



MINI MARVEL

Auto-Sleeper Mezan Low Line on 2.0HDi Peugeot Partner

The latest mini monocoque from the Cotswolds is a hot contender in the dual-use motorcaravan stakes



AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £26,792
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Peugeot Partner
- **LAYOUT:** Front lounge with rear split kitchen; rear caravan entrance
- **ECONOMY:** 39mpg



*Words by Di Johnson,
pictures by Pete Johnson*



ABOVE: Tall drivers might find the spare wheel cramps their style.

LEFT: Driving the Peugeot is as car-like as one could wish for. The passenger seat folds down to a useful table.

The nifty monocoque Mezan has proved a successful addition to Auto-Sleepers' stable of motorhomes. This success, at the bijou end of the market, has encouraged the company to produce a rising roof version which challenges the very similar Romahome Duo Hylo. Some healthy rivalry in this field should push both design teams and pricing policies to the limit.

The chipper little Mezan Low Line is a two-berth motorhome, based on the truly car-like Peugeot Partner. The Partner is a small van which (here in platform cab form), makes an ideal base for this conversion - particularly when fitted with the 2.0-litre diesel engine. Miraculously, the Mezan manages to pack two single berths (or a double), hob, sink, freestanding table and even a loo, into this small delivery-van-sized vehicle.

A lifting-roof version enables owners to defy those dreaded height barriers, or most of them at least. The security of being able to keep your prized new purchase locked in a garage is another advantage. Also, if you've nowhere to keep a motorhome other than your garage, the Mezan must be worth considering - that is, if you can accept its paucity of space.

The big advantage of the Low Line over the high-roof version is its aerodynamic properties. Importantly, tall folk can still stand, both in the kitchen and in the rear half of the lounge area when the roof is raised. I can stand all the way to the front. But then, I'm a sensible height for motorhomes!

Entry from the rear leads into the kitchen area. Settees (or single beds) are on either side of a central passage, while small pull-down worktops at the aft end of each settee serve as occasional tables. A freestanding table is housed in the overcab storage area. This is a sweet little doll's house of a motorhome that's only a tiny bit longer than a large estate car.

DRIVING MADAME MEZAN

With two litres to empower you, and an ultra-low profile, performance is in the money saving category. The driving feel is as car-like as you're

likely to find - if you prefer driving smaller vehicles, this conversion might be just the ticket.

Due, I think, to the pronounced overhang at the rear, there's a slight tendency to 'slurpy' handling. We drove in very windy conditions over high ground, close to the Ridgeway near Oxford. Little 'wiggles' were apparent when passing high-sided lorries on the busy dual carriageways. Gaps in the trees funnelled extra fierce side-gusts of wind necessitating steering corrections. A rather stiff test I think, but revealing all the same.

Despite the wiggles, Ms Mezan felt perfectly safe and it would not put me off purchase. Go easy on the throttle when pulling away though, if you want to reduce wear on the front tyres. That rear overhang might well be the cause of a bit of torque steer when accelerating.

With moulded GRP cabinets and pleated blinds, it was pretty quiet in the rear. (Pleated blinds don't seem to rattle when in transit.) We'd been warned about the grill pan dramatically

exiting its home when cornering, so we put it away among our clothes. Inevitably I forgot it the next time I drove!

Apparently the magnetic catches on the door of the grill box aren't strong enough to hold the pan as it slides about. I asked at the dealership whether anything is going to be done about this problem, but they had no information.

While I found the driver's seat position very much to my liking, the spare wheel (located behind the seat) made it a tiny bit cramped for my tall husband, Pete. Yippee! No arguments about whose turn it is to drive next. I jest. He actually liked driving the 'van, but would have preferred a little more space to adjust his seat.

The cab, or should I say driver's compartment (it feels so car-like), is quite refined - I particularly liked the steering-column-mounted radio/CD player controls. Ventilation and heating is very good, in stark contrast to some other base vehicles.

With the Peugeot you can feel the draught



Fabrics and fittings all have a look of quality, while the clear central aisle makes the front end surprisingly spacious.

when you swivel one of the neat round ventilators towards your face. The heat on 'yr feet' was quickly delivered too, when required. The front seats are upholstered to match the caravan, and corn-coloured removable carpets are provided in the caravan body. Surprisingly, the cab carpet was firmly stuck in place. Wood-effect décor panels on the fascia, and door-inserts of dark brown velour, convince you that you're not delivering the post.

