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# RIO BRAVO?

## Nu Venture Motorhomes Nu Rio on LWB 2.0TD Citroen Dispatch

*A practical and refreshing alternative to coachbuilt monsters, or just an eccentric tiddler?*



The first paragraph in a motorhome test often introduces the reader to the product and its place in the motorhome market. And so it was to be with the Nu Venture Motorhomes Nu Rio. These

opening gambits require advanced planning so I like to splash them through my thought puddle several times to ensure it all sounds suave, smooth and meaningful in this great marketing world we inhabit. With all this in mind (and before getting hold of it), I had

the Nu Rio marked down as a niche product and was going to tell you how it would fulfil a specific - if not that massive - role in the market for small coachbuilt motorhomes. Nu Venture Motorhomes has built up something of a reputation as a maker of micro-coachbuilt 'vans which tend to fill small gaps in the market - the previous Rio model was no exception. So there it was - opening paragraph sorted - a new micro coachbuilt motorhome for that small niche of the small motorhome market.

Unfortunately, three days into the test

I changed my mind completely about the 'niche' thing. I know where I changed it from, but I'm still not sure where I changed it to...

### DISPATCH RIDER

The 'Ol' Rio' was based on the previous generation Fiat Scudo, whereas the Nu Rio has changed horses and sits astride the all-new Citroen Dispatch. I could be wrong, but I think the new Scudo and Dispatch are the same vehicle beneath the badge. The most significant change in motorcaravanning terms is that the new mount brings a longer

1 Nu Rio in old Croston, Lancashire

2 Rio front end features a classic layout

3 To the rear are the wardrobe, washroom, and kitchen

4 The new Dispatch is a nice thing to drive



## AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £31,995
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Citroen Dispatch long wheelbase platform chassis cab
- **LAYOUT:** Front lounge/dinette, rear nearside kitchen, rear offside washroom
- **ECONOMY:** 34.1mpg



Words & pictures by Andy Stothert

wheelbase version of the platform chassis, thus enabling a stretched body to be grafted on. The old Rio came in two models with different interior layouts in the same body. Buyers had to make a decision about whether they wanted either single beds or a proper toilet compartment, as there just wasn't room for both in the compact body. The longer wheelbase of the new Citroen has transformed the Nu Rio into a small coachbuilt motorhome providing two single beds up front (or a huge double) a proper toilet compartment, and a reasonable kitchen space.

But (and this is a big but), the Nu Rio is now nearly 600mm longer and this is where my dilemma arises about where its home is in the great scheme of marketing blurb and product placement. Is it still a 'micro' coachbuilt? At 5.64 metres long I don't think so. Is it still a niche product? Well, I'm not sure, but at less than 1.98 metres (6ft 6in) wide it slots easily into lots of spaces and places which other coachbuilts can't. Most significant for some will be the fact that many

# On Test Nu Venture Motorhomes Nu Rio



## I LIKED

- Driving experience
- Modest exterior width
- Space efficient layout
- Functional washroom
- Capable kitchen
- Versatile sleeping arrangements
- Simple interior styling
- Build quality
- Excellent lighting

## I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Larger capacity auxiliary battery
- Opaque washroom window
- Handle on inside of the toilet door
- Electric step

## I DISLIKED

- Heki rooflight (a personal foible)
- Big heavy and rigid sofa cushion

of those places are the most beautiful - and anything broader isn't welcome. Did I reach a conclusion from all this dithering about whether this is still a niche product? Well: it could be one of the very few motorhomes with an almost universal appeal in the two-berth sector or, putting it another way, it could appeal to the biggest niche in the market.

## NU VENTURING

Base vehicle development is an ever-advancing process and the new Citroen Dispatch (along with its Peugeot and Fiat siblings) is the very latest arrival on the scene. It appears to have got bigger in every way from the outgoing model and now finds itself in direct competition with the short wheelbase VW T5. And it drives just as well as the VW too - or maybe even a little better.

Most of the mileage done on motorcaravan tests will be on normal main roads and motorways, and this is all well and good, but (purely in your interests, you understand), I decided to take the Nu Rio to the Lake District for a few days. This would enable it to witness the best (scenically) and worst (gradients, surfaces, etc) roads in England. One day it went up and down Newlands and Honister Passes, whilst another dawn saw it storm Wrynose and Hardknott Passes.

