

# A SINGLES ADVANTAGE

## Dethleffs Advantage T6611 Elegance on LWB Fiat Ducato 2.8JTD



### *Jonathan Lloyd takes advantage of a rare beast – a low profile with permanent single beds*

You've got to hand it to Lowdham Leisureworld. They have, in the six years they've been selling motorcaravans, built up one of the most appealing model ranges in the country. Of course, some of us remember Lowdham starting in the business of retailing touring caravans more than thirty-six years ago.

Few are likely to remember when German company Dethleffs started up in manufacturing, way back in 1832!

That's some history and, for the benefit of the serious motorcaravan enthusiast, a potted history of the company appears within this report. Suffice to say that Dethleffs has a sound engineering background and is experienced at building motorcaravans. Consider this though: in 2004, are both these attributes enough to guarantee strong sales appeal? No, I don't think so either.

What is missing from so many motorcaravan manufacturers' line-ups is any sort of design innovation. This is not true of Dethleffs. Just look

at what the company has produced recently: the compact Bus II, the avant-garde Premium A-classes, and the um, the er, Advantage T6611. So what's special about that then? It's the permanent single beds in the back. Low-profile motorcaravans with permanent double beds at the rear are reasonably common, but ones with permanent single beds (not bunks) are as rare as the proverbial hen's teeth.

#### SO WHAT?

Having permanent single beds in the rear is important for several reasons. Firstly, there are many people who motorcaravan together and who are not partners. Parent and sibling, or two siblings, are the most common, but there are also people that motorcaravan as friends - and for whom sharing a double bed might not be appropriate.

Secondly, many couples also prefer to sleep in single beds, especially as they offer easier access and egress for both partners than the more common rear transverse double, or longitudinal double against a side wall. In both these double bed arrangements, one partner has to climb over the other for a nocturnal visit to the loo.

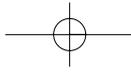
For intimate intervals in the T6611 a super

#### MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF DETHLEFFS

- 1832: Dethleffs KG founded. (Originally they made whips.)
- 1931: First touring caravan designed and constructed for the personal use of company owner Arist Dethleffs and family.
- 1932: First caravans for retail built to order.
- 1983: First motorhome built. This was a

luton overcab coachbuilt constructed on the Fiat Ducato. It was extremely well received and became a success.

- 1989: First A-class coachbuilt motorhome constructed.
- 1993: Dethleffs sets new standards in safety by crash testing motorhomes.
- Today: More than 4000 motorhomes are produced per year; around 40 per cent of these are exported.



## ON TEST: DETHLEFFS T6611 ELEGANCE ON LWB FIAT DUCATO 2.8JTD

large double bed can be made by adding some infill cushions. (*Stop looking incredulous in the cheap seats, there has been many a good tune played on an old fiddle.*)

I've written endlessly about the advantages and disadvantages of permanent beds in a motorcaravan, so to avoid boring old hands there is also a beginners' guide with this report to help those who are new to motorcaravanning.

### PERMANENT BEDS - THE KNOWLEDGE

#### Advantages

- No complicated conversion of seats to a bed with the required cushion shuffling.
- Bedding can be left in situ.
- No joins, sculptured dips or raised areas in the mattress.
- Appropriate density of foam or pocket springing can be chosen, as the mattress doesn't have to do double duty as a seat.
- Often a cavernous storage area underneath the bed.
- Rear bed area can be easily shut-off from the rest of the interior; so early risers don't disturb their partner's slumbers.

#### Disadvantages

- They take up a lot of room and sometimes the lounge provision suffers as a result.
- Transverse double beds, and those placed alongside the wall, require the inner occupant to climb over whoever is sleeping on the outside if they need the loo in the night.
- High-level double beds over a garage are quite hard to climb up to and down from, while headroom may be limited.

### ADVANTAGE DETHLEFFS

All right, it should be the other way around. It's actually a Dethleffs Advantage, but the sub-title is more than just a play on words. The Dethleffs Advantage does have lots of advantages. The



*The most desirable advantage of this Advantage, permanent low-level single beds.*

manufacturer is particularly keen for me to point out the fact that 'The management of the build processes surpasses DIN ISO 9001 quality management systems'. The aim of this is to try to ensure that you don't get a 'Friday afternoon' lemon.

