

Compact overcab coachbuilts with bunks from France and Italy offer mum, dad, and the kids great holiday accommodation



whith summer well and truly here, thoughts turn to sun, sea and sand as the main holiday season kicks in. If you've got a couple of kids of a certain age, chances are they'll absolutely love holidaying in a

motorhome - even more so in one with cosy bunks to snuggle into.

So, this month's contenders offer familysized accommodation, but crucially, not in enormous 'vans that'll struggle to fit your driveway and be too daunting to drive.

The Continentals are the acknowledged experts when it comes to family 'van design. This is, in part, because a higher proportion of families go motorcaravanning in mainland Europe - the good weather of course, helps, as the great outdoors puts on a smiling face. That's not to say that family trips aren't attractive this side of La Manche - one of the advantages of having a 'van on your drive is the opportunity for fast getaways at weekends - loaded up with fun-to-use outdoor toys.





Both 'vans feature spacious overcab double beds and front lounges with amidships kitchens and washrooms in attendance. Reason to buy bunks are located across the rears - the bottom bunks lifting to create 'garage' space for family holiday kit.

OVERALL LENGTH: 5.99m (19ft 8in)
OVERALL WIDTH: 2.35m (7ft 8.5in)

Neither 'van is a leviathan, but the Chausson Flash 03 is the fatter; at just 6.24 metres long even it can be considered compact. The McLouis Lagan 202 comes in at just under the

magic six-metre mark, making it easier to park and cheaper on the ferries.

Base vehicles are chalk and cheese as the Chausson's Trusty Ford Transit takes on the doyen of motorhome motivators; the McLouis rides on the Fiat Ducato.



The Ford transit may be Europe's best-selling light commercial vehicle, but it's Fiat's Ducato that is almost ubiquitous in the motorhome base vehicle stakes. There are several reasons for this, but it's probably the drive, and the excellent range of diesel engines, that make the Ducato stand out. Very well equipped as standard, the SE version of the McLouis Lagan 202 adds 130 horsepower engine with six-speed gearbox, cab air-conditioning and a passenger airbag. The Chausson's Ford Transit chassis is the very latest of the breed - in its most powerful incarnation, the 2.2-litre engine delivers 140bhp to the front wheels through a six-speed gearbox. There's airconditioning here too, along with a standardfit passenger airbag and a stylish radio/CD player. In the McLouis, a music-maker will be a retrofitted extra. Cab ergonomics are superb in both cabs, with comfortable and car-like driving positions that are so much less truckish than competition from the likes of Renault and Mercedes. The McLouis offers lots of useful storage - big door bins and central, laptop-sized, locker are outstanding items. The Chausson's Transit counters with dash-top lockers, two-litre bottle-sized bins and a clever flip-over dash-top table. There's no driver's door bin though, the right-hand-located handbrake making this impossible. Bling-wise, it's the Tranny's silver-spoked, leather-clad steering wheel that stands out. Cab plastics, too, look and feel more upmarket.

Cab comfort in the Chausson is helped by the design of the motorcaravan behind. No seat swivels are fitted as the Flash 03's lounge







- 3 The cab plays no part in the living area
- 4 Darker upholstery creates a traditional feel to the interior
- 5 The lounge features a Pullman dinette, while mealtimes see a clever table extension slide out

features a Pullman dinette - important as in the Transit, a swivel can make the driver's seat over-high. The McLouis

benefits from Fiat's close cooperation with motorhome design: fitted swivels here leave seat height unaffected. Finally, don't look for the McLouis' spare wheel as it has Fiat's Fix and Go system: a 12V compressor and sealant should - hopefully - repair and reinflate a flat tyre to allow you to get to the tyre company.

#### **ROAD MANNERS**

The McLouis was laughably easy to drive. Short and sweet on the road, it features light, precise steering and powerful, progressive brakes. A relatively short wheelbase and good steering lock make manoeuvring easy and that sub-six-metre length should see it reasonably happy tackling a supermarket car park. The optional 130 horsepower engine is a best-of-breed pleasure to use, with a freerevving nature and plenty of power on tap. The six-speed gearbox features well-chosen ratios and while the dash-mounted change is not as slick as the Ford's, it's still easy to use. On the motorway, 70mph is easily maintained and comes up at just 2500rpm.

