LOVELY HOBBY Hobby Siesta Exclusive 600FC on 2.2-litre Ford Transit

This voluptuous German low profile is lovely to look at, but what's it like to live with?





t's said life after retirement has three phases: 'go-go,' 'goslow' and 'no-go!' Motorhome manufacturers target - in particular - the first phase, along with those still working, but with diminished family responsibilities.

This is a demanding clientele, often seeking comfort and sophistication in a compact and powerful package. The so-called 'Van' class of small, low profile coachbuilts (around six metres in length) has resulted, with versions, and fierce competition, from many Continental converters. German company, Hobby is a big player, offering several versions, all with the fixed bed considered essential in this market.

Here we test the Siesta Exclusive 600FC low profile. This is Hobby Van's big sister; a little longer and wider, but on the same front-wheel drive Ford Transit. Hobby UK supports sixteen dealers - mainly small family companies - offering customers personal service and backup. We collected 'our' Siesta from Hobby's UK headquarters,

Ambergate Caravan Centre, located near Ripley in Derbyshire.

Siesta Exclusive is striking - even beautiful. The white Transit cab (with silver bumpers) blends smoothly into a low profile body, which is notable for sensuous curves and unusual tapering windows. Hobby's trademark, steel blue and silver decals adorn the flanks. Everything's in proportion; to me, at least, this body was definitely 'feminine' - a big shapely Saxon - an Ursula or Marlene perhaps? Expensive (at over £53,000), but she looked it - attracting many admiring glances on site.

IS SHE A GOER?

It's becoming less usual, nowadays, to find Transit-based 'vans - most are Sevels, badged as Fiat or Peugeot. But Ford's chassis offers a good alternative, and Siesta Exclusive has many standard features that others offer only as extras, if at all. The 2.2-litre engine boasts 140 horsepower and a sweet sixspeed gearbox. Our 'van was brand new, but

loosened nicely during the test. The fascia has a faux-wood finish and a tactile leathercovered steering wheel. The handbrake is to the driver's right; a small door-pocket has been fitted nearby on this latest version, augmenting other handy cab storage facilities.

Height-adjustable cab seats are comfortable over long distances and though swivel-mounted, are set relatively low (minimum height 430mm), which is helpful, given the fixed steering wheel. Remis blinds are fitted to the windscreen and cab windows - fortunately without a top pelmet to obscure the view forwards. Their only drawbacks proved to be a 'sizzling' rattle from the side blinds and slight ingress of morning light over the windscreen blind.

A Blaupunkt Travel-Pilot 500 satnav screen sits atop the dashboard, incorporating a reversing camera to compensate for lack of through vision - nonetheless, the redundant rear-view mirror remained. This being my first outing using a satnav, I was amused to have two, contradictory, lady navigators

Live-in Test report









Words and pictures by Andrew and Rona Bromley

1 At Earnse beach, Walney Island, Barrowin-Furness, Cumbria

2 The cab includes Blaupunkt Travel Pilot satnav/reversing camera and faux-wood trim. Knee room under the fixed steering wheel can be tight

3 View forward from the bedroom shows L-shaped kitchen, with lounge beyond



chittering at me simultaneously: guess who won the arguments!

This Transit was fitted with cruise control, cab air-conditioning, twin airbags, and traction control. Setting off uphill with a cold engine required careful clutch feathering, as the 'van is quite high geared. Reversing gently - turning up into our driveway - provoked an unpleasant smell of burning clutch. I wondered just how resilient is *any* modern transmission?

Once under way, the 'van proved powerful, smooth and quick, with assured handling and road holding. For my taste, it's not quite as rewarding to drive as a Fiat Ducato - having a softer ride and heavier steering - but still perfectly acceptable. At 70mph it's very relaxed - the engine turning over at just 2300 revs in sixth gear. Over 500 miles of varied roads, I attained 25.9mpg (computer readout: 27.6mpg). This should improve with age.

A reasonable turning circle allows easy manoeuvring, helped by the highmounted reversing camera, although, as a newcomer to such technology, I had difficulty interpreting the ultra-wide-angle view presented on screen.

Lack of rear vision is the only major downside of the driving experience, as Siesta Exclusive's width (at 2.36 metres, the biggest hips in the Hobby range) is too great even for the extended-arm door mirrors. This produces a pronounced rear blind spot, and following traffic could only be seen on bends: wider mirrors, or a rear camera operating as a 'mirror' might help.

