

DROP-DOWN GORGEOUS

Hobby Toskana Exclusive 750H-UCC

Produced for the UK, this luxury low profile, tag-axle German boasts an electrically-operated drop-down bed in a layout that is gaining popularity



Words & pictures by Andrew & Rona Bromley

- 1 The front lounge has two short sofas and a coffee table
- 2 The offside front sofa converts into a travel seat
- 3 Headroom in the rear lounge is limited by the drop-down bed



Fixed beds are all the rage, but during daytime they are, arguably, wasted space. A-class motorhomes have long featured beds stored in the roof above the cab, lowering for night-time use, and clever

designers are now offering roof-beds in low-profile coachbuilds, a layout that is gaining popularity.

Hobby is a German manufacturer of luxury caravans and motorhomes. It includes, in its Toskana Exclusive range, three layouts with this feature (all denoted by an H-based suffix). Here we test the 750H-UCC, a monster measuring 8.04 metres (26ft 4.5in) from nose to tail, with Fiat Ducato mechanicals on a tag-axle (with double-floor) Al-Ko chassis, and maximum weight of 4,500kg.

Externally, its pedigree is unmistakable - three vertical windows on the offside rear are a hallmark of big Hobby motorhomes. Huge it may be, but smoothly curved flanks and prow give a classy expensive air, befitting a £70,000+ motorhome.

ON THE ROAD

Powering this behemoth is Fiat's 3.0-litre 157bhp motor - standard on British-specification Toskana Exclusives. Running on 16-inch wheels, with Michelin Agilis Camping (M+S pattern) tyres, the ride is supple, and the conversion reasonably rattle-free. Six gearbox

ratios are perfect for maintaining excellent forward progress. Though not vibrating unduly whilst reversing, the clutch smelt unpleasantly during tight manoeuvring up a modest incline.

There's also a price to pay for powerful performance and a heavy body: we averaged 21.7mpg (trip computer reading).

As always, the Fiat cockpit is ergonomically sound and British-market Toskanas are well specified with twin airbags, cruise control and a superb automatic climate

control system - much appreciated during our cold-weather test. A reversing camera is fitted (though inoperative on the test 'van) and will be invaluable as visibility is scant through the rear window, which seems miles away from the driver! The new-design Remis blinds on the cab doors didn't obstruct the driver's vision. However, the extra-long mirror arms meant - from my driving position - the offside mirror were partly obscured by the quarter-light's frame.

WE LIKED

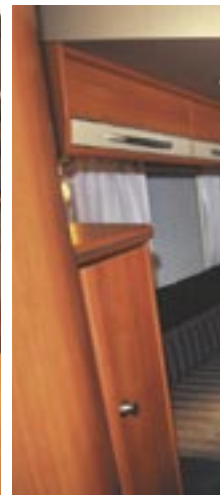
- Quality of finish and construction
- Very comfortable drop-down bed
- Impressive audio system
- Spare wheel as standard

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Drainer in kitchen
- Manual backup for bed lowering mechanism
- More powerful lighting
- Remote control for audio system

WE DISLIKED

- Lack of elbow room for toilet
- Dingy upholstery
- Lack of manoeuvrability in tight spaces
- Fuel consumption





INSIDE IMPRESSIONS

Full marks to Hobby for fitting the caravan door (complete with flyscreen) on the UK nearside, showing how seriously the company takes its British customers. Sadly, central locking doesn't extend here. An oval window in the door (with blind) is another Hobby signature item.

Entering, there's a front lounge to the left and wardrobe opposite, followed by the washroom. On the nearside right is the kitchen and beyond,



a U-shaped rear lounge, with drop-down double bed tucked into the ceiling above.

On one side of the doorway is a large - blue-lit - control panel. Below is another operating the interior lights, although it was so dark at night I needed a torch to read the symbols. Opposite is a grab handle and two coat hooks.

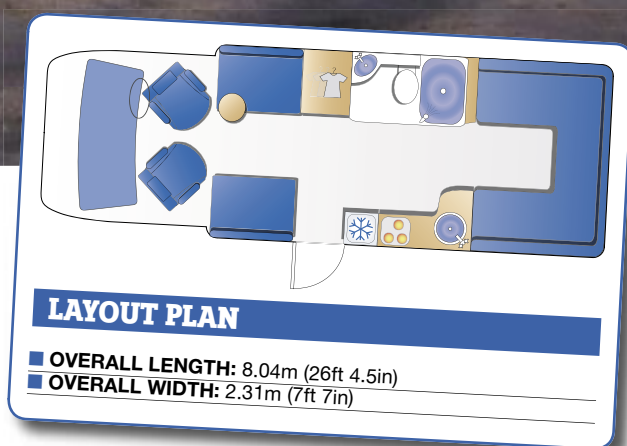
Interior woodwork is mid-tan - cupboards having cream and silver trimmings, with kitchen furniture fronts in cream. We thought the grey-striped Vulkano upholstery drab, although practical; Hobby offers alternatives, including opulent leather.

