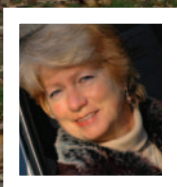


On Test Autocruise Stardream on 2.2-litre HDi Peugeot Boxer



Words by Di Johnson,
pictures by Pete Johnson



In 2007, Yorkshire-based motorhome manufacturer Autocruise, was acquired by Swift Holdings. Poor weather had hit sales, and summer flooding, which affected the company, was blamed for Autocruise encountering financial difficulties. Swift Holdings also owns the Swift Group, based in Cottingham, near Hull, and it acquired Autocruise to add to the Swift, Ace and Bessacarr motorhome brands it already has.

Established in 1988, Autocruise makes and sells around 800 motorcaravans a year. Swift's chairman said: 'Autocruise has established a strong reputation for its unique design

and construction qualities, which will be maintained under our ownership. The factory at Mexborough, near Rotherham, is modern and has benefited from recent investment: this fact makes it sensible to keep Autocruise as a separate company.'

AWARD WINNER

The Autocruise Stardream won an award in 2006 at the Caravan Club's Design and Drive competition. Dedicated comfort for two is the niche that it aims to occupy, with no pretensions of accommodating more people or carrying rear-seat passengers. The 'van is 6.78m (22ft 3in) of low profile prettiness, powered by Peugeot's Boxer, with a 2.2-litre

(120bhp) turbo-diesel and six-speed gearbox, mounted on an Al-Ko chassis. Its main feature is a commodious U-shaped rear lounge, which converts to a vast double bed. The two inward-facing settees, of the U-shape, are also long enough to make up alternative singles.

A UK nearside-located caravan door (with well-spaced entry steps) delivers you into an L-shaped nearside kitchen, which sits opposite the washroom, located immediately behind the driver's seat. The washroom profits from a separate shower cubicle with a bi-fold door, so there's no mop required after a shower. Behind the cab passenger seat is a unit housing a Truma Combi boiler, which can be accessed from three sides: service

STAR DREAMING

This award-winning low profile offers superb comfort and comprehensive facilities - with British-ness to the fore



engineers will love this 'van. Above, is a classic cocktail cabinet. The Stardream is very much a 'British' product, built to cater to our particular tastes.

DREAM LOOKS

The Peugeot Boxer cab has (Autocruise fitted) running-board-assisted entry into the front seats, which I found a great help when climbing in. They look good too. The trusty Peugeot 2.2-litre engine powers the Stardream, a task it performed with composure. With an Al-Ko chassis and genuine low profile stance, it tackled corners with on-rails confidence.

It's very easy to forget that you're driving

I LIKED

- Panoramic U-shaped lounge
- Flip-up worktops and shelves for coffee cups
- Massive double bed
- Single beds option
- Skyview over-cab rooflight
- Spacious shower
- Hob with electric hotplate

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Inboard or heated water tanks
- Cab air-conditioning
- Cruise control

I DISLIKED

- Washbasin appearance

1 Lift-up worktops/tables in the big lounge benefit both the seating areas and the kitchen

2 Plentiful windows and rooflights result in a lovely light interior

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around in something that's over 22ft long. Slick gear changes and delightfully positive, but light, steering should make long tours a pleasure, especially as Peugeot's captain seats are present in the cab. Fitted with integral seatbelts, they give a much better fit than those I usually find in motorhomes when quite often, the belt has little contact with my upper body.

My only whinge was that I'd have liked air-conditioning and cruise control. Oh, and Pete, our taller driver, kept knocking his head on the low shelf fitted across the cab when taking his turn at the wheel (this is a Peugeot issue).

The large window in the rear produced good rearwards visibility, so there's no necessity for a reversing camera.

Low profiles have the X-factor when looks are being assessed, and the Autocruise is no exception. The slippery aerodynamic shape is much prettier than Luton-equipped 'vans. I noticed the good quality caravan door and the eye-catching wheels, though I wasn't too sure about the new square graphics. They looked like part of a paint colour chart to me (though some poor blighter probably spent three weeks incubating the idea).

However, I liked the grey and warm rust colours of the paint sample squares (especially against the pale grey sides), which break up the plastic-picnic-box effect of the body. The graphics, I have to admit, had grown on me by the time we handed the vehicle back.

