



Words & pictures
by Mark Brownrigg

HOMING IN ON VALUE

This Belgian-built low profile offers a lovely lounge and looks to possess quality that reaches beyond its entry-level price



Budget motorhomes have a reputation for cutting corners in design and quality, but not this one. Sure, there are compromises - as on any motorcaravan - nevertheless, the overriding feeling is that you are buying into a mid-£30,000 model, while spending £5000 to £6000 less. That's *my* kind of budget 'van'!

The Belgian-built Home Car XS-22 was introduced in October 2007 at the NEC in Birmingham and, reflecting the interest it's causing, Campbells of Kirkham had run out of brochures when I turned up. Not that Tim Hilton and his friendly team of wallet emptiers are complaining. Campbells is a family business, now in its third generation of involvement in caravans and motorhomes. You will be given a warm welcome, whenever you drop in. The

folks pride themselves on looking after their customers, even *after* the magic moment of the sale. Gratitude shows: Campbells has been voted MMM's Northern Area Dealer of the Year for 2008 - by its customers.

CAR'S CHARACTER

There is nothing of the look of a budget 'van' about the XS-22. Walking round it, you are struck by its neat modern low-profile shape. Built on the latest Ford Transit cab and chassis, it looks really cool. Once inside, the wow factor is the feeling of light and space you get - the layout making the most of its 5.94-metre (19ft 6in) body-length.

While a front lounge version (the XS-33) is available, the XS-22 comes with a rear lounge layout. This offers a surprising amount of space in the kitchen, and a classy-looking, U-shaped set of settees aft. Wrap-around windows guarantee plenty of light and there's a nice

mix of overhead lockers and corner shelves. Upholstery colours are dark blue and beige, with light gold curtains. The wardrobe and washroom are on the offside of the 'van, across from the kitchen. All in all, your first impression is one of good quality in both design and build.

DRIVING THE CAR

This was my first chance to play with the new Ford Transit's cab and engine; I loved every minute. The test 'van had the optional GT pack, bringing radio/CD player, electrically-operated mirrors and windows, remote central locking, colour-matched bumper (and sturdy quilted and buttoned upholstery in the lounge). Adding around £1000 to the price, this consolidates the feel of better-than-average quality.

The Transit has a comfortable, almost car-like cab, where everything falls easily to hand: Ford, as always, provides a silky-smooth



(fascia-mounted) gearchange. The old centrally mounted handbrake that tripped generations of the unwary, is now sited at the right side of the driver's seat – where it can be somewhat 'over-familiar' as you slip down to the ground!

On the road, this 'van is a joy to drive, its 110bhp 2.2-litre engine raring to go – if still a little noisily when you press the *fortissimo* pedal - and delivering more than enough power to haul this relatively light motorhome up hills. Plated for 3500kg MAW (and therefore attractive to older drivers banned from anything heavier), it offers a huge payload of 1070kg. Not even my wife could find that much to carry! So, simply throw in everything you're likely to need and head off into the sunrise...

All round visibility is excellent, while the short wheelbase makes for easy manoeuvring, giving the 'van a sure-footed, easy-to-handle feel: it's as if it's enjoying the outing as much as you are!

There were two minor rattles when on the move, from inside the oven and one of the sink/hob covers: cunningly placed dishtowels will soon suppress these.

COMFY CAR

Comfortable lounging space comes at a premium in many budget 'vans, but not this Home Car model. Each side settee is six feet long, so there will never be a fight about whose turn it is to get their feet up. Cushions,

1 View forward from the lounge sees the left-hand kitchen opposite washroom and wardrobe. Caravan door is on the UK nearside

2 U-shaped rear lounge is the layout's high point

3 The interior boasts a good range of lockers and shelves



4 Compact kitchen lacks work surface

5 Lounge makes a huge double bed

6 Freestanding table is generous, but awkward and heavy

covered in Belgian fabric, are surprisingly firm: that should make them last for years, without the risk of bottoming-out.

However, there are a couple of potential flaws. Firstly, and because the side settees double up as single beds, they are 762mm (2ft 6in) deep, making uncomfortable long-term sitting for any shorter-legged person. So, take plenty of cushions: for use as well as decoration. Secondly, the slats which support these settees look to be on the flimsy side of adequate. I have had slats broken in some of my 'vans, when heavy friends dropped onto them - so either pick your friends carefully, or ask them to sit down gently.

Internal headroom is excellent at 1.93 metres (6ft 4in), despite the 2.67-metre (8ft 9in) low profile body-shell. The Heki rooflight and side/rear windows have cassette flyscreen/blinds fitted and full-length curtains draw round the cab to ensure privacy. These will help to keep out cab door draughts, which weren't noticeable in the mild weather when we tested the 'van, but experience has taught me to be pessimistic.

