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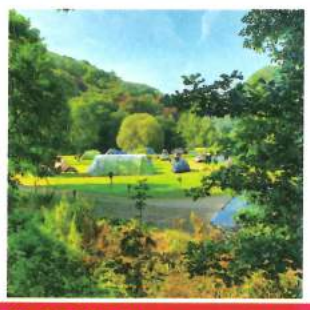

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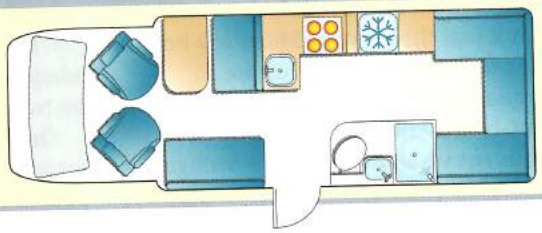
At the double

Benimar's latest model has two drop-down double beds, one over each lounge area

Peter Vaughan

BENIMAR TESSORO 482

Price from: £61,995
Berths: 4 **Travel seats:** 4
Base vehicle: Ford Transit
Length: 6.98m
Gross weight: 3,500kg



A British-style layout (with door on the UK side) and a continental design – the best of both worlds?

There's a growing number of what might be termed 'UK-style layouts' on offer from continental manufacturers. Benimar, of course, has been here before, thanks to the input of its importer, Marquis Leisure (which is also a sister company within the Trigano Group), but the Tessoro 482 is the first model in the range to combine a rear lounge with the Ford cab. Here, too, is the latest, newly facelifted Transit, making its first road test appearance in MMM.

Like other Britain-bound Benimars, it is NCC-approved (National Caravan Council, the UK trade body) and it has the habitation door on our nearside (unlike most imported rivals). But this is not just the existing Mileo 282 body on a different chassis. Despite similarities (and identical pricing), the Fiat-based Mileo has a slightly different version of the twin-lounge floorplan (washroom and kitchen swap sides, for a start) in bodywork that's 0.40m longer overall.

MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

On the face of it, this is a big motorhome, with two lounge areas, four berths and four travel seats.

But the tape measure tells a different story and you'll be pleasantly surprised to note that overall length is just under 7m. It also has a 3,500kg gross weight, so will suit drivers without a C1 licence.

However, there is no option to upgrade, so those intending to use all four berths will need to consider carefully whether the 300kg payload (247kg with the automatic gearbox) is adequate, especially as this is based on travelling with empty water tanks.

On this occasion it wasn't an issue for me, as the Tessoro was to be my solo home and office.

As one of the very first examples off the production line, this test 482 was missing the touchscreen DAB radio with MP3 player, sat-nav, Bluetooth and integrated rear view camera, which will enhance the fascia as part of the standard spec.

Despite that, the new Transit already boasts an improved dashboard design with far more conveniently positioned heating and ventilation controls, while the external styling has been softened by the tweaks.

What hasn't changed is the way the big Ford drives or feels. You sit lower in the Transit than in a Fiat/Peugeot, with reach and height adjustment for the steering wheel ensuring a driving position that should suit almost anyone – as well as feeling less truck-like.

Tilt and height-adjustable seats with variable lumbar support are the icing on the cake.

Flexible wand reading lights are fitted over both cab seats

A useful surface for drinks and a shoe rack is below, near the habitation door

The rear bed comes down low for easy access

SECOND OPINION

"It's the impressive standard spec that is the standout feature here with the shortest options list possible"

DANIEL ATTWOOD MANAGING EDITOR

And from the get-go the Ford feels more sophisticated, especially when fitted (as here) with the optional automatic gearbox.

The blue oval might not match the VW Crafter or Mercedes Sprinter at the top of the class, but its punchy performance and smooth-shifting transmission combine well with a comfortable ride to create a driver-pleasing all-round package.

Not only that but Benimars come with stop/start and automatic lights and wipers, plus the 168bhp (170PS) engine as standard, and the automatic option is £1,000 cheaper than on Fiat-based models.

The torque converter transmission here has six speeds to the new Ducato's nine but you won't feel shortchanged.

In fact, for a coachbuilt of this size, the 482 drives exceptionally well, the only disappointment being the amount of conversion noise from the living area on this example.

