

TOY TOWN TOURER

CityVan CV57P on 2.3-litre Fiat Ducato

This car park-friendly French A-class offers an easy drive and two instantly available double beds



I'm not sure, but I've a pretty good idea that the French designers of CityVan have never seen Postman Pat. Or maybe they have, and that's the reason that this toy-townesque motorhome isn't available in red. Give it a coat of postbox paint and you might indeed, expect to see Pat and faithful cat, Jess installed in the cab, motorhomers at last! Seriously though, this diminutive A-class' looks are both unique and - to my eye - a real love-it-or-hate-it proposition.

Having first clapped eyes on CityVan at a previous NEC show, I was puzzled by both its looks and colour: functional looks are one thing, but functional and grey too? Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and having driven and lived in this example, I have to say I've warmed to its charms, even though I still wish it could be had with a more cheerful external hue.

CityVan is the brainchild of the Pilote Group, a very experienced outfit with a wealth of experience building A-class motorhomes in France and Germany. The marque aims to bring truly compact motorcaravanning to the A-class type and indeed, no CityVan is over six metres long and all are not much over two metres wide. There are six models in the range, offering a variety of fixed bed layouts: twin singles, longitudinal and transverse doubles and bunks are all on offer. There's also a front lounge, rear kitchen layout that makes into a transverse double bed. In addition, and in classic A-class style, drop-down in-cab beds

provide a lengthways double: for 2009 this is an optional extra.

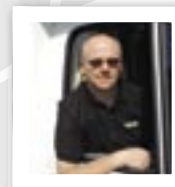
And so to the subject of this residential recording: the CV57P. This CityVan is only 5.68 metres (18ft 7.5in) long, while the 2.05-metre (6ft 8.5in) width is the same as a Fiat Ducato panel van, helping it slide into a standard parking space with reasonable ease. Interior design is dominated by the reason-to-buy, lengthways, double bed in the nearside rear. Forward of this is an offside kitchen, with seatbelt-equipped half-dinette opposite. The washroom stands in the classic position, for a layout of this design, in the rear offside corner and next to the bed.

GREY VAN MAN

A good A-class cab does something to me - something good: it puts me very much in holiday mood. Sitting in a cab seat you're surrounded by the maker's idea of a leisure vehicle, rather than an environment normally enjoyed by that mythical creature white van man. Also, the panoramic view through the big windscreen simply invites you to drive off into the sunrise.

That said, there are A-classes both good and bad - I've experienced some that have made me feel I'm about to go delivering loaves or parcels! Having loaded my little collection of motorhoming kit onboard, I settled myself in this cab to discover that the fitted captain's seats were rather firm to my frame. Even so, I felt a slow grin spread across my face as that holiday feeling kicked in.

Yep, the CityVan cab is a very nice place to be, that good A-class character is very much



Words & pictures by Dave Hurrell



AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £41,007 OTR
- **BERTHS:** 4
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Fiat Ducato Camper chassis cowl
- **LAYOUT:** Drop-down double bed and swivelling cab seats ahead of nearside half-dinette, wardrobe and lengthways fixed double bed, offside kitchen, caravan door, storage cupboard, washroom
- **ECONOMY:** 25.6mpg

1 *The compact A-class cab features rather firm captain's seats*

2 *Passenger side cab door gives safe access to the UK kerbside*



present - shame I wasn't off to Dover!

Fiat's lower-slung Camper chassis underpins this 'van, offering a wider rear axle into the bargain. Under the bonnet lurked the 130 horsepower engine and six-speed gearbox combo that's an optional extra - 100 horses and five speeds are standard fare. The dash is provided by Fiat, while the optional Comfort Pack adds air-conditioning to its armoury. No stereo is present, but that just gives you the chance to fit your own favourite. Bear in mind the huge selection of different types on offer these days, and with a double-height slot in the dash, you can choose a head unit with a large screen that will let you view DVDs, satnav and the output from a reversing camera.

