

# AUTOCRUISE

## Starburst

Enviably storage space and a large transverse rear washroom set this 'van apart from its strictly two-berth rivals

**Price** £46,493 (£47,988 inc Lux Pack) **Sleeps** Two **Belts** Two  
**Base** Peugeot Boxer/AL-KO **Engine** 2.2-litre, 130bhp **L/W/H** 6.38/2.22/2.71m  
**Economy** 26.5mpg **MTPLM** 3500kg **Payload** 475kg  
**Water fresh/waste** 94/73 litres **Battery** 100Ah **Gas** 2 X 7kg

Transverse rear washrooms are relatively uncommon in the modern motorhome market – just a handful of 'vans offer this layout, which prioritises space in the smallest room. This is often an area that's sacrificed in favour of lounge comfort, so it's an interesting footprint for designers to tackle to try to best combine the two.

It's a layout that has been adopted to good – and popular – effect in the Swift Bolero 630EW, the Autocruise's Swift Group cousin. But the

Starburst is not identical: Autocruise's designers have adopted a clever swing-out kitchen unit for the Starburst, vastly increasing both work- and storage-space.

The Starburst slots neatly into the bottom of the Star Plus range, a trio of AL-KO-based, high-specification models, all with the same swing-out kitchen unit. While it will seat six in comfort for lounging and dining, it's intended as a strict two-berth – aside from its double bed (or pair of singles) there are just two belted seats.



CARAVANGUARD  
INSURANCE  
QUOTE  
£262.75\*



**ATTRACTIVE REAR**  
Autocruise has worked hard on the styling of the rear of the 'van, and it shows: the moulding and the light clusters are smartly designed



**STYLISH OVERCAB**  
The handsome overcab design is new for 2010; not only does it look stylish, it also allows for a spacious interior locker



**ACCESSIBLE STORAGE**  
You can access storage space underneath the sofas via two external locker doors – handy if you don't want to carry muddy kit into the 'van



**THE GAS LOCKER**  
Access to the two 7kg gas bottles is via a locker on the nearside of the 'van. It is in a low down position, to aid the lifting of heavy bottles

PICTURES: PHIL RUSSELL

Our own Liz Paterson and Niall Hampton enjoyed a couple of nights away in the Starburst to discover how a couple on tour could live with the layout. We wanted to discover how practical the swing-out kitchen would prove, and whether a few days away would reveal any weaknesses in the large rear washroom, which eats up a good portion of the floorplan.

**DESIGN**  
★★★★★

The handsome Starburst shares its exterior looks with its other

Star Plus-range stablemates: all possess the same smart, sweeping grey-and-red graphics. Our vehicle came with plastic wheel trims, but 15-inch alloys are available as a £598 cost option.

Our testers particularly liked the overcab moulding, which is a new addition for the 2010 season. "It looks really smart, and creates enough space for a large locker on the inside of the 'van, too," said Liz.

The fresh- and waste-water tanks are both underslung; the former is insulated, too.

A capacity of 94- and 73-litres respectively should prove ample for couples even on longer tours. The Starburst's payload of 475kg should also prove sufficient for two adults and their kit.

The gas locker – which allows for two 7kg bottles – is satisfyingly low slung, meaning that it's easier to lift full bottles in and out. An electric step aids access to the motorhome, there's electric door locking all round, and a standard-fit, LED awning light provides night-time illumination.

**ON THE ROAD**



The 2.2-litre 130bhp is only available on the Peugeot Boxer cab; however, opt for the 160bhp unit with auto gearbox (see Equipment, p126) and your vehicle will be based on the Fiat Ducato. It's the low AL-KO chassis that is key to this model's drive; it results in plenty of stability around corners, and a smooth, comfortable ride. Also noticeable by their absence were the creaks and rattles that often emerge from a motorhome's accommodation



**SECURE ON THE MOVE**

The offside external locker space has a partly recessed floor. It's great for storing loose items that you don't want rolling around



**UNDERSLUNG TANKS**

The fresh water tank is insulated. If you specify the optional, £190 Winter Pack you'll receive tank heaters and drain insulation, too



**IMPRESSIVE BOXER CAB**

Our testers liked the 2.2-litre, 130bhp Boxer engine, and were impressed at the dearth of noise from the accommodation area



**OPTIONAL LUX PACK**

This full-length, wind-out, recessed Fiamma awning comes as part of the optional Lux Pack; the pack costs an additional £1495

\*FOR INSURANCE QUOTES TERMS AND CONDITIONS SEE PAGE 178

# LIVE-IN TEST

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area when on the road: even when fully loaded the Starburst's interior was more or less silent. Our vehicle was fitted with Peugeot's 2.2-litre, 130bhp engine; the unit proved amply powerful during our test, conducted on a variety of roads.

