

Good rear lounge designs give residents great relaxation and an ultimate panorama - lovely views become an ever-changing treat, consumed from the comfort of your favourite sofa



hat is it about the rear lounge-equipped motorcaravan?
Exciting? Not very...
Radical? Nope... Different?
Not really... Unexpected?
Nope... No matter, though,

rear lounge designs in British 'vans are a staple of most UK converters for a good reason, and that's because they suit our needs - motorcaravanning, as we do, in the fickle climate that makes the weather a conversation starter on many a campsite. Panel vans, overcab and low profile coachbuilts - there are plenty of motorcaravans out there so equipped; the

basic design is as old as the hills that you'll be able to get a very good view of when relaxing in any of 'em.

If your motorhoming might involve lots of indoor relaxing, reading, watching telly, or gazing out of big windows at views and assorted furry and feathery varmints, rear lounge layouts should be high on your to-see list.

This month it's a pair of low profiles, each with aft end relaxing spaces, each from respected UK firms, each in the mid-to-high end of the price and range spectrums. It's not just the layout that's traditional here either - the converters are too: Autocruise is renowned for producing understated designs





(with little showroom bling) that work well. Even after the recent Swift Group takeover, Autocruise has kept both its own factory and separate model ranges - proof positive that Autocruise is a product worth its salt. Auto-Sleepers continues to provide top-end traditional motorhomes aimed at a traditional customer base - a recent management buyout at the firm, hopefully, reinforcing the company's foundations for the future.

Both contenders are good lookers, but different in character. The Auto-Sleeper Broadway is curvier - so much so that it suits the lines of the Peugeot Boxer cab better than the Autocruise Stardream, with its rather square-looking flanks. The Stardream isn't

based on the Boxer though, but on cousin, Fiat Ducato.

Step onboard and you discover layouts that are almost the same: forward-located caravan doors reveal washrooms and kitchens up front, with those all-important lounges taking up all of the aft end space.

MOTIVE POWER

Differences between these two lie in the motivation and support departments: different engines and chassis share coachwork and mechanics that are otherwise identical, apart from Italian and French

monikers. The Stardream first, and here the Fiat Ducato's mid-range 2.3-litre motor kicks out 130 horsepower driving the front wheels through a six-speed gearbox. The Broadway's Peugeot lump provides 130 gee gees too, but does it with 100ccs less capacity. The transmission, however is the same six-speed box of cogs as its rival.

LAYOUT PLAN

OVERALL LENGTH: 6.28m (20ft 7.5in)

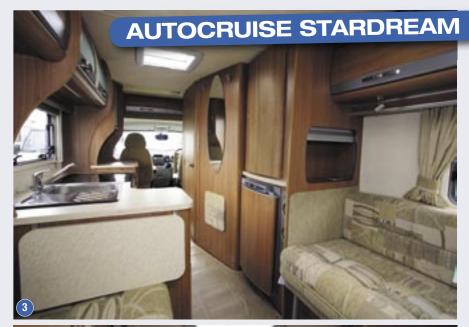
OVERALL WIDTH: 2.32m (7ft 2.5in)

To support then, and it's here that we discover the biggest disparity. Stardream gets the sexiest motorhome chassis award, as it's supported by the multi-talented Al-Ko replacement rear frame: it's lower, while its rear axle sports a wide track, and benefits from independent suspension. The Al-Ko setup also provides a longer wheelbase. Broadway gets a special chassis too - the Peugeot camper specific frame is also lower (though not so low as the Al-Ko product) and has a wider rear track - than standard - too, but rides on a rigid axle with (technical-as-abrick) cart springs.

