



AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £44,068 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 4
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Fiat Ducato LWB chassis cab
- **LAYOUT:** Swivelling cab seats ahead of half-dinette with side sofa (Euro lounge), nearside kitchen with fridge/freezer opposite, rear offside fixed longitudinal double bed with washroom alongside, wardrobe forward of this
- **ECONOMY:** 26.6mpg overall





Words & pictures
by Nick Harding

HALCON NIGHTS

Moncayo Halcon 735 on 2.3TD LWB Fiat Ducato

Spanish-built Moncayo is back in the UK - offering motorcaravans to suit many tastes. This month's live-aboard test sees a flagship low profile put through its paces



Stylish looking, isn't it? There's plenty here that warrants further inspection and I can assure you the beauty is more than just skin deep. Built in sunny Spain, Moncayo (say it mon-cay-oh) motorhomes

are now represented in the UK by Somerset-based Davan Caravans, a family-owned dealership operating from impressive premises on the outskirts of Weston-super-Mare. Conveniently just off junction 21 of the M5 motorway, Davan is worth remembering if you're en route and in need of some forgotten spares or emergency replacements.

There's definitely some pedigree here at Davan. Glen Davies is managing director and grandson of the firm's founder. His grandfather started out building touring caravans back in 1936, the same year as Glen's dad was born. Production continued until 1976, when it was decided to move full-time into retailing. Davan has occupied its current premises since 1981, now selling motorhomes and caravans - its eighth year with the former - as well as offering a full back up, including National Caravan Council approved workshops and an extensive accessories shop with cafe.

Already enjoying considerable success with CI motorhomes, as well as dabbling with a few other brands, Glen Davies decided to add Moncayo for this season. He appreciates Moncayo's UK activity will be a long-term project, although there are no specific plans to bring other dealers on board. 'Our job is to get Moncayo up where it should be and get people confident in it,' says Glen. To that end, Davan offers a five-year, transferable warranty covering bodywork and major items of equipment with every Moncayo it sells.

Moncayo makes some 1000 motorhomes a year and Davan is bringing in models from the Silver, Mediterraneo, and flagship Halcon coachbuilt ranges, as well as Liberty van conversions. The aimed-for theme is high specification allied to attractive prices, in a stylish package that gives every indication of being well screwed together.

Other models in the Halcon range include the rather neat 780 garage model with a not-so fixed bed than can be moved up and down depending on how much storage space you want in the room below. Nevertheless, I'd expect the fixed bed 735, as tested here, to be the better seller.

Its features are many and - even with a week's use in some pretty determinedly rough weather - I handed back the Halcon feeling I'd barely got to know it. Things like the white roof, for example; it's actually a polyester (GRP) piece - the same as used for the interior walls - and is designed not to suffer the damage that heavy hailstones can cause

to alloy skinning. Although I experienced a couple of heavy overnight frosts and a fair amount of rain, the generally foul weather during my week failed to turn up a single hailstone to check this claim.

You may just about be able to spot from the photography the neat, radiused edge of the alloy-skinned sides at the top edge of the bodywork. It doesn't just add to the good looks, it should spell few problems with water ingress. Dark, recessed side windows add to the sleek appearance.

FIAT FARE

Even as you get up into the driver's seat, you get your first announcement that this is a going to be a slightly superior motorhome. In 2008 guise, the Halcon's cab comes with climate control as standard, plus there's cruise control on this 735. Adding to the refinement is a Kenwood stereo radio/CD player with additional rear speakers

Our test model had the standard offering of 2.3-litre Fiat engine, but optional is the 3.0-litre unit. Unusually, you could switch entirely and go for a (very similar) Citroen Relay base.

It's the standard latest Fiat fare in the cab. The driver gets a rev counter, as well as the usual speedometer, fuel and temperature gauges. In the middle of all these is an LCD readout for date, time, outside temperature and headlight angle. Plus, you can call up travel data such as miles per gallon (instantaneous as well as overall), range, average speed, travel time etc. There's also a vast array of warning lights - the door open reminder is useful.

