

BARDIC BABE

Auto-Sleeper Stratford on 2.2-litre Peugeot Boxer

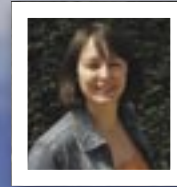
This panel van conversion squeezes an awful lot into its medium wheelbase body. Rachel Stothert is the first to take it away and see if it works as it should



It may not sound anything special, but this compact little 'van from Auto-Sleepers is one of the few conversions of Peugeot's medium wheelbase Boxer panel van (also see Fiat Ducato and Citroen Relay). One reason it's different is that this petite campervan has a layout much more

commonly seen in long wheelbase van conversions.

A rear lounge and central kitchen/washroom is certainly a traditional floor plan across the range of motorhome sizes from campervans to A-class leviathans. What's unusual here is that Auto-Sleepers has managed to squeeze a separate-shower washroom into a very compact camper.



Words & pictures by Rachel Stothert



Stratford fits a standard car parking space

AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £37,875
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Peugeot Boxer MWB window van
- **LAYOUT:** Rear lounge, nearside central kitchen and offside washroom
- **ECONOMY:** 22mpg overall

OK the sofas are shortish, but where has the space for a separate shower enclosure come from? Only time will tell.

PUT A GIRDLE ROUND THE EARTH

At speed, this 'van drives smoothly with plenty of power. There were only a few hundred miles on the clock when I picked it up, so I didn't expect the engine to be as sprightly as it proved to be (it often takes at least a thousand miles to 'loosen' the engine). Because, in motorhome terms, the Stratford is a small vehicle, taking it gently round the narrow back roads between



Stratford and Alcester was completely without stress. I didn't have to worry about tricky manoeuvres if I met something coming in the opposite direction.

This good driving experience continued when I had to reverse a small way up a steep hill to allow the traffic in front to pass around an inconveniently parked car. No judder was apparent.

As for road noises, these were limited to a few small squeaks coming from the dashboard and rattles from the side door blinds. The driving position was comfortable, mainly because the cab seats are the more

expensive Peugeot items with inbuilt swivel - standard cab seats with swivel mechanisms inserted between the base and the seat are much higher.

One bugbear found mostly in the Peugeot cab (and some Fiats) is the roof-mounted plastic shelf into which the cab courtesy lights are built. I'm not tall (a modest 5ft 4in), but when getting in and out of the driver's seat I bashed my head.

Cab-wise, much of everything else is standard to Fiat and Peugeot. Deep door pockets, and a large central glovebox plus small one on the passenger side. Both driver

and passenger get an airbag and both cab seats come with armrests (driver has one and passenger two).

MY LADY FAIR

This is a fairly striking campervan, even in what might be called 'boring' white. I

1 *The Stratford at Mary Arden's house in Wilmcote*

2 *Front end is all kitchen and washroom*

3 *Looking towards the rear lounge: the aisle isn't as narrow as it may appear*

On Test Auto-Sleeper Stratford on 2.2-litre Peugeot Boxer

have never been convinced that white van conversions are that attractive, until now. This one seems to suit white. Maybe because it's compact you don't really notice the white. Or maybe the white actually makes the burgundy and grey graphics stand out a little more - and not in a bad way.

Another factor in the smart appearance is the black glass windows all the way along the sides of the 'van. This use of black seems to be quite a popular design feature these days, with at least one other manufacturer adopting the look. In this case, the tinted glass panels (which are original to the window van this is based on) are over the windows (instead of being simply black graphics between the windows). They are single-glazed, but I'm told that the special thermic glass and vents should prevent condensation.

All the external hatches are white, which is another great reason to have a white 'van, as they blend so well. You have the toilet access hatch, exterior TV/DVD socket and fresh water tank inlet on the offside and the LPG tank filler (in black) on the nearside.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

If there's one slight snag with that sleek exterior look it's the slightly grey hue that the privacy glass gives the interior. It also gives the word outside a dull filter. It does a great job of hiding what's inside, though. You can



4 *The washing up set-up may look complex, but it proved efficient*

5 *You could possibly accommodate two close friends for dinner*

6 *Despite its compact dimensions, the kitchen works well*

7 *To combat the step down to the rear floor, the cab passenger seat has a removable footrest. There is also a small occasional table for use here*

see in but only if you get up close and even then you can't see a lot.

