

PAY DAY

Eurostyle A63 on 2.4-litre Ford Transit

Value for money and a big payload make this compact German coachbuilt an attractive proposition for families



Poke your nose into the larger dealerships dotted around this sceptred isle and you'll find many offering their very own brands of motorcaravan. Termed 'dealer specials' in the trade, these are for the most part, British-built versions of mainstream models with the dealers' own names added. They also tend to feature an enhanced specification for the same (or even less) money than the manufacturer's standard fare.

Enter Lowdham Leisureworld: this dealer specialises in Continental-built 'vans, majoring on brands from Germany: and a close working relationship with one German converter has

given birth to the Lowdham Eurostyle. Built by Dethleffs at its Sunlight factory, Eurostyle aims to offer German quality at sensible prices. 'Vans are tweaked for the UK market, so you can expect to find such things as ovens and removable carpets fitted as standard.

There are six models in the range, all coachbuilt. Three low profiles and three overcab designs all offer fixed beds of one sort or another - lengthways double, over-garage doubles, twin singles and bunks are all represented.

FAMILY STYLE

Eurostyle A63 offers a conventional family-friendly overcab layout in a shortish body length. Externally, it sports a sharp-edged



roofline that marks it out as an entry-level motorhome as simpler construction techniques save money. Even so, this 'van impresses - its lower flanks (skirts), for instance, are executed in strong aluminium, rather than wobbly plastic.

Entry is achieved through a UK offside-located caravan door that reveals a front end Euro lounge (swivelling cab seats, half-dinette, side seat), centre washroom and kitchen, and across-the-rear bunks.

FORCEFUL FORD

Many of the strengths that this motorhome offers are encapsulated in its base vehicle. Not only is A63 underpinned by Ford's tough and dependable Transit, it's also the desirable twin rear-wheel drive version. This offers better stability, better traction and a big payload. This chassis' decent wheelbase also results in a



Words & pictures
by Dave Hurrell



short rear overhang, further enhancing stability and ease of driving.

The fore-and-aft mounted engine produces 140 horses that drive those chunky rear wheels through a six-speed gearbox with easy-to-use dash-mounted lever. Up in the cab you get a leather-wrapped silver-spoked steering wheel, and good quality plastics with a car-like look and feel. Kit is good too: twin airbags, electric windows and mirrors, cruise control, and radio/CD player with steering column-mounted controls all impress. As I wax lyrical about this vehicle, you'd be forgiven for thinking I'm a Transit fan and you'd be right. There are quite few Ford Transit-based motorhomes appearing on the scene at the moment, and to my mind that's good thing.

With a choice of front or rear-wheel drive (and even four-wheel drive), Ford's famous

light commercial is a versatile beast. Buy one and you'll discover that there's just about always a Ford Transit dealer near you - making base vehicle servicing convenient. Costs, too, are reasonable, while availability of spares is probably second to none. There are very good reasons why fleet operators choose the Transit over the likes of Fiat's Ducato, even though the Fiat commercial vehicle is cheaper to buy.

TRANSIT ON TARMAC

There are few downsides to travelling in this Tranny - the most noticeable is the height of the driver's seat. Old hands will remember the over-high pews in old shape Fiat Ducatos (and Peugeot Boxers) - such was the lofty position created by the fitting of a (seat-raising) swivel, some of us cynical old hacks dubbed these pews, 'flying bar stools!' Fiat has since solved the problem and now factory-fits swivels that

leave the cab seats at the perfect height. Sadly, Ford has yet to react to this problem, leaving the Eurostyle Driver's seat a bit on the high side. The steering column also has no adjustment, which makes things even less satisfactory. This problem is better or worse, according to the fitted seat swivel (some are thicker, some thinner), and this Eurostyle proved better than some other Transit-based motorcaravans I've tried. As always, take a long test drive of your chosen model before you sign on the dotted line.

Thankfully, I found the driving position only slightly higher than normal for my five-foot-

1 Kitchen and washroom stand between rear transverse bunks and front end Euro lounge

2 Furniture is simple, but classy



ten frame. The car-sized steering wheel and dash-mounted gearlever help make diving easy, while the engine revved easily and performed with verve. There was more body-roll than there would be with the equivalent Fiat-based 'van - the payoff being better ride quality, with less crashing over bumps than the Tranny's firmly-sprung Italian rival. Engine-wise, the Ford 2.4-litre lump benefits from the latest in injection technology, but it's not as smooth and sophisticated as the latest motors from Fiat and Peugeot.