Niall wasn't overly keen on the Boxer steering, though: "I don't find it as positive or as light as that of the Ducato," he said. But he was full of praise for the six-speed gearbox: "The change feels satisfyingly solid and the length of the gear ratios is just about right."

## The cab is a comfortable place to be, even on longer journeys

The full-colour, optional reversing camera – part of the £1495 Lux Pack – is simple to operate, and very handy: there's no rearwards view at all from the driver's seat, unless you leave the washroom door open. Cab air-conditioning and cruise control are also provided if you opt for the Lux Pack.

Our testers were also thankful of the Starburst's relatively short overhang. "It limits the 'swinging out' of the rear of the motorhome – always good when you're driving through heavy traffic," said Liz.

The cab itself is a comfortable place to be, even on longer journeys – the seats are height-adjustable, firm and supportive, and there are two arm-rests on both chairs – a real bonus when on long motorway stretches.

A passenger airbag comes as standard (something that we think should be more prevalent in the motorhome industry), and there's a cubby hole just up above the cab –

this proved ideal for storing our first-aid kit, high-visibility jackets and maps.

## LOUNGING & DINING

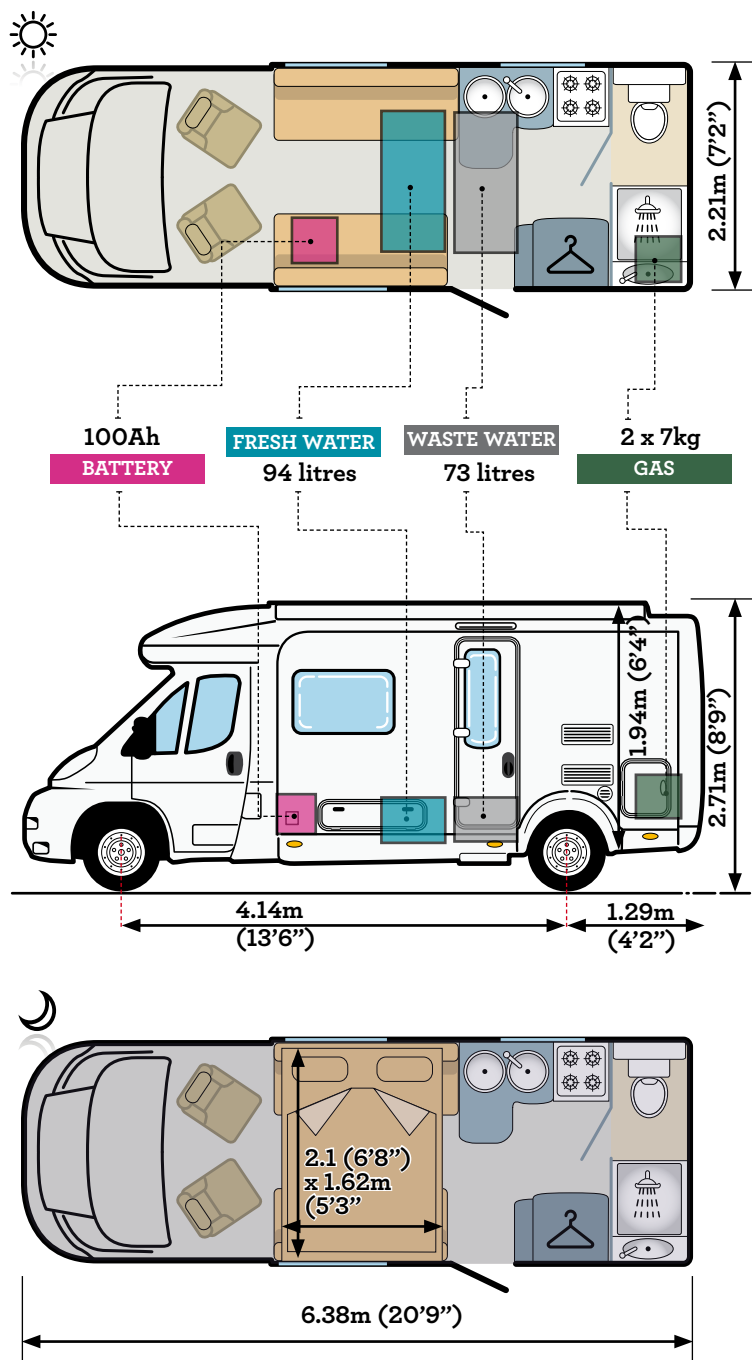
Both lounging and dining within the Starburst are sociable affairs: with the cab seats swivelled, six can be seated in comfort – although elbowroom for this many might prove an issue at meal times. A free-standing table can be erected for dining, and it provides plenty of plate space – more than enough, in fact. "This table is massive," said Liz. "It's really too big when there are just two of you in the motorhome – it makes it tricky to squeeze out from your seating place." The table is stored in a dedicated cupboard next to the accommodation door. "It's handy to have it tucked away, but the table is so heavy that retrieving it from its cupboard is awkward, and even more so when the kitchen unit has been swung out," said Liz.