Ambience is vastly improved by the roof vent above the kitchen and the rooflight in the lounge: the light coloured fabrics and wood furniture also help. Considering the tinted glass, the interior is not as muted as you might imagine, even on overcast and rainy days.

The other downside to those smooth glass panels is the lack of opening windows. You can open a small portal in the side door and there's another small window in the washroom. However, this is not designed to open: the size of the opening in the interior panel means you can't reach the catch.

ROADSIDE REPOSE

The passenger seat swivels, and even has a removable footplate, in order to compensate for the raised cab seats in relation to the lower floor in the back. This allows one person to take a tea break. The table is stored in the wardrobe with a cranked leg, which fits a bracket on the very front of the washroom. The washroom wall gets in the way of swinging it properly out of the way for access to and from the passenger seat. It's really a bit of a nuisance, and it'd probably be easier to use the fold-up worktop on the side of the kitchen for cups of coffee.

FALSTAFFIAN FEASTS

This is no budget motorhome, even if it is of petite proportions.

The reason for fitting an electric-only compressor fridge (instead of the standard three-way type) is so that vents are not necessary, offering more flexibility for location. Although this model looks small, compressor fridges are much deeper than their three-way cousins, so this Waeco example has a perfectly adequate 80 litres of capacity. The only issue for me was the constant whirring. I'm a light sleeper, and it kept me awake a little - until I realised that turning it down to really low would help. As I was unlikely to keep opening and closing it in the night, I reasoned that the residual cold built up during the day would keep food cool enough. The fridge is simple to use, having a single dial inside that dictates the temperature, and automatically switching to mains when you hook up.

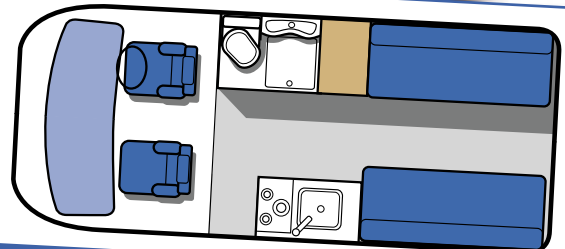
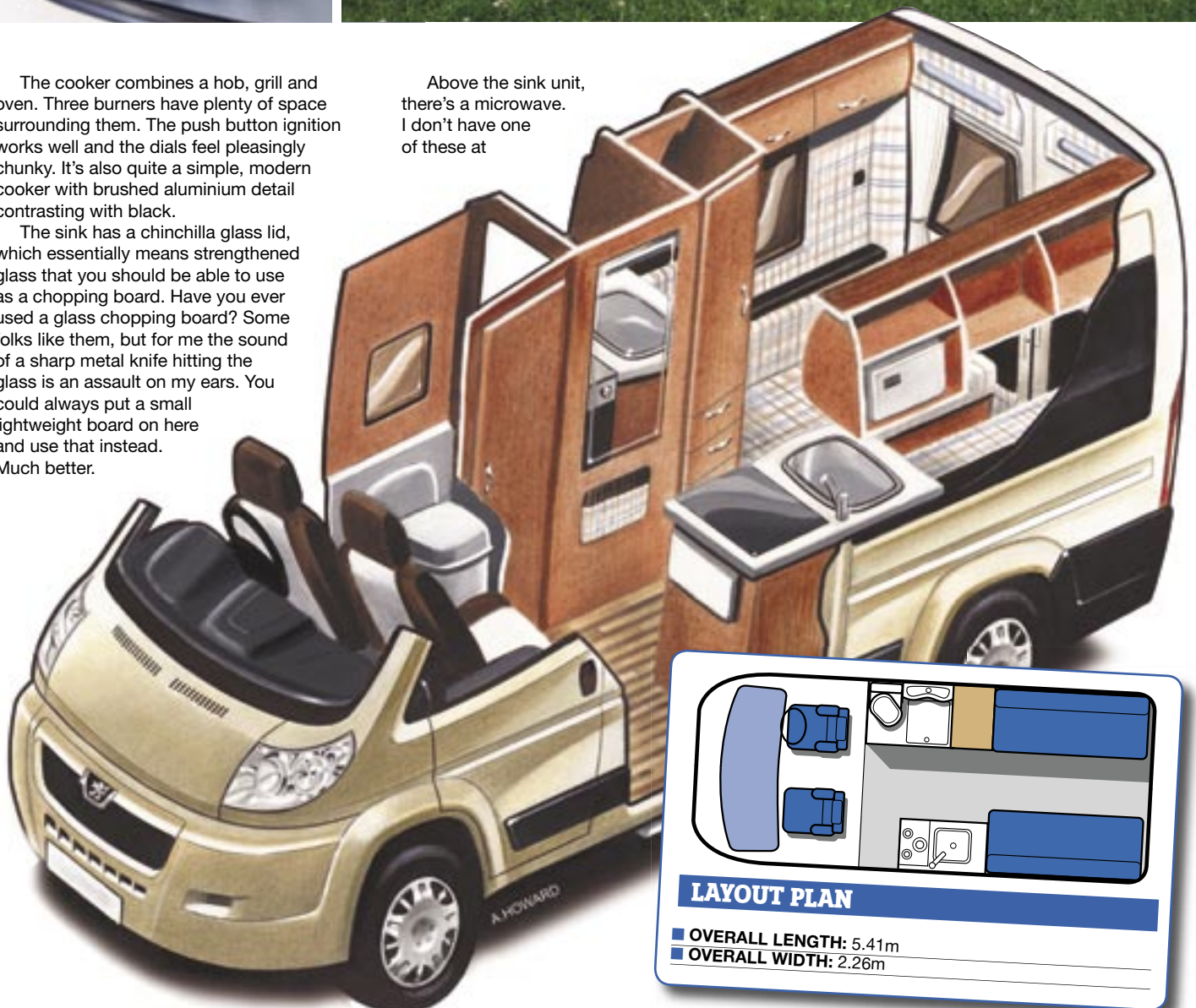




