

LONG-TERM TEST

MMM's long-term test Ravenna at the Northern Motorcaravan Show, York.



UNRAVELLING THE RAVENNA...

Part six

Jonathan and Flora Lloyd take over the stewardship of the MMM long-term test vehicle for a month

During our 'ownership' of the Ford-based Auto-Sleeper Ravenna many people asked broadly similar questions. Here are the answers to a compilation of the most commonly asked questions, together with our 'responses' to one

or two that should have been asked!

First is the question we were most frequently asked. Those following are in random order. (Is 'random order' an oxymoron? Sorry, I digress.)

Q: Is the Ravenna a 'proper' Auto-Sleepers coachbuilt?

A: Of course it's a proper Auto-Sleepers coachbuilt. There is nothing improper about it. However, it is not built in the traditional Auto-Sleepers way. It is of sandwich construction, and is not a monocoque GRP moulding. Also, the furniture is more modern than Auto-Sleepers' traditional style.

Q: What's the Ford like?

A: All things considered (equipment level, options, ride, performance, economy, ease of servicing, value for money etc) I think that the new Ford Transit is one of the best light commercial base vehicles available at the moment.

Q: You previously owned a coachbuilt motorcaravan based on the last model Transit (2.5D auto), and you were always singing the praises of the Ford. Is this new Transit as good?

A: Yes and no! Mostly yes, or even better. Yes, the Duratorq engine is a gentle giant, much more civilised than the old DI unit. No, the seats and seating position are not as good. The squab is too high, each seat has lost an armrest, and there is no lumbar adjustment.

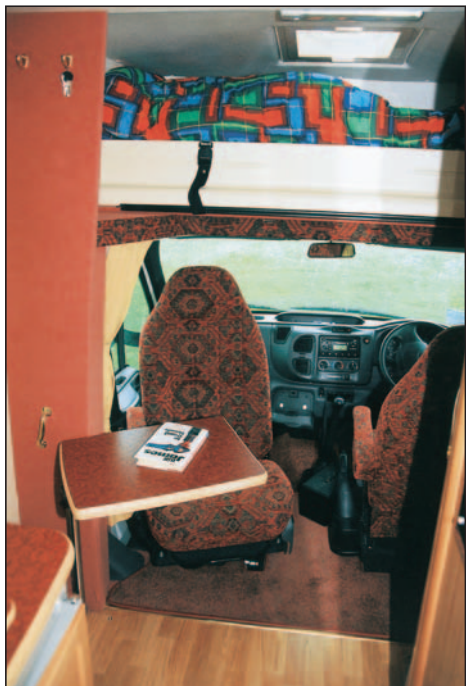
Q: What do you think of the new Auto-Sleepers furniture and fabrics?

A: Inspired, varied, and contemporary. About time too. We both loved the red and gold Ravenna interior.



Is the 'new' Transit as good as the 'old' Transit?

UNRAVELLING THE RAVENNA...



What about the cab seats?

Q: You currently own a VW LT-based Auto-Sleeper Medallion (monocoque body with Auto-Sleepers' traditional handcrafted furniture) and Jonathan frequently describes it (to anybody who is stupid enough to stand still long enough to listen! JHL) as 'the best put-together motorcaravan we've ever owned'. Is the Ravenna as well made?

A: (Jonathan) In my opinion, definitely not, but it is much more competitively priced than the Medallion was, and the Ravenna's build quality is still above the industry norm.

A: (Flora) I don't think the difference is as great as Jonathan suggests.

Q: How has it stood up to fair wear and tear?

A: Overall, very well, though there is the odd wonky hinge and cupboard catch that needs adjustment, plus the fit of the caravan door needs attention. Nothing that any competent dealer would be unable to handle.

Q: Any disasters?

A: Yes, the glass hob 'exploded' sending glass shards everywhere. I had just arrived at the Northern Motorcaravan Show, and hadn't even turned the gas on! This is the second time this has happened whilst in MMM ownership. I borrowed a 'dustbuster' from a colleague, but all it really did was redistribute the broken glass rather than vacuuming it up! I suppose I should have been thankful for the free acupuncture treatment every time I sat down!



Any disasters?

To be fair to Auto-Sleepers, as soon as I reported it to Steve Cant (Sales Manager), he immediately contacted base and arranged for a new hob cover to be brought to York and for a service engineer to fit it. The service engineer duly arrived on the rally field at the appointed time, took one look at the cooker and said that as the cooker would have to be removed, and he wasn't CORGI registered, the job couldn't be undertaken. Umm. At least the rattles from the kitchen would be reduced for the homeward run!

Q: Anything you're not going to tell us?

A: Yes I'm definitely not going to tell you about the time I had supped an injudicious amount of alcohol, went to bed, felt cold, suffered all night from howling drafts coming into the interior, only to discover the next morning that I had left the outside access door to the underbed locker wide open. Bird brain!

Q: I know that you both went away in the Ravenna for a weekend, but also that Jonathan spent six nights in it 'flying solo'. Is it a good layout for single motorcaravanners?

A: Certainly is. The only slight downside was that if you removed the rear backrest to create a single bed, there was a gap adjacent to the wall for restless sleepers such as I to roll down.

Rather like the actress who described her recently departed (dead) husband as 'now making satisfactory progress', Flora enjoys time to herself. Similarly, I enjoyed going away



What did you think of the new design fridge?

on my own in the Ravenna. It was one of those motorcaravans that 'grows' on you. The more I used it, the more I liked it.