Overhead locker provision is good. Two above the kitchen unit, two banks of three down each side of the rear lounge and an attractive mix of lockers and shelves across the rear. The nearside rear seat lifts to show a long deep space, ideal for carrying holiday plunder or barbecue necessities: the offside equivalent is filled by the inboard 85-litre fresh water tank and Truma heater pipes. The overhead locker depth, at 280mm (11in), with the upper shelf another inch wider - because of the curvature of the locker doors - provides serious space for long haul packing, while the hinges are good quality and the catches hook over a plate to stop them from bursting open in an emergency swerve. Bravo, Home Car!

CATERING CAR

Every smaller 'van suffers from compromise and the length of the kitchen is the biggest loser in this one. There are no serving

surfaces: if you need serving space while you are cooking, then the kitchen sink has to have its lid lowered to provide it. If you are working in the sink, the burners must be covered to provide working space. If your meal involves both sink and burners, then be prepared to use your initiative... Of course, this is normal in many Continental 'vans.

There are three burners on the hob and a nice chrome mixer tap over the stainless steel sink. Below the sink, there is a Spinflo Duplex combined grill and oven. Beneath the burners is a Dometic 88-litre fridge, with a small freezer compartment.

It's an adequate kitchen, of good quality, but I have several gripes... Below the oven, where you would expect a space to hold pots and pans, there's only a door opening onto gas isolation taps. Next, there's no dedicated cupboard for mugs and plates. Worst of all, a couple of small drawers at floor level (beneath the wardrobe) seem intended for cutlery. Must you drop to your knees for a teaspoon every time you make a brew?

However, with lighting you're spoilt. If daylight through the big acrylic double-glazed window isn't enough, there are two halogen downlighters, one above the burners, another above the sink.

A final grumble: there's no waste container - nor any obvious place on the door, or a cupboard, where you could hang that good old standby, the plastic bag.

SLEEPING CAR

A good rear lounge usually offers the option of using the side settees as single beds - here 1.83m long and 762mm wide (6ft 0in x 2ft 6in), once backrests are removed. Alternatively, filling in the space between them creates a king-sized bed. You make this up by using a small plywood platform which links the two settees, then sliding in the stand-alone table to complete the double bed base. The two backrests drop into place, leaving a massive 2.16m x 1.83m (7ft 1in x 6ft 0in) bed. Easy to

I LIKED

- Sheer drivability of the latest Ford Transit
- Passenger and driver airbag
- Low profile good looks and understated graphics
- Space and comfort in the lounge
- Extra space in kitchen
- Inboard fresh water tank for winter touring
- Size and comfort of the double bed
- Good quality furnishings and fittings throughout

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More thought given to storage for pots and pans
- A cutlery drawer higher and easier to use
- Light plywood sections, to complete the base of the double bed

I DISLIKED

- Heavy table
- Washroom space too tight for tall guys like me
- No carpets in rear - a Continental bad habit
- Lack of work surface in kitchen



assemble (in theory), the practical problem is the sheer weight of the table (which stores behind the driver's seat). Manhandling it onto the wooden supports beneath the settee cushions is a gut-wrencher - so heavy, that it precludes any older and frailer owners at a

stroke. But here is a possible solution: why not get (or make) three copies of the plywood in-fill? Light as the proverbial feather, you can slot these into place one-handed and still have your king-sized bed, provided you don't use it as a trampoline.

CAR'S COURSES

For dining, the dreaded heavy table comes into its own. It fills the space between the two side settees and gives plenty room for four to eat. Looks great, is real wood and is simple enough to set up and take down, with its folding legs.





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That is, provided you don't try to assemble it in the kitchen, or between the settees (the table top is too wide for either). The trick is to stand it on end on the rear seat, and clip/unclip the legs at leisure, then grunt, heave and drop it into place. Classy, but the table's height is just a little low, for comfortable dining.

CAR SPLASH

Positives first: the washroom looks great: a swivel-bowl toilet just inside the door, a neat plastic washbasin with very attractive cupboards (shelved) beneath and to the right, plus a separate shower in the corner - and plenty of wall-mounted mirrors to remind you that you really should have gone on that diet, before you started out.

However, there are inbuilt problems. Firstly, the excellent space of the kitchen area has squeezed the width of the washroom, so prepare to butt yourself forward into the soapy water, each time you bend to wash your face. Secondly, practise pirouetting with your hands above your head, before you try to sit down on the toilet: otherwise, you could be struggling. This is a littler room than most...

