



# SALON SELECT

Rapido Le Randonneur 7068F on 2.8JTD Fiat Ducato Al-Ko

*One of the latest offerings from mainland Europe marries Continental style with UK-friendly lounging. Dave and Fiona Batten-Hill relaxed with a drink*

**P**leasing all of the people all of the time is an acknowledged impossibility. But Rapido, with its Le Randonneur 7068F, is taking a more than respectable stab at doing just that. The U-shaped rear lounge has a well-deserved following with good reason. It's versatile, comfortable, practical and space efficient. Putting one into a low-profile conversion on a ground-hugging Al-Ko chassis and adding a well thought out half-dinette up front is a recipe for a crowd pleaser. Locating the essential

facilities in the waist, and giving the whole 2.8-litre power, adds potential on-road panache and still more practicality. But does the 7068F fulfil its on-paper promises in reality?

### BODY TALK

Like all its 70F series stablemates, the 7068F has a familiar face. Naturally, badging the nose 'Rapido' gives only an even chance of identifying the base vehicle correctly. But the Barber of Sevel isn't so easily foiled – and badging the



### AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £45,610 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 4
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Fiat Ducato Al-Ko chassis cab
- **ENGINE:** 2.8-litre (127bhp) turbo-diesel



**RIGHT: Travel and lounging are the roles of the front and rear areas.**

**FAR RIGHT: The kitchen isn't large but it's fully equipped as standard. The sink's worktop lid stows in the wardrobe.**

**BELOW LEFT: The entry door is both step-less and seamless. The internal hardware is welcome; the central locking is more so.**

**BELOW RIGHT: The rear ladder and rack is an option worth having, being simple and functional.**

**BOTTOM LEFT: Cupboard love: the bottom one holds the heating; the centre one is for a flat screen TV.**

**BELOW RIGHT: Room for one more inside. The provision for a second leisure battery is especially welcome.**

**BELOW FAR RIGHT: Back to front: the domestic services separate the zones effectively.**

steering wheel 'Fiat' is a dead giveaway. The presence of an Al-Ko 1500 chassis is equally obvious; without it, an external entry step would be needed and there'd be much more daylight under the side and tail skirts.

Aft of the cab, the 7068F is raffish, even if its rudimentary overcab – more of a swelling, really – makes it look a touch nose heavy, but a little restrained curvaceousness below knee level prevents accusations involving slab sides. The running boards embracing the cab's door sills not only add homogeneity but also make entering and leaving the cab that much easier. The conversion's entry door may be declared offside for UK use, but that's no problem, and its low sill makes using it equally easy. And remote central locking that includes the entry door? A blessed addition that should by now be compulsory.

The 7068F's proportions mean that the swoopy graphic's ability to give the impression of length isn't wholly necessary. The Polyglace polyester skin may give slightly confused reflections but claims about superior resistance to the impact of hail and scratches by branches – if true – make these superfluous. The promise is that the white stuff will remain unblemished by minor impacts and can be more easily fixed should more consequential damage occur.

Around the extremities, the fit and finish of the mouldings is gratifyingly good. Up top, the polyester roof moulding, non-slip by all accounts, and guaranteed watertight, has neatly faired-in roof rails. The rear ladder option looks purposeful and works well - the conversion coachwork looks and feels the part.



