



# A NEW DAY DAWNS

## Nu Venture Motorhomes Rio Dia on Fiat Scudo 2.0JTD

*Jonathan Lloyd is delighted by an Anglo-Italian with a Spanish flavour*

**N**u Venture Motorhomes isn't a new venture at all. This small but well formed Lancashire-based company has been making innovative coachbuilt and panel van-based motorcaravans for some years. What's more, it is very good at it. So, when the Rio Dia was unveiled at the 2005 York show, I guessed it would merit further investigation.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Dia is Spanish for 'day' and the Nu Venture Dia is designed for daily use. For more than a decade now, automotive manufacturers have called an estate car on steroids an MPV (multi-purpose vehicle), though many would suggest that there isn't a great deal of 'multi' in the 'purpose'. Concurrent to this line of thinking is my belief that the best MPV is a compact elevating roof motorcaravan.

The Dia is just such a piece of kit. Small enough to be used as a car, but large enough (and with sufficient mod cons) for weekends away and extended summer holidays.

### WHY?

All elevating roof motorcaravans have a VW badge on the front. Not 100 per cent accurate I know, but it's close enough as Volkswagen definitely has the majority.

A glance back in time revealed that a decade or so ago British manufacturers also built elevating roof motorcaravans on the Tranny, Renault Trafic and the Talbot Express. Slowly they've disappeared until (barring a few recent notable exceptions, such as the pretty new Renault Trafic) it's become a truism that if somebody buys a new elevating roof motorcaravan it's likely to be based on a vee-dub T5 Transporter.

Not everyone likes the vee-dub, although anybody who has actually tried one would find it hard to actively dislike it, as the T5 is superb on the road.

That said, they aren't the most competitively priced light commercial in the marketplace. VW spares can be expensive, and some people have a loyalty to other marques. So who looks after these folk when they want to buy a campervan?

Here it's obviously Nu Venture Motorhomes! The term 'campervan' is used throughout this test, as it is a widely recognised, though technically vague, description of this type of small motorcaravan.

### HOW?

By starting with a different base vehicle. The Scudo looked a strong candidate from day one - as Nu Venture builds coachbuilt motorhomes on the platform cab version so it already has a lot of acquired experience and knowledge of the marque.

Fiat's Scudo burst onto the scene around a decade ago. It was launched as - so the publicity fluff of the time declared - a car-sized van that was designed from the outset as both a car (a people carrier really) and a commercial van. Such intended duality in design could so easily have meant that it wasn't really very good in either role - but it was, and then some. Genuinely avant-garde in design, Scudo impressed from my first stolen glance. Subsequent lengthy spells behind the wheel have confirmed Fiat's boast that not only does it look good, it performs very well too.

Prior to the introduction of the Scudo, small Fiat commercials had never been a byword for mechanical excellence or outstanding build quality. Body panels usually felt flimsy, coachwork design was too often 'back of a fag packet stuff' and sales were probably insufficient to worry Fiat UK over the size of the sales folk's commission payments.

The Scudo couldn't have been more different from its predecessors. Body shape looked sleek and yet load space and accessibility were class



**AT A GLANCE**

- **PRICE FROM:** £21,750 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Fiat Scudo panel van
- **ENGINE:** 2.0-litre 80kW (109bhp) turbo-diesel







**ABOVE LEFT:** The offside sliding door allows easy access to the battery and some through ventilation on really hot days.

**ABOVE MIDDLE:** Looking to the rear, we see a classic interior layout.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** View forwards shows swivelled cab passenger seat. There's some useful storage space on the shelf above the driving department.

**RIGHT TOP:** The Scudo's 'fit and finish' is good, with everything well screwed together.

**RIGHT BOTTOM:** Driver's eye view. The Scudo command centre is car-like and well laid out, including desirable fascia-mounted gearlever.



leading. Fit and finish were good, everything was well screwed together, a punchy turbocharged derv drinker was available to power it along, and a fascia-mounted gearlever provided slick cog swapping and an uncluttered cab floor.

