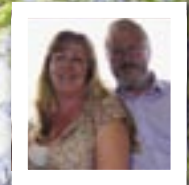


LIVING WITH A...

...1999 Herald Squire 400E



Donna and Phil Garner sold a classic yacht, went camping, then fell in love with Monty



My husband Phil and I had lived happily on a classic wooden yacht for eight years, the first five or so of those years with the younger two of my three teenage children. However, by 2009 the crew, sorry the children, had all flown the nest. We soon realised that the yacht was shortly going to be too big for just the two of us to handle and started to look for alternatives.

We had re-discovered a love of camping in 2008, but soon started to wonder about the advantages of motorhomes. This usually happened whilst sitting in the living area of our rather small tent, watching Phil cooking in the doorway and trying to avoid getting too much rain in the pasta.

YOUR HOME GOES TOO

The similarity to yachting was obvious: you take your home with you and have quite a large amount of freedom in where you travel, but without the tides or gale warnings. Yes, this had definite possibilities! We had hired a motorhome for a short period whilst touring in Australia a few years ago, and we'd loved the whole concept of the freedom and spontaneity of travelling where and when we wanted.

After much discussion and heart-searching, our yacht was listed with a broker and we began researching motorhomes. It took 18 months to find a buyer and we put that time to good use.

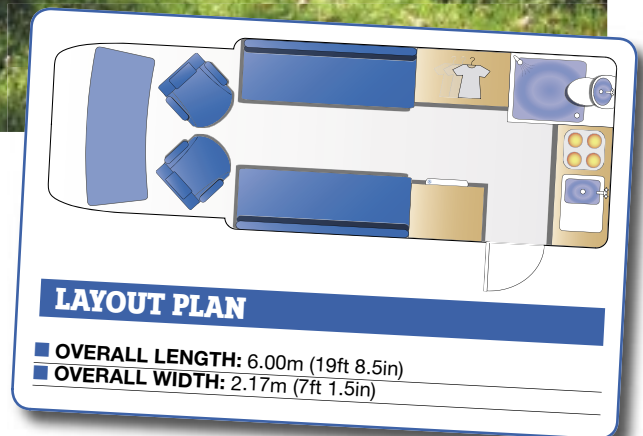
We had a fairly clear idea about our ideal layout – eight years living in the relatively small

space of a classic yacht had honed our requirements – but we wanted to keep an open mind. We looked at everything from pop-tops and panel van conversions, to the hugest Winnebago-style RV and fifth wheelers. In the end, we decided that six to seven metres was the optimum length for comfortable living, without being so big that we would worry too much about narrow country lanes or parking issues.

Our initial deliberations had us settling on either a U-shaped rear lounge or, my particular favourite, a Lunar with rear bench seats and little flip-top table in between them. However, a chance meeting led us to consider an end kitchen layout instead. We definitely wanted an overcab coachbuilt and, although we didn't envisage ourselves clambering up and down a ladder (not with Phil's dodgy knees), we knew it would be invaluable for storage, not to mention for the occasional visit from an offspring or two.

MEETING MONTY

Finally, at the end of August 2009, the ideal buyer was found for our yacht *Misty Morn* and off we went, with money in our sweaty little hands (well, in the bank actually) to search in earnest. For peace of mind, we had decided to purchase through a dealer, and had been to Martins of Exeter on numerous occasions; the sales staff had always been friendly and helpful, even though they knew we wouldn't be in a



position to buy until we had sold the yacht.

We did our usual stroll around the site and went inside a Ford Herald Squire 400E, looked around, looked at each other and said: "This is it! We've found our 'van!'" It was perfect, and although 10 years old, was in very good condition and had obviously been well cared for. A mutually agreeable deal was struck, which included the fitting of a bike rack, and arrangements were made for the collection date of 'Monty', as our new motorhome was promptly christened.

VITAL STATISTICS

Monty is based on a Ford Transit, with a 2.5-litre turbo diesel motor and five-speed gearbox. Weighing in at a modest 3,300kg, including a very practical 720kg payload, and measuring just 6.00m long and 2.17m wide, he is the ideal size.

