

EXCLUSIVE

# Additional versatility

When is a fixed bed not a fixed bed? When it's in the new Fairford Plus



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Peter Vaughan

## AUTO-SLEEPER FAIRFORD PLUS

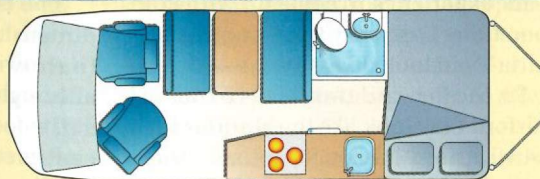
**Price from:** £58,000

**Berths:** 4 **Travel seats:** 4

**Base vehicle:** Peugeot Boxer

**Length:** 6.36m

**Gross weight:** 3,500kg







With the passenger seat swivelled the front lounge can accommodate a 2+2 family

## SECOND OPINION

*"The versatile rear area will serve all sorts of leisure and sporting purposes and shows very original thinking"*

DANIEL ATTWOOD EDITOR



Uniquely, the garage area can be converted into occasional seating

A roof vent with fan provides ventilation for the bedroom



New rear awning provides shelter. Portable step also used inside for bed

The Fairford has been in Auto-Sleepers' campervan line-up since 2016 as a four-berth offering with a very British floorplan featuring front and rear lounges in the extra-long (6.36m) Peugeot Boxer. Now we bring you the first ever test of its prototype sister model, the Fairford Plus, developed as a result of Auto-Sleepers' export drive.

On the Continent, almost all campervans of this size have a fixed bed and it soon became clear that the Cotswold firm's German dealers wanted something more European in the range. Auto-Sleepers' R&D man, Brian Cross, felt he could use his 27 years' experience to come up with something that wasn't just another Adria Twin lookalike.

So, the forward two-thirds of the Fairford Plus look like the standard-issue Fairford (although, actually, the entire kitchen has moved forward by

about 150mm along the nearside to create a wider rear bed). But, at the back, the lounge has gone, replaced by a fairly high-level transverse fixed bed. Or a huge garage. Or an occasional seating area. Or a giant dog bed. Let me explain...

## IT'S A BEDROOM

You're, perhaps, most likely to see the Fairford Plus in fixed bed mode. In this set-up there's a transverse double, much as you'd expect to see in many imported van conversions, except that it's mounted quite high at around 0.91m (3ft) off the floor.

The bed itself has decent dimensions of 1.88m by 1.37m (narrowing to 1.22m on the offside), although the useful magazine pockets at the foot of the bed steal a couple of centimetres of spaces by your feet.

There are generous top lockers

on either side, incorporating rear speakers and lighting (all switched in one go, which can seem a bit 'sudden' first thing in the morning) and sockets here for TV and more (USB, 12V, 230V and aerial). All the windows are fixed (the side windows are panelled over in the bedroom) but a roof vent with two-way fan caters for fresh air.

The rear mattress had to be kept as thin as possible due to the ingenious way that it folds when not required for sleeping. It's only about 75mm (3in) thick, so Premier Furnishings developed a triple-layer sandwich to improve comfort. It's still a firm bed, so the advice as ever is to try it for comfort before you buy.

Access to the bed has been addressed by providing a portable double step (which can also be used outside to ease entry through the rear doors; the side door comes with the usual slide-out electric step). It's

a necessary addition and it doesn't impair access to the washroom at night. When you wake up needing a tinkle do, be careful not to sit up too fast, though, as there are overhead lockers to be aware of.

Of course, there's generous storage under the bed and, if you need more, then it's a simple job to fold away the mattress and its metal frame (supported by two steel crossbars that stand upright adjacent to the washroom when not in use). Here, the Fairford Plus differs not only in eschewing the usual wooden slatted bed base, but also in the way the mattress folds and stores on each side.

The garage area is also wider than in many rivals (a fact that was a key part of the design) as the usual cabinets at either side are slimmer and do not have to include gas or water storage. The 69-litre fresh tank (along with the modest 40-litre waste)

is underneath the 'van, where you'll also find the 25-litre built-in LPG tank and the Whale space heater.

Moving the services outside creates a generous garage space that's 1.38m square with the full interior height of the vehicle (1.88m), and still with some useful locker space at the sides for mains lead, hose, etc, and even extra bedding. The Whale eight-litre boiler is also housed here, on the offside, and there's a fitting for an external hot and cold shower, too.