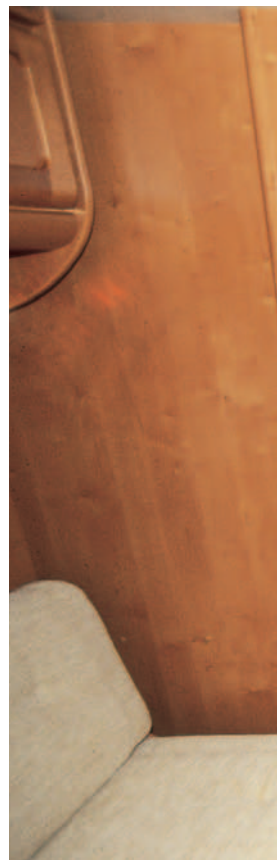
### CENTREPOINT

Taking the small step up inside brings you face to face with a half-dinette, and into an area warmed by large expanses of 'Canadian maple'. The ranks of lockers, with their gold effect handles and trims, sit above the kitchen and dinette and continue aft, delineating the lounge area's upper works. Being standard-style equipment and consequently spacious, the lockers naturally offer useful storage space, while shallow lockers with their own, spring-latched doors underscore those over the dinette.

More obvious is the way that the functional domestics occupy the 7068F's waist. On the right is a smallish linear kitchen, complete with a sensible refrigerator and a low-level oven (Thetford and Smev respectively). The rectangular sink/drainer and the three-burner, draining hob sit neatly enough in a light grey marble-effect worktop. These units' covers, a removable wooden one for the sink and a hinged glass version for the hob, help maximise the workspace. A small, slide-out under the sink attempts to do the same but it would fare better if it were stronger.

Nevertheless, you get pan space, lockers up top, a cutlery drawer, two mains sockets, and a splashguard. An over-hob extractor, well placed for its allotted task, and an overhead downlighter, join a chromed, swivel swan-neck tap to complete the 12V power and fresh water facilities in the culinary department.

To the rear of the kitchen, an apparently





potentially useful locker turns out to be already occupied, by Truma. Above where the heating unit lives is a little more worktop, beneath a dedicated locker for a flat screen TV. This comes fitted with a Vogles arm to take a TV and a frosted polycarbonate door to hide it. Next up is a bow-doored locker, whose purpose is unclear. It might accept a tube television, it might store bottles and tins - but for either purpose its floor appears ominously lightweight. But it's still storage, of which kitchens in general - and this one in particular - don't always have enough.

Lack of storage space isn't an issue in the wardrobe forward of the entry door. This has a shelf above, a three-quarter height drop, a light, and a spot for the sink's worktop cover to live. The fore-and-aft hanging rail is mounted low enough to accept coat hangers' hooks easily - some haven't the clearance - and the upper shelf has a fascia rail, to keep the contents under control when the door's opened. And beneath this exemplary wardrobe is a further welcome addition. Under a wooden cover is a hefty leisure battery and an adjacent space for another one - excellent.

**DOES THE SHOWER GEL?**

Almost. The washroom, to the rear of the half dinette, helps the kitchen dictate that the 7068F is waived. The need for rights of passage confirms that putting an L-handle on the washroom door is a bad move.

But a washroom door handle that either snags your clothing or bruises you can't spoil

what's behind that door. Again rich in a wood finish and abetted by the classy emanations of halogen downlighters, the washroom feels warm even when the heating's switched off.

Cupboards by the mirror, and outboard of the Thetford swivel-bowl toilet, join the shower's corner rack to provide plenty of storage room. The shower's rotating polycarbonate screen tucks away neatly, Rapido's logo moulded into the cabinet's walls inspires brand loyalty. A moulded plastic duckboard, not to mention extra wall-mounted drainers, avoids soggy feet. On the back of the washroom door, flexible towel rails look set to bend rather than snap and there's a useful mirror on the other side. The chrome-plated washroom fittings, including fiddle rails for the shelves, look good.

Add a small, opening window, a big roof vent, blinds and flyscreens all round, and a handful of warm air outlets, and you've a pleasant, workmanlike washroom. A moulding in the shower floor covers – literally – wheelarch intrusion and is no loss. But mounting the WC well inboard, on an extension, is a costly way of achieving cupboard door space. On the upside,

it lets this door swing and gives a spot for WC chemicals to hibernate. On the other hand, drawing out the waste cassette is a stretch – and using the neat, tough basin means standing partly in the shower.

Solution? An open shelf, rather than a doored cupboard.

