



# EMOTIONAL DECISION

Eriba Car Emotion 653 on Ford Transit 2.2 TDCi

*A brand new German low profile offers its take on Europe's most popular layout*

Words and pictures  
By Dave Hurrell



The subject of this month's live-a-board test is the epitome of the breed - a Continental low profile motorcaravan containing one of the most popular and enduring layouts available.

The layout may be about as usual as they come, but the 'van that contains it is part of a born-again brand that could make some waves in the UK market. Previously made in France, Eriba motorhomes are now produced in Germany at parent company, Hymer's impressive Bad Waldsee plant.

Ready to surf those waves is MMM Award-winning dealer, Lowdham Leisureworld, a firm that already sells Eriba's little trailer caravans

and has now re-launched the motorhomes in the UK. The 2008 Eriba brochure lists 19 models - compact 'Van' and standard low profiles, A-class' and a panel van conversion. Lowdham Leisureworld currently brings six of these across the water to Blighty - two compact 'Van' and four standard low profile models - all sporting permanent beds of one sort or another, and all Ford Transit-based.

The Car Emotion 653 offers an oft-used layout of Euro lounge (half-dinette and swivel cab seats with side sofa) ahead of L-shaped kitchen, with a longitudinal double bed and washroom in the rear. A body-length of 6.81 metres (22ft 4in) ensures that this accommodation does not feel too cramped.

Coachwork is executed predominately in

1 One of the most popular layouts sees a Euro lounge ahead of kitchen

2 To the rear, kitchen and wardrobe give way to a fixed double bed with washroom alongside



*Eriba at Brancaster harbour in North Norfolk*

## AT A GLANCE

■ **PRICE FROM:** £40,495 OTR

■ **BERTHS** 2

■ **BASE VEHICLE** Ford Transit platform cab

■ **LAYOUT** Swivelling cab seats ahead of half-dinette with side sofa, nearside kitchen and washroom, offside wardrobe, cupboards and longitudinal fixed double bed

■ **ECONOMY** 25.7mpg overall



shades of silver, giving the 'van a simple, classy look that provoked compliments from fellow campers at the Camping and Caravanning Club's lovely site at Sandringham. Colour keyed hatches and vents show good attention to detail and ensure that nothing jars the eye.

Inside, the furniture maintains this standard as the cabinetwork looks superb. Strong positive-locking metal handles are fitted to every cupboard door with some offering easy-closing slam latches. Overhead furniture is underpinned by a thick silver-trimmed plywood base that reinforces an idea of solidity. Unusually, all the overhead lockers have side-hinged doors giving them 'cupboard' status. This seems very nice, but it's possible to get clouted in the napper by an open cupboard

door if - like me - you're not careful.

Even if you look very carefully, you'll be hard pressed to find a cabinet with a straight line as curves and tapers help make the interior of this big silver box both interesting and very good looking.

## EMOTION'S MOTION

Ford's trusty Transit (here in platform cab form that boasts a strengthening steel sub-floor) provides support and motivation, its shorter wheelbase making for a noticeable rear overhang. Up front, the Tranny transmits drive through a five-speed gearbox to the front wheels, using a dash-mounted lever that provides a light and slick action that's a pleasure to use. As the handbrake is also re-

## On Test Eriba Car Emotion 653



positioned on the right of the driver's seat - to allow it to swivel - the route to the living area from the cab is left nicely uncluttered.

Comfy cab seats offer height adjustment, but alas, there's no reach or rake adjustment on the steering column. Kit levels in the cab are good - with electric windows and mirrors and trip computer stand out items. Sadly, no central locking was fitted to the test vehicle. Being accustomed to just pressing a key fob's button to get things secure, I found myself returning to the 'van several times to do a 'circuit' and check that all the doors were locked.

The stereo is a good 'un with a single CD player, a great sound and steering wheel-mounted controls that make it easy and safer

to use on the move.

Ford storage is also pretty good although moving the handbrake to the right means you loose a - too obtrusive - door bin and armrest. No matter, the dash offers cup/can holders, two-litre drinks bottle slots, and twin dash-top compartments (one having a 12V socket). In the centre, a flip-over table is designed for white van man's sandwiches, but provides a neat occasional table for motorcaravanners too.

Like many modern engines, Ford's 2.2-litre turbo-diesel comes in various power outputs - here it's in 130bhp guise as part of the Emotion Plus options pack. A willing performer from the off, the motor became

better and better as I put miles on this fresh-out-of-the-box motorhome.

