

ADRIA 3-WAY SPACE



Words & pictures by Dave Hurrell

BASE CAMPERS

Two classic rising roof campers have very different base vehicles and individual characteristics

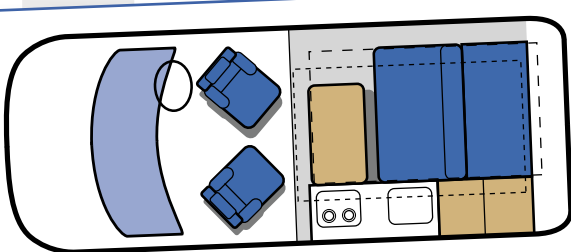


Notionally, and in reality, the world of rising roof campers is dominated by the Volkswagen. From 1960s splitties to the latest T5, the Volkswagen camper remains an icon. So what about alternatives, and why would you want one?

Well, for starters, price. The T5 is not a cheap vehicle and a good quality conversion

with the right motor, gearbox and extras can easily break the £40k price barrier: especially when the Euro/Sterling exchange rate (dreadful at the time of writing) is factored into the equation.

The T5 is arguably one of the best-engineered light commercial vehicles on the road, but once behind the wheel, some folks find that it's van-like (more upright) driving position doesn't suit them. This can be even



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 4.78m (15ft 8in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 1.90m (6ft 3in)

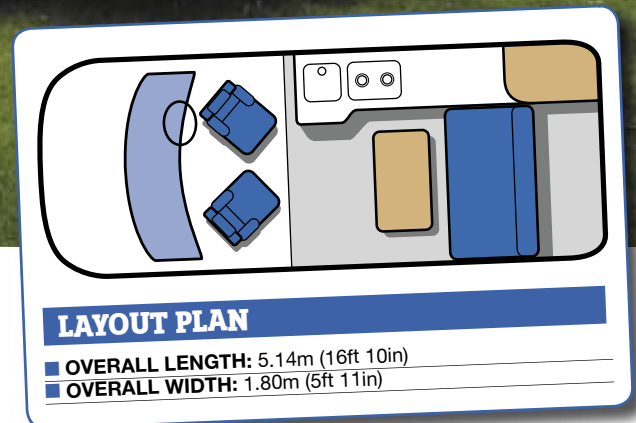


1 3-Way's Traffic cab is more van-like than its rival's, but still very comfortable

2 Scudo cab is the more car-like

1

AUTOCRUISE PULSE



more important when you consider that a rising roof camper is the perfect candidate to become an everyday/sole vehicle.

Enter this month's protagonists - one from Slovenia, and one from dear old Blighty. Slovenian Adria started producing caravans in 1965, eventually gaining a reputation in Britain for value-for-money models. Latterly, its motorhomes, and in this context, panel van conversions that have made Adria a force to

be reckoned with. Adria's fixed-bed Twin model is a modern icon in terms of its design and offers one of the most popular layouts in Europe (so much so that many other converters have borrowed the concept). Thus, we can say that Adria knows a thing or two about van conversions, but what about Autocruise, the producer of this month's British offering? Well, there is

campervan heritage buried deep in the history of Autocruise but it's only recently that the company, in its current guise, has started producing panel van conversions alongside its respected range of coachbuilts. This situation has arisen, partly because of an increase in the popularity of van conversions, and partly thanks to the impetuosity of Autocruise's current owners - the Swift Group. Both the Adria 3-Way Space and Autocruise Pulse are in the classic camper mould - that is (like many a VW conversion) they arrange their furniture down one side, with a forward-facing bench seat filling the rest of the interior. The 'furniture' contains kitchen equipment and storage spaces in both cases, while the rear seat offers three-point belts and folds flat, helping to create a double bed.

MOTIVE POWER

It's France versus Italy in the base vehicle stakes, as Adria's Renault Trafic (actually built in Luton, Bedfordshire) takes on the latest Fiat Scudo (funnily-enough, built at the Sevel Nord plant in Valenciennes, France).

