

TEST REPORT EXTRA



BÜRSTNER OR BOEING?



Dave Hurrell 'flies' the jumbo-sized Bürstner A747-2, with its first-class luxury and vast cargo hold

German manufacturer Bürstner produces a range of low profile, overcab coachbuilt, and A-class motorhomes. The A747-2 is at the top of their A-series Fiat Ducato-based range, in both size and price (bigger still is the Iveco-based A850). Whether it is a coincidence or not, naming one of your largest motorhomes

'747' sums up its character neatly. It may not be a jet, but it sure is a jumbo.

Let's play tag

This model could be designed for people who want the lot in terms of motorhome flexibility. At over eight metres long, the big Bürstner

makes an impact straight away, and the main clue to its generous nature is the tag-axle chassis. Al-Ko provides the rear underpinnings and two rear axles, to create a six-wheeler with a low chassis frame and large payload. The bodywork is unremarkable, being a solid-looking plain sandwich construction coachbuilt with GRP luton, roof and rear panel. That low chassis frame allows the construction of a double floor with huge storage and fully winterised plumbing. So when you buy this Bürstner all-year-round motorcaravanning is included in the price.

Family 'van

Make a list of desirable features you would like to see in any 'van and you will probably find them here. Large comfortable beds, good provision for lounging and dining, spacious kitchen with lots of work surface, washroom with separate shower, plus that modern motorhome 'must-have' - a garage. As with most imports, the cab may be right-hand drive, but the living quarters are laid out to suit driving and parking on the right - that is with the caravan door on the UK offside.

This door is the first clue to the good quality of design and construction. Its fit and finish is excellent and it even has a two-point locking system and gas strut stay, rather than a nasty plastic hold-back clip. There are only two keys on the keyring, one for the vehicle and one for the caravan. A suite of easy-to-use Seitz locks has been fitted - so you won't spend time thinking up new swearwords as



Looking back from the luton. The deep blue and silver upholstery is relieved by sycamore-coloured wood. Light floods into the lounge/diner from the Heki 3 rooflight above.

BÜRSTNER OR BOEING?



View forward sees the washroom door on the right with generous, curvy kitchen opposite.



Curvy cupboards mean the oven ends up too high for easy use by most normal height humans.

you try to find the right key for a particular locker. The double floor means it is two steps up to the interior, and the first one is a single-tread electric item, while the second internal step has the thoughtful inclusion of a coconut fibre doormat.

The six-berth layout is typically Continental, with the garage dictating a centre kitchen and washroom. Directly behind the large luton is the Pullman dinette, with a long

sofa opposite. Next is the nearside L-shaped kitchen ahead of a two-door wardrobe, with the washroom opposite. The garage fills the rear, with a double bed located above it.

Decor is fresh and modern with sycamore furniture finished with dark wood and silver trim, while the upholstery is a stylish deep blue and silver with non-functioning decor drapes and the usual Continental net curtains. Blinds and flyscreens are fitted throughout.



In the cab Bürstner have added captain's chairs and 'faux' wood trim. The rear camera system is an excellent addition, but its LCD monitor is poorly fitted to the centre of the dashtop.



Storage compartments are numerous and capacious and it's just as well - food and drink for six takes a lot of space!

Motive power

Bolted securely to the Al-Ko chassis and grafted on to the Bürstner bodywork is Fiat's Ducato cab - the most popular form of motive power for the modern motorhome. Beneath the bonnet lurk 127 horses of turbo-diesel



The large sofa opposite the dinette gives an excellent dining/lounging combination. With a lighter stowable table this area could gain much-needed floor space.

power, every one of which will earn its keep pulling this large 'van along the highway. In the cab there are no surprises from Fiat, with the recently facelifted dash providing a myriad of heater/fresh air vents, and storage that includes a good-sized locking glove compartment.

Electric windows and mirrors feature, along with cab door central locking, all adding to comfort, safety and convenience. Bürstner have added 'faux' wood to the dash, while the captain's chairs are upholstered in the same material as the rest of the living area. Strangely, the passenger seat has a swivel fitted, but this is of little use as the double floor dictates that the cab is a good deal lower than the living area and entirely separate from it.

The dash-mounted gearchange and right-hand handbrake are very welcome here, as entry to the rear is a tight squeeze - owing to the step up, lack of a cab roof cutaway and the protrusion of the dinette rear-facing seat. If you're bigger than me (5ft 11in and medium build) you may find access via the caravan door the best option.

Another important addition to the cab is a rear-view camera. There is no rearward through-vision. So seeing tailgaters behind you and reversing should be much easier with a camera. The system is also fitted with a microphone and speaker, letting you hear as well as see things directly behind.