It's becoming a bit of a chestnut I know, but the Transit does not suffer the transmission problems currently affecting Fiat's Ducato; consequently, it reversed perfectly. However, going forward can be a problem, as when cold there's a tendency to stall on takeoff. More right foot is required to combat this quirk and it's something you get used to after a short while.

Would I buy a Ford Transit? You bet, and in fact, my next 'van is ordered and will indeed, be based on the same 2.4-litre, 140bhp Tranny.

EURO ZONE

Like the outside, the interior of the A63 exhibits a simpler, flatter style of construction than more expensive 'vans. Even so, locker doors with a kick to their bases and silver and dark 'wood' inserts add style. Other impressive features include sprung staves for all the bed bases and good quality upholstery. This interior seemed well screwed together; fit and finish looked good, both above and below the skin. No curtains are fitted, but decor panels and hem-weighted nets soften the interior's feel quite nicely. UK specification includes removable carpets, but I was quite taken by the jazzy, multi-coloured wood-stave-style flooring beneath, and chose to live without a rug under my feet.

Eurostyle provides - in the finest Continental tradition - a classic Euro lounge. This consists of swivelling cab seats that turn to face a half-dinette and side sofa. One of the things that make this design popular is the fact that the forward-facing seat offers two

I LIKED

- Ford chassis
- Twin rear-wheel drive
- Six-speed gearbox
- Tough alloy skirts
- Good quality furniture and upholstery
- Separate shower
- Comfy beds
- High quality lighting

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Lighting above washbasin
- A grill
- Dual-fuel heating and hot water

I DISLIKED

- Lack of kitchen storage and drawers
- Water pouring off roof and through caravan door

fully-belted travelling places - essential in this family-friendly 'van. Here, that seat goes one better than the - less supportive - norm, with a full-width steel frame supporting the seat back and providing automotive-type head restraints mounted in the frame. Relaxing and eating aboard is easy, with plenty of room for four as an extension slots in to make the table bigger. Entertaining should see six accommodated in snug fashion.

FAMILY FEEDING

The greatest area of compromise in this compact family motorhome is to be found in the kitchen. Cooks will need to be adaptable or used to working in a relatively small space as this (well-equipped) galley lacks work surface and is light on storage space. The inclusion of an oven (with no grill) that's probably not found in Continental-market version, robs this 'van of a large cupboard, exacerbating the storage problem. Two lockers above provide the only meaningful space - the presence of a cutlery tray in here betraying the fact that this galley lacks any drawers. A three-burner hob,



big - 105-litre - fridge and circular drainerless sink complete this galley's quite decent kit list. Canny cooks will take full advantage of the oven, cooking one-pot meals and serving up the pizza that'll keep the little darlings happy come rain or shine.

SHOWERING THE SHOWER

The washroom's outstanding feature is its separate shower - something that should be good for rinsing muddy sprogs in a controlled environment. Rigid doors and a twin-outlet tray make the shower all the more practical to use.

The rest of the area offers the standard fare of old-style swivelling loo and vanity basin

with cupboard below, mirror above. Opposite, there's a high-level corner cupboard with mirrored door and lights above. Strangely, these are the only lamps in the room: men should be prepared to mop up the trail of shaving detritus that inevitably, will be left twixt basin and mirror.

BED TIME

The Eurostyle specification sheet describes the A63 as a four berth, but in reality, there are five sleeping places on offer. Lower the dining table to half-height, pull out a section from beneath the side sofa and you can create a near-domestic-sized single bed. As is often

the case, this bed prevents the use of the overcab bed's access ladder, but this extra berth may be useful for visitors or couples that wish to sleep separately.

The overcab bed is simply effective, with sensible amounts of headroom, a window on one side and decent lighting. At the rear, the pair of transverse bunks will be the main reason to buy this 'van. Little complaint here too; they're both roomy enough, comfy and ideal for the little darlings - even adults should be able to slumber comfortably in either. Blackout takes the budget route with pull-down blinds (rather than the more expensive, fully-enclosed cassette type) and press-stud-attached cloth panels for the cab. The panels proved fiddly to attach, while the light-coloured material did not offer full blackout. A set of external insulating blackout screens would, it seems, be a good idea.