The cab seats are very comfortable: both are adjustable and have two armrests, making for a relaxing drive, even on long journeys. The only downside is the lack of airbags and a CD player – instead, a radio/tape combination. The

WE LIKED

- The freedom!
- Light and airy feel
- Comfortable seating/beds
- Roomy kitchen and prep area
- Spacious overcab
- Excellent driving position
- Having a spare wheel

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A flyscreen for the door
- More skylights for better ventilation

WE DISLIKED

- Lack of external access to storage

- 1 The lounge is comfy and the free-standing table can be used outside
- 2 The overcab bed makes a capacious storage space
- 3 A giant double, or two single beds can be made
- 4 Kitchen includes decent sink and plenty of cupboards
- 5 The fridge unit's worktop is a boon
- 6 We don't shower in the washroom
- 7 Playa Arenillas site, Islares, northern Spain



radio reception is good however, and we could fit a new radio/CD player if we wished.

The storage in the cab is reasonable, with a pocket on the driver's door, a good-sized lockable glove box and a large dashboard well, which is extremely useful for holding all the paraphernalia needed on a journey. Fully laden, we normally expect a fuel consumption of 25mpg and a very comfy ride.

Having suffered the very scary experience of a tyre blow-out on the M5 (luckily it was the nearside front tyre), we are very pleased that we have a spare wheel, which is contained in a wind-down device below the chassis.

STORING TALENTS

The overcab is very spacious and comfortable and access is almost the full width of the vehicle, with a cargo net for safety and curtains to hide all the accumulated junk, erm, possessions. It has one side window with a light overhead. The bed cushions are all

removable and the outer half can be pushed forward for easier access to the cab.

With 510mm headroom, it's not quite high enough to sit up, but as we only use it for storage, that isn't a problem. It amazes me how much stuff fits in there: at the moment we have a double duvet, six pillows, three sleeping bags, a blanket, two large outdoor chairs (for us), one small outdoor chair (for visitors), a stool, an outdoor table, a first aid kit, a box of books, a windscreen cover, a set of Bose speakers, a laptop, an electric piano (for Phil), a guitar (for Phil) and a set of juggling clubs (again for the multi-talented Phil).

INSIDE STORY

Behind the driver and passenger seats are two 1.85-metre bench seats. These were a huge selling point for us, as we like to sit and read with our feet up and this was not possible in the dinette versions we'd seen.

We can comfortably seat six people, if

they're not too large. The two bench seats pull out in a one-third/two-thirds combo, converting to either two single beds, a perfectly adequate double bed, or for fun-loving types, a triple bed!

The space under the offside side is taken up with the gas locker and water tanks. The Carver hot water boiler runs off either mains or gas, and takes 20-30 minutes to heat a full tank of water. The fresh water tanks hold 77 litres. The space under the passenger side seat is empty and so makes a good storage area, although it is only accessible from inside.

There are overhead cupboards all round, along with a double open shelf on each side. After a cupboard door handle came off in my hand, we decided to substitute the slightly flimsy originals with tasteful brass replacements. We are very pleased that the cupboards go right up to the roof, thereby not allowing a dust haven on top... life is too short for dusting!

The upholstery is the only part which shows the age of the vehicle, as it's a little worn, and



so on the list of things to replace, eventually. Also, it's in a rather bold beige/dark red/green pattern, which is nevertheless, quite practical. The moss green carpet and curtains co-ordinate rather well, and it did give me a good excuse to buy new matching cushions! All habitation windows have both flyscreens and blinds.

The wardrobe (and table storage) is on the offside. This provides a good amount of stowage, with shelf and hanging rail. We have come to appreciate the versatility of the free-standing table, although I thought at first I would find it inconvenient having to put the table up and down. But it only takes a moment, and it saves carrying another table for outdoors, although we did buy another free table for casual use.

The Carver Trumatic gas fire is situated beneath the wardrobe and makes the interior very cosy on cold evenings. The side of the wardrobe also houses the battery switches, water tank level indicator and hot water boiler controls.

Opposite the wardrobe and adjacent to the stable-type door is the fridge. This can be run on gas or mains and, when the engine is running, it's powered by 12 volts. It's a good size, with a small icebox.

There are cupboards below, above and to the side, with a handy shelf too. The worktop above is designed to house the television, but we much prefer to listen to the radio, play music or games, read or socialise, so we use this area for food preparation.

Whilst we were researching motorhomes, we were always amazed at how little thought appears to have gone into the kitchen area. We came to the conclusion that they must have been designed by men who don't cook!

STEAMING AWAY

The end kitchen includes a three-burner gas hob, with grill and oven, and a decent-sized oblong sink with drainer. There is a lift-up worktop, which can go over the sink, but as we use the fridge unit's worktop for food preparation, we have access to both the sink and cooker at the same time, which doesn't seem to be the norm in many other models. There is plenty of cupboard space around the kitchen area, with a cutlery drawer below the drainer.

