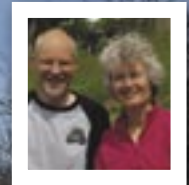


DETHLEFFS MAGIC EDITION



Words and Pictures
by Andrew & Rona
Bromley



HAPPY ENDINGS

Medium-sized A-class coachbuilts offer great lounging alternatives - front or rear



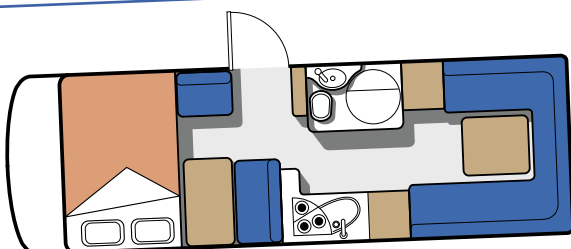
A-class 'vans are aristocrats. Built on chassis-cowls (the bare bones of the base vehicle, with engine, dash and running gear), their commercial origins are hidden beneath a bespoke skin. Compared to 'ordinary' motorcaravans they afford more usable living space, swivelling cab seats forming part of a flat-floored living area, with drop-down overcab bed. Generally more luxurious and expensive than humbler brethren,

very few are built in the UK - most being imported from Germany, France and Italy. Here we test two examples from long-established, well-respected manufacturers: a French Rapido (Luxury Front Lounge Coachbuilt class winner in this year's MMM Awards) and an upmarket German Dethleffs. Under the skin they're both based on Fiat's Ducato, but visually you wouldn't know - which, of course, is part of the attraction.

Both companies produce myriad layouts - rear lounge, front lounge, transverse bed, island

bed, twin beds... ..with nine different Rapidos in the dF range alone, and four alternative Dethleffs Magic Edition interior designs. In this case, a front lounge Rapido plays a rear lounge Dethleffs - each layout presenting its own pros and cons.

If asked to guess the two 'vans' nationalities, I'm pretty sure you could: the Rapido looks svelte and rounded, especially from the front - with a serene smile - every inch the French lady. The Dethleffs, by contrast, in (metallic) black, grey and white,



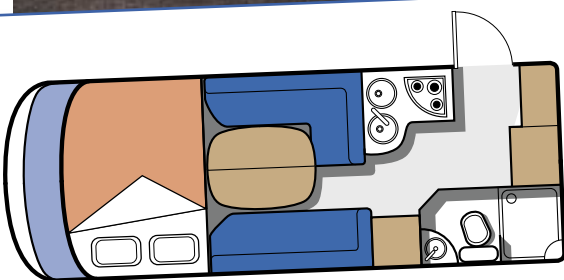
LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 7.43m (24ft 4.5in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.33m (7ft 8in)

- 1 The cab presents a wide vista and all-important cab door
- 2 Good view from the Rapido cab is enhanced by a rear camera



RAPIDO 9048DF



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 6.49m (21ft 3.5in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.35m (7ft 8.5in)

looks a handsome brute, with a vulpine - foxy - grille: if *that* loomed in your rear-view mirror you'd move over sharpish! To me it's the motorhome equivalent of BMW's X5 - unmistakably German - and I rather liked it!

Rapido's superb white complexion stems from its impact resistant polyester-clad panels, topped off with high UV resistance 'American Resin' gel-

coat - its appeal enhanced by discreet decals. The rear panel is windowless, but a reversing camera is standard: pity, therefore, that 'ours' hadn't been connected! Even so, large coach-like mirrors meant that reversing this relatively small motorhome wasn't too arduous.

Magic Edition also has a flawless finish, with an aluminium skin and GRP nose and rear panels. A rear window allows through vision from the cab.

Both vehicles share the Continental A-class norm, with only two doors; one on the passenger side of the cab, the other (habitation door) on the offside. Only the Rapido has a window in the habitation door.

