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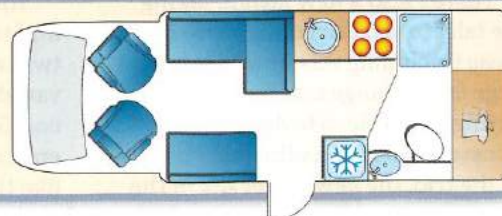


Peter Vaughan

The 2018 Tessoro has its habitation doors on the UK side – and here's an interesting new end washroom layout, too

BENIMAR TESSORO 483

Price from: £53,995
Berths: 4 **Travel seats:** 4
Base vehicle: Ford Transit
Length: 6.70m
Gross weight: 3,500kg





It's a big lounge with a big table. If only the tabletop folded in half, then moving around this space would be easier

Benimar's Tessoro range arrived in the UK just a year ago, offering alternative layouts to its (slightly dearer) sister, Mileo. There were two key differences, though – a Ford Transit, rather than Fiat Ducato cab, and a habitation door on the continental side.

For 2018, the Transit base gets even more spec – with automatic lights and wipers and a (very effective) quick-defrosting windscreen added to the tally – but the big news is that the entrance door is now on the UK nearside (something rarely seen on an imported 'van).

There's also a new layout, taking the tally to six. Unusually, three of those (including this new 483) have a large front lounge and no fixed bed, relying on an electric drop-down transverse double as the main berths. Of the trio, the newcomer sits in the

middle size-wise and is the first to major on bathroom facilities.

IN TRANSIT

There's no doubt that at least part of the appeal of the Tessoro remains its Ford chassis – especially now that an automatic is available. While the Fiat is basically over a decade old now, and showing its age, the Transit is a much fresher design. That strikes you as soon as you sit in the cab, where the ergonomics (apart from the position of the heater controls towards the passenger's side) are spot on.

You sit lower, too, with a reach and rake adjustable steering wheel, twin armrests, tilting squab and variable lumbar support ensuring a comfortable drive for all. The whole environment feels much less truck-like than the Ducato's and there's a

smart new addition this season with Benimar fitting an Xzent touchscreen DAB radio with sat-nav and pin-sharp reversing camera built in. It's another example of sole importer, Marquis, providing an everything-included specification (the only options are an alternative – faux leather – upholstery, a towbar and the auto gearbox, although an awning will be a popular dealer-fit accessory).

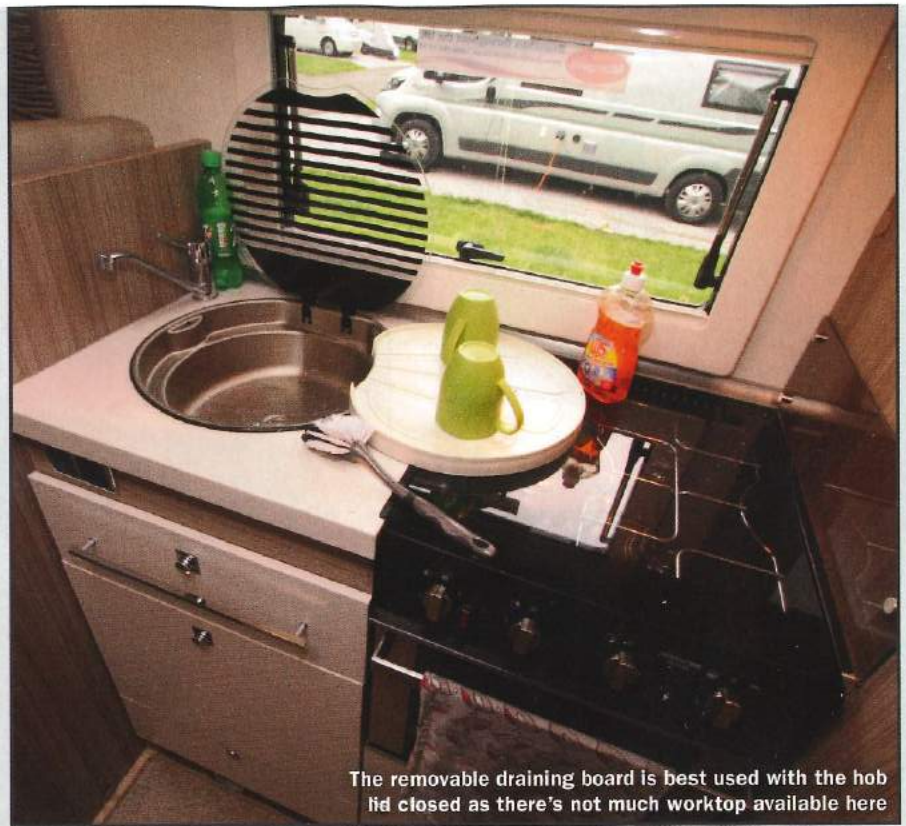
Even the 170-horsepower engine (that's PS, so it's actually 168bhp) is standard, giving the Tessoro (especially such a compact example) really gutsy performance. Acceleration from rest is surprisingly quick and steep ascents in the Forest of Bowland were dispatched remarkably effortlessly. That's less of a shock when you look at the all-important torque output figure – its 405Nm maximum beats the top-of-the-range



