

On Test Pilote Reference Galaxy 630T

LA CHEVALLERIE'S INTEGRAL

Pilote Reference Galaxy 630T on 2.3TD Fiat Ducato

A popular French A-class offers a classic layout in a package that's not too big



- 1 Caravan door has a window and a rubbish bin attached
- 2 The heater is accessed via an engineer-pleasing external door



Back in 1962 when Pilote first dipped its French tootsies into caravan manufacturing, it probably had no idea where it was to lead. It wasn't until 1978 that the firm produced its first coachbuilt motorhome. By 2004

a king's ransom had been bravely invested into a huge manufacturing centre at La Chevalerie, near Angers in western France.

Anyone who has spent time cantering along French autoroutes will have noticed that the preferred 'camping car' of your average Gauloise-smoking Frenchman is the ubiquitous low profile coachbuilt. However, I was looking forward to seeing how Pilote is currently approaching the 'integral' (or A-class as we on this side of the oggin call the type), as the company specialises in this type of motorhome.

IT'S NOT BRITISH

A-class 'vans are not really our thing here: I'm talking about mainstream British manufacturers, as none makes an A-class model. Strange, because British motorhomers seem to like the concept: you've only to look around motorhome show camping fields to recognise just how popular they've become. This is despite many being left-hookers, with caravan entry on the (UK) offside and an inconvenience of width. Personally I'll always go for the smallest size of motorhome that I can comfortably live with, but some folk don't share the same set of priorities when looking for a new dream machine.

This right-hooker isn't a big beast. At 6.33m (less than 21 feet long), it's about the size of a smaller-than-average coachbuilt. It's the extra width of an A-class at the front that makes the interior so much more spacious, but the exterior is still difficult to squeeze down narrow roads. The G630 somehow manages an appearance of petite-ness, so that a new owner would not be too daunted by its size. An all-white body is enlivened by pale blue graphics with a cheerful orange sun (seagull flying across same).

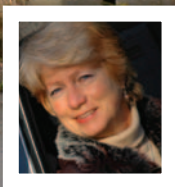
External storage comprises a wet locker either side for chocks, hoses, wellies and hook-up lead, while there's outside access to the under-settee storage on the nearside. This is beside all the usual requirements of toilet cassette and gas lockers. Usefully, the Truma heater can be accessed from the outside, an arrangement that should keep your service engineer happy.

Entrée to the cockpit (cab door) is on the nearside, but the caravan door is on the offside at the rear. So, when you're parked at a busy UK roadside, it's possible to exit onto the kerb through the cab door. With this in mind, I would investigate having an electric cassette step fitted here, as I found it a big step up for my little legs.

The dump valve for the waste took some finding, so to save my knees, I asked Hayes' mechanic to point out its location. Pilote had sensibly put the opening just behind the sill near the Continental driver's (left-hand drive) seating position, but this 'van is right-hand-drive. British drivers should be able to work out where to park to get the opening over the drain, but it would be easier for someone manoeuvring a left-hooker.

AMBIENCE

Galaxy means A-class if it's a Pilote and there are a further three names used in the naming of ranges. Explorateur is top of the tree, Reference the middle and lastly Aventura, which is family 'van (advertising speak for the cheapest).



Words by Di Johnson, pictures by Pete Johnson

The layout of the Reference Galaxy 630T puts the washroom and wardrobe across the rear with an L-shaped kitchen on the offside (with fridge/freezer stack opposite), just inside the caravan door. Forward of these, a long nearside settee sits opposite a half-dinette with a short settee making an L-shape. The table is one of those all-singing, all-dancing, hinged, swivelling and sliding jobs.

Décor is err... amber, or *ambre* as it says in the book. Upholstery is brown and amber stripes with tweedy sections. The colour is very similar to the cabinetwork, and the trim of amber-coloured leatherette contrasts with ultra modern and substantial lighting.

Grey carpet, with biscuit spots, is provided in the cab, but the bound-edge carpet supplied for the rest of the interior was stashed under the long settee. This left the narrow-strip wood-effect vinyl exposed. I would have preferred more contrast in the overall colour scheme, but there are options available.