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

With a price tag of well over £60k (as tested), the Tessoro cannot be classified as entry-level and it justifies its market positioning with a look that's enhanced by a big overcab sunroof, alloy wheels, a metallic silver cab and flush-fitting habitation windows, as well as bold new graphics for this season. The external spec also includes a TV aerial, solar panel, mountings for a bike rack and an outside barbecue point, while the habitation door has a flyscreen and the entrance is low enough to require no external step, although the door isn't linked to the cab's remote central locking. The cycle rack itself and an awning will be dealer-fit accessories, but remember (as always) to include these in your payload calculations.

What you won't have to shell out extra cash for is the first year's insurance or a tracker system.

Inside, the layout is an evolution of a British classic. There's a half-dinette seating area up front, a central L-shaped galley facing you as you enter, a large washroom on the nearside and a U-shaped lounge (which will probably be the key reason to purchase this, rather than other Tessoros) in the rear.

Of course, the lack of a fixed bed limits external storage, but you won't have to make up beds from seats in the 482 as it has drop-down double berths over both of its seating areas.

Outside storage has not been overlooked altogether, either, as there's an external hatch (540mm by 320mm) into the under-seat space on the offside. The storage here runs the full width of the vehicle and is ideal for ➤

LIKED

- Great-to-drive Ford automatic base vehicle
- Rear drop-down bed comes down low

DISLIKED

- Unequal depth of rear settee squabs
- Rattles while driving

WANTED

- More payload
- Second exterior loading door for under-seat space

The UK spec means oven, grill, mains hotplate and even a microwave

long, slim items such as chairs that fold into a tube-like bag, but there is no corresponding nearside locker door, so smaller items that roll across will have to be reached by lifting the seats on the inside.

BACK TO FRONT

Five people could sit quite comfortably in the rear lounge, where net curtains add a continental look and white walls, three large windows and an octet of spotlamps set into the underside of the bed give a light, bright feel. Headroom of 1.87m with the bed stowed, plus a lack of any high-level cupboards, further increases the impression of space.

The relatively compact table (800mm by 480mm) emphasises that this is primarily a lounge – dining takes place up front – so it would have been nice to have somewhere to put down drinks without setting up the table, especially as the leg can be awkward to extract from the back of a (full) wardrobe. It's an island leg type table but more stable than many.

Both the seating areas come with a variety of sizes and shapes of scatter cushions (in red for one area, green for t'other), while upholstery differs between the two zones, too.

In the rear it's a leather-look that is eminently practical but, perhaps, lacking in luxury, while you'll also note that the settees (slightly oddly) are of very different depths – a rather slim 370mm on the offside and a rather deep 640mm on the nearside.

The front lounge is, again, well-lit, this time thanks to the overcab sunroof and the reading lights on flexible arms over each cab chair. These lamps include USB ports, too.

The forward space also gets net curtains and room for four or five people, while the table here is wall-mounted and has a swing-out extension, so that it can be reached from the nearside seat or the rotated passenger cab chair.

No storage is provided for this table and a limited gap between it and the forward-facing rear passenger seat may necessitate its removal for travel, especially if child seats are to be fitted.

The step down from the cab to the lounge is not an issue, however, with feet resting comfortably at the lower level from all seats when on site.

Both lounges have a TV provision, with a height-adjustable bracket mounted just inside the doorway and a second television holder sitting above the wardrobe (each with 12V, 230V and aerial sockets adjacent).

In the front lounge there is also a useful surface alongside the side seat beneath which a four-bottle wine store is neatly hidden.

The Euro-style half-dinette lounge is quite compact

ALL MOD CONS

British motorhomes have cookers with mains hotplates, as well as ovens and grills and even microwaves. European 'vans have big fridge/freezers instead. Or so some pundits would like to have you believe.

Well, this Tessoro has all of the above, but then this is a Euro model that's been developed especially for sale in the UK.

And the Tessoro 482 also has three large soft-close drawers (the top one with a cutlery holder, the bottom one deep enough for all your pans, etc), convenient 12V and 230V sockets (one of each), an extractor hood and a fancy illuminated splashback. Downsides are the height of the microwave (not ideal for short chefs but at least you can serve straight onto the relatively low, flat surface over the wardrobe) and the shallow cupboard below the oven (spices and condiments only).

