

**BESSACARR E572**



**KNAUS SKY TI 700MEG**



# SINGLE SUPPLEMENTS

*Bessie's big hitter in the low profile single-bed stakes squares up to the Sky Ti, a brand new model from born-again Knaus*

Words & pictures by Jonathan Lloyd



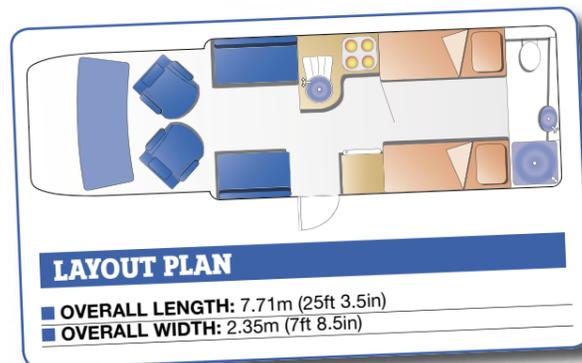
This comparison feature focuses on two motorhomes that feature permanent single beds. We are aware that any motorhome with sufficiently long rear settees can have semi-permanent beds just by leaving the bedding in place and utilising the swivelled

cab seats as armchairs.

That, however, misses the point. The permanent beds in both our combatants are equipped with proper mattresses, not dual-purpose seat squabs. Also, each arrives with a spacious lounge.

At time of writing, there's just one per cent difference in the figures on the windscreen tickets. Both just managing to shimmy under the 55 grand bar. I say 'at the time of writing' because Knaus is a German manufacturer. However, fluctuating currency exchange rates may not have as much of an impact than with other European brands, because the company fixes its UK prices for six months.

Although Knaus emerged from bankruptcy three years ago, it's only been in the last few



months that it's started exporting to the UK again. If memory serves, Lowdhams has been importing and selling these stylish motorhomes since 2000.

Bessacarr, meanwhile has previously been the most conservative brand within the Swift

Group, though the 2012 model year has seen a significant makeover to the 500 series of low profiles, with warp-factor improvement to spec levels.

Both are low-profile coachbuilts with the Knaus stretching the tape to 7.47m and the Bessie to 7.71m. More significant is the difference in underpinnings, which we'll discuss later.

Both 'vans are easy on the eye. Clever graphics try valiantly, but just manage to fail in disguising what are basically slab-sided bodies. Bessie arrived with some clever 3D stick-on panels, which we liked. In response, the Knaus pitched up with a striking slate grey cab, which we liked even more!

Although the Knaus is in right-hand drive format, the conversion isn't handed for the UK so the entrance door remains on our offside.

**MOTIVE POWER**

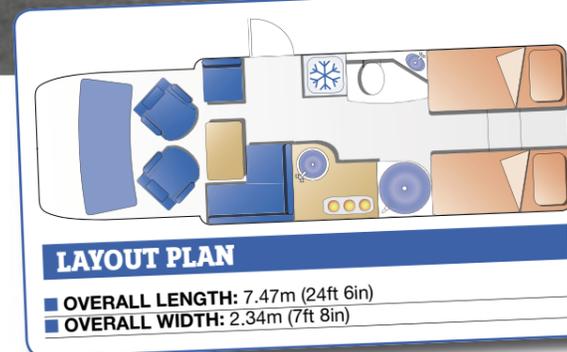
Both are 2.3-litre Euro 5 offerings, though with different engine mapping and turbochargers. The Knaus motor supplies an extremely healthy 130bhp, whereas the Bessie (thanks to a variable geometry turbocharger and some whizzo 'black box' changes) manages an extra 20 horses and a healthy 10 per cent increase in torque at 300 fewer rpm. Each has a manual six-speed gearbox as standard, with autos – Comfort-Matic – as options.

As tested, both were well specified thanks to the inclusion of Lowdhams' UK Pack on the Knaus and the Swift Group's Elegance Pack on the Bessie. Cruise control, cab air-conditioning, electrically-operated mirrors and windows are appealing.

As an aside, is there now a generation of young motorists who can't operate a manual window? Whatever, anti-lock brakes (ABS) and automatic control of the division of stopping power between front and back wheels (EBD) will be rather more important to many than powered windows.

**ROAD MANNERS**

These are not live-in tests with a serious amount of miles covered, so my comments on the relative merits of each engine are based on a recent experience of driving two versions of



another manufacturer's overcab coachbuilt equipped with the different engines.

