



TRACK STAR

George Hinton gives a gold medal to an innovative island bed model

Vehicle supplied for test by: Auto-Trail VR Ltd, Trigano House, Genesis Way, Europarc, Grimsby DN37 9TU. Call 01472 571000.

Auto-Trail's original Tracker was a baby motorhome on the lightweight Fiat Scudo platform chassis. Then, a decade ago, it 'grew up' onto the Ducato chassis, but still as a compact model, available today as the EKS. The range expanded and, for 2013, it has developed yet again with this new RB model. The existing 7m FB fixed-corner-bed version sold well, but customers then asked for an island bed option to give access from both sides, yet still in a manageable overall length.

CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

Whether you consider 25ft 'manageable' is a personal matter but, with an internal length of 16ft 5in, the RB certainly packs plenty in. The bodyshell continues to be built on a jig then married to the Fiat chassis, and if that doesn't speak loudly of its integrity, how about the 10-year warranty? Or lack of rattles on the road?

Insulation is to Grade 3, maintaining 20°C inside when it's -15°C outside. Testing when the first December snow hit the south of England and it dropped to -8°C overnight, we kept cosy thanks to the

40mm wall and 45mm floor and roof insulation plus effective Truma heating.

Walls are externally skinned in high-gloss GRP, which is also the material of the roof and rear panel. The lower skirts and the spare wheel cover on the rear panel are moulded from acrylic-capped ABS.

The layout comprises a small front lounge, compact centre kitchen on the offside mirrored by the washroom with separate shower, then there's the island bedroom at the rear. The lounge can be made into an extra bed, four feet wide tapering to three.

There are only the two travel seats in the cab, but Auto-Trail offers a layout option, replacing the offside sofa with a half-dinette and two seatbelts, for £825.

ON THE ROAD

The highly-developed Ducato is light and easy to drive. Our only criticism is of the dipped headlights, which cast rings of light with shadows in the centre, but they are adequate. Equipment includes cab air con, cruise control and two airbags.

Despite weighing virtually 3.5 tonnes empty, the RB can still get up to 50mph in under 15 seconds, 60 in 22. The Maxi chassis is plated at 4,250kg MTPLM, so there's a generous payload allowance of 770kg. It rides well too, but appears happiest cruising at 65mph on the motorway, when it returned 25mpg. The low mileage (515 at the start of this test) means that can only improve.

The weight might also make some drivers ineligible, and attract higher Continental tolls, but road tax is still just £165pa.

LIVING ABOARD

Among the 2013 Tracker standard features is the Dometic entry door, centrally locked, with automatic step, but now incorporating a holder for the Auto-Trail umbrella, an improved larger waste bin and new roller flyscreen.

The floor is level throughout, apart from the five-inch step up to the washroom. Overall impression? I'll quote one of the wardens at our Alderstead Heath site: "It's got the 'wow' factor."

It's spacious, with a wide aisle, neutral but classy upholstery and smart co-ordinated detailing. There's a black cooker with stainless touches, new Daewoo stainless-trimmed 800W microwave with black grille surround and black acrylic windows in the wardrobe doors.

The Truma space heater sitting at the base of the wardrobe also has black detailing on its bronze fascia, while the Truma boiler is tucked away in the extreme offside rear corner under the bedside chest of drawers. Both are gas/electric models and space heating can be used on the move.

Ample under-settee storage offers no easy front access: you must lift the slatted frames and cushions on their gas struts. The nearside also houses the gas locker (1x13kg and 1x7kg capacity) while the offside contains the 100Ah house battery under its floor. Top lockers are more limited, one by the door having glass and bottle holders, while the Sargent electrical control centre fills most of one opposite.

An outstanding feature is the giant Skyline front sunroof and there are three



Kitchen is compact but well-specified



Neutral but classy upholstery



Coffee table is a nice touch

no-cost options: Super Lo-Line (our demonstrator), which features a large, shallow storage bin beneath the sunroof and two side pockets; Lo-Line which has bigger storage lockers; and Hi-Line with double bed. Headroom underneath the sunroof is more than 6ft 9in, 6ft 6in elsewhere.

Seating is comfortable and supportive, but the heating system, with two outlets under the offside sofa, needed some experimentation. To overcome the cold draughts from the cab area on sub-zero mornings, it helped to close air outlets in the bedroom and washroom. The lighting is excellent - there's even a dimmer for the under-cabinet area - and we like the rigid circular coffee table on its boom arm.

KITCHEN

Undeniably well-equipped, the kitchen has limited worktop space - just a 10in x 21in area between drainer and hob if you discount the sink and cooker lids. Food storage is also restricted as both roof lockers are racked for crockery, but if you include the adjacent lounge locker that houses the through-roof TV aerial, it becomes acceptable. There is loads more clothes space in the rear bedroom after all, while the Dometic 8-series fridge offers another 96 litres' cool storage.

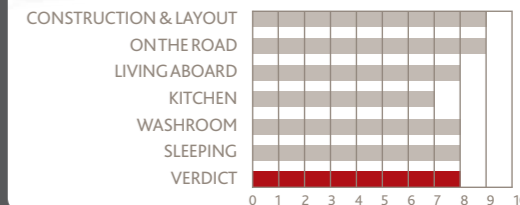
I have the usual moan about microwave oven location: its base, at 5ft 2in above floor level, is above my wife's head. Thetford's compact cooker adds an 800W electric ring plus three burners, grill and oven.