Several motorcaravans we've tested in the past have failed to get up Hardknott - with a spectacular failure in one case, when a large rear overhang caused the 'van's front wheels to leave the ground on the one-in-three

gradient. Others have got so far and simply refused to climb any further, while many others haven't even been given the opportunity to fail on the mountain passes because of the 6ft 6in width restrictions. The Nu Rio performed immaculately, with just a bit of scrabbling for grip on the rutted steeper sections of Hardknott and Honister. On the rest of the twisting lanes in the Lake District it became apparent that only an eejit or a lunatic could get himself in trouble with this motorcaravan.

I have heard some criticism of the new Dispatch to the effect that the power steering is over-assisted, and that there is no 'feel.' Well, it seemed fine to me and when grip on the front wheels did get slightly compromised on the steeper roads this could be felt through the steering wheel - quite obviously. There was a slight 'shimmy' on the transmission under power and a steering wheel tremble at 70mph on the motorway - the latter most likely to be simply a wheel balancing issue.

The power plant is a 2-litre multi-valve diesel, producing some 120bhp and it does need to be understood before you can start to appreciate its abilities. I say this because I got straight out of our 120bhp Fiat Ducato and initially thought the Dispatch was a bit gutless. Whether it's turbo-lag or just that this engine needs a few more revs than the 2.3-litre Ducato unit, I don't know, but once it gets spinning the engine performs very well. Personally, I'd rather have the effortless low-down pull of the bigger engine than the racy nature of this 2-litre unit, but it is certainly no slouch. None of the hills on the motorway going north slowed it down at all in sixth gear, although it was a close run thing driving into the teeth of a gale over Shap fell on the M6.

This is without doubt the most civilised motorhome I've ever driven in terms of low noise levels and was definitely very car-like to use. The gearchange is also excellent and at least the match of the latest Ford Transit. But, just like the Transit, the housing that supports the gearlever obstructs easy passage from the driver's seat into the living quarters.

The brakes were unremarkably effective, which is good, and they did get a thorough testing in the places this little motorhome ventured. Rearward visibility isn't brilliant, due mainly to the door mirrors being more car than





**5** Compact galley is reasonably well equipped

**6** Twin singles will be the easiest and (for many) the preferred sleeping option

**7** There are several ways to kip in the Nu Rio – I found the transverse direction slightly too short

**8** For such a small 'van the lounge area is very spacious, but the dinette is a tad tight

van-like. I thought a one-piece rear door with full-length window would aid rear vision, but unfortunately, existing customers don't agree - Nu Venture motorhomes still have a stack of one piece doors which customers asked to be removed and replaced with the stable door thing which 'adorned' the back of this Nu Rio.

What else? Storage space in the cab is only reasonable, but is redeemed somewhat by the full-width shelf over the windscreen.

There was one other little test that needed conducting while in steep places... Since the introduction of the new bigger Sevel-built van (the Fiat Ducato/Peugeot Boxer/Citroen Relay are made by the Sevel consortium, as is the Dispatch and its similar siblings),

I've encountered several (including our own Ducato-based camper) with a judder when attempting to reverse up steep hills.

Thankfully, this one went up hills just as sweetly backwards as it did forwards.