A nice feature on the rear door demonstrates that someone has concerns for your safety. Careful positioning of a small frosted window enables you to safely open the door when parked on the street at night, without obscuring the tail lights.

RELAX IN THE BACK MA'AM?

Entry, via the rear-located door, is very inviting because the floor at the rear is built below chassis level. This provides a low sill and therefore undemanding access; no messing with retractable steps here.

Up a small step from the kitchen area and you enter the lounging and dining domain. This features two inward-facing settees with passageway between. Lots of natural light and good views are provided courtesy of large windows behind each settee, plus a window in the caravan door.

Fixtures, fittings and fabrics all have that look of quality. The uncluttered look that results from the moulded GRP cabinetwork gives a more relaxed feel to the lounge than one would expect for its size. It feels much bigger than it is. (I won't mention 'Tardis', I promise.)

I'm getting ahead of myself. I've always loved 'raising the roof', but in the Mezan it's as easy as putting up a brolly. Working out how the two over-centre restraining clips work is the most difficult bit, and that's a doddle. With the aid of two gas struts it lifted clear of my head. This allowed Pete and the roof to unfold.

I must mention that the taller of us found the process of getting the roof down and tucking away the surplus fabric comparatively difficult. Something to do with his height and bad back I suppose. I appointed myself chief roof-raiser



I LIKED

- Comfortable driving seats and settees
- Colours used in interior
- Cheeky appearance
- Car-like driveability
- Quick erection of the rising roof

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A pull-out section for making up the double bed
- A tray for draining dishes and a dedicated place to store it
- Two extra scatter cushions for comfortable lounging
- The wardrobe idea abandoned and more useful cupboard space instead

I DISLIKED

- The bi-fold cupboard closures
- The grill pan's trick of exiting the grill box at speed when cornering
- The difficult access to the under-settee storage
- Tucking away the roof fabric when lowering

which meant I could refuse to empty the toilet!

The two settees wouldn't disgrace a much larger 'van - there's plenty of seating here to invite friends in for coffee. The spacious interior will surprise them, but a meal for four would need careful forward planning.

The decor is a mixture of sand, ivory, milk and amber, and, given that this is a diminutive 'van, the neutral colour range is the sort that won't drive you to distraction after four or five weeks.

Though I found the seat width of the settees a bit short, when it's time to kick off the shoes and put your feet up, the Mezan proves to be a good place in which to relax. Shove one of the scatter cushions behind your back, get out the latest block-buster and you could be back at home on your sofa.

The substantial free-standing table (which is stored in the overcab) is generous and lightweight. At three feet long and one-and-a-half feet wide, it's bigger than is strictly required for two - and four friendly souls could share a meal. Erecting requires careful manoeuvring and you need to have a care for the upholstery.

Lighting is splendid in the lounge. There are two oval fluorescents fixed to the lifting roof, and two halogen spotlamps niftily positioned

so that either the kitchen or the lounge may benefit from their illumination.

Large windows either side of the 'van ensure that you won't need to use all this lighting unnecessarily and deplete the leisure battery. Coffee and biscuits in the lounge doesn't merit getting out the big table; the dividing bulkheads between the kitchen and lounge hinge down onto swing-out supports and provide the perfect place to rest your mug.

On the nearside are fitted 12V and TV aerial sockets close to that side's drop-down bulkhead and on the front of the seat base is a mains socket. On the cab passenger seat can be found two levers but neither of these is for seat adjustment as there isn't any. Pull one lever and the seatback folds forward revealing a completely flat surface for plonking your glass of wine or plate of nibbles. Alternatively, when driving solo, you could keep your map to hand here. The other handle releases the whole seat to hinge forward, giving clear access to the leisure battery electrics stored beneath.

On chilly nights you might be glad to be able to cuddle up to the blown-air outlet for the Eberspächer diesel-fired heater. This is situated between the offside settee and the fridge. The heater will extend your holiday season into the



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Caravan entrance and kitchen are both in the rear, and with the roof raised there's plenty of headroom.

I didn't immediately recognise this narrow space as a wardrobe.

The table and double bed base bars are stored in the slim overcab.

Behind a bi-fold door in the kitchen hides the Elsan Visa Potty toilet.

A generous freestanding table is provided that's more than big enough for two.

We found the flip-down tables/worktop extensions invaluable.