IS SHE CUDDLESOME?

Exterior looks are all well and good, but there's more to choosing a motorhome mate - it's what's going on inside that really matters. As usual on Continental 'vans, the habitation door is on the UK offside, but I'm told Hobby may soon supply Britain with nearside-door models. Regrettably, the habitation door isn't connected to the cab's remote central locking. The curved flank of the 'van slightly overhangs the electrically operated Omnistep, so care is

needed, especially on exit.

Inside, the lounge/diner is up front, with a large fixed table centre stage. Immediately aft of the caravan entrance is a tall unit fronted by a nine-glass cocktail cabinet (in the test 'van it couldn't be opened because of a jammed catch!). The remainder of this unit houses the fridge/freezer/oven tower and wardrobe. Opposite, on the nearside, is the L-shaped kitchen unit and aft of that, a longitudinal fixed bed with modest foot cut-off. The washroom is at the offside rear, behind a tambour door.

The cabinetry is superbly finished, curvaceous (naturally!) tan wood with cream panels and silver highlighting. Neat, rattle-free catches hold cupboard doors firmly, while upholstery (dubbed Sydney) has brown and green stripes with suede-effect panels. The floor is slightly ribbed (grit-retentive) vinyl, with oatmeal carpets (which we removed for the test trip), except in the cab, where they're charcoal coloured.

The lounge comprises a small two-seater settee on the nearside (which converts to a

On Test Hobby Siesta Exclusive 600FC

single, belted travel seat) and a single inwardfacing 'dicky' seat opposite. The cab seats swivel to face the table, but there's insufficient room to turn them completely, so a clash of occupants' legs would preclude both being used together. Moreover, although the lounge seats are well provided with lighting under the high-level cupboards, there's none for the cab seats, so they can't be easily used for evening reading. The lounge seats are quite comfy for sitting, but feet-up sprawling is only possible for one, using both cab seats faced together. The table is typically German - big and heavy, with drop-leaves to facilitate access to the cab, but which then block your knees for sitting. The tabletop can be moved side-to-side (while part of its column is removed to help construct the lounge bed), but whatever you are doing, the table gets in the way. We called it 'the elephant in the middle of the room,' and the first thing we'd do would be to install a freestanding replacement.

The other - potentially painful and bloody - issue with the lounge is the central ceiling light, which has three, very powerful adjustable spotlights, below a fixed light cluster on a separate switch. Two levels of lighting are available - bright, or very bright. Unfortunately, unlike the rest of the ceiling, which gives 1.98 metres of headroom, these lights stand proud at only 1.86m and have sharp protruding screws. Being bald, and 1.89m tall, the cluster is the second thing I would replace!

There's a television aerial point and socket by a narrow shelf under the cocktail cabinet. Owners will need to fit a TV bracket, but we feel it's a bit close for comfortable viewing. Sybarites may wish to watch whilst in bed, so there should really be secondary TV facilities in this vicinity.

Otherwise, the lounge is successful and was comfortable during the long evenings of the test.



CAN SHE COOK?

Kitchen facilities look promising, with a cream-fronted unit under a thick grey slateeffect surface. At the back of the worktop (something of a stretch) is Smev's manualignition three burner hob with glass lid, monogrammed 'Hobby.' There's a semicircular stainless steel sink (also with glass lid) made by Smev. Its shape would preclude fitting most washing-up bowls, and the tap felt more lightweight than the beefy mixer in the washroom. There's lots of work surface, with two inset mains sockets (they'd be better in the wall above), but as usual - sigh - no stainless steel drainer. An oddity was the rising metal post set into the worktop: this retains the travel seat's belt. On 2010







production versions it won't rise, but will still occupy part of the kitchen's surface.

Under the sink, a curved door opens to reveal a useful cupboard with two shelves, while beneath the hob is a large cutlery drawer above two deep pan stores.

Opposite the kitchen is a Dometic Tec Tower, containing a huge three-way fridge/ freezer and oven. Rona hadn't seen this design of fridge before and wasn't enamoured of the small, pokey containers in the fridge door, preferring the more usual big shelves. If being picky, one might expect the fridge to have Automatic Energy Selection in a 'van of this calibre.

