### Elegant interior

The interior offers stylish and comfortable living for its occupants. Up front, a half dinette sets the scene with both cab seats swivelling to face the large fixed table. A classic forward-facing Pullman dinette seat completes this practical lounge-diner. At the rear is the layout more often seen in low-profile 'vans with a longitudinal double bed set alongside the washroom. The middle ground is occupied by the kitchen and a large two-door wardrobe.

### Bürstner basics

The Fiat Ducato 2.8-litre front-wheel drive chassis cowl is the starting point for Bürstner's take on the A-class motorhome. An Al-Ko rear chassis is

grafted onto the cab-less front end. This has the main advantage of lowering the rear chassis height and allowing double-floor construction. A moulded GRP sub-floor is then added, with the living area floor sitting several centimetres above. The resultant cavity between the two floors may not sound like much but in reality it solves many of the problems we motorcaravanners encounter. Winterisation is the biggy here, as this cavity encloses water tanks (fresh and waste), leisure battery, wiring, plumbing and heater ducts. Next is storage. Two compartments run across the full width of the vehicle, providing a home for all those light-but-long items (chairs, tables, skis, etc) that can be difficult to store. This area indicates the high standard of construction of this 'van and I was particularly impressed with the GRP sub-floor. Tough, rot-proof and practical, it's very much superior to plywood - and should help prolong active life in a 'van that is well qualified to be used all year round.

### A-class navigation

With many imported motorhomes, all the manufacturers do for the UK market is place the 'Continental-handled' caravan component on a right-hand drive chassis. In chassis cab based models this will only be noticeable because the caravan door is on the UK offside, but in A-class models (where the 'cab' is built as part of the caravan) it can mean that there are oddities in the cockpit.

In the case of this Bürstner, the cab has a Continental handing. Most noticeable is the single cab door - on left-hand drive chassis it would be the driver's door but here it becomes the passenger's. This is no bad thing in reality as (almost by default) it gives an exit on the UK nearside, something that's very useful when parked at the kerbside. So that's really good then? Yes, but I wish Bürstner had at least moved the control for the electric mirrors. Unfortunately, there it sits, mounted on what is now the



*The double floor construction provides a home for tanks and pipes, plus storage compartments for all your flat stuff.*



*This multi-purpose unit is perfect for the TV. Its stylish base provides useful storage and twin, pull-out rubbish bins.*





*The cab door may be on the wrong side for the driver but it provides safe exit on the kerb in the UK.*

passenger cab door - somewhat awkward to reach from the driving seat. Other downsides here include a handbrake very close to the side of the adjacent gas locker, and the fact that the driver now has just a sliding side window, rather than the electric one that the cab door provides.

Fortunately, it's not all bad and once I'd settled myself in one of the super Aguti captain's chairs and hit the road I was ready to forgive the

I-Elegance its import-generated idiosyncrasies. Once you get used to that 'long way from the windscreen' driving position, this 'van becomes a joy to drive. The style of the front end - seeming to curve in and down at the front - makes it seem smaller than it is and less daunting than some others of the type. The superb panoramic view through the windscreen makes up for any blind spots created by flat side windows and screen pillars.

Fiat Ducato underpinnings and Al-Ko rear chassis offered predictable handling, although there was a tendency to do a 'wobble' when crossing the 'bow wave' of overtaken trucks on the motorway. A high fifth gear meant that - with



*Aguti captain's seats and a panoramic windscreen make driving a pleasure.*

a motorhome of this size - 60mph was the comfortable speed to change into top. The result is that you end up driving faster, or spending long periods of time in fourth.

### Elegant style

Fresh and modern, or a tad too Teutonic? Well, it depends on taste, but in reality the 660's decor was very easy to live with. Light wood cabinets, with silver detailing, partnered well with quirky upholstery in brown and charcoal - some of which seemed to be made from (albeit synthetic) recycled pigskin! That pigskin-ish stuff extends to the - somewhat fussy - decor drapes, with expected Continental-style net curtains. Good quality cassette blinds are partnered with horizontal top-hung concertina blinds around the cab. Those big cab windows work well with the wind-up rooflight above the kitchen to allow plenty of natural daylight inside, even on the kind of gloomy days we Brits are used to. When the sun comes out, the interior exhibits a fresh, modern character. And it's now that the cab blinds exhibit another facet of their

usefulness - to protect you from potentially unwelcome heat.

