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Little treasure

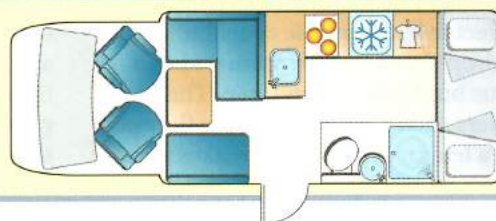
A sub-6.5m motorhome for families, the Tessoro 413 is an unusual bunk bed model that packs a lot in



Peter Vaughan

BENIMAR TESSORO 413

Price from: £51,995
Berths: 4 **Travel seats:** 4
Base vehicle: Ford Transit
Length: 6.41m
Gross weight: 3,500kg





A conventional continental-style lounge that's quite compact yet still adequate for four or five

Naming a newly designed motorhome must be the final, nail-biting decision that manufacturers make before a launch. Made-up word, established moniker, place name or just numbers and letters? Whatever the choice it wants to be memorable.

According to the web, 'tesoro' means treasure or darling in Spanish – just don't ask me why it's gained an extra 's' when Benimar added that fancy raised font on this 'van. It does seem appropriate here, though, as the 413 is a model specifically designed for touring with the little darlings. No longer does a family 'van have to have an ungainly overcab; this is one of a select few low-profile coachbuilts with a drop-down bed for mum and dad, plus bunks for the children. That it offers such a parent-pleasing floorplan in a length of just 6.41m makes it even more worthy of attention.

FORD FOR FOUR

Whether its Ma or Pa at the wheel, they'll be glad that Benimar chose the Ford Transit to underpin the Tessoro. From the moment you settle behind the reach-and-rake-adjustable steering wheel (itself with a nice small diameter and leather-wrapped), it feels more car-like and contemporary than the Fiat/Peugeot-based opposition. You sit lower for a start, behind a fascia that could have been removed from a Fiesta, then photocopied at 125%. Only the heater controls positioned towards the passenger is annoying (unless, perhaps, you're the passenger!).

As befits a product specified for the UK by importer, Marquis, this isn't just a *Bob the Builder*-spec Transit, either. On the outside, there's metallic silver paint, plus alloy wheels and I'm-faster-than-you '170 Horsepower' logos on each front wing.

Then, on the inside, there are height-adjustable seats with twin armrests and an Xzent DAB radio with touchscreen, Bluetooth, CD and MP3, sat-nav and the display for the reversing camera (although, annoyingly, the radio switches off after just 10 minutes when you park up).

And, you don't have to add any options packs to get cab air-con, a passenger airbag, cruise control, ESP and hill assist – they're all included in the £51,995 price tag. More surprisingly, so are automatic lights and wipers, while cornering lights are another standard feature – and a real boon in night driving.

We could criticise the slightly baggy fit of the cab seat backrest covers and the rattles (possibly from the slide-out pantry unit), but we think you'll be too impressed by the way the Tessoro drives to care very much. The wide-rear-track chassis keeps things



There's a shoe locker by the door with a useful surface for drinks above



The slide-out pantry unit is great for tinned and packet foods



Brit-pleasing features include the mains hotplate and built-in microwave

SECOND OPINION

"Bunks rule when motorhoming with children and this 'van has a microwave and huge fridge to extend the family appeal"

DANIEL ATTWOOD EDITOR

well planted on challenging roads, while the ride quality is better able to soak up the surface imperfections of our battered Tarmac than any rival Ducato/Boxer. Then, there's the smooth urge of the 2-litre engine. Maybe 130bhp is adequate but who wants 'adequate' when another 40 horses make driving much more relaxing? And, again, we're not talking extras here, but standard spec. In fact, the only factory options listed are a towbar and Ford's highly desirable automatic gearbox (a slick torque converter unit, not a clunky robotised manual). We'd definitely tick that box.

IT'S OK FOR THE UK

You'll have to talk to your Marquis branch if you want to add a satellite dish, awning or bike rack (mountings for the last are already in situ), but there's a roof-mounted solar panel, as

well as external shower and barbecue points. A Trackstar Leisure Category 6 tracking system is fitted, too, which can mean significant discounts from many insurers.

