

All washed up?



Not at all, says **Michael Le Caplain** as Auto-Sleepers' new Cotswold flagship impresses him with its now-rare and rather palatial end washroom 'EB' layout

If there's one thing you could never accuse Auto-Sleepers of, it's failing to cover most, if not all niches of the motorhome market. Granted, there's no A-class or tag-axle monster in the company's line-up, but elsewhere you're almost guaranteed to find something to suit your personal needs, whether it's a pint-sized Mezan, a socking great Berkshire – or pretty much anything in between.

So where does that leave Auto-Sleepers' latest creation, the Cotswold EB? On the face of it, it's tricky to see exactly what the inspiration behind the newcomer is. In an industry seemingly dominated by fixed beds (there's also a new Cotswold model sporting a French bed layout), finding a newcomer conforming to that most quaint of layouts

– the full-width end washroom – could be construed as being a rather retrograde step. Not least at a time when major rivals are busy binning their own end washroom layouts (think Gleneagle, Mohican) in the wake of dwindling sales.

Then again, maybe therein lies the inspiration – if you think about it, the Cotswold EB isn't that dissimilar in layout to the fixed single bed coachbuilts we tested in the December issue, just with the convenience of a double bed option thrown into the mix, and the single beds making arguably better use of valuable floor-space by doubling as lounge settees. Either way, we felt a closer look-see was called for, and so it was with an open mind that I sallied forth to Auto-Sleepers HQ in – aptly enough – the Cotswolds to see what's what.

First things first, it seems appropriate to point out that the Cotswold EB isn't the first end washroom coachbuilt to feature in the Auto-Sleepers range: regular readers will doubtless remember the (now obsolete) VW T5-underpinned Sandhurst we tested a few months back, which conforms to pretty much the same floorplan as the EB. The Cotswold is much bigger, however, stretching the tape measure to a full 23ft

6in stem to stern, and with Broadway-like side and frontal styling and optional alloy wheels, it's quite a handsome machine.

The 'low-profile' moniker Auto-Sleepers apply to this newcomer does seem decidedly inappropriate, given the bulbous overcab moulding renders the Cotswold a not-inconsiderable 9ft 11in tall. You'd swear this was an overcab coachbuilt from the outside.

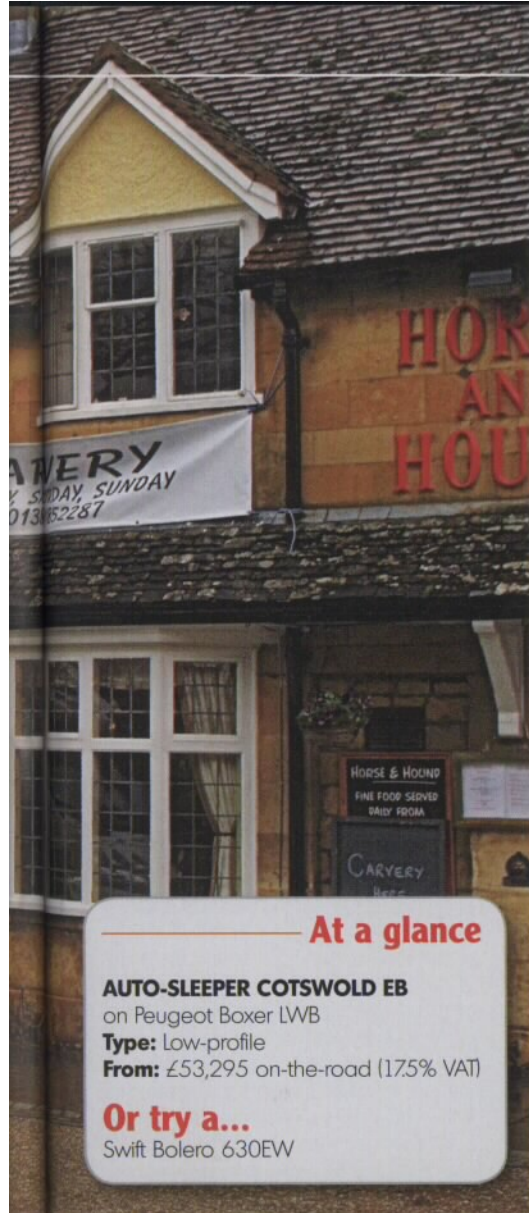
You'd imagine that it would do the handling no favours, either, the centre of gravity being noticeably higher than it would be on a true low-profile like Swift's Bolero. In reality, however, the X2/50 suspension does its usual fine job of offering nimble cornering, albeit at the cost of a little ride comfort, something that comes into clearer focus still when you open the taps on the 160Hdi engine fitted to our test example.

