

ON TEST



DEVON DISCOVERY

**on short wheelbase Ford Transit
with optional 2.5 turbo diesel power
and automatic transmission**

John Hunt enjoys ten days in a true all-purpose vehicle

"Oh, isn't it pretty!" we exclaimed as the Discovery drew up outside our Andover premises.

The unusual colour of Arctic Blue (a welcome change from the usual white with stripes) with coordinated roof and bumpers ensured that this vehicle looked a lot more expensive than it was. Still held at the time of our test at under £20 000 (although as we go to press just over that) for the basic package, even this demonstrator-with-everything managed to get on the road at a price comparable with that of many completely standard hightops.

It was hard to remember that this was simply a panel van with an added hightop; it would not look out of place among the upmarket 'multi-purpose vehicles' in the same price bracket as this fully equipped little motorcaravan.

And, although a 'proper' motorcaravan, it felt little, as I found to my delight on our first shopping trip. There was no need to search for a suitably placed parking bay which would allow a bit of overhang. The Discovery slotted in as neatly as any medium car – and with its power steering, as easily, too. Visibility all round was pretty good, with a useful view through the rear windows when reversing towards an obstacle. And when you are tightly squeezed in, there's no need to risk scraping the big hinged doors on other vehicles; they can remain closed: much easier to exit by the rear or sliding side doors.

The transmission was automatic and, unaccustomed as I am to that luxury, no difficulty was experienced in shuffling between forward and reverse when manoeuvring.

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Ready to entertain in the fairly spacious seating area.



When our visitors have gone, we make the beds: not difficult.



Offside seat box, showing drawer, Propex and book troughs.



Clock, gallery rail and side trough for occasional storage.



Back seats have rake, restraint harnesses and headrests.

Motoring

That auto transmission behaved well on the open road and, when brisk acceleration was needed, the kickdown was there – quicker than going through many of the manual gear changes found on motorcaravans. I discovered there were often two stages. Pressing the pedal right to the floor could result in the transmission going straight from fourth to second ratio, whilst a gentler pressure changed down into third. One soon learned the trick.

On the open road, the Ford cruised comfortably between 60 and 70mph, with little effect from side winds or speeding heavies. The suspension seemed to be a reasonable compromise whether the 'van was empty or fairly fully laden. As the photographs show, we transferred most of our effects (a) to test the springing and (b) to see just how much we could accommodate.

There was no sign, as found on some over-bodied (or under-powered) coachbuilds, of 'hunting' between third and fourth when cruising. Top ratio was held most of the time and, when hill climbing, the automatic change of ratio came smoothly, detectable more from the alteration in engine note than any jerk in progress.

Yes, the diesel engine could be heard most of the time, but not annoyingly so, even to this driver and passenger who prefer the quietness of a well tuned petrol lump. Starting up from cold was almost instant every time and then the fact that this was a diesel bursting into life was more apparent to those outside than in the cab.

As always, the automatic transmission proved itself a boon when creeping through notorious Newbury where through traffic between Southampton and all points north must mix with local shoppers and commuters.

Audrey and I found the cab suited our anatomies and produced no aches or pains on a long run, which is something to be thankful for when original cab seats have to be replaced by flatter ones which must form parts of the beds.

No complaints from the passengers in the rear, either, sitting safely

with three-point harnesses and head restraints. They had a view forward through the windscreen obstructed only, as on most vehicles nowadays, by the headrests of the front seats. We found that the side windows did not unduly restrict the view of the surrounding countryside – in other words, their tops were high enough for us to be able to see the surrounding countryside without craning our necks.

Rear passengers had, therefore, comfortable seats and masses of legroom. None of the travellers was distracted by rattles from the furniture or fittings. There weren't any! That's something that cannot be claimed of very many new motorcaravans.

All controls were within easy reach and the dashboard was akin to that of a good car, spoilt a little perhaps by a not very beautiful switch for the fridge. But I do regret the loss of the eyeball vents which, on older Fords, provided a fresh air flow to the face. It was just possible to motor with our preferred 'cool heads and warm feet', but only provided the cab heater was not turned too far to 'hot'.

I liked having a tachometer (part of the Ford optional package). It showed the economical cruising range to be between 1500 and 3000rpm. An upward change of gear usually took place at about 3000rpm. Cruising at a steady 50mph held the revs at 2500. (From that it was easy to work out the top gear mph per 1000rpm – a figure we seldom manage to get from the manufacturers for our specification page.)