Lounging is a more pleasant affair, even for six: the two facing sofas, with their matching scatter cushions, are supportive and comfortable. Space and the connections for an LCD TV are located within the tambour-doored cupboard next to the accommodation door; if fitted, this could be comfortably viewed by all of the occupants on the sofas or in the swivelled cab seats. There are a couple of audio speakers above the lounge area, too.

There is an impressive number of mains sockets within the 'van: there's a total of five, including one above the wine bottle holder to the right of the fridge. This proved handy for charging mobile phones and other small devices.

Finally, the blown-air heating – a vent of which is located at the base of the offside sofa – is very efficient. Our testers toured in the January snow: "Not once did we feel cold while sitting in

## Dimensions



## History

Autocruise has produced van conversions, low-profiles and coachbuilts under the name of both Autocruise and Pioneer since the company was founded 22 years ago by John Cockburn and Gordon Bentley. The company was bought out by Swift Holdings UK in October 2007, and since then the parent company has grown the Autocruise line-up, most significantly its number of van-conversions models, of which it now has seven.

Autocruise has also worked hard on its coachbuilt offerings: in 2009 its low-profiles and overcabs were divided into three distinct ranges, the Star, Star Plus and Driving. The popular Starburst received improved equipment and was placed in the 'Plus' range, where it remains today.





**COMFORTABLE CAB SEATS**

A passenger airbag comes as standard in the Boxer cab. Supportive seats and a pair of arm rests on each make for a comfortable journey



**COOKING CLASS**

The full-size oven with grill should make easy work of the largest dinners – we particularly liked the addition of an electric plate



**ROOMY KITCHEN**

The kitchen area is spacious, and there's loads of work surface thanks to the swing-out unit. It does block access to the washroom, though



**AMPLE WARDROBE SPACE**

A half-sized wardrobe provides storage for clothes that require hanging – there should be ample space here for the garments of a couple



**LOUNGE & KITCHEN**

Neither the kitchen nor lounge areas suffer because of the inclusion of the Starburst's transverse washroom – each is roomy and comfortable



**FUSS-FREE LOUNGE BED**

The double bed is easy to make up using the lounge cushions and the sofa bases, which slide forward to meet in the middle



**GLASS CUPBOARD**

Plenty of room in this cupboard for some glasses and a couple of wine bottles – the locker has a smart burgundy fabric lining, too



**DEDICATED TV LOCKER**

This tambour-doored locker is designed to hold an LCD TV – the TV can be viewed from all of the lounge seats and the swivelled cab seats



**USEFUL SIDE TABLE**

This neat little table can be raised at the end of the nearside sofa – it's perfect for holding a cup of tea or maybe a night time book

# LIVE-IN TEST

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the lounge,” said Niall. The controls for the heating are located to the front of the kitchen, and can easily be reached by an occupant of the offside sofa.

