How to provide comfortable sleeping for six, in a reasonably compact package has, over the years, exercised many motorhome designers. Generally, double beds are provided in an overcab luton with, perhaps, another converted from a rear lounge (or sometimes two bunks instead). It’s placing the final two berths that causes the headache. Many designs extend a front dinette into the aisle for night time - making access to, and particularly egress from, the overcab problematic. You’ll often find compromises on size too, with one or more berths being suitable only for children or teenagers. Fine if you’ve a growing family, but what if you need room for six adults?

Now renowned French converter Pilote (whose empire includes the Le Voyageur, Bavaria, Frankia, Cityvan and Mooveo) has produced a novel solution. This takes the form of a drop-down bed above the rear lounge, which itself converts for sleeping, plus a large luton, thus providing three full-sized, double beds.

Our test Aventura arrived by transporter from Hayes Leisure, in the West Midlands - since 1985, a main dealer for Pilote in the UK. First impressions? Yes, it’s a white box with a bump on top, but at 6.48 metres (21ft 3in), not excessively long. White bodywork is pleasingly relieved by beige-coloured bumpers, side skirts and graphics of abstract design (perhaps Polynesian in influence). The UK offside-located habitation door betrays the ‘van’s Continental origins, while three large tinted windows around the stern hint at its rear lounge layout. The lion on the grille and discreet chromed ‘Hdi 3.0’ badge tell you this is Peugeot’s most powerful light commercial. Altogether, it’s quite an imposing package.

Opening the solid caravan door (no window, but an (optional) flyscreen) reveals a low internal step, a tall cupboard to your right and kitchen unit to the left. Opposite, there’s a cramped-looking half-dinette (with wall-mounted table) and forward of that, two swivelling cab seats below an overcab bed. The kitchen appears modest - though there’s a big fridge - but the washroom opposite looks more promising. To the rear, the U-shaped lounge, with large, offset table, seems spacious: above, the drop-down bed forms the ceiling. Warm woodwork (maple, perhaps?), tweedy, sandy-coloured ‘ganache’
should be standard equipment - as in even the cheapest of cars. Here, it’s an option, as is cruise control. Rearward visibility is pretty good through the ‘van’s back window, even if occasionally semi-obscured by the net curtains drifting across.

PILOTE PILOTING

A typical Sevel, Aventura handles tidily and holds the road well; a blessing, with 157 horses tempting my heavy right hoof!

It certainly had more than enough power to overtake trucks safely and confidently on fast A-roads, though doing nothing for fuel consumption, which was indicated at 24mpg on the trip computer. However, it felt low-gearied, and I was always a gear higher than I’d expect, at any given speed. Having

**AT A GLANCE**

- **PRICE FROM:** £50,180 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 6
- **Layout:** Swivel cab seats, overcab bed, half-dinette, central kitchen and washroom, rear U-shaped lounge/bed with drop-down bed above
- **ECONOMY:** 24.1mpg

upholstery with grey/orange patchwork panels, and a strip-wood-effect vinyl floor covered throughout with (optional) grey, sandy-dotted carpets provide a pleasing ambience, lit by skylights and big (netted) windows.

**SEVEL POWER**

Unlike our test vehicle, future Aventuras won’t be on Peugeot Boxers, they’ll use the Fiat Ducato base instead. There’s little difference between them (they, and Citroen’s Relay, are all built at the Sevel factory in Italy), save that Peugeots have radios also controlled by steering wheel-mounted buttons. Aventura’s standard motor is Fiat’s 2.3-litre unit - producing 130bhp, it’s a fine, lusty engine. The 3.0-litre (157bhp) motor fitted as an optional extra to ‘ours’, is shared by all the Sevel partners, but Fiat alone offers the desirable, but pricey, ComfortMatic automated gearbox. Pilote builds on Fiat’s wide-track, lower, camper-specific chassis, which was also fitted to this Peugeot.