Around the cab, the CityVan-added mouldings that bridge the gap between dash and body looked well executed, although a few exposed screw heads let things down a touch. Outside, big electric mirrors gave a good view aft, but the nearside one is slightly obscured by the adjacent screen pillar. Also, with no internal view to the rear, I'd consider having that reversing camera installed. Finally,



the optional cab passenger door is an extra worth paying for as it gives access to the kerbside when parked in the street. Omit it and you have exit through the UK offside-located caravan door.

STREETWISE

Hitting the tarmac, the overriding impression was of a light vehicle - the 130 horsepower engine accelerating smartly and propelling the CityVan with ease, up to and beyond the legal limit. Gear ratios proved perfectly judged with a ratio for every occasion. Visibility proved very good too and I didn't really notice any lack imposed by the non-standard windscreen pillars.

Noise-wise, the conversion remained reasonably hushed for an A-class (less good examples of the type can be very creaky-squeaky), with a little noise coming from the A-class bed above the cab. I was pleased to discover that - unlike some Continental A-class 'vans - the windscreen wipers (fitted by the converter) are handed for right-hand drive - thus the swept area of the screen gives the driver the best view. I really liked driving this little motorhome and as a fan of

compact 'vans, I appreciated the CityVan's ability to travel in town with ease. Even a local supermarket car park was tackled without my blood pressure going up too much.

CITY LIFE

The functional-looking exterior is matched by an equally utilitarian interior, which, nevertheless, looks quite stylish. The utilitarian aspect is demonstrated by furniture that exhibits no expensive curves, while style takes the form of sexier silver door and drawer fronts with nice silver handles. Above, a big Heki rooflight comes from the options list (part of the Comfort Pack), but it's well worth paying for, as it adds lots of natural light and provides essential hot-weather ventilation for lounge, kitchen and A-class bed.

With a space-eating lengthways fixed bed in its rear, there's no room for palatial lounging space in this little motorhome and it's here that the wide-and-square A-class cab does well, making the most of the front end space with cab seats swivelled. Indeed, it's the cab seats that are the best in the house, as the half-dinette's forward-facing seat is a tad

narrow and very upright.

Directly opposite this setup is the kitchen, so seating for four is the maximum available. As with many Continental 'vans, this one suits a lifestyle that sees owners stretched-out relaxing outside as much as possible. The cab passenger seat and dinette pew



On Test CityVan CV57P

3 Cab seats turn to face a half-dinette and compact galley

4 To the rear, the fixed double bed stands next to the washroom. Light, bright interior is, in part, thanks to the optional Heki rooflight

5 Bijou kitchen includes four burners, but a small fridge

6 With a narrow forward-facing seat, the cab seats are the best seats in the house. Mealtimes can see an extension expand the small table

provide a cosy dinette for two, while a slot-in table extension allows a diner to eat from the swivelled driver's seat. Once the person is seated, they can retrieve the extension, from its home attached to the front of the kitchen unit, and slot it in. However, once the extension is fitted, both cab seat occupiers are trapped and must wait to be served.

Another constraint of this area is the A-class bed, which looms quite large and low above. Even so, I found that it didn't get in the way once I was sitting down. However, when entering the lounge I did find that it was quite easy to bash my napper on the bed's leading edge. Bear in mind that the maximum headroom here is just five feet eight inches. The same was true when using the kitchen - methinks a bit of applied padding would be a capital idea.

COMPACT CUISINE

Bijou best describes a kitchen that, even so, packs a lot into a very small space. Best feature here by far, is the stack of drawers



that forms the lion's share of the galley's storage space. Deep and easy to use, the drawers will take all manner of kitchen kit and food. The only other space is found in the single - unshelved - locker above, so its partner opposite (above the table) will probably end up doing kitchen duty. Cooking is taken care of by a four-burner hob with grill below, nicely equipped with the all-round electronic ignition that's still rarely found on Continental 'van hobs.

