

When given a choice of motorhomes to live with, I generally go for one of two things: compact size and/or a fixed bed layout. The reason for these choices is that I'm both lazy and an average driver - I don't like making the bed up each night, and anything too large makes me feel nervous on the road.

However, Auto-Sleepers' Wilton is neither of these; it's a medium-sized overcab coachbuilt with a big rear lounge and yes, despite my prejudices, I liked it.

TRADITIONAL WEAVE

I wasn't initially sure about the coloured exterior skirts, but didn't notice them after a while. The only place where their line is broken is for the habitation door. Actually, this 'van looks okay on the outside, there are no gaudy or flashy graphics and the Ford Transit base vehicle is neither elegant nor ugly.

Smooth lines neither appeal nor deter; many ultra modern 'vans can look a bit too stylish for my liking. The aft end is a tad plain and the origin of this 'van is indicated by a Union Jack badge mounted halfway up the rear panel.

Even so, how many of the actual components are British? Of course, the same could be said for many British cars I guess. The one thing that the Wilton does have in spades is Britishness - both look and the design are part of a package that is very recognisable.

You'll instantly spot the gas locker door on the nearside - spacious and extremely easy to access (with two 13kg cylinders side by side), the locker is an extremely well ventilated compartment with a metal grid floor. The rather large door lifts up and fixes to the wall neatly, while the lock, although difficult at first, eased with use.

On the offside you'll find the mains-hook-up point, the Truma water heater flue, the toilet service door (with flush water tank filler above) and a rather large locker set into the skirt. The locker's door has two locks and clips to the sidewall in the open position. There's a set of brackets mounted on the door to hold the rear steadies' winder, but this particular handle fell out of the brackets when the door was closed. Just nearby, you'll also find the exhaust pipe for the Eberspächer diesel-fired space heater.

The exterior locker is a great place to store heavier and bulkier items, as it's low down and between the wheels, making for better stability on the road.

The rear steadies' winder proved only just long enough to reach the winding shaft heads,

WE LIKED

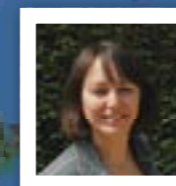
- Spacious, well-equipped kitchen
- High level of equipment
- Lots of in-cab storage
- Bed comfort
- Driving the Ford Transit base

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A way to plug in the TV without needing the cupboard door open
- Easier to access occasional table
- More belted travel seats

WE DISLIKED

- Faulty latch on slide-out kitchen unit
- Washbasin impeded by window frame



Words & pictures by Rachel Stothert

MAGIC CARPET

Auto-Sleeper Wilton on Ford Transit 2.4TD

MMM's Deputy Editor is surprised by how much she enjoys staying aboard a Cotswold classic





SHARP END STUFF

Thick curtains slide around the cab. They meet in the middle when closed and tie well back well out of the way of driver and passenger's vision when not in use. Surprisingly, I found a mains socket behind the drivers seat – great for leaving mobiles out of the way to charge when on site.

Above the cab you'll find a transverse double bed. The base folds away when travelling, creating a storage compartment that keeps the mattress and any bedding in place.

When it's time for bed, simply lift the base out of its holding bracket and allow it to drop flat. The mattress is firm, but comfortable - even for adults. I slept up here, finding the only 'adult' problem was manoeuvring onto the ladder to get down. Kids should have no problem.

There's a cargo net available (to prevent the kids falling out of bed) and a curtain for privacy. Usefully, each side has a light and there's a roof vent for essential fresh air. The vent's flyscreen is good, but a thump on the blind was needed to make it roll back.

WILTON WASHING

The washroom is a good size and the toilet swivels to create extra legroom in front of the washbasin. Electric flushing benefits from a built-in water tank, while a toilet roll holder is within arm's reach. The towel rail and plastic hooks are a little flimsy for my taste - a heavy towel would certainly put strain on the rail.

