



# ON TOUR WITH A...

## ...2006 HYMER C-CLASSIC 514

*Lesser-known northern territory is explored in a compact, budget coachbuilt from Germany*



**A** Hymer for under thirty grand? A likely story. 'If it's true' thinks I, as we approach Hymer UK near Preston, 'even the wheels will be an optional extra'. I have a small confession to make at this point (we all have prejudices of one kind or another), but I'm not usually keen on Hymer products. A sweeping statement maybe, but it mainly revolves around those gargantuan fixed tables and inadequate kitchens, which the Germans seem so certain about. So, I was harbouring some rather negative thoughts before I even clapped eyes on this Hymer, and a first glimpse didn't lift my spirits. The C-Classic 514 is Hymer's shortest motorhome at a whisker under 18ft 6in long (or 5.61m if you

are German) and looks nearly as tall. It is also mounted on a short wheelbase chassis, leaving an awful lot of motorhome hanging out over the back of the rear axle. To put this in context, our own truck is two feet shorter than the Hymer, but on the longer medium wheelbase chassis.

Without voicing my thoughts to the ever-helpful folk at Hymer UK, I thought that this looked like a recipe for some very interesting times on the narrow bumpy roads of north Lancashire, where we were headed

### DOWN AT THE DOCKS

Quite why we've neglected the northern fringes of our home county so badly in recent years I'm

not sure, as we often enjoyed weekends away in the rural and coastal fringes of Lancaster when we had proper jobs and 2.4 children (boy, girl and dog). So, with a few days to get to know the mini Hymer, we set off for Glasson Dock (a few miles south of Lancaster) to look at boats. I have this vision that one day we'll buy a 50-foot steel sloop, flog the 'van and house, then sail off into the sunset.

Unfortunately, my good lady doesn't fancy the idea, quoting the dangers of falling off the property ladder or something. She knows of my fear of ladders and apparently (so she says) if you flog the house and live in a motorhome this will also be fitted with one. So she lets



Words & pictures by  
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**RIGHT:**  
*The Ashton Memorial,  
Lancaster.*

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
*Beacon Fell, overlooking  
the Bowland Fells.*



### TOURING TRIVIA

**WE STAYED AT:**

- Caravan Club CL Heron's Wood (members only), full details on page 354 of the club's 2005/06 Sites Directory and Handbook.
- Clitheroe Camping and Caravanning Club site, Edisford Road, Clitheroe, Lancs (tel: 01200 425294), non-members welcome.

**WE VISITED:**

- Ashton Hall Plant Centre (tel: 01524 751767)
- Leighton Hall (tel: 01524 734474; web site: [www.leightonhall.co.uk](http://www.leightonhall.co.uk))
- For more ideas, see [www.visitlancaster.co.uk](http://www.visitlancaster.co.uk)

**FOOD:**

- Puddleducks Café, Dunsop Bridge (tel: 01200 448241)
- The Stork, Conder Green (tel: 01524 751234)

me look at boats and dream - Glasson Dock is a great place for dreamers. There is also an excellent eating out opportunity too, in the form of The 'Lockkeepers Rest,' which, to be truthful, is a burger van, but food always tastes better outside doesn't it? A height barrier has appeared (at the main car park) since we were last there, but we found a parking place quite easily on the road. Summer Sundays will be a different matter though, so a midweek visit is the best option.

**GETTING TO GLASSON**

You can't get to Glasson without using some quite nasty little roads, and the stunted Hymer

acquitted itself a lot better than I'd feared. It does feel slightly different to the longer models, with a bit more pitching from front to back, a slightly choppy ride, and an (at first) odd sensation that weight is constantly being shifted from one of the front corners to the opposite rear as bends are entered and exited. However, I soon got used to it and found myself driving the 'van just as slowly but happily as I do our own. We only had a very light load on board, and no bikes on the (part of the package) rear bike rack, so the handling was probably as good as it will ever be. With that bike rack being so far out from the back axle and most of the storage space at the extreme rear, some thought will have to

go into where heavier items are stored in the little Hymer. I did notice however, that Hymer has fitted spring assisters to the rear axle and it did feel to have a fairly firm backside, if you'll pardon the expression.

