



ON TOUR WITH A...

...2006 Timberland Endeavour XII on 2.5dCi Renault Master



ABOVE: No problem parking this motorhome in the pay and display car park adjacent to Scarborough Sea Life Centre.

RIGHT: General view forward shows seating arranged as an inward-facing settee. Production models will have a table for the swivelled cab passenger seat.

FAR RIGHT: Permanent transverse bunks are right at the back beyond the kitchen and washroom.



Words & pictures by
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Jonathan Lloyd sets out to see some of Yorkshire's finest...



TOURING TRIVIA

I STAYED AT:

- Camping and Caravanning Club site, Scarborough (tel: 01723 366212)
- Camping and Caravanning Club site, Slingsby (tel: 01653 628335)

I VISITED:

- Flamborough Head Lighthouse (open April-September at selected times and dates; tel: 01262 673769; web site: www.trinityhouse.co.uk; adults £2.50)
- Bempton Cliffs RSPB reserve (open all year; tel: 01262 851179; web site: www.rspb.org.uk)
- Sea Life Centre, Scarborough (tel: 01723 376125)
- Dalby Forest Drive (near Thornton-le-Dale, North Yorkshire)
- North Yorkshire Moors Railway (tel: 01751 472508; web site www.northyorkshiremoorsrailway.com)

Way back when I was an obstructive adolescent, many panel van conversions were designed to be family-friendly and lots of them sported bunks to accommodate the junior motorcaravanner. In fact, we had one - a 1960 Bedford CA Dormobile Romany. Bunks were stretcher-style (a length of canvas between two aluminium poles), which located either in the elevated rising roof or across the cab. I slept in the latter position and woke many campers up by inadvertently pressing the (permanently-live) horn push with my hoof. It wasn't long before a lynch mob of bleary-eyed winceyette-clad camping neighbours forced a rewire of the horn push through the ignition switch!

Anyway where was I? Oh yes, that was then and this is now and modern panel van conversions with bunks are almost exclusively rising roof Volkswagen campers. They are, of course, a near-perfect mismatch as they represent the greatest number of berths in a motorcaravan of the smallest possible interior volume. A sure recipe for a riot among the members of our dysfunctional family!

Companies such as Timberland Motorhomes have seen a phenomenal growth in their sales figures, which I guess has been to the detriment of some of the UK's longer-established converters. Up to now, Timberland's target market has been couples and solo motorcaravanners wanting the space and facilities of a coachbuilt with the easier driving of a smaller panel van. Some have been DINKYs (double income, no kids yet), but most have been silver panthers, treating themselves after the kids have flown the nest. The Endeavour XII attempts to address a potential gap in the market. It is an upmarket, long-wheelbase panel van conversion aimed at families, with space for somnolent two 'yoofs' on transverse rear bunks. What a great concept. Let's see how it worked out in practice.

PICK UP AND TAKE OFF

Timberland has recently moved to larger premises near Humberside International



Airport. Road links are very good, so despite a busy morning in the office I was only slightly behind schedule when I arrived to pick up the Renault Master-based Endeavour. Although this is the prototype model of an all-new design, it wasn't our first meeting. In fact, we previously got intimately acquainted when I was a judge at this year's Caravan Club Motorcaravan Design and Drive Awards.

Half an hour later saw equipment stowed within the varied and spacious lockers, cupboards and boot - the Master's curved snout heading towards what many consider to be one of the most elegant suspension bridges in the country (across the Humber). From the north shore I headed on to the Yorkshire coast.

THE BEST LAID PLANS...

The original intention was to take the 'van to the Scarborough area and potter along and around the Yorkshire Wolds Way with my 10-year-old grandson. Unfortunately, he couldn't make the revised test dates and I came down with

ABOVE FROM THE TOP:
Sea Life Centre residents - these penguins were rescued from another zoo and will not return to the wild as they are not able to fend for themselves.

At Flamborough Head Lighthouse.



a very painful attack of gout. Still, never mind, I decided to go to the Vale of Pickering and the Carrs anyway, to find out what the area might have to offer a lone perambulatory-challenged Victor Meldrew type like me!