A first look tells the viewer a lot about each, as the Renault looks chunkier and more upright, but still very stylish. This van was pretty radical when it was launched and was one of the first to feature the high-set, sloping



On Test Adria 3-Way Space & Autocruise Pulse



ADRIA 3-WAY SPACE

I LIKED

- Stylish looks
- Comfortable cab
- Good performance
- Wider interior
- Three rear seatbelts
- Fully covered kitchen
- Standard roof bed
- Wide beds
- Inboard fresh water tank

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Space heating
- A grill
- More storage space in kitchen
- Flyscreens

I DISLIKED

- Table stowage location



3 Swivelling cab seats are easy to turn

4 The rear sliding seats provides no less than three belted seats

5 A hinged cover conceals the kitchen appliances and improves the lounge. The table is plenty big enough for four

headlights that are now commonplace. The Scudo is more sleek-looking, and a newer design, but one with a more mainstream and conservative character.

At the rear, the Autocruise is unusual (for a camper) in sporting side-hinged doors. The Adria offers a more conventional tailgate, complete with heating and wash/wipe.

Under the Adria and Autocruise bonnets, two-litre four-cylinder motors produce 115 and 120 horsepower respectively. Both have six-speed gearboxes (with dash-mounted levers) driving the front wheels. Both vans ride on all round coil springs - the rear of the Autocruise provides an independent-on-trailing-arms setup that's more car-like than the Adria's 'Bob-the-Builder' rigid axle. Finally, the Adria came adorned with side bars that look great and a bull bar that looked very nice too: however, I wonder if the bar is legal in the UK, and I'm fairly certain it's not a good idea - as these things are documented as being the cause of injuries to pedestrians struck in accidents. Modern vehicle noses are designed to reduce the injury caused to pedestrians - adding a bull bar negates the effect.

ROAD MANNERS

Cabs are easy to gain and both are well equipped as standard, although things such as air-conditioning come courtesy of extra cost options in both. The Adria cockpit does look plainer than the Autocruise (even ignoring its rival's slab of 'wood' trim). The big difference here is the driving position - if you hanker after a camper that makes you feel that you're driving a car, then the Autocruise's Scudo should please you. That's not to say that the Adria's Traffic driving department is poor - far from it. Although the cab environment is far more 'van' than its rival, its driving position is very comfortable and, for my frame, even better than the benchmark VW T5.

On the road, performance in both is good, although the Scudo seemed slightly sluggish, in spite of boasting five more horsepower than its rival. The Traffic, as ever, (I've driven plenty of these) is very willing and free-revving, although I was - yet again - caught out by its rev limiter which denies you any more power at just over 4000rpm in every gear. High gearing in both vehicles makes legal limit cruising a nice experience, while brakes, steering and gearchange are equally good. Interior views to the rear are both impeded by the head

restraints fitted to the rear seats, but these could be removed if nobody was using them en route. Rear view in the Autocruise is further impeded by the vehicle's barn doors, which have two windows separated by a central pillar. Both rear seats have three-point belts fitted - something that helps make either of these motorcaravans very suitable as everyday vehicles. Adria owners get an additional bonus, as there are no less than three full belts here (the Autocruise has two): those with three offspring take note. It's also worth noting that - unlike the Autocruise - the Adria's sliding side door is on the UK offside: normal on-street parking will see rear passengers exiting into the road.

There was almost no conversion noise in the Adria - a testament to its good design and excellent build quality. The test Autocruise was not quite so silent when in motion: its panel van roots (the Adria has factory-fitted side and rear single-glazing) mean that it's fitted with plastic double-glazed windows and (very nice) pleated cassette blind/flyscreens. Unfortunately, the unit fitted to the side sliding door rattled awfully over any ripple in the road - so much so, that I wondered if the test 'van may have had a badly adjusted door lock.

Finally, when the time comes to grab a parking space, both 'vans will fit a standard bay easily. The Autocruise is a touch longer than its rival, but 100mm (four inches) narrower, making things a tad easier.

