

Panel van conversions would seem to be in the ascendant and this month's twin trial compares a new kid to an established favourite: each crucially offering two single beds



ere are two fine examples that say all is well in the world of high tops, where there's arguably a better variety of choice than ever before.

Auto-Sleepers, for so long the undisputed champion of the

panel van conversion, currently has all manner of serious adversaries – ranging from rival mainstream manufacturers - think Swift/Autocruise, to imports (Adria, Trigano etc), to an intriguing and diverse variety of smaller converters, such as IH, Devon, Murvi, and Timberland.

Timberland's Destiny could be seen as a more direct comparison to the Auto-Sleeper Warwick Duo, but we've gone for these two models (recently introduced Warwick Duo versus established Endeavour XIX), just to prove the point about choice. Timberland's Endeavour XIX has a front lounge set-up, the Warwick Duo majors on twin rear settees. The XIX designation denotes this is the single bed Endeavour variant, which means both vehicles under review offer a choice of double or twinsingle sleeping arrangements.

We're not just pitching two vehicles headto-head here – it's almost two manufacturing





philosophies: Auto-Sleepers is now well on the way to its half-century of crafting conversions at its Cotswold base and selling them via an extensive network of dealers across the UK. Timberland, just about to reach its first decade milestone, is an altogether more bespoke affair, building pretty much to individual order and with manufacturing and sales concentrated on its dual-premises set-up in north Lincolnshire. It's worth adding that both manufacturers usually have a strong presence at major motorhome shows.

Front lounge, rear lounge? Renault Master or Peugeot Boxer? I've not even mentioned

the smart silver appearance of both. Other colours are available, including - if you must - white. Let comparison commence...

### **MOTIVE POWER**

Slightly ironically, considering my earlier comments relating to heritage, Auto-Sleepers bases its Warwick on the latest Peugeot Boxer, while Timberland's Endeavour starts life as the Renault Master. While the current Boxer is state-of-the-art, Renault's venerable Master comes to this motorhome party somewhat

late in its life and is just starting to show its age - most notably in the cab - despite Timberland's decision to try and jazz things up with (optional) 'walnut'-effect trim across the grey dashboard. Another noticeable difference, to me, is the Renault's relatively small windscreen. However, it boasts one key option that Peugeot doesn't, and it features here: automatic transmission. This gives Renault the edge over the Peugeot.

LAYOUT PLAN

■ OVERALL LENGTH: 5.90m (19ft 4.5in)

**OVERALL WIDTH:** 1.99m (6ft 6.5n)

Cab air-conditioning also features in both examples here (£1295 extra in the Renault, £823 for the Peugeot). Both also sported optional alloy wheels. In fact, the Endeavour alloys are part of Timberland's Executive Pack of options that, at the time of writing, was listed at £4495/£5550 depending on whether you order at a show or not. This also covers colour-coded bumpers and mirrors (£995), colour-coded electric awning (£895), electric skylight (£795), electric step (£485) and water purifier (£245). An impressive package which most buyers will, I suspect, find hard to resist.

Timberland starts off with some 650kg of payload before it begins adding any extras to the Endeavour. The Warwick has 536kg in



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- 3 Peugeot dashboard looks, and is, more modern
- 4 View forward shows the vital rear lounge with washroom and kitchen ahead
- 5 You can't escape the corridor effect with a layout such as this
- 6 The lounge sofas allow feet-up relaxing for two



### I LIKED

- Modern base vehicle qualities
- Thoroughly good build throughout
- Positive locker catches
- Good detailing

#### I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Better provision for TV stowage
- More engine/transmission choice
- Insulating/blackout pads for cab widows
- I DISLIKED
- TV fitting
- Table stowage provision

standard trim. Arguably, there are unlikely to be payload issues in two-person vehicles like this but, slightly worryingly, Timberland appears not to know the weights of its options.

#### **ROAD MANNERS**

Whilst there's simply no chance of an automatic Peugeot at the moment, Renault claims its Quickshift6 semi-auto option is actually more economical than the manual – to the tune of one mile per gallon. That may be, but when driving the thing, there's often some lag between the ratios, although there is the option of flicking the dash-mounted lever to make your own (clutchless) changes.