Good lighting and push-button Piezo-electric ignition help make the small kitchen a good work space.

spring and autumn, drawing its fuel from the vehicle's tank.

I'm not sure I'd want to sleep aboard with only a thickness of canvas aloft protecting me from sub-zero temperatures. Out of season it might be preferable to sleep with the roof down.

MINI MENUS

The first thing to mention is that there is plentiful headroom in the kitchen. Due to its position, behind the chassis, the galley floor is lower than the rest of 'van. The kitchen has all the amenities you could hope for apart from hot water, which is an optional extra. Both the two-burner hob and grill beneath have civilised push-button ignition.

The small fridge with freezer compartment, situated underneath the grill, is the main food storage area. Regular visits to the grocer will be the norm. Overhead is a small cupboard with a bi-fold closure. It's here that the differences begin to show between the high roof and the Low Line models.

The high cupboards on both sides of the 'van are considerably smaller as they've had their heads chopped off. Aerodynamic, garage and height-barrier friendly, or more storage space... it's up to you and indeed there's no

difference in price between the Low Line and high roof versions.

On the nearside, the small cupboard (with another bi-fold) puzzled me. At the back of the space it had no bottom. It disappeared down, well beyond my reach.

"What the heck's the point of this?" I ranted to Pete. "Everything will get lost down there."

Pete pointed out the tiny (around two inches long, in mitigation for my stupidity) piece of metalwork. "It's a wardrobe and that's a hanging rail", he explained with a long-suffering sigh. A clever idea, but a very small hanging space that'll take a couple of garments is present in back of the nearside kitchen cupboard. I think we'll move on.

The flat top of the two cupboards is a tempting place to bung things. But as soon as you need to get at the cupboard, you'll have to remove the clutter as the bi-fold opening system forms both the top and the front. I found leaving them open gave me a little shelf along half the hinged door.

A good-sized stainless steel sink sits beneath the... humph, wardrobe. It has one of those grey plastic latch-on drainers. A tray would be better (which, as an owner, I'd buy) and one could be rested on the drop-down flap

between the sink area and lounge. The sink and hob both have the benefit of a hinged glass cover which provides invaluable worktop.

A properly hinged-door cupboard, beneath the sink, accepted all our pots and pans and cooking utensils. A little cutlery drawer made finding the teaspoons easier. And it's here that Auto-Sleepers' signature white, platinum-rimmed crockery is stored in its own moulded plastic container. Much as I like it, I think it takes up a bit too much space in a small motorhome. I'd buy some melamine plates, which take up minimal room.

Tucked away behind yet another bi-fold door, under the pots and pans cupboard, is the Elsan toilet. In the high roof, a curtain is provided to spare your blushes between the kitchen and lounge, but this is sadly absent in the Low Line.

This lack, however, is speedily remedied by pulling up the concertina blinds, pulling the curtains across the cab and sending your companion for a walk. Life in this Mezan is easier if you're sharing with a partner, rather than a friend.

KETTLE ON, KIT OFF

Okay, so there's no washroom as such, and maybe there's no hot water on tap, but you'll not



be as deprived as you might at first think. Put the kettle on, remove the carpet and the kitchen becomes a washroom. This is where the ancient device called a flannel comes into its own.

Pull the curtains, so you won't mind baring all your naughty bits, and you'll find there's plenty of room to thrash about and make a thorough job of removing the day's dust. We don't have to get whiffy while there's water to wash with.

MINUTE DREAMS

There was nearly a mutiny when I mentioned to Pete that the Mezan Low Line was our next test vehicle.

"You can do it on your own, I'll show you how

to take the photographs," was his initial reaction. "The beds are too small for me," he insisted.

I baked him a cake, looked up the size of the beds and assured him he would fit. Er... he didn't, but he did in the end. Our unfailingly helpful and supportive Road Test Editor came in for some colourful, descriptive prose!

Two single beds can be achieved with little fuss. First, toss the settee backrests into the cab. They come in two parts which makes them light and simple to deal with. Next, recover bedding from beneath the offside seat through a hole in the top of the fibreglass compartment. This was a struggle as there's no assistance from hinges or struts to hold the seat base up.

Your bedding has to live here as any room in the overcab is taken up by the table.

Now, as has been previously explained, Pete found his feet dangling without support, while I found there was loads of room. Tee-hee, that'll teach him to be so tall. But then my eyes alighted on a long upholstered infill, which hinged in the middle.