Just as important (in my opinion) are the comprehensive warranties that should make an equally effective contribution to purchasers' peace of mind (two years warranty on the Fiat, two years on the conversion and six years anti-water ingress cover). Enough for the most wary purchaser one would have thought, although, of course, it is how these warranties (and the conditions on them) are interpreted by the dealer that is important.

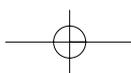
### LOW PROFILES LOOKED AT

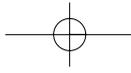
Low-profile coachbuilt motorhomes were relatively late gaining popularity in Britain compared to the rest of Europe. Obviously us Brits preferred a shape that was difficult to clean, was prone to leaks, and that made the motorhome aerodynamics as challenging as possible. Actually we (as in Flora and I) still prefer that shape to our own motorcaravan, not least because the luton area in our own 'van is let out as bed and breakfast accommodation to eight-year-old Kyle, our tribe's junior muck-magnet.

Dethleffs' low profile is a genuine one, with a leading edge that starts from the top of the windscreen. (Some low-profile models I have seen could be described as not-quite-as-lofty



*General view rearwards showing amidships washroom and wardrobe, plus, at the far rear, the bedroom.*





luton overcab coachbuilds.) The moulded overcab and interface panels integrate well with the flat-sided box that forms the walls for the residential section. Attention to detail on the styling of the rear light clusters adds interest to what is, otherwise, a fairly bland design. Blandness isn't necessarily a bad thing, as over-stylised body shapes, or those with graphics that look like an explosion in a jam factory, do tend to date quickly.

The side skirts on the featured motorcaravan felt more solid than on many. This was hardly surprising really, as these were shaped from aluminium instead of being formed from flimsy plastic. Aluminium is also used for the cladding to the sandwich construction sidewalls. On these, the paint was well applied, resulting in a mirror-like gloss finish to the coachwork. This high gloss is difficult to achieve in a GRP gel-coat. On the other hand, aluminium is more prone to damage from flying stones than GRP and it can be difficult to repair minor dents.

Colour coordinated front bumper, spoiler and

skirts distance this Ducato from its bread van ancestors.

Cyclists will appreciate the four-bike rack (on a two-berth 'van?) and anybody wanting to take extra gear can utilise the standard-spec roof rack and ladder.

#### PRACTICAL LAYOUT

Although this was a right-hand drive vehicle, the caravan entrance door has remained resolutely on the Continental side (UK offside). That said, it's easily approached via a low threshold and an inboard step. Additional plus points include a flyscreen door and burstproof lock.

Forward from the entrance door is the offside kitchen, opposite which is the dining table and forward-facing double seat. Surrounding the two swivelling cab seats are some useful overcab hidey-holes, all equipped with fiddle rails. The wardrobe and washroom are located amidships, with those lovely permanent twin beds bringing up the rear. A very practical design for two, that also recognises that owners may wish to carry

passengers safely in the rear, hence the inclusion of two dedicated rear travel seats with high backs, head restraints and three-point inertia reel belts.

#### LOUNGING AND DINING

Although not the most palatial lounge available in a Dethleffs' 'van, this was up to the job and comfortably accommodated two occupants plus two guests (which is, perhaps, all one should expect from a two-berth 'van).

Both cab seats swivel to join forces with the forward-facing double travel seat. All were comfortable, though taller folk will be unable to use the seat next to the window on the forward-facer, as the overhead telly cupboard is quite (painfully) low. The lounge is a pleasant place to sit in, with all-round windows, and a sturdy table - to eat off or play board games on. Below the wall support for the table there is a most useful six-bottle store. Now that's a proper cocktail cabinet.

The forward-facing seat squab can be



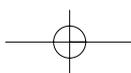
Design detail of light clusters adds interest to the rear panel.

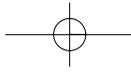


Plus points in the lounge include a seat squab extension.