DOUBLE LOUNGING

The front lounge has two large inward-facing single seats/mini-settees. The offside one converts to a forward-facing (three-point belted) travel seat. We're told that production motorhomes may have belts on both sides. A small round table fits behind the cab passenger seat (both cab seats partially swivel) and four halogen reading lights are supplied, though not serving the cab seats.

Three rooflights brighten the interior - one non-opener above the cab and two opening examples in the main body.

Across the rear is the large, comfortable



U-shaped lounge, but if you're tall it's 'duck or grouse' on entry, with just 1.7 metres (5ft 7in) headroom below the bed. A big table - ample for four - with central floor mount stows in a dedicated cupboard. Halogen reading lights above the seats (augmented by ceiling LED clusters and ambient roof panels) give some illumination, but on a dark winter's evening I still wanted more.

HOBBY COOKING

Aft of the habitation door (and a wooden wall) there's a large (150-litre) fridge/freezer with manual (not AES automatic) energy selection, and high-level work-surface above.

Next - with clear glass lid - comes a Thetford cooker, offering three (electronic ignition) gas burners and combined oven/grill. Shiny, slate-effect work-surface curves out round the circular sink, with its mixer tap and dark glass cover.

Sadly, despite ample space, there's no drainer. There are two 230V sockets in the work



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surface behind the sink. Above are two large shelved cupboards with a railed shelf between them. Below the cooker is a drawer and cupboard and under the worktop a big cutlery drawer, plus three lower drawers. A large curved (shelved) cupboard below the sink completes the galley's impressive storage capacity. There is good lighting, with three under-cupboard halogen and four roofline, LED lamps.

TEUTONIC TITIVATION

In a luxury motorhome you'd expect sybaritic ablutions, so how does this Toskana shape up? A curving vanity unit with inset oval grey plastic washbasin runs along the outside wall, while a Thetford swivel-bowl loo juts into the centre space. A separate shower cubicle is beyond, complete with folding screen. The room's translucent window has no blind, and there's another translucent oval window in the door - stylish, yet bizarre. Not coy these Germans! The shower cubicle (accessed by moving past the toilet) is commodious, though a wheelarch intrudes slightly. The interior is finished with smooth, quality wallboard, but having no

light, it's somewhat dark and there's just one drain hole. With a high-pressure water pump installed, showering should be invigorating.

When seated on the 'throne' (electrically-vented and using water from the main tank) your right arm is constricted by the curve of the vanity unit. There's no toilet-roll holder (just a cubby for spares), nor are there any towel/robe hooks, though there's a strip mirror either side of the basin. The main washroom has illumination from four ceiling halogens, and sufficient cupboard and shelf storage for necessities.

The washroom is neither roomy nor memorably swanky, but is satisfactory.

DROP DOWN TO SLEEP

Rather than converting the rear lounge, come bedtime the press of a switch brings the double bed ponderously down above the seating, automatically turning lounge lights off and bedroom lights on. The resultant bed (twin mattresses of 100mm (4in) foam over a slatted base) is 1.93m (6ft 4in) long, 1.4m (4ft 7in) wide and extremely comfortable. It's not too high from the floor, at 1.27m (4ft

2in), and affords reasonable headroom of 700mm (2ft 3.5in). Once abed, there's nothing substantial to lean against if reading. We'd also like a back-up manual system for raising and lowering the bed, in case the motor fails or battery flattens. This bed stowed slightly askew, but was very solid.

An emergency bed, for non-claustrophobics can be made underneath the drop-down bed, utilising settee cushions and table. But headroom is minimal, especially below the high-level cupboards that are attached to the drop-down bed's base. Most supernumeraries would use the bed constructed from the front lounge seats and cushions. This bed, unlike many of the type, is easily made, comfy and of reasonable width at 940mm (3ft 1in).