The engine (the basic two-litre unit) was surprisingly adequate. What's more, the test 'van had only 12 miles on the clock when we picked it up, so the already adequate performance would, no doubt, improve a little as the miles accumulate. Whether everybody else lies about the weight of their vehicles, or Hymer has quoted the unladen weight too high (2730kg) I'm not sure, but this was, by some margin, the fastest overcab coachbuilt I've

driven equipped with the two-litre motor. It didn't die that much of death on motorway hills either, and though crosswinds moved it around a bit and headwinds did slow it up, this 'van was much sprightlier than it had any right to be. Besides the performance being fine, what I really liked about this engine is how smooth and free revving it was. It may not be as torquey as the bigger ones, but it certainly was a sweet little diesel to use.

What else is there (automotively that is)? The brakes became better as the miles piled up, Marion complained about the passenger seat being too high for her legs to reach the

floor, and I nearly forgot the sparsely-equipped cab, as it isn't that important to me. If you want a Hymer which comes as standard with awning, bike rack, and a flat screen TV (which this one does) for under thirty grand, then you don't get a carpet in the cab, electric windows, nor electrically-adjustable heated mirrors. The cab seats are still upholstered in standard Fiat blue, which is the same colour and tone (near as damn it) as the cloth on the lounge seating. These seats don't swivel either.

With a dinette behind the passenger seat and the wardrobe to the rear of the driver, almost cutting off the cab from the living area, the lack of swivels (or the fact that the upholstery doesn't quite match) seems irrelevant.

And as for the lack of electrical gizmos in the cab, I had a whale of a time using the window winders and welcomed the fact you could open and close the cab windows on site without going through the rigmarole of locating the ignition keys, switching on, then waiting for those strained sounding motors to gradually close the bloomin' windows. We could've been on the beach by then, or halfway up a mountain. Sorry about that: electric windows in motorhomes are one of my pet rants.

So yes, overall, the driving experience is a good one.

**THAT CONDER MOMENT**

First stop was a Caravan Club CL at Conder Green (Heron's Wood), just one mile from Glasson Dock, 400 yards to The Stork (good grub and a wonderful 'country inn' kind of atmosphere), the same from the footpath and cycleway which leads by the River Lune right into the centre of Lancaster, and less than half a mile from the Garden and Plant Conservation Centre (it's a Garden Centre really) at Ashton Hall. The CL is also close to Lancaster Golf Club, but they all seemed a bit too serious for our approach to golfing mayhem, and also

refused to let us take a photo of the Hymer in front of their stately pile. We'd almost forgotten why this area always appealed so much, and have promised ourselves a return visit in our own truck so we can actually pedal that cycle path, and wander aimlessly around Lancaster again without the priority of obtaining photos of a test 'van getting in the way of using a motorcaravan properly.

**SETTLING DOWN**

The very first thing you notice about the interior of the Hymer when it's time to live in it is the acres of work surface in the kitchen. Very un-Germanic. There's a grill too, for that essential morning toast. Very, very, un-Germanic.

The grill/oven unit is probably an after-fit, or at least afterthought, judging from its position near the floor. And this particular Smev unit doesn't perform anywhere near as well as the full cookers made in this country, but at least it's there and it's acceptable. As I said, the positioning is low, but better down there than too high.

The stainless steel circular sink doesn't have a drainer, but with so much room available for a tray this certainly isn't important. The matching trendy looking circular hob has three burners, but it will be a very tight fit for three even smallish pans.

Not only is there loads of room in this kitchen to work and put things down, and not only is it quite well equipped, but it is also really quite cunningly planned and well endowed with good storage ideas. The lift-up flap to access the space in the rear corner (a kind of mini-garage) and the facility to have a crate containing foodstuffs directly accessible is a nice practical touch. There are also plenty of other places to store food too, though a drawer in the rear cupboard above the Combi heating unit would make accessing it that much easier. Lighting is lacking from the ceiling into the

**WE LIKED**

- Nimble manoeuvrable chassis
- Smooth engine
- Decent performance
- Roomy, well-equipped kitchen
- Practical washroom
- Big comfortable overcab bed
- General storage ideas and provision
- Sound engineering throughout
- Good build quality
- The price

**WE WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- Better all round lighting
- Medium wheelbase chassis
- L-shaped lounge option and swivel cab seats
- Built-in entrance steps

**WE DISLIKED**

- Large mirrors in bathroom (just one of us!)