Situated above the fridge, the oven will - on production 'vans - have an integral grill. It's sited high though, and the door opens upwards - perfectly placed to crack you sharply on the cranium. The lack of a dropdown door and narrow access meant retrieving hot baked spuds wasn't easy. All in all, we don't feel the oven is well positioned, and would be better located beneath the hob. This hob, meanwhile, was well lit, with two under-cupboard halogen spots - two more in the upper fascia. However, using the sink with your back to the main ceiling lighting casts deep shadows. An over-sink ceiling light would be helpful.

Despite these reservations, we liked the kitchen's storage and work surface provision.

Live-in Test report



On Test Hobby Siesta Exclusive 600FC

10 Fixed double bed is long and supremely comfy

11 The lounge bed is quite easy to make and reasonably comfortable

12 The plastic-lined drawer under the side seat could usefully be used for shoes

13 Flush-mounted awning is part of the Exclusive package

14 Washroom with excellent shower cubicle. A stainless steel washbasin would have been nicer

door restricts where towel hooks could be placed. For illumination there's a window (translucent but no blind) and three halogen lights, alongside a ceiling-mounted 230V socket (mains sockets in washrooms do not meet UK electrical safety standards and could be dangerous. DH). There's a blown-air heating outlet in the shower (helping dry it after use) and another in the room.

So, a nice washroom, only lacking in hooks and rails. Ideally, we'd prefer the loo to have a dedicated flush water tank, so rinse-aid can be added, rather than it utilising the fresh water supply.

WHAT'S SHE LIKE IN BED?

I always say that this is the crux of the matter: if the bed isn't comfy, the 'van and I will have a short, unhappy relationship - in bad cases, a one-night stand! I am happy to report that this bed is not just fit for siestas, but provides a really good night's repose for two. The split, sprung mattress is of excellent length and reasonable width,



taking into consideration the slightly pesky cut-off at the foot - a pretty much, standard feature with such designs. The bed is too high to use comfortably as a seat (at 760mm), but that improves the storage area below. At 730mm, headroom below the overhead lockers is a little lacking for tall folk, which is a shame, as good reading lights are supplied.

However, for its primary purpose it's supremely comfy, and is ready without preparation - the main selling point of the fixed bed.

Finally, a rather flimsy concertina blind separates bedroom from kitchen and lounge when required.

The lounge bed is relatively easy to make,







as these things go - which isn't saying much! Take off the tabletop, remove the column's middle section, replace and tighten the top, rearrange cushions (not quite as shown in the otherwise helpful manual) and you have a long, tadpole-shaped, transverse single bed. This is quite comfortable, if not as soporific as the fixed bed.



HAS SHE ROOMY DRAWERS?

No use having lots of payload (here, on a 3500kg MAW chassis, a healthy 655kg) if there's nowhere to pack it all. Fortunately, although lacking the garage found with the transverse, high-level bed layout, the Siesta has sufficient storage for most couples. For starters, there's the large underbed store, accessed either from outside, or by lifting half the bed base and mattress. There was no strut to hold the bed base upright, so this was an awkward, two-person job (production 'vans will have gas-strut assistance). It was disappointing to find the space cluttered by the (100-litre, 22-gallon) freshwater tank, water filter, pump and Truma heater, but even so, there's room for lots of holiday junk too. We stored our inflatable canoe plus satellite dish, cameras and tools.

Elsewhere, there's a large (illuminated) wardrobe alongside the fridge tower, with a hanging drop of 1.30 metres, and a cupboard above - intended for clothes, but ideal for cereal packets. That's a good thing, because the many high-level lockers (two in the kitchen, two over the settee, one over the 'dicky' seat and five above the bed) all have fixed shelves and deep lips, restricting the size of what may be stored. Removable shelves would be very useful here.

Above the cab, there are smaller overhead lockers on each side, plus two at the front, and a shelf (with fiddle rail) under the big skylight - ideal for maps and hats.

At low level, there's space under the lounge seat, accessed from above, plus a small plastic-lined drawer. Under the settee there's more storage.

Our main quibbles relate to the unit by the door containing the fridge tower. At the bottom it contains a shoe cupboard that's only big enough for one pair: we put our rubbish bag in there instead. Under the fridge is another locker: the front has no hinges, but just pulls off. I've no idea why; it's a strange feature. The cocktail cabinet isn't designed to carry bottles, only glasses, and surely one couple - plus guest - don't need three glasses

WE LIKED

- Ford Transit base vehicle
- Beautiful exterior
- Quality and finish of interior furnishings
- Spacious shower
- Kitchen storage
- Very comfortable double bed
- Lounge bed that was actually usable

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A freestanding table
- Integral stainless steel sink and drainer
- Dedicated flush water tank for toilet
- Somewhere to hang towels in washroom
- Spare wheel

WE DISLIKED

- Big awkward fixed table
- Lack of rear vision (see text)
- Oven position, particularly the hazardous door (when open)
- Central light cluster too low

each? With its blingy blue lighting, it seemed a little OTT.