Inside, the Rapido's new Lisbonne velour upholstery is vibrant, in bright orangey-brown and beige. With mid-tan woodwork and removable beige carpets (except in the cab, where they're sensible charcoal) over vinyl, the overall impression is too warm for my personal taste. However, the covers are high quality, and there's a wide choice of other upholstery, including leather.

Magic Edition comes smartly liveried in luxurious (read easily dirtied) ivory and charcoal Samba leather, with Cyprus Villa wood-effect furniture. Removable cream carpets (removed!) overlay tan, wood-effect vinyl throughout, with practical dark grey in the cab.

MOTIVE POWER

Rapido has the 2.3-litre 130bhp engine as standard. Dethleffs' standard is the 2.2-litre 100 horsepower motor (which might struggle to motivate such a large vehicle - at 7.43



2

DETHLEFFS MAGIC EDITION



3



4



5



6

3 Magic Edition specification provides a very classy interior

4 Front end lounge-diner gives way to centre kitchen and washroom, with a second lounge in the rear

5 There's less room around the swivelled cab seats, but the forward-facing bench has a nicely-raked backrest

6 The rear lounge has a club-like atmosphere - its rooflight, however, is a tad small

WE LIKED

- Fiat driving experience with 157bhp motor
- The drop-down bed
- Sumptuous rear lounge
- Useful shoe bins by habitation door

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More kitchen work surface
- Bigger shower
- Ceiling-mounted lighting and a bigger rooflight in rear lounge
- Bigger payload
- Second TV point in rear lounge

WE DISLIKED

- Making the lounge bed
- Lack of spare wheel
- Lack of draining outlet for freshwater tank

metres long, nearly a metre longer than the Rapido). Magic Editions imported by Lowtham Leisureworld generally have the 157 horsepower 3.0-litre lump, as fitted to our test vehicle.

The Rapido uses an Al-Ko rear chassis with extra-wide rear track, sophisticated suspension and a double floor (the dF suffix tells you this).

Dethleffs relies on Fiat's own (cheaper and simpler) wide-track, lowered Camper chassis.

With four travel seats, Rapido's chassis is uprated to 3700kg MAW, while Dethleffs' is 3850kg as standard. In each case you'll need to check your licence entitlement, and will face lower speed limits on the Continent, with these over 3500kg MAW motorhomes.

Both cabs have standard Fiat Ducato layouts, but with fascia extensions out to the windscreen. The driving positions are good - the cab seats (Aguti in Dethleffs, Isri in Rapido) being multi-adjustable, and helped by considerable steering wheel reach adjustment. Visibility, through wide and distant windscreens, is excellent, though the drivers' big, hang-down mirrors (twin lens on Rapido) could obstruct sightlines at roundabouts. Concertina blinds for windscreens and cab windows cause no problems in either 'van. Three UK-handed wipers for Rapido and two for Dethleffs, sweep most of the screen, with washer jets integral in the arms.

Reassuringly, driver and passenger airbags were fitted to both 'vans (Rapido's passenger airbag is an optional extra, but is standard on the Dethleffs the Magic Edition). Cab air-conditioning and cruise control are standard on both.

ON THE ROAD

The Rapido (with 1500 miles under its belt) performed well, with lively engine, sweet six-speed gearbox and supple Al-Ko rear suspension. Dethleffs' bigger engine didn't show much advantage, but with less than 100 miles clocked, was new and still very stiff. Its lowered Fiat rear chassis and cart-spring suspension felt less smooth (perhaps effected by the large rear overhang), but still perfectly acceptable. In both, handling on roundabouts and twisting A, B and unclassified roads (we go everywhere!) felt very secure. With A-class cab seats set some way inboard, the 'vans felt wider than they were, with visibility to the right at acutely angled junctions awkward. Wind noise was high in the Rapido, especially from somewhere in the front right corner, while each 'van had rattles, but nothing intolerable.