The Ford cab is more modern and more car-like than the ubiquitous Fiat Ducato



The XXL fridge with microwave above are part of the everything-included spec



The removable draining board is best used with the hob lid closed as there's not much worktop available here

SECOND OPINION

"One drive of the latest Euro VI Transit is enough to make you wish more coachbuilds were based on it"

RACHEL STOTHERT DEPUTY EDITOR

Fiat 180 Multijet unit. That this new Ford unit (replacing the much less refined 2.2) does so from just two litres is a sign of the times, as is the need to top up the AdBlue tank via a filler placed under the diesel flap.

The Tessoro felt surefooted, too, thanks to its motorhome-spec wide rear track and was fairly rattle-free.

The silver metallic cab is standard, as are ESP, traction control, Hill Assist, alloy wheels, air-con, cruise control and remote central locking (though you need to secure the habitation door separately, with a key).

PIGGY IN THE MIDDLE

While the Tessoro 486 is slightly longer and has a much more expansive galley, as well as internal access to its garage, and the 481 loses the large external locker space

altogether to squeeze in under 6m overall, the new 483 boasts by far the best washroom of the range. It's also the only one to offer three doors into the rear garage.

Chausson was first to offer this type of floorplan, with a huge rear locker partially underneath an equally humungous wardrobe (rather than, more usually, beneath a fixed bed) and the concept works well.

Here, the garage includes spare wheel storage, 12V and 230V sockets and a heater duct, but no lighting. Headroom is 1.31m with the option to increase this to full floor-to-ceiling storage, say, for skis, in a small zone on the offside. But, while the nearside door can be clipped open and the rear hatch is supported by gas struts, the offside door just flaps in the breeze.

When considering what you'll load in here it's good to see that there's

almost 500kg of payload and that Benimar includes 50 litres of water in its calculations. All Tessoros come on a licence-friendly 3.5-tonne chassis.

You'll note, too, the 99% wood-free body construction with XPS insulation (53mm in the floor and roof), the generous water tank capacities (and easy-to-use waste drain), plus the external barbecue point and new, neater styling at the rear.

RADIO GAGA

Another key selling point of this Tessoro will be its generous lounge area. With a long L-settee on the offside (incorporating travel seats for two), a two-person sofa on the nearside and twin swivel cab chairs, there's room for at least six folk to gather around the vast central table. At 910mm square this is one of the >

