

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

Swift Mondial GT on 2.3TD Fiat Ducato



*Britain's biggest motorhome manufacturer has re-entered the panel van market with a cutting-edge high top named by the past*



**S**ome of the best camping holidays of my life were spent in rusty, leaking old panel vans, so I couldn't wait to see the new Swift Mondial GT. This was a prototype 'van (fresh from its triumph at the NEC), yet one named for a model from the past.

Like kids who outgrow their parents, this new generation of Ducato panel vans is bigger (and better?) than before.

Built on the long wheelbase Fiat X250 chassis, the Mondial has a lounging space, kitchen and washroom that would look good in

any coachbuilt: throw out that old Porta Potti!

The old Mondial was cheaper than the equivalent Auto-Sleeper, offered more internal space, deeper cupboards, and a bed that purred out on ball bearings, rather than with broken fingernails. After years of absence, the Mondial has been redesigned and re-launched to spearhead Swift's attack on the currently fast-growing panel van conversion market.

But is it a winner?

#### **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

This new Mondial attracted interest: I had to beat people off while I was doing the test. It's

sleek, powerful and compact - with none of a coachbuilt's boxy-ness or bulges - and oozes class, looking as good as 'vans that are a lot more expensive.

Inside, it's equally striking. Cab windows are tinted and side windows are Swift-fitted, double-glazed acrylic and also slightly tinted. The front lounge offers a comfortable offside sofa and nearside forward-facing pew. Colours are on the warm side of neutral, with coffees and creams, light greys and gold: you can live with these... Wow factor is present in the offside kitchen, with excellent serving and work space. Opposite, there's a seriously big



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**I LIKED**

- Sheer drivability - handling, power, balance
- Feeling of well-used space inside this panel van
- Colours and comfort of the lounge
- Great kitchen with space and light
- Under-seat storage lockers
- Good-sized washroom
- Large wardrobe

**I WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- Passenger airbag
- A footrest for the passenger seat in lounge
- A fitted-out cutlery drawer

**I DISLIKED**

- Awkward access to toilet cassette
- Low cab roof. I hate duck, so I'm going to grouse!



1 The latest Mondial employs a classic front lounge layout

2 A big side sofa offers feet-up lounging for one lucky camper

3 Under-seat locker space will swallow your bedding

wardrobe and sizeable washroom.

First impression? You've stepped into a high quality, medium-sized coachbuilt.

**THE DRIVING FORCE**

The new Fiat cab controls fall naturally to hand. Side windows and the (heated) wing mirrors are electrically operated. Cab doors have remote locking, but the prototype came with only key-operated central locking. On a bitterly cold day, there was no sign of normal Fiat draughts through either cab door; and the heater also works... Bizarre!

On the road, the Mondial offers sheer drivability. The Fiat 120 Multijet engine delivers its horses smoothly and you won't be left for dead at traffic lights or cursed for loitering up inclines and into headwinds. There's an excellent balance between power and weight: pack your 597kg payload, and forget it.

The fully adjustable cab seats are comfortable, while clutch and steering are a joy to use – their light feel could be a clinching factor for older campers. There's a laptop locker beneath the gearlever. Brakes are excellent, with both ABS and EBD – if you ever need to stop fast, you'll bless them. All in all, a nice 'van to take from A to B but, with that long wheelbase, remember not to cut corners too tightly!

**LOUNGING ABOUT**

The Mondial comes in front and rear lounge versions. In the prototype's front-lounge design, the passenger cab seat swivels around to give an armchair extension to the lounging area. There's plenty of space to move around, a comfortable sofa with a decent backrest and foam that shouldn't leave you bottoming-out within a couple of years. Above, there are lots of interesting cubbyholes

and a line of lockers over the sofa offering storage space. Below, big lockers under the sofa and rear seat will swallow bedding, or your bargains from the sales.





This traditional layout has its minuses. First, only one of you can claim the sofa and get your legs stretched out. OK, so there's the seat alongside the side door, but - since that has to double up as a bed - it's comfortable, but not shaped to fit the human form. A couple of hours on that and you'll volunteer to take the dog out! Which leaves the rotated cab seat. But the cab's floor is several inches higher than the living area floor: unless you're seven feet tall, your legs will dangle. Sometimes, there's a footrest available to cure the problem. I couldn't find one in the prototype, so be ready to get out that toolbox and knock one up yourself.