Below is the fridge, which is a bit of a disappointment, thanks to the fact that its rather old fashioned-looking visage hides just 60 litres of cooling space. However (after delving into the CityVan brochure),

it seems that the Brit-pleasing cooker is the culprit. We get a grill but it robs fridge space: the Continental standard item offers 97 litres.

And so I move to the sink: this is located on the forward end of the kitchen unit (I've just bashed my head on the bed base again), where it's partnered with a stylish (plastic) mixer tap, but no drainer. As the cooker's hinged glass lid is the only worktop on offer a sink cover/chopping board would be a good idea, but one was not present. I think one is available for this unit and it may simply have been missing from the test 'van, while the no-drainer problem can easily be solved by placing a tray on the cooker top.

CITY BATHS

The washroom is long and narrow, its shape being dictated by the amount of space alongside the rear double bed. It's here that designers have to juggle dimensions - needing to provide a wide enough bed *and* a washroom that has enough room to use it easily. The bed is, at its maximum, near domestic-sized in width, so the ablution space is a touch tighter than is usual, thanks to the fact that this motorhome is slimmer than the norm.

Starting in the far rear, there's a Thetford C250 loo that sports electric flushing and a handy wheeled cassette for easy trips to the dump point. The centre ground is dominated by an oval plastic vanity basin set into a wall-hung (tambour-doored cupboard) housing: this basin is served by a tap spout that doubles as the showerhead - the mixer control set into a plastic moulding to its left.