Any reversing problems? With test routes on the Fylde coast and Trent Valley being flat as proverbial flukes, we were hard pressed to tell. On our Rapido jaunt, we achieved an indicated 29.7mpg overall; Dethleffs offered only 23.5mpg, but one must make allowances for the bigger engine's youth (and trip computer accuracy) and hope for improvement.

LOUNGE AND DINE

Rapido's front lounge is capacious and welcoming. Cab seats swivel to face a hefty table on two thick columns - the top sliding from side to side and folding in two, facilitating passage. It can also be lowered, but we found it very bulky, and obstructive when extended for dining. Two settees, one L-shaped (to allow two belted travel seats) face each other, and six or more could relax here, though only one settee has a raked back. A high-level TV cupboard at the rear of the lounge will accommodate a 15-inch set.

Dethleffs has a front half-dinette, providing two forward-facing travel seats - with nicely raked backs - and an inward-facing seat. The clip-on table has a slide-out extension. When swivelled, the cab seats had less room for manoeuvre than Rapido's, and cramped leg space. A TV bracket is affixed next to a large, glass-fronted cocktail cabinet, alongside the habitation door. This is convenient for denizens of cab and side seats, but not the forward-facing dinette pews.

Crucially, the Dethleffs also has a rear U-shaped lounge, with plush, shaped backrest cushions, set around a fixed-base table, which again, impedes access and egress. Why not have removable tables? Much more flexible, and also useable outdoors.

It's worth noting that Dethleffs has two changes in floor height (to trip me, the unwary), as dinette and rear lounge are both slightly higher than the central section. The Rapido has a flat floor throughout.

A draw, in this section: both have very comfy lounges, and it's personal preference whether you like the 'open-plan' Rapido lounge, or the more private Dethleffs rear 'drawing room.'

COOK'S QUARTERS

In the Rapido, the kitchen is aft of the offside settee, and features an attractively curved, L-shaped unit. The work surface is mainly occupied by two circular stainless steel sinks (with a swivelling mixer tap between them) and the hob. The larger sink has a hinged glass cover, the smaller has a removable glass cover

RAPIDO 9048DF



WE LIKED

- Large comfortable lounge
- Capacious cab
- Well-equipped, spacious washroom
- Fiat driving experience
- Automatic gas cylinder changeover and Secumotion

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A working reversing camera
- Simpler sink/drainer arrangement
- Better storage provision in kitchen

WE DISLIKED

- Making lounge bed
- Lack of spare wheel
- Lack of draining outlet for freshwater tank

7 Rapido interior is vibrant in orangey-brown

8 The big front lounge gives way to an L-shaped kitchen and nearside corner washroom

9 Large lounge should entertain at least six in comfort

On Test Dethleffs Magic Edition I GS & Rapido 9048DF

(where do you store it?), with plastic drainer and tray within. This is all somewhat fussy; a simple sink/drain combination would utilise space better. The three-burner hob has auto-ignition and a useful split glass lid, so you can use one burner, leaving the remaining lid as work-surface. An extractor fan, mounted under the high-level cupboards, deals with cooking odours. Below the hob, a deep cupboard *should* be ideal for pots and pans, but unfortunately, part is sectioned to contain a rubbish bin, greatly reducing practicality. And would you really want store pans next to the garbage? Beneath, a shallow drawer could hold cutlery, though it's near floor level. Tall, curved doors under the sink look promising, but reveal a disappointingly shallow, and unshelved space. There are four bottle holders at the base (this is a French 'van, after all), but it's not clear what you could store in the remainder - it's rather a waste. The doors' shut-lines were skew-whiff, too.

Opposite the kitchen unit (under a large

top cupboard), the Dometic fridge/freezer offers 150 litres. This three-way (AES) unit automatically selects the appropriate energy source. At the rear, twist washroom and wardrobe, is the oven/grill. An afterthought maybe, but it's at a practical height and handy position, with cupboards above and below.