You can enter the living area through the cab, the sliding side door, or one of the two rear doors - the other has furniture hard up against it. There's a fixed step at the rear and an electrically operated step for the side door. Entry space is generous - even for those with 'luxury' upholstered rears.

Headroom inside measures 6ft 2.5in (1.89m); a bit intimidating for a six-foot-one guy, but when you discover that you don't crash into rooflights, you stop worrying... The cab ceiling is lower and provides a narrow storage space for infill cushions, which turns it into a hard-hat area for most people. Duck, or grouse!

The Heki rooflight and side/rear windows all have cassette blinds/flyscreens, while concertina blinds draw across the windscreen for night time privacy. At first, I couldn't find blinds for the cab's side windows - fine, if you're an exhibitionist. Then I discovered two pieces of insulated fabric that fitted perfectly, clipping onto studs I had missed before. So modesty, if preferred, is easily guaranteed.

The lockers look great and are nicely fitted with good solid handles and hinges that will last for years, but... Firstly, doors are held by magnetic catches: not my favourite fixing. Secondly, the sides of a panel van curve in towards the roof (this is where boxy coachbuilts score), so you lose a lot of space

at the back of your lockers. With the bottom shelf only eight-and-a-half inches deep, it limits what you can stuff up there.

All 'vans involve space trade-offs. In a narrow panel van, if you have decent living quarters, then one of the prices to pay is shallow lockers, which flatter to deceive.

## A CHEF'S DELIGHT

The kitchen offers excellent workspace for meal preparation by a keen chef (or for putting down steaming takeaways) on either side of the stainless steel sink. There are drainage racks, both to the side of the sink and beneath its glass lid. The matt chrome mixer tap is lever-operated. Above there are four lockers, one of them with a dedicated floor for cups and plates, and good swivelling spotlights, both for the sink and the gas hob, (with oven and grill). Below sink level there's a Dometic 81-litre, three-way fridge, with a decent freezer compartment.

On this prototype 'van, neither main drawer had a fitted cutlery tray, nor was a waste bin fitted in either bottom cupboard. There's space to spare, so you shouldn't need the dreaded plastic bag in such a lovely 'van.

In short, this kitchen area is attractive enough to tempt even me into cooking the dinner - well, almost!

Opposite the galley, is a long oval mirror: there are coat hooks alongside this, and at the left of the side door. While the wardrobe offers plenty of depth and hanging length, I suspect it will be stuffed with shirts and tops, jeans and chinos, as well as the coats and waterproofs.

## THE LITTLEST ROOM

The Mondial's washroom is light and spacious. It has a drop-down washbasin - the usual way of saving space in smaller 'vans' little rooms. There's a small mirror-doored vanity cupboard above the basin. The washing area is big enough to easily pass the bending forward test. Equally, turning and sitting on

the swivel-bowl Thetford toilet doesn't involve contortions. However, tall guys beware the showerhead, which is cunningly placed just inside the door and poised to attack!

## FILLING YOUR FACE

The dining table is stored in the wardrobe. It is reassuringly solid, without being too heavy to lug around the 'van. Assembly is easy; a simple release, then the legs swing down... Watch your fingernails!

This 'van is designed for two people, and



**4** The kitchen has plenty of precious work surface and a full-feature cooker

**5** In the washroom, a drop-down basin makes best use of available space

**6** The showerhead – a silent assassin

**7** Free-standing dining table resides in the wardrobe

**8** Best bed is the giant double

**9** The table will only fit across the lounge



beds or a massive double.

For single beds, the offside sofa provides the first. Slide the driver's seat as far forward as it goes, then stuff infills into the gap, leaving a comfortable 6ft 2in by 2ft 5in (1.88m x 740mm) bed with a bright spotlight above for reading that blockbuster. Where do you put the removed backrest? Use your initiative.

For number two, unfold the forward-facing pew, slide the passenger cab seat forward, stuff in the remaining infills, and you have a 6ft 2in by 2ft 1in (1.88m x 634mm) bed that won't stand too much rolling around.

The safer option is to make up the giant double. Set up the nearside single as before, then work a lever to release the sofa and slide its base out to fill the gap between the beds. The backrest slots in nicely and you have a massive six-foot-two-inch-square bed which is comfortable, but has a downside. If the person at the cab end of the bed (when sleeping across the 'van) needs a nocturnal trip to the loo, it's impossible to find a way across your sleeping partner, without treading thereon, or having your intentions misunderstood. Beware right hooks!