A reasonable enough £1586 cost option, this truly superb engine lends the big Cotswold (which is built on a 4-tonne chassis) a healthy dose of get-up-and-go, although, being of Peugeot origin, of course, the desirable Comfort-Matic automatic transmission offered on similarly engined Fiat Ducatos is not available. I'd still strongly recommend opting for the bigger motor, however – I can't help thinking

Supplied by

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At a glance

AUTO-SLEEPER COTSWOLD EB

on Peugeot Boxer LWB

Type: Low-profile

From: £53,295 on-the-road (17.5% VAT)

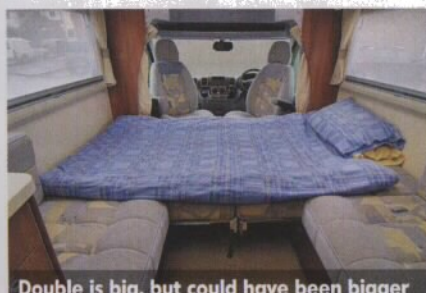
Or try a...

Swift Bolero 630EW

that the hefty chassis and big body would conspire to rather overwhelm the standard engine's 130bhp.

One other niggle concerns the Cotswold's driving position. I'm as near as makes no difference to six feet in height, so I'm hardly freakishly tall, and yet I really struggled to get properly comfortable behind the wheel. The root of the problem seems to be the driver's seat, which doesn't lower anywhere near as much as it should (the passenger seat doesn't adjust for height at all). As a result, my lower-left leg ended up pressed against the underside of the dashboard every time I changed gear.

These concerns aside, however, you should be in for a quiet, relaxing drive with the EB, for our test model – a pre-production demonstrator that had already run the gruelling gauntlet of the NEC Show – remained resolutely rattle-free, even on poorly-metalled road surfaces.



Double is big, but could have been bigger



The absence of bulkheads makes the Cotswold's single-room lounge and kitchen feel spacious

Speaking of which, it's much the same story when you undertake a closer examination of the interior, where the usual Auto-Sleeper high levels of build-quality quite literally shine through. One or two unfinished surfaces are evident when you lift the settee bases, but elsewhere every catch, every button and every control feels engineered, not merely screwed together. This is a £50,000 motorhome that actually feels like a £50,000 motorhome.

It's a pity the same level of quality doesn't extend to some of the exterior services, though – the grey water drain in particular is both plasticky and too narrow in bore, and the conversion door is inexplicably excluded from the remote plipper's central locking loop.

Climb aboard, however, and I suspect most potential buyers will forgive the Cotswold EB just about anything. In a world where some motorhomes increasingly feel hemmed in by a variety of intrusive bulkheads and seem to be all bedroom and no lounge, the EB's single-room lounge and kitchen area feels as spacious and welcoming as Blenheim Palace. It really is a great place to be, with Marquis County-alike cabinetry (allied, for once, to consistently 'handed' positive catches), abundant direct and hidden ambient lighting (much of it using low-power-draw LEDs) and play-it-safe, but attractive and supremely comfortable settees that can each swallow up to three adults with ease.



Kitchen worktop space is only average

Fact File

Price from: £53,295 on-the-road

Price as tested: £56,103 on-the-road

Options fitted: 3-litre 160HDI engine (£1586), Option Pack 1 – cab air-conditioning and alloy wheels (£1222)

Base vehicle: Peugeot Boxer LWB chassis-cab

Engine: 3-litre HDi producing 157bhp

Travel seats: 2, including driver

Berths: 2

Weights & Measures

Length: 7.17m (23ft 6in)

Width: 2.32m (7ft 7in)

Height: 3.02m (9ft 11in)

Internal height: 1.99m (6ft 5½in)

Gross weight: 4005kg

Payload: 556kg (160 engine)

Bed sizes: Nearside single 1.82m x 0.73m (5ft 11in x 2ft 4in), offside single 1.92m x 0.73m (6ft 3in x 2ft 4in), or double 2.13m x 1.31m (6ft 10½in x 4ft 3in)

Spec check

- ▣ Cab air-con: ✓ Option
- ▣ Airbags: 2
- ▣ Swivel cab seats: 2
- ▣ Boiler: Webasto DualTop diesel/electric
- ▣ Heating: Webasto DualTop diesel/electric
- ▣ Hob: 3 gas burners, 1 electric hotplate
- ▣ Grill: ✓
- ▣ Oven: ✓
- ▣ Fridge: 150 litres SES
- ▣ Toilet: Thetford bench-type, electric flush
- ▣ Mains sockets: 4



The comfortable settees will accommodate three adults each with ease



There's abundant storage and a jumbo fridge

It feels tall in here, too, while the usual dark cave over the cab is replaced by an enormous open shelf flanked by two good-sized storage pods and topped off by a huge clear-pane (but sadly non-opening) panoramic window and a couple of warm-looking bulkhead lights. It's not as practical a set-up as a doored locker, but the substantial lip on the forward edge of the shelf should be man enough to prevent most items from spilling out onto the floor and the whole set-up makes the front part of the lounge feel as spacious and airy as the rest of the vehicle. We understand that an overcab bed option is likely to be offered in the not too distant future, too, although whether this will bring with it

suitable rear travel seat provision has yet to be confirmed.

