



ITALIANO S'IL VOUS PLAÎT

Mobilvetta Kimu 102 on 3.0dCi Renault Master

MMM's king-sized long-term 'van goes through its final paces before it leaves us

Words & pictures by Michael Le Caplain



Mobilvetta look is dominated by overcab moulding.

AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £49,995 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 5
- **BASE VEHICLE:** 3.0dCi Renault Master chassis cab

RIGHT: The Master's dash is starting to look its age a little, now that the new Fiat Ducato and Ford Transit have started to come on stream, but it's well-planned and well-equipped.

The uncluttered garage is spoiled just a little by a lack of fitted lashing points, but it does get a grippy floor and a pair of big access doors.

BELOW FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: The combined efforts of the washroom wall and half-dinette make the centre of the Kimu feel a little 'pinched.'

There's more room to manoeuvre around the Kimu's swivel toilet than is often the case in a motorhome of this design.

Separate shower gets ample storage space and a drain plug located sensibly in the centre of the tray.



Pingu. That's what I kept inadvertently calling MMM's imposing long-term Mobilvetta Kimu 102. This is an easy mistake to make, even if one is the animated penguin star of the children's BBC television programme of the same name, and the other is an equally animated (thanks to its powerful Renault Master base vehicle) Italian motorhome. A Kimu, I'm reliably informed, has yet to put in an appearance on the CBeebies channel!

If, however, this particular Mobilvetta's cute-sounding name puts you in mind of an equally cute little car-derived camper then think again, for Kimu (unlike Pingu) is actually pretty big.

SUPER-SIZE KIMU

When I arrived at MMM Towers to collect it, I saw that it was parked alongside the German-built, Ford Transit-based TEC 698G then being tested by MMM's sister-magazine, Which Motorcaravan. Despite the fact that you could never exactly call the TEC small, the Mobilvetta seemed to positively tower over it. No doubt about it (I thought confidently as I drove away), Kimu is king among overcab coachbuilts.

Then I checked their relative vital statistics and received something of a surprise: while the Mobilvetta is indeed two inches longer than the TEC, it's also two inches narrower (7ft 5in versus 7ft 7in) and concedes fully three inches to the German in terms of overall height.

The only explanation I can come up with for this apparent illusion is the Kimu's gigantic

overcab luton moulding. Where the TEC's (admittedly still pretty substantial) luton is discreetly squared-off, the Mobilvetta's is huge, bulbous and most definitely in your face.

MASTER AND SERVANT

I spent a few days in the company of MMM's long-termer and put it through all manner of road and driving conditions, to see how it stacked up against the competition.

Day one was very much of the gentle rural amble persuasion and despite its considerable size, I found the Mobilvetta surprisingly wieldy.

Much of this is down to the terrific base vehicle of course, which in this case is the previously class-leading Renault Master, in its most potent 3.0-litre dCi guise. I say 'previously class-leading' not because the Master has lost any of its impressive potency over the past few months, but more because key rivals – and the very latest Fiat Ducato in particular – haven't just caught the Gallic charmer up, but actually nipped ahead of it in one or two areas. The Fiat Ducato may still be the most common base vehicle sight on the motorhome market, but its ubiquity is now more than matched by its dynamic prowess.

Ford's latest Transit is equally impressive, especially in 2.4 TDCi guise, while a recent half-day spent in the company of the very latest incarnation of the Mercedes Sprinter proved that both it and the near-identical Volkswagen Crafter are light years away from their predecessors.

The Kimu's Master underpinnings, then, needed to impress hugely to live up to its lofty name, and I have to say that they still do. Admittedly, the steering wheel felt a little too thin-rimmed and generous in circumference compared to the sporty little number found in Fiat Ducatos these days at any rate. Also, the car-like fascia enjoyed by the Volkswagen T5s of this world makes the Renault's vast slab of plastic look a bit, well, commercial.

There's no arguing with the spec on offer, though: you'll have to pay extra for a passenger airbag, but our example's electric door mirrors and windows, remote central-locking, cab air-conditioning and whiz-bang – if faintly 1980s – CD player/tuner all impressed. And while my purely personal preference in motorhome cabs is for completely unadorned fascia panels, given the choice between the Kimu's faux carbon fibre trim, and the more commonplace (and frankly hideous) 'walnut' addenda found most often in UK-built coachbuilts, I'd take the Kimu's approach every time.