However, going backwards is not quite so smooth. This latest Ducato (along with its Sevel brethren) does suffer from a certain amount of vibration in reverse and very careful clutch control is needed for fuss-free rearward travel. This problem, it appears, is worse when reversing uphill.

The Chausson's Transit, thankfully, did not suffer the same malaise.

Water finding its way under the bonnet is another problem that's appeared on the latest Ducato: if the 'van you buy has no plastic cover fitted on the top of the engine, you should expect remedial work to be carried out when the 'van goes in for its first service. This consists of plastic covers being fitted onto certain sensitive items under the bonnet and re-sealing of the joint where the scuttle meets the centre of the windscreen.

I'm an unapologetic Ford Transit fan - easy servicing and cheap, available spares being just two of the benefits that make me an enthusiast of the breed. The Chausson was only the second front-wheel drive Transit with the most powerful engine and new six-speed gearbox that I'd driven, so I was very much looking forward to the experience. The 2.2litre engine is a touch harsher than the Fiat, but it's just as willing and with an extra 10 horses on tap, it had plenty of 'go.' Slightly

heavier steering and a smaller wheel

made navigating this 'van a bit more of a chore, but again, the cab environment and driving position are about as car-like as you can have in a commercial vehicle. Brakes were well up to par, while the dash-mounted

- always one of the best in

gearchange

five-speed form remains superb,

- Powerful Ford Transit base with six-speed gearbox
- Lack of on-road conversion noise
- Clever extending table
- Bigger fridge
- Comfy beds
- Separate shower
- The price!

#### I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- An alternative L-shaped lounge
- More worktop in kitchen
- Spark ignition on hob

## I DISLIKED

Noisy space heater

even with another ratio added. Suspension is more compliant - softer - than the Fiat, so more body-roll was evident: handling, however, always felt predicable and safe. In the rear, there was much less conversion noise than in the McLouis - maybe due to the softer suspension being more forgiving over the rough stuff. One thing's for certain, the Chausson felt rock solid and very well screwed together.

### **LOUNGE AND DINE**

Both 'vans sport very brown, silver trimmed furniture and it's the soft furnishings that set them apart. The Chausson's deep red velour is quilted and somewhat old-fashioned looking. It does, however, make for a warm feeling interior that should be comfortable to live with - even in the winter

The McLouis' cushions are coffee-creme and ice cream-coloured: they speak of summer, but owners of more messy little people may be better off choosing something less likely to show the dirt. Me? I'm well known for throwing red wine around. Do you drink much? No, I spill most of...

Both overcab bed bases rise on gas struts, making it easier to get from cab to living area and back, head bump-free. However, this feature is even more welcome in the McLouis as its half-dinette design means that (along with swivelled cab seats) the cab becomes part of the living area. The Chausson sports a full Pullman dinette that leaves the cab playing no part in providing on-site facilities. The main reason for this seems to be to provide six seatbelts in this six berth 'van. This is a very laudable thing, but the rearward-facing dinette seat only offers lap straps. I couldn't help wondering how much more spacious the Chausson's lounge would be with swivelling cab seats and an L-shaped sofa design in place of the Pullman dinette. Even so, both lounges work well as they also sport inwardfacing seats on the offside, immediately forward of the caravan doors. Seating for five people is a capacity complement in both lounges: this is fine in the five berth McLouis, but where the other person would sit in the six-berth Chausson is a moot point.

Doing the sums becomes even more mind boggling when you notice that the five berth McLouis only has four belted seats! No matter, the fact is, both are best used as four berth 'vans - mum, dad and two sprogs will appreciate the extra space they'll have when living in both.

