

# Test Pilote

George Hinton takes the controls of a brand new Continental-style A-class

Vehicle supplied for test by: Hayes Leisure, Walsall Road, Darlaston, West Midlands WS10 9SS. Call 0121 526 3433 or see hayesleisure.co.uk.

**I**F OUR test subject this month looks a shade familiar, so it should, because Pilote's new-for-2011 Aventura compact A-class duo is based on the City Van we reviewed back in January 2008, albeit with a slight stretch. Layout options are either a conventional corner fixed bed design, or this more sophisticated model with a garage beneath a transverse rear double.

### CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

Based on Fiat's Ducato 35 Camping Car chassis-cowl with a 4.04m wheelbase and boasting the 2.3-litre, 130bhp Multijet

diesel engine as standard, the new compact Aventuras are described as real alternatives to panel van conversions, occupying virtually the same footprint, at 6m long and 2.05m wide, as a long-wheelbase Ducato panel van.

Although it's right-hand drive, the body remains Continental. This means you get a cab door where access is easiest (nearside), compensating for the caravan door on the UK offside.

Solid construction features laminated walls skinned in marine-grade aluminium, while the roof is laminated polyester for resistance to hail damage. Styrofoam

insulation is used in walls, floors and roof, while the skirts are extruded aluminium.

Construction has been refined since 2008, the A-class front now having "acoustic, thermal and anti-vibratory insulation strengthened with a patented material, exclusive to the Pilote Group", called 'Silent Plastic'. Oh yes, and the colour has moved from two-tone city grey to conventional gloss white.

Inside, there is a nearside five-place cab dinette with reversible front seats and a single seat facing inwards on the offside, convertible to a generous third berth. The offside kitchen has the washroom

opposite on the left. At the rear is the generous, transverse fixed double bed with a slim garage beneath – narrow because some of the space is used inside for an unusual underbed wardrobe/storage unit.

### ON THE ROAD

The familiar Ducato is light and viceless to drive, with a six-speed manual gearbox and ABS braking. Visibility still suffers a little due to very thick front windscreen pillars, while the single-lens power mirrors aren't quite as good as the superb standard Fiat cab twin-lens issue.

Optional central locking covers both the single nearside cab door and the offside caravan door, but we were disappointed to find no airbags. They can be specified as an option, but are rather expensive at £1,360 for the pair, being packaged with two Aguti cab seats.

Another omission is a spare wheel, the factory option costing the best part of a grand as it includes a wind-down cradle to carry it. A much cheaper solution would be to buy a wheel and tyre and stow it in the garage. Alloy wheels would also be extra, at £700.

On the plus side, cab air conditioning is standard, making your run to the sun more bearable. We criticised the City Van for rattles, but the Aventura is far better, aided in no small part by not having a drop-down cab bed.

### LIVING ABOARD

Although there is an inset step at the caravan entrance, the standard Fiat chassis means this is quite high up at 14½in, so some might want to carry a loose step or specify the fitted electric option at £280. The second internal step is 9in. Apart from a 5in step up into the shower, where the mainly generous 6ft 6½in headroom drops to 6ft 2in, the floor is level.

Paired three-point seatbelts grace the forward-facing dinette seat, with convenient stalk-type lower sockets rather than loose webbing. Seat height is a comfortable 19½in and cushions are plump 4½in foam.

Upholstery is in a design called Tiramisu, which also describes the colours, while the walls are all woodgrain-effect plywood. Practical light flooring is in 3in-wide birch plank-effect vinyl. Detachable carpets are optional but the cab is carpeted.

Facing the dinette on the offside, the third seat can be used as an extra dining seat thanks to a neat extension on the heavy dining table. Releasing a screw clamp underneath lets it slide out, then a clever hinge mechanism on the slide helps it to pop up level with the main table-top. This allows the 18½in-wide table to expand from 3ft 3in to 4ft 5½in long.

Storage cannot be over-generous in such a compact vehicle, but there are three shelved top lockers in the dinette area, plus a tambour cabinet above the dinette seat complete with mounting bracket, to conceal your LCD TV, and provided with the requisite sockets.

The under-seat space is already well-occupied by the 100-litre water tank below the dinette and by the Pilote-branded 105Ah boxed battery, charger and consumer unit beneath the single seat, leaving just a little room where you could stash tools or spare shoes.

The under-bed hanging space, with conventional hinged door, has a 29in rail but only 19in is usable due to the adjacent shelf/steps. The hanging drop is also 29in.

Heating and hot water are provided by a Truma 4000 Combi boiler mounted in the garage, for which dual-fuelling is another option fitted. The under-floor waste water tank holds a creditable 95l and is emptied via a large valve sited nearside centre. It can be frost-protected as an option. The fresh water tank has a top cleaning cap and an old-fashioned plug-on-a-chain for emptying. A lockable external filler cap is fitted – two keys serve the entire vehicle.

Windows have net curtains in the usual Pilote style (except the kitchen), while lighting is by a triple halogen ceiling fitting supplemented by a pair of halogen spotlights. Overhead, daylight and ventilation comes from a midi Heki sunroof.

