



EASY LISTENING

Autocruise Jazz on 2.3-litre Fiat Ducato

The Deputy Editor takes our brand new long-term test camper to Yorkshire



We first saw the Autocruise Jazz less than a year ago. Since then, this high top's compact - medium wheelbase - dimensions and clever layout have been attracting more than a little attention.

These are just some of the reasons why the MMM judging panel named this camper its Motorhome of the Year for 2010: the Jazz is a truly striking 'van, and, for me, it was love at first sight. I'm very pleased to report that an example has joined the MMM team - living with me for the next six months.

During this time, I'll be exploring the UK in

the 'van - testing all aspects of its design, and getting to know the vehicle in intimate fashion. I'll also be using the Jazz to try and convince my partner, Andrew, that motorhoming is fun: there'll probably be lots of wine involved in this part of the process!

But first, I had to get the hang of it and discover how everything works. To do this, I dived in at the deep end, taking a trip up to the North Yorkshire coast. This solo debut offered me a chance to really get my teeth into the 'van and discover whether everything works as well as it promises.

Essentially, this 'van is Autocruise's homage to the Murvi Piccolo, with a front lounge

consisting of swivelling cab seats and a two-person forward-facing travel seat. Aft, is an L-shaped kitchen and corner washroom. That's really all there is to it, so I was hoping that my first experience living in the 'van would see all its systems just as easy to figure out.

DRIVING TUNES

I had decided that this 'van could be one I'd like to own, simply because of its compact dimensions. Andrew is still getting used to the motorhoming lifestyle, so I wanted something that he wouldn't object to driving, as well as something that offered more comfort than a rising roof camper: Andrew's leanings toward owning a VW California will have to be stopped, as I like having a separate washroom onboard.

The Jazz is not that much bigger than your average VW camper - it's only about twenty inches longer, six inches wider and just as manoeuvrable. This was never more obvious than on a quick trip to Spurn Head for lunch, en route to the first campsite at Whitby.

The road along to Spurn point is rough, narrow in places and some of the parking spaces are only just big enough for a car. Even so, all this suited the Jazz down to the ground.



Words and pictures by Rachel Stothert



AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £37,785 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **LAYOUT:** Swivelling cab seats ahead of forward-facing bench, rear L-shaped kitchen and corner washroom
- **ECONOMY:** 25.6mpg

- 1 Jazz features a compact layout that, nevertheless, offers most of the comforts of home**
- 2 Beyond the twin-belted rear seat, the kitchen and washroom stand next to each other in the rear**
- 3 Swivelled cab seats, comfy bench and raised floor conspire to create a super lounge**

The bumps also proved a great opportunity to push the conversion rattles to their limit. All the way along that rutted road the only evident sound was that of the concertina blinds chattering away in the background, but very little else. And I could still hear the radio.

After lunch by the sea - with the Humber estuary on one side and the North Sea on the other - I presented the engine with somewhat of a challenge; miles and miles of country lanes lay between me and Whitby. The 2.3-litre (120bhp) Fiat engine coped admirably, and the vehicle as a whole was fairly stable when negotiating the many twisty bends.

The only criticism I have of the otherwise excellent Fiat Ducato base is regarding the cab seats, and this applies to many commercial vehicles and not just the Fiat. My lack of leg length means I have to slide the driver's seat all the way forward. Even then, I still have to reach that little bit further to operate the pedals. Taller people, however, should not have the same issue.

LOUNGE MUSIC

And so here we are, on a glorious little site overlooking the sea near Whitby. I'm not going to lie to you, motorhome tests can tend to be



On Test Autocruise Jazz

much more positive when the sun is shining. And it was today.

I'm writing this test sitting in the 'van's lounge, with the side sliding door open to the elements - the sun and the view of the coast are just glorious. And this is one of the shining features of this 'van, a comfortable and inviting lounge area, which provides superb views, but is not so big that it compromises the rest of the living space.

