

THE ENTRIES

VAN CONVERSIONS UP TO £34,000

Torbay Volkswagen Rebel	£20,002
East Neuk Campervans Fifer Touring	£27,995
Adria Twin 2.2	£29,900
Devon Provence	£33,658

VAN CONVERSIONS OVER £34,000

Torbay Volkswagen Fusion	£34,528
Van Master Pecos	£35,495
Torbay Mercedes-Benz Fusion	£37,100
Torbay Volkswagen Nimbus	£37,946
Murvi Morello	£38,410
Torbay Volkswagen Maverick	£38,695
Timberland Endeavour X1X	£39,490
Timberland Endeavour X1X SB	£39,490
Devon Sapphire	£43,296

COACHBUILTS UP TO £36,000

Elddis Autoquest 115	£27,090
Home-Car PR59	£31,130
Swift Sundance 580 PR	£31,845
Knaus Van Ti	£32,495

COACHBUILTS £36,001 - £45,000

Hymmer Camp 642 CL	£36,595
Rimor Superbrig 689TC	£36,995
Adria Izola S687 SPG	£37,900
Swift Sundance 630L	£38,395
Pioneer Pizzaro	£39,195
Swift Bolero 630 EW	£39,660
Adria Izola A697 SL (150bhp)	£39,900
Pioneer Jolliet	£40,195
Rimor Sailer 700TC	£41,390
Autocruise Starburst	£43,795
Fleurette F67 LD	£43,995
Autocruise Stardream	£44,790

COACHBUILTS OVER £45,000

Fleurette F73 LM	£46,890
Bessacarr E765S	£52,295
Autocruise Gleneagle	£52,781
Autocruise Augusta	£53,376
Laika Kreos 3005	£54,795

A-CLASS UP TO £60,000

Dethleffs Globebus I3	£39,950
Adria Vision 677 SP (120bhp)	£49,650
Adria Vision 707 SG (120bhp)	£52,850
Hymmer B544 SL	£56,895

A-CLASS OVER £60,000

Rapido 999M	£60,600
Carthago Chic I47	£60,995
Concorde A Liner	£150,000



Design & Drive 2007

OVER 40 MOTOR CARAVANS WERE ENTERED INTO THE CLUB'S 2007 DESIGN & DRIVE COMPETITION. GEORGE HINTON IS YOUR DESIGN EXPERT, MIKE LE CAPLAIN THE MAN BEHIND THE WHEEL

CLASS 1 VAN CONVERSIONS UP TO £34,000

- 1st: Adria Twin 100hp £29,900
- 2nd: Devon Provence £33,658
- 3rd: East Neuk Campervans Fifer Touring £27,995

Just four entries in this class. Torbay's VW Caddy-based Rebel is a minimalist camper-cum-day-van with few equivalents. It offers a good-sized double bed but you have to heave the kitchen outside to a drive-away awning. Smart to look at, giving it youth appeal.

East Neuk Campervans impressed the panel of judges with fresh layout-thinking in its SWB Fiat Ducato Fifer Touring, plus well-crafted execution. Two rear travel seats convert to a double bed, there are workable surfaces for the tiny kitchen, and a tall cupboard pulls out to provide a toilet compartment.

Devon's Renault-based Provence nearly repeated its previous success. The front L-lounge layout takes under a minute to make into a bed, there's a mid-kitchen and rear washroom, and the demo model offered a leather interior and cab air conditioning.

The Adria Twin won this class last year, but the 2007 class winner, on the new Ducato, has been refined for greater versatility. The surprisingly



ABOVE: Adria Twin's folding double bed provides extra storage capacity
BELOW: Refined Ducato adds to Twin's versatility
LEFT: Judging was not easy!



generous fixed rear double bed now folds in two and stows to allow huge load-carrying capacity.

ON THE ROAD

None of the driving judges was surprised when the Adria Twin won its class. Its refinement is impressive given that the same test route roads caused even some coachbuilds around the £40,000 price mark to rattle like crazy.

While its ride was quite firm (like all X2/50 Ducatos), its handling was superb. The 100MJ engine felt a little overwhelmed, though – the 130MJ option could well be a wise investment.

