

# NIGHTS IN WIGHT'S SATIN

Romahome R25 on 1.6-litre Citroën Berlingo

*Super-smooth GRP encloses the latest mini motorhome to come from the Isle of Wight*



Romahome and small Citroën vehicles have been synonymous for over twenty years. After the little Honda Acty and Bedford Rascal bases, the Isle of Wight company moved on to the Citroën C15, never looking back. As base vehicles have changed - from C15 to Berlingo - so the Romahome designs have been developed and refined. The Romahome range has expanded too, now starting with the R10, (a single berth, two-seat conversion on the diminutive Nemo van), via the R30 (formerly known as the Dimension and based on the short-wheelbase Citroën Relay van), to the acclaimed R40 - a small coachbuilt on the Dispatch. The mainstay, though, has always been the mini coachbuilt R20 - sitting on the sturdy Berlingo - the definitive Romahome.

## BASE MATERIAL

Ever since Citroën introduced a larger, much-changed model of this base vehicle, Romahome's new conversion has been eagerly awaited. It's now arrived, in the shape of the R25. We tested the brand new

prototype, collecting it from dealer, Freeborn's showroom in Southampton.

We've owned three of the older-style Berlingo Multispace estate cars over the years, and found them tough, capacious, economical and comfortable - and, over a total of ninety thousand miles, very reliable. So, we were looking forward to trying the new model although, personally, I find the styling changes to the Citroën base unappealing. But beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

On inspection, Romahome has done an excellent job with this model. The coachbuilt body is beautifully crafted in gleaming, satin-smooth GRP - a clever 'flying R' decal on the side - melding smoothly with the chassis cab of the base. Slightly less rounded than its predecessor, the body-shape is more modern, and similar to that of the larger R40, especially from the rear. Looking small and neat, it's something of a shock to realise that R25 is nearly a foot longer than the old R20 - at 5.18 metres (17ft 0in) - and no longer a midget. The body is narrow, though, at 1.88 metres (6ft 2in) with mirrors folded - an important consideration on crowded British back roads.





Words & pictures by Andrew Bromley



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1 View forward to the lounge in 'Jammy Dodger'

2 'Jammy Dodger' upholstery and colour scheme is cheerful without being brash

3 Great ingenuity produces a compact, quality coachbuilt

4 The cockpit is supplied in standard Citroën trim



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AT A GLANCE

|| PRICE FROM: £30,885 OTR

|| BERTHS: 2

|| LAYOUT: Two longitudinal settees ahead of rear kitchen

|| ECONOMY: 39.7mpg



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ROAMING

First job, extracting oneself from Southampton city centre in an unfamiliar 'van - navigating through contradictory road signs and lots of traffic isn't easy. You sit low in the driving seat - below the coachbuilt body - so there's little visibility through the rear side windows, while the standard Berlingo mirrors are too small to give a good view. There's no interior mirror on this prototype, either (they'll be standard in production vehicles), so it's a relief to reach Black Knowl Caravan Club Site in the New Forest - our home for this test.

With a tall body overhanging the wheelbase by quite a margin, the ride is, as you may expect, somewhat lollopy, and you navigate speed humps with circumspection, lest the raised (standard-fit) rear steadies 'kiss' them.

Learn to adopt a smooth, genteel style of driving and the R25 becomes a pleasant companion. Although the driver's seat height is low and non-adjustable, reach and rake on the steering wheel can be altered considerably, and should suit most folk. Performance from the (1.6-litre, 90bhp) turbo-diesel engine is brisk, although it's gruff when extended - this

particular example having noticeable turbo whistle. Conversely, the second R25 we drove later in the test, didn't show this characteristic. There were no internal rattles apart from the usual cooker-top noise, easily silenced with a tea towel. However, road noise from the wheels was intrusive and tiring. I'd fit a noise-deadening kit.

'Our' R25 was a brand-new conversion, on a 2008 base vehicle, and the computer gave an overall reading of 39.7mpg. The second 'van was newer, and it claimed 44mpg, which is more what you'd hope for.

