



FISHING FOR COMPLIMENTS

Elnagh Marlin 66G on 2.8JTD Fiat Ducato

Words and pictures
by Dave Batten-Hill

The Marlin 66G is anything but small fry

BELOW RIGHT: The Ducato's 2.8-litre engine propelled with aplomb but its lofty cab seats are a perennial problem.

Budget' is a word that can strike terror into the stoutest of hearts. But another meaning, low priced, is pertinent to the Elnagh Marlin 66G. A six-berth, overcab coachbuilt with an on the road price of just over thirty-five grand stands as pretty fair value... but is it good value?

Answering this is easy enough, just a matter of looking for the 45-degree angles where corners have been cut. Or is it? Not necessarily, because it's an immutable law that, as products become increasingly productionised, manufacturing costs fall. It may be that a motorhome at the lower end of the price spectrum isn't built cheaply. How does this apply here? We're about to find out.

On paper, the Marlin 66G is true to that which is implied by its name. No, it isn't a big game fish but it does possess a big garage. It also has six berths, a half-dinette, swivel cab seats, a washroom, and the whole is motivated by Fiat's trusty 2.8-litre JTD motor.

In the flesh – or rather, in the metal and GRP – the 66G is impressively large. Dominated by a big luton, the vehicle's seven-metre length is largely balanced by its lofty overall height. A coachbuilt of this length will have difficulty looking stubby anyway but the presence of graphics that add to the impression of length is always welcome. The 66G has them, big fish included, as well as sandwich construction walls that have been neatly punctured, where necessary, to accept external doors, windows, vents and so on. Contrasting skirts all round suit the vehicle, although the rear wheelarch spats bring the word 'afterthought' to mind. The use of GRP for the exterior panels is welcome. Though touching anything in a coachbuilt is always a mistake, foliage made of sterner stuff is needed to make an impression on GRP-clad surfaces. As so often, the adoption of materials that can be induced to adopt three-dimensional shapes easily is a sensible move. The 66G uses GRP mouldings and ABS plastic panels to advantage.

Whether the Marlin's white colouring is advantageous is a debatable point. Yes, white looks clean – until it gets dirty. True, a white exterior makes some difference to the amount of solar heat reflected rather than absorbed by the bodyshell. But is it stylish? Let's say it's as stylish as a large coachbuilt can be in white. More adventurous hues fail to appear on the options list, but then again, some don't like them.

What also doesn't appear on the options list is equipment that might well have done, but for the SeA Group and Don Amott ensuring that they are fitted as standard. So if you want ABS braking, cab air-conditioning, heat-reflective cab windows, central locking, electric cab mirrors, a Pioneer CD/radio, cab carpet, plus

a roof rack and ladder, don't think additional budget – all this gear's on board at the price.

POWER PLAY

For those who haven't tried one, there's a reason for the Fiat Ducato chassis cab being found at the sharp end of so many motorhomes. This isn't a commercial for Fiat - but in the scheme of things, the Ducato isn't all that commercial, in feel at any rate. The 66G features the most powerful of the UK market engines - and it's no surprise. A big coachbuilt needs enough power. The 66G has it.

Getting aboard involves a bit of a climb as the conversion doesn't have fixed running boards. Once installed in the cab, you find it lacks little. The broad sweep of the dash may lack colour but grey plastic is easy on the eye - and what lies in, on and around the dash is encouraging. The ignition key (with rolling code immobiliser chip) hasn't the buttons to make it work from a distance but key-operated central locking is nevertheless a desirable feature. When the key's used, the presence of an ABS light on the dash is reassuring, while air-conditioning is a positive boon, even in an English summer and regardless of the vehicle's colour.

A plus point in the Ducato is that, regardless of whether or not they match the seats in the back, the cab seats are decidedly good. In the 66G they match, but more importantly, they offer support, have an adjustable internal



AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £35,078 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 6
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Fiat Ducato LWB platform chassis
- **LAYOUT:** Overcab double bed, half-dinette, L-shaped kitchen, separate-shower washroom, transverse double bed in rear
- **ECONOMY:** 23.4 mpg overall



I LIKED

- User-friendly base vehicle
- Good CD/radio
- Comfortable lounge
- Big table and its useful undertray
- Workmanlike kitchen
- Provision of a drainer-equipped hob
- Conveniently placed oven/grill
- Spacious washroom
- Washroom door stiffener doubling as a towel hook
- 'Secret' storage beneath the bed step
- Triple access to the garage

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Lined cab curtains
- A bigger central rooflight
- Extraction over the hob
- A blind for the overcab roof vent
- A lock on the garage internal access hatch
- Better quality washroom furniture
- A fixed kitchen heat shield

I DISLIKED

- Lighting and ventilation (see text)
- Undersized rear bed steps
- Protruding doorknobs

lever into first and letting in the clutch gives a reassuringly powerful thrust in the backbone and the standard chassis copes well with most surfaces. What makes the difference lies above and behind the chassis.