The Chausson's Pullman dinette is a great eatery, providing plenty of space for four at the big, strong table. A fifth

person can eat from the side seat thanks to a clever table extension that slides out from underneath at an angle and springs up to finish flush to the tabletop. A clever thing indeed, but the fact that it's at an angle reduces legroom for the person sitting on the outside of the rearward-facing seat. The McLouis features a simpler system, as a

# I LIKED Compact size Willing engine Nimble handling Half-dinette layout Kitchen worktop Convector-based space heating Clever table hinge I WOULD HAVE LIKED Bigger fridge Ignition on hob More, better quality lighting I DISLIKED The price







6 A half-dinette lounge is the standout feature upfront

7 Light-and-bright fabrics speak of holidays, but may show the dirt

8 Swivelling seats bring the cab into the living area, while a drop-in extension increases dining space



drop-in section emerges from the wardrobe to extend the table, which slides out on a strong alloy frame. Again, excellent dining for five is the result. It has to be said that it's the norm for Continental motorhomes to offer good dining provision and these two are no exception.

These lounge/diners place eating provision above lounging comfort 'cause you'll all be outside, lounging in the sun or watching a superb sunset with a glass in hand, won't you?.

#### **COOK'S QUARTERS**

Both galleys offer much the same facilities, but in different ways. Three-burner hob, grill and fridge heat and cool your food in both 'vans, with the larger fridge in the Chausson taking honours. The McLouis hits back with a good slab of worktop to the right of its sink. Both kitchens have a good-sized drawer and two lockers above, while the amount of space

in lower cupboards is compromised by a rear wheelarch in the Chausson, and the hot water boiler in the McLouis. The McLouis sink and hob are pretty standard affairs - the hob with a traditional grill under a flap below the hob. Chausson offers a swish and sexy double-Dshaped hob/sink combo that looks great, but here, appears to be a bit of a space waster. The grill is a separate Smev unit with ignition and an internal light so you can see when the toast is done. Neither hob has electronic ignition: a cost saving exercise? Maybe those ever-smoking Continentals have always got a lighter to hand?

Both kitchens will do their jobs reasonably well and are typical of the Continental galley in a 'van of this size. Outdoor cooking beckons when bigger meals are on the menu.

#### **BATHING SPACE**

Crucial difference between washrooms is the fact that the Chausson features a separate



- 9 The kitchen's double-D hob/sink combo seems to rob space
- 10 The well-equipped washroom features a separate showering area
- 11 Lounge bed is only for good for short motorhomers

### **HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA**

#### **PRICE**

- From: £28,150 OTR. As tested: £32,322 OTR
- BASICS (\*manufacturer's figures)
- Berths: 6
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 2 years base vehicle and conversion, 5 years water ingress
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: GRP clad sandwich construction overcab coachbuilt
- Length: 6.24m (20ft 5.5in)\*
- Width: 2.28m (7ft 6in)\*
- Height: 2.93m (9ft 7.5in)
- Wheelbase: 3.75m (12ft 3.5in) Rear overhang: 1.73m (5ft 8in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg\*
- Payload: 612kg\* (after the vehicle in working order)

#### THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Ford Transit chassis cab
- Engine: 2.2-litre turbo-diesel producing
- Transmission: six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs with ABS all round
- Suspension: Front: Independent Rear: Rigid axle
- Features: Remote central locking, electric windows and mirrors, driver and passenger airbags, ESP, radio/CD player with steering column-mounted controls, cruise control, cab air-conditioning, trip computer, passenger door bin, dash-top storage compartments and flip-over table

#### **INSIDE**

- Layout: Overcab double bed ahead of Pullman dinette with side seat, offside kitchen, nearside washroom, across-therear bunks
- Insulation: Floor 30mm, walls 25mm, roof 30mm
- Interior height: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in)

#### KITCHEN

- Sink: Stainless steel unit as part of sink/hob combo, chrome swivelling mixer tap, removable plastic drainer, hinged glass lid
- Cooker: Three-burner hob as above (no ignition), Smev grill with ignition and interior light

#### CHAUSSON FLASH 03

Fridge: Dometic RM7401 three-way. Capacity 97 litres

#### WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette
- Basin: Circular unit set into vanity unit, swivelling chrome mixer tap
- Shower: Separate area with mixer tap, bracket-mounted shower head, nylon curtain, single-outlet trav

