

A KNOCKOUT KNAUS

**Knaus Sun Liner 808LEG on
2.8JTD Fiat Ducato Al-Ko**

*This big German liner offers cabins for four.
Di Johnson went on a cruise*

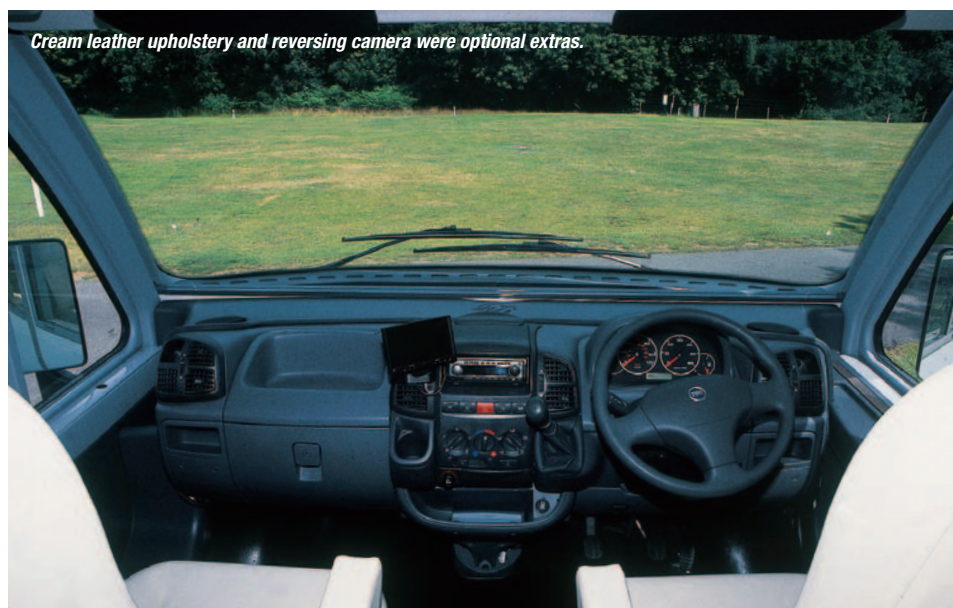


Let's get this straight; I'm not impressed by size! I'd even go so far as to say I'm prejudiced against 'big' when talking about motorhomes. So, the first sight of this ocean liner of an A-class reminded me of places rendered inaccessible by the Sun Liner's 8.34m length and 2.3m width.

Fortuitously for the manufacturers of large motorcaravans, not everyone wants to squeeze themselves into unfeasibly narrow alleyways in Spanish hill towns or granite-lined Cornish lanes. They might prefer to enjoy all the comforts of home when travelling. Civilised living, I suppose you'd call it.

Keen skiers might want a motorhome with the capability of staying at the resort of their choice. They'd have no worries about sub-zero temperatures, and would be able to dry out their ski gear overnight.

Knaus has been established for more than 40 years and has a reputation for a good quality product. It offers a range of models built to UK specification, one of which, the Knaus Sun Ti 650MF, won MMM's 2004 Motorhome of the Year Award.



Cream leather upholstery and reversing camera were optional extras.

TAKING TO THE HIGH SEAS

There's no driver's door but you can get to the pilot's seat from the door on the nearside of the cockpit, or via the offside-located caravan door. Getting the luscious cream leather covered Aguti seats adjusted for my driving comfort was a bit of a fight. The backrests need to be lowered to accommodate the drop-down overcab bed. So a quick-release mechanism (or, in my case, not so quick) is fitted to the seats. These mechanisms needed strong hands to move them. I used both my hands on the knob and utilised my body weight to adjust the rake. With use, they should become easier to manage.

A-class motorhomes have high windscreens. This is great for admiring the scenery but when the sun shone directly into the cab, it struck me I might have a problem. Wrong! Knaus has worked out that the vertically-challenged will need a bit of

help, and the visors have been equipped with a drop-down facility.