Both Timberland and Auto-Sleepers rate high as specialists who do their darndest to keep conversion rattles as well damped as possible.

Most MMM readers have lighter right feet than me, so I was more than pleasantly surprised to get some 32mpg from the Warwick Duo. Timberland's Endeavour achieved much the same, even with its auto box.

This is a purely personal thing, but I've always felt the Renault has a slight edge on the Peugeot in terms of road behaviour. It simply seems better planted on the road, and corners that wee bit more tightly.

Nevertheless, provided you don't want to push the Peugeot too hard, you'll find all-round performance is more than good and – best of all – reasonably quiet.

Cab seats are sufficient in both, although later Timberland Endeavours are to benefit from ISRI seats, I'm told, which again will give them the edge, as well as twin armrests on both seats.

The Warwick's layout precludes any additional passengers beyond the cab, but the Endeavour can take a third traveller. However, I have two issues with the third travel seat: first there's only a lap restraint here, secondly, and more importantly, the backrest is simply too low to offer any kind of protection from whiplash in the event of an accident.

And one last minor point: the Auto-Sleeper appears to have the more durable cab carpet.

#### **LOUNGE AND DINE**

We're into the sprawl-ability factor now, and that's where it's easier to pick a winner. Auto-Sleepers came up with the Duo variant of the Warwick partly to satisfy the demands of couples who want to relax, recline (and watch TV), each on their own long settee.

The other bonus of a layout like the Duo's is you can still use the twin rear doors for the loading and carrying of larger objects, which may not necessarily be directly connected to motorcaravanning life (bikes, household furniture, rubbish to the dump etc).

The Endeavour floor plan, alternatively, offers a better all-round use of space as well as a greater feeling of spaciousness, compared to the unavoidable corridor effect of the Warwick's layout. For the Endeavour, both cab seats swivel to join the lounge area (one settee and three individual seats play against the Warwick's two settees). Unfortunately, most folk will find their legs dangling uncomfortably from the - higher - cab seats. Also, the most logical place for the Endeavour's freestanding (pedestal) table is between the cab and rear passenger seats, where you simply end up with too big a discrepancy between seat and table heights.

The Warwick's larger table (also free-standing, but with folding legs) initially offers better dining, but my criticism here concerns its stowage. Stowing the table for travel is always going to be a tricky one in a van conversion and the Warwick Duo's lives in the large open shelf area over the cab: neat enough, but it renders the rest of the space there fairly useless. Far better is the Timberland solution of clipping it to one rear door (the other takes a worktop extension for the kitchen).

Finally, a word about soft furnishings: while Timberland offers a fantastic choice (including leather), I'm talking about what was presented here. Time is the only real test, but the Auto-Sleeper appears to have the edge on upholstery quality, as well as including four plump scatter cushions that don't just outnumber the Timberland's - somewhat limp - two.

#### **COOK'S QUARTERS**

Split or straight-run kitchen? Again, welcome to the wonderful world of choice. It always surprises me that kitchens in van conversions, like here, are often superior to those in their larger, coachbuilt, brethren. Here again, are two different but equally effective examples. The Timberland galley puts cooker and fridge on the nearside, sink/drainer on the opposite side, while the Auto-Sleeper gets a decentlength single unit that manages to offer work surface and cupboard space that's all too often sacrificed, even in much larger vehicles.

Both have a full Spinflo cooker that includes an electric hotplate, which is in keeping with current (pun intended) thinking that, if you're hooked up to mains on site, you may as well make the most of it. Both also have space for a sink with drainer. And, most important of all, both provide cooks with that welcome work surface.

Something of a cooking luddite, I'm still to be convinced by the advantages of a microwave oven, at home or in a motorhome.

