

MM TEST REPORT EXTRA



SEE THE CLASS

Hymer C 524 on 2.8TD Fiat Ducato

Dave Hurrell is impressed by an entry-level Hymer

The smaller overcab coachbuilt motorhome, usually based on one or other of the Sevel-built chassis cabs, is a bread-and-butter staple of motorcaravan manufacturing. Entry-level models are a popular choice for many people and most manufacturers include some models of this type in their range. Hymer have just such a range, previously known as Camp

Swing but now redesigned and launched in the UK as simply the C-Class. There are nine models and (apart from two that offer a garage) they follow the usual trend with their main living area components arranged in various familiar layouts that have become popular over the years. As many experienced motorcaravanners will know, bunging in some



The use of a two-tone grey and white colour scheme and cleverly designed lutton breaks up the bulk and adds class.



Neat lockable covers conceal the water filler and hook-up point.

furniture and a few gadgets to keep the occupants clean, fed and comfortable does not necessarily a good motorhome make. The devil – or lack of it – is often in quality and design detail. Things need to look good, work well and not come off in your hand! Hymer are already ahead of the game when it comes to quality, and their leading position in motorhome manufacture and sales has allowed them to approach design and detailing in a new way. So, enter the C-Class. From the outside, a stylish looking overcab motorhome. The inside could also prove to be a 'box of delights' and I was lucky enough to get my hands on one to see just how much devil there was in the C-Class's detail.

Hey, good looking

Innovative design detailing has turned the potentially bulky and uninteresting overcab coachbuilt shape into an attractive style

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statement. The 'pinched' top to the luton and the combination of light and dark grey in different areas of the body break up its bulk and make it look superb. Here it can be seen how details can become part of the whole. All of the external features - such as vents, fillers and hatches - have been colour coordinated to blend with the design. Even the porch light is purpose-made to be part of the product and not just some out-sourced fitting applied to the bodywork carbuncle-style. This design suits the lines of the latest Ducato cab well, and the Hymer cut-out radiator grille completes the picture.

Climb aboard

Detail is set to be a recurring theme and the first tangible evidence of this comes with the 'van's key ring. Not only does the Fiat key pop out from its own neat plastic housing when you press a small button, but even better is the fact that Hymer's contribution is one key only. This one key fits every caravan component. All the hatches, caravan door, even the neat lockable water filler and hook-up point. I was already impressed, and I hadn't even unlocked a door! Open the UK offside caravan door, operate the switch and



UK offside caravan door opens to reveal a folding flyscreen. The door stays clear of the fridge vents when open. Neatly integrated porch light can be seen at the top.



Looking to the front with familiar layout of dinette opposite kitchen. Overcab bed is fixed. The fresh, modern upholstery enhances a combination of silver and grey against light colour wood.

the omnipresent (sorry) double-tread electric step provides access to an interior that sees a six-berth, family-sized layout. Quite standard fare here, with the usual overcab double in front of nearside Pullman dinette, which is opposite the kitchen. Wardrobe and washroom come next. There is an unusual combination of transverse bunks and garage across the rear, with the lower bunk hinging up to increase headroom and space in the garage area.

The Italian end

There is no cab cutaway so moving from the rear into the cab requires care. Once there, you find two comfortable high-back seats, upholstered to match the caravan and set at a sensible height for someone of my five-eleven stature. The Sevel cab is a definite improvement over its predecessor with large clear dials, and what seemed like dozens of face-level heating/ventilation vents. According to manufacturer's advertising, the new Fiat cab should come with all the toys - electric windows and mirrors, central locking and CD player - but this demonstrator had none of these, not even a radio. I must admit I was miffed, as I had bought a special selection of CDs with me!

I fired up the big common-rail diesel and set

off for an extended test run - including all road conditions, from motorway to country lane. All the well-known characteristics of the Sevel-built vehicle are there. Excellent handling but firm ride, great steering and brakes, and a new gearbox that just keeps getting better and better. Motorway cruising at the legal limit is effortless and venturing up narrow country lanes produced no drama or fears for the coachwork (thanks to good visibility and excellent mirrors). In spite of redesigned door seals there was still some stuttering wind noise from around the driver's door. In general, on-road noise levels in the cab are about the same as I remember pre-facelift Ducatos to be. I think that claims of executive saloon levels of noise in press ads must be the product of an over-excited 'advertising creative'!

