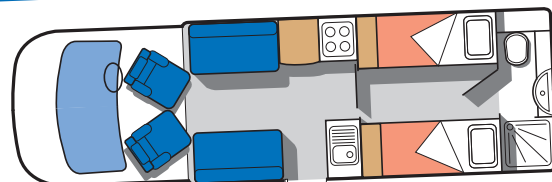




SINGULARLY SUCCESSFUL



AUTOCRUISE AUGUSTA



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 7.54m (24ft 9in)*
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*

Permanent single bed designs are comparatively new to the UK market, but are already proving popular. Two big hitters vie for podium honours

Step right this way! See the lion-hearted British-built Augusta take on the Teutonic rising Sun Ti from Knaus. With 'as tested' price tags of around fifty thousand pounds, purchasers have a right to expect a top-quality build together with a high level of supplied equipment, plus a large dollop of the wow factor. We feel that neither of these two will disappoint!

Before getting into a microscopic examination of these two motorcaravans, let's look at the basic similarities and obvious differences.

The single most important feature of each is permanent single beds. The target market will be partners who prefer to sleep separately, plus the increasing number of motorcaravanners who are not partners, but friends or relatives for whom sharing a double bed may not be appropriate.

When permanent single beds first appeared in motorcaravans, I found myself saying that they were a waste of a good settee. After all, how difficult is it to convert a full-length settee to a single bed? Mature reflection and live-in test experience has forced me to (partially) reconsider my position. Any permanent bed is instantly accessible and, more importantly, the correct grade of

foam/interior springing can be chosen as it doesn't also have to do duty as a seat.

However, it's not all joy as (unless the lounge is forfeited completely), there is usually an increase in body length over a 'van not equipped with permanent beds. This also brings a commensurate reduction in drive and park-ability.

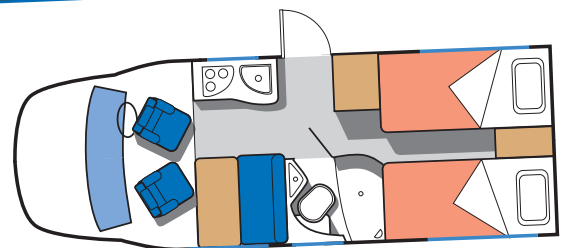
Both the Autocruise and the Knaus are low and longish. The Knaus stretched the tape to 6.86m (22ft 6in), while the Autocruise is another 2ft longer at 7.54m (24ft 9in). The Brit sits on the big new Peugeot Boxer (with Al-Ko wide-track low-line rear chassis), whereas the German graces (rather more overbearingly) the long wheelbase Renault Master platform chassis.

The rear track of the Master is narrower than that of the Peugeot's Al-Ko chassis, with the result that the rear wheels appear (and are) more inboard. Whether this is actually a disadvantage is something we'll look at later.



Words & pictures by Jonathan Lloyd

KNAUS SUN TI 650ME



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 6.86m (22ft 6in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but you'd be hard pushed to actively dislike either motorcaravan. The frog-like front of the Master is smoothly rounded and very well executed. The Boxer, together with its Sevel-built chums (Fiat Ducato and Citroen Relay), is currently joint leader in the race to have the highest headlights in the world *and* the biggest chin; though to be fair, the designers have made a cracking job of it.

Fellow journalists have commented that the latest Sevel has made the rest look old-fashioned by comparison. Everybody is entitled to an opinion, of course, but whenever folk say that kind of thing, you know there is going to be a - but. My but is that although this is true with the outgoing Sevel, it's not universally the case. To my eyes, regular facelifts combined with Sun's duck-egg coloured bumper has kept the Renault well on the pace in the eye candy stakes.

Our Augusta was white with just a few well-chosen graphics. I say 'ours,' as Autocruise is well known for producing all-silver thoroughbreds so, in the future, this may be an option. Augusta's coachwork did look clean though, and the fit-for-purpose stance induced by the wide track chassis is only slightly let down by the standard (OK on a bread van, but not so good on a fifty-grand motorcaravan) Peugeot wheel trims. In contrast, all Suns arrive

with alluring alloys as standard.