#### I LIKED

- Flexible build arrangements and extensive options list
- Base vehicle's automatic option
- Table stowage
- Spacious feel to interior

### I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Better quality locker door catches
- Better guidance on weights of options
- Three-point belt and head restraint for rear travel seat

### I DISLIKED

- Carpet side wall trim
- Location of TV screen and rear speakers
- Fiddly nearside single bed make-up





7 Renault cab looks old fashioned, but provides automatic transmission

8 The lounge capacity increases once the cab seats have been swivelled

9 Dining facilities are compromised by seat levels

10 Split kitchen and washroom sit to the rear









11 Kitchen impresses with a good blend of kit, worktop and storage

12 Compact washroom still felt roomier than its rival

Others swear by them, hence Auto-Sleepers includes one in the Warwick Duo package. Timberland will supply same if you wish.

By dint of its variety - in terms of size of lockers and cupboards, provision of cutlery drawer etc - Warwick offers the superior kitchen storage, but the Endeavour fights back with a larger capacity fridge.

Kitchen ventilation is almost over catered for in the Warwick, where a Dometic extractor unit competes with a rooflight adjacent that also has a two-way electric fan.

#### **BATHING SPACE**

OK, so nobody buys a van conversion for its spacious washroom. Nevertheless, here again are two alternatives that should give you cause to consider what best suits your needs.

Similarities first. Both have folding basins, bench toilets, mirror-fronted vanity units and shower areas that mean you have to draw a curtain around you.

There are also key differences. Location, for starters: Endeavour's is across the rear, Warwick's is mid-'van nearside (and indeed

stretches out across the entrance at the sliding side door). Somewhat surprisingly in light of this, it's the Auto-Sleeper that appears to have the larger washroom (albeit the Timberland's washbasin is the larger of the two).

Thereafter, we're down to the tiniest things that can make such a difference. The two plugholes in the Warwick shower tray, for instance, is a definite plus. But I'm still to be convinced that buyers really want or need a soap dispenser. The Warwick boasts a proper door, Endeavour makes do with a folding panel.

### **HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA**

#### **PRICE**

- From: £38.995 OTR
- As tested: £41,133 OTR

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

- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle, 2 years conversion
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: All-steel body, factory-fitted single-glazed tinted Athermic windows
- Length: 5.99m (19ft 8in)\*
- Width: 2.05m (6ft 8.5in) Height: 2.60m (8ft 6.5in)\*
- Wheelbase: 4.03m (13ft 2.5in)\* ■ Rear overhang: 1.02m (3ft 5in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg\*
- Payload: 536kg\* (after the vehicle in working order, driver (75kg), 90 per cent gas, fresh water, fuel)

#### THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Peugeot Boxer long wheelbase high roof panel van
- Engine: 2.2-litre common-rail turbo-diesel producing 120bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- Features: Central locking to all doors, ABS, ASR, tinted glass, electric windows and mirrors, driver's airbag, radio/CD player, trip computer, twin door bins, central storage locker, glove box, colour-coded front bumper, electric slide-out step at sliding door, free-standing step for rear, roof bars

#### INSIDE

- Layout: Fixed cab seats, ahead of nearside washroom and wardrobe, offside kitchen, rear lounge
- Insulation: Thinsulate all round
- Interior height: 1.83m (6ft 0in)

- Sink: Stainless steel rectangular combined bowl and drainer with Chinchilla glass lid, mixer tap with swivel spout
- Cooker: Spinflo Caprice with three-burner hob plus electric hotplate, grill and oven
- Fridge: Dometic three-way. Capacity 77 litres

#### WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford C250 electric-flush, bench-type with wheeled cassette
- Basin: White drop-down bowl, with white mixer tap, mirror-fronted vanity unit
- Shower: White twin-outlet GRP tray and walls as part of washroom

#### **BEDS**

Offside single

Length: 1.85m (6ft 1in) ■ Width: 680mm (2ft 3in)

Nearside single

Length: 1.85m (6ft 1in) ■ Width: 680mm (2ft 3in) Alternative transverse double

Length: 1.87m (6ft 1.5in) ■ Width: 1.85m (6ft 1in)

### **EQUIPMENT**

**BED TIME** 

- Fresh water: Underslung 69 litres (15.2 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung 40 litres (8.8 gallons)
- Water and space heater: Truma Combi 4 boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation

