

On Test Dethleffs Esprit RT 7094 on 2.5dCi 150 Renault Master

A forecast for some beautiful spring sunshine and warm weather was just what the doctor ordered, as it was time to carry out this Touring Test. A welcome call from the helpful folk at Lowdham Leisureworld near Nottingham was just the ticket too, as I was offered the opportunity to test the latest Renault Master – this time providing a superb base vehicle for the Dethleffs Esprit RT 7094. A fixed bed, low profile model with full-width rear washroom, front dinette and oodles of storage space was just perfect for the trip I had in mind: a tour of the coastline where I spent many childhood holidays was on the agenda.

A few hours of travelling across the South Lincolnshire area saw us steering the Renault towards the beautiful and tranquil area around the north Norfolk coast. In just a few days, we would discover more about one of England's greatest heroes, find a wartime jewel along the coast and enjoy a surprise dinner with motorcaravanning in-laws.

ON THE HEATH

The North Norfolk coastline, between Cromer and Blakeney, has to be explored to be fully appreciated. The road winds through some gorgeous villages, narrowing as it passes some of the lovely flint cottages along the route. You need to park up and get out on foot or cycle to enjoy this countryside.

We headed straight to Weybourne, where we had booked two nights' at the large, fully featured Kelling Heath Holiday Park. A unique natural environment is the description for this 250-acre site, and it's certainly that: heathland, woodland and wetland are all here, as are beautiful views of the coastline. There's



Our attractive pitch at Kelling Heath

TOURING TRIVIA

WE STAYED AT

- Kelling Heath Holiday Park, Weybourne, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7HW (tel: 01263 588181; web site: www.kellingheath.co.uk)
- Whitehall Farm Caravan Club CL (members only), Burnham Thorpe, Kings Lynn PE31 8HN (tel: 01328 738416; web site: www.whitehallfarm-accommodation.com)

WE VISITED

- The Muckleburgh Collection, Weybourne Military Camp, Weybourne, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7EG (tel: 01263 588210; web site: www.muckleburgh.co.uk)

WE DINED AT

- The Lord Nelson, Walsingham Road, Burnham Thorpe, Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE31 8HN (tel: 01328 738241; web site: www.nelsonslocal.co.uk)



On tour with a...



ON TOUR WITH A...

**...Dethleffs Esprit RT 7094 on
2.5dCi 150 Renault Master**

Words & pictures by Dave Hurrell

*Tides, tanks and tales of Trafalgar added
to the fun of exploring north Norfolk*



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something for everyone too, as the site itself offers walking and cycling, a nature trail with conservation ponds and plenty of wildlife to spot. The management is dedicated to protecting the environment and this work is evident on touring the site.

Among a wide range of leisure facilities is a health and fitness club with indoor pool (extra charges apply), an outdoor pool during the main holiday season, and a great choice of evening entertainment. Choose from The Forge restaurant, The Terrace bar with less formal dining, or the bistro atmosphere of Pizza on the Square (eat in or take-away). We sampled the Terrace Bar for drinks on both nights, deciding that the weather was just perfect for eating outside back at the pitch, and glad we did too as the evening dusk saw the wildlife advancing from the heathland! Kelling Heath has large areas for tourers, the dry, grassy pitches all good sizes and just perfect for setting up camp with this Dethleffs. Quiet as it was during the spring season, the dawn chorus on this wooded site was almost deafening!

REAL WARTIME TOYS

Our one full day in the Weybourne area meant a visit to the amazing Muckleburgh Collection, not something you'd necessarily expect to find right on the coast. However, there's been a military base at this site since the 16th Century, and history really does come alive here. The sight of wartime tanks alongside rocket launchers and aeroplanes lures the visitor into the wartime camp atmosphere, where a wealth of militaria from all our conflicts of recent times is displayed. There are more big vehicles inside too and, if this doesn't whet your appetite quite enough, you can even drive one (details of availability and prices from the reception). Just the sheer size of the more modern rocket launchers was enough for us – alongside the incredibly tiny space the pilot of a Harrier Jump Jet must squeeze into before heading into action! Alongside a vast collection of memorabilia, it's the big vehicles that impress: the admission fee was worth every penny, and there's plenty

of parking space outside the museum.

There are other big toys to see nearby too. The Poppy Line runs steam trains from Sheringham along the coast to Weybourne and then onto Holt, with a rail link in the other direction to Cromer. There's even a halt at Kelling Heath, so the purchase of a day's rover ticket is well worth it if you have time to hop on and off.

BY THE SEASIDE

The Victorian seaside town of Cromer is one of the best places to head for if you fancy a day on the beach. You'll think it's a shingle beach, but let the tide go out and then discover the mass of sandy shore left behind, giving time for bait diggers and the like to emerge between the tides. The same tide creates a fascinating story along this beautiful coastline, as you head west and north from the Cromer/Sheringham area, with each village still home

to traditional fishing boats. Wells-next-the-Sea is perhaps one of the most motorhome friendly centres, with a good-sized car park just a few yards from the shopping area.

