

BESSACARR E695

Two lounge areas, multiple sleeping berths and plenty of storage space make this a great 'van for a touring family

⊕Price from £50,317 (OTR*) ⊕Sleeps 4 ⊕Belts 4 ⊕Base vehicle Fiat Ducato LWB Maxi ⊕Engine 2.3-litre 130 MultiJet ⊕L/W/H 7.08/2.33/3.05m (23'3"/7'8"/10') ⊕Economy 26.2mpg ⊕MTPLM 4005kg ⊕Payload 565kg ⊕Water fresh/waste 90/68 litres ⊕Battery 95Ah ⊕Gas 2 x 7kg (*Price as tested £51,312)

The Bessacarr E695 underwent a minor cosmetic facelift for the 2010 season and we enjoyed a longer-term test over a 10 week period. It's a middle-market, family motorhome. To do its job well, it must tick three crucial boxes: it has to offer multiple travel and sleeping berths, a usable toilet/washroom and

sufficient payload for all the camping and living equipment a family needs to take on tour. It does so in true British fashion: that is, it offers a wraparound rear lounge layout, with three spacious windows allowing in lots of light. Up front, there's a very Continental-styled half-dinette with two belted passenger seats.

Originally launched in October 2007, as part of the Swift Group's Voyager family, is it now a little long in the tooth when compared to the exciting things that have been going on with the Group's Escape, Sundance/E400 family overhauls, and all the innovation that's poured into the van conversion market at sister company Autocruise? We

invited our reader testers Martin and Adele Bromfield, and their nine-year old granddaughter Emily to put the 'van through its paces over a long weekend in Brighton. We've compiled their opinions along with those of editor Rob Ganley, who spent a week touring the South Downs in the 'van last month.

DESIGN ★★★★★

The E695 is based on the Fiat Ducato Maxi LWB chassis, and the four-tonne chassis affords a payload of 565kg. Given the main driver in most young families today will likely have passed their test before January 1, 1997, the weight shouldn't present licence problems to its target market.

It's based on the standard height chassis, which means a flat floor throughout the interior, and no step down from the cab into the living quarters. The greater ground clearance makes it possible to mount the fresh- and waste-water tanks underfloor, freeing up the seat boxes for storage. The chassis comes with heavy-duty extensions which are ready for an optional towbar to be fitted.

The aluminium-skinned sidewalls have a high gloss finish, as do the aluminium skirts, which are neatly complemented by the colour-coded front bumper. With its flowing overcab section, attractive moulded rear panel, integrated roof bars and

Our testers

Martin and Adele Bromfield, and their granddaughter Emily, from Glamorgan. Martin and Adele have been motor caravanning for 30 years. They started out in a self-converted Thames Trader Bus, and today own an A-class Hymermobile 644.



We stayed at...

Sheepcote Valley Caravan Club Site
East Brighton Park, Brighton BN2 5TS
Tel 01273 626 546

Web www.caravanclub.co.uk

Located a couple of miles from Brighton in its own valley, this site has a total of 169 pitches, 86 hardstandings, including some for RVs.



WIDTH 2.33m (7'8")



INTERNAL HEIGHT 1.92m (6'3")

LENGTH 7.08m (23'3")

Swift Group, Dunswell Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4JX
Tel 01482 847 332 Web www.swiftleisure.co.uk



LUXURIOUS WASHROOM

With its separate shower and toilet, our testers found this area well organised. They liked the duckboard and footrest in the cubicle



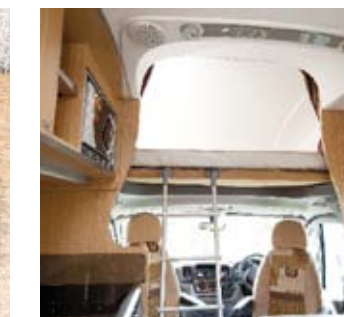
TV BRACKET

This secondary TV bracket faces the front passenger seat bench for front lounge viewing. A second, larger TV arm services the rear



CONTROL PANEL

It's not the most intuitive we've come across, but once you've got the knack it's quick and easy to monitor all the necessary onboard levels



EASY OVERCAB ACCESS

When not in use, the ladder stashes beneath the overcab mattress. It can be left up at night, too: the front lounge doesn't double as a bed



