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PRIME MOVER

Nick Harding checks out a competitively-priced option from Spanish brand Benimar

If a brand new Benimar Mileo is a bit out of your budget then how about compromising on specification and taking a look at its lower-cost sibling, the Benimar Primero?

Models in the new-for-2019 Primero line-up – four coachbuilts that class themselves as compacts (they're just shy of 6m in length) – come with more affordable price tags and it's the 283 that steals the spotlight with its UK-friendly, rear lounge layout.

BUILD QUALITY

The bodywork is produced in an identical way to more expensive models on the same production line. It's GRP-clad, 99% wood-free and has a five-year warranty against water ingress.

Fittings like the opening sunroof over the cab suggest anything but a low-cost motorhome. Importantly the habitation door is on the UK nearside, something which is unusual for an imported motorhome. It

includes a window and a waste bin but only has a single locking point.

Standard steel wheels with plastic trims are indicators of this vehicle's 'budget' credentials, as is a front bumper in black (rather than being colour-coded). What you wouldn't expect to find in a lower-cost motorhome are flush-fit windows in the coachbuilt bodywork.

It's all on the camper variant of Fiat's Ducato chassis-cab with wider rear track and lower centre of gravity making it just that bit more suitable as a motorhome base.

DRIVING

There must have been a temptation to drop down to the 115bhp engine from Fiat, but Benimar has gone for the proven 130bhp unit with six-speed manual transmission as standard.

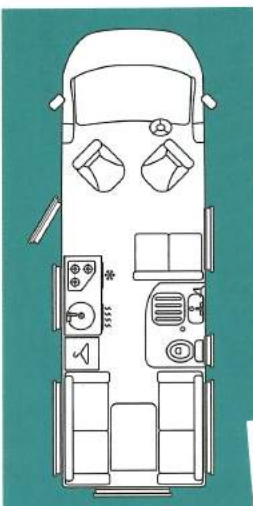
It's a regular Ducato cab, with cupholder central console, although there are a few notable upgrades. Air conditioning is standard, as are cruise control,

steering wheel controls and a touchscreen stereo offering AM/FM radio, CD player and MP3 connectivity, phone connection, trip computing and more. There's also a Traction+ setting for when things get a bit slippery underfoot... it might just save a few blushes.

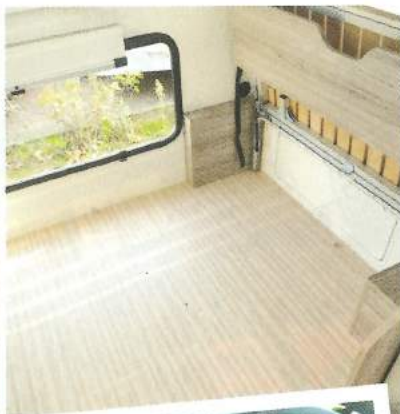
Steadier drivers than me should achieve economy the right side of 30mpg. The only option is a £2,100 premium for upgrading to the 150bhp engine and Comfort-matic automatic transmission.

DAYTIME

It might be made in Spain but the Primero 283's floorplan is fully conversant with the preferences of UK motorhomers. The rear lounge comprises two short, inward-facing settees surrounded by opening windows with cassette blinds and flyscreens, with a small rooflight overhead. There are seven overhead lockers around the lounge (plus open corner shelving), each with soft-close, curved



Clockwise from left: rear lounge; useful rear storage; cab; front dinette



72%

BUILD QUALITY

74%

DRIVING

68%

DAYTIME

56%

NIGHT-TIME

59%

KITCHEN

76%

WASHROOM

61%

DETAILS

67%

VERDICT



Price/as tested
£45,995/
£45,995 OTR



Base vehicle
Fiat Ducato



MRO
2,630kg
(51.77cwt)
MTPLM
3,500kg
(68.89cwt)
User payload
870kg (17.13cwt)



Overall length
19ft 8in (5.99m)
Overall width
7ft 7in (2.30m)
Overall height
9ft 6in (2.89m)
Max internal height
7ft 1in (2.15m)



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Fuel/tank/econ
Diesel/19.8 gals
(90 litres)/26-30mpg

Figures from manufacturer's literature.