I was initially dismayed to see the trip computer tell of only 17.5 miles to every precious gallon of derv. However, as the miles rolled away, performance increased and fuel economy improved: after 500 miles a still-improving 25mpg figure was seen on the display. A quite high top gear sees 70mph come up at around 2500rpm, making for relaxed motorway cruising.

It's the fitting of a swivel to the cab seat and night blind to the windscreen that adversely affects the driving experience. The swivel raises the seat, while the blind's top rail effectively lowers the windscreen's header. This makes the driving position (even with the seat set at its lowest) rather high. My five-foot-ten frame found the driving position okay until the sun visor was deployed, then a posture akin to Quasimodo was required to maintain proper forward vision. Although this situation is far from perfect, the normal driving position with visor raised was acceptable and will, of course, depend on individual physique. It's also worth mentioning that other Transit-based 'vans are so afflicted.

Ride quality proved excellent, albeit at the expense of handling. This chassis is more softly sprung than Fiat's Ducato, so it handles the bumps with less drama and crashing, but exhibits more body-roll and bouncing over uneven surfaces. This 'van was far more at home on fast A-roads and motorways than twisty, bumpy, country lanes.

### EURO ENTHUSIAST

Nairobi upholstery offers the lounge fashionable neutral colours and a modern 'circle-in-a-square' pattern. Faux suede completes the scheme and all appeared hard wearing, although some of the seams on the cab seats displayed slightly unattractive



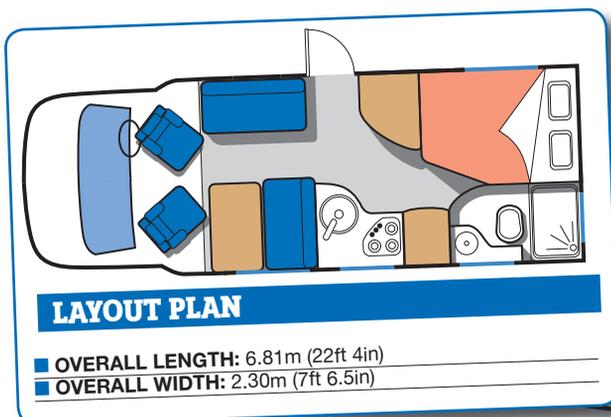
'puckering.' Down below, a light wood-effect, matt-finish floor proved to be less than muck-friendly, both showing and, seemingly, attracting the kind of crud found on most sites. Thankfully, Lowdham's genial Stuart Craig informed me that removable carpets will be included as standard.

As a classic of the type, this Euro lounge works very well indeed, providing two forward-facing belted travel seats in addition to relaxing and dining space. The travel seats are fundamental to the design and the reason why the half-dinette is one of the most common features in Continental motorcaravans. The travel seat fitted here features the expected pair of three-point belts, but what makes impressive is the fact that it has a full-width steel-framed back. This improves rear passenger safety though sheer strength, but also allows the mounting of automotive quality head restraints.

In lounging mode this area will seat six once the cab seats have been swivelled. However - as this is a two berth 'van - the couple found aboard for most of the time will



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derive most comfort from the cab seats and side sofa. The dinette seat, meanwhile is a touch upright, but perfect for dining.

Mealtimes see comfortable dining from the big solid table, equipped with a swivel-out extension serving either the driver's seat or side sofa. Invite just another couple for dinner and you'll have a comfortable time.

**CONTINENTAL CUISINE**

That strong steel frame that runs up the back of the dinette seat provides the ideal site for an L-shaped kitchen, another Continental 'classic', which lurks amidships. With curvy cupboards above and below, the galley looks superb - displaying all the advantages and some of the drawbacks of the type. Where many Continental kitchens have a lack, the three-burner hob sports - oh joy of joys - electronic ignition. To its right, the round sink lacks a drainer, but offers a waste-equipped 'shelf' that (unless its designers know something I don't) seems to offer little, save a home for veg peelings. Any worktop on offer is

twixt hob and sink, with the hob's glass lid doing duty during prep. I found no drop-in cover/board for the sink - something that would give that extra little bit of chopping space, should one be supplied or obtained.