LOUNGE AND DINE

The classic camper designs found in both 'vans easily produce lounges with the potential to put even larger motorcaravans to shame. It's the work of moments to release the buckles holding the - almost identical - rising roofs down and a sharp shove sees both elevate to provide lots of headroom. Both have ventilators (with fly-nets and zipped covers) in their canvas sides and a big zip-open panel in the front which allows fresh air and light in. It's also the work of moments (a few less in the wider Adria) to swivel the cab seats, which help create a spacious, convivial relaxing space that's spot-on for four people. A couple of downsides are found in the Autocruise, where the cab seats come quite low to the living area floor, while the deeper furniture unit impedes the swivelled driver's seat a touch.

Both 'vans feature tinted windows, but it's the very dark tint of the (flush fitting) plastic outer skins of the Autocruise that help make its interior gloomy. The rather grey interior

AUTOCRUISE PULSE



6 Pulse features deeper cabinets

7 Rear seat is narrower with two belted seats

8 The small table works well, even when in lounge mode, the second, larger table is less successful

I LIKED

- Stylish good looks
- Car-like to drive and park
- Well-equipped kitchen
- Lots of storage spaces
- Double-glazed windows
- Cassette blinds/flyscreens
- Space heater

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Better-designed large table
- Roof bed as standard

I DISLIKED

- Large table's stowage location
- Dark-tinted windows
- On-road noise from sliding door

On Test Adria 3-Way Space & Autocruise Pulse



doesn't help either. Although cream-coloured furniture relieves it a touch, with the roof panels zipped shut things are even darker. I photographed the Autocruise on a brilliantly sunny day, but it was still quite dim inside. I'm told that clear flexible plastic is to be fitted in the rising roof windows to improve things - I'd much rather the dark tint on the side windows be got rid of.

The furniture in the Adria sports a big lid that completely covers the kitchen area - something that presents a neat and usable surface when the area is in lounging mode. The Autocruise sink and hob sport hinged glass lids that create much the same effect but with a, to my eye at least, less harmonious look.

Mealtimes see two different approaches to providing eating surface. The Adria goes the more conventional route, with a table that's rail-hung on the kitchen unit. It's stored under the rear parcel shelf/bed section, so extracting it involves going outside: approaching through the tailgate you must lift the shelf to extract the table. If you've kit stashed on the shelf, this will be even more awkward. Once in place the table works very well and is plenty big enough for four to dine at. Indeed, its generous size is also a bit of a drawback, as it looms large in the living area of this compact camper. A smaller table with an easier-to-get-at stowage place would be better: this would be my first DIY job were I to become an Adria 3-Way owner.

The Autocruise provides two tables, one large, one small. The small one is conveniently located at the forward end of the furniture unit, mounting on a cranked leg to serve the swivelled passenger seat. The second is stored in the same awkward place as the Adria's, emerging to mount on a second cranked leg attached to the front of the bench seat. Table number one worked fine, but only serves one person. Table two proved too big and heavy for its mounting, sagging unconvincingly. A smaller table on a pedestal/floor socket mount would seem to be the answer: Autocruise is looking into the problem.

COOK'S QUARTERS

9 Compact kitchen is a sensible proposition, but has no grill

10 3-Way's downstairs bed is much wider than its rival's

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

ADRIA 3-WAY SPACE

PRICE (Note: prices may change according to exchange rate fluctuations)

- **From:** £30,087 OTR
- **As tested:** £33,404 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- **Berths:** 4
- **Three-point belted seats:** 5 (including driver)
- **Warranty:** 2 years base vehicle and conversion
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes
- **Construction:** All-steel body, factory fitted windows, GRP rising roof with canvas sides
- **Length:** 4.78m (15ft 8in)*
- **Width:** 1.90m (6ft 3in)*
- **Height:** 1.99m (6ft 6.5in)*
- **Wheelbase:** 3.09m (10ft 1.5in)*
- **Rear overhang:** 800mm (2ft 7.5in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 2770kg
- **Payload:** 560kg (after the vehicle in working order)

THE VEHICLE

- **Chassis:** Renault Trafic SWB window van
- **Engine:** 2.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 115bhp
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round
- **Suspension:** Front: Independent with coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on coil springs
- **Features:** Electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking, driver and passenger airbags, radio/CD player with steering column-mounted controls, rear wash/wipe heated rear window, door bins, cab air-conditioning, two parcel shelves, height-adjustable cab seats, reach-adjustable steering wheel