Q: As an Industrial Safety Officer, I am very concerned about safety in the 'living part' of motorcaravans. Is the Ravenna a safe motorcaravan?

A: You are probably better qualified than I am to answer that, but I think it is, and it has been manufactured to exceed the EN1646 standard. Auto-Sleepers have been one of the industry leaders in promoting safety issues, and Anthony Trevelyan (of Auto-Sleepers) has worked tirelessly with the NCC to see that strict codes are adhered to regarding the installation of electrical and gas equipment. It is hoped that the company's products follow that ethos.

However, nothing is perfect, and Mrs Editor slipped off the (less-than-brilliantly-positioned) exterior step, seriously fracturing her ankle. The step needed to be mounted so that the entire tread surface is available on egress. Also, the step dipped from the horizontal alarmingly when stood on.

Q: Is the shower big enough?

A: Big enough for what? On second thoughts don't answer that! We felt that the shower was of a more-than-adequate size for washing, changing and visits to the loo. We prefer to have a bit more lounge space than a gigantic changing room with separate shower cubicle. Understandably, others may have



What do you think of Auto-Sleepers new fabrics? (Photo also illustrates the annoying gap behind the cushion, apparent when flying solo.)



Are the Truma space and water heaters as good as the Carver units they supersede?

different priorities and so might find that another motorcaravan suited them better.

Q: What about the practicalities of the interior and exterior redesign of the Electrolux fridge?

A: (Flora) I liked it, and appreciated the separate salad compartment and full-width freezer.

A: (Jonathan) I disliked it, thought it inefficient at storing bottles, and I missed the illuminated 12V/230V 'power on' telltale lights.

Q: We've owned several Auto-Sleepers' motorcaravans, but they have all been fitted with Carver space and water heaters. Are the Truma replacements as good?

A: We think so regarding performance, price etc. However, one of the strengths of the (now defunct) Carver company was their superb spares service. We've yet to put Truma to that test.

Q: Other reviewers have commented on kitchen rattles when driving, and a roaring noise coming from the dashboard at certain speeds. Any thoughts?

A: Kitchen: It was very noisy, by far the worst Auto-Sleeper I've driven in this respect. The fitted 'drop-in' cooker was the principal offender, but also the base units themselves vibrated a lot over indifferent road surfaces. My theory is that the problem results from the way this 'van was built. The last (very-much-quieter) 'old' Tranny Ravenna I drove was, I seem to remember, built by placing the furniture units over the fitted carpet and then securing them. This test vehicle was (as a response to consumer demand) fitted with a vinyl floor +



Is it a safe motorcaravan?



Would you buy one?



Was the shower room big enough?

removable over-carpet. Thus, the furniture was attached directly to the vinyl-covered floor, with the predictable percussive results when encountering poor road surfaces. I think it needs the 'cushioning' of the carpet. Perhaps a neoprene fillet on the bottom of the cupboards would achieve the same damping effect?

Roaring noise: Again I'm 'out on a limb' with this one as I don't think it's coming from the dashboard at all, but from the gas drop-out safety vent in the entrance door footwell, and perhaps from the gaps surrounding the ill-fitting caravan entrance door.

Q: Will it be expensive to run?

A: I doubt it. The residential part will require the same amount of servicing and maintenance as any other motorcaravan. The base vehicle only requires a service every 'million' miles or so. Seriously, it has been designed for minimum downtime (the time a vehicle is off the road for repairs and servicing); so most repairs would be straightforward and should be within the capabilities of keen DIY-ers. Alternatively, such work should be reasonably priced at your local garage (see table A). Ford Transit-based motorcaravans are going to make particularly good secondhand buys.

Spares for Fords are available at any greengrocers (well almost). Incidentally, I achieved 26.7mpg at a steady 70mph.

Table A
SERVICING COSTS ON 120PS FORD TRANSIT 2.4-LITRE TD DURATORQ

| | |
|---|--|
| Annual/15 000 miles (whichever is sooner) | £103.00 inc service consumables, labour and VAT |
| Three years/30 000 miles (whichever is sooner) | £133.25 inc service consumables, labour and VAT |

Information kindly supplied by TC Harrison
(Ford main dealer), Oxney Road,
Peterborough. Tel: 01733 425555

Q: Can you use it as a car?

A: Yes, we did and covered nearly 1000 miles. As I've said before, having forked out more for my motorcaravan than I did for my house, I use it at every opportunity. I suggest readers do the same to get maximum value out of their 'van.

Q: Describe the Ravenna in three words?

A: Why? I'm not going to be paid much for three words, am I?

Alright then, practical, compact, friendly.

Q: Would you buy one?

A: (Flora) I think so, though the bed making mechanism needs further development, and the different thickness of the bed cushions makes one wonder whether any of the designers actually tried making up the double bed before finalising the cushion sizes. (The second point has already been addressed.)

A: (Jonathan) Yes, and if I could afford a new one, it would almost definitely be the Durashift version (ASM...Auto Shift Manual), but they will have to do something about the kitchen rattles first.

For a comprehensive overview of the Ravenna and brief specification details (part one, exterior and base vehicle; part two, interior) see Mike's Motorcaravanning Month in the July and August editions of MMM. Road tester Roger Mechan's impressions appeared in the September issue, and George and Val Collings had their say in October. December saw the Ravenna back in Mike's Motorcaravanning Month for a report on its trip to France.