PILOTING THE PILOTE

Apart from the extra width at the front, driving this A-class is like driving any other motorhome, but with a glorious panoramic view afforded by the vast windscreen. The Fiat 2.3-litre engine tugs the Reference along without any fuss and manoeuvring for the photos was enjoyably easy; that 6.33-metre length makes all the difference.

Some plastic wood decorates the dash, but more importantly, I noticed an air-conditioning control button. This is vital for comfortable travelling in sunshine as the big

On Test Pilote Reference Galaxy 630T



WE LIKED

- Shorter length
- Easy drive
- A-class bed
- Excellent washroom
- Robust and stylish light fittings

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More power points
- Electric step for cab door
- Larger leisure battery

WE DISLIKED

- The interior colour scheme
- Narrow lounge bed
- Firm seating

squab of the long settee on the nearside is rather too narrow, even for me. With the squab cushion pulled out and the backrest angled it was better, but a couple of inches extra depth would make all the difference to sitting comfort. The most comfortable seating is in the captain's chairs, though if feet-up is your preference, it's possible on the dinette and settee. It's the dinette that also provides the two forward-facing three-point belted seats for your passengers.

For a convivial evening with friends there's bags of space for bums. On the long settee alone, you could seat four - and I reckon nine could have a riotous evening sheltering from the British climate.

The table manages what few Continental versions achieve; that's to say it doesn't get in the way as much as they usually do. Most of these immovable tables' tops can be swivelled and slid, but the 630T's has an added string to its bow. A central piano hinge means it can be

halved in size, and, while this is not as good as folding it up and shoving it away, it's a step in the right direction.

Four could dine in comfort with a bit of sliding of the table to optimum position and additional bodies might be shoe-horned in if they are friendly. You won't have to worry about scratching the surface of the table as its colour and pattern is sort of... hmm, scratched brown?

NOUVELLE CUISINE

There's space in the little kitchen to allow the cook to carry on with the work while folks come and go behind. The hob has four spark-ignition burners, instead of the more usual three - they must really be trying to appeal to the UK buyers, as there's also a Smev oven/grill. Under the cook's feet is a lift-up section of floor, which reveals storage space that would be full of tins and extra jars of coffee, if it were mine.

The big round stainless steel sink has an inset cover - adding to worktop space - and

screen makes the cab akin to a greenhouse. On the driver's side is a large bin suitable for a collection of CDs; this storage adds to the already good oddment space provided in the latest Fiat cab.

Aguti captain's seats - with integral seatbelts - are supportive and easily adjustable. Admirably large, blind-style sun visors can be pulled down to whatever height suits your size or the angle of the sun: they are of the type found in coaches. Pleated blinds are fitted to screen and cab windows, rather than lamentably fiddly insulated screens.

LUMIERE

A wind-up Heki rooflight illuminates the lounge-diner, while the kitchen area is bathed in the light from a smaller version. An opening kitchen window, plus one in the caravan door (above a rubbish bin) adds to the overall feeling of light. All those windows in the front of the vehicle (and the cream-coloured ceiling) make it a bright space, despite the amber ambience.

Seating in the lounge is firm, which suits some, but I prefer softer upholstery. The





a plastic drainer extension, which is stored in the wardrobe. Also inset into the worktop, is a waste bin. A 150-litre Dometic fridge/freezer sits opposite, with TV space above. There is plenty of well thought out storage such as double-decker drawers with wire baskets for veg and a decent cutlery drawer. There is a towel rail fitted in this kitchen: rare as hen's teeth in motorhomes.

Though the cooker is beside the caravan door (providing ventilation) there is still provision made for door closed, foul-weather operations in the way of a combination hood fitted above the hob. This has an extractor fan, two lights and 230 and 12V sockets – although, methinks, this is not the ideal place for sockets...

LAVABO

The Pilote's *pièce de résistance*, is the washroom. This really is both stylish and spacious - big enough to be used as a dressing room. All the usual requirements are

here: shelf, towel rail, toilet roll holder, chrome-effect assembly with soap dish and two mugs, plus a smart modern tap adorning the surface-mounted circular green acrylic washbasin.

The decorations are an attractive pale biscuit with tiny silver squares and green-patterned vinyl flooring. High and low wood-look cabinets provide a plethora of well thought out storage space. A large mirror completes the picture.

