



BRINGING UP BABY

A perennial classic, the 2012 Auto-Sleeper Nuevo gets a makeover that's more than just skin-deep

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I'm nearly 56 years old, so my diminishing brain cells fail me when it comes remembering how long Auto-Sleepers has been making the Nuevo. However, I know it's been a while and for good reason – this coachbuilt's popularity is due to its diminutive size, excellent layouts and comfortable ambience, to say nothing of build quality and equipment levels.

There's a choice of models: EL, EK and ES offering rear lounge, front lounge and front lounge with rear seatbelts, respectively. The EL's two-berth design provides a compact rear-located lounge that offers just a transverse double bed. The EK is one of the most popular layouts in compact British 'vans, with a front twin-sofa lounge, plus kitchen and washroom aft.

As I was eager to get my grubby mitts on an example, AS offered me the chance to look at the third of the trio. The ES provides the two rear seatbelts and adds a bed over the cab (EL and EK are low profiles), making it the only four-berth Nuevo.

WET PAINT

Having had its PDI the night before, the 'van was as new as a demonstrator can be. So new, that its 130 horsepower Peugeot Boxer motor seemed tight – enough for performance to be described as rather lacklustre.

Fans of the marque will, however, know that once the engine has loosened up it'll be more than powerful enough to push the little Nuevo along at licence-threatening speeds. Once moving along the nearby A45 dual carriageway, I found comfortable on-the-limit cruising to be the norm, while in the rear the conversion progressed in blissful silence.

Backroad twisties saw rollerskate-like handling – undulations and more precipitous potholes producing little increase in conversion noise. I seem to remember that my last encounter with a Nuevo (Live-in test, MMM, September 2009) produced rather more vocals from the living area, so Auto-Sleepers gains quite a few well-earned brownie points.



EURO 5?

Prepare to be confused. Well, you might not be, but I was when I discovered that Peugeot has built what appears to be Euro 5 base vehicles, but with Euro 4 engines under the bonnets.

The Euro 5 base should be easy to spot, as a cab facelift marks it out from the old 'uns. Black plastics and new heater controls are the indicators, while most will come with a shiny new stereo too. All 2012 Fiat Ducatos, presented like this, will always be Euro 5 compliant.

So, if you're in the market for a new 'van in 2012, and it's based on a Peugeot Boxer, check carefully if it's hiding the old motor under its bonnet. If so, you should be able to cut a deal, and indeed, Auto-Sleepers' Andy Brand informed me that Marquis Motorhomes

(Auto-Sleepers' own dealer) would offer a good price on any new Euro 4 'vans. However, as I write, Euro 5 Boxers had arrived and were being converted, so there's probably only a few Euro 4s with the new cabs in the system.

All this means that I'm not able to report on the talents – or otherwise – of the 2.2-litre Euro 5 motor. However, you might expect (during the essential pre-purchase test drive) to find small increases in performance, smoother running and less noise than the old, with improvements in fuel economy the most attractive feature.

EXTERNALS

A lighter-looking Nuevo is the result of a radical external facelift, with modern graphics enhancing the whole. The skirts have changed



ESSENTIALS

2012 AUTO-SLEEPER NUEVO RANGE

- **Price from:** Nuevo ES: £47,995 OTR. Nuevo EL/EK: £45,995 OTR
- **Length:** 5.63m (18ft 5.5in)
- **Gross vehicle weight:** ES: 3,500kg. EL/EK: 3,300kg.
- **Payload:** ES: 386kg. EL/EK: 351kg (after allowance for driver at 75kg, 90% fuel, water and gas)

- **Optional extras fitted to test vehicle:** Premium Pack – alloy wheels, cab air-conditioning, front fog lights, cruise control, awning, microwave, solar panel, Hal-locate tracker, TV (£2,500), coloured body sides (£695)
- **Other options available:** Upgrade to 130bhp engine – EL/EK only (£960)



from GRP to alloy. The roofline is now lowered, though the ES chunky overcab looked fine. And it seems that it's well designed too: there was very little wind noise, even at motorway speeds.

To the rear, the moulding is similar to the old, but sharper-looking – a black panel provides a home for high-level brake light, rear camera and very obvious Auto-Sleeper legend.

An aerial socket feeds signals from remotely-mounted dish, aerial or site-supplied TV. Whale's love-it-or-hate-it plug-in water fill system can be left connected straight to a tap on super pitches, but filling (from a hose or container, via the supplied submersible pump) can be slow.

Any downsides? Well, the removal of an external wet locker means hose, cable and wedges will need to find a home indoors.

INSIDE JOB

Step inside, via the one-touch-controlled electric step, and you're confronted by an interior that looks much the same. Dark, chrome-adorned wood looks classy, while this year's blue-dressed upholstery adds a traditional feel.

Levels of equipment are high, with all-LED lighting, gas/mains-powered heating, a full cooker and auto energy selection fridge.

It's the heating that sees a significant change, as convector space heater and separate boiler are swapped for Truma's all-in-one combi. Some may lament the passing of the convector, as it offers near-silent heat without sapping 12V power. However, these things can rattle awfully on the road, so maybe it's not a bad trade-off.

Another very welcome addition is a wooden storage cabinet in the washroom. The design of the whole, with its swing-wall-creating shower, remains the same, but the inclusion of the cupboard is a revolution in Nuevo ablutions storage. There's always been a plastic cabinet in here, but it's small and its slippery interior is very good at ejecting the contents each time you slide open its mirrored doors.

There's good storage in the kitchen too, with four drawers providing more than plenty of space for cutlery and utensils.

THE WORKS

The ES provides four berths with the essential forward-facing belted travel seats. These flatten to provide twin sofas – albeit with rather low backrests. When the cab seats are swivelled, two single beds use the squabs of said cab seats as the foot of the beds. Extend supports

across the aisle and the two backrests drop in (that's why they're low, as their widths fit the gap) to help create a transverse double bed.

Meanwhile, the new overcab provides a roomy double bed that, unlike some previous Auto-Sleepers, actually looks big enough for adult-sized humans. This configuration works best with single beds as then nothing gets in the way of using the overcab ladder. Indeed, I'd use it this way when four are on board.

Dining sees two tables that can be mounted in several floor sockets, the result being very versatile dining and snacking facilities. With no permanent twin sofas, storage space suffers, but the overcab is ready and waiting to take the bulky-but-light stuff (bedding, outdoor chairs, clothes in squashy bags). Under-seat stowage should still take the heavy gear and there's a decent wardrobe, plus the usual overhead lockers.

The latest Nuevo range has been much improved for 2012, and should serve to extend the lineage of what is a great little British motorhome. Meanwhile, I look forward to driving a Euro 5 compliant Peugeot Boxer-based 'van as soon as I can get my hands on one. ■

1 Rear belted seats help this four-berth model work safely

2 A Euro 5-style cab but here it's misleading

3 The washroom is the same design, but a new cabinet is a storage revolution

4 Well-equipped kitchen also offers plenty of drawers

5 Multiple tables and sockets make for versatile dining

6 Seats flatten to make sofas and single beds