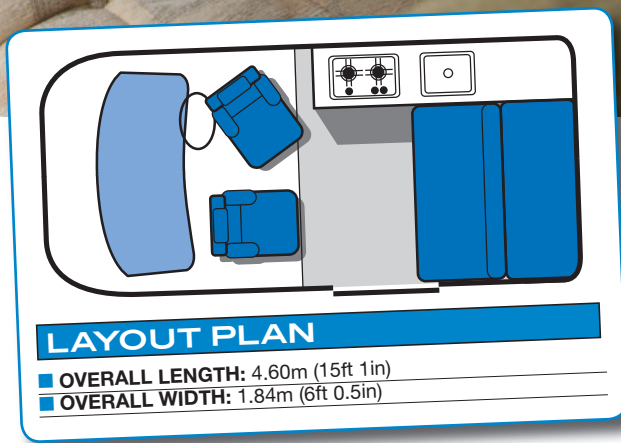
A problem (perhaps more of a disadvantage than a problem) with many LCVs and car-derived vans is that the compliance of the suspension is not progressive. In other words, if it is set up as a car, one only has to put a crate of wine in it and it starts to wallow alarmingly. If it's set up for maximum payload, then, when unladen, it bangs and crashes over our seemingly ever-worsening road surfaces and tends to skip when cornered enthusiastically. This is often due to the fact that many competitors were making do with cart springs at the back. Not Fiat, they went for a torsion beam arrangement, which provided excellent handling whether the Scudo was loaded to the gunwales or empty.

Many think that the 15-inch wheels fitted to the 2.0JTD versions are also relevant to its mild road manners (some competitors make do with 14-inch wheels). Whilst there might be some truth in this, my considered opinion is that the great handling and minimum body roll has more to do with where those wheels are placed on the chassis rather than on their size. With front and rear overhangs of well under a metre apiece, the Scudo really does feature a wheel-in-each-corner configuration.

Rack and pinion steering benefits from power assistance. From launch it has used a progressive hydraulic system, which always gave a sensible amount of feedback to the driver at all speeds and never became over-light. Recently, an electric system has been successfully tried on some LHD versions (similar to that used on the new Panda), so it might be all change by the time you read this.

The four-spoke steering wheel adjusted for





height and was comfortable to twiddle. Radio/CD control is via buttons on either side of the wheel's central boss. I forgot to measure the turning circle, but it seemed reasonable for a front-wheel drive vehicle of this size.

Scudo displays an embarrassment of riches in the door department, with six of 'em. Two cab doors, two side sliders and two side-hinged at the back. This is a multi-drop delivery driver's dream, but also pretty popular with motorcaravanners who wish to use their pride and joy as their everyday vehicle.

It seemed strange that headlamp washers appeared on Fiat's options list but wash-wipe for the back doors didn't. Neither did a rear tailgate in lieu of barn doors, which would have been my preferred choice.

Fiat has placed a high priority on safety with larger ventilated front discs for the 2006 model year, with four-channel ABS with EBD (Electronic Brake Distribution) available as an option across the range for the first time. Front seat belts have pre-tensioners and both front and rear passengers have a specially strengthened body shell around them. A driver's airbag is standard, passenger and side airbags are extra cost options.

So there it is; a thoughtfully designed and well-built base vehicle that drives like a car rather than a builder's cart. Apparently, if so inclined, one can knock on the door of 100mph and blow away some other cars in traffic lights grands prix.

Of more interest to me, and I suspect to most of you, is the Scudo's excellent tractability, refined cruising at 70 mph and positively miserly thirst. I reckoned to be getting more than 35 mpg without really trying. Common-rail injection technology usually takes the accolades for the good MPG figures, though the well-chosen gear ratios must also have contributed.

Owners, and my local haulier (who also

leases Scudos to a well-known national chain of florists), report that the Scudo is very reliable and the Dia's low overall height should ensure that any Fiat car dealer should be able to accommodate it for servicing or repair.

