

## On Test Fendt K-Mobil 500



**F**endt, as our young grandson, 'Farmer' William, would say, makes 'girt big tractors.' The rest of us may have seen its massively Teutonic caravans towed behind muscular 4x4s. Now, this sister company

of Hobby also constructs motorhomes and Midgley Motor Caravans of Skipton is importing two models, the K-Mobil 400 and 500. We were offered the first chance to test a new demonstrator, but there was an unforeseen delay...

While returning from the Glasgow Show at night, something heavy in the 'van's rear garage fell against the lift-up door, which opened. Unfortunately, with typical German efficiency, Fendt designs the door with strong gas struts, which swung enthusiastically into operation; the garage door came up like a wing, and promptly hit a tree! Exit, one garage door.

We've all heard horror stories about the delays which can afflict the supply of body parts for coachbuilt 'vans – some can be off the road for months. It is reassuring that Fendt passed this test capably, and a replacement door was available in days. When we tested it, the 'van lacked only the gas struts and a replacement decal, to be fitted shortly.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Our 'van was a K-Mobil 500, built on the latest Ford Transit with the 130bhp 2.2 litre engine. The K denotes Kompakt, but that's wishful thinking: the 500 measures 6.75 metres (22ft 2in) tip to tail - hardly a midget. Both are 'Vans' - that is, part of the spate of narrow, low profile coachbuilts produced by most of the main German manufacturers.

I was expecting a silver bird, but this Fendt was white; long, lean and lovely. The smooth curves of the GRP bodywork are matched by swooping decals – it is an impressive sight. Closer inspection showed that the steering wheel was on the 'wrong' side. This was the demonstrator – British specification will be RHD, but the habitation door will, as usual, remain on the offside. Look at the rear, and there's a blank wall – nicely tailored, but no window and no reversing sensors or camera either. Gulp! We won't tell them I haven't driven the latest Transit before, nor a left-hooker (ever). Let's just hope the Fendt isn't accident-prone!

### LAYOUT

Moving inside, what's the layout? An external electric step gives access through a reassuringly solid door with a proper security latch and narrow oval window. No flyscreen is fitted (optional extra). Looking around, the ambience is very warm – woodwork, seating fabric, floor vinyl and curtains are mainly russet, relieved by a creamy faux leather ceiling and pretty, but impractical, pale-covered cab seats. The removable carpets were rolled up in the garage and if we owned the 'van, that's where they'd stay.

There appear to be only two layouts for these Vans, whomever the manufacturer. Both feature fixed beds and most are transverse doubles, but some have twin longitudinal singles instead, convertible to a massive double. The K-Mobil 500 is of this type, hence the 'van's extra length. The beds are set high at the rear, allowing a commodious garage beneath. Immediately aft of the caravan door is the kitchen, opposite the washroom and





Words & pictures by  
Andrew Bromley

# MIGHTY MIDGET

Fendt K-Mobil 500 on 2.2TD Ford Transit

*German Fendt is one of the latest brands to hit the UK scene. We test the first example to make it across the North Sea*



## WE LIKED

- Excellent storage and payload
- Twin wardrobes
- Comfortable twin beds
- Light and airy cabin

## WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Garage door side-hinged at front
- Rake adjustment on dinette and 'dicky' seats
- Reversing camera (optional, but not fitted)

## WE DISLIKED

- Lack of headroom over twin beds
- Low header rail on windscreen blind
- No space for a draining board

## ON THE ROAD

Moving off cautiously, I bear in mind that first gear is said to be high – it's easy to stall until you get used to it. Once on the open road, I find that the gearbox is really nice, the other ratios seem well chosen and the engine is torquey. The steering seems slightly slow - woolly compared to a Fiat - so the 'van feels just a little ponderous. The seats are supportive, though, and there's no chorus of creaks and groans from the furniture, just the occasional human 'squeak' from the front passenger seat!

We tour the Dales near Skipton trying to avoid the stone walls and tourist coaches. I am looking for photographic opportunities, so Rona takes over the driving, and it's my turn to squeak! After parking at Embsay Station on the Yorkshire Dales steam railway (well worth a visit), we set-to exploring the 'van's interior.

## THE INNARDS

The swivelling cab seats, 'dicky' seat, front dinette (seating two) and table with an extra swivelling leaf make - on first inspection - a



forward of that, a half-dinette. Immediately to the right is a 'dickey' side seat, facing the dinette table. Both front seats swivel to form part of the lounge area.