Unsurprisingly, the 130bhp unit was more than adequate and was never found wanting. The 150bhp motor, meanwhile, allowed the vehicle to remain in higher gears for longer when driving against a strong headwind up motorway inclines.

These differences will be less noticeable on these low profile lovelies than on high and mighty overcabs, but may become more apparent when towing.

To sum up, the difference is noticeable, but not as significant as some 'saloon-bar sages' will have you believe. The real USP of the 150 lump is that one can specify Fiat's class-leading Comfort-Matic automatic gearbox

1 A fancy new stereo, printed-on dash 'wood' and 150 nags under the bonnet mark out this Euro 5 Ducato

2 Only new heater controls announce the Knaus' Euro 5 base



**BESSACARR E572**



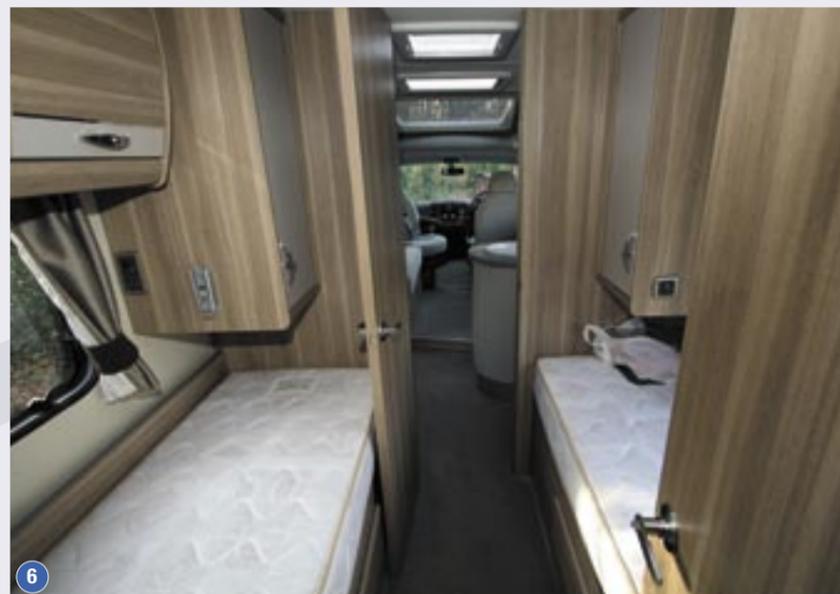
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- 3 Salon in the Bessie is light, airy and comfortable
- 4 Cream coloured doors define the Bessacarr galley
- 5 Slightly smaller than its rival's, but a very capable, capacious cooler
- 6 The bedroom can easily be shut off from the rest of the 'van

(although the auto should soon be offered with the 130bhp engine – check with manufacturers for availability).

Two decades ago the difference between standard Sevel-built chassis cabs and those with Al-Ko rear chassis inhabited chalk and cheese territory. Now, with the availability of extra-long wheelbase chassis cabs with wide rear track, the gap in handling has narrowed somewhat – though it's still there. Al-Ko also offers a wide track axle and longer wheelbase than the standard fare, but in addition utilises independent torsion-bar rear suspension instead of cart springs.

It's always difficult to compare two lightly laden motorhomes, as it's often only when they are fully-laden that the differences become more pronounced. In short, the Al-Ko was marginally better over rutted roads and seemed to transmit less road noise.

Experience has shown that Al-Ko underpinned motorhomes have a distinct advantage over those balanced on elliptical or coil rear springs. Whereas conventionally sprung motorhomes inevitably suffer the consequences of running close to their maximum weight (gross vehicle weight) and begin to wallow and roll more as the years pass, without exception the handling on Al-Ko equipped ones I've tested remains as pin-sharp as it was on day one – even on 20-year-old examples.

I know I should get out more, but my careful study of the weight plates attached to the forward under-bonnet cross member revealed that the Bessie (with Al-Ko chassis) had reduced towing capacity over the standard Fiat offering. Gross train weight changed from 6,500kg to 6,000kg – a significant reduction.

**LOUNGE AND DINE**

In both 'vans the lounge-diner is ahead of the entrance door, and the swivelled cab pews boost the seating compliment. And that really is where the similarities end.

Bessie has two inward-facing settees and therefore no rear travel seats. Knaus has opted for an L-shaped settee on the nearside, which cleverly converts to a double forward-facing travel seat.

