

magical history tour

Our Adria long-term test 'van is put through its paces during a winter tour of motor museums in the Midlands

BORROWING a magazine's long-term test 'van, when it has already been through the hands of several others, is a bit like being the last one into the bath after older siblings have had their dip! Well, that's the thought that occurred to me as I first opened the sliding side door of *Which Motorhome's* Adria Twin SF, to load in all my travelling kit. None of the shiny new surfaces you get when testing a factory-fresh motorhome, but instead just a hint of grubby upholstery and a few general signs of wear and tear.

Our long-term Adria is now approaching 5000 miles, all of them in our hands, and the signs of use are starting to show. I doubt a series of motoring journalists are going to be as caring with a 'van as a private owner would be, but I guess this is the whole point of a long-term 'van, so that we can report back to you just how well a motorhome stands up to regular use. Anyway, more of that later, now I should explain what I am actually using the Adria for this month.

The fact that you are reading this magazine probably means you're a motoring enthusiast, at least to some degree. So, I thought it would be a good idea to use the Adria for a winter tour of motoring museums. My destination is the birthplace of motoring in the UK, the Midlands, which is now home to several motor museums. It's a great basis for a winter break, as the museums I visited are open all year round, and, of course, the exhibits are inside - in the warm! If your partner isn't a car enthusiast, your ammunition for some arm-twisting is the fact that there's plenty more to do in the area. For example, the free-to-enter Coventry Motor Museum is right in the heart of the city, so your partner could wander round the impressive Cathedral ruins, the free Herbert Art Gallery, or do a spot of shopping, while you're checking out a cut-away Triumph Herald, or trying to count just how many of the cars in the museum you have owned yourself, at some point. The cars I have owned over the years included a classic

FACT FILE

PRICE FROM £40,990

PRICE AS TESTED
£45,871

EXTRAS Metallic paint (£990), radio/CD (£96), Supaguard paint protection set (£499), bedding set (£190), leisure battery (£216), Van SE Lux Pack - cab air-con, passenger airbag, cruise control, ambient lighting, Star Sky lights, illuminated step, Combi 4E gas/electric heating (£2890)

ON TEST SINCE
15 August 2011

MILEAGE NOW 4877

MPG THIS MONTH 29.2

FAULTS Bubbling-up suede-effect trim on sliding entrance door, leisure battery in box under dinette seat is not secured

LATEST TRIP Staying at the Caravan Club's Chapel Lane site near Birmingham, while visiting motoring museums in the Midlands



Words & Pictures | Steve Rowe

long-term test adria twin sf

Mini 1000, Morris Minor Traveller, Mk1 Ford Escort and VW Type 2 campervan, all of which can be found in the museum - does that make me a museum piece too?

As well as the museum in Coventry, I am visiting the Heritage Motor Centre in Gaydon, Warwickshire, plus the National Motor Cycle Museum, which is just off the M42, on the same roundabout you use to enter the NEC. As a fan of motorcycles, as well as cars (with three bikes currently filling the back of my single garage, in front of my Smart car!), I first visited the National Motor Cycle Museum about 15 years ago, and the collection seems to have grown a lot since then. Now there are hundreds of British bikes, right from the start of motor cycling in the late 19th Century - a visit here is a must if you've got any interest in two-wheeled transport.

The Heritage Motor Centre is equally important if you're a fan of four-wheeled motoring. I first saw many of the vehicles that form this fascinating collection when they were housed at a place called Syon Park, in West London. However, 18 years ago a brand-new museum was built near Gaydon in Warwickshire, just off the M40, which now houses this collection, along with many more motoring exhibits. What made the collection so fascinating when I first saw it in West London was all the prototype

cars that never made it into production. For instance, my second ever car was an old MG Midget, and the museum houses a 1970s prototype for a new Midget, which never made it into production. Styling-wise, it looks somewhat like the Fiat X1/9, and I'm sure it would have been a success. This car is one of many prototypes, as well as modified versions of production cars that were never made, which now sit alongside some well-preserved examples of British cars that did make it into the showrooms.

That's enough nostalgia for the moment, what about the Adria, you ask? How well did it motor along during my short break? Well, going back to the issue of wear and tear for a moment, one thing that first struck me on entering the 'van was a sort of bubbling-up of the suede-style interior trim on the sliding side door. I can only assume this has been caused by some type of damp, perhaps just a damp atmosphere inside the Adria, when it has been left standing for a while? This might have been enough to move some of the material away from its foam backing. It makes no difference to the practical use of the vehicle, but does look a little unsightly.

One aspect that does really annoy me, and does affect the practical use of the vehicle, is the position of the gas locker box, blocking most of the entrance through the sliding side door. I can imagine someone



FOR

LONG AND SUPPORTIVE REAR BED

EASY TO DRIVE, WITH QUIET AND POWERFUL EURO V ENGINE

PLENTY OF STORAGE, INCLUDING THE LARGE REAR 'GARAGE' AREA

LOTS OF INTERIOR LIGHTING OPTIONS

AGAINST

GAS LOCKER BOX IS AWKWARDLY PLACED

REAR BED IS QUITE HIGH UP

MAINS RCD HARD TO ACCESS, IN THE DINETTE SEAT BASE

ONLY A COUPLE OF MAINS SOCKETS

in the Adria drawing office thinking that this was a good idea, as the top of this box doubles up as a seat, next to the front table, but as well as blocking most of the doorway, it really impedes movement inside the 'van. Without it, the clever layout would feel much more roomy, but with it you feel like you're constantly battling with the furniture when moving around inside.