In the 66G, the conversion is sufficiently well engineered for progress to be quiet, while the ride is comfortable. The included cab carpeting mutes the engine and transmission exclamations still more than does the standard sound insulation. You've good motive power, a quiet environment, good vision and air-conditioning to keep you cool.

Sitting pretty? You would be but for a complaint common to coachbuilts with swivelling seats. In these, as in low profiles and van conversions, the swivels pump up the seat height by 30mm or so. I'm six feet tall and whether it's true that I have a lengthy spine (I've been told so) is moot; I can't see through a sun visor, nor is peering under a windscreen header rail my idea of a treat. Still, everything has an upside - and in the Marlin, the (by no means exclusive) tottering high seating position showed that it suffered no more nor less body roll than any other tall coachbuilt. Drive it accordingly, with due deference for corners and crosswinds, and it does very nicely, thank you.

This leaves just one other item, for which garage model motorhomes tend to come under fire: through vision. Some is present here, there being a rear window, but leave the window uncurtained when driving and it doesn't do a great deal of good. Since you can see whether there's a lorry behind in the door mirrors, a panorama of its upper cab through the internal mirror is hardly helpful. The Marlin, like many of its rivals, would benefit greatly from a rear view camera.

LOUNGERIE DEPT

A half-dinette is the main reason why the 66G's cab seats swivel, the better to seat six

diners. Spinning the seats round is simple enough, and when spun they are presented with a table at a convenient height... or the passenger is. Catering for the diner in the driving seat is facilitated by a table extension. This folding device (a potential finger-biter) lives in the wardrobe when not in use, and sliding the tabletop sideways to accept it reveals an unexpected bonus. Underneath is a large, moulded bin, with divisions at the side and space enough for quite a few bits and bobs. When the table is extended to full size, it's big.

The same can be said of the lounge. With the two travel seats and a wide, side sofa, it's spacious enough and there's more space up top. Lockers to either side at high level can accept the usual hardware and there's a TV cabinet at the leading end of the left side. This is big enough for a conventional, tubed TV and has the necessary 230V, 12V and aerial connections plus a slide-out mount with turntable for the haunted fish tank.

GOURMET GALLEY

It's all very well having large dining capacity but having a kitchen to suit helps. The 66G has such a kitchen, so repasts on site needn't be modest.

The galley is based around an L-shaped worktop that is of a usable size. This houses a three-burner hob that, sadly, lacks spark ignition. To its right is a neat, square sink that is fed by a chromium-plated monobloc tap and is large enough for the task at hand. Storage is provided above and below, with a single, high-level locker above the hob, a cutlery drawer above a deep locker under the sink and a tall locker by the refrigerator. This last is adequate, though a touch marginal on capacity and owners will have to remember to select the relevant power source - the unit has no automatic energy selection.

lumbar pad, adjustable rake and reach, and an armrest each. Nothing but praise there; the vehicle's usable for even long-haul travel.

So, how did the 66G travel? On starting, the JTD gives a *basso profundo* rumble from below decks. Snicking the five-speed manual gearbox





LEFT: Even without its extension, the table proved sizeable.

LEFT INSET: Smart storage under the table.

BELOW LEFT: Seat of power: upfront, driver and passenger seats swivel to join the lounge-diner.

BELOW MIDDLE: The aft half houses L-shaped kitchen, washroom and a fixed bed atop a huge garage.

BELOW RIGHT: The well-designed kitchen features an oven/grill placed at genuine eye level.

Above the angle of the L is a desirable addition. A Smev oven/grill stands next to the locker and features internal illumination, spark ignition, and a drop-down, glass door.

The kitchen's ability to store comestibles and offer preparation and cooking facilities for meals for up to six is without question.