HEAD TO THE HEAD

Among the original plans was an idea to climb to the top of Flamborough Head Lighthouse and use the opportunity to admire the view and take some 'smart-Alec' photographs of the 'van. As I was barely able to walk, this wasn't really an option. However, all was not lost as the climb was replaced by a spot of twitching on the top of the nearby Bempton Cliffs, an RSPB reserve.

The chalk cliffs are a haven for sea birds. Performing during my visit were gannets and guillemots and, of course, the adorable puffins. A delightful piece of synchronicity occurred when leaving the reserve - after observing the antics of the guillemots and whilst driving to the first campsite, I heard their namesakes being interviewed and playing live on the radio. For the benefit of any high court judges reading this, *the Guillemots* are a popular music ensemble, very much appreciated by the young and hip m'Lud!

GETTING TO SEE LIFE

The next day (on the Camping and Caravanning Club site just north of Scarborough) dawned bright and cheerful - for about 20 minutes - after which the sky turned increasingly leaden with correspondingly low light levels. Common sense dictated yet another change of plan and with torrential rain forecast, an indoor venue was sought - the particularly well-stocked campsite information room providing an appealing alternative.

Scarborough Sea Life Centre promised an afternoon of gently informative entertainment. The (pay) car park is adjacent to the centre itself and is devoid of height barriers. There should be plenty of space for visitors arriving by motorcaravan on all but the busiest August weekends.

The centre consists of a series of large tanks and pools that contain countless sea creatures of all shapes and sizes from both cold water and tropical environments. In addition, it undertakes several rescue and rehabilitation programmes and offers a permanent home to those creatures who, through illness or injury, will never make it back to the wild. Education and entertainment comes in the guise of several short talks on different species scheduled throughout the day

(usually at their feeding time). A great afternoon out and very big on the 'ahh' factor.

My intended single night's stay at Scarborough stretched to three nights as it is so well situated for exploring this part of the coast. In addition, it has that special atmosphere that only seaside campsites have - I guess it must be all those buckets and spades!

LIVING IN THE ENDEAVOUR

The decision to have a midships washroom in the Endeavour narrows the central aisle considerably, effectively dividing the interior into two main sections. The forward area consists of the lounge/dinette with kitchen opposite, with the extreme rear housing a brace of transverse permanent bunks.

The convertible inward-facing settee/Pullman dinette is a fantastic idea and, with further development, it should be a strong selling point for the Endeavour. It worked up to a point, though it does need more design input. Whilst in Pullman dinette format, my rear passengers reported that they were quite comfortable, though a bit annoyed about the (non-restrained) cushions slipping about. The removable seatbelt stalk serving the inboard passenger seat was

ABOVE LEFT: Good night! The comfortable double bed proved to be of a generous size.

ABOVE RIGHT: The rear bunks and capacious 'boot' were easier to photograph from the outside. Each bunk occupant has a reading light and curtains.

RIGHT, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Seating in travelling and/or dining mode.

Easy-to-work-in kitchen benefits from a slot-in domestic-style cooker and a separate drainer in addition to the usual tackle. Base unit storage is behind bottom-hinged cupboard doors.

The washroom features space-saving fold-away sink over a bench-style cassette loo.



I LIKED

- The concept - family motorcaravanning in a compact package
- 'Can do' philosophy and obvious enthusiasm of manufacturer
- Plenty of kitchen worktop
- Good value, useful contents of Special Executive Pack
- High performance and economical base vehicle

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A better equipped washroom

I DISLIKED

- Large turning circle
- Fan noise from smart charger
- The clash between dinette and oven

thought to be a great idea.

With the forward-facing seat extended into the aisle (which it needs to be in order to accommodate the four diners suggested by the four-berth description) there was a clash between this and the oven. On one occasion, this problem made it difficult for me to retrieve my dinner.

However, to transform the interior, all one had to do was to rearrange the dinette as an inward-facing settee. Immediately it became a great place for lounging and informal eating off a tray. I'm afraid that as a lone traveller I failed to dress for dinner and actually ate whilst attired in shorts!

Seriously though, the whole point about this sort of flexible arrangement is that it is flexible! The principal advantage of this is that it can be arranged how you would like it to be and not how the designer thinks you should have it.

Although the passenger seat swivelled to join the fun, the Renault's non-drop-down handbrake meant that the driver's seat had to remain resolutely pointing forward (some Renault Master-based motorcaravans feature a handbrake that remains lowered even when the brake is on).

