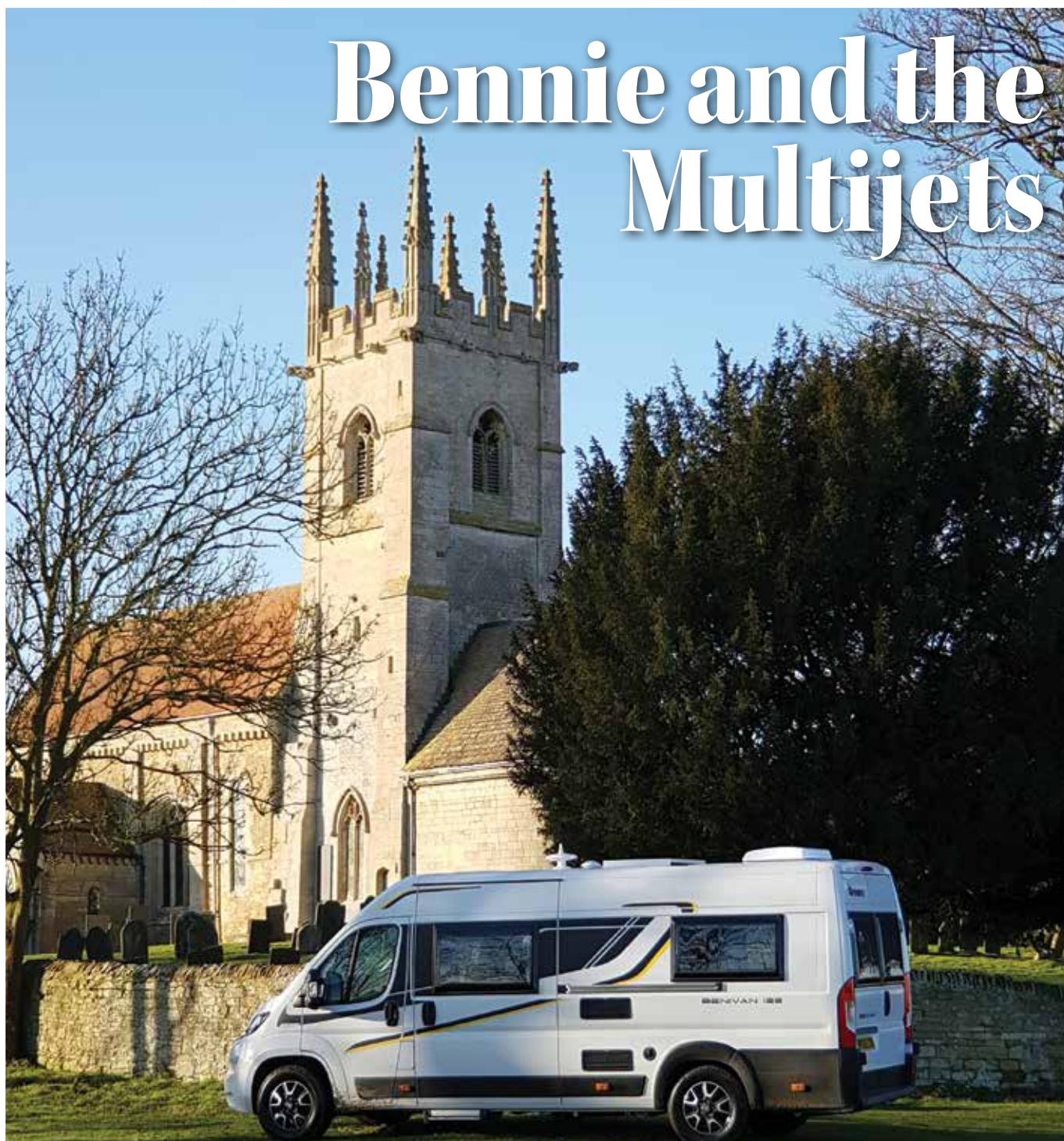


# Bennie and the Multijets



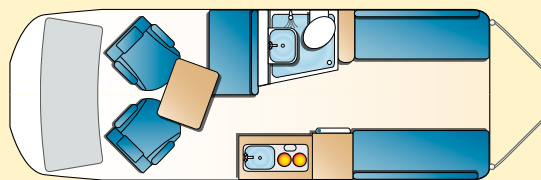
This rear lounge van conversion gets Fiat's 160bhp Multijet engine – and loads of kit – as standard