Back to transmissions, and lovers of, or those who need, an automatic gearbox will - here - have to make the choice to become a Stardream owner. Only the Autocruise offers the (expensive) option of an auto 'box, and only then with the 3.0-litre (157bhp)



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- 3 Stardream's interior is lighter-coloured than its rival, but still very stylish
- 4 Like the Broadway, Stardream's washroom and wardrobe sit on the offside
- 5 The dining table benefits from dedicated stowage behind the driver's seat

I LIKED

- Al-Ko chassis with low stance
- Big comfy lounge
- Dedicated table storage
- Excellent kitchen
- Separate shower
- Through-locker with dual outside access

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

A passenger airbag as standard

I DISLIKED

■ Poor rear view camera and obstructive monitor

engine option. The ComfortMatic is actually an automated manual affair, but it drives - with two pedals - just like a traditional 'slush-box,' albeit in a less slushy (read less smooth) manner. No chance of an auto in the Broadway - Peugeot, it's said, put no development money into the ComfortMatic, so was denied the chance to offer it. Seems like politics comes out tops over making money in the Sevel partnership organisation that builds both vehicles.

ROAD MANNERS

Gentlemen (and gentlewomen) start your engines! Both will prove to be free-revving, willing, powerful and quite quiet, although the Broadway's Peugeot unit is a tad harsher and more vocal than the Stardream's Fiat lump. Driving these Sevel-built vehicles never ceases to amaze me, such is their friendly nature. A great driving position, comfy, adjustable seats, superb mirrors and light controls all conspire to make even long journeys a breeze. I was also pleased to discover that both driver's seats could be moved back far enough to get comfy, in spite of the washroom wall (dining table stowage slot too, in the Stardream) being directly behind. Cab kit is similar, with the Broadway's standard passenger airbag and central locking extended to the caravan door, earning it points. It's a mini obsession of mine that passenger airbags should be standard in all motorhomes - after all it's probably true that there'll almost always be a second person in the cab.

More differences are down to those rear chassis. The Al-Ko frame provides (in part, thanks to the fact that it's lower) better handling than its rival - its independent suspension means that the ride is a touch more complaint too. That's not to say that the Broadway did not handle fine - it did, but with a harsher ride and more body-roll when cornering. As two different firms made the motorhome bodies it was difficult to quantify the influence each chassis had on conversion noise. You might expect that the Stardream's more compliant Al-Ko rear would be help reduce noise, but actually, there was little difference in the din coming from the rears when driving. The usual sink lid, cooker lid, oven/grill rattles were there, but the rest of the living area's internals behaved themselves reasonably well, falling into the 'acceptable, to quite good' category regarding noise generation.

With rear lounges, both 'vans provide some through vision via internal mirrors, so I was surprised to see a reversing camera fitted to the Stardream. I was even more surprised to see that its in-cab monitor was the type

that fits over the internal mirror. Sure, the surface of the screen is reflective enough to be used for rear vision when the camera is turned off, but the whole set up just seemed like overkill. The view from the camera when in reverse wasn't up to much either.

Finally, the thorny subject of vibration when reversing. With identical gearboxes there should have been little difference between these two. However... Broadway reversed perfectly, leading me to conclude that its base vehicle was of more recent manufacture, and after modifications to the gearbox had been introduced. The Stardream, however, produced a shudder when going astern that caused me to shudder too. Stardream's base was probably produced before the gearbox mods kicked in, but the good news is that these mods will be carried out by Fiat if any owner reports the problem (as long as the warranty is still in force). As always, do not buy any motorcaravan unless you have first taken a good test drive... ... in both directions!

LOUNGE AND DINE

To the raison d'être: both reason-to-buy lounges are surrounded by stylish furniture - silver trimmed and good looking, and a touch darker and richer in the Broadway. Both sport neutral fabrics that have a nice quality feel: cosiness is enhanced by 'proper' curtains at the windows. Stardream's relaxing space is a wraparound, U-shaped affair, while Broadway places a useful chest of drawers between its two sofas.

Both these lounges are difficult to criticise, as they're very comfy indeed, surrounded by those all-important windows and lit and ventilated by Heki rooflights. Feet-up lounging is guaranteed in both, while telly watchers in the Stardream benefit from a tambour-doored locker (in the side of the adjacent wardrobe) that conceals the set when it's not being used. This has the added benefit of improving security. I failed to find a dedicated TV space in the Broadway, but the presence of an aerial (and its amplifier in the wardrobe) led me to believe that the best place for a set would be on the side of the wardrobe. Of course, you'd need to pack it away when it's not being used - for security reasons at the very least.