CARAVANGUARD
INSURANCE
QUOTE
£302.75*

DECENT HALF-DINETTE

With a flat floor from cab to habitation area, and a leaf-extension table, the half-dinette facing the kitchen makes into a very useable lounge for four people



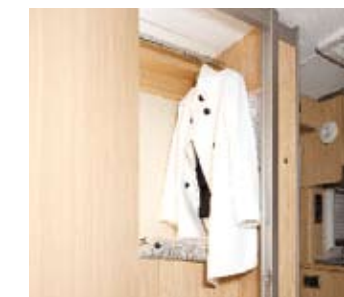
KITCHEN EXTRAS

As well as a clip-on drainer, the sink gets a chopping board that doubles as a basin lid. Storage for crockery and cutlery is adequate



CABIN COMFORTS

As well as Bessacarr's trademark walnut dash inserts, the Elegance pack buys you cab air-con, cruise control and reversing camera



WARDROBE WATCH

Adele finds few family motorhomes provide a decent wardrobe space, but was pleasantly surprised by that in the Bessacarr



REAR PANEL CAMERA

The reversing camera is integrated into the rear panel beneath the high-level running light, and comes as part of the Elegance pack

*FOR INSURANCE QUOTES TERMS AND CONDITIONS SEE PAGE 170

LIVE-IN TEST

BESSACARR E695

recessed awning, elegant is the word that springs to mind.

ON THE ROAD

The Ducato offers a firm ride, but handling and steering were sharp and very responsive for a 7m-long 'van. "We found the headlamp height adjustments ideal for travelling in Europe, which we do a lot," said Adele. "I liked the adjustable steering wheel, as I'm shorter than Martin."

The E695 is powered by the 2.3-litre 130 Multijet engine, allied to a six-speed gearbox.

The Continental-style half-dinette layout up front allows for a full UK-style kitchen

Our loan 'van was fitted with the optional Elegance pack (£995), which adds cruise control, cab air-con and a colour reversing camera built into the rear view mirror. And, of course, Bessacarr's trademark walnut dash inserts.

Editor Rob Ganley grumbled in his monthly reports on the Bessie about having to remove the half-dinette table for travel in order to fit a child seat to the rear passenger seats. Now that the cab passenger seat has an airbag as standard (child seats are not to be used in seats without first disabling passenger airbags), this is the only option.

"There's not sufficient space to fit a child seat between the table and the backrest of the forward-facing belted passenger seat bench. And as an extendable table with a sturdy leg, it's heavy to move, and it doesn't have a dedicated storage spot when in transit."

LOUNGING & DINING

Inside, there's a rear U-shaped lounge, and a half-dinette

with two forward-facing belted passenger seats opposite a kitchen unit up front and a washroom facing the caravan entry door.

The framed locker doors are all positive locking, and all the windows get pleated blinds, and a drop-in carpet covers the vinyl floor.

Up front, the swivelling cab chairs make a four person lounge, in what is very much a Continental-style space-saving layout, with the added benefit of a full UK kitchen.

"We loved the swivelling driver and passenger cab seats," said Adele. "They're easy to swivel around on site to face the extendable kitchen table and can be adjusted for height."

For rear lounge dining, there is a dedicated cupboard next to the entry door, with a free-standing table that seats five at a push. All the seatbacks have ventilation boards, although it's a shame the rear cushions aren't secured with press studs or Velcro backs to stop them coming free in transit. There are plenty of individual directional reading lights under the cabinets in the rear lounge to satisfy all members of the family, and up front there are spots for those in the cab seats. The lighting is mainly LED, which go easy on the current drain.