Once parked up, first job is to lower the steadies, without which, seasickness on site would be a hazard! Once they're deployed, the 'van is rock-steady. Entrance to the living area is through a door in the rear panel, which is quite high, so a portable step (or the optional electrically-operated Omni-step) is essential. The door opens sufficiently wide to allow easy access and is sturdily made, with a tall opening window (with blind) in the upper half. Personally, I'd like a second, lower window too (as in older Romahomes) - improving rearward visibility. The door in this prototype needed adjustment, being slightly proud at one corner: on one windy night

## On Test Romahome R25

there was literally a 'howling' draught!

Immediately inside the rear door, the kitchen unit sits along the nearside of the central aisle - opposite a tall cupboard, followed by a large work surface. Forward again, is a comfortable lounge with twin settees. The cockpit is lower than the main 'van body, therefore the capacious overcab is lower and more easily accessible than in other motorhomes. Access from the cab to the living area isn't easy; the athletic and slim might manage it, but there's a tray between the cab seats that gets in the way, as does the driver's armrest. Most folk will use the rear door.

In the test 'van, all cupboard doors were a smooth, glossy dark red, with the trademark Romahome white GRP surfaces elsewhere. The ceiling - excluding the overcab - is finished in a beige fabric, the floor a tough, speckled, off-white vinyl-faced board. High quality foam soft furnishings were in a beige and red pattern, apart from those in the cab, which were standard Citroën grey. Matching trim for the cab is an optional extra. Romahome calls this colour scheme 'Jammy Dodger,' which shows a nice sense of humour! We liked it, and also appreciated the 'Café Latte' colour scheme of the second R25 we tried, which probably has more mainstream appeal. Whichever colour scheme, we couldn't fault the quality of finish - it was superb throughout.

### LOUNGE AND DINE

On either side of the lounge there's a big - opening - double-glazed window with a pleated Seitz cassette blind. The two settees are 1.18 metres (slightly under four feet) long and at just the right height (440mm, 1ft 5.5in) for most people to find them very comfy: no dangling feet here. For sprawling - feet up - there's a tall, slightly raked seatback to lean against. Sit more formally, and there's ample legroom across the aisle. Removing the middle cushion on each settee gives you two proper travel seats, with three-point seatbelts (an option costing £265). Here, however, there's not much foot-room for bigger hooves and the seatbelt stalks are a little untidy. Even so, this facility helps make the R25 a viable sole vehicle, and will be much appreciated by Romahome's typical clientele.



For dining, there's a large freestanding table (with folding legs), the same design as found in many motorhomes. It lives in the overcab, so to remove it you must first shift all the junk you've piled on top. It's also quite heavy, and awkward to erect between the settees. Once *in situ*, it's a tight squeeze to insert yourself between seat backrest and table. We'd prefer a smaller table, and if it could be stored in a rear cupboard so much the better.

Remove the travel seat backrests, however, and four people could very easily be fed and watered here - the table should be amply big enough.

'Our' 'van had no television for wiling away long dark evenings, and the radio is a fair stretch away in the cab. However, the 'Café Latte' 'van we tried later had all the extras you could desire, including a neat drop-down television above the cab: very desirable.

### KITCHEN

Rona was impressed with the kitchen facilities, especially given the size of the 'van. The long surface includes a good-sized, stainless steel sink, with mixer-tap and glass cover, plus a two-burner hob with electronic ignition. No drainer though - a pity, especially as the work surface is that lovely smooth (wipe-clean) GRP. You wouldn't dare place a hot pan here - indeed, a discreet notice warns against it. However, a wooden chopping board is supplied. Below the hob, there's a grill behind a drop-down door. Again, there's nowhere to rest a hot grill pan - the open door dropping below horizontal. Ideally, it would be held level and faced with metal. Under the sink is a Dometic three-way (55-litre) fridge that includes a small freezer compartment. We noted that cooking sessions could create condensation on smooth surfaces - even in the overcab. I think the (optional) kitchen extractor fan would be very useful to have.

