

NOUVELLE MACHINE

IH Motor Campers J220 on 2.2-litre Mercedes Sprinter



Snatched from October's NEC show, this brand-new coachbuilt went camping almost before the paint was properly dry

1 Cab offers a car-like driving position that should suit most drivers

2 Dials are easy to read, even in bright light



Much nagging and cajoling saw me get my chubby little paws on the latest model (and the first example made) to emerge from IH Motor Campers' Yorkshire production facility. Some veiled threats, and even a spot of tearful begging (an actor's life for me) persuaded IH head honchos, Ian and Nicola Hartley, that I could actually live in the thing, even though perfectionist Ian warned me that there were still things to finish and fine tuning to be done. No matter, the 'van was in my clutches and I was heading off for a period of camping that combined an MMM live-aboard test with a spot of prototype assessment. Around 750 miles and a week of autumn days and nights followed, as I toured from Lincolnshire to Devon, via Suffolk.

Getting on for one-and-a-half decades ago, Ian Hartley put together his first campervan conversion on his driveway at home. He was rightly satisfied with his efforts, though potential buyers were less than impressed with the

mildly clapped-out petrol-guzzling Ford Transit that it he had built it on! Fast forward to today and IH Motor Campers has gained a place as one of the UK's best motorcaravan converters - once you combine Ian's super conversions with more user-friendly base vehicles, it seems folks queue up to buy 'em. Recently, a small, but ever-increasing, range of low-profile coachbuilds has joined IH's famous panel van conversions. Like the tin tops, these are built to a high standard, and very well equipped straight out of the box. As a bonus for buyers, IH has an excellent reputation for customer service and after sales care.

CLASSICALLY TRAINED

A liberal application of IH design and construction standards makes the J220 what it is - the basic concept is unsurprising, and a classic in motorhoming terms. Six-and-a-half metres (21ft 4in) of low-profile coachbuilt hides a layout that places a twin-sofa lounge up front, with transverse kitchen and corner washroom living aft. The design is a classic here in

Words & pictures
by Dave Hurrell





Pitched at Cornish Farm
Touring Park Taunton

AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £61,995 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **LAYOUT:** Swivelling cab seats ahead of two longitudinal settees, rear kitchen and corner bathroom
- **ECONOMY:** 24.8mpg

Blighly, as it provides an excellent lounging environment (to watch the rain from), plus good kitchen and washroom space - all contained in a 'van that's a lot less than a leviathan. Popularity is proven by the fact that most mainstream converters offer similar designs - from Swift to Auto-Sleepers, via Autocruise and Auto-Trail, you can take your pick.

Looks-wise, the 220 has external styling that speaks of solidity - its 'peaked cap' overcab and coloured flanks help create a whole that's not too bulky and not too white. Folks who find the gold colouring (Jaune Vermeer) of the test 'van a little too much will be pleased to discover that the hue of your choice can be applied to the sides.

BASE INSTINCTS

As any Venetian that's not paddling will tell you, good foundations are important, and in motorcaravan terms, some of the best underpinnings come from Germany. Here, it's Mercedes-Benz that gets the honour of supporting and propelling the 220 - Merc's



latest Sprinter looks good mated with this motorcaravan, optional alloy wheels adding style. The natty chrome grille's an option too, while under the adjacent hood lurks a (standard for the J220), 2.2-litre 129 horsepower motor. The test 'van was based on Euro 4 emissions-compliant mechanicals, but it's worth noting that the very latest Euro 5 motors are already arriving - Mercedes is ahead of the competition in this respect.

In the cab you get height-adjustable seats (in IH standard-fit half-leather) and, here, a rake and reach-adjustable steering wheel - the whole should produce a comfortable and car-like piloting position for most folks. Cab plastics look good, and better quality than rival Fiat Ducato's slightly 'washing-up bowl-feeling' linings. Even so, I detected one or two rough edges and a couple of places where fit was less than perfect. Two big dials (speedo and rev counter) dominate the instrument binnacle, while a digital display presents itself as a trip computer, but does much more - coolant temperature and a very handy kilometres-per-hour reading are accessed via one of the menus, for instance. I was very pleased to discover that unlike my own Ford Transit (think binnacle black hole), the instruments are all very easy to read - even the digital display remained perfectly legible in bright sunlight.

