

# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

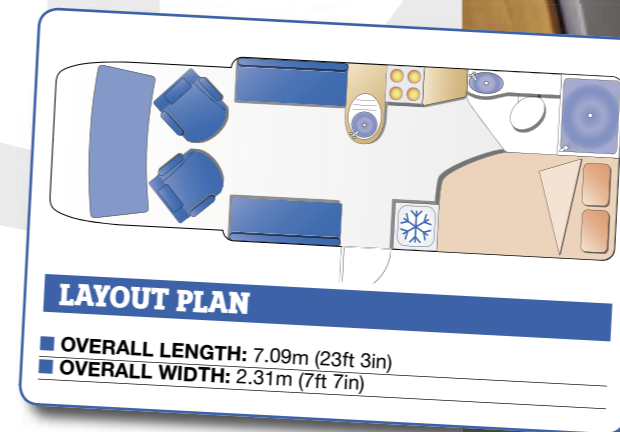
Auto-Trail Tracker FB Super Lo-line on 2.3-litre Fiat Ducato chassis cab



Andrew and Rona Bromley test an exciting new addition to Auto-Trail's Tracker family of smaller coachbuilts



- 1 New Ducato cab, with dark fascia and multi-media screen
- 2 Streamlined overcab locker offers space for bedding, with useful cubbies alongside
- 3 Lounge from rear – two comfortable settees and drop-down television,



Auto-Trail motorhomes are unmistakable, whether they are huge eight-metre Comanches or six-metre Trackers. Hi-lines with formidable brows, Lo-lines (nearly low profile) or Super Lo-lines (true low profiles) all have the distinctive family look. They all look very similar except to a true aficionado, with generic blue, silver and grey decals – you may need to sneak a look at the name on the nose and sides for positive identification.

Auto-Trail, based in Grimsby, has made motorhomes for 30 years and many of its older Mercedes-based 'vans (equally as distinctive as the modern breed), can still be seen on Britain's roads – a testament to rugged build quality.

Now, all Auto-Trails are based on Fiat's Ducato, which has just been upgraded. Although the original Tracker – the baby of the

range – was built on the smaller Fiat Scudo, later production on Ducato has still resulted in a 'van of modest proportions.

This year, the existing Tracker EKS is joined by two more: the baby RS, with washroom across the rear, and the longer FB. Any Tracker (like most Auto-Trails), can be specified with Hi-line, Lo-line or Super Lo-line roofs at no extra cost. Moreover, a half-dinette layout is also available (at cost) if two extra travel seats are vital.

Here, we test the lengthier FB, with just the two cab seats for travelling and Super Lo-line roof. Look out for a review of the RS version in the November issue of *Which Motorhome*.

## INTERIOR

Auto-Trail's clientele seek a luxurious, distinctly British motorhome, with a robust and classy feel, as well as competitive price and specification. Many motorhomes love a fixed bed, and the FB's longitudinal double (French

bed) in the nearside rear will appeal – but it also offers a transverse double formed from the lounge settees. The washroom occupies the offside rear and the L-shaped kitchen is amidships, on the offside.

The stylish habitation door (connected to the cab's central-locking system) is, naturally, on the nearside. Access is via a Thule step, which retracts when the ignition is fired, after a warning beep.

Trackers have charcoal and cream Thornbury upholstery; cream removable carpets (except in the cab, where it's practical dark grey), over a dark, wood-strip effect vinyl floor; cream curtains, with lime green tie-backs; and medium-brown, Aosta woodwork. Ample LED lighting and a huge, over-cab skylight create a bright and welcoming interior.

## SIDE-TRACKED

Outside, our test 'van was all-over gleaming white – specify the Platinum Pack for a

metallic silver finish to cab, front bumpers and side skirts. The body panels have thick GRP skins, and look robust and solid.

## ON THE TRACK

This 'van had the new cab finish and Euro 5 Multijet II engine. It still displaces 2.3 litres and delivers 130bhp, but is reportedly more economical and cleaner than its predecessor. An upgrade to 150bhp is available, with the three-litre option now provides 177bhp.

The test vehicle was very new, the engine tight and I'm old-fashioned – I 'run-in' new motors. Nonetheless, it accelerated, handled and held the road just as a Ducato should – very well.

It's built on Fiat's Camper chassis, with a wider rear track, and shod with Continental's Vanco-Camper tyres. The new Ducatos, in Auto-Trail specification, are very well equipped, with traction control/ESP, twin airbags, cruise control, cab air-conditioning

and new-style Remis cab blinds.