These lounges provide dining spaces too, and freestanding tables to eat from. Stardream makes a better fist of this set up, as it provides dedicated table stowage just aft of the driver's seat. Broadway stows its table in the wardrobe - okay, but involving ferreting through hanging clothes come dinnertime.

But there's more to sitting and eating in both these motorhomes than first meets the eye. Firstly, Broadway's chest of drawers has

I LIKED

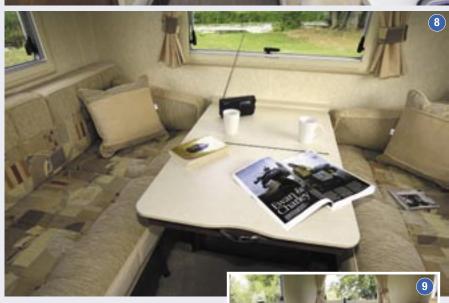
- Curvy coachwork
- Passenger airbag
- Big comfy lounge
- Clever oven
- Chest of drawers in lounge

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Better washroom storage
- I DISLIKED
- Gas locker location







6 Rich wood colours and light coloured cloth make a good combination

7 Looking aft sees washroom and wardrobe on the offside. The lounge's twin sofas are bisected by a handy chest with hidden talents

- 8 The chest's top slides and flips to provide a multi-use surface, good enough for dining
- 9 Freestanding dining table works well, but its home in the wardrobe can be a nuisance





10 Stardream's kitchen is more than a match for Broadway's

11 A perfectly ordinary washroom, but one that should work very well hidden talents, as its top slides and folds open to provide a surface that two residents could easily use for all their dining needs. Needless to say, this is also a good location for laptop and gaming activities. Up front, both provide swivelling cab seats as part of the living space. Quite often, with this design, cab seats play no part in providing on-site facilities, so I was quite surprised to discover that both 'vans do.

Broadway tries to do better here, as there's a second, smaller table (that also stows in the wardrobe with its pedestal leg) that sets up between the cab seats. I guess, as a coffee/snack table is its intended use, and it's a good idea, especially - with good weather and lounging taken outside - you could leave the lounge made up as bedroom. However, entry and egress from the swivelled driver's seat is tight: expect to sit here, deploy the table and stay to be served by your significant other. Stardream's swivelled cab seats merely function as

additional pews; again, the driver's seat tucked around the corner - is less usable.

COOK'S QUARTERS

Both kitchens are very well equipped, but different in character, and in the way that they provide cooking and 'wet' facilities.

It's here, more than anywhere that Autocruise's reputation for producing sensibly designed 'vans that work well is most obvious. Autocruise kitchens are mostly very good, and this one's no exception. A fullsized stove (with three gas burners and one electric hotplate on its hob) forms the heart of Stardream's galley, flanked by a very sensible sink/drainer, and further forward (ahead of the caravan door) a separate unit with a big slab of worktop - locker above (fitted out for bottles and glasses), and drawers below.

The main unit boasts worktop in front of the sink and a flip-up surface. Plenty of working surface and in fact, more than my kitchen at home! Plenty of drawers and

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

PRICES

- From: £47,996 OTR ■ As tested: £47,996 OTR
- BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)
- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle & conversion
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: GRP clad sandwich with ABS/GRP mouldings
- Length: 6.85m (22ft 5.5in)*
 Width: 2.22m (7ft 3.5in)*
- Height: 2.71m (8ft 10.5in)*
- Wheelbase: 4.44m (14ft 7in) ■ Rear overhang: 1.40m (4ft 7in)
- Gross vehicle weight: 3500kg
- Payload: 345kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg and 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, gas)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Fiat Ducato Al-Ko chassis cab
- Engine: 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 130bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS
- Suspension: Front: independent on coil springs. Rear: independent on torsion bar
- Features: Door pockets, central storage locker, flip-up map holder, radio/CD player with rear speakers, trip computer, electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking, driver's airbag

