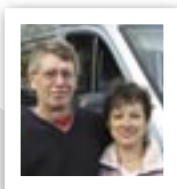


# OPEN CHAMPION

## Autocruise Augusta on 3.0-litre Peugeot Boxer

*We find out if Autocruise motorhomes are still as individual and eccentric as ever. The Augusta sits at the top of the golf course-inspired Driving*



*Tested by the Travelling Stotherts*



Overall, I liked the motorhomes produced by Autocruise before it went bust and the business had to be rescued by the Swift Group. Autocruise was indeed, a little bit eccentric and - occasionally - did get things very wrong, but the feeling you got was that a lot of thought went into the design of the interiors. What didn't always strike such a harmonious note was the weird exterior styling. This was the first example I've seen from the rescued company and I wondered how Swift's influence had changed things - bearing in mind that it has retained the workforce, and Autocruise products are still being produced in the same factory.

The Augusta is one of the three-strong golf course-inspired Driving range and these

deceptively large motorhomes sit at the very top of the Autocruise pile, in terms of price and specification.

### STYLISH SWING

We all see things from a different angle, but to my rheumy lenses the Augusta exterior doesn't have the traditional Autocruise 'look' and for me this is no bad thing. In fact, if you want to accuse the Augusta's styling of anything, it is that it looks very similar to many other modern motorhomes out there. For some of us, who view our motorcaravans as simply a travelling machine (rather than a lifestyle statement or status symbol), the Augusta is demure enough to be acceptable without being totally anonymous.

The Augusta is very low, and very long (nearly 25 feet), but you can only really judge just how big this thing is when you stand back

**1** Front lounge has a light and spacious look, but seating is over high

**2** Beyond the amidships kitchen, the central door gives access to a separate bedroom with en-suite washroom



**AT A GLANCE**

- **PRICE FROM:** £53,753
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Peugeot Boxer  
Al-Ko chassis cab
- **LAYOUT:** Front lounge/dinette,  
centre kitchen, separate twin-singles  
bedroom, washroom across rear
- **ECONOMY:** 22.6 mpg



and take in the pencil-like profile. This genuinely low-profile shape should aid fuel economy, but due to my usual incapacity to plan anything precisely, we ended up testing the Augusta during the worst week of winter weather for eighteen years. Because of this, I'm not convinced that we travelled far enough (or fast enough) to obtain an accurate reflection of the 'van's true economy credentials.

The rear half of the chassis is an Al-Ko extension, enabling the Augusta to carry that sleek looking body without the unsettling influence of a huge rear overhang. This chassis has a MAW of 4250kg, which leaves plenty of user payload potential, but this has licensing implications for younger, new, or older drivers. The heavyweight chassis also has other implications too, but I'll get to that in the driving section.

The motive power for this lot is the brilliant 3.0-litre Iveco engine, which, in this case, is installed in a cab with a Peugeot badge on the front. However, if you require an automatic 'box then it will carry the Fiat emblem. Confused? Worry not, for it is the same vehicle in reality, but only Fiat offers the automatic (ComfortMatic) option.

Moving into the familiar (Fiat/Peugeot/Citroen) cab, it comes equipped with all the usual electric mirrors and windows etc. Surprisingly, it lacks a passenger airbag, but has cab air-conditioning, cruise control and steering wheel-mounted radio switchgear.

In the February freeze we couldn't test the cab-air-conditioning's effectiveness, but - partly due to the interior layout - the cab heater got things very toasty up front. A small black mark goes to Autocruise for not including the caravan

door in the central locking loop - something you'd expect on a top-of-the range motorhome.

Both cab seats have swivel mechanisms fitted and this has the effect of raising the driver's seat (on its lowest setting) to a position where an average-sized driver (like me at 5ft 9in) can't see under the sun visors without stooping. Things get even worse for an undersize driver, like my small companion, Attila (at a smidgeon over five feet) who had to get so close to the wheel that the plastic mouldings at shin level prevented her operating the clutch. I know that Fiat can supply seats that swivel *and* retain their original height (as they are fitted in our own Ducato), so I presume they are available from Peugeot too.

Due to there being only two three-point belted seats (in the cab), and despite the beds for four, in this day and age the Augusta must be considered as a two-berth motorhome.



# On Test Autocruise Augusta

## DRIVING RANGE

In straight lines and going forwards, this lengthy 'van drives just like all the other smaller Boxers, Ducatos and Relays, with no real sense of all that extra stuff following you around. On the motorway too, it doesn't drive significantly differently from the smaller versions, but in urban or country lane situations it needs a lot more space and time to get round tight bends; with kerbs, hedges and street signs ever eager to snag your progress. So even though it looks the same from the driver's seat, this is not a 'nimble camper'.