The main visible differences from the previous model are the very dark (nearly black) fascia and a large screen on the central console, operating as the reversing camera screen, plus radio, MP3, Bluetooth and satnav if specified. Many will be delighted that the automatic radio cut-off (with ignition off) can now be set for up to three hours. The camera wasn't connected on the test vehicle, but I found no difficulty reversing, despite the lack of rear window as those door mirrors give excellent visibility.

## REST STOP

Auto-Trail has fitted a new swivel to its cab seats, so both now turn fully without fouling either settee, thus allowing feet up lounging (though there's no reading light in the cab). Alternatively, if you wish to lounge facing the cab, there's ample back-support at the rear end of the settees, with scatter cushions for comfort.

If you've specified the Media Pack, a 15-inch Avtex TV drops down from above the cab, perfectly positioned for viewing. There are adjustable LED reading lights under the offside overhead lockers, but, oddly, there's only ambient lighting over the nearside.

Seating is comfortable, but although the seat cushions appear flat, there's actually a modest swell towards the front – a nascent knee-roll; the backrest has slight shaping, too. No problem for lounging, but these features may cause a nuisance when converting the settees to a bed.

The large, free-standing table (comfortably offering space for four), has a dedicated locker by the habitation door.

This motorhome, like all Auto-Trails, is heavily insulated, boasting the NCC's highest grade (Grade III) of insulation and heating. Inside, temperatures can be maintained at 20 degrees C, even if it's minus 15 outside. A Truma Combi 4E heater under the rear bed

(working on gas or mains electricity), blows heat through vents in the lounge, washroom, under the washroom step (to benefit the sleeping area) and doorway.

**FOOD ON THE GO**

The L-shaped kitchen, behind the offside settee is well specified. There's lots of workspace, increased by a removable lid covering half the stainless-steel, stipple-finish sink, which has an integral drainer. A mains socket above the work-surface is ideally placed for the kettle.

The cooker has a four-burner, dual-fuel hob under a glass lid. There's a separate grill and oven, and a small pan cupboard. We feel this hob design means only small pans can be used, particularly on the sunken electric plate; preferring three, more widely separated burners. There's no extractor over the cooker – instead, there's a centrally-placed ceiling skylight with fan above the kitchen area.

Kitchen storage is excellent. One overhead locker has a tambour door and wiring for a microwave; the other is large and unshelved. A curved door under the sink opens to reveal a large cupboard containing a capacious cutlery tray plus another shelf. The floor lifts to reveal a hidden cubby. Alongside the curved cupboard is another tall space with two deep shelves.

The fridge unit is opposite the main kitchen, behind the habitation door. It's huge – 190-litres total capacity, including the separate freezer – and has three-way auto-selection. There's another tambour-doored cupboard above.

Overall, it's a classy, practical kitchen which would be a pleasure to use.

**CLEAN TRACKS**

The washroom hides behind a wooden door in the offside rear corner. Inside, the washbasin is set in a vanity unit – a large mirror above has integral LED lights. There are two cupboards with chrome baskets – one below the basin, one wall-mounted.

Thetford's C250 swivel loo is centrally placed, with the shower cubicle beyond. This has bi-fold frosted doors and the walls are smooth, easily-cleaned plastic.

The shower tray has but one drainhole; on this prototype, sited at the rear – drainage would be better were it placed to the front, as



the 'van sits slightly 'tail-high'. There's a towel ring, loo-roll holder and two robe-hooks on the door, plus skylight for ventilation.

**TRACKING AT NIGHT**

And now, the *raison d'être* of the FB's design – the French bed. Those who like 'em, love 'em.

This one is an excellent example with a sprung mattress, reading lights above the padded headboard, ambient lighting, additional speakers, shelves for the lady of the house (I'm assuming she has the cutaway side!) and room to sit up in bed. There's a TV point and sockets at the foot of the bed (on his side!) and a skylight.

However, the bed is a little short, at 1.88m (6ft 2in), and width narrows from 1.3m (4ft 3in) to 1m at the foot. We're not fixed-bed fans because reaching overhead lockers involves scrambling across the bed, and the cut-away dictates sleeping position – with the smaller partner to the outside.

With us, the mattress swiftly becomes hidden under coats and clutter, rather negating the intended purpose of an instant bed. Whatever our views, these beds are very popular. And, there's always the lounge bed...

This is, potentially, swiftly made. Settee bases pull to the 'van's centre, seat cushions meet in the middle and backrests drop into the gaps by the walls. However, the slight knee-rolls make the resultant bed lumpy, so the seat cushions need turning, the raised sections facing the walls and backrests are placed in the centre. The backrests are slightly shaped, too, so must be turned upside-down.

The resulting bed is supportive though, 2.11m (6ft 11in) long and between 1.22m (4ft) and 1.17m (3ft 10in) wide. When remaking the settees, slats at head and foot of the bed tended to jam, so the bed/settee bases wouldn't slide back smoothly. This was a prototype 'van, though so we expect the problem will be sorted before production.

