



# FRENCH RESISTANCE

## Rapido Le Randonneur 749M on 2.2TD Mercedes Euro-Sprinter

*The Germans may have invaded the French motorhome market with the Mercedes Sprinter, but Rapido's Le Randonneur 749M still wears its Gallic style with pride, reports Peter Vaughan*

Allo, allo! What 'ave we 'ere? A motorhome wearing a name as French as 'Le Randonneur' (the hiker) should surely be based on a Peugeot or Citroën. Even a Fiat would share looks and technicalities with the French pair, but non, non. This is very German, a Mercedes-Benz. Truly a case of Franco-Prussian alliance.

Rapido has been gradually building a name for itself in the UK since Brownhills added the franchise to its collection of motorhome brands. Quality, combined with French design flair and a strong range of low profile layouts, has been a recipe that has found favour with British buyers seeking something a little different.

Our first test of one of these Mayenne-built motorhomes was a 972M A-class, built (like all the A-class Le Randonneurs) on a Sprinter chassis cowl. That vehicle (supplied direct from Rapido) was a pre-facelift Mercedes, while what we have here is a post-update CDI-engined Merc,

taxed and registered by Brownhills especially for MMM. It's also our first test vehicle to wear the confusing, new-style number plates.

Collected from Newark in the hectic week prior to the York show, the Rapido was our home for the period of the exhibition, followed by a trip to France to sample a Eurocamp Independent holiday. We would take in the French motorhome show at Le Bourget, just outside Paris, on our way home - giving us 14 days (in total) living in the 749M. It seemed somehow fitting that the Rapido should return to its homeland for the test, despite the right-hand drive and UK spec'.

### Rapido rundown

All Rapido motorhomes have worn the Le Randonneur name, followed by a model number, until the advent of the new Renault Master-based Maestro range introduced for the 2002 model year. The very first Le Randonneur

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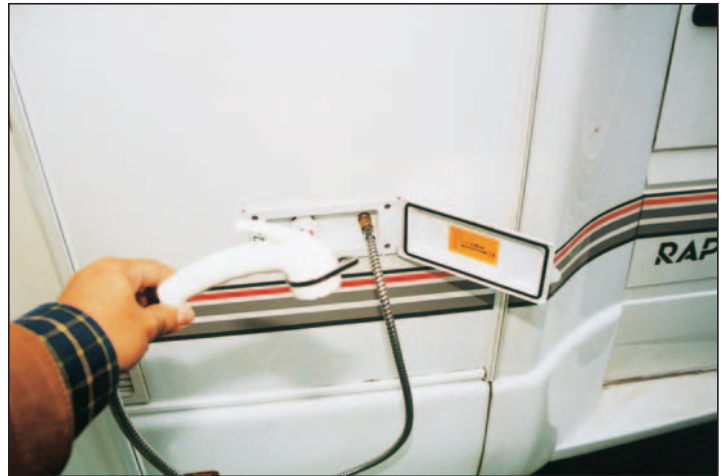
Underfloor locker has bottom-hinged doors on either side and is ideal for long objects such as skis or awning poles.



Bottom-hinged hatch on nearside gives access to under-bed locker, with plenty of room for outdoor chairs, folding bicycle and more.



Nearside skirt incorporates moulded locker, but weight of contents made skirt panel bow outwards. Further forward is gas locker.



External shower is fitted just behind the driver's door and is supplied with hot and cold water - ideal after a day on the beach.

motorhome was a rising roof coachbuilt based on the Renault Trafic, but the company's compact caravans go back much further. In fact, Rapido has just celebrated its 40th anniversary. It is also one of the very few remaining independent European motorhome manufacturers and it prides itself on not being part of one of the growing conglomerates.

Le Randonneurs come as 7-series (low profiles), 8-series (overcab coachbuilts), and 9-series (A-class). Base vehicles are Fiat or Mercedes, with an appropriate F or M suffix appended to the model number. There are nine low profiles in all; two of them based on the Sprinter. Both Mercedes models, like most Rapidos, feature fixed bed layouts and the 749M (as tested here) is the smaller of the two. The main advantage of the half metre longer 779M is its bathroom with separate shower.

### Conservative, classy

At a little over 6m in length (just under 20ft, in old money) the 749M is one of the more compact fixed bed models on today's market. Its glass fibre sandwich construction body sits on a medium wheelbase Sprinter and the sleek roofline, sweeping down to meet the windscreen visually reduces its bulk. The body curves out smoothly behind the cab, and running boards

below the cab doors help to integrate cab and caravan aesthetically, as well as aiding entrance and egress.

The grey and red graphics relieve the all-white bodywork, while a colour-matched front bumper is a welcome touch. The roof is stepped to include a roof rack, without the side rails adding to the overall height. The folding rear ladder is part of the upgraded standard specification for the UK.

What doesn't change for our right-hand drive shores is the position of the caravan door; as with so many imports, it remains on our offside. With two cab doors available, that seems of minor consequence, but we admired the door's design with an automotive-style lock and handle, opening window and internal magazine pocket. Those who have owned a Talbot Express-based motorcaravan will recognise the origins of the door handle, but the remote central locking is a rare bonus. Unusually, all three doors lock at the touch of a button, though we had to give the caravan door a firm slam to ensure that it would lock too. As the test progressed, the inner door seal became partially detached from the door, making it harder to close.