Plenty of kitchen storage is supplied, with





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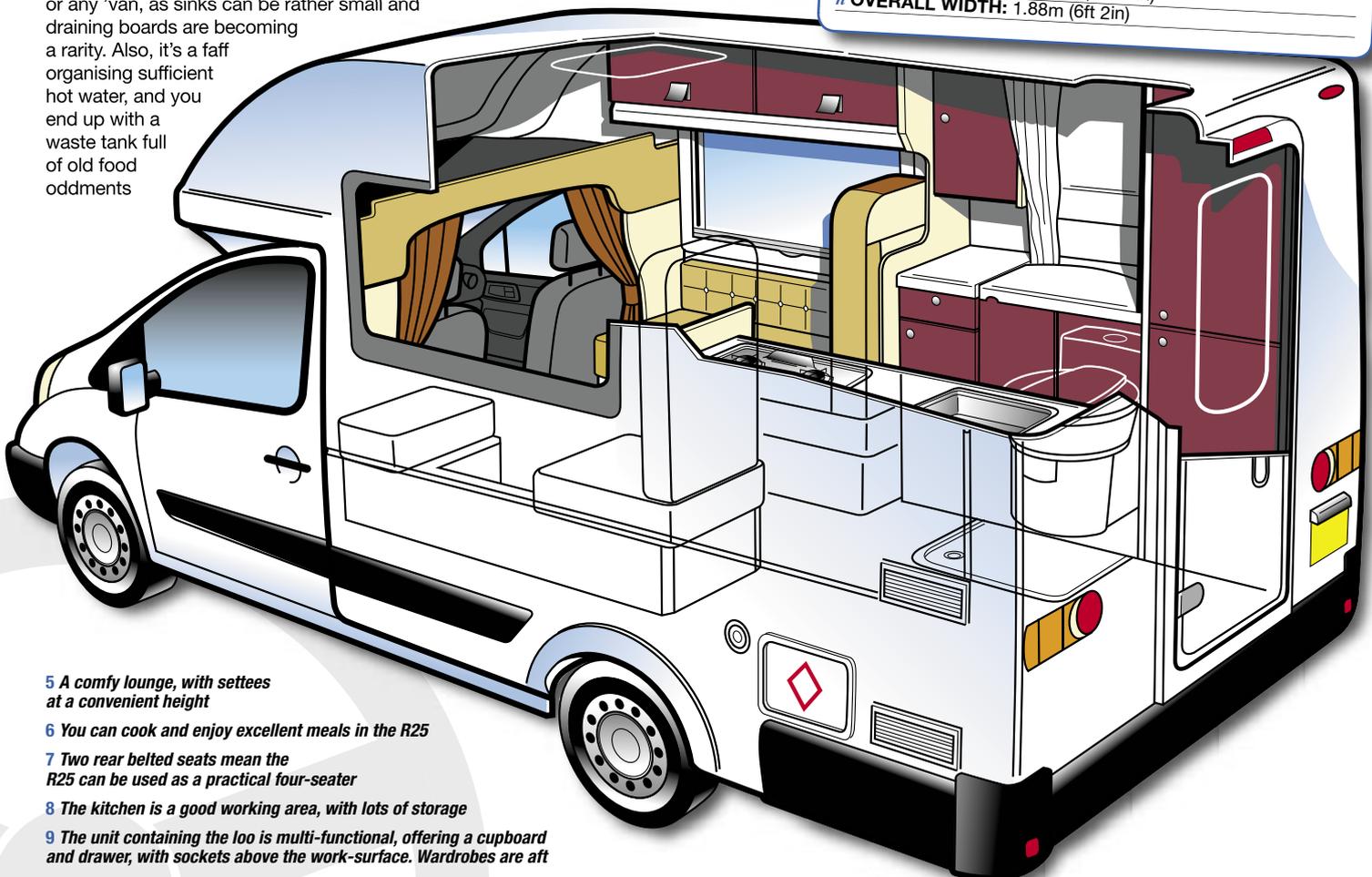
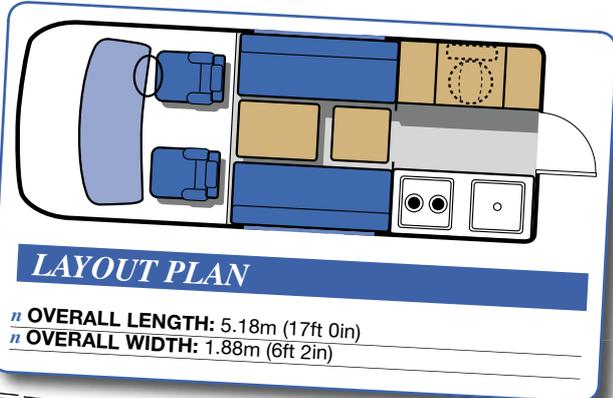