That lusty three-litre engine is magnificent and in some ways disguises the size of this truck, as it jumps off the line with some verve. It also has seemingly endless reserves of torque when you are bumbling along slowly, through the ups and downs of the scenery. The brakes are fuss-free and the steering is fine, though it isn't as sharp or responsive as its smaller siblings; nor would you expect it to be. The handling, on wide fast roads is superb, while the only limit as to how fast this monster will fly round corners seems to be how securely you've stashed your gear in the rear.

However, I would gladly forsake a bit of that sports car handling for a slightly softer and more comfortable ride. We were only lightly loaded (full fuel and water tanks, with about a weekend's worth of food and clothes), but the Al-Ko chassis had a hard ride when compared to similarly loaded original rear suspension. There's also an undesirable knock-on effect in the amount of noise the Autocruise conversion makes when travelling on anything but the smoothest of road surfaces. There was also quite a lot of wind noise from the cab roof window whilst travelling at moderate motorway speeds (55-60mph). It's a shame about the interior cacophony, because progress is quite refined otherwise.

The Al-Ko chassis always seems to throw up another unwanted complication too, in the

form of a lacklustre handbrake. Whether it is an adjustment issue or a design fault I know not, but this one wouldn't hold the vehicle on anything more than a modest incline. I discovered this whilst attempting to conduct a test of this 'van's ability to reverse up hills, and because the handbrake was totally useless on steep hills I had to abort the attempt. Suffice to say that the juddering from the transmission on the one hill start I managed in reverse was bad. Hopefully, by the time you read this Fiat and Citroen will have solved the transmission problem, but at the time of writing things were still a bit vague. Thankfully, it seems Peugeot has now grasped the nettle, and is fitting modified gearboxes with a lower reverse gear ratio to Boxer-based 'vans suffering judder. Early reports suggest that this mod has been successful.

## COURSE LAYOUT

Interior layout is simple: lounge up front, kitchen in the centre, bedroom towards the rear and the washroom right at the back. The bathing space, as you'd expect, is separated from the rest of the living area, but the Augusta also segregates the bedroom from the open plan kitchen/lounge. This is a very appealing layout in a 'housey' kind of way, and somehow feels more like a narrow boat than a motorhome. There are loose carpets throughout the 'van, but with this interior consisting of such well-defined spaces we thought that a heavy-duty laminate floor would have been more appropriate in the kitchen and washroom.

## THE CLUBHOUSE

Starting right at the front with the cab seats; not only are they slightly too high for driving, but due to a step down into the living quarters, they are also a touch too high for use as the principal armchairs in the lounge. The sofas were also a touch too high (500mm,



1ft 8in) for comfy long-term sitting for me, whereas the small, smouldering, short-legged one thought they were far too lofty.

The two sofas can quickly be converted into a reasonable-sized double bed, and (for all sorts of illogical reasons) I spent both nights we endured in the freezing February weather in the lounge bed, despite the dedicated bedroom further aft. Have I mentioned that the heating system didn't function? This is the lot motorhome testers must sometimes endure, as manufacturers have enough on their plates without worrying about the welfare of layouts like us.

The Augusta is equipped with a dazzling array of the new-fangled LED lights to illuminate your life. For reading, the miniscule spotlights in the lounge area are indeed, spot-on, but for general lighting the ceiling-mounted (triple-mega-LED) lamp is required. Sadly, this lacks the warm-coloured glow that's nice on those evenings when dining-in is the romantic thing to do.

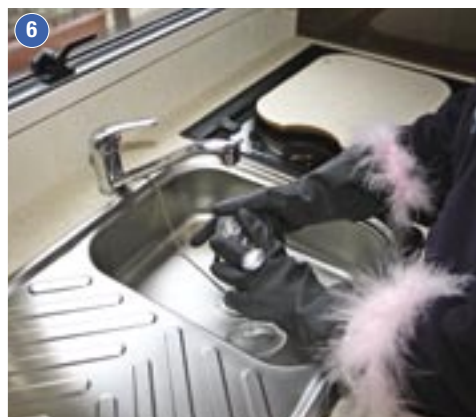
## DRIVING DINING

'Get the table out will you dear, and butter some bread whilst I burn the beans', she suggests, as I'm spread out on the sofa immersed in a Pratchett tome and giggling like a schoolgirl.