The little VW Caddy-based Torbay Rebel was a blast to drive, while the Fifer turned out to be one of the competition's real surprises, being well-made and quiet.



ABOVE: Flexible L-shaped lounge gave Morello the edge in a competitive class

CLASS 2 VAN CONVERSIONS OVER £34,000

- 1st: Murvi Morello £38,410
- 2nd: Timberland Endeavour X1X £39,490
- 3rd: Timberland Endeavour X1X SB £39,490

Torbay's extremely well-finished compact elevating roof models had to compete against larger fixed-roof vans, which obviously offered more facilities. Vanmaster's Pecos lost out, with a layout that gives a cramped rear corridor, with offside kitchen and nearside washroom and wardrobe. The table was also unwieldy.

Devon's flagship Mercedes Sapphire is one of the longest panel vans around, allowing a lengthways

fixed bed; but it's narrow at 4ft, tapering to 3ft 6in. The front L-lounge and mid-kitchen are convenient, but the Sapphire was dark inside with its undersized windows.

Murvi's ageing but continually updated Morello scored well in all departments to put it top of its class again. A flexible L-lounge that can be swung forward to form travel seats is still a winning point, while the kitchen and washroom are entirely functional. Do check the payload is sufficient – the 3300kg (max) model submitted weighed a surprisingly high 3080kg.

ON THE ROAD

The Murvi's prototype cab seats (which are being remedied) didn't pull forward enough for most of the judges. Otherwise, the Ducato-based conversion impressed hugely with its near-silence on the road, its nimble handling and surprisingly compliant suspension.

The best of the rest for me was the Vanmaster Pecos, whose handling/ride compromise and lack of conversion noise was very nearly the match of the Murvi, with Torbay's Mercedes Vito-based Fusion a close third.

The Fusion might have scored even better marks had its automatic gearbox demonstrated snappier kickdown, as its car-like handling and performance and lower, comfortable driving position made for a genuinely refreshing change.

CLASS 3 COACHBUILTS UP TO £36,000

- 1st: **OVERALL WINNER** Elddis Autoquest 115 £27,090
- 2nd: Knaus Van Ti £32,495
- 3rd: Home-Car PR59 £31,130

Only four entries, with examples from Swift and Explorer, backed up by Lunar's Belgian parent, Home-Car, and Germany's Knaus Van Ti (via Lowdham's of Nottingham).

The Swift Sundance 580PR low-profile has a flexible rear lounge arrangement and is almost too good to be from an entry-level range. It has one of the best-specified kitchens in the business and there's nothing in the soft furnishings to offend

The Knaus offers a great deal in a very compact box on the Ducato chassis, including a high-level rear fixed bed over a garage. The kitchen is basic but the swing-away washroom basin is a novelty, and if you don't mind the fiddly conversion, the cab dinette makes a third berth.

Home-Car's PR59 was notable for the excellence of its fixed bed's 6ft 6in length (not its 4ft width, though) and the general feel of quality belies its competitive price. It scored pretty steadily all round, losing a little ground on lack of kitchen

ON THE ROAD

The Elddis Autoquest 115 majors on value, nimble handling and fizzy performance, and if Explorer can nail its few quality flaws (one of the Boxer's seat adjusters snapped off, for instance) and dampen the cooker's rattling, it'll be tough to beat.

My personal gong went to the terrific Home-Car PR59, whose Renault Master underpinnings belied its bargain price, displaying admirable refinement and ride quality, and a free-rewving (if optional) dCi 120 engine. The fly-off handbrake's a nice touch, too, although the passenger seat rocked back and forth under acceleration and braking.

The Knaus Van Ti's short wheelbase instigated some pitching, and its conversion rattled near-incessantly, but Fiat's 130MJ engine made it a proper little rocket.

workspace, scarcity of bathroom fittings and plain cabinetwork.

Explorer Group's entry-level Elddis Autoquest 115 is a two berth that benefits from a specification any couple would find pleasing, with a three-burner hob, grill and small oven, heating and hot water. It's comfortable, tasteful and great value. A well-deserved class and overall winner.



