

on the road again

La Strada are back in the UK, and the fixed bed Regent S is one of the stars of the line-up

LA STRADA was always a premium-priced, and therefore rather niche-market, brand here in the UK, so the vagaries of the fluctuating euro meant that it was almost inevitable that it would follow other small volume European brands out of the UK door as the economic climate worsened.

Oxfordshire-based Elite Motorhomes, however, have taken over from where former agent, Westcroft Motorhomes, left off a couple of years ago, and La Strada is once more back in the UK.

La Strada (which, German manufacturing roots aside, is actually the Italian for 'the road') have always played the quality engineering trump card, and nothing has changed for 2011. There's little else, IH and Westfalia aside, in this particular market sector that can even get close to matching the brand's inherent solidity and attention to detail, and while the budget conscious can still choose from Ford (Trento/Pronto) or Fiat (Avanti) underpinnings, it's the Mercedes three-pointed star that has always held the greatest appeal amongst La Strada customers.

The Sprinter-based Regent S tested here is a case in point. It looks superb in glossy black, allied to those slick seven-spoke alloy wheels (down to you for £853 in 16-inch Mercedes/Tomson alloy or a whopping

inches; those looking for the full 20-inch bling effect will need to find an additional £3700), while tasteful, minimal graphics add class, not vulgarity.

Engine options start with the 129bhp 2.2CDI and max out with the potent 190bhp 3-litre V6 powerhouse, although we suspect most buyers will occupy the middle ground and opt for the 163bhp 2.2 engine, which adds just £740 to the base model's price; those looking for maximum oomph, on the other hand, can expect to have a rather focusing £3300 added to their bill.

Whichever engine you specify, however, only chronic myopia – or chronically shallow pockets – should prevent you from ticking the options box marked 'automatic gearbox – £1362': the Sprinter's manual gearbox is notoriously notchy and unintuitive in layout, meaning autos are always more popular on the used market, as well as being much nicer to drive.

There's a host of other options to consider (four-wheel-drive, anyone!), but the real meat of the Regent S concerns its interior layout. In essence, think Adria Twin, and you're pretty much there: you enter through the huge sliding door into a half-dinette lounge allied to a pair of swivel cab seats. The former is equipped with proper three-point seatbelts, although given that the S is a relatively two-batch

FACT FILE

PRICE FROM £50,892

PRICE AS TESTED
£52,993

BERTHS 2

TRAVEL SEATS
(INC DRIVER) 4

DIMENSIONS 5.91m L,
2.04m W, 2.83m H

INTERIOR HEIGHT
1.95m

MAXIMUM WEIGHT
3500kg

PAYLOAD 550kg

BEDS Rear double bed
1.95m x 1.19m-1.44m

FRESH WATER
100 litres (inboard)

WASTE WATER
70 litres (inboard)

LEISURE BATTERY
100 Ah

MAINS SOCKETS 3

BASE VEHICLE

MERCEDES SPRINTER
MWB PANEL VAN

ENGINE 2.2CDI 129bhp

C

COOKING 3-burner
spark ignition hob

FRIDGE 60-litre
three-way

GAS 2 x 7kg

HEATING Truma Combi
4 blown-air

BOILER Truma Combi 4

RIVALS

occasional passengers than fellow campers.

Lifting and securing the heavily padded overcab ceiling opens up plenty of headroom, while natural and electric lighting are more than generous and bring out the best in the handsome rich cabinetry and oatmeal soft furnishings. The half-dinette backrest is typically (and unavoidably) upright, but the cab seats are supportive and comfortable.

The Twin-alike layout means that the galley is necessarily compact, but it extends to a three-burner spark-ignition hob and a decent-sized sink. The remote-located three-way fridge is a rather disappointing 60 litres in capacity, although opting for a compressor-type alternative brings with it an extra five litres. Storage is good, but Elite are likely to equip UK-bound models with a combined oven/grill of some description, which will obviously eat into available drawer space.

Moving further back, the attractive green-paned double doors to the right open to reveal a small, but well-designed washroom. Storage has been limited to a single eye-level locker to maximise the amount of space there is to bear around the shower tray, and the shower riser doubles as the washbasin tap (a compromise we've never been particularly happy with), but the large mirror adds an illusion of space, and it's all very well lit.

The best news of all, however, concerns the transverse end bedroom. Measuring a healthy (if not wholly four-square) 1.95m by 1.19m-1.44m, thanks to a specially widened nearside rear panel, the bedroom is surrounded by comfortably padded materials and genuinely feels like it's part of a coachbuilt in use. In daily driver mode, however, the bed base folds into a near-vertical position, and with the two-drawer unit beneath removed, there's a massive amount of through-storage space that even an extended visit to IKEA couldn't fully overwhelm.

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Words & Pictures | Michael Le Caplain

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but
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out

WHICH motorhome says ★★★★★
Not cheap, but beautifully engineered and carries ultimate badge kudos. Watch the base vehicle spec, though.

