

Stars of 2009



ADRIA CORAL A660 SP



AUTO-SLEEPER BROADWAY EK



AUTO-SLEEPER NUEVO II EK



BILBO'S CELEX SE



BÜRSTNER VISEO i 715



ESCAPE 624



ESCAPE 664



HOBBY VAN EXCLUSIVE L



HYMER CAR 322 SE



IH J500



IH OREGON RL



MURVI MALLARD



RAPIDO LE RANDONNEUR 776F



SWIFT KON-TIKI 679

We've tested 250 motorhomes over the past year and a handful are worth another mention here. These 14 'vans have proved their worth as Group Test winners, displayed their credentials with five-star rated conclusions and demonstrated their assets on longer live-in testing. **Marie Vaira** rounds up the best of the bunch from this year's crop of road tests.

ADRIA CORAL 660SP

PRICE FROM
£46,941 ON-THE-ROAD



THIS overcab coachbuilt, with a fixed transverse rear bed over a whopping great garage, has a perennially and provenly popular layout that's long been a feature of the Slovenian manufacturer's continental line-up. The current Coral range was first introduced for the 2007 model year, on the back of the X2/50 Ducato launch.

In January, we pitched the A660 SP against comparative models from Hobby and Swift in our Group Test, the Adria topped six of 12 categories, claiming the rosette in the fields of bodywork, lounging, dining, travel seats, beds and washroom. That's impressive.

Heaping praise on this continental contender, Test Judge Michael Le Caplain decided that the Coral was 'clearly the most stylish' of the three motorhomes on test. The dining table won praise for extending easily, allowing more dining paraphernalia to be placed on its surface. The Adria also garners brownie points for its full-width head restraints to the travel seats and the fact that the backrest cushions cover the wooden base beneath almost entirely. The kitchen will appeal to those who value worktop, storage space and a large fridge/freezer above all else, and will find an oven set high, but no grill.

Beds measured in as the biggest of the group, with the overcab and transverse doubles almost matching each other in terms of size and accessibility. In the washroom, Mr Le Caplain decided: 'It gets our vote simply because what room there is, is perfectly adequate, there's a decent amount of stowage space and the shower is entirely separate from the washroom proper and is of a good size.'

AUTO-SLEEPER BROADWAY EK

PRICE FROM
£47,995 ON-THE-ROAD



IN August we took three Auto-Sleepers on three different base vehicles and ran them up and down A-roads and B-roads until a clear winner emerged. In a battle between the Mercedes Sprinter, Volkswagen T5 and Peugeot Boxer, the Boxer engine roared to victory – 'there's simply no getting around the fact it remains the driver's choice, the most contemporary in feel and the best value,' we enthused, 'Factor in its superb handling, ergonomics and a good range of engines, and it's the clear winner.'

Sat on that Boxer was the body of the Broadway EK. It's one of over a dozen different Peugeot-powered Auto-Sleepers, and a sister model to the Broadway EL.

New this year, the Broadway was based on the previous Sigma, but with darker woodwork, chrome handles and bolder exterior graphics.

The small kitchen area is packed with kit – compact but functional. Aside from the curious case of the left-handed locker handle in the kitchen, storage is great, with a good selection of split-shelved and full lockers. In the washroom, a swing-wall arrangement closes off the shower from the rest of the room, which feels sturdy. The lounge's nearside dinette has two forward-facing travel seats and the long offside settee hides a large storage area that can also be accessed through an exterior door. The whole of the practical lounge area converts into a huge double. The overcab sleeping solution folds out into a small double, best suited to kids, or one small adult without claustrophobic tendencies – there's no window and headroom peaks at just 18 inches.

WHICH motorcaravan says...

The Coral gets the nod as broadly talented - sporting a great washroom, beds and lounging/dining facilities, handsome styling - and it's as impressively engineered as anything in its class.



WHICH motorcaravan says...

If you spend more time relaxing in the lounge than you do fussing in the kitchen, this is the layout for you. The lounge makes up into that huge double bed, but the kitchen is practical.



AUTO-SLEEPER **BILBO'S** NUEVO II EK ★ CELEX SE ★

PRICE FROM
£41,495 ON-THE-ROAD



PRICE FROM
£31,990 ON-THE-ROAD

As we tighten our belts another notch, less ostentatious motorhomes suddenly look a whole lot more tempting, and this fits the bill perfectly. In June Michael Le Caplain compared an Auto-Trail Excel 590 EK, Swift Bolero 600EK Compact and this Auto-Sleeper in a battle of coachbuilts shrunk in the wash, with end kitchens, corner washrooms and large parallel settees up front allied to a pair of swivel cab seats. This'll fit into a supermarket parking space and can tackle country lanes with ease.

The Nuevo has been around for as long as some of us can remember, but there's more to this new Nuevo II than a collection of bolder exterior stickers. Inside, the cabinetry is of a darker hue for a classy, upmarket feel. Elsewhere, the story is pretty much as the standard Nuevo. It's the classic Nuevo layout with new teak furniture, LED lighting and other detail enhancements.

Its class-leading kitchen more than makes up for it being the priciest 'van out of our test trio. The fridge is located away from the main kitchen arrangement, freeing up valuable cupboard space.

The Nuevo's Peugeot chassis allows a uniform floor level throughout. Impressed by the lounge area, the only detail Michael could find to grumble about is the chrome locker handles. For a light lunch in the Nuevo, there's a small occasional table, as well as the usual main folding table – it's a thoughtful little detail.

And as for quality, Le Caplain says: 'Auto-Sleepers made their name by ensuring that their motorhomes were beautifully made, and our Nuevo proved hard to fault. Our test model Nuevo II was a credit to the manufacturer.'

A class-leading camper based on the renowned T5 Volkswagen for under £30k (back in the summer, pre T5 facelift) was an exciting prospect for Peter Vaughan in our October issue, especially looking as good as this Stone Blue Bilbo's.

Road-tester Le Caplain agreed: 'The Stone Blue hue is stunning. Our hearts usually sink when a converter launches a cheaper, less well-equipped version of an existing camper, but the only sacrifices with an SE are winding windows up and down manually, pushing on the door mirrors to adjust them and sticking with an 84bhp 1.9-litre engine. At just £30,000, you can even forgive the unpainted bumpers and door mirrors.'

The unusual paint colour is a cost option but belies its 'value range' tag. It's the same story inside: the kitchen is probably the best you'll ever find in a vehicle this small, with its compressor fridge, two-burner hob and separate Smev grill, two large drawers, and sink fed by an inboard tank. And storage is miles ahead of its rivals. The rear seat converts in seconds into a double bed with a generous width of over 4ft at the head end. There's a decent amount of internal lighting and in the day natural light floods in through the two windows in the side of the rising roof.

There simply isn't an easier roof on the market to raise and lower. Its one Achilles' heel, the 84bhp engine, seems to have been comprehensively overcome with engine remapping and the result is an all-rounder that's very hard to beat.

The whole theme of this camper is that it has been designed to be used for camping by people who really do go camping.

WHICH motorcaravan says...

The Nuevo is a solid performer across the board, rather than a dazzling star in any one area. Its improvements in spec and décor over the previous Nuevo are just enough to take it to the top of the class.



WHICH motorcaravan says...

The benchmark for elevating roof campers just got cheaper. Incredibly, you can still drive away the new facelifted version of Bilbo's Celex SE for under £32,000 – but we'd suggest you spec it up with cab air-con.