## ODDS AND SODS

The cupboard above the forward-facing rear seat holds your TV and a Status 315 omni-directional aerial was provided on the prototype. In the cab, there's a radio/CD/MP3 player, while there are three 230V sockets if

the table reflects this: plenty of space to serve two comfortably, but you'd be struggling with visitors. The table fits only one part of the floor area – between the side door and the sofa. Two could maybe cram together on the forward-facing pew, but not if either wave their elbows like my granddaughters. Placing the table long-ways in front of the sofa isn't an option as the T-shaped feet are too big for the aisle. Forget about the cab seat for dining, it towers above the action and one would need orang-utan arms or a very supple back.

For entertaining, it's better to store the table and use the serving areas in the galley. You could hold four people in comfort (with plates on their knees), five people if it's a liquid lunch. After that, it's synchronised breathing or a barbecue. This is not a 'van for hosting multitudes: go visiting, instead.

## GETTING YOUR HEAD DOWN

In any panel van conversion, converting seats to sleeping quarters means a bits-and-pieces bed. In the Mondial, you can set up two single



## On Test Swift Mondial GT

you want to use your own CD/cassette player – or, of course, fan heater.

On the wall above the sofa, the control panel offers information and switching for vehicle/leisure batteries, water pump/lighting and fresh/waste water tank levels. The 66-litre fresh water tank is underslung, as is the 50-litre waste water tank. If you take your 'van walkies in winter-time, it's worth investing in a thermostatic heater for the fresh water tank, to prevent freezing up. Meanwhile, if you drain waste water directly through to a bucket you'll be safe enough. As for yourselves, the 'van is insulated with high performance Thinsulate, to keep out winter cold and the

Truma E2400 gas-fired blown-air heating system should do the rest.

There's an 85 amp hr leisure battery, which, if you're touring and charging up through the day, should handle most of the wild camping challenges thrown at it.

Outside, the gas locker holds two 7kg bottles and should also take a properly coiled mains lead and maybe levelling wedges too. To access the toilet cassette you must open both rear doors fully to get at the door behind which, the cassette lurks. This is a bit of a 'production,' especially if a gale of rain is battering your rear doors. You just know this'll be the case when it's full, don't you?



You have to open the rear doors, then a cupboard door, to access the toilet cassette

### TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

### SWIFT MONDIAL GT

- **Price from, as tested:** £33,995 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato long wheelbase high roof panel van; 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 120bhp; six-speed manual gearbox; front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle and conversion
- **Dimensions:** Length: 6.19 m (20ft 4in) including rear step; width: 2.05m (6ft 8.5in); height: 2.55m (8ft 4.5in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** 597kg
- **Belted seats:** Three (including driver)
- **Beds:** Lounge double: 1.88m x 1.88m (6ft 2in x 6ft 2in); alternative singles: Nearside 1.88m x 640mm (6ft 2in x 2ft 1in); offside: 1.88m x 750mm (6ft 2in x 2ft 5.5in)
- **Other features:** Remote central locking, ABS brakes with EBD, driver's airbag, electric cab windows, electrically-heated and adjusted wing mirrors, lockable (laptop

size) central storage box, radio/CD/MP3 player with iPod connection, twin door bins, stainless steel sink with glass lid, gas hob with oven and grill, 81-litre fridge with freezer compartment, Thetford swivel-bowl toilet with electric flush, drop-down washbasin with single-lever mixer tap, shower mixer tap with showerhead, riser rail, two-outlet tray floor, 66-litre (14.5 gallons) fresh water tank, 50-litre (11 gallons) waste water tank, gas capacity 2 x 7kg cylinders

- **Options fitted to test vehicle:** Alloy wheels (£620)

- **Other options available:** Driver's accessories pack of cab air-conditioning and cruise control (£995), engine upgrade to 157bhp 160 MultiJet with Comfortmatic automatic gearbox and Driver's pack (£3995), wind-out awning (£695)

E&OE

### A WINNER?

The old Mondial stood out from its competitors as a value-for-money purchase. This new model is a neat piece of design and seems a good quality product. Everything on the prototype worked and felt solid enough to go on working indefinitely.

What more can you ask for than a 'van which looks great, is comfortable to live in and a pleasure to drive? The Mondial is all of these. If its reliability turns out to be as good as its predecessor, then Swift has come up with another winner. ■