With two double beds, even though only two can travel (in this layout), you get the luxury of choice – and space. If you specify the half-dinette, the lounge bed can still be made, so this becomes a proper four-berth tourer.

**STORAGE**

This motorhome is intended for serious long distance travelling, but has it enough storage and payload to cope?

Auto-Trail has set the FB's maximum weight at 3,650kg, so you'll need to check your licence for entitlement to drive. If there's a problem, the 'van could be replated to 3,500kg, but payload, already marginal at 370kg, reduces to a low 220kg.

The good news is there's lots of storage, starting with a streamlined overcab wooden locker, capable of accepting sensible quantities of bedding, plus open cubbies either side of the overcab. Upper doors throughout lack positive locks, but, in practice, hold fast and don't rattle.

The settee-bases have lift-up slatted tops with weak gas struts, but there's plenty of room underneath – the offside locker also has exterior access. There are four overhead lockers in the lounge (one occupied by the Sargent power supply unit) and there are more above the fixed bed. The main store, though, is below this bed – again the slatted base rises on gas struts, which are strong enough to hold it! The space here is enormous and largely uncluttered, despite containing the Truma



**WE LIKED**

- Base vehicle
- Quality of finish, inside and out
- Proper kitchen sink and drainer
- Lots of accessible storage
- High level of equipment for price
- Spare wheel with lockable cover

**WE WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- Toilet with its own flush supply
- A few more spot lights – over kitchen and nearside settee
- Three-burner hob for larger pans, rather than four-burner hob for small ones
- More payload

**WE DISLIKED**

- Shaped foam settee cushions that interfere with lounge bed-making
- Loose slats on lounge bed bases

**TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION**

- **Price:** £48,570 OTR
- **Price as tested:** £50,369 OTR
- **The vehicle:** Fiat Ducato camper chassis cab; 2.3-litre Multijet II Euro 5 turbo-diesel 130bhp engine; six-speed manual gearbox; front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Base vehicle and conversion – three years
- **Dimensions and weights:** Length 7.09m (23ft 3in). Width 2.31m (7ft 7in). Height (not including optional Maxview Vudome) 3.03m (9ft 11in). Gross vehicle weight 3,650kg. Payload 370kg
- **Belted seats:** 2 (including driver)
- **Beds:** Lounge double (transverse) 2.10m (6ft 11in) x 1.22m max (4ft 0in). Rear fixed bed 1.88m (6ft 2in) x 1.00m (3ft 3in) to 1.30m (4ft 3in)
- **Water and space heating:** Truma Combi

- 4E, gas/electric operation, blown air
- **Tanks:** Fresh water 100 litres, waste water 55 litres. Underslung, insulated and heated
- **Gas:** 1x 13kg, 1x 7kg cylinders
- **Options fitted to test vehicle:** Media Pack + includes remotely controlled Maxview Vudome satellite aerial, European sat nav, 15-inch drop-down TV, 7-inch touch screen radio/CD/DVD player, Bluetooth connectivity, colour and infra-red reversing camera (£1,799)
- **Other options available:** 80W solar panel (£725), white roof rack (£195), white rear ladder with security lock (£275), heaters for water tanks (£100 per tank), rear steadies (£150), half-dinette with two three-point seat-belts (£800), alternative cloth upholstery (£205), engine upgrade to 148bhp (£940)

– and there's exterior access.

The wardrobe, on the offside between kitchen and washroom, is also large with a 1.09m (3ft 7in) drop from a removable rail and two shelves below – one of which is removable. Finally, there's a useful exterior locker, mid-way along the offside.

So, there's ample space, but bear in mind the modest payload when packing.

**EQUIPMENT**

This model had the £1,799 Media Pack Plus, with all manner of remote-control satellite goodies including a roof-mounted Camos dome, fitted. But the base model has an array of standard features that you'd expect to be expensive optional extras.

A recessed awning, external barbecue point, external Bullfinch shower point, insulated water tanks, dimmer-switch controlled LED lighting – and a proper spare wheel under a stylish, lockable, easily-accessible cover – are all standard.

**CONCLUSION**

Auto-Trail has a winner on its hands here; well-designed, robustly made, very well specified, comfortable and practical. ■

4 A cosy lounge, yet well illuminated by the overcab sunroof

5 Well-equipped kitchen, with work-surface, conveniently placed socket and stainless-steel drainer, plus good storage

6 Well-appointed washroom. Shower cubicle in rear has smooth, easily-cleaned plastic walls

7 Fixed bed – this has good headroom, reading lights, bedside shelves and TV point – true luxury!

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