SILVER MACHINE

I can't be the only person who finds the latest Fiat Ducato downright ugly: too stretched and with angles in all the wrong places. High praise then, to Moncayo, who can turn this 'ugly duckling' base vehicle into a rather attractive motorhome - thanks to careful sculpting of the coachwork and imaginative use of graphics. I think the silver paintwork helps the overall cause.

If it isn't already, silver could easily be becoming *the* colour for new motorhomes. Increasingly, upmarket models are being offered in this finish and few would argue that it doesn't half look good, especially on low profile designs like this.

A different exterior colour brings its own challenges, of course. If you want an option like a bike rack, it shouldn't look too incongruous; an awning could be another matter. Davan has already singled out Fiamma's latest model with 'titanium' finish as the ideal complement.

If I don't care much for its looks, I am a big fan of the way this latest Ducato drives. The

Halcon cruised easily at 70 on the M5, with the engine turning at under 3000rpm - the trip computer indicating around 23mpg at the same time. On country roads, the handling was exemplary, with the help of positive steering and very responsive brakes. The six-speed gearbox is a pleasure to use too.

My average over a week of testing was in the 23mpg-25mpg bracket, with the engine yet to register its first 1000 miles, while I accounted for well over half of those.

Rattles? The cab's passenger seat was the first to make a noise on the outward run, but by the time I came to hand the Halcon back it had sorted itself, only to be replaced (on my final journey to Davan) by a rattle from the table.

Rear on-road heating is one of many items standard in the Halcon. Even if you don't have extra passengers, it's a boon for warming the lounge prior to arrival on site. The rear travel seat itself comes with three-point belts and



1 Decent stereo and climate control are fitted in the cab

2 On-road heating in the rear is a welcome feature

On Test Moncayo Halcon 735

adjustable head restraints but, as is so often the case, the seating itself is far too upright for long journeys and you need to hold on tight when going round corners at any speed other than crawling.

The door mirrors – electrically adjustable, of course – are big and brilliant.

HALCON DAYS

White polyester interior walls and ceiling aren't as austere as they sound, as I'm sure you'll agree from the pictures of an interior that's every bit as stylish as the outside.

True, there were a few niggles when it came to actually using the Halcon. Swivelling the cab seats needed a bit of effort, largely, I think, because they were so new. I'd guess things will ease with use, but equally I feel Moncayo's designers could make more effort to ensure the cab is part of the whole lounge set-up. In particular, the blown-air heating vents stop well short of the cab area, while both cab seats seemed too far from any reading lamps.

Sometimes, however, a week just isn't long enough. Whilst I bemoaned the lack of rear corner steadies (typical of so many models built on the Continent), I have to be honest and say at no point during the test did I feel I actually needed them. If the weather had been excessively windy it may have been a different story.

Even when catering for a family of four, I didn't feel the need to add the table extension.

I wonder if this is something many owners will be tempted to leave at home altogether, especially as it lacks a dedicated storage slot.

The upholstery on this test demonstrator is Davan's own choice for the UK, a natty woven-look pattern with complementary suede-effect trim. Options include blue or a white leather-look style that's the preferred choice in Spain, I'm told. Worth a look, but you need to make your own mind up about that one.

Floor carpet overlays are only an option. At £275, my temptation would be to do without and maybe source a simple off-cut for the lounge area.

Typical of so many motorhomes, whilst there's provision for you to take a flat screen TV, its high location means it's no easy thing to watch. A TV aerial is optional, although it's all prewired.

A large sunroof really brings the light into the lounge area, although overall I found the interior quite dark. Again, do bear in mind this was a period of bad weather testing in the UK and I rather suspect the smaller windows will help keep the interior cooler when the weather really does get towards scorching. That sunroof opens too, to provide welcome ventilation in warmer climes.

