

# On to a Winner

George Hinton thinks Adria's compact coachbuilt is set for success – and you could win one by entering the prize draw in this issue!



Vehicle supplied for test by: Adria Concessionaires, Hall Street, Long Melford, Suffolk CO10 9JP. Call 01787 888980 or see adriaconcessionaires.co.uk

**A**DRIA'S CURRENT range spans Fiat Ducato panel van conversions and coachbuilts, as well as premium models built on the new Renault Master and Mercedes Sprinter chassis. The entry-level Fiat Sport coachbuilt range comprises four models offering between three and six berths. Here we look at one of the most popular layouts, the 573 DF, which has a fixed bed plus a double dinette berth. Remember you have a chance to win one in our free-to-enter prize draw! See p51 for full details.

#### CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

Don't be misled by that 'entry-level' statement. The Sport range is built in a

state-of-the-art factory in Novo Mesto, Slovenia, to a very high standard and carries full ECE/NCC approval.

Unsurprisingly, the main entrance is on the Continental side, but the cab door gives easy enough access to our nearside. Walls and roof are sandwich construction with a high-gloss polyester outer skin; the skirts are extruded aluminium. A silver or dark grey metallic cab as an alternative to standard white attracts a £1,290 premium.

This Sport is roomy inside (7ft 2½in wide) without being a handful on country roads (exterior dimensions are under 7ft 8in plus mirrors). As well as the two cab seatbelts, there are four around the dinette table, the rear-facing pair being of

the lap variety. The table, of course, drops to form a large double bed.

Aft of the entrance door are the compact kitchen and washroom, incorporating a separate shower.

#### ON THE ROAD

The Fiat Ducato 35L chassis-cab has a 3.8m wheelbase and a 2.3-litre 130bhp Euro 5 engine with particulate filter and six-speed manual gearbox. A claimed fuel consumption improvement of between 9% and 14% over the Euro 4 engines is borne out by our own figures, while service intervals have increased to 30,000 miles. It seems more refined, but this may just be the result of better sound

insulation between the cab and engine. The easy-to-drive Ducato is a deservedly popular base vehicle and there are no chassis-related problems to report. Though rated at 3.5 tonnes as standard, Adria offers a free optional upgrade to 3,650kg for those without licence restrictions.

Fiat does not advertise any changes to the suspension for 2012, but this one seemed a touch more compliant than previous versions, an impression perhaps enhanced by the particularly solid and rattle-free construction of the body.

ABS braking with standard EBD/EBA is nicely progressive and visibility is generally good (there is limited vision past the rear seat through the lowish rear window).

The dashboard now features black plastic and there is a new high-gloss centre console and chrome highlights on the air vent controls and gear shifter. Remote cab central locking and heated electric twin-lens door mirrors are standard. Meanwhile the £2,590 SE Lux option pack adds passenger airbag, cab air conditioning, cruise control, an electric option on the heating system and ambient lighting. Fiat's Fix 'n' Go kit substitutes for a spare wheel which, with cradle, costs £312 extra.

Ride quality isn't bad loaded or not and wind noise is low. Handling too is excellent, aided by the wide-track rear axle, which fills the wheel arches out nicely. Access from cab to rear is 10½in wide between the seats, while there is an 18½in aisle between the kitchen and dinette.

#### LIVING ABOARD

Finding your way home at night is eased by a low-energy LED exterior light, while a fixed internal step gives straightforward access via the offside caravan door; internal headroom is an adequate 6ft 5½in.

The living area is brightened by a Heki 2 wind-up sunroof directly above the table. This is flanked at its leading edge by a triple-LED downlight array that can be operated from the entrance. Blue or white light can be selected via a switch on the mounting plate. Optional ambient lighting comprises a super-slim strip of warm white LEDs fitted between the roof lockers and the ceiling all round.

The 90-litre fresh water tank under the rear dinette seat, filled through a locking cap on the nearside, met all our needs. The waste goes into an 85-litre tank behind the rear axle. This is emptied through a large tank valve, cable-operated by remote handle behind the nearside rear wheel. Heating and hot water come courtesy of a Truma E4 Combi Boiler located just behind the dinette under the fixed bed. This is accessed by lifting the slatted bed frame on its twin gas struts; controls are located just above by the TV station.

There are blinds and curtains on all windows except those in the kitchen and

washroom. Two pairs of scatter cushions are supplied as well as a decorative throw for the bed. Detachable beige carpet comes in four sections, including cab and washroom. This is laid over Adria's usual narrow dark woodstrip-pattern vinyl flooring. The cab gets matching seat covers.

Three storage lockers are located over the nearside dinette, two being firmly shelved; there are three more over the fixed bed. There's a limited amount of storage under the forward dinette seat, half the space being occupied by the 100Ah gel leisure battery and its charger etc. A mains socket with hinged cap faces the opposite seat base and is useful for laptops etc.

The wardrobe offers a good 45½in drop from the 24in wooden rail, though it's hard to reach unless you're a six-footer. There's no shelf, but a useful full-width 7in x 6½in trough is set at the front, the gas locker being behind. The cupboard below is the same depth but still a useful size. The wardrobe contains two large bed infill cushions, which could easily be carried under the fixed bed.

The solid, wall-hung table has no dedicated storage space, but it would also fit under the fixed bed.

Electrical readouts, switches and tank level monitors are found in the control panel above the entrance. A strangely-located mains socket is found in the doorway side of the wardrobe.

