

VARIETY SHOW

John Thynne takes a look at the motor caravan models unveiled to the public at Birmingham's NEC in February

There was plenty for all kinds of motor caravan enthusiasts to get their teeth into at Birmingham's NEC show. Adventurous, outdoorsy types will have been impressed by the new vehicles from Auto Campers, while older couples couldn't fail to be drawn to the likes of the Vantage Motorhomes Zen, which packs plenty into its 5.18m-long frame. Signature models from new company Bentley Motorhomes will have appealed to families looking for a touch of class, while established firm Swift offered visitors another wonderful form of Escape courtesy of its six-berth 696.



Niesmann + Bischoff

On show for the first time in this country was Niesmann + Bischoff's Arto 69PL. Based on the Fiat Ducato 35L, this offers a rear longitudinal fixed double bed along the offside as opposed to the transverse option of the existing 69L. Featuring a generous garage space and four seats with three-point seatbelts, this is the ideal family motorhome. But it comes at a price – costing in the region of £73,000 on the road, this German beauty is exclusively imported by Shropshire-based Travelworld.



Pilote

This French manufacturer introduced its two-berth Aventura G 600 TGA (right and below) and three-sleeper Explorateur P 732 LJE (above). They cost from £49,570 and £63,620 on the road (including delivery from the Continent).



Concept Multi-Car

Kent-based Concept Multi-Car, the UK Volkswagen conversion agent of Reimo, brought the new Weekender Plus (below) to the NEC. Based on the VW T5 chassis, the basic model sleeps two but superflat elevating or insulated high-top roofs are available that extend night-time capacity to four. Prices start at £34,450 for the 2.0TDI 100bhp five-speed manual but a plethora of engine and gearbox options is on offer, with the 178bhp six-speed 4MOTION version retailing at just over £40,000 (excluding road



tax). Long- and short-wheelbase versions are available. Also on show was the Reimo Multi Style (above), up for grabs for the first time on a short wheelbase. Offering a rear private toilet area and kitchen with two-burner hob and sink, this two/four-berth starts at around £40,000 (excluding road tax).



Auto Campers

Offering a 'unique inside-outside' dining experience is the range of new conversions from Auto Campers. A clever slide-out fridge means those under the optional cassette awning have easy access to bottles of wine and beer, while the diesel hob is also within reach. Based on the short-wheelbase Ford Transit 260, two-berth Auto Campers are available as low-roof Day Vans or medium-roof Leisure Vans in entry-level Classic or Trend specifications. A final Limited model (above), which has an additional 200kg payload, front and rear air conditioning and a host of other upgrades is also available with a low roof. Designed and manufactured by established Berkshire firm, Roy Wood Transits, the display model at the NEC certainly caught the eye and could well appeal to younger, adventurous, sporty types. From an attractive-looking £24,995 plus charges.



Hillside Leisure

A new addition to the Hillside Leisure conversion family is the Thulston, based on the long-wheelbase Volkswagen T5. Occupants have the choice between two single beds or one, large double and can take advantage of a well-equipped central kitchen featuring full-size oven, separate grill and four-burner hob. There is a bathroom at the rear which, for the first time in a Hillside conversion, has an interior shower. From £41,000 on the road.



Swift

As well as giving its existing Escape range a facelift, the Swift Group has introduced a new model in the form of the 696. Sleeping six, courtesy of a front double, overcab double and two rear bunks, it joins 622, 624, 664 and 686 in the line-up. Costing from £37,495 on the road, an optional 130bhp engine can be specified for an additional £1,685 (standard engine is 100bhp Fiat Ducato Multijet diesel). Upgrades to the entire range include a new 'Mali Acacia' woodgrain finish and granite-effect kitchen sink inside, while new graphics and a low-energy LED light further improve things outside.



Wellhouse

Huddersfield-based Wellhouse's take on the Hyundai i800 people carrier is a luxurious-looking camper offering a host of goodies including Webasto heating and hot water system, Dometic 972 portable toilet, Smev dual hob and oven/grill and 47-litre Vitrifrigo compressor fridge. The Hyundai's 2.5-litre CRDi engine will provide plenty of poke and being "a car, not a van", Wellhouse describes the i800 as a "dream to drive". Indeed, with Reimo roof folded down, it measures less than 2m high – so you should have less trouble with parking barriers. From £34,000 on the road, including five-year warranty.