The cooker combines a hob, grill and oven. Three burners have plenty of space surrounding them. The push button ignition works well and the dials feel pleasingly chunky. It's also quite a simple, modern cooker with brushed aluminium detail contrasting with black.

The sink has a chinchilla glass lid, which essentially means strengthened glass that you should be able to use as a chopping board. Have you ever used a glass chopping board? Some folks like them, but for me the sound of a sharp metal knife hitting the glass is an assault on my ears. You could always put a small lightweight board on here and use that instead. Much better.

Above the sink unit, there's a microwave. I don't have one of these at



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 5.41m
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.26m

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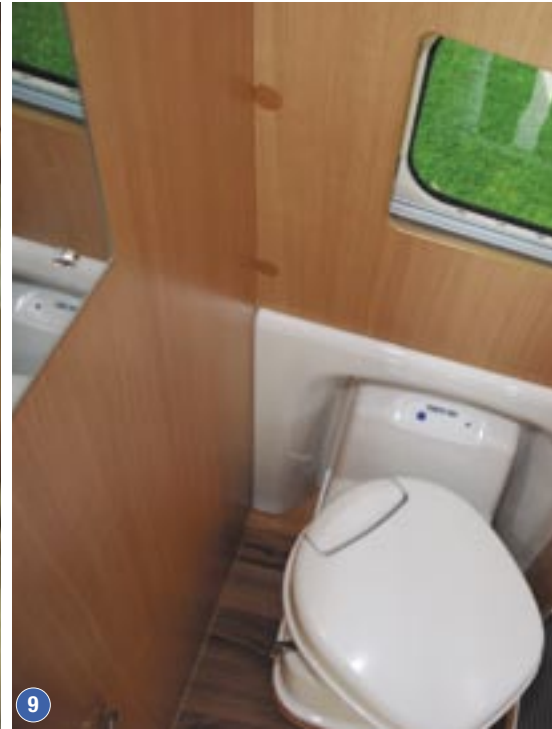
home: we got rid of it because we didn't use it enough. But, in the interest of science I had a go. Firstly, it's not too high, being set slightly below the roof so even I could reach inside it. Of course it's not as big as a domestic model, or as powerful. But 700W should be enough to cook scrambled eggs or heat soup. As I'll come to mention, I'd much prefer a cupboard. There's a ledge above this though, with a lip, which I found perfect for storing tea and coffee.