The whole room is airy and light due to the presence of a good-sized opaque window and a small opening roof vent. Sadly, the window frame (with a cassette blind/flyscreen) impacts on the basin, making it seem even smaller than it's already-compact oval shape dictates.

On the wall, there's a small dispenser for liquid soap. In the moulded wall unit above, there's a cup holder and two wires to hold toothbrushes in place. The mirrored doors serving the small cabinet proved awkward to use, as they lack decent handles.

Beneath the basin, a cupboard is great for larger bottles and (after some digging) I found

even a flip-over shelf that has coffee cup sized slots. In the lidded dash-top compartment beyond the steering wheel, you'll even find a second 12V socket.

This vehicle comes with electric mirrors (although they don't offer as good a view of the sides as the Fiat Ducato's), electric windows, steering wheel mounted cruise control, trip computer, intermittent wipers, dash-mounted gear lever and a fairly standard Ford radio/CD player. I hadn't actually got the hang of the radio after a week. However, it does feed living area speakers and works without the keys in the ignition.

on the adjacent wall, behind the cab. This is also where you'll find the fire extinguisher and a bracket to mount a small table.

Along with a grab handle, a recessed interior step-well aids access, while a tough-looking light – mounted here – allows you to see what you're doing in the dark. Outside, an awning light - just above the kitchen window - improves visibility still more.

Stepping into the Wilton, you find yourself just behind the cab. The kitchen is just on your right with the washroom opposite. In the rear, a large U-shaped lounge will be the main reason to buy this 'van.

In the cab, the seats are co-ordinated with the rest of the interior and expertly covered, while the carpet matches, and fits the cab extremely well. Both seats have height adjustment to suit all frames. My sub-five-foot mum (although she reckons she's just over that) managed to adjust the passenger seat to a level where she could touch the floor, but an aching sensation, after a two-hour journey, proved she still had to stretch a little more than she wanted to.

The passenger seat swivels round, making it the perfect seat for someone to sit and chat to the chef while they're creating meals. This is where the small occasional table (stored awkwardly in the back of the wardrobe) comes in. It's obviously a 'quick stop for a brew' table, with the idea taken from rising roof and high top 'vans - it even swings out of the way in the same fashion. Fortunately, this table doesn't block the caravan doorway when deployed.

WILTON'S UNDERLAY

What's great about the Transit cab is Ford's approach to storage provision, which is found everywhere. There are large and small pockets all over the place to suit different things; loose change rolling about in the bottom of large compartments won't happen here. The same applies to pens and other small items. Large drink bottles also have a place to go. There's

rubbing against the lower rear skirt at each turn. This action also requires your knees to be in perfect working order; you'll almost need to kneel on the floor to be able to see the things, never mind feed the winder onto them.

That said, some thought has been applied to the design of the water drain taps, which have moulded insets in the skirts and are easy to reach.

As you may have already guessed, this a rather well kitted out motorhome; we've already established that it has both Truma water heating, Eberspacher diesel-fired space heating and corner steadies, so it comes as no shock to learn that the step serving the one-piece habitation door is electrically-operated. The door itself has a gas strut to keep it open which also allows it to shut solidly, without any need for slamming.

The door is also linked into the central locking system for the cab doors, so you don't have to go round and check that the habitation door is locked when you press the button for the cab doors. All should lock automatically.

However, bear in mind that these systems can sometimes be temperamental, as proved when I headed off for a shower early one morning, leaving the keys, along with my sleeping mum, in the 'van. Strangely, the system locked itself behind me and I had to rouse an incredibly grumpy person from her slumbers to let me back in.

FITTED INTERIOR

The door has a window, which lets much needed light into the area aft of the cab. The window has both blind and flyscreen, and opens to allow you to call the kids in for tea without having to open the door.