Storage is exceptional, with the usual space-sapping gas locker and boiler being replaced by a refillable gas tank and the very latest Webasto DualTop diesel-fired combined heater/boiler, both of which live beneath the chassis. To wit, both bedding lockers are practically empty - factor in the enormous wardrobe, neighbouring trio of large drawers and a bewildering array of eye-level lockers dotted throughout the main body of the motorhome, and the standard 606kg payload (556kg on the 160HDi model) suddenly begins to look like more of a necessity than a luxury.

The kitchen is similarly blessed with abundant storage - including a pair of generously proportioned two-shelf low cupboards - although worktop is only average, and rendered practically non-existent with the removable drainer deployed. You can't argue with the equipment level, though, which includes a microwave, domestic-style dual-fuel cooker, Thetford's jumbo 150-litre SES fridge/freezer and even a Maxview satellite TV system.

As for the beds, the twin singles are non-uniform, but even the shorter nearside one is just shy of six feet long, with its offside counterpart three inches longer. As it stands, too, the double measures nearly 6ft 11in by 4ft 3in, although it could have been so much bigger had Auto-Sleepers not taken the decision to exclude the rearmost portion of the settees from the bed make-up in order to open up a couple of seats for when one occupant is an earlier riser than the other. Given that this would appear to answer a question no-one to my knowledge has ever asked, this seems like an incongruous design quirk.

So what of the EB's trademark end

washroom, then? Well, if you're a fan of end washrooms (and I certainly count myself as one such), then you'll absolutely love the EB's example. Various Marquis County design flourishes are obvious herein, including the funky blue pin-lights sunk into the mirror, the salad-bowl-on-a-table clear plastic washbasin and the pleasingly 'woody' ambience, but it's the amount of sheer space on offer that strikes you the most. Most of a five-a-side football team could get changed in here with room to spare, and the gigantic wardrobe ensconced in the corner would certainly swallow all their kit.

The separate shower is absolutely massive, too, and garners extra points for its plentiful bottle storage, extractor fan that whirrs into life automatically with the lazy cord-operated light, and twin shower tray drains (if not the rather oppressive black tiles). The presence of a bench-type toilet is perhaps surprising, but it's banished discreetly out of direct sight through the main door, tucked away as it is around the corner to the left as you enter. 🚗



Washroom has a striking amount of space

WHICH motorcaravan says...

You've got to admire Auto-Sleepers for bucking the current market trend and introducing a new layout that just about everybody else is busy consulting to the history books. And what they've come up with is a genuinely upmarket motorhome that, for two people, must rate as the welcome spiritual successor to the late lamented Autocruise Gleneagle. **AUTO-SLEEPER COTSWOLD ★★★★★**

AUTO-SLEEPER COTSWOLD EB £53,295 on-the-road

- ✓ Superb washroom
- ✓ Palatial lounge
- ✓ Equipment level
- ✓ Storage
- ✗ Needs engine upgrade
- ✗ Driving position
- ✗ Overall height

The Cotswold

Brand new, award winning and worthy of its place!



Auto-Sleepers
MOTORHOMES OF EXCELLENCE

Auto-Sleepers are proud to present the new Cotswold range. Still traditionally handcrafted to the same high standards we have upheld since day one, whilst amalgamating some of the latest design technology and intelligent functionality.

This completely new range represents a well-balanced fusion of traditional values and industry-leading design.

Recognised and rewarded by the Caravan Industry as Winners of the prestigious "Motorhome of the Year" and "Thetford End Washroom of the Year" awards, the Cotswold Range is setting the standard in quality and desirability.

- All new exterior styling
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- Security safe
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- External BBQ and TV point
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- Luxurious Bathrooms
- Remote single key locking



Winner
Cotswold EB
The 2010 Caravan
Industry Motor
Caravan Award



Winner
Cotswold EB
Thetford Washroom
of the Year Award
for Motor Caravans



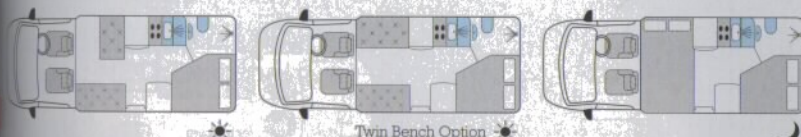
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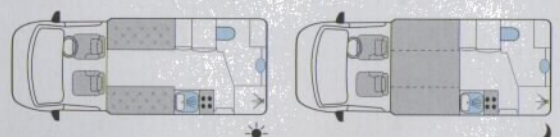
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Twin Bench Option

Cotswold EB



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