

TEST REPORT EXTRA



'ZED BED' **Swift Kon-Tiki Z on 2.8TD Fiat Ducato**

Dave Hurrell tries the latest version of Swift's ever-popular Kon-Tiki with its unusual diagonal fixed bed

Ever since Thor Heyerdahl created his trans-Pacific raft and proved that you could do more with balsa wood than make model aircraft, the name Kon-Tiki has epitomised adventurous travel. When the same name was chosen for a range of motorhomes it was a master stroke. Even non-motorcaravanners recognise the brand as a large luxury motorhome. And as

Swift suggest the Kon-Tiki is 'the most sought after luxury coachbuilt motorhome in the UK', the range has a lot to live up to.

The latest offering is the Kon-Tiki Z, which aims to offer luxury motorcaravanning for up to three people. The jewel in the crown of this new model is a permanent bed at the rear. The Kon-Tiki range had a major redesign in

late 1999 to improve, among other things, standards of insulation, and now features a double floor to make all-year-round use comfortable when external temperatures are as low as 15 degrees below freezing.

First impressions

At 24ft long, big is the first word that springs to mind. Although the slim luton stops it looking like a mobile block of flats, the 'van will still occupy almost two spaces in your local supermarket car park. However, big does not have to be unattractive and the designers have produced a look that suggests quality, with a curvy overcab, a one-piece roof and a deeply sculpted rear panel. All this with marker lights and a high-level brake light above the rear window. Kon-Tiki graphics adorn, complete with its namesake raft urging you to follow Thor's example!

The drive

One of the most important things about any motorhome is how it drives. Some people buy a 'van without a decent test drive, and regret it afterwards.

The nature of motorcaravanning means you will probably be spending long periods behind the wheel and the vehicle should be as easy and comfortable to drive as possible. I made myself comfortable and set the excellent electrically-adjustable heated mirrors before setting off.

Driving this large motorhome was surprisingly easy. The well-weighted power steering, excellent gearchange and brakes, combined with the powerful Fiat 2.8-litre turbo-diesel (but not the latest common-rail



Big is the first word that springs to mind.

'ZED BED'



Looking towards the rear bedroom with lounge on left, followed by bathroom, and kitchen on right.

JTD unit), made for a relaxed driving experience. You are more likely to be held up by people in front than to become the cause of a traffic jam. Engine revs need to be kept over 2000rpm to take advantage of the turbocharger's boost and, as fifth gear seemed to be an overdrive with a big gap from fourth, I used the rev counter to help with cog-swapping at the right time.

The cab environment is enhanced by electric cab windows, an excellent Philips radio/cassette and large lockable glove compartment. The number one problem for me was the height of the driver's seat. As it started to rain and I turned on the wipers, I found myself watching the tip of the wiper blade going through my line of sight. Later, when using the sun visor, I had to duck my head to see under it! The problem has been well documented and I find it hard to believe that nobody has done anything about it by now. As I said before, try before you buy.

Timber and tin

If you are a seasoned motorcaravanner you will know the score. We were cruising at about 60mph on a straight smooth A-road. Meanwhile, behind us the cooker was doing a fair impression of Ringo on seven pints of lager, with various fixtures and fittings on backing vocals. As I worked out how many tea towels it was going to take to silence the cooker, I was mindful of the fact that this prototype 'van had done the show circuit.

The Kon-Tiki experience

The layout of the Kon-Tiki Z is ideally suited to luxury touring for two. The front lounge/kitchen, and centre shower/toilet room, are complemented by a rear double bedroom with washbasin and wardrobe. The

third (overcab) berth can only be described as occasional, owing to its size and the small amount of space in the lutan area.

The interior design features a curved theme, with the front of the sofa, the kitchen unit, and the shape of the bed giving a serpentine feel to the route through the 'van. The colour scheme is very definitely green, with velour curtains, green removable carpet over wood-effect vinyl flooring, and modern check-style green and beige upholstery to cab seats, lounge and bedroom. Blinds and flyscreens are fitted throughout, along with an excellent range of 12V halogen and fluorescent lighting.

Lounging around

Running along the offside, behind the driver's seat, is the L-shaped sofa. The forward-facing section of this is a travelling seat for one (including three-point belt, head restraint and steel under-frame). Three berths and three travelling seats is the right combination, but better protection is needed for the upper seatbelt mounting, which is not covered by the head restraint.

The sofa backrest cushions are made with a modern soft feel and are very comfortable. The driver and passenger cab seats also swivel, providing extra seating for visitors. In the front of the lutan are three lockers, the centre one of which is fitted out for a TV (with sockets for power and the fitted Status aerial). The large Heki 2 rooflight above combines with the big lounge window to make this whole area feel light and spacious.

Making an entrance

Opposite the sofa, and directly behind the passenger seat, is the caravan entrance, complete with full-length flyscreen door. I was



Cab has co-ordinated upholstery. Swivelled seats become part of the lounge.