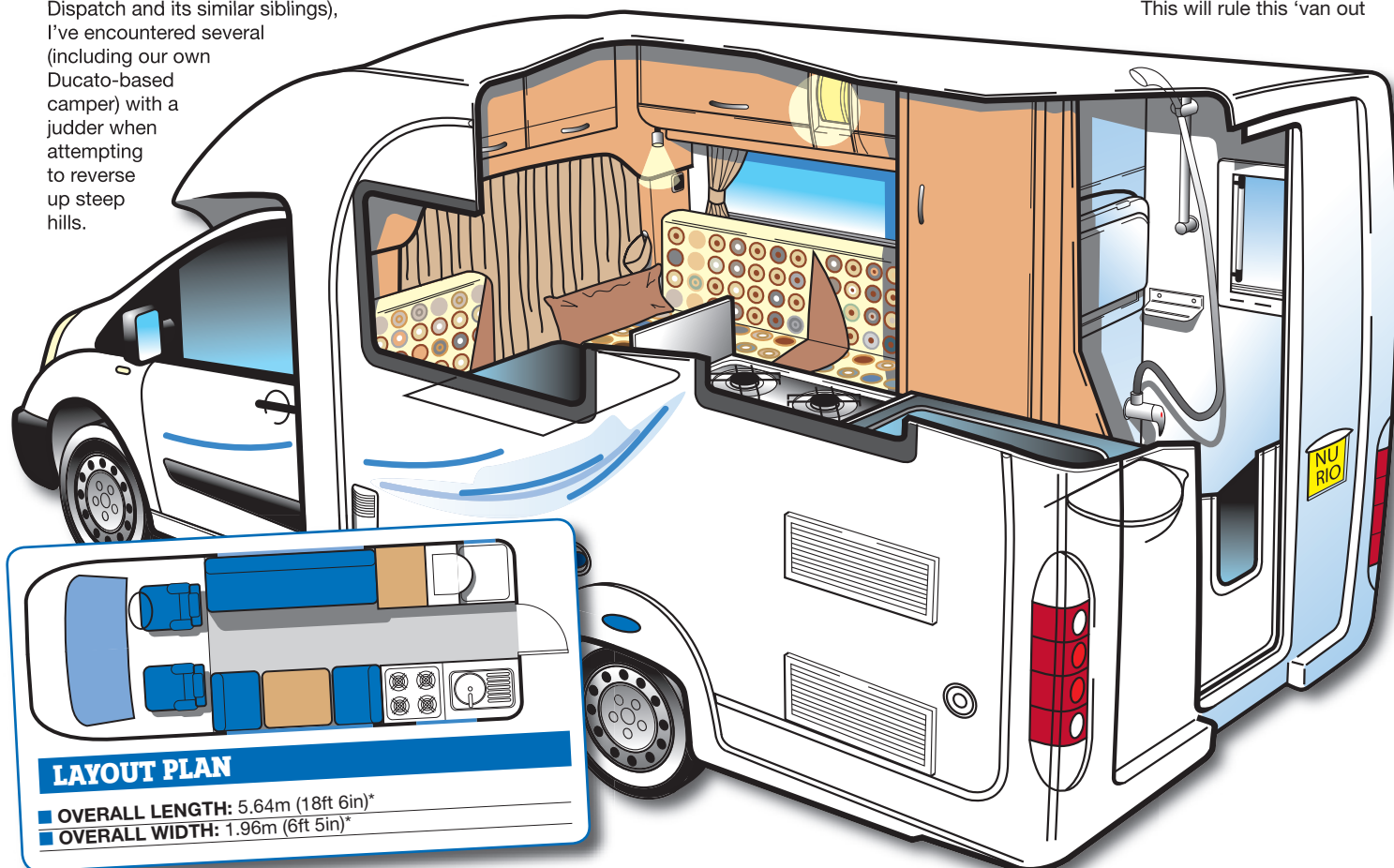
What you can do (all too easily) is forget that this really is a motorhome and start driving it like a car, with the effect that all the scatter cushions end up being well named, while the contents of the cupboards get a good shuffling.

I'm fairly sure that no other coachbuilt motorhome is nicer to drive than the Nu Rio and that includes the even smaller ones based on the Berlingo. So perhaps it does have a niche – the only proper motorhome that truly drives like a big car?

### NOT SO NU LAYOUT

To a certain extent, the limited amount of living space available in the Nu Rio dictates the layout and there is absolutely nothing new or radical about it. The layout consists of a centrally mounted, rear-located entrance door with the toilet compartment on the right and kitchen on the left. Between these two and the cab comes the lounge. There's a small wardrobe next to the washroom, while either side of the aisle in the lounge there's a sofa and a two-seater dinette. It's the simplest way of using the space and probably the best. The only real drawback is that the centrally mounted rear door means that fitting a bike rack is out of the question.

This will rule this 'van out





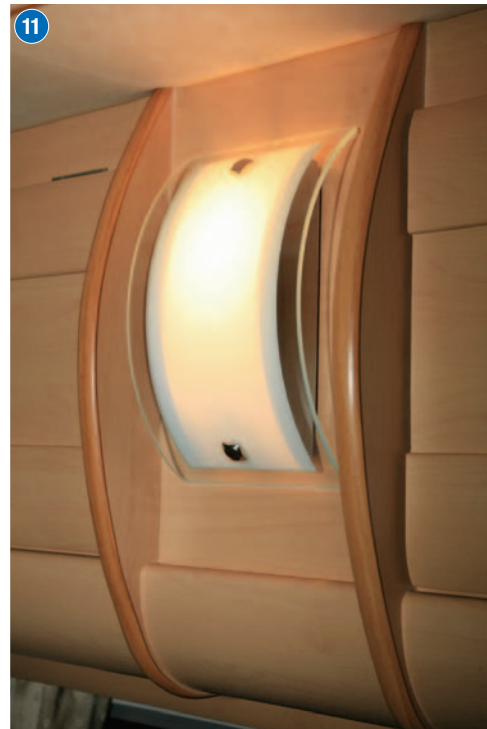
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9 The lower window in the stable door aids reversing