I was relieved to see that this 808 had the (optional) reversing camera fitted, and electrically-adjustable (and heated) mirrors. On this length of 'van you need all the help you can get visibility wise. It amused me to think that this behemoth comes with exactly the same engine as my own 'van, which is just five-and-a-half metres long (though I didn't try chucking it around corners as I would our Murvi panel van conversion). The Knaus comes with the lower ratio fifth gear, as befits a 'van of this size and weight. All seemed quiet aft, even when driving around on stony ground trying to find the right location to please the photographer.

Apart from fantastic living quarters, a vehicle of this size gets you respect, man. When you pull up on a campsite you can see a brief look of awe pass

across the faces of the campers, as this tag-axled *Queen Mary* glides into harbour. Perhaps 'posh coach' might be a more accurate description.

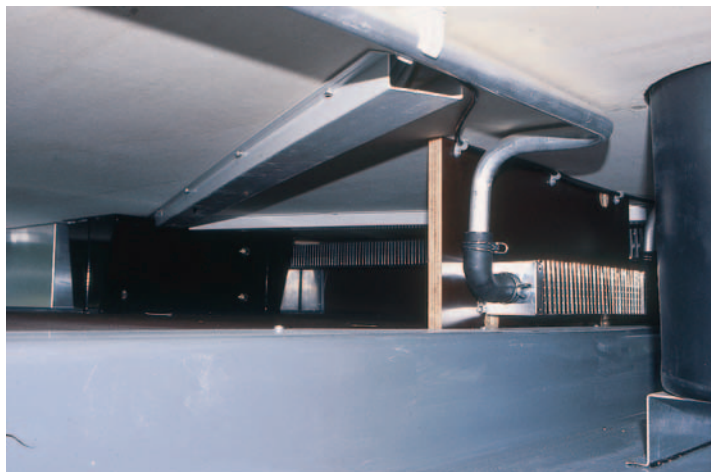
I liked the look of the front end, but the long body, with its odd sized windows, would benefit from a long grey stripe along the side to take in all the windows. At the moment, patches of grey are associated with each window, all at different sizes, heights and positions, but a braver, bolder, simpler graphic would, I think, improve the appearance.

A CUNARD BABE?

Even if you set off for a five-year cruise (sorry holiday) in this babe, you'd be hard pushed to use up all the available storage space. The cargo hold (garage) alone is capacious, but between the double floors is a vast area, accessed by locker doors around the



Looking aft reveals L-shaped lounge/diner ahead of kitchen and washroom. The rear end is home to two comfortable single beds. Note that the middle section can be closed off from both ends using two sliding partitions.



The 808's big underfloor cavity provides storage and a home for the fresh water tank. The Alde wet central heating system heats this area and the rest of the 'van using finned radiators like the one on the right of the picture.



All around the skirts are access hatches that allow you to get at the between floor storage.



Forward view looks past en suite facilities to the galley and lounge beyond. As befits this luxury a flat screen TV provides Romanesque viewing from the two single beds.

body. Anchor points are provided in the garage for heavy loads, such as a motorbike, and from here you can look into the vast, heated, underfloor storage area, where the fresh water tank is sensibly located. The waste water tank is outside this area, but is winter-friendly, as it is insulated and heated.

'With cargo space like this, a wine tasting tour of Europe could see us bringing back enough bottles to keep us going for years,' I observed to Pete. 'Speak for yourself,' he quipped.

The cassette toilet hatch is positioned on the

starboard side, above the tag axle. On the port side is the gas locker, which will accommodate 2 x 11kg cylinders. It also incorporates the fresh water filler within. The battery compartment features a smart slide-out tray, designed for two batteries (but containing just one – allowing, I guess, for a future upgrade in 12V capacity).

HIGH SEAS STYLE

Entrance through the offside caravan door, which has a pleated flyscreen, is via an inset footwell. I found this to be uncomfortably high but, by now

(I'm assured), an electrically-operated step will be standard.

Inside, a spacious and tastefully finished lounge/diner greets you. The seating is finished in very pale cream leather (an optional extra) including the swivelling cab seats. Pale oyster suede scatter cushions have a sleeve of metal-buttoned buttermilk-coloured fabric; good thinking... easy to remove for cleaning.

Faux curtains, with stripes of similar colours to the upholstery and decor, adorn the windows. Seitz blinds are provided with net curtains for



Continental handing of the body means the single cab door is on the UK nearside.