*Will Hawkins*

## BENIMAR BENIVAN 122

**Price from:** £52,495  
**Berths:** 2 **Travel seats:** 4  
**Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato  
**Length:** 6.36m  
**Gross weight:** 3,500kg







The rear travel seats are supportively shaped, but they leave quite a narrow aisle through to the rear lounge

**W**ith the Benimar brand, there's one aspect you can guarantee – a high standard level of kit, tailored to suit UK customers. That's, perhaps, especially true of the Benivan van conversions, as (unlike the coachbuilds that hail from Peñíscola in Spain) they are actually built in Blighty by sister company, Auto-Trail. So, not only do you get a sliding door on the UK nearside, but these campers are National Caravan Council approved.

There are two models in the range, this 122 being the longer model based on the 6.36m Fiat Ducato. It's not just a *Bob the Builder* spec base vehicle, though. It comes with the 160bhp engine, so you get more grunt for your money (a reasonable £52,495). The reversing camera is standard, too, so you won't have to worry about forking out for extras (just an awning and bike rack, perhaps, both of which will be dealer-fit accessories).

## POWER TO PLEASE

If there's one aspect of the Benivan 122 that is sure to appeal, it's that potent 160bhp engine. The 2.3-litre capacity of this Euro 6d turbo-diesel engine may be the same as the 120bhp unit fitted as standard to most rivals, but it has almost 19% more torque (380Nm from just 1,400rpm), so you can zip along at a good pace on country roads. And, if you plan long trips around Europe (when that's possible again), the extra performance will be especially welcome in mountainous terrain like the Alps.

Aside from the engine, the driving comforts include cruise control and cab air-conditioning as standard. Benimar also fits the Xzent head unit with remote switches on the steering wheel, DAB radio and sat-nav, as well as the display for the aforementioned reversing camera.

The steering wheel is the more

tactile leather-covered version and you get Traction Plus, Hill Descent Control and ESC, too. More unusual upgrades, though, are the automatic lights and wipers, while the icing on the cake is a pair of heated cab seats – you won't see those on a campervan features list often, even as an extra.

I enjoyed driving the Benivan around the flat, but twisting, fenland roads of south Lincolnshire and, as you'd expect of a Ducato, it always felt reassuringly stable. There's a good rear view from the twin-lens wing mirrors, too, even with the driver's seat pushed as far back as it will go – and only a little rattling came from the kitchen fittings, despite the fairly parlous state of local roads.

The plasticky interior of the Ducato cab is the same here as in countless rivals and it looks cheap and dated compared with Mercedes and VW vans. Time for a facelift, Fiat?



There are concertina blinds and long rear sofas at the back of the 122



The front seating area could do with a sunroof above for more daylight



The same table can be used up front but it's too big to be practical here

## SECOND OPINION

*"Very closely related to its sister models built by Auto-Trail, the Benivan benefits from extra spec and the 160bhp engine"*

RACHEL STOTHERT DEPUTY EDITOR



The big news in the kitchen is the gas oven/grill, which joins the spec for 2020

## TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

So, I enjoyed the driving experience; what about living in the Benivan 122? Bear in mind that I am 6ft 2in and I can't help feeling that this campervan might suit smaller motorhomers rather better.

Its layout takes the popular design of a rear lounge and adds the versatility of having a half-dinette up front, so there are four travel seats. However, turning the driver and passenger seats to face the living space highlights some challenges with the interior design. Once the driver's seat has been rotated, there is very limited knee room between this and the rear passenger seat. Sit opposite each other and you may find that legs and knees have to interlock.

It's also possible to position the table here, with a hole for its island leg in a spot between the cab seats and the half-dinette. With the table set up,

only one person gets proper access to it – whoever is on the inner travel seat. The driver and passenger seats get a corner of table each, but the person by the wall can't easily reach their grub.