However, I was not very impressed with the standard of the installation, as the LCD monitor had been poorly fixed to the pop-up map holder in the middle of the dash (negating its use) and garnished with black insulating tape. Do make sure you're completely happy with any fitted extras before you take delivery - this kind of thing would make sure my dosh stayed in my wallet until it was sorted.

Six wheels on my wagon

It is easy to be daunted by the size of this 'van and indeed you should consider carefully before you take on a motorhome that will require two parking spaces in the average car park and has the character of a small truck. Once on the road, all the well-known traits of the Ducato make themselves known. Powerful brakes, well-weighted power steering, and a simply superb gearchange are all there, making this large vehicle surprisingly easy to drive.

With four rear wheels paired one behind the other, roadholding is superb and it corners as if on rails, with no noticeable lean while tackling fast roundabouts. Increased payload, it seems, is not the only benefit of the fitted tag-axle. Rearward vision is adequate through the external mirrors, with the rear-view camera allowing you to see directly behind, although strong sunlight can make the LCD screen difficult to see at times.

Pulling power and acceleration is good, but the very high top gear fitted to the Ducato Maxi seems to have met its match here, and I spent long periods in fourth. A lower ratio top gear or final drive would make the gearbox more useful, as the amount of time when top gear can be used will be even less when the vehicle is fully loaded (to a maximum weight of five tonnes).

Passengers are well catered for with four three-point restraints fitted to the forward and rearward-facing dinette seats, giving a total of six belted travelling seats including those in the cab. The CD/radio is a Blaupunkt unit and has matching speakers in the lounge area. It also works with the ignition switched off for on-site entertainment.



In common with many, the TV locker is mounted too high for comfortable viewing from anywhere but the luton bed.

Lounge and dine

The combination of Pullman dinette with sofa opposite is dominated by the free-standing table. Although large and heavy, it could, in theory, be moved to open up the area for lounging, but its bulk and weight mean that (in practice) it will have to stay where it is.

A lift-up flap extends the table's length, allowing diners to reach it from the sofa. Six people could eat here, at a pinch, with comfortable dining for five being the norm. The table has a massively engineered frame and a mechanism that lowers the top to half height to bridge the gap between the dinette seats to become part of the bed base. I would have preferred to see a lighter table with dedicated stowage so that it could be removed to open up the lounge and make this area - which lacks floor space - more versatile.

The longitudinal sofa is over six feet long and benefits from a sprung stave base and backrest, making it the perfect place to relax with your feet up. Be prepared to fight to get it!

A TV locker is mounted high up, directly above the rear-facing dinette seat and has slide-out shelf, but no turntable. Watching from the sofa or forward-facing dinette seat is possible but could turn out to be a neck-aching experience. Some manufacturers now provide TV lockers that lower the set to a more comfortable viewing height and it would have been great to see an arrangement like that here. In this situation the most comfortable way to watch telly will be while reclining on the luton bed.

Kitchen

A six-berth motorhome needs a decent galley if all the occupants are to be properly fed and watered, and this L-shaped offering scores highly, with plenty of practical work surface. Eliminating pan-juggling and swearing, this will go a long way to keeping cook happy. The curvy nature of the kitchen has not helped the Bürstner designers in their 'where the heck can we put the oven that the Brits love so much' dilemma. The Smev oven and grill is a vision in stainless steel and, apart from having no spark ignition, works brilliantly. Unfortunately, as it is mounted high up on the right-hand side - you'll need a stepladder to see what's cooking. With the ever increasing number of Continental motorhomes finding their way to these shores I think it's time that manufacturers started designing-in ovens from the beginning. You may not want to use one in the barbecue season, but slow-cooked

BÜRSTNER OR BOEING?



With hot water aplenty, a separate shower makes sense, but if you're big enough to reach the oven, you may be too big to use this bijou bathroom.

beef in red wine would probably go down very well after an energetic day on the piste!

The rest of the kitchen gets top marks, with a good-sized cutlery drawer and loads of storage above and below, plus the aforementioned curvy cupboards making it look stylish and modern. The stainless steel three-burner hob has a flush glass lid to further extend the preparation area and the matching drainer-less circular sink has a fitted plastic chopping board that enhances this versatile and spacious work area.

A large Dometic Powerfridge completes a picture that allows the storage and preparation of enough food to keep five of the residents insisting that burping is correct motorhome etiquette when thanking the cook for a lovely meal!

Washroom

A fully winterised motorhome with separate shower is a really good idea. After all, staying in for a douche has to be preferable to a sub-zero dash to the ablutions block with the



Over-garage bed is generous in size and comfortable thanks to its latex mattress. It has neat curved steps to allow easy access.

danger of frozen hair snapping off on the way back! This washroom has all the bits and pieces you would expect to find. The swivel-bowl, electric-flush loo is flanked by a strong circular basin and mixer tap set into a marble-effect counter giving plenty of space to stand toiletries.

