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TESTED

All-new compact McLouis Fusion 331
Sunlight's latest budget campervan
Owner's report: La Strada camper

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£4.75
FEBRUARY 2019



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Born again Italian



Dave Hurrell

From the land of *la dolce vita*, McLouis has returned, offering a range of five models, of which this is the smallest

MCLOUIS FUSION 331

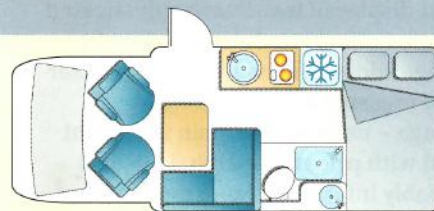
Price from: £49,995

Berths: 4 Travel seats: 4

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato

Length: 5.99m

Gross weight: 3,650kg





The layout is pretty standard, except for the more unusual drop-down single bed above the lounge

Bigger, better and back in the UK! The McLouis brochure shouts the return of – it claims – a much improved range of motorhomes. This Italian brand stopped coming to our shores almost a decade ago – probably due to the challenges of the banking crisis and the consequent fall in demand, along with less competitive exchange rates. Furthermore, the then importer, Don Amott, moved away from its staple of budget-priced motorhomes from Italy.

Back then McLouis was best known for entry-level coachbuilds that displayed less-than-sophisticated construction. For 2019, though, the range adopts the new Fusion moniker and presents a much-changed image – no longer bargain basement and with prices to match. I am also reliably informed that these 'vans are produced in a new factory to boot.

There are five models in the range and, unsurprisingly, all feature fixed beds. There are two island bed models, one twin single bed layout and two transverse double bed designs. Lengths range from six metres to just under seven-and-a-half.

The 331 comes in at 5.99m, making it the baby. Its internal layout is popular at this length, so there's choice in the marketplace – something that should see you doing research before you open your wallet. A half-dinette-based front lounge heads up the central washroom and kitchen with a transverse double bed above a garage in the far rear. This is a popular and classic continental arrangement.

However, the 331 plays host to something extra: above the lounge, which converts into a transverse single bed, there's also a second single

in the form of an electrically-operated drop-down bed. So, four berths, kitchen, washroom and garage, and all in a low-profile measuring less than six metres long. Sounds great – as long as all the elements can work in harmony in such a compact space!

PUREBRED PROFILE

As much as the layout is unsurprising, so is the base vehicle: yes, it's Fiat's doughty Ducato that provides motive power, so the 331 is an all-Italian product. And, mounted on the lower-stance Camper chassis, there's no need for an external step to ease you through the UK offside habitation door. And there's only one item on the options list and that's an automatic gearbox, at £2,000.

The engine is the 130bhp version and proved to be more than up to the



Cushion joins notwithstanding, the lounge's single bed is far better than the majority of this type that *MMM* has tested



The rear bed access ladder is rather uncomfortable on bare feet



Tweaking the table's adjustment will provide enough space for four residents to sit and eat in comfort

SECOND OPINION

"McLouis was once a well-known brand here. Now it's back with predictable designs but plenty of spec"

PETER VAUGHAN ROAD TEST EDITOR

task of propelling the 'van at all legal UK road speeds, with plenty in reserve for continental motorway work.

Sitting in the cab, the view of the dashboard brought a smile to my face: not only is a passenger airbag standard – hurrah! – but so is cruise control, cab air-conditioning, Traction Plus and one of Fiat's more upmarket touchscreen entertainment devices.

The excellent level of appointments in the cab are mirrored by the kit fitted to the living area. And that story starts with an upmarket habitation door – window, waste bin and central locking are all fitted.

And, while we're on the subject, there's also a 120-watt solar panel on the roof and the underslung waste water tank is heated to keep frost at bay. Heating is by the popular Truma Combi and it's the more powerful 6kW model, running on both gas

and mains. This very good kit list is finished off with a National Caravan Council-approved leisure battery and a gas locker that can accommodate a pair of 13kg cylinders.

The chassis comes rated at 3,650kg maximum weight, which produces a big payload that's within striking distance of three quarters of a tonne.

However, if your licence is limited, downplating to 3,500kg is available free of charge.

LIGHTER LIFE

Interior styling is pretty much right up my street as light wood tones and cream locker fronts create an airy atmosphere. Upholstery is fashioned in cream faux leather, my liking for which is based on its ability to shrug off red wine, rather than its style!

It's a harmonious interior indeed,

that's made all the better by a superb lighting scheme. Direct and indirect illumination abounds and – oh joy of joys – there are no less than six ceiling-mounted fittings where many 'vans offer few, or none.

So, all's perfect then? Well, not quite. Akin to quite a few other models I've tried of late, there's a lack of in-cab reading lamps serving the swivelled front seats, making for about the only dark spot inside.