For those interested in construction, each uses bonded sandwich walls. The Sun's are aluminium-clad with aluminium skirts; the Augusta's GRP-clad with moulded GRP skirts. Autocruise also uses an aluminium frame for extra rigidity.

I'm not prepared to divulge where I stand concerning the saloon bar argument over the definition of low profile - unless, of course, you buy me a pint! The argument goes thus: one lot says that the relative difference in radius and height of the front curve of the overcab means that the Knaus is a low profile, whereas the Autocruise is actually a low line. Dissenters claim that both are low profile because neither overcab roof has a lutton hump enclosing a bed.

Finally price: or should that be cost? Anyway, as tested the Autocruise is £52,700 and the Knaus more than two thousand pounds cheaper at £50,195 despite sporting some add-ons. More usefully, a comparison of each model's on-the-road starting price reveals that the Knaus Sun Ti has a six thousand pound price advantage. On the other hand, there is more of the Augusta... Perhaps I should have worked out the cost per metre!

MOTIVE POWER

Both are front-wheel drive with six-speed gearboxes and both have more horses than Newmarket. Each equine contributor should be Euro 4 compliant, though I'm not sure this particular Pug would get past the first hurdle. Fortunately for the Peugeot Boxer, current legislation only bans smoking in enclosed public spaces, as the Augusta smoked like Andy Capp used to before he became more politically correct. Black smoke was emitted whenever the loud pedal was pressed, a bad case of over-fuelling, I guess. I know this is not typical of the smaller Peugeot engine, and would assume that it is not typical of three-litre examples either. That having been said, the three-litre lump was just thrilling to drive and provided amazing acceleration, even on this four tonner.

With an eleven horsepower disadvantage the Sun Ti's Master was always going to be



AUTOCRUISE AUGUSTA

I LIKED

- Aluminium-framed construction
- Good ride thanks to wide track Al-Ko chassis
- Jaw-dropping acceleration
- Capable lounge
- Choice of soft furnishing fabrics
- Well-equipped spacious kitchen
- Wet central heating system
- Radiator in washroom

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Wider permanent single beds
- Option for rear travel seats in this four-berth 'van

I DISLIKED

- Excessive exhaust smoke



- 1 New Peugeot cab is top banana
- 2 The 157bhp engine proved to be a bit smoky
- 3 Augusta's lounge comfortably accommodated six. Freestanding table can also be used for alfresco dining
- 4 General view rearwards. Behind the kitchen is the bedroom, with the washroom right at the rear



the loser here, and it was. Marginally. It might have less oomph on paper (it certainly wasn't as urgent) but it still had plenty of go for most of us. Further, more appropriately chosen gear ratios made it far more relaxing to drive. It would definitely lose out to the Peugeot in a 0-60mph sprint, but who cares?

The Boxer was first off the blocks for this test and so surprised was I by its emissions, that when it came to the Renault's turn, I deliberately tried to make it smoke: zilch, nothing, clean as a whistle. Food for thought, especially when I recalled that Renault withdrew its three-litre engine (allegedly over concerns about emissions).

ROAD MANNERS

'Cornered as if it was on rails' is a well-worn cliché, but that doesn't stop it being true of the Peugeot/Al-Ko combo. Not only that, Al-Ko has also sorted out the bone-jarring ride formerly experienced over potholed roads. Firm the suspension certainly was, but unlike in the past, it wasn't over-firm.

It was initially thought that as a direct result of its narrower rear track, (combined with a comparatively wide body), the Master was unlikely to be as good at holding the road when cornered enthusiastically, and, in fact, it wasn't quite as good as the Augusta.

Perhaps it's my ponderous driving style, but (again) I found the difference between them to be nothing like as vast as some claim. It wasn't a case of one good, the other bad; more that the Master was very good and the Pug/Al-Ko excellent! It's probably worth mentioning that the Renault was laden, while the Peugeot just contained my camera kit and not inconsiderable ego.

Both had responsive steering with a well-chosen amount of power assistance, though the Renault felt more nimble when manoeuvring. It would do really as it's shorter both overall and in wheelbase.

