

Best of both worlds

■ WORDS Steve Rowe PICTURES Claire Collins

The all-new Autocruise Accent aims to provide large coachbuilt facilities within the confines of a van conversion. *Motor Caravan* is the first to test one out



SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF the current Peugeot Boxer and Fiat Ducato, with their square-sided bodies and larger internal space, more and more people have been choosing a large van conversion instead of a coachbuilt motorhome. The advantages include better manoeuvrability, easier parking, plus the lack of any future water-ingress worries that can plague a few unlucky coachbuilt owners. Being built within the existing steel shell of the van means no sandwich-construction walls, which can sometimes deteriorate and let in water.

Since permanent double beds have become popular in coachbuilds, this has been reflected in the large van conversions and several converters now offer a layout with a double bed at the rear, which folds-up during the day.

Autocruise has already been offering this type of layout in the form of the Pace van conversion, but for the 2010 model year it has introduced a new version with the Accent. What's the difference? Instead of having a space at the rear, fairly useless when the bed is not in use, the Accent has a pair of inward-facing settees at the back, which make-up into a transverse double bed. This extra level of versatility means you can leave this area made up as a double bed, or use it as a second lounge area during the day, using these twin settees.



You get a nearside rear door view, albeit limited

EXTERIOR FEATURES 8/10

With its standard metallic paint scheme and colour-matched front bumpers, the Accent looks very stylish. The Autocruise graphics are low-key and the matt-black panel, running along the middle of the vehicle, helps to give an integrated look.

The fresh and waste water tanks are mounted under the floor in the centre of the vehicle, with outlets and drain taps to either side of the vehicle. The fresh water tank fills from a cap on the offside wall and has its own insulation jacket for winter use.

To aid entry, there's an electric fold-out step to the side entrance door, though the step up isn't too bad without it.

ON THE ROAD 8/10

With its 120bhp, 2.2-litre turbo-diesel engine, the Accent has enough power for relaxed motorway driving and also performs very well on country lanes.

The fresh and waste water tanks are centrally mounted under the floor, so even with these full, handling is not going to be compromised.

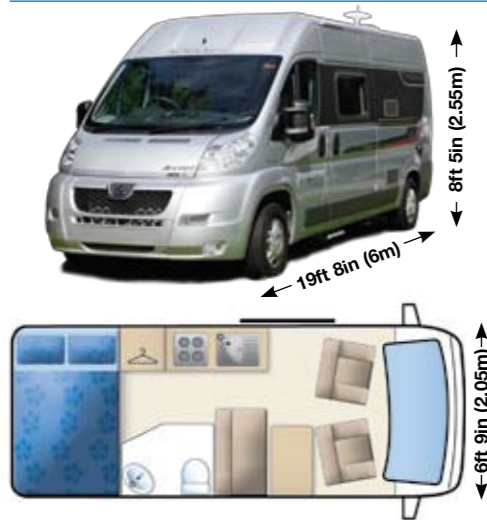
One advantage of van conversions over coachbuilds is that you often get through visibility in the driver's rear-view mirror. This is the case with the Accent, where the driver gets a limited view out of the window in the nearside rear door. Not a lot, but every little helps, as they say!

VAN ON TEST
Autocruise Accent
From £39,095 OTR

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Autocruise Accent

From £39,095 OTR



BASE VEHICLE
Long-wheelbase Fiat Ducato/Peugeot Boxer with 2.2-litre (120bhp) TD engine

BERTHS
4 travel; 3/4 sleeping

BED DIMENSIONS
Rear permanent double bed measures 6ft 2in x 4ft 5in (1.88m x 1.35m)
Front dinette-derived double bed 5ft 8in x 2ft 11in tapering to 1ft 9in (1.7m x 0.9m tapering to 0.54m)

MT PLM
3500kg

PAYLOAD
513kg

GAS
Compartment for two 7kg cylinders

BATTERY
85Ah leisure battery

FRESH WATER
66-litre insulated tank

WASTE WATER
50-litre tank

BASE VEHICLE
Long-wheelbase Fiat Ducato/Peugeot Boxer van with 120bhp, 2.2-litre JTD Multijet engine, with 6-speed gearbox and ABS breaking. Standard features include remote central locking, immobiliser, electric cab windows and heated door mirrors, airbags