## KITCHEN ★★★★★

Autocruise’s swing-out kitchen unit – which features in all of its Star Plus ’vans – is certainly a clever concept. A bolt mechanism unhooks and the entire cupboard unit pulls out, greatly increasing the amount of both the available work and storage space. It’s

The kitchen is well-thought-out: everything is within easy reach of the sink

great if you’re the cook, but not quite so appealing if you’re not and you need to access the washroom, or the accommodation door: “You have to swing it back in again if you’re trying to get past,” said Liz, “which isn’t ideal if there are plates or foodstuffs on the top.”

That niggle aside, the kitchen is well-thought-out: everything is within easy reach if you’re standing in front of the sink. The inclusion of a full-size cooker – complete with three hobs and a handy electric plate – will suit those who prefer to cook in the ’van rather than eat out, and there’s ample storage space for enough food to last a week, as well as all the necessary pots and pans. A microwave also comes as standard, as does a 112-litre automatic-energy-selection fridge.

“This ’van would be great if you’re a wine lover,” said Niall. “Not only is there a dedicated space for four bottles alongside the fridge, there’s also room for the

accompanying glasses in the locker next to the door.” A dedicated crockery cupboard, in the locker above the sink, and a cutlery drawer complete the excellent kitchen storage facilities.

## WASHROOM ★★★★★

The Starburst’s washroom is key to its layout: it takes up a relatively large proportion of the vehicle’s footprint, and really needs to appeal if the Starburst is to prove popular.

And in this case, it does. There’s plenty of space for dressing, and our testers liked the concertina-doored shower: “It’s really roomy,” said Liz. Niall wasn’t so keen when he went to use the basin afterwards, however; it’s enclosed within the cubicle, which meant walking across the wet shower floor. “There’s only one plug hole for the water to drain out of the shower,” he said. “A second would probably help to clear the water on uneven ground – or a simple duck board, to keep your feet dry.”

Storage is acceptable within this area: there’s a tall (but shallow) cupboard up above the swivel toilet, a small cupboard up above the mirror, and a toothbrush- and toilet-roll holder. Our testers were pleased to note the blown-air vent at floor level, which kept the area warm even during the snowy weather they suffered on their trip.

Clear washroom windows – over the opaque variety – are far less common in British motorhomes than in their Continental cousins, so we were surprised to find one fitted in the Starburst. “I really don’t like that at all,” said Niall. “It means you have to pull the blind every time you want to use the washroom.”

## SLEEPING ★★★★★

The Starburst’s bed is created by sliding out the slatted

## + LIKES



### MICROWAVE

It’s great that there’s a microwave fitted as standard – it makes cooking on campsites a lot easier. That said, we’re still not keen on its position, at head height.



### REVERSING CAMERA

This snazzy reversing camera has a full-colour screen and is vital for those backward manoeuvres – there’s no rear view through the ’van otherwise.



### SPACE ABOVE CAB

Every inch of storage space above the Starburst’s cab has been utilised – there is also a whopping great locker for bedding, and a cubby hole for maps and the like, too.

## - DISLIKES



### CLEAR WASHROOM WINDOW

British-built-’van washroom windows are almost always opaque – this clear example bucks the trend. We’re not fans; it means you have to keep closing the blind when you want to use the washroom.



### CAB SILVER SCREENS

The windscreen has concertina blinds, but you have to use these press-stud thermal screens on the side windows. They’re a pain to fit – we’d much prefer more concertina examples.