220 TAKES OFF

And so to the tarmac, where the Merc's big screen gave a good and uninterrupted view of the road, no matter where the seat height was set. Even the (optional) cab blinds caused me no problems. The external mirrors proved their worth, but rear through vision is probably poor. I say probably, because there is a small rear window, but the test 'van had no internal mirror fitted. The steering has plenty of feel, but is not too heavy, while the brakes work well, albeit with a good push needed to retard the vehicle when you roar up to busy roundabouts. The Sprinter chassis has always had a softer ride - fans would say comfortable, detractors - bouncy.

This incarnation of the marque however, seemed much improved, soft springing gave a comfortable ride, with much less wincing over the bumps and far less crashing conversion noise heard than within the notoriously hard-sprung Fiat Ducato. In spite of the softer

springing, handling was very good indeed - at no time did I feel the need to 'lean' into corners. One of the advantages of choosing this chassis is the fact that it's rear-wheel drive - muddy pitches should provide fewer problems, while for those who wish to tow a trailer, rear-drive provides better traction, especially on steep hills.

The four-pot motor is mated to a six-speed gearbox, and providing 129 turbo-charged, inter-cooled horses it propels the 220 at road-legal speeds with reasonable ease. However, I was rather surprised to discover that it's a bit of a harsh beast - unhappy at 30mph in fourth gear and at anything less than sixty in top. A flat road and backed-off cruising produced reasonably smooth progress, but ask the motor to work and roaring and noticeable vibration set in. The gearchange too, proved less than class-leading: being a Merc, it felt very well engineered, but stiff and notchy too.

Of course, in fine ('it'll be better when it beds in, sir') tradition it may well become easier with use. A solution? Well, it'll cost you a fair lump of wonga, but there's the 3.0-litre V6 option...This super-smooth, super-powerful, Derv-drinker is a honey, and one of the best engines I've had the pleasure of sitting behind. I'd go for the smooth auto gearbox too - covering the price with my hand as I signed the order form!

Finally, a peer under the rear produced a grin on my old chops as I spotted not only a strong (IH-added) steel frame supporting the rear of the body but also - oh joy-of-joys - a spare wheel.

INSIDE



On Test IH Motor Campers J220

Climbing aboard through the rear-located caravan door sees you in the kitchen with the washroom opposite, turn left for the lounge. The test 'van's interior was dressed in light oak cabinets with darker worktops and furniture inlays (Noce Romantica) all looking very nice indeed, and completed by subtle IH logos. However, opting for a small converter like IH means you can choose from several furniture finishes and fabrics - something that's rare with volume producers. Half-leather upholstery is a standard feature in IH products, the test 'van adorned with Mustang Vintage brown hide and Benjie Mocha fabric.

LOUNGE AND DINE

Swivel the cab seats (an easy task, aided by a fold-down handbrake lever) and sit down to discover a class-leading lounge - cab pews and super curved-end sofas accommodating six people. Two good-sized windows and a wind-up Heki rooflight provide natural illumination and fresh air.

On the offside, and mounted on the wardrobe's sidewall, a cabinet opens to reveal a 15-inch flat screen TV/DVD player. This is a standard-fit unit and set at a very convenient height for easy viewing. A roof-mounted directional aerial is adjustable from within the wardrobe, giving terrestrial digital TV and radio. The audio signal can also be fed through the radio/CD player in the cab to give enhanced sound quality via ceiling-mounted speakers. In addition, owners can now opt for a cutting-edge multi-media system called Antiva (GPS location, Internet access, e-mail, messaging system, Internet telephone, video download/storage/playing and video security



functions will all be on offer). Although fitted to the prototype 220, the system was not fully functioning. However, as soon as it is, we'll be featuring a test of this exciting new device.

Mealtimes see an interesting dining solution emerge to do duty between the sofas. Two, carefully shaped tabletops are stored in the locker above the cab, and two

pedestal legs in the wardrobe. Insert the legs in their floor sockets and mount the tabletops (which edge-nest together) to provide comfortable dining for two. One section of the table (in place in either position) provides a platform for coffee and snacks, drinks, or supporting your laptop. All this is easy to erect, comfortable to sit at and looks good.





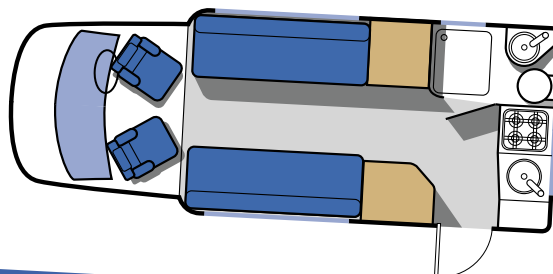
There's icing for this feature too, as in a dedicated drawer below the wardrobe, lurks a full set of cutlery and crocks, all neatly nested for rattle-free travel.