LEFT AND ABOVE: Highly specified Autoquest is also great value for money and a good-looker



CLASS 4 COACHBUILTS FROM £36,000-£45,000

1st: Autocruise Starburst £43,795

2nd: Adria Izola S687SPG £37,900

3rd: Pioneer Jolliet £40,195

Twelve different models here (three imported) from six manufacturers. Swift pitched a Sundance 630L against a Bolero 630EW, but Rimor entered both a Mercedes-based Sailer 700TC and Ford Superbrig 689TC.

Clearly the six-berth Superbrig is aimed at families but the 3.5-tonne chassis was deficient in payload – 3100kg without driver. With a small wardrobe and just five roof lockers, you'd have to travel light. However, it's surprisingly spacious, bright and substantial, especially at £37k.

The Rimor Sailer 700TC features a transverse fixed bed over garage, with a small cab dinette and side sofa up front – but we can't see how a 2ft 8in bed can be called a double, so it's really a three-berth. There was no separate 12V ring circuit for accessories and one mains socket was fitted upside down, and upholstery on the forward-facing travel seats interfered with the free retraction of seatbelts. The seating was shapeless, and the dinette gloomy.

Of the other importers, Adria entered two Izola Renault coachbuilds: the S687 SPG low-profile and the A697 SL. Both had rear fixed-bed layouts, the A697 having twin singles that can be made quickly into a double. The 5/6 beds are super-sized but there are only four travel seats. The Continental kitchen is supplemented by a high eye-level grill and the larger of Theford's low-level fridges.

The A687 SPG was runner-up in this class, with a rear garage/transverse bed layout and three berths, but the same four travel seats. A small sofa next to the cab dinette helps make a good lounging area and a large single bed, but a great two-door fridge-freezer left no space for a grill or oven.

ABOVE: Low-profile body adds to Starburst's appeal
BELOW: Double or twin beds are a bonus

ON THE ROAD

My Starburst notes are peppered with comments like 'very well sorted' (for ride quality), 'excellent' (for stability) and 'good fun to drive'. The Peugeot Boxer engine offered strong performance and impressive refinement. Faults were limited to a too-short driver's seat squab that offered little under-knee support and a cooker that rattled rather.

Of a host of strong performers in this class, the Rimor Ford Superbrig's performance and ride were as genuinely superb as its Mercedes Sailer sibling's handling and driving position were genuinely awful, while only over-firm Isri cab seats blotted the second-placed Adria S687's on-the-road copybook.

Swift's Sundance 630L is a classic six-berth rear-lounge layout built high on a Ducato Maxi chassis. The 6ft 2in sprung rear sofas make single or double beds while the overcab bed is 6ft x 4ft 1in. However, we gave up trying to assemble the dinette bed after eight minutes as we could not fit the five extra pieces together!



The company's Bolero 630EW has a short settee/large rear washroom layout and scored quite well for comfort, ambience and convenience, though the mid-floor step could worry the less-agile. The fold-down bed support legs can be a pain to stow.

The low-profile Fleurette F67LD four-berth four-seater has a fixed bed on the 130bhp Fiat/Al-Ko 3500kg chassis. It was 125kg lighter than the brochure stated, leaving a cracking 625kg payload. The cab dinette is also your lounge, so it's a pity the forward-facing seats are uncomfortable. Mind your knees on the under-frame of the extending table when sitting in the swivelled cab seat. Outside it was well-finished in high-gloss GRP.

Hymer's entry-level Hymer Camp coachbuilt range is as well-built as any of its prestige models, but has little to make it stand out from the crowd. The three double beds are each well sized, but only four seats have belts and all mattresses except the overcab sit on plywood locker lids. Storage is tight for a full complement. Both kitchen and washroom scored well, while outside, the non-white paint finish was striking.

The Pioneer Jolliet is a conventional rear-kitchen two-berth. Its short parallel settees easily pull together to make the double bed, but I didn't like the skimpy push-in armrests that have to be tugged out and forced back each time. The interior feels cramped – partly because the large 81L Dometic fridge juts out well into the aisle. The small washroom benefits from a swing-wall design that takes the handbasin out of view. Well-specified and well-detailed, but £41k is a huge sum for a SWB Boxer. It scored highly, though, making third in class.