We arrived from the western side of the town, where we found a car park straight away on the right, so no need to negotiate any narrow streets through the centre. Wells has a wonderful harbour front with space to sit, which we did, enjoying the views and the sun – and of course some truly local fish and chips. Sitting on seats outside the harbour master's office, watching all the boating people busy preparing for the next tide, the fresh haddock was just mouthwatering. Good job we don't live here!

Next it was time for a wander around the narrow streets off the main harbour road, home for some proper local shops too; a fish shop selling crab (dressed), one or two shops stuffed with antiques and curios, plus a well-stocked





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hardware store with absolutely everything. It's just the place for a relaxing stroll – and don't leave without a crab, at least one game of bingo and a go at grabbing the soft toy (20p) with those ridiculous metal claws!

SEAL YOUR FATE

If the traditional seaside atmosphere is not to your taste, the north Norfolk coast has other delights. The popular spot for tourists, at Blakeney, boasts some of the best coastline around here with the famous Blakeney Point (National Trust) worth the walk. There's a pay car park by the harbour, but we found the local village hall offering free parking in its spacious car park – all official of course and just a couple of minute's wander back to the shoreline.

If you don't want to walk the reasonable distance to the Point, you can take advantage of the daily boat trips from the harbour to see

seals and birds. These trips are dependent on tide times. We sampled some local ale before heading off to one of our favourite motorhome dining spots, at Brancaster Staithe. We discovered this open, natural harbour area years ago and it's not such an obvious place to find. The short road to this area, where you can park up, enjoy the coast and watch the boats, is almost opposite a chandlery centre.

For our last night in the Dethleffs, we decided to head for the pretty village of Burnham Thorpe, famous for being Nelson's birthplace. Just a couple of hundred yards outside this village is a Caravan Club certificated location, at Whitehall Farm, where the grassy pitches are complemented by traditional flint walls and it's all very quiet and peaceful. Hook-up, toilet and showers are included in the price here. But what's also so great about this CL is the short stroll (10 minutes or 15 minutes if you want to gaze around) to The Lord Nelson, a Greene King pub that can boast about its food as much as its famous customer!

We had met up at the CL with Suzanne's parents, tempted by the prospect of some delicious food at the pub, and we were not disappointed. The chef's own lasagne went down well, while sausage, mash and proper onion gravy kept Suzanne happy. This was served in the bar, which actually isn't a bar because it just has an old-fashioned serving hatch and is all part of the charm. The pub's other main room has a more formal dining atmosphere, with a good choice of dishes from fixed price and a la carte menus. An interesting wine list, guest ales alongside locals such as Norfolk Wherry and an obvious centre for local people too, makes this a pub to remember. We should all remember it too, for just one important point: there's a barn round the back where Nelson held a farewell party before heading for that big battle. Well, he had to leave from somewhere, didn't he?

DETHLEFFS DESIGN

The Esprit RT 7094 was our home for the duration of the tour and, thankfully, more thought had gone into the design than the 'van's rather uninspiring name. Externally,



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- 1 Our Dethleffs touring home offered fixed bed, L-shaped galley and front lounge
- 2 A classic Continental front end features a half-dinette, while the washroom runs right across the rear of the 'van
- 3 The Poppy Line has lots to get 'steamed up' about!
- 4 Weybourne beach is the epitome of the Norfolk coastal scene
- 5 Kelling Heath spreads over 250 acres and offers bar, restaurants and health club
- 6 Dressed crab made a tasty starter
- 7 The Muckleburgh Collection features an array of weaponry
- 8 The Lord Nelson at Burnham Thorpe offers great ale, good food and plenty of history

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several things are apparent; long, and with a big rear overhang, this 'van also looks quite low, sleek even. The other obvious feature is Dethleffs' choice of motorhome tug - the respected Renault Master puts the motor into motorhome with the latest 150bhp engine under the bonnet. The coachwork looks very nicely screwed together - if a little fussy around the mouldings - with little visible sealant.

The test 'van's silver flanks are an extra cost option and (with the white cab) served to break up the perceived bulk well. A colour scheme with the cab in red is also available, but as another model in stock at Lowdham, and so adorned, had already been dubbed 'the fire engine' I'd avoid 'rougeing up' my own Dethleffs. However, if you're fond of red, I'm told the 'fire engine' can be had at a very good price!