## THE BUSINESS END

Move forward past the dinette table and slide into the left-hand front seat. Two things struck me immediately: the header rail is too low and the Mondeo-style steering wheel doesn't adjust, neither for reach or rake. The wheel, initially, was sat in my lap, but the seat adjusted satisfactorily. The gear stick was to be operated by my right

hand - how odd! It offers five gears and moved around very sweetly. The handbrake, between the seat and the driver's door, leaves the centre of the 'van vacant, and falls beautifully to my left hand – much better than on a right-hand drive version, where I must use my right hand; that always feels wrong. Wunderbar! Two airbags, cruise control, trip computer, cab air-conditioning - in fact nearly all the expected extras are fitted. Then the Missus discovers there's no vanity mirror on the passenger side sun visor – a black mark! At least the extended door mirrors give a good view – I'll need them!





cosy lounge.

However, the backrests on the dinette and 'dicky' have no rake adjustment, so you must sit bolt upright. Excellent discipline for the grandchildren, but not comfortable for me – I like to slouch! My choice would be a swivelled cab seat, though I banged my head on the (well-upholstered) cab roof.

The dinette bench has two seatbelts and these have vertical adjustment – a good feature. I wonder how firmly the belts would hold child-seats though, as this is a flat bench, the manufacturer should really be fitting Iso-Fix mounts. Above the dinette is a narrow shelf where the (optional) flat-screen TV would live.

The kitchen unit is a 'standard' German type, with a large (93-litre) three-way fridge, a (manually lit) three-burner hob and a stainless steel sink. Nowhere for a draining board, no

grill, no oven, just lots of cupboard space and a reasonable amount of work surface. UK specification will include a Smev oven and grill. There is sensible provision in a cupboard for holding a plastic rubbish bag.

One concern about the hob is that it closely abuts the end of the offside bed, where dangling duvets could cause a fire. A screen is needed here.

Opposite the kitchen is the washroom. It looks great, with a circular shower tray and a round rooflight above. The plastic (rather fiddly and flimsy) shower screen forms a narrow tube – very Star-Trek! However, if you aren't trim in size, you might have difficulty using this shower.

There's the usual Thetford swivelling loo, a fixed washbasin, showerhead on a riser rail, lots of cupboards, mirrors and lights, but no loo roll holder!



**1** Looking forwards from the kitchen reveals the half-dinette lounge with inward-facing 'dicky' seat and swivelled cab pews

**2** The rear view sees amidships kitchen and washroom with twin, longitudinal single beds in the rear

**3** Upright lounge seating makes the cab pews the best place to relax

**4** No drainer in the kitchen, but UK spec models will get a grill and oven

**5** The washroom has plenty of kit

**6** Semicircular shower will be tight for big people



## AND SO TO BED

Fixed beds are the *raison d'être* of these 'Van' designs and we much prefer the longitudinal twin single (convertible to a double) layout. With a transverse double, if one of you wants to get up in the night, you have to get your leg over – literally! These beds were made from what the brochure calls 'cold foam' – presumably some sort of memory foam – whatever, they seemed very comfortable and long enough for tall people. However, we found headroom insufficient to sit up and the reading lights vulnerable, sited below your shoulder. Access is normally via three steps, but if the double is made up a metal ladder is used, stored in a little cupboard.

Many 'Van-type' designs have a small forward bed - suitable only for kids - made from the dinette and a cab seat. Fendt goes one better, with the dinette cushions and table

joined to the 'dicky' seat to make a full-sized transverse single. Hmm, without a manual, it wasn't easy to work out: the result looks better in the picture than it really was.

If you are going to use this 'van to sleep more than a couple, you might want more than the little curtain fitted at the end of the main beds to maintain a semblance of privacy.

## STORAGE

Storage facilities are excellent. There are high-level cupboards all round the dinette and on both sides of the cab, with a shelf and fiddle rail in the middle above the cab. More cupboards are over the kitchen and yet more in the bedroom area. The cupboard catches seemed strong and well fitted, but a clumsy person had broken one.

Under the 'dicky' seat there is a shoe-sized cupboard, but the dinette seat base

houses just the inboard water tank.

Wardrobe provision is clever – there are two, located under the rear beds and reached via tambour doors, each with rail and shelves.

Then there's the garage. This is large enough for bikes and features tie-down rings with easy access to the gas locker located in here. The garage door, which caused all the grief, is hinged at the top. This is a mistake because the aforementioned gas struts are needed to push it open and it takes up valuable airspace: think of Continental campsites where 'vans can be packed together like sardines. Also, tall people have to duck to get under the door and if it comes open on the move... Well, accidents do happen! Hinge it at the front side and there wouldn't be a problem.

A generous payload of 705kg allows you to make full use of the extensive storage, which is one of the best features of this design.