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both high and low-level cupboards, including a capacious cutlery drawer above the fridge and a dedicated, high-level crockery cupboard. Opposite the kitchen, there's a most useful - large - GRP work surface - with two mains sockets above - ideal for the kettle. Another mains socket lives above the hob opposite - not so useful, but its position is determined by a regulation distance from the sink. A white curtain mysteriously disappears into a tailor-made gap at the rear of the work-surface: more on that later.

We don't generally wash-up in our 'van, or any 'van, as sinks can be rather small and draining boards are becoming a rarity. Also, it's a faff organising sufficient hot water, and you end up with a waste tank full of old food oddments

- yuck! We use site facilities wherever possible. However, it's worth noting that this 'van does have enough elbow room to work, plus hot water quickly supplied by the diesel-powered Webasto ThermoTop C300. Where to hang a wet tea towel is a poser though, and one would be loath to drill holes in the GRP to fit hooks or rails! Doubtless Romahome would fit them for you.



5 A comfy lounge, with settees at a convenient height

6 You can cook and enjoy excellent meals in the R25

7 Two rear belted seats mean the R25 can be used as a practical four-seater

8 The kitchen is a good working area, with lots of storage

9 The unit containing the loo is multi-functional, offering a cupboard and drawer, with sockets above the work-surface. Wardrobes are aft

## BEDS

So, after a good meal and a nice drop of red wine, what about sleeping arrangements?

We're tall folk, so for us, the transverse double bed isn't an option. It makes up easily enough though - the table's legs are folded, and it rests on ledges on the settee bases. A small extra surface, which also stores in the overcab, makes up the full width, and the settee backrests fit on top to make a level bed (5ft 9.5in long and 3ft 10.5in wide) that's big enough for many, and comfortable. So, where do we sleep?

Simple: remove the cab seat headrests, fold seatbacks forward (quite awkward, because of the position of lever, low on the outside of each seat) and push them flat. Next, detach and remove rear travel seat backrests and lay them on top of flattened cab seats, having first remembered to set the steering wheel as high and retracted as possible. The resultant single beds are very long at 6ft 7in. The maximum width of each single is 2ft 1in, minimum, the cab section, is 1ft 7in. We made up the double bed and the singles (sleeping longitudinally), so each of us would have plenty of room for their top half, and the beds were only narrow where our legs would lie. An infill cushion between the front seats would make a gigantic double bed - Romahome confirmed that this is in development.

In theory, the single beds are fine. In practice, the offside bed rises towards the foot - the travel seatback (used here) needs more shaping. More importantly, the end of the seat cushion rests against the steering wheel: lie down on the bed - and the horn sounds! Oddly, the 'Café Latte' 'van (although it looked identical) didn't seem to suffer from 'horny bed syndrome' to the same degree. In any event, I slept satisfactorily, although the cab-to-body bulkhead impeded my legs somewhat.

Between the cab and the body there's a curtain rail, with sandy-brown, lined curtains stored behind the cab seats. At bedtime you pull these across, then popper them up to the ceiling like a Bedouin tent around the bed-end. Very clever, I thought.