Cosy L-shaped lounge has forward-facing travel seat with three-point belt and head restraint.

not at all happy with the quality of this unit. The sliding cover designed to fill the gap left by the inside door handle when the flyscreen is used was flimsy, did not line up properly, and came off in my hand several times. The caravan door was 'bog standard' to my eyes and the lock plate protruded from the frame into the path of anyone leaving or entering. I found myself repeating the £43 000 mantra and thinking of the entrance doors of the competition, some of which are fitted with top-quality door locks and constructed in GRP throughout.

Cuisine machine

Behind the caravan entrance, and ranged along the nearside, the kitchen is packed with top-of-the-range appliances. A deep, stainless steel sink and drainer has a clever folding mixer tap and toughened glass lid. Next to this is a full-size Stoves cooker with four-burner hob and separate grill and oven, all with spark ignition. The fridge/freezer, which sits next to the cooker and separates the kitchen area from the bedroom, is the latest Electrolux 135-litre AES model. It does away with the need to switch manually between 12V, gas and mains - its Automatic Energy Selection system does the work for you.

Below the sink is a good range of drawers and cupboards. With the added storage of overhead lockers, and the enormous capacity of the fridge, the most ambitious of cooks should be able to excel. The stove performed superbly, with a good oven and grill and powerful burners. Water delivery to the sink was excellent and the mixer tap worked well. So where is the work surface, do I hear you cry? Well, out from under the draining board slides this little piece of worktop, drawer-



Excellent sink unit and full-size Stoves cooker, but where is the worktop space?

style. It is about the size of a kitchen salesman's sample. If this was a panel van conversion I would applaud it - but if you put domestic-style appliances in a 24ft motorhome you should have room to prepare domestic-style meals.

Last and by no means least is the omission of any sort of kitchen extractor. You've got the equipment to produce large quantities of condensation and cooking smells, but very little way of getting rid of them.

Bon appetite

So, you're settled on your pitch and your favourite sounds are drifting from the four-speaker stereo system. You put down your glass of lightly chilled white Burgundy, when the cook asks you to lay the table for dinner. The smell of chicken with white wine, cream and wild mushrooms is wafting from the oven. Unfortunately, the free-standing table is buried somewhere at the back of the 'van in amongst your clothes in the wardrobe!

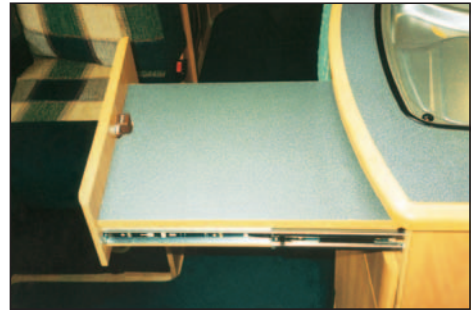
The dining arrangements leave a lot to be desired. Once you have struggled to get the

table out and unfolded it, you may have lost your appetite. It does provide adequate dining for three but leaves precious little space in the lounge/kitchen area once set up. Both the table and its storage need a rethink.

Bathing and all that

The washroom is of reasonable size and contains a separate shower cubicle, excellent Thetford swivel-bowl electric flush toilet and one overhead storage locker. Of all the areas in this prototype 'van, this seems to be the bit that didn't get finished. The threshold to the door is far too high, as though it was meant for a washroom with integral shower, and the wooden overhead locker seems to have come from the lounge of another 'van.

To its credit the shower is superb. The circular compartment and its door are strong and practical, and the mixer and showerhead deliver plenty of hot water at the correct temperature. The lighting in here is also good, with halogen downlighters in the shower. The light switches, however, are mounted outside the room and it proved too easy to leave the



...This is it. The only worktop is this tiny slide-out addition under the drainer.



The 135-litre fridge/freezer decides for itself between 12V, 230V or gas power.

lights on by mistake.

Sleepy heads

As previously mentioned, the single overcab bed is really only suitable for occasional use, or for a child. It is easy to set up, although the folding mattress and access ladder have no dedicated storage area. As brave motorhome testers we tried this bed (one at a time of course), but once was enough!

The rear double bed is set at an angle,



Once laid for a meal, the free-standing dining table leaves very little space for the cook.



We felt the washroom had an unfinished look, but the circular shower is excellent in use.

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Vanity basin, complete with large mirrors and mixer tap, is sited at the foot of the bed.



Lift-up the end of the bed base for access to locker and powerful Truma Combi water/space heater.



The oval bed - supremely comfortable, but lacking floor space around it. On the right is the wardrobe, where table storage is awkward.

with the head end in the offside rear corner of the 'van. The wardrobe is in the nearside rear corner with a large cupboard below, and the vanity unit with washbasin is at the foot of the bed.