## FACILITIES

This is a well specified 'van thanks, in part, to the fact that the Midgley Motor Caravans Options Pack is fitted. Fendt has gone to town on lighting, though it's not to our simple tastes. Two clear plastic cabinets either side of the door, which hold drinking glasses, are lit by green LEDs and there are halogen lights, spots and strips in the most unlikely places. In addition – and much more to my liking – there is a stylish overcab sunroof and three (Mini and Midi) Heki rooflights – one of them over the rear bedroom.

There are cassette blinds, flyscreens and curtains in the living area, with Remis concertina blinds fitted to the windscreen and cab windows. The windscreen blind's top track lowers the header rail and I have concerns as to longevity as the screens seem flimsy: I envisage a book, for example, sliding down the sloping dashboard into the blind, damaging it.

Water and space heating is by a Truma E6 Combi boiler powered by both mains electric and gas. The underfloor waste water tank is heated, and emptied via a proper dump pipe.

An Omnistor awning is stylishly hidden in the bodywork. It is manually operated, which some may not like, but is one less electric



**7** Single beds are comfy, but propped-up-in-bed reading is off the menu

**8** The lounge makes a long single bed, but one that - without an instruction manual - went together unconvincingly

**9** The garage is a great feature, but the culprit garage door would be better off side-hinged

feature to fail.

An awning light is fitted, as are rear steadies - useful because there is a fair amount of rear overhang that could make things wobbly when pitched.

However, there is one big disappointment as a can of gunge (sorry - tyre sealer and inflator) replaces the spare wheel. Shame!

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

So, why would you buy this 'van, rather than a similar offering from Hymer, Eriba, Dethleffs, Knaus or even its twin sister, the Hobby Exclusive? Were I buying in this market, I would look very carefully at all these Vans before deciding. A final choice could come down to the base vehicle and its specification, the comfort of a mattress or even the lighting or position of the TV. Then there are delivery times, trade-in offers and service back-up.

Obviously, price is a major consideration and is variable because of the current volatile euro/pound exchange rate.

Certainly, this particular motorcaravan was svelte, well finished and had many practical points, making it worth short-listing. I was very relieved to be able to return it, unscathed, to its owner at the end of the test! ■

## TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

## FENDT K-MOBIL 500

- **Price as tested:** £41,350 OTR (includes right-hand drive and UK specification gas, electrics, fire retardant upholstery)
- **Base Vehicle:** Ford Transit platform cab, 2.2-litre turbo-diesel engine producing 130bhp, five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle, two years conversion
- **Dimensions:** Length: 6.75m (22ft 2ins); width: 2.15m (7ft 0.5in); height: 2.71m (8ft 10.5ins)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** 705kg
- **Belted Seats:** 4 (including driver)
- **Beds:** Lounge single: 2.00m x 1.06m (6ft 7in x 3ft 6in) max  
Rear fixed singles: Both 2.00m x 760mm (6ft 7in x 2ft 6in). Alternative double: 2.00m x 1.96m (6ft 7in x 6ft 5in)
- **Other features:** Kitchen: (MMC specification) stainless steel sink, three-burner manual ignition hob, Smev oven and grill, Dometic 93-litre fridge.
- **Washroom:** Thetford swivelling cassette toilet with electric flush, roof vent, fixed washbasin,

circular plastic shower enclosure.

- **Heating:** Truma Combi E6 water and space heating boiler with blown-air, gas-mains operation.
- **Water tanks:** fresh; Inboard 100 litres (22 gallons), waste; underslung (heated) 92 litres (20 gallons). Gas: 2 x 11kg cylinders
- **Optional extras fitted to UK specification vehicles:** Ford Flexy Pack: upgrade to 140bhp engine, six-speed gearbox, ESP (Electronic Stability Programme), HLA (Hill Launch Assist), cab air-conditioning, trip computer, ABS, electric windows and mirrors, remote control central locking, cruise control, 'wood' dash trim, colour-coded bumpers. MMC Pack: Remis cab blinds, flush-fitting Omnistor awning, removable carpets, Truma Combi E6 boiler, Smev oven and grill, extra lighting, winterisation, towbar preparation, TV preparation (£4150 for both packs)
- **Other optional extras available:** Habitation door flyscreen (£100), towbar (£450), flat screen TV and aerial (from £300), reversing camera (from £300), reversing sensors (from £300)

E&OE



### VEHICLE LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

Midgley Motor Caravans, Unit 16,  
Airedale Business Centre, Keighley Road,  
Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 2TZ  
(tel: 01756 797652;  
web site: www.midgley.co.uk)