

LIVING WITH A...

...2008 Auto-Trail Cheyenne 630LB

In spite of some problems, Chris and Verna Stansfield remain enthusiastic serial Auto-Trail owners



AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £51,670 OTR
(nearest equivalent model Navajo)
- **BERTHS:** 4
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Fiat Ducato chassis cab
- **ECONOMY:** 24mpg
- **COST OF SIMILAR AGED VAN TODAY:** £38,000

We started motorhoming nine years ago and the Cheyenne is our third 'van. All have been Auto-Trails, which we like because of the brand's quality, innovative design, good workmanship and pricing.

However, we have had problems with this 'van - something we'll come to later.

Many people have told us you need to try things out over an extended period before you decide which is the best layout and, of course, individual needs also change with time. Have we got it right this time? We think so - fingers crossed. We spend an average of 120 nights a year in the 'van, nearly all on sites and costing about £1,700 in fees. We travel extensively in Great Britain and visit Europe three times a year, in particular France, which we love for its people and their laid-back lifestyle.

WHAT YOU GET, WHAT WE ADDED

Our Cheyenne 630LB Hi-Line has a well-designed rear kitchen, dual-fuel cooking, space heating and hot water systems. There's

a good washroom - with separate shower - lots of storage and a spacious wardrobe.

The lounge features swivelling cab seats and long settees, which can be made into two single beds or a double. We opted for the excellent value SE pack (cab air-conditioning, entertainment centre, recessed awning with light, reversing camera) and upgraded the upholstery to Buckingham blue with cream carpets. We bought the 'van from Brownhills, who transferred our Phantom Tracker, safe and Gaslow refillable gas system from our previous motorhome.

EXTERNAL LOOKS

Auto-Trail's bulbous luton is an easy identifier, while flowing decals and recessed high-level front and rear lights enhance the appearance. The high-gloss, heavyweight GRP-clad walls are easier to repair than aluminium covered panels and clean to a deep gloss shine.

The floor, walls and roof have thicker insulation than the norm and the last is a one-piece GRP moulding, helping to eliminate leaks. The floor is vinyl-coated underneath to provide a waterproof surface. All habitation

windows are flush-fit (tinted), which reduces wind drag.

On the nearside, behind the cab, is the diesel filling point (is Chris the only one who has trouble undoing the filler cap?). Next is the gas locker, followed by a large under-sofa locker (with internal access). Above, there's a recessed awning with light. At the rear, the spare wheel locker is nearly full-width and deep enough to store windbreaks and sun loungers. On the offside is the battery compartment, with the 110 amp hr leisure battery and space for another.

INTERNAL LOOKS

Inside headroom is 1.98m (6ft 6in). The washroom has a small step up (and a step down into the shower), but does not cause any problems for Chris, who is 1.88m (6ft 2in) tall. On either side, the front lounge's windows are above the inward-facing seats, with easy-open window stays, which do, however, take a bit of getting used to. The internal woodwork is attractive wood-grained Acer, which we love - carpentry and workmanship is neat and well

finished, and the push-button locker doors all fit well. Overhead lockers have a three-inch 'sump' in their bases, which makes it difficult to find items, especially if you are short. The entrance door is one-piece and has an opening window with flyscreen.

We don't like the window design because the slightest breeze blows the flyscreen off its track and it's very fiddly to re-fit. A full-length independent flyscreen door would be better, and also provide improved ventilation for those hot summer days when we have the door fully open.

The floors are carpeted before furniture is installed, which provides additional soundproofing and ensures the underbed lockers are warmer. Heki rooflights - in the lounge and washroom - are wind-up and complete with blinds and flyscreens. Under the offside settee is a full-length storage area, which is brilliant.

DREAM DRIVING

We have the 2.3-litre 130bhp diesel engine (with six-speed gearbox and cruise control) and early reports suggested would be like driving a car - that, it truly is. A good driving

position (spacious and comfortable, with a well-laid-out cab) is enhanced by two armrests, lots of seat adjustments and ample room between the cab seats. The 'van is a dream to drive - quick, lively, smooth and goes where we want it to.

The excellent electric mirrors also have built-in indicators - a great aid to safe driving. However, Chris has found that the very edge of the driver's mirror is obscured by the side window pillar, necessitating a forward stretch to ensure nothing is at the edge of vision. The rear camera automatically engages in reverse gear to provide a good rear view.

The ride is very quiet - a compliment to the build quality - with no rattles or squeaks. Safety-wise, both driver and passenger have airbags. A worry for many drivers is the lack of a spare wheel, here replaced by a Fiat Fix and Go repair kit. However, all 2011 models now have spare wheels as standard: seems some converters do listen to customers' wishes.