Below is a locker with twin tambour doors and fiddled shelf, and above a large mirror-fronted two-door shelved cupboard. The shower has a rigid bi-fold door and strong tray, albeit with only one waste outlet. The shower mixer holds a preset temperature and there is a shelf for gel and flannel. This washroom has it all: the only thing it doesn't have is quite enough space. Close the door and there isn't a lot of room to move. Get in the shower and it's just a tad narrow. This is a shame, as just a few extra centimetres of space in here would have made all the difference. Some people smaller than me may disagree, so apply the three main rules of motorhome purchase: try, try and try again before you buy.



A room divider emerges from its slot to create en-suite facilities for the rear double.

Sweet dreams

Star of the show when bedtime comes is the fixed double berth above the garage. Sitting on a sprung-stave base it is long, wide and comfortable and benefits from a good quality domestic-style latex foam mattress. Shaped steps make for easy access and, once aloft, you will enjoy excellent headroom, while two windows and an opening skylight mean that hot summer nights shouldn't be too stuffy.

Stowed in a slot next to the wardrobe is a concertina-style room divider. This flexible screen hangs from a curved, ceiling-mounted track and closes off the rear, giving en-suite access to the washroom and wardrobe. This is great for night-time privacy and getting changed without having to draw all the curtains. This feature is well-designed, simple and practical - a real gem.

At the other end, the luton bed is equally big and comfortable with the same stave base and latex mattress. No cab cutaway means it is always available and it's great for kids, with good ladder access and ample headroom (although there is less headroom than in the rear fixed bed).

Downstairs, both the sofa and the dinette convert into beds. Drop the table to half height and rearrange the base and backrest cushions to create a generous single, although the shaped backrests make it a bit lumpy. The slatted base and backrest of the sofa fold and slide sideways to meet the dinette extensions and, along with some infills, this creates an enormous double bed that would sleep four close friends with ease. However, this set-up is fiddly to achieve and prevents the use of the luton ladder. If you use the dinette and sofa as singles, then you have comfortable sleeping for six and everyone has easy access to both kitchen and washroom.

Central services

With many motorhomes you will find the mass of the equipment that makes things work dotted about in a seemingly haphazard fashion. Leisure battery under the driver's seat, mains circuit breakers in the wardrobe, battery charger under one of the lounge seats - that kind of thing. Prepare for a refreshing change. Inside an exterior hatch on the front



The big luton bed has a radiator at each end and a comfy latex mattress.



Drop the table to half height and add the backrest to make a large single. The sofa opposite could make single number two.



Slide and hinge the sofa base and backrest to create a huge sleeping area: big enough for a whole family of Victorian peasants!

nearside is located the majority of the electrical controls along with the waste tank dump valve and water system drain valves. There is no grovelling underneath to drain anything down; even the inboard fresh water drain has a simple plug on a chain that pulls out from inside the tank. Twin leisure batteries give an excellent 150 amp hrs of capacity and all the fuses and circuit breakers are easily accessed, should a fault develop. Here we have systems designed properly with commonsense engineering to the fore.

The 12V control panel is mounted above the caravan door and provides the usual functions, including an analogue ammeter allowing the monitoring of current flowing in the low voltage circuits.

Fresh water is fed to the kitchen and washroom via a submersible pump and the tank has a large access lid for easy cleaning. Good heating is important in a 'van that has all-year-round capability and the A747 is fitted with an Alde Combi boiler that produces hot water and feeds wet radiators, using both mains electricity and gas. Radiators are fitted throughout, including at each end of the luton and along the rear bed, as well as in the basement and cab.

This system is superb. It uses a water-jacket heat exchanger principal to heat domestic water, so even with the water drained down during lay-ups, the system can still be used for space heating, as the heating circuit water is frost-protected with an antifreeze. (Great for airing the 'van out during

periods of non-use.) The control panel is mounted adjacent to the rear bed, so it is easy to switch on in the morning. Two things would go down well here: a time switch to turn the system on automatically in the morning (or while you are out), and a bulk gas tank to take away the worry of running out of fuel when not using a hook-up.

Lighting throughout is taken care of by halogen spots of one sort or another. There is even a *Star Trek*-style ceiling lamp above the table, which has a halogen spot at its heart that casts a warm glow onto the surface below. Areas needing better illumination included the kitchen, the shower - where there was no lighting at all - and the rear double berth - where, for some reason, the lights seemed very dim.