MEANDERING MOBI

Out on the road, you're always well aware of that king-sized luton moulding looming over your head, but it doesn't mean you feel obliged to stick to wide open roads. I took many of the photos out in the Lincolnshire fens, and while the startled-deer agility of its little brother, the Trafic, was obviously missing, it felt surprisingly at home. My two-hour amble along single-track country roads out in the middle of nowhere felt perfectly natural.



I LIKED

- Renault's marvellous Master base vehicle
- High quality GRP bodywork
- Large garage with two doors
- Well-equipped spacious washroom
- Draining hob
- Kitchen storage provision

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A bigger fridge
- Better dining for four people
- An oven/grill

I DISLIKED

- The luton side windows
- The rear ladder's too-high moulded-in step

Power and torque are on hand, seemingly irrespective of what gear you're in, and while the rear window does seem a million miles away from the rear-view mirror, there is a modicum of through-vision to be had. Meanwhile, the huge door mirrors are as effective as they ever were at allowing you to see what's going on either side of those towering body panels.

LOW 'N' HANDSOME

Ah yes, the body. One of the Kimu's unique selling points is its GRP monocoque body, which, Mobilvetta claims, should make water ingress a thing of the past. Given the azure-blue skies and blazing sun of my test period, I could hardly put this particular claim to the test, although I will say that our test vehicle's conversion must have been exceptionally well sealed, if the effort required just to get the main entrance door to close was anything to go by. Really and truly, you needed to be in a towering, John Cleese-esque rage to get the thing to close first time of asking if both the cab doors (and the windows) were closed and it was always accompanied by a slightly daunting 'sonic boom' from the rear of the conversion, as all the trapped air tried (and apparently failed) to find somewhere to escape.

It's a handsome looking thing, though. Where some motorhomes (conversions on bog-standard chassis cabs spring most readily to mind) appear perched upon their given chassis - especially from the rear - the Kimu hunkers down over its long wheelbase frame more like a custom-made

low-rider car. The almost comically vast rear wheelarches in particular make the standard steel wheels look frankly lost in their dark depths, while the bottom edge of the main entrance door looks like it's scraping on the tarmac.

I quite liked the 'busy' appearance of the sidewalls, too: where a surprising number of large motorhomes can often sport large tracts of unbroken white bodywork, and look a trifle unbalanced as a result, the Kimu's proliferation of locker doors, windows and body addenda (roll-out awning, rear ladder, roof rails, etc) looks inherently 'right'. I approve thoroughly of the sextet of large round tail lights, too, together with the so-subtle-it's-almost-unnoticeable contrasting colour of the bumpers, lower body mouldings and wheelarch trims - all are neat and effective.

There are, however, a couple of grouses I should air before we repair to the Kimu's interior. The twin windows either side of the overcab moulding, for instance, tell the depressingly all-too familiar tale that it matters not a jot which way the occupants of the overcab bedroom sleep, as any attempt at sitting up in bed (to read, perhaps, or slurp that all-important first brew of the day) will prove nigh-on impossible. This is because leaning back on stacked pillows will see you either mangle the closed cassette blind, or press up against a chilly convex window, neither of which is particularly comfortable.

It's a bit of a stretch getting from the step moulded into the rear bumper (to the left of the

number plate) all the way up to the first rung of the rear ladder too, and it's even worse when you endeavour to return to terra-firma. This is due to the fact that the moulded step is set into a bumper that slopes away towards the underneath of the rear panel, so finding it with one desperately waving foot is a bit of a hit-and-miss affair. The step could do with some sort of non-slip grip pad affixed to it, too.

Still, the garage is of a very good size, and enjoys the convenience of two full-size access doors. It's a pity there are no lashing points fitted therein though.

WELCOME ABOARD

Stepping aboard is pretty straightforward, thanks to the aforementioned low doorway and moulded-in twin steps, while the single inward-facing seat to your right makes the doorway itself feel uncommonly wide. This is especially useful if you've got an armful of duvet or are carrying a storage crate or two.