QUALITY COOKING

The kitchen is a masterpiece, which should satisfy most cooks. Granite-effect work surfaces are at a comfortable working



1 *Leaving Camping Treviris Campingplatz, Trier, Germany*

2 *The Cheyenne is Verna and Chris Stansfield's third Auto-Trail*

3 *The spacious lounge has luxurious upholstery*

4 *The Cheyenne's classic layout places the kitchen and washroom aft*



height and the sink has a domestic-style mixer tap and inset drainer with removable cover. However, a little more slope on the sink base would speed up drainage! The dual-fuel Spinflo Caprice cooker (with one mains electric hotplate) has a hinged glass lid, full-width grill, a decently-sized oven and pan storage below. Above the work surface are two cupboards - one with a grey tambour door (why can't this be colour coordinated?) pre-wired for a microwave oven, and one with plate racks. Above, is a three-speed reversible fan. Forward of the caravan door is the fridge, with worktop above, and a chest of drawers - the top of which we use for the TV.

SPACIOUS LOUNGING

The swivelling driver and passenger seats are fully upholstered and add an extra dimension to the lounge - helping to make space for eight people. However, the heavy free-standing table is only adequate for six to dine. Sumptuous upholstery is in 150mm (6in) thick foam, colour coordinated and comfortable for both sitting and sleeping.

Wood grain - anti-condensation - panels are situated below the two windows and a small cupboard sits between the offside lounge seat and the wardrobe.

Ambience is enhanced by 12v low-energy LED lighting, which provides a warm white light above and below lockers, with two adjustable reading lamps providing brighter white light. Lighting is supplemented by dimmer-operated 230v lamps at the front. Whether you sit on the lounge seats or in the cab seats, it's very comfortable to watch TV.

LUXURIOUS SLEEPING

Sleeping arrangements are flexible and comfortable. The lounge seats are 1.87m (6ft 1.5in) long, and, by pulling out the sofa bases (which is finger-tip easy) and laying down the backrests, a huge double bed is made.

We make up two single beds, with a 300mm (12in) gap between, so we don't disturb each other when going to the loo at night. We also use Ikea mattress toppers with a fitted sheet and duvet. The luton makes up



into a double bed, 1.95m x 1.25m (6ft 5in x 4ft 1in), with a firm comfortable mattress. Once in bed, the rounded ceiling profile doesn't feel claustrophobic. The luton has opening windows either side (with flyscreens and pleated blinds) that provide fresh air on those hot summer nights. There are two - bright white - switched lights for reading in bed, and a full-width privacy curtain.

DESIGNER BATHING

The washroom is well-designed and finished in Acer wood grain panels. It makes maximum use of a small space - there's enough headroom for us at 1.88m (6ft 6in) - and has just about enough elbowroom for larger people.

The decent-sized (seamless plastic) separate shower has glazed doors with LED lighting. LED lights are also fitted above the mirror. A nice touch is LED lighting under the washroom door, which can be switched on at night when you want to go to the loo.

ENTERTAINMENT

What a choice! The 'van has a remote controlled, multi-channel radio/CD/DVD/MP3 player in the cab (with rear ceiling-mounted speakers providing good quality sound) and 10-inch flip-down TV receiver, with Freeview and roof-mounted Status - directional - aerial operated from inside a locker. Our Sky box is wired into the 'van's system, with an Oyster automatic satellite dish. Although this was expensive, it's brilliant: just pitch, switch on and watch.

HABITATION AND CONTROLS

The main control panel (located above the caravan door) is digital, push-button-operated and next to the controls for the Truma heating and hot water system. There are battery charging options, a battery condition indicator, power consumption gauge, battery discharge readout, digital interior and exterior temperature gauges, clock, alarm and event timer. As we keep the 'van at a storage site, the ability to bring it home and charge both



WE LIKED

- Value for money
- Quality with innovation
- High-quality finish and luxurious upholstery
- Single beds option
- Well-designed and equipped kitchen
- Well-fitted washroom
- Amount and variety of internal and external storage

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A full-sized flyscreen door
- Better waste bin
- Frost-proof water and waste systems
- Spare wheel

WE DISLIKED

- Entrance door's flyscreen and bin
- High-level locker 'sumps'

leisure and vehicle battery at once is brilliant - a monthly charge-up in winter does the trick.

The main electrics and other controls are housed in the high-level locker aft of the driver's seat, with the main relays at floor level and easy to get at. Also provided are four mains sockets, three 12V sockets, a smoke alarm and TV point. All electrical circuits and gas appliances have individual switches and isolator valves.

COMFORT

The dual-fuel Truma heating system is excellent and flexible. This sends blown warm air to four floor-level vents via a multi-speed fan. There are 500W, 1,000W and 2,000W mains operation settings, which are ideal for both overnight and daytime heating in winter. Heat levels can be quickly boosted using gas power when it's really cold. The 12-litre hot water boiler is also gas-mains-powered and very efficient.