The forward-facing (RIB) seat offers travelling places for two (with three-point belts), as well as playing its part as a comfortable lounge sofa. Shaped for travelling, this seat is also nicely supportive when you're relaxing. In other motorhomes I have preferred to use the swivelling cab seats for lounging, but here there's more choice, as all the seating offers good comfort.

The lounge has a raised floor, crucially, to elevate the rear seat up to the same level as the cab seats. This also allows some underfloor storage space, but it's a shame that there's only top access to this space (via a hatch), as this restricts its use slightly. Also, you also have to lift the carpet each time you want to get at it.

One small spot-lamp may not seem enough to light the lounge, but the latest LED technology means this lamp is almost powerful enough to light the whole interior. It's also directional, so can be pointed anywhere necessary, while the use of an LED bulb means it runs much cooler than the halogen equivalent.

There's also a mains socket here, which was very handy for me - providing power for my laptop, while I tapped away at the keyboard.

A big downside in the lounge is found in the high-level lockers. These have a narrow base and doors that taper outwards towards the roof. Also, and because of their curved backs restricting internal space even more, they're generally quite useless for storing clothes.

I can understand why this has been done - it's so that the person sitting by the window on the forward-facing seat won't bang their head when standing up. Even so, I'd like to see these lockers made bigger.

DINNER CLUB

Sitting down for a bite to eat is also a relatively easy process. You simply slide the table out from its stowage space in the narrow locker above the cab, attach it to the rail on the wall and lock it in place. Next, swing its single leg down and slot it into a bracket on the floor.

If you wanted, you could drive around with the table locked firmly in place. However, to make the most of the lounge, it's better to keep it above the cab and just get it out for meal times.

Essentially, this table is only really any good for three people to eat at, as the cab passenger seat is just too far away. With the driver's seat pulled forward to the table nobody need be uncomfortable while eating. Knees may touch though.

LULLABY ON BROADWAY

Everyone who looks at the Jazz asks how you make up the bed. It just doesn't seem like it could be long enough at first glance. However, it is, for all but the tallest of people, and the bed construction is one of the easiest around.

First, a release mechanism allows the seat base to flip over and towards the cab seats. This offers access to the storage space underneath, where bedding can be stashed. Next, the backrest hinges forward (pulling on a bar activates the mechanism) to fill the space left by the base: this creates the majority of the bed. The foot is made by folding down a wooden panel underneath the (cantilevered) wardrobe and inserting shaped infill cushions.

After getting my 'jigsaw-puzzling' brain into gear, I eventually worked out that the hinged two-part cushion (which makes up an armrest for the seat during the day) flips forward, while a smaller infill cushion plugs the gap left by the seatbelt cutaway. That leaves one long cushion that fits at the head of the bed to make up its full length - albeit in a rather Heath-Robinson fashion.

Then on goes y'r bedding, and you're ready to sleep. All this is far quicker to do than to describe, and only takes a couple of minutes.



FOOD OF LOVE

Now to my real passion, the means of sustenance: I'm regularly disappointed by motorhome kitchens as some look good, but don't actually work very well, while some are obviously just poorly designed.

This one is neither. Its L-shape is functional, offering a decent amount of workspace, yet it doesn't dominate the rest of the interior. The sink is located across the back wall, with the fridge underneath, the cooker along the side.

The sink is a square design, with an inset ledge for your wash-up sponge etc. Its solid metal mixer tap sits to one side - its spout angled high enough to allow the filling of most kettles. It dripped while on the road, so I'm currently searching for one of those little rubber caps, designed to cover the spout. In the corner there's plenty of worktop to place an electric kettle and toaster, plus the necessary