**AUTO-SLEEPER WARWICK DUO** 

- Leisure battery: 110 amp hr
- Gas: Underslung refillable tank, dashmounted contents gauge. Capacity 25 litres
- Lighting: Three fluorescent double strip lights overhead, four single fluorescent strips under lockers, twin spotlights over cab seats, fluorescent light over sink, awning light
- Sockets: 230V: Three (kitchen, offside settee base, TV point) 12V: Two (kitchen, TV point)

#### **OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Metallic paint (£325), alloy wheels (£399), cab air-conditioning (£823), cruise control (£164)
- Conversion: Reversing camera (£282), two-way extractor fan rooflight (£145) Other options
- Base: Reversing sensors (£235), 3.0-litre, 157bhp, engine (£1300)
- Conversion: Two-way extractor fan (£145), map pockets (FOC), alternative upholstery (£205), part leather upholstery (£499), cab passenger seat swivel and swing-arm table (£434), solar panel (£360), tank frost protection heaters (£190)

E&OE





13 The washroom seems smaller than its rival

14 Kitchen places cooker and fridge on the nearside

Warwick's two single beds are available for use very quickly and it doesn't take much longer to make a double, with both seat/bed frames sliding together. However, if you want the flattest of mattresses you'll find yourself juggling the cushions to get the knee rolls to the outer edges. If you go for the two singles, there's the opportunity to utilise a small worktop that slides over and folds up between the beds for a very useful bedside table.

In comparison, there's a bit more work to do with the Endeavour's bed make up. The

nearside single is a somewhat convoluted affair, involving folding out the base of the seat. Making this all into a full double is as straightforward as in the Warwick again, thanks to a framework that's easy to pull out.

I can't say I was impressed by either nighttime blackout in the cabs - Timberland's cab blinds, or Auto-Sleepers' slightly 'gappy' lined curtains. The blinds in the former, I know from past experience, are prone to rattles when driving and also infringe on views out from the driving position. They work sufficiently well at night (when new), but the whole construction seems too flimsy to last.

In the Auto-Sleeper, the curtains have no way of fixing to the side pillars, leaving a notable gap. Perhaps I'd ask my friendly Auto-Sleeper dealer to supply a set of (thermal) window pads to secure my Warwick deal. Now, there's something that could usefully stow away up there above the cab with the table.

For both, night time lighting is good. No, make that better than good - there's an excellent array of lights in the right places

## **HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA**

#### **PRICE**

■ From: £41,995 OTR ■ As tested: £53,880 OTR

## BASICS (\*manufacturer's figures)

- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle & conversion
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No (we expect 2009 models to comply)
- Construction: All-steel body with acrylic double-glazed windows
- **Length:** 5.90m (19ft 4.5in)\*
- Width: 1.99m (6ft 6.5n)\*
   Height: 2.52m (8ft 3in)\*
- Wheelbase: 4.08m (13ft 4.5in)\*
- Rear overhang: 959mm (3ft 2in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg\*
- Payload: 650kg\* (after the vehicle in working order, driver (75kg), 90 per cent gas, fresh water, fuel)

#### THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Renault Master long wheelbase high roof panel van
- Engine: 2.5-litre common-rail turbo-diesel producing 120bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed Quickshift6 auto-changing gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
   Suspension: Front: Independent double wishbones with coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle with single-leaf springs
- Features: Central locking to all doors, ABS with EBD and EBA, electric windows and mirrors, driver's airbag, radio/CD player, trip computer, single door bins, centre console bin, glove box, electric slide-out step at sliding door, metallic paint, tinted windows, mud flaps

#### INSIDE

- Layout: Swivel cab seats ahead of offside settee, nearside single forward-facing seat, kitchen, full-width washroom incl. wardrobe
- Insulation: Rockwool to sidewalls, polystyrene blocks to floor and ceiling
- Interior height: 1.83m (6ft 0in)

#### **KITCHEN**

- Sink: Stainless steel rectangular combined bowl and drainer, mixer tap with swivel spout
- Cooker: Spinflo Caprice with three-burner hob plus one electric hotplate, grill, oven, pan store
   Fridge: Thetford three-way. Capacity 88 litres