If I were the designer, I would have extended the kitchen unit so that it butted out slightly in front of the doorway, and put the gas locker in this. Kitchen units which slightly cover the sliding side door access area have become a popular design feature in many van conversions now, and they block much less of the doorway than this separate gas locker box does. Another option would be to put the gas locker at the rear, with access through the rear doors, though this would make the under-bed storage 'garage' at the rear much less useful.

Since the Adria already has space for four to sit, once the swivelling cab seats have been turned to face the dinette table, I don't think this gas locker seat is really necessary. Just to add insult to injury, I scraped my leg on one of the chrome catches that secures the door



As it was December, I decided to use my time with the Adria to visit motor museums in the Midlands, where the exhibits, and visitors, are kept nice and warm inside! Although some smaller museums shut for winter, the three I visited are open all year, so are great for a short winter break. If your partner isn't into motoring, there's plenty to do in the area, with lots of shops to explore. My home was the Caravan Club's Chapel Lane site, on the outskirts of Birmingham. For details of all the exhibits, the museums I visited have good websites, so be sure to check these out.



The Caravan Club's Chapel Lane site was my home. It's very close to the NEC - ideal if you're visiting a show there and want to stay nearby.

1st stop



The Coventry Transport Museum is right in the centre of the city and it's free to enter. Check out the website: www.transport-museum.com

2nd stop



on the gas locker – I want danger money (there's nothing left in the budget! – Ed).

Before getting on to more positive stuff, I'd also like to moan about the kitchen, which doesn't have all the features we Brits love. For cooking there's just a two-burner gas hob, with no oven or grill. There's a sink for washing up, but no drainer, or space for one, and in fact, there's very little space in the kitchen at all and hardly any worktop, unless you put the hinged glass covers for the sink or hob down. Facing the kitchen, the three-way fridge is of a decent size, so that's our first good point.

The rest of the layout is really clever and I'm always impressed when manufacturers manage to squeeze a permanent bed into a van conversion. It's arguably never the best use of space, but I love the fact that you don't have to juggle seat cushions at night to make up the bed, plus you can leave your bedding in place during the day. The Adria's permanent French bed is mounted quite high up, which makes for a large storage space under it (accessed via the twin rear doors), but it means that you have to be quite athletic to get into the bed. I'm over 6ft tall, and even I felt like I was taking a leap

into the unknown when I dangled my legs over the side of the bed to 'pay a visit' during the night. In its favour, though, I have to say that this fairly firm and supportive bed is *very* comfortable and it's also quite long, with my 6ft 2in frame filling it exactly – in some fixed bed layouts I have to sleep curled up as I can't stretch out fully. So, full marks to the Adria designers here.

If you want to get to the loo during the night, the narrow washroom is fine, but it's a bit of a squeeze if you plan to have a shower. A couple of curtains screen off some of the washroom, but you still have to remove the toilet roll and towel from their holders, if you don't want them to get wet. Also, the 'van's wheelarch intrudes into the washroom and reduces the size of the shower tray, so only the reasonably slim would enjoy having a shower here. But, as they say, you can't have everything, and this is still a better-than-average toilet area for a van conversion.

Another quick gripe, while I remember. I managed to trip the mains fuses when boiling the kettle, while using my toaster, and it took ages to find the RCD 'fuse' box. I eventually found it in the box under the forward-facing dinette seats, where it was

next to a loose leisure battery, which had bashed right up against it. It's hard to access here, especially as you have to remove the seat cushion first, so even fitting the RCD in the back of the wardrobe would have been a better bet. Incidentally, I only found two mains sockets in the Adria, one in the kitchen and one above the bed. The socket in the bedroom is next to a TV aerial socket, so you could mount a flatscreen TV on the wall here, to watch when you're in bed.

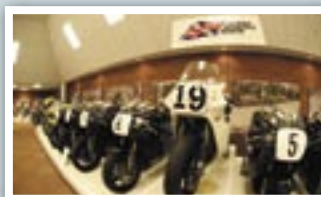
Due to the lack of sockets, I had the kettle in the kitchen and the toaster on the bed (on a tray, I might add!), with a tripwire suspended down the central aisle when I wanted to use my laptop in the dinette – plugged back into the kitchen socket! Mains sockets don't cost much, so why are motorhome manufacturers always so mean with them?

Seems like I've moaned a lot this month, but there's also a lot to like about this Adria. If you're after a van conversion with a permanent bed, plus a large rear storage area and the ability to carry a couple of passengers in the back, plus a reasonable toilet compartment, then the Adria Twin SF could be the perfect choice. It has few rivals and it looks good, too.



While in Coventry, I took time to look around the ruins of the Cathedral, famously bombed during WW2. Close by is the shopping centre.

3rd stop



The National Motor Cycle Museum has 100s of bikes, telling the story of motor cycle manufacture in the UK: www.nationalmotorcyclemuseum.co.uk

4th stop



The Heritage Motor Centre is home to a fascinating collection of exhibits. For details, visit the website at: www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk

5th stop