Having such a big area to play with opens up all sorts of possible uses, not just the obvious bikes and sports gear. Auto-Sleepers has trialled mobility scooters here (it'll take two) and, via Premier Furnishings, it can even offer a dog bed tailored to fit the area. With a pair of seatbelt clasps to attach Fido's and Rover's harnesses to (in addition to the usual tie-downs for other gear) and that fan in the roof,

the Fairford Plus seems especially well suited to our four-legged friends.

If your needs are more for a workspace, then you'll be impressed by the next neat feature – a second roll-out awning (in addition to the usual one over the sliding door) above the Peugeot's rear barn doors. Developed especially by Thule at the behest of Auto-Sleepers, this will allow you a bit of shade or weather protection while you labour in the garage, back doors open.

And, maybe, after all that hard work (or dog walking), you want to put your feet up. The bed frames unfurl again but this time using built-in legs, rather than the crossbars, for support. In a little over a minute, and with the dogs/bikes/sports gear outside, the Fairford Plus transforms again to offer a rear lounge.

The seats are narrow (the squabs are only about 340mm front-to-rear) >



**LIKED**



- Wide rear garage/boot area
- Lots of kitchen worktop

**DISLIKED**



- Tap position relative to washbasin
- Filling storage areas with extra cushions for front double bed

**WANTED**

- More opening windows
- Washroom storage



You won't find this much worktop in most rivals' kitchens



Pullman dinette is unusual, as is the use of tinted athermic glass side windows

but, if you want a true rear lounge, there's still the standard Fairford (or its countless competitors). I was tempted to stretch out here, feet up with a magazine and back doors wide open to enjoy the warm summer temperatures at the end of a long day's testing.

**FAMILIAR FEATURES**

Of course, the Fairford Plus still has its sister model's forward seating area, too, and, unlike nearly every continental camper in this class, it's a pullman dinette rather than a half-dinette. That means forward and rearward-facing benches (each a generous width for one but a tight squeeze for two), two three-point seatbelts on the front-facing one, and a swivel base for just the passenger seat (which is rather higher than the rear dinette seats).

My favourite place to sit in the 'van was on the rear-facing seat, scatter cushion for a backrest, turned to face the open sliding side door, using the bench as a comfy sofa.

Almost as appealing is the rotated cab chair where your feet don't dangle as there's enough of the raised floor section on which to rest them. Whichever way I sat, though, I couldn't get as comfortable on the front-facing pew (despite its angled backrest), as the squab is rather short.

In a further nod to the export market origins of this vehicle's development, the table has also been changed here to a fixed type with solid central support. There was certainly no wobble as I tapped these words on my keyboard and you could comfortably get three adults around the table by extending the rear-facing seat into 'bed mode'.

There's a second telly point above

the end of the galley and this test 'van also had the Media Pack (with Mecatronic 65cm automatic satellite dish but no TV screen). Reading is well catered for by the lights on a rail, which can be repositioned at will and, when the doors are closed, you'll find you switch on more of the lights (there are plenty) more of the time due to the dark tinted glazing used on all windows behind the cab.

**THREE OR FOUR**

Another benefit of the new table is that it lowers simply, using a foot-operated lever, at bed-making time. In fact, turning the dinette into a 1.77m by 0.90m single bed for a child or small adult is remarkably easy.

The Fairford Plus, however, is one of the few full four-berths in its class (achieved without a canvas-sided pop-top that is best for summer use only)

and creating a double bed up front takes a bit more time and effort – and four more cushions.

The system has been refined since the first Fairford debuted, but there is still the question of keeping all the extra cushions on board – it fills both the overcab shelf and what would otherwise be a really useful space under the rear-facing bench.

If you don't need the fourth berth, of course, you're best leaving the infills at home, but, if you are travelling four up, the front bed is flat (despite all the joins) and leaves two small undressing areas (outside the washroom and by the sliding door). And the hob and fridge remain accessible for the first cuppa of the day.

**WONDERFUL WORKTOP**

Too often, fixed bed campervans have a very small galley squeezed in next

to the sliding door and offer the cook just a two-burner hob on which to compose dinner. The Fairford Plus' chef, however, has a lot more space – and more options.

