



Four thousand miles on, and our Renault-based Mobilvetta is still running sweetly.

**AT A GLANCE**

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



Kimu at Schloss Gesmold.



Words and pictures by Dave Batten-Hill



# ITALIANO S'IL VOUS PLAÎT

**Mobilvetta Kimu 102 on 3.0dCi Renault Master**

*Our long-term test vehicle has its mettle tested on a marathon trip*



Working in this business is great. Instructions arrive, by phone or e-mail, plans are made and off we go. This time, the brief was ambitious: pick up a vehicle, go across Holland to northern Germany to attend a press launch, and then come back. Oh, by the way, visit 14 dealers in the south and west of the UK when you return, to produce material for the MMM Awards supplements. Not quite all in a day's work but you get the picture.

This begged a question: what vehicle would we be using? For the first half of our trip, a Dethleffs Esprit RT6874 (see Live-in Test in the September issue of MMM) had done the trusty steed bit. We hoped that its successor would be just as trusty and it certainly looked good on paper. Another Renault chassis cab – the now superseded 3.0-litre dCi 140 this time. Another garage model with a fixed tail berth, a full profile coachbuilt bodyshell complete with luton, and cab air-conditioning. Those who recall July's heatwave won't need clues to spot which attribute was the most welcome.

So, plans made, we set off to collect the Kimu from fellow tester Dave Newell's place in Telford.

**KIMU SAVVY**

The scene shifts to that Shropshire town, on a warm afternoon. There, we met Dave and turned our attention to the Kimu. It is, in a word, big – just a whisker under seven metres long – and tall. Inside, it's as spacious as its size implies and it swallowed our worldly goods effortlessly.

Dave's handover clued us up. He told us of the clock in the control panel only running on 'Kimu time' – set it as often as you like, it doesn't stay right for long. We checked over the big half-dinette, the spacious washroom, and the convenient access to the garage via a tambour slider on the front face of the tail bed, and then we hit the road.

It's said first impressions count. Ours of the Kimu stayed with us, in respect of its dynamic behaviour. Its impressive chevaux count of 136 made its presence known in the first few miles. The motor was punchy, torquey and provided a lot of welcome urge. The dash-mounted shift lever for the six-speed gearbox permitted slick cog-swapping, and the steering and foot controls proved light and user-friendly.



**WE LIKED**

- Effective cab air-conditioning
- Efficient base vehicle
- Relaxing progress
- Excellent space heating
- Well-designed washroom
- Realistically tough exterior
- Garage access, from inside too

**WE WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- A reversing camera
- An oven/grill
- Spark ignition for the hob
- Reading lights
- Illumination in the wardrobe
- The kitchen cabinet door to be right-hinged

**WE DISLIKED**

- Poor through-vision
- Narrow entry steps
- Blindless roof vents

The conversion had advantages and drawbacks. It was quiet, being free of creaks and rattles, and what with its mannerly chassis and refined powertrain, the Kimu offered smooth, comfortable progress. On the other hand, its 3.09-metre height has to have an effect on this progress, and it did. Yes, it obeyed the laws of physics, rolling in bends and pitching over extended undulations. Though they were no worse than in any other big coachbuilt, these aspects had to be considered. What also had to be considered was that a tall bed means a still taller tail window location and therefore restricted through vision. A reversing camera really should be standard.

**FERRY ENTERTAINING**

The trip to Harwich showed off the Kimu's mile-munching talents admirably. The 3.0-litre motor made light of motorway cruising and A-road inclines alike, so the drive was quite relaxing. And

relax was what we did on the *Stena Discovery*, the fast ferry whose four-hour crossing to the Hook of Holland still gives more welcome downtime than can a Dover to Calais hop.

After a brief halt to gum beam-benders to the headlamps, it was on to our Dutch campsite, five miles south-south-west of Nijmegen. At Heumens Bos, the boss had failed, for the second year running, to leave us a barrier key in the wooden box outside reception. Pitching once again on the car park, we were powerless but the night wasn't too chilly and the Kimu's excellent Webasto, diesel-fired heating quickly raised the internal temperature a touch without upsetting the leisure battery one bit. Meanwhile, LPG heated the water in the Truma boiler, as well as in our kettle on the sparkless hob. The only snag was that any food had, perforce, to be boiled or fried. No oven or grill may suit our Continental cousins but we Brits missed these facilities... toast withdrawal symptoms set in distressingly quickly.