It's a thoroughly welcoming place to be, the cabinetry being pale enough to look modern, but dark enough to feel warm, while the hard-wearing navy blue upholstery (broken up by some token modernist swirls and hieroglyphics) should appeal to younger buyers while not alienating the more mature customer. It's good to see bound-edge loose-lay carpets (sectioned into separate pieces for ease of removal and cleaning), while lighting is on the generous side of adequate.

And yet, straightaway we've got a bit of a



problem. Any motorhome you care to think of has a compromise in-built somewhere, and the Kimu's lies in its central gangway. Simply put, it's a bit too narrow for comfort, thanks to the combined efforts of the nearside half-dinette (whose seats, incidentally, sport an all-important couple of three-point safety belts) and the obese bulge of the washroom wall on the offside. And



You soon start to wonder how on earth you managed without the useful little drain sunk into the Kimu's three-burner Smev hob.

while the resultant gap doesn't exactly prevent even those wide of beam from reaching the rear section of the motorhome, it does make the vehicle feel quite 'pinched' amidships, with the rear portion rather cut off from the front.

The good news is that the aforementioned washroom does justify its intrusion into the conversion by being of a particularly good size, with better than average room to manoeuvre around the swivel cassette toilet. There's also a well-designed separate shower, which extends to a pair of good-sized shelves and a central drain. A pair of diametrically opposed shower

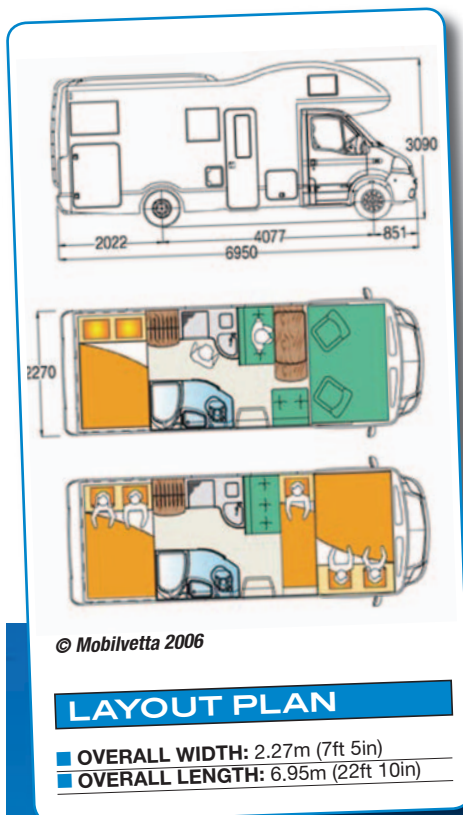
tray plugholes would have been even better for speedy drainage purposes (on those odd occasions when your pitch-up isn't entirely dead-level), but this is a good compromise. The washbasin looked bigger than most of its ilk, too.

KIMU COOKS

Speaking of plugholes, this is the first motorhome kitchen I've encountered to sport a drain set into its hob (here, a Smev non-spark ignition three-burner unit). This sounds utterly pointless, until the first time you let a pan of water boil over, or try to mop up after cleaning the hob – then you wonder quite how you ever lived without one.

I had to live without what I assumed was either a second drainer bowl or a flush-fit bin next to the kitchen sink, however, as whoever had the motorhome last inserted the lift-out wooden cover so snugly that no amount of leverage, huffing and puffing and out-and-out curses could shift it. Still, it's the natural place for the kettle to live thereabouts, so it wasn't too much of a problem.

Elsewhere in the galley, the surprisingly small fridge disappointed a little; I know the 102 is designed for couples with one or two children, but I'd imagined a motorhome this size would have warranted a 150-litre stack fridge/freezer. I can't quite imagine where Mobilvetta would have positioned it, mind, but it wouldn't take



Low and handsome, the Kimu's body is made from moulded GRP.



FAR LEFT: L-shaped kitchen makes do without an oven, grill or true fridge/freezer, but sports ample storage and worktop space.

LEFT: Offside inward-facing lounge seat helps make the most of the Kimu's lounging potential.