Dethleffs' kitchen (situated on the nearside behind the dinette) has similar facilities. A combined stainless steel Dometic three-burner hob and sink (with Dometic extractor under the cupboard above) again, has split glass lids providing flexible work surface. There's no other working area, nor a proper drainer (just a plug-hole in the hob), but kitchen storage facilities are better thought out. Below the Spinflo Duplex oven/grill, there's a usefully large pan cupboard - or it would be if the cutlery tray weren't placed there. There's a pullout larder rack, a shelved cupboard under the hob, cupboard and drawer beside the fridge and a rubbish bin - sensibly placed - on the

habitation door. The fridge/freezer (again, three-way AES) has greater total capacity, at 175 litres.

Summarising, the Rapido has better kitchen work surface, Dethleffs scores with more usable storage.

WASHROOM

Rapido's washroom occupies the rear nearside corner. There's a mirror on the outside of the door and two towel rails inside. A moveable wall mirror facilitates preening and there are plenty of cupboards and shelves. There's a stainless steel fixed washbasin, plus soap dish, toilet roll holder and toothbrush rack. A Thetford C250 swivel-bowl loo faces the door between the basin and separate shower. The shower unit - with folding doors - is nicely lined in plastic. There's only one (centrally-placed) drain hole, but an extending towel rail/washing rack is a plus. The room is well lit, with a clear window (fortunately with blind) and three overhead LED lights.

Dethleffs' ablutions (opposite the kitchen)



10 The well-equipped kitchen includes huge fridge/freezer and clever hob/sink combo

11 Ceramic-bowled loo and semi-separate shower grace the washroom

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

DETHLEFFS MAGIC EDITION I SG

PRICE

- From: £69,919 OTR
- As tested: £71,529 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturers figures)

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 4
- Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion 2 years, water Ingress 6 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: A-class coachbuilt, aluminium skinned sandwich construction, GRP mouldings. Caravan entrance on UK offside, cab door on UK nearside
- Length: 7.43m (24ft 4.5in)*
- Width: 2.33m (7ft 8in)*
- Height: 2.67m (8ft 9in)*
- Wheelbase: 4.03m (13ft 3in)*
- Rear overhang: 2.44m (8ft 0in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3850kg
- Payload: 545kg (after deduction for driver @75kg, one full gas cylinder, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, and with 2.2-litre engine fitted)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Fiat Ducato chassis cowl on wide rear track Camper chassis
- Engine: 3.0ltr turbo-diesel producing 157bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS and ASR
- Suspension: Front: independent on coil springs. Rear: rigid axle with elliptical springs
- Features: Electric windows, electrically-adjusted mirrors, driver and passenger airbags, captain's seats, cruise-control, cab air-conditioning, alloy wheels, mud flaps, reach-adjustable steering column

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats and drop-down double bed ahead of half-dinette with side seat, nearside kitchen, offside washroom, U-shaped lounge in rear
- Insulation: Floor 41mm, walls & roof 34mm
- Interior Height: 1.95m (6ft 5in) max

KITCHEN

- Sink: Inset stainless steel bowl, partial glass lid, mixer tap
- Cooker: Dometic three-burner hob with auto-ignition, sectional glass covers, Dometic extractor hood, Spinflo Duplex oven/grill

- Fridge: Dometic three-way fridge/freezer with Auto Energy Selection. Capacity 175 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Dometic ceramic-lined swivel-bowl, electric-flush cassette
- Basin: Fixed plastic vanity unit with mixer tap.
- Shower: Curved transparent plastic-screen encloses shower in part of washroom, mixer, shower head, two drain holes