Fiat quotes a money-saving oil change interval of 18,000 miles but I'd change it yearly regardless of distance covered, as more frequent oil changes are my own - belt-and-braces - custom and practice.

In addition, Fiat garages operate a menu pricing programme that guarantees fixed service and replacement costs.

As this is being typed, Fiat UK is offering a three-year Fiatcare comprehensive warranty package on mechanicals and paintwork and an eight-year anti-perforation warranty.

However, close inspection revealed that the package described as 'a three-year comprehensive warranty', actually isn't at all. It's a two-year comprehensive warranty underwritten by Fiat, with the third year's policy provided by the dealer. This is at no extra charge, but it only covers major mechanical items.

**OVERVIEW**

Turning a good base vehicle into a good motorcaravan isn't as easy as some may think. The more compact the base vehicle, the more difficult it can be to achieve a layout conducive to harmonious living. Nu Venture has simply adapted the classic Volkswagen layout to suit the Scudo and create the Dia. It's hardly revolutionary but if it ain't broke...

For those new to motorcaravanning, this design places a run of kitchen cabinets/gas

locker etc, down one side of the interior, with a convertible forward-facing two-person passenger seat/double bed taking up the remainder of the available width.

**NEVER MIND THE QUALITY, FEEL THE WIDTH**

For the designers of the Dia, the chief compromise to be grappled with must have been how much of the available interior width is given to the rear seat/bed. The wider the bed, the narrower the kitchen has to be and vice versa. As with other Dia design decisions, Nu Venture got it about right. The bed is a modest but comfortable 1.06m (3ft 6in) wide, which means, of course, that the same amount of posterior parking room is available when in seat mode. Despite this, the kitchen feels more spacious than it has a right to.

Although at odds with what some manufacturers might believe, the most important thing to include in a small motorcaravan is not a cocktail cabinet with leaded light door (nor is it three different sorts of oven), but plenty of elbowroom. Nu Venture gets it right here as well.

**MORE DETAIL PLEASE**

OK, let's start with how the Dia pops its top. Standing height is achieved by the use of a full-length rear-hinged elevating roof. It looked like





a Reimo one to me; a guess supported by the sight of familiar closure straps.

Raising and lowering is gas-assisted, or, more accurately, the struts are gas-assisted. Anybody who is reasonably able-bodied should be able to manage to raise this roof without a problem.

When lowering the roof, you must make sure that:

- a. Everything is tucked in down the sides.
- b. The fabric is dry, as even the slightest amount of condensation could cause mildew growth on the canvas walls.

Each sidewall has an arch-shaped panel, which zips down to reveal a clear plastic window. A similar shaped one in the forward-facing wall reveals a mesh ventilator. Letting the light flood in through these panels further reduces any lingering feelings of claustrophobia one might experience.

Although the Scudo has six doors, the Dia only uses three of them for access and egress, the cab ones and the nearside slider. The latter has a commendably low threshold of just 490mm (1ft 7.5in) so many folk will be able

to dispense with an exterior step. Generous dimensions, plus the fact that the door's a slider, make it easy to get in and out of even when someone's parked too close in a car park. On site it's a real boon, slide it open and feel at one with the world. Its partner on the other side opens to reveal little more than the back of the kitchen cupboards and the leisure battery.

The cabinetwork felt solidly made and is fitted with positive-locking catches on the doors and lockers. The light beech-style colouring and the oatmeal and fawn geometrically patterned soft

**THIS PAGE:**

**ABOVE LEFT:** Zip-down panels reveal two windows and a mesh ventilator in the roof.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Top accessed galley storage space is shared by mains unit and battery charger.