These minor irritations apart, we were satisfied with the storage facilities.

WHAT MAKES HER TICK?

Life support becomes very important when holidaying outside the 'main season', and here the Hobby did us proud. Space and water heating is by Truma Combi 6E, which runs on gas, mains electricity, or a combination of the two. A little noisy when warming up, once the desired temperature is reached it remains quiet overnight and hot water is available 'on tap.' Moreover, the two 11kg-cylinder gas locker has Secumotion fitted, allowing the heater to warm the interior whilst on the move. This is not a big selling point in summer, perhaps, but a real boon in winter. It's nice to see a 3M water filter fitted, to improve drinking water quality.

Surprisingly, only an 80 amp hr leisure-battery is fitted (under the cab seat). We would

On Test Hobby Siesta Exclusive 600FC

15 Underbed storage has room for quantities of holiday gear, despite the presence of the fresh water tank, pump, filter and Truma boiler

15

VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Hobby Motorhomes UK Ltd, Ripley Road, Ambergate, Derbyshire DE56 2EP (tel: 01773 853900; web site: www.hobbycaravansuk.co.uk)

NE STAYED AT

Meathop Fell Caravan Club Site, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6RB (tel: 01539 532912; web site: www.caravanclub.co.uk) certainly specify the optional 110 amp hr unit, which, apparently, will still fit in the same location.

Apart from that effective, but hazardous ceiling light, the lack of a light over the kitchen sink, and a couple of spots needed for the cab, this 'van is pretty well illuminated. During the day, the large overcab rooflight is assisted by a Midi Heki amidships and Mini Heki over the bedroom. Night time 'mood' lighting above the top lockers is a restful touch. The solid habitation door (with flyscreen) has a slim, oval window, which really enhances the exterior appearance of the 'van.

All windows (apart from the washroom) have Seitz concertina blinds. Sadly, the one located above the lounge bed head proved too short, so morning light entered underneath. Curtain decor panels and nets are fitted to lounge and bedroom windows.

The simple-to-operate control panel (mounted inside in the living area doorway) has, in addition to the usual functions, a button activating a waste water tank heater: there's posh! We also liked the twin speakers in the lounge. These are mated to the excellent Ford 6000 radio/CD player, which switches off after an hour when on site - irritating, but far better than Fiat's 20 minutes.

Outside, a three-metre, manually operated, Omnistor awning is smoothly integrated with the roof. Sturdy rear steadies are provided, though we found no need to use them. Underneath, despite plenty of room and payload, there's no spare wheel: shame on you, Hobby! This was especially annoying, as the base van's 'birth certificate' (found on the useful www.etis.ford.com web site), showed it originally came with one!

WOULD I MARRY HER?

This was a very cosy trip, in frosty weather, in a beautiful 'van we were proud to escort. Very well made and highly specified to match its price, few extras will be needed, apart - possibly - from aerial and TV equipment to taste.

If you like longitudinal, fixed bed designs, then this is an excellent example of its type. The difficulty of reaching the high-level cupboards without clambering over the bed, and the cut-off mattress, outweighed the benefits.

In the end, we'd probably go for a Hobby Van, with its full-sized transverse double bed. Being a tad slimmer than its more voluptuous sibling, its door mirrors might afford a better rear view.



LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE

Low profile coachbuilt

PRICE

■ From: £53,313 OTR ■ As Tested: £53,313 OTR

BASICS

- Vehicle: Ford Transit platform cab
- Berths: 3
- Three-pointed belted seats: 3
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle, 2 years conversion, 5 years water ingress

CONSTRUCTION

Alloy-clad sandwich construction with GRP mouldings. Swiko rear chassis extension. Caravan entrance on UK offside

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Length: 6.45m (21ft 2in)*
- **Width:** 2.36m (7ft 9in)*
- Height: 2.83m (9ft 3.5in)* ■ Wheelbase: 3.75m (12ft 3.5in)*
- Rear overhang: 1.81m (5ft 11.5in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg
- Payload: 655kg (after allowance for the weight of driver @75kg, 100 per cent fuel, leisure battery, 90 per cent fresh water, gas)