## TOILETING

Small 'vans often have cramped loo facilities if, indeed, any at all - apart from maybe, a minute potty. Romahome has really tried here - the large work surface and cupboards opposite the kitchen conceal a proper fixed cassette loo. It's a Dometic model (with ceramic-lined bowl and its own water supply - filled from outside the 'van), rather than the ubiquitous Thetford swivel device. The work surface above hinges up, and two cupboard doors open to allow access. The purpose of the previously mentioned white curtain is now revealed, as it draws across the 'van to give at least visual privacy to the occupant. The interior surfaces of the loo compartment are smooth wipe-able GRP, with no difficult-to-clean crevices.

For hand washing, the sink is nearby, across the aisle.

Underfoot, and extending into the aisle, is a lift-up section of floor. Beneath is a small GRP shower-tray, but 'Jammy Dodger' had no shower. It's an optional extra, and 'Café Latte' came so equipped. Shower controls are mounted in the side of the loo compartment (behind the curtain) and double-capacity fresh and waste tanks are fitted to allow for extra water use. There's no shower curtain around the shower though, the idea being that one should use the shower hand-held (in a controlled fashion), whilst sitting on the loo - washing - rather than for a full-on 'shower experience.'

Perhaps, but we anticipate a flooded floor. There's another problem. The loo already sits high above the floor - we measured it at 500mm. Remove the shower tray lid, and it becomes 580mm, so most people will have dangling feet. And the loo's lid is slippery! Romahome is aware of this and modifications are in hand. We also feel that the curtain is too close to the toilet and could impede 'operations.' We'd prefer a more solid divider, as the toilet is too near the living area of the 'van for us to be entirely comfortable without. Maybe we're just squeamish?

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## STORAGE

Storage is excellent for a 'van of this size; quite enough for two to holiday successfully with all their clobber, and probably enough to absorb much of the payload. Starting at the rear offside, there are two cupboards (or wardrobes), one above t'other. Both have hanging rails, the top having 810mm of drop, the lower 845mm: that's hers, then! Alongside the loo there's a shelved cupboard and a drawer, and above, a further shelved cupboard. The kitchen has two overhead cupboards - with strong magnetic catches - and at low level, has the large cutlery drawer and a slim, shelved vertical cupboard. There's another large shelved cupboard under the cooker.

The lounge features two high-level lockers per side, again with magnetic catches. Remove the settee cushions (the bases have



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### WE LIKED

- » Overall finish and high quality of construction
- » Long-term GRP guarantee
- » Comfy lounge with good settee height
- » Wipe-clean surfaces
- » Generous kitchen work space
- » Quality ceramic-bowl toilet with its own water supply

### WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- » Stainless steel surfaces/drainers in kitchen
- » Seat height adjustment for driver
- » An infill cushion to fit between cab seats to make a huge double bed
- » Another, lower window in back door
- » Better lighting over kitchen work surface and control panel
- » Smaller, more manageable table

### WE DISLIKED

- » Toilet curtain too close to toilet, and gives little privacy
- » Shower tray lid - remove it and the toilet is too high. Impractical to use the (optional) shower
- » Too-small door mirrors



**10** Short, but comfy transverse double bed will be fine for many, but not for us

**11** Long single beds, ready for occupation – note the offside bed rises towards the foot

**12** 'Café Latte' shows off the toilet, with optional shower controls - tray lid removed

**13** 'Café Latte' 'van boasted the optional, removable twin bike rack. You can have bikes on the rack yet still access the entrance door

**14** Offside under-settee cubby contains the leisure battery

open tops) and the cubbies revealed contain - on the offside - the 110 amp hr leisure battery and - on the nearside - the Webasto space/ water heater. One cubby on each side is also available for storage, and you could keep boxes in the spaces between the seat bases.

Then there's the huge overcab, where you can stash your sleeping bags, and all the lighter clutter. An exterior locker, for hose, cables and wellies, is promised for production 'vans. All in all, Romahome has done us proud for storage.