Looking to the front we see that the lounge/dining area consists of forward facing travel seats and swivelled cab seats.




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*One undivided washroom is preferable to putting up with a poky walk-in shower compartment and a miniscule toilet area.*

*Handy bottle storage means your favourite tipple is within easy reach of the lounge. ▶*

extended into the aisle where, without blocking the gangway, it gives a vital few extra inches 'parking space' for those of us built for comfort rather than speed.

All the cupboard and locker doors have positive locking catches with comfortably sized pushbuttons.

#### IN THE KITCHEN

Adequate rather than excellent, methinks. There is absolutely nothing wrong with it, save perhaps the absence of a grill. It's just that the kitchen isn't this model's strongest suit. Some may criticise the lack of a drainer and worktop, though the worktop wouldn't bother us - as we would use the adjacent table. The wide drawer was

more than capable of containing our eating irons and meagre collection of kitchen tools. The gas safety shut-off valves are just behind this and easily accessible in an emergency.

#### WASHING TACKLE

There seems to be a popular belief among designers that no matter how small the washroom is, a separate walk-in shower compartment must be included. We think that's piffle, and often would much rather have one undivided washroom boasting a shower within it, rather than two poky compartments. And... the designers of this 'van agree! All the important tackle is present and correct here, together with some rather appealing radiused

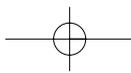


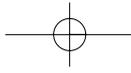
doors to the undersink cupboard.

#### STORAGE POINTS

The T6611 has a variety of accessible storage, far more than two people should reasonably wish for. Still, far better to have too much than too little. Be aware of the quoted 501kg payload, which I'd have thought to be adequate, though looking at what some fellow motorcaravanners carry, it may not be! Of particular note is the transverse exterior accessed locker across the back of the 'van. I reckon you would be able to put a couple of folding bikes in here, but to be honest I didn't try it!

The gas locker will hold two 13kg cylinders or their equivalent.





A large cutlery drawer opens to reveal sensibly placed easily accessed gas shut-off taps...and an unswitched 230V socket. As a clumsy washer-upper of pots and pans, the positioning of a socket so close to the sink concerns me.



Gas locker (right of loo access door) accepts two 13kg cylinders.

◁ Compact kitchen has only a tantalising suggestion of worktop between the hob and the sink. We'd probably use the table as a worktop when preparing anything complicated.



Underbed storage is cavernous and would probably take a couple of folding bikes.

**FABRICS AND FINISHES**

Two interior finishes are available: Elegance which was featured in the test 'van and Comfort (according to the blurb, this offers a metal finish insert to the cabinetwork and different soft furnishing fabrics). Overall fit and finish appeared good on this particular example. I am friends with a couple of Dethleffs owners and they seem very pleased with their 'vans.

**ON THE ROAD**

I'm probably in a minority of one here, but I often prefer the ride obtained from the standard Ducato chassis to that experienced when using Al-Ko chassis extensions with their torsion suspension units. I find the Al-Ko set up bone-jarringly jiggle over rough road surfaces, so I was a perfectly happy bunny to discover that this was standard Ducato fare. Although why it was plated at 3495kg and not 3500kg remains a mystery!

Anyway, this particular Ducato performed like most Ducatos do - with confident road holding,



Ducato drove delightfully. Note manual operation of cab windows. Of course with cab air-conditioning, windows won't be used that frequently.

positive low-effort steering, and effective braking. The fascia gearlever operated faultlessly and the 2.8-litre common-rail motor provided spirited performance.

The usual moans applied as well - a tall top gear ratio, high seating position, and offset pedals.

However, it is not for nothing that the Ducato has achieved the status of the most popular chassis cab among European motorhome converters.

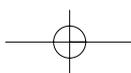
**WHAT'S HOT**

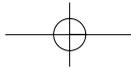
There is far more to praise than criticise. Here are a few of the many pluses that caught my eye.

Firstly, there's the lock for the exterior ladder, the removable cab seat covers and the solid sliding partition door to the bedroom (which also benefits from a natty foldaway bedside table).

Secondly, the handle to operate the dump valve on the wastewater tank is removable so it doesn't get covered in road mud.