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10 Overcab locker should easily swallow all your bedding



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11 Mains lights are mostly decorative

12 The small washroom functions well and because of the fold-down basin, even the shower is functional

13 Near Buttermere in the English Lakes

for some, but not others. The rear door has certain advantages though: when parked in narrow drives and car parking spaces, there's always a door easily available. It also means those long lengths of timber can be transported from the wood yard. So there it is: one of the oldest layouts in the book, but still one of the most versatile.

## NU MAN IN RIO

Normally speaking, I'd be introducing some amorous causticity into things at this stage by commenting on some ludicrously female approach to our travelling life from my boss, Attila the Absent. But this test cropped up when the weather was absolutely foul - and she claimed that shopping/hair-washing commitments meant she couldn't spare four days for 'swanning about in the Lake District.' So, I went off on my tod. I forgot everything except the Scotch and cameras, and, to be

truthful, I wasn't quite as well organised as usual: strange that, because it's her who forgets everything when we're out together.

Cooking comes first, and things worked out reasonably well in this department. The kitchen sink is a modern stainless steel black glass-topped affair with a full-size drainer and a fold-down mixer tap in its circular bowl. Personally, I don't like any kind of lid on the sink as it means we have to find somewhere else to store the washing up bowl, which we use at site facilities. But, as usual in small motorcaravans, space availability tends to make these decisions and the lidded approach is probably appropriate here with worktop space at a premium.

The cooker is a four-burner Smev unit with grill below and once you've boddged-up some sort of platform to raise the grill pan to optimum toasting height, this particular feature works very well. There is no oven as standard,

but the same cooker with built-in oven appears on the options list. However, fitting the oven will entail losing the biggest and most useful food storage cupboard, so some thought needs to go into the decision.

The fridge isn't the biggest available either, but should prove adequate for two in normal use. Work surfaces are almost non-existent, but a fold-up flap on the end of the kitchen unit helps out a little here, while the table can be pressed into service as a butty-making platform if need be.

If the Nu Rio was a huge leviathan of a thing I'd probably be complaining gleefully about the lack of worktops and oven, but it isn't and, all things considered, the kitchen is as good as can reasonably be expected in something this size. In fact it's actually much better than in some motorcaravans, which are a lot bigger and more expensive. The only real whinge I have about the kitchen is that the cutlery drawer is a bit mean and it snags on the rear door's blind casings if opened fully.

Ventilation above and around the kitchen is adequate with a five-way vent in the roof above, an opening window behind the cooker and the adjacent entrance door available, should things get seriously steamed up. Lighting in this area of the 'van, and throughout, is excellent.

## RINSING IN RIO

The washroom in the Nu Rio is of the minimalist variety. Not so much minimal in what it provides, but it definitely uses a minimal amount of space inside the body shell. The combination of folding sink and bench-type cassette toilet (with wheel-equipped cassette) has enabled the converter to fit a shower of almost usable proportions.

I didn't test it because I couldn't be bothered with all the wiping down afterwards (and it's possible to order the Nu Rio without the shower), but it's there and it'll do the job if there is no easier option.

Everything in this small room is made of startlingly white plastic, but in a space so small it definitely helps to make it feel bigger



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than the tape measure suggests. Storage space for toothpaste and soap etc is limited to a small mirror-fronted cabinet - the likes of which I haven't seen for years - so not all your bathroom bits and bobs will fit in here. Ventilation in the small room is by a top-hinged opening window, but as this is of the see-through variety (not opaque) then there will be no ventilation whilst the bathroom is occupied. There is a supply problem with small opaque Seitz windows apparently - we cured the same problem in our own camper with translucent window film.