Small fabric pockets on the inside are not of much practical use for anything, while opening the door in the rain (a likely eventuality in this country) will result in the pockets and anything they contain, getting wet. There's a much handier (bigger) pocket



1 Kitchen, washroom and wardrobe populate the front end

2 Beyond the kitchen lurks the lounge: the star of this British classic

3 The Ford cab features oodles of cleverly designed storage areas

4 An occasional table serves the swivelling passenger seat

5 The overcab bed is great for kids - and agile adults too

it incorporated toilet roll holder, with a slot to dispense the paper. However, full rolls are not of much use as there's insufficient room for them and you have to turn the roll with your hand in the cupboard: It's a great idea (keeping the toilet roll away from splashes) that doesn't quite work.

The separate shower has a plastic door that slides round to shut off most of the area, while a small flip-out panel closes the final gap. There's elbowroom, a separate light and small compartments for shower gels and shampoos in here. Yes, water will most likely find it's way into the rest of the washroom, but not very much should escape. The shower mat efficiently sends water into the tray below, where there are two drains to help cope with sloping pitches.

CUISINE

Another good reason to buy this 'van is the kitchen, which makes few compromises. There's a full cooker with four-burner hob, grill and oven, all with push-button ignition. Conveniently, the hob includes a mains electric-powered hotplate.

Next to the cooker is the sink with integrated drainer. Although made from stainless steel, it has a satin-effect finish, which should be easier to keep clean and show fewer marks. Both hob and sink have glass lids: the sink cover is made of toughened glass and so can be used as a chopping board or a pan rest.

I wouldn't normally recommend a sink with an integrated drainer as they take up so much worktop space, but it really doesn't matter in this 'van, as there is plenty of worktop space present. Your electric kettle can be plugged in well away from cooker and sink. Detailing includes fitted racks that'll be handy for keeping spice jars and the like nearby.

Three lockers comprise the overhead storage space. One has a tambour door

and built-in mains socket to allow a small microwave oven to be fitted. Of the other two, one contains a crockery rack that contains the Auto-Sleepers' signature set of plates, dishes and mugs. The other has a shelf to divide the space. Being modest in height, I really struggled with the overhead lockers and once I'd taken a plate out, I couldn't put it back in - and I couldn't reach the back of the upper shelf in the other locker. I'd need some kind of portable step to make things easier.

There's pan storage below the cooker and a tall cupboard between this and the fridge. Here you'll find an internal drawer, which is great for cutlery and smaller utensils such as can openers and small knives: but you'll need to find somewhere else for spatulas, serving spoons and the 'rabbit-ears' corkscrew. Below this are a shelf and a bin; the bin tips forward to accept rubbish and has a handle for removal.

The 80-litre fridge is a good compromise between space taken and storage capacity, although (in these days of 150-litre fridge/freezers) it may seem small to some.

There's a very useful pullout storage unit between kitchen and lounge. However, its latch did not work properly - leading it to slide open during transit. It didn't seem to fully engage with its latch, so my solution was to wedge it shut while travelling. This unit is a great feature that just needs some more work and I'm told Auto-Sleepers is resolving the problem

AFT END ATTRIBUTES

On the wall adjacent to the washroom (and opposite the kitchen) you'll find the wardrobe: there's a shelf, a small hanging compartment and a place for shoes below. This is also where you'll find both the main dining table (and the cab's occasional table) stowed. It's unfortunate that the occasional table is stored against the wardrobe's rear wall, making it difficult to access when clothes are hung.

Thankfully, the main table sits in its



own area against the washroom wall. It's easy to remove, with the lip of the wardrobe compartment moulded to allow it to pull straight out.

Next to the wardrobe, you'll find a small 'dresser' unit with a low-level cupboard (having two big shelves), and a good surface for placing a TV. Here, there's also a mid-height tambour-doored locker and a high-level wine cabinet, complete with four glasses and brackets for wine bottles.

Your television may sit at good viewing height, but the sockets (mains, 12V and aerial)

are located in the locker above, with no way of plugging in the TV without the locker's tambour door being open.

The storage space below the lounge is easy to access by simply lifting the sofa bases. No shoulders are needed to hold them up while you rummage around underneath - strong metal stays do the job for you.