'Certainly,' I reply. Well, I hunted high and low for a table (on the roof, under the 'van), but there just wasn't one to be found in the Augusta. Even more strange, we couldn't find a place to store one either. If the dining table in the photos looks a little lost in these palatial surroundings it's because we borrowed it from our own 'van. I later e-mailed a nice man at the Swift Group to ask whether the Augusta normally came with a dining table as standard. Rather than tell me to stop being such a whining sarcastic old sod, he informed me that yes, it should have had a table (freestanding), stowed in the cupboard at the back of the washroom. This wouldn't seem to be the most convenient storage location, as it will entail quite a bit of manoeuvring to get the table to the lounge.

## COOKING IRONS

In recent years Autocruise has been almost famous for its extending (swing-out unit) kitchens and the extra chopping/dumping room they provide the cook. The Augusta has





none of these clever expansion tricks up its sleeve, but I don't think they'll be missed, as a simple fold-up worktop extension does the job just as well. The drainer on the stainless steel sink is a touch miserly in such marvellous company, but otherwise the kitchen was a pleasure to use. The full-sized Spinflo Caprice cooker worked a treat, and whilst we never use the electric hotplate on these hobs (just too slow), I'm sure it's a good idea for saving precious gas whilst touring abroad. What I didn't like was the pan storage space at the bottom of the cooker, as - whilst cornering over enthusiastically - the pans could crash about and damage the gas lines and isolation taps found in here.

The big fridge/freezer is a Thetford model (rather than the more traditional Dometic) and it seemed to work okay, using its - rather gimmicky to me - (Smart Energy Selection) auto-selection system that automatically switches to the most appropriate energy source.

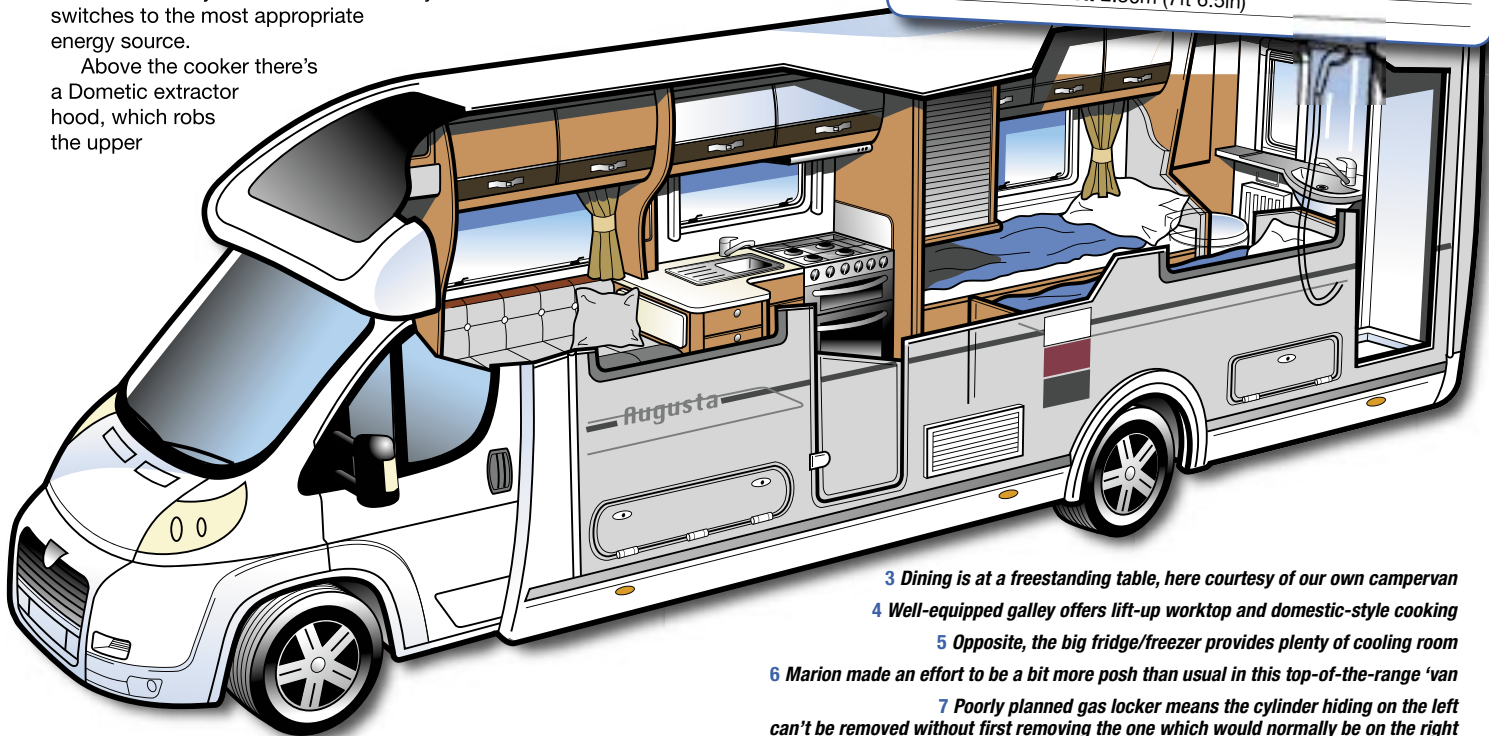
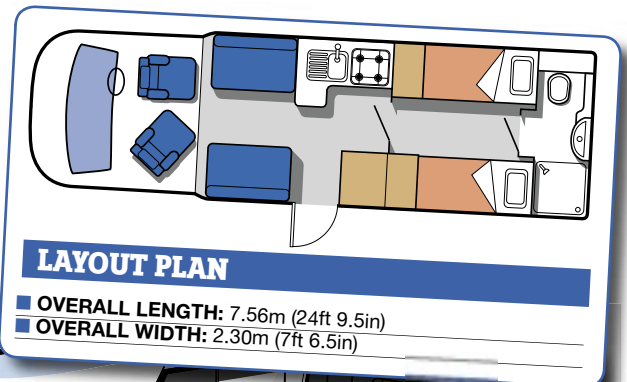
Above the cooker there's a Dometic extractor hood, which robs the upper