Oval in shape and complete with deep mattress, fitted cover and matching scatter cushions, the bed looks the business, and it is. The head of the bed benefits from shelves on three sides, with plenty of room for glasses of water, clocks, books etc. With two halogen

reading lights above, night-time requirements are complete.

The bed is supremely comfortable and, of course, instantly available for the odd Chardonnay-induced afternoon nap! All this space and luxury has to be paid for somewhere, and in this case it is the floor area of the bedroom that picks up the tab. We did not find it possible to use the washbasin properly, gain access to the wardrobe, or get dressed without a struggle, and we are both

under six feet tall and of medium build. With a bit more floor space this area could become a class leader in luxury design.

Hot and cold

The Truma combination water and blown-air heating unit is mounted in part of the bed base. It worked very well, producing plenty of piping hot water and providing effective room heating ducted to outlets in all areas of the 'van. It did seem a shame that Swift had seen



Overcab bed is suitable for occasional use, or for a child. There's no storage provision for the mattress or ladder.



Deeply sculpted rear panel is aesthetically pleasing.

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fit to install the control panel for this heater at the bottom of the foot of the bed. When you wake in the morning one of the first things you want to do is get the heating and/or hot water on - grovelling on the floor to set the controls is not the way you want to do it! Mounting the control on the wall above the bed would make using this appliance much easier.

Putting it all away

If you are looking for a 'van with good storage capacity, then this is it. A payload close to 800kg, masses of internal locker space, and the huge storage locker underneath the fixed bed means you can take all the things you would like to (subject to a final check at the local public weighbridge).

The underbed area has access from inside



Exterior access door to cavernous underbed storage is big enough to take all those bulky essentials.

and via a large external door. The key for the locker door also operates the caravan door, the capacious gas locker, the toilet servicing

hatch and the fresh water filler. With the single base vehicle key, this enables two-key operation for the whole motorhome.

Summing up

The Kon-Tiki Z is certainly not without appeal, especially with that ever-ready bed and the vast storage beneath. More floor space is required in the bedroom, though, and the dining arrangements need improvement. The shower room needs to be more coherent in its execution, but the rest is just a matter of fine tuning. The combination of quality domestic-sized appliances, excellent shower, superb fixed double bed, good payload and huge storage, make for a motorhome with the potential to provide long-term luxury touring for two. The Z is a worthwhile addition to the Kon-Tiki range. □

In brief

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato Maxi chassis cab with Al-Ko chassis extension

Engine type: 2.8-litre intercooled turbo-diesel

Output: 90kw (122bhp) @ 3600 rpm (now replaced by 127bhp common-rail JTD engine)

Gearbox and drive: Five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

Make & model: Swift Kon-Tiki Z

Body type and construction: Bonded sandwich construction with GRP sidewalls. One-piece GRP roof and rear panel, GRP luton

Conversion NCC approved: Yes

Electrical equipment: Mains hook-up, RCD and MCBs, two 230V sockets, one 12V socket, 12V external socket for water filler, 75 amp hr auxiliary battery with mains charger

Lighting: One pelmet-mounted fluorescent, 12 halogen downlighters, six halogen reading lights, awning light

Cooking facilities: Stoves four-burner cooker with separate grill and oven, spark ignition

Refrigerator: Electrolux RM4505 135-litre AES

fridge/freezer with gas/12V/230V operation

Water heater: Truma 6kW gas/electric Combi boiler

Fresh water tank: 100 litres (22.5 gallons), inboard

Waste water tank: 72 litres (16 gallons), underfloor

Space heating: Truma gas-operated Combi with blown-air outlets in lounge, kitchen, bedroom and washroom

Gas locker capacity: Two 6/7kg cylinders

Rear restraints: One lap and diagonal to forward-facing section of sofa

Additional features: Heki 2 rooflight to lounge, external access hatch to underbed locker, flyscreen to main door, rear stereo speakers, fire extinguisher, TV aerial

Dimensions

Overall length: 7.25m (24ft 0in)

Overall width: 2.22m (7ft 3in)

Overall height: 2.98m (9ft 9in)

Interior height: 1.96m (6ft 5in)

Bed dimensions: Overcab single 1.90m x 0.70m

(6ft 3in x 2ft 3in), headroom 0.55m (1ft 10in).

Rear double 1.90m x 1.30m (6ft 3in x 4ft 3in)

Max authorised weight: 3850kg

Load capacity: 793kg (standard model)

Price

Standard model: £43 580 on the road (as tested)

Optional extras

Base vehicle options: None listed

Caravan options: Ladder, roof bars and tread mat (£310), rear corner steadies (£255), Omnivent three-speed reversible fan (£290)

Kon-Tiki Z kindly supplied for evaluation by: Swift Motorhomes, Dunswell Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4JX.

Tel: 01482 847332.

Fax: 01482 841042.

Web site: www.swiftmotorhomes.co.uk



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