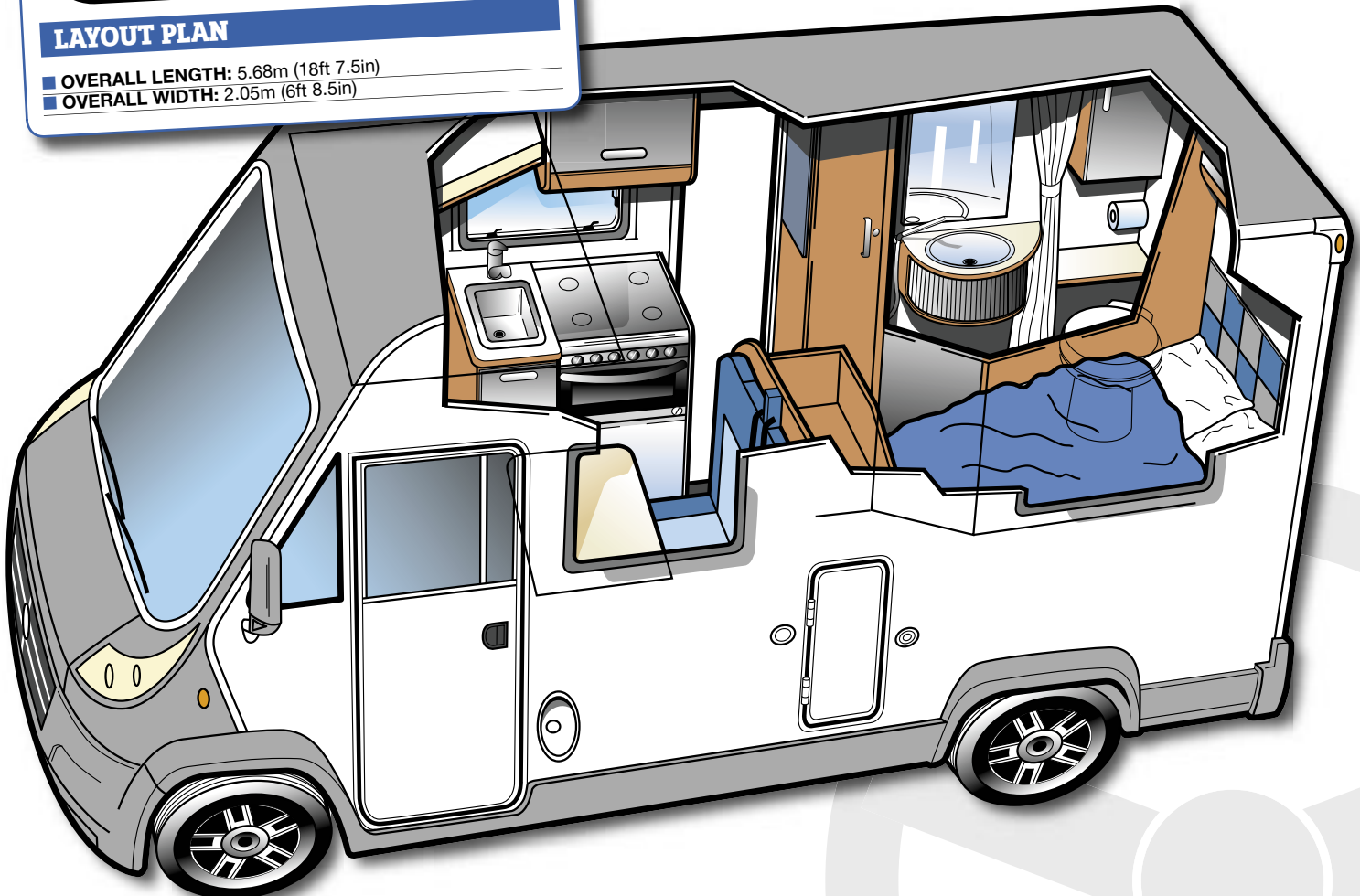
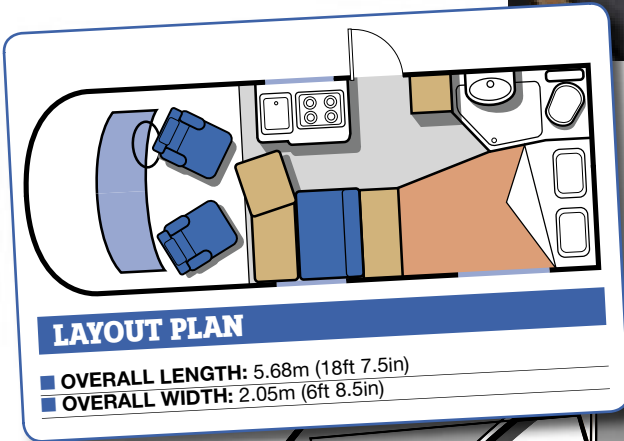
When it's time for a shower the basin (and the mirror above), which is mounted on a hinged panel, swing away over the toilet, helping to create a separate showering area, while the showerhead/tap clips into a bracket



above. The washroom floor provides a single-outlet tray and a nylon curtain travels around a semi-circular track to protect the washroom door. The result is a good-sized

shower that's easy to use. There's space for loo rolls and the like in the under-basin cupboard, while above the toilet, a large, sensibly designed cupboard provides plenty of space for lots of cosmetics.

In this quite narrow room it's the washbasin





that creates most of the problems. Its bulk means that there's not much space in front of it and it tends to get in the way when sitting on the toilet. I think this room would far better if it were less ambitious - with no aspirations to separate showering and a smaller basin there would be more room to move and use the facilities in comfort.

SLEEPY TOWN

Subtly tapered almost from its head, the rear double bed is easy to use and provided me with a very comfy night's sleep. There's plenty of room to sit up, read, and drink your cocoa, but the headboard panel could do with a bit more padding. Shelves are also conspicuous by their absence: I'd add a couple to accommodate specs, glass of water, book, etc. Above the bed,

a pair of handsome swivelling spots provides plenty of light for reading.

This bed is only really found wanting in terms of its length. At just six feet one inch long it was fine for my five-ten frame, but if you're taller, make sure you try it well before you buy.