At first glance, the dining table appears to be too large for the space and too close to the forward-facing travel seat.

But, it is not and, unlike some, this table stands upon a telescopic single leg, which means it can be slid this way and that at the release of a clamp. Thus, it can be moved forwards and sideways, and adjusted to suit travel or lounging. It can be >

LIKED



- High spec as standard
- Well-designed washroom

DISLIKED



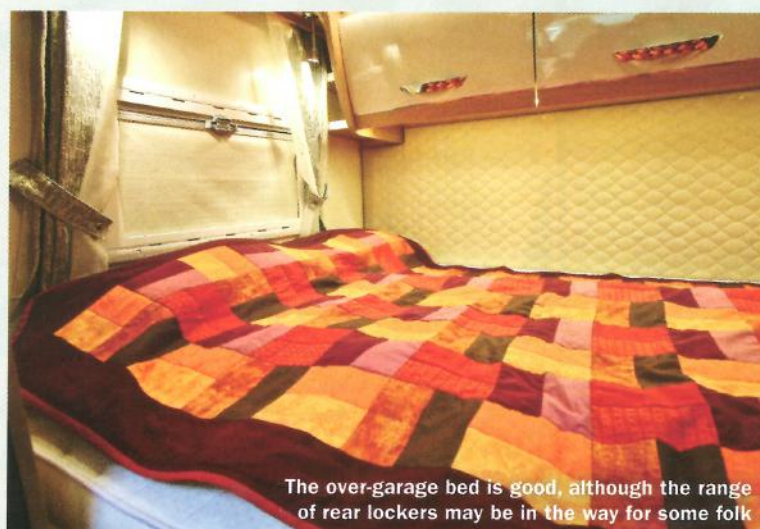
- Lounge bed partly blocked by low locker above
- Rear bed's ladder

WANTED

- Reading lights in cab
- A shelf serving the rear bed



Bijou it's true, but the kitchen is well equipped – even to the extent of having an extractor above the hob



The over-garage bed is good, although the range of rear lockers may be in the way for some folk

moved further away from the travel seat and it's reasonably easy for the top to accommodate four residents for dining in comfort. It's a pretty good compromise, with plenty of adjustment on offer.

BUNK ROOM

Creating two single beds from the lounge starts with the seating. The press of a foot-operated latch in the table base – plus a good push downwards – sees it descend to seat level. A couple of infills are then added – one with a rigid back that sits on supports adjacent to the habitation door – and a quite decent single bed is created – far better than the vast majority of dinette-based beds I've come across. It might still benefit from an overlay – maybe a memory foam device.

Deploying the drop-down bed is simplicity itself: a key is inserted into the switch mounted on the side of the base and turning one way or the other has the bed lowered and raised in a fuss-free and smooth operation.

Now the 'bunk room' is complete. However, one possible downside is the overhead locker that's attached to the drop-down bed looms rather low over the head of its downstairs counterpart.

Some people may find this makes for an uncomfortable position with their head under it and, if you sleep the other way around, your upper body needs to be accommodated by the narrower offside section. This leaves the usable length of this bed at around 1.55m, which is too short for many adults. However, in reality this is an occasional bed most likely for children's use only.

WHAT'S COOKING?

Time to get a pan on and, for me, that meant pasta and sauce. Simple and just the kind of thing I need after decent day's work, and comforting in the gloom of mid-November. Just one pan needed, but you may be pleased to know that this galley is capable of quite a bit more.

At first, all seems rather compact, but that's the nature of kitchens in small 'vans. Aside from the fact there is only a two-burner hob, the rest is OK. There's an oven/grill (small, and adequate and mounted safely low down), decent drawer storage, a big cupboard and even an extractor fan mounted overhead. The fridge offering 142 litres of chilled and frozen space defies expectations of something so small.

One thing that's often missing in these compact kitchens is work



It's a classic, compact fixed bed layout that you'll find in a number of continental brochures. The light-coloured upholstery and woodwork stops it seeming too confined

surface and it's the same story here, while canny motorhome cooks will know that they can utilise the table when serious catering activities are underway. The 331's cooking department is really pretty good given its compact dimensions.

BASICALLY BANG-ON

On opening the washroom door, it took just one look for me to say "yeah, that's pretty good." Delving further proved initial impressions were correct. Nothing fancy here, but storage above and below, a deep basin set into a thick countertop, excellent lighting and one of the latest-design loos at the right height for comfortable sitting.

A large mirror and opaque opening window, complete with blind and flyscreen, brings more good news.