The side entrance comes with an electric step, and a warning buzzer and dashboard retraction switch, should you try to drive off with it extended. The door's design does not allow the fitting of a flyscreen, but the third fridge vent



Mercedes cab has superior quality dashboard mouldings compared with Fiat and Ford rivals. Cab comes well equipped in this Rapido.



Latest Mercs have excellent fascia-mounted gearshift. See also neat drink holder and (behind the can) rear passenger heating controls.



reduces the worry about the door blocking the vents when clipped open.

Forward of the door you'll find the external hot and cold shower, while in the rear offside corner is the cassette toilet servicing hatch. Below that is access to the ski locker, running the full width of the vehicle, below floor level. There are loading doors on either side to an area measuring over 2m long, 410mm wide and 240mm high. If you don't ski, awning poles or windbreaks can live in here.

On the nearside is a hatch (945mm by 400mm) leading onto the under-bed locker. On the inside of the bottom-hinged door is the winding handle for the rear corner steadies. The twin locks and handles used on this hatch (and the gas locker) are a new design for 2002 and much more robust than most exterior locks used on motorhomes. Better news still is the fact that the 749M comes with just two keys, one each for Rapido and Mercedes functions.

Also along the nearside are the fresh water filler, mains hook-up socket, and gas locker (with capacity for two 6kg propane cylinders). And, in the skirt panel, is yet more exterior stowage space. This area easily housed our levelling wedges, pitch-marking sign, fresh water hose and mains lead. Under the weight of this (hardly excessive) load, however, it was noticeable that the whole skirt panel was flexing.



Both cab doors have useful storage pockets and below these are 'secret' panels - passenger side hides warning triangle and lamp.

Marker lights, high-level rear brake light, a sturdy tap for the waste water valve and an awning light complete the impressive external itinerary. Brownhills sales team also report that the non-slip roof rack area feels more substantial to walk on than other brands that they sell, a feeling that I can endorse. The only fly in the ointment is on the underside, for the spare wheel is rather inaccessible in its location forward of the underfloor ski locker.

### Euro power

Basis for the 749M is a Euro-Sprinter, a motorhome specification version of the Sprinter chassis cab, in 313CDI or 316CDI forms. The 313, as tested, has the four-cylinder 2150cc engine producing 129bhp, while the optional 316 gains an extra cylinder and 27bhp from its 2686cc. Either way, you get common-rail technology and the new-look Sprinter cab.

On the outside the current Mercedes Sprinter is more rounded and attractive than its predecessor, but inside there is no comparison. The fascia design is probably the best of all the current crop of light commercials and there is a quality feel that was sadly lacking in early Sprinters.

The two-tone grey environment is lifted by the warm colours of the captain's chairs, which share the fabric of the living area. A removable cab carpet would also usually enhance the looks, but we opted to leave all the carpets (standard for UK Rapidos) behind. Vinyl is much easier to clean at the end of a test!

When spending around £40 000 on a motorhome wearing the lauded three-pointed star, you expect a certain level of luxury. 'Our' Rapido did not disappoint. The 'plip' central locking we have already mentioned and the captain's chairs look suitably swish. The mirrors and windows adjust at the touch of a button and there's a Blaupunkt RDS radio/cassette (albeit with just two speakers). On the safety front we had both a driver's airbag and anti-lock brakes, features that one motorhome dealer tried to tell me recently could not be specified on a motorhome. Well, here they are and, whilst you hope you'll never need them, they could extend your life expectancy.

The cab chairs are firm and lack height/tilt squab adjustment, but they seemed to suit the differing physique of this pair of drivers. They are especially good at providing lumbar support. The untrimmed seat bases look a little utilitarian, but there is useful storage under the passenger's backside. Both doors also have slim stowage pockets and there is a small lockable glovebox.

It is the detailing of the Sprinter cab that impresses, though. Pen, note and cup holders are all provided. Non-slip surfaces in the recesses ensure that your sunglasses and mobile phone do not slide around, and lower

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General view looking forwards - see the dinette on nearside, caravan door and kitchen on offside, useful pigeonhole cupboards above the cab.

storage areas on the cab doors hide a first aid kit (driver's side) and a warning triangle and lamp (passenger's side). Beneath the passenger's feet a floor panel lifts to reveal the jack and tool kit.

The cab air-conditioning was tried once, but with autumn fast approaching it was the heater that saw more action. Had we had rear passengers, I'm sure they would have appreciated the separate ducting and blower to the rear. As a driver, I was pleased to find a rev counter and digital clock both featured in the well-presented instrument cluster.

### En route

Looks, equipment level and badge appeal are all very well, but some Sprinter-based motorhomes have left me sorely disappointed when it has come to driving them. The old engine range of the asthmatic 2.3D or the powerful but unrefined 2.9TD did little to inspire.

The newer CDI (common-rail direct injection) Sprinters are leagues ahead under the bonnet, but the chassis that they power is much the same as before. It is worth noting, therefore, that the Mercedes seems unusually sensitive to being over-bodied. Look at weight distribution, overall height and the length of rear overhang, if you value driver appeal.

The choice of Mercedes-based motorhomes is nothing like as wide as the selection of Fiat-based rivals, but many European manufacturers are now offering Sprinter-based models, albeit at quite a premium over the ubiquitous Ducato. Rapido are not newcomers to building on the Sprinter and the 749M is well proportioned to sit on the medium wheelbase Mercedes chassis. Not only has the rear overhang been kept to a modest 43 per cent of the wheelbase, but all the heaviest fittings are placed within the wheelbase. And to make sure that you enjoy the drive, Rapido add a JSA suspension kit to sharpen up the responses.

