We met the new manufacturer of Danbury motorcaravans last year when MMM tested a rising roof derivative of the Active. All early Actives were based on the short wheelbase version of the Trafic, though one could choose between a rising roof (made by Danbury) and a fixed high top. Danbury manufactures all its furniture in house and has expanded its premises rapidly to cope with an increase in demand, as its range has become more widely known. Danbury is a privately owned company based at Rangeworthy, a few miles north of Bristol. At the time of writing, the company deals in direct sales only – although it hopes to appoint a network of agents in the near future.

BECOMING MORE ACTIVE

After the success of the first (short wheelbase) Active the range has broadened to include two long wheelbase high top models. The newbies are similar to each other in the kitchen and washroom departments, but differ a great deal in mounting and sleeping arrangements. The first long wheelbase Active to be developed featured an inward-facing settée, which converted to a double bed. This latest incarnation has two forward-facing dedicated rear travel seats instead of the settee. These convert into two comfortable single beds whilst maintaining the central aisle.

We’ll look at the interior in more detail later. For now, let’s examine the philosophy behind the design.

LIVING AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

The long wheelbase layout isn’t just the short wheelbase one elongated. Short wheelbase Actives are pure campervans intended for short stays, weekends away and days out. Everything your old rear-engined Volkswagen camper used to be, but with modern common-rail turbo-diesel powered front-wheel drive underpinnings. The long wheelbase version is good for all the abovementioned uses, with the addition of a separate washroom with loo. In fact, all the facilities one would expect to find in a motorhome designed for longer stays or for completely self-contained camping.

The Active name is not the result of casually sticking a pin in the ‘A’ section of the dictionary, but is a deliberate shot at describing the lifestyle of its target market. Any Active is designed for proper camping (in its own right, to see far away places), but also as a hospitality unit for walkers, mountain bikers, twitchers, canoeists, motor race enthusiasts, (or just about any other pastime, sport or hobby you can think of). As a result of this focus, Actives have as many wipe-clean surfaces and fabrics as possible. The test vehicle just laughed at mud. Frills, pleats and décor reminiscent of a 1950s gentlemen’s club have no place in here. Chosen fabrics and finishes are contemporary and practical (by that I mean scrubbable and disinclined to show the dirt). Add this to the rakish ‘come and get me’ exterior lines of the Trafic, and the result is a motorcaravan with a very modern appearance. In addition, all furniture is constructed from marine grade plywood and finished in an attractive honey-beech wood grain.

Although this is the long wheelbase version of the Trafic, it’s still short enough to use as a car and for many it could be an only vehicle. This latest model adds two forward-facing rear travel seats to a drop-dead gorgeous body. It will be equally at home on the daily run to Bash Street Middle School, outside a flash eatery in Knightsbridge, or on a jet-skiing holiday in Sardinia.

EXERCISING THE ACTIVE

Standard motor is the widely acclaimed 1.9-litre common-rail injection turbo-diesel and Renault has got it spot on. This is a fast, economical and civilised unit. And I’ll tell you something else about the 1.9 unit; it wasn’t fitted in the test ‘van! Instead, it had the (£1700) extra-cost option of the top banana, 2.5-litre unit. Pushing out more than 135PS, and producing plenty of torque, this is a derv-drinker to dream about. All this is planted in a slick, wind-cheating shape, with a super-smooth six-speed gearbox - if the driver isn’t a very happy bunny, they probably don’t have a pulse! It was an absolute hoot to drive: indecently quick (30-50 in six seconds), whisper quiet, dynamically neutral (hardly any under or oversteer at normal road speeds), and beautifully poised. There was also no pitching on uneven roads or wallowing when cornered enthusiastically.

In the past, light commercial six-speeders were often equipped with an old five-speed box with a tree-stump-pulling crawler gear added on. At the other extreme, sixth gear can be an overdrive ratio to enable white van man to rush down the motorway with the engine turning at 500rpm so that he can phone his bookie without engine noise interrupting him. This cog-box is a peach. Well chosen equally spaced ratios made it a genuine six-speeder and quite different to the five-and-an-afterthought
So as not to be outdone by its rivals, the latest Trafic has the current de rigueur chromatic enhancement of the instruments at night. Apparently, it’s better for the white on black instrumentation to have a purple, blue or (in our case) orange on black readout at night. I don’t object, I’m just ambivalent over whether there is any advantage over old-fashioned illumination.