Sandwiched between the kitchen unit and the washroom to its rear, the fridge is one of the



- 3 Transit cab is well equipped, but the driver's seat proved over-high
- 4 Eriba sports a classic Euro lounge, where mealtimes see a table extension do duty
- 5 The L-shaped kitchen features a sensible low-set oven
- 6 Big fridge/freezer is a super cooler
- 7 The rear travel seats benefit from a full-width, steel-framed back



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8 Double bed is long and comfy

9 Outside, a big hatch helps load the under-bed area

10 Lots of storage space under the bed

11 Midships clothes storage is excellent

12 Washroom is well equipped, but not for the ample of frame

best motorcaravan cooling units available. Finished in fetching silver, one of Dometic's finest provides a separate freezer, internal illumination and auto energy selection (AES) to boot. Turn this baby on, select auto operation and the fridge's brain does the rest - selecting 12V, gas or mains operation as appropriate.

Ovens are not the norm in Continental 'vans so many that are fitted are afterthoughts, in kitchen layouts that were never designed to take them. The most common location chosen is above the fridge, where units mounted too high can be quite dangerous to use. Thank goodness Eriba (probably with Lowdham's advice) has chosen to site the fitted mini oven unit low down in the kitchen, where it offers thermostatic control, a grill, internal illumination and ignition.

Storage is provided up top by a brace of shelved cupboards and another (that needs some shelves) above the fridge. Below, a decent cutlery drawer and big, swanky, curved-front cupboard do duty. It's the cupboard that needs attention here, as its slide-out wire baskets and door-mounted shelves seem to leave too much unused space. This could be seen as a nasty case of form over function; I'd look at re-fitting the interior of this cupboard were this Eriba mine.

### ERIBA CLEAN

One of the best things about the washroom is its sliding tambour door. Stylishly silver, and easy to use, its main quality is the fact that it's unobtrusive and can be left open, making it easy to gain the toilet in the wee small hours. Washroom equipment provides few surprises with corner basin, 'bog' standard swivel-bowl loo and separate shower all in attendance.

One of the most impressive features is the sheer acreage of mirror in here - the larger of the two is quite superb. The matt-finish stainless steel washbasin is set into a generous counter, while above a corner cupboard features an adjustable wire shelf system. Sadly there was only one shelf supplied and I'd want another to make the

most of this feature. I was slightly bemused to find a (albeit at high level) mains socket fitted in this cupboard. It's away from splashes and just right for powering razor or dryer, but breaks UK electrical regulations that say mains sockets in bathrooms are a no, no.

This washroom is undeniably compact - its position alongside the bed makes it so - and a lack of floor space and smallish separate shower means it's only suitable for those of more modest stature. Even so, this one worked fine and accommodated my five-foot ten, 13-stone frame. It's worth bearing in mind that I've tested motorhomes whose similar washrooms were cramped enough to force you to sit on the toilet with the door open! As always, when searching for your ideal 'van, try the washroom well - closing the door and miming ablutionary activities to make sure you have enough room.

### USP - UNIQUE SLEEPING POSITION

There are literally hundreds of motorcaravans out there that offer the Emotion 653's layout, with the permanent double bed being the main reason to buy. Just like with the washroom, trying the bed for size is vital before you hand over your debit card. Sounds obvious? Well yes, and you may be forgiven for thinking all these beds are much of a muchness. Sadly, some are less than accommodating - short or narrow and with a large cut-off at the foot. Here we find a bed of good length and width - its narrowing at the foot not too obtrusive. It proved comfy too and I slept very well throughout the test. No rear window and overhead cupboards that don't extend down too far mean it's perfectly possible to get propped up in bed for book and beverage. Unfortunately, Eriba has seen fit to attach some 'showroom appeal' storage pouches to the bed's headboard right where you're gonna sit. Fortunately, they're removable.

### SPACE CRAFT

One of the appeals of the fixed double bed is the storage space underneath and here that

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space is very well designed. The under-bed area is also home for the Truma heater, but there's plenty of space available for stashing bulky kit. The bed base rises easily on gas struts for internal access, while outside a generously sized hatch gets you in. The 653's generous payload (630kg) allows you to load up with confidence. Importantly, this 'van's 3500kg MAM is licence-friendly whether you're younger or older.

Interior stowage space sees lots of overhead cupboards, plus useful shelves above the cab, but the star is the furniture unit sandwiched between the caravan door and the bed. This stylishly curved conglomerate offers one-above-the-other, jacket-length wardrobes and a floor-to-ceiling shelved cupboard. There's nowhere for longer garments to hang, but sheer capacity and great versatility more than makes up for this.

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

In these days of high-tech gear it's refreshing to see a simple control panel, which, indeed, is simplicity itself to use. Just a few pushbuttons and an analogue meter - reminiscent of 1970s tape decks - do the job - controlling the flow of 12 volts and displaying tank and battery levels. The Hymer logo found here betrays

this 'van's heritage, lending a certain cachet by default; anything with the word Hymer attached will probably attract a bucket or two of motorcaravanner respect.