The Sevel cab is so familiar, it’s easy to forget just how good it is. Despite thick A-pillars, visibility is adequate (especially in the absence of cab blinds) - helped by those enormous door mirrors. The fascia-mounted gear stick - stirring six ratios - is perfectly placed, and there’s good steering wheel adjustment for reach (though insufficient for rake). Adjustable seat height enables most drivers to reach a comfortable position. Aventura has cab air-conditioning as standard, but I was disappointed to note a shelf where the passenger airbag could be; nowadays, it should be standard equipment - as in even the cheapest of cars. Here, it’s an option, as is cruise control. Rearward visibility is pretty good through the ‘van’s back window, even if occasionally semi-obscured by the net curtains drifting across.

**PILOTE PILOTING**

A typical Sevel, Aventura handles tidily and holds the road well; a blessing, with 157 horses tempting my heavy right hoof! It certainly had more than enough power to overtake trucks safely and confidently on fast A-roads, though doing nothing for fuel consumption, which was indicated at 24mpg on the trip computer. However, it felt low-gearied, and I was always a gear higher than I’d expect, at any given speed. Having
recently driven another 3.0-litre, the difference in driving experience puzzled me, but the explanation may be simple: standard chassis-based ‘vans (like this Aventura) have fifteen-inch wheels, but the four-tonner I’d previously driven had a Maxi chassis and larger, sixteen-inch wheels. All else being equal, I’d expect smaller wheels to lower the gearing, which is how it felt. Perhaps this assisted reversing - I managed a wet, grassy slope with little vibration or fuss.

Unfortunately, forward progress over Galloway’s roads wasn’t particularly pleasant; we were seated comfortably, but the noise from the interior was sometimes dreadful. On smooth road surfaces (remember them?) it was relatively quiet, only the energetic creaking of the rear drop-down bed making us smile. Cross some cat’s-eyes, meet a pothole or badly filled trench, and multidigious cupboard doors would crash and bang in violent protest. These doors had positive catches, but were loosely held, creating this cacophony. Also, some hinges were loose, and one cupboard door was misaligned with its frame. After the rear ladder bounced out from above the drop-down bed, we stored it on the floor.

Being passengers in the two half-dinette travel seats would be awkward. Regrettably, you must first move the front passenger seat forward, lift and slide the tabletop as far forward as it’ll go and wrinkle your feet in. If the cab passenger wants to move their seat back again, you have to pull the tabletop back and entrap yourself. Footroom is tight (the cab step being uncomfortably close) and forward visibility isn’t wonderful either. At least you have a side window and it’s better than the nominal fifth seat: in the offside rear lounge, facing backwards, with only a lap-strap. No thanks!

Consider this as a four-travel-seater, six-berth ‘van, operating as base camp, with some of your friends and family arriving separately.

SITTING AND EATING
It follows from the above that I wouldn’t expect to use the half-dinette much for lounging, though the swivelled cab seats are fine, and the wall-mounted table is convenient for them - especially with its extension leaf added. Clearly, Pilote expects the cab seats to be popular on site, as the TV (set high above the dinette in a tambour-doored cupboard) would best be viewed from here.

Most communal sitting around will be done in the big rear lounge, where six could seat themselves primly, while fewer might sprawl. Shaped backrest cushions are comfortable, and the windows afford good views. Three halogen lights in the ceiling (the upper bed’s base) and two overhead reading lights (I’d prefer four), give reasonable illumination. A large wall-mounted mirror - angled towards the lounge - magnifies available light, though more useful would have been a second TV point here instead. Another 230V socket would also be handy; Hayes told us that extras can easily be fitted, but we feel they should be standard. The table (on its offset leg) is large and stable, and will swivel - albeit squeakily. However, wherever it’s swivelled, squeezing past is always a chore. My only other gripe is the drop-down bed’s sharp lower edge - just 1.78 metres (5ft 10in) above the floor. After a couple of ‘contacts’ I named it ‘the Nutcracker Suite!’ Nonetheless, the lounge is a highlight of this Aventura - once safely ensconced, it’s a comfortable place to gather.