LIKED



- Large garage with three loading doors
- Ford cab and road manners

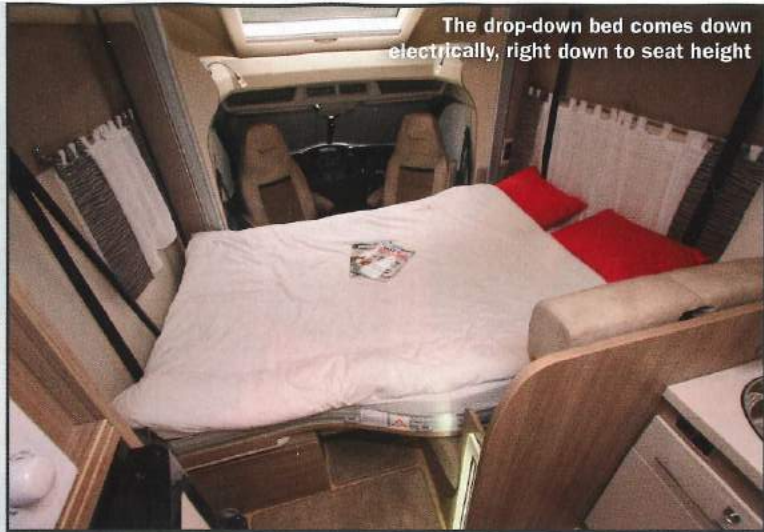
DISLIKED



- Overly large table
- Noisy fan for charging unit

WANTED

- Dimmable lighting
- Radio that stays on for longer



largest motorhome tables you're likely to come across, so it does rather dominate. Yes, it slides along both axis (and is height-adjustable, too), but if only it could fold in half it would be less obtrusive.

There's much to like here, though, including the feeling of space, enhanced by the lack of top lockers, as usually affixed to the base of the drop-down bed, and the selection of scatter and bolster cushions. The new cab reading lights (the only directionally adjustable lamps) are a great addition, especially as they incorporate hidden USB sockets, while the overcab sunroof lets in plenty of daylight.

Artificial lighting is, perhaps, too generous because, with it all switched on, you need to don your Raybans. If only some of it was dimmable.

More frustrating, though, is the constant hum from the charging

unit under the sofa and the fact that the radio switches itself off just 10 minutes after you turn the ignition key and park up (especially annoying as there are speakers in the ceiling over the kitchen).

Perhaps you'll watch morning telly instead of tuning in to Ken Bruce. A TV aerial is now standard, although a screen is one of the few items not included. However, the height-adjustable bracket adjacent to the doorway ensures no more cricked necks, whether you're watching from the lounge or the bed.

LIGHTS OUT, NEARLY

As a light sleeper, I turned off the charger overnight. What I couldn't switch off were all the lights from the microwave, iNet box (another spec addition for 2018, so you can fiddle

with your Combi heater from your phone), control panel, etc.

Nevertheless, I had a very good night's sleep in a superbly comfortable drop-down bed, which glides down to whatever height you like at the twist of a key. If you want to maintain a lounge, or use the second bed below, then a ladder is available but, alternatively, the bed can be powered all the way down to seat height – just 750mm off the floor. That makes access easy, albeit with the issues of climbing over your partner that apply to almost any transverse bed.

Pleasingly, the electric bed is shaped so as not to interrupt the use of the entrance door (or the kitchen) and the loo is just a couple of steps away (and up a step). I was relieved to be presented with a winding handle to use should the electrics fail; the Tessoro blew a fuse when being



Scatter and bolster cushions not only add to your comfort when lounging, but they brighten up the interior

checked before handover but the bed behaved itself on test.

When the 483 really scores over rivals is as a four-berth. The omission of cupboards below the drop-down bed not only allows it to come down lower in two-berth mode but frees up more headroom for family sleeping below when you're mob-handed. And the lower bed, for once, is a good one – very big and largely flat. Its make-up is not too complicated, either, involving two infill cushions (easily stored in the wardrobe) and lowering the table electrically, although the small flap that completes the bed base between the two opposing seats felt rather flimsy.

We didn't need to use the powerful Combi 6 gas/mains heater in the mild (but very wet) conditions of this test, but, while all areas of the 'van (including the cab) are well served

with outlets, I suspect that the output will be less effective in the washroom. Not only is this a fair distance from the heater itself but the ducting travels below the floor to get to the rear of the motorhome.

MICROWAVE MEALS

I suspect that the typical Tessoro 483 buyer will stock up with M&S ready meals in that giant (149-litre) fridge/freezer and be happy to microwave their dinner in the Nevir nuker above.