The table rather dominates the area, too, which makes it a squeeze to sit at, unless you're small. A small, round coffee table would be far more suitable here, as the space does make a useful secondary seating area on site if you're partner is still asleep in the stern. And, remember, the 122 is only a two-berth.

Importantly, the rear seats add versatility to the vehicle (and extra folk could always sleep in a tent or awning, or a Cabbunk could be added for a child). The travel seats are comfortable and well-shaped, although the backrests are a bit more upright than I'd like.

But there's something missing, which other campervan

manufacturers have started to add, and that's a big overcab sunroof. As there's no rooflight over the half-dinette, either, you'll notice that the front lounge can feel quite dark unless the weather is sufficiently balmy to have the sliding door wide open. Fortunately, there's a full-height flyscreen on this large doorway to keep the mozzies at bay.

Under the half-dinette is a good-sized storage locker, easily accessed by lifting the seat squab. Above, on the offside wall, there are two high-level cupboards and, over the cab, there's an open shelf with a lip.

## REACH FOR THE SKY

If the front seating area is compromised on site and will be reserved for only occasional use, the rear lounge is much more spacious and inviting. With a skylight and ►



**LIKED**



- 160bhp engine makes it good to drive
- High standard specification

**DISLIKED**



- Front dining space lacks legroom
- No rooflight or sunroof for front lounge

**WANTED**

- Choice of internal/external colours
- Longer beds



A tip-up basin makes good use of space in the washroom

windows in the back doors and on both sides, the rear of the 122 is a welcoming space with long settees that allow plenty of room for you to put your feet up.

This area is bright in the daytime and, in the evening, with the lighting strips along the top edges of the lockers and reading lights in all four corners, this lounge is delightful. Turn off the LED strips and it feels cosy with just the reading lights on.

The rear of the Benivan is also a much better place to dine. There's a slot in the middle of the floor for the same table that you can use in the front. Here, though, you can get four people around it to eat with plenty of elbow room.

When you're not using the table, there's a special locker for it at the forward end of the offside settee. The shelf on top is useful for drinks when you haven't erected the table, while

the wall above would be suitable for a telly as power sockets are located here for such a purpose (a TV aerial is fitted, too).

### COMMENDABLE KITCHEN

The Benivan has a good kitchen on its nearside, beside the sliding door, although the aisle between the galley and the half-dinette is quite slim.

There's a two-burner gas hob and stainless-steel sink in a combination unit with glass lids to act as splashbacks when cooking or washing up. And, when the lids are closed, they give you lots of surface space for preparing food or for plugging a kettle or coffee maker into the three-pin socket on the left. An extra flip-up extension on the right (as you face the galley to work) adds yet more usable surface when your meal-making is more adventurous.

Below the worktop is the most significant addition to the Benivan's spec for 2020 – a gas oven/grill, so your cooking options can include a wide-range of ready meals.

The kitchen also has a cutlery drawer (under the sink) and a cupboard for pots, pans or non-perishable food below that. One slightly oddball feature, though, is the tall, slim shelved cupboard on the right-hand side. Its shape makes it difficult to picture what you'd store in there. Under the oven is another cupboard, which you could use for crockery or other kitchen equipment.

Above the hob is an eye-level cupboard with a top-hinged door and shallow shelf. Then, alongside the galley, under the wardrobe, is an 85-litre three-way fridge.

It's a modest size for a modern motorhome and it should be adequate for most couples on tour, thanks to its



This is the reason you'll buy a Benivan – the spacious and inviting rear lounge with room to put your feet up

removable freezer section.

On the outward-facing corner of the kitchen unit is a vertical strip light. With the sliding door shut, it adds ambiance to the living space, while, with the door open, it could add illumination to a drive-away awning (in addition to the awning light above) or for sitting outside in the summer to eat or relax with a drink.

### COMPACT CLEANING

The washroom, sited opposite the kitchen, will be familiar to any owner of an Auto-Trail van conversion (V-Line or Tribute). Like other aspects of this Benimar, the design is not only shared with these models, but also the Chausson and Roller Team campervans that are built in the Grimsby factory, too.