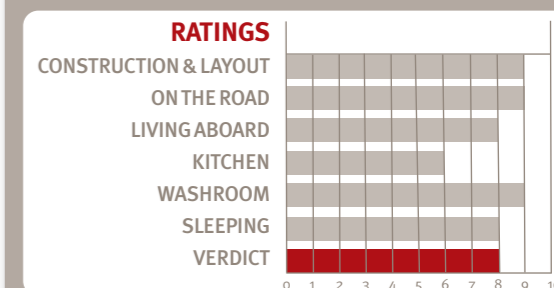


Less than 20ft long, the Aventura G600 is easy enough to manoeuvre



Washroom is both well-equipped and spacious

“For practicality the Aventura bathroom must be rated the highlight”



RRP/as tested	£49,570/£53,440 OTR
Base vehicle	Fiat Ducato 3500 MWB
Engine	2,287cc, in-line 4-cyl, common-rail turbodiesel
Power	130bhp (95.5kW) @ 3,600rpm
Torque	236lb ft (320Nm) @ 2,000-3,000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, FWD
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/17.6gal (80 litres)/23.8mpg (est)
Overall length	19ft 8in (6m)
Overall width	6ft 9in (2.05m) exc mirrors
Overall height	9ft (2.75m)
Max internal height	6ft 6in (2m)
MRO	2,855kg (56.2cwt)
MTPLM	3,500kg (68.9cwt)
User payload	645kg (12.7cwt)
Berths	3
NCC approved	No

Figures supplied by manufacturer

Club insurance: 0800 028 4809 • Info: pilote.co.uk



Both cab seats swivel to extend lounging and dining options



Above: kitchen is typical for a Continental-made motorhome

Below right: you need to step up to the fixed rear bed, which is generously sized

A spacious gas locker takes two Continental-size cylinders (13kg) while two external lockers house levellers and mains cable etc. The garage has a floor like a deep shower tray, complete with a drain at the door end, so mucky mountain bikes or scooters should pose no terrors. However, you might need a loading ramp, as the threshold is quite high. Internal height is 3ft 5in, door height just 3ft 1in, so you wouldn't get a motorbike in there, although there are four substantial lashing points. A handy bin could take wet gear, while a closable heating vent means you can even dry the contents.

**KITCHEN**

We have seen bigger kitchen units in far smaller motorhomes lately, the Pilote's measuring 3ft 4in long and 1ft 10in wide, virtually all occupied by the glass-topped stainless steel sink and three-burner hob units (with electronic ignition). A plastic drainer stows in the wardrobe.

Again, in typical Continental style, there are no fittings for crockery storage and no pots and pans provision. However, there is a good, five-compartment wooden cutlery drawer that also reveals the gas valves when opened, above a second larger drawer useful for all manner of kitchen tools etc.

For food storage there are two roof lockers, one shelved, and the 971 Thetford fridge. There is no oven, but importer Hayes does specify a gas-fired Dometic mini-grill as a standard UK market extra, though its position, just above the floor, is

far from ideal. Lighting is provided by a single striplight under the overhead lockers and a single 13Amp socket outlet is set into the front of the base unit just above the drawers.

**WASHROOM**

The washroom is far more luxurious than the kitchen. Measuring 4ft 3in long by 34½in wide and offering a semi-triangular shower towards the rear, there's a real impression of generous space here, even though the effective showering area is only 17in wide and an average 18in long. It's well-fitted too, with a riser-rail, and although there's only a single drain, it's on the nearside where the water naturally collects.

The toilet is a top-spec Dometic CT300 with ceramic bowl and there's a clear, wind-up rooflight for light and air, but no window. At night, paired halogen downlighters above the basin are quite effective.

Outside the shower tray the raised floor is grey vinyl. The oval, plastic fixed handbasin is set in the front right-hand corner with a mirrored wooden cabinet above and a large cabinet below. Other fittings include a towel rail on the door, tooth mug and toilet roll holders and a chrome gallery rail edging a useful shelf behind the toilet. For practicality, the washroom must be rated the highlight of the Aventura G600.

**SLEEPING**

The rear over-garage bed, reasonably-sized at 6ft 4in long, 4ft 4in wide, is mounted on two single beech-slatted alloy frames, so there will be no condensation issues beneath the comfortable foam mattress. Roof lockers along the back wall are commodious, but you must clamber onto the bed, which offers 3ft headroom, to add or retrieve items. Daylight comes from the nearside window. There's a clear rooflight above, fitted with nightblind and flyscreen, and night-time lighting, by two halogen spotlights, is entirely satisfactory.

For making up the optional third dinette berth, an L-shaped infill cushion will test your jigsaw skills but, as singles go, this is generous at 6ft 6in long and varying from 2ft 11in down to 2ft 1in wide. Pleated blinds close off the cab windows at night. You could specify a lowerable cab double bed too, but it would be crowded!

**VERDICT**

Other manufacturers have gone the compact route with varying degrees of success, but Pilote has cleverly gone for the popular fixed bed layout in two variants. Garages are undeniably useful for small families' clobber, while the low bed version offers easier access. The Aventura is not as big as it looks on the outside, but it's certainly roomy enough inside. If the Continental design doesn't deter you, it's worth a close look. ■