**EQUIPMENT**

Even in base specification, the R25 is well equipped. The Webasto heater is a little noisy, but quick to warm the 'van through, even though it has but one vent in the front of the nearside settee base. The body is well

insulated, but water tanks are underslung and uninsulated. Romahome will insulate them if desired, but you could still use the 'van in winter by emptying the tanks, carrying fresh water in a water porter and putting suitable antifreeze in the loo's flush water tank. There's a spare wheel, but it's a Space-Saver; still, that's better than none.

Lighting is by LED: two ceiling clusters are controlled by a switch conveniently situated by the rear door - offering two levels of illumination. A second switch in the lounge would have been helpful. In the lounge, there are two swivelling reading lights on either side, and two more over the kitchen. Rona felt these were insufficient, and would prefer a fluorescent strip light. It would be useful to have another light illuminating the control panel over the back door, where it's very gloomy. There's a Midi-



Heki above the lounge and a basic roof vent (with flyscreen but no blind) at the rear.

Optional extras-wise, the only limiting factors are your payload and your pocket. The 'Café Latte' 'van had an external gas barbecue and mains electricity points, and we tried out Romahome's new bike rack. This fits into a rear mounting and can be slid out, enabling access to the rear door - even while bikes are attached. Although ingenious, we found it somewhat cumbersome, and feared the ensemble could exert excessive leverage aft of the back axle.

**CONCLUSION**

Romahome has used great ingenuity to produce a compact, quality coachbuilt with all the necessary features to enable a couple to enjoy long holidays. In addition, the 'van can still be used as a daily 'car,' with its extra belted-seat passenger capacity and good economy. Using lightweight materials throughout, Romahome has made thoughtful use of the extra 50kg of payload offered by the new-model Citroën Berlingo. All this is available at a starting price of around £30,000 - quite an achievement.

In our view, this early prototype had some problems which need tweaking - the 'hoot' of a single bed is one! We would want to improve some aspects of toilet usage, and would check weights (fully laden) on a public weighbridge. However, there's no doubt this is a worthy successor to the old R20 (which will continue to be available for a little while longer). The many loyal Romahome fans (and new customers) should be very impressed. **11**



**VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY**

Romahome Limited, Prospect Road, Cowes, Isle of Wight PO31 7AD (tel: 01983 292451; web site: www.romahome.com)

**WE STAYED AT**

Black Knowl Caravan Club Site, Aldridge Hill, Brockenhurst, Hampshire SO42 7QD (tel: 01590 623600; web site: www.caravanclub.co.uk)

## LIVE-IN TEST DATA

### TYPE:

Low profile mini coachbuilt

### PRICE

Note: all prices include VAT at 17.5 per cent

▮ **From:** £30,885 OTR

▮ **As tested:** £31,150 OTR

### BASICS

▮ **Vehicle:** Citroën Berlingo platform cab

▮ **Berths:** 2

▮ **Three-point belted seats:** 4 (including driver)

▮ **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle, three years conversion, ten years all interior and exterior GRP

### CONSTRUCTION

Moulded GRP body and caravan door.

Caravan entrance in centre of rear panel

### DIMENSIONS (\*manufacturer's figures)

▮ **Length:** 5.18m (17ft 0in)\*

▮ **Width:** 1.88m (6ft 2in)

▮ **Height:** 2.66m (8ft 9in)\*

▮ **Wheelbase:** 2.72m (8ft 11in)\*

▮ **Rear overhang:** 1.46m (4ft 9.5in)

▮ **Max authorised weight:** 2225kg

▮ **Payload:** 285kg (after weight of all available options, driver, front seat passenger, 90 per cent fuel, 100 per cent gas, 15 per cent fresh water)

### INSIDE

Twin-sofa lounge (converts to two forward-facing belted travel seats) ahead of nearside kitchen, offside toilet, wardrobes

