



WELCOME CHANGE

Chausson Welcome 27 on Ford Transit 2.4TD

Dave Hurrell tests a cost-conscious Gallic coachbuilt with an unusual nose

'Invasion of the profiles' may sound like the title of a 1950s sci-fi movie but could sum up a big part of the motorhome market in Britain today. Hardly a month goes by without news of yet another Continental brand reaching our shores, with a good chunk of the blighters being the low-profile coachbuilt variety, mostly with fixed double beds in the rear. The other thing you could put money on is the likelihood that a Fiat Ducato will be providing motive power for these bijoux boxes on wheels. France is one of the main breeding grounds for these beasts, and I was pleased to get the chance to test an example of Gallic motorhome prowess that didn't feature either a low profile, or a Fiat 'front end'.

French bread and butter

Manufacturer Chausson is part of the Triganò

Group, one of the big boys of Continental motorhome production. The company's distinctive Fiat-based low profile 'vans are a common sight on the roads of mainland Europe. This one, however, is a bit different. The fixed rear bed is still there, sitting alongside a separate-shower washroom, and behind the L-shaped kitchen and half dinette (the current 'favourite flavour' of many 2004 models). There the similarity ends, as the Welcome 27 sports a curvy luton above the cab with a big double bed and plenty of headroom. The presence of a luton with this layout may not sound like much of a difference, but the addition of a second double bed, to a design that normally provides comfortable touring potential for two, transforms this 'van into a full-blown family holiday home.

Base instincts

The Fiat Ducato may be legendary in motorhome terms but the Ford Transit is legendary, period. Renowned for being reliable, tough and cheap to service, the Tranny is one of my favourites and indeed my own 'van is based on one. This Welcome sits on the 350, long wheelbase variant, with 125 horses under the bonnet and driven rear axle with twin wheels. A good look underneath produced sight of a very well finished chassis with heavy-duty box-section construction and a rear anti-roll bar that, coupled with those twin rear wheels, might produce excellent handling and traction.

In transit

The cab environment has an intimate feel to it, with dash and doors seeming closer than a Fiat



The driven rear axle, with twin wheels, gives good handling and excellent traction and payload.



The cab retains a classic Tranny feel with quality switches, and twin airbags as standard.

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The view from the overcab shows the forward half dinette, centre kitchen, and rear fixed bed with washroom alongside.

Ducato or Mercedes Sprinter. The other predominant feeling is of quality, with dashboard and door mouldings looking good and feeling better. Switches too, are of the clunk rather than click variety.

In spite of the Welcome 27's value for money aspirations, the chassis is very well specified, with remote central locking, ABS, twin airbags, and the expected electric windows and mirrors. Once in the cab, two things disappointed, both of which concerned the seating. Number one was the lack of true seat height adjustment. This is present on my 1996 Transit and I found the front and rear squab angle adjustment did not make up for its omission. Number two was the fact that the inch-thick seat swivel compromised cab ergonomics to the extent that it was difficult to get a comfortable driving position where I could see the instruments properly. Although removal of this swivel would reduce the lounge seating by one, that's what I'd do if this 'van was mine: you can spend long periods behind the wheel and comfort and safety here are important.

Fire-up the traditional direct-injection turbo-diesel Duratorq and the noise is pure Transit. This



A rear-mounted heater matrix supplements the Ford cab heater to keep rear passengers toasty.

DI unit sounds a tad more vocal than the common-rail engined competition, both at tickover and on the road. However, like the rest of the vehicle, it sounds and feels bombproof, with no rattles or 'noises off' to make you wonder if all is well under the bonnet. The on-road experience also confirms the perceived quality of the chassis. In spite of having just 400 miles on the clock, performance was very good with more to come once the engine has some 'loosening up' miles under its belt.

Super steering and excellent brakes were complemented by a traditional, but precise, floor-mounted gearchange, whose only fault lay in its position in the middle of the cab floor (thus making it a bit difficult to move from driver's seat to living area). Ratios are well chosen too, with an ability to pull top gear from around 40mph, albeit at the expense of increased revs and noise levels at higher speeds.

Handling was excellent, no doubt due to those twin rear wheels and rear anti-roll bar. I loved this base vehicle, if only for its ability to prove that heavy-duty drive and suspension can still give good ride quality.

The caravan part of this ensemble remained virtually silent throughout the test, in spite of driving lightly laden on some truly terrible surfaces - a testament to both Chausson and Ford's design and construction standards. The quality of the Ford Transit is emphatically better than its Sevel-built rivals in all areas except motive power. The fact that the Transit is used as part of this cost-conscious motorhome makes me wish more manufacturers would follow Chausson's lead.

Welcome design

The layout in the living area uses swivel cab seats as part of the lounge/diner. This leaves space for an L-shaped kitchen - ahead of the aforementioned fixed bed and separate-shower washroom. Any popularity of this design is based on the fact that it allows separate areas for living, cooking, and sleeping, in a motorhome that comes home a whisker under seven metres long.