Provided you haven't packed too much kit in the big garage, the spare wheel is easily accessible.



The water filler is incorporated into the top left of the gas locker.



Snazzy lights will impress guests, and the shelf restraints will hold their cargo when cornering fast on your way to the Alps.



You can screw a flat screen television to the aluminium bracket that pops up in the cab. It can be easily adjusted to obtain an optimum viewing angle.

privacy. The cab windows have effective pleated blinds. The side window blinds are particularly easy to pull up and, when open, are parked so inconspicuously you wouldn't know they were there. In fact it took me a while to find them – they are so very neat. For the wide windscreen blind, you simply pull it up with two hands.

The lounge and dining area is immediately behind the cab seats. The kitchen, washbasin and wardrobe are on the nearside in the middle of the 'van. The toilet/shower room, fridge/freezer, and more storage facilities are on the offside. At the rear, and up two steps, are two generous single beds or a vast double. The two singles will, I think, prove very popular, as many may prefer this convenient option.

LUXURY LINER LOUNGING

Seven friendly, and not too broad, guests could be seated in the lounge. It feels pretty luxurious; I sat waiting for a steward to bring me a G&T. However, my feet couldn't touch the floor from the dining room seats, and even Peter, at 6ft 1in, could barely reach.

Nevertheless, the swivelled front chairs allowed me to get comfortable, with my feet firmly on the deck. To be fair, this situation is nearly always the case with me, and there is



The roomy and light lounge/diner could seat seven slim friends. This table may be big and heavy but it provides an excellent dining surface. I found the cab seats suited me best as my feet reached the floor.



The caravanning door incorporates some storage, and has a tall narrow window complete with blind. Just inside the door, we find a useful coat hanging area.

really a very nice ambience in the lounge (to make up for reminding me I'm not tall). An electrically operated Remis rooflight adds to the light and airy feeling in this area.

L-shaped seating on the nearside can be adapted by removing one of the inward-facing seats for travel. This allows the rear nearside passenger legroom in one of the two belted forward-facing seats. This transformation only entails finding somewhere to store two cushions, and releasing a drop-down board. On the offside is a side settee with a curved base. There's ample room under the lounge seating for even more cargo. The power management system lies under the two forward-facing seats in the L-shaped lounge.

Three high-level cupboards have shelves fitted with sensible restraints, so there's no danger of the contents crashing down on your head. I should mention that only the bottom shelf is within my reach (shoes off, stand on the seats, and problem solved). The doors open outwards rather than upwards, and the catches feel positive and easy to manage.

Choices of lighting consist of two nice downlighters underneath the lockers, two spots beneath the overcab bed, while numerous kitchen lights contribute to the general illumination. Two speakers, switches for the lights, a 230V socket, and an on-off switch for the stereo (reachable from the overcab bed), are grouped together under the cupboards.

The lounge area would be much improved,

when entertaining, if the table could be stashed away, or a much smaller one substituted. The table, however, is permanent. But at least it can be swivelled and slid from side to side.

Knaus seems to have cornered the market in sensible TV solutions. The Sun Ti 650 it has an excellent device that hinges down from the ceiling, articulating to the right height for viewing. In this Sun Liner there's a dual approach. In the lounge, on the driver's side of the cab, a pop-up bracket, for a flat screen TV is a great solution. I found the bracket easy to pop up, but it has a mighty spring fitted, and is therefore difficult to return to its recess. A bit of weight would help here; pass me another chip butty...

In the bedroom, a bracket for a flat screen is positioned in front of one of the high lockers and, as the bed is also high, once again there'll be no cricked necks. So you could buy the ultimate viewing solution, a pair of his-and-hers flat screen TVs!

This next innovation could save marriages. As the 'van has a sliding door between the kitchen and shower/toilet/washbasin area and another door to isolate the rear bedroom, the telly enthusiast can watch their favourite programme whilst others can read in peace, with two doors between them. How's about that then? I want one.

DINING BLUE-FUNNEL STYLE

Gracious dining could be the only way to describe this way of partaking of victuals. It really is a civilised

space for sitting with company, to converse, or appreciate fine wines and good food. Snag is I've still got to learn to cook it. Would you believe it the Sun Liner even comes with a bespoke tablecloth!