The Pioneer Pizzaro's rear-entry layout endows this compact coachbuilt with added versatility. There are compromises though: the toilet resides behind a silver plastic roller-shutter door and you have to close off the aisle to give yourself legroom, while the basin is the tip-up type. Practical for two, with an L-settee plus swivelling cab seats

and a kitchen with big fridge and a Spinflo cooker plus oven. Hard, again, to see why the price exceeds £39k.

The Autocruise Stardream sports a regular rear lounge layout for two which made up in 55 seconds to a 6ft 11in double or 6ft singles. The interior is a touch dark, with a dresser behind the passenger seat, and the washroom is dark too. The stainless sink/drainage is exposed, and there's generally good storage, except for small wardrobe.

Autocruise's Starburst pipped its partner by a surprisingly wide margin. What's the appeal? Low-profile body, a twin-settee lounge making double or single beds, a good kitchen and full-width rear washroom make for easy living. I have reservations about the fussy roof end and tail panel mouldings and dated soft furnishings, though.



CLASS 5 COACHBUILTS OVER £45,000

1st: Autocruise Gleneagle £52,781 (above)

Jt2nd: Autocruise Augusta £53,376

Jt2nd: Bessacarr E765 S £52,295

The Laika Kreos 3005, imported by Lowdham, has both clever layout details and flaws: the kitchen has loads of storage, but you can't use the worktops if you want anything out of an over-garage cupboard, as they open across it. Underseat drawers and external lockers are great and it appears well-made, but lack of handbook, safety equipment and even a battery hampered judging.

The larger of the Fleurettes, the F73 LM was a rather long low-profile with a short (6ft) island bed flanked by twin wardrobes. The cab dinette is your only lounging space, but this one has a supplementary side settee. However, there's scant kneeroom when using the swivel cab seats, and the swivelling ply panels forming the single bed base seemed flimsy and took 2½ minutes to set up. Pretty good value for money, but it lost marks for a restricted payload and by failing to supply a handbook.

Swift Group had high hopes for its big Bessacarr E765S – the classic fixed bed layout. The bed is only 6ft 1in long, narrowing from 4ft 3in





ABOVE: Autocruise Gleneagle – a new two-berth with Aluframe construction

down to 3ft, but we applauded the soft furnishing detail with leather edges to the beige fabric. Cab seats can be raised to the right level for dining, but we weren't so sure about the table extension, which is well-sized but spring-loaded, and can collapse if leant upon. The quality of some of the bodywork detailing, in particular the plastic tail-light housings, was flimsy, otherwise it's practical and appealing.

Autocruise submitted a low-profile Peugeot/AI-Ko based Augusta, with a forward lounge with twin settees, an unusual midships split kitchen with the sink in the doorway, then a rear bedroom with two single beds that undersail the short wardrobes. That still leaves length for a rear washroom.

Although it's a four-berth, there are only two travel seats, the fixed beds are just 6ft long, while the large front double makes up in 45 seconds. Value marks were less than average, but you do get an inbuilt awning for your £53k.

Class victory fell to the Autocruise Gleneagle, a new Peugeot Boxer-based two-berth model. Layout comprises 6ft 3in long front settees, luxury centre kitchen with swing-out cabinets and tall fridge-freezer, microwave et al, plus a full-width rear washroom notable for

ON THE ROAD

The Autocruise Gleneagle and Augusta deservedly take the top two places in this class for much the same reasons as the Starburst does in the previous category, although the former get the biggest 160bhp Peugeot engine allied to a four-tonne chassis. The Gleneagle was quite tail-happy when pushed, and its suspension unusually crashy, but elsewhere it proved difficult to fault.

The Laika Kreos, based on the rarely-used Iveco Daily 35 chassis, stood out for its superb ride (even if the pay-off is waterbed handling) and potent, if noisy engine, but being unable to fully disengage its handbrake with the seatbelt on was a real issue.