The new Peugeot Boxer's cab addresses all the criticisms of the outgoing one and if anybody can't make themselves comfortable in the superb Isri seats then they must be rather an odd shape. The Peugeot's steering column was alone in offering the advantage of being adjustable for reach.

Knaus chooses to replace the standard Master seats with Aguti ones which have the same range of adjustments as the Augusta's Isris, but are much firmer.

Yonks before the first Boxer was born, I

I LIKED

- Relaxing drive
- Superb Aguti cab seats
- Dedicated forward-facing travel seats in rear
- Permanent single beds/convertible to double
- Rear garage
- Exterior colour scheme

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Proper gas oven in lieu of warming oven (available option)
- Extra fold-away kitchen work surface
- A level floor throughout

I DISLIKED

- Nothing

KNAUS SUN TI 650ME



5

5 Renault was the master of relaxed progress

6 Under the bonnet is home to the top 150dCi (actually 146bhp) motor

7 Forward lounge has an automotive feel about it

8 Rearward view shows amidships wardrobe and washroom, plus single beds beyond



6

owned a Renault 4 van with a fascia-mounted gearlever. That said, Sevel can justifiably claim to be the first modern LCV manufacturer to provide a near flawless gearchange from a fascia-mounted lever. The new generation Boxer just raises the barrier for others to try to tackle. The Renault gearchange was first class, but the Peugeot's was in a class of its own.

On paper the Pug is probably better than the Renault at most things but (despite the Vauxhall Victor style instrument dials and lack of wide-angle exterior mirrors) I felt more at ease driving the Renault. It should be more economical on fuel as well.

The Knaus came equipped with an engine-powered rear heater matrix and fan, plus extra-cost cab air-conditioning.

LOUNGE AND DINE

Both motorcaravans feature forward lounges and both manufacturers have added seat swivels to enable the superb, ergonomically correct, cab pews to boost the lounging capacity. Why sit on caravan style benches when the best seats in the house are designed to be supportive, comfortable and occupied for long periods?

The Sun TI lounge (it is in fact a sun lounge but not in a cedar wood kind of way) will accommodate four, whereas the Augusta seats at least six - more if they're friendly/thin/both. Augusta's lounge layout - with its twin inward-facing settees - is typically British whereas the Sun's lounge - with its half-dinette - is typically European.

The Augusta offers a freestanding table that can be used outside, while the Sun's attaches to the wall, so can only be used in situ. However, the Sun TI's table was more stable in use, extending easily and efficiently when required.

When sitting in the Sun's lounge the ambience was overwhelmingly automotive, no doubt a result of including the large sunroof over the cab and of the colour of the soft furnishing fabrics. Augusta's lounge said country cottage to us, suggested by the Timeless, classic, country casual, fabrics.

Sun has two forward-facing belted travel seats in the rear, which add considerably to the 'van's versatility. Rear travel seats are not an option in the Augusta (a four-berth 'van), which, for us, would be a big minus point.

Differing floor levels in the Sun's lounge provided a trip hazard for my clodhoppers and would be unsuitable for anybody with mobility difficulties.



7



8

On Test Autocruise Augusta & Knaus Sun Ti 650ME



9



10

Brownie points were awarded to the Augusta for the side-sliding windows (can be opened when on the move and offer no cranium crunching when sat under the awning) and for the 'best-in-class' touch control, dimming 230V lights.

Not to be outdone, the Sun scored a hit with a well-engineered drop-down TV arrangement.

Both lounges worked well, but differently!

COOK'S QUARTERS

Nowhere is the British versus European clash of priorities more apparent than in the kitchen. Augusta's palatial kitchen is split either side of the aisle, while the Sun's is much smaller, really just a single cupboard run opposite the dinette.

The Augusta boasts a slot-in style-style cooker with all the bells and whistles including a dual fuel hob, gas grill and a conventional gas oven. There's also a 230V microwave located above.

In contrast, although the Sun's shaped glass lids and curved cupboard doors promised a stylish and practical kitchen, it was found to be a bit of a triumph of packaging over content. Sun has just a three-burner gas hob with (in our case) an extra cost gas grill/warming oven. The latter we've always found to have far too steep a temperature gradient inside to be of use as a proper oven. Also, the rather narrow draining shelf in the Sun's sink is nothing like as practical as the Augusta's conventional ribbed draining surface adjacent to its sink's bowl.