There are six berths available here, but only



Aft of the cab, the forward-facing passenger seat provides two belted travel seats.

four safe travelling seats (two in the cab and two on the forward-facing dinette seat).

The interior is bright and modern - but more Gallic than Teutonic in style. Light wood joinery with silver trim complements the autumnal colours of the soft furnishings well, and a versatile range of halogen lighting means the interior feels cosy, even on a cold dark night. Non-drawing décor curtains and nets adorn the windows, which benefit from full cassette blind/flyscreen units rather than the cheaper pull-down units you might expect to find here ('pull-downs' have the unfortunate fault of letting light in at the bottom when closed).



Swivel cab seats (with 'booster' cushions) combine with the forward-facing seat and side sofa to provide dining for up to six.



With the table removed a cosy lounge is created.



Looking forward from the fixed double bed we see the L-shaped kitchen with lounge/diner and overcab berth.

Welcoming lounge

The half dinette forms the heart of the lounge/eatery and faces the swivelled cab seats, along with a short, side sofa to give eating and lounging for up to six. Two problems present themselves at this point. The first is caused by the Ford's rear-wheel drive configuration. The presence of a driven rear axle under the floor means it's a tad higher than its front-wheel drive brethren, thus the cab floor and swivelled cab seats come rather lower than expected.

Chausson solves this problem by supplying two 'booster' cushions for cab seats to raise their squabs to the correct level. Although a touch utilitarian, these are, nonetheless, effective, and make using the table not only possible but comfortable too. Reaching the table from the side-on sofa is also an issue and this is solved by an extra leaf that combines with the sliding tabletop to bring the end of the table within reach. The resultant enlarged table provides plenty of surface for six diners as long as they are happy to slide into their seats and stay put while

the person nearest the kitchen serves the meal.

Lounging and entertaining is also possible for up to six people but the short seating and rather upright style of what is, after all, a dinette, cannot compete with a full-blown twin-sofa lounge layout.

Nevertheless, once set up, this area can become a cosy little spot to relax, play games or read, while the fitted TV locker above means watching your favourite programme is easy from the swivelled cab seats.

Welcome meals

To the rear of the dinette on the nearside is the main kitchen area.

L-shaped and spacious, this galley's main advantage is its separate status. The cook has plenty of room to move around in an area that has its own identity, located, as it is, between the lounge/diner in the front and the fixed bed and washroom in the rear.

The main kitchen unit features a three-burner hob and a circular, stainless steel, drainerless sink. There is working surface between the two, but as

it's in the rear corner of the L, it's the hinged, glass lid over the hob that's likely to be the most useful for prep. Opposite all this is a floor-to-ceiling unit housing the big AES (Automatic Energy Selection) fridge/freezer. Very much family-friendly, this automatic cooler provides domestic levels of storage with a separate freezer.

Plenty of storage is provided with lockers above, and large cupboards below, including a decent cutlery drawer - something that can be lacking in home-grown 'vans. This kitchen would be purely continental (with just sink and hob) if it were not for some additions specified by importer Barrons. An oven is often an afterthought in an imported motorhome and this one's no exception, being mounted high up above the fridge. However, Barrons have gone some way to make this set-up 'user-friendly' by specifying a separate grill fitted below the hob. If there's one thing that's more difficult than using a high-level oven it's trying to achieve high-level grilling - and this set-up makes things a bit better. Mind you, I would have just as soon seen a combined oven/grill fitted in place of

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The L-shaped kitchen includes a grill below the three-burner hob.

the grill, making the whole thing user friendly. All things considered, this is a good kitchen with loads of storage, a good range of appliances, and adequate work surface.

Welcome shower

A separate-shower washroom is a boon, especially if you plan to use sites with little or no facilities (such as club CLs or Continental aires). This one shares many of the features, both good and not so good, of the type. Its location, in the rear nearside corner and alongside the fixed bed, means it's quite narrow. Another pinch point is the door; make it open wide and you have to cut away the foot of the bed too much. Keep the bed wide at the bottom and the door will not open wide enough. The compromise reached sees the bed narrow a bit at its foot and the door open wide enough (but only just) for access.

This washroom is very well appointed, with wooden furniture, plenty of storage and good mirrors. The basin is set into a strong countertop with loads of cosmetics parking space, and the omnipresent swivel-bowl loo has electric flushing.

At the rear is Chausson's version of the circular shower. Its rigid sliding door locks in the open position for travel and glides round to enclose you in a slightly cosy showering space, which, nonetheless, has everything you could need. This includes a shelf for gel and a low level 'shelf that thinks it's a seat' - presumably for resting your derriere on while washing your feet. All in all a super shower, albeit with only one drain outlet and a sliding door that needed gentle persuasion to get it to slide. Floor space is always an issue in this design of motorhome and the downside of slightly narrow door access has its upside in sensible amounts of shoulder room when standing in front of the basin with the door closed.