In the words of a popular chanteuse; 'I'll save





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Lock for the exterior ladder.



Ridged piping over the wardrobe's hanging rail stops clothes bunching up when travelling.

the best to last'. My favourite was a simple but extremely effective idea. A ridged tube covers the wardrobe's hanging rail. This effectively prevented clothes bunching up during journeys.

**WHAT'S NOT**

Nothing is perfect and there were a few areas that I felt could do with further development, notably the bizarre location of the 13A mains sockets. One was immediately above the sink, one immediately below, and one on the back of the forward-facing seat backrest. Made me wonder what might be plugged into a seat back. On second thoughts, don't even go there.

The TV cupboard came into unwelcome contact with the top of my head and there was no dedicated dining storage for the table (which might become quite a missile in a road traffic accident or emergency stop).

Finally, I would have liked to see a fire extinguisher, fire blanket and a smoke alarm.

**IN A SENTENCE OR TWO**

It was a pity that there wasn't time for me to take this appealing motorcaravan away for an extended period, as I'm sure that it would have confirmed my initial favourable impressions. USP (Unique Selling Point) for this 'van must be those two low-level permanent single beds. OK, they may be not unique, but they are rare enough to warrant a special mention.



**IN BRIEF**

- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato 15 long wheelbase chassis cab with Camping Car package
- **Engine type:** 4-cylinder 2.8-litre common-rail direct-injection turbocharged and intercooled diesel
- **Output:** 94kW (128bhp) @3600 rpm
- **Gearbox and drive:** Five-speed manual gearbox, fascia-mounted gearlever, front-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Dethleffs Advantage T6611 Elegance
- **Body type and construction:** Low profile aluminium-clad bonded sandwich coachbuilt
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** 230V hook-up,

- consumer unit with RCD and MCBs - feeding battery charger, fridge and mains sockets
- **Lighting:** Five halogen downlighters, seven swivel halogen spotlights, dual intensity central luminaire
- **Cooking facilities:** 3-burner gas hob and separate gas oven
- **Refrigerator:** Dometic RM6401 electronic ignition three-way, capacity 108 litres
- **Water heater:** Truma Combi C6002 gas/230V operation, capacity 12 litres
- **Space heater:** Truma Combi C6002 gas-operation blown-air, supplying six outlets
- **Fresh water tank:** 115 litres (25.3 gallons) inboard
- **Waste water tank:** 90 litres (19.8 gallons) underfloor
- **Gas locker capacity:** Two 13kg cylinders
- **Rear restraints:** Two forward-facing seats with head restraints and three-point inertia reel seatbelts
- **Additional features:** Inboard entrance step, flyscreen door, 4-bike rack, roof rack and ladder, rear steadies, stereo radio/CD player,

driver and passenger seat swivels, cab air-conditioning, engine immobiliser, decorative 'wood' panels to dashboard, Heki 3 panoramic rooflight

**DIMENSIONS:**

- (\*data supplied by manufacturer)
- **Overall length:** 6.83m (22ft 5in)\*
- **Overall width:** 2.25m (7ft 4.5in)\* excluding mirrors
- **Overall height:** 2.79m (9ft 2in)\*
- **Interior height:** 1.91m (6ft 3in)
- **Bed dimensions:** Two permanent singles: 1.96m x 680mm (6ft 5in x 2ft 3in), or arranged as an all-over double: 2.05m x 1.96m (6ft 9in x 6ft 5in)
- **Max authorised weight:** 3495kg\*
- **Load capacity:** 501kg\*

**PRICE (all prices include VAT)**

- **Standard model:** £40,045 (on the road)
- **As tested:** £41,040 (on the road)

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

- (\*fitted to test vehicle)
- **Base vehicle options:** Cab air-conditioning (£995)\*
- **Caravan options:** Choice of interior finish at no extra charge

Vehicle kindly supplied for evaluation by: Lowdham Leisureworld, Lowdham Road, Gunthorpe, Nottingham, NG14 7ES (tel: 0115-966 3838; e-mail: motorhomesales@lowdhams.com).

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