Talking of warmer weather, I found the cab area rather on the cool side whilst on site. It's not helped by quite a gap between the (unlined) curtain and the cab doors, which could be resolved by fitting some press studs.



Also, I'm not sure about the extensive use of Velcro to keep cushions in place. It has a tendency to lose its efficiency over time. I also wonder if putting the fire extinguisher at floor level behind the driver's seat is the ideal location (somewhere in the vicinity of





the caravan door would be my preference). Thankfully, a smoke alarm is fitted before each Halcon takes to the road with its new owners.

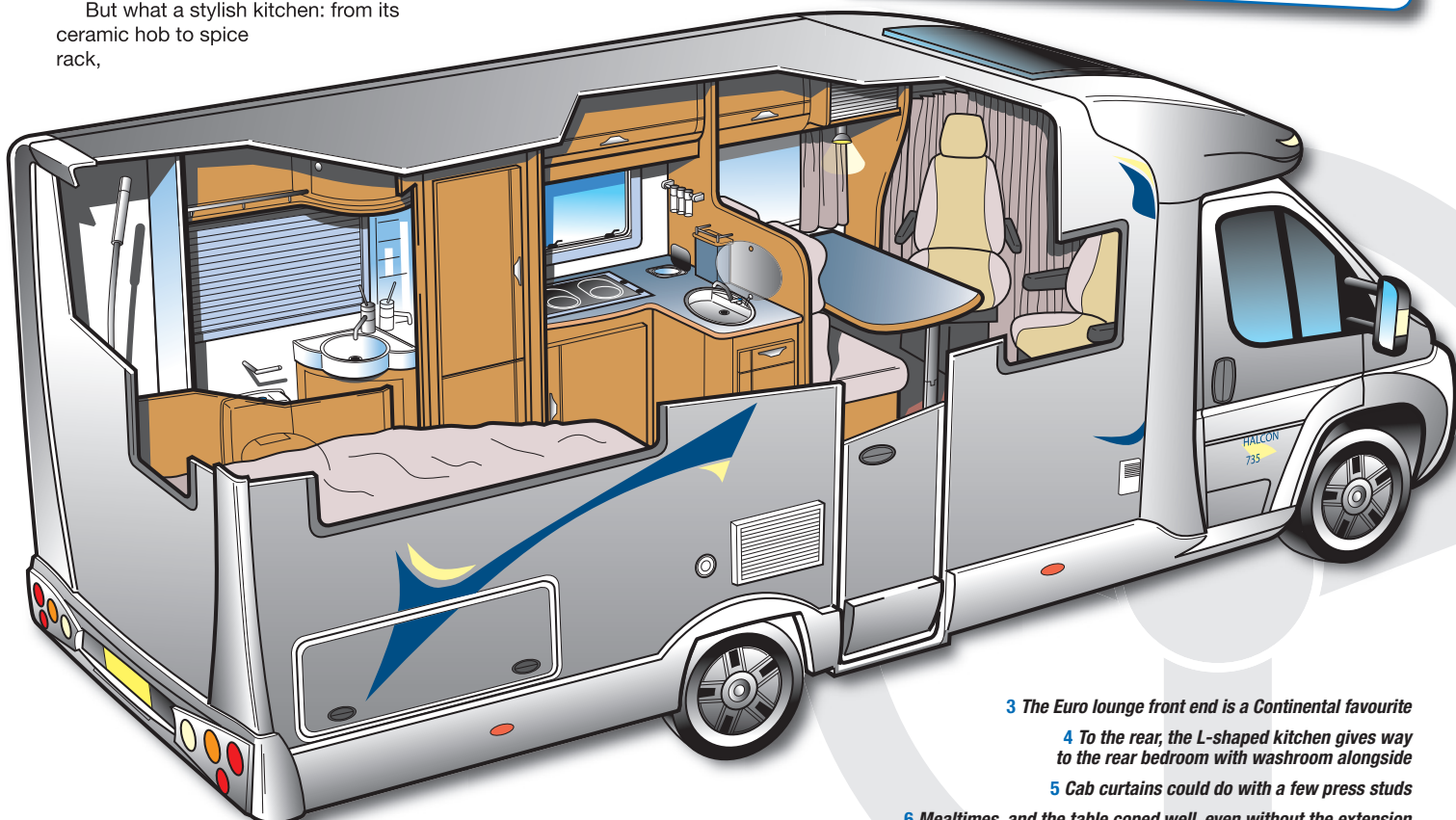
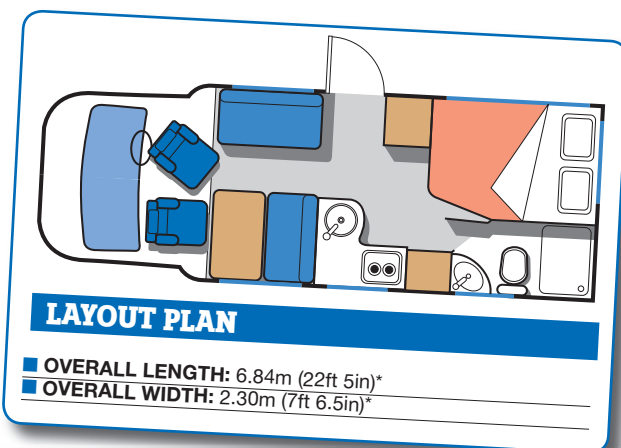
SPANISH OMELETTE ANYONE?