Welcome rest

Sleeping is all in doubles with a family-friendly layout courtesy of the spacious luton berth. Access is by alloy ladder and, once installed, sleepers benefit from a window, shelf and magazine net. The lighting consists of one - rather mean - filament lamp but there is a rooflight above providing daytime illumination and essential hot weather ventilation. The caravan-side section of this bed hinges up and is supported on gas struts. This makes it a doddle to deploy come bedtime and avoids the need for those awkward, sliding bed-boards found on less sophisticated overcabs. Of course, this system is used in conjunction with a cab cutaway, which has the dual feature of increasing headroom in the lounge and making it easier to move to and from the cab.

The rear fixed double bed is the hub of this 'van's design and will be the main reason for purchase. Like many of the type this one does its job well - always available and very comfortable (riding, as it does, on a sprung-slat base). These fixed beds vary in length from 'van to 'van so take your tape measure when looking. This one's a good length, at six-foot-two, but some can be barely six foot long so make sure you give them a good try.

Last and very much least is the dinette double that gives this 'van's six-berth qualification. Lower the table to half height and slide out the side sofa base to provide a platform for seat backs and one infill - to construct a spacious but multi-ridged bed. This berth is best seen as occasional, as, like many of its type, it precludes use of the luton access ladder (and the 'van does not provide a full complement of safe, belted travel seats).

In four-berth mode, with two sleepers in the luton and two in the rear double, everyone can move around and use all the facilities without tripping over each other. There are no sliding



The washroom features a separate circular shower, and wooden furniture.

screens between the sleeping areas but curtains are fitted to both the overcab and the rear beds, giving a modicum of privacy for the occupants.

Welcome takeaway

Those twin rear wheels do more than improve traction and handling; they also make sure that loading need not be too weight conscious. A bag of sugar short of 800kg stated payload means a family-sized load of holiday kit can be



Opposite is the AES fridge/freezer, with oven above.



Dinette and side sofa make up bed number three. It's big, but bumpy, and only really for occasional use.

Storage above and below the basin and excellent halogen lighting help make the washroom special. ▷

accommodated with ease (although a visit to your local public weighbridge to check the weights of your fully-loaded motorhome is always a good idea).

Storage space inside is good, and centres round the cavernous locker under the rear bed. The underbed area has been divided into three sections. The bed base lifts on gas struts to reveal that the space at the foot of the bed is taken up by the Truma Combi heater. Chausson has sensibly boxed this in (complete with a

hinged lid) to protect it from stored items, and created another transverse storage bin behind it. Meanwhile, the head of the bed covers another section that can be accessed by a square external hatch. This space is large enough for all manner of outdoor equipment and extends right under the adjacent washroom floor to provide another, smaller storage space. The rest of the general interior storage consists of a full complement of overhead lockers and a top-accessed locker beneath the side sofa.



Welcome warmth

The big Truma Combi water and air heater forms the heart of the Welcome 27's service sector. This unit packs a six-kilowatt punch and provides plenty of hot water for the shower and all other needs, as well as blown hot air to all areas including the washroom. I was slightly concerned to discover that the model fitted was gas-only operation, with no mains element for water heating. 230V water heating is something that is of particular benefit when hooked-up, allowing



This overcab berth makes for a family-friendly 'van - it's spacious and comfy, with good ventilation.

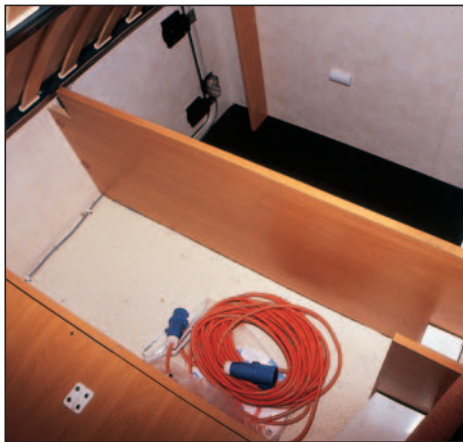


The caravan-side section lifts easily on gas struts to give more headroom in the lounge and ease access to the cab.

The rear fixed bed is a typical good example and a decent length at six-foot-two. ▷



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Underbed storage is neatly divided into sections for ease of use.



The rearmost storage area extends under the washroom floor.



A generous external hatch gives access to the underbed storage area.

constant hot water without depleting gas reserves. I was further disappointed to find no electric water heating on the options list. If I were buying I would look into the possibility of a retrofit on this most useful of features.

A large, inboard water tank is fitted, along with a sensibly sized underslung waste tank - complete with large diameter, easy to operate drain valve that required only a small amount of grovelling on the ground to reach it.