INSIDE

- **Layout:** Swivelling cab seats, nearside kitchen ahead of storage cabinets, sliding bench seat. Side sliding door on UK offside
- **Insulation:** N/A
- **Interior height roof raised:** 2.22m (7ft 3.5in) max; at centre of living area: 1.89m (6ft 2.5in)

KITCHEN

- **Sink:** Rectangular stainless steel bowl with chromed plastic mixer tap, no drainer
- **Cooker:** Smev two-burner hob with folding alloy heat shield, no ignition.
- **Fridge:** Waeco Coolmatic 12V compressor type with freezer compartment. Capacity 40 litres

WASHROOM

- **Toilet:** None fitted
- **Basin:** None fitted
- **Shower:** None fitted

BEDS

In-roof double

- **Length:** 1.91m (6ft 3in)
- **Width:** 1.32m (4ft 4in)
- **Headroom:** 780mm (2ft 7in) at head

Lounge double

- **Length:** 1.93m (6ft 4in)
- **Width:** 1.28m (4ft 0in) max

EQUIPMENT

- **Fresh water tank:** Inboard 40 litres (8.8 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** Underslung 40 litres (8.8 gallons)
- **Water heater:** None fitted
- **Space heater:** None fitted
- **Leisure battery:** 90 amp hr
- **Gas:** 1 x 7kg cylinder
- **Lighting:** Two Halogen spotlights in kitchen, one above side sliding door, Stalk-mounted reading light at rear, filament light on rising roof
- **Sockets:** 230V: 1 (in kitchen). 12V: 1 (in cab)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** Coloured bumpers (£538), metallic paint (£1165), passenger airbag (£429), air-conditioning (£1185),

■ **Conversion:** None

Other options

- **Base:** Satnav with air-conditioning (£3122), 150bhp engine (£2487), auto transmission (£1615), heated windscreen (£312), towbar (£807)

■ **Conversion:** None

E&OE



HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

AUTOCRUISE PULSE

PRICE

- **From:** £31,235 OTR
- **As tested:** £32,795 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- **Berths:** 2
- **Three-point belted seats:** 4 (including driver)
- **Warranty:** 3 years base vehicle and conversion
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes
- **Construction:** All-steel body, GRP rising roof with canvas sides
- **Length:** 5.14m (16ft 10in)*
- **Width:** 1.80m (5ft 11in)*
- **Height:** 1.96m (6ft 5in)*
- **Wheelbase:** 3.12m (10ft 3in)*
- **Rear overhang:** 960mm (3ft 2in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 2932kg
- **Payload:** 551kg

THE VEHICLE

- **Chassis:** Fiat Scudo panel van
- **Engine:** 2.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 120bhp
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round
- **Suspension:** Independent all round with coil springs
- **Features:** Driver and passenger airbags, Electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking, adjustable steering column, cruise control, cab air-conditioning, cup holders, Radio/CD player with separate display and steering column-mounted controls, lockable glove compartment, reversing sensors

INSIDE

- **Layout:** Swivelling cab seats, offside kitchen and wardrobe, sliding bench seat. Side sliding door on UK nearside
- **Insulation:** Thinsulate all round
- **Interior height roof raised:** 2.45m (8ft 0.5in) max; at centre of living area: 2.09m (6ft 10in)

KITCHEN

- **Sink:** Rectangular stainless steel bowl with glass lid, folding plastic mixer tap, no drainer
- **Cooker:** Smev two-burner hob, grill, both with push-button ignition

- **Fridge:** Waeco Coolmatic 12V compressor type with freezer compartment. Capacity 80 litres

WASHROOM

- **Toilet:** None fitted
- **Basin:** None fitted
- **Shower:** None fitted

BED

- **Lounge double**
- **Length:** 1.98m (6ft 6in)
- **Width:** 1.08m (3ft 6.5in) max