It's a simple affair to eat the food you've just cooked. The larger dining table is stored in the overcab recess. Practically, this is an open space with no door, so getting the table down and replacing it is really easy. However, you can't really use this space for anything else if you plan to use the table regularly. You'd have to remove what you'd put up there to get the table out. There's also a small alcove on the left, which is difficult to reach.

Right so you've got the table down. It's a long thin affair with the traditional folding legs at either end. Bearing in mind this is a pure two-berth 'van, there's plenty of room for two plates, a bowl of salad, bread and wine. There might just be enough room for two friends as well (using smaller plates and careful elbows).

AFTER THE FEASTING ENDS

It's not a military operation, but you do have to be organised when using this kitchen. Fill the spacious sink with hot water from the Truma Combi 4 heating/hot water system. A combined system saves space inside a 'van like this, giving a 10-litre boiler. Rest the sturdy plastic drainer on the side of the sink (the cooker lid needs to be closed) and lift out the small metal rack. This slots onto a bracket on the underside of the lid, making a small, useful draining rack for plates, mugs and cutlery. Between the two systems, you have an efficient draining space.



TAKING ONE'S REPOSE

Once the food's done, you can relax. There are two compact sofas in the rear. Each has a decent backrest and the two scatter cushions allow you to stretch along the sofa using a cushion as a backrest against the door (or against the wardrobe/kitchen unit depending on which way you sit).

The best thing about this 'van, is that on hot days or balmy evenings, you can simply open the rear doors and get a great view of the surrounding countryside: alfresco living

at its best.

One slight annoyance is aforementioned the lack of opening windows. The rooflight lets a little fresh air in, but you have to open the doors to get the full benefit. You might not want to be that open to the elements, or invite insects to dinner.

Also, there are no little ledges for coffee cups, phones or anything else. It would be handy to have a little bracket (like in the cab) for the small coffee table.

The gogglebox, which is standard, is hidden



I LIKED

- Deep kitchen drawer
- Spacious washroom
- Compact size

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Press-studs (or similar) for rear curtains
- Bracket for small table in lounge
- A washroom cabinet

I DISLIKED

- Constant hum of fridge
- Microwave taking up valuable storage

8 Most of the Stratford's usable storage is found in this wardrobe unit

9 The bathroom is a good size – unusually so for a petite camper

10 The rear lounge makes a cozy double bed

11 Broadway Tower makes a fitting backdrop



away in a small compartment on the side of the wardrobe, and is an adequate size. It's got a DVD slot in the side and can be attached to a digibox. The TV slides out of its small compartment and can then rotate on a bracket so that it can be seen by both occupants.

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM...

Your lounge is your bed. I stored my bedding under the nearside sofa, which is certainly uncluttered and free from services. My bulky duvet, sheet and two pillows just about managed to fit under there, so there would be plenty of room for more compact bedding.

Remove the bedding from its store, then slide the seat bases out to meet in the middle. The backrest cushions slot snugly (tightly) into the central space.

It's a simple job and performed quickly. The backrests are actually in two parts, the lower patterned section you use and the upper piece covered in a suede-like fabric, which can be left in situ (attached to the wall with Velcro) for support when sitting up in bed or removed and stored in the cab.

Though as flat as is possible, the bed would benefit from a memory foam mattress

topper to even out the bumps and provide a softer base. There are two light switches on either side, which control the downlighters, plus with the TV being where it is, if you lay your head on the nearside, you can watch the box in bed.

THAT WHICH WE CALL A ROSE...

Surprising is not normally a word associated with washrooms, but there's always an exception. In this case the surprise is a spacious washroom that manages to offer a separate shower.

When you open the door and step in, the toilet with a wood-effect vinyl floor is directly in front of you. There's plenty of legroom for all heights. There's a decent sized mirror on the wall behind the drivers seat, along with a toilet roll holder. On the right is the separate shower compartment, which also contains the crescent-shaped basin moulded from white GRP. It's a spacious shower, which even has a vent for blown-air on cold mornings.