What I did find irritating was the annotation of the speedometer. 20, 40, 60 and 80 mph might be useful for all you fully-integrated European types, but for Bulldog Drummond here, 30, 50 and 70 mph is far more useful when trying to keep within the UK speed limits. Even better would be to number all at 10 mph intervals. Such annotation would enable the speedometer to be read at a glance, instead of actually having to work out exactly where - say - 30 mph is on the dial.

The Renault Trafic must be one of the best drives around. However, in contrast, a glance under the bonnet suggested that it might be a DIY mechanic’s nightmare. I couldn’t even see the engine, let alone reach it, and I pity the poor devil that has to work on it. Presumably, Renault main dealers are now recruiting eight-foot - all three-stone double-jointed gymnasts. Fluid levels and top-ups are as easy as wink, but anything else may well require engine ancillaries and/or trim to be removed.

Far more important than a few skinned knuckles at cambelt changing time is the level of safety offered to occupants. Renault has undertaken a lot of work on the safety cell principle and rear passengers will be pleased to note that they are included in this high level of crash protection. Strange though, given the commitment to passenger safety, that a front passenger airbag is not a standard fitting.

Large diameter disc brakes all round and standard ABS (on the 2.5-litre version) add further to the safety points tally. A powerful fan-assisted demisting system kept the screen clear, and (as the test vehicle
came with the optional electric pack and air-con) the windscreen also had a ‘quick clear’ heating element. Jolly effective it was too.

With the temperature around freezing I didn’t feel the need to use the dash air-conditioning (complete with chilled glovebox), so I can’t comment on its effectiveness. If it’s any help, similar systems fitted to Renault cars are usually pretty effective.

**ACTIVE PLAN**

The sliding side entrance door is immediately behind the nearside cab door and entrance and egress is aided by the low floor height and the inboard step, which divides the ascent. The Trafic is such a ground-hugger that an additional exterior step is unlikely to be required. It did occur to me that, as the (all steel) high top was factory fitted, a full-height side door would have been advantageous over the current ‘duck or grouse’ standard-height offering.

Once aboard, one is really standing in the middle of the lounge. This consists of two swivel cab seats and two forward-facing rear seats located either side of the central aisle. Readers should be aware that the cab floor is significantly higher than the caravan floor.

Immediately behind the lounge, Danbury has placed the kitchen, which, once again is divided by the central aisle. Nearside is home to the cooker whereas the sink and fridge are on the offside.

The washroom and wardrobe occupy the far rear. They are divided from the rest of the interior by a folding concertina fabric door.

This interior layout is effectively simple and, quite simply, very effective.

**ACTIVE RELAXATION**

Ah now, after a hard day’s white-water rafting or mountain climbing you’ll need somewhere comfy to sit - and the lounge provides just that, along with plenty of natural and artificial light. Night-time illumination is via four halogen downlighters and two twin-tube fluorescents. The angled squabs to the forward-facing seats cause the leading edges to be quite high and the vertically challenged may find their feet dangling in mid-air when seated here. However, as a couch potato of unrivalled slothfulness, I can comment that I found these seats extremely comfortable even when sat for extended periods.

What wasn’t quite so comfortable (in temperatures as low as minus seven degrees Centigrade) was the lack of any standard-fit heating. I spent the week on a campsite with electric hook-up and my trusty 230V fan heater whirring away - without that it would have been a bit bracing! To be fair to Danbury, several different types of heater are available as extra-cost options, though the company awaits the release of the latest Webasto diesel-fired blown-air space heater, which it feels will be just the ticket for the Active. The people at Danbury have plenty of experience here as they fit the petrol-powered Webasto into their retro-style Volkswagen T2 Transporter conversions.

Single-glazed glass side windows look the biz from the outside as they are shaped to fit. Each side has an opening section, which, as they are sliders, allows them to be opened on the move. This Active is designed to be a three-season motorcaravan, so I’d be relaxed over the
compromised thermal insulation of single-glazed glass over acrylic double-glazing. If this is worrying you, a pair of internally fitted quilted thermal pads to supplement the lined curtains should do the trick.

The test vehicle arrived with the standard floor covering, a hardwearing vinyl in a woodblock-style pattern. You don’t get a carpet and I didn’t wish for one.

