

SIX APPEAL

The Hobby 750 belongs to the rare breed of six-wheeled motorhomes, thanks to its Al-Ko tandem-axle chassis. Peter Vaughan spent five nights in the Yorkshire Dales to see if the German 'van is as good as it looks

If you were going to buy a motorhome purely on its looks, the Hobby 750 would have to sit at, or very close to, the top of your list. Hobby motorhomes have always been striking lookers; remember the old Talbot Express-based 600 model with its choice of four duo-tone paint finishes? Well, the latest 750 FMSe flagship continues to offer that all-too-rare panache. Gone are the range of colours, but who could possibly dislike the stylish blue bodywork of this 26ft holiday home on wheels? With silver skirts and bumpers, there's precious little that's left in boring white. Park the Hobby next a group of other motorhomes of similar price and it's as if a Sunseeker yacht has arrived at a rowing boat convention.

It's not just the colour. The low-profile body merges neatly with the Ducato cab, and the long, low body sweeps back until those twin rear wheels catch your eye. The (optional) graphics add a touch of fun for that leisure image, and at the rear there's a sort of rooftop spoiler. The body sides are subtly curved and the window frames, fridge vents and mains socket are all painted matching blue. Looking at the size and the style of this motorhome, you'd be forgiven for expecting a truly frightening price tag.

In fact, the Hobby 750 is priced to compete with large coachbuilts from

the likes of Swift, Autocruise and Auto-Trail, and, as an official import, is exclusively available from Hobby Motorhomes UK (part of the Brownhills Group). Models destined for the UK come with right-hand drive and a number of detail changes and improvements to the standard specification; left-hand drive versions are also available to order. At first glance, the Hobby makes quite an impression.

Hobby range

Hobby's model designations are hard to fathom. There are four Hobby 600s, which are all classed as D Line. Of these, two are 6.17m (20ft 3in) long, and two are 6.78m (22ft 3in). The smallest models are the 600 FS and 600 KS, but the larger ones are called 650 FS and 650 FSe, despite still being part of the Hobby 600 range. The flagship model is a Hobby 700 and a C Line, but its actual model type is 750 FMSe. The 750 is the only Hobby 700, if that makes any sense.

All models have a fixed bed at the rear, some lengthways, some transverse. All are low profiles (Hobby Motorhomes UK do not import the overcab models), but only the 750 has the tandem-axle chassis and the striking blue paint scheme.

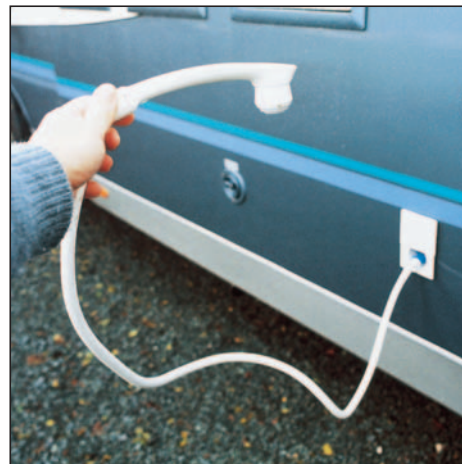
HOBBY 750



Gas locker can hold one 13kg and one 7kg cylinder. Gas point for barbecue can be seen below.



Large external hatch provides access to the heated under-bed locker, which can also be reached from inside the motorhome.



External shower point; just add the hose for that wash down after a day on the beach.

Exterior details

Our test vehicle was an official UK model with RHD, but the caravan door remains on the offside. As it is a curved panel, the door can only open to 90 degrees, but on future models you will at least be able to secure the door in the fully open position. There's also no awning light, but the low entrance does mean that there's no need for an external step. Inside there's a sensible door mat to wipe your feet on, before you step onto the fawn carpets (removable, thankfully in muddy December, to reveal equally stylish parquet-style flooring below).

A unique Hobby styling feature, common to 600 and 700 models, is the use of tall narrow windows in the lounge area. In the 750 FMSe there are no less than five of them, all top-hinged and fitted with blinds and flyscreens. Below the lounge windows on the offside are the gas locker hatch and the external gas point (for a barbecue). Further to the rear is a large hatch to access the under-bed storage area, which measures 1.84m by 1.44m (6ft 0.5in by 4ft 8.5in) at its widest and longest points, with a depth of 0.56m (22in).