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats ahead of offside washroom, wardrobe, nearside kitchen, U-shaped lounge in rear. Caravan door on UK nearside
- Insulation: Floor 63mm, walls 32mm, roof 31mm
- Interior height: 1.93m (6ft 4in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Stainless steel, with drainer and swivelling chromed mixer tap
- Cooker: Spinflo Caprice domestic-style stove with 3 gas burners, 1 electric hotplate, grill and oven, all with electronic ignition
- Fridge: Thetford three-way with auto energy selection (SES). Capacity 107 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford C200 electric-flush, swivel-bowl cassette
- Basin: Matt finish D-shaped bowl with counter space, swivelling chromed mixer tap

AUTOCRUISE STARDREAM

Shower: Separate compartment with twin-outlet tray, rigid bi-fold door, mixer, riser rail, wire shelves

BEDS

Lounge singles

Length: 1.88m (6ft 2in)Width: 700mm (2ft 3.5in) Alternative Lounge double

Length: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in) ■ Width: 1.88m (6ft 2in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water tank: Underslung, insulated 94 litres (20.6 gallons)
- Waste water tank: Underslung 73 litres (15.4 gallons)
- Water and space heating: Truma combi boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- Leisure battery: 100 amp hr
- Gas: 1 x 7kg and 1 x 13kg cylinders
- Lighting: Lounge: 4 adjustable LED spots, 1 LED ceiling lamp. Kitchen: 1 fluorescent strip, 1 LED ceiling lamp. Adjacent to caravan door: 1 LED downlighter. Washroom: 2 adjustable LED spots, 2 LED downlighters in shower. Cab: 2 halogen downlighters. LED strip awning light
- Sockets: 230V: 3 (2 in kitchen, 1 in TV locker). 12V: 1(in TV locker)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

Base: None

Conversion: None Other options available

- Base: Upgrade to 157bhp engine with Comfort-Matic auto gearbox (£3775), as part of Lux Pack - air-conditioning cruise control, alarm, reversing sensors (£1495), alloy wheels (£597), tracking system (£638)
- Conversion: As part of Lux Pack wind-out awning (price as above), roof rack and ladder (£587), Winter Pack - tank heaters, waste drain insulation, fridge vent covers (£190)

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cupboards too, although the drawers felt a tad more flimsy than the Broadway's. Located across the aisle (and below the wardrobe), the fridge boasts good capacity and switch-on-and-forget automatic energy selection. Broadway's cooking kit consists of a separate four-burner (all gas) hob and separate oven. Above, there's a 'hole' fitted out to take a microwave.

Ups and downs here, as - tut-tut - the hob has no spark ignition, but the oven is very interesting. It's a combi oven/grill unit by Spinflo - the interesting bit is the fact that its drop-down door slides into its base - and out of the way - when open. I've seen this unit before, and I was impressed enough want one in my own (self-designed) camper. Sadly, there wasn't enough room.

Broadway's sink is a glass-lidded drainerless affair, but it does have a drop-in cutting board that should double up as a drainer. I say should, as Auto-Sleepers had fitted the tap in a position that prevented the drainer lining up on its location slots. Oh dear. There are no drawers in the main kitchen unit, but thankfully there are some across the aisle. Another auto energy selection fridge (also of good capacity) is present and correct. Auto-Sleeper enthusiasts will be pleased to discover the set of signature crocks in an upper locker, but maybe disappointed to find just one mains socket.

BATHING SPACE

It's worth mentioning, at this point, that the Stardream is around half a metre (20 inches) longer than the Broadway - a linear generosity that makes a difference to space in Stardream's kitchen and also, its washroom. The extra room allows Stardream to have an entirely standard bathing space, complete with separate shower. The vestibule contains a strong, deep basin that incorporates counter space for potions, while there's plenty of floor space, including when using the (not too high) toilet. Above, a



