





Words & pictures by
Dave Hurrell

LIVIN' IT LARGE

Swift Kon-Tiki 659 on 3.0-litre Fiat Ducato

Big on presence and facilities, the latest grand tourer from Swift is impressive from most angles



The latest addition to Swift's Kon-Tiki range is, like its three siblings, over 8.5m long and rides on a tag (twin rear) axle Al-Ko rear chassis. These days, all Kon-Tikis are front lounge designs, with various

types of fixed bed in the rear. I know very little about touring caravans, but my spies tell me that one of their most popular layouts is the one, here repeated, in the new-kid-on-the-block, 659. Indeed, Swift's latest range of luxury towing tourers, Conqueror, includes no less two of them (in caravans of different lengths), so I'm thinking the design must be very popular with tuggers.

This design is not new (I'm sure I can remember a similar Lunar model, and Auto-Trail has just launched its take on the layout): a front lounge and amidships kitchen stand ahead of a bedroom (with lengthways double bed).

The boudoir is served by a genuine across-the-rear en-suite washroom - genuine because there's no through-route and once the concertina room divider is closed, the whole is a haven of privacy for two. The downside is that anyone sleeping in the lounge, which makes up into a transverse double bed, has to pass through the bedroom to get to the facilities. Four-berth it may be, but - and especially as this 'van has no rear seatbelts - the 659 is really designed to provide luxury accommodation for two.

BIG ITALIAN

It's laudable that Swift doesn't try to make this model (or the other Kon-Tikis) initially appear cheaper by specifying the 130bhp engine as the standard power unit.

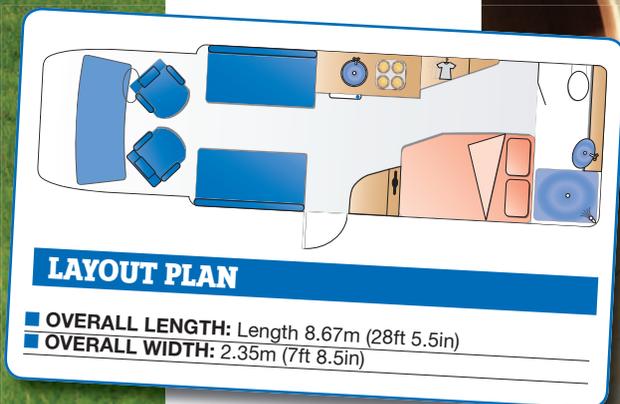
Laudable, because 130 horses just about stop short of being adequate for this size and weight of 'van and most customers would probably specify the bigger motor anyway.

The top-of-the-tree 157bhp engine that does come as standard is not only a deal more powerful, but it's torquey too: think plenty of oomph and grunt that means fewer gear-changes and a more relaxed drive. Turbine smoothness, at speeds between 50 and 70mph and hushed operation belies the fact that there's an oil-burner under the bonnet, while a nice high top gear only adds to a good feeling of unfussed progress.

With the Ducato's comfortable cab environment, light controls and excellent mirrors, this big motorhome is very easy to drive. It's even better and easier, too, than a bog standard Ducato, as a colour reversing/rear view camera (with internal mirror-mounted monitor), cruise control, cab air and passenger airbag are all standard.

It's only when negotiating an Aldi - sorry, this is a luxury 'van, Waitrose car park - that you notice the 659's bulk: the long length and wheelbase will mean that extra care is required, although those large mirrors make life a lot easier.

1 Amidships kitchen, with lounge up front, bedroom and washroom aft





RELAX

A quality, centrally locked caravan door makes for easy access and sees you arrive in the kitchen area. First impressions speak of comfort and class, with silver-trimmed (positive locking) cabinets adding to the sense of class.

Sensible dark brown (removable) carpets, cream suede-style upholstery, curtains with nets and concertina blinds all conspire to

make the Kon-Tiki's inside look as good as its outside. Indeed, the interior hits the spot for us Brits, as it'll be as comfy and cosy on dull wet days as it will be functional as a bright, stylish living space when the sun is shining. Above, a big overcab sunroof adds both natural light and bags of style.

The lounge sofas are too short for full feet-up lounging, but swivelled cab seats are on hand to provide a couple of armchairs. A dogleg-mounted table provides a snack 'n' coffee surface, while delving under the fixed double bed produces a freestanding table suitable for four to dine from.

Six people can be comfortably seated for drinks and a chin-wag, while the typical touring pair of residents should have plenty of room to sprawl and eat. Above the cab, there's a small drop-down TV with Freeview tuner and DVD player. Aft, built into the divider twixt kitchen and bedroom, is a drop-down TV locker, waiting to accept your choice of set. Once installed, it should be easy to swivel the TV (having raised the Venetian blind room divider) to watch while abed. Audio-visual entertainment is completed by the cab's radio - a unit that also plays CDs and discs burned with Mp3 files. An iPod input is present, while extra speakers deliver your favourite sounds to the bedroom.

COOK

Like the rest of this 'van, the galley is well equipped. The domestic-sized stove (with one mains hotplate) is the star of the show, while a microwave is a useful standard-fit feature.