Although we've seen the 'slide-away squab to make room for the outside passenger's feet' before, this conversion from lounging to travel involves 'opening' the top of the seat back to reveal four sockets ready to accept the head restraints. The upshot is that loungers didn't feel as though they were sitting on a bus and yet the rear travel seats aren't compromised by being designed primarily as residential chairs.

In addition to the double forward-facing

**BESSACARR E572**

**I LIKED**

- Al-Ko chassis
- Alde central heating
- Palatial full-width washroom

**I WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- Better integration of lounge bed mechanisms
- Longer single beds

**I DISLIKED**

- Reduced towing capability

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**I LIKED**

- Generously-sized and flexible rear bed
- Clever lounge to travel seat conversion
- Option of 3,500kg chassis, but still with a usable payload

**I WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- Less flimsy shower doors
- An offside window in the lounge
- Sliding window next to rear travel seats so that it could be opened en-route

**I DISLIKED**

- Oven placed too high
- Three different floor levels

seat and the swivelled cab seat, the Knaus has a single inward-facing seat on the offside. Behind this, the (included) TV is stowed in a now-you-see-it-now-you-don't locker with pop-up mechanism.

Bessie buyers don't get an idiot's lantern, but they do get a brace of locating plates on which to hang flat screen sets – one each in lounge and bedroom.

The Bessacarr table is an adequately-sized free-standing device, with dedicated stowage in the cupboard behind the loo. The Knaus eating surface is the size of Wales and mounted on a telescopic column. This turned out to be the more stable of the two, could be adjusted for height, as well as sliding every which-way and lockable in any position.

Both lounges have panoramic double-glazed opening skylights, which made them seem light and airy, though the Bessie was the clear winner on the window count, boasting one extra in the lounge. Also the entrance door is partially-glazed, where the one in the Knaus is unremittingly blank.

Both lounges functioned well as lounges, but only the Knaus offers rear travel seats. Also the table in the Knaus can be reasonably deployed without it blocking access to the best seats in the house – the swivelled cab pews. This is important if one of your party – management – prefers to have the table up throughout the day and evening. The lack of an offside window in the Knaus did niggle though, so I'd have one retro-fitted.

**COOK'S QUARTERS**

Both combatants decided to split their centrally-located kitchens either side of the aisle. This is pretty much a given if one of the two-door, domestic-style mine's-bigger-than-yours, fridge/freezers are the cool cabinets of choice, because they don't fit under a standard-height work-surface.

Both galleys were visually appealing in a 'Manhattan condo' kind of way, with radiused cabinetwork and curved doors a plenty. Bessacarr decided on a contrast to the rest of the cupboards by using white-coloured doors, whereas Knaus opted to blend in with the rest by using the same wood finish on all the doors and drawer fronts.

Where Knaus scores over Bessie is in the ease of retrieving 'stuff' from the kitchen's base-level storage. A curved door opens to reveal two deep slide-out storage baskets, complimented by an adjacent trio of drawers.

That's not to say the Bessie's base-level

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- 7 Main salon in the Knaus is more flexible, but it lacks a window on the offside
- 8 & 9 Worktop/shelf surface opens to reveal the sockets for the rear seat's head restraints
- 10 Galley scores a hit with good drawers and slide-out baskets
- 11 Biggest miss is the too-high location of the oven

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**HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA**

**BESSACARR E572**

**PRICE**

- From: £53,845 OTR
- As tested: £54,940 OTR

**BASICS**

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (including driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion 3 years, water ingress 10 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: Low profile sandwich construction coachbuilt, aluminium clad walls, GRP clad roof
- Length: 7.71m (25ft 3.5in)
- Width: 2.35m (7ft 8.5in)
- Height: 2.77m (9ft 1in)
- Wheelbase: 4.40m (14ft 5.5in)
- Rear overhang: 2.41m (7ft 11in)
- Gross vehicle weight: 4,250kg
- Payload: 915kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, gas)
- Insulation: Floor 44mm, walls and roof 32mm
- Interior height: 2.00m (6ft 6.5in) max

**THE VEHICLE**

- Chassis: Fiat Ducato Heavy, Maxi AI-Ko chassis cab
- Engine: 2.3-litre Euro 5 turbo-diesel producing 150bhp
- Transmission: 6-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Discs all round with ABS and EBD
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Independent on torsion bar
- Features: Driver and passenger airbags, electrically-operated windows and mirrors, central locking, adjustable steering column