### Lounge and eat in elegance

'Tis flavour of the moment, the half dinette. It's also typical of a Continental in that there's no separate lounge area. A-class advantages include a cab that's part of the whole, and here we see this used to the full. Get pitched and swivel the comfy cab seats to create a versatile lounge diner. Four can relax in comfort, although you do have to cope with the fact that the table is fixed and the forward-facing bench seat is a tad upright.

Opposite the table on the offside is the kind of multi-purpose unit I love to see in motorhomes. Its base is a capacious, shelved cupboard with a stylish curved door, and its two-tier top has a multitude of uses for dumping your stuff (it's just inside the caravan door) and as a buffet during meals. No high-level TV locker in this 'van, as the multi-purpose unit has wiring and sockets adjacent - at a much better height for comfortably watching the box. The two tiers allow inclusion of DVD, video, or digibox, although these would need to be stowed somewhere safer during travel.

As usual with this set-up, dining is in luxury for two and adequate for four. The swivelled driver's seat comes at the table at an angle and does its job very well. However, just to be on the safe side (and to increase table space) Bürstner has added a semi-circular section that pivots out from under the table top to increase its versatility.

Last and by no means least is the superb view you get through that big windscreen. Panoramic is the only description that fits and I found myself indulging in some 'strategic parking' to get the benefit - not only where there was a gorgeous vista but just to experience 'life through a lens' watching interesting campsite comings and goings!

### Elegant cuisine

Just aft of the (offside) caravan door is the kitchen. Stereotypically Continental, this galley encapsulates most of the annoying features of this motorhome. A three-burner hob, mini oven/grill, circular drainer-less sink, and large three-way fridge complete the line-up of appliances, while storage is an eclectic mix of cupboards, drawers and lockers.

The prize for 'showroom appeal item of the month' goes to the cupboard fitted to the fridge door. At first you think 'oh look that's unusual, what a good idea'. Then you start actually using the fridge, and discover the cupboard just gets in the way - and makes you swear as you accidentally open it when you meant to open the fridge. It also makes the fridge controls difficult to get at, and, after a while, you realise that its shallow interior won't store much of the stuff you take away with you anyway.

The fridge is a different matter. The latest model from Dometic, it features an easy-to-use lock (with a vent position for smell-free lay-ups) and semi-automatic operation on gas - just switch to this setting and it lights up automatically.

The rest of the kitchen storage is very good with three cupboards above and a supremely useful shelved, tambour-door locker. Just open the vertically sliding door once on site and it becomes open shelves. Down below is a narrow cupboard big enough for tall bottles and a fitted-out cutlery and utensil drawer.

The cooking appliances had partner Suzanne uncharacteristically vociferous in condemnation. The three-burner Cramer hob was only mildly annoying in having no auto-ignition (in a fifty-grand 'van?). This just meant mild cursing was heard (especially first thing) as one of us tried to find our sparky gas igniter thingy. But it was the little Smev oven that really got her goat. A picnic site at Rutland Water was the scene of 'The Great Toast Fire of 2004' and during the after-disaster inquiry I was told that she had never had toast on fire before in her life! She also maintained that the oven was mounted too low down and was



*The middle ground is occupied by the kitchen and a large wardrobe, with the washroom and fixed double bed beyond.*



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The vanity unit has good mirrors and plenty of counter top.



The A-class bed glides down from above the cab. All that was missing was a couple of reading lights.



The two best things in the kitchen are the capacious cutlery drawer and the tambour-doored shelf unit above.

almost impossible to light or see into (having no auto ignition or internal illumination). I sat cross-legged on the floor and peered in, monitoring two slices of bread for what seemed like an hour, so Sue could finally enjoy her egg on toast brunch. Continental motorhome kitchens often have after-thought ovens mounted in strange places but Bürstner seem to have shot themselves in the foot big-time here by fitting basic appliances in an otherwise upmarket motorhome.

But there is a fitted waste bin. Oh how we pine for a decent bin (well I do anyway) and here we find, not one, but two. They slide out of the cupboard next to the caravan door drawer-like; I was told they're for recycling and not for lazy people like me who need to fill two before staggering to the campsite dustbins.

### Bathed in elegance

Six-and-a-half metres of Continental motorhome normally includes a washroom with separate shower and this one's no exception. Like many others of the type, the shape of this mobile ablutions block is dictated by the presence of the double bed mounted alongside it. Thus, we see a long, relatively narrow room with potential pinch points in the same places as other 'vans with this layout - and it's how these points are handled that produces good and bad washrooms. The areas in question are floor and shoulder space in front of the washbasin, and the amount of floor and legroom available when moving past the



This 'ultimate motorhome wardrobe' has double doors, auto illumination, and enormous drawers too!

inevitable swivel-bowl loo to get to the shower.