The body construction is 99% wood-free, with Grade 3 insulation and a Winter Pack that includes a heated waste water tank and external thermal windscreen cover.

The fresh tank (a generous 120 litres) is inboard for ultimate winter-proofing and the gas/electric Truma Combi boiler is the more potent 6kW version. But the most important feature for some might be the habitation door on the UK nearside (a rare find on an imported model) – although it's not linked to the Ford's remote central locking.

You'll be pleased to see upmarket framed windows for the habitation area and that the door requires no external step.

There are also doors on either side at the rear for access into the bunk/garage area. These are quite high off the ground – nearly a metre above terra firma on the offside and only fractionally less on the nearside – and inside the space below the bottom bunk is shallow (230mm), though still useful for levelling wedges, hose, mains lead, etc, and, perhaps, some small outdoor chairs.

The reason for the lack of depth here is revealed when you delve deeper. There are false floor panels across the full width of the 'van and under these you'll find three 'secret' compartments, one of which houses a full-sized (steel) spare wheel. You could hide valuables here, but for big items there's another solution.

As with many other bunk bed models, it's possible to turn the lower bed space into a garage. Hinged bed bases simply fold through 90 degrees >

LIKED



- High-spec Ford cab with 170bhp motor
- Great family layout in under 6.5m

DISLIKED

- Kitchen's top locker compromised by extractor ducting
- Some rattles while driving

WANTED



- Drop-down bed to come down lower
- Central locking on habitation door



The rear bunks have curtains, lighting and ventilation but no USBs

after removing the two-part mattress (which can then be stacked vertically inside) to create a space that's up to 1.09m high and 680mm/820mm wide (broader on the offside, where the loading door is also larger).

The garage is not accessible from the living area and does not interfere with the top bunk at all. If you want a three-berth with a garage it's a great solution, otherwise remember that you'll have to unpack when it's bedtime for occupant number four (probably your youngest).

HALF TIME

Unsurprisingly, the Tessoro's lounge adopts a half-dinette, so as to incorporate the necessary rear travel seats (here with separate, height-adjustable headrests).

In actual fact, this bench can be turned into a small L-shape on site,

but that seems rather pointless. The additional cushion is not well supported so it is not the most comfortable place to sit, although with both cab seats swivelling and a wide inward-facing settee on the nearside that really doesn't matter.

There's more than enough room to get five sat around the fixed table and, despite the lower floor aft of the cab, the height adjustment on the cab seats mean no one needs to be uncomfortable.

When folded in half the table is just right for drinks – if a tad high – and it unfurls to double in size yet doesn't become the floppy soup-spiller you might imagine. It's sturdier than most and can twist as well as slide in all directions. On the test 'van, however, the catch to lock it in place for travel had been damaged by one too many experiments of 'what does this do?'

Enhancing comfort on site,

there's a selection of Tango-esque scatter cushions and, temptingly, the passenger cab seat can rotate right round so that you can put your feet up on the adjacent sofa. I'd bag this spot to watch the telly (not included) on the neat, height-adjustable bracket by the door (assuming my daughter didn't get there first!). At night you could raise the TV to the top of its rail for viewing from the bed.

The overcab sunroof makes the front of the 413 appear very light, perhaps crucially, as this is quite a small lounge area, and there's plenty of artificial illumination, too. Flexible wand reading lights are fitted above the cab chairs and these include USB ports in their bases.

Another neat trick is the side seat's armrest, which provides a useful resting place for drinks, as well as hiding a four-bottle rack and shoe cupboard (for two pairs) below.



The table folds in half and there's plenty of light; the inward-facing section of L-settee is not the best seat

NOTHING MICRO HERE

The galley continues the theme of 'how did they squeeze all this into less than 6.5m?' The spec list is impressive – two gas rings, mains hotplate, grill/oven, extractor hood, microwave and a giant fridge/freezer with 149-litre capacity and automatic energy selection. Storage might not seem so great, at first, because the cupboard under the oven is so slim as to be almost pointless and the only top locker is dominated by the extractor's ducting, but then you discover the full-height slide-out pantry unit next to the fridge and the trio of drawers (the lowest one sufficiently large for pots and pans) under the sink.

This kitchen should serve a family well (there's even a reasonable amount of worktop) as long as the cook is tall enough to reach that microwave.