Up front, the sleeping space is far more novel, as unlike most A-class beds (which



7 The A-class in-cab bed extends to make a longitudinal double

8 The fixed rear double is comfy, but not that big

9 A swing-wall helps create a showering area

10 Washbasin proved obtrusive

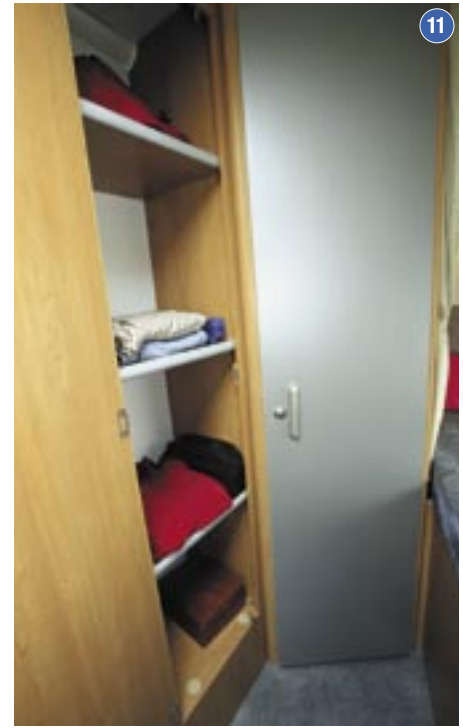
11 Next to the washroom, a full-height cupboard is a great feature



see you sleeping transversely), this one is arranged longitudinally.

A turnbuckle-equipped leather strap is released to allow the bed to descend, once you've reclined the cab seatbacks - a task that's easily achieved with a pull of the reclining handles. Next job is to operate a centrally located bolt and give a sharp pull to the rear. This action sees the bed base extend aft, and once the second mattress section is dropped in (and a stabilising support pole installed underneath) a longitudinal double bed is made. A short ladder gets you aboard, where you discover a very comfy bed with individually switched spotlights at its head, and surrounded by neat stretchy material trim. You can get propped up here, but I found not quite enough room to sit right up. This bed has another, almost unofficial, use: leave the second mattress section at home and it's easy to use un-extended as a transverse double for younger (four feet or so, tall) kids.

Putting the thing away needs quite a strong push upwards, but you don't need to worry about leaving the lights on: auto-switching makes sure they go out when the bed is stowed.



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SUPERSTORE

The most obvious and useful storage space in this motorhome is, unsurprisingly, situated beneath the fixed double bed. Here, you'll also find the Truma heater, leisure battery, charger and electrical distribution systems, but there's still a good chunk of space left for bulky kit.

You can access this area through a big external hatch, sensibly positioned in the 'van's rear wall. While inside, and traditionally, the bed base lifts to expose the space; I was disappointed, however, to discover no means of supporting the base - gas struts

being the norm in many other motorhomes of the type. I propped the base with the A-class bed's steel support, but this was a less than satisfactory and safe solution to the problem.

One of the other useful storage solutions in this CityVan is positioned ahead of the washroom. Here, a full-height shelved cupboard offers loads of space for clothes, shoes, or other kit at will. Above the bed, a pair of big overhead lockers (unshelved like the rest) provides more flexible space. At the foot of the

I LIKED

- Compact size (length and width)
- Easy to drive and park
- Excellent performance
- Comfy beds
- Big under-bed storage
- Electric/gas heating

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More external colour
- Softer cab seats
- Deeper dinette seat squab
- More, and better sited sockets
- LED lighting

I DISLIKED

- Lack of space in front of washbasin
- Lack of space while sitting on toilet
- Hitting my head on the base of the A-class bed



On Test CityVan CV57P

bed, a slim wardrobe provides hanging space, while the shallow cupboard below would seem ideal for wine and soft drinks bottles.

All in all, there's a pretty good selection of storage solutions for such a small motorcaravan. Payload is very good too, and as the maximum authorised weight is 3.50 tonnes, this 'van can legally be driven by all who have a standard car license.