Much as I moan about big solid tables, when you're sitting around one, it's great to know that despite the odd nudge from the diners, you're not going to spill your coffee. Five can eat their rations at this table with room to spare. And because it has the ability to slide from side to side, it's not too difficult to get everyone seated.

I chose the front seats to eat from, otherwise I would have needed something to put my feet on to make myself fully at ease in the L-shaped seating. The obvious solution to this problem is a shallow box, or step. This would also have brought the higher shelves in the 'van within my range.

GALLEY CUISINE

In this kitchen I didn't much care that the sink has no draining area (even if I do go on about drainers most of the time), and that there are only three burners to the hob. I can buy a drip tray and a steamer. Huge amounts of grocery storage and a large fridge/freezer (117 litres, plus 26 litres of freezing space) compensate for any deficiencies.

Good, solidly-built cupboards, with thought given to accessibility, succeed in making cooking that much more enjoyable. The catches on all but one cupboard are excellent. A decorative curved acrylic door, on a top cupboard, needs to be supported when you rotate the catch, but as it's so pretty, I'll overlook this foible.

The hob's three-burners-in-a-row configuration (one big one and two little ones) actually frees up worktop. There ain't stacks, but it's adequate.

Both 230V and 12V sockets are positioned on the wall of the adjacent wardrobe, together with a sheet of metal with lots of holes in it. The sheet looks great but I'm not sure what it's supposed to be for. Possibly it's for hanging up utensils when berthed. The wide, capacious cutlery drawer will be a hit with any cook.

An oven/grill combination is fitted as standard on the UK variant. But there's no electronic ignition; watch your eyebrows as you strike a match! The fridge/freezer is on the offside, with a large cupboard over and deep drawer under. To the left are two very long narrow drawers - useful for carrying lots of gloves, scarves and shoes.

Another neat idea is a narrow deep slot above the drawers (thus just inside the caravan door), which is equipped with a hanging rail - just right for waterproofs and heavy coats.

A STEWARD FOR THE WASHROOM

You half expect a uniformed flunky to appear with a bale of warm, fluffy, white towels; though this shower room is more Starship Enterprise than Cunard.

It has a separate shower compartment with all-singing all-dancing power shower. You won't be overcome by claustrophobia here, as it's truly spacious. There's a choice: you can use the mega central rose, from which pours a veritable Niagara Falls, or four directable power jets can pummel you from the side.

Never mind the water, what about the lighting; it's amazing. You could believe that you've been transported into the next century. Panels of blue lights (114) dot the inside of the shower and make freshening up, at the end of the day, an experience



With a towel rail under and enough storage space for a year's supply of creams and potions, this part of the washroom is my idea of well-appointed.

to be remembered; wow! It seems crass to mention it, but such enthusiastic ablutions will eat into fresh and waste water capacities.

Oh yeah, and there's a cassette toilet too. Possibly because folks might be tempted to stay



Three-in-line hob configuration frees up work space.



You half expect a steward to appear with a bale of fluffy white warm towels in this incredible blue-starlit shower room.

too long in this Aladdin's cave of a shower, there's a beautifully appointed washbasin on the other side of the 'van. Mirrored and surrounded by more storage than most of us can count on at home, it will make up for not being able to get to the shower.

The basin is stainless steel with stylish taps. Two downlighters ensure that you get your make-up on the right way, and a small fiddle-railed shelf could carry vital creams and potions to make yourself presentable in the mornings.

With 230V and 12V sockets fixed beside the basin, lots of hair drying and primping can be achieved here, though health and safety officers might have a fit. A long, deep slot underneath, with a pull-out towel rail and a vast cupboard below, will make this a popular spot for us ladies.

To the right of the mirror is a narrow, but deep and high, cupboard with three shelves. This will be the most useful of all the compartments (you won't have to bend down to reach). I should think half a shelf for him and two and a half for her, not that I'm being sexist you understand!

The wardrobe, which is fitted with a light of course, is big, as befits a 'van this size. In the cupboard beneath lies the Swedish Alde heating system, with a small header tank in the wardrobe above (it doesn't noticeably intrude). Above the heater is an additional shelf.