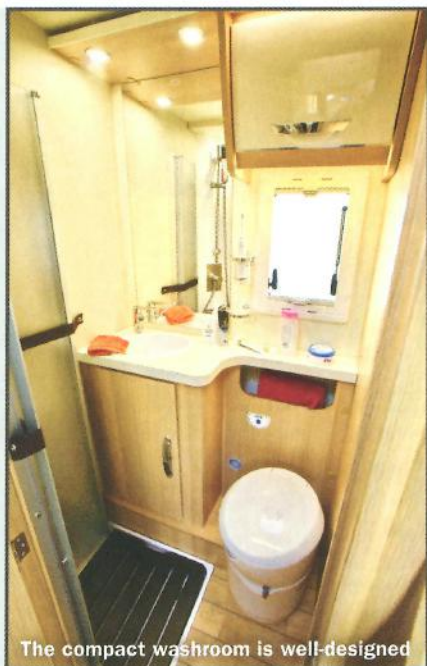
There is also adequate floor space to use the facilities. The shower is a semi-integrated device that has ablutioners standing in its tray while using the basin – albeit on a floor-levelling duckboard. When it's time for a shower, and with the duckboard removed, twin rigid screens make a cubicle, while the corner is home to the usual mixer/rail/shower head arrangement. This compartment may not be spacious enough for those of larger frame, but I found it fine.

Other compact washrooms I've tried have included wobbly plastic fittings, high-mounted toilets, nowhere to put anything down that's in use and, horror of horrors, the dreaded nylon curtain, which has a terrible tendency stick to your soapy body while showering! The lack of 'features' like this made me like this washroom even more.

UP THE APPLES AND PEARS

Bedtime in the rear double is a bit of a climb as it's set high to allow space for a garage below that's *de rigueur* with this design. McLouis does provide a metal ladder, which can live on the bed when not needed (or somewhere safer for travel). I found it rather awkward to use and far from foot-friendly. Also, once in place, its foot prevents the washroom door from opening fully. Not ideal but not a deal breaker – a shorter ladder with wide treads would be the solution. I'd make my own one in softwood, but it should be easy enough to get a local carpenter to do the same and at relatively modest cost.

Once you've clambered aboard, the bed area impresses, with space to sit up, good ventilation from a window and Mini Heki rooflight, plus the aforementioned excellent lighting. ➤



The compact washroom is well-designed



A proper slim garage with dual access

The bedroom could do with a shelf and the rearmost sleeper may feel hemmed in by the lockers that run across the back wall. Even so, it's a good example of the type and I slept soundly in this 'van.

Climbing upstairs to bed will always have its challenges, but one of the main reasons to buy this McLouis should be the garage that lurks below. And it is a real garage – with an offside access door that's just over a metre high and sufficient headroom inside for full-sized cycles, maybe even a very compact scooter. It is quite narrow, though, due to the fact that the gas locker, the wardrobe and the boiler sit here in a line.

Of course, there's plenty of space for other kit and McLouis has thoughtfully provided a second – smaller – door on the nearside, so all your camping kit will be easy to get at.

In a belt and braces approach, alloy mounts for a bike rack are pre-installed outside on the rear panel.

Back inside, the under-bed wardrobe can be accessed through its door and also from the top, as a section of the bed base rises on gas struts. Inside is a jacket-length drop with full-width rail and shelving. **MMMM**

THE **MMMM** VERDICT

An impressive first test of a 2019 McLouis on the brand's UK relaunch. This smallest model appears well-made and mostly well-designed. It has a level of equipment that adds value to a competitively priced motorhome. Niggles are few, although the low-lying locker that compromises the length of the downstairs single bed mars the 331 as a full four-berth.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Adria Compact Plus SP	£51,925
Carado T132	£45,999
Dethleffs Globebus T1	£55,990
Sunlight T60	£45,999

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Quote details can be found on page 186



FACTS AND FIGURES



PRICE

From: £49,995

As tested: £49,995



BASICS

Berths: 4

Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Three 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 8½in)

Height: 2.95m (9ft 8in)

Gross vehicle weight: 3,650kg (3,500kg and 4,400kg options)

Payload: 737kg



BASE VEHICLE

Type: Fiat Ducato Camper chassis-cab

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



KITCHEN

Cooker: Two-burner hob, combined oven/grill

Fridge: Thetford 142-litre, three-way, with automatic energy selection



BEDS

Lower front single: 1.95m x 0.88m (6ft 5in x 2ft 11in)

Upper front single: 1.90m x 0.80m (6ft 3in x 2ft 7½in)

Rear double: 2.13m x 1.37m (7ft 0in x 4ft 6in)



ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 115 litres (inboard)

Waste water: 100 litres (underslung)

Space/water heating: Truma Combi 6kW, blown-air, gas/mains

Leisure battery: 100Ah

Gas: 2 x 13kg

OPTIONS

Fitted new: None

Other options available: Comfort-Matic robotised gearbox (£2,000)

SEARCH

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