CITY LIGHTS

CityVan includes a good range of halogen spotlights, found in A-class bed, lounge and rear bedroom, but the single-tube fluorescents in the kitchen and washroom were a tad disappointing. Ceiling lights are also lacking.

The Truma Combi boiler that gives hot water and blown-air heating is a highlight of this motorhome's service sector. It's a highlight because it is powered by both gas and mains electric: something that's rare in a Continental, where gas-only heating is the norm.



13



There's a paucity of sockets here, with just one mains and one 12V socket on offer. The 12V example can be found (along with an aerial socket) adjacent to the TV bracket. This is okay, as its position (in the base of the nearby overhead locker) is acceptable for mobile phone and laptop leads. However,

the location of the only mains socket seems slightly odd, as it's set into the wall just inside the caravan door and across the entranceway from the kitchen. You could, of course, conveniently plug your vacuum cleaner in here, but everything else - kettle, toaster, etc, etc - is probably gonna end up on the floor

LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE

A-class coachbuilt

PRICE

- **From:** £41,007 OTR
- **As tested:** £47,327 OTR

BASICS

- **Vehicle:** Fiat Ducato Camper chassis cowl
- **Berths:** 4
- **Three-point belted seats:** 4
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle and conversion, five years water ingress

CONSTRUCTION

Alloy clad sandwich construction coachbuilt with alloy/ABS skirts, ABS/GRP mouldings. Caravan entrance on UK offside, cab door on UK nearside

DIMENSIONS

- **Length:** 5.68m (18ft 7.5in)
- **Width:** 2.05m (6ft 8.5in)
- **Height:** 2.75m (9ft 0.5in)
- **Wheelbase:** 3.45m (11ft 4in)
- **Rear overhang:** 1.25m (4ft 1in)
- **Max authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** 705kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water and of one gas cylinder)

INSIDE STORY

Drop-down double bed and swivelling cab seats ahead of nearside half-dinette, wardrobe and lengthways fixed double bed, offside kitchen, caravan door, storage cupboard, washroom

- **Insulation:** Styrofoam all round
- **Interior height:** 2.00m (6ft 6.5in)

THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 2.3-litre turbo-diesel producing 95.5kW (130bhp) @ 3600rpm
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Fuel consumption:** 25.6mpg
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS
- **Suspension:** Front: Independent with coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- **Features:** Air-conditioning, electric mirrors, captain's seats, trip computer, adjustable steering column, variable wiper control, cab



carpet, electric window on passenger door, sliding window on driver's side

LOUNGING AND DINING

Swivelling cab seats and forward-facing double seat offer seating for four, wall-hung single-leg dining table with extension offers dining for four

KITCHEN

Offside-located unit includes three drawers, single un-shelved locker above

- **Sink:** Rectangular stainless steel bowl with swivelling plastic mixer tap, no drainer
- **Cooker:** Smev combination hob/grill with hinged glass lid, four burners, all with electronic ignition
- **Fridge:** Dometic RM 4211 three-way. Capacity 60 litres

WASHROOM

Oval plastic vanity basin with swivelling plastic mixer tap/shower head, Thetford C250 Swivel-bowl toilet with electric flushing and wheeled waste cassette. Basin and mirror swings to enclose toilet (swing-wall) to create showering area with nylon curtain to protect door, single-outlet tray floor. Tambour-doored cupboard below basin, single-door shelved cupboard above toilet, toilet roll holder, towel rail

BEDS

- **A-class double**
- **Length:** 1.98m (6ft 6in)
- **Width:** 1.36m (4ft 5.5in)
- **Headroom:** 660mm (2ft 2in)
- **Rear fixed double**
- **Length:** 1.86m (6ft 1in)
- **Width:** 1.26m (4ft 1.5in)

STORAGE

- **Lounge:** Two high-level shelves, one overhead locker. Wardrobe: At foot of bed with side-to-side hanging rail, shelved cupboard

CITIVAN CV57P

below. Rear bed area: Two overhead lockers, one shelf, under-bed area accessed by lifting bed base and through external hatch in 'van's rear wall.