Meanwhile, behind me the Hymer bit was commendably quiet. Considering there was not much more than a tank of water, a gas cylinder and my toothbrush on board, the lack of conversion noise was remarkable. It's a testament to that Hymer double-act, good design and construction.

The cab heater is a big improvement over its predecessor and I particularly liked the pop-up map holder (great for a route-planner when on a long haul). Last and very much least is the adjustable steering column. It has so little movement as to be virtually useless: another 'sales led' creation I suspect.

Sitting pretty

Six sleeping berths are provided, but the experienced among us could be forgiven for thinking that there may not be six safe travelling seats. (Many manufacturers install lots of beds and then expect some of the occupants to find an alternative means of transport.) That, thankfully is not the case here and six belted travelling seats are provided, the only downside being that the outside rear-facing seat has a lap belt only. All the rest are three point.

At home with Hymer

A colour scheme of off-white, grey and silver, teamed with light coloured woodwork creates a modern feel to an interior that bristles with innovation and detail. Clever use has been made of plastics for drawers and drop-down storage bins, while silver detailing on handles and trim strips creates a look that is both modern and slightly retro. Everywhere you look you see the hand of a designer (rather than a buyer bringing in components). Even the



Latest Fiat cab has more car-like appearance with lots of storage and a much improved heater. Claims of executive saloon car levels of noise are debatable.



Looking back we see the offside kitchen unit. The sliding washroom door is on the on right. Transverse bunks can be seen at the rear.

overhead locker hinge-and-stay system is purpose-made to be elegant, simple and effective. Doors are hung on a longitudinal rod that also provides an over-centre latch to keep them open. As I looked at the way the Corian-style kitchen work surface had been moulded to fit the curve of the front of the familiar Electrolux fridge, I found myself wishing that the designers at Hymer had turned their attention to things like the oven and hob as well. The out-sourced products in this 'van look incongruous, such is the integrated design of the rest of the interior.

Packing six berths and a garage into a body

length of under six metres means lounging is confined to the Pullman dinette or one of the beds. If you desire a lounge for those long evenings in the UK, two models in the range offer a sofa, and one a rear U-shaped lounge. In the C 524 the provision of sleeping accommodation and storage is paramount.

Cooking

One of the stars of the show is the kitchen. Its moulded top with integrated sink/drainer immediately grabs your attention and much has been made of the folding sink cover/cutting-board that slides on a rail along

the unit. I found this best used in position over the sink. It tended to get in the way when opened or slid along. However, it is a very useful feature and as a cutting-board/work surface is located by its slide-rail making it easy and safe to use, but not suitable for hot pans!

The sink is superb. With an excellent mixer tap and a separate drain to collect drips, it is both stylish and practical. Great so far, but the best is still to come. A sink plug may seem a small detail but this one is a triumph. It uses an O-ring seal to stop water draining and incorporates a tiny lift-out strainer basket to collect the bits. This in itself is a great idea and the icing on the cake is the trap beneath. At last, a purpose designed waste, made to stop food particles entering the waste tank, and a trap to stop smells entering the interior. The rest of the kitchen is equipped with a Smev three-burner hob, oven and grill – all in stainless steel and with electronic ignition. There's a 103-litre three-way Powerfridge. Storage consists of two overhead lockers, with nifty drop-down bins below, and a good-sized drawer. The rest of the potential for kitchen storage has been reduced by the addition of the UK specified oven. This is not as bad as it sounds, as to the left (beyond the caravan door) is a cupboard and shelf unit, the top of which is a designated TV table. This could provide useful additional storage space for the kitchen.

Eating

The familiar Pullman dinette is comfortable with an adequate table and, like many of its ilk, great to use. Of course, it doesn't seat six, so a full complement at mealtimes will require sittings. I would solve this problem by heading far enough south to be able to eat outside and enjoy the sunshine!



Kitchen unit is a design statement in itself.



The good old Pullman dinette. This one's spacious and comfortable, but I'd eat outside at every opportunity.



The fitting of an oven robs the kitchen of a cupboard, but this unit is just the other side of the caravan door. The top has sockets for TV.



Never has one small detail meant so much to so many! This clever little strainer plug and its trap-equipped waste could be the answer to pongs!