Driving across the rutted entrance to the York show at a pace that would not worry a snail reminded me how much softer the suspension is on a Merc than a Fiat. The body lurched and swayed and the contents of the cupboards crashed around noisily. Fortunately, this was the only time that these traits were revealed.

The more I drove this Rapido, the more I enjoyed it. I was continually surprised by its competence and by how relaxing it was at the helm. The relatively soft suspension does not translate into Citroën 2CV-style cornering lean, just an absorbent ride that adds to driver and passenger comfort. It is also, no doubt, a factor in the total absence of conversion rattles. We had an occasional rear suspension squeak on the worst French back roads, but all the Rapido furniture and fittings remained silent - bliss!

The 313CDI may give way a substantial amount of engine capacity to its key rivals, but the 2.2-litre engine matches the torque output of the latest



The lounge area consists of just a conventional dinette, but seat height and cushion along the wall make it surprisingly comfortable.



Looking back from the cab - fixed bed is behind the dinette, wardrobe and bathroom can be seen on left of photo. Warm colouring throughout.

2.8JTD Fiat, and at lower revs. Furthermore, motorhome journalists at the UK launch of the CDI Sprinter were in agreement that this 129bhp power unit was the pick of the bunch. The extra 10 per cent of torque from the five-cylinder 316 engine is only really necessary in the bulkiest of Mercedes motorhomes.

With a delivery mileage in just double figures, the test vehicle initially felt tight, but soon the common-rail turbo-diesel was impressing us with its relaxed pace. Motorway hills could often be dispatched in fifth with little loss of speed, while 80mph Continental cruising was well within its repertoire (with an increased, but still highly competitive, noise level). More surprising was how stable the Rapido felt at speed, in sharp contrast to some Mercs we've sampled.

On the secondary roads around the Morvan hills of Burgundy the test became tougher still, with incessant sharp bends and steep climbs. Fourth gear dispatched most of these roads, with just occasional use of third. In any case, gear shifting is no longer a chore in the Sprinter, the dashboard-mounted stick being as easy to use as the Fiat's, and years ahead of the previous truck-like floor change.

Visibility is generally good from the driver's seat, though through vision is almost non-existent as the high-backed rear seats hide the rear window. The large nearside window is extremely useful at acute junctions, an ironic benefit of not switching the caravan layout for RHD. The door mirrors stick out way past the body, but lack the safety-enhancing blind-spot lenses now fitted to other base vehicles. When manoeuvring, however, it is the smaller turning circle (a benefit of rear-wheel drive) that really catches your attention. A kerb-to-kerb figure 1.81m less than a similarly proportioned Fiat-based coachbuilt that we tested recently really shows when your navigator slips up.

Overall, we found this Rapido to be rapid, relaxed and surprisingly manoeuvrable. It would fit in many parking bays without too much overhang and seemed to devour mile after mile of open road in the refined manner befitting its stately bonnet badge. It returned upwards of 20mpg (fast motorway cruising), with a best of 27.7mpg when touring. Compare that with 22-26mpg of a low-profile Fiat 2.8JTD tested recently, and it suggests that the Sprinter may be more susceptible to the way it is driven.

### Euro norm

This Le Randonneur is one of several fixed bed motorhomes to have passed through MMM's hands in the past year. The layout is one of the most popular of all European designs and has recently found favour here too. In the Rapido range you can have the same layout based on a Fiat, as the 740F.

On the nearside, behind the cab, is the dinette - a conventional four-



Heki sunroof is the more expensive wind-up model. Wooden surround with inset halogen lighting is a stylish touch.

## MMM LIVE-IN TEST REPORT



Kitchen all closed up - hob has flush-fitting glass lid, sink cover can be safely stowed in the wardrobe when travelling.

► Control panel is on the end of the high-level cupboard over kitchen. It is simple to use and wants only a waste water gauge.

place Pullman-style seating area adjacent to a large top-hinged side window. Immediately behind the dinette is the fixed bed, under which you'll find the Truma Combi boiler and a large storage area.

Along the offside, the kitchen resides behind the driver's seat. Unlike many rivals, neither the dinette nor the kitchen impinges on adjustment of the cab seats for a comfortable seating position, even for taller motorcaravanners. To the rear of the kitchen is the caravan door, followed by the wardrobe, then the bathroom.

Some motorcaravanners decry the fitting of a fixed bed, especially in a relatively compact vehicle such as this. It will, admittedly, not suit those who entertain on a grand scale. On site seating is restricted to four persons at the dinette, possibly five if a swivel base were added to the driver's chair. But for two, this design seems a great all-rounder, not least for the convenience of that instant bed and the capacious locker beneath it.

### Lounge seating

Mercedes-based Rapidos offer only this conventional fore and aft seating, while Renault and Fiat-based models optionally come with a more open-plan arrangement of L-settee and swivel cab seats. In the 749M, therefore, the cab becomes redundant on site and you walk easily through to the rear (aided by the cutaway cab roof and the lack of a gear lever on the floor).

The dinette table is clipped to a rail along the sidewall, along which it slides to ease access to the seating. The forward-facing seat has a high back and head restraints, but seemed rather upright to me. On site I preferred the rear-facing seat, while Jo found the forward-facer suited her better - no arguments over who sits where then! The floor is raised between the dinette seats, so even shorter legs comfortably reach the floor. We did note, however, that parts of this false floor creaked when trodden on.

There's no storage provided for the table, though it could be laid on the bed during the day, or under the bed for travel. We never found it inconvenient to leave it in situ and it was sturdy and generously proportioned for even our most indulgent dining.