Augusta galley staff will enjoy an embarrassment of worktop and storage space, and should be able to create culinary masterpieces out of the critical gaze of the lounge/diner occupants. The serious point here is that the Sun chef will be working in the middle of the lounge/diner and the aisle could become congested. A lack of worktop will probably mean that the Sun's table is likely to be used for food preparation, which, of course, will then have to be cleared before dinner can be served.

On the plus side, the Sun's fridge has automatic energy selection, whereas the Augusta's doesn't... Owners will just have to switch between energy sources manually!

My judgement is that the Sun's kitchen is perfectly adequate, but the Augusta's is excellent. The question prospective

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

PRICE

- From: £51,195 OTR
- As tested: £52,782 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturers' figures)

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (including driver)
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle, 1 year conversion
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: Aluminium framed GRP-clad sandwich construction low-profile coachbuilt
- Length: 7.54m (24ft 9in)*
- Width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*
- Height: 2.68m (8ft 9.5in)*
- Wheelbase: 4.60m (15ft 1in)
- Rear overhang: 2.00m (6ft 7in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 4005kg*
- Payload: 626kg (after 75kg for driver, full fuel, tools, spare wheel, hook-up cable)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Peugeot Boxer Al-Ko chassis cab
- Engine: 3.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 157bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Discs all round
- Suspension: All-round independent
- Features: ABS, EBD, traction control, remote central-locking, electrically-operated and heated exterior mirrors, electrically-operated windows. Fully-adjustable Isri cab seats each with swivel and two armrests. Multimedia player/radio, driver and passenger airbags

INSIDE

- Layout: Forward lounge ahead of split kitchen. Door to amidships bedroom with two permanent single beds and door to full-width washroom with vanity basin, 'airing' cupboard, cassette toilet and walk-in shower cubicle
- Insulation: Floor 50mm, walls 25mm, roof 30mm
- Interior height: 1.94m (6ft 4.5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Stainless-steel unit and single drainer
- Cooker: Spinflo Caprice slot-in domestic-style stove with hob (three burners plus one

AUTOCRUISE AUGUSTA

- electric hotplate), grill, thermostatically-controlled oven and matching saucepan store. Daewoo 230V microwave oven
- Fridge: Dometic RM 7401L three-way, manual energy selection. Capacity 104 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Theford swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette
- Basin: Moulded GRP vanity unit with mixer tap
- Shower: Separate walk-in cubicle with bi-fold door, soap dishes, hooks, mixer tap, riser rail/shower head

BEDS

- Two permanent singles
- Length: 1.85m (6ft 1in)
- Width: 700mm (2ft 3.5in)
- Lounge double
- Length: 1.90m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 1.30m (4ft 3in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water tank: 97 litres (21.3 gallons)
- Waste water tank: 60 litres (13.2 gallons)
- Water and space heater: Alde compact 3010 gas/230V Combi boiler with circulation pump feeding 'wet' radiator space heating system throughout interior
- Leisure battery: 2 x 85 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity two 7kg cylinders
- Lighting: 12V: six halogen swivel spotlights in main salon/kitchen, overhead fluorescent/halogen lighting, downlighters in over-hob extractor unit, two swivel reading lights over permanent beds, overhead lighting in washroom and shower compartment. 230V: two touch-sensitive operation dimming feature lights on cab interface bulkhead
- Sockets: 230V: four. 12V: one

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base vehicle: 3.0-litre 157bhp engine upgrade (£1587)
- Conversion: None

Other options

- Base vehicle: Cab air-conditioning (£823), front fog lights (£118), passenger airbag (£212), alloy wheels (£435)
- Conversion: TBA

E&OE



HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

KNAUS SUN TI 650ME

PRICES

- From: £45,095 OTR
- As tested: £50,470 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturers' figures)