Why the stereotype? Simply because if you enjoy more creative cooking, then the 486 layout will be more your bag. Here, the galley is compromised by all the other stuff that the Spanish maker has shoehorned into bodywork measuring rather less than 7m overall. The main galley unit measures just a

metre across and any worktop all but disappears with the glass lids of hob and sink raised.

That's not to say there's a paucity of kit, though. In fact, along with the XL-sized cooler (with so-much-more-convenient automatic energy selection) and the microwave, you get a combined oven/grill and a hob with a mains hotplate. There are only two gas rings, though an extractor hood above is another plus. As is the removable drainer for the sink, although it's best to close the cooker lid to make space to use it.

Bearing in mind the massive fridge, there's a decent amount of kitchen storage, including a large soft-closing cutlery drawer and a second, deeper drawer that's ideal for pots and pans, etc, below.

There's also a large rooflight above, so the galley area is never gloomy. ►



The shower is excellent but we'd like a hanging rail here for wet clothes...



...on the other hand, you can carry a whole shop's stock of dry clothes

'VAN FOR THE VAIN?

If you're not comfortable with your own physique, then maybe this isn't the 'van for you as, when you open the bathroom door, two large mirror-fronted wardrobe doors greet you with your own reflection. And there's another tall mirror behind the basin.

Behind those wardrobe doors is a hanging rail measuring 1.61m long! That's enough space for you and your missus to pack a different outfit for every occasion for weeks on end, especially as there's acres of shelf space, too. The only thing lacking is the depth for ballgowns.

When you've decided what to wear, there's plenty of room to get changed, while there's also no shortage of space to use the basin and swivel cassette loo (the latest type, of course).

The shower is a separate cubicle, naturally, and is hard to fault. Twin diagonally opposed drain holes, a good powerful jet of water, a roof vent to let steam escape and doors that latch together magnetically tick all the boxes. Maybe a hanging rail for wet clothes would be icing on the cake, especially as the position of the TV bracket means there's nowhere to hang coats by the door. **MMMM**

THE **MMMM** VERDICT

The latest Tessoro is now an even better all-rounder with added spec and its habitation door on the UK side, while the Ford cab gives it tonnes more driver appeal than Fiat-based rivals. The new 483 layout adds a great bathroom, big garage and large lounge at the expense of galley space, and it works surprisingly well as both a two and four-berth.



THE ALTERNATIVES

- Bürstner Ixeo TL 680 G: £57,995
- Chausson 640 Welcome: £50,760
- Swift Bessacarr 524: £58,180

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FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE
 From: £53,995
 As tested: £53,995

BASICS
 Berths: 4
 Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Base vehicle three years/60,000 miles, conversion two years, water ingress five years

Type approval: European Whole Vehicle

DIMENSIONS
 Length: 6.70m (22ft 0in)
 Width: 2.30m (7ft 6½in)

Height: 2.89m (9ft 6in)
 Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg
 Payload: 495kg
 (including 50 litres fresh water)

BASE VEHICLE
 Type: Ford Transit
 Engine: 2-litre, Euro VI,
 168bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual

KITCHEN
 Cooker: Thetford Triplex cooker with combined oven and grill, two gas burners, mains hotplate
 Fridge: Thetford 149-litre, two-door, fridge/freezer with automatic energy selection

BEDS
 Low-level bed: 2.14m x 1.47m/1.20m (7ft 0in x 4ft 10in/3ft 11in)
 Drop-down bed: 1.89m x 1.40m/1.20m (6ft 2½in x 4ft 7in/3ft 11in)

ESSENTIALS
 Fresh water: 120 litres (inboard)
 Waste water: 105 litres (underfloor)
 Space/water heating: Truma Combi 6, gas/mains, blown-air
 Leisure battery: 105Ah
 Gas: 2 x 6kg

OPTIONS
 Options fitted: None
 Options available (not fitted to test vehicle): Monaco faux leather upholstery (£745), towbar (£1,250), automatic gearbox (£1,750)

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