STORE 'N' KIT

The good range of overhead lockers in the lounge will be essential to help cope with the lack of kitchen storage, while the decent-sized wardrobe directly aft of the galley will see itself packed tight with family fashions.

Outside on the offside, a garage-sized locker door gives access to this 'van's most useful stowage space. The base of the bottom bunk rises easily, assisted by a gas strut, to crate a slim garage for family kit - bikes and other bulky gear should fit a treat.

A healthy payload of over three-quarters of



- 3 Classic Euro lounge includes a side sofa
- 4 Overcab bed is spacious and comfortable
- 5 The lounge can become a generous single bed
- 6 The kitchen is compact, but well equipped
- 7 The washroom offers a desirable separate shower
- 8 The rear bunks will be the main reason to buy
- 9 The garage is created when the bottom bunk is flipped up



Outside, alloy skirts and a short rear overhang impress

a tonne also helps this 'van function effectively as a family holiday home.

A63's kit list offers much good news, with 127-litre (28-gallon) inboard water tank providing enough of the wet stuff for a family.

Lighting is excellent throughout - high quality spots and downlighters are in abundance and belie this 'van's entry-level aspirations. Only the gas-only Truma heating system lets the side down a touch, preventing

you from taking fuller advantage of that on-site mains electricity you've probably paid for. I'd seriously consider fitting a pair of Gaslow refillable cylinders if this 'van were mine. Not only do they remove the need to lug replacements, you'll be able to top up with the extra LPG you'll need at garages across Europe.

Finally, the caravan door gets one nice feature and one that's not so nice. A neat

VEHICLE LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

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TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

- **Price as tested:** £34,990 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Ford Transit chassis cab, 2.4-litre turbo-diesel producing 140bhp, six-speed gearbox, twin rear-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Base vehicle 3 years, conversion 2 years
- **Dimensions:** Length 6.31m (20ft 8.5in); width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in); height: 3.15m (10ft 4in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3850kg
- **Payload:** 880kg
- **Belted seats:** 4
- **Beds:** Overcab double: 2.12m x 1.42m, headroom 670mm (6ft 11.5in x 4ft 8in x 1ft 2.5in); Lounge single: 2.12m x 840mm (6ft 11.5in x 2ft 9in); Lower bunk: 2.05m x 820mm, headroom 650mm (6ft 8.5in x 2ft 8.5in x 2ft 1.5in); Upper bunk: 2.05m x 820mm, headroom 510mm (6ft 8.5in x 2ft 8.5in x 1ft 8in)
- **Other features:** Kitchen: Circular stainless steel sink with swivelling mixer tap, no drainer, Smev three-burner stainless steel

hob with hinged glass lid, no ignition, Smev oven with electronic ignition, no grill, Dometic RM7390 fridge with freezer compartment, capacity 105 litres
 Washroom: Thetford C200 swivel-bowl, electric-flush cassette toilet, plastic washbasin with swivelling mixer tap, cupboards above and below, two mirrors, separate shower compartment with mixer tap, riser rail, twin-outlet tray, rigid doors
 ■ **Heating:** Truma Combi C6002 hot water boiler with blown-air space heating, gas-only operation

■ **Water tanks:** Fresh: Inboard, 127 litres (28 gallons); waste: 110 litres (24 gallons)

■ **Gas:** 2x 7kg cylinders

■ **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** As part of Flex Pack: Cab air-conditioning, electric mirrors, central locking, radio/CD player (£995)

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concertina flyscreen will keep the bugs at bay in summer. However, when I opened the door after rain I discovered a second 'shower,' as water poured from above, straight into the doorway. Investigations revealed that, on this model, the slope of the overcab finishes right over the caravan entrance: this creates the natural drain point for the water from the roof - hence the shower. The door simply needs a 'drip strip' fitted: should be an easy job for the dealer to do before you take delivery.

FINE FAMILY STYLE?

Considering its well-specified chassis good levels of equipment and obvious German build quality, the Eurostyle A63 looks like very good value for money. Its main downside is the compact kitchen, but if you're putting family-sized accommodation in a 'van of well under six-and-a-half metres long something's gotta give. Plenty of power, big payload and a separate-shower washroom all add credibility to the essential bunk-based layout. Overall, I was impressed with the brand, so if you fancy a Ford and are in the market for an overcab or low profile coachbuilt at a good price, check out this and the other five Eurostyle models. ■