For dining, the rear lounge table will comfortably accommodate four. The dinette table, however, is narrow and would only serve two people.

CHEF’S CHALLENGE
Six people need to eat, so cook needs suitable facilities, and in Continental ‘vans these tend to be Spartan. So it is here. Perhaps, because this ‘van is relatively short, the kitchen unit is small, providing only a round lid-less sink and a three-burner (manual ignition) hob under
a glass lid. There’s just a removable plastic drainer ‘tray’, which sits over the hob-lid, while a narrow frontal strip serves as work surface. The ’van’s one and only 230V socket is in the side of the unit, adjacent the habitation doorway, so your electric kettle must sit on the lowered hob lid, with its cable stretching over the sink - it’s hardly ideal.

Below, there’s a combi oven/grill - an optional extra, and expensive too. The (warped) oven tray didn’t fit properly, while the supporting rack has a fixed handle, so you can’t close the door. After two hours waiting for our supper to cook, we concluded that the oven was half-baked - just like our spuds!

At least there is sufficient storage space in here, with a good cutlery drawer, three overhead cupboards and two large cupboards below (one with a slide-out veg rack, the other with shelves). Aft of the kitchen unit is a 149-litre Thetford fridge/freezer, with attractive cream and grey door panels. It has Smart Energy Selection, giving either manual control, or Auto setting, which automatically selects the power source. There’s a good-sized cupboard above the fridge and a slim drawer below.

Despite it’s good storage, we feel the kitchen is inadequate to the task of catering for six. At the very least it needs some more worktop - perhaps a pullout, or lift-up section? It also needs a better-placed 230V socket (preferably two) and a different oven.

TOILET TRIALS
Six people will also need practical ablutions (unless they’re to be restricted to full-facility campsites), so how does Aventura measure up? Open the solid washroom door and (to the left) you discover a large, quadrant-shaped

OVERALL LENGTH: 6.48m (21ft 3in)
OVERALL WIDTH: 2.30m (7ft 6.5 in)
On Test Pilote Aventura A656UA

On test odd above, fitted in the surface, plumbing visible. There’s a mirror over the washbasin, but no shelf and nowhere for a soap dish. On the plus side, there’s a towel hook just outside the shower and a towel rail on the inside of the door.

UPSTAIRS DOWNSTAIRS
The raison d’être of this motorhome - room for six to sleep in comfort. First, the luton: this is quite high from the floor (at 1.70 metres, 5ft 7in), and gained by an alloy ladder, which doesn’t unduly interfere with access to dinette or cab. There’s good headroom in this bed (670mm, 2ft 2.5in), with light provided by two nearside reading lamps and an offside window. With two 90mm thick mattresses on sprung bases, it’s a large, comfy sleeping space for two. When not in use, the bed base pushes forwards, allowing easy cab access.

The rear lounge seating converts by shortening the table leg and using the top as an infill base. A pair of linked cushions (stowed in the luton) sit on the table, while the backrest cushions are shoved under. Voilà! A bed 2.23m (7ft 4in) by 1.30m (4ft 3in) is created. Actually, it’s the least successful bed here, because of the number of cushions used, while the infill cushions are somewhat squishy - sliding around and leaving gaps. However, I’ve slept in far worse! An overlay would sort it. With the upper (drop-down roof) bed lowered, headroom underneath is 660mm (2ft 2in), although the overhead lockers (two at each side) come down with

WE LIKED
■ Base vehicle
■ Large (sophisticated) fridge/freezer
■ Choice of spacious beds
■ Light, roomy lounge
■ Large shower

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED
■ More than one 230V socket
■ Second TV point for lounge
■ Passenger airbag
■ Rear steadies
■ Thicker cab curtains

WE DISLIKED
■ Pokey kitchen
■ Cramped toilet area
■ Tight dinette
■ Lack of spare wheel
■ Noise from furniture when travelling
the bed, leaving only 31cm (1ft) beneath. However, with so much bed length that didn’t matter, even to tall me!