Why was that then? Well, after a week’s rambling in the spectacularly muddy environs around the Kennet and Avon canal, a wipe down with a damp cloth was all that was required to restore the floor to showroom condition.

Sybarites will be pleased to hear that an extra-cost comfort pack will soon be available - and this is likely to include a removable bound-edge carpet, space heater and blinds/fliescreens.

The fitted radio/CD player excellently broadcast both music and speech. Furthermore, the whole campsite was able to enjoy this as the two door-mounted speakers sounded as loud outside the ‘van as they did in.

The stays fitted to the high-level lockers were not really up to the job and were already beginning to fail. This problem has - thankfully - already been addressed for production models. Unlike in many high tops, here we find genuine full-standing headroom at a minimum of 1.89m (6ft 2.5in).

ACTIVE CATERING
Clever Danbury has done very well here to squeeze in as much as it has. This prototype had a four-burner hob, grill and thermostatically controlled oven. Manufactured by Smev, this cooker unit also featured flame failure devices, electronic ignition and a light in the oven. There’s more...it didn’t rattle on road and was finished in practical and elegant stainless steel. Similarly, the sink was very practical with an easy-to-use monobloc lever mixer tap and was finished in the same stainless steel. None of your tart’s boudoir gold Victorian taps and marbled sinks here. I’ve said it before but it’s worth repeating... Danbury deliberately sets out to produce a rugged and practical motorcaravan for proper camping. Good for them!

Storage is OK, though the cupboard under the cooker needs some subdivision to separate the Marmite and best bitter from the leisure
battery and smart charger.

This prototype had a fairly small (40-litre) Waeco Coolmatic compressor fridge. I thought this to be adequate though not generous (see Active improvements for proposed changes to production models).

The 230V-only storage water heater provided lashings of hot water. When wild camping, the most efficient (and cost effective) form of water heating in a motorcaravan will have to be employed…the kettle!

Fresh water is stored in an underfloor tank and waste water collects in a freestanding wheeled waste water porter. It’s very easy to use, but a bit cumbersome to store.

**ACTIVE SLEEPING**

Rock ‘n’ roll is an Active feature. Not a blur of crepe sole shoes and DA hairdos on the dance floor, but instead (or as well as) the simple and easy way that each forward-facing seat turns into the lion’s share of a single bed. The remainder is made from the swivelled cab seat and slide-out extension to the rear seat squab. Result: two comfortable single beds from which each of the

The single beds are completed using an infill and the base of the swivelled cab seats.

The overcab locker is big enough to store bedding and infills.
somnolent can decant into the central aisle for unimpeded access to the loo without disturbing the slumbers of the other. Danbury manufactures the seat-to-bed mechanism in house and a jolly good job has been made of it too.

ACTIVE ABLUTIONS
The washroom is located back at the blunt end along with the wardrobe. A concertina folding door ensures privacy when shut - and could allow a view through for the driver when open. Ours didn’t afford the latter as its rear doors lacked windows.

A moulded wall unit above the swivel-bowl electric flushing loo contains the tip-up sink, a shelf with fiddle rail, and a double-door mirror-fronted cabinet. Clothes storage takes the form of a half-height hanging wardrobe and some cupboards. Artificial illumination is by a central overhead luminaire. There is no shower tray as standard, which I didn’t miss. Neither were there any clothes hooks, a towel rail or toilet roll holder, which I did miss.

The faucet does double duty as the showerhead and this is included even if the extra-cost shower pack (tray, drain and curtain) isn’t. This is still handy for hair washing or for rinsing off sandy feet outside.

ACTIVE IMPROVEMENTS
The test vehicle was the very first prototype of the long wheelbase single bed version Active. By and large, Danbury has got it right first time. However, feedback from showgoers suggested some improvements, which the company will be making to production models. I’ve detailed them in the accompanying info box.

As I have frequently said in MMM, I’m not an engineer and have never claimed to be. So others more qualified than me may disagree with the following criticisms. I was concerned over the absence of a fire blanket/extinguisher and smoke alarm. Furthermore, the LPG regulator is open to the main salon and not in the gas cylinder compartment where it would be sealed from the interior and vented to the exterior. Also, I think that there should have been an easily accessible control manifold so that individual gas appliances can be isolated.