**KITCHEN**

- Sink: Circular moulded bowl with removable drainer and monobloc mixer tap
- Cooker: Thetford slot-in domestic-style stove with four-burner hob (three gas, one electric), grill and oven. Sanyo microwave oven
- Fridge: Thetford three-way fridge/freezer with auto energy selection (SES). Capacity 175 litres

**WASHROOM**

- Toilet: Thetford swivel-bowl electric-flush with wheeled cassette
- Basin: Oval moulded vanity bowl partially inset into base cupboard. Chrome monobloc mixer tap
- Shower: Separate walk-in compartment with opaquely-glazed bi-fold door, moulded soap/gel trays, monobloc mixer tap with trigger operated shower head

**BEDS**

- Lounge double
- Length: 2.08m (6ft 10in)
- Width: 1.21m max, 1.05m min (3ft 11.5in – 3ft 5.5in)
- Rear singles
- Length: 1.84m (6ft 0.5in)
- Width: 700mm (2ft 3.5in)

**EQUIPMENT**

- Fresh water: Underslung, insulated 94 litres (20.7 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung, 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Water and space heater: Alde boiler feeds wet radiators, gas-mains operation
- Leisure battery: 95 amp hr
- Gas: 2 x 7kg cylinders
- Lighting: All LED. Spotlights, reading lights, ambient mood lighting, task lighting, awning light
- Sockets: 230V: 5. 12V: 2

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

- Fitted to test vehicle: Elegance Pack – upgraded Radio/CD/MP3/Bluetooth, dashboard mount for certain Tom Tom satnavs, twin-lens colour rear vision camera with rear view mirror-mounted monitor, cab air-conditioning, cruise control (£1,095)
- Other options available: Comfort-Matic automatic transmission (£1,695) – only available with Elegance Pack, Winter Pack – fresh and waste water tank heaters, waste pipe insulation, fridge vent covers (£199)

storage was hard to access, it wasn't and the revolving grey storage trays are a good idea. It's just that Knaus has more know-how here.

The lead was short-lived though, as Bessacarr makes better use of the high-level storage, and also includes a 230V microwave in the standard spec. We've always been very taken with Swift Group's removable draining surface for the sink, finding it a great solution to the conundrum of worktop or sink drainer. That said, the Knaus definitely majors on worktop and it's an inspired move to place the inset hob towards the rear of the worktop.

Tellingly, the Knaus hasn't a grill (okay, we could do without that), but the lack of electronic-ignition for the hob was a source of irritation. In addition, the lofty placement of the oven would require 'management' (5ft 3in and shrinking) to wear an all-in-one waterproof and heat resistant spill-suit, or employ oxygen and crampons to reach it safely. I'd better move on, because I'm finding the thought of that quite appealing!

On to those cooling cabinets: both are two-door and looked to be of similar size, though the Thetford in the Knaus actually has 15 litres more of space than the Dometic in the Bessie.

Meanwhile, I was wondering what the narrow, high-level tambour-doored kitchen cupboard was for. Well, I can reveal that it was originally included in the Sun TI range, Sky's more expensive sibling, to house the standard-spec coffee maker. Here, it's been modified to use as a cocktail cabinet.

Kitchens verdict: The height of the oven is our deciding factor, as we use the one in our own 'van a great deal more frequently than we first envisaged, and feel that the potential for accidents compromises the chosen location for the one in the Knaus. If only they'd put the fridge/freezer on the floor instead of raising it on a plinth, everything would have been tickety-boo. Shame.

**BATHING SPACE**

Each offering is in a different location. Knaus had chosen to separate the walk-in teleporter-style shower compartment from the rest and place it just ahead of the nearside permanent bed, with the washroom proper, featuring loo and basin, across the aisle on the offside.

Bessie's full-width washroom is across the far rear beyond the bedroom. It also features a walk-in shower cubicle, vanity basin and

electric-flush loo, though there were differences in the latter. Thetford's 'comfort station' in the Bessacarr is of the swivel-bowl variety, whereas the Dometic offering in the Knaus has a swivel seat and ceramic-lined bowl. Both have a wheeled holding tank.

The wash/toilet section of the Knaus can be used 'as is' (the most rearward wall and latch-keep slides into the central aisle to make the self-contained washroom more suitable for enthusiastic swinging of felines), or the door can be opened 90 degrees to make the facilities en-suite to the bedroom, more spacious, but frighteningly open-plan.

Of course, the washroom in the Bessie is always en-suite to the bedroom and buttoned-up Brits like me appreciate the privacy afforded by a nice solid door to close behind you. The designers have made good use of the space – and resisted the temptation to fill it with frippery – so the big space feels even bigger! The luxury of a heated towel rail (as well as a convector radiator) will certainly be useful on wet weekends away. The trigger type shower-head should make the water go further.