Although billed as a four-berth, the RT 7094 (I promise not to call it that again) makes perfect sense as a grand tourer for two. Like many of its ilk, the bed made from the lounge is unconvincing and really only any good for occasional sleeping. Layout follows

Continental good practice of swivel cab seats, half-dinette and side sofa upfront, closely followed by an L-shaped galley. In the rear, things get more interesting as a longitudinal fixed double bed is flanked by a whole wall of storage options. Bringing up the rear, the washroom goes the whole width of the 'van and offers a separate shower among its charms. As with the outside, fit and finish is very good, with duo-tone, silver trimmed cabinets looking very classy indeed and lending an ambience that's quite un-Teutonic, in spite of this 'van's German origins.

NIP AND TUCKED MASTER

You'd be hard-pressed to tell the difference between the old and face-lifted Renault Master - the radiator grille's slightly changed expression is about the only noticeable thing from outside. Inside, the dash looks much the same and it is details such as a better stereo that separate old Renault from new. Where the changes are really at is under the bonnet, where all the engine options are 2.5-litre and modified

to produce different power outputs. Top-of-the-tree is the 146bhp (dCi 150) unit fitted here. There's a six-speed gearbox too, with a very high top (60mph-plus before you use it) for relaxed motorway cruising.

A crawl underneath revealed a motorhome chassis set-up completely new to me. This Renault is the platform cab version (this includes a rear chassis with a flat steel floor instead of the more usual ladder frame) with an Al-Ko rear chassis (complete with independent suspension) grafted on well to the rear of the cab. Unusual though this set-up is, it seems to work well, producing a floor height that needs no external step and handling well on the road.

The Master cab retains its good quality plastics and well laid out controls, Aguti captain's seats adding to the overall upmarket feel. The cab is comfortable, if a bit truck-like, and once on the road offers an easy drive with powerful brakes, good gearchange and steering. I was very eager to try the new, most powerful motor and once we were rolling it proved more than up to the task of propelling this seven-metre-plus motorhome with ease. Unfortunately, it was the getting rolling part that found it wanting, with more than a bit of hesitation on take-off. Such was this 'lag' (turbo or otherwise), that I found myself doing as we all do at time - shouting at a reluctant machine to 'get on with it!' Masterful though it may be,



WE LIKED

- High quality base vehicle
- Low overall stance
- Comfortable, versatile lounge-diner
- Big fridge/freezer
- Oven at sensible height
- Welcoming interior
- Gas/mains heating

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Drawers in the kitchen
- A softer bed
- More headroom in the washroom

WE DISLIKED

- The engine's 'lag' when accelerating



9 The ever-ready fixed bed proved to be like a Teutonic trampoline

10 Burnham Thorpe Caravan Club CL where the in-laws drop in for brekky!

11 Only the washroom's low ceiling threatens its status

12 The kitchen's well equipped, but drawerless

13 Blakeney harbour looks idyllic with the tide out

it now has a rival in the shape of - king of the motorhomes - Fiat Ducato; this chassis' 160 Multijet engine pulls strongly from low revs with little or no hesitation. Also, the Ducato's driving position is much more car-like.

STEPS ABOARD

Two step-treads easily get you aboard and another raises you to lounge level. Here, headroom is sacrificed (5ft 10in) to achieve a flat floor through to the cab, but my head did not make contact with the lowest point Heki roofline frame once and I'm five-foot-ten barefoot. Swivelled cab seats, side sofa and forward-facing dinette seat all join in to create a typically Continental lounge-diner that works very well - the raised floor scores points lowdown, as seat height is sensible and all the seating is at the same level. Mealtimes can sensibly accommodate four people as a drop-in table extension increases dining space. Those of greater stature may find this lounge brains 'em, but for us it was spot on.

CUE GALLEY

Lined up behind the lounge on the nearside, the kitchen offers a high level of equipment including an oven/grill mounted at a sensible height below the three-burner hob. A two-speed extractor hood lurks above, while to the right the drainerless sink features a pop-up waste and a curious drainer-equipped 'shelf' that seems to be suffering an identity crisis. Neither drainer nor second bowl, it proved to be of little use save as a dock for soggy tea bags. Opposite, on the offside, squats the terrifyingly obligatory fridge/freezer - a unit so vast (150 litres) that my wallet will not stretch to filling it to its brim. Automatic energy selection (AES) is standard too. The potential for long periods between shopping trips mean this cooler can be very useful indeed.

Downsides in this galley include - unsurprisingly - a lack of worktop and, surprisingly, absolutely no drawers. This fact was reinforced by the discovery of a lonely cutlery tray, sulking and homeless, in one of the lockers. Dark mutterings about the parentage of German motorhome designers evaporated when I checked the Dethleffs' brochure: it seems drawers have been sacrificed to allow

us Brits our oven - of course *they'll* be enjoying a spring cook-out near Nice while we're in the wet and windy Lakes with an M&S lasagne: 35 minutes at gas mark 5!