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Half-dinette rides ahead of centre kitchen and offside washroom with the high tail bed above the garage.

The steps up to bed. These tuck away behind one silver tambour screen, while the other leads to the garage.

The workmanlike washroom offers plenty of storage space.

The driving environment features comfy seats and effective air-conditioning.

The control panel worked well but for an inaccurate clock.

How would like your eggs - boiled or fried? No oven or grill meant hob-son's choice when cooking.

Wrong! Hinging the kitchen cupboard door this way shows lack of forethought.

High tail: the big garage puts the bed a long way up.

But here was where the sizeable washroom came into its own. A big water capacity and plenty of room permitted ambitious ablutions. The large shower, with its sliding screen and accommodation for essentials, meant sumptuous showering, while for lesser washroom pursuits, the decently-sized basin served us well. Plenty of cupboard space and good-sized mirrors made the washroom entirely usable.

Of course, after our late evening landfall and the 93-mile run from the Hook, we were weary, which made the presence of a bed ready to fall into particularly welcome. We'd have slept had it been studded with nails but the bed was in fact very comfortable. An open shelf took our night time drinks, alarm clock and so on. The only niggle was that the single ceiling light was harsh. High enough to be a mausoleum slab, the bed was lit like an operating theatre... attempts at nocturnal reading were rendered too ghastly to pursue.

**PROFIT AND SCHLOSS ACCOUNT**

Fast forward 134 miles and we get to Osnabrück, the venue for our press launch. There, the Kimu had two days off while we talked TEC. We then saddled up and headed homewards in the Kimu, but we stopped on the way, at a location too tempting to miss. Schloss Gesmold's gatehouse made an admirable backdrop for our charge.

With the snaps in the can, we could engage in an epic blast back to our favoured campsite near Delft. We'd already sussed that the Kimu was easy enough to handle on Continental arterial routes and the average speed we maintained was high. An easy cruising rhythm became second nature and, since you can stand on a biscuit tin and see for miles in Holland, dropping down into fifth gear was rarely necessary.

By now, the ambient temperature had risen significantly. On the road, hitting the air-con button quickly made life in the cab very comfortable. Pitched on-site at Delftse Hout, life in the interior

threatened to become far less comfortable - but cracking open all the available windows saw to that, while revealing another aspect of the Kimu. We didn't use the overcab bed or the dinette berth but we did use the Fiamma roof vents. These were a long way up and proved that a lack of headroom certainly isn't an issue in the Kimu. What threatened to become an issue was the roof vents, specifically the one above the tail bed. The problem lay with the blind, or rather, its absence. Open the roof vent for... yes, ventilation and, come cock-crow, you get the wake-up call of blazing sunshine. Closing the roof vent made the area too warm for comfort.

**OUTSIDE CHANCE**

Back on British soil, two requirements came to the fore. One was visiting the dealers, the other, keeping the Kimu pristine for its photographs. The latter offered the opportunity to deal with the Kimu's exterior at close quarters. Renewing





**DATA FILE**

**MOBILVETTA KIMU 102**

- **Price:** £49,995 OTR
- **Base:** Renault Master chassis cab
- **Engine:** 3-litre turbo-diesel producing 135bhp
- **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 cab seats 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.

our insect collection on a daily basis meant frequent visits to jet washes. These proved that the Kimu is indeed a big beast. Jet washes are geared for washing cars - and at least a 15-minute session, plus a five-minute pre-wash to soften the massed fly corpses, was a must.

Once clean, the vehicle was revealed as impressively... white. The seamless side panels have a finish tough enough to withstand the

occasional contretemps with encroaching foliage. The opening panels fit as well as they work and the assorted mouldings are gratifyingly solid to the touch. The subtle, contrasting light grey of the skirt mouldings lends the body shell a degree of panache and the tail lighting proves effective, particularly at night.

The coachwork did, however, possess a puzzlement of its own; its bizarre graphics







**FAR LEFT:** The Kimu's spacious half-dinette in action.

**CENTRE LEFT:** The opening window in the entry door came in useful in the heatwave. Note the DIY stuck-on anti-slip mats – essential for the narrow steps.