**FAR LEFT:** The washroom is functional if not plush, with everything needed in the right place and at the right height.

**LEFT:** The roomy well-equipped kitchen. We'd swap that flashy light above the sink for a few more in strategic places.

**BELOW LEFT:** A Hymer lounge with the table gone? Amazing!

**BELOW RIGHT:** The Hymer makes good use of space for such a small 'van - kitchen worktop is big enough to fulfil a multitude of uses.

upper cupboards, and indeed, lighting isn't the 514's strongest point, but overall this must be one of the best kitchens ever built by Hymer.

**WASH**

The washroom shows some signs of the low price, but only when compared to other Hymer costing twice the money. There is indeed a lot of

white stuff in here, and the separate shower has a curtain rather than fixed door, but it remains eminently usable and whilst the floor area around the toilet isn't vast, it's enough. Also, the loo is low enough for a healthy ergonomic posture. I don't have to paint this picture any further, do I?

Storage space is better than some, with

a nice 'wooden' cupboard under the sink for ablutional materials. The washroom doesn't have a window but the roof vent and bright walls contribute in equal measure to create a nice light, spacious ambience.

What I hate - I mean really hate - about Hymer, are those huge mirrors that are often fitted on both walls around the toilet. Chaps will recognise my reluctance to give any more information here, and you've got to wonder why they fit these 'revealers of far too much' just here? Despite the horror show in the mirrors, this washroom is a sensible, practical and pleasant space.

**BEDS**

The 514 is a four-berth motorhome with a double bed upstairs and another double downstairs made up from the dinette. The upstairs bed is almost instantly available - you just pull it down out of the roof - clamber up into overcab pod and drift off to sleep on the big comfy mattress. The mattress lies on sprung staves and has sufficient headroom above for both occupants not to get claustrophobic. You can't sit up in bed to read or sup your cocoa (or Scotch in my case) but I think life would evolve to cope.

One thing that is absolutely woeful upstairs is the lighting, and this does really need sorting out, or you'll be taking a torch up for the bedtime book.

We didn't bother using the downstairs bed, as the upstairs one is so superior in every way (except for access and lighting), but we did construct it to see what's involved. Also, to check it all works (which often they don't) and it did, but the resulting double isn't huge (6ft x 4ft, with enclosed ends), is awkward to make, and has quite a few joins.

However, it is better than many a dinette bed we've fought with, while both beds can be used simultaneously, with the upper bed access ladder still usable when the dinette bed is made.





**ABOVE LEFT:** The roomy comfortable upstairs bed. The ridiculous little light up here is positioned almost under one pillow.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** With lower bed made up the ladder can still be used to access the upstairs bed.

**BELOW:** A Pullman dinette has its uses and this shows the main one – as a decent dining place.

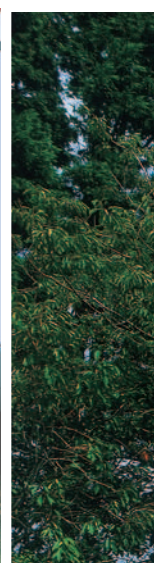
**THE PULLMAN EFFECT**

The dinette arrangement (which sits just behind the nearside of the cab) is probably the most effective answer to juggling all the various requirements of travelling/lounging/dining/sleeping for four adults in such a small motorhome.

And wait for this... the table can be removed.

The reason for this is simply that it is part of the bed base. But a German motorhome with a removable table? Wonders will never cease!

The dinette functions well as a dining room, acceptably as a bed, but not quite so well as a lounge. With just the two of us lounging around we adopted a feet-up attitude on the two



**SPECIFICATION**

- **Price as tested:** £29,995
- **Layout:** Four-berth overcab coachbuilt with nearside four-seat dinette ahead of washroom, offside wardrobe ahead of entrance door and kitchen
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato SWB chassis cab with 2-litre diesel engine producing 85bhp, five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Two years base and conversion, six years water ingress
- **Dimensions and weights:** Length 5.61m (18ft 5.5in); width 2.27m (7ft 7.5in); height 2.93m (9ft 7in). Max authorised weight 3200kg; payload (including allowance for weight of driver, full fuel, full fresh water, and one 11kg gas cylinder) 470kg
- **Belted seats:** Six (driver, front passenger, two forward-facing rear seat passengers, one rearward-facing passenger - three-point; lap-belt only for one rearward-facing passenger)