The basin tap doubles as the showerhead, but there is a holder on the wall, although it's not very high. For the men out there, the round directional mirror should help with shaving.



On Test Auto-Sleeper Stratford on 2.2-litre Peugeot Boxer

12 Pocket in the side door is great for books, if you don't open the door when it's raining

13 The TV is neatly stored, and swings out to be in a good viewing position

14 A room with a view

YE STORE ROOM

At home the kitchen at home is my pride and joy. Plenty of worktop space and cupboards were a priority to cope with my love of cooking. In a motorhome these factors are not quite so important as I don't go on holiday to cook extensively, preferring to make simple meals.

Even so, I do expect to be able to store lots of wine and food, and that's where this 'van loses out a bit. It is dinky, and there does have to be compromise somewhere along the way. Here, it's storage, and not just in the kitchen. There's not a lot of 'cupboard' space anywhere.

Let's start with the kitchen. A deep drawer beneath the cooker is actually quite perfect. You don't have to bend over double in a fairly narrow passage to be able to see what's inside, and it's more than capable of storing large bottles and tins. You also get a second drawer just below the sink for cutlery and utensils. It's a good size with space for larger items as well. But that is it for the cooking area.

The only other possible storage space is taken up by the microwave oven, which you'll either use, or you won't. And if you like sites limited-facility sites (no electric hook-up?), you won't be able to use it anyway, as the appliance can only be run on the mains. Personally, I think it would have made a great cupboard.

Behind you, and below the wardrobe, two shallow drawers and a large locker (which contains the fuse box) offer a decent amount of storage, but you will need to decide what to use it for. Let me explain...

In the lounge you'll find the large underbed space on the nearside (with a door in the front panel) where I stored my bedding. Although it may seem big and clutter free my duvet etc filled it up, so unless your bedding is minimalist in the extreme – that's that one accounted for. Four roof lockers are of a decent size, but you can only use three; the final space is taken up with the Auto-Sleepers crockery (and tailored brackets) that comes with all models as standard. This means that two people would have to share those three roof lockers and the wardrobe for all clothing and personal stuff.

The washroom is the same, no actually it's worse, aside from a few little alcoves with ineffectual rails, there is no storage. I'm assured that this will be adapted and production models will offer better bathroom



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LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE

High top panel van conversion

PRICE

■ From: £37,895 OTR

■ As tested: £38,795 OTR

BASICS

■ Vehicle: Peugeot Boxer medium wheelbase window van

■ Berths: 2

■ Three-point belted seats: 2 (incl. driver)

■ Warranty: 2 years conversion, 3 years base vehicle

CONSTRUCTION

Steel bodied high roof panel van with nearside full-height sliding side door and twin rear doors

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturer's figure)

■ Length: 5.41m (17ft 8in)

■ Width: 2.26m (mirrors folded) 2.51m (mirrors extended)

■ Height: 2.59m (8ft 6in)

■ Wheelbase: 3.45m (11ft 5in)

■ Rear overhang: 1.02m (3ft 4in)

■ Maximum authorised weight: 3300kg*

■ Payload: 548kg*

INSIDE STORY

Swivel passenger seat, central kitchen and washroom, rear twin-sofa lounge

■ Insulation: 40mm all round recycled plastics

■ Interior height: 1.89m (6ft 2in)

storage. Just one locker for things like towels would be great.

There are some useful nooks in the doors, two on the rear, and one long one on the side slider. They're good for books

I'm certain that how much 'stuff' you need in your daily life will determine the Stratford's suitability: if you need many clothes, lots of toys, and a good dollop of food and booze then it's probably not for you, but if you are a pared-back camper then it could suit you just fine.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS

As I tested the first Stratford to leave the production line, I offered some feedback to Auto-Sleepers based on my time in charge. As a result, I'm promised that a fixing of some sort (Velcro?) will be attached to the rear doors to make sure the curtains remain shut at night; the washroom alcoves will be adapted; and the possibility of a small rear table will be considered. ■