locker of most of its space. As storage space in this kitchen is a bit on the lean side, this could have been thought out and fitted a bit better. The problem with the storage provision in the kitchen is partially caused by the gas locker being placed in the centre of it, and this could have been more sensibly positioned elsewhere - perhaps half under floor level in an underseat locker. I realise this could add to the cost, but the Augusta is not a budget motorhome.

**SHORT PITCH**

The main selling point of this layout is surely the completely separate bedroom (with its twin single beds either side of the central aisle) linking directly into the en-suite washroom. The assertion that this is a two berth 'van is

confirmed here, as anyone sleeping in the lounge must stagger (me, in the dark and freezing cold, because the heating system was duff) through the bedroom to get to the washroom. The twin single beds, with 'proper' mattresses, lie longitudinally, and with doors at both ends shutting it off from the rest of



- 3 Dining is at a freestanding table, here courtesy of our own campervan
- 4 Well-equipped galley offers lift-up worktop and domestic-style cooking
- 5 Opposite, the big fridge/freezer provides plenty of cooling room
- 6 Marion made an effort to be a bit more posh than usual in this top-of-the-range 'van
- 7 Poorly planned gas locker means the cylinder hiding on the left can't be removed without first removing the one which would normally be on the right





the interior and outside world, this looks like the kind of motorhome bedroom we all dream of. The twin wardrobes are suspended above the foot ends of the beds and in a perfect world we would rather have had one of the wardrobes shelved out. But of course, volume manufacturers have to try and cater for us all. However comfy and cosy looking this bedroom may be, this is where I fell out slightly with the Augusta. For one who has such an athletic and stretched-out sleeping style (*fidgety? ED*), the beds were too short and too narrow. After an hour of cursing, banging, kicking and keeping Marion awake,

I took my sleeping bag and stomped off into the lounge to sleep there.

The moral of this bed-swap tale? If the Augusta's layout appeals, make very certain that the beds are big enough for both of you before you place your order.

### WATER FEATURE

The washroom in this mobile apartment sits across the whole width of the 'van, right at the rump of things and it provides ample ablution facilities for even the pickiest of motorcaravanners. Space is bit tight around the throne, but the height is right, and I

reckon if the beds are big enough for you, then there won't be an issue with your girth in here. The toilet itself (the new Thetford swivel-bowl job with wheeled cassette) feels a bit plastic-y to me, but as long as it works then fine. It did. To me, it comes in the same category as the fridge - as long as it functions, then that's all that matters.

The washbasin is practical in colour and it has adequate dumping space for bits, bats and cosmetics, while the shower is sensibly sized. Overall, this washroom is a bit dark and lighter coloured walls would probably give it a bit more appeal, but it is a well-thought-out space.