## RELAXING IN RIO

The central lounge in the Nu Rio is also the dining room and only sleeping area. The inward-facing sofa and side dinette exist in a space just over 1.5 metres long and whilst the sofa is a spacious, ever-ready, feet-up lounging place, the dinette, for dining purposes, may prove a bit of a tight fit for larger folk. Perhaps I should have mentioned larger folk before (in the showering arena possibly), but this 'van isn't really designed for big people.

Whether it's in the upward or outward direction, larger specimens will need to measure up carefully before considering buying a Nu Rio. Headroom is 1.86 metres (6ft 1in) throughout, the shower isn't desperately small and the kitchen is spacious enough, but certain aspects of this motorhome will not suit the bigger frame. Getting from the cab seats into the living area is one example, the dinette another, while the beds are certainly not the longest available. The sleeping arrangements are versatile though, with the option of twin singles (leaving the aisle free), a transverse double, or a lengthways

double. The extra length required to achieve the two singles (and longitudinal double) arrives via two small extensions into the cab. For the double, the central aisle is bridged by the sofa backrest cushion. Some 'issues' did arise in these procedures: firstly the big stiff heavy backrest cushion is surplus to requirements if using the two single beds and, besides being awkward to shift, there isn't really anywhere to put it. If it were split, the two sections would then fit in the cab at night. Nu Venture Motorhomes is going to look at this solution.

That big awkward backrest also disturbed my slumbers when fitted into the double bed because its design is almost too smart for its own good - with a cut-out along one side to fit against the window that bits of my body seemed to slide into. That said, I found the single beds fine (if a bit narrow) and the double OK on one side used in longitudinal style. With that huge wooden-backed cushion split into two flatter more manageable sections, this will be a very adaptable and comfy sleeping place for two average length human beings.

## RIO RANT

This is the 'debrief' section where I rant on about anything missed, forgotten, or previously impossible to categorise. I hinted somewhere earlier that the lighting is excellent throughout and it is.

Besides there being four spotlights in the lounge area, there are also two twin-element fluorescent units in the ceiling and two Art Deco-looking mains lights on the upper lockers. I reckon the last are just 'fluff' really (because they aren't very bright), whereas the manufacturer thinks they add a bit of style.

Style without substance is a foreign concept to me, so I'll comment no further, except to say that the Nu Rio is otherwise remarkably free of useless frilly bits.

The kitchen has a total of three halogens and another twin-tube fluorescent, whilst the washroom has another double strip light.

Heating is taken care of by the quiet and efficient Truma E2200 blown-air unit with outlets in the lounge, kitchen and washroom, while the water is warmed by a Truma Ultrastore gas/mains-powered boiler. Predictably, there is a Heki rooflight (one of my pet hates) above the lounge, while all the windows are double-glazed opening units with blinds and flyscreens.

As standard the cab is curtained off completely at night, but swivel cab seats are on options list. Storage potential in the Nu Rio is generally fine, with decent-sized overhead lockers, a large overcab cupboard and a huge void under the sofa, completely uncluttered by tanks or equipment. The only improvement to the storage would be an external access door for chairs or folding bikes etc, plus some struts to assist in the raising of the heavy sofa locker base.

## RIO BRAVO!

The perfect motorhome for many people is something which is small enough to be easily manageable, can explore wherever you fancy and will be economical to run. It will drive in a quiet and civilised fashion, will be functional without being filled with unnecessary 'fluff' and contain all the necessary comforts of home. A bit of a mythical beast then this perfect motorhome? Well yes, but the Nu Rio comes mighty close.



### I STAYED AT

Troutbeck Head Caravan Club Site,  
Troutbeck, Penrith CA11 0SS  
(tel: 01768 483521);  
web site: [www.caravanclub.co.uk](http://www.caravanclub.co.uk)

### VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Nu Venture Motorhomes, Unit 2,  
Seven Stars Road, Wallgate, Wigan,  
Lancashire WN3 5AT (tel: 01942 494090)  
web site: [www.nuventure.co.uk](http://www.nuventure.co.uk)

## LIVE-IN TEST DATA

## NU VENTURE MOTORHOMES NU RIO

### TYPE

Low profile coachbuilt

### PRICE

- **From:** £31,995 OTR
- **As Tested:** £32,496 OTR

### BASICS

- **Vehicle:** Citroen Dispatch long wheelbase platform chassis cab
- **Berths:** 2
- **Three-point belted seats:** 2 (including driver)
- **Warranty:** 3 years base vehicle, 1 year conversion