The motorhome's body has a single floor, but most of the plumbing is above the floor level and remains frost-free, except in very cold temperatures. The insulated fresh water tank is slung below the floor at the rear, while the waste water tank is in the centre. This does mean long runs of pipework, but it has a superb, large-bore drain tap.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Auto-Trail provides a full warranty for the first 12 months and insurance-based cover for a further 24 months, making three years in total. Fiat Camper Assistance is also available (throughout Europe) to deal with vehicle breakdowns.

We have covered just under 19,000 miles to date, and have not been let down by the 'van, but we have had a number of problems with our dealer fittings and Auto-Trail's workmanship. The 'van was delivered with filthy carpets, which were replaced by Auto-Trail. Our Phantom alarm system - transferred to the 'van by Brownhills - took three attempts before it worked.

Both rooflights' gearboxes failed and were replaced - the main one by Auto-Trail the day after notification. The other took Brownhills ten weeks to obtain the spare part!

Severe damp was found under the offside lounge window at the first habitation service - present as a result of poor window seating by Auto-Trail. Again, it took Brownhills ten weeks to obtain the wallboard, which is actually available for next-day delivery!

As a result of Brownhills' lack of customer service, we had the warranty work completed by Auto-Trail's aftercare centre (run by Mark Atkinson). We have been extremely pleased with the workmanship and the aftercare centre's customer-focused approach. By the time we had the damp area replaced, we also had a 'spongy' floor problem and a broken caravan door catch, but all is now well. At the second habitation service, damp readings were high under the washroom window, which was taken out and re-seated - another production problem! Fiat has also changed the engine and



gearbox mounts, installed a new clutch and lower reverse gear under warranty (to cure a mild case of the dreaded reversing judder problem). Again, the service from Fiat Assistance was brilliant. Our 'van had the misfortune to be damaged, while on the storage site by a caravan, which caused over £4,000 of damage. Photos of the damage, sent to Auto-Trail's Mark Atkinson, brought the necessary quote and the work was completed in eight weeks.

Would we have another Auto-Trail? Yes, we like the brand's design, innovation, quality and workmanship.

OUR NEXT CHALLENGE...

We have bought a Peugeot 107 car to tow, and are in the process of having an A-frame and towbar fitted. This has been planned to give us better access to those more remote parts of the country where larger motorhomes have problems. ■



- 5 The kitchen is well equipped and includes a dual-fuel cooker
- 6 We prefer to use the single beds, leaving a walkway between for easy access
- 7 Auto-Trail's tried-and-tested washroom has plenty of room for folks like us
- 8 The separate shower is an Auto-Trail signature feature
- 9 Entertainment kit and life support systems are very impressive
- 10 The external barbecue point is ideally positioned

FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Conversion:** 2008 Auto-Trail Cheyenne 630LB SE Hi-Line
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato 35 light chassis cab
- **Power plant:** 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 130bhp, six-speed manual gearbox
- **Gross vehicle weight:** 3,500kg
- **Payload:** 455kg
- **Layout:** Overcab double bed and swivelling cab seats, ahead of twin-sofa lounge, rear kitchen and corner washroom
- **Exterior measurements:** Length 6.70m (22ft 0in), width 2.31m (7ft 7in), height 3.02m (9ft 11in)
- **Berths:** 4
- **Bed size(s):** Lounge double 2.08m x 1.87m (6ft 10in x 6ft 1.5in), overcab double 1.95m x 1.25m (6ft 5in x 4ft 1in)
- **Length of ownership:** 3 years
- **Supplied by:** Brownhills, Newark
- **Mileage covered:** 7,000
- **Average fuel economy:** 24mpg
- **Accessories/extras:** SE Pack - recessed awning, awning light, exterior shower, electrically-operated entrance step, roof fan, dual-fuel cooker, external gas point, flip-down colour monitor and reversing camera, CD/DVD/MP3 player, multi-channel TV/radio receiver, Freeview box, Status directional aerial and booster, Gaslow refillable gas system, safe, kitchen towel holder, Self-seeking satellite TV system
- **Base vehicle service:** £304
- **MOT:** £54
- **Recalls:** Electric step operation
- **Habitation service:** £216
- **Insurance:** £272, including European breakdown cover (Caravan Guard)
- **Price new today:** £51,670 OTR (nearest equivalent model Navajo)
- **Cost of similar aged 'van today:** £38,000
- **What went wrong:** Rooflight mechanisms failed, damp in lounge and washroom walls, de-laminated floor section, broken caravan door latch, judder when reversing
- **Further reading:** N/A
- **Contacts:** Brownhills Leisure World, A1/A46 Junction, Newark, Notts NG24 2EA Tel: 0845-6055470 Web: www.brownhills.co.uk Auto-Trail VR, Trigano House, Genesis Way, Europarc, Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire DN37 9TU Tel: 01472-571000 Web: www.auto-trail.co.uk

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