Actually, my culinary skills didn't stretch to a Spanish omelette in this instance. But a 'Sunday dinner' of pasta, home-made tomato sauce, salad and bread warmed in the oven was comfortably dealt with by this kitchen. Washing up after the meal wasn't quite so straightforward, due mainly to the lack of a drainer. With extended use, I think I'd find myself filling a washing-up bowl before removing it and using the sink itself as the rinsing and draining area.

But what a stylish kitchen: from its ceramic hob to spice rack,

complete with jars, this is some showstopper. It's pretty practical, too. The sink is in stainless steel, the oven/grill is over the (excellent) large fridge/freezer, but not set too high to be too much of a danger, and there's good cupboard space...

As you'd expect, there's a more than full complement of kitchen kit. The extractor hood, for example, also hosts 12V and 230V sockets, plus a couple of lights. To be honest, the opening



- 3 The Euro lounge front end is a Continental favourite
- 4 To the rear, the L-shaped kitchen gives way to the rear bedroom with washroom alongside
- 5 Cab curtains could do with a few press studs
- 6 Mealtimes, and the table coped well, even without the extension

On Test Moncayo Halcon 735



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kitchen window proved more than adequate for ventilation.

The waste bin built in the kitchen worktop is perhaps a bit over the top (too small and too fussy, I reckon, especially as there's already a far larger bin directly opposite at the bottom of the caravan door). You may think otherwise.

The ceramic hob really is state-of-the-art in motorhomes. It was the first time I'd used one and I must admit I was impressed with the fuss-free way it performed. Should be easy to keep clean too.

AWASH WITH FEATURES

Like the kitchen, the washroom is also state-of-the-art, with the very latest in terms of its trendy mixer tap and showerhead.

However, should you decide to take young children away you might just find they're not tall enough to reach light switches in here.

It proved a great shower, but there's very little room for drying and changing once you've performed your ablutions - even with the swivel-bowl toilet turned out of the way. The single towel hook seemed a little mean, too.

My biggest criticism here is the small washbasin and its equally small plughole. I do like a decent sink you can get both of your hands into and scoop up enough water to wash your face.

Storage in here is okay as there's a large cupboard under the basin that should take care of most things, plus the shower cubicle boasts a couple of open shelves. There's also a locker with mirror alongside at ceiling height over the sink. No, I couldn't figure out the reason for that mirror position either!