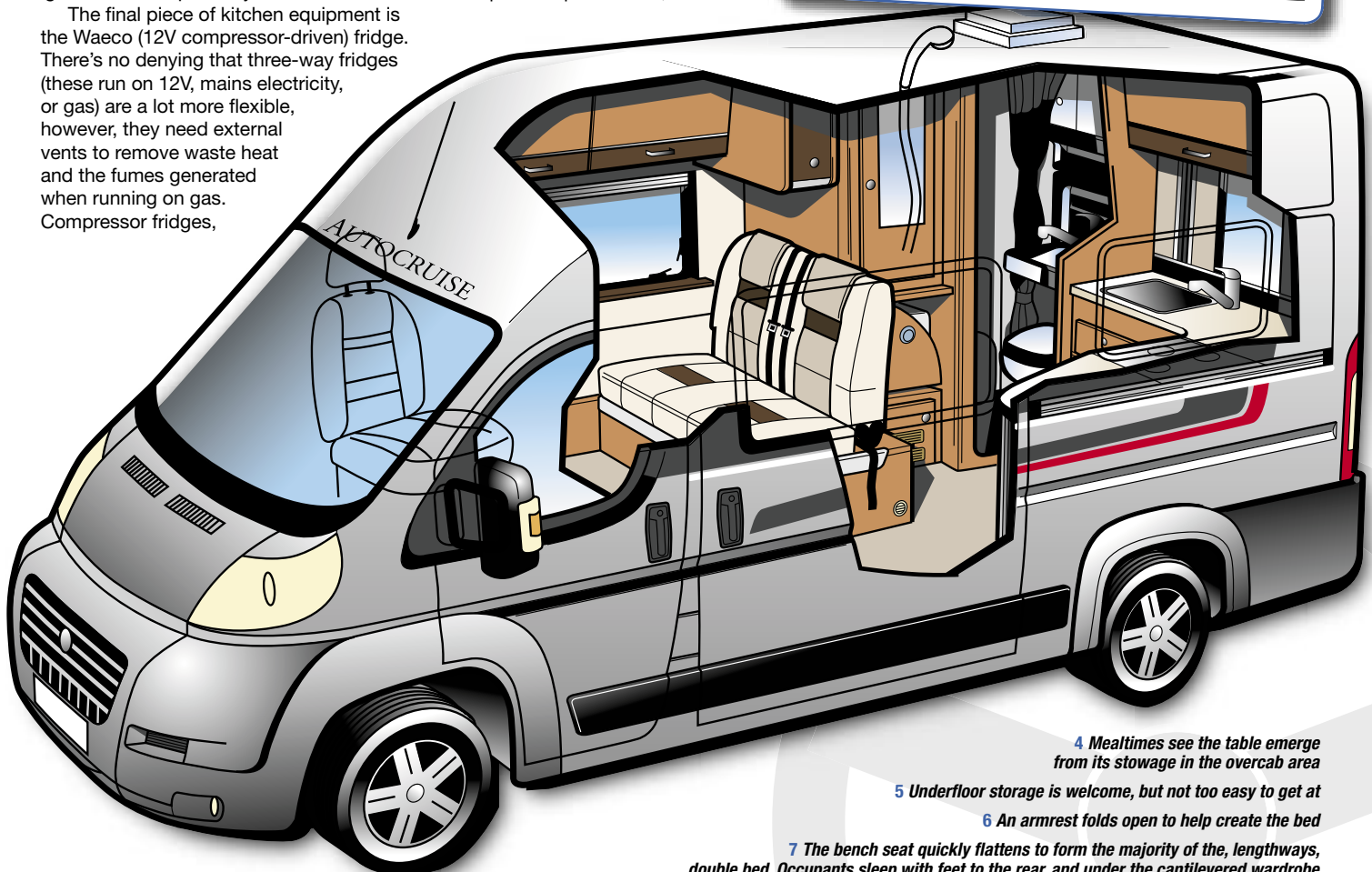
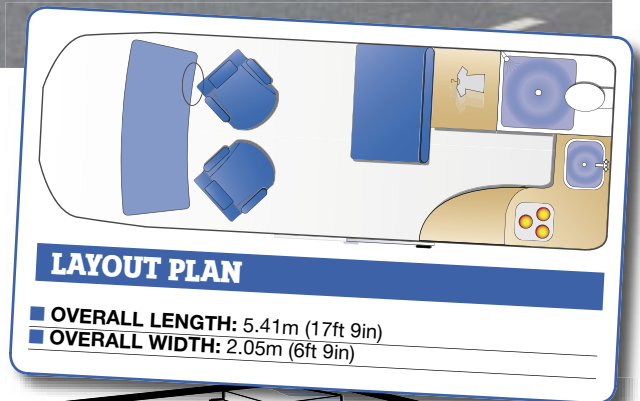
two mains sockets to power them.