Chopping board slots in over drainer and slide-out worktop extension makes galley a little more practical. Stainless steel fittings new for '02.



Large drawers below rear-facing dinette seat and under the oven provide good storage space for non-perishable foods.

For relaxation, a dinette normally fares rather less well, but the placing of an extra upright cushion along the wall beneath the window meant side-facing, back-against-the-wall sprawling was unusually inviting. With two reading lights positioned above the window, we could stretch out here of an evening, though there was no extra space for guests. Those seeking more space for stretching out, feet up, might pack a set of plump pillows for daytime sprawling on the bed.

The large side window enhanced the feeling of space, as did the Heki sunroof above. This is the real McCoy, Heki 1, with a wind-up handle to hinge it open from the front, or five-way tilting for more modest ventilation.

When it's time to hit the road, two rear passengers can be accommodated on the forward-facing seat and there are two three-point belts mounted on a centre steel pillar, a new feature for 2002. In common with certain other current motorhomes, however, the seat/seatbelt design is flawed. The centre seatbelt support is not properly concealed and could present a risk of head injury, while the belt for the seat next to the wall is trapped by the tightly fitting backrest cushion, thus preventing the inertia reel mechanism from working correctly. If you carry one rear passenger, make sure that he/she uses the centre seat.

The upholstery shown in our test vehicle is an obsolete fabric, despite this vehicle being to 2002 specification in every other way. Three new patterns, Dublin, Seville and Lima, are now available and are claimed to be of superior quality.

### Cuisine française

French cooking is world famous and, whilst the top Parisian chefs would probably balk at serving in hotel Le Randonneur, motorcaravanners should not feel short changed. The layout necessarily creates a compact culinary department, but here it is well-appointed and came in for no brickbats from my own travelling chef, Jo.

Kitchen fittings have reverted to stainless steel from the beige ceramic of last year's Rapidos. The hob is a three-burner Smev with push-button ignition, while alongside is a sink with integral drainer. The sink comes with a full flush-fitting cover that stores inside the wardrobe so as not to become a potential missile when travelling. There is also a plastic chopping board that slots in above the drainer.

Worktop space is limited, but a slide-out surface pops out from under the draining board and is just enough to hold a plate for serving up. If more preparation space is required, the dining table is close at hand.

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Tip up the permanent bed on its gas strut and you'll find a huge stowage area below, plus segregated areas for Truma boiler and auxiliary battery.



Vin in 'van! Behind the driver's seat is this three-bottle wine rack.



Wardrobe door has well-positioned mirror and coat hooks. Here you can also see the stowed central concertina division.



Below the sink is the latest Powerfridge, a 103-litre model with the simple rotary dial to select 12V, 230V or gas operation. Electronic ignition is standard, but there is no longer a door catch that allows the fridge internal ventilation when not in use. A built-in fan boosts cooling when in extreme summer temperatures.

Under the hob is a large cutlery drawer that will hold all the culinary tools, not just a couple of knives and forks. Below that, and standard for UK Rapidos, is the Smev oven and grill, again with push-button ignition. Then, at floor level, is a large drawer, with another deep drawer appearing opposite (from under the rear-facing settee). These two drawers are ideal for tinned and packet foods, as well as fresh fruit and veg. The under-seat drawer also seems to make good use of this (often inaccessible) area.

More kitchen stowage space is available in two high-level lockers, while an extractor hood (with two halogen spotlights) is fitted over the hob. The spice rack proved useful for condiments and washing-up liquid, while a single three-pin mains socket is also fitted behind the drainer.

The Rapido furniture features solid maple cabinet door frames and it is the quality of the furnishings that gives this French 'van a decidedly up-market feel. In contrast to the Spartan feel of some German motorhomes, this Gallic style features warmer colours for a homely impression more in keeping with British tastes.

### Encore de storage

There's no more storage under the dinette seats, just the already mentioned drawer. Thank the huge 140-litre fresh water tank and the gas locker for that. There are two high-level cupboards over the dinette, however, one with a removable/adjustable shelf. Below each is an extra, shallow, cupboard behind a curved, push-to-open front.

The area under the bed is vast. In rough terms, excluding a little extra corner alongside the boiler, it is 1.02m by 1.22m with a depth of 440mm. Then there's the boxed-in section at the rear, which houses the auxiliary

battery. Likewise, the Combi boiler, battery charger and RCD unit are separated from the main stowage area, to prevent damage. To give you an idea of capacity, we kept a Di Blasi folding bicycle, two large outdoor chairs, walking boots, cab window insulated screens, a shopping basket and a bucket under here and still had space to spare.

Four more high-level lockers are sited over the rear bed, two with adjustable shelves. Then there is the TV cupboard over the foot of the bed, supplied with 12V, 230V and aerial sockets, as well as a slide-out TV turntable. No aerial is fitted as standard, although the wiring is already in situ.

A second TV cupboard, again with a trio of sockets, is positioned over the driver's seat, so we can only assume that the average Rapido buyer is something of a telly addict. We took no television at all and used both lockers for extra storage!

Pigeonholes alongside the cab TV locker were useful for guide books and leaflets about tourist attractions. Clothes were hung in the wardrobe, which has automatic illumination and a side-to-side rail, as well as a shelf above where we kept games and novels. Below the wardrobe, a deep drawer housed Jo's impressive collection of footwear for every conceivable motorcaravanning occasion.