The Knaus facilities are fine though, and certainly don't lack anything. My only serious criticism here concerns the curved shower doors, which felt rather flimsy to me.

**BEDTIME**

The USP of these motorhomes is that they both have permanent single beds. Our European contender has them at the far rear, whereas the Blighty-based one places them ahead of the full-width rear washroom.

Measuring revealed that while the Knaus slumber-sizes were spot-on, the Bessie's proved shorter than the brochure claimed. Those over 6 feet tall will be in real trouble in the Bessie, whereas in the Knaus they will have a bigger mattress all-round... perfect for those built for comfort rather than speed, as well as for the lofty.

The Bessie's proper separate bedroom did appeal though, and we especially appreciated the low-level beds for easy access and egress, plus the surprisingly voluminous half-height individual wardrobes.

In established garage designs such as the one in the Knaus, there is, as in so many aspects of motorcaravan design, a trade-off or compromise between two competing demands for the same space. Basically, the taller the garage, the higher off the floor the beds have to be.

Without actually trying it, it looked to me as though two ordinary adult-sized bikes could be accommodated in the garage without having to lower the handlebars, though the flip side is that the beds in the Knaus are much higher than those in the Bessacarr. That said, the Knaus beds are not particularly difficult to access, but do require a greater level of mobility than accessing those in the Bessie.

It's also worth bearing in mind that the single beds can be made into a double only in the Knaus. However, romantically inclined couples could make up the forward double in

12 Bessacarr's full-width rear washroom is palatial, while its heated towel rail is the icing

13 Each of the Bessie's single beds has a wardrobe, ambient lighting and padded headboard

14 With washroom door latched across the aisle, you create an en-suite to the rear beds in the Knaus

**KNAUS SKY TI 700MEG**



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**HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA**

**KNAUS SKY TI 700MEG**

**PRICE**

- From: £54,495 OTR
- As tested: £54,495 OTR

**BASICS**

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle 3 years, conversion 2 years, water ingress 5 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Low profile sandwich construction coachbuilt, aluminium clad
- Length: 7.47m (24ft 6in)
- Width: 2.34m (7ft 8in)
- Height: 2.75m (9ft 0.5in)
- Wheelbase: 4.03m (13ft 2.5in)
- Rear overhang: 2.47m (8ft 1.5in)
- Gross vehicle weight: 3,650kg
- Payload: 670kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, gas)
- Insulation: Floor 40mm, walls and roof 33mm
- Interior height: 2.00m (6ft 7in)

**THE VEHICLE**

- Chassis: Fiat Ducato Light camper chassis cab
- Engine: 2.3-litre Euro 5 turbo-diesel producing 130bhp
- Transmission: 6-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Discs all round with ABS, EBD
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: rigid axle on monoleaf springs
- Features: (UK specification) Driver and passenger airbags, cab air-conditioning, cruise control, electric mirrors and windows, daytime running lights, radio/CD/MP3 player

**KITCHEN**

- Sink: Deep circular bowl with monobloc mixer tap. No drainer
- Cooker: Three-burner manual-ignition hob, separate high-level gas oven
- Fridge: Dometic three-way fridge/freezer with Auto Energy Selection. Capacity 190 litres

**WASHROOM**

- Toilet: Dometic electric-flush with swivelling seat, ceramic-lined bowl, wheeled cassette
- Basin: Stainless steel oval bowl inset into worktop with wall-mounted monobloc mixer tap
- Shower: Separate walk-in cubicle with curved transparent doors

**BEDS**

- Lounge double
- Length: 2.00m (6ft 7in)
- Width: 1.20m max, 500mm min (3ft 11in – 1ft 7.5in)
- Rear singles
- Length: 1.95m (6ft 5in)
- Width: 870mm (2ft 10.5in)
- Alternative double
- Length: 2.135m (7ft 0in)
- Width: 1.95m (6ft 5in)
- Headroom: 810mm (2ft 8in)

**EQUIPMENT**

- Fresh water: Inboard, 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung, 95 litres (21 gallons)
- Water and space heater: Truma Combi 6 boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- Leisure battery: 100 amp hr
- Gas: 2 x 7kg cylinders
- Lighting: All LED. Downlighters, reading lights, task lights, lit surround to Seitz panoramic rooflight. Central ceiling-mounted luminaire in bedroom
- Sockets: 230V: 3. 12V: 1

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

- Fitted to test vehicle: None (UK specification is enhanced over base motorhome, contact dealer for full details)
- Other options available: Engine upgrade to 150bhp (£1,095), chassis upgrade to 4,005kg (£1,295)

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Bessie as an alternative...