The half-height (Spinflo Triplex) cooker offers three burners - one is a high-speed unit that boils your kettle in double-quick time, and is also suitable for woks. Two smaller burners provide simmering services. Below a combined oven and grill has a single control for both. Simply twizzle the knob left for the oven or right for the grill. The stove's electronic ignition worked perfectly.

The final piece of kitchen equipment is the Waeco (12V compressor-driven) fridge. There's no denying that three-way fridges (these run on 12V, mains electricity, or gas) are a lot more flexible, however, they need external vents to remove waste heat and the fumes generated when running on gas. Compressor fridges,

running only on 12 volts, need no external vents, making them much easier to position when building a motorhome. And that's part of the reason why one has been installed here, as it's difficult to fit fridge vents in a van conversion's rear doors.

The fridge's 12-volt operation puzzled me, until a



4 Mealtimes see the table emerge from its storage in the overcab area

5 Underfloor storage is welcome, but not too easy to get at

6 An armrest folds open to help create the bed

7 The bench seat quickly flattens to form the majority of the, lengthways, double bed. Occupants sleep with feet to the rear, and under the cantilevered wardrobe

On Test Autocruise Jazz

quick call to Autocruise highlighted the fact that there is an isolator switch, allowing you to make sure the fridge is completely switched off when not in use. This switch is above the two mains sockets in the kitchen, and simple to operate when you know how. However, if it had been labelled I would have found it with ease.

Storage-wise, the kitchen is pretty good, and far superior to that in the rest of the 'van. The lockers, although shallow in depth, are adequate for foodstuffs. The large high-level locker at the rear has a central rack for plates and two at either end for mugs. Because of its size, these racks don't totally dominate the space, allowing storage of other items up here. Along the side, two more lockers provide good amounts of space.

The cupboard below the cooker is great for pans, although some have to lie sideways, as it's not quite deep enough to sit large pans flat. This is also where you'll find the gas isolation valves for cooker and heater.

The cutlery drawer is pleasantly surprising, as it's big enough for standard cutlery, plus a



I LIKED

- Rear seat comfort
- Kitchen storage
- Ease of bed making

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Shelves in wardrobe
- Label for fridge isolator switch
- Wider bed

I DISLIKED

- Lack of clothes storage
- Firmness of mattress

selection of larger utensils.

The final mention goes to the tapered cupboard, located at the forward end of the kitchen unit. This features a tambour door that slides open towards the front of the 'van. The door stays shut thanks to a magnetic catch, and a small handle enables easy opening and closing. It's actually a good idea that the roller door doesn't go all the way around the curved forward end. It's a little annoying at first that you can't get full access, but it does mean that you can wedge larger items in here without fear of them falling out when you open the door. This cavernous space really

needs more partitions - fabric foldout boxes, bought from places like Ikea might help things stay put. It could probably do with a small plastic bin in here as well.

There are plenty of windows for ventilation, the rear window opens outwards, while the side one slides. Lighting comes via two slim fluorescent strips and an overhead LED lamp. There's also another overhead light in the lounge area.

BATH TIME BLUES

All motorhomes have to compromise on something, even really big ones, so it comes as no surprise that there are elements of the Jazz that could work better. The washroom could be a little wider - to negate the effects of the wheel-arch lining intruding into the room - but this would mean a narrower kitchen and less floor space in this area.

Even though this is a compact room, you still get a toilet, washbasin and shower. The toilet is at the rear and there is a moulded unit above, containing a drop-down basin and a small vanity cabinet.

The cabinet may be small but, with its decently lipped shelf, there's plenty of space for toiletries.