Thankfully, the 660 comes up trumps in these areas as Bürstner's design team has created enough space for bruise-free ablutions. That

luxury, the separate shower, became a welcome feature as we tested the 660 during the National Motorhome Show at Peterborough. Although quite compact, the shower performed well, enclosing you with its rigid, bi-fold door and providing a good flow of hot water from an easily adjustable showerhead. Large capacity water and waste tanks made sure we could use this facility without decamping to the service point every five minutes during our stay.

The washbasin, a counter-top for cosmetics, mirror, high-level locker and low-level cupboard took care of all other washroom activities with aplomb. Only the inadequate lighting took the sheen off an otherwise excellent space. Two halogen downlighters above the basin left the lighting scheme wanting, and it was positively gloomy in the shower. Thankfully it would be very easy to add to the lighting and I would consider having a rooflight retrofitted to increase daylight and improve ventilation during steamy situations.

### Bürstner beds

Four berths in two instantly-available double beds sounds like a recipe for super slumbers, and it is.

Up front, the ubiquitous A-class bed glides down (just fold the cab seatbacks forward, release a seatbelt-style security buckle and pull) to provide a large double, mounted on sprung staves and giving excellent comfort. All that's missing here is a couple of reading lights (again, these could probably be retrofitted).

At the rear the longitudinal double bed features a pocket interior-sprung mattress, and generous



The oven and the cupboard fitted on the front of the fridge were the sources of much frustration.





*There's enough space in the washroom for bruise-free ablutions.*



*A pocket-sprung mattress and generous length made the fixed double bed one of the best we've tested.*

proportions, to give excellent comfort. This was our bed for the duration of the test and it proved to be one of the best motorhome berths we've ever tried. No rear window means a proper padded headboard – this, and twin halogen reading lights, made reading my bedtime book and drinking that morning cuppa an absolute pleasure.

Sleeping forms a large part of the time spent in any motorhome so good beds are very

important. Pay particular attention to length. The rear fixed berth here is a healthy 6ft 6in long – some beds struggle to make six feet, so always try before you buy.

**A-class storage**

The 660 has much to offer storage-wise. So much, in fact, that our motorhoming kit was swallowed with ease, leaving cavernous spaces crying out to

be filled with leisure pursuit paraphernalia.

The expected quota of overhead lockers populate the interior. Most of these are shelved – a feature that improves storage and reduces the DIY additions list.

Aside from the aforementioned cupboards and lockers in kitchen, washroom and lounge, the storage star inside is the wardrobe. Sandwiched twixt lounge and rear bed on the



*Access to the underbed storage from inside is tricky...*



*...while outside it's superb – this strong metal drawer glides from within.*



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Draining waste water is simple with an easy-to-use valve located inside a skirt locker.

offside, this fearsome, two-door beast is capable of swallowing ball gowns whole! Below, is a pair of wide drawers - some of the biggest I've seen in any 'van. Given just one of these I could pack enough clothes for a month.

Other storage includes those excellent and aforementioned spaces under the floor, plus another chunk in the base of the forward-facing dinette seat (ideal for tools and gear not needed very often).

Meanwhile, under the rear bed is another storage space. Access from inside is a bit difficult - as the front end of the space is taken up by the Truma heating unit, and the bed base hinges up across only half its width (with no gas struts to assist). Move outside and open the exterior access hatch and you discover a natty pull-out tray that makes getting at the clobber stored here easy. Just release the catch and slide out the giant drawer to see all your kit laid out in front of you. It's a great idea this, the only drawback

being the amount of space the drawer takes up. Swings and roundabouts really. I'd opt for the extra space, but then I'd be seen with my legs waving wildly as I forced my slender (honest) frame inside to get the item I wanted (which, of course, will always be right at the back!).

### Elegantly served

Not too much to say here; the Truma Combi heating/hot water unit worked superbly - as I've come to expect - and delivered hot air and water to all the right places.

Services-wise it's the double floor that's your friend - especially when it comes to winter

camping. You can relax knowing that all the techy bits are safe and warm just beneath your feet. Indeed, Bürstner has taken no chances and fitted a heater to the waste water tank, just in case.