#### KITCHEN

A fixed-bed layout in a vehicle measuring under 6.5m in length means something has to give spacewise, and in this instance it's the kitchen. It's just 44in long, giving room for a basic, three-burner gas hob without ignition and an admittedly big, but uncovered, 14in-diameter stainless steel sink. That only leaves odd-shaped areas between them as a 'worktop', sufficient to stand the odd can and opener – so you'll be preparing food on the table, the glass hob cover or outside.

Storage is limited to two deeply-lipped top lockers – the left shelved, the right ideal for cereal boxes and bottles – but one will be replaced with a microwave oven in the next build batch. My wife (4ft 11in) could not reach into the cupboards, let alone a microwave, without a step.

There's also a usefully-deep cupboard beneath the unfitted cutlery drawer, while under the hob there's a 100-litre Dometic RM8501 fridge with removeable freezer compartment for perishables.

Lighting is excellent from a single LED striplight running the full length of the roof lockers, and if you want to use an electrical appliance there's a convenient 13A socket with protective flap in front of the sink.

The kitchen carpet is separately detachable.

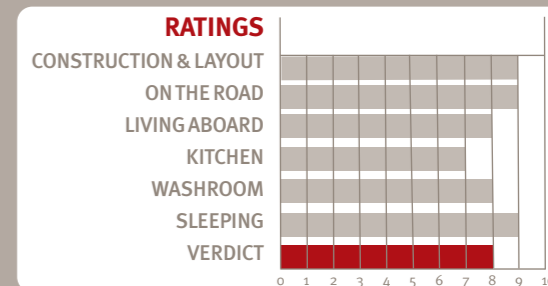


Neat, even understated, exterior



Latest Ducato boasts a stylish cab

“ Ride quality isn't bad loaded or not and wind noise is low ”



RRP/as tested	£38,890/£42,580 OTR
Base vehicle	Fiat Ducato 3500 MWB
Engine	2,287cc Multijet 4-cyl DOHC 16v common-rail
Power	130bhp (95.5kW) @ 3,600rpm
Torque	236lb ft (320Nm) @ 2,000-3,000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, FWD
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/19.8gal (90 litres)/27.9mpg
Overall length	21ft 3in (6.48m)
Overall width	7ft 8in (2.34m) exc mirrors; 8ft 10in (2.69m) inc mirrors
Overall height	9ft 7½in (2.76m)
Min internal height	6ft 5½in (1.97m)
MRO	2,835kg (55.8cwt)
MTPLM	3,650kg (71.8cwt)
User payload	815kg (16.0cwt)
Berths	4
NCC approved	Yes

Figures supplied by manufacturer

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



Kitchen is compact, so lacks workspace

**WASHROOM**

This heated, carpeted washroom has a separate shower with tri-fold acrylic door as well as plenty of storage space.

Thetford's flat-top C250 rotating cassette toilet, fed from the main water tank, gives another surface upon which to rest things, complementing the shelves integrated with the sink surround and in front of the smaller mirror.

However, its location in front of the shower makes it quite difficult to use comfortably. It's also awkward to clean the shower tray (unless you stand in it) or to bend to pick anything off the floor.

The oval handbasin is a water-saving gem, shaped like half an Easter egg at the bottom, so you can really wash in a puddle. The whole room is 5ft long (including the shower) by a maximum of 2ft 8in wide.

The shower tray measures 22in x 28in and there is a riser-rail, low-set water control 25in above floor level and both high and low shelves. It works well – however, there's only one drain, which is set towards the front.



Twin shelved cabinets flank the angled wall mirror and there's a large cupboard under the sink. Fittings are a bit sparse – there's just a small 10½in plastic towel rail that's only an inch off the wall and three gown hooks. An opening opal window and a clear wind-up rooflight provide light and air. Twin LED downlight fittings are well positioned above the high mirror and basin, while a second large mirror forms the basin splashback.

**SLEEPING**

The main fixed bed – 6ft 5in long by a maximum of 4ft 3in wide – tapers to 3ft 4in after the top 3ft 8in. The foam mattress is firmly comfortable on its slatted base. Two reading lights are fitted, with a second Heki sunroof directly above, and there's a TV station over the foot of the bed with aerial, 12V and 230V sockets.

The 6ft 3in-long dinette bed is made up in the usual way after first unclipping the steel-framed 7mm ply side extensions and sliding them into the aisle. The heavyish

table rests between the seats, a lightweight board filling the gap between the seat extensions – then you re-arrange the cushions, using the two infills.

Four-inch foam gives similar comfort to the fixed bed, but only the sliding extensions have any ventilation holes, so there will be some dampness underneath by morning. Made up to a maximum 4ft 4in width, the only space left to undress is in the doorway or kitchen, so it feels pretty cramped.

Two recessed LED downlighters under the top lockers give adequate illumination for a spot of night-time reading. The cab is simply curtained off at night.

**VERDICT**

The rattle-free build quality of this Adria is truly impressive. It will make a really handy Continental tourer for a couple, while there's room for the occasional foray with the grandchildren. I wouldn't recommend it as a regular four-berth – it just isn't big enough for comfort – but other Sport models cater better for families. ■



At 6ft 5in, the fixed bed is a generous length



Wall-hinged table has no dedicated storage



Washroom is nicely designed and user-friendly