COOK IN

Aside from the smart-looking dark laminate, the standout item in the galley is the sink. Unusually deep, this stainless steel bowl looks very smart, but has no drainer. It does however, have a nice drop-in cover/chopping board - its wooden surface embellished with J220 nomenclature. Cooking is taken care of by an IH-favourite half-height stove. Although far from new, this Smev model offers a capable mix of four hob burners, with grill/oven unit below. Internal illumination gave a good view

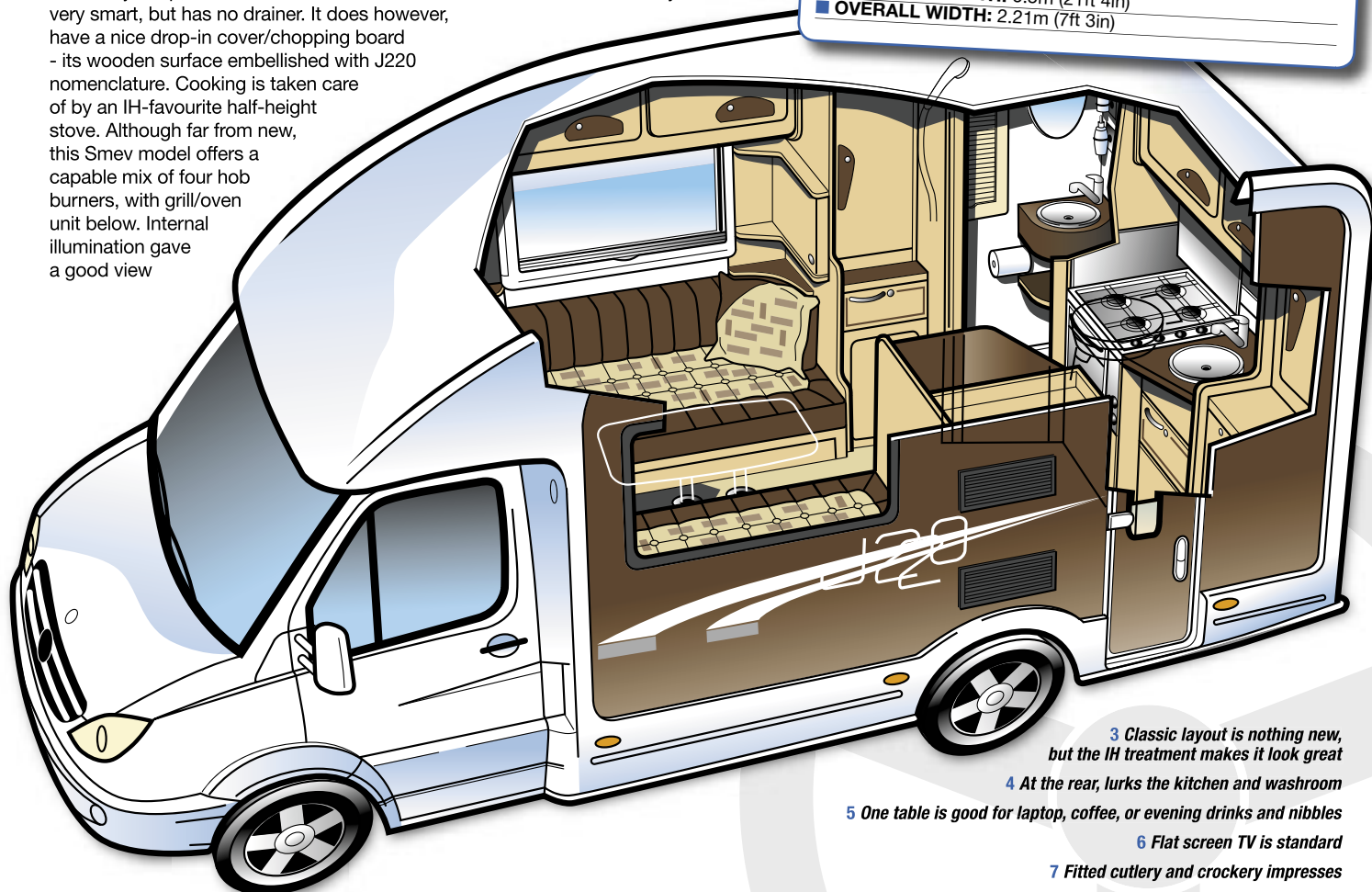
of my burning toast, while all sections are equipped with handy electronic ignition. Above, IH has added a hinged wooden cover that doubles as pan park and worktop: place a tray here to collect the washing up waiting to be dried.