CAR CONTROL

Control panel and light switches are at the side of the habitation door. Blown-air heating is via a Truma C6002 gas-powered heater with outlets in kitchen, lounge and loo. That inboard fresh water tank is worth its weight in gold, for winter or late season touring and there are rigid waste water pipes to the 85-litre tank. The 85 amp hour leisure battery should cope with most of the challenges you throw at it - provided you remember to drive and re-charge regularly if you're wild-camping.

This is a budget 'van, so there are no customised TV and aerial facilities provided, but there are cupboards to spare. Likewise, you are provided with only two 230V and one 12V sockets. You may want to install more; plenty of room for that.

The wardrobe is half-length, with a limited rail of only 380mm (15in) long: be ready to fight your better half for space to hang your threads.

Outside, there is external access to the underseat locker on the nearside, while the



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7 Washroom proved tight for a tall guy

8 Under-lounge locker has an external door

gas locker has space for one 13kg and one 6kg cylinder (it might also hold a carefully coiled mains lead and wedges). The flaps for both electricity and water inlets are beautifully easy - yet effective - to open or close: if only all 'vans were thus.

CAR'S CONCLUSION

This is a budget 'van, more ambitious than most. It pitches towards a quality level that wouldn't shame a mid-£30k-priced model and provides this, for £6k less. While the XS-22 is designed to compete against models like the Compass Avantgarde, Carado and McLouis Lagan, it's going to give a fright to some higher priced 'vans too.

The Home Car XS-22 provides a very liveable design and a fair degree of comfort, and out on the road it is a pleasure to navigate. Sure, there are spatial compromises and some strange locations for things like cutlery drawers, but what 'van doesn't have irritations? This is an excellent intermediate 'van, which is well assembled and should last well with careful owners. It's worth putting up with a few minor niggles, for the sake of saving £6k. In the shadow of the Credit Crunch, why pay more than you absolutely must? ■

VEHICLE LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

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TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

- **From:** £28,650 OTR
- **As tested:** £29,645 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Ford Transit 110 SWB chassis cab
- **Engine:** 2.2 litre turbo-diesel producing 110bhp
- **Transmission:** five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Brakes:** discs all round
- **Suspension:** Front: independent. Rear: rigid axle
- **Warranty:** Base vehicle 3 years, conversion 2 years, water ingress 3 years
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes
- **Construction:** Alloy clad bonded sandwich. Caravan entrance on UK nearside
- **Length:** 5.95m (19ft 6in)
- **Width:** 2.31m (7ft 7in)
- **Height:** 2.70m (8ft 10.5in)
- **Wheelbase:** 3.30m (10ft 10in)
- **Rear overhang:** 1.77m (5ft 9.5in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500 kg
- **Payload:** 1070 kg
- **Berths:** 2

- **Three-point belted seats:** 2 (incl. driver)
- **Features:** Cruise control, remote central locking, ABS, driver and passenger airbags, electric windows and mirrors, radio/CD player, twin door bins
- **Interior height:** 1.95m (6ft 5in)
- **Sink:** Stainless steel with glass lid, chrome mixer tap,
- **Cooker:** Three-burner hob with hinged glass lid, Spinflo Duplex grill/oven with electronic ignition
- **Fridge:** Dometic three-way with freezer compartment, manual energy selection. Capacity 88 litres
- **Toilet:** Thetford swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette
- **Basin:** Plastic unit with mixer tap, shelved locker below
- **Shower:** Separate cubicle enclosed by nylon curtain, with chrome mixer tap, showerhead, riser rail, single-outlet tray
- **Beds:** Lounge double: 2.18m x 1.85m (7ft 2in x 6ft 1in). Alternative singles: each 1.85m x 772mm (6ft 1in x 6ft 0.5in)

TEC FRETEC 718TI UK

- **Other features:** Fresh water: inboard 85 litre (18.7 gallons). Waste water: underslung 85 litres (18.7 gallons). Water heater: Truma 10-litre boiler. Space heater: Truma with blown-air. Leisure battery: 85 amp-hour. Gas: Capacity one 13kg and one 6kg cylinder. Lighting: halogen ceiling lamp, three adjustable spotlights in lounge, two adjustable spotlights in kitchen, two halogen lights in washroom. Sockets: 230V and 12V, two in lounge
- **Options fitted to test vehicle:** GT Pack of radio/CD player, electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking, GT graphics, colour-coded bumper, quilted and buttoned upholstery (£995)
- **Other options available:** Air-conditioning (£850), cab carpets (£60), colour-coded bumper with fog lights (£220), electric windows, central locking and electric mirrors (£550), radio/CD (£250), loose bound-edge carpets (£195), flyscreen door (£141)



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MMM



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