12 The galley includes a clever oven with slide-away door

13 Washroom storage is lacking, as is a place to put things down. Swing-wall helps create a separate shower

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

AUTO-SLEEPER BROADWAY EL DUO

PRICES

- From: £48,995 OTR
- As tested: £50,217 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle, conversion 2 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: GRP clad sandwich with GRP mouldings
- Length: 6.28m (20ft 7.5in)*
- Width: 2.32m (7ft 2.5in)*
- Height: 2.86m (9ft 4.5in)* ■ Wheelbase: 3.45m (11ft 4in)
- Rear overhang: 1.83m (6ft 0in)
- Gross vehicle weight: 3500kg
- Payload: 548kg

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Peugeot Boxer Camper chassis cab
- Engine: 2.2-litre TD producing 130bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS
- Suspension: Front: independent on coil springs. Rear: rigid axle on leaf springs
- Features: Door pockets, central storage locker, flip-up map holder, radio/CD player, trip computer, electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking, cab air-conditioning, dash trim, cruise control, driver and passenger airbags, ASR

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab passenger seat ahead of offside washroom, wardrobe, nearside kitchen, twin-sofa lounge in rear
- Insulation: Floor 40mm, walls & roof 30mm
- Interior height: 1.96m (6ft 5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Square stainless steel bowl with Chinchilla glass lid, drop-in drainer/cutting board, clip-on drainer basket, chromed mixer tap
- Cooker: Four-burner hob with Chinchilla glass lid -no ignition, Spinflo oven/grill with slide-in door (when open), interior light and electronic ignition

Fridge: Thetford three-way, with auto energy selection (SES). Capacity 96 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford C200 electric-flush, swivelbowl, cassette with built-in flush water tank
- Basin: Plastic bowl moulded onto swingwall, chromed mixer tap
- Shower: Swing-wall places basin over toilet and creates shower compartment with twinoutlet tray, rigid door, riser rail, mixer, soap dispenser, moulded-in shelf

BEDS

Lounge singles

- Length: 1.93m (6ft 4in)
- Width: 710mm (2ft 4in) Alternative lounge double
- Length: 2.11m (6ft 11in) ■ Width: 1.37m (4ft 6in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water tank: Underslung 78 litres (17 gallons)
- Waste water tank: Underslung 53 litres (11.6 gallons)
- Water and space heating: Truma combi boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- Leisure battery: 100 amp hr
- Gas: 3 x 7kg cylinders
- Lighting: Lounge: 1 fluorescent ceiling lamp, 2 adjustable halogen spots, 6 adjustable LED spots. Kitchen: 2 fluorescent ceiling lamps, 1 under-locker fluorescent ceiling lamp. Washroom: 2 fluorescent ceiling lamps. Awning lamp
- Sockets: 230V: 3 (cab, kitchen, lounge). 12V: 1 (kitchen)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Optional Pack 1 cab airconditioning, alloy wheels (£1222)
- Conversion: None

Other options available

■ Base: Alloy wheels (£400)

■ Conversion: None

E&OE





- 14 Creating the single beds sees the cab filled with spare cushions
- 15 Double bed is very big, flat and comfy
- 16 Tambour-doored TV locker is a convenient feature that improves security
- 17 Through locker at the rear is good for long items - skis mavbe







wooden locker offers enough accommodation for the potions, toilet rolls and the like.

The shower is a good size, and enclosed by rigid doors. Only downside is the clear window. Okay, you can close the blind, but what's the point of a window (to let in light) if you have to close the blind when using the room? I'm told that translucent stick-on plastic is available for windows - half a metre of same would be on my shopping list if I owned a Stardream.

Broadway's washroom is of a design found in quite a few other Auto-Sleeper products, and it's more radical than its rival. This bathing space is based around a swing-wall design, which - when you've hinged the washbasin-equipped wall across - creates a separate showering area. Clever, but flawed, sums it up as there's nowhere to put anything down (other than on the toilet lid) and the ridge in the floor (created to separate the shower tray) is a tad uncomfortable on the feet. Storage, too, is lacking with just a - slippery - plastic cabinet to hold all your ablution requirements. I am being picky here, as this washroom works okay - it's just not as good as Stardream's. Remember, however, that the Broadway is a more compact 'van and something's got to give.