The wooden-divider cutlery drawer has another usefully deep drawer below, and there is a foot-wide shelved cupboard at the bottom where the gas valves are found.

There's a nice, big 14in circular sink in stainless steel, while its integral semi-circular drainer now comes with a >>

TECHNICAL

RATINGS



RRP/as tested	£50,568/£52,912 OTR
Base vehicle	Fiat Ducato 40 Heavy
Engine	2,287cc Fiat/Iveco Multijet
Power	130bhp (95.5kW) @ 3,600rpm
Torque	236lb ft (320Nm) @ 1,800rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/19.8gal (90 litres)/23.1mpg
Overall length	24ft 11in (7.60m)
Overall width	7ft 7in (2.31m) exc mirrors
Overall height	9ft 11in (3.03m)
Max internal height	6ft 6in (1.99m)
MRO	3,480kg (68.5cwt)
MTPLM	4,250kg (83.7cwt)
User payload	770kg (15.2cwt)
Berths	3 (2 seats for travel)
Caravan Club Insurance quote	£435.34*

*52-year-old person living in the TA22 postcode area (Dulverton, Somerset). Driver, whose occupation is bank staff, has full unprotected no claim discount and has held a full, clean licence for 25 years. Motorhome is kept on a driveway and is not modified. Use is social, domestic and pleasure not exceeding 6,000 miles per year. Price as of January 2013 and includes Insurance Premium Tax where applicable. Figures supplied by manufacturer

Club insurance: 0800 028 4809 • Info: auto-trail.co.uk



“ The bed’s frame is hinged just below the pillow line ”



Above left: Tracker RB offers its users a spacious and comfortable fixed rear bedroom

Above right: the washroom is stylish but compact

suitably-sized wire draining rack which we haven't seen before. The partial sink cover is a piece of solid 8mm laminate that covers the drainer and half the sink, so you can still prepare food. Neat idea. Lighting is excellent – there's a continuous strip of LEDs along the kitchen's length.

Overall, Auto-Trail has made really good use of limited space.

WASHROOM

It's the same story here: within a 4ft 8in x 2ft 7½in space you find a sealed shower cubicle with 24in tray and single drain towards the front of the vehicle, a good-sized semi-Belfast-style sink with curved front and illuminated mirror splashback, and our favourite Thetford 300 flat-top swivel toilet.

Two storage baskets are found in each cabinet, high and low-level, and there's a useful shelf beside the basin. The shower has a stylish black panel for the control and riser rail, but there's nowhere to put anything, so get a shower gel with integral hook! A great feature is a high-quality chrome hanging rail for wet clothes that swings down from the ceiling. Note that headroom here is only 6ft.

Cool blue LEDs light the shower and there's a Mini Heki for daylight and ventilation, plus a warm air outlet. Other fittings include a chromed towel rail, tissue holder and double gown hook.

SLEEPING

The rear bedroom takes up 5ft 8in of the length on the offside, while there is an extra six inches on the nearside, affording a bit more room to get around the end of the bed.

The bed's dimensions are 6ft 2in x 4ft 4in, but you don't end up with a foot all round when it is in use: it's nearer nine inches at the bottom end, with the projecting window blind surround to squeeze past.

The bed has a party trick: its slatted aluminium frame is hinged just below the pillow line and the whole thing slides towards the headboard, the top end pivoting up on gas struts. It takes a bit of brute strength though, and we found the hinge gear was chewing holes in the mattress. The result is an 18in bottom gap to positively waltz around!

A storage slot between wardrobe and bed hides the main free-standing table, providing a useful bedside shelf on top. There's one on the other side too, over the wee chest of drawers, big enough for the early-morning tea tray.

There are two big shelved roof lockers above the headboard and two big under-bed drawers facing the kitchen, plus a full-height corner unit with mirror, light and power point. Over half the underbed area is storage, accessed from an outside hatch or by lifting the mattress. The wall above the nearside window is prepared for a

flatscreen TV, with power and aerial sockets. Complementing the two windows is a Heki wind-up sunroof and again there's high and low-level LED lighting plus two reading lamps. A neat feature is blue LED night-lighting under the bathroom door.

The front settees just slide together to form a bed, while the cab is closed off by the latest generation of easy-action Remis pleated blinds. ■

VERDICT

If the length and weight pose no problems, this is a highly-practical and comfortable tourer for two.

The optional Media Pack, which represents great value for money, includes a decent radio/CD/DVD player with rear speakers that doesn't cut out after 20 minutes, Bluetooth phone and MP3/Aux connections, day/night colour reversing camera and West European sat-nav. There's more too: a 15in drop-down TV screen in the cab roof and a Status TV aerial with digital signal finder.

Other options include the usual Fiat engine upgrades, with the Comfort-Matic robotized gearbox available on any of them for £1,420.

At just over £50,000, the Auto-Trail Tracker EB looks excellent value.