### I-elegance or I-ignorance?

Simple stuff really. This German motorhome is a pleasure to drive and live in. It provides safe and comfortable, all-year-round, travelling and camping for up to four people. It's only let down by a few silly details such as lack of lighting and poorly specified cooking appliances. If you're thinking about an A-class the I-Elegance range is a must see. □



### IN BRIEF

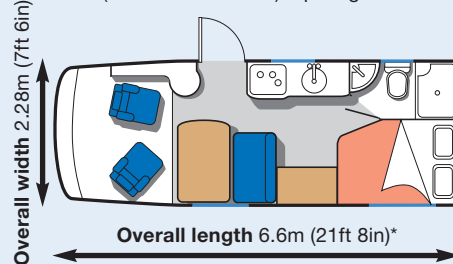
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato chassis cowl with Al-Ko rear chassis
- **Engine type:** 2.8-litre common-rail turbo-charged and intercooled diesel
- **Output:** 93.5kW (127 bhp) @ 3600rpm
- **Gearbox and drive:** 5-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Bürstner I-Elegance 660
- **Body type and construction:** A-class, double floor with aluminium-clad sandwich-construction side panels and alloy skirts, GRP sub-floor
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** Mains hook-up feeding leisure battery charger, refrigerator and one unswitched 13 amp socket in kitchen
- **Lighting:** All 12V halogen; two eyeball spots under A-class bed, two eyeball spots adjacent to A-class bed, single ceiling lamp and adjustable stem spotlight in lounge/diner, two fixed downlighters above kitchen, two eyeball spots in washroom, two stem lights above bed head, auto-illumination in wardrobe, awning light
- **Cooking facilities:** Cramer stainless steel three-burner gas hob with hinged glass lid and manual ignition. Smev stainless steel mini oven/grill with manual ignition
- **Refrigerator:** Dometic RM7401L, three-way, capacity 97 litres
- **Water heater:** Truma Combi C3402 gas-only operation, capacity 12.5 litres (2.75 gallons)
- **Space heater:** Truma Combi C3402 blown-air gas-only operation, outlets in living area and washroom

- **Fresh water tank:** Inboard, 140 litres (30.75 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** Inboard within double floor, heated, 100 litres (21.99 gallons)
- **Gas locker capacity:** Two 13kg cylinders
- **Rear restraints:** Two three-point seatbelts on forward-facing dinette seat
- **Additional features:** Pull-down A-class double bed, concertina blinds in cab, radio/CD with four speakers, nearside cab door with electric window, cab air-con, ABS and ASR, Aguti captain's seats with integral seatbelts, twin recycling rubbish bins, Seitz GRP caravan door with window, large double-door wardrobe, washroom with separate shower compartment, wind-up Heki rooflight, concertina privacy screens to both beds

### DIMENSIONS

(\*data supplied by manufacturer)

- **Overall length:** 6.6m (21ft 8in)\*
- **Overall width:** 2.28m (7ft 6in)\*
- **Overall height:** 2.81m (9ft 2.5in)\*
- **Interior height:** 1.901m (6ft 3in)
- **Bed dimensions:** Fixed rear double 2.07m x 1.31m (6ft 9.5in x 4ft 3.5in) tapering to 900mm



at foot (35.5in), mattress depth 130mm (5in). A-class double 1.98m x 1.4m (6ft 6ins x 4ft 7ins), mattress depth 100mm (4in), available headroom 690mm (27in) max

- **Max authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Load capacity:** 445kg

*Note: Mass in running order (3055kg) includes driver, 90 per cent fuel, water, 2 x 11kg aluminium gas cylinders, tools, spare wheel, and cable. For more than three persons the optional chassis upgrade (to 4000kg) is recommended.*

### PRICE (all prices include VAT)

- **Standard model as tested:** £48,780
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle, two years conversion, five years water ingress

### OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- **Base vehicle options:** Chassis upgrade to 4000kg (£1300), air suspension (£1824), alloy wheels (£574), motorcycle carrier (£1144), satellite navigation system (from £1287), cruise control (£206)
- **Caravan options:** Front corner steadies (£212), roof rails (£411), bike rack (from £338), rear-view camera (£704), roll-out awning (from £447), roof lockers instead of A-class overcab bed (no charge), leather upholstery (£2028), extractor fan in kitchen (£111), exterior shower (£96), mains electric water heating (£97), solar panel system (from £675), Alde wet central heating system (£1214), exterior gas point (£122)

*Bürstner I-Elegance 660 kindly supplied for evaluation by:*

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