Timberland is already 'on the case' and production models will have a redesigned seat mechanism for the dinette, cushion retainers,

and either an island leg or fold-away bar table for the cab passenger seat. This will mean that the Pullman dinette arrangement won't have to be the default choice for four diners, thereby neatly addressing the criticisms.

The kitchen worked well. A sink with a separate drainer is included and the monobloc mixer tap delivered a steady and controllable flow. The domestic-style full cooker is what all Johnny Foreigner rivals should be aiming at fitting. More tea and crumpets anyone?

I'm not commenting on the dark wood finish to the cabinetwork. Oh, all right then, here goes. I thought it looked gloomy in such a crowded conversion. Almost inevitably, the overwhelming majority of the visitors to the 'van disagreed and found it both contemporary and classy. In any case, prospective purchasers should be aware that there is a choice of finishes available to the cabinetwork, plus an even wider choice of soft furnishing fabrics.

Whilst I'm eating humble pie I'd better tell you about my body mod. No, not a nipple ring for an ageing journalist, but a squashed sill on the test vehicle. I caught a rubber traffic cone and the resulting damage can clearly be seen.

My first prang in 350,000 motorcaravan miles driven. It was 100 per cent my fault, no question. Although I would like to draw attention to the blind spot caused by the inclusion of Remis cab blinds, I should, of course, have moved my head so I had an unobstructed view whilst manoeuvring.

Anyway, back in the living area, the double bed was found to be comfortable and of generous size. The fact that it blocked the aisle didn't bother me one jot. The rear bunks are for kids and, from my experience as a father and grandfather, I can tell you without a doubt that junior motorcaravanners will love 'em, especially as the folding room divider gives privacy to both the Rugrats at one end and Ma and Pa at t'other.

So all peace and harmony after lights-out? Er no! The fan-cooled Sargent smart charger and consumer unit was irritatingly noisy at night (as is the case with some other 'vans so-equipped). A case for better soundproofing, I suggest.

On production models one will be able to hinge the bottom bunk so that it can be folded out of the way. This will allow the option of retaining one additional berth (the top bunk), whilst creating a gargantuan boot, for the transportation of an inflatable boat, bike or other bulky kit.



ABOVE FROM THE TOP: Relaxing on the Camping and Caravanning Club site at Slingsby. The neat colour-coded awning is part of the optional Special Executive Pack.

Sealife Centre, the seal has been in hospital and following a good recovery is likely to rejoin a colony in the North Sea.

Full steam ahead at the North Yorkshire Moors Railway just outside Pickering.



SPECIFICATION

- **Price:** £37,895 (OTR)
- **As tested:** £43,920 (OTR)
- **Description:** 4-berth high top conversion with sofa/Pullman dinette lounge, centre kitchen and washroom, fixed transverse bunk beds in rear
- **Base vehicle:** Renault Master long wheelbase factory high top steel panel van with 2.5-litre common-rail turbodiesel producing 115bhp. Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Base vehicle two years, conversion one year
- **Dimensions and weights:** Length: 5.89m (19ft 4in), width: 1.99m (6ft 6.5in), height: 2.72m (8ft 11in). Max authorised weight: 3500kg. Payload: 740kg
- **Belted seats:** 4 (including driver)
- **Beds:** Lounge double: 1.88m x 1.20m (6ft 2in x 3ft 11in). Rear bunks: top, 1.66m x 610mm, headroom 570mm (5ft 5.5in x 2ft 0in, H 1ft 10.5in), bottom, 1.73m x 620mm, headroom 530mm (5ft 8in x 2ft 0.5in H 1ft 9in)
- **Kitchen:** Linear design on nearside. Full size