BEDS

- Overcab drop-down double
- Length: 1.95m (6ft 5in)
- Width: 1.35m (4ft 5in)
- Transverse lounge double
- Length: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in)
- Width: 1.17m (3ft 10in) useable section. Total width 1.63m (5ft 4in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water tank: Inboard, 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste water tank: Underslung, insulated, 90 litres (19.8 gallons)
- Water and space heater: Truma Combi 6 boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- Leisure Battery: 95 amp hr
- Gas: 2 x 11kg cylinders
- Lighting: Halogen reading lights under high-level cupboards in lounge, 'mood' lighting above, further lights in cab ceiling, overcab bed, kitchen, washroom and shower
- Sockets: 240V: 2 (in kitchen and TV point), 12V: 2 (in kitchen and TV point)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: 3.0-litre 157bhp, engine upgrade (£1610)
 - Conversion: None fitted
- Other options
- Base: ComfortMatic Automatic gearbox - only available with 3.0-litre engine option - (£2085)
 - Conversion: 5m Omnistor awning (£1030)

E&OE



HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

RAPIDO 9048DF

PRICE

- From: £67,720 OTR
- As tested: £67,995 OTR

BASICS *(*manufacturers figures)*

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion 2 years, water Ingress 5 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: A-class coachbuilt, GRP skinned sandwich construction with double floor, GRP mouldings. Caravan entrance on UK offside, cab door on UK nearside
- Length: 6.49m (21ft 3.5in)*
- Width: 2.35m (7ft 8.5in)*
- Height: 2.86m (9ft 4.5in)*
- Wheelbase: 3.80m (12ft 5.5in)*
- Rear overhang: 1.70m (5ft 7in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3700kg
- Payload: 620kg (after deduction for driver @75kg, one full gas cylinder, 90 per cent fuel and fresh water)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Fiat Ducato Al-Ko Chassis-cowl
- Engine: 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 130bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS and ASR
- Suspension: Front: independent on coil springs, Rear: independent on torsion bar with trailing links
- Features: Electric windows, electrically adjusted mirrors, driver and passenger airbags, cruise-control, cab air-conditioning, reversing camera

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats and drop-down double bed ahead of twin-sofa lounge-diner, rear-located kitchen and corner washroom.
- Insulation: Floor 40mm, walls & roof 30mm
- Interior Height: 1.95m (6ft 5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Two inset stainless steel bowls, one with plastic drainer and inner bowl, glass lids, mixer tap
- Cooker: Three-burner hob with auto ignition, split glass covers, extractor hood, oven/grill

- Fridge: Dometic three-way fridge/freezer with Auto Energy Selection. Capacity 150 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford C250 swivel-bowl, electric-flush, with wheeled cassette
- Basin: Stainless-steel round bowl and mixer tap.
- Shower: Walk-in, plastic-lined compartment with plastic folding doors, mixer, shower head

BEDS

- Overcab drop-down double
- Length: 1.90m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 1.34m (4ft 5in)
- Lounge transverse double
- Length: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in) max
- Width: 1.60m (5ft 3in) max

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh Water Tank: Inboard, between floors 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste Water tank: Underslung, insulated and heated 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Space and Water Heater: Truma Combi 6 boiler with blown-air, gas/mains operation
- Leisure Battery: 100 amp hr
- Gas: 2 x 11kg cylinders
- Lighting: 3 Fluorescent ceiling lights. Halogen reading lights under high-level cupboards in lounge and cab. LEDs in kitchen, washroom, shower and recessed in ceiling
- Sockets: 230V: 2 (in kitchen and TV locker); 12V: 1 (in kitchen)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Passenger airbag (£275)
- Conversion: None

Other options

- Base: 3.0-litre 157bhp engine (£1910), ComfortMatic automatic gearbox - only with 3.0-litre engine - (£1685), alloy wheels (£910), towbar (£1083)
- Conversion: None

E&OE

contain a Dometic loo (with ceramic bowl) to the left and a silvery-grey fixed washbasin ahead. There are cupboards for storage - including a slim, slide-out unit - and two mirrors. Two towel rails, a toilet-roll holder and hooks are provided. Unlike in the Rapido, the shower is within the main washroom: two clear, curved plastic screens pull round to make a 'teleport' tube. Great fun, but perhaps a smidge narrow for more portly folk. The shower tray boasts two drain holes. There's no window in this washroom, just a basic skylight and two halogen lamps.