The washroom (with shower) is at the rear offside corner. The Thetford toilet has a 20-litre capacity waste cassette, and this is great if you have a number of days to go between emptying, but it does mean that it is rather heavy when full. We usually carry it between us, as I don't want Phil to put his back out and have to explain why to a chiropractor! If you were a solo emptier, you'd probably want to invest in a trolley, which could always be stored in the spacious overcab!

The washbasin is very large and drops down above the toilet, and it's by far the roomiest we've seen in any motorhome. The shower is arranged in front of the toilet, with a pull-round shower curtain. Although it is reasonably roomy, we prefer to use site facilities - to avoid steaming Monty up too much... I really should rephrase that!

WARMING TO TRAVEL

With plentiful lighting, a roof vent and large windows, Monty has a very light and airy feel inside. However, as we spend much of our time in warmer climes, we would have preferred more skylights. We often park in places where it can be inconvenient to open the windows wide, such as French aires, so we don't always get as

FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Conversion:** 1999 Herald Squire 400E
- **Base vehicle:** Ford Transit chassis cab
- **Power plant:** 2.5-litre turbo diesel, five-speed manual gearbox, rear-wheel drive
- **Gross vehicle weight:** 3,300kg
- **Payload:** 720kg
- **Layout:** Overcab double bed ahead of twin-sofa lounge, offside wardrobe and washroom, nearside fridge unit, across-the-rear kitchen
- **Exterior measurements:** Length 6.00m (19ft 8.5in), width 2.17m (7ft 1.5in), height 2.90m (9ft 6in)
- **Berths:** 5
- **Bed sizes:** Overcab double 2.03m x 2.22m (6ft 8in x 4ft), lounge double/triple 2.03m x 1.85m (6ft 8in x 6ft 1in), alternative singles 1.85m x 1.04m (6ft 1in x 3ft 5in)
- **Length of ownership:** 1 year and 9 months
- **Supplied by:** Martins of Exeter
- **Mileage covered:** 11,300
- **Fuel economy:** 25mpg
- **Accessories/extras:** Fiamma awning, bike rack, spare wheel, TV aerial, winter fridge covers, new tyres
- **Base vehicle service:** £180 (Tancock's Garage)
- **Habitation service:** N/A
- **MoT:** £55 (Tancock's Garage)
- **Recalls:** N/A
- **Insurance:** £338 (Safeguard, with 12-month European cover)
- **Price new today:** Brand and model no longer produced
- **Price of similar aged vehicle today:** £15,995
- **What went wrong:** Tyre blow-out, broken locker handle
- **Further reading:** N/A
- **Contacts:** Martins of Exeter, Clyst Road, Sandygate, Exeter, Devon EX2 7JL Tel: 01392-446250 Web: www.martinsofexeter.co.uk
- **Tancock's Garage Ltd**, Unit 16-17 Kestrel Business Park, Kestrel Way, Exeter, Devon EX2 7JS Tel: 01392-445242 Web: www.tancocksgarageltd.co.uk
- **Safeguard Insurance** Tel: 0800-9775953 Web: www.safeguarduk.co.uk

much fresh air inside as we'd like.

We would also have liked a flyscreen on the door, but this would have been difficult with the stable-type that's fitted. There's a Fiamma wind-out awning on the nearside, giving good protection from rain and sun.

We prefer the latter, which is why we spent six months touring Spain, Portugal and France in summer 2010. Monty performed above and beyond expectations, providing a comfort and freedom that far outweighed our sailing trips. During this time, Monty even became famous, and was featured on Radio Devon and Cornwall on a number of occasions! We love travelling with Monty and hope for many more summers touring in the years to come! ■



WANTED

TELL US ABOUT OWNING YOUR MOTORHOME

We want a report on **your** motorhome. Let your fellow readers know the good, the bad and the statistics. You could earn yourself £250 if your report is chosen for publication. Once you have used your 'van for at least six months, send us up to 2,000 words (including an 'I like', 'I would have liked', 'I dislike' panel) and details for our facts and figures box, plus a dozen good quality photographs - including one of yourself with the 'van (sharp prints, slides or best quality digital pictures on CD are all acceptable), and leave the rest to us! Send it to Rachel Stothert, MMM, Warners Group Publications, West Street, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 9PH or email rachel@warnersgroup.co.uk