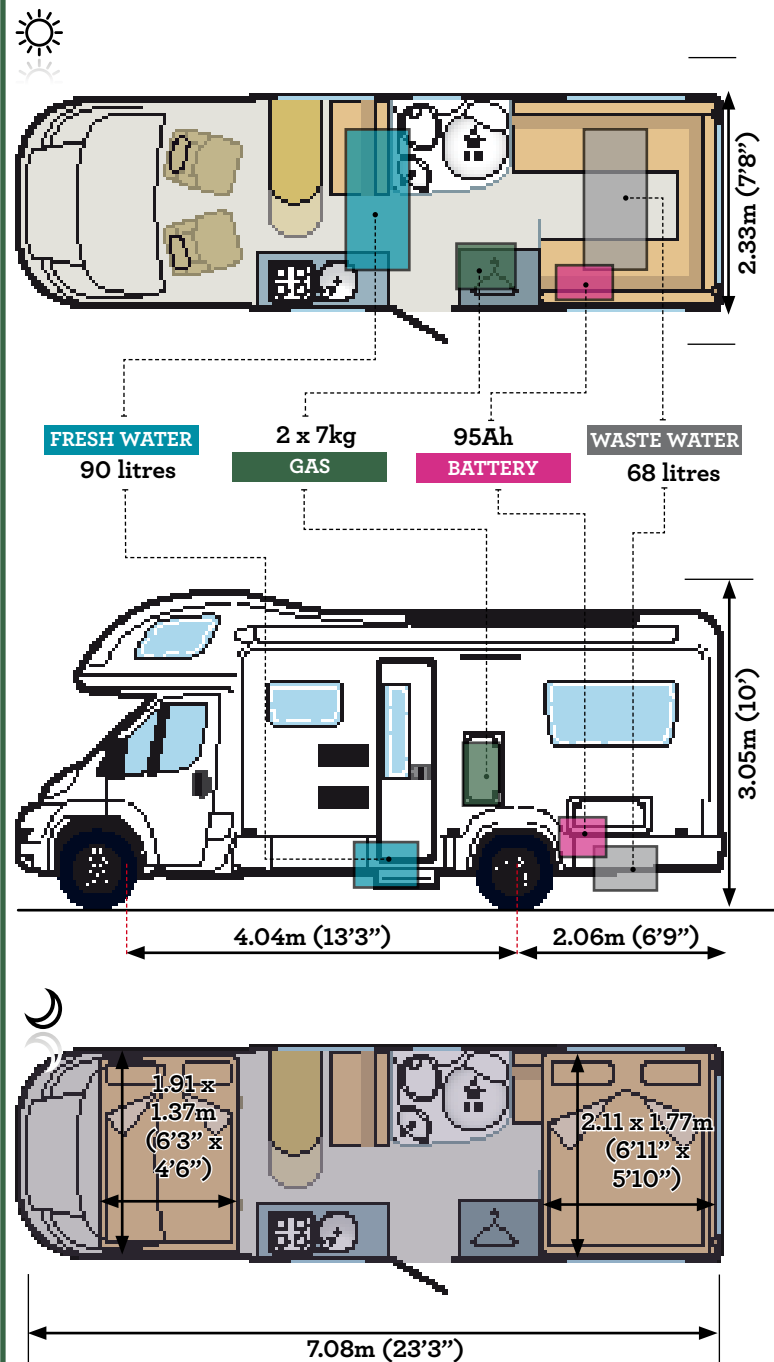
KITCHEN

The Continental-style half-dinette layout up front allows for a full UK-style kitchen: that is, a 104-litre fridge with Smart Energy Selection (SES), a full oven and grill, three burners and an electric hotplate, and a microwave oven.

The deep stainless steel-sink comes with a removable draining board and a chopping board cover. There's no extractor fan, but the window is well positioned and easy to open. Workspace is a bit sparse, but chefs can use the front dinette table as extra workspace.

"There were so many things I liked about the kitchen

Dimensions

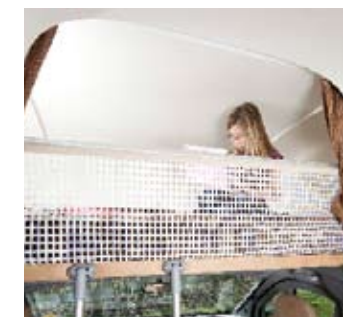


History

Bessacarr started out as a Yorkshire-based mobile home manufacturer, which branched out into manufacturing touring caravans in the late 1950s. Through the decades, products built under the brand have become well known and much loved for their traditional look and feel, and their timeless elegance. In 1996, Bessacarr caravans was bought by the Swift Group, who relaunched the Bessacarr motorhome manufacturing brand the following year. Today, Bessacarr motorhomes are built at the Swift Group factory in Cottingham, and are badge engineered versions of Swift motorhomes - ie, they share the same chassis and body shell, with differences in interior upholstery, graphical colour schemes and minor specification upgrades over the Swift sister brand, to position them as a more prestigious brand.