▮ **Insulation:** Floor - 40mm, walls - 30-50mm, roof - 50mm

▮ **Interior height:** 1.88m (6ft 2in) max

### THE VEHICLE

▮ **Engine:** 1.6-litre turbo-diesel producing 66.2kW (90bhp) 4000rpm

▮ **Transmission:** Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive

▮ **Fuel consumption:** 39.7mpg overall

▮ **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS

▮ **Suspension:** Front: Independent on McPherson struts and coil springs. Rear: independent on trailing-arms



and coil springs

▮ **Features:** Remotely-operated central locking (cab only), electrically-adjustable door mirrors, electric windows, driver's airbag, radio/CD player, headlamp height adjustment, height-adjustable (cab) seatbelt top mountings, reach-and-rake adjustment to steering wheel, space-saver spare wheel

### LOUNGING & DINING

Two inward-facing settees provide comfortable lounging for four. Freestanding table (with folding legs) erects between settees giving ample surface for four to dine. Table stores above cab

### KITCHEN

Nearside kitchen unit has GRP surfaces, hinged glass lids over sink and hob, cutlery drawer, shelved low-level cupboards, high-level cupboards, large GRP work surface opposite

▮ **Sink:** Smev stainless steel bowl with mixer tap

▮ **Cooker:** Smev two-burner hob and grill with electronic-ignition

▮ **Fridge:** Dometic 3-way with freezer compartment, manual energy selection. Capacity 55 litres

### WASHROOM

No separate washroom. Although a unit in the kitchen holds a Dometic CTW3110 ceramic-bowl toilet with built-in flush water supply, privacy curtain, and shower tray with removable lid

### BEDS

Transverse double

▮ **Length:** 1.77m (5ft 9.5in)

▮ **Width:** 1.18m (3ft 10.5in)

Longitudinal singles

▮ **Length:** 2.00m (6ft 7in)

▮ **Width:** 630mm (2ft 1in) max, 480mm (1ft 7in) min

### STORAGE

Nearside: Two high-level cupboards above kitchen, cutlery drawer, narrow, shelved cupboard

next to fridge, large shelved cupboard under cooker. Offside: Two wardrobes in offside rear, drawer and shelved cupboard alongside toilet compartment, shelved cupboard above work surface to side of toilet. Lounge: Four high-level cupboards, open-topped cubbies below settees, large overcab storage area. An external wet locker to nearside rear is proposed for production vehicles

### LIFE SUPPORT

▮ **Fresh water:** Underslung (uninsulated), capacity 34 litres (7.5 gallons)

▮ **Waste water:** Underslung (uninsulated), capacity 34 litres (7.5 gallons)

▮ **Water and Space Heater:** Webasto ThermoTop C300 diesel-fired boiler with blown-air

▮ **Leisure battery:** 110 amp hr

▮ **Gas:** 1x 7kg cylinder

▮ **Lighting:** All LED-powered. Two ceiling lights, two swivelling reading lights above each settee, two over kitchen surface

▮ **Sockets:** 230V: 3 (one above hob, two over offside work surface); 12V: 1 (over offside work surface)

▮ **Control panel:** Mounted above rear entrance door: Zig CP400 battery condition gauge, Zig water contents gauge, pump, lights and auxiliary switches, fuses, Webasto heater controls

▮ **Blinds/curtains:** Seitz blind/flyscreen to rear door window, Seitz pleated blinds/flyscreens to lounge windows, lined curtains to cab

▮ **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes

### OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

▮ **Base:** None

▮ **Conversion:** Rear seatbelts (£265)

Other options

▮ **Base:** Cab air-conditioning (£750), reversing sensors (£185), rev. camera/monitor (£370)

▮ **Conversion:** Electric step to rear door (£360), bike rack (£395), extractor fan above kitchen (£230), matching upholstery to cab seats (£230), drop-down TV, aerial, auxiliary socket (£669), shower and larger water tanks (£450), exterior BBQ point and power point (£275), external 230V socket (£73), grab handle (£55)



An external portable step is essential unless the optional Omni-step is fitted