Though both 'vans have good washrooms, we preferred the Rapido's ablutions, as the shower is completely separate and roomier.

BEDTIME

Rapido's in-cab bed swings down easily (with cab seat-backs lowered) and can be accessed either by metal ladder (provided the lounge bed isn't made), or a sprightly leap from the settee, depending on age and nimbleness. The foam mattress rests on sprung slats, and there's a rooflight and reading lights above the bed-end. However, cheap-feeling ruched curtains hung into the bed-space and the edifice didn't feel quite as solid as I'd like.

Dethleffs' drop-down bed (accessed by an aluminium ladder) felt more substantially mounted, with better, less intrusive curtaining. Like its rival, there's a slatted base and a rooflight, but just one lamp for artificial illumination. We preferred this Dethleffs bed, but there's not much in it. However, both these 'vans claim the capability to sleep four adults, and there's the rub...

Rapido's front lounge converts to a transverse bed. The reason for raking only one lounge backrest becomes clear, as this forms the bed-head. A frame pulls out from the nearside settee box to form part of the bed base. It's cantilevered, and therefore, prone to jamming: irritatingly, it's a two-person job. It meets up with the (lowered) table top, then a piece of plywood extends to the opposite settee and two fill-in cushions (stored in the wardrobe) are required. The resultant bed is



12 Kitchen is well equipped, but storage space is compromised

13 Rapido's bathing space gains marks, thanks to its completely separate shower

DETHLEFFS MAGIC EDITION



14 The drop-down bed is large and comfortable

15 Rear lounge double bed is big, but bumpy



a good size when finished, but inelegant, with variable support from underneath.

More importantly, this layout means anyone sleeping in the in-cab bed and 'caught short,' must potentially, clamber over annoyed persons en-route to the loo, then reverse the process! If only one person sleeps downstairs, the nearside settee makes a good, longitudinal single and the issue won't arise.

The Dethleffs has a different problem. Rear lounges generally covert to beds quickly and easily, so we had high hopes for the Magic Edition - but we ended up wishing we could wave a wand! Drop the fixed table to sit slightly below the surrounding settees, clip a plank of wood, with metal ends (brought out of storage), across the seat bases and attach two wooden bars for support elsewhere. I never realised Heath Robinson was a German! The settee's seat cushions now move to the centre and the backrests from either side fill in behind them. However, because both backrests are shaped for comfy lounging, the head *and* foot of the bed are then raised - a recipe for discomfort. With unshaped backrests, and scatter cushions for lounging, a decent bed might be possible. Sorry Dethleffs, no points for this bed.

Magic Editions can be specified with a fifth bed in the dinette, using the (lowered) table as a base: the test 'van wasn't thus equipped, so we were spared that task!

Neither converted lounge bed really fulfilled the purpose to our satisfaction. If we had to choose we'd plump for Rapido, because it could provide a longitudinal single.

STORE ROOM

Rapido has a useful payload of 620kg and good storage capability to match. There's a floor-to-ceiling wardrobe (1.89 metres/6ft 2.5in drop from the rail, with shelving down one side) in the offside rear corner and a big floor-level cupboard beneath the oven, plus three high-level cupboards over the kitchen (one with a curved translucent plastic front). These are supported by five cupboards lining the lounge's upper walls. There's storage under the settees too - on the nearside being accessible from both outside and inside the 'van. In the cab, there's a deep locker alongside the driver's seat. The space in the double floor area can be accessed via exterior doors on each side, or partially from inside, by raising a section of floor to reveal three lidded, plastic cubbies. Accessed from outside, there are two long plastic troughs, excellent for mucky holiday clobber.