The drop-down bed is lowered and raised electrically on scissor-type mechanisms (hidden behind side curtains), and via a switch beside the habitation door. Accessed by short alloy ladder, the bed is 1.37m (4ft 6in) from the floor, with 740mm (2ft 5in) headroom. Two powerful reading lights are on the offside this time, and opposite to those in the luton, so you’ll need to position the ‘van dead-level if those in the overcab are sleeping heads one way and those in the rear are sleeping t’other! The single-piece mattress sits on slats and Rona thought it a little firm. I found it comfy, though a little short for my lanky frame.

With ladder in place, it’s still possible to access the bottom bed, so this is genuinely a six-adult-berth ‘van. As always, there’s scope for tweaking; with no privacy curtains, putting children to bed early could be awkward.

Steadies aren’t fitted, neither are they optional. With a high-level bed at either end, any movement is very noticeable - with six on board, it might be like jelly! There’s only a thin cab curtain (internal cab screens are supplied), though the blinds elsewhere excluded light much better than I expected, despite having no bottom frames.

Overall, this Aventura’s semi-novel sleeping arrangements are pretty successful.

PAYLOAD AND SPACE
With the standard 2.3-litre engine, Aventura has 475kg of payload (reducing by around 50kg if the heavier 3.0-litre is fitted). If carrying three passengers (at the standard 75kg apiece), then you’re left with about 200kg for clutter. But where to store it all? There are no outside lockers, so all cupboards and spaces must be accessed from inside. Under-seat storage in the rear lounge is accessed from above, by lifting seat-cushions tenaciously gripped by Velcro, though the front-facing seat-base has a narrow drop-down flap. The Truma heater occupies part of one under-seat locker, the gas-locker another, and the rear locker has a false floor, hiding the leisure battery. Otherwise, there’s reasonable storage room here, but that awkward table always obstructs access. The overhead lockers attached to the drop-down bed are - necessarily - smaller than expected.

There’s a tall, slim unshelved wardrobe aft of the washroom (with 1.47m, 4ft 10in drop), but it’s too shallow for clothes hangers. Adjacent, is a big mirror and below, a narrow surface, and a small, shelved cupboard.

The freshwater tank takes up the dinette seat base, while above the dinette window there’s another shelved cupboard (with the previously mentioned wonky door/frame interface). Opposite, by the habitation door, there’s a tall cupboard: another wardrobe? No, there’s no hanging rail and only one low shelf. Pity, as the main wardrobe is too small for a whole tribe. There’s a (wobbly) fiddle rail above this cupboard; you might store things here on site, but it’s high and would be unsafe when travelling. There are some useful moulded shelves in the habitation door and a cubby above it.

Storage is adequate, rather than voluminous, but this is, after all, a relatively small motorhome. A larger wardrobe would be our main desire.

WARM, WET AND ILLUMINATED
Six folk in a motorhome would probably keep it warm by body heat alone! However, Aventura specifies the basic Truma Combi 4 (gas only) for space and water heating. The test ‘van came with the superior, and optional, Combi-6EH, which heated water quickly and efficiently. Fortunately, being summer, we didn’t need the space heating, even in Scotland. There’s a total of seven blown-air outlets - under the rear lounge seats, dinette seat and kitchen unit, and in washroom and doorway.

The freshwater tank’s capacity of 130 litres is impressive, if heavy - I’d travel with it largely empty, to save weight. A pity then, that the tank is emptied by fishing around inside for a chain and plug... ...what’s wrong with an external tap?
Lighting is by halogen spots throughout, save for a fluorescent strip over the kitchen unit and a central fluorescent dome between kitchen and washroom. Natural light comes via a small rooflight, high over the dinette, another in the washroom and a large Seitz skylight to the front of the rear lounge, where its illuminating effect is magnified by the mirror.

Apart from that lonely 230V socket in the kitchen, there’s a single 12V socket in the TV cupboard. The leisure battery supplies 105 amp hr, and two 13kg gas cylinders are equipped with a Heatec system, allowing the heater to be used whilst travelling.

