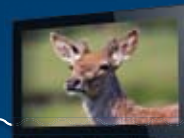


Practical

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Elddis Autoquest 180
Costa del Sol, Spain



ELDDIS Autoquest 180

After their epic winter-sun adventure, ROB GANLEY reveals how his family fared in this award-winning budget 'van

Price from £33,999* Sleeps Six Belts Six Base vehicle Peugeot Boxer Engine 2.2-litre 100bhp TD Fuel economy 24.2mpg L/W/H 7.15m/2.20m/2.99m (23'4"/7'2"/9'8") MTPLM 3500kg Payload 535kg Water (fresh) / (waste) 45/45 litres *price as tested £34,998

Six genuine sleeping berths, six travel seats, a massive U-shaped end lounge, a washroom that doesn't cut corners, a workable kitchen and a very useable overcab bed all squeezed into a motorhome a shade under 24 feet is a true feat of engineering. When you dial in the fact that all this is available from just £33,999, you have got a whole lot of 'van for little money here.

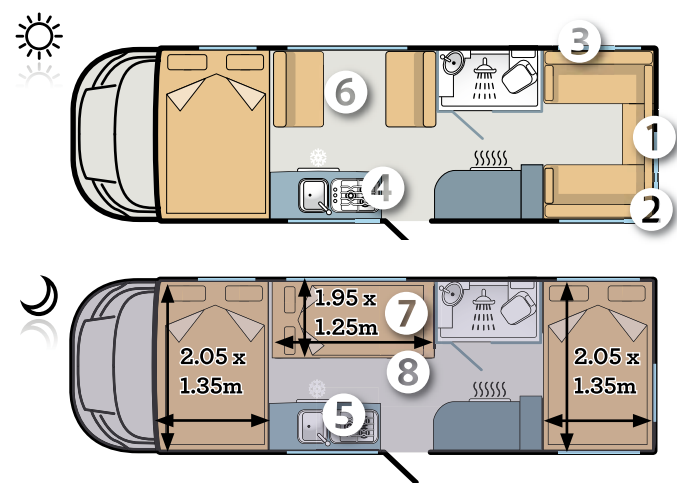
But is it built to last? I put some serious mileage on the Autoquest with my family trip to Spain (p24), and subjected this 'van to heavy duty live-in testing - four adults (my wife Anna and I, and my parents) and one infant (our son Joe). We covered 3250 miles over 16 nights, six of which were on aires without hook-up, and one in foot-deep snow in northern Spain, awaking to serious icicles. And this 'van

barely put a foot wrong - that's pedigree for you. The Autoquest has been Elddis' best-selling budget range for many years now, and has rightly won a number of prestigious awards in that time. In 2008, the caravan body got a much-needed facelift. The outdated-looking boxy overcab and planked sidewalls were replaced with the flowing Luton and flat aluminium sidewalls you see

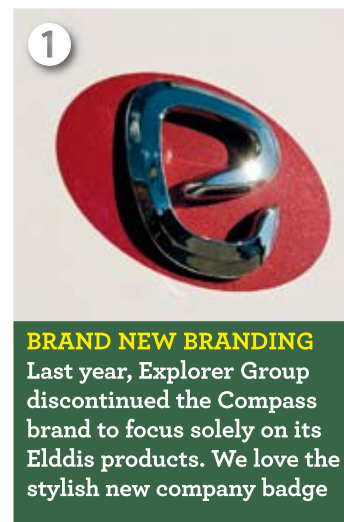
here. And in 2009, Explorer Group discontinued Elddis' badge-engineered sister brand, Compass, to focus solely on its bigger seller. This is the first 'van we've tested from the range sporting the smart new livery.

It's not perfect, though. We learned quickly that there's nothing in the way of externally accessed storage. All the bigger items must be walked through the 'van and stashed in the seat boxes. Thankfully they all have push-button locker doors. On the road, the 2.2-litre 100bhp HDI engine coped admirably under loading approaching the motorhome's MTPLM (3500kg). It's not underpowered, and the torque is astonishing, right through the rev band in each gear. We came across few inclines when it ran out of puff. On such a long journey, and with buffeting from serious crosswinds, that was a godsend. I was also glad of good through vision thanks to the large rear window, which also worked well for passenger-assisted reversing manoeuvres (ie no one had to get out and get cold!). The steering wheel-mounted radio buttons are a big hit too, and my rear passengers were thankful for the Truma en-route heating system as we crossed Spain's high plains.