#### **REDS**

Overcab double

- **Length:** 2.17m (7ft 1.5in) ■ Width: 1.52m (5ft 0in)
- **Headroom:** 600mm (1ft 11.5in)

Lounge double

Length: 1.66m (5ft 5.5in) ■ Width: 1.30m (4ft 3in)

Both Bunks

Length: 2.13m (7ft 0in) ■ Width: 820mm (2ft 8.5in) max ■ **Headroom:** 750mm (2ft 5.5in)

#### **EQUIPMENT**

- Fresh water: Inboard 130 litres (26.6 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung. 100 litres 22 gallons)
- Water heater: Truma boiler, gas-only operation
- Space heater: Eberspacher Airtronic with blown-air, diesel-only operation
- Leisure battery: 100 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity 1x13kg cylinder
- Lighting: Filament lamps in overcab, kitchen and bunks, 2D fluorescent ceiling lamp and two adjustable halogen spots in lounge, two halogen downlighters in washroom
- Sockets: 230V: One (in kitchen). 12V: None fitted

#### **OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Air-conditioning, 140bhp engine and six-speed gearbox, Radio/CD player (£3172)
- Conversion: None fitted

Other options

- Base: Contact dealer for details
- Conversion: Contact dealer for details

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showering area. That's not to say you can't get a sluice down in the Mclouis - its mixer tap/ riser rail set-up is superior to the Chausson's showerhead on a bracket, but it lacks a separate area for the activity. Aside from that, both little rooms are similar, with ubiquitous Thetford, electric-flush loos and vanity basins. The McLouis' more plasticky unit is less attractive than the Chausson's solid-topped affair. The Chausson comes with lots of storage space and a full complement of accessories: three mirrors, two towel rails, robe hook, soap dish and toilet roll holder impress. Lighting and ventilation in here are better, as two halogen downlighters and a roof vent are better than the single filament lamp and no vent in the McLouis. Strangely, neither 'van has blind or flyscreen on the obscured windows. You can't see in, but I'd want to be able to open a window with flyscreen closed to let out steam without letting flying biters near my delicate flesh.

#### **BED TIME**

The size of overcab beds is crucial if they are to be effective and not just end up as storage areas for lightweight gear. They must to be spacious enough to be used without occupants feeling like Dracula after sun-up and well ventilated enough to stop them becoming stifling in hot weather.

Both overcab double beds here sport comfy mattresses and decent headroom. Windows on one side only will make for better bed-heads and, in hot weather, opening them and the Heki rooflights over the lounges should provide a stream of convected cooling fresh air at night. The Chausson scores here with a roof vent in the overcab area too.

Downstairs, the Chausson dinette is easy, in theory, to convert into a double bed. However, you must beware the fact that the mechanism that allows the table extension to 'pop up' for use - makes the table very heavy. So, remove the table and drop it down



#### **HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA**

#### **PRICE**

- From: £35,537 OTR ■ As tested: £38,278 OTR
- BASICS (\*manufacturer's figures)
- Berths: 5
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 2 years base vehicle, five years conversion and water incress
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: GRP clad sandwich construction coachbuilt
- Length: 5.99m (19ft 8in)\* ■ Width: 2.35m (7ft 8.5in)\* ■ Height: 3.05m (10ft 0in)\*
- Wheelbase: 3.40m (11ft 2in)
- Rear overhang: 1.50m (4ft 11in) ■ Maximum authorised weight: 3300kg\*
- Payload: 448kg\* (After the vehicle in working order, driver (75kg), full gas, fresh water, fuel)

#### THE VEHICLE

- Engine: 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 130bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Front: Independent Rear: Rigid axle
- Features: Remote central locking, electric windows and mirrors, driver and passenger airbags, ASR, cab air-conditioning, trip computer, central 'laptop' locker

- Layout: Overcab double bed and swivelling cab seats ahead of half-dinette, side seat, offside kitchen, nearside wardrobe and washroom, across-the-rear bunks
- Insulation: Floor 70mm, walls 33mm. roof 33mm
- Interior height: 2.01m (6ft 7in)