EQUIPMENT

- **Fresh water tank:** Underslung, 30 litres (6.6 gallons)
- **Waste water tank:** Underslung, 26 litres (5.7 gallons)
- **Water heater:** None fitted
- **Space heater:** Webasto Airtop with blown-air, diesel-only operation
- **Leisure battery:** 110 amp hr
- **Gas:** 2 x 4.5kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** 4 cold cathode fluorescent strip lamps, 2 in kitchen, lounge, and at rear
- **Sockets:** 230V: 1 (in kitchen). 12V: 1 (in kitchen)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- **Fitted to test vehicle**
- **Base:** Prestige Pack - coloured bumpers, electrically-folding mirrors, air-conditioning, cruise control, alarm and deadlocks, rear parking sensors, front fog lights (£1560)
- **Conversion:** None
- **Other options**
- **Base:** None
- **Conversion:** Double roof bed (£440)

E&OE

Classic camper layout kitchens are best used sitting down and these two are no exception. The Autocruise is the more conventional in mainstream motorcaravan terms, as its larger sink and (two-burner) hob benefit from hinged glass lids that also form splash-backs when raised. The fridge is a 12V compressor model, like its rival, but bigger, while the grill is a welcome feature not found in the Adria's galley. Adria has a just a two-burner hob - a surface-mounted device that features a rather dodgy-looking folding alloy heat shield. The Autocruise kitchen also wins the space race, providing more cupboards and a handy bottle store: the Adria places both the gas locker and the inboard water tank within the main kitchen unit, so storage space here is compromised. Both 'vans have a good slab of worktop that could put many a larger motorhome to shame.

It's no surprise to find that neither of these compact campers has space for a washroom, and indeed not even a mini Porta Potti toilet is provided for use in the living area. With only pumped cold water supplied, it's kettle and sink for washing too. Of course these campers will spend most of their time on sites with full facilities, but a little portable loo (Theford, Dometic and Fiamma all produce them for around 70 quid) could be carried in the rear for 'emergency' use.

BEDTIME

The Adria scores points come bedtime, as it provides a roof bed in standard form (from the options list, Autocruise will relieve you of £440 to provide same). This near domestic-sized double descends on gas struts to provide an excellent sleeping surface for two adults - its six-foot-three length giving it good credibility as a 'proper' double bed. A deal of agility is need to gain the bed - hopping up from the cab seats sees you installed in a space with plenty of room and ventilation. Do bear in mind though, that the roof's canvas sides make this more of a summer bedroom. Indeed, hot weather could see couples more comfortable sleeping one up, one down, while the roof bed makes this 'van suitable for camping friends.

11 Well-equipped kitchen has a larger fridge and a grill

12 Narrower seat means a narrower bed

On Test Adria 3-Way Space & Autocruise Pulse



Downstairs, the rear bench does its rock-and-roll trick (once the three head restraints have been removed and stashed in the cab, the seat squab flips over forwards and backrest hinges forwards to fill the gap), combining with the rear parcel shelf section to form a long and wide double bed that's also very comfortable. Downsides include the fact that it's now not possible to open the fridge (so you can't get at the milk for that in-bed morning cuppa) and there's not enough floor space to stand a Porta Potti to use in the night.

Bedtime in the Autocruise sees the downstairs double deployed in the same way as its rival. Here, the bed is longer, but quite narrow. You can't open the fridge either, but there should be floor space enough left to stand a portable loo. The optional roof bed (not fitted to the test vehicle) is also smaller than its rival's.

STORE ROOM

One of the advantages of the classic camper layout is that it offers lots of storage space in a compact vehicle. In both 'vans this feature is enhanced by the fact that the rear bench seats are mounted on rails set into the floor and the rear bed/parcel shelf sections fold up. This allows the whole to slide forward and back increasing load space upfront, or in the rear. With the seats slid forward, space in the rear is big enough for bulky outdoor kit - bikes etc, while the seats' proximity to the cab creates a more intimate car-like environment for passengers. The aft end of the Autocruise is home to a large wardrobe. With end-to-end hanging rail and two doors (tambour at the front, hinged at the rear). The Adria provides a pair of tambour-doored lockers that can supplement kitchen storage and take folded clothes. Owners of both these 'vans should be prepared to store some clothing in a bag or two on the rear bed (parcel shelf) section, where there's also plenty of room for bedding. With the shelf deployed there's also a nice large space beneath, where a decent amount of your more solid kit can live. Finally, each 'van has a decent-sized drawer that emerges from the bench seat's base. Canny owners will make the most of the various shelves and compartments in both cabs for first aid kit, warning triangle high-vis' waistcoat and the like.