HOBBY HOLDS

With a high maximum weight (GVW) and four rear wheels, you'd hope for a good payload, and Hobby claims 632kg, which should be sufficient for extended trips, even carrying three people.

There's a low, full-width, store under the rear lounge - accessed either from above or through two exterior hatches, one per side. This space is L-shaped, part of the nearside under-settee space being occupied by the gas locker. Above the lounge six high-level, but necessarily shallow, cupboards attach to the bed base. When abed, shelves across the width of the 'van are handily placed for books and cups. A TV bracket (optional), attaches above the table's stowage locker, in the lounge's forward corner, with a shallow vertical shelf unit adjacent.

The wardrobe is large, containing a top

TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

- **Price OTR from:** £76,576
- **Price as Tested OTR:** £76,983
- **The vehicle:** Fiat Ducato Al-Ko chassis cab; 3.0-litre 157bhp turbo-diesel engine; six-speed manual gearbox; front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle and conversion, five years water ingress
- **Dimensions and weights:** Length 8.04m (26ft 4.5in); width 2.31m (7ft 7in); height 2.96m (9ft 8.5in); gross vehicle weight 4,500kg; payload 632kg
- **Belted seats:** 3 (including driver)
- **Beds:** Front lounge single: 2.13m x 940mm (7ft 0in x 3ft 1in); drop-down rear double: 1.93m x 1.40m (6ft 4in x 4ft 7in)

- **Water and space heating:** Truma Combi 6 boiler with blown-air, mains/gas operation
- **Tanks:** Fresh and waste water both 100 litres (22 gallons)
- **Gas:** 2 x 11kg cylinders
- **Options on test vehicle:** Rear steadies (£255), TV bracket (£152)
- **Other options available:** Chassis upgrade to 5,000kg GVW (£100), leather upholstery (£2,245), ComfortMatic auto gearbox (£1,685)

(All prices with VAT @ 20 per cent)

4 Well-appointed kitchen only lacks a stainless steel drainer and auto energy selection for the fridge

5 In the washroom, the vanity unit is rather close to the toilet

6 Rear bed deployed. A very comfortable mattress, and not too high from the floor

shelf, four side shelves and hanging rail with a metre drop for accommodating party clothes and coats. A cupboard below the wardrobe is entirely occupied by the Truma Combi boiler (also accessible from outside). Lurking in there, and with multiple hoses curving from its squat torso, it reminded me of a malevolent spider!

Up front, there are four small overcab lockers and another two on either side above the front lounge. On the nearside, two fabric pockets are handy for maps and magazines.

Under the front lounge seats there's good top-accessed storage - the nearside can also be reached externally. The offside seat box halves to give the forward-facing passenger foot-room.

EXCLUSIVE ELECTRICS

The impressive Eclipse Elac audio system comes as standard (unless requested otherwise) and I spent a happy evening reading the fat instruction manual and experimenting. I could have made myself really popular on site, belting out *Wishbone Ash* at top volume, but I resisted the temptation! Speakers are replaced by vibrating 'exciters' throughout the ceiling, while the Visaton box in a seat base proved to be a sophisticated bass conductor. The resultant 'shower of sound' is very nice, though slightly muffled by the stowed roof bed. Additionally, the door mirror-mounted radio aerial wasn't very receptive. The Elac also plays DVDs and MP3s and includes Tom-Tom satnav and rear view camera monitor. Unlike standard Fiats, the radio doesn't switch off after 20 minutes use on site, but a remote control would have been useful.

This Toskana also boasts two 80 amp hr leisure batteries, water tanks tucked cosily between the floors and a water filter. A big plus point on this six-wheeler is the inclusion of a spare wheel - here, easily accessible under the tail. A very long Omnistor wind-out awning, awning light and roof rails are fitted, while the test van had optional rear steadies



The front bed is wider and easier to make up than many of the type

- probably unnecessary with four rear wheels and a modest overhang. The Truma heater (space and water) works on both gas and mains electricity: ours didn't, for some reason, but thankfully, the well-insulated interior didn't become too cold overnight.

CONCLUSION

There's no doubt this is a fine, roomy motorhome from a fine manufacturer and competitive in its sector. The drop-down bed works well, is very comfortable and doesn't intrude unduly when

stowed. For those wishing to tour in luxury, who don't find its size daunting and like the layout, the Hobby is worthy of consideration. If you'd prefer something slightly smaller and less expensive, Hobby also offers the 690 H-GFLC, with a drop-down bed over a splendid front lounge, plus another large (over-garage) bed at the rear. ■

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