There were one or two complaints from the rear that the headrests were fixed too high, and difficulties with buckling in the child seat owing to the thickness of the backrest



Contact Elddis, Delves Lane, Consett, County Durham DH8 7PE
Tel 01207 699 000 Web www.elddis.co.uk



BRAND NEW BRANDING
Last year, Explorer Group discontinued the Compass brand to focus solely on its Elddis products. We love the stylish new company badge



FUSS-FREE REAR END
Typical of budget 'vans, the Autoquest has an unadorned rear wall panel, although the road light cluster hints at automotive styling



EASY ELECTRICAL ACCESS
A direct hand-down from caravan manufacturing, lockable external access to the leisure battery and hook-up inlet is simple and brilliant



EASY ENTRANCE
The Luxe Pack fitted to this model gets you an electric entrance step, but all models have a master switch by the footwell. A great, simple idea



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A LOT OF FRONT
A twin dinette means there are rear three-point belts for four passengers: two forward-facing and two rear-facing. Gas struts raise the overcab bed when it's not in use



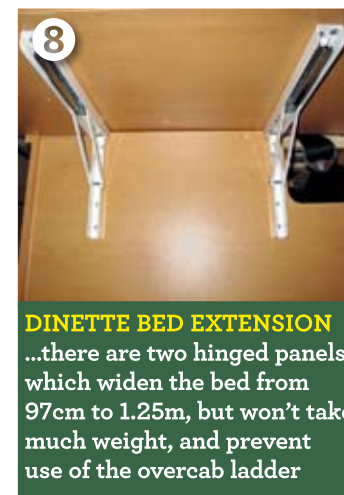
COMPACT KITCHEN
The three-burner hob, sink plus drainer, oven, grill and 92-litre fridge amount to a decent kitchen spec, but food preparation space is tight



MOUNTED FOR MEALS
The table clips to a wall rail, and has its own locker when not in use. Curtains, blinds and window flyscreens cater for all weathers



FRONT DINETTE DOUBLE
Pulling out a slatted centrepiece forms the twin dinette bed's base, which is covered by two loose cushions. To extend it...



DINETTE BED EXTENSION
...there are two hinged panels, which widen the bed from 97cm to 1.25m, but won't take much weight, and prevent use of the overcab ladder

*FOR INSURANCE QUOTES TERMS AND CONDITIONS SEE PAGE 178

and the length of the three-point belt, but we coped.

Elddis' manufacturing preference for tiny fresh and waste water tanks (just 45 litres each) backed up with caravan-style aqua roll and waste master has advocates among UK ralliers, but didn't suit our touring needs: they just took up valuable wardrobe space. But I do like the Whale autofill system that makes putting water on board a breeze, and the colour-coded drain taps either side of the 'van. And the heating and insulation properties, with temperatures falling well below zero outside, impressed me a lot for a budget model. Our 'van was fitted with the £999 Luxe Pack of blown air heating, electric step, door flyscreen and Heki 2 rooflight.

Drop-in carpets on the vinyl floor made keeping the 'van clean easy work, and we loved the two-lounge layout at evenings. The kitchen was fine for three-pot cooking, providing the rest of the crew cleared the area to let chef use that front lounge table for preparation space.

Overhead lockers with resistance catches rather than positive locking mechanisms won't be to everyone's taste – you could expect that resistance to weaken over time – but we had no problems with them opening on the move.

The washroom is just the right size to be practical without eating into too much of the floorplan. And the beds were easy to make and provided decent, flat surfaces.

Yes, there were minor annoyances. I'd have liked a privacy curtain to partition off the rear bedroom. The cushions in the overcab were slightly too wide so the surface wouldn't lie flat. But it's hard not to marvel at how well it's assembled, the impressive payload, and how the 'van does exactly what it says on the tin, ie, it delivers a fabulous family holiday with no fuss at all.

PRACTICAL MOTORHOME SAYS...

Solidly built, generous proportions at a bargain price, with a wide dealer network and aftersales backup. Deserves to sell like hot cakes in these recessionary times.



SPACIOUS OVERCAB
With 60cm max headroom, the new overcab mould trumps the old by some 7cm, but space tapers more steeply toward the front end



HEAT TO THE WASHROOM
Go for the blown air option and you'll enjoy vented heating here. With a swivel toilet and shower, at 1.3 x 0.8m it's just the right size



SPACIOUS REAR LOUNGE
A free-standing table for meals and this extension for the odd cuppa help make the wraparound rear lounge the place to relax of an evening



The mixer-tap shower head, riser bar and curtain are just the job for showers

REAR U-LOUNGE
The rear lounge has three panoramic windows and four 'roller ball' lights. Seating is comfy, but no board behind the backrest may mean condensation

OR YOU COULD TRY...



ESCAPE 686 BY SWIFT FROM £35,650

Launched in February last year as a direct rival to Autoquest, the Escape 686 is a like-for-like six-berth overcab with end lounge. It won the Caravan Club's Design and Drive award, and proved excellent in our long-term test.

Tel 01482 847 332 Web www.swiftleisure.co.uk



CI CUSONA 600 FROM £39,766

Based on the Ford Transit, this Italian-built 'van has the same, British-style rear lounge layout and six sleeping berths (the entry door is on the UK offside). Its 3850kg MTPLM may deter younger families without the B+C1 licence category though.

Tel 01472 571 005 Web www.ci-motorhomes.co.uk ©