SPANISH SHUT-EYES

You can't beat a fixed bed for comfort. I'll leave you to argue about who gets the 'short side.'

I LIKED

- Stylish shape and silver finish to exterior
- Comprehensive specification
- Comfortable fixed bed
- Solid feel to woodwork
- Overcab sunroof
- Fiat power and performance
- Davan's own five-year warranty

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Better distribution of blown-air heating
- Heater control within arm's reach of the bed
- Cab window insulation screens
- Corner steadies (perhaps)
- Reading lamps for cab seats

I DISLIKED

- Rear travel seats (see text)
- Cold cab area when on site
- Small cutlery drawer
- Lounge bed make-up
- Space constrictions in washroom





(thanks to the bed's cut-off at the foot) but it's the one-piece mattress that will really make your night. The twin reading lights here are on rails so can be adjusted. There's also lighting directly overhead as part of the rooflight console.

I'd prefer some kind of headboard/backrest to prop myself against for night time reading, although a pillow wedged in the corner sufficed. And a shelf to put my glasses on wouldn't have gone amiss, although there is a small pocket for such little items.

The lounge bed is, unsurprisingly in this kind of layout, pretty tricky to make and probably not a job you'd want to undertake every time you go camping. It takes a fair bit of table manhandling, seating rearranging and adding extra infill cushions (which you may want to leave at home anyway if there's just the two of you on-board).

The cassette blinds provided good blackout at night, but the curtains are really only there for show, although I rather liked the

linen-style nets.

Again, because of the cold weather during which I tested the Halcon, I couldn't miss the fact that you had to get out of bed to reach the heating control in the morning. Brrrrr!

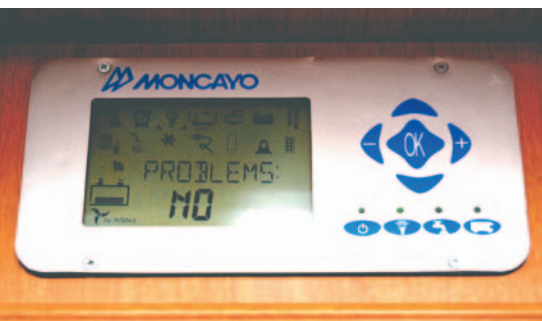
A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

Bearing in mind this, like the majority of motorhomes, will be used by a couple, the Halcon's storage space is more than adequate.



- 7 You need to be adult-sized to reach the light switches in the washroom
- 8 The state-of-the-art ceramic gas hob was easy to use, though lack of work surface and drainer cramped the galley's style
- 9 Cutlery drawer is small
- 10 A practical waste bin inside the caravan door
- 11 Fixed bed proved very comfortable, lacking only a small shelf nearby
- 12 Lounge bed is a bit of a jigsaw
- 13 Uncluttered storage area under the bed is easy to access
- 14 Overhead lockers have reassuring solid doors and are sensibly, shelved

On Test Moncayo Halcon 735



Sophisticated electrics panel is over caravan door

Full marks to Davan for checking the payload figures for me. It put the Halcon on a local weighbridge where its mass in running order came out at 2940kg, leaving a pretty generous 560kg payload.

I always like to see shelves in overhead lockers, as here throughout, and there's good low-level storage too, despite the fresh water tank taking up all of the forward-facing rear seat base.

The large area under the main bed is easy to access, either by lifting the whole bed base (with the help of struts) or via an external locker door. The water heater tank is the only item taking up space here and this is sensibly sectioned off - albeit easy to

get at for servicing duties. The wine rack is a really useful touch. It took a bit of finding, but I eventually came across it low down in the lounge on the nearside wall. Kitchen storage - like the slide-out wire baskets - is similarly thoughtful and stylish, apart from the rather small cutlery drawer.

Variety, that's the key to good storage options in any motorhome and this Halcon definitely boasts that.