So, this was a pleasant little four seater car. How did it measure up as a motorcaravan?

The living component

Layout will surprise no one with, in the front half, those four seats as described. Both cab seats are reversible (the driver's with a bit of to-and-fro shuffling to avoid the steering wheel).

The kitchen is at the offside in the rear half, with the shower room and small wardrobe opposite. The central gangway runs from the cab to the rear doors.

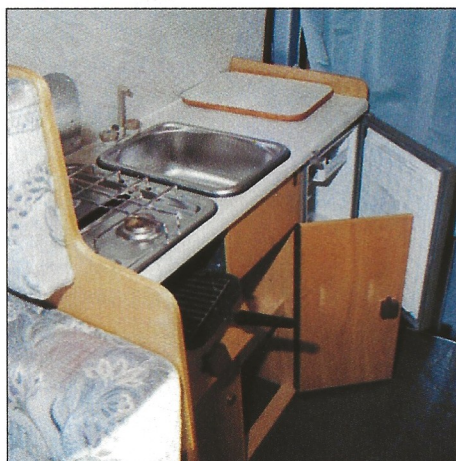
That's it: now for a little more detail and some opinions.



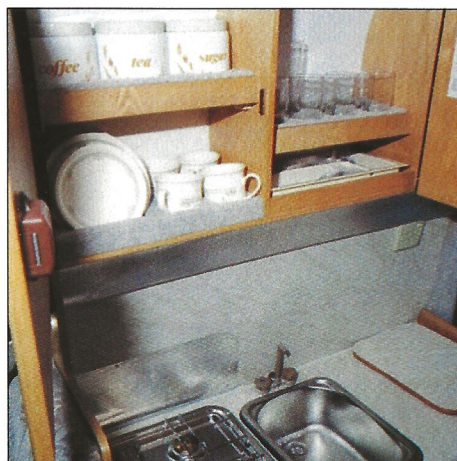
Handy fire extinguisher. Overcab locker ready for loading.



Overcab locker held all our bedding with room to spare.



A little kitchen – but everything that's essential.



Wall cupboards hold items firmly but do waste some space.



No draining board, so we used our folding plate drainer.

Sitting, eating, sleeping

Although with cab seats reversed there would appear to be the set-up for twin single dinettes, in fact there is only one table which, on its island leg, occupies the centre gangway. With the table in place an agile person could wriggle from front seats to the rear but I didn't consider this an ideal arrangement, with only two people in the 'van. Although I realise that a centre table suits many, as proved by sales figures of other makes, I still prefer an uncluttered gangway.

However, as the photograph shows, each of the four diners can reach, without stretching, his corner of the table. Crockery for four is supplied, plus cups and tumblers of good quality and – unusually – cutlery. All are held when travelling in dedicated places.

The single glazed windows at each side (one in the door) with flyscreens and the roof windows above them all slide to open and have security catches which allow them to be fastened fractionally open. Sliding roof windows can be opened in warm weather to increase airflow without draughts when on the move but if opened on site in wet weather may allow some rain to blow in. Win one, lose the other. All windows have unlined curtains. On-site ventilation is assisted by a multi-position roof vent above the kitchen area.

Beds are made up in the way that will be familiar to many owners of hightop motorcaravans. Headrests are removed from cab seats which are then pushed right forward and fully reclined to meet the rear seats, the base cushions of which have been pulled forward (supported by extended drawers) and their backrests placed fully flat.

The beds offered a reasonable compromise between firmness and comfort (cushions are of two-layer foam). They suited me; Audrey would have liked something a little softer – but no designer is going to please every possible occupant. We both agreed that they were better than many we have been compelled to sleep on over the years – and the upholstery was attractive and appeared to be hard wearing.

A socket for mains electricity is provided in the sitting area (with another in the kitchen). Lighting was adequate with three double fluorescents plus one reading spotlight. Another could always be specified as an option.

Preparing food

The offside kitchen extends from the back of the seating area to the rear doorway, consists of a hob with two burners and a grill, an Electrolux 3-way RM123E refrigerator (that's the smaller one) and cupboards (see later). Like all models of this refrigerator, the controls are located inaccessibly at the bottom but at least in the Discovery they are raised about six inches above the floor.