**LEFT:** Internet searches failed to link the 'van's name with it's reptilian logo.

caused a certain amount of controversy. Apparently, a triangular-headed three-legged lizard with a skeletal coccyx and curly antennae, it repeatedly engendered the question 'wossat?' Driven by curiosity, I went on the Internet to try to answer this question. Apart from being a proper name, an indefinable Japanese term and the name of assorted products, 'Kimu' isn't reptilian in any way, shape or form. The definition remains an unanswered question – unless you know different!

While working externally, it was pleasing to discover that the vehicle's ins and outs were well thought out and largely easy to use. The fresh water filler accepted replenishment with minimal regurgitation and the pull-handle that operates the grey water drain remotely is positive in its action. The gas locker has an opening large enough to make cylinder lugging easy.

**LION AROUND**

Our travels took us to Longleat, where on-site we learned more of the Kimu's foibles. Having an awning light over the entry door made climbing in and out quite easy after dark. Day or night, the narrowness of the two steps into the conversion threatened a slip. Equipping the

entry door with an integral bin is a useful move but not all of the kitchen arrangements are so ergonomic. While the L-shaped worktop is adequate for most culinary exercises, the sink and drainer lids would need to be in place when cooking for the full complement. Despite lacking AES, the refrigerator is reasonably-sized, for two at least. The cutlery drawer is good-sized too, but, oddly, the door to the cabinet beneath is hinged on the 'wrong' side. Fully open, it makes the storage space accessible, but then again, you need to lean over it to get to the cabinet – very odd.

Like the kitchen, the dinette (for which, read 'office') has concealed fluorescent lighting. The table is sufficiently large and slides out to extend the dining capacity. When the passenger seat is swivelled, the table can be used from its forward side and the TV cabinet is intelligently sited above the three-quarter-width side sofa. The passenger seat's swivel was less intelligent. Its locking lever is tucked away under the front of the seat and the swivel was unutterably stiff – lubrication made no difference at all.

Further aft, the living space could be illuminated more than adequately. Though the three halogen downlighters are fixed, the combination of these, the side fluorescents and three central fluorescents permits flexible lighting, up to and including very bright. But it's a pity the wardrobe wasn't invited, the lack of any illumination earning it 'black hole' status. Still, the cupboard beneath the wardrobe was useful, as were the hefty, folding wooden bed steps that tucked away behind a second tambour screen when not in use.

At Longleat, we didn't get to see the lions but we heard the sea lions – all night long. We also received permission to use the kind of location that's hard to follow, courtesy of Lord Bath. Longleat House as a middle distance element made the Kimu more than photogenic.

**HOT PROPERTY**

The latter part of our trip put both the Kimu and us to the test. The externally sensed temperature

readout peaking at 38°C left us gasping. Under these conditions, cranking up the cab air-con at rest became essential and saved us distress. However, the Kimu remained unfazed by these temperatures. Even when faced with the 848-foot climb up Fish Hill, out of the Vale of Evesham, it remained unperturbed. Equally, when the weather broke briefly at Battle, the rain accompanying a seriously spectacular thunderstorm was kept in its place – outside.

In all, our use of the Kimu extended to no less than 4000 miles. During this distance (which was covered in varying states of urgency), the vehicle soldiered on with neither fuss nor objection, returning an average of 23.2mpg into the bargain. Putting perhaps a year's normal motorhome mileage on a test vehicle certainly put it to the test. That we emerged largely unfazed ourselves stands as testament to the Kimu's usability in a variety of circumstances. □

**THANKS TO:**

**Longleat Enterprises:**

(tel: 01985 8444400;  
web site: www.longleat.co.uk)

**Stena Line:** HSS service between Harwich and Hoek van Holland (tel: 08705 707070 to book).

**Camping and Caravanning Club sites:** Cabbage Moor; Kingsbury Water Park; Winchcombe; Weston-super-Mare.

**Caravan Club sites:** Hurn Lane; Longleat; Cadeside; Putts Corner; Hunters Moon; Black Knowl; Normanhurst; Wyatts Covert; Four Oaks; Moreton in Marsh; Ferry Meadows.



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