During the test, the 12V systems (which are controlled by an LCD panel) performed without fault and the leisure battery held up well, in spite of long evenings with the lights on.

Aside from the rather mean single filament lamp in the luton, lighting is excellent throughout and includes an external awning lamp. Practical touches include switching for ceiling lamps from just inside the entrance door and at the head of the rear bed - great when returning at night, or getting up in the wee small hours.

French fancy, or stale baguette?

This one's short and sweet really. A proper family motorhome that has the convenience and storage capacity of a fixed bed layout with separate-shower washroom - all in a 'van a whisker under seven metres long. All this is underpinned by one of my favourite chassis with



an excellent payload. Equipment, too, is impressive, from the big AES fridge and capable Truma heating system, to the Ford Transit's twin airbags and ABS brakes. The Chausson

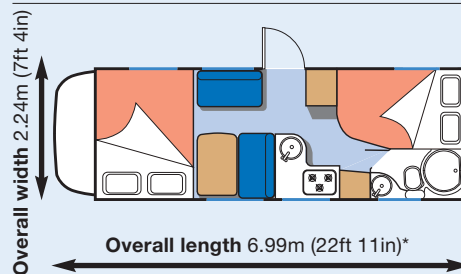
Welcome 27's build quality and specification could leave you impressed. It leaves me with one overriding impression; great value for money. □

IN BRIEF

- **Base vehicle:** Ford Transit 350L long wheelbase chassis cab
- **Engine type:** 2.4-litre Duratorq four-cylinder turbo-diesel
- **Output:** 92kW (125bhp) @ 3800rpm
- **Gearbox and drive:** Five-speed manual gearbox, floor-mounted gear lever, rear-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Chausson Welcome 27
- **Body type and construction:** Sandwich construction coachbuilt body with polyester outer skin and ABS plastic lower mouldings
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** 230V hook-up and consumer unit with RCD & MCBs, two UK type unswitched mains sockets. Mains charger feeds 92 amp hr leisure battery
- **Lighting:** One filament lamp in luton, four adjustable halogen spots and one halogen ceiling lamp in lounge/diner, single halogen downlighter in kitchen, two halogen downlighters in washroom, two adjustable halogen spotlamps and one halogen ceiling lamp above fixed bed, awning light
- **Cooking facilities:** Smev stainless steel three-burner gas hob (with integral drain), Smev gas grill unit with manual push-button ignition, Smev gas oven with electronic ignition and internal illumination. Circular, drainerless, stainless steel sink with mixer tap
- **Refrigerator:** Dometic RM7505, three-way AES

fridge/freezer, capacity 135 litres

- **Water heater:** Truma Combi C6002S (gas only), capacity 12 litres (2.64 gallons)
- **Space heater:** Truma Combi C6002S blown-air unit (gas only)
- **Fresh water tank:** Inboard mounted, 128 litres (28.15 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** Underfloor mounted, 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Gas locker capacity:** 2 x 13kg cylinders
- **Rear restraints:** One forward-facing seat with two three-point inertia reel seat belts
- **Additional features:** Remote central locking to cab doors, electric windows and mirrors, radio/cassette unit with rear speakers, ABS anti-lock brakes, twin airbags, swivel cab seats, cutaway cab roof with lifting gas-strut assisted luton bed section, on-road heating for rear passengers, removable carpet to living area and cab, TV locker, external access to underbed locker, washroom with separate shower cubicle



DIMENSIONS

(*data supplied by manufacturer)

- **Overall length:** *6.99m (22ft 11in)
- **Overall width:** *2.24m (7ft 4in) excluding mirrors
- **Overall height:** *3.03m (9ft 11in)
- **Interior height:** 2.08m (6ft 10in)
- **Bed dimensions:** Luton double 1.98m x 1.52m (6ft 6in x 5ft 0in), available headroom 690mm (2ft 3in); lounge double 2.06m x 1.30m (6ft 9in x 4ft 3in); rear fixed double 1.88m x 1.30m (6ft 2in x 4ft 3in)
- **Max authorised weight:** 3850kg
- **Load capacity:** 799kg

PRICE (all prices include VAT)

- **Standard model:** £34,170 as tested (on the road)
- **Warranty:** Base vehicle 2 years, conversion 2 years (conditional 5 years water ingress)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- **Base vehicle options:** Cab air-conditioning (£1019), CD player/radio (£559)
- **Caravan options:** Ladder and roof rack (£420), external shower (£68), flyscreen door (£145), solar panel kit (£73), rear steadies (£94), kitchen roof fan (£94)

Chausson Welcome 27 kindly supplied for evaluation by:

Barrons Motorhomes, Burtree Gate, Darlington, Co Durham (tel: 01325 383333; web site: www.motorhomedeals.co.uk) E&OE