Turn around and you



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 6.5m (21ft 4in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.21m (7ft 3in)



3 Classic layout is nothing new, but the IH treatment makes it look great

4 At the rear, lurks the kitchen and washroom

5 One table is good for laptop, coffee, or evening drinks and nibbles

6 Flat screen TV is standard

7 Fitted cutlery and crockery impresses

8 Dinnertime sees a twin-table set up do duty

On Test IH Motor Campers J220

a J220 the kitchen has changed: Ian Hartley already had plans for swing-out worktop and other enhancements.

DOING THE WASHING

They say kitchens and bathrooms sell houses, and the same could be true of this motorhome - especially when you inspect the ablutions. I first came across the IH 'bathroom with bling' concept when I tested another IH coachbuilt - the J500. Opening the 220's washroom door, you cannot fail to be impressed by its style. Bright white walls look super-clean, while wood-coloured edgings and that elsewhere-used dark wood-coloured veneer (for the washbasin unit) make a nice contrast. Three cabinets offer plenty of sensible storage space for cosmetics - two, with clear Perspex doors, have internal illumination by blue LED strips. The blue LED theme extends to concealed lighting above, while the big, ceiling-mounted showerhead and chunky chromed shower curtain rail look the business. There's also a halogen shower light/



I LIKED

- Overall styling
- Rear-wheel drive
- Easy-to-read instruments
- Classic layout
- Super lounge
- Versatile tables
- Well-equipped kitchen
- Angled fridge
- Impressive washroom
- Handy boot storage
- Gas/mains heating

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Storage for bedding (being amended)
- More versatile/better bed arrangements (being amended)
- More shoulder room when sitting on the toilet (being amended)

I DISLIKED

- Harsh engine and stiff gearchange (see text)

extractor fan combo mounted in the ceiling.

The most 'blingy' part of the J220 it's true, but this washroom is also practical to use. There's plenty of standing room on the shower tray floor, with lots of accessories on offer - two mirrors, towel rail, tooth glass and soap dispenser are joined by a toilet roll holder that cleverly, is splash proof. The Dometic cassette loo has a ceramic inner bowl - its plastics appearing to be much better quality than competitor, Thetford's equivalent. Downsides? Well, the washbasin is tucked in slightly awkwardly the corner and the twin curtains that enclose the showering area could become clingy. It's also a bit of a squeeze when sitting on the toilet, thanks to the basin intruding into one's right shoulder space. As you might expect, Ian was already on the case, with plans to change the basin design.

SLEEPOVER

Beds are made from the lounge seating - almost in the classic fashion for this design. One of the reasons for this layout's popularity is that, generally, it is very easy to make the beds. With sofas at 6ft 4in long, it should be a simple matter to make the first sleeping option - no bed-lengthening infill cushions will be needed here. Pulling seat squabs out slightly (so that they clear the backrests) should make two good-sized singles with plenty of space in between - each sleeper able to get up without disturbing their partner. A double should be equally easy: pull sofa bases together and drop in the backrests, which would make a giant bed that allows sleeping lengthways or across.

But it was here that the J220's 'in development' status became apparent! Fixed backrests with curved ends make for superb lounge sofas, but compromise the beds. The ends limit the length of the single beds to well under six feet, while the double (with no backrests dropped in behind) allows only lengthways sleeping. As part of my brief was to critique the J220's talents, I had a few words on the topic of snoozing space. It's almost needless to say that a redesign of bed provision is on the horizon. Bedding storage, too, was found lacking, but this is more straightforward to solve - with one of the under-sofa drawers being replaced by a simple locker.

It's also worth mentioning here that, as a smaller concern, IH is both able and willing to alter details of its 'vans to meet customer requirements.

IN STORE

Rear end first, and it's the boot that sets this 'van apart from others of its ilk. Two marine quality over-centre latches release to allow the double-skinned GRP boot lid to rise - supported on gas struts. Inside we find room for outdoor furniture, barbecue and tools - maybe even a folding bike. You service the loo through this door too, the wheeled cassette extracts from the offside of the compartment. Other outside space takes the form of an offside skirt locker, which should be the perfect





home for leads, hose and wedges.