The Dethleffs has a smaller payload, of 545kg, (when calculated with the 100 horsepower engine fitted, the 3.0-litre, 157bhp motor weighs substantially more). Magic Edition doesn't have a double floor, but offers some underfloor storage at the rear, accessed via the offside settee base and outside locker doors. The space revealed, whilst useful, is oddly shaped and wouldn't take anything large or unwieldy. There is storage under all the seating, apart from the dinette base, which houses the fresh water tank. Though the wardrobe isn't as large as the Rapido's, it's sizeable - with a drop of 1.31 metres (4ft 3.5in) from the hanging rail, and drawers below. High-level lockers are above the rear lounge, with more over the dinette. A two-tier shoe-locker is by the door (a nice touch), and there's good driver's armrest locker. All this means that the Dethleffs has useful amounts of storage, if not as much as the double floor-equipped Rapido. Both 'vans have roof rails but only the Dethleffs had a ladder and rack

LIFE SUPPORT

Both 'vans rely on Truma's Combi 6 heaters for warmth and hot water, running on either gas and/or mains electricity. Rapido's is under the kitchen unit (with an external access door) and has blown-air outlets; in washroom, kitchen and lounge. Dethleffs' Combi inhabits space under the rear lounge, supplying three outlets there, two in the dinette, one in the kitchen and one in the washroom. Both gas lockers hold two 11kg cylinders, and Rapido also specifies Duocomfort automatic switching between cylinders, with Secumotion, feature allowing you to drive - safely - with the gas heating switched on.

Fresh water for both 'vans is stored internally; a 100-litre insulated tank in the double floor in the Rapido, 125 litres in Magic Edition's dinette seat base. Waste tanks (90 litres in Dethleffs, 100 litres in Rapido) are underslung, but insulated. Emptying the Rapido freshwater tank involves pumping via the taps - there's no drainage outlet, which I find inexplicable.

Sadly, and importantly, neither 'van has a spare wheel.

Rapido's under-oven cupboard houses the 100 amp hr leisure battery, with room for a second - a sensible idea. The Dethleffs has a single 95 amp hr supply. Rapido's lighting is a mixture of LED (in ceilings and washroom), and halogen for the reading lights under the cupboards. There's a large Heki rooflight amidships, so the daytime interior is quite bright. Dethleffs lighting is largely halogen, with plenty of reading lights in lounge, cab and dinette, plus a 'mood' strip-light above the lounge cupboards. Although there's a big Heki over the dinette, the small rooflight over the rear lounge, and lack of ceiling lights (combined with darkish wood finish) makes this area rather sombre - think, gentleman's club...

CONCLUSION

These 'vans are undeniably expensive, and at this level, one might expect near perfection for one's brass. Both do many things well, and are nicely made and specified.

Their primary, drop-down beds will be where most owners snuggle down at night. A crucial question is; will they have overnight guests? If so, we feel neither design is entirely satisfactory. Rapido's drop-down bed occupants must clamber over the lounge bed to get to the loo, and the proximity of the two beds restricts privacy. Dethleffs' sleeping arrangements are well separated, but the rear lounge bed needs modification before it's satisfactory for sleeping.

For two people, either 'van would be a good purchase. For us, the choice would be Rapido's 9048dF, but a good case could be made for either. However, if the second bed is needed regularly, we'd examine other layouts in the chosen range, perhaps looking for a fixed transverse rear bed over a garage, with a large forward lounge/dinette. ■

RAPIDO 9048DF

16



17



18



16 We found the drop-down bed's ruched curtains intrusive

17 The lounge bed base has variable support and will probably prove to be uncomfortable

18 Large wardrobe and plenty of storage on the 'van's rear wall

VEHICLES LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

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web site: www.lowdhams.com)

Rapido 9048dF
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Clifton, Preston, Lancashire PR4 0XN
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web site: www.brownhills.co.uk)