WELL-EQUIPPED KITCHEN
 Adele liked the large, round sink that allows room to fit a kettle under the tap, and found the clip-on plastic draining board very useful



OVERCAB KIDS' DEN
 With excellent headroom and a high level safety net, the overcab area doubles as a great den for younger children



FAMILY-SIZED FRIDGE
 Thetford's stylish three-way fridge has Smart Energy Selection (SES), and at 105-litres should enable a family to keep stocked up on tour



THICK DROP-IN CARPETS
 The thickness of the overlay carpets, that press-stud to the vinyl floor, has increased in recent years. Drop-in carpets make cleaning the 'van easy



FEET-UP LOUNGING
 The wraparound rear lounge is surrounded by three panoramic windows and an overhead rooflight, making it the perfect place for long-legged lounging on site



PRIVACY PARTITION
 Adele liked the concertina-style partition that separates the end lounge from the rest of the 'van, effectively turning it into an ensuite



SEAT BOX LID ON STRUTS
 Martin found storage in the seat boxes ample, and easy to access thanks to the self-supporting framed seat box lids on pneumatic struts



HUGE REAR DOUBLE
 The lounge bed is easy to make up: just slide the facing sofas together, and fill the sleeping surface with the backrest cushions



OVERHEAD STORAGE
 There's abundant, customisable overhead locker storage, which has positive locking catches for a safer on-road experience

★ LIVE-IN TEST

BESSACARR E695

that it would be easier to mention the things I didn't like, namely the tiny waste bin attached to the inside of the door," concluded Adele.

WASHROOM

It's a slight step up into the offside washroom, where it's a bit of a squeeze for leg and elbow room on the throne. Swift Group has wisely opted for a spacious, walk-in, circular shower cubicle, with the group's trademark wooden duckboard. The opaque window lets in lots of light.

"The microwave oven proved a boon for sterilising baby bottles," said Rob

There are also two down-lighters overhead but no ceiling air vent, and a single plug for draining which means level pitches are a must.

"The fully-lined shower area with curved plastic doors on runners allows for plenty of room in the shower. There is even a moulded seat or footrest area for those who find it difficult to stand and wash," said Martin.

SLEEPING

The TV bracket in both the front and rear lounges enables you to take your TV to bed with you for some night-time viewing. There's an aerial and socket for both fixtures, too.

The rear lounge makes into a massive double bed by simply sliding the seat bases together and using the backrest and seat squab cushions to fill. Importantly for a family 'van, a concertina divider slides across for privacy.

The only disappointment is that the nearside sofa, at 1.76m (5'9") is rather short as a single sleeping berth.

The overcab bed has a one-piece mattress, and the access ladder stashes underneath.

"It's an impressive 1.91 x 1.37m and has a good quality mattress. For those with children, it has a high safety net to stop the little ones falling out. Such is its size, one could easily fit four small children in the overcab bed. With the net up during the daytime, it's also a perfect playpen area," said Adele.

STORAGE

The overcab bed and lounge seat bases get the same aluminium frame and beech slats, and both are mounted on gas struts, which are self-supporting once they're raised, giving outstanding access to the storage areas under the seat bases. There's external access to the rear nearside seat bunk, too. There's also decent hanging space in the wardrobe above the space heater.

Fixing points for a rear mounted cycle rack are built into the rear wall, too.

"Fixing points for a rear-mounted cycle rack are something no motorhome owner should venture off without. Martin and I always take our cycles with us so we can go to places that are inaccessible to larger 'vans," said Adele.

EQUIPMENT

As well as the Elegance pack fitted, the winter pack should be a real consideration for those with winter sports in mind. Otherwise, standard features like a recessed awning, hotplate and microwave oven in the kitchen, and dual-fuel en-route habitation heating mark this out as a solid mid-market product.

"We loved the equipment levels," said Rob. "Electric heating meant we could make best use of our site fees by keeping the 'van warm on some cold early-spring nights. Similarly, the microwave oven proved a boon for sterilising baby bottles."

+ LIKES



- DISLIKES



CAB SEATS

"The swivelling cab seats are comfortable on the road, easy to rotate on site, and height and comfort adjustable for travel and lounging. They're great!" said Martin. "And I loved the spacious lounge area."

