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EXCLUSIVE

BENIMAR'S NEW BUDGET PRIMERO

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EXCLUSIVE



Anglo-inspired Iberian



Dave Hurrell

This six-metre low-profile might appear to be British, but it's actually manufactured in Spain

BENIMAR PRIMERO 283

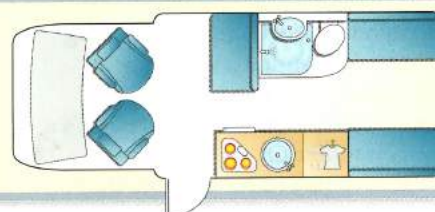
Price from: £45,995

Berths: 2+1 **Travel seats:** 4

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato

Length: 5.99m

Gross weight: 3,500kg





The neutral motorhome décor is well illuminated by the big overcab sunroof

Coming in at a smidge under the magic six-metre mark, this new Benimar Primero 283 looks every centimetre the typical continental low-profile from the outside. But one important feature starts the story of a surprisingly non-continental interior. And that feature is the habitation door, which is on the UK nearside.

Step aboard and the first view of the front end appears typically European, as swivelling cab seats and a twin rear travel seat (half-dinette style) are the main components of a set-up found in the majority of imported motorhomes, and many British ones, too. Usually, the dining table (wall-mounted) lives here as well, completing the familiar Euro lounge. Here, there is a table, but it's a small circular one.

Then, as you move towards the rear

of the 'van things become increasingly British in design. The kitchen is well equipped and, in the rear, a cosy twin-sofa lounge finishes off the layout in much the same way as many a compact homegrown motorhome. And it's here that the main dining table resides, thus solving the mystery of why the table up front is best suited for drinks and snacks.

So, why does this Spanish motorhome feature a floorplan that few continental converters offer? The answer lies with one of Europe's largest leisure product concerns, Trigano. Both Marquis (which has Benimar's exclusive franchise in the UK) and Benimar are part of the Trigano Group, so the former is able to influence the design of the motorhomes it imports. Essentially, that influence shows itself in the UK-handing of the body and the layouts.

VALUE RANGE

The Primero is new to Benimar for the coming season and aimed at the value end of the market. Significantly cheaper than the existing Mileo range, it should compete directly with similar models from the likes of Bailey (Advance), Elddis (Autoquest and Accordo), Lunar (Cassini) and Swift (Escape) as well as budget-priced imports from the likes of Chausson, Rimor and Roller Team.

A motorhoming newbie once exclaimed to me, "but they're all Fiats!" That's understandable from someone new to the game, but unsurprising to the more experienced *MMM* reader, as it's the industry's favourite base vehicle. Of course, that same Fiat Ducato chassis lurks beneath the 283's outerwear.

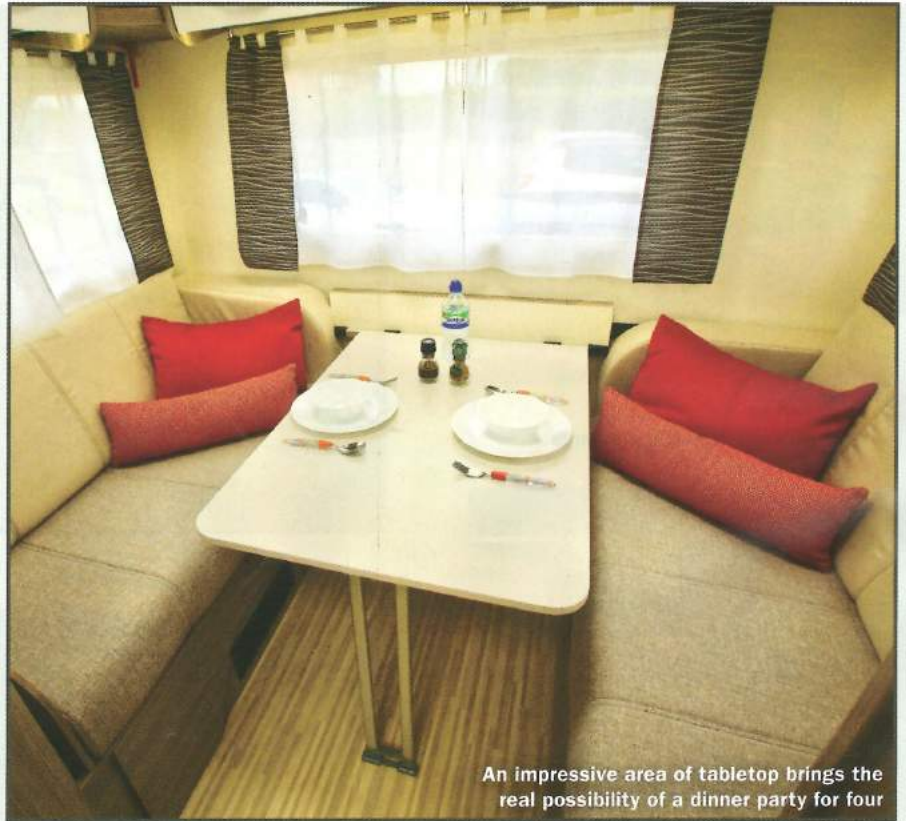
In fact, the Primero is underpinned by Fiat's lower Camper chassis, so the