A mirror on the front of the wardrobe enables you to make sure that you look your best before you emerge from the motorhome, while two coat hooks allow convenient hanging for an extra pair of jackets or fleeces.

Just to convince you that this 'van has a Gallic flavour, there's a wine rack behind the passenger cab seat - but it only holds three bottles of Châteauneuf du Pape!

### La nuit

Blinds and net curtains drawn, insulated screens suckered to the cab windows, cab curtains drawn for a more homely look, and the day is drawing to a close. Halogen lights give plenty of illumination wherever it is needed, and the 749M seemed well insulated from the variable weather



*Rear bedroom has net curtains and decorative drapes, as well as blinds and flyscreens. Bed narrows slightly at feet end, but doesn't suffer the severely chopped off corner of so many rivals.*

conditions outside.

Bed making for a couple on board this Rapido is a thing of the past, for the one-piece Bultex mattress on a slatted base beckons whenever you feel weary. It is one of the most comfortable beds we have ever experienced in a motorhome and, though it narrows slightly halfway along its length, it doesn't suffer the dramatically cut-off corner that afflicts many fixed bed designs. At the end of one very, very long day driving from Croydon to Burgundy via Paris traffic jams, we were extremely pleased not to have to juggle with a jigsaw of bed cushions before retiring. Ultra-modern bedside reading lights and a shelf for your book and glasses simply add to the convenience.

The second bed is made from the dinette seats and is likely to be a guest/grandchild berth for most Le Randonneur owners. The table slots in between the benches, the seats extend into the gangway, and a clever sliding backrest also stretches the bed into the cab. Despite being made from seven cushions, the bed seemed quite flat and free from ridges, but it



*Alongside the permanent bed is this useful shelf unit for your bedtime reading and your specs.*



*Front dinette actually makes slightly larger of the two beds. It's pretty flat, but making it will remind you how good it is to have a permanent bed.*

also reminds you of the delights of an instant bed.

A sliding wooden partition and a concertina divider separate the two bedrooms, creating an en-suite master bedroom at the rear. This has the added bonus that the front living/cooking area can be used with blinds and curtains drawn back, while the rear bedroom is still occupied. A changing area (including the wardrobe) can also be quickly created in the rear by simply closing two blinds and the central division.

### Salle de bain

Whilst the 749M lacks the wooden bathroom furniture and separate shower of its longer cousin, the 779M, its bathroom is still perfectly adequate. The corner handbasin has storage below (not waterproof when showering) and two large mirrors above. Two further cupboards also have bold blue doors, a pleasant change from the usual sea of white plastic.

The toilet is a swivel-bowl Thetford Cassette with electric flush and, in this model, the swivel bowl does usefully create extra space for showering.



*Rear can be closed off from the rest of the 'van to create an en-suite bedroom or private changing area, without closing all the blinds.*

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Attractive washroom has swivel cassette toilet, fixed corner handbasin, and plenty of cupboard space (with appealing blue doors).

Pull the shower curtain around and there's more than enough room for a hose down, but you have to hand hold the showerhead (which is also the washbasin faucet).

There's plenty of lighting and ventilation in the 'little room', but just one drain hole for the shower is a demerit. The telescopic clothes drying rack and trio of towel rails are definite pluses, however.



Clothes drying rack extends telescopically above the loo.

### Top spec'

Rapido do not compete in the budget coachbuilt sector and their speciality has long been low profile motorhomes. Both factors give you a clear indication that the 749M will be a well-honed product that has evolved gradually. Modifications to 2002 models, including upgrading to the C6002 Truma boiler and the new Powerfridge, show that Rapido is working to stay ahead of its competitors.

That 6kW blown-air heater with gas and mains power for the boiler function, is unusually generous in such a compact coachbuilt and should ensure its compatibility with winter camping. Equally, those who like to get off the beaten track (or simply avoid the hassle of constant refilling) will love the massive 140-litre fresh water tank.

The short options list is testament to the fact that UK-market Rapidos have everything you could expect already included. We were impressed by the build quality throughout, a feeling that could not be marred by the odd faults on delivery - a missing radiator cap and a loose-fitting auxiliary battery connection. The former fault ought to have been picked up when the vehicle was PDI-ed by the Mercedes dealer.