CONSTRUCTION
Van conversion with 3M Thinsulate insulation; silver-metallic paintwork with colour-coded front bumper; manually-operated retractable doorstep with warning buzzer

STANDARD EQUIPMENT
80-litre three-way Thetford fridge; Thetford C250 cassette toilet; Smev oven/grill; electric side door entrance step; Heki panoramic roof light; TV cupboard; Truma Combi 4 gas and electric blown-air heating

MANUFACTURER
Autocruise Motorhomes, East Yorkshire HU16 4JX
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🌐 autocruise.co.uk

RIVAL MODELS
Adria Twin, Autocruise Pace, Chausson Twist

FOR
A versatile van conversion that crams all the facilities of a big coachbuilt into a van conversion bodyshell

AGAINST
Small kitchen and washroom

PRACTICALITY 9/10

The Autocruise designers have put a lot of thought into this conversion. When designing the rear seating area they also hit upon the idea of raising it up, so that a storage space could be created underneath, accessible through the rear doors. Being able to access a storage space like this from outside the vehicle is something that many coachbuilt owners have now got used to, but it's a unique bonus on a van conversion.

The only downside of this design is that the seats are mounted high up, nearer to roof lockers inside the van, so you have to be careful not to bang your head when getting up from the seats. The designers should put roof lockers on one side only, so taller people could sit on that side.

The most practical aspect of this conversion, is the fact that you can choose to either leave this rear space made-up as a double bed, or you can convert it back into seating each morning. There's already a spacious seating area up at the front, which seats four people, so the rear seating area is a bonus rather than a necessity.

LOUNGING 8/10

For a really relaxing read or an afternoon nap, the swivelled cab seats are probably going to be the choice for most owners, since you can recline them and can also benefit from the headrests. Both the forward-facing seats at the front and the inward-facing settees at the rear are quite upright in comparison, so less easy to get comfortable on if you want to sprawl.

One of the clever aspects of the front lounge is that the floor is also raised here, to match the higher floor in the cab, so the person sitting on the swivelled passenger seat doesn't find their legs dangling in the air. There's then just a step down to access the centre of the vehicle, then another step up at the rear to access the seating area here.

Relaxing on the settees can be tricky



There are numerous dining options with the Accent

DINING 10/10

If you turn the rear bedroom into a seating area during the day, then you have a choice of two areas for dining. At the rear, an island-leg table can be used so that four can dine in relative comfort, albeit shoulder-to-shoulder. Meanwhile, at the front, a wall-mounted table fits between the swivelled cab seats and the forward-facing seats, but it's a bit of a reach to the table for anyone sitting in the swivelled passenger's cab seat. Cleverly, this table can also be mounted outside the van, with one end of it clipping on to a rail on the back of the kitchen units, once the sliding door is opened.

The kitchen is in the centre of the van, between the front and rear seating areas, so whichever you choose to use, you'll be able to serve up food fairly easily. Perhaps you could even have a 'his 'n' hers' evening with your friends – with the ladies playing cards at one end of the van, while the men drink beer and discuss motorhome reversing problems at the other end!



The cab seats are the comfortable choice



Storage space is provided in overhead lockers. But mind your head!



The table can be mounted outside

The dining table can be screwed into the floor, then easily dismounted again

There's plenty of room to eat

WASHROOM 7/10

When you try to cram two seating areas into a van conversion, there have to be some areas of compromise and it's really the kitchen and washroom that suffer. The Accent's washroom manages to fit in a washbasin, swivelling cassette toilet and room for a shower, but it's fairly confined.

There's not much room between the toilet and the wall to create shower space and a curtain on two sides shields the toilet and toilet paper from getting wet, but you will splash the other two walls when showering. The wall on the left as you enter is lined with vinyl wallpaper, while the wall behind the washbasin is white plastic. Considering it's going to get splashed with water, perhaps it would have been better if the whole washroom had white plastic walling, rather than having some sections with wallpaper?

If you love to have a long morning shower, this cramped shower area might be a bit too limited, but for a short splash over and wipe-down it will be fine. The toilet and washbasin are certainly easy enough to access.