**VERSATILE TABLE**

The freestanding table fits neatly inside this cupboard alongside the fridge. It's a large, heavy unit, though, so lifting it out might be tricky



**EASY CLEAN FLOOR**

Removable, beige-coloured carpets popper into place throughout the lounge and cab areas – they feel both tough and hard wearing



**WASHROOM CUPBOARD**

This small cupboard is a neat touch – it's located up above the mirror in the shower cubicle. It's handy for storing toiletries



**UNDERSEAT STORAGE**

The storage area underneath the sofas can be accessed by raising the seat bases – they lift up easily thanks to a pair of gas struts on each



**DINNER TIME**

Pull the table close to the cab seats and six can dine here. The lounge is a comfy place to be, but the table is very big – it's a squeeze to get out to the kitchen area



**AES FRIDGE/FREEZER**

The automatic-energy-selection fridge comes as standard; it's 112 litres in volume, and has a small freezer compartment, too



**CROCKERY AND CUTLERY**

A dedicated crockery cabinet is located above the sink – it has elastic-strung racks and holders to secure everything while on the road



**SOLID WORKMANSHIP**

The lockers above the lounge are push-button operated – they're spacious and feel satisfyingly sturdy and well constructed



**SHOWER BASE**

Locating the basin within the shower cubicle is a great space saver, but you'll get wet feet if the shower tray hasn't fully drained

# LIVE-IN TEST

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units from beneath the sofas to meet in the middle; the two back-rest cushions then simply push down into the gap to create a good-sized double bed. It's nice and flat (as long as you remember to put the slightly raised portion of the seat base cushions closest to the windows), and the supportive cushions are firm but comfortable to lie on.

Alternatively, the sofas can be transformed into two single beds simply by removing the back cushions altogether, or by pulling the slatted bases out slightly and dropping the backs straight down. Either

### The amount of storage space is impressive for a 'van just over six metres in length

way, the single beds that result should be wide enough for most occupants, but those who are on the taller side may find them too short for long-term use – our testers used the swivelled seats of the cab to create a little bit of extra length, although these seats are slightly higher than the sofa bases.

The large locker above the cab (the space for which is freed up by that new Luton moulding) proved perfect for storing bedding: it will easily swallow two sleeping bags or a double duvet, as well as a couple of pillows and a blanket. Liz and Niall were less impressed with the press-stud silver screens for the side windows of the cab: "I really don't like these – they're so fiddly," said Niall. "I would much prefer cassette concertina blinds, as there are on the windscreen."

## STORAGE

The amount of storage space available within the Starburst

is impressive for a motorhome that isn't much more than six metres in length. There are six medium-sized lockers lining the lounge area alone, and these – combined with the half-size wardrobe above the fridge – should prove ample for a couple to store all their kit. All the lockers open via a push-button, and feel sturdy and well constructed. There's also a lot of room under each of the two sofas, the bases of which lift up on gas struts for ease of access.

However, there's no storage space in the motorhome for larger items, but barbecues and the like, which can be broken down, should be able to fit underneath the seats easily enough. Our testers particularly appreciated the external locker doors which provide access to the roomy spaces underneath the sofas; they allow you to store muddy levelling ramps and cables without having to trail them through the motorhome. They also commented on the practicality of the partially-recessed floor in the offside locker – it meant that they could store the ramps securely without them slipping around underneath the seat.

## EQUIPMENT



Our Starburst came equipped with a roll-out canopy awning, part of the Lux Pack. Whether the optional equipment this pack provides (cab air-con, cruise control, reversing camera and awning) is worth an additional £1495 is purely subjective, but we would be highly tempted by the dealer fit Winter Pack – for just £190, this adds tank heaters, drain insulation and fridge vent covers to the kit list. An engine upgrade (to the 160bhp with a Comfort-Matic automatic gearbox) is only available on Fiat vehicles with the Lux Pack, for £3775. Unless you want or require an automatic gearbox, we would suggest that you stick with the perfectly adequate 130bhp unit.

## TECHNICAL DATA

### BASE VEHICLE



**Chassis** Peugeot Boxer cab/AL-KO chassis **Engine** 2.2-litre turbodiesel **Power** 130bhp @ 3500rpm **Torque** 236 lb/ft @ 1500rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual **Features** Driver and passenger airbag. Variable power-assisted steering. ABS and EBD. Immobiliser. Remote central locking. Electric windows, and electric and heated door mirrors. Radio CD player. Concertina windscreen blind and silver side screens. Spare wheel and tyre.