The two sliding doors between the bedroom and the middle section of the 'van, and the additional one between the middle and the kitchen, mean that the centre section might be called into use as a dressing room, or changing room if you prefer. I can see this being a very useful facility.

CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

The two large single beds, or vast double, in the rear have interior sprung mattresses with suede-effect coverlets. Between the two beds, at the head, is a piece of infill foam covered to match the mattresses. This is itself capped by an acrylic tray. It has two sides that securely locate on the infill. Thus, breakfast in bed is thoughtfully catered for in the Sun Liner.

The bed is reached via two steps, one of which lifts revealing a handy spot to stash your slippers. Knaus, it seems, has thought of everything. Copious cupboards line the ceiling, and attractive lighting (which includes two personal downlighters) makes it a gracious bedroom. A window either side of the bed gave us a grandstand view of the campsite wildlife and any stars or planets worth noting before sleep descended. There is even a pouch (in the same material as the coverlets and cushions) hung on one side of the bed for putting... I'm not sure what, but someone will think of something no doubt.

Although there is no indication that the beds can be made into a double, between the single beds you'll notice a handle, which, when pulled, slides a piece of board towards you, thus filling the gap between the beds. An infill cushion fits onto the board, converting the two single beds into one gigantic double.

It's at this point that a small problem rears its head. The two steps are now 'not available'. The bed is at my chest height, but with some very unladylike scrambling, I can get up into the unmade bed. But once the duvet is on... no chance.

If you want a double, choose the overcab bed. The Sun Liner's rear bedroom is much better suited to those who prefer singles. Thankfully, the Knaus mattresses are more compliant than is usual in German designs and we slept very well.

UP IN THE CROWS NEST

When, or if, you choose the forward-located drop-down double bed for your sweet dreams, you might find the bed difficult to lower and click back up. It isn't the weight, it's the catch which is hard to operate; this will almost certainly ease with use. Once down, this is an impressive berth. It lowers sufficiently to provide for plenty of headroom, making it possible to sit upright and read.

A ladder is provided but not really needed; it's easy to hop up from the seats. I think I'd leave the ladder at home. The bed, when lowered from the ceiling, brings its own curtaining with it. No curtains are necessary across the front of the bed, as the two sliding doors between the bedrooms give the occupants a truly private bedchamber. The inhabitants of this bed can take their pick from the ample cupboard space available in the lounge for storing their 'essentials'.

CHIEF ENGINEER'S DEPARTMENT

An Alde Compact 3000 water and space heating system is installed. The boiler consists of three concentric-arranged cylinders (heat exchanger, water jacket for the heating system, and [outermost] water jacket for domestic hot water). I won't bore you with all the details but the net result is a flexible system, which allows you all the choices you could wish for. You can heat water, or water plus space heating, or space heating on its own.

Additionally, these all have the capability of running on gas or electricity. The system even has the possibility of using both fuel sources at once, if gas or electricity alone is not sufficient.

This isn't a blown-air system. Radiators convect the heat throughout the 'van, so no cold drafts or fan noise. Finned radiators are found between the double floors, in the washroom, behind each lounge seat, under each single bed, beneath the kitchen window and in the driver's side of the cab, and there is even a radiator providing heat for the footwell (via a vent). That ought to keep the hothouse flowers happy; impressive and flexible heating that'll be perfect for winter motorhoming.

Beneath one of the L-shaped lounge seats is housed the power management system, charger, fuses and 12V isolator. An optional Digitaldynamic DVD/CD/MP3/SVCD/DVCD/VCD - phew - vehicle multi-media system, was fitted to the vehicle tested. The key needs to be on the first position in the ignition to use this. So, whatever entertainment you might require now, or in the future, this Knaus has it covered.

FIT FOR THE ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET?

The flexible and effective heating system, choices of positions for watching TV, mega storage, shower to die for, and two private cabins, all make for a desirable package. If exceptionally comfortable living is your priority, and you have the space to store it, and the money to buy it, then the Sun Liner has to be worth serious appraisal. □



Two milk-coloured suede-effect coverlets and two pillows, together with the rock-steady acrylic tray between the berths, make the rear bedroom feel exceptionally well appointed.