The toilet and washbasin are easily accessible



Cramped washroom vetos leisurely showers



Storage space is limited here

KITCHEN 7/10

Like the washroom, the kitchen is compact, consisting of a small set of units along the nearside wall, opposite the washroom. There's not a lot of room to move around, but all the basic facilities are there, including a two-burner gas hob, a small stainless steel sink (but no drainer), and a small Smev grill/oven. There's a Thetford three-way fridge/freezer mounted at the rear of the kitchen, under the wardrobe.

Storage space is limited to a cupboard and two low-level drawers, so you might struggle to find somewhere convenient to put your cutlery. However, one little bonus is the fold-up flap of work-surface at the sliding door end of the kitchen. If you're using both the hob and the sink, this will be the only free work surface left in the kitchen, but you could always use the table behind you in the front dinette area.



The rear bed will accommodate most couples

NIGHT TIME 9/10

The Accent can either be used as a luxury motorhome for two, or as a compact family van. The large double bed at the rear will take two adults comfortably, but the front seating can also be transformed into a bed. Other van conversions with this rear double bed layout normally have a two-part mattress, with the larger part folding down from the wall. In the Accent this is replaced by the four separate cushions that make up the settee backs and squabs. However, these seat cushions are quite well made, so the assembled bed mattress is fairly solid and comfortable, plus the tightly-fitting cushions don't have room to move around

BUILD QUALITY 9/10

The Accent seems very well put together. All the lockers and doors work well and the whole interior feels quite upmarket. I like touches such as the wood-effect window sill for the rear side window, which helps to make the vehicle feel quite homely.

All windows have blinds and flyscreens and there's a concertina blind to shut off the windscreen at night, plus silver screens for the cab side windows.

Adding to the quality feel is the neat bound-edge carpet, which is in three separate sections, allowing you to remove one or more if you are staying on a muddy site, to reveal the vinyl wood-effect floor below.



Plenty of room for smaller children to sleep

during the night. The rear double bed measures 6ft 2in long by 4ft 5in wide so it should be big enough for most couples.

This front bed utilises the forward-facing twin seat and the swivelled cab seat. As a result, it's double-sized at the headend but only single size at its foot. So, it could be used by one adult or perhaps a couple of smaller children. It would be a great van for a couple who want to take their small grandchildren away with them occasionally, but who mainly tour on their own.



We've teamed up with Shield to give you an idea of how much it would cost to insure a new Autocruise Accent.

Premium indication £285.14

Our premium indication is based upon a 55-year-old man living in Harrogate and driving on an insured and spouse basis, with unlimited mileage and a £400 excess.

**For a personal quote contact
0844 847 4478 or
www.shieldyourmotorhome.co.uk**



There are plenty of hidden storage areas

STORAGE 9/10

The Accent is full of hidden under-floor storage areas, accessed by hatches in the floor. At the front, there's a hatch under the carpet, while at the rear, the bases of both under-seat areas have floor hatches. On the offside, this hatch lifts to reveal the leisure battery, while on the nearside it provides access to a fairly deep under-floor storage. There's an additional hatch giving access to this area in the step that leads up to the raised floor at the back.

From the outside, the rear doors can be opened to gain access to the storage area under the rear dinette floor, via a slide-up hatch, and this is where the rear island leg table top can be stored. There's also access at the rear to the gas bottle locker which usefully houses two of the large 7kg cylinders.

Motor Caravan says

The level of thought and innovation in the Accent is really pleasing. The Autocruise designers have taken the increasingly popular van conversion layout with a rear double bed and thought hard about how they can improve on it. While you can still buy the Autocruise Pace, the Accent has that extra flexibility of being able to use the rear as a lounge/dinette as well as keeping it made up as a permanent double bed. The only downside is that the mattress is made up of four seating cushions. For a van conversion it really does feel like a compact luxury coachbuilt, with only the twin steel rear doors giving the game away. If you're looking for a van conversion with a permanent double bed, you should certainly take a look at the Accent.

Exterior features	8/10
On the road	8/10
Lounging	8/10
Dining	10/10
Night-time	9/10
Storage	9/10
Kitchen	7/10
Washroom	7/10
Practicality	9/10
Build quality	9/10
Overall mark	84/100

Thanks to the Caravan Club and its helpful wardens for the use of its Alderstead Heath site in Surrey during this test.