My favourite feature is the twin slide-out pantry units for all your tinned/packet foods.

That wardrobe may only suit suits, jackets, etc (hanging height is 840mm), but supplementary storage is to be found under the nearside seating in both lounges (the fresh water tank is under the half-dinette and the boiler under the rear offside sofa).

Shoe racks are fitted on either side of the habitation entrance.

There's good storage in the washroom, too, which benefits from a truly separate shower that features a duckboard, decent headroom, a clothes drying rail, basket for gels and twin drains. The rest of the 'little room' gets a roof vent, opening window, towel hooks and rail and even a soap dispenser – nearly full marks for this area then, with the height of the loo (check it out if you have shorter than average legs) as the only negative.

ELECTRIC DREAMS

Many twin lounge layouts will require you to convert the seats in each seating area – sometimes rather laboriously – into beds. In this Benimar, though, the effort is almost exclusively reserved for a single finger on a switch!

Up front, the bed comes down low enough to give you 510mm of headroom in bed – leaving enough height for three people to still sit around the table below. A ladder is required to access the bed, which has its own privacy curtain, and the shape of the bed (narrower on the nearside) ensures that you can still come and go through the habitation door. However, a sticker warns you not to use the hob with the bed lowered, so you'll need the occupants here to get up before that first cuppa of the day is brewed.

Unlike the front bed, the rear one is rectangular and it can come down ➤

The height of the loo is the only negative in this washroom

Twin slide-out pantry units are the star feature of the kitchen

THE MMM VERDICT

The Tessoro 482 packs a lot into a sub-7m body, both in terms of living space and spec, while the Ford cab is even more appealing in its latest guise. Perhaps no longer the bargain they once were, these Benimars still have a lot more standard kit than some rivals – from 168bhp engines to solar panels and GPS tracking systems. As a four-berth, however, the payload is rather marginal.

much lower, although to enable it to do so you'll need to remove all the backrests and scatter cushions – and the three large seatbacks are substantial items to store elsewhere (probably in the cab).

In its lowest position the mattress is just 860mm off the floor, so no ladder is needed, but there's nothing to stop you 'parking' the bed higher and retaining the lounge below. Indeed, a second ladder is provided for use here.

Each bed has a simple LED strip light at the head, on the offside for the front bed and the nearside at the rear.

Despite that, I found it more convenient to sleep with my head to the offside in the back bed as the top of the wardrobe then acts as a useful bedside table.

Another key aspect of having a pair of drop-down beds is that duvets and pillows for each can be stored ready for use, not only further increasing night-time convenience, but also freeing up under-seat storage for your other gear. MMM

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FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE
From: £61,995
As tested: £63,995

BASICS
Berths: 4
Travel seats: 4
Warranty: Base vehicle three years, conversion two years, water ingress five years
Type approval: European Whole Vehicle

DIMENSIONS
Length: 6.98m (22ft 11in)
Width: 2.30m (7ft 6½in)
Height: 2.89m (9ft 6in)
Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg
Payload: 300kg with manual gearbox, 247kg with automatic

BASE VEHICLE
Type: Ford Transit wide-track chassis-cab
Engine: 2-litre, Euro 6d, 168bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed automatic gearbox (as tested)

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

BEDS
Rear drop-down: 1.87m x 1.39m (6ft 1½in x 4ft 6½in)
Front drop-down: 1.91m x 1.40m narrowing to 1.20m (6ft 3in x 4ft 7in/ 3ft 11in)

ESSENTIALS
Fresh water: 120 litres (inboard)
Waste water: 105 litres (underfloor, insulated and heated)
Space/water heating: Truma Combi 6E gas/230V blown-air
Gas: 2 x 6kg
Leisure battery: 100Ah

OPTIONS
Fitted to test vehicle: Automatic gearbox (£2,000)

THE ALTERNATIVES

Auto-Trail Tribute F72 (Ford)	£46,860
Rimor Evo 77 Plus (Ford)	£48,995
Swift Escape 674 (Fiat)	£54,825

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