Inside, the lounge provides six shelves, four overhead lockers, two display cabinets and two big drawers - one under each sofa. The wardrobe is a good width, although the TV aerial's protruding mast and the table legs cramp its style somewhat. Payload was unannounced at the time of the test, so I took the J220 to a public weighbridge. A £5 fee later, and I could calculate a payload of 380kg. However, there's more to this story than meets the eye, as this J220 prototype is heavier than production models will be. Ian tells me he would expect to achieve a payload figure of around 500kg on this 3500kg MAW chassis. Customers who require more carrying capacity can opt for the 3880kg upgrade.

LIGHT, HEAT AND WATER

Life support services in the J220 are very straightforward and very comprehensive. Tanks are underslung, but of good capacity (winter campers will need to opt for heating and/or insulation), while draining of both is by nice big chunky taps. Water and space heating was courtesy of Truma's trusty Combi in the test 'van - running on gas and mains electricity it'll make the most of your hook-up. Those who travel further away from reliable supplies of gas can opt for Webasto's excellent (my own 'van is so equipped) DualTop system that runs on (gas-saving) diesel from the vehicle's tank. 12V power is supplied - sensibly - by twin leisure batteries and owners can opt for a bulk gas tank that can be filled at garages in many countries. Lastly, the lighting in the test 'van was very effective and included over-locker, in-cabinet and ceiling-mounted mood lights. Apart from the shower light - all are LED powered - a great power-saving feature.

CONCLUSION

My time with the barely-off-the-drawing-board J220 was - especially considering its prototype status - very interesting. I've criticised the live-in test failings of mainstream

mass-produced 'vans before and passed on the information to the converters, only to have it ignored. Ian Hartley, however, listened intently to my critique, and hopefully, I'll have helped with the J220 design's fine-tuning.

Necessary tweaks aside, the IH J220 is a great example of an updated classic design. A class-leading lounge, capable kitchen and blingy (though still workable) washroom impress, while outside the rear boot is a unique feature that's both stylish and useful. Mercedes' Sprinter offers desirable rear-wheel drive and a reputation for build quality, excellent service and reliability that's hard to beat (and a great match for IH's reputation for customer service). My only reservations here were the rather harsh engine and stiff gearchange, although a trip to the options list (and a lump of cash) can net you one of the best motors around - the 3.0-litre, 190bhp V6. Also bear in mind that the Euro 5 motors (the

test vehicle being Euro 4) are new units, and could be better, as could the new six-speed gearbox that comes with them. ■

9 The kitchen is blessed with a plethora of cupboards and drawers

10 Bed design allows only lengthways sleeping at present

11 Washroom does its thing: with plenty of bling

12 Under-sofa drawers are useful, but one needs to go

13 IH's unique rear boot stores plenty of outdoor gear



VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

IH Motor Campers Ltd,
Great North Road, Knottingley,
West Yorkshire WF11 0BS
(tel: 01977 677118;
web site: www.ihmotorhomes.com)

WE STAYED AT

■ Breakspeare Way Caravan Club site,
Buncefield Lane, Breakspeare Way,
Hemel Hempstead HP2 4TZ
(tel: 01442 268466;
web site: www.caravanclub.co.uk)

■ Cornish Farm Touring Park,
Shoreditch, Taunton TA3 7BS
(tel: 01823 327746;
web site: www.cornishfarm.com)

■ Slapton Sands Camping and Caravanning Club Site,
Middle Grounds, Slapton,
Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 7QW
(tel: 01548 580538; web site:
www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE

Low profile coachbuilt

PRICE (all prices quoted with VAT at 15%)

- **From:** £61,995 OTR
- **As tested:** £64,850 OTR

BASICS

- **Vehicle:** Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis cab
- **Berths:** 2
- **Three-point belted seats:** 2 (incl. driver)
- **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle and conversion

CONSTRUCTION

GRP clad sandwich construction coachbuilt with GRP mouldings. Caravan door on UK nearside

DIMENSIONS

- **Length:** 6.50m (21ft 4in)
- **Width:** 2.21m (7ft 3in)
- **Height:** 2.95m (9ft 8in)
- **Wheelbase:** 3.66m (12ft 0in)
- **Rear overhang:** 1.83m (6ft 0in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** To be confirmed (see text)