### CONSTRUCTION

GRP clad sandwich construction sides, GRP overcab moulding, roof, rear panel, skirts, wheel arches, transition panels

### DIMENSIONS (\*manufacturers figures)

- **Length:** 5.64m (18ft 6in)\*
- **Width:** 1.96m (6ft 5in)\*
- **Height:** 2.54m (8ft 4in)\*
- **Wheelbase:** 3.10m (10ft 2in)
- **Rear Overhang:** 1.63m (5ft 4in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 2932kg\*
- **Payload:** 600kg\* (after allowance for the vehicle in running order)

### INSIDE STORY

Front lounge/diner, rear offside wardrobe and washroom, rear nearside kitchen, entrance door centrally located in rear panel

- **Insulation:** Roof 34mm, floor 20mm, walls 25mm,
- **Interior height:** 1.86m (6ft 1in)

### THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2-litre turbo-diesel producing 88kW (120bhp) @ 4000rpm
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Fuel consumption:** 34.1mpg overall
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round
- **Suspension:** Front: independent with constant ride height.  
Rear: independent pneumatic

- **Features:** Driver's airbag, ABS, remote central locking, electric windows, satnav, height-adjustable seats, reach and height-adjustable steering column, radio/CD player with steering column-mounted controls, overhead storage shelf

### LOUNGING AND DINING

Longitudinal sofa on offside, two-seater Pullman dinette opposite

### KITCHEN

- Two upper lockers, two lower storage cupboards, integrated cutlery drawer
- **Sink:** Circular stainless steel unit with drainer, hinged glass lid, chrome mixer tap
- **Cooker:** Smev stainless steel four-burner hob with integrated grill and hinged glass cover
- **Fridge:** Dometic RM4213S three-way. Capacity 60 litres

### WASHROOM

Fold-down washbasin, chrome mixer tap, small mirror fronted cabinet, shower tray floor, shower mixer tap with riser-rail-mounted head, Thetford electric-flush bench-type toilet with separate flush tank and wheeled cassette

### BEDS

- *Longitudinal singles*
- **Length:** 1.88m (6ft 2in)
- **Width:** 730mm (2ft 5in)
- *Alternative transverse double*
- **Length:** 1.86m (6ft 1in)
- **Width:** 1.57m (5ft 2in)
- *Second alternative longitudinal double*
- **Length:** 1.88m (6ft 2in)
- **Width:** 1.86m (6ft 1in)

### STORAGE

- **Dinette and lounge:** Four overhead lockers, top-accessed space under rear dinette seat, front and top-accessed space beneath sofa, overcab cupboard through top-hinged locker doors.
- **Wardrobe:** Centrally-located with single door and side-to-side hanging rail.

### LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Underslung. Capacity 50 litres

(11 gallons)

- **Waste water:** Underslung. Capacity 50 litres (11 gallons)
- **Water Heater:** Truma Ultrastore boiler, mains-gas operation
- **Space Heater:** Truma Trumatic E2200 with blown-air, gas-only operation
- **Leisure battery:** 85 amp hr
- **Gas:** Capacity 2 x 7kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** Lounge: Two 230V units on upper lockers, two twin-tube fluorescent fittings on ceiling, four halogen spotlights in corners of lounge area. Kitchen: adjustable twin-filament halogen downlighter above cooker and sink, halogen downlighter and twin-tube fluorescent fittings on ceiling. Washroom: twin-tube fluorescent fitting on ceiling.
- **Sockets:** 230V: 1 (on wall adjacent to kitchen and lounge). 12V: 1 (on wall adjacent to kitchen and lounge)
- **Control panel:** Mounted in upper lockers above kitchen; displays vehicle/leisure battery voltage, fresh/waste water tank levels. Includes 12V master switch and controls for battery selection, water pump, auxiliary equipment, lighting
- **Blinds/curtains:** Seitz cassette blinds and flyscreens to all caravan windows except rear door, which has pull down blinds. Lined curtains to lounge windows and cab partition. flyscreen/blind to Heki rooflight above lounge, and five-way vent above kitchen
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** No

### OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** None
- **Conversion:** TV aerial (£106), TV/DVD player (£395)
- *Other options*
- **Base:** All Citroen options can be ordered at manufacturer's prices
- **Conversion:** Fire extinguisher (£25), extra 12V socket (£32), extra 230V socket (£38), cooker with oven (£320), cat 1 alarm (£500), reversing kit (£330)