- Berths: 2/3
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)
- Warranty: Three years base vehicle, two years conversion, five years water ingress
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Aluminium-clad sandwich construction low profile coachbuilt
- Length: 6.86m (22ft 6in)
- Width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)
- Height: 2.65m (8ft 8.5in)
- Wheelbase: 4.10m (13ft 5.5in)
- Rear overhang: 1.92m (6ft 3.5in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg
- Payload: 547kg max (after 75kg for driver, 90 per cent fuel)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Renault Master long wheelbase platform cab
- Engine: 2.5-litre turbo-diesel producing 146bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Discs all round
- Suspension: All-round independent
- Features: ABS, EBD, electrically-operated windows and mirrors, driver and passenger airbag, radio/CD/DVD/MP3 player, fully-adjustable seats each with swivel and two armrests

INSIDE

- Layout: UK offside entrance door. Forward lounge with swivelling cab seats and half-dinette, kitchen opposite, amidships wardrobe and washroom, two permanent single beds at far rear
- Insulation: Floor 50mm, walls 34mm, roof 34mm
- Interior height: 1.92m (6ft 3.5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Triangular shaped with stepped draining shelf and mixer tap
- Cooker: Cramer three-burner stainless-steel hob, Cramer grill/warming oven
- Fridge: Dometic RM7295L three-way with AES. Capacity 102 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette
- Basin: Black moulded vanity unit
- Shower: Enclosable semi-separate compartment with bi-fold doors, moulded seat

BEDS

- Two permanent singles
- Length: 190cm (6ft 3in)
- Width: 840mm (2ft 9in)
- Alternative double
- Length: 1.90m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 1.92m (6ft 3.5in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water: 110 litres (24.2 gallons)
- Waste water: 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Water and space heater: Truma C6002 Combi boiler, gas/230V operation. Storage hot water and blown-air heat distribution
- Leisure battery: 105 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity two 11kg cylinders
- Lighting: 12V: 12 halogen downlighters
- Sockets: 230V: three, 12V: one

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: 146bhp engine upgrade (£1320), cab air-conditioning (£1095), rear on-road heating (£895), towbar (£895), multimedia package: including radio/CD/DVD/MP3 player, rear vision camera and monitor (£895)
- Conversion: TV aerial and amplifier (£275)
- Other options
- Base: Quickshift6 auto-changing gearbox (£1495)
- Conversion: None

E&OE

purchasers will need to ask themselves is how much of a priority is a well-equipped kitchen?

BATHING SPACE

There is much more washroom space in the Augusta than in the Sun.

Each manufacturer has a different approach to the best location and most efficient bathroom organisation. Augusta's is full-width across the rear, Sun's is amidships on the UK nearside.

Sun makes excellent use of the available space by having an area that can be closed off for showering but which remains integral to the washroom at all other times. Extensive use of (predominately white) wipe-clean moulded fixtures and fittings scored on practicality and gave an airy feel to the Sun's smallest room. The moulded seat in the showering area was thoughtful and didn't steal a significant amount of space. Two odd omissions from the Sun's smallest room were a towel rail and toilet roll holder.

Augusta's 'little' room is actually more like two rooms. A walk-in shower cubicle forms one room, the rest (featuring loo, vanity basin and masses of storage), forms the other. The extensive use of wood finishes made it appear more warm and welcoming, while a Domestic style radiator fitted in here is perfect for warming towels.

BED TIME

This is the area that prospective purchasers should look at more carefully than any other, as having two permanent single beds is obviously the main priority for anybody considering our dynamic duo.

The Augusta's boudoir is accessed via a door which helps turn the rear half of the 'van into a separate room, complete with en-suite

9 Spacious, lavishly-equipped kitchen is separate from the seating area

10 Occupying the full width of the 'van, the 'facilities' are luxurious indeed - notice the radiator

11 European kitchen's sole nod to the UK market was the (extra cost) grill/warming oven

12 Amidships washroom makes good use of the available space. Bi-fold doors close off the showering area when required

AUTOCRUISE AUGUSTA



13



14



15



16

washroom. The two permanent beds are low-level and located longitudinally on either side of the central aisle. All well and good as far as far as it went, but there is no opportunity to turn them into a double (of course, this would block access to the washroom). Also, the beds were a bit narrow.