Water tanks follow the arrangement found in most Continental 'vans, with capacious fresh container located beneath the forward-facing dinette seat. The waste tank is underslung - its chunky drain valve benefits from an equally chunky drain hose. The hose gets dedicated stowage in the gas locker, whose easy-access interior accepts a pair of 11kg Continental-sized cylinders.

The range of lighting on offer in the 653 is quite simply dazzling. There are nice looking reading lamps in the lounge and at the head of the bed, but you could be forgiven for thinking that halogen downlighters were on special offer when this 'van was conceived. Plinths in all areas are festooned with the things and night-time ambience is simply superb. The slightly, dare I say, uncertain taste feature is contained within a little shelf unit located on the nose of the upper cupboards twixt lounge and kitchen. Useful only for displaying your motorhome's sports day trophies when on site, the shelves have red-coloured vertical strip lights built into both sides - all the better to catch the glint of all that silverware! Behind

#### I LIKED

- Willing, fault-free base vehicle
- Stylish good looks
- Attractive furniture
- Classic layout
- Versatile Euro lounge
- Low-set oven
- Big fridge/freezer
- Comfy bed
- Wardrobe/clothes cupboard unit
- Sliding washroom door

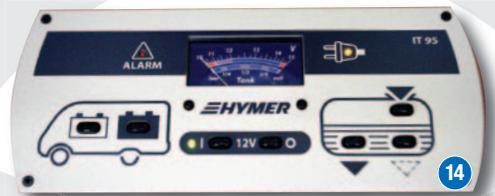
#### I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Slightly firmer ride
- Cutting board cover for sink
- Larger leisure battery

#### I DISLIKED

- Over-high driver's seat
- Poor stitching on cab seat covers





**13** Knick knack shelf fronts the more useful flat screen TV locker

**14** Simple control panel betrays this 'van's Hymer origins

## LIVE-IN TEST DATA

### TYPE

Low profile coachbuilt

### PRICE

- From: £40,495 OTR
- As tested: £44,485 OTR

### BASICS

- Vehicle: Ford Transit platform cab
- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)
- Warranty: 2 years base vehicle, 3 years conversion, 6 years water ingress

### CONSTRUCTION

Alloy clad sandwich construction with GRP mouldings, alloy skirts. Caravan entrance on UK offside

### DIMENSIONS (\*manufacturer's figures)

- Length: 6.81m (22ft 4in)\*
- Width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)
- Height: 2.79m (9ft 2in)\*
- Wheelbase: 3.75m (9ft 10in)
- Rear overhang: 2.08m (12ft 3.5in)
- Max authorised weight: 3500kg\*
- Payload: 630kg\*

### INSIDE STORY

Swivelling cab seats ahead of half-dinette with side sofa, nearside kitchen and washroom, offside wardrobe, cupboards and longitudinal fixed double bed

- Insulation: Floor 46mm, walls 35mm, roof 35mm
- Interior height: 1.97m (6ft 5.5in)

### THE VEHICLE

- Engine: 2.2-litre turbo-diesel producing 96kW (130bhp) @ 3500rpm
- Transmission: Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Fuel consumption: 25.7mpg overall
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all-round
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- Features: ABS, ESP, driver and passenger airbags, electric windows and mirrors, key-operated manual locking, cruise control, trip computer, variable delay wipers, air-conditioning radio/CD player with steering

## ERIBA Car

column-mounted controls, passenger door bin, 2-litre bottle storage bins, twin dash-top storage compartments, flip-over snack table height-adjustable seats

### LOUNGING & DINING

Swivelling cab seats and half-dinette with inward-facing settee (Euro lounge) provide comfortable lounging for four Rail-mounted table serves lounge seating. Dining for five with swing-out table extension deployed.

### KITCHEN

L-shaped unit with floor-level cupboard with pullout wire baskets, cutlery drawer, three cupboards above, two with shelves

- Sink: Circular stainless steel with waste-equipped 'ledge,' plastic swivelling mixer tap
- Cooker: Cramer three-burner hob with hinged glass lid, Smev mini oven/grill with interior illumination, all with electronic ignition
- Fridge: Dometic RM7655 AES two-door fridge-freezer. Capacity 150 litres

### WASHROOM

Access via sliding tambour door, Thetford swivel-bowl, electric-flush, cassette toilet, stainless steel basin set into vanity counter, plastic mixer tap, two mirrors, cupboard with adjustable wire shelf above, unshelved cupboard below, separate shower compartment with rigid bi-fold door, single-outlet tray, mixer, riser rail, clothes/towel drying rail above.