With the basin dropped down, you can swivel the tap around. The one thing that confused me is the fact that the tap has a shower spray-type spout, despite the fact that there is a separate showerhead and control. I'd like to see this as a normal 'solid' flow of water - the same as the kitchen tap. Why you may ask? All I can say is, have you ever tried to rinse your mouth out with a showerhead? It's tricky, and you end up with more water running down your chin than is rinsing out the toothpaste.

To use the shower you simply pull the curtain around past the door and over the vanity cabinet. A decent riser rail allows you to adjust the angle and height of the shower head adequately. There is also a ledge to stand your shower gel. The room is a little narrow, so elbows may get knocked while showering - however, there does seem to be plenty of space if you take advantage of the room's quite generous length.

Other washroom features include a towel rail and toilet roll holder in one corner.



However, hanging a towel here makes getting to the toilet paper a little more awkward - the two are rather close. There are also two pegs by the door where you can hang y'r towel (except when showering). For bad weather days there is an extendable washing line that can be used for draining wet waterproofs and airing damp clothes and towels.

CHORE(AL) SOCIETY

It's vital that essential services are easy to access and simple to operate.

The control panel is above the sliding door - from here water pump, battery levels, water tank levels and lights, are monitored and controlled. The panel goes into standby mode - with all its LED indicators extinguished - but the power remains on. To wake it you press the main power switch and then the lights button, or, press the lights button twice. The lights will not switch on unless the green power LED indicator is lit.

Next to the main control panel are the switches for the Truma combi unit, which provides hot water and blown-air space heating running on gas, and/or mains electricity. Though they may look complicated, Truma's quick-start guide explains things and is quite easy to understand. The left dial controls the power source: up for mains electric, down for electric and gas operation. The right dial controls the heater: up for hot water only, down for heating and hot water.

The electricity distribution and mains battery charger unit is set into the base of the rear seat and easily accessed via a door. You can also access the Truma heater quite easily through a door below the wardrobe.



Other services can be managed via opening the rear doors. The leisure battery compartment sits above the gas locker - both positioned in the corner of the kitchen. To the right, the toilet cassette is easy to extract from behind the washroom.

The waste water drain is located low down, just beneath the side sliding door, while the fresh water filler (and tank drain) are on the offside, along with the electric hook-up inlet.

GRAND FINALE

And after living in this 'van, am I still in love with it? The answer is yes. It's lost its shine a bit, but it still impresses me a lot.

8 The washroom is unsurprising, but well equipped

9 The L-shaped kitchen features good kit and plenty of working surface

10 Under the cooker, the pan cupboard is quite shallow

11 The kitchen's nose is home to a capacious locker that could do with more shelving

12 Gas locker, leisure battery and toilet cassette are all got at through the rear doors

13 Management panel and heating controls live above the side sliding door



This is a simple little 'van that does many things well and only few things badly. I love the comfortable lounge and the capable kitchen. Of course, there are things I would change - clothes storage could be better, and even though the bed is flat, it's quite firm and could do with a mattress topper to improve comfort.

We've got a few more outings to look forward to over the next few months, and I'll also let you know how our Autocruise Jazz has fared, after it's finished its tenure with MMM. ■

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Autocruise Motorhomes, Dunswell Road, Cottingham, East Yorks HU16 4JX (tel: 01482 847332; web site: www.autocruise.co.uk)

WE STAYED AT

Sandfield House Farm, Sandsend Road, Whitby YO21 3SR (tel: 01947 602660; web site: www.sandfieldhousefarm.co.uk)

Middlewood Farm Holiday Park, Middlewood Lane, Fylingthorpe, Robin Hoods Bay, Whitby, North Yorks YO22 4UF (tel: 01947 880414; web site: www.middlewoodfarm.com)



LIVE-IN TEST DATA

AUTOCRUISE JAZZ

TYPE

High top van conversion

PRICE

- From: £37,785 OTR
- As tested: £41,140 OTR

BASICS

- **Vehicle:** Fiat Ducato medium wheelbase high roof panel van
- **Berths:** 2
- **Three-point belted seats:** 4 (incl. driver)
- **Warranty:** 3 years base vehicle & conversion