I noticed that it fitted loosely into two inserts in the fibreglass moulding, either side of the cab, at the end of the bed. Aha! Triumphant I placed it in the slots. "This will solve your problem", I announced. Sadly there wasn't enough support; it was too long and sagged uselessly. (A little bit more development please, Auto-Sleepers.)

Not to be beaten I found the backrests could be positioned to do the same job. Phew!

Building the double could be made much simpler than is the case presently if the usual pull-out section were fitted (it's a much quicker and easier system). Instead, the four metal bars, which have to be retrieved from a material pouch stored in the overcab, are more demanding. Withdraw the bars from their slots and position across between the two settees. Draw the two seat bases to one side and use two of the upholstered backrests to infill.

The bed's fine, but getting to the loo or fetching a glass of water in the wee small hours isn't as easy as with the singles. The singles option makes this 'van ideal for holidaying with a friend.

The friend, however, must be prepared to take very few possessions as the only place for clothes and spongebags is underneath the nearside settee, but about half this space is taken up with a fresh water tank. Considerable discipline will need to be exercised.

PACKING MEGA INTO MINI

There's no pretending that storage is this 'van's forte. If you are likely to stay on sites and prefer to eat out sometimes, this won't be a problem. I notice many campers, whose 'vans are blessed with opulent facilities, never, or rarely, use them. So why pay for them if y'don't need 'em?

Outside storage consists of a small locker on the offside, where the hook-up cable and other potentially muddy things can be stashed. The gas locker accepts two 4.5k/3.9kg cylinders and, maybe, the odd bundle of small tools.

The space inside, for gobbling up all your kit, is obviously going to be restricted. But trips away in summer would be considerably easier to organise - thankfully shorts, tee-shirts and sandals don't take up much room.

MINI EQUIPMENT

You won't feel deprived of gear in the Mezan. The only piece of kit that might be missed is a water heater which is an optional extra. Most of the stuff we expect in a 'van these days you'll find aboard the Low Line.

The diesel-fired space heater will warm you at the end of a long day's walking in spring and autumn, and the 85 amp hr leisure battery will ensure that it'll keep running. The battery is sensibly-sized and it's wise to have some spare capacity because diesel-fired heaters tend to be power hungry.

Gas storage is good for the size of the vehicle. With no demands

for heating the 'van, the cylinders should see you through a reasonable tour. The inboard fresh water tank means off-season camping should see little chance of frozen plumbing as long as the interior is kept warm.