Nu Venture

New from Nu Venture is the Nu Rio with side entrance door. Based on the Citroën Dispatch and boasting an all-GRP exterior, rear seating can be converted into two 6ft-long singles at night or a 6ft x 5ft 9in double. Standard specification is impressive and includes Thetford electric flush toilet, 60-litre three-way fridge freezer, Smev four-burner hob and grill, Truma blown-air heating system, sat-nav and vehicle tracking systems. The rear-entrance version of the Nu Rio picked up a silver award at the 2009 MMM awards so this vehicle has good pedigree. What's more, it starts at £35,195 on the road.



Hobby

New from German manufacturer Hobby is the D650 ESC Toskana Classic. Based on the Fiat Ducato, it has four belted seats for travel, while two single beds can be made up at night. Swivelling driver and passenger seats ease matters for dining or relaxing and the kitchen comes equipped with a glass-lidded three-burner hob and fridge with freezer box. On-the-road price from £55,729.



Marquis

Marquis introduced an eighth model to its County range in the form of the low-profile, two-berth Worcester. As with the other vehicles in the line-up, it is based on the Mercedes Sprinter chassis and handcrafted for Marquis by Auto-Sleepers. Lounge seating converts into a pair of decent-length singles or a big transverse double. Boasting a 163bhp turbo-diesel engine, recessed awning, reversing camera, high-quality fabrics and furnishings, the Worcester starts at £61,495 on the road.



Auto-Sleepers

Auto-Sleepers launched the Kemerton, a new high-top van conversion based on the Peugeot Boxer. Priced from £45,195 on the road, it offers a bathroom with separate shower and toilet at the rear, well-equipped kitchen (three-burner gas hob/oven, sink/drain, 70-litre fridge/freezer, microwave and extractor fan) amidships and lounge with swivelling cab seats. Seating converts into a double or two single beds.

The company also unveiled the Bourton (second from right) and Malvern (right), using the medium-wheelbase Mercedes Sprinter chassis. You may have seen something strikingly similar in the form of the Marquis County Northants and Gloucester, on which these two luxurious-looking vehicles are based. The Bourton and Malvern cost from £54,995 and £61,495 on the road.



Hymer

On show for the first time was German manufacturer Hymer's Hypermobil B-Class 534, exclusively available through Brownhills of Preston. Measuring 6.5m long, there is room for a luxurious-looking bathroom with bench seat and separate shower. The model pictured costs £72,773 on the road, including right-hand drive conversion, third and fourth belted seats for travel in the rear and electric height-adjustable transverse bench seat.



Bentley

Hot on the heels of the Artisan range displayed at the October show came three classy new coachbuilts from Bentley Motorhomes. The Signature line-up comprises the 7.7m-long Oulton (£63,720 on the road, boasting a fixed 6ft 6in x 4ft 3in double bed at the rear), Donington (£62,720; pictured) and Cadwell (£58,230). Based on the new Renault Master cab and Al-Ko AMC chassis, each comes with driver and passenger airbags, sat-nav, alloy wheels, reversing camera, Truma Combi blown-air gas and electric heating and Caprice Spinflow dual-fuel cooker as standard. Stylish exterior graphics and sophisticated-looking interiors featuring blue LED-lit drinks cabinets make these motor caravans stand out – they certainly drew admiring glances at the show.



Itineo

Berkshire-based Woking Motorhomes showed two big Itineo A-Class models. Both the SB 720 (pictured) and MB 800 (in its 'heavy' 4.25-tonne guise) are capable of sleeping six and, somewhat unusually, seating six for travel. The former features bunks at the rear, while at the back of the MB 800 is a large, fixed-double island bed. Separate shower rooms in each add to the feeling of spaciousness. All this motor caravan comes in at under £55,000 OTR for the SB 720 and around £60,000 OTR for the MB 800.

Vantage

Specifically marketed at couples, the Zen only features cab seatbelts. Not having to worry about travel seating in the rear, the folks at Vantage have created a surprisingly roomy L-shaped lounge that converts into two single beds or a big 6ft 3in x 5ft double at night. They've also managed to squeeze a small kitchen and washroom with retractable, hand-held shower head and proper electric-flush toilet into a Vauxhall Vivaro base vehicle that measures just 5.18m in length. From £39,950 on the road.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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