The shower compartment has a bi-fold door and modern bar-style showerhead on a riser. A transparent rooflight lets in plenty of natural light into this altogether excellent washroom.

CHAMBRES A COUCHER

This is an A-class, so, as you'd expect, the main bed is the drop-down double over the cab area. There's a light either end of this bed and there's a big plus in having it thus. Whichever way the slope runs where you're pitched, you can lie abed with heads uphill.

An access ladder is provided, but I found it easier to use the dinette seat and the table to ascend and bail out. Also, if you are using the downstairs bed (which is made utilising the long nearside settee), there is no room for the ladder.

The downstairs bed is described as a double - two anorexics maybe, sleeping head to tail, or more practically, two children. Three flaps flip-up and two supporting legs drop down to make platforms for the seat base. The back cushion drops down into the gap to complete an easily made, but firm (journalist speak for brick-like) bed. Undoubtedly this 'van will mostly be used by couples, so I would prefer to see a more comfortable settee capable of sleeping one only.

CHEZ CONFORT

Truma's Combi E6002 provides water and space heating, powered by both electricity and gas. Importantly, there is a heated waste



- 3 This is very much an amber and brown interior
- 4 A-grade A-class washroom, excellent in all respects
- 5 Drainer and an oven/grill - even a home for tea towels- this is a Brit-friendly galley
- 6 Kitchen and washroom sit aft of the sofa and half-dinette-equipped lounge
- 7 The L-shape provides two belted travel seats
- 8 If you invite friends to join you aboard, I reckon you could seat nine
- 9 One of the main reasons for buying an A-class is the space saving drop-down bed

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The lounge bed is better used as a generous single

TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

- **Price as tested:** £52,650 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato Camper chassis cowl, 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 130bhp, six-speed gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle and conversion, five years water ingress
- **Dimensions:** Length 6.33m (20ft 9in), width 2.36m (7ft 9in), height: 3.00m (9ft 10in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** 470kg
- **Belted seats:** Four (including driver)
- **Beds:** Drop-down A-class double: 1.90m x 1.35m (6ft 3in x 4ft 5in), lounge double: 2.05m x 950mm (6ft 8.5in x 3ft 1.5in)
- **Other features:** Kitchen: Stainless steel round-bowl sink with removable plastic drainer, 150-litre three-way fridge/freezer, spark ignition four-burner hob, oven and grill. Washroom: Thetford electric-flush swivel-bowl toilet, translucent green acrylic basin with chromed tap, separate shower cubicle with folding door
- **Heating:** Truma Combi E 6002 boiler with blown-air, mains-gas operation
- **Water tanks:** Fresh: inboard, 130 litres (28.6 gallons). Waste: underslung heated, 80 litres (17.6 gallons)
- **Gas:** 2 x 13kg cylinders
- **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** None
- **Other options available:** Choice of engine and automatic gearbox options (price TBA), choice of interior colour options, (FOC)

E&OE

water tank and the fresh water tank is located in a heated section between floors. This extends the Pilote's camping season - even providing an opportunity to take up skiing.

The 470kg of payload quoted should be adequate for a small family and there's room for two big 13kg cylinders in the gas locker. There's also an automatic gas cylinder changeover switch and an interior cut-off valve.

Now for the downside, there are only two 12V and two 230V sockets fitted. One pair is set rather hazardously over the hob, the other high above the fridge/freezer with the

aerial socket for the TV. This would be my first modification, as modern usage requires we have at least a couple of spare 230V sockets.

L'ADDITION

Summarising, the 630T has some excellent points and others less so. Its most impressive attribute is the gorgeous washroom, which even passed Pete's toothbrush test: when he bends down to clean his teeth, his posterior must not collide with anything. We both fell in love with this spacious and light room, despite there being no window present.

The long settee rather lets this 'van down

- both in practicality and comfort - its hard cushions and narrow width make it doubly dodgy. However, it wouldn't take much to improve this, particularly if you accept it as a single bed. Another aspect in the 630T's favour is its suitability for winter holidays. When you've spent loads of your hard-earned dosh on a motorhome, you won't want to stay at home just because there may be a bit of a cold snap forecast.

Finally, for folks considering their first A-class, the 630T's lack of bulk could be an asset, as it offers good facilities in a shorter-than average 'van. ■

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