There's sufficient workspace and the area is well laid out. The lack of a drainer may cause

food for thought at some point but the Smev hob – hardly likely to be in use at washing-up time – can double as one, having its own waste drain fitted. Providing four, sliding cup hooks on a chrome-plated rail is a neat touch, provided they aren't used when the vehicle's moving – could get very noisy! The addition of a foldout heat shield, concealed under the hob's lid, may also seem thoughtful but using it is somewhat

of a fiddle. A fixed heat shield on the kitchen's rearmost wall would have been more practical and probably cheaper. The lack of an extractor fan in the kitchen is a disappointment.

WASHING LINES

Across the gangway from the kitchen and just to the rear of the entry door is the washroom. This cuboid cabinet sits in the angle formed by





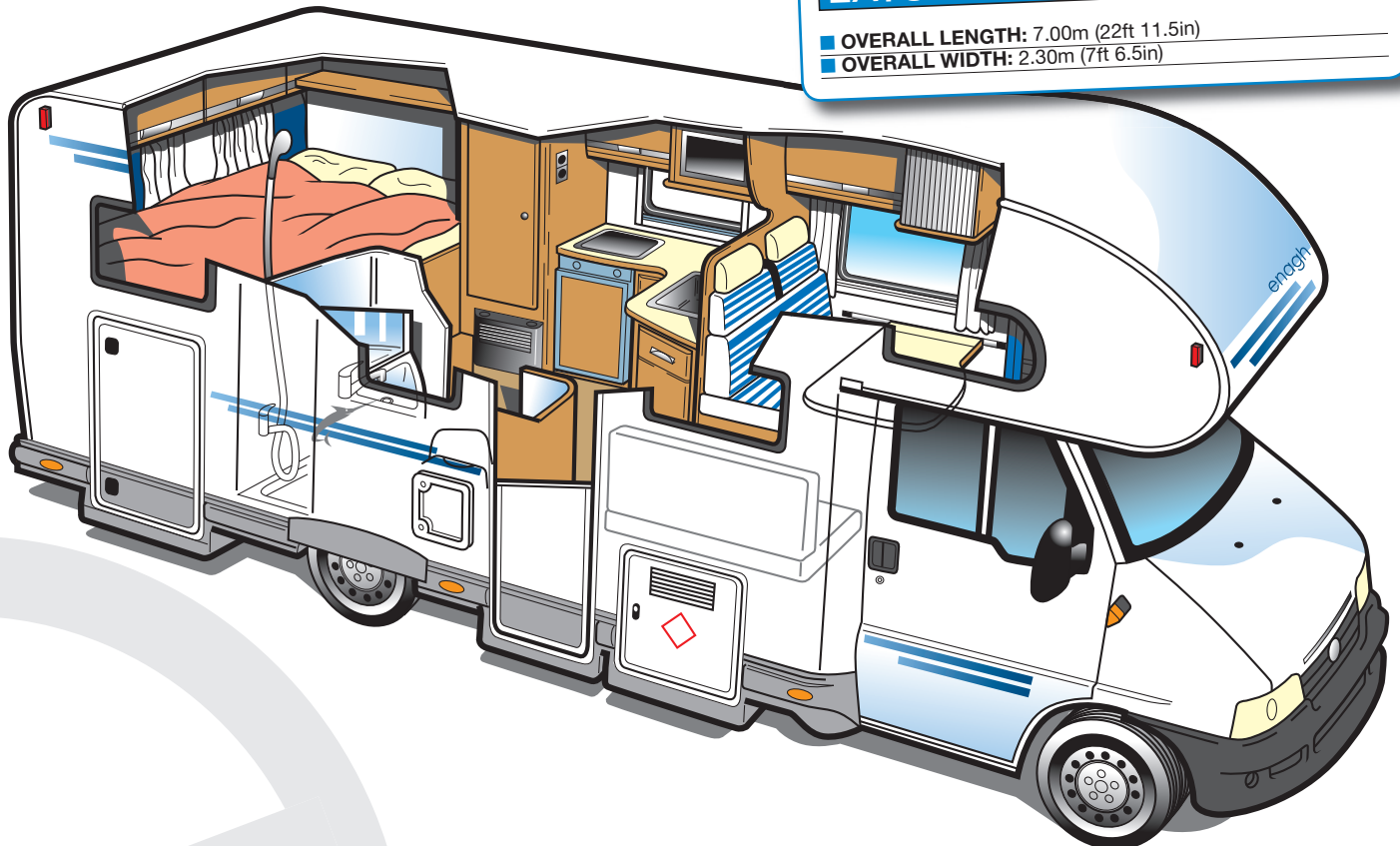
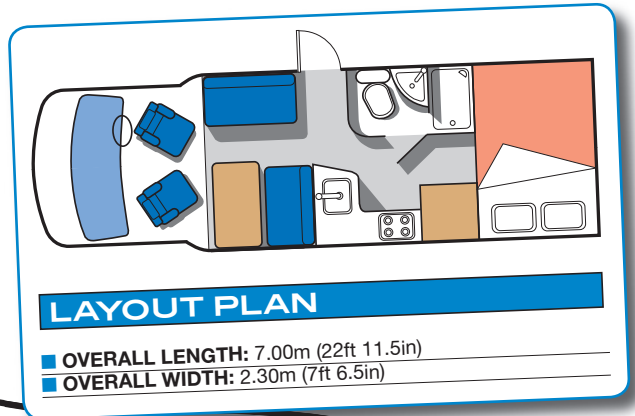
the wall and the garage and it's no small matter. With the turn of an annoyingly projecting, spherical knob, the door swings out to reveal the usual suspects fitted neatly into the available space.