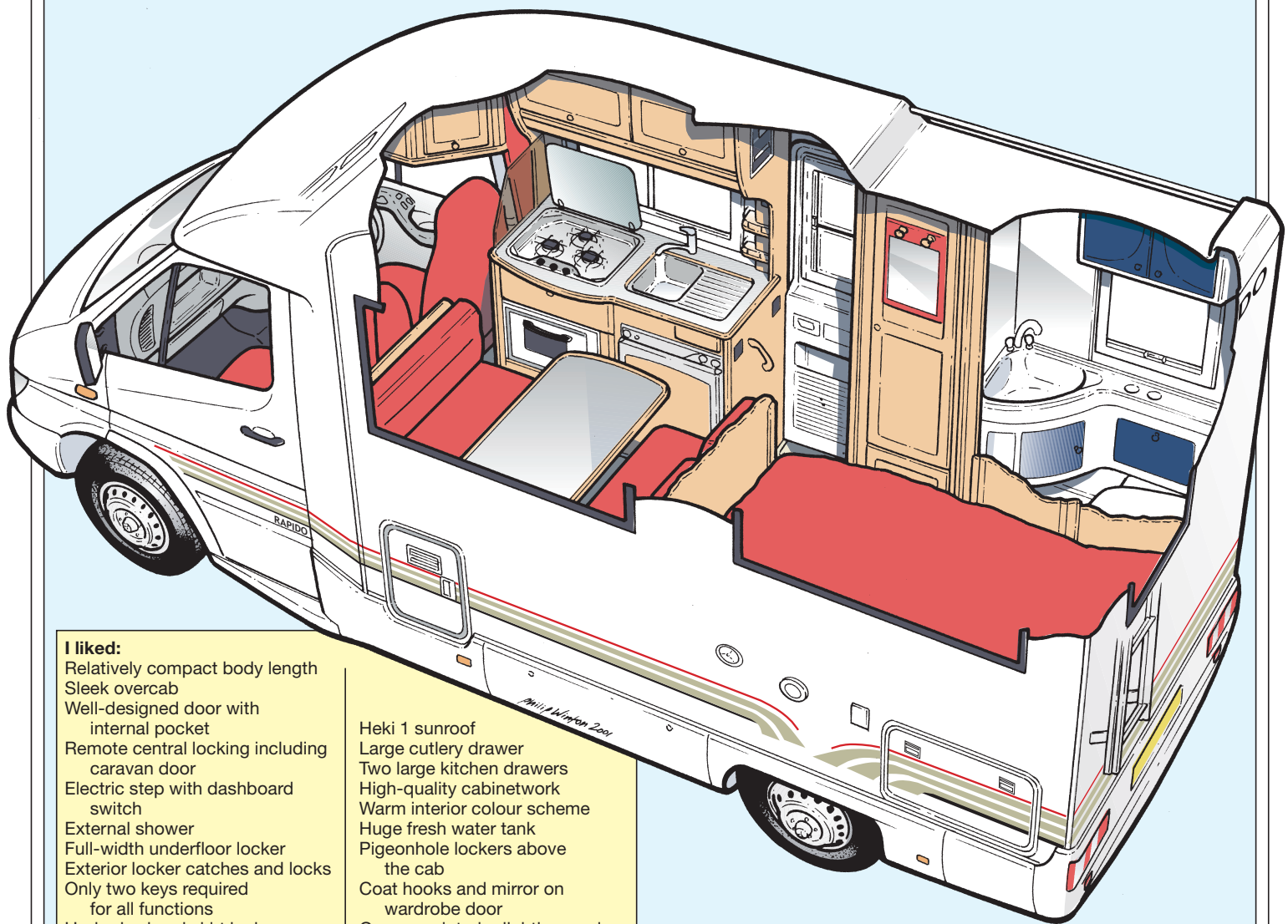
### Conclusions

'The motorhome that suits you perfectly' proclaims the Le Randonneur brochure. Well, the 749M certainly suited Jo and I for our fortnight of Rapido 'ownership'. We are often sad to hand back the keys to a test vehicle, but this was especially the case with this Franco-German low profile. We enjoyed the driving far more than we expected to, while past Rapido tests had given the 749M plenty to live up to. Flawed seatbelt design aside, we found little to dislike about this Le Randonneur and a lot that impressed us.

Were it not for the small matter of £40 000, the 749M might be sitting on our driveway still. Now, I wonder! If I send in this report by e-mail and stay in France, how long will it be before Brownhills realise that FL51FGZ has gone missing? After all, with so many motorhomes in stock, surely they wouldn't miss just this one...





**I liked:**

Relatively compact body length  
Sleek overcab  
Well-designed door with internal pocket  
Remote central locking including caravan door  
Electric step with dashboard switch  
External shower  
Full-width underfloor locker  
Exterior locker catches and locks  
Only two keys required for all functions  
Under-bed and skirt lockers  
Non-slip roof rack area  
Cab layout and design  
Removable carpets  
Electric windows and mirrors  
Driver's airbag and anti-lock brakes  
Excellent captain's chairs with good lumbar support  
Rear passenger heating  
JSA suspension kit fitted as standard  
Total absence of conversion rattles  
Comfortable, but not over-soft, suspension  
Fine cruising ability, even at 80 mph  
Dashboard-mounted gear shift  
Tight turning circle  
Good range of adjustment of cab seats, unaffected by furniture behind  
Dinette seats set at comfortable height

Heki 1 sunroof  
Large cutlery drawer  
Two large kitchen drawers  
High-quality cabinetwork  
Warm interior colour scheme  
Huge fresh water tank  
Pigeonhole lockers above the cab  
Coat hooks and mirror on wardrobe door  
Generous interior lighting, and light switch by caravan door  
Extremely comfortable fixed bed, without usual chopped-off corner  
Bedside reading lights and bedside shelf  
Room divider  
Clothes drying rack and towel rails in bathroom  
6kW blown-air heating system

**I would have liked:**

Reinforced skirt, so that loaded locker did not cause flexing  
Blind-spot lenses on door mirrors  
Swivel driver's seat  
Showerhead that needn't be hand held  
More shower tray drain holes