### **WASHROOM**

- Toilet: Thetford C250 electric-flush, bench-type with wheeled cassette
- Basin: White drop-down bowl, with stainless steel mixer tap, mirror-fronted vanity unit
- Shower: White single-outlet GRP tray and shower curtain as part of washroom

### **BEDS**

Offside single

■ Length: 1.70m (5ft 7in)
■ Width: 610mm (2ft 0in)
Nearside single

■ Length: 1.75m (5ft 9in) ■ Width: 610mm (2ft 0in) Alternative longitudinal double

■ Length: 1.91m (6ft 3in) ■ Width: 1.83m (6ft 0in)

Timberland

### TIMBERLAND ENDEAVOUR XIX

### **EQUIPMENT**

- Fresh water: Underslung 50 litres (11 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung 40 litres (8.8 gallons)
- Water heater: Truma boiler, gas-mains operation
- Space heater: Eberspacher diesel-fired with blown-air
- Leisure batteries: 2 x 110 amp hr
- Gas: Underslung refillable tank, dashmounted contents gauge. Capacity 20 litres
- Lighting: Three fluorescent double strip lights overhead, four single fluorescent strips under lockers, twin spotlights over cab seats, fluorescent light over sink, awning light
- Sockets: 230V: Four (two each side of kitchen). 12V: One (nearside of kitchen)

### **OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

Fitted to test vehicle

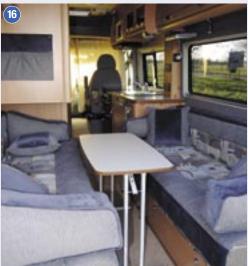
- Base: Executive Pack comprising colour-coded bumpers & awning, diesel heating, alloy wheels, water purifier, walnut-effect dashboard trim, electric rooflight, electric slide-out step at sliding door (£4495), Quickshift6 auto transmission (£1495), cab air-con (£1295), Thatcham Cat 1 alarm (£695)
- Conversion: Remis cab blinds (£495), flat screen TV/DVD player (£995) veneered shower door (£225), Oyster satellite TV dish (£1995), external barbecue point (£195)

Other options

- Base: 150bhp engine upgrade (£1,495), cruise control (£395), parking sensors (£375), auto lights/wipers (£245), front fog lights (£225)
- Conversion: None

E&OE







- 15 Single beds have the benefit of one-piece mattresses
- 16 Freestanding table provides for meals
- 17 The rear doors let fresh air into the lounge



and I think owners would have few qualms in this respect. Switches were found in the appropriate locations, too.

#### STORE ROOM

Full marks to Auto-Sleepers for its positive, push-button-operated locker door catches. Also noteworthy is the small 'safe' set out of sight in the floor of a seat base.

I've already mentioned the overcab area for the Warwick, Timberland's is a much preferable locker. Thereafter, the Endeavour loses the 'space race' at nearly every turn. Its overhead lockers are unshelved; indeed they don't even get partitions. Endeavour's settee base is compromised by the heating system's paraphernalia, while Warwick's two settee bases are easier to access and relatively uncluttered.

Warwick also boasts the bigger wardrobe, although I can see some folk not enjoying the way it extends over and above the nearside settee.

As mentioned, the Endeavour appears to have compromised on washroom space, part of that may be down to having its wardrobe in there.

#### **LIFE SUPPORT**

We've nearly all fallen foul of the horrendous cost of gas refills (£16.40 for a 6kg cylinder was my last hit), so it's a wonderful benefit to have a fitted gas tank (25 litres Warwick, 20 litres Endeavour, with Timberland considering uprating to a 40-litre on future models). With LPG retailing at around 50p a litre at filling stations, there are considerable savings to be had.

It's hardly surprising, considering the number of electrically operated options available, the Timberland comes with two leisure batteries. Auto-Sleepers will probably argue its one leisure battery is sufficient, while its use of energy-saving LED lighting is one of a number of aspects that suggests the Warwick is the more modern of the two 'vans. In fairness to Timberland, it argues that like Auto-Sleepers, much of its R and D work recently has been done on its rear lounge models at the expense of the front-loungers.