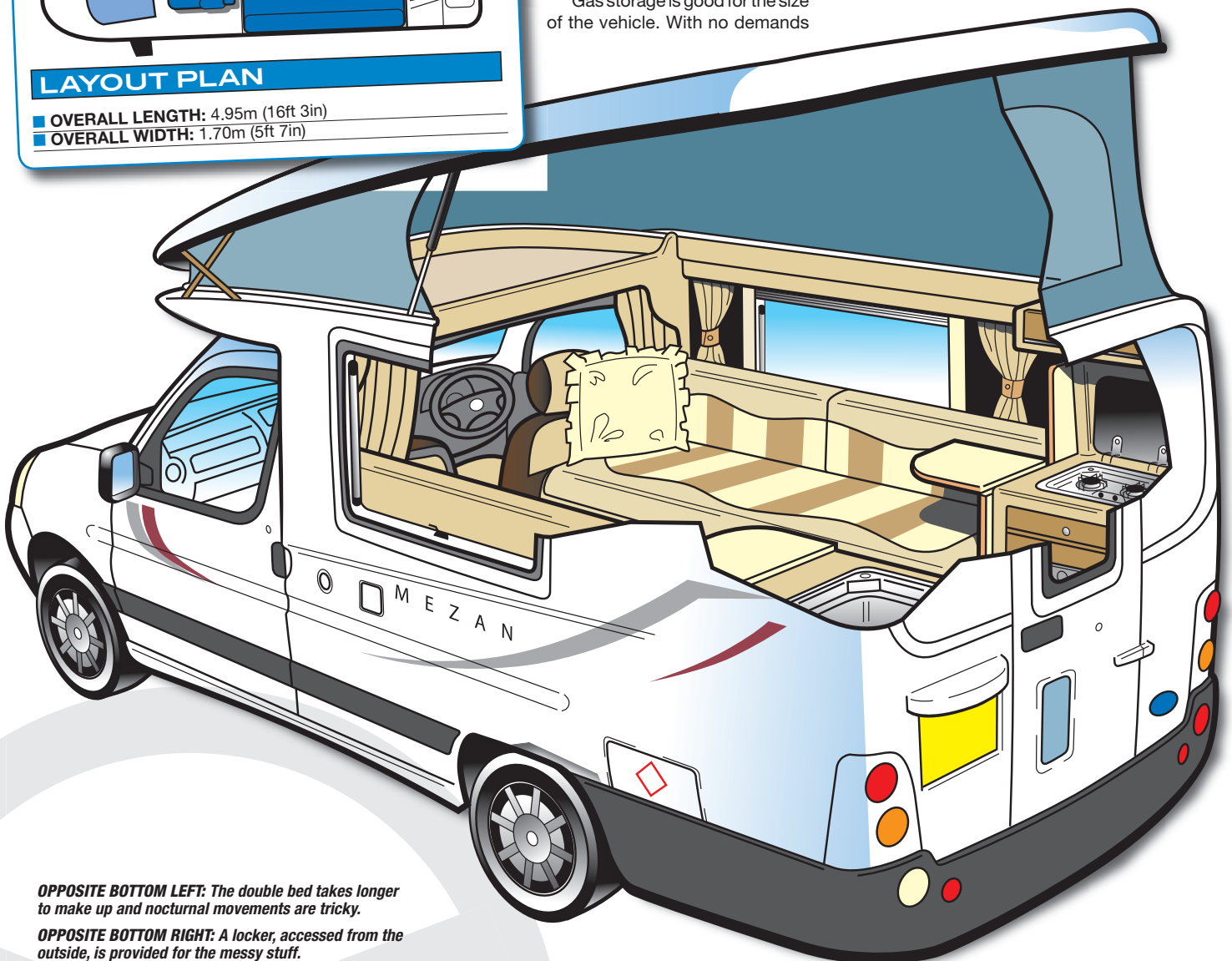
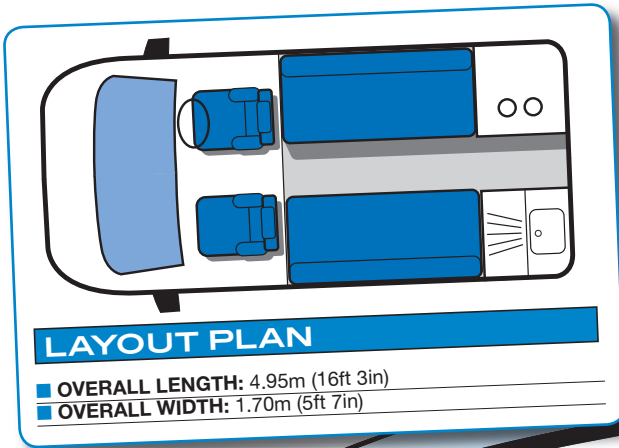
SUMMING UP THE MEZAN

The Mezan Low Line is very much a 'van for a purpose. As the rising roof compromises the storage space (unlike the high roof version there's no cavernous storage space in the overcab) it will appeal to a particular audience. The attractions of a car-sized 'van that you can sleep, eat and relax comfortably in for a good part of the year are evident.

If the 'car' in question can be garaged and defies height barriers, it's another strong inducement to giving the Low Line consideration. The competition, in the form of Romahome's very similar Duo Hylo, is slightly shorter and is also well worth bearing in mind.

One of our fellow campers, on site at the Camping and Caravanning Club site in Oxford, asked if he could take a peek. He was travelling in a much larger beast, but thought the 'van looked 'sweet', and was amazed at what had been fitted inside.

The very thing that might attract criticism from some, its size, is the attribute that others are seeking. If small size is what you're after and you'd like something well finished and 'kinda' cute, an Auto-Sleeper Mezan Low Line is waiting just for you. □



OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT: The double bed takes longer to make up and nocturnal movements are tricky.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT: A locker, accessed from the outside, is provided for the messy stuff.