The leading component is an electric-flush, swivel-bowl cassette WC. This is well placed but lacked an essential; searching the area revealed there was no loo roll holder, not even hidden in the locker beneath the washbasin. This basin is a roughly triangular moulded ABS item fed by a plated monobloc tap, while an inconveniently placed mirror occupies

the narrow bulkhead made by the shower cabinet's front wall.

Since the only other places in which to reflect were on the two doors of the high-level locker, shaving and the like will be easy only for the very tall, or the bearded.

Down under the basin, a further door opens to access more storage space. Like that in the top locker, the space was useful. But what had to be





FAR LEFT: All white now: washroom furniture is well placed, but does not appear to be very robust.

MIDDLE: Room at the top: luton berth was comfortable.

RIGHT: Dinette bed secrets revealed: flat it was not.

BELOW: We liked the length-enhancing graphics and contrasting skirts.

borne in mind was that the washroom furniture, Thetford excepted, is made of ABS plastic - very white, very bright and seemingly, not very tough.

The shower compartment occupies the entire tail end of the washroom. This gives a respectably capacious showering area, and a folding, figured shower screen proved effective at keeping spray at bay. Equally effective space for toiletries is provided, moulded into the shower cabinet's outer wall. The open shelves have integral fiddle bars, meaning that doing the shampoo bottle shuffle wasn't necessary, while the soap dish, sensibly, is open.

The washroom's strong suit, apart from its generous size, is in its fittings. A ceramic tooth mug, in its own, chromium-plated holding loop, is neat, and a towel hook on the washroom's front wall proved extremely useful. The washroom systems also worked well. The volume and pressure of the hot water supply was good and the basin and shower drained well.

The absence of a blind for the washroom's side window was curious. Yes, it was frosted - but after dark, there could be an unplanned performance for the benefit (or otherwise) of onlookers. It was good to see a fitted, non-slip shower mat, and the machining of a simple towel hook into the washroom door's stiffening rib is a clever notion. Putting a six-inch high threshold at the foot of the doorway, however, is less than smart.

Opposite the washroom stands a fair-sized wardrobe, its lower fascia occupied by a Truma convector heater, operating on LPG, and, with blown-air assistance, also distributing heat through the conversion. The wardrobe, though it has a good drop and is convenient to use, suffers from having no internal illumination.

THE BIG SLEEP

Maybe not a big sleep - but there's plenty of room for various sleepers to stretch out. Starting at the front, the overcab bed base (which conveniently lifts for travel) could be just as easily lowered for use. When in use, it proved quite spacious - for an overcab bed. Access via a ladder was easy enough, while the headroom is fair. An acrylic window at one side gave good

ventilation, abetted by a simple, overhead vent. The bed can be curtained off for privacy and this helped to create a cosy, comfortable nest. The addition of a single downlighter dictates which is the head end of the bed.