The sink is a Swift-made GRP affair, with removable drainer that allows proper working surface to its left. The supplied drop-in chopping board adds yet more useful surface. No visible drawers in this galley provoked dark mutterings from yours truly: regular readers will know I'm a drawer-obsessed motorhome tester simply because they're so easy to use. However, delving into the low-level cupboard I discovered an internal cutlery drawer and some wire basket pullouts: okay Swift designers, you get away with it this time...

To refrigeration, and there's a useful Thetford fridge with full auto (Smart Energy Selection) operation that looks stylish. But there is no huge fridge/freezer, although the Kon-Tiki's designers

I LIKED

- Good looks
- Grand tourer credentials
- High specification as standard
- Powerful engine
- Al-Ko chassis
- Interior layout
- Top-loading freezer
- Full-sized cooker
- Sumptuous fixed bed
- Spacious washroom

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Option of rear seatbelts

I DISLIKED

- Lack of drawers in the kitchen
- Difficult access to underbed locker

2 Interior decor is classy, but with a cosy feel

3 The kitchen is extremely well equipped, but lacks 'proper' drawers

4 The freestanding dining table is fine for four

5 The table stows under the bed, which is enclosed by a room divider and served by a drop-down TV locker.

6 Across-the-rear washroom contradicts the term by being just one of the 659's unique selling points

7 Transverse lounge bed is easy to make

have been creative and very clever because stroll across the aisle and you discover a low-level cabinet that houses both a cupboard and a top-loading freezer. My desired drawers aside, this kitchen has pretty much all the ambitious cook could want.

BED 'N' BATH

With a good length, not too much of a cut-off at its foot and a thick, interior-sprung mattress riding on sprung staves, the bedroom's sleeping surface achieves domestic quality-plus status. There's plenty of room to sit up too, while the right-side sleeper can use the little vanity unit next the wardrobe (across the aisle) as a night table. Their partner is remembered too, as a little corner shelf - a simple but thoughtful touch - stands ready.

The washroom is also one of the stars of the show, and for an equally simple reason: it's space that helps make it work, with lots of room to move around and use the loo and basin. The shower, too, is of good proportions, and enclosed by a rigid single door. Outside, the aforementioned vanity unit is served by a mains socket - think hairdryer - while the adjacent wardrobe turns the whole into a pampering and changing area when enclosed by the boudoir's room divider.

In the lounge, a decent transverse double bed is made in seconds: pull the sofa bases together, backrests drop in and that's it.

KIT AND STORE

Heated tanks, large gas locker (two 13kg cylinders), all LED lighting, twin leisure batteries, dual-fuel boiler - all Kon-Tiki's kit is high-end, very capable and intelligently applied. Lighting is numerous and mains sockets are well placed: two above the cab should be good for powering a laptop while sitting in a swivelled seat. Storage is equally numerous and while the underbed locker is tricky to get at (no external hatch and the stowed table impedes access), up front there's an external door that gives into under-sofa space and a full-width underfloor area. Inside, the sofa base lifts on gas struts (as does its partner and the bed base) - another quality touch. Inside, lockers, cupboards and a decent wardrobe (narrowing towards the rear) provide plenty of space.

Finally, the five-tonne gross vehicle weight gives a payload that's close to a tonne so

TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

Swift Kon-Tiki 659 (prices quoted with VAT @ 20 per cent)

■ **Price from:** £70,179 OTR

■ **As tested:** £71,961 OTR

■ **The vehicle:** Fiat Ducato Al-Ko chassis cab; 3.0-litre turbo-diesel engine producing 157bhp; six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive

■ **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle and conversion

■ **Dimensions and weights:** Length 8.67m (28ft 5.5in); width 2.35m (7ft 8.5in); height 3.09m (10ft 1.5in); gross vehicle weight: 5,000kg; payload: 915kg

■ **Belted seats:** 2 (including driver)

■ **Beds:** Lounge double: 2.13m x 1.38m (7ft 0in x 4ft 6.5in); fixed double: 1.93m x 1.35m (6ft 4in x 4ft 5in) max

■ **Space and water heating:** Truma combi boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation

■ **Tanks:** Fresh water 120 litres (26.4 gallons), waste water 100 litres (22 gallons)

■ **Gas:** 2 x 13kg cylinders

■ **Options fitted to test vehicle:** Living area air-conditioning (£1,782) adds 35kg

■ **Other options available:** ComfortMatic auto gearbox (£1,629) adds 17kg, leather upholstery (£1,527)

E&OE



VEHICLE LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:
 Swift Motorhomes, Dunswell Rd,
 Cottingham, East Yorks HU16 4JS
 Tel: 01482-847332
 Web site: www.swiftmotorhomes.co.uk

younger and older drivers should check their licences to make sure they can drive it.

GRAND TOURING

Anyone who's interested in buying the 659 will probably want a low-level fixed double bed - this 'van's most important unique selling point. That's a contradiction in terms, I know, but this Kon-Tiki's success is based on its recipe: a set of top-notch facilities that encircle that essential fixed bed. Get any one of them wrong and it

could still be a deal breaker. Thankfully, that's not the case here, as comfy lounge, super kitchen, sumptuous double bed and spacious washroom all add up to a 'van that's just about perfectly suited to us Brits, while levels of standard-fit kit are very high.

When I first saw this 'van I had a genuine 'love at first sight' moment; more time spent looking under the skin of the Kon-Tiki 659 has done nothing to stop my heart being all flutter. ■

