

Running reports



Phil drives the diminutive Excel along Mousehole harbour

Comfy Mouse-sized 'van

EXCEL 600B BY AUTO-TRAIL

Base Fiat Ducato MWB, 2.2-litre 100 MultiJet
Berths Three
Mileage 2165
Average mpg 26.8
From £36,308 OTR (inclusive of £1050 Sport Pack)
Faults None
Likes Comfy lounge area
Dislikes Lack of power sockets
Run by Rob Ganley
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"It's a bit tight, but you'll get it through no problems!" These were the words of encouragement from our photographer Dave Smith as I took the Excel into the small village of Mousehole on our Cornish adventure tour (see p8). The sign says: 'Width restriction, six-foot six-inches'. The Excel measures seven-foot four-inches. Tight? You're not kidding! But no matter, the

little 'van just managed to squeeze through the gap between the buildings.

Not that I'd recommend anyone else do this – we just go the extra mile to bring you all those great pictures.

I was very keen to get behind the wheel of this compact little 'van myself and I had no hesitation in prying the keys away from editor Rob Ganley's grasp to steal it away to Cornwall.

The long trip down to the south coast allowed me the chance to properly gauge on-road performance. Although the 2.2-litre engine only produces 100bhp, it was more than adequate for motorway cruising, while the torque coped well with the long inclines of the Cornish A- and B-roads. Some were too steep for fifth gear, but nonetheless, the smallest engine in the Fiat Ducato range coped admirably.

So to the interior, where I spent my evenings after long

days out and about. Lounging was great, and the on-board TV/DVD kept me entertained. The sofas were very comfortable, offering good, and soft, back support.

The kitchen is great, too, with ample workspace, a good three-burner hob and grill/oven. There is no drainer and no bin, and the cutlery drawer is in a strange location – low down in a cupboard beneath the oven – but there was plenty of space in which to prepare food, cook and wash up.

One gripe was the lack of power sockets. For someone with a lot of gadgets that are in constant need of charging, having only one mains socket was not ideal. With a laptop, PDA, camera and mobile phone to power, I ended up charging equipment on a rota system!

The area I was most impressed with was the storage space. With a week's worth of clothes, food, books

and other bits and pieces, I still couldn't fill all the overhead lockers, and the garage beneath the bed remained empty. The half-length wardrobe was fine for hanging my clothes. And the under seat locker was ideal for storing water hoses, electric hook-up cables and muddy shoes.

Speaking of mud, we did have some fun leaving one of our sites after a night of heavy rain. The front wheels of the Excel got bogged down, and no amount of rocking would free them. Luckily, a local farmer managed to free us with his tractor. Phew!

All in all, the Excel was a perfect choice for my Cornwall trip, and I was surprised at how much it offered. It certainly challenges the perceptions, and I'm already planning another trip in it, although I won't be testing its width again in a hurry!

by Phil Curry