**8** The bedroom is very attractive. The door leads into the washroom

**9** Matching tambour-doored wardrobes sit above the foot of each bed

**10** This huge exterior door opens to reveal just the toilet cassette access

**11** The washroom is a tad dark, with the all-wood walls, but very user-friendly

**12** Separate shower is sensibly sized



## LOCKER ROOM

Storage provision is a bit 'hit and miss'. Yes, there's lots of it, but it's not in all the right places or quantities.

The gas locker (which, as I already said, robs the kitchen of its biggest storage opportunity) also has an inbuilt flaw, in so far as changing cylinders can't be accomplished without juggling them around.

The nearside sofa provides an unobstructed storage space big enough for outdoor furniture. This can be accessed from outside and full marks here, for it is also on the awning side (nearside) of the 'van. The other (offside) sofa

contains the Alde heating unit, and isn't quite so accessible, so I reckon the gas locker would have been better placed here.

Clothes storage is well taken care of, with those two wardrobes, plus upper lockers in the bedroom. In addition, both bed bases contain a void just waiting to be filled with golf clubs and the like. The position of the bedroom restricts the size of the exterior access doors to these lockers (because of the wheel arches), but there are access doors inside too. However, it may be a struggle to get bulky items in and out. Just in case you're thinking - because of that large exterior door - that there's a small 'garage' in

the rear offside corner, forget it, as this only gives access to the toilet cassette, flattering to deceive as a storage place.

## GOLFING GEAR

Let's start with that defective Alde 'wet' radiator heating system first - the one feature that should make winter camping comfortable. The cold snap should have been the perfect opportunity to test its abilities and I'm sure it would have been superb. Indeed, the very fact that it is fitted suggests this motorhome should make the ideal cold-climate touring machine. But sadly not, as both water tanks lie underneath and are completely uninsulated: a very strange contradiction.

The means of filling the water tank is via one those systems which, in my humble opinion, over-complicates life. The only way of getting the wet stuff in is to use the supplied

### I LIKED

- Engine performance
- Superb handling and road holding
- Smooth low-line exterior appearance
- Apartment-like layout
- Functional washroom
- Capable kitchen
- Excellent lighting
- Neutral décor

### I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A dining table (see text)
- Lower lounge seating, or raised floor
- Increased kitchen storage space
- More convenient table storage
- Re-sited gas locker
- Shelving in some lockers
- Easier top access to under-bed lockers
- Lighter coloured walls in washroom
- Insulated/heated water tanks
- Central locking to caravan door
- Struts or retainer on lower locker access
- Bigger beds

### I DISLIKED

- On-road conversion noise
- Ineffective handbrake
- Reversing vibration





## LIVE-IN TEST DATA

### TYPE

Low profile coachbuilt

### PRICE

- **From:** £53,753 OTR
- **As Tested:** £53,753 OTR

### BASICS

- **Vehicle:** Peugeot Boxer AI-Ko chassis cab
- **Berths:** 2
- **Three-point belted seats:** 2 (incl. driver)
- **Warranty:** 3 years base vehicle and conversion (with exclusions after 1 year)

### CONSTRUCTION

GRP clad sandwich construction, GRP overcab moulding, roof, rear panel, skirts, wheel arches, transition panels. Caravan entrance on UK nearside

### DIMENSIONS (\*manufacturers figures)

- **Length:** 7.56m (24ft 9.5in)\*
- **Width:** 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)\*
- **Height:** 2.69m (8ft 10in)\*
- **Wheelbase:** 4.55m (14ft 11in)
- **Rear Overhang:** 2.02m (6ft 7.5in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 4250kg (check your driving licence entitlement)
- **Payload:** 690kg (after allowance for the vehicle in running order)

### INSIDE STORY

Front lounge with swivelling cab seats, inward-facing sofas, kitchen in centre, separate bedroom with twin single beds, washroom across rear

- **Insulation:** Floor and walls 28mm, roof 30mm

### THE VEHICLE

- **Engine:** 3.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 115.5kW (157bhp) @ 3600rpm
- **Transmission:** Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive



- **Fuel consumption:** 22.6 mpg
- **Brakes:** Servo-assisted discs all round
- **Suspension:** Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Independent on torsion bars
- **Features:** Remote control central locking on cab doors, drivers airbag, electric windows and mirrors, cab air-con, cruise control, trip computer, variable delay wipers, height-adjustable seats, reach-adjustable steering column, radio/CD player with steering column-mounted controls, overhead storage shelf, twin door bins, sat navigation system incorporating reversing camera monitor, reversing camera

### LOUNGING AND DINING

Swivel cab seats and twin inward-facing sofas served by freestanding dining table with stowage in washroom cupboard

### KITCHEN

Located in centre with L-shaped main unit on offside incorporating sink, cooker, lift-up extension to work surfaces, storage cupboards, cutlery drawer. Upper lockers contain fitted crockery unit and extractor fan.