BELOW: Folding back the overcab bed base opens up useful storage space on either side, which is big enough to accommodate a large storage crate when on site.



BELOW LEFT: Half dinette provides comfortable dining space for just two.

BELOW RIGHT: Overcab bed could do well without one of the side windows, but the padded head-guards and ample lighting do impress.

long to fill the fridge that is fitted as standard.

You'll hunt in vain for a grill or oven, too, although there is, conversely, a fitted extractor hood, complete with a pair of halogen downlighters set into it. Storage space, too, is above average, especially in the cupboards beneath the sink.

Of course, a kitchen is used to cook food, and this is another area that had me scratching my head a little. This is a four-berth motorhome – one that may well appeal to couples, certainly, but a four-berther nonetheless – so why is it that only two people can sit down to meals? You just might be able to reach the half-dinette's table from the passenger seat, but really, you're looking at sitting two to dinner.

Matters improve somewhat once the plates and cutlery are replaced with books and wine glasses, as the single offside seat and swivel cab seats open up thoroughly convivial

entertaining opportunities, and there's ample lighting to make it all feel warm and cosy after dark. The occupant of the offside single seat would need the sort of agile neck more common among giraffes to see the television screen (the TV locker is directly overhead), but this is a minor point really.

UPSTAIRS

Come night-time, the resident sleepyheads can choose between one of two double beds. A couple of offspring would be more than comfortable in either bed as long as sleeping bags, rather than a single duvet, are employed. I suspect mum and dad may prefer the convenience of the rear transverse double, given the closer proximity of the toilet, and the fact that you don't have to make like Sherpa Tensing to get to it. And besides, kids love sleeping in overcab beds.

Each bedroom gets a super abundance of lighting and surrounding windows (I've already touched on the double-edged sword nature of the latter), and while the blinds and flyscreens aren't the top-of-the-line concertina affairs, they still clip together to keep intrusive early morning sunlight well and truly at bay.

FORM AND FUNCTION

In conclusion, then, what we have here is something of a 'curate's motorcaravan,' in that it's very good, if only in parts. The bedrooms are spoiled only by the provision of one or two unnecessary windows, the washroom is very good indeed (especially with respect to its good-sized and well-appointed separate shower), while storage is well above average – you could even store a pair of large crates either side of the luton bed during the day.

The inadequate dining facilities, small fridge



and absent oven/grill do disappoint, and there's evidence that form has taken precedence over function in one or two areas (the rear ladder step in particular) although the build quality of the conversion and its sheer good looks do impress, and its few quirky little idiosyncrasies can be sorted quickly and easily if they prove too irksome to live with.

For two people, though, the Kimu offers palatial living accommodation allied to what remains one of the best base vehicles in the business. If you can live with its drawbacks (should you choose to accommodate a couple of guests), then this is a good-looking and beautifully made motorhome that should be high on the wish list of anyone actively investigating this particular market niche. □

RIGHT: Over-garage double bedroom enjoys good lighting levels – both natural and electric.



DATA FILE

MOBILVETTA KIMU 102

- **Price:** £49,995 OTR
- **Base:** Renault Master chassis cab
- **Engine:** 3-litre turbo-diesel producing 135bhp (3-litre Master superseded by 2.5-litre for 2007)
- **Gearbox:** Six-speed manual, dash-mounted gearlever
- **Length:** 6.95m (22ft 10in)
- **Width:** 2.27m (7ft 5in)
- **Height:** 3.09m (10ft 2in)
- **Berths:** 5
- **Belted seats:** 4 (including driver)
- **Fresh water:** 110 litres (24.2 gallons)
- **Waste water:** 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Space heating:** Webasto Airtop 3500 diesel-fired blown-air
- **Water heating:** Truma gas-fired boiler, capacity 10 litres (2.2 gallons)
- **Layout:** Transverse overcab double bed, half-dinette with swivelling passenger seat and side sofa ahead of nearside L-shaped kitchen, offside separate-shower washroom, transverse double bed above garage in rear
- **Further reading:** *Italiano si'l Vous Plait:* MMM August 2006, pages 171-175; MMM November 2006, pages 171-175; MMM January 2007, pages 141-145; MMM March 2007, pages 155-159



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