DETH BED

The lounge bed is billed as a double and is made once the table is secured at a lower level. Infill cushions emerge, join backrests and squabs and help construct a less than convincing transverse berth that's even less convincing as a double bed. Fact is that visiting kids'll be the only ones comfy here, and that will be thanks to the fact that they'll be far more excited and less prone to aches and pains than the rest of us.

The fixed double in the rear is a tad high off the floor but plenty long enough, although it does suffer from a 'chopped off' corner at the foot. This bed rides on sprung staves, but we found it to be very firm - early morning backache and tea and aspirin was the result. Of course, if you like your bed firm this one will be perfect; the rest of us'll buy one of those clever memory foam overlays.

DETH WASH

The ablutions are situated in the far rear, running across behind the bed's head. Vanity basin, countertop, big storage cupboards and spacious separate shower - this washroom is very well appointed.

However, the one thing it does not have is lots of headroom. You step down into the shower so no problem there: the rub lies in the main area where headroom is but five feet ten inches - less under the ceiling-mounted plinth that carries this room's halogen downlighters. The reason for this dearth of vertical space is the fact that the floor is raised to accommodate a storage locker beneath. We found this washroom fine to use, but if you're tall it'll be a real headache - literally!

LIFE AND DETH

It's in storage and kit provision that this motorhome scores high marks. Standout features include Truma's superb Combi EH that provides space heating and hot water running on gas and mains electricity and very generous water tanks. Lighting is very good too, with a vast array of halogens in every area. Storage space



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SPECIFICATION

■ Price as tested: £47,635 (OTR)

Description: Four-berth low profile with swivel cab seats ahead of half-dinette and inward-facing sofa. L-shaped nearside kitchen, offside longitudinal fixed double bed, opposite wardrobe and cupboard storage. Across-the-rear washroom with separate shower compartment.

■ **Base vehicle:** Renault Master dCi 150 platform cab with Al-Ko rear chassis extension. 2.5-litre turbo-diesel engine producing 146bhp, six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive.

■ **Warranty:** Base and conversion two years, water ingress six years

■ **Dimensions and weights:** Length: 7.27m (23ft 10in), width: 2.32m (7ft 7.5in), height: 2.64m (8ft 8in). Maximum authorised weight: 3850kg (Note: check your licence before contemplating the purchasing of a motorhome with a MAW over 3500kg)

■ **Payload:** 635kg (after driver (75kg), 90 per cent fuel, 100 per cent fresh water, two 11kg gas cylinders, hook-up lead)

■ **Belted seats:** Four (including driver)

■ **Beds:** Lounge double: 2.00m (6ft 7in) x 1.26m (4ft 1.5in), fixed rear double: 1.93m (6ft 4in) x 1.32m (4ft 4in), narrows to 920mm (3ft 0in).

■ **Kitchen:** Cramer three-burner hob with hinged glass lid, no ignition, two-speed extractor hood, Spinflo oven/grill with push-button ignition, Dometic 150-litre AES fridge/freezer, square drainerless stainless steel sink with folding mixer tap and hinged glass lid, three cupboards and two shelves above kitchen, two cupboards below kitchen.

■ **Washroom:** Thetford swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette toilet, vanity unit with oval stainless steel basin and mixer tap, separate shower compartment with rigid screens, riser rail/showerhead/mixer, three shelved cupboards,

DETHLEFFS ESPRIT RT 7094

three rail-fiddled shelves, two mirrors.

■ **Heating:** Truma Combi EH gas/mains water and blown-air.

■ **Gas:** Two 11 kg cylinders.

Tanks: Fresh water: inboard, 162 litres (35.6 gallons), waste water: underslung and insulated 103 litres (22.6 gallons)

■ **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** Metallic silver paint (£730), Liberty pack - pelmet lighting, roof rack, bike rack, radio/CD player (£1210).

■ **Other options available:** Passenger airbag (£296), cruise control (£212), motorcycle rack (£TBA), towbar (£585), exterior shower (£105), sunroof above cab (£TBA), fabric option (£185), digital control panel (£TBA), Alde 'wet' central heating (£1300), radio/CD/DVD player (£545), flat screen TV (£945), satellite TV system (from £1885), reversing camera (£725)

is impressive, as underbed room'll take all your bulky kit and slimmer stuff will go in the underfloor locker at the rear. In the bedroom, be-mirrored his and hers clothes cupboards and a big wardrobe shine, as does a convenient locker in the centre that hides a swing-out laundry basket.

DETH TAKE US ALL?

Well, not quite, but this Esprit will take two of you on long-term touring in style, as this 'van rides on a high quality chassis and is very comfortable. Downsides include reduced headroom in the lounge and washroom, a firm

bed and a drawerless kitchen, but overall it's a good one and - in typical German style - seems very well screwed together.

The layout creates an airy open feel inside and the classy-but-warm decor means it's not too Teutonically terrible to live with. ■



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