At the rear is a ladder to the roof, but the roof rails are well forward and the Heki sunroof sits between them. Consider the rails to be more decorative than purposeful for, in any case, it would be a shame to spoil the Hobby's lines and aerodynamics with rooftop clutter. More importantly, the roof is a one-piece moulding, so fears of water ingress problems are allayed.

Along the nearside are the cassette toilet servicing hatch, fresh water filler, external shower point and the mains hook-up point. Marker lights



Simple-to-operate rear steadies and conveniently positioned spare wheel are pluses, grubby drain hose is a minus.



Right-hand drive Hobby motorhomes are available exclusively from the official UK importers and come with a number of extra features.



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abound and there is also a high-level brake light at the rear.

Rear corner steadies are fitted as standard and these are simply lowered by hand, rather quicker and easier to use than the usual wind-down type. Also below the floor at the rear (on the offside) is the waste tank drain. This has a reasonable length of hose attached, clipped to the underside of the vehicle. Positioned to the rear of the back wheels, the hose gets covered with road muck, and releasing the pipe to drain down is a messy business. A fixed drain tap with a screw-on pipe (to be kept inside) would be preferable.

Heavyweight

The only way to build a motorhome this long, whilst using a Fiat Ducato cab, is to add Al-Ko's tandem-axle chassis at the rear. As well as aesthetic one-upmanship, the six-wheeler chassis, combined with Ducato Maxi cab, has the practical benefit of a 4500kg gross vehicle weight (compared to a maximum of 3850kg with the Al-Ko single rear axle chassis). That results in a payload of 949kg, even after allowing for fuel, gas and water. This is one motorhome in which you should be able to load up for extended touring without the usual weight worries.

In Germany, vehicles of over 3.5 tonne maximum laden weight are subject to lower speed limits, and new legislation also requires them to be fitted with anti-lock brakes. The ABS system is standard on UK Hobby 750s and, even if you consider yourself to be a careful driver, this has to be a benefit. On wet and icy December roads it certainly added peace of mind. Further adding to the safety-related specification is a driver's airbag. Fortunately, we didn't test the airbag, but we did feel the ABS cut in on a couple of occasions of enforced hard braking.

Cab comforts

High-backed Isringhausen captain's chairs clamp you in place with an almost vice-like grip, such are the pronounced, rally car-style, side bolsters

MMM LIVE-IN TEST REPORT



Third captain's chair in the rear is of a different style to the seats in the cab and comes with an integral three-point restraint.

of these seats. They have tilt and height-adjustable squabs and adjustable armrests, and support you in all the right places. I couldn't help wondering, though, whether those of broad build would find them comfortable. For Jo and I, they were simply first class.

The cab also comes with electric windows, fake wood trim, removable carpet, and a four-speaker radio/cassette. The last had yet to be fitted to our brand-new test vehicle, but Brownhills did offer song sheets of Christmas carols instead. Jo said she'd rather listen to the Fiat's diesel engine than my singing, which I tried not to take to heart.

The latest Fiat cab comes with truly excellent double-lens door mirrors (electrically adjusted and heated if you pay extra). The blue dials include a rev counter, and the digital clock is now more visibly sited above the centre mirror. The glove box now has a lock, but you still don't get a passenger side door pocket without visiting the accessory department of your local Fiat dealer. What we did get on our test vehicle was cab air-conditioning (a £1000 option). Had we been testing in Spain, in summer, we'd have really appreciated it, but in the Dales in December it wasn't often needed.

The Hobby has a cut-away cab roof, adding to the feeling of space up front and making for an easy walk-through to the rear. Cupboards around the cab roof are ideal for maps and guide books.

JTD to come

Our test vehicle was one of the last 2.8iTD-engined examples with 122bhp. All 2001-specification Hobby motorhomes will come with the new JTD common-rail 127bhp motor, which is claimed to be significantly more frugal. We'll have to wait and see.

The extra 5bhp may also make a small difference to performance, but the existing power unit was definitely not found wanting, despite the size of motorhome that it was carrying behind it. The low-profile shape no doubt helps, but we were surprised at just how easily the Hobby would cruise at the legal limit (with more in reserve for where that's legal). Off the A1 and into the hills around Hawes and the Ducato always seemed happy to storm the steepest gradients that we could throw it at.

Most of the time the 750 belies its massive length. It feels much like any other Ducato until you take a wrong turn and have to do a three (or seven, or nine) point turn. It takes a lot of road to turn around in a vehicle this long. Watch that you don't turn corners too quickly either, for there's a substantial wheelbase to remember.