- **Beds:** Dinette double 1.86m x 1.22m (6ft 1in x 4ft 0in); overcab double 2.03m x 1.53m (6ft 8in x 5ft 0in), headroom 610mm (3ft 0in) max.
- **Kitchen:** L shaped with three-burner hob, oven/grill unit, circular sink (no drainer), Thetford 97-litre fridge
- **Washroom:** Electric-flush swivel-bowl cassette toilet, washbasin with storage below, separate shower area with curtain
- **Heating:** Truma Combi gas-fired unit providing space and water heating
- **Tanks:** Fresh 100 litres inboard, waste 100 litres underfloor
- **Gas:** Two 11kg cylinders
- **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** None, but price includes awning, cycle rack, flat screen TV and DVD player previously listed as options
- **Other options:** Hymer lists many options including matching upholstery on cab seats (£808), cab carpet (£63), alloy wheels (£586); contact Hymer UK for a full list



dinette seats, but I'd be lying if I said I found it comfy. Marion was fine, but for me a swivelling driver's seat would be money well spent in here, even if it wouldn't be that sociable.

**STUFF**

Heating of space and water is taken care of by a Truma Combi unit, which is situated at the far rear, above the full width under-floor storage locker. This rather useful space can be accessed from both sides, externally via a small locker door on the nearside, or a much larger door on the rear offside corner. In view of the massive overhang, care will have to be taken not to overload the rear axle, but bearing that in mind, this is a very well engineered and useful locker. It will accommodate golf clubs, wheelchairs, inflatable boats, and all manner of stuff - and even has adjustable tie-down points. It's in here (and whilst examining the underside) looking at the detail of the way the 514 is put together, that you begin to realise Hymer has applied all the same attention to detail and used all the same sound engineering in this economy model as it has in motorhomes costing a hundred thousand pounds or more.

One thing I didn't like underneath (amongst the many I did) was the central position of the spare wheel. This has been placed here to allow for that cunning low-level storage space under the rear, but a puncture will mean calling someone out rather than doing it yourself.

**THROUGH THE TROUGH**

The following day saw us journeying through the Trough of Bowland, a wild expanse of big heather-covered hills to the east of Preston and Lancaster. We had lunch at the really very excellent Puddleducks café/shop/post office in Dunsop Bridge (which is buried very deep down narrow stone-walled lanes) and appreciated the manoeuvrability the short wheelbase chassis offers on the road. It was at Dunsop Bridge, in a tight parking space, that we decided neither of us is keen on double fold-out electric steps. For starters, if you're not careful, they have a tendency to rattle your shins on the way out, then, in the wet, they dump you on y'r chin on the way up (or more dangerously on the way down). And if a pedestrian walks by just as you push the button - you may risk giving them a nasty fright.

After staying at the Camping and Caravanning Club site at Clitheroe, plus the drive through the tortuous lanes of 'The Trough' to get there, we principally learnt that the little 'van is very easy to drive in these tight places and, on site, is the best Hymer, at any price, we've ever experienced.

**VERDICT**

Yes, we'll certainly be back to that CL at Conder Green and, as for the amazing little Hymer, at less than thirty grand, please form an orderly queue outside the Hymer UK's HQ in Preston.



It's a great little bus, which is screwed together just like the bigger more expensive versions, but with a better layout if a good kitchen is one of your priorities.

(Note: Although Andy tested a 2006 model, discontinued for 2007, the Hymer C-Class 512 CL is the 2007 equivalent model, based on the Ford Transit chassis, and still available at a competitive price) □

**ABOVE TOP:** Lancaster Castle. This medieval fortress still functions as a twenty-first century prison.

**ABOVE:** The Stork at Conder Green offers good grub and a wonderful country inn atmosphere.

**LEFT MIDDLE:** Gas locker has slide-out and holds two cylinders.

**FAR LEFT BOTTOM:** Rear storage: this can be accessed from outside as here, or via a fold-up flap in the worktop. It is all very well sealed and engineered.

**LEFT:** On site at Heron's Wood Caravan Club CL.

**MOTORHOME KINDLY LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:**

Hymer UK, Blackpool Road, Preston, Lancs (tel: 08008 140300; web site: www.hymeruk.com)