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Excellent washroom has sliding door and elegant concealed lighting. Washbasin swings to the left on the vertical silver pole to create room for showering.



Combination tap clips on to shower rail and a sliding cover protects the mirror. Strong shower tray has two drain holes.

Washing

Centrally located on the nearside, the smallest room features a sliding door that runs inside a curved outer wall. A mix of white walls with a wood grain back panel and peppermint green locker doors creates light, bright, up-to-the-

minute styling - that will surely make you feel good in the morning. Lockers abound; one has a drop-down door that makes an extra surface for in-use toiletries. Some cupboards have simple (but useful) elastic straps within, keeping bottles and tubes in place even while

travelling, others have bin-style fiddled shelves for smaller items. The custom-designed basin sits below a large mirror, with another to the left above the toilet. The toilet itself is the usual Thetford swivel-bowl unit and I found myself, once again, wishing



The ladder up to the luton is steep but can still be used with the downstairs double in place.



The dinette double goes together in the usual way - using the tabletop, slide-outs, and infill cushions. The result is a 6ft x 4ft double.



The rear bunks are over (or 'in') the garage and lose width to the washroom at the foot end.



The two-door wardrobe has ample space for hanging clothes, and two drawers for smaller items. Its base is home to the Truma Combi boiler.

that Hymer had commissioned a special design to match (maybe in mint green).

There is no separate shower but it's when you want a sluice-down that the washroom gets clever. The washbasin is mounted on a vertical silver pole – this is one of the overall design themes – and swings to the left to end up out of the way above the toilet. Lift the combination tap/showerhead to its higher position and close the door behind you. The shower screen is attached to the inside of the door. It hinges open and extends to close off the toilet area, creating a spacious shower compartment with no basin to get in the way. There is even a sliding cover to protect the mirror. There is wonderful concealed strip lighting along the top of the back wall, and the same excellent drain plugs as the kitchen on the basin and the twin outlet shower tray. This washroom is one of the best I have seen for design, practicality and use of space. I loved it.



With the lower bunk in place a generous storage area is still available...

Sleeping

From the outside, the luton looks commendably slim due to its pinched profile and rounded shape. Inside, where space is needed, the pinched-in sides are hardly noticeable. The lack of a cab cutaway means the large bed is executed in one piece and mounted on a sprung-stave base giving excellent comfort and instant availability. A window at either end, a nifty reading lamp, and good headroom, all combine to make this a nice place to sleep (with an optional rooflight completing the picture). Access is via a rather steeply angled ladder. It may be a bit sheer but it can still be used with the dinette double made up.

The dinette berth goes together in the time-honoured way, by lowering the table to bridge the gap between seats and adding a backrest and an infill for a generous single. Side rails are extended, and two more infills



...hinge it up and the garage has room for bikes or maybe a scooter.

added to make a four-foot-wide double. Even with the double deployed it is still possible to move around and just about open the fridge, so everyone can have a morning cuppa before they get up.

The rear bunks are instantly ready for use and a hinged vertical ladder gives access to the top one. The only option for sleeping here is heads to the outside as the washroom eats into the bunks' width at the bottom end. Mounted on the same sprung-stave bases as the luton berth, they are still comfortable to use and would be great fun for kids.

Storing

The wardrobe provides internal storage in addition to the overhead lockers above the dinette. It continues the theme of being different, by having double offset doors and two drawers that match the style of those in the kitchen.



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Externally, a weatherproof drawer slides from the nearside skirt, ideal for storage of items such as hoses, leads and wedges. Swing open a door at the offside rear to reveal the dual-purpose garage area. The lower bunk – when ready for use – sits in the middle of the garage – vertically speaking – and still leaves a generous storage space below, should you wish to travel with it in place. However, it also hinges up towards the rear of the 'van potentially increasing the height of this space to allow carriage of taller items such as bikes, or maybe a scooter. It was here that I detected a slight case of prototype disease. The bunk would not swing up far enough (and the retaining strap, hook, and the frame that the bunk rested on, had the look of a hastily constructed solution). That said, I am sure that once these problems are ironed out this multi-purpose area will prove to be a versatile and useful feature, with the ability to choose between storage and accommodation a boon.