That long Al-Ko wheelbase, complete with four rear wheels, does have



View from the cab looking back through the lounge to the kitchen and bedroom beyond.



General view from the rear bedroom looking forwards.

a very positive outcome on the handling of this big beast. Indeed, cornering is more sports car than HGV. On motorways the curved sides and low body probably also help, but the six-wheeler Hobby is almost unbelievably steady as you pass the juggernauts. If you're fed up with the wander and sway of your existing motorhome, Hobby has the answer. This is certainly a driver's 'van.

All the other factors are standard Fiat fare. The slick, dashboard-mounted gearshift, the tolerably refined engine, the well-weighted power steering. Only the constant rattling from the fixed, bar-style table spoils the driving experience a little.

Back seat luxury

It's not just the front seat occupants who have a plush time in the 750. In the rear is a third travelling seat, and it's another Isringhausen captain's chair. The design is slightly different, featuring a separate, adjustable head restraint and a built-in three-point belt, but the comfort level is just as sybaritic. If there's a motorhome to be chauffeured around in, this is it, though perhaps not in winter, for there's no rear passenger heating.

On our test vehicle the exposed steel frame onto which the rear seat is mounted looked a little untidy, but 2001 UK-spec' models will have a concealed frame.

Space for everything...

...and everything in its place. The Hobby 750's layout seems entirely logical and a well thought-out use of all the space. The large lounge area is up front, the kitchen amidships, and the bedroom and bathroom are at the rear.

Step in through the centrally-positioned side door and you are immediately struck by an impression of space. One visitor described it as 'like a first class hotel room' and certainly the Hobby gives off a five-star image. The towelling-style upholstery is both modern and stylish, and the vinyl-panelled ceiling is an unusual and classy touch, while the curved high-level lockers complete the up-market appearance.

The furniture is generally very well finished, but a couple of relatively minor details let it down. The corner next to the bathroom door has vulnerable stick-on edging where a hardwood corner trim (as used elsewhere) would be smarter and more durable. And, secondly, the panel supporting the door below the wardrobe seemed flimsy. The high-level cupboards, though, look and feel solidly made and have substantial hinges.



Spacious lounge area has three swivel armchairs and a long sofa, so there's plenty of room to entertain. Double thickness backrest cushion for the settee impairs seating comfort, but it could easily be modified.

HOBBY 750



The kitchen has three-burner hob and an oven, but neither has push-button ignition. Large cutlery drawer and plenty of worktop, though.



The three-way fridge is a little short on capacity, but underneath are two waste bins (one for the recycling?).



Heki 1 sunroof is standard on 'UK-spec' Hobby 750 - it tips every which way or winds up by rotary handle. Panelled ceiling is unusual.



Comprehensive control panel with fresh and waste water level gauges. This is just above the caravan door.



The table easily extends to cater for family meals, but seats are poorly positioned in relation to table.



Room for a 16-inch TV on the slide-out swivel base, and very generous depth in the wardrobe (ideal for ballgowns!).

Using the cab as part of the living area (both seats swivel) means that you have more than 21 feet of living space, and it feels like it. Despite the 'three room' style of the layout, there is also an open-plan nature to the design, so the vehicle doesn't feel split up or compartmentalised.

Lounging looks good

The two captain's chairs in the cab turn easily to face the rear, where there's that third swivel chair and a settee that's more than 6ft 6in long. The deep side windows give a good view out, without creating a goldfish bowl feeling, and daylight also comes in via the standard Heki sunroof. And this is the posher Heki 1, the version that tips in every direction or winds up (front-hinged) by a rotary handle.

Despite quarter-circle armrest cushions at each end of the sofa, this isn't the comfiest place to sit. The backrest is double thickness and absolutely square, so it's best to put your feet up and stretch out rather than sit in a more demure fashion. The folded backrest is necessary for the lounge bed, but many owners will probably not need this facility, and the backrest could simply be cut down to single thickness for greater comfort. It's hard to understand why Hobby do not provide the cushion in two halves. The other half could simply travel on top of the fixed bed, or be left at home if not required.

The three swivel armchairs are just as comfortable for reading and relaxing as they are when motoring, but it's worth noting that the cab seats are rather higher than the rear chair and settee. This does mean that your

feet tend to dangle in mid-air when sitting in the swivelled driver's seat. The passenger seat doesn't turn through the full 180 degrees, so feet can stay more comfortably on the higher cab floor, or you can stretch out and put your feet up on the other cab seat.