13 In the rear, 'boot' storage works well

14 Drawer storage under the seat is a useful addition

15 With shelf folded up and seat slid forward, a large load area is created. Slid-forward seat gives a car-like travelling space

16 Charger, mains unit and leisure battery are neatly tucked away in the rear



LIFE SUPPORT

The Autocruise provides upmarket life support systems that start with neat flush-mounted fluorescent lamps that look very stylish and work well - consuming a small amount of electricity. The control panel is also a good quality unit, using pushbuttons and LEDs in a simple, but effective manner. Nearby, is the manual control for the diesel-fired blown-air heating system provided by Webasto. The heater unit is mounted under the cab passenger seat and delivered plenty of heat, warming up in only a couple of minutes (I tested this on a dull, but hot and humid day, while suffering from hay fever: everybody say ahhh!). Do bear in mind though, that if you pitch next to people in tents, the noise of this heater may cause a disturbance. The Autocruise fresh water tank is underslung, so winter supplies of H₂O will be thanks to a water porter carried inside in the warm. Of course, with no water heater or washroom fitted, filling the kettle and sink from a container should present few practical problems.

It's somewhat ironic that the Adria's fresh

tank is inboard mounted, but the 'van has no space heating fitted - winter camping here will probably involve mains hook-up and a fan heater to keep the interior toasty. Lighting in the Adria is mainly by halogen spots, with downlighters up front. A handy stalk-mounted reading light is located in the far rear that becomes the head of the bed. In the rising roof, a standard filament lamp illuminates the upstairs bed area.

As previously mentioned the Autocruise is a panel van with living area windows fitted during the conversion process. This gives several advantages, including the fact that they are double-glazed and here fitted with top-notch pleated cassette blind/flyscreen units. The Adria sports neater single-glazed, factory-fitted windows, while Adria added rather clever plastic-sealed sliver nylon curtains that were easy to use and seemed as though they might be good insulators and reflectors of outside heat in hot weather. Bear in mind though, that there are no flyscreens fitted other than those in the ventilation panels in the rising roof's sides. If I owned the Adria, I'd try and have a removable flyscreen made for one of the side windows: during hot nights, though ventilation is very desirable, you do need to exclude biting insects.

CONCLUSION

Both these campers are viable alternatives to the ubiquitous Volkswagen T5 each offering a more car-like driving experience than the Veedub. The Adria's Renault Trafic is stylish on the outside and comfortable inside, but less sophisticated than the Autocruise's Scudo. The Scudo is also the most car-like, and being narrower, should be easier to park. Mainly because of its narrower downstairs bed, the Autocruise should suit slimmer folks, while opting for the roof bed will add versatility. Overall, the Autocruise has a better kitchen and more storage room, paid for by the deeper furniture unit that reduces interior space. The biggest faults with this 'van were the unconvincing large dining table and the loud rattles from the side sliding door when on the road. The Adria's more van-like character also provides a wider bed and those three rear seatbelts, but the offside sliding door could be a problem when used as an everyday vehicle - the school run for instance.

I liked both these little campers, but I did not like the Autocruise's very dark interior. Lastly, we come to price: the difference between the two is quite small with extras (including the roof bed not fitted to the test Autocruise) added. ■

AUTOCRUISE PULSE



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17 Twin doors give access to the rear load area

18 Like its rival, Pulse offers a large loading space with the rear seat slid right forward, although deeper fridge cabinet dictates the seat's forward stopping place

19 There's an impressive amount of storage space in the furniture unit, including a dual-access wardrobe and bottle store

20 A more sophisticated control panel, and diesel-fired space heating gains marks



20



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