**I disliked:**

Inaccessible spare wheel  
Flawed rear seatbelt design

**SPECIFICATION****The vehicle**

**Base vehicle & engine type:** Mercedes Euro-Sprinter medium wheelbase chassis cab with 2.2-litre direct-injection common-rail turbocharged and intercooled four-cylinder diesel engine  
**Output:** 95kW (129 bhp) @ 3800 rpm  
**Max torque:** 300Nm (221 lb ft) @ 1600-2400 rpm  
**Compression ratio:** 18:1  
**Gearbox & drive:** Five-speed manual gearbox, gearshift on dashboard, rear-wheel drive  
**Brakes:** Floating caliper discs all round, ventilated at front. Dual-circuit hydraulic system with load dependent modulator. Parking brake operating on separate rear drums. Anti-lock braking system and traction control  
**Steering:** Power-assisted rack and pinion  
**Suspension:** Front - fully independent struts, transverse leaf springs, shock absorbers and stabiliser. Rear - parabolic leaf springs with shock absorbers and stabilisers. JSA reinforced suspension  
**Tyres fitted:** 225/70 R15 (Continental Vanco)  
**Spare wheel position:** In underfloor cradle towards rear of vehicle, forward of underfloor ski locker  
**Fuel tank capacity/type of fuel:** 75 litres (16.5 gallons), diesel  
**Instruments:** Fuel level, coolant temperature, speedometer, LCD trip mileage recorder, rev counter, digital clock/outside temperature display




**LIVE-IN TEST REPORT**

**Warning lamps:** Anti-skid traction control switched off/slippery surface, brake fluid low/parking brake accumulator pressure too low, rear fog lamp on, airbag/seatbelt pre-tensioner malfunction, main beam headlamps on, battery not being charged, brake pads worn, engine oil level low, handbrake on, coolant level low, anti-lock brake system malfunction, engine control unit malfunction/replace fuel filter, anti-skid control malfunction, glow plugs, windscreen washer fluid low, electronic brake force distribution malfunction

**Windscreen wiper controls:** Two speeds plus intermittent and flick wash, stalk control operation

**Immobiliser/alarm:** Electronic engine immobiliser automatically activated by remote central locking; alarm not fitted

**Other features:** In-cab headlamp angle adjustment, lockable glovebox with cup holders on inside of lid, pen and note holders on dashboard, captain's chairs with adjustable armrests, removable cab carpet, Blaupunkt RDS radio/cassette with removable fascia panel and two speakers, electric front windows, cut-away cab roof, door pockets on both sides, height-adjustable upper seatbelt mountings, step retract switch on fascia, rear heating controls on fascia, electrically adjustable heated door mirrors, cab air-conditioning, remote central locking, tinted cab windows, slide-out ashtray and cup holder, driver's airbag, tool kit and jack under floor in passenger footwell, first aid kit behind lower panel on driver's door, warning triangle and warning lamp behind lower panel on passenger cab door

### Performance & economy

**Achieved 30 - 50mph acceleration time:** 8.0 seconds (3rd gear)

**Fuel consumption during test:** Best 27.7mpg, worst 20.7mpg, overall 23.5mpg recorded over five fill-ups over a test distance of 1767 miles

### The caravan

**Body type & construction:** Sandwich construction bodywork with glass fibre outer skin; moulded glass fibre side skirts, overcab section, cab to caravan joining panels and rear bumper; non-slip roof rack surface

**Insulation:** 25mm Styrofoam in floor, walls and roof

**Conversion NCC approved:** No

**Warranty:** Twelve months manufacturers warranty on base vehicle and conversion

**Number of keys required:** Two - one for cab doors and ignition, one for caravan door and external services (gas locker, cassette toilet, water filler and external storage areas). Remote control locks/unlocks caravan door and cab doors

**Windows & doors:** Double-glazed acrylic caravan windows (two top-hinged on nearside, one sliding and one top-hinged on offside, plus vertical sliding window in door, one sliding window at rear). One-piece caravan door on UK offside with automotive-style door lock and door handle, and internal storage pocket

**Additional ventilation:** Wind-up vents with flyscreens over rear bed and bathroom, Heki 1 wind-up/five-way sunroof with blind and flyscreen

**Blinds/curtains:** All double-glazed windows fitted with blinds and flyscreens, insulated screens attached with suckers to cab windows, lined cab curtains, room divider for rear bedroom (part wood panel, part concertina screen), net curtains and decorative drapes for bedroom and lounge windows

**230V AC system:** Mains hook-up, RCD and two MCBs, automatic battery charger, three unswitched three-pin sockets (in kitchen and both TV cupboards)

**12V DC system:** Auxiliary battery in separate locker under rear bed, control panel adjacent to caravan door with digital battery condition gauge

**Capacity of caravan battery:** 90 amp hr

**Lighting:** Two ceiling-mounted halogen downlighters in lounge, two swivel halogen lights under high-level lockers in dinette, two halogen lights over cooker, two ceiling-mounted halogen downlighters over rear bedroom, two halogen swivel reading lights at head of fixed bed, two halogen lights in bathroom, external awning light

**Cooking facilities:** Three-burner Smev hob with flush-fitting glass lid, push-button ignition and drain hole, Smev grill/oven with push-button ignition

**Extractor fan/cooker hood:** Built-in single-speed extractor over hob

**Refrigerator:** Electrolux RM6401 Powerfridge 103-litre gas/12V/230V with electronic ignition, full-width freezer compartment, single rotary switch for power source selection, and additional fan to aid cooling in extreme temperatures

**Sink & drainer:** Stainless steel sink and integral drainer with flush-fitting removable cover and inset removable chopping board

**Water system:** Inboard fresh water tank (fitted below forward-facing dinette seat), water tank filled by lockable external filler, gas/mains boiler, self-priming water pump serves kitchen mixer tap, washbasin tap/shower and external shower

**Water heater:** Truma Combi C6002 gas/mains boiler with 40/60 degrees Celsius variable setting on gas, 12 litres capacity