Open a nearside hatch and you have access to most of the service controls. Even the waste tank drain valve lives here in a back-friendly, muck-free environment.



The inboard-mounted fresh water tank has a simple plug-on-chain draining system and a large inspection hatch for cleaning.

BÜRSTNER OR BOEING?



Beneath the forward-facing dinette seat plastic bins provide useful storage.



Garage is cavernous and rear hatches (at bottom left) allow the loading of long items such as surfboards.

Take it all with you

With a payload of one and a quarter tonnes you really can take it all. The usual comprehensive range of aircraft-style lockers are in evidence - unfortunately without positive locking catches - and the two-door wardrobe is more than adequate in size. Under the forward-facing seat, two handy plastic storage bins have a myriad of uses. Outside, storage moves up a gear, and as you open the large side-hinged garage door, you are greeted by stashing-space that can only be described as cavernous. The garage is large, with plenty of room for scooters or bikes. Additionally, the basement created by the double floor has loads of space, in spite of being home to waste tanks and electrics. Two rear hatches and one side door are also provided, the former allowing the loading of long items such as surf boards. The only criticisms here are the lack of access from the interior and the lip on the bottom of the garage door opening that might make loading scooters difficult.

Fly off in a jumbo

Aside from a spatially compromised washroom, this big Bürstner just about has the lot. Six can travel and live in comfort and - thanks to a generous payload - take all their toys on holiday. A family of four would enjoy even more comfort, with all facilities available for instant use. The A747 has excellent build quality, competitive pricing (undercutting many smaller, less well-equipped motorhomes) and good design. Double-floor construction and wet radiator heating are the marzipan and icing on a motorhome cake that can be enjoyed all year round. □

SPECIFICATION

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato Maxi Al-Ko
Engine type: Four-cylinder, 2.8-litre intercooled turbo-diesel
Output: 94kW (127bhp) @ 3600rpm
Gearbox and drive: Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive

Make and model: Bürstner A747-2
Body type and construction: Sandwich construction with aluminium outer skin. GRP luton, roof and rear panel sections
Conversion badged as EN1646 compliant: No
Electrical equipment: Two 75 amp hr leisure batteries and charger. Mains hook-up with RCD and MCBs. One Continental-type mains socket in kitchen

Lighting: Halogen spotlights fitted throughout (two in luton, four in lounge, two in kitchen, two in washroom, two in over-garage bed area). Lighting in garage and wardrobe. Feature halogen ceiling lamp above dining table

Cooking facilities: Smev manual ignition oven and grill. Cramer three-burner manual ignition hob. Both in stainless steel

Refrigerator: Dometic RM6401L, three-way, 103-litre Powerfridge

Water heater: Alde Compact 3000 Combi unit, gas/electric, 8.5-litre capacity

Fresh water tank: Inboard, 115 litres capacity

Waste water tanks: Inboard, in basement, 100 litres capacity

Space heating: Alde Compact 3000 Combi unit, gas/electric, feeding wet radiators in living quarters, cab and basement

Gas locker capacity: Two 7kg cylinders

Rear restraints: Four three-point inertia-reel seatbelts fitted to forward and rear-facing dinette seats

Additional features: Electric step, wind out awning, Blaupunkt radio/CD player with rear speakers, removable carpets, rear-view camera, Heki 3 rooflight in lounge, garage

Dimensions

Overall length: 8.16m (26ft 10in)

Overall width: 2.30m (7ft 7in)

Overall height: 3.15m (10ft 4in)

Interior height: 2.00m (6ft 7in)

Bed dimensions:

Luton double 1.95m x 1.58m (6ft 5in x 5ft 2in)

with headroom of 600mm (23.5in)

Downstairs double 2.16m x 1.93m (7ft 1in x 6ft 4in)

Over-garage double 2.00m x 1.44m

(6ft 7in x 4ft 9in)

Max authorised weight: 5000kg

Load capacity: 1250kg

Price (all prices include VAT)

Standard model: £43 950 on the road

As tested: £44 600 on the road

Optional extras

(starred options fitted to test vehicle)

Base vehicle options: Satellite navigation (£1973), cab air-conditioning (£905), LHD chassis (less £1165), ABS (£593), driver and passenger airbags and seatbelt pre-tensioners (£473)

Caravan options: Awning (£650)*, on-road heating (£313), bike rack (£206), motorbike carrier (£1030), leather upholstery (£1924), rear corner steadies (£153), air-conditioning (£971), nearside garage access door (£251)

Barrons

Bürstner A747-2 kindly supplied for evaluation by:

Barrons Motorhome Centre, Chapel Lane, Coppull, Lancs PR7 4NE (tel: 01257 795995; web site: www.motorhomedeals.co.uk).