(While Electrolux have made big strides in the development of their larger fridges, I'm surprised that, apart from electronic gas ignition, this popular little model remains almost as it has been for years.)

Cooker and sink are both of stainless steel, the latter fitted with a faucet with mixer taps for the water supply pumped from the underfloor tank. The sink has a chopping board cover and, although there is a little flat worktop beside it, there is no draining board.

The control panel is adjacent to the mains electricity input and cut-out (ELCB, RCD or what you will) and both are conveniently located in a panel adjacent to the upper cupboards. Another mains socket is provided here. The twin, apparently identical batteries are located in the engine compartment. The manufacturers have provided interior access to the rear lights in case bulbs need changing (something that's sometimes forgotten).

Across the gangway is the . . .

Shower room

There have been interesting developments among the larger manufacturers of small motorcaravans with ingenious slide-out or hideaway cassette toilets, to such an extent that the conventional, self-contained shower/toilet room has almost disappeared on the shortest of their conventional 'vans.

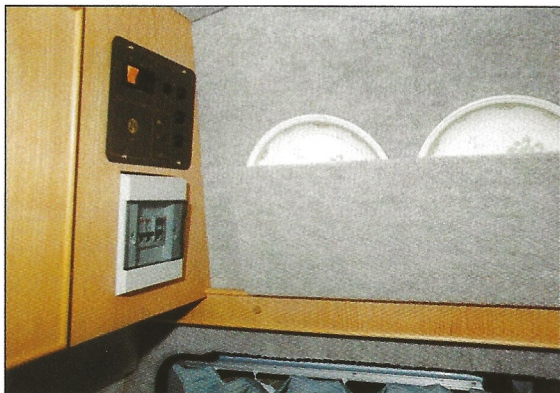
It was good, therefore, to discover this Devon's. It's a proper, self-contained little room, big enough to stand or sit or move around in and adequate for showering, which of course I tried. What's more, the rear part of the 'van can be shielded from the front (by a combination of open door and detachable curtain) to provide a private dressing area. In cold weather, it was comforting to be able to step out on to the carpet for a brisk rub down, while the whole 'van was warmed by the optional Propex blown-air heater.

The shower room contained just the Thetford Cassette, a shower hose and a roof vent which allowed in adequate daylight. There was a small mirror but no vanity cabinet nor basin. We overcame the latter difficulty by either washing in the sink opposite or placing a plastic bowl on the loo and filling it from the shower hose.

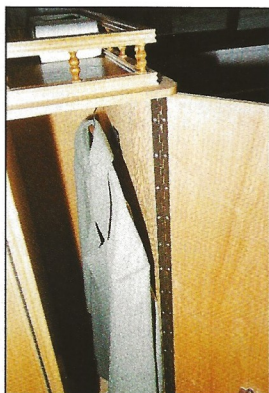
The cassette is Thetford's well known standard model and has its own fresh water supply for flushing the bowl, with a hand pump – no electricity and therefore less to go wrong. The holding tank is pulled out into the gangway and therefore needs no external door to mar the coachwork.

There was no clinging shower curtain, nor any need for one with the water resistant walls and close-fitting door. A few dribbles did escape on to the carpet outside from the bottom of the doorway. That could easily be cured by fitting a small weather strip (and the makers may do this at

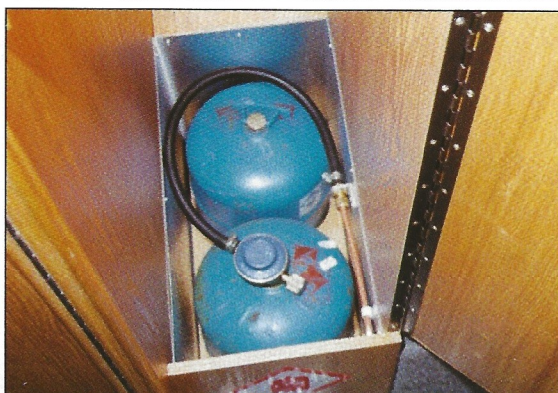
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Rear offside corner: control panel, RCD and plate holder.