Just as an aside, or rather an outside, there's an external shower point on the 7068F. Testing in cold weather precluded trying this out but it will undoubtedly prove useful post-swim, or when there's a muddy mutt involved.

**GROUND FLOOR LOUNGERIE**

Motorhome rear lounges prove that millions of touring caravanners can't be wrong. The 7068F's tail lounge reinforces this, being comfortable, spacious *and* capacious. Head-level lockers all round put the area almost in danger of having too much storage – and below them, a quartet of adjustable, switched spotlights (plus a brace of downlighters in the Heki 3's neat, wood trim) allow mood-setting to taste, if you can stand not having the three

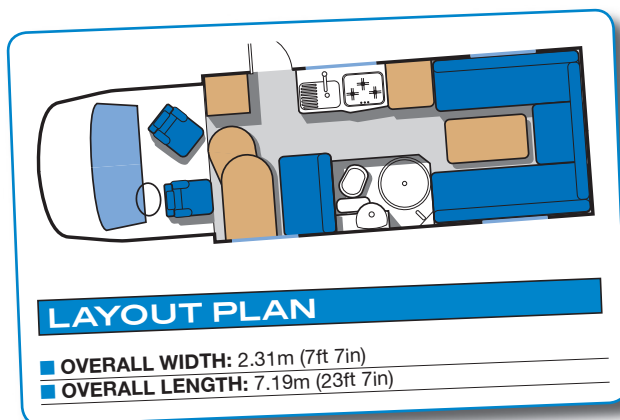


**RIGHT: The rear lounge – always a popular choice with both couples and families.**

**FAR RIGHT: Washroom workout: the rich wood effect adds class, even if the wheelarch/WC intrusions compromise space.**

**BELOW RIGHT TOP: Table stowage beneath lounge seating: a neat idea.**

**BELOW RIGHT BOTTOM: A locker, through and through. Very useful, particularly during pitching.**





lounge windows' ever-changing panorama on view. Warm colouring, in the brown-fleck removable carpeting, and the oatmeal with added stripes upholstery, adds to the mood. And the faux curtains inverted shirt-cuff look inputs a mildly heraldic touch. It's also clever to store the table horizontally under the right side locker. There, it can't fall on your feet - and in place, it stands firmly on its own folding feet. After having stumbled over the small step up into the lounge for the first and only time, you'll stand firmly on yours, too.

The storage under the lounge furniture seems modest at first. There's the table under the right side locker, a small drawer over the wires and pipes under the left, and nothing at the tail. But in exchange you get... not a garage but a through locker. True, this accommodates the spare wheel and the new power board but you get ribbed rubber matting, a locker door each side, and lighting. All very useful for gravel-free pitching.

Come bedtime, an easy task lies ahead. Behind the Gallically-soft cushions are positionable wedges. In swapping lumbar support for a flat mattress, you can have a ripping time playing with the Velcro, while sliding out the bed's beech-sprung base supports is a breeze. Assembled, the bed is huge, and, comfortably ensconced, you can continue watching your flat screen TV, use the nearby worktop to house your night time consumables, pull a pleated divider across for privacy... or just go to sleep.

Towards the sharp end, the half-dinette also features the aforementioned foam wedges. Have the weighty table kneel, do the wedge

trick, spin the passenger seat around and you've a transformation. What was a useful table, forward of a pair of reassuringly belted travel seats and behind the cab seats, becomes a comfortable and respectably sized bed. And in the cause of comfort and luxury, you can avail yourself of a further TV. In the corner of the cab, above the driver's seat, is a locker with mains, 12V and aerial points - and the capacity to accept a medium-sized set.

This ability naturally adds to the dining area's attractions, not that this area needs much support. In dining mode, the table is more than large enough for the dining needs of two. Swivel the cab seats, then pull out, lift and lock the table's extension, and you've dining room for four. This is impressive; especially as the cab seats are set at the ideal height.