Servicing

The control panel is located in a familiar position above the caravan door. It is styled to look simple and designed to be simple to operate. Among other functions, it tells you the most important facts that every motorcaravanner needs to know: the condition of both leisure and vehicle batteries and the contents of both the fresh and waste



Gas locker accepts two 13kg cylinders.



water tanks. The liquid crystal display is simple and easy to read and the controls are easy to use. Good design is combined with technology to excellent effect.

The 90 amp hr leisure battery is mounted under the cab passenger seat and is of the latest gel type, so no danger of potentially explosive gassing. Fresh and waste water storage is taken care of by inboard fresh and underslung waste tanks. The latter has large-bore pipework and valve for dumping. The fresh water is fed from the underseat tank via a submersible pump, which delivers good rates of flow to both sink and washbasin/shower.

The large lip-free gas locker has space for two 13kg bottles. Hot air and water is supplied by a Truma Combi unit, mounted in the base of the wardrobe. It supplies outlets in the living area, washroom and garage, and kept me as warm as toast. Lighting throughout the 'van is extremely good -with a combination of halogen spots, reading lamps, and nifty designer-style striplights built flush into the underneath of the overhead lockers.

Concluding

One of the problems with modern motorhomes is that many of the components used are borrowed from other situations. Cabinet hinges you might find in your kitchen at home and waste fittings from trailer caravans that were never designed to drain into a fixed tank. Several years ago, when I returned to motorcaravanning, I remember thinking how excellent was the cassette toilet. A familiar necessity of everyday life had been completely redesigned to make it function superbly in a new situation. The twin virtues of good design and quality should skip hand-in-hand into the future of motorcaravan manufacture and the people at Hymer seem to understand this. Here we have a small revolution. A standard format motorhome that has been made to look good and perform well, all based on good design and attention to detail. From a designer's point of view, this C 524 could be described as ground-breaking. From mine, it's just a superbly usable motorhome with spade-loads of quality and more than a touch of class.

In brief

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato 15 chassis cab
Engine type: Four-cylinder 2.8-litre JTD common-rail turbo-diesel
Output: 94kW (127bhp) @ 3600rpm
Gearbox and drive: Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
Make and model: Hymer C 524 Garage
Body type and construction: Overcab coachbuilt body, sandwich construction with aluminium outer skin. GRP luton, roof and rear panel. Aluminium skirts
Conversion NCC approved (badged EN1646): No
Electrical equipment: 90 amp hr gel leisure battery and charger. Mains hook-up with RCD and MCBs, three UK-type mains sockets, two 12V DC sockets
Lighting: Two halogen reading lamps to dinette, three downlights in main living area, flush under-locker striplighting to dinette and kitchen, reading lamps in luton and rear bunks, concealed striplighting and mirror light in washroom, porch light, garage light

Cooking facilities: Smev three-burner hob and oven/grill with rotisserie, all with electronic ignition
Refrigerator: Electrolux RM6401L three-way 103-litre Powerfridge
Water heater: Truma Combi C3402 (gas only)
Fresh water tank: Inboard 120-litre
Waste water tanks: Underslung 100-litre
Space heating: Truma Combi C3402 (gas only) blown-air with outlets in main living area, washroom and garage
Gas locker capacity: Two 13kg cylinders
Rear restraints: Four. Three x three-point inertia reel belts, one x static lap belt
Additional features: Flyscreen door, electric step, wind-up sunroof, external storage drawer, rear radio speakers, adjustable tie-down system in garage, removable carpets

Dimensions

Overall length: 5.8m (19ft 1in)
Overall width: 2.2m (7ft 3in)
Overall height: 2.9m (9ft 6in)
Interior height: 1.97m (6ft 6in) max

Bed dimensions:

Luton bed 2.0m x 1.7m (6ft 7in x 5ft 7in) max
 Dinette bed 1.83m x 2.12. (6ft 0in x 4ft 0in)
 Rear bunks 6ft 7in x 2ft 1in (840mm x 2.0m) max
Max authorised weight: 3400kg or 3500kg
Load capacity: 495kg or 595kg

Price

Standard model: £37 690

Optional extras

Base vehicle and caravan options: All UK spec 'vans come with an extras pack, including such things as oven and removable carpets. Hymer lists over 200 options. Contact Hymer UK for details

Vehicle kindly supplied for evaluation by:
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