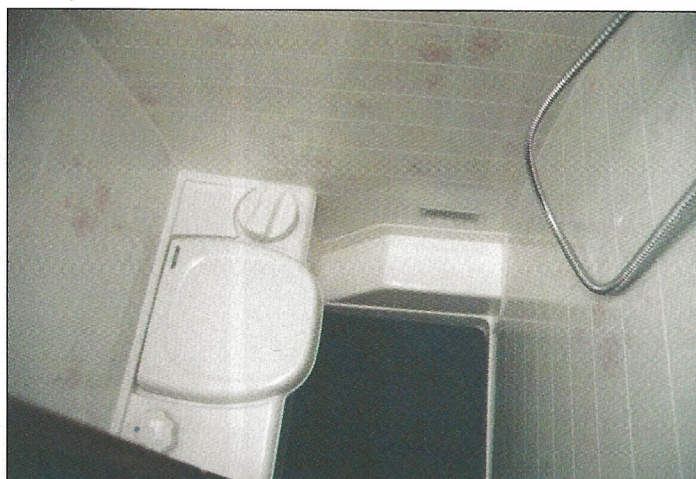
Narrow wardrobe – but more generous 'drop' than many.



Two Camping Gaz 907s in sealed compartment at base of wardrobe.



View from rear doorway. Note small cupboard beneath refrigerator.



Toilet room: that's essentially all there is in it.

my suggestion). The last bit of water in the shower tray needed coaxing down the plughole with a sponge.

Here, a word of praise for the excellent Atwood storage heater, which is a standard fitting. On gas or mains electricity it produced hot water more quickly than any other storage heater I have tried; on both together, it was really rapid. (The only other way in which you'd get quicker hot water from cold would be with one of the now virtually abandoned wall mounted 'instant, constant-flow' gas heaters.)

The capacity is a healthy 10 litres and there's a choice of settings: very warm or hot. If two people wanted a before-breakfast shower, the water could be hot enough for the second while the first was drying and dressing. (Then whoever it was would need to go outside and empty the small waste water tank, which I found I almost filled after my own douche.)

There's one possible disadvantage with this Atwood in the little Devon. Read on.

Where to put everything

The cupboard under the sink is half occupied by the Atwood – and it is the only such cupboard in the 'van. At first glance you'll think, as we did, "Where on earth can I put everything?"

It's not as bad as it seems. Fortunately for us, we had the Discovery long enough to be able to put the matter to the test, transferring all the essentials from the overstocked Legend into the much smaller Discovery.

The first surprise was to find that all our bulky bedding for two (sleeping bags, duvets, blankets, pillows and a special wedged underlay) went into the overcab locker, with enough room to spare for a couple of overnight bags. The cab roof is not cut away, so there is the maximum storage space above – no attempt at a roof bed to waste space.

Yes, we each banged our heads once, being accustomed to walking tall to the front seats, but you soon learn. And you don't need to stoop too much: not difficult, even for a couple of hardly agile oldies. I'm told that there is now some carpet lining here to soften the blow.

Oddments and my 'nasties' went beneath the front seats, beneath one of which we found the jack and wheelbrace rattling. I gather this is going to be fixed somewhere.

The rear seats have easy-running drawers which pull forwards – but if the beds are made up you can get in through the tops after moving the cushions. The small wardrobe, between the loo and nearside rear seat, gave enough drop for fairly long dresses. (I gather that some owners have reduced the length and increased storage space by fitting shelves at the bottom.)

The compartment right at the bottom of the wardrobe holds two



Opened shower room door and small curtain isolate rear end.

Camping Gaz 907 containers. There is no provision for using the slightly larger Calor bottles. We found, after one frosty night, that the gas still vaporised. Whether this was because the Atwood and Propex, at lowest settings, were on all the time, I don't know.

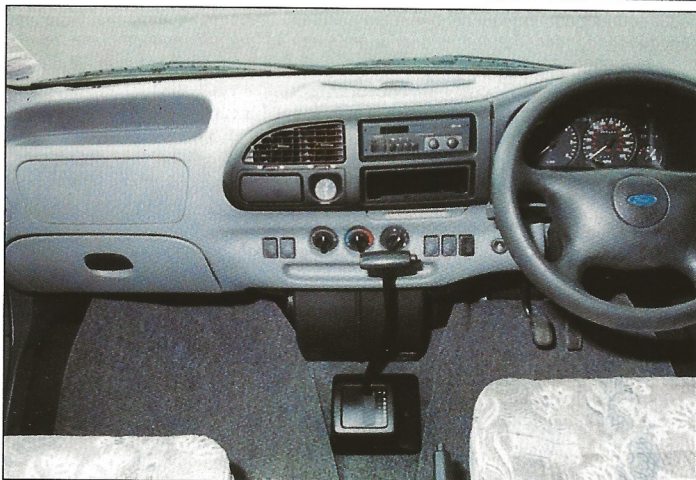
There's that cupboard beneath the sink and cooker with a shelf, but partly occupied by the Atwood, and a shallow one beneath the fridge.