Overall the Rapido 7068F has a really rather pleasant interior. The assorted lockers are well built, usefully shelved and spacious. The area over the cab only has a cubby slot as well as its TV cabinet but the storage about the lounge more than makes up for it. The interior is zoned logically and each zone can be multi-functional as requirements dictate. Access from both sleeping areas to the kitchen and washroom is straightforward and, more importantly, doesn't involve disturbance to one's sleeping partners: domestic harmony on wheels, no longing required.

**DYNAMISM**

Motorhomes being mobile by default makes their getting there an important matter and it isn't so much the travelling but the way in which it's done that matters most. Putting a





low profile behind a Fiat Ducato's cab and on top of an Al-Ko 1500 chassis gives on-paper promise. In Rapido's 7068F this promise is fulfilled and if getting there is an issue for you, you won't be disappointed in the vehicle.

From stage one, the pleasant surprises begin and they keep on appearing. The small step up into the entry door is obvious but this door joining in the central locking is a subtle but immensely useful addition. The same goes for the functional running boards, which

make entering the cab particularly easy. And once in the hot seat, you find that the 'Grand Comfort' seats truly live up to their name. As well as excellent thigh and back support, you get adjustable armrests.

The array of specification included is also a pleasant surprise. A spot of button hunting and warning lamp gazing soon shows what's on board. You get ABS and ASR, an airbag, electric mirrors with heating, cab air-conditioning, and an RDS radio/CD player

– not to mention cab carpets and upholstery as per the rest of the seats. Talking of finishes, you also get a little touch of plastic tree on the dash. And in the cause of comfort – particularly on a wet, windswept and chilly afternoon – the presence of an engine coolant-supplied interior heater was more than welcome. The temperate exhalations of the cab heater were joined by further ones, exiting from the rear face of the wardrobe. It was well worth having the heater, and, therefore, no cold coachbuilt discomfort.

**IN BRIEF**

- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato Al-Ko chassis cab
- **Engine:** 2.8-litre 93.5kW (127bhp) four-cylinder common-rail turbo-diesel
- **Gearbox and drive:** Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Rapido Le Randonneur 7068F
- **Body type and construction:** Low-profile coachbuilt, GRP-skinned sandwich construction, Styrofoam insulated polyester panels, GRP conversion mouldings, ABS low-level mouldings
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** Mains hook-up, 3 MCBs, CBE-56 16A battery charger, CBE 15-way 12V distribution board
- **Lighting:** Four adjustable spotlights to rear lounge, two downlighters to rear lounge rooflight surround, two downlighters in kitchen extractor fan unit, three downlighters to washroom, one downlighter to central gangway, one downlighter above entry door, two adjustable downlighters to forward roof surround, one adjustable downlighter above half-dinette, automatic wardrobe light, awning light.
- **Cooking facilities:** Smev three-burner draining hob, with ignition and hinged glass cover, Smev combination oven/grill unit
- **Refrigerator:** Thetford auto energy selection three-way with full-width freezer compartment and interior illumination, capacity 96 litres
- **Water heater:** Truma Combi C6002 6kW boiler, gas/mains operation
- **Space heater:** Truma Combi C6002 6kW



- blown-air, gas/mains operation
- **Fresh water tank:** Inboard, 120 litres (26.4 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** Underslung, insulated and heated, 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Gas locker capacity:** Two 7kg cylinders
- **Leisure battery capacity:** 90 amp hr
- **Rear restraints:** Two three-point inertia reel belts to forward-facing dinette seat
- **Additional features:** ABS/ASR, driver's airbag, cab/conversion central locking, 'Grand Comfort' swivelling cab seats, faux wood trimmed dash, headlight height adjustment, front mud flaps, chenille upholstery, chromium-plated toothbrush/mug holder, soap holder, toilet roll holder, chrome-plated shower mixer with baton shower head on riser rail, 'drum' type frosted polycarbonate shower door, two towel rails, forward TV cabinet with 230V/12V/aerial outlets, rear flat screen TV cabinet with frosted lift/slide door, 230V/12V/aerial outlets and adjustable TV support arm, on-road heating with adjustable output and fan, kitchen extractor fan, living area