With its home in the lounge, the dining table is really easy to get at



Part continental but with British influence, the kitchen does a good job



An impressive area of tabletop brings the real possibility of a dinner party for four

SECOND OPINION

"At these prices, the Primero is set to continue Benimar's remarkable growth in the UK market"

PETER VAUGHAN ROAD TEST EDITOR

rear axle has a wider track than the bog-standard Ducato item.

Meanwhile, up front, it's the 130bhp engine that provides motivation. And this is the only engine option, although Fiat's Comfort-Matic robotised gearbox is available (a £2,100 option). But this 2.3-litre Multijet diesel engine is more than capable, though, of pushing the 'van along at all legal road speeds and in a relaxed fashion.

The good news continues, too, as, although there are deliberately few optional extras (in typical Marquis fashion), the 283 comes equipped with most of the items owners might choose from a longer list. The driving department includes a DAB radio, air-con, cruise control and the essential passenger airbag as standard. Another bonus is the addition of Traction+ to the ASR system, which should make it

easier to get the 'van off a muddy pitch and keep going.

SEATS 4, BEDS 1

With cab seats swivelled, the front seating area has an excellent feeling of light and space. The former is thanks to the large sunroof above the cab, the latter is most likely due, in part, to the lack of a full-sized dining table. The overcab also includes some useful shelving, suitable for stowing loose items on site, and is home to reading lamps that serve each cab seat.

Décor is in the usual neutral colours found in most modern motorhomes. However, the most noticeable feature is the fact that the cab seats are not retrimmed – they retain the original Fiat upholstery.

This is one of the first indicators of money being saved. The other is

that cab blackout is provided by quite modest curtains, where most 'vans would have stick-on screens or even fitted blinds. But these economies bothered me not as, in brown and cream, Fiat's upholstery blends well with the rest of the interior and the seats are still very comfortable. The curtains may be basic, but they are quick and easy to close and open.

The circular table is mounted on a cranked, wall-mounted leg and is big enough for coffees and a snack.

And the dinette also makes into a single bed, with the driver's seat positioned facing towards the centre of the cab, a bridging section slid out from beneath the rear bench and the addition of an infill cushion completing the berth. Maximum length is achieved by removing the rear seat's backrest but, even then, this bed is only 5ft 1in long. And ►

LIKED



- Kitchen kit and storage
- Rear lounge converts into large storage area

DISLIKED



- The sofa's folding mechanism
- Shape and format of the rear bed cushions

WANTED

- Free-standing table
- Slatted base for offside sofa



Flawed in some ways, but the lounge double is long and acceptably wide



The compact table up front is ideal for coffees or G&Ts

owing to the bumpy nature of the cab seat base (where the sleeper's feet rest), it is really best considered to be an occasional berth, perhaps for a grandchild.

SMALL 'N' COSY

A comfy sofa per resident and the possibility of some quality feet-up time continue to make the rear lounge design especially attractive to motorhoming couples. The lounge here is described – in best estate agent talk – as cosy, so the short sofas are not long enough to allow stretched out lounging or provide alternative single beds to the transverse double.

However, with the heating on and a dark and chilly night outside, this space is indeed likely to be genuinely cosy – especially as the adjacent wardrobe wall is furnished with

sockets for a TV.

Mealtimes should be a pleasure, too, as the table is easy to hang on a rail screwed to the rear wall, although a free-standing unit would be more versatile. It's easy to get at, as the table's home is a slot at the forward end of the offside sofa.

Fancy a bit of a banquet for four? You're in luck as there's an impressive tabletop acreage available, so accepting all the paraphernalia of an ambitious meal should be no problem. As a lounge/diner, I found little to criticise here and much to like.

The beds made from twin sofas are often some of the easiest to construct, using a simple system that sees sofa bases slide together and backrests dropped in behind to complete. The same is true here, but with minor differences. The nearside seat base is equipped with sprung slats, as you

might expect, but the offside slides out to reveal a less comfy solid base. And there is just one backrest used to help make the bed, the other space being filled by the supplied pair of soft armrests.

In addition, the backrests are angled (in order to make sitting in the lounge more comfortable). But angled backrests do not make for flat beds, so you will need to place the backrest at the foot end of the bed.

The armrests also limit the width of the bed as they sit tucked in against the rear wall on each side.