**RIGHT TOP:** The rear settee...

**RIGHT MIDDLE:** ...easily converts into a comfortable double bed of modest width.

**RIGHT BELOW:** The island leg table is just the right size. Add a tripod base and you can use it outside too.

**NEXT PAGE:**

**TOP LEFT:** The simple kitchen offers hob with grill beneath and matching sink. The fridge is a 12V compressor model.

**TOP RIGHT:** The gas cylinder locker is well executed, metal-lined and vented.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** The boot area provides versatile, vital stowage space especially considering that the Dia has no wardrobe.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Sleeping bags and some clothes can be stored under the settee.





furnishing fabric combine to give the interior a perfect ambience for the Ikea generation. Not to your taste? Choose something else, then. One of the many advantages of going to a small bespoke converter such as Nu Venture is that fabrics can be the purchaser's choice, rather than that of the computer in charge of a mass production line.

**SEATING**

From its inception the Dia was considered a two-berth. For the getaway couple there is a choice of sitting on the forward-facing rear settee or on the swivelled cab passenger seat. Between the two there is an island leg table for dining. I found it could be reached from both the cab seat and the settee providing the top was swivelled so that each occupant had a corner rather than a side when dining.

**CATERING**

Many large coachbuilts will be shamed by the sheer practicality of the Dia's kitchen. Once again, Nu Venture decided to KISS (keep it simple stupid) in a small space. It didn't opt for over-the-top equipment or twee little cupboards that you can't get a box of matches in. Instead there is a practical electronic-ignition stainless steel two-burner hob and grill with a 12V compressor fridge underneath, a sensibly sized sink (no need for dollshouse crockery) and oodles of worktop.

Principal storage of provisions will be in the cupboard under the sink and in the locker under the hinged worktop adjacent. The latter

is also home to the mains consumer unit and leisure battery charger.

The hot water system is simple to operate, costs nothing in maintenance and is extremely easy to drain down for the winter months. It is, of course, a kettle. There is just a pumped cold water supply to the sink, but really that's all one needs in a campervan.

**STORAGE**

Kitchen storage we've dealt with, sleeping bags or duvets stow underneath the rear seat squab and clothes in a handgrip or holdall in the 'boot' under the rearmost bed extension. There are several other hidey-holes and open lockers around too.

The cab is surprising in this regard. In addition to the usual moulded cupboards, drink holders and door bins, there is a really useful full-width shelf above the cab. With a bit of to-ing and fro-ing, I managed to get two folding camping chairs (Maclaren type) and a fold-up slatted table up there.

There is no hanging wardrobe and if you think you need one, you are probably looking at the wrong sort of motorcaravan. This is a campervan for folk who wear fleeces and leisure clothes, the like of which can be stored by stuffing them under a seat. Suits and ball gowns should be left with the butler or wardrobe mistress back at the mansion.

Actually there is a serious point to be made here. An experienced motorcaravanner looked around the Dia whilst I was its custodian and pronounced it (rather dismissively) as far too

small, even for weekends away. I disagree; it's not too small, although it may be too small for that person's particular style of motorcaravanning. It is what it is - a compact motorcaravan for folk who wish to use it for days out, weekends away and holidays undertaken as part of a simple camping lifestyle. It's not for those who like to take lots of clutter or who wish to replicate all the home comforts.

In its present form, Dia is really most suited to summer use, though an addition of a portable 230V fan heater would make it suitable for on-site camping in the late spring or early autumn. Flora and I would wish to use the Dia on a campsite anyway, so we could avail ourselves of the site's facilities (loo, shower and what have you).

It may be possible to store the smallest freestanding Porta Potti under the bed, but - even if it did fit - we would view such equipment as for emergency use only.

The gas cylinder locker is at the far rear of the run of cupboards and holds a 3.9kg propane cylinder or similar. The door has an effective seal, the locker itself is vented to the exterior, is metal lined and has a restraining strap for the cylinder.

A 600kg payload indicates that, even after conversion, the Dia has great potential as a load lugger

**SLEEPING**

Experience has taught us that this is where many campervans fall down. It's not usually the bed itself, but the actual conversion of the seating to a bed that causes problems. Some





require the strength of Samson, others demand everyone to be outside, and a few require puzzle-solving skills far greater than mine. My record stands at eight separate cushions that needed to be shuffled and then placed in just the right way, some upside down, others not!