CONSTRUCTION

All-steel panel van body. Caravan entrance - side sliding door - on UK nearside

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturers figures)

- **Length:** 5.41m (17ft 9in)*
- **Width:** 2.05m (6ft 9in)*
- **Height:** 2.55m (8ft 4.5in)*
- **Wheelbase:** 3.45m (11ft 4in)*
- **Rear overhang:** 660mm (2ft 2in)
- **Gross vehicle weight:** 3300kg
- **Payload:** 450kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, gas)

INSIDE STORY

Swivelling cab seats ahead of forward-facing bench, rear L-shaped kitchen & corner washroom

- **Insulation:** 3M Thinsulate all round
- **Interior height:** 1.90m (6ft 3in). 1.75m (5ft 9in) in lounge

THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 80kW (120bhp) @ 3600rpm
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Fuel Consumption:** 25.6mpg
- **Brakes:** Discs all round with ABS
- **Suspension:** Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- **Features:** Electric mirrors, remote central locking, trip computer, adjustable steering column, side door pockets, cab air-conditioning, cruise control, reversing



sensors, radio/CD player, flip-up map holder, central storage locker

LOUNGING AND DINING

Forward-facing rear seat and swivelled cab seats create four-seater lounge. Table stores above cab, wall-mounted with single leg, provides dining for three

KITCHEN

L-shaped unit has cutlery drawer above fridge, pan storage below cooker, three high-level lockers and a tambour-doored cupboard

- **Sink:** Stainless steel square bowl, hinged glass lid, mixer tap, no drainer
- **Cooker:** Spinflo Triplex half-height stove with three-burner hob, combined oven/grill, all with electronic ignition
- **Fridge:** Waeco 12 Volt compressor type. Capacity 80 litres

WASHROOM

Access via tambour door. Thetford C-200 electric-flush swivel-bowl toilet, drop-down washbasin above, with swivelling mixer tap and small mirror-doored vanity cabinet. Integrated shower with own mixer tap and head, single-drain shower tray, shower curtain. Toilet roll holder, two hanging pegs, towel ring, extendable washing line, small roof vent

BED

Lounge double

- **Length:** 1.90m (6ft 3in)
- **Width:** 1.30m (4ft 3in)

STORAGE

Space above cab, two high-level lockers in lounge, space under forward-facing rear seat, underfloor compartment in lounge, wardrobe with hanging rail, locker for flat screen TV with sliding mechanism and bracket

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Underslung, 66 litres (14.5 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung, 40 litres (8.8 gallons)
- **Water/space heating:** Truma Combi 4E boiler with blown air, gas-mains operation
- **Leisure battery:** 100 amp hr
- **Gas:** 2 x 7kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** Lounge: one LED directional spot, one LED ceiling light; kitchen: one LED ceiling light, two fluorescent strip lights; washroom: one LED ceiling light; LED awning lamp
- **Sockets:** 230V: 4 (one in lounge, one in TV locker, two in kitchen); 12V: 2 (in cab and TV locker)
- **Control panel:** Located above side sliding door. Displays fresh and waste water levels, battery levels. Controls main power, lights, awning light and water pump
- **Blinds/curtains:** Concertina blind for windscreen and insulated silvered covers for side windows in cab. Curtain closes off cab area. Concertina blinds/flyscreens to lounge, side kitchen window, rooflight, Venetian blind to rear window.
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** Engine upgrade from 100 to 120bhp (£1527), Comfort pack - cruise control, air-conditioning, alarm, reversing sensors (£1195)
 - **Conversion:** Wind-out awning (£633)
- Other options
- **Base:** Upgrade from 120bhp to 157bhp with ComfortMatic auto gearbox - only available in conjunction with Comfort Pack and on Fiat vehicles (£3775), Alloy wheels (£597), tracking system (£638)
 - **Conversion:** None

E&OE