There are generous areas of worktop both between the sink and cooker and forward of the hob, where the kitchen does the usual thing of blocking part of the entrance (but not obstructing access).

The cooker is a Thetford Triplex with three gas rings and a combined oven and grill, while above the sink is a new motorhome-specific microwave (now without a plate).

Only the fridge (81 litres and lacking automatic energy selection) might seem a bit mean if you're catering for four.

A cutlery drawer is concealed within the cupboard under the sink, where we also found the removable draining board. Up top are plate racks

and a set of crystal wine glasses, as well as an extractor hood.

And, if you're wondering if Auto-Sleepers has omitted a wardrobe, no, that's under the forward end of the galley. It has doors to the front and side to aid finding the right garment and it's tall enough for shirts, trousers or jackets.

Storage is mostly generous in the Fairford Plus, but less so in the washroom. There's a towel ring, a loo roll holder and toothbrush mug, but no cupboard or cabinet.

Space to use all the facilities is more generous than in some campervans and you can shower without getting all tangled in a curtain, but the sliding basin, which looks like a clever idea to create more room for showering, needs a bit more development.

As it is, the showerhead (which doubles as the tap) tends to spray over the soap dish (not into the basin) ►



## TESTED : Auto-Sleeper Fairford Plus



The washroom doesn't require a shower curtain



The wardrobe has two doors and is hidden under the kitchen worktop

### THE MMM VERDICT

Probably the most innovative new model from Auto-Sleepers for some years, the Fairford Plus takes a different approach to the popular rear bed layout and could prove especially popular with dog lovers. Its kitchen and its versatility are major strengths but it works better as a two/three-berth than for four, due to the number of extra cushions needed for the front double bed.

and sometimes splashes your loo roll at the same time.

That's one aspect that we'd have hoped would have been addressed in the move from Fairford to Plus, but there have been other useful developments introduced.

There's a new on-board WiFi system (just add a SIM card and pair your phone or other device) and new simple-to-use 6kW Whale heating (with up to 3kW on mains power).

On the outside it's classic Auto-Sleepers in some ways – with Peugeot factory-fit athermic glass side and rear windows, alloy wheels and a choice of metallic colours – but the new graphics look a lot more contemporary and the roof rails (here

with optional canoe rack) go with the Fairford Plus' multi-purpose vibe.

The test vehicle was powered by the familiar 2-litre 160bhp Euro 6b unit but production models will get the new 2.2-litre Euro 6d motor with five extra horsepower and, more tellingly, 20Nm more torque. **MMM**

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## FACTS AND FIGURES

### PRICE

From: £58,000 (ex-works)

As tested: £62,790 (ex-works)



### BASICS

Berths: 4

Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion three years

Type approval: European Whole Vehicle



### DIMENSIONS

Length: 6.36m (20ft 10½in)

Width: 2.26m (7ft 5in)

Height: 2.64m (8ft 8in)

Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg

Payload: 424kg



### BASE VEHICLE

Type: Peugeot Boxer extra-long window van

Engine: 2-litre, Euro 6b, 160bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual gearbox (as tested)



### KITCHEN

Cooker: Thetford Triplex three-burner hob and combined oven/grill. Dometic microwave

Fridge: Thetford 81-litre three-way



### BEDS

Rear double: 1.88m x 1.37m/1.22m (6ft 2in x 4ft 6in/4ft 0in)

Front double: 1.90m x 1.35m (6ft 3in x 4ft 5in)

Alternative front single: 1.77m x 0.90m (5ft 9½in x 2ft 11½in)



### ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 69 litres (underfloor)

Waste water: 40 litres (underfloor)

Space/water heating: Whale underfloor

6kW gas/230V blown-air and 8-litre boiler

Gas: 25-litre underslung LPG tank

Leisure battery: 2 x 100Ah

### OPTIONS

Fitted to test vehicle: Premium Pack – alloys, cab air-con, cruise control, awning, reversing camera, DAB radio/sat-nav, solar panel, Al-Ko Air Top suspension (£2,500), Dometic habitation air-conditioning (£1,000), Media Pack – Mecatronic satellite dish (£995), Winter Pack (£295)

### THE ALTERNATIVES

Adria Twin Supreme 640 SGX

£50,995

Dreamer Camper Van XL

£51,200

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