Criticisms about the differing seat heights aside, this is a roomy and inviting lounge area that has plenty of room to sprawl or to entertain guests. TV watchers will also notice the television cupboard (with slide-out turntable) above the fridge. This is ideal for viewing from the sofa or the cab seats.

Dinner time

Initial impressions are good. The fixed, 'bar layout', table is rock solid and it quickly unfolds to double its size for more than two diners. The different seat heights rear their heads again here, though, and there's also the problem of actually reaching the table. The rear seat will not slide forward far enough to comfortably eat (or write) at the table, while the driver's seat is also too far away. The best place to sit for dining is on the side-facing sofa (with the table extended), but there's really only room for one here.

We coped with dining in the Hobby, but a little extension to the rear seat runners and a few inches extra at the forward end of the table would have made all the difference.

'UK-spec' kitchen

The Hobby kitchen has been upgraded for British tastes and all 2001



Stylish swivel spot lamps feature in the lounge and rear bedroom.

◀ *Concertina division shuts off the bedroom area, complete with its en-suite facilities. The fixed rear bed is generously wide and has six-inch deep mattress. Future models will have stronger bed base.*

▶ *The settee pulls out easily to make a second full-sized double bed - which is flat and comfortable.*



models incorporate an oven as standard. With a three-burner hob, stainless steel sink and two mains power points, the Hobby avoids the criticism that German motorhome kitchens are too basic. At the same time, the Teutonic 'van manages to overcome that failing of so many British coachbuilts - a complete lack of kitchen worktop space.

The main kitchen unit is L-shaped, and there's plenty of room for the chef to prepare. The shelf in the overhanging unit is also a bonus, and the high-level roller-shutter-fronted locker above that will be modified in future so that the doors do not open whilst travelling.

The lack of a drainer is easily overcome by using a tray, but the omission of push-button ignition for either the hob or oven seemed a bit mean in a luxury 'van. The Spinflo Cara oven was rated highly by my resident chef (Jo), who preferred it to the more commonly fitted Smev unit.

There's no shortage of kitchen storage, and the cutlery drawer is generously proportioned and caters for kitchen knives and other larger implements. There's also a slide-out vegetable basket, though the screws supporting its runners were inadequate and it collapsed under the weight of a few potatoes. There is no bespoke crockery storage, but we found the cupboard under the oven to be ideal for this purpose.

Opposite the main kitchen unit is the fridge, mounted above floor level for convenient access. It is a three-way model with electronic ignition, but the 70-litre capacity is barely adequate for a vehicle of this class. Below the fridge a slide-out unit contains two waste bins - that's two more than you'll often find.

Under the cab seats are the auxiliary battery and charger, but the capacity of the caravan battery (75 amp hr) is unusually low for a

Continental motorhome. The stylish control panel (positioned over the caravan door) monitors battery and water (fresh and waste) levels.

More storage

The vast under-bed area can be reached from inside as well as out, the whole bed tipping up with the assistance of gas struts. The Hobby is not unique, however, in having inadequate gas struts that simply cannot support the weight of the mattress.

Elsewhere, there's a multitude of high-level lockers - 17 in all, each with a smaller cupboard below (and that doesn't include the five small cupboards around the cab roof). The upper lockers have attractive handles, but no secure locking, so they could be prone to releasing their contents in a rollover accident.

The wardrobe is deep enough for ballgowns and is illuminated, so 'her indoors' can dress up whenever she feels like it. There are cupboards and a bookshelf alongside the table and there's a small amount of stowage space under the settee, though this is hard to access and the area is largely filled by the 110-litre fresh water tank. The TV cupboard swallowed our 16-inch colour telly with ease.

At night

The permanent double bed (in the rear offside corner) is of generous width, and the six-inch-deep one-piece mattress sits on a slatted base. There are reading lights ideally positioned at the head of the bed, and the TV can be turned to face the bedroom. You can even pull a concertina screen across the 'van to shut off the sleeping/washing area (but not including



Stylish high-level cupboards abound in lounge and bedroom as well as the kitchen. All have two levels.

◀ *Towel rail is sited in the toilet/shower cubicle when it really needs to be outside with the washbasin.*

▶ *Unusually positioned shower head with noose-like hose. There's plenty of room to shower, but tray needs better drainage.*



HOBBY 750



Large washbasin is sited outside the toilet cubicle. Mirrors are fitted behind and the missus can sit on the bed to apply make-up.

the wardrobe) and create a cosy en-suite bedroom.