On the wall above are shallow cupboards fitted with some rather nice containers for coffee, tea and sugar. Also secured there are the crockery and cutlery for four people, with glasses and cutlery in the adjacent locker. These items fill the cupboards. Larger dinner plates are held firmly in a trough above the rear doors: quite difficult to extract, which means they don't jump out when the vehicle is driven over bumps, although I wondered if they might loosen after much usage.

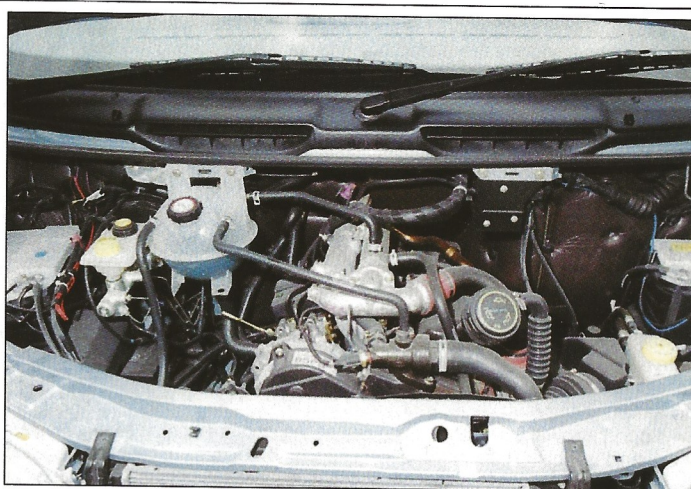
Beneath the fridge is a deep cupboard a few inches high. I found it to be a cool place to store cans of beer and bottles of squash.

The table top is secured in the gap between the shower room wall and the rear door. It is possible to remove it with the door closed. Its leg is clipped in the wardrobe.

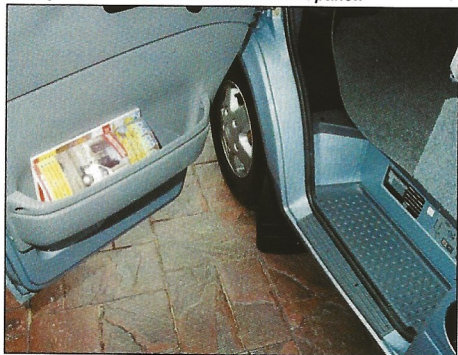
There are other places for odds and ends, such as the glove locker, troughs on front doors, slot for magazines beside the offside rear seat and a big trough just inside the side doorway. There are also places to dump things when stationary, such as the troughs above the side windows and a gallery rail at the top of the wardrobe.



A very neat dashboard and instrument panel.



It's all there somewhere! Note batteries on either side.



Both cab doors have holdalls, open to provide easy step-up.



Super mirrors, adjustable and with separate blind spot mirrors.



At least the spare wheel is accessible and easily wound down.



Two roof vents; no attempt at a luggage rack.



So convenient for parking and shopping.



Oh, dear: that white fridge vent cover spoils everything!

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Lastly, there are the drawers beneath the seats, which support the bed bases when they are pulled out – quite a neat idea. They run freely. The offside one is slightly smaller than the nearside, to leave room for the optional blown air space heater.

Who's it for?

Is this your type of motorcaravan? Well, it depends. The Discovery would be suitable for general all round use but, although the optional heater is very efficient, I wouldn't recommend it for dedicated winter campers – especially without the ability to carry a propane gas bottle. Furthermore, insulation against cold can never be as good in a van conversion with both side and rear doorways as in a coachbuilt.

But for those looking for a true dual purpose vehicle with car-like ease of driving, passenger carrying, manoeuvrability and parkability, combined with a very well finished and fully equipped motorcaravan, you would have to search very hard to find anything superior to the Devon Discovery at its tempting price.