INSIDE STORY

Swivelling cab seats ahead of lounge with two-seat settee/single travel seat and single inward-facing seat, nearside kitchen, offside Tec Tower fridge/oven, and wardrobe, washroom in offside rear, fixed longitudinal double bed in nearside rear

- Insulation: Floor 90mm, walls & roof 34mm
- Internal Height: 1.98m (6ft 6in)

THE VEHICLE

- Engine: 2.2-litre turbo-diesel producing 103kW (140bhp) @ 3500rpm
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Fuel Consumption: 25.9mpg overall
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round.
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- Features: ABS, ESP, traction control with Hill Launch Assist, driver and passenger airbags, electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking (cab only), cruise control, trip computer, cab air-conditioning,

Men Hobby

Ford 6000 radio/CD player with steering column-mounted controls, Blaupunkt Travel Pilot 500 satnav with reversing camera, front mud-flaps, rear steadies, no spare wheel

LOUNGING AND DINING

Lounging and dining for five around large fixed (adjustable, with drop-leaves) table

KITCHEN

Rounded L-shaped unit with cutlery and two pan drawers. Curved-door cupboard with two shelves. Two shelved overhead lockers. Dometic Tec Tower opposite containing fridge/freezer and oven

- Sink: Semi-circular stainless steel with folding mixer tap and glass lid. No drainer
- Cooker: Smev three-burner hob (manual ignition) with glass lid. As part of Tec Tower: Dometic oven with electronic ignition (no grill, but production 'vans will be so equipped)
- Fridge: As part of Tec Tower: Dometic threeway fridge/freezer. Capacity 150 litres

WASHROOM

Access via sliding tambour door, fixed grey plastic washbasin with mixer tap set into vanity unit with cupboard, mirror tiles splashback, translucent window (no blind), Thetford C250 electric-flush swivel-bowl toilet with wheeled cassette, automatic ventilator. Separate shower cubicle with folding plastic door, plastic-lined walls, riser rail, mixer tap, single-outlet tray

BEDS

Fixed longitudinal double

- Length: 2.01m (6ft 7in)
- Width: 1.30m (4ft 3in) max, 1.09m (3ft 7in) min

Lounge transverse single

- **Length:** 2.12m (6ft 11.5in)
- Width: 940mm (3ft 1in) max, 545mm (1ft 9.5in) min

STORAGE

Above cab: High-level lockers and central shelf with fiddle rail. Lounge: Low-level cupboard and drawer under single seat, storage space under settee (capacity depending on whether used for travel seat), high-level shelved lockers

HOBBY SIESTA EXCLUSIVE 600FC

above. Kitchen and entranceway: Low-level shoe cupboard, glasses cabinet, floor-level cupboard (with pull-off front) in tower unit, wardrobe with deep locker above. Bedroom: Five overhead lockers, large storage area under bed accessible from above and outside

LIFE SUPPORT

- Fresh Water: Inboard, 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste Water: Underslung, heated 92 litres (20 gallons)
- Water and Space Heater: Truma Combi 6E boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation
- Leisure Battery: 80 amp hr
- Gas: 2 x 11kg cylinders
- Lighting: Lounge: 3 adjustable halogen lights with fixed cluster on ceiling, 2 adjustable halogen spots on rail over settee, 1 over single seat. Kitchen: 4 spots, blue display lighting in glasses cabinet. Bedroom: 2 adjustable reading spots above bed-head. Washroom: 3 halogen ceiling lights. Mood lighting around ceiling edge, wardrobe light, awning light
- Sockets: 230V: 2 (in kitchen work surface, in washroom ceiling), 12V: 2 (on TV shelf, in base of travel seat)
- Control Panel: Located adjacent to caravan door, contains water pump and waste-water tank heater switches, battery condition and water level gauges
- Blinds/Curtains: Remis cab window blinds, blinds to all caravan windows, flyscreens to all opening windows (except washroom), concertina flyscreen to caravan door. Decor drapes and net curtains to lounge and bedroom windows
- Badged as NCC EN1646 Compliant: No

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base Vehicle: None
- Conversion: None Other options available
- Base Vehicle: Towbar and electrics (£774),

alloy wheels (£802)

■ Conversion: Bike rack (£393), hob extractor fan (£160), living area air-con (£1589)

E&OE

Siesta exclusive 600



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