INSIDE

Swivelling cab seats ahead of twin-sofa lounge-diner, offside wardrobe and washroom, nearside/across-the-rear kitchen

- **Interior height:** 1.99m (6ft 6in) max, 1.82m (5ft 11.5in) min

THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2.2-litre turbo-diesel producing 95kW (129bhp) @ 3800rpm
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, rear-wheel drive
- **Fuel consumption:** 24.8mpg
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round
- **Suspension:** Front: independent on transverse leaf spring. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- **Features:** Remote central locking, electric windows and mirrors, twin door bins, dash-top bins, lockable glove compartment, air-conditioning, trip computer, overhead shelves, cab carpet, driver and passenger airbags, ASR traction control, height-adjustable seats, adjustable steering column

LOUNGING AND DINING

Swivelling cab seats and twin inward-facing sofas provide lounging for six people. Twin pedestal-mounted table system offers dining for two and coffee/snack/work table option using single leg and half-top

KITCHEN

Main unit includes overhead lockers, cupboards and deep drawers, cooker, sink. Rear window and ceiling-mounted extractor fan provide ventilation. Unit forward of caravan door contains further cupboard space, above and below, and offers higher-level work surface. This unit also houses the fridge

- **Sink:** Circular stainless steel bowl with drop-in wooden cutting board, no drainer
- **Cooker:** Smev half-height stove, with four-burner hob and illuminated oven/grill, all with electronic ignition
- **Fridge:** Dometic RM7361 three-way with manual energy selection. Capacity 88 litres

WASHROOM

Stainless steel vanity basin with chromed mixer tap and shelf under, Dometic CTS 3110 cassette toilet with electric flushing, ceramic-lined bowl and wheeled waste cassette. Wet room floor with one outlet, overhead shower rose (integral shower) with concealed plumbing and wall-mounted mixer tap, ceiling-mounted chrome rail suspends twin shower curtains, shower light incorporates extractor fan. Tooth glass, soap dispenser, two mirrors, towel rail, robe hook, two-door display cabinet, single-door cupboard

BEDS (Note: manufacturer's figures, at time of test, beds were subject to a redesign)

Lounge double

- **Length:** 1.93m (6ft 4in)
 - **Width:** 1.47m (4ft 10in)
- Alternative singles
- **Length:** 1.93m (6ft 4in)
 - **Width:** 738mm (2ft 5in)

STORAGE

Lounge: 6 shelves, 4 overhead lockers, 2 illuminated display cabinets. 2 large drawers under sofas, overcab locker stores tabletops. Rear area/kitchen: 2 overhead lockers, 6 cupboards of varying depth, 2 deep drawers, wardrobe, magazine rack, drawer containing

IH MOTOR CAMPERS J220

cutlery/crockery set. External: Rear boot under top-hinged door offers space for outdoor kit, offside skirt locker provides stowage for hook-up leads, levelling wedges, etc

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Underslung, 110 litres (24.2 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung, 70 litres (15.4 gallons)
- **Water/space heating:** Truma combi boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- **Leisure battery:** 2 x 140 amp hr
- **Gas:** 2x 7kg cylinders (alternative 30-litre (approx 15kg capacity) fixed tank)
- **Lighting:** LED-powered downlighters in cab, lounge, kitchen. LED strip in kitchen. Concealed LED strips above upper lockers, in ceiling feature, lounge display cabinets, washroom ceiling and display cabinet. Halogen shower light in washroom
- **Blinds/curtains:** Blinds/flyscreens to all caravan windows, blinds to cab
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** No

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** Alloy wheels (£658), chromed front grille (£138), adjustable steering wheel (£218), electrically operated, and heated mirrors (£218), multi-function steering wheel (£224), air-conditioning (£997)
- **Conversion:** Colour-coded caravan door (£287), colour-coded outside light (£115)

Other options

(Note: listed engine upgrades are for Euro 5 compliant units)

- **Base:** 163bhp engine upgrade (£2000), 190bhp V6 engine upgrade (£4000), 3880kg MAW chassis upgrade (£1500), auto gearbox (£1144), cruise control (£195), mudflaps (£80)
- **Conversion:** Air-conditioning (£1667), safe (£90), bike rack (£350), carbon monoxide alarm (£74), exterior gas point (£224), extra mains/12V sockets (£89), full leather upholstery (£2495), reversing camera (£586), solar panel (£655), towbar (£494)

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