I don't know if you can get an idea of the excellent finish to the woodwork and upholstery from the photographs. It seemed to be constructed to very high standards with skilled craftsmanship and quality products.

The absence of rattles on the road showed that it had been put together properly.

The Discovery is built to the standards set by the National Caravan Council and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. And, coming from a comparatively small manufacturer, each vehicle can incorporate alterations to the basic specification and be built on any of the large range of new short wheelbase Ford Transits. For those who need it, four speed automatic transmission is available on the diesel models, as are all the other Ford options such as central locking, electric cab windows and air conditioning.

Audrey and I would still prefer a petrol Transit for our own use – that's entirely personal and in no way implies criticism of the diesel. We did like the Discovery.

You may think I have been unduly uncritical in this report but, judging this motorcaravan for what it is, there are very few faults to find. To back up my opinion, I have placed an order for our own Discovery, to be built on the vehicle we chose and incorporating our own preferences.

One thing we haven't changed is that stunning Arctic Blue exterior paintwork!

I liked

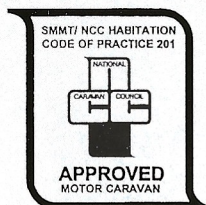
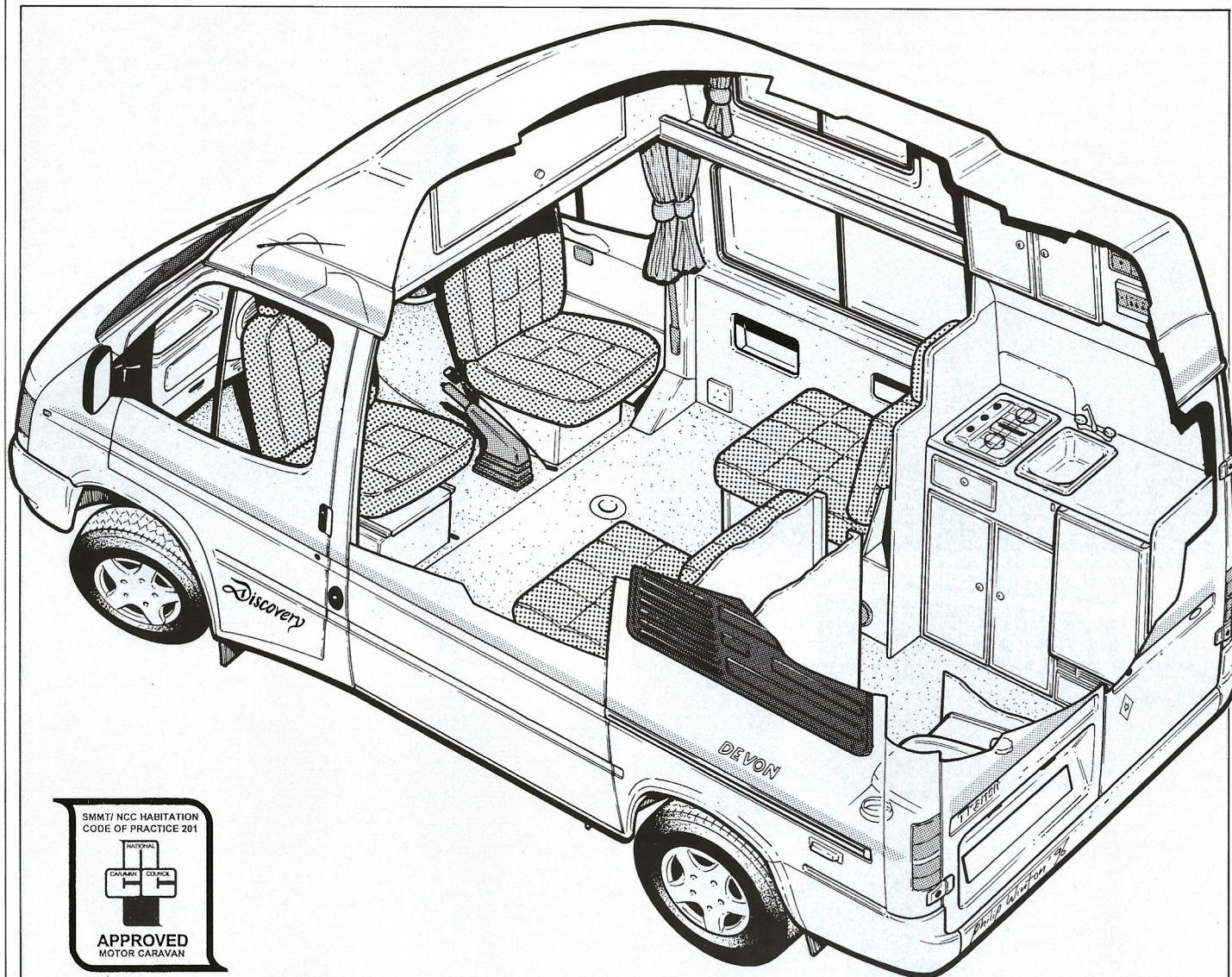
- Enticing price for a 'proper' motorcaravan
- Attractive exterior colour scheme
- Colour-coordinated roof and bumpers
- Manoeuvrability and parkability
- Optional power steering
- Optional auto transmission
- Tachometer and dashboard clock
- All-round visibility
- All four seats when travelling