- **Sink:** Stainless steel sink and drainer with chromed mixer tap
- **Cooker:** Spinflo Caprice slot-in unit with three gas burners, one electric hotplate, separate grill and oven, all with electronic ignition
- **Fridge:** Thetford N175 three-way fridge/freezer with Smart Energy Selection. Capacity 175 litres

### WASHROOM

Located across rear with Thetford C250 electric-flush swivel-bowl toilet with wheeled cassette,

washbasin with mixer tap, cupboards above and below, separate shower cubicle

### BEDS

Twin permanent singles

- **Length:** 1.83m (6ft 0in)
- **Width:** 680mm (2ft 3in)

Lounge double

- **Length:** 2.03m (6ft 8in)
- **Width:** 1.17m (3ft 10in)

### STORAGE

Nearside front sofa base accessed from above and exterior; part of offside sofa accessed from above; total of 10 upper lockers (one fitted out for crockery and one for bottles); unobstructed under-bed spaces accessed by exterior locker doors, lift-up bed bases and interior drop-down doors

### LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Underslung, uninsulated. Capacity 88 litres (19.3 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung, uninsulated. Capacity 73 litres (16 gallons)
- **Space and water Heater:** Alde Compact 3010 boiler feeding wet radiators, mains-gas operation
- **Leisure battery:** 120 amp hr
- **Gas capacity:** 2 x 7kg cylinders
- **Lighting:** Lounge: 2 mains-operated lamps on walls, LED ceiling fitting, 4 LED spotlights above sofas, 2 halogen spotlights in cab. Kitchen: 2 halogen downlighters in cooker hood, LED spot above sink, halogen downlighter above caravan door, LED safety light in door footwell. Bedroom: LED ceiling fitting, 2 LED spotlights above bed heads. LED ceiling fitting above toilet/sink, 2 LED spots in shower.
- **Sockets:** 230V: 5 (1 in lounge, 2 in kitchen, 2 in bedroom). 12V: 2 (1 in kitchen,



**AUTOCRUISE AUGUSTA**

1 in bedroom)

- **Control panel:** Mounted on upper locker near caravan door. Displays vehicle/leisure battery voltage, fresh/waste water tank levels, battery selection switch, water pump switch, auxiliary equipment switch, lighting switch, 12V master switch
- **Blinds/curtains:** Cassette type pleated blinds and flyscreens to all caravan windows and rooflights
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS**

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base:** None
  - **Conversion:** None
- Other options
- **Base:** ComfortMatic automatic gearbox - only on Fiat Ducato base vehicle (£1492)
  - **Conversion:** Roof rack and ladder (£538)

E&OE



submersible pump in a jerry can (it would not fit into ours), or getting up close to a tap to use the dedicated hosepipe. Such is progress...

What else is there? A wind-out sun canopy/awning, a directional TV aerial, a television fitted in the bedroom (which wasn't present on the test vehicle) and a satnav/reversing camera monitor, which again, wasn't present in the test vehicle. I'm beginning to think Autocruise didn't trust me with anything remotely removable - even the table!

**19TH GREEN**

A decent round? Or not? Well Swift has definitely smoothed out the some of the creases



on this Autocruise, resulting in a sleek modern-looking motorhome, which should function well in all but extreme circumstances. Some of the cleverness has also been ironed out though, and whilst the Augusta won't suit everyone, that's the reason why manufacturers offer such a vast choice of layouts. However, if it does appeal to you, do ensure that the beds are big enough for your body or sleeping style and that the base vehicle has been modified (or built to the new design) to eradicate the transmission fault. ■

**VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY**

Autocruise Motorhomes,  
Swinton Meadows Industrial Estate,  
Meadow Way, Swinton, Mexborough,  
South Yorkshire S64 8AB  
(tel: 01709 571411;  
web site: www.autocruise.co.uk)

**WE STAYED AT**

Royal Umpire Caravan Park,  
Southport Road Croston PR26 9JB  
(tel: 01772 600257;  
web site: www.royalumpire.co.uk)

13 Current Autocruise 'vans feature smooth styling

14 The nearside exterior locker access is big enough for chairs and the like. Here, the leisure battery can be seen with its cover removed

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