The next bed along, as it were, is the dinette berth. Building this was a task in itself, involving

setting the (extended) table to half height, with its leg folded and its outer end supported on the provided, low mounting rail. Then, an oddly shaped piece of wood, stored in the wardrobe, fitted between the end of the travel seat and the sofa opposite. Cushion juggling, with the addition of a folding cushion (stowed, guess where), made





a large but none-too-flat bed. Designers have yet to come up with the ideal dinette bed and they haven't with this one. Nevertheless, this bed's cosy enough but it would have been more so had the adjacent full-length cab curtains been lined.

The third of the beds is another upstairs berth, over the garage rather than over the cab. This bed needed no making up, which was convenient, and the mattress proved very comfortable. The height of the bed proved less convenient. This is often the case with beds that top garages. The first access step (cut away to accommodate the Truma heater) and the higher, second step proved too small - and in polished, wood-effect material, were none too grippy.

In this area, the addition of a 'secret' storage cubby under the taller step and an access hatch into the garage showed some thought had gone into the design. But there's a downside. Slightly built thieves could access the 66G's interior from the garage as easily as owners could

put their goods into the garage from inside. A simple locking device fitted here would hardly break the bank. Nor would a less obvious door handle for the wardrobe; like the washroom, the wardrobe door had a protruding knob.

The rear bedroom itself is fairly well laid out with a rank of lockers heading the rear wall, above the tail window. An open shelf, complete with lip, above the head end of the bed, accommodated nocturnal essentials (though dictating a windowless wall). The area's other window occupies the offside wall at the foot of the bed.

OUTSIDE CHANCE

Here, we're talking ins and outs. Externally, the 66G works well enough. It has an awning light, a well-placed vented gas locker, a high-level brake lamp, and two access doors make a through garage. The garage itself has a singular advantage - it is huge. Four profile-cut alloy tie-down locations and a practical, patterned floor



MMM LIVE-IN TEST DATA

marlin 66

TYPE

Overcab coachbuilt

PRICE

■ From: £35,078 OTR

■ As tested: £35,078 OTR

BASICS

■ Vehicle: Fiat Ducato LWB platform chassis

■ Berths: 6

■ Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)

■ Warranty: 2 years base vehicle and conversion, 5 years water ingress

CONSTRUCTION

GRP-clad sandwich construction with GRP/ABS panels/mouldings.

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturer's figures)

■ Length: 7.00m (22ft 11.5in)*

■ Width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5 in)*

■ Height: 3.15m (10ft 4in)*

■ Wheelbase: 3.70m (12ft 1.5in)*

■ Rear overhang: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)

■ Max authorised weight: 3500kg*

■ Payload: 585kg*

INSIDE STORY

Swivel cab seats and overcab double bed ahead of half-dinette with side sofa, nearside L-shaped kitchen, offside separate-shower washroom, transverse double bed over garage in rear

treatment were appreciated - a light in here would have been appreciated even more. (Remember, when loading a rear garage you need to be mindful of both payload and axle weights. Ed)

What may be obvious is that there's been as yet little reference to the important matters of lighting and ventilation. These areas are where the 66G sells itself short. The overcab roof vent may have an integral flyscreen but it is blindless - so ventilation equals a not necessarily welcome alarm call at dawn. This criticism can't be levelled at the rear bed because it has no vent at all. The central Mini Heki rooflight (though equipped with a blind and a flyscreen) proved inadequate to ventilate the kitchen area and tail bedroom.

During daylight hours, the washroom's side window provided sufficient ventilation, but the fixed, circular roof vent in the shower provided no illumination to speak of. After dark, matters were made worse by the paucity of interior lights. The rear bedroom has just one downlighter, as do the bathroom and kitchen areas. Even with the total of four downlighters on, the lounge area was gloomy while the overcab bed again has just a single light. This made the 66G undoubtedly restful of an evening but reading or close work of any kind was out of the question.

In the final analysis, corners have been cut to keep the price of the 66G relatively low. Some of these money-saving strategies are quite acceptable, but others, especially the inadequate ventilation, detract from the vehicle.