- Rear seat harnesses and head restraints
- Ride quality
- Absence of rattles
- Easy bed making
- Two mains sockets
- Accessible, visible RCD
- Twin batteries
- Walk-in shower/toilet room
- No need for shower curtain
- Manually pumped flush water

- Atwood water heater
- Quality crockery set
- Private dressing area
- Places for odds and ends
- Excellent all-round finish

I would have liked

- Better cool heads, warm feet provision
- Twin single dinettes
- Top hinged roof windows
- Another reading light (available)
- More accessible fridge controls
- More kitchen storage space (but don't know how!)
- Space for Calor cylinders
- Combined gas/mains space heating



SPECIFICATION (standard model)

The vehicle

Base vehicle & engine type: Ford Transit 80 short wheelbase with 2.5 turbo diesel 4 cylinder engine.

Output: 63kW/85PS at 4000rpm.

Max torque: 200Nm/147lbf ft at 2100rpm.

Achieved 30–50mph acceleration time: 10 seconds average using kickdown.

Gearbox & drive: Four speed optional automatic, rear wheel drive.

Mph per 1000rpm (top gear): 20.

Brakes: Disc/drum dual circuit, self adjusting, servo assisted.

Steering: Power assisted (optional), rack and pinion.

Suspension: Front independent, rear leaf springs with telescopic shock absorbers.

Tyres fitted: Firestone 195R14 8PR.

Spare wheel position: Rear underfloor in wind-down cradle.

Fuel tank capacity: 68l/15gal.

Fuel consumption during test: 9.84l per 100km/28.7mpg.

Type of fuel: Diesel.

Instruments: Fuel, coolant temperature, speedometer with trip, tachometer (optional), analogue clock.

Warning lamps: Direction indicators, battery charge, main beam, brake fluid, oil pressure, water in fuel, cold start, engine management system, rear fog, hazard flash.

Windscreen wiper controls: Stalk, 2 speed + intermittent, wash/wipe.

Heater controls: 3 dials: warm/cold, distribution, 3 speed fan.

Cool heads/warm feet just possible.

Other features: Self seek AM/FM radio, central locking*, electric door mirrors*, cigar lighter, courtesy cab lamp with delay, tinted glass*, pockets on both cab doors.

The caravan

Body type & construction: Panel van with hightop.

Insulation: 3mm carpeted ply with air cavity.

Windows and doors: Two single glazed sliding side windows, two single glazed sliding roof windows, fixed windows in hinged rear doors, glazed sliding side door, flyscreens.

Additional ventilation: Multi-position screened roof vent + similar in toilet room.

Blinds/curtains: Unlined curtains all round.

Mains electricity/electrical sockets: RCCB with mains switch and two circuit breakers; two 240V 3 pin sockets.

Batteries & control panel: Zig CF8 with mains, touring/site and 12V switches, fuses, battery condition indicator, one 12V socket.

Capacity of second battery: 36 amp hr.

Lighting: Three double fluorescents + one in shower room, one adjustable reading light.

Cooking facilities: Hob with two burners and grill.

Extractor fan/cooker hood: None.

Refrigerator: Electrolux RM123E gas/12V/240V, electronic ignition.

Sink & drainer: Stainless steel rectangular sink, no drainer.

Water system: Underfloor tank feeds sink and shower through mixer taps.

Hot water system: Atwood storage, gas/240V, capacity 10l.