It all looked so good, but, when Jo climbed into bed on our first night away, three slats gave way under her and the bed sagged a little in the middle. Jo would probably rather I didn't tell you exactly what she weighs, but, at 5ft 2in and size 12-14, she's really quite small. And things got worse; halfway through our second night, Jo awoke in the middle of a dream that she was drowning. In a sense she was, for most of the slats beneath her had now popped out of their retainers and the side of the bed against the wall had a very pronounced dip in the middle. We had no option but to move to the lounge bed.

Part of Hobby Motorhomes UK's package of updates to the 750 is a strengthened bed - ours was apparently not a unique problem. Hopefully, 2001 models will make this a thing of the past and Hobby owners can sleep

without fear of sinking into the locker below. Certainly this rear bedroom should then be as good as any in its class.

The front bed simply makes up by sliding out the slatted base of the settee and unfolding the backrest cushion into the gap left behind. Despite there only being three travelling seats, this second bed is a full-sized (and very comfortable) double.

The 750 comes with plenty of halogen spot lamps, though there are no lights at ceiling level. Swivel spotlights in both lounge and bedroom are perfect for detailed studying of MMM. Blinds and flyscreens are fitted at all the windows, along with curtains and net curtains at the lounge and bedroom windows.

The cab has full-length unlined curtains, but it was noticeable that the front of the 'van was rather cooler than the rear (it was below freezing outside at night). A set of Silver Screens, or the fitting of thermal-lined cab curtains, would help to prevent heat loss through the uninsulated and single-glazed cab. Having said that, the quiet-running Truma Combi gas-fired heating system kept us warm and snug, even when there was snow on the ground outside. The downside, using the heating most of the day and night, was consumption of a 3.9kg Calor propane cylinder every 1.5-2 days.

Bathroom

The Hobby uses a popular Continental design of having the shower and toilet in a cubicle alongside the bed, while the washbasin is outside this compartment, at the foot of the bed.

The toilet area is adequate, though in a 26ft 'van you might well have expected a separate shower. Nevertheless, the shower curtain protects the door (and the loo too, if you wish) and there's more than adequate space to enjoy a powerful flow of warm water from the unusual, ceiling-mounted shower hose. The water temperature is retained after shutting off the supply temporarily. There's just one small drain hole for the shower tray - so drainage could be improved.

There's plenty of room for toiletries, both in the shower cubicle and under the washbasin. The large basin is backed by even larger mirrors, so the vain will be very at home. Others will simply find room to wash or apply make-up (perhaps while sitting on the end of the bed). One annoying detail, however, is that the towel rail is in the toilet cubicle rather than alongside the washbasin.

The twist handle on the toilet door (and the similar one on the wardrobe door) occasionally released themselves while travelling, and these are to be replaced with push-button catches on future UK models.