On balance, the upsides outweigh the downsides but in a competitive marketplace some consideration, particularly of the ventilation point, is warranted. □

- **Insulation:** Floor 77mm, walls 33mm, roof 33mm
- **Interior height:** 2.28m (7ft 6 in) max, 2.04m (6ft 8in) min

THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2.8-litre turbo-diesel producing 93.5kw (127bhp) @ 3600rpm
- **Transmission:** Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Fuel consumption:** 23.4 mpg overall
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round
- **Suspension:** Front: coil-spring independent; rear: leaf-spring rigid axle
- **Features:** ABS, cab air-conditioning, heat-reflective cab glass electric windows, key-operated central locking, electric mirrors, immobiliser, headlamp height adjustment, locking glove compartment, driver and passenger door bins, height adjustable upper seatbelt points

LOUNGING AND DINING

Swivel cab seats with reach and rake adjustment and height-adjustable inner armrests, half-dinette with two seatbelt-equipped travel seats, rail-mounted transverse table with drop-in extension over storage tray, two-seater side sofa, dedicated TV cabinet with slide-out rotating mount plus power and aerial sockets

KITCHEN

L-shaped unit with hinged glass lid over hob, high-level oven/grill, one high-level locker over hob, cutlery drawer with five-section moulded plastic divider above deep locker with two shelves and gas isolators, tall locker with two shelves immediately forward of refrigerator

- **Sink:** Square drainerless sink in satin-finish stainless steel, with swivelling chromium-plated monobloc tap

- **Cooker:** Smev three-burner draining hob in satin-finish stainless steel. Smev oven/grill unit with grill pan, drop-down glass door, illumination and spark ignition
- **Fridge:** Dometic three-way unit with full-width freezer compartment (manual power selection), capacity 110 litres

WASHROOM

Fully enclosed area with triangular moulded ABS washbasin with chromium-finish monobloc tap. Thetford electric-flush swivel-bowl toilet. Single-drainer shower compartment with folding, figured polycarbonate screens, chromium-plated monobloc mixer with removable showerhead. Chromium-plated fixed towel loop, high-level towel hook, ceramic tooth mug in chromium plated holder, fixed roof vent, bulkhead-mounted mirror

BEDS

- Overcab double
 - **Length:** 2.12m (6ft 11.5in)
 - **Width:** 1.38m (4ft 6in)
 - **Headroom:** 650mm (2ft 1.5in) max
- Lounge double
 - **Length:** 2.15m (7ft 0.5in)
 - **Width:** 1.20m (3ft 11in)
- Transverse over-garage double
 - **Length:** 2.17m (7ft 1.5in)
 - **Width:** 1.40m (4ft 7in)
 - **Headroom:** 1.00m (3ft 3.5 in)

STORAGE

Three high-level lockers, space beneath side sofa, moulded tray with divisions beneath dining table in lounge, three-quarter drop wardrobe with fore and aft hanging rail, three high-level lockers and open shelving above rear bed, full-width rear garage with tie-down points and access doors to both sides

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Inboard. Capacity 115 litres (25 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung. Capacity 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Water heater:** Truma Ultrastore boiler, gas-only operation
- **Space heater:** Truma Trumatic convector, with blown-air, gas-only operation
- **Leisure battery:** 110 amp hr
- **Gas:** Capacity two 13kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** One adjustable halogen downlighter in overcab bed, four halogen downlighters in lounge, single halogen downlighter above work surface in kitchen, single halogen downlighter in washroom, single halogen downlighter under shelf in rear bed area
- **Sockets:** 230V: three (one in TV cabinet, one above kitchen worktop, one by entry door). 12V: three (one in TV cabinet, two in cab)
- **Control panel:** Mounted above wardrobe with LED power and water pump indicators, and simple LED indicators for fresh/waste water content and vehicle/leisure battery status
- **Blinds/curtains:** Full-height corduroy curtains to cab, privacy curtains to luton bed area, functional nets to main living area windows. All windows apart from washroom fitted with pull-down blinds and flyscreens. Pleated blind and flyscreen to central Mini Heki rooflight, flyscreen only to overcab vent
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** No

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

No options listed

E & OE

WE STAYED AT

Uttoxeter Racecourse Caravan Club site, Wood Lane, Uttoxeter ST14 8BD (telephone: 01889 564172; web site: www.caravanclub.co.uk)

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Don Amott Leisure Kingdom, Hilton, near Derby DE65 5FJ (telephone: 08454 560582; web site: www.donamott.com)



TOP LEFT: The over garage bedhead shelf was useful but mean lighting and the absence of a roof vent in the tail were not.

BOTTOM LEFT: The steps up to the rear bed were awkward and slippery but the garage access hatch found here was welcome.

BOTTOM LEFT INSET: Secret storage lurks under the steps.

LEFT MIDDLE: Big garage has tie-down points and twin access doors, but no lighting.