A FULL KIT COUNT

As you've by now gathered, this is a very well specified motorhome, with an extensive list of standard items that sets it apart from some rivals. Would you believe there are still a few things I haven't got round to mentioning yet? The exterior shower fitting, the strip light that also acts as the hanging rail in the wardrobe, even electric operation for the waste water outlet valve, to name but a few. Curiously, the switch for the latter was labelled to suggest it operated a double step at the caravan door. A personal thing, but I'd have been perfectly happy with manual operation anyway.

Fearing for my CSE in Physics, grade two, I approached the electronic control panel over the caravan door. I needn't have worried. As well as its own comprehensive manual to explain everything, it's largely foolproof and actually quite easy once you've got the hang of a few things. For example, the 'stove' logo



actually refers to the water heater. It's also pre-setup for solar panels, gas alarms etc, should you decide you want to 'spec up.'

I've a feeling buyers of Moncayo Halcon motorhomes will be lovers of gizmos.

CONCLUSION

Want a Fiat-based, low profile motorhome with a fixed bed? You're absolutely spoilt for choice. There are, quite literally, hundreds of models out there.

The obvious UK rivals are Swift's Bolero 680FB and Bessacarr E560. Continental adversaries start with MMM's last long-termer, the Chausson Allegro 93. Then there's the Knaus Sun TI 600 LF, Adria Coral 650, Rapido 700 series, Geist Silver Touring, Burstner Solano... It's pretty much an endless list, so you can see how much competition the Halcon faces. Plus, of course, much will rest on finding a dealer/importer that you know you can rely on.

Staying on a Caravan Club CL (members only, five-'van site), without mains electricity

and during an exceptionally cold spell, was probably a little harsh on this vehicle. And there's quite a draw on electricity from all those appliances (well, I was determined to test everything).

Nevertheless, it's the sheer value for money of all those goodies as standard that should have you taking a good, long look at the Halcon.

Personally, I feel this example betrays its southern Europe credentials a little. It will prove a great touring vehicle, I know. But, much of the design lends itself to warmer climes: the cool interior; the difficulty of getting the cab warm on site while the washroom is roasting (even with the vent here only partially open); the rather small windows; the unlined cab curtains.

Options? I'd love to think Davan will take up my advice to supply cab window insulation screens as standard. I'd want a bike rack if this were to be my motorhome (I keep dreaming) and I'd seriously consider alloy wheels to really keep up appearances.

Davan is realistic. It reckons on gradually building up Moncayo's reputation in the UK. That's not to say there's anything to stop you taking a peek at the current offerings right now. I think, like me, you'll be more than a little impressed. ■

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Davan Caravans, St Georges, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset BS22 7XA
(tel: 01934 510606;
web site: www.davan.co.uk)

WE STAYED AT

Sherwood Farm Caravan Club
Certificated Location (members only),
Stretton-on-Dunsmore,
Rugby CV23 9JB
(tel: 01788 810325;
web site: www.caravanclub.co.uk)

LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE

Low-profile coachbuilt

PRICE

■ **From:** £44,068 OTR (as tested)

BASICS

- **Vehicle:** Fiat Ducato LWB chassis cab
- **Berths:** 4
- **Three-point belted seats:** 4 (including driver) Warranty: 2 years base vehicle, 5 years conversion

CONSTRUCTION

Bonded sandwich construction with alloy-clad sides, polyester (GRP) interior walls, ceiling and roof panel. Caravan entrance on the UK offside

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturer's figures)

- **Length:** 6.84m (22ft 5in)*
- **Width:** 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*
- **Height:** 2.83m (9ft 3.5in)*
- **Wheelbase:** 3.85m (12ft 7.5in)*
- **Rear overhang:** 996mm (3ft 3in)
- **Max authorised weight:** 3500kg*
- **Payload:** 560kg*(after the weight of the vehicle in running order)

