

# BENIMAR

## BENIVAN 161

An impressive washroom and fixed single beds are among the many plus points in this smart two-berth, says Peter Baber

**B**enimar's new Benivan 161 van conversion is the same length as the 144 that we reviewed in issue 283. Both come in at 5.99m long, to make them easier to park.

But while the 144 has a transverse double, the 161 manages to squeeze in two fixed single beds, as well as some intriguing storage options. Does it work? We went to find out at Marquis Leisure's Lancashire depot.

The cab is standard Ducato, with drinks holders in the middle. Our model came with Fiat's fairly new nine-speed automatic gearbox.

Coming in at the sliding door, you have to step up to the front lounge, with its two travel seats. There is no sunroof, but you don't really notice, thanks to the Heki in the roof and the large windows. The window surround above the clip-on table is padded, to add another touch of comfort.

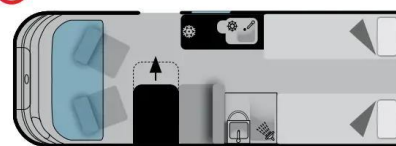
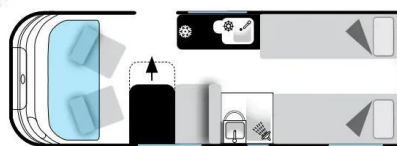
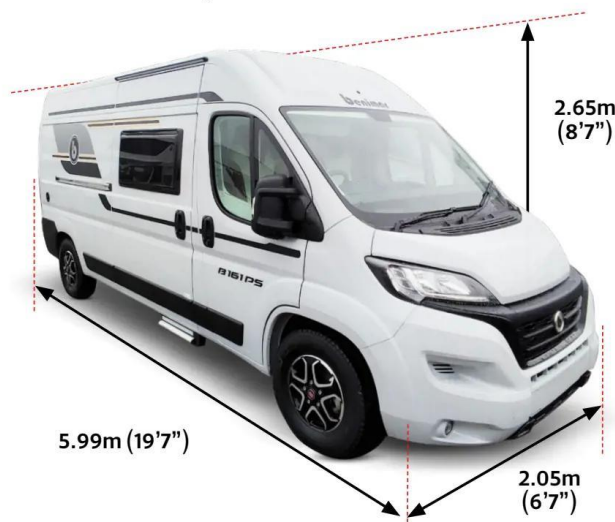
A striplight across the entrance to the cab, an LED in the ceiling and an individually switched striplight under the overhead locker offer extra lighting at night. There is a mains, 12V and TV socket to the left of the locker.

A TV above the bench could easily be seen by both people in the cab seats, but there are no USBs nearby.

The first indication of compromise to fit two single beds lengthways in the back comes in the side kitchen. It only has a one-burner hob, inline with the small sink. But you do get an unusually large amount of workspace, which is well lit with a striplight.

Putting the fridge at the peninsula end of the kitchen unit is also clearly a space-saver, but it does make it easily accessible for anyone sitting outside.

**Price** £57,495  
**Sleeps** 2 **Belts** 4  
**Base vehicle**  
 Fiat Ducato  
**Engine** 2.3-litre  
 140bhp turbodiesel  
**Length/width/height**  
 5.99/2.05/2.65m  
 (19'7"/6'7"/8'7")  
**MTPLM** 3500kg  
**MiRO** 2853kg  
**Payload** 674kg  
**Water (fresh/waste)**  
 70/70 litres  
**Leisure battery** 100Ah  
**Gas** 2 x 6kg



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It even comes with corner lighting that brightens both kitchen and lounge.

It is a pity that the only socket in the kitchen is at the rear, inconveniently over the sink. It would be better placed closer to the fridge and the worktop.

The washroom packs in a lot for a van of this size. You don't get a separate shower cubicle, but you do get a large fold-up handbasin with a mirror, an opaque window, a swivel toilet and a sizeable shower tray with two drain holes. All is lit by an LED and a striplight and there is a roof vent, too.

The rear beds should be wide and comfortable enough for most adults. They come with swan-neck, switched spotlights with USB ports.

If you prefer to convert the beds into a double, there are wooden panels with 'claws' that you fix to the inner edges of both beds, plus cushions to fill the gap. But these are heavy and awkward, so it might be best to decide before you set off whether you need them, and to leave them at home if not.

In this rear section, there are two overhead lockers on the offside, both

up close



Cab is standard Fiat Ducato, with central drinks holders



LEFT Cupboards in the washroom are rather shallow

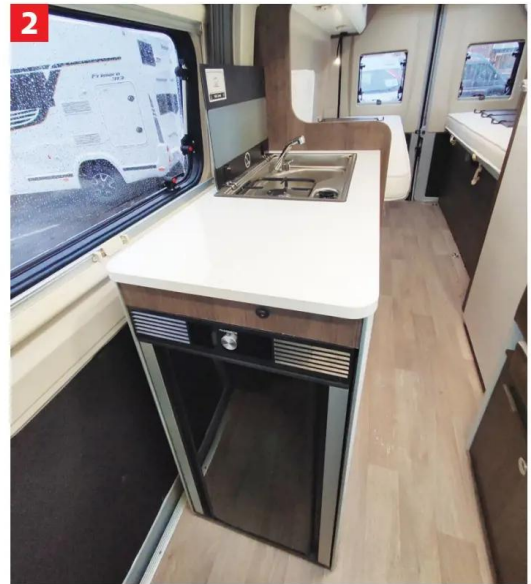
RIGHT The single beds at the rear are wide and comfortable...



... but can be converted into a double with panels and cushions, if you prefer







**1** Swivel the cab seats and swing out the table extension for a comfortable front lounge

**2** Fridge is located at the end of the kitchen peninsula, so can be accessed from outside

**3** Spacious and well-equipped washroom has a fold-up basin

a good size. There is one at the back on the nearside, then further up front there is a half-height wardrobe that includes a shelf, but also has a hanging rail – if you remove the shelf and the panel, there is at least enough room to hang several jackets. It's an innovative idea.

Under the beds, meanwhile, there is a standard compartment on the nearside. But on the offside, there are no fewer than three cupboards – one of which comes with a second hanging rail, and two others that can

be removed if you would rather use the space to store more bikes en route, for example. You really do get a lot of storage options here.

Up front, there is one overhead locker, a corner shelf and a large cubbyhole under the table. You can also make use of the space around the electrics and ducting under the travel seat, thanks to an access flap.

Storage in the kitchen, however, is a little less copious. As you only get two drawers and one overhead locker, you might need to use some of the

other space for dry food storage. Similarly, in the washroom, the cupboards are very shallow – you won't be able to fit much in.

### **PRACTICAL MOTORHOME SAYS...**

Fitting two lengthways single beds into a 6m-long vehicle is one of those challenges motorhome designers love to rise to. Benimar has succeeded well here, so long as you're not particularly bothered about doing a lot of sophisticated cooking on tour. The washroom is impressive for the size of 'van.



Excellent interior lighting includes switchable swan-neck spotlights



Ample storage from both overhead lockers and some handy shelving

Wardrobe over the bed is open at the bottom, so you can hang jackets here



There's also more cupboard space below the beds at the rear







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