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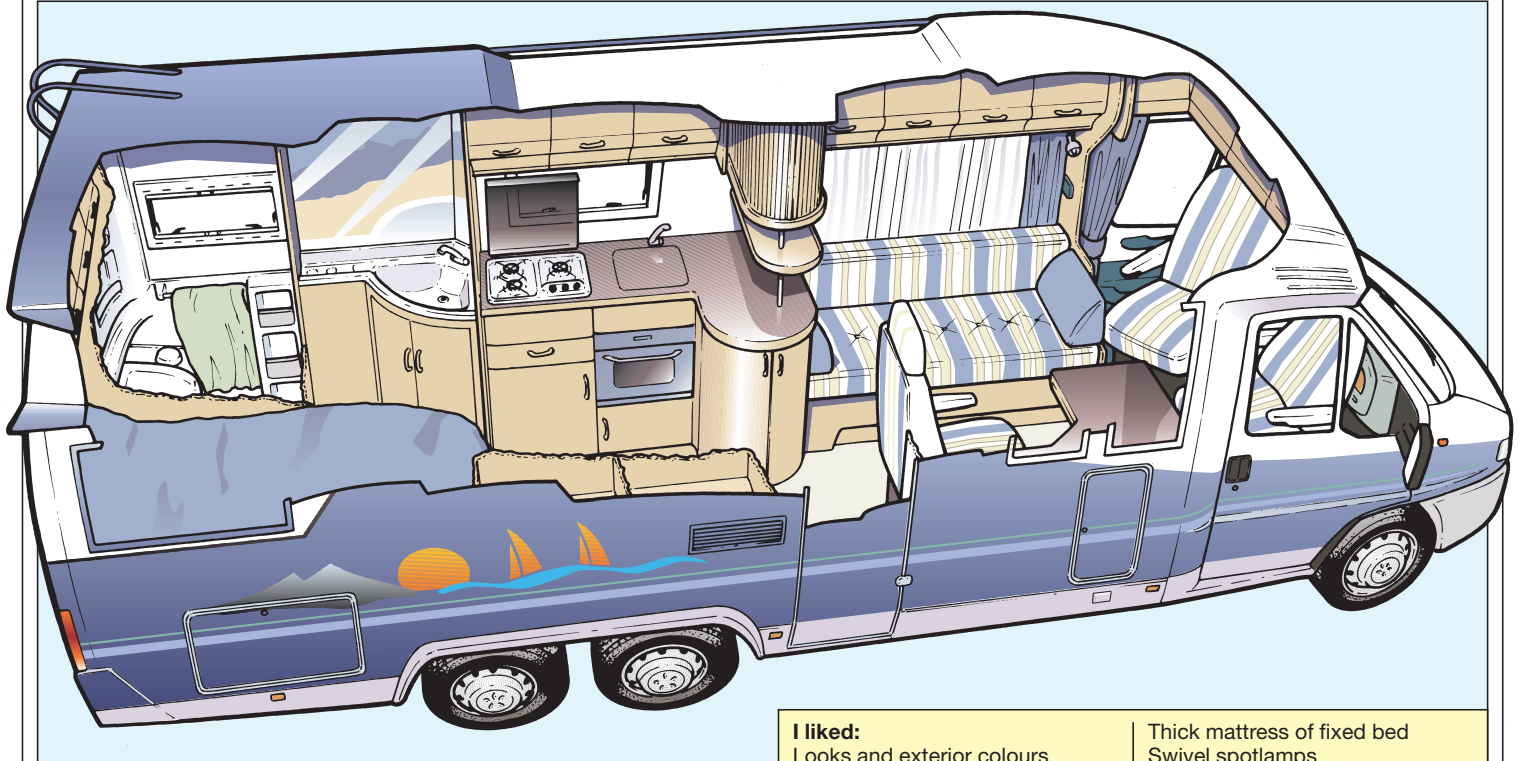
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I liked:

- Looks and exterior colours
- Removable carpets
- Low entrance step to caravan door
- Exterior shower
- Large under-bed locker
- Easy-to-use corner steadies
- Generous payload
- Anti-lock brakes as standard
- Driver's airbag
- Captain's chairs for three
- Electric cab windows
- Strong performance
- Fabulous stability and handling
- Spacious layout
- Modern fabrics and interior decor
- Cab integrated into living area
- Heki 1 sunroof
- Well-positioned TV cupboard
- Excellent oven
- Number of mains power points
- Only two keys required
- Lots of kitchen worktop
- Twin waste bins
- Masses of storage space
- Deep wardrobe

- Thick mattress of fixed bed
- Swivel spotlamps
- Effective and quiet heating system
- Large washbasin

I would have liked:

- Awning light
- Redesigned waste water hose
- Passenger door pocket
- Split backrest on settee
- Larger fridge
- Electronic ignition for hob and oven
- Upgraded auxiliary battery
- Stronger gas struts to lift bed
- Thermal-lined cab curtains
- Re-sited towel rail
- Better drainer for shower tray
- Positive locking catches for high-level lockers

I disliked:

- Rattles from table
- Difficulty in sitting comfortably to dine
- Flimsiness of rear bed slats

Conclusions

As I said at the outset, the Hobby 750 is all about style. Style inside, style outside, style by the bucket load. It has substance too, with its 4.5-tonne chassis, anti-lock brakes and driver's airbag. And it has space, as you have a right to expect in a 26ft motorhome. There's plenty of room to lounge, there's a generally well-planned kitchen, and a fixed bed is becoming 'de rigueur' at this level of the motorhome market. Hopefully, the last feature will not cause problems on the latest models, which really leaves us disgruntled only over the dining arrangements (and perhaps the lack of a separate shower). Fall in love with the way it looks (and the way it drives) and you may well forgive the flagship Hobby these shortcomings. With a sub-£45 000 price tag, it certainly makes a lot of other large (but not this long) coachbuilts look rather poor value for money. □