INSIDE STORY

Swivelling cab seats ahead of half-dinette with side sofa (Euro lounge), nearside kitchen with fridge/freezer opposite, rear offside fixed longitudinal double bed with washroom alongside, wardrobe forward of this

- **Insulation:** Floor 43mm, walls 27mm, roof 27mm
- **Interior height:** 2.06m (6ft 9in)

THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 96kW (130bhp) @ 3600rpm
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Fuel consumption:** 26.6mpg overall
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all-round
- **Suspension:** Front: independent on MacPherson struts. Rear: Rigid axle with leaf springs and Al-Ko Air Top suspension aids
- **Features:** ABS, AFU (Assistance au Freinage d'Urgence - mechanical brake



assist), ASR, metallic paint, remote central locking to cab doors, electric mirrors and windows, driver and passenger airbags, climate control, Kenwood radio/CD player with additional twin rear speakers, driver and passenger twin door bins, height-adjustable top seatbelt mounts, fire extinguisher behind driver's seat

LOUNGING & DINING

Swivelling cab seats and forward-facing settee plus inward-facing bench seat. Rail-mounted table with extension section. Dining for 4/5

KITCHEN

Nearside kitchen unit with hinged glass lid over stainless steel sink. Lidded waste bin set in worktop. Single overhead locker with shelved section. Cutlery drawer with shelved cupboard below. Cupboard under cooker with twin slide-out wire shelves. Fridge-freezer plus oven/grill opposite

- **Sink:** Stainless steel unit with folding mixer tap
- **Cooker:** Cramer two-burner vitro-ceramic hob with extractor unit over. Combined grill/oven over freezer, all with electronic ignition
- **Fridge:** Dometic RMT7855L three-way fridge-freezer. Capacity 175 litres

WASHROOM

Washbasin with locker below and vanity unit overhead (high mirror!). Thetford swivel-bowl cassette toilet. Separate shower cubicle with solid semicircular sliding door

BEDS

- **Rear fixed double**
- **Length:** 1.95m (6ft 5in) max
- **Width:** 1.34 (4ft 5in) max
- **Lounge double**
- **Length:** 2.20m (7ft 2.5in)
- **Width:** 1.20m (3ft 11in)

STORAGE

Exterior and interior access to underbed area. Three large, shelved overhead lockers in bedroom. Interior access to base of inward-facing bench seat. Open shelf across full width

MONCAYO HALCON 735

of front overcab area, flanked by twin side lockers. Three overhead lockers to lounge, all shelved. Overhead TV locker with slide-out bracket for flat screen TV

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Inboard. Capacity 120 litres (26.5 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung. Capacity 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Water heater:** Truma Combi boiler, gas-mains operation
- **Space heater:** Truma Combi with blown-air, gas-only operation
- **Leisure battery:** 92 amp hr
- **Gas:** Capacity 2 x 13kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** Lounge: Three reading lamps plus three-lamp unit overhead. Kitchen: Fluorescent main light, plus two task lights over hob. Bedroom: Two reading lamps plus twin-bulb unit over bed. Other lighting: Downlighters in washroom, illuminated hanging rail in wardrobe, awning light
- **Sockets:** 230V two (in kitchen extractor unit and TV locker), 12V two (in kitchen and TV locker)
- **Control panel:** Mounted above caravan door, liquid crystal display, monitors/operates all caravan functions
- **Blinds/curtains:** Cassette blinds and flyscreens to all living quarters windows with additional linen nets and part-curtains to lounge and bedroom. Unlined curtaining to cab. Unlined curtain divider for bedroom. Cassette blind/flyscreen to cab rooflight
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** No

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** None
- **Conversion:** None
- Other options
- **Base:** Cruise control (£200), Webasto programmable diesel-fired heating (£950), fog lights (£130), alloy wheels (£600), satnav system (from £1740)
- **Conversion:** Living area air conditioning (£1300), extra mains sockets (£50), reversing camera (£550), electrically-operated rooflight (£300), awning (£370), bike rack (£150)

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