Then, returning to the topic of storage, you'll spot a large wardrobe

(hanging height 1.07m) with two drawers (for your drawers) below. There are two eye-level lockers in the lounge, but under-seat space is taken up by the boiler and water tank. Remember, though, that bedding can stay in place on all the beds, so doesn't need to be stored away.

The payload of 415kg is calculated with a reasonable 50 litres of water and a 75kg driver on board, so should be adequate for three passengers (two of them probably children) and four people's gear.

A LOAD OF BUNK

Of course, the most fundamental part of this motorhome's layout is its rear bunk beds and these are truly adult-sized (though slightly narrower towards the nearside). Each has its own privacy curtain, light and opening window (a roof vent as well, up

top). The lower bed has a little more headroom, the upper one a slatted bed base for extra comfort – let the kids fight it out! There may be dissension in the ranks, also, over the lack of USBs back here.

The parental quarters (rated at 230kg maximum) come gliding down from the lounge ceiling at the press of a button, but don't lower as far as some may like. One person could still sit in the lounge underneath (and the cab seats could be reached relatively easily), while headroom of 550mm in bed is inadequate for sitting up (and less than for either bunk) but still not claustrophobic. Importantly, the lowered bed does not prevent access through the habitation door, although a sticker suggests you shouldn't use the hob with the bed down.

Like the kids' beds, the front berth's shape dictates that feet go to the nearside and it comes with a privacy >



The washroom is roomy and well specified



The garage space expands with lower bunk folded but access is high

THE VERDICT

Despite its compact length (6.41m), the Tessoro 413 still packs in everything that a 2+2 family will need. The washroom (with large separate shower), kitchen (with microwave and big fridge/freezer) and sleeping accommodation (with adult-sized bunks) are all excellent and the spec is comprehensive. Add in the 170bhp Ford chassis and this Benimar makes a great package at a competitive price.

curtain. It also has a single LED striplight and, while there's no specific ventilation provided, the opening overcab sunroof is close by.

ALL WASHED UP

As important for family motorhoming as the bunks will be the separate shower. It's a good size, with twin drains, a duckboard and tinted bi-fold door. And, although you step up into the washroom, the shower still has headroom of 1.89m. The only thing lacking is somewhere (other than the floor) to put your gel and shampoo.

There's plenty of room around the basin and swivel toilet, too, plus pretty generous high and low-level

storage. Worktop alongside the washbasin is useful for the products that you're using and there's a hook and a rail for towels. With an opening window, rooflight, choice of mirrors and toothbrush mug, it's hard to fault this little room – even the loo is at a comfortable height, for once. **MMM**

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FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE
From: £51,995
As tested: £51,995

BASICS
Berths: 4

Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Base vehicle five years, conversion two years, water ingress five years

Type approval: European Whole Vehicle

DIMENSIONS
Length: 6.41m (21ft 0½in)
Width: 2.30m (7ft 6½in)
Height: 2.89m (9ft 6in)
Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg
Payload: 415kg

BASE VEHICLE
Type: Ford Transit

Engine: 2-litre, Euro 6, 170bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual gearbox

KITCHEN
Cooker: Thetford Triplex with two gas burners, mains hotplate and combined oven/grill. Nevir microwave
Fridge: Thetford 149-litre with automatic energy selection

BEDS
Drop-down double: 1.88m x 1.40m/1.20m (6ft 2in x 4ft 7in/3ft 11in)
Rear bunks: Upper 2.12m x 0.82m/0.68m (6ft 11½in x 2ft 8in/2ft 3in), lower 2.10m x 0.80m/0.67m (6ft 10½in x 2ft 7½in/2ft 2½in)

ESSENTIALS
Fresh water: 120 litres (inboard)
Waste water: 105 litres (underslung, insulated and heated)
Space/water heating: Truma Combi 6 gas/mains, blown-air
Leisure battery: 100Ah
Gas: 2 x 6kg

OPTIONS
Fitted to test vehicle: None
Also available: Automatic gearbox (£2,100), towbar (£1,350)

THE ALTERNATIVES

Chausson 716 Welcome	£48,150
Pilote Pacific P706S	£53,276
Roller Team Auto-Roller 707	£49,740

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