### BED

- Rear fixed double
- Length: 2.00m (6ft 6.5in)
- Width: 1.34m (4ft 4.5in) max

### STORAGE

- Lounge: Three deep shelves, three high-level cupboards, limited space under inward-facing sofa. Amidships: Two jacket-length wardrobes, one full-height shelved cupboard. Bedroom: Five high-level cupboards (four are shelved),

large under-bed locker accessed via lift-up bed base and external hatch.

### LIFE SUPPORT

- Fresh water: Inboard. Capacity 110 litres (24.2 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung. Capacity 70 litres (15.4 gallons)
- Water heater: Truma Combi 6 boiler, gas-only operation
- Space heater: Truma Combi 6 with blown-air, gas-only operation
- Leisure battery: 80 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity two 11kg cylinders
- Lighting: Lounge: five halogen downlighters, three adjustable halogen spots. Inside caravan door: one halogen downlighter, four halogen downlighters to frame of rooflight. Kitchen: six halogen downlighters. Bedroom: Five halogen downlighters, two adjustable spots. Washroom: Three halogen downlighters, single-tube fluorescent to shower compartment. Lights in wardrobe and underbed locker, awning light.
- Sockets: 230V three (TV locker, kitchen, washroom cupboard), 12V one (TV locker)
- Control panel: Mounted above caravan door, analogue meter displays battery and water levels via push-button controls
- Blinds/curtains: blinds to all cab windows, blind/flyscreens to all caravan windows and roof lights, faux drapes & net curtains to lounge & bedroom, concertina flyscreen to caravan door
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No

### OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Emotion plus pack includes 130bhp engine, coloured bodywork, cab air-conditioning, wood-effect dash trim, painted front bumper, electric windows/mirrors, (£1495)
- Conversion: Emotion Plus pack, as above also includes security lock on entrance door

Other options

- Base: None
- Conversion: None

E&OE

this 'showroom bling' item is something far more interesting and useful. A cupboard door gives access to a flat screen TV bracket that - at the push of a latch - descends through a drop-down hatch to sit above the dinette seatback. Cab seats will be the best place to get seated while watching the Caravan Channel: afterwards, your precious Panasonic slides up out of sight.

Other significant items include the excellent Hymer wind-up rooflight and the less excellent pull-down blinds. In a 'van of this quality I'd expect to see proper cassette units that open from the top, thus letting in light, while preserving privacy. Heating and hot water is taken care of by the latest boiler from Truma. The Combi 6 is more compact than the old model and provided plenty of the hot stuff in a fuss-free manner. Sadly, it functions on gas only.

### EMOTIONAL DECISION

The Eriba Emotion 653 is a very stylish low-profile motorcaravan that, by association, benefits from Hymer's mighty stature and

reputation for quality.

It could also be deemed attractive because of the base vehicle that underpins it. The ubiquitous Fiat Ducato is going through a rough spell at present, and tales of dodgy reversing and under-bonnet water leaks with puddles collecting on top of the engine (via a poorly made scuttle) could easily put off prospective purchasers. Thankfully, I can report that the Transit reverses without drama or gearbox trauma. Ever inquisitive, I gently poured water down the 653's windscreen to discover that water does indeed find its way under the bonnet. A few drops landed on the engine's plastic topping and some wetness found its way into the headlight areas on both sides. Shame Fiat didn't fit a plastic engine cover from day one.

Potential drawbacks with the Transit base include a rather soft ride and increased driver's seat height spoiling the driving experience. As always, take a long test drive on all types of road before you sign on the dotted line.

The Eriba's stylish exterior is matched by its insides - an air of luxury pervades the interior and night-time ambience is superb thanks, in part, to all those stylish lights. Stylish yes, but be careful how you use them when away from hook-up, as the 80 amp hr leisure battery would soon drain - leaving you living style-free with a torch grasped between your teeth!

Bear in mind also, that this 'van will probably not suit you if you're large of stature - the compact washroom being the pinch point.

If, having looked at the myriad of motorcaravans on offer that have the 653's classic layout, you fancy the Eriba, get out the calculator and a Hymer brochure to make some comparisons. Lowdham Leisureworld tells me it aims to be competitive - maintaining prices that directly reflect the Continental price in Euros, with only the price of UK specification extras added. Indeed, as I write, Lowdham is offering prices that reflect a time when the Euro/pound exchange rate was more attractive. ■

#### VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY:

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