DREAMIN' OF VIEW

On entering, the first impression is of light, masses of it. Three big windows in the rear U-shaped lounge make this a great place from which to appreciate our beautiful countryside, or for keeping an eye on the comings and goings in and around the campsite. In addition to these windows, there are three rooflights dotting the ceiling.

Autocruise has fitted an opening rooflight in the lounge, and a smaller version in the kitchen. There's also a big curved rooflight over the cab. This brightens up what can sometimes be a rather dreary space and to cap it all, there's even a window in the caravan door; this is my kind of motorhome.

When the hot sun beats down overhead you'll be jolly glad that all three rooflights open. In Britain we need all the light we can get, but this can be a disadvantage in hot weather. Thankfully blinds can be pulled, making the rooflights an effective light and ventilation solution.

U-SHAPED MY DREAMS

The capacious U-shaped lounge, with yielding and attractive patterned upholstery, should impress even the most critical eye. The fabric on the settees has a mink and oatmeal hue with tiny bits of soft pinkish rust warming the design. Four contrasting cushions add a touch of luxury. The oatmeal bound-edged carpet, with woodblock-effect vinyl beneath, harmonises with the upholstery and the unusual pale burr maple-effect worktop and tabletop add luxury liner, art deco ambience.

What a difference a couple of lift-up surfaces can make to the convenience of a lounge. When friends pop in for a coffee or something stronger, there's no need to dig out





3 For the taller driver, the shelf in the cab is positioned rather low. The big curved rooflight is a desirable extra

4 The freestanding table stores neatly behind the driver's seat after your meal is over

5 Good worktop provision, a draining area and a full cooker suits us Brits

6 Now that's what I call a big bed, and there's no need to remove the cushions across the rear, there's so much room

7 I wasn't sure about the new graphics when I first saw them, but the long window in the caravan door impressed

the main table, merely pull up one of these, and set down the wine and nibbles. With these two occasional 'tables' you've still got clear access to the kitchen. When it's time to put them away, it's the work of seconds to lower them and they don't take up any noticeable space. All paragons should be equipped with these paragons of British ingenuity.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The lightweight, but sturdy, freestanding dining table is stowed behind the driver's seat. It's the type that has the advantage of dual usage: If the sun's shining you can take it outside where it's equally at home. Five can eat comfortably in the lounge, but, I guess, you could squeeze more in if enjoying some casual dining.

With the two lift-up surfaces available, I'd be tempted (if there were only two diners and merely a light lunch to enjoy) not to bother with erecting the main table: jolly useful if you're in a hurry. Of course, you'll have to choose a really nice spot to park for dinner, as the big windows demand a good view as a backdrop for your meal.

DREAM CUISINE

The L-shaped kitchen has all you'll need for on-board catering. It's kitted out with a full domestic-style cooker (a Caprice Mark III with three gas burners and one electric hotplate), so you won't have to simplify your cooking when holidaying. There's lots of well-set-out storage space for stashing your groceries. I particularly liked the generous drawer provision.

A window above the stainless steel sink and drainer ensures plenty of natural light when cooking and washing up. This is helped by the large opening rooflight above the cab and the window in the caravan door. Two spotlights take over the task of illumination when the sun goes down. The kitchen extends across to the other side of the caravan door with a drawer in, and worktop sitting on, the unit that houses the Truma boiler.

With the caravan door shut you can take advantage of another useful lift-up worktop, beside the cooker. Along with the lift-up flaps in the lounge, there's an impressive amount of useful surface to keep the cook happy.

The overhead lockers in the kitchen are differentiated from the lounge units by panels of greenish 'glass' inset into the doors. An 81-litre fridge sits opposite the cooker, with a stack of drawers alongside and wardrobe above.

REACHING FOR DREAMS...

When it's time to recharge the batteries after a day's sightseeing or cruisin' long stretches of open blacktop the time comes to test out the beds. (Open? She must be talking foreign, do I hear you say?) Things are straightforward in the Autocruise: sliding out two supports and moving some cushions converts the rear lounge into a massive double bed. I'm not exaggerating when I say that if four friends had sleeping bags (and they weren't fussy about personal space) you could sleep them all across this bed.

The table's not involved with making the double; you only have to pull the two settee bases into the middle of the 'van. However, you do have a bit of cushion rearrangement to do. Due to the comfortable knee-rolls on the settee cushion bases, you have to turn them so that the rolls are on the outside edge. If you like single beds, the long settees make excellent divans and are simplicity itself to achieve. I think this sort of two singles option should be investigated, as an alternative, by those considering buying a motorhome with fixed beds.

