

catch the 715

We intercepted the new fixed bed Lo-Line Tribute en route to its Manchester show debut

SOMETIME a motorhome range comes along that just feels right straight away. And so it was with the launch of the Ford-based Tribute coachbuilts manufactured by Auto-Trail. Then they made the 2012 models look a little sharper and honed the spec with the arrival of the must-have Sport Pack. And it was no surprise that the latest T-725 garage model (tested last month) walked away with the Family Coachbuilt award for 2012. But what the range was missing was any low-profile versions. Not any more...

Say hello, then, to the first Lo-Line (in Auto-Trail-speak) model Tribute. Or rather, one of the first, as there's also a more compact end kitchen two-berth T-615 (see News). But we reckon it's the T-715 that'll be grabbing the headlines. After all, not only does this seven-metre low-profile have the classic French bed layout that buyers in their thousands love, but it comes with a choice of 'couples spec' side settees in the lounge or a half-dinette (and two extra seatbelts, for an additional £800) for those who want to carry sprogs in the back.

And better still, you can tick the Sport Pack box (everyone will), and the 'HD' half-dinette seating option, spoil yourself with cab air-conditioning (at £955) and still spend less than £40k. In anyone's book that has to be great value.

A good deal of the Tribute's appeal for some customers will be the Transit cab.

Like the rest of the Tribute range, this has the motorhome spec lowered chassis and wide rear track and hurling the Ford around a couple of Grimsby roundabouts like a white van man on a mission shows that this is one very surefooted motorhome! The offside settee cushions ended up on the floor, but the soothing ride means there's a welcome lack of creaks or squeaks from aft of the cab.

As the Tranny has gone Euro V, we reckon you might get close to 30mpg if you don't drive like the aforementioned chap with the rolled up copy of The Sun on the dash. If, on the other hand, you're desperate not to be stuck on the Late Arrivals area one night you can always make the most of the stonking performance from the standard 140bhp motor, which is smoother than the 125bhp unit in the T-615.

On site, the Ford's more confined cab shows in the way the cab seats spin through little more than 90 degrees and the occupants here will be clashing knees. Never mind, there's room for four more on the slightly upright side benches. And two couples could comfortably dine together at the free-standing table (which has its own locker). This area feels even bigger than it is because the side windows are generously proportioned, there's a Heki sunroof above and the habitation door has a deep window. So daylight is in abundance, and production models will have reading lights on the offside

FACT FILE

PRICE FROM £37,149

PRICE AS TESTED
£38,148

BERTHS 4

TRAVEL SEATS (INC DRIVER) 2 (optional 4 – extra cost £800)

DIMENSIONS 6.95m L, 2.27m W, 2.63m H (excluding TV aerial)

INTERIOR HEIGHT
1.94m

MAXIMUM WEIGHT
3500kg

PAYLOAD 640kg (595kg with Sport Pack)

BEDS Forward lounge bed 1.98m x 1.21m, rear fixed bed 1.89m x 1.26m

FRESH WATER
85 litres (underfloor)

WASTE WATER
85 litres (underfloor)

LEISURE BATTERY 70Ah

MAINS SOCKETS 3

BASE VEHICLE

FORD TRANSIT LWB WIDE-TRACK LOW-FRAME CHASSIS

ENGINE 2.2TDCi 140bhp Euro V

COOKING/HEATING

COOKING Thetford three-burner hob, Duplex combined oven/grill

FRIDGE Dometic 85-litre with removable freezer compartment

GAS 1 x 13kg & 1 x 7kg

HEATING Trumatic gas convector with Ultraheat 230V blown-air (Sport Pack)

BOILER Truma Ultrastore gas/mains

RIVALS

BAILEY APPROACH 740 SE

ELDDIS AUTOQUEST 155

ESCAPE 664

SWIFT SUNDANCE 620FB

as well as the nearside.

There are his and hers lights over the fixed bed, and the lack of any rear window makes sitting up under the duvet with the Sunday papers a very appealing prospect (especially as the mains heating controls – still linked to an old-fashioned-looking gas fire – are within reach too). That's if you wake up in time to get a Sunday paper, as the thick mattress seemed exceptionally soporific. It does suffer the usual chopped off corner (though no more so than rivals) and the bed also seems rather hemmed in, between the big wardrobe at the foot of the bed and washroom alongside.

Access to the loo will definitely be of the clamber-over-you type for one sleeper, but the bed also seems more private, to the extent that we'd like a privacy curtain to be fitted when you go for the HD seating up front (and are more likely to use four berths).

Both the galley and the washroom carry on with the best aspects of other Tribute models. In the kitchen that means a decent amount of worktop space between triangular hob and sink units, plus a standard-fit oven/grill, while in the washroom it means a proper separate shower, which gives it a real advantage over rivals from Elddis and Swift.

Where the latest Tribute also scores highly is in storage capacity. The space under the bed is vast, and easily accessed from both inside and out. There are plenty of eye-level lockers with positive locking catches and what you might think are two tiny overcab compartments turn out to be one huge locker fed by twin doors. If you're using the T-715 as a four-berth, this space will easily house thick winter bedding and pillows for the front bed. Then there's a massive floor-to-ceiling shelved cupboard for folded clothes between the galley and the washroom, as well as unencumbered under-seat lockers with bases that rise on gas struts. Payload is plentiful, too, so you really will be able to pack a spare kitchen sink!

The first low-profile model in the Tribute range



WHICH motorhome says ★★★★★

Superb value addition to Britain's best budget motorhome range, with a proven layout, choice of lounge and Sport Pack.

**EXCLUSIVE
FIRST EVER
TEST**



it has the classic french bed that buyers love, but comes with a choice of side settees or half-dinette

Words & Pictures | Peter Vaughan