*Quote is for the model as tested worth £45,995OTR. Based on 50-year-old banker living in Sheffield, who has no accidents, claims or convictions and keeps vehicle on drive, 3,000 miles per year, excess of £100 with 5 years NCD unprotected. Due to the value of the vehicle a tracker device must be fitted. Subject to underwriting. The Club's Motorhome Insurance is arranged for the Club by Devitt Insurance Services Limited, Insurance Brokers. Caravan and Motorhome Club is a trading name of The Caravan Club Limited. The Caravan Club Limited and Devitt Insurance Services Limited are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.



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doors and an easy, positive catch action.

An over-sized table – which is great at mealtimes but can be a bit cumbersome otherwise – clips to a rail on the back wall and slots in adjacent to the offside settee for travel. There's also on-site seating at the front, around a small circular table on a dog leg.

At the back there's an extra surprise – a large hatch across the rear wall means the area can be accessed for storage. For this, the nearside settee base folds up against the side wall – it's a slightly tricky operation, but an adjustable strap adds further assurance.

The lack of carpet overlays is an obvious cost-saving, while there's also a lighter woodgrain finish to the furniture compared to that of the more upmarket Mileos.

NIGHT-TIME

This is where things start to get a little bit tricky. Making the rear settees into a transverse 6ft 8in x 4ft 1in double bed involves pulling out the bases (the nearside is slatted, the offside – under which you'll find the Truma

Combi boiler, water pump and exterior-access gas locker – a solid ply). One of the settee backrests is needed in the subsequent re-arranging of cushions, but it's angled so you'll need to put the small bolster cushions underneath to create a flat sleeping surface.

If you're a night-time reader you'll be disappointed as the only illumination, apart from the LED strips, comes from the stemmed units over each swivelled cab chair.

There's actually a third sleeping berth in the lounge – a solid section slides out from the bench base – but it's strictly for small children.

KITCHEN

Cooking facilities comprise a three-ring hob and a combined oven and grill. There's a circular sink to the immediate left of the hob, while a flip-up extension to the right provides much needed worktop space (served by two mains sockets). Storage is pretty good – a deep, double-doored overhead locker and three decent capacity drawers (one including a cutlery tray). There are issues, however. The oven is set just off the floor – not the easiest to access – while you might feel a little short-changed by a fridge capacity of 81 litres, and there's no direct lighting in the kitchen, either.

WASHROOM

I couldn't find any difference between the Primero washroom and its equivalent in a Mileo. There's quite a step to negotiate to get up into the washroom after sliding back the tambour entrance door. Once inside there's not much sign of scrimping with lots of plastic mouldings,



Clockwise from above: kitchen is on the basic side; rear seating converts into a double bed at night, but it isn't the most straightforward of mattresses to make up; modern-looking washroom; coachbuilt body is almost wood-free



"There's not much sign of scrimping in the washroom. I couldn't find any difference to its equivalent in a Mileo"

screens for a part-circular shower, twin plugholes, and a mixer tap for the fixed basin (small, but deep) that extends for use as the showerhead. A Thetford swivel-bowl toilet is in the right place and allows plenty of legroom.

There's also a window, a couple of clothes hooks, deep mirrors, matching soap dispenser and cup, and a low-level towel rail – but the only storage is a shelved locker over the window.

DETAILS

Limited lighting apart, there's plenty in the Primero's plus column. Of course, there are signs where costs have been saved. Loose covers for the cab seats are an obvious one but the seats themselves come with double armrests and height adjustment. On a personal note, the

triangular nature of the three-ring hob isn't ideal – just try using three pans at the same time on such an arrangement.

VERDICT

A compact low-profile coachbuilt that puts value for money to the fore. And with a UK-friendly layout, I'd suggest this Spanish model is definitely worthy of consideration.

With thanks to

Vehicle supplied for testing by: **Marquis Leisure**, Orchard Works, Willersey, Near Broadway, Worcestershire WR12 7QF. Contact: marquisleisure.co.uk, 01386 853338.