**Fresh water tank:** Inboard, 140 litres (30.8 gallons)

**Fresh water level gauge:** On control panel, push button to read, digital read-out

**Waste water tank:** Underfloor, 100 litres (22 gallons)

**Waste water level gauge:** On control panel, full warning light and warning buzzer only

**Space heating:** Truma Combi C6002 6kW gas-fired blown-air heating (includes bathroom), rear passenger heating (using engine heat) with separate fan and controls when motoring

**Gas locker:** Externally-accessed lockable compartment with vents in door and base, capacity for two 6kg propane cylinders

**Shower compartment:** Walk-in bathroom in rear offside corner with Thetford Cassette swivel-bowl toilet with electric flush, fixed corner

handbasin with mixer tap, high and low-level storage lockers, opening window with blind and flyscreen, shower using extended washbasin tap, shower curtain, two mirrors, towel rails, telescopic clothes drying rack, halogen lighting, opening roof vent

**Seating:** Two captain's chairs with adjustable armrests in cab, Pullman-type dinette with two forward and two rearward-facing seats

**Table(s)/storage:** Wall rail-mounted table with single leg, no table storage provided

**Berths:** Sleeping accommodation for four (two double beds). Travel seats for four

**Rear restraints:** Forward-facing lounge seat fitted with two lap and diagonal restraints

**Wardrobe:** Side-to-side hanging rail, automatic illumination, shelf above, deep drawer below

**Flooring:** Vinyl flooring with removable carpet over, separate removable carpet for cab

**Additional features:** Under-bed storage area with external lockable access door, fixed bed with slatted base tiltable on gas struts for access below, storage area in nearside skirt, full-width underfloor ski locker at rear, high-level rear brake light and exterior marker lights, large cutlery drawer, overcab TV cupboard (12V, 230V and aerial sockets), rear TV cupboard (12V, 230V and aerial sockets) with slide-out TV turntable, control panel with battery condition and fresh water gauge, rear corner steadies, roof rack and ladder, electric step, book shelf by rear bed, three-bottle rack behind passenger cab seat, slide-out kitchen worktop, gas cylinder change-over switch, spice rack, front mud flaps, fire extinguisher, cab running boards

### Dimensions

(\* denotes figure supplied by base vehicle manufacturer or converter)

**Overall length:** 6.05m (19ft 10in)\*

**Overall width (excl mirrors):** 2.23m (7ft 4in)

**Overall width (incl mirrors):** 2.63m (8ft 7.5in)\*

**Overall height:** 2.79m (9ft 2in)\*

**Length of wheelbase:** 3.55m (11ft 8in)\*

**Length of rear overhang:** 1.54m (5ft 0.5in) - 43.4 per cent of wheelbase

**Turning circle (kerb to kerb):** 11.89m (39ft)\*

**Driver's max leg length:** 1015mm (40in)

**Step-up height to caravan:** 170mm (7in), then 255mm (10in), then 190mm (7.5in)

**Door aperture:** 1.85m (6ft 1in) x 0.52m (1ft 8.5in)

**Interior length from dash:** 4.67m (15ft 4in)

**Interior length behind cab:** 3.67m (12ft 0.5in)

**Interior width at waist height:** 2.10m (6ft 10.5in)

**Interior height:** Lounge/kitchen 2.01m (6ft 7in) maximum, bedroom 1.89m (6ft 2.5in)

**Work surface height:** 0.96m (38in)

**Table dimensions:** 1005mm x 635mm x H 710mm

(39.5in x 25in x H 28in)

**Bed dimensions:**

(1) rear fixed bed

**mattress length:** 1.85m (6ft 1in)

**mattress width:** 1.27m (4ft 2in) narrowing to 1.20m (3ft 11in)

**mattress depth:** 110mm (4.5in)

(2) dinette bed

**mattress length:** 1.89m (6ft 2.5in)

**mattress width:** 1.27m (4ft 2in)

**mattress depth:** 120mm (5in)

**Shower compartment:** 1140mm x 800mm x H 1855mm (45in x 31.5in x H 73in)

**Wardrobe:** 420mm x 590mm x hanging height from rail 1110mm (16.5in x 23in x H 43.5in)

**Gas locker:** 660mm x 360mm x H 630mm (26in x 14in x H 25in)

**Gas locker door aperture:** 410mm x 480mm (16in x 19in)

**Max authorised weight:** 3500kg\*

**Unladen mass:** 2940kg\*

**Load capacity:** 560kg\*

### Price (all prices include VAT)

**Standard model:** £39 825 on the road with 2.2-litre (129 bhp) turbo-diesel engine

**As tested:** £41 425 on the road (see options below)

### Optional extras (\* starred items fitted to test vehicle)

**Base vehicle options:** 2.7-litre (156 bhp) turbo-diesel engine (POA); fog lights (£130); Security Pack 1 - anti-lock brakes, anti-skid system and driver's airbag (£1110); Security Pack 2 - anti-lock brakes, anti-skid system and driver and passenger airbags (£1600)\*; Sprintshift automatic gearbox (£760) only available with Security Pack 1 or 2; cruise control (£280) only available with Security Pack 1 or 2; reinforced 1750kg front axle (£210); differential lock (£630); alloy wheels (£680)

**Caravan options:** Removable carpets, roof rack and ladder, and gas oven/grill all fitted as standard for UK models. Other options - Omnistor 3m awning (£480), Fiamma bike rack (£180), towbar (£830), motorbike rack (£1280), swivel cab seat (£170), TV aerial (£220), alarm (£370)

**Rapido Le Randonneur 749M kindly supplied for evaluation by:**

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