With the Aguti pilot seats folded, the overcab bed lowers to a height that makes it easy to step straight up into the bed from the lounge seating.



IN BRIEF

- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato 18 Maxi with Al-Ko rear chassis
- **Engine type:** 2.8-litre JTD common-rail turbocharged and intercooled diesel
- **Output:** 94kW (127bhp) @3600 rpm
- **Gearbox and drive:** Five-speed manual gearbox with short fifth gear ratio, fascia-mounted gear lever, front-wheel drive
- **Make and model:** Knaus Sun Liner 808LEG
- **Body type and construction:** Aluminium-clad, closed cell foam sandwich A-class with double floor. Aluminium side skirts. GRP cab front, wheel arches and rear trim
- **Conversion NCC badged as EN1646 compliant:** No
- **Electrical equipment:** 230V hook-up with RCD and MCBs, leisure battery charger, control panel, 95 amp hr gel type leisure battery
- **Lighting:** Downlighters: two in cab, two in dinette, six in kitchen, one in glass-fronted cabinet, one in doorway, two over washbasin, two over rear beds. Diffused strip lights: one over drop-down bed, one in toilet, one diffused panel between rear beds. Door-operated lamp in wardrobe. Three panels of blue mini lights in shower compartment
- **Cooking facilities:** Cramer three-burner hob, Smev induction oven and grill unit. All with manual ignition
- **Refrigerator:** Dometic RM7655L 150-litre three-way fridge/freezer
- **Water heater:** Alde Compact 3000 9486B, 6kW gas and 3kW electric operation
- **Space heater:** Alde Compact 3000 9486B wet radiator system, 6kW gas and 3kW electric operation. Radiators in shower room/toilet, behind furniture, in garage, waste tank area, and in double floor cavity
- **Fresh water tank:** Inboard, 105 litres (23 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** Outboard, 100 litres (22 gallons), insulated and heated
- **Gas locker capacity:** Two 11kg cylinders

- **Rear restraints:** Two forward-facing seats with three-point inertia-reel seatbelts
- **Additional features:** Cab air-conditioning, fog lights, electrically-heated and adjustable rear-view mirrors, Remis electric rooflight, flyscreen door, pre-cabling for two areas of TV storage, Aguti pilot swivelling cab seats, cassette blinds to cab windows, removable carpets, pillows, scatter cushions, table cloth, interior sprung mattresses on beds

DIMENSIONS

(*data supplied by manufacturer)

- **Length:** 8.34m (27ft 4.5in)*
- **Width:** 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*
- **Overall height:** 2.99m (9ft 9.5in)*
- **Interior height:** 2.07m max (6ft 9.5in)
- **Bed dimensions:** Drop-down overcab double 1.95m x 1.40m (6ft 5in x 4ft 7in), two rear singles 1.95m x 860mm (6ft 5in x 2ft 10in) or optional double 1.95m x 2.1m (6ft 5in x 6ft 10.5in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 4500kg* (drivers are reminded to check their entitlement to drive vehicles over 3500kg)
- **Load capacity:** 833kg*

PRICE (all prices include VAT)

- **Standard model:** 2006 UK specification: £63,995 to include alloy wheels and electric access step, plus all additional features as listed above
- **As tested:** £64,790 (2005 model price including starred options below)
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle, two years caravan, five years water ingress

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- **Base vehicle options:** Chassis upgrade to 5000kg GVW (£360), Fiat cruise control (£215), towbar (£825)
- **Caravan options:** (*starred items fitted to test vehicle)
- **Multi-media pack:** TV/DVD/CD/radio/reversing camera (£895)*, leather upholstery (£1400)*, roof rack and ladder (£410), bike rack 2/3/4 (£200, £215, £230), motorbike rack in garage (£450), Omnistor awning (£700)

Knaus Sun Liner 808LEG kindly supplied for evaluation by: Hants & Dorset Outdoor Leisure, London Road, Widley, Waterlooville, Portsmouth PO7 5AE (tel: 023-9237 4921; web site: www.hdleisure.com)