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Auto-Sleepers, Orchard Works, Willersey, Broadway, Worcs WR12 7QP (tel: 01386 853338; web site: www.auto-sleepers.co.uk)

WE STAYED AT

Island Meadows Caravan Park, Aston Cantlow, Henley-In-Arden, Warwickshire B95 6JP (tel: 01789 488273; web site www.islandmeadowcaravanpark.co.uk)

AUTO-SLEEPER STRATFORD ON 2.2-LITRE PEUGEOT BOXER

THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2.2-litre turbo diesel producing 88kW (120bhp) at 3500rpm
- **Transmission:** Six speed manual gearbox, front wheel drive
- **Fuel consumption:** 22mpg overall
- **Brakes:** ABS, EBFD (electronic brake force distribution), EBA (emergency braking assistance), ASR (traction control), ESP (Dynamic stability control)
- **Suspension:** Front: independent with anti-roll bar. Rear: rigid axle with leaf springs and anti-roll bar
- **Features:** Driver and passenger airbag, electric windows and mirrors, trip computer, variable windscreen wipers, adjustable steering column, central locker, doors bins, pop-up map holder, 12V socket, overhead storage

LOUNGING & DINING

Swivel passenger seat with occasional coffee table on single removable leg stowed in wardrobe. Rear twin inward facing sofas with freestanding dining table stored above cab. TV slides from back of wardrobe.

KITCHEN

Nearside kitchen unit with cutlery drawer between sink and fridge and large drawer under cooker

- **Sink:** Linen-effect sink with chromed Whale swivel mixer tap, removable draining board/chopping board, metal drainer rack and heat-resistant chinchilla glass lid
- **Cooker:** Spinflo Triplex combination oven with three gas burners, grill and oven with push-button ignition. Daewoo 700W

microwave with five power settings and rotary timer control

- **Fridge:** Waeco CoolMatic CR-80 compressor fridge (runs off 12volt and mains) with freezer compartment. Capacity 80 litres

WASHROOM

Outward opening door, with push button handle. Thetford C200 CS swivel cassette toilet with electric flush. Separate shower compartment with bi fold clear glazed doors and crescent shaped sink. Combined mixer sink tap/shower head, shower holder. Chromed shaving mirror with scissor style extension arm. Tooth mug and holder. Three GRP moulded alcoves with elasticised rail.

BEDS

Transverse lounge double

- **Length:** 1.86m (6ft 1in)
- **Width:** 1.22m (4ft 0in)

STORAGE

Cab: overcab recess with nearside alcove. Kitchen: Shelf above microwave, cutlery drawer below sink, deep drawer below cooker. Wardrobe: with ledge above TV enclosure, small table brackets and hanging rail; two drawers and locker below. Lounge: Two high level cupboards each side; alcoves in rear doors; nearside underseat locker. Washroom: three alcoves with rails

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Underslung, 69 litres
- **Waste water:** Underslung, 40 litres
- **Water/space heating:** Truma Combi 4E boiler

with blown air, gas-mains operation

- **Leisure battery:** 110 amp hr
- **Gas:** 25-litre underslung tank
- **Lighting:** Lounge: One LED ceiling light, four LED downlighters, four LED spotlights. Kitchen: One LED downlighter, one LED ceiling light. Washroom: two LED ceiling lights. Side entrance: LED light on timer. Awning: LED strip light.
- **Sockets:** 230V: 3 (two in lounge, one in kitchen); 12V: 2 (one in lounge, one in cab)
- **Control panel:** Above side door, simple push button and indicator lights for power, water pump, leisure and vehicle battery status, fresh water level and full waste tank indicator
- **Blinds/curtains:** Pleated blinds and flyscreen to all side windows (lounge, side door and washroom) and lounge roof light. Flyscreen and blind for kitchen and washroom roof vent. Curtains for rear door windows and cab.
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base vehicle:** Upgrade from 100PS to 120PS (£920)
 - **Conversion:** None fitted
- Other options
- **Base vehicle:** 15in alloy wheels, cab air con, pass airbag, cruise control, metallic paint
 - **Conversion:** Reversing camera, frost stat, solar panel 22W, solar panel 55W

E&OE