#### **KITCHEN**

- Sink: Circular stainless steel unit with chrome mixer tap, no drainer
- Cooker: Smev three-burner hob and grill with hinged glass lid, no ignition
- Fridge: Dometic RM4211 three-way. Capacity 60 litres

#### WASHROOM

■ Toilet: Thetford Swivel-bowl electric-flush cassette

#### **MCLOUIS LAGAN 202SE**

- Basin: Plastic bowl in vanity unit with swivelling chrome mixer tap
- Shower: Mixer tap, riser rail, shower head, nylon curtain on semicircular track, shower tray floor with one outlet

#### **BEDS**

Overcab double

- Length: 2.14m (7ft 0.5in) ■ Width: 1.52m (5ft 0in) Headroom: 660mm (2ft 2in)

Lounge single

Length: 2.20m (7ft 2.5in) **Width:** 745mm (2ft 5.5in)

Bunks both

Length: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in) ■ Width: 750mm (2ft 5.5in) ■ **Headroom:** 720mm (2ft 4.5in)

#### **EQUIPMENT**

- Fresh water: Inboard 110 litres (24.2 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Water heater: Truma boiler EL, gas-mains operation
- Space heater: Truma convector with blown-air, gas-only operation
- Leisure battery: 85 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity 2 x 7kg cylinders
- Lighting: All filament lamps: One in overcab bed, two in lounge, one in kitchen, one in washroom, one in each bunk
- Sockets: 230V: Three (in TV locker, kitchen, washroom upper locker). 12V: One (in TV locker)

#### OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: SE Pack consists of 130bhp engine upgrade (100bhp standard), six-speed gearbox, cab air-conditioning passenger airbag, painted front bumper (£2741)
- Conversion: None fitted

Other options

- Base: Alarm (£595), Airide suspension (£500), reversing sensors (£260), reversing camera (£595), towbar (£495), radio/CD player (£325)
- Conversion: outside gas point (£130). roof rack (£150), Status TV aerial (£225), air-conditioning (£1800), wind-out awning (£495)

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- 12 The kitchen has more worktop, but a smaller fridge
- 13 No separate shower, but the washroom's a capable space
- 14 There's a single bed available in the lounge, but it impedes the overcab access ladder







15 Overcab berth has all-important ventilation above 16 Bunks narrow at the foot

17 The garage is spacious, but has only one door



to bridge the gap between the seats. Next, pull out side supports and drop in the long infill that stores along the dinette's wall side.

Drop in the backrests and add another infill along the wall to complete the bed. As is usual with this type of berth, extending the dinette's width prevents the use of the overcab access ladder. Better to use this bed un-extended, as a generous single, then there'll be room for the ladder. Don't be too tall though, as this bed is only five-foot-five and a bit long.

The McLouis has more modest aspirations downstairs, offering a transverse single bed in the lounge that makes this 'van a five berth. Here, the much lighter table drops on a clever double hinge to fill the space in front of the dinette seat. The inward-facing seat opposite completes the bed. Again, once this bed is made the overcab ladder is put out of use.

The bunks will be the main reason to buy either of these motorhomes and both offer good examples of the breed. The McLouis scores with bunks that are full-width for the full lengths. In the Chausson, the washroom eats into the bunks' foot. Commendably, the Chausson gives each bunk sleeper a window, in the McLouis, only the downstairs occupant gets a view out. Roof vents above in both 'vans will be welcome, if not essential, in hot weather.

#### **STORE ROOM**

Just as the bunks are the reason to buy, the fact that the spaces they occupy convert into compact garage spaces will influence that allimportant purchasing decision. Families, and especially kids, will want to cart all manner of stuff with them on holiday - bikes, inflatable, or folding boats - maybe even the odd surfboard will need to be transported. The garages are both created in much the same way as bottom bunks lift, leaving a tall, narrow space with plenty of room for things such as bikes. The McLouis scores points with an access door either side, and its bunk lifts in one go, suspended by dog lead-type clips. However, the bunk folds, incompletely, to the rear, taking space in the garage's cavity. In the Chausson, the bunk's front section folds forward and flush, held in place by a neat cabinet bolt. However, the base is split into two halves and with only one access door, an expedition into the interior is needed to lift the other half.