The Ducato-based Fleurette F73's acceleration, meanwhile, drew an awed 'lordy' from me, while only slightly iffy brakes marred the genuinely excellent Fiat/AI-Ko based Bessacarr E765.

its darkness. Build features Aluframe construction, Alde central heating with airing cupboard and heated gas locker and belly lockers, reversing camera and awning.



ABOVE: Functional and effective – Rapido's 999M

**CLASS 7
A-CLASS OVER £60,000**

1st: Rapido 999M £60,600
2nd: Cathargo Chic I 47 £60,995
Just three entries here but with a huge price difference, two being just over the £60k threshold, then the late entry Concorde at more than double.

The A Liner is all luxury of course, with soft leather upholstery and two TV sets, though the cabinet locks are also found on cheap Italian imports. The basement has a garage, large generator, battery room, store rooms, auto levelling jacks, built in hook-up cable reel and far more. However, the price, size and the fact that you need an HGV 3 licence to drive it (our driving judges couldn't get behind the wheel) counted against it, superb layout and top quality notwithstanding.

Carthargo's Chic I 47 has a garage layout but the Continental spec model entered came with live and neutral reversed in its electrics, non UK-compliant upholstery, a hazardous step in the floor and various other details that cumulatively lost it points. Shame, because construction is interesting – aluminium/styrofoam/aluminium sandwich with a carpet-type inner lining – and it was well finished.

The astonishing Rapido 999M deservedly steals class honours here for its Anglicised interior – low grill and big fridge-freezer – nice five-seat cab-lounge and good storage, coupled to a chassis with a beautifully supple ride.

ON THE ROAD

The Renault Master-based Adrias look stunning inside and out. I marked the 707 down for its bouncy ride and occasional susceptibility to crosswinds, but enthused over its brisk performance, Quickshift automatic gearbox and good value. Its stablemate, the 677, meanwhile, would be near-unbeatable in optional dCi 150 guise, although its conversion proved to be less muted.

The Hymer, on Fiat chassis, faltered only on ride quality (too much pitching) and door mirrors blighted by large blind-spots, with pretty much everything else – most notably performance – spot on.

The Dethleffs, too, could only really be faulted on conversion noise and a Fiat 130MJ engine that struggled a little to haul the 13's large body around.



**ABOVE: A Vision of clean lines
BELOW: Suede-effect upholstery and feature-packed interior helped the Vision to its class win**

**CLASS 6
A-CLASS UP TO £60,000**

1st: Adria Vision i677 SP £49,650
2nd: Adria Vision 707 SG £52,850
3rd: Hymer B544 SL £56,895

The Dethleffs Globebus 1 3 is Fiat/AI-Ko based, with a small rear lounge and a standard double bed-size drop-down in the cab. The washroom is poky despite a swing-wall shower screen and the

kitchen is basic. It's also two travel seats short – but check the price!

Hymer's classic B544SL has a cab double bed partnered by a long and pleasingly soft nearside sofa that makes a generous third, while the L-shape dinette means three can dine in comfort. Super details include the almost-full-length wind-up washroom rooflight and the body styling, but prices start from £57k (over £62k with options). Adding a cab door and improving the wipers were plusses, but both doors are on our offside.

Both the winning and runner-up Adrias were great value, with luxury touches such as motorised operation of the cab beds and of the transverse over-garage bed in the i707 SG. Our only criticism of the 707 was the difficult adjustment of the cab seats for dining which still left them a bit distant from the extendable but non-adjustable table.

The winning i677SP probably clinched it with a dining table that did the opposite – adjusted but didn't extend. A feature-packed inventory includes centrally-locked door, double floor design with access hatches for services, easy-care cream suede-look textured upholstery, work surfaces in white simulated marble and a Dometic fridge-freezer-oven tower (but no grill!).

ON THE ROAD

Rapido's 999M deservedly won its class – for its Mercedes chassis gave a beautifully supple ride and eerie lack of noise out on the road. Its performance was more of a relentless build-up of momentum than a full-bore explosion of power, but its ergonomics and seat comfort were near-faultless.

I found the Carthago's firm, pitchy ride and super-wide body slightly at odds with the superb performance of its 160bhp Fiat engine, but only persistent cab noise really held it back.