The Dia offers a cracking example of how easy campervan bed making can be. Lift and pull on the handle under the rear seat squab and the squab itself moves forward. At the same time, the backrest folds flat to meet with the extension behind. Bingo, a double bed in an instant. Converting it back to a seat was just as effortless. And there's more... the bed itself was flat and comfortable and, even with it extended, there was room to undress without needing the talents of a contortionist.

If like me you like an early morning cuppa in bed, you'll have to remember to get a small

amount of milk out the night before, as the bed does prevent access to the fridge.

**WHERE?**

As stated earlier, Nu Venture Motorhomes is based in Lancashire, Wigan actually. It shouldn't be confused with Nu Venture Campers (also of Wigan), which is an entirely different company in spite of the similar name.

NVM is just about as close to the spectacularly attractive Wigan Pier as it is possible to be without getting wet. In fact, its premises hide behind the Seven Stars pub. Many of NVM's orders are placed directly at the factory or at outdoor shows such as the National Motorhome Show (Peterborough in April) and the Northern Motorcaravan Show (York in September). Nu Venture always has a good range of 'vans on display and the principals are always on hand

to offer help and advice. Further, the company has four established agents (Todds of Preston, Lazydays of Hinstock, P & P Campers and Cars of Gosport, and Robsons of Wolsingham) who will be happy to help.

**CONCLUSION**

In short, the Rio Dia is a practical and uncomplicated motorcaravan conversion on an excellent base vehicle. Nu Venture has managed to distil the essence of campervan and poured every last drop into the Dia. What's more, it's excellence as a four-seater car, hospitality unit, and load lugger make it - to my mind - a genuine multi-purpose vehicle.

And finally: Dia? At just £21,750 on the road, this Nu Venture Motorhomes camper is most certainly not. □

**VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY:**

*Rio Dia kindly supplied for evaluation by:*  
Nu Venture Motorhomes, Unit 2, Seven Stars Road, Wallgate, Wigan, Lancashire WN3 5AT (tel: 01942 494090; web site: www.nuventure.co.uk)



*Standing room is achieved by raising the canvas-sided roof.*

**IN BRIEF**

- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Scudo panel van
- **Engine type:** 2.0-litre 80kW (109bhp) turbo-diesel
- **Gearbox and drive:** Five-speed manual, front-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Nu Venture Motorhomes Rio Dia
- **Body type and construction:** All-steel six door panel van with GRP canvas-sided elevating roof
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** Mains hook-up, consumer unit, one mains socket, smart charger leisure battery, water pump
- **Lighting:** Four individually switched halogen spotlamps
- **Cooking facilities:** Stainless steel Smev two-burner hob and grill with electronic

ignition, matching sink

- **Refrigerator:** Waeco Coolmatic 12V compressor type, capacity 40 litres
- **Water heater:** None fitted
- **Space heater:** None fitted
- **Fresh water tank:** Underfloor, 28 litres (6.16 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** None fitted
- **Gas locker capacity:** One 3.9kg cylinder
- **Rear restraints:** Two three-point inertia-reel seatbelts to forward-facing bench seat
- **Additional features:** Passenger seat swivel, removable carpet over vinyl floor

**DIMENSIONS**

(\*data supplied by manufacturer)

- **Overall length:** 4.60m (15ft 1in)\*
- **Overall width:** 1.84m (6ft 0.5in)
- **Overall height:** 2.13m (7ft 0in)\*

- **Interior height:** 1.41m (4ft 7.5in) roof closed, full-standing height with roof elevated
- **Bed dimensions:** One double 1.85m x 1.07m (6ft 1in x 3ft 6in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 2330kg\*
- **Load capacity:** 600kg\*

**PRICE** (all prices include VAT)

- **Standard model:** Standard model as tested: £21,750 (on the road)

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

(\*fitted to test vehicle)

- **Base vehicle options:** All Fiat Scudo factory options available
- **Caravan options:** All appropriate accessories can be fitted by manufacturer. Contact Nu Venture Motorhomes for details

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