In two shakes of a mouse's tail, it's possible to make up the singles. Remove a couple of backrests, throw your pillows and sleeping bag or duvet down, and that's it. By putting up with the work of a minute or two, and doing without the fixed variety of bed, you can chop five or six inconvenient feet from the length of your motorhome and gain a sumptuous lounge to boot.

Curtains, with tiebacks in contrasting material, cosy-up the bedroom, while the overhead lockers look good with their smart chunky handles in modern brushed aluminium. Even the spotlights under the overhead lockers contribute to the coordinated look.

DREAMY DOUCHE

The Stardream has all that's required to make a well-appointed washroom, including a window, mirror, two spotlights above the basin and a light in the shower. All this is great, but the plastic granite-effect basin



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TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

AUTOCRUISE STARDREAM

- **Price:** £41,995 OTR
- **As tested:** £44,466 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Peugeot Boxer Al-Ko chassis cab; 2.2-litre turbo-diesel engine producing 120bhp; six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle and conversion, six years water ingress: Length 6.78m (22ft 3in); width 2.30m (7ft 6.5in); height 2.65m (8ft 8in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg,
- **Payload:** 516kg (after habitation allowance)
- **Belted seats:** 2, including driver
- **Beds:** Double: 2.10m x 1.86m (6ft 10.5in x 6ft 1in); alternative singles: both 1.86m x 700mm (6ft 1in x 2ft 3.5in)
- **Other features:** Domestic-style cooker; 81-litre fridge; stainless steel sink and

drainer; Thetford swivel-bowl electric-flush toilet; separate shower with bi-fold door; Truma Combi space/water heater with blown-air; 97-litre fresh water tank; 73-litre waste water tank; Gas capacity 1 x 13kg plus 1 x 7kg cylinder

- **Options fitted to test vehicle:** 120bhp 2.2-litre HDi engine with six-speed gearbox (£940), Skyview rooflight above cab (£650) captain's cab seats (£881)
- **Other options available:** 157bhp 3.0-litre HDi engine (£2500), cruise control (£165), cab air-conditioning (£823), alloy wheels (£725), roof rack and ladder (£600), microwave oven (£250), walnut-style dash trim (£105), external barbecue point (£95)

8 A useful set of shelves is found inside the wardrobe for jumpers and fleeces

9 There's nothing wrong with the washbasin, but the shape reminded me of a gent's urinal in a mobile toilet

10 The generous shower compartment has its own light and even a wire rack for soap and loofah

and shelf bears a regrettable resemblance to the urinals commonly found in showground mobile toilets. (*How do you know, Di? Ed*) This doesn't matter of course, it's much more important that there's plenty of space provided, but it is unfortunate.

The warm wood colours and chromium-looks for shower riser, taps and towel rail, plus all the nice-to-have hooks, toothbrush-glass and toilet roll holder, give the washroom a home-from-home feel. The separate shower, with its bi-fold door, is also plenty big enough. Lastly, you won't struggle to find homes for shampoo, night balm, exfoliating creams and other such essentials as the solidly built cabinets in here are more than up to the job, with no wobbly plastic units to be found.

LOAD UP YOUR DREAMS

Cargo space, accessed from the outside, consists of a long thin locker across the rear, with access from both sides. This space would be useful for things such as skis, though I wouldn't risk the Stardream's underslung water tanks in the sort of temperatures you're likely to meet in snowy mountains, without installing 12V heaters. Lots of overhead locker provision, around the lounge and kitchen, will gobble up all your clothing and the under-bed storage your bedding.

The wardrobe (which is above the fridge) benefits from a set of shelves big enough to take fleeces and jumpers. Two magazine/map, cargo net pouches are fitted under the window of the caravan door, while there's a further fabric pouch

for your newspapers on the kitchen wall.

DREAM CATCHING

For just over £40,000, there is consummate comfort for two in the Stardream. There are no attempts to carry or sleep more than two motorcaravanners and the 'van is all the better for it. You also get a well fitted-out and screwed together motorhome for your bucks. Details such as the capable kitchen, with plenty of storage, plus the double or single bed choices, add to the attractions. I could only nit-pick about small details like the unfortunately shaped washbasin and graphics, and these only get a mention as I couldn't find anything else to complain about. The Stardream is a great tourer for two. Nice one, Autocruise. ■



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