Most regrettably, given that there’s plenty of room underneath the ‘van, there’s no spare wheel - though one is available as a (very expensive) factory-fitted option.

CONCLUSION
Pilote has set out to make a true, six-berth motorhome, and has certainly succeeded. However, we feel this success has come at a price. Design-wise, the dinette is cramped, the kitchen unit lacks work surface and the toilet area is too tight. Had the ‘van been, say, 600mm (1ft 11.5in) longer, there would have been room to expand these necessary facilities sufficiently to make it a more practical proposition. Also, this is an expensive motorhome; some features we’d expect to find are optional extras, and some optional extras seem very pricey. Sadly, this isn’t uncommon nowadays, and doubtless partly caused by the present exchange rate with the Euro. One way I’d save money is by specifying the 130bhp engine which, I reckon, is perfectly adequate for all normal driving in a motorhome of this size.

Assuming it’s affordable, who is likely to buy this motorhome? We feel it would be great on the Continent, on sites with full facilities, for those generally wanting to eat out and live outdoors, but who need full-sized beds for six. However, even in rainy Britain, the attraction of two ready-made beds, and lots of lounge space for inside entertainment, is appealing.

**VENUE**

**On Test** Pilote Aventura A656UA

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<th>VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hayes Leisure, Walsall Road, Darlaston, West Midlands WS10 9SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(tel: 0121 526 3433; web site: <a href="http://www.hayesleisure.co.uk">www.hayesleisure.co.uk</a>)</td>
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<th>WE STAYED AT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beeswing Caravan Park, Drunjohr Moor, Kirkcunzeon, Kirkcudbrightshire DG2 8JL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(tel: 01387 760242)</td>
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### PILOTE AVENTURA A656UA

**KITCHEN**

Linear unit on offside, aft of habitation door: cutlery drawer with shelved cupboard below; underneath oven, a large cupboard with storage tray, overhead, three storage cupboards, (two shelved); above fridge, a large cupboard and below, a slim drawer

- **Sink**: Large round stainless steel bowl with mixer tap
- **Cooker**: Dometic manual-Ignition three-burner hob with glass lid, Dometic oven/grill
- **Fridge**: Dometic N150 three-way SÉS (auto energy selection) fridge/freezer. Capacity 149 litres

**WASHROOM**

Access via욕도 핫 룸, 바스스브리스, 싱크, 헤드를 보관할 수 있는 장소, 내부 침실과 화장실, 두 사람의 침실의 위치를 나타내는 도수, **체증 및 정물 위치**

- **Headroom**: 1.46m (4ft 9.5in)
- **Width**: 1.25m (4ft 2in)
- **Length**: 2.24m (7ft 4in)
- **DINETTE WITH FOUR SEATS, DINING ROOM FOR TWO**

**BEDS**

Overcab double

- **Length**: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in)
- **Width**: 1.10m (3ft 7in)
- **Headroom**: 1.87m (6ft 2in)
- **Width**: 1.33m (4ft 4in)
- **Headroom**: 740mm (2ft 5in)

**STORAGE**

Aft of habitation door: Tall cupboard with one shelf near bottom. Above dinette: TV cupboard; wardrobe, small cupboard, (shelved). Rear lounge: Four small overhead lockers attached to base of drop-down bed, top-loading seat base lockers (partly occupied by equipment), front-loading seat base locker in rear

**LIFE SUPPORT**

- **Fresh water**: Inboard, 130 litres (28.6 gallons)
- **Waste water**: Underslung, 85 litres (18.7 gallons)

**PRICE**

- **From**: £50,180 OTR
- **As tested**: £55,320 OTR

**DIMENSIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>6.48m (21ft 3in)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Width</td>
<td>2.24m (7ft 4in)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>3.05m (10ft 0in)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wheelbase</td>
<td>3.80m (12ft 5.5in)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rear overhang</td>
<td>1.76m (5ft 9.5in)</td>
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**CONSTRUCTION**

Alloy and GRP clad sandwich construction, GRP cappings, alloy side skirts. Caravan

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