- **Caravan door area:** shelf above, full-height shelved cupboard immediately aft of door and ahead of washroom. Outside: Metal lined locker at front offside

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Inboard 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung 95 litres (20.9 gallons)
- **Water/space heating:** Truma Combi boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- **Leisure battery:** 105 amp hr
- **Gas:** 2 x 13kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** Cab/lounge: 4 halogen downlighters, 1 halogen reading lamp. A-class bed: 2 halogen downlighters. Kitchen: 1 single-tube fluorescent. Rear bed area: 2 halogen reading lamps. Washroom: 1 single-tube fluorescent
- **Sockets:** 230V 1 (adjacent to caravan door). 12V: 1 (in lounge)
- **Control panel:** Mounted above caravan door. Controls 12V supply, water pump, LEDs indicate mains hooked up, vehicle and leisure battery levels, fresh and waste water levels
- **Blinds/curtains:** Pull-down blinds/flyscreens to all caravan windows, blinds/flyscreens to all rooflights, pleated blinds to cab windows, fabric décor panels and nets to lounge and rear bed area windows

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** 130bhp engine upgrade (£1620), as part of Comfort Pack, cab air-conditioning, electric mirrors
- **Conversion:** As part of Comfort pack, electric external step, Heki III rooflight, cab blinds (£1770), cab passenger door (£1400), A-class bed (£1100) Winter Pack comprising insulated/heated waste water tank, winter fridge vent covers, automatic gas cylinder changeover (£430)

Other options

- **Base:** Driver's door (£1400)
- **Conversion:** Luxus caravan door with central locking system (£910)

or potentially, hanging by its lead - that is of course, unless the lead is stretched across the entranceway into the kitchen. Of course it should be pretty easy to have extra sockets fitted to your CityVan.

Blackout, bug defence and window dressing are provided by pull-down blinds and flyscreens and decor panels and net curtains at lounge and bedroom windows. The cab was equipped with pleated blinds, an option that (as part of the Comfort Pack) is far better than the standard sucker-equipped internal silver screens that'll probably be a right faff to attach. As expected, tanks are capacious - the fresh water container is in the base of the dinette seat, so it's nicely winterised. The waste tank is underslung at the rear, but the Winter Pack of accessories adds insulation and heaters to frost-proof it.

Finally, the control panel is a no-nonsense device, with no fancy graphics or LCD panels. A few switches and LEDs do the job of controlling and indication pretty well, although you may need your glasses to read the legends.

CITYVAN CAN?

CityVan as a type is not unique, as there are other mini A-class motorhomes out there with the same street-conquering aspirations.

However, CityVan is unique in the way it presents itself, looking like no other motorhome I've ever seen. During the test, I grew to quite like its quirky looks, but I still wish it could be had in a colour more exciting than white and grey - something with a bit more zing.

On the tarmac it provided a fun drive and one that was nicely stress-free. I enjoyed living on board, too. Inside, it's the longitudinal double bed (majoring in this layout) that helps to compromise both kitchen and lounge, while the washroom could do with a smaller, less obtrusive basin.

If you like the layout, it's worth bearing in mind that the six-metre CityVan CV 60P offers a bigger lounge, by dint of the fact that its extra length allows the kitchen to be moved aft. ■

- 12 *The under-bed area houses the heater and offers plenty of storage space served by a large external hatch*
- 13 *The foot of the bed sees a narrow wardrobe, with shallow cupboard below*

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Hayes Leisure, Walsall Road, Darlaston, Birmingham, West Midlands WS10 9SS
(tel: 0121 5263433;
web site: www.hayesleisure.co.uk)

WE STAYED AT

Kingsbury Water Park
Camping and Caravanning Club site,
Bodmoor Heath Lane, Sutton Coldfield,
West Midlands B76 0DY
(tel: 01827 874101; web site:
www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