MMM LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE

Rising roof micro coachbuilt



PRICE

- From: £26,792 OTR
- As tested: £27,438 OTR

BASICS

- Vehicle: Peugeot Partner
- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (including driver)
- Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles/6 years body perforation base vehicle, 2 years conversion

CONSTRUCTION

SWB platform cab with moulded GRP coachbuilt body, front-hinged fabric-sided rising roof, single rear-located caravan door

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Length: 4.95m (16ft 3in)*
- Width: 1.70m (5ft 7in)*
- Height: Roof closed, 1.96m (6ft 5in)*
- Wheelbase: 2.69m (8ft 10in)*
- Rear overhang: 1.4m (4ft 7in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 1990kg*
- Payload: 295kg* (after essential habitation equipment of 71kg)

INSIDE STORY

Longitudinal, inward-facing bench settees, ahead of split rear kitchen with shower tray floor and portable toilet in dedicated locker, full standing headroom

- Insulation: 3M Thinsulate 15mm (expands to 25mm when fitted*)
- Interior height: Roof lowered 1.26m (4ft 1.5in) to 1.55m (5ft 1in), roof raised 1.57m (5ft 2in) to 2.80m (9ft 2in)

THE VEHICLE

- Engine: 2.0-litre HDi, producing 66kW (90bhp) @ 4000rpm
- Transmission: Five-speed manual gearbox with floor-mounted gear lever, front-wheel drive

Auto-Sleeper

- Fuel consumption: 39 mpg overall
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Independent McPherson struts on front, trailing arms and torsion bars on rear
- Features: Driver's airbag, electric windows, radio/CD player with controls on steering column, key-operated central locking, headlamp adjustment, height-adjustable top seatbelt mounts, power-assisted steering, adjustable steering column, compartmentalised door pockets, map pocket on back of driver's seat, glove compartment oddments cubbyhole above two dash-top trays, fold-forward passenger seat creates table

LOUNGING & DINING

Inward-facing settees offer seating for six, folding free-standing table stores above cab and deploys between sofas, fitted crockery for two

KITCHEN

Rear kitchen area with nearside sink and offside cooker. Cupboards above and below. Drop-down extensions on both sides double as work surface and occasional tables for the lounge

- Sink: Nearside stainless steel rectangular bowl with cold water tap under glass lid (hot water optional extra)
- Cooker: Smev two-burner gas hob under glass lid with grill below, both with spark ignition
- Fridge: Dometic RM4213S manual energy selection, with freezer compartment. Capacity 60 litres

WASHROOM

No washroom fitted, facilities as below

- Toilet: Elsan Visa Potty 238 in dedicated locker in kitchen area

BEDS

- Double
- Length: 1.82m (5ft 11.5in)
- Width: 1.45m (4ft 9in)

Or two singles

- Length: 1.82m (5ft 11.5in)
- Width: 560mm (1ft 10in)

STORAGE

- In living area: Under settees: full-length offside bin, half-length under nearside, limited overcab storage
- In kitchen: Locker with bi-fold door above hob, locker with bi-fold door above sink and small clothes hanging space behind, cupboard below sink for food, pans and cutlery tray
- Outside: One locker on offside

LIFE SUPPORT

- Fresh water: Inboard. Capacity 42 litres (9.23 gallons)
- Waste water: External. Capacity 26 litres (5.71 gallons)
- Water heater: None fitted
- Space heater: Eberspächer D2 Airtronic diesel-fired blown-air
- Leisure battery: 85 amp hr
- Gas: Two 4.5kg/3.9kg cylinders
- Lighting: Four fluorescent strips: two in rising roof, one on each side of kitchen, two halogen swivelling spots between kitchen and lounge
- Sockets: 230V - one (on nearside settee), 12V - one (forward of sink unit)
- Control panel: Located forward of the sink unit, water pump and lights isolating switches, analogue multi-function meter indicating fresh water and battery levels
- Blinds/curtains: Pleated blinds and flyscreens in lounge, roller blind and flyscreen to caravan door, curtains across rear of cab
- Badged as NCC (EN1646 compliant): Yes

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Cab air-conditioning (£646)
- Conversion: None

Other options

- Base: Wheel trims (£50)
- Conversion: Water heater (£376), upholstery choice (£205), TV aerial and booster (£197)

E&OE



WE STAYED AT
 The Camping and Caravanning Club site,
 426 Abingdon Road, Oxford OX1 4XG
 (tel: 01865 244088; web site:
 campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY
 Marquis Berkshire, Oxford Road,
 Chieveley, Nr Newbury, Berkshire
 RG20 8RU (tel: 01635 248888;
 web site: www.auto-sleepers.co.uk)