KITCHEN DRAINAGE

"I loved the moulded and removable draining board that saves not only the worktop it covers, but is an ideal place to stack wet dishes without having to place towels down for drainage before drying. There is also a moulded chopping board that fits neatly into the rim of the basin for added workspace," said Adele.

WORKSPACE

Kitchen workspace is rather on the cramped side, and although you can use the extended half-dinette table, a work surface extension would have been preferable. Adele would have liked a decent waste bin, too.

NO DEDICATED TABLE STORAGE

"There's no way to fit a child seat to the rear passenger seats without removing the heavy half-dinette table, and it has nowhere dedicated to store on the road," said editor Rob Ganley.

TECHNICAL DATA

BASE VEHICLE

Chassis Fiat Ducato LWB Maxi **Engine** 2.3-litre turbodiesel **Power** 130bhp @ 3600rpm **Torque** 295 lb/ft @ 2000rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual gearbox. Front wheel drive **Features** ABS brakes. Electronic Brake Force distribution. Fully adjustable swivel cab seats. Adjustable steering wheel. Cab carpet. Electrically adjustable mirrors. Electric windows. Remote central locking. Engine immobiliser. Driver and passenger airbags. Stereo radio/CD player with iPod/MP3 connection.

CONVERSION

Floor/walls/roof: 44/34/34mm. Thick gauge, one-piece aluminium sidewalls finished in gloss white. One piece GRP roof. Full GRP rear panel with high level brake light and camera housing. Aluminium skirts. Integrated longitudinal roof bars.

LOUNGING AND DINING

Furniture Drop-in carpet over vinyl floor. **Layout** Swivelling cab seats. Nearside forward kitchen, half-dinette opposite. Offside washroom. Rear U-shaped lounge. **Seats** Eight **Dining** Eight

KITCHEN

Sink Stainless steel basin. Removable plastic drainer. **Monobloc mixer tap** **Cooker** Three gas burner hob. One electric hotplate. Separate oven and grill. **Microwave oven** **Fridge** 105-litre three-way Thetford fridge freezer

SLEEPING

Lounge bed 2.11 x 1.77m; or nearside single 1.89 x 0.7m **Offside single** 1.77 x 0.77m **Overcab** 1.91 x 1.37m

EQUIPMENT

Water and space heater Truma Combi boiler with blown-air. Gas-mains operation **Leisure battery** 95Ah **Gas** 2 x 7kg **Lighting** All 12V, mostly LED **Sockets** 5 x 230V; 1 x 12V

OPTIONS FITTED

Base Elegance pack: cab aircon, cruise control, colour reversing camera with screen or rear view mirror (£995)

OTHER OPTIONS

Base Upgrade to 3.0-litre engine with Comfortmatic auto transmission (£3775) **Conversion** Winter pack: Fresh/waste tank heaters, drain insulation, fridge vent covers (£190)



THE VERDICT

"It's a well thought out design, which shows that the manufacturers have taken on-board the advice from many veteran 'vanners, and perhaps including women on the design team. At least that seems to be the case. A man's view of design seems to prioritise the technical aspects when creating a great 'van, but there is room for a woman's input when it comes to the day-to-day comfort of living in a 'van," said Adele.

It's certainly a practical interpretation of the rear lounge layout, and no corners are cut in supplying a solid, family-friendly 'van. For many buyers, it's a heart-

over-head decision, and the Bessacarr's elegant exterior and fabulous 'showroom' interior design, with bright upholstery, blonde furniture, abundant lighting and decent sightlines, make this an extremely appealing proposition from the moment you set eyes on it.

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

LONG-TERM TESTER NOTES



ROB GANLEY
"On quality, layout and specification alone, this is the perfect family 'van, but I can't forgive the inability to fit a child passenger seat quickly and easily to the forward facing passenger seat bench."



SARAH WAKELY
"At £995, the Elegance Pack is a reasonably priced and very useful addition to the basic spec. Cab air con and cruise control are always welcome, and we're fans of reversing cameras in 'vans over 7m-long."



JEREMIAH MAHADEVAN
"As well as multiple passenger seats and sleeping berths, a family 'van needs a lounge available when the kids have gone to bed. The E695 has got two, and both are excellent. Top marks from me."