The heating and hot water controls are mounted on the wardrobe wall, which is handy for switching the heat on first thing in the morning: you might even reach them while still abed.

BUY A PANORAMA

Next is the, reason-to-buy, lounge. Its huge U-shape has more than enough space for two people and will be great for entertaining.

The big windows and rooflight let in loads of light and help make this a great place for a panoramic view of the surrounding countryside. All the windows have concertina blinds and flyscreens, as well as fully operational curtains.

Night time illumination comes from lights running around the interior above the high-level lockers. In addition, there are six spotlights, two strip lights in the kitchen, and a ceiling light

upfront, near the cab. A nice touch, in the wine cabinet, is a light that comes on automatically when the left-hand door is opened.

LOUNGE 'SLEEPER'

The lounge double bed is made up by simply pressing two catches, thus allowing you to pull two bed supports into the centre of the aisle. The backrests then drop into the centre. It takes just a couple of minutes and, as the seat cushions are fairly flat, you get a fairly flat bed. This double bed is huge, but the lounge is long enough to allow the side sofas to be used as two singles.



- 6 The washroom offers a separate shower, but has one or two downsides
- 7 Dining comes courtesy of a free-standing table
- 8 The galley is very well equipped and includes lots of worktop
- 9 The 'dresser' features a Brit-favourite drinks cabinet
- 10 The big U-shaped lounge is superb
- 11 At night, the lounge becomes a huge double bed

On Test Auto-Sleeper Wilton

MAGIC CARPET?

I liked the Auto-Sleeper Wilton, it should appeal to many with its neutral exterior styling. I haven't even mentioned the interior décor because I think that it is just right. I don't want to be overwowed in a motorhome, I want décor to feel comfortable and blend into the background.

Remember, if you love something, the chances are that someone else will hate it, when the time comes to sell.

Yes, the faulty kitchen cupboard latch annoyed me, as did the fact that this is a four-berth 'van with only two belted travel seats. Of course, this layout makes it difficult to provide more and the overcab bed will, no doubt, be useful for storage and visitors.

The huge lounge and excellent kitchen more than make up for all the other shortcomings of this 'van. Even my partner, Andrew, liked it, especially when he was stretched out on one of the big sofas, reading or watching TV. ■

TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

AUTO-SLEEPER WILTON

- **Price from:** £42,268 OTR
- **As tested:** £42,268 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Ford Transit chassis cab; 140bhp 2.4-litre turbo-diesel; six-speed manual gearbox, rear-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle, two years conversion
- **Dimensions and weights:** Length 6.94m (22ft 9in), width 2.33m (7ft 8in), height 2.91m (9ft 6.5in); maximum authorised weight: 3500kg; payload: 251kg
- **Belted seats:** Two (including driver)
- **Beds:** Lounge double 2.20m x 1.83m x 2.5in x 6ft 0in), alternative singles 1.83m x 630mm (6ft 0in x 2ft 1in), overcab double 1.94m x 1.20m (6ft 4.5in x 3ft 11in)
- **Kitchen:** Stainless steel sink and drainer, 88-litre three-way fridge with freezer compartment, four-burner hob (including three gas burners

- and one electric hotplate), oven and grill
- **Washroom:** Electric-flush cassette toilet, vanity basin, separate shower
- **Heating:** Eberspächer diesel-fired space heating with blown-air, Truma hot water boiler, gas-mains operation
- **Tanks:** Fresh water: underslung, 69 litres (15.2 gallons), waste water underslung, 52 litres (11.5 gallons)
- **Gas:** 2 x 13kg cylinders
- **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** Chassis downgrade from 3800kg to 3500kg - reduces payload from 551kg to 251kg (FOC)
- **Other options available:** Roof rack and ladder (£344), inboard water tank (£61), flat screen TV (£498), cab air-conditioning (£705), passenger airbag (£235), satellite navigation system (£940)



VEHICLE LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:
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 (tel: 01386 853338; web site:
 www.auto-sleepers.co.uk)



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