It can’t have failed to escape your notice that the test vehicle didn’t have glazed rear doors. This was chosen as a “let’s try it and find out” option in response to a customer’s comment (who had the double bed version) that he felt that the windows made the washroom feel like a goldfish bowl. I would go for the glazed option every time as it would add light to the interior and gives a valuable view through, handy when parking in an urban environment. The choice is yours.
ACTIVE ASSESSED

Is the Active fit for purpose, or would it be like the purchase of that exercise bike you’ve got hiding away in a cupboard under the stairs – a good idea that somehow didn’t translate into reality?

After completing this test of the very first prototype, and taking into account the proposed modifications, my answer would be that production models will be very much fit for purpose. Furthermore, the long wheelbase single bed version of the Active is very much a practical and driver-friendly motorcaravan that has the additional advantage of being clothed in an elegant and eye-catching body. Danbury deserves to do well with it, and if the level of interest this prototype generated when it was in my care is anything to go by, they will.

The test vehicle came with optional unglazed rear doors.

IN BRIEF

- **Base vehicle:** Renault Trafic LWB high top panel van
- **Engine type:** 2.5-litre 4-cylinder common-rail turbocharged diesel (1.9-litre engine standard)
- **Output:** 99kW (135bhp) @ 3500 rpm
- **Gearbox and drive:** Six-speed manual, fascia-mounted gearchange, front-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Danbury Active LWB
- **Body type and construction:** All steel high top panel van
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** 230V hook-up, two 13A sockets, leisure battery, smart charger
- **Lighting:** Two twin-tube fluorescent fittings, four halogen downlighters in salon, one fluorescent fitting in washroom, three courtesy lights
- **Cooking facilities:** Slot-in unit with stainless steel electronic-ignition 4-burner hob, grill, and thermostatically-controlled oven (with internal illumination)
- **Refrigerator:** Compressor-type 12V operation, capacity 40 litres
- **Water heater:** Storage type, 230V operation only, capacity 22 litres (4.83 gallons)
- **Space heater:** None fitted
- **Fresh water tank:** 73 litres (16 gallons), underfloor
- **Waste water tank:** Wheeled wastewater porter supplied
- **Gas locker capacity:** Two 4.5kg/3.9kg cylinders
- **Rear restraints:** Two forward-facing travel seats with three-point inertia-reel seat belts
- **Additional features:** Remote control central locking of all doors, radio/CD player, steering column adjustable for reach, engine immobiliser and intruder alarm, rock ‘n’ roll single bed mechanisms, wind-up opening rooflight, rear washroom with fabric concertina door, moulded vanity unit with mirror door cupboard, shelf with fiddle rail, tip-up basin and swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette toilet, island-leg dining table with two floor sockets, lined curtains with matching tie-backs (salon), internally-fitted thermal screens (cab)

**DIMENSIONS**

(*data supplied by manufacturer)*

- **Overall length:** 5.18m (17ft 0in)*
- **Overall width (exc mirrors):** 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*
- **Overall width (inc mirrors):** 2.90m (9ft 6in)*
- **Overall height:** 2.56m (8ft 5in)*
- **Interior height:** 1.89m (6ft 2.5in)
- **Bed dimensions:** Two singles 1.854m x 584mm (6ft 1in x 1ft 11in)
- **Max authorised weight:** 2910kg*
- **Load capacity:** 650kg*

**PRICE**

(*all prices include VAT)*

- **Standard model:** £28,709 (on the road)
- **As tested:** £33,654 (on the road)
- **Warranty:** Base vehicle and conversion 3 years

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

(*fitted to test vehicle)*

- **Base vehicle options:**
  - 2.5-litre 135bhp engine (£1700)*
  - Metallic paint (£349)*
  - Satellite navigation and electric windows/mirrors (£1199)*, air-conditioning pack (£759)*
  - Alloy wheels (£799)*, towbar (£139)*, front fog lamps (£89), passenger airbag (£259), glazed rear doors with heated windows and wash/wipe (£299)
- **Caravan options:**
  - Diesel-fired space heater (£899), shower pack (£599), upgrade to gas/230V water heating (£399), flat screen TV and DVD player (£899), freestanding awning (£399), leather upholstery (£1899)

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Danbury Active kindly supplied for evaluation by: Danbury Motorcaravans, Unit 1 Bristol Mineral Works, Limekiln Road, Rangeworthy, South Gloucestershire BS37 7QB (tel: 08701 202358; web site: www.danburymotorcaravans.com).