- slot-in cooker, sink with matching drainer, three-way fridge, capacity 86 litres
- **Washroom:** Full-width bench-type electric-flush cassette toilet, fold-away washbasin, cupboard and shower tray floor
- **Heating:** Gas/mains water heater, diesel-fired blown-air space heater
- **Gas:** One 20-litre fixed tank
- **Tanks:** Fresh water 50 litres (11 gallons), waste water 40 litres (8.8 gallons)
- **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** Special Executive Pack - colour-coded bumpers & mirrors; electrically-operated awning, step and panoramic skylight; water purifier; diesel-fired blown-air space heater; walnut dash trim, alloy wheels (£3850). Cab air-conditioning (£1295). Passenger airbag (£395). Remis cab blinds (£485)
- **Other options available:** Quickshift6 automatic transmission (£1295), electronic parking sensors (£375), cruise control (£395), satnav (£1995), colour reversing camera and monitor (£745), cycle rack (£295), 12V fan in rooflight (£295), multi CD player/radio (£395), satellite dish/freeview box (£1975), fresh water tank winterisation (£225), towbar (£445), leather upholstery (£1275), 75W solar panel (£785), 2 x 135 amp hr leisure battery upgrade (£145)



Cayton village.

The midships washroom felt more spacious than it had a right to and the fold-away basin increased the available elbow room for clumsy abluters such as yours truly. Everything in here is wipe-clean so it should stand up well to the rigours of mob-handed motorcaravanning. It was disappointing to note that neither a towel rail nor any hooks were included, nor was there anything to park the shower head on.

Overall there was a lot to commend the equipment fitted to the Endeavour. As I write, the specification is likely to include a standard-fit bulk gas tank, but like everything on this prototype, its inclusion will be reviewed after the testing period.

Diesel-powered, blown-air heating fitted to the 'van was an extra-cost option. It functioned well and the timer mechanism meant that it came on automatically in the morning before I surfaced, and again in the evenings, warming

the 'van just prior to my return from the local hostelry. Perfect for us soft southerners!

Two other impressive features were the electric operation of the panoramic rooflight and colour coordinated roll-out awning - both are included in the Special Executive Pack. The pack struck me as being fine value for money as it offered a potential saving of £1060 on the included items when bought as a whole rather than individually. Further, the contents of the pack are well chosen, usefully upgrading the 'van without including over-elaborate gizmos or vacuous styling additions.

DOING THE DALBY

One of the advantages of a 'slim-Jim' motorcaravan such as the Endeavour is that it can reach the parts that other motorcaravans can't.

With this in mind, I took it on the Dalby Forest Drive, passing through the picturesque villages of Hackness, Langdale End and Bickley en-route

to the start. This was undertaken during the day I travelled to my second base, another Camping and Caravanning Club site, this time at Slingsby.

A six-speed gearbox (offering a ratio for every occasion), a willing, powerful, common-rail turbodiesel motor, and a comparatively low centre of gravity allowed the 'van to really fly when hustled. And yet it was as well-behaved as a maiden aunt when potooling around backroads or in town. The icing on the cake was its parsimonious thirst, achieving over 30mpg. Good for a week's usage that included fast motorway cruising, touring in very hilly terrain, and stability testing on private roads. What wasn't so endearing was the gargantuan turning circle, a feature made more noticeable by the fact that my normal mode of transport is a rear-wheel drive medium wheelbase Transit, which turns on a button.

RELAXING AT SLINGSBY

Once again, a visit to the site's information centre provided enough suggestions of things to do to occupy a family for at least a fortnight of dodgy weather. I returned to the 'van clutching a handful of leaflets and brochures, determined to see Duncombe Park at nearby Helmsley. Unfortunately it was closed for the two days of my stay (open Sunday to Thursday during the period end of April to end of October).

So instead it was full steam ahead on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. Motorcaravan parking is available a short stroll from Pickering station, and adjacent to Grosmont station. Goathland (famous as Aidsfield) has very little parking and lots of 'double yellows'. My advice would be to park the motorcaravan at either end of the line and alight at the smaller stations and halts to explore on foot.

On my last full day the sun shone, so at last I was able to make full use of the electrically-operated awning. Timberland thoughtfully provided some tripod feet and a shorter central leg so that the smaller table top could be used for dining alfresco.

CONCLUSION

The Renault Master is a super chassis and recent years have seen this generation of vehicle deservedly gaining a good foothold in the motorcaravan market.

The Endeavour XII conversion is a very interesting new model that just needs some detail improvements to perfect its design. Most are already scheduled and Timberland should be congratulated for moving into a new sector of the market. The more young families that are attracted to the marvellous hobby that is motorcaravanning, the better. □



MOTORHOME KINDLY LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

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