BED TIME

Sleeping space in both the Stardream and Broadway is versatile, as both offer either a double or two single beds. Singles are very easy to make in both, simply remove backrests and you're done. Broadway's chest of drawers, meanwhile, makes the perfect night table. However, all those backrest cushions (more in the Stardream, as there's no space-filling chest of drawers) have to go somewhere, and the cab is really the only home for 'em. Call me lazy, but lugging the lot forward proved painful. Of course, this situation will be similar in any 'van with a similar layout. The double beds are made in the same way too: bed bases slide together, backrests drop in and you're done. This time there's no particular need to move the remainder of the cushions as they sit, out of the way, at the rear. Thanks to well designed upholstery all the beds should be comfy, reversing the cushions should also help to level out any annoying undulations. Bedding storage can be in overcab lockers if your bedding isn't too bulky, or under the lounge seating if there's more of it.

STORE ROOM

Plenty of overhead lockers, decent wardrobes and good amounts of under-seat storage are present in both 'vans, with the Broadway's chest of drawers and external 'belly' locker gaining points. Stardream hits back with a through locker at the rear (with external doors on both sides) that's good for long items windbreaks, skis, that kind of thing. Broadway loses marks though, by locating its gas locker in one of the sofa bases.

Most things that the touring couple will want should be able to be stored away without too many problems, although outdoor furniture will need to be selected to fit the space on offer. As is often the case, the largest of chairs will, most likely, not fit any of the lockers in either 'van: fans of Lafuma Relaxers take note.

Payload next. Both are based on an everyone-can-drive-it 3500kg chassis, but Broadway's mass in running order is some 200kg more than its rival.

However, Stardream quotes its payload after taking into consideration the weight of the driver and 90 per cent fuel water and gas, Broadway simply quotes, 'maximum user payload.' It's laudable that Autocruise uses what is an industry standard (especially for Continental 'vans) to calculate load capacity and a shame that Auto-Sleepers does not. The bottom line is some time with a calculator adding up weights and a trip to a weighbridge with the 'van.

LIFE SUPPORT

Lights first, and the presence of LED powered lamps in both 'vans is a welcome sight - such is their energy-saving talent, along with their cool running and long life. Stardream has all LEDs apart from the two reading lamps in the cab, which are halogen incandescent. Broadway has a pair of halogens too - this time in the lounge - but mixes LEDs with (just as efficient) fluorescents.

Heating and hot water is by Truma combi in both Autocruise and Auto-Sleeper - both running on gas and mains electricity. Unusually, the Broadway's gas locker takes three 7kg cylinders, while Stardream accepts one 13kg and one 7kg cylinder.

To tanks, and both fresh and waste are underslung, with the Stardream's the more capacious. The 'Dream scores even more points, as its fresh tank is insulated.

CONCLUSION

Two very capable British motorhomes should suit the needs and desires of the average, or not so average, British motorcaravanner well. Both are good quality vehicles and very well equipped. There's little to choose between their reason-to-buy lounges, both are very nice indeed, while the comfy ambience of both should make even dreary days seem nicer. The Autocruise Stardream scores marks for its better kitchen and washroom, albeit at the expense of its greater overall length. Broadway offers more dining solutions, while Stardream's neat TV locker is nice feature.

Stardream is a touch cheaper too, although not enough to make buying a Broadway a deal breaker. Buy either 'van (the choice will probably come down to personal taste and/or driveway space) and you'll probably enjoy touring and living in it, although enthusiastic cooks and showering-in-the-'van fans will probably choose the Stardream. Finally, bear in mind that if you do want an automatic gearbox it'll have to be the Autocruise too.

VEHICLES LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

Autocruise Stardream Marquis Motorhomes,

Mill Avon Holiday Park, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL20 5SW (tel:01684 296 222;

web site: www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk)

Auto-Sleeper Broadway EL Duo Marquis Motorhomes, The Causeway, Great Billing, Northampton, Northants NN3 9EX (tel: 01604 402 888; web site: www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk)





18 Single beds easy to make, chest makes a good night table

19 Big double is reasonably flat and comfy