Inside storage is remarkably similar, with a trio of overhead lockers in the lounge and large wardrobes that, if these 'vans were mine, would be shelved-out; all the better to store a family's-worth of holiday clothes. Underseat storage is also available in both lounges - something that's very useful for all those bits and bobs - such as tools - that you rarely use but would not travel without.

#### **LIFE SUPPORT**

Classic Continental plumbing, here, is right on the money. Big inboard freshwater tanks are, as expected, mounted under forward-facing dinette seats. Waste tanks are both underslung at the rear and have blade-type dump valves that work so well - emptying the contents in double-quick time when you pull a handle. Bear in mind though, that if you own Chausson or McLouis, you'll have to grovel underneath to reach 'em.

Lighting is very definitely in the budget category with no reading spots in the McLouis' lounge and cheap-looking lamps elsewhere. The Chausson scores higher here, with a couple of decent quality halogen spots over the table, plus the aforementioned halogen

downlighters in the washroom. It's not worth worrying about this too much though, as lighting is probably one of the easiest and cheapest things to upgrade.

Water heating is courtesy of Truma boilers - the McLouis winning by a head with gas and mains power for its unit. Space heating sees each 'van take an entirely different route; one conventional, one more cutting edge. Traditional, but very effective, the McLouis' Truma gas-powered convector produces near-silent warmth that does little to deplete the leisure battery. In addition, it has blown-air heat distribution to warm other areas of the 'van, including the washroom. In the Chausson, an Eberspacher diesel-fired blown-air heater draws fuel from the vehicle's tank to warm the interior. The advantage here is that as long as you have plenty of fuel in the tank, you can stay warm: no fear of running out of gas is the result. The unit worked well, but produced an unexpected amount of noise inside, growling as it made hot air. I must admit, I suspected that the fitted unit may have been faulty - these heaters have a reputation for sounding noisy from outside the 'van, not so much inside. Even so, bear in mind that any adjacent tent campers may be disturbed by the Eberspacher's vocals.

Last, but not least, is he fact that both 'vans have simple control panels - the kind you can operate without recourse to a 300-page instruction manual.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Could these motorhomes - compact as they are - provide decent family accommodation? The answer is yes, but although they boast more, they're both best used as four berths. Also, be prepared to travel light, clothes and food-wise. Shelved wardrobes will help, while the McLouis' 60-litre fridge will see you shopping for fresh food more often. Lounging and dining are on a par, as are the beds, but the Chausson's washroom boasts the separate shower that'll be spot on for sprog-sluicing. Of course this facility is paid for - in part - by the Chausson's extra length. Use campsite facilities and buy the McLouis - a 'van that steps neatly under the six-metre mark to maybe fit your tight driveway and save money on many ferry crossings.

Base vehicles are both very good - my penchant for the Transit is based as much on its reputation for cheap, easy running costs ,as its new powerful motor and gearbox. The McLouis' Fiat cab matches the Ford, comfort and ergonomics-wise.

Finally, we come to price. The McLouis Lagan 202 - in SE guise - will remove just over £38k from your wallet. The Chausson Flash 03 - as-tested - costs nearly six thousand pounds less; something that's difficult to ignore.

## **VEHICLES LOANED FOR**

#### **EVALUATION BY:**

Chausson Flash 03:

Midland International Motorhomes, Wall Hill Road, Allesley, Coventry CV5 9EL (tel: 024 7633 6411; web sites: www.midland-international.co.uk;

www.chausson.tm.fr)

McLouis Lagan 202:
McLouis Motorhomes, PO Box 9,
Egginton Road, Hilton, Derby DE65 5FJ
(tel: 01283 732193; web site:
www.mclouismotorhomes.co.uk)







- 18 The overcah hed has no dedicated roof vent
- 19 The garage features a door on both sides
- 20 The bunks are full-width for the whole of their length