This compact space comprises of a Thetford toilet with a swivel bowl, a

shower curtain covering the door side of the cubicle, shower fittings (separate to the basin's tap), a tip-up washbasin and, above that, a mirror-fronted cupboard for storing your toiletries.

The toilet has sufficient space around it to sit comfortably and the two LED lights make it a bright space, but the shower control is rather awkwardly positioned and there's no opening window in here, just a small fixed fixed roof vent. You'll also need to add some straps to keep your potions in place, as the washroom cupboard shelves only have very small retaining lips.

### THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

Sleeping in the Benivan is at the back; the front lounge does not make into a bed. The sofas work as single beds if you can fit into a bed that's 1.79m long

by 69cm wide. That's a tad short, so most owners will turn the seats into a double bed and sleep across the 'van.

To do this, you pull out a slatted frame from under each settee to join in the middle. Put the backrests of the sofas into the gap and you've got a bed that's 1.85m by 1.79m. That's a reasonable size, but anyone over 6ft tall will struggle for space (not helped by the fixed top section of the backrests). Also, sleeping transversely means climbing over your partner to get to the loo.

There's space under the nearside sofa for your bedding, while beneath the opposite seat are the leisure battery and Truma gas/mains heating and hot water system.

You'll also find three overhead lockers on each side of the 'van – good for storing clothes and other lightweight items that won't damage anything if they fall out when you ►



The rear seats convert quickly into a double bed and you'll probably sleep across the 'van unless you're not very tall

## THE **MMM** VERDICT

At £52,495, the Benivan 122 is a mid-priced competitor in this large van conversion sector and its specification is much more comprehensive than many rivals. What you can't do is personalise the spec or colour scheme (inside or out). Its combination of rear lounge and extra travel seats is a proven recipe, although the front lounge here needs more legroom.

open the doors after travelling. Between the kitchen unit and the bedroom, there's a small wardrobe for shirts, skirts and trousers.

## OUTSIDE ADVANTAGES

Throughout the Benivan 122 impressed with its spec – and that continues outside. There's a 100W solar panel on the roof, which is good for keeping your leisure battery topped up when you're off grid.

An electric step at the sliding door is provided for easy access. And the 25-litre underslung gas tank saves internal space that you'd normally need for a gas cylinder or two. The water tanks are underslung, too,

which isn't ideal for winter camping, but allows more internal storage.

Finally, you'll note the stylish 16in alloy wheels. The fact that the Benivan comes only in white will be a disappointment to those seeking a more colourful external appearance for their camper. **MMM**

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## FACTS AND FIGURES



### PRICE

**From:** £52,495

**As tested:** £52,495



### BASICS

**Berths:** 2

**Travel seats:** 4

**Warranty:** Two years on base vehicle and conversion

**Type approval:** European Whole Vehicle



### DIMENSIONS

**Length:** 6.36m (20ft 10½in)

**Width:** 2.05m (6ft 8½in)

**Height:** 2.53m (8ft 3½in)

**Gross vehicle weight:** 3,500kg

**Payload:** 515kg



### BASE VEHICLE

**Type:** Fiat Ducato extra-long L4H2 panel van

**Engine:** 2.3-litre, Euro 6d, 160bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual gearbox



### KITCHEN

**Cooker:** Two-burner hob, separate oven/grill

**Fridge:** Dometic 85-litre three-way with removable freezer compartment



### BEDS

**Rear double:** 1.85m x 1.79m (6ft 1in x 5ft 10½in)

**Alternative singles:** 1.79m x 0.69m (5ft 10½in x 2ft 3in)



### ESSENTIALS

**Fresh water:** 70 litres (underslung)

**Waste water:** 70 litres (underslung)

**Space/water heating:** Truma Combi 4E gas/230V blown-air

**Leisure battery:** 72Ah

**Gas:** 25-litre underslung LPG tank

## OPTIONS

**Fitted to test vehicle:** None

**Other options available:** Nine-speed automatic gearbox (£3,000)

## THE ALTERNATIVES

Auto-Trail V-Line 636 SE	<b>£53,140</b>
Chausson V697 33 Line	<b>£46,605</b>
Dreamer Living Van	<b>£52,145</b>
Swift Select 184	<b>£49,100</b>

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