Which leads us on to look in more detail at how effective the additional sleeping accommodation actually is. The answer is 'very' in the Bessie: a sensibly-sized transverse double bed capable of sleeping two adults comfortably was easily made from the inward-facing settees. In contrast, the forward bed made from the Knaus lounge appeared to me to be akin to some sort of medieval torture machine, and really only suitable for one adult or two teeny tots.

One can't fail to notice the irony surrounding the fact that the Knaus, with four travel seats, can't sleep four, though the Bessacarr, with only two travel seats, comfortably sleeps four adults. That said, if we considered just the permanent single beds then the Knaus does it for us. However we preferred the 'bedroom' in the Bessie.

**STORE ROOM**

Basically, if you want a motorcaravan with a garage, you'll likely opt for the Knaus. If not, then Bessie has by far the biggest actual volume of internal storage. Also, the Knaus has (proportionally) the biggest tail on it: over 60 per cent of the wheelbase is rear overhang, so take care not to overload the rear axle by over-enthusiastic garage filling.

If just outside access to storage compartments and not a garage is on your wish list, then the Bessie fits the bill as it has some good hatches on each side. The nearside front one also afforded access to the leisure battery compartment, which is made from acid-resistant moulded propylene, is inset into the floor, and has room for an additional battery – next to the supplied 95 amp hr unit.

The Knaus arrives with a garage 'sorting kit,' which consists of two bike tie-down troughs, three horizontal load rails (with adjustable tie-down cleats) and an additional external door. All this is part of Lowdhams' UK specification package.

The gas-strut-assisted aluminium squab frames on the Bessacarr's lounge settees featured sprung slats and were easily and effortlessly deployed when converting the lounge to a bed. However these frames are

clearly visible by those seated on the opposite settee and looked slightly unfinished.

Two winners in this section, as both offer the sort of storage that the target market would expect... and one can't ask for much more.

**LIFE SUPPORT**

Knaus dwellers will enjoy its extremely well-developed and thoughtfully-specified life support systems, including sensibly-sized water tanks, a decent leisure battery, powerful combi-boiler and so on. However, the Bessie with its Alde wet (radiator) heating, microwave and glazed two-point latching (centrally locking) entrance door, enhances life support to such a degree that it's the kit-count winner.

To draw the conclusion that life in the Knaus will somehow be vastly inferior is not true, not really. Sure, the blown-air heating system may not provide such an even temperature throughout the interior (compared to the 'wet' radiator system in the Bessie), but unless you are spending all-winter in the 'van or even full-timing, will it really make that much difference?

Food for thought is the Swift Group's new decade of body integrity warranty. And that's worth having, even if it is merely a knee-jerk reaction to newcomer Bailey's ten-year body warranty.

**CONCLUSION**

Make no mistake, both of these are great motorhomes. The Bessacarr has a mightily impressive standard spec list, at any price, but particularly at this one. It also offers a more powerful motor, Al-Ko underpinnings, Alde heating, et al.

However, the Knaus has a more flexible lounge, those – potentially important – rear travel seats, a garage and bigger permanent beds. Which you choose would really depend on your priorities. Either will make a great leisure vehicle, just make very sure that your choice will suit your usage patterns.

Of course, we never wimp out of making a personal choice. I'd have gone for the Knaus, whereas 'management' would have chosen the Bessacarr. ■

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15 Bessie's lounge double should comfortably accommodate two less-than-sylph-like adults

16 Located under a bed, the Alde central heating boiler is a kit-count winner

17 Two substantial storage areas can be accessed from both inside and out

**BESSACARR E572 LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:**

Swift Group Limited, Dunswell Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4JS  
Tel: 01482-847332  
Web: www.bessacarrmotorhomes.co.uk



18 Dinette is okay as a single, but a disaster as a double

19 High-level single beds are bigger, and it's possible to bridge the gap between to make a gargantuan double

20 Excellent garage is equipped with bike troughs and rails with adjustable tie-down cleats

**KNAUS SKY TI 700 MEG LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:**

Lowdhams, Lowdham Road, Gunthorpe, Nottinghamshire NG14 7ES  
Tel: 0115-9663838  
Web: www.lowdhams.com