I'll also take slight issue with the location of the additional speakers in both living quarters. For some reason, Timberland puts one directly over the cooker (the other is over the settee). Auto-Sleepers has them both at the very rear, one over each settee. I do like to listen to music on board, but it's nice to get the balance right - literally.

Similarly, much as I prefer the Timberland's diesel-fired Eberspacher heater option (it really does pump out the heat), there's just the one outlet in the lounge. The Warwick's (Truma) gas/mains-operated blown-air system has outlets in the lounge, between the kitchen and the cab and critically, in the washroom. If you're considering using your camper all-year, boy, does this make a difference...

Does television count as life support?
Maybe. While I'm no TV watcher, both vehicles here have TV/DVD players with all the Freeview-type gubbins - this Endeavour even going as far as an (optional) Oyster satellite system. I wondered if the Endeavour's rather small screen (in a far neater unit) is too far from the lounge seating. Meanwhile, Auto-Sleepers admits it still has some work to do re housing the Warwick's monitor. Here, it's on the underside of a locker, and although on a hinged bracket, it's on display all the time – rather worrying from a security point of view. Also, the wiring looks uncharacteristically messy.

Decent enough insulation, heating and hot

water systems apart, I can't see either of these vehicles being considered for extensive out-of-season use. Again, the jury's out on insulation. Auto-Sleepers opts for Thinsulate throughout, Timberland uses a mix of Rockwool for the sides and polystyrene for the floor and roof.

As for general ambience, it's the Auto-Sleeper that comes across as the more refined. There's just that bit more done to present the interior as a whole rather than simply a sum of parts. Examples? Simple things like the Chinchilla glass lid to hide away the sink/ drainer, the way the blinds are partially hidden, and less reliance on carpet trim for the sidewalls - that sort of thing. Mind you, it's too early to judge the effectiveness of Auto-Sleepers' single-glazed athermic windows. One thing I did notice; they do collect condensation overnight.

And I'm intrigued by the Auto-Sleeper heater option, which, I'm told, is a method of ensuring the underslung tanks (common to both vehicles here) are kept free of the possibility of icing up. Again, Timberland offers a similar winter solution.

#### CONCLUSION

Prices start at £41,995 for the Endeavour, £38,995 for the Warwick Duo, but that's only the beginning of the story. You're going to have to do some real price/specification juggling to come up with any meaningful comparison – including the options you feel should be essential in a vehicle like this.

Nevertheless, as a manufacturer selling direct, Timberland prices should really be far more competitive – there's no third-party mark-up to factor in for retailers, for instance.

Both manufacturers play the quality card, but frankly, both could improve: The Timberland's locker door catches and the Auto-Sleepers' somewhat iffy TV fitting (although I'm assured work is being done on this) come to mind.

Timberland also claims flexibility. As a manufacturer/retailer, you are dealing direct with the producer of your motorhome – in this case one that can offer you a mouthwatering array of extras. Counter to this, the Auto-Sleepers price list only carries costs for manufacturer-fitted options. Only your imagination (or more likely, your wallet) limits the amount of extras most dealers will be able to fit.

There is one key criterion I would draw your attention to: residual values. It shouldn't come as a surprise that your bespoke, built to order vehicle could be worth a lot less than you expect when it comes to trade-in time, while mainstream dealers – and indeed the public generally, (just look at the classified ads each month) still clamour for previously-owned Auto-Sleepers.

As the maxim has it: you pays your money, you takes your choice...

# VEHICLES LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

Auto-Sleeper Warwick Duo Auto-Sleepers, Orchard Works, Willersey, Nr Broadway, Worcestershire WR12 7QF (tel: 01386 853338; web site: www.auto-sleepers.co.uk)

Timberland Endeavour
Timberland Motorhomes, Limber Road,
Kirmington, North Lincolnshire
DN39 6YP (tel: 0845 0099998; web site:
www.timberlandmotorhomes.com)



18 Twin single beds: the nearside example is a bit of a faff to construct 19 Double bed runs lengthways

20 Rear leads straight into the washroom with the table and worktop extension stowed on the inside of the doors