Personally, I'd rather see a simpler method of creating the bed, with square backrests that drop in to make a flat mattress. Junking the armrests would allow a wider bed, too. All that said, the bed is plenty long enough and wide enough to accommodate all but the largest of frame.



The Primero is the latest addition to the UK Benimar line-up, adding low-cost compact coachbuilds to the portfolio

GETTING A ROASTING

So, a banquet, you say, but is the kitchen up to the task? Well, as you might expect, Marquis' influence at Benimar's Peníscola factory extends to the kitchen and, although it's not quite up to the best of motorhome galleys (or as well equipped as in a more expensive Mileo), there is plenty of kit available to whip up a comprehensive dinner party menu.

As is often the case, work surface is in short supply, although there's a useful and strong panel that lifts up at the forward end of the unit.

The three-burner hob is partnered with a circular sink that's a good size, and, while it lacks a fixed drainer, I found a removable unit in one of the kitchen cupboards.

There are good levels of storage features, too, with a stack of drawers below the adjacent wardrobe and a

roomy cutlery/utensils drawer.

The oven/grill is Thetford's Duplex unit – commendably compact and yet still big enough to tackle most roasting and baking jobs. It's mounted a little low, but rather than the dangerously high situation of some ovens when fitted above domestic-style fridge/freezers.

The fridge itself is a modest unit and with less capacity than you might expect in a new model. Storage provision is finished off well with two large top lockers, one of which is shelved. There's no extractor fan, but the kitchen's opening window and the Mini Heki rooflight above should provide steam and smell clearance.

PLASTIC PALACE

An easy-sliding tambour door gives access to the washroom and is a great

arrangement because it doesn't swing into the aisle and so avoids getting in the cook's way.

Inside, the majority of the little room is in easy-to-clean plastic.

Large mirrors, good lighting, a roof vent, an opening window and nice accessories partner the practical design with semi-integral shower.

Storage is limited, but certainly adequate, with a high-level cupboard and a useful cubby above the toilet.

The latest-model Thetford loo is a stylish beast, and here it's mounted on a plinth that may make it a bit high for those who are short in the leg.

The shower features two drains and a semi-circular rigid screen that encloses a good area, which includes the washbasin, while the tap becomes a shower neat thanks to a pull-out hose fitting.

All-in-all, it is a decent and >



A compact and well-planned washroom, just check the loo isn't too high for you



External hatches give access to storage space in the lounge

practical washroom installed in a small space.

LOCKER SPACE

Coachbuilt motorhomes with rear lounge layouts are not known for their storage capacity, so the 283 seeks to remedy this with a system that converts two-thirds of the rear space into a large storage area.

This storage area is served by a pair of external access hatches, one in the rear panel and one in the nearside flank. In addition, the nearside sofa base also lifts and folds flat against the wall, thus helping to create a larger loadspace.

However, I did find the mechanism for folding the base and holding it against the wall rather awkward.

At one point I held the folding sofa base up by using my head while leaning in to reach and release the corner stays mounted at either end of the frame. I'm sure with practice it will be easier but care is needed on your first attempts.

I also found the strap that's provided to hold the base up against the wall could be better. However, all that said, it is still a clever idea. **MMM**

THE VERDICT

Compared with Benimar's more expensive Mileo, the new Primero range is aimed at the budget end of the market. Although the specification is less comprehensive, shortcomings are few and shouldn't compromise a comfortable motorhoming life. The 283 layout (also now available as a Mileo) is spacious and appealing but the rear storage area concept needs more work.



THE ALTERNATIVES

Elddis Accordo 135 £42,999
Swift Escape Compact C402 £47,350

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INSURANCE

0800 980 7023
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Quote details can be found on page 220



FACTS AND FIGURES



PRICE

From: £45,995
As tested: £45,995



BASICS

Berths: 2+1
Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Two years base vehicle, two years conversion, five years water ingress
Type approval: European Whole Vehicle



DIMENSIONS

Length: 5.99m (19ft 8in)
Width: 2.30m (7ft 6½in)

Height: 2.89m (9ft 6in)
Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg
Payload: 870kg



BASE VEHICLE

Type: Fiat Ducato Camper chassis-cab

Engine: 2.3-litre, Euro VI, 130bhp, six-speed manual, front-wheel drive



KITCHEN

Cooker: Three-burner hob, Thetford Duplex oven/grill

Fridge: Thetford 81-litre three-way, manual energy controls



BEDS

Front single: 1.50m x 0.66m (5ft 1in x 2ft 2in)

Rear double: 2.20m x 1.23m (7ft 3in x 4ft 0in)



ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 120 litres (inboard)

Waste water: 105 litres (underslung)

Space/water heating: Truma Combi 4kW, gas/mains, blown-air

Leisure battery: 90Ah

Gas: 2 x 7kg

OPTIONS

Fitted new: None

Options available: Comfort-Matic semi-automatic gearbox (£2,100)

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