Water pump: Pressure sensitive electric with illuminated switch.

Fresh water tank: 50l/11gal underfloor with lockable filler cap and drain tap.

Fresh water level gauge: None.

Waste water tank: 23l/5gal underfloor with drain tap.

Waste water level gauge: None.

Space heating: Propex Compact gas, blown air circulation (optional).

Gas locker: Beneath wardrobe, access from interior, takes 2 Camping Gaz 907 containers.

Shower compartment: Nearside rear with Thetford Cassette and mixer taps feeding shower hose; screened multi-position roof vent; mirror; shower curtain unnecessary.

Seating/sleeping: Four forward-facing travelling seats form two single beds; cab seats swivel to face rear.

Rear restraint harnesses: Two: lap/diagonal.

Tables: One centrally mounted on island leg.

Tables: storage provision: Top clipped behind shower compartment, leg in wardrobe.

Additional features: Capacious overcab locker; sliding drawers beneath rear seats; deep pocket inside side doorway; two shallower pockets beside offside rear seat; lipped shelves above side windows; shelf with gallery rail above wardrobe.

Dimensions (metric/imperial)

Overall length: 4610/15ft 1 1/2in.

Overall width, excl mirrors: 1975/6ft 6 1/2in.

Overall width, incl mirrors: 2535/8ft 3 1/2in.

Overall height: 2565/8ft 5in.

Turning circle, kerb to kerb: 11m/36ft.

Rear overhang: 885/35in.

Wheelbase: 2835/9ft 3 1/2in.

Driver's max leg length: 1090/43in.

Step up height to caravan: Side 405+180/16+7in, rear 585/23in.

Wardrobe: As described in text with side-to-side hanging rail.

Flooring: Carpet throughout.

Door aperture: Side 1255x510/49 1/2inx20in, rear 1255x510/49 1/2in.

Interior length from dash: 3300/10ft 10in.

Interior length behind cab: 2540/8ft 4in.

Interior width at waist level: 1830/6ft.

Interior height: 1945/6ft 4 1/2in (kitchen 1880/6ft 2in).

Work surface height: 800/31 1/2in.

Table dimensions: 735x560x710H/29x22x28inH.

Bed dimensions:

(1) Two singles **Mattress length:** 1905/75in.

Mattress width: 585/23in.

Mattress depth: 115/4 1/2in.

Dimensions of shower compartment: 800x635x710H/31 1/2x25x73inH max.

Wardrobe (height from rail): 230/9inW, 460/18inD, 1180/46 1/2inH.

Gas locker: 230/9inW, 460/18inD, 305/12inH.

Gas locker door aperture: 460/18inx230/9in.

Other principal cupboards/lockers:

Overcab max: 1575/710x535H/62x28x21inH.

Drawers beneath seats: 325x370 & 325x405/18 1/2x14 1/2 & 18 1/2x16in, both 140/5 1/2inH.

Gross vehicle weight: 2440kg/48.02cwt.

Unladen weight: 2020kg/39.76cwt.

Load capacity: 420kg/8.26cwt.

Price

incl VAT:

as tested £25 745 including delivery, number plates and one year VED.
standard petrol model £20 445 plus £750 on-road costs.

Optional extras available

(prices are rounded)

Base vehicle options:

2.5 turbo diesel engine £1380*, air conditioning £952, airbag for driver £194, airbags for driver and passenger £388, anti-lock brakes £740, alloy wheels £606*, audio radio cassette £164, auto transmission with turbo diesel engine £1921*, metallic paint £605*, colour coded bumpers £147*, central locking £247*, electric door mirrors £164*, headlamp jet wash £206, heated rear window(s) £129, heated windscreen £100, limited slip differential (not with auto) £699, power-assisted steering £629*, rear step £112, tachometer (standard with TD) £94, tailgate (no charge), tailgate wash/wipe and heated glass £270, tinted glass £100*, electric cab windows £258, 'comfort' pack £59*.

Caravan options:

Double bunk roof bed £94, double bed with settee cushion £173, Propex blown air heating £470*, front roof vent £76, roof colour (white no cost) £217, TV table plus aerial and 12/240V and co-ax sockets £170, fresh water level gauge £53, waste water level gauge £53, free-standing annexe tent POA.

* Included in test model.

DEVON DISCOVERY converted by Devon Motorcaravans Ltd,
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E&OE



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