### CARAVAN BODY

High-impact 1.5mm GRP side panels. Floor/roof/wall thickness: 63/31/32mm



### LOUNGING & DINING

**Layout** Twin facing sofas. Swivelling cab seats. L-shaped kitchen with swing-out unit. Transverse rear washroom across width of 'van. Nearside door for habitation access. Removable carpets **Seats** Six **Dining** Six



### KITCHEN

**Sink** Stainless steel with glass cover **Cooker** Electric-ignition three-burner gas hob, with electric plate. Full-size oven and grill. Built-in microwave. **Fridge** 112 litres with auto energy selection.



### WASHROOM

**Toilet** Thetford C250 swivel cassette toilet with electric flush and 18-litre wheeled waste tank. Basin within shower compartment. **Shower** mixer with riser bar.



### SLEEPING

Double 2.1 x 1.62m  
OR Two singles 1.62 x 0.7m and 1.76 x 0.7m



### EQUIPMENT

Water and space heater Truma Combi 4 gas/230V electric water and space heater **Leisure battery** 100Ah **Gas** 2 x 7kg **Lighting** LED throughout **Sockets** 5 x 230V



### OPTIONS

160bhp engine with Comfort-Matic auto gearbox (£3775.33). Lux Pack: cab air-con; cruise control; colour reversing camera, roll-out canopy awning (£1495). Alloy wheels (£597.72). Roof rack and ladder (£587.50). Winter pack: tank heaters; drain insulation; fridge vent covers (£190); HAL-Locate tracking system (£638.59).



## LONG-TERM TESTER NOTES



**ROB GANLEY**  
"This is a layout that's been tried out to great effect in the Swift Bolero, but Autocruise has introduced a twist with the swing-out kitchen unit to increase work space. It's not perfect, but it will appeal to many."



**SARAH WAKELY**  
"It's the washroom that impressed me most in this 'van – Autocruise has shunned the typical corner example for a transverse space across the rear. It's light and spacious; but I dislike the clear window, though."



**JEREMIAH MAHADEVAN**  
"The Starburst might only be 6.4m (20'9") in length, but it offers an impressive amount of storage space. There's more than enough room here for the kit of two people, even on a longer tour."



## THE VERDICT

Our testers were quite taken with the Starburst. "I love the layout," said Liz. "The washroom is particularly impressive – it's great that there's a full-size shower. The lounge area is really comfy, too."

Where this layout does fall down is in the length of its single beds. While the double is spacious and comfortable, the singles are likely to prove too short for most people. If you and your touring companion prefer to sleep apart, the Starburst probably isn't the 'van for you.

But if a sociable layout and a double bed is what you're after – and if you're happy to live with pivoting the swing-out kitchen unit every time you want to pass – the Starburst is a tempting prospect. It's smart, well put-together, offers masses of storage space, is nicely equipped and the washroom's great.

The Starburst has been a strong seller for Autocruise in the past – in its 2010 incarnation, this only looks set to continue.

DESIGN	★★★★★
ON THE ROAD	★★★★★
LOUNGE & DINING	★★★★★
KITCHEN	★★★★★
WASHROOM	★★★★★
SLEEPING	★★★★★
STORAGE	★★★★★
EQUIPMENT	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

## OR YOU COULD TRY...



### AUTO-SLEEPER COTSWOLD EB

£53,295



This Peugeot-based, British-built alternative has more modern interior styling than the Sportstar: the transparent basin in the spacious washroom and the light-coloured upholstery are obvious examples. It comes in at 7.16m (23'4") and is built on a 4005kg, which means that only those with a B+C1 category driving licence are permitted to drive it.



### SWIFT BOLERO 630 EW

£46,981



This is the Autocruise's bigger cousin – also from the Swift Group, the Bolero 630EW oozes luxury in its fixtures and fittings, and it's not that much more expensive than the Starburst. At 7.04m (23') it's longer than the Autocruise, but this means it can fit in a more spacious washroom. The Swift does, however, have a smaller payload.



### CHAUSSON FLASH S2

£35,035



The Chausson Flash S2 is an excellent, value-for money, sub-six-metre motorhome. Its transverse washroom is complemented by the inclusion of a forward-facing fixed double bed, but the motorhome does have a half-dinette – it will therefore appeal to motorcaravanners who don't mind sacrificing lounge comfort for the convenience of a fixed bed.