The Sun Ti's 'end bedroom' has wider beds, a natty clear Perspex central table, which fits over the middle cushion and a slide-out bed extension so that two could easily and quickly become one double. The Sun is a winner here, though attention must be drawn to a differing floor level, and a flimsy dividing screen (whose magnetic catch resolutely refused to hang onto its locating plate).

Augusta is a clear winner in the auxiliary bed department, with a generously wide double available by converting the lounge settees, whereas the Sun only offers (what is described as) an occasional child's single bed.

STORE ROOM

With so many high-level lockers and lots of underbed storage, the Augusta was ahead on 'available volume' but lost out to the Sun Ti on flexibility.

Principally, the Sun nudged ahead with the rear-located garage. (Note that this was achieved without the owners needing oxygen and crampons to get into the beds above.) Although not massive, it appeared to be perfectly capable of garaging a brace of folding cycles (or those all-terrain bikes with smaller frames), plus loads of wet/dirty clobber.

Knaus has done exceptionally well to construct such a solid motorcaravan on a 3500kg chassis and still manage a healthy 547kg payload - plenty for the designed occupancy of two/three. Autocruise uses a heavier chassis (4005kg) and owners will have 626kg available for all their 'essentials'.

LIFE SUPPORT

In our opinion, both motorcaravans are suitable for year-round use in Britain.

Each has sensibly-sized water tanks (though the Sun's are 10 per cent bigger).

13 Augusta's boudoir is a proper bedroom. Central door gives access to the washroom

14 Alde central heating boiler is standard equipment

15 Beneath each permanent bed is a cavernous storage area

16 Removable armrests in the lounge were effective, but not bulky

17 Single beds were wide and comfortable. Pull-out section below the white central cushion turns two singles into a gargantuan double

18 Garage is fine for folding bikes and bulky gear

19 Perspex three-sided cover for the bedroom's central mattress cushion turns it into a useful bedside table

20 On-road rear heating is a useful feature



KNAUS SUN TI 650ME

17

Augusta has a highly developed electronically controlled electrical supply management and charging system and more leisure battery power available.

Knaus specifies the ubiquitous Truma Combi boiler to provide hot water and space heating via sensibly placed blown-air outlets for the Sun range. Unusually, Autocruise equips the Augusta with a top-of-the-range style-style Alde wet radiator heating system. This should be more controllable and better at distributing the heat, plus it shouldn't dry the atmosphere as much as blown-air systems can.

CONCLUSION

Although both motorcaravans feature permanent single beds, this was about all they had in common. Each was significantly different to the other in interior layout, cabinetwork, equipment, fabrics, finishes and underpinnings.

The Knaus Sun Ti felt more 'European' with its contemporary style signatures. It made good use of its smaller internal volume. The Augusta felt more traditionally best of British and the extra couple of feet in length enabled a more spacious lounge and a much better kitchen.

Prospective purchasers should be aware that all will be licensed to drive the Sun but that will not necessarily be true of the Augusta. This is because if you passed your driving test more recently, you'll only be licensed to drive a vehicle with a maximum authorised weight of 3500kg.

On a professional level these are both well thought-out and well-finished motorcaravans and deserve a place on anyone's short list.

At the time of writing, Renault was the only one of the two base vehicle manufacturers to offer automatic transmission (Quickshift6 auto-changing manual) with right-hand drive.

On a personal level, we'd want the Augusta's lounge and kitchen with the Sun's bedroom and forward-facing rear travel seats. Not possible? It'll be an automatic Knaus Sun Ti 650ME then. ■



VEHICLES LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

Knaus Sun Ti 650 ME:
Lowdham Leisureworld,
 Lowdham Road,
 Gunthorpe,
 Nottinghamshire G14 7ES
 (tel: 0845 6349411;
 web site: www.lowdhams.com).

Autocruise Augusta:
Autocruise Group Holdings Ltd,
 Swinton Meadows Industrial Estate, Meadow Way,
 Swinton,
 Mexborough
 S64 8AB
 (tel: 01709 571411;
 web site: www.autocruise.co.uk)