speakers, second auxiliary battery location

**DIMENSIONS**

- (\*data supplied by manufacturer)
- **Overall length:** 7.19m (23ft 7in)\*
  - **Overall width:** 2.31m (7ft 7in)\*
  - **Overall height:** 2.75m (9ft 0in)\*
  - **Interior height:** Min 1.84m (6ft 0.5in) max 1.98m (6ft 6in)
  - **Bed dimensions:** Lounge nearside single: 2.03m x 800mm (6ft 8in x 2ft 7.5in), lounge offside single: 1.90m x 800mm (6ft 3in x 2ft 7.5in), or lounge double: 2.10m x 1.40m (6ft 10.5in x 4ft 7in). Dinette single: 2.00m x 680mm (6ft 7in x 2ft 3in)\*
  - **Max authorised weight:** 3500kg\*
  - **Load capacity:** 400kg\*

**PRICE (all prices include VAT)**

- **Standard model:** £45,610 on the road
- **As tested:** £46,280 on the road
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle, two years conversion, three years water ingress

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

- (\*fitted to test vehicle)
- **Base vehicle options:** Faux wood dash trim (£190)\*, cruise control (£240), towbar (£970), motorcycle rack without tow bar (£1260), motorcycle rack including tow bar (£1600)
  - **Caravan options:** Rear ladder and crosswise roof rack bars (£400)\*, box for second leisure battery (£80)\*, leather upholstery (£1100)



**FAR LEFT TOP:** Assembling the dinette for sleeping is easy.

**FAR LEFT BOTTOM:** Ducato cab appointments include a driver's airbag and superb 'Grand Comfort' seats.

**MIDDLE:** The lounge double bed is big, soft and luxurious. Two decent singles are an option.

**LEFT:** The dinette, rigged for a repast, has plenty of space for four.

manoeuvrability that belies the Al-Ko's 4.15-metre wheelbase. This little lot adds up to a rewarding drive, which in turn makes the getting there not a chore but a pleasure.

**CLEAR AND PRESENT**

The content of this treatise on Rapido's 7068F begs a question: is the vehicle perfect? The short answer is no - but finding the perfect motorhome could well be a life's work. But Rapido needn't fret because the 7068F is still very good indeed. U-shaped lounges are a guaranteed draw and incorporating one into a conversion that can undeniably refute any accusations of being staid makes for an attractive package. Attractive to whom? While it's always a debatable point, there's valid support for the argument that what delights traditionalists can also attract new-age motorhomers. Will it? Time, or rather, sales, will tell... and it seems pretty clear that they'll be speaking positively. □

And in the cause of the far less welcome opposite circumstance, it was good to see a fire extinguisher behind the driver's seat.

The seat height means that you aren't peering beetle-browed under the sun visors - and tweaking the reach, recline and lumbar support gives an ideal driving position. All this is not just aided but practically overshadowed by what occurs on setting off. Fiat's 2.8-litre, common-rail turbo-diesel power plant offers a gutsy, seamless delivery - but being

able to use it makes all the difference. Here's where the Al-Ko chassis comes in. Giving a low centre of gravity and superior, torsion bar springing, it allows the 7068F to be hustled along with impunity. Body roll, pitch, dive and squat are minimal, as compared to a full-height coachbuilt. The power's there, the brakes are too, you can see out front and back - although the washroom and high rear window sill make this tricky - and the conversion's a quiet one. Moreover, the taut control is accentuated by a

**VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY:**  
*Rapido 7068F kindly supplied for evaluation by:* Brownhills Leisure World, A1/A46 Junction, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 2EA (tel: 0800 374941; web site: www.brownhills.co.uk)

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