

Rapido

8096dF 55th Edition

Rapido celebrates 55 years in business with a pair of special editions, including this high-spec island bed A-class

AT A GLANCE • PRICE FROM £71,000 • BERTHS 4 • TRAVEL SEATS 4

YOUR 55th anniversary may not be the most obvious one for a party, but when the result of such longevity in the leisure vehicle business is a very highly appointed A-class motorhome – with more than a touch of style – for just over £70k, we can't help feeling that this is a celebration you won't want to miss out on. After all, here is a 7.49m-long island bed motorhome with a full double floor (for extra storage and better winterisation) that's pitched to compete with mainstream luxury coachbuilts from the UK. Coachbuilts, note, not A-classes, because none of the major British firms builds an A-class.

And while back in 1961 Rapido was a caravan brand (actually, a folding caravan brand), it has grown become one of the most renowned makers of A-class motorhomes (its first Le Randonneur motorhome was built in 1983, its original A-class debuted less than a decade later, in 1992).

It is also one of the longest established continental brands on our shores, as well as one of the more successful, offering its products through five dealers around the UK (including Scotland and Northern

Ireland). Today it has a line-up of three van conversions, 12 low-profiles and 20 A-classes – all on Fiat Ducato.

You can see where the bias is here, which is why we picked the 8096dF over its low-profile anniversary equivalent – the 696FF – for this test. That and the fact that we reckon this model, with its Al-Ko chassis and double floor is worth the extra loot.

The 8096dF is not just an existing layout loaded up with a few extra trinkets, either. It is a brand-new model with a layout that has 'UK friendly' written all over it.

Not least, that's because it has a lounge with parallel settees and a completely flat floor from cab to bedroom. Yes, you read that right, it's a British-style seating area. And with the leather-look 'TEP' upholstery, the full-width A-class cab, panoramic windscreen, superb mood lighting and the trademark Rapido fold-in-half table, doesn't this lounge look inviting?

Better still, the side-facing settees can be converted into a pair of individual belted travel seats, should the grandchildren be along for the weekend; although, if you need a four-berth all of the time, swapping the seats

Words & pictures
Peter Vaughan





Blue backlighting adds bling to the shower cubicle



Stainless-steel basin is typically Rapido



Garage height of 1.18m with bed raised



True double floor for more storage



Table folds in half when dinner is over



Fridge/freezer is a traditional 'wide' model



Tigger appreciated the 150bhp option



Individual rear travel seats

around each day might not be ideal and the extra cushions and framework need to be stored somewhere (probably in the garage).

That said, no one in your family is going to feel shortchanged come sleep-time, as long as a pair of double beds is suitable for your family dynamics. The usual drop-down cab bed is manually operated but ever-so-easy to use and it offers good headroom (0.78m), as well as a very comfy Bultex mattress on a slatted base. Compared with a claustrophobic luton overcab or most low-profile's drop-down berths, it's fit for a king.

Should royalty ever actually buy a Rapido, though, it'll surely be the rear bedroom that results in such a princely purchase. These are as good a night-time quarters as you'll find, with a generously wide bed made possible by the angled sides of the adjacent wardrobes, which is a clever touch. Compare the mattress dimensions – 1.95m by 1.58m according to the office tape measure – and you'll find few bigger.

The pleated headboard and Art Deco reading lights impress, too, along with the solid sliding doors that provide privacy for the split en suite ablutions at the foot of the bed.

There's a lockable door to prevent those kipping up

front from disturbing you, too, while the only downside here seems to be the stepped floor in the shower. The offside shower cubicle otherwise serves impressively well, with soap dish and shampoo basket, clothes drying rail and blingy blue backlighting.

Across the corridor, the stainless-steel washbasin, sliding mirror and plentiful storage (with oh-so-practical elasticated retaining straps) are usual Rapido touches. There's a touch more room to use the swivel loo than in some rival designs, too.

Where you might find the 8096 a little lacking is in kitchen worktop, but the French firm from Mayenne has done a decent job of space utilisation thanks to an in-line hob that frees up a bit of preparation space in front. Turning the L-shape to face the lounge also enhances the feeling of space, even when the en suite toilet door is closed. It increases the likelihood of the cook overflowing their creativity onto the table, too, so maybe the lack of galley surface isn't so bad after all.

As in other areas, the 55th anniversary 'van certainly isn't wanting for spec. Kitchen roll holder and spice rack, central locking of the drawers, an extractor hood, oven/grill (at low level) and a massive 160-litre HPC (that's High-Performance Cooling for motorhoming in *really* hot weather) fridge/freezer with automatic energy

FOR

- Spacious lounge and superb lighting
- Central locking of kitchen drawers
- Flat floor throughout
- Generously sized island bed
- Well-planned en suite
- Height-adjustable bed/garage

AGAINST

- No positive locking on top lockers
- Limited kitchen worktop
- 150kg limit in garage



Shaped wardrobes allow a wider island bed



Drop-down bed gets a comfy Bultex mattress

selection are all standard fare.

What else do you get for your cash? A reversing camera with night vision and sound, linked to a double-DIN Pioneer stereo with rear speakers, as well as the expected cruise control, heated twin-lens coach-style mirrors and height-adjustable captain's chairs in the cab. Then there's the habitation door with waste bin and flyscreen, but no external step as the two internal ones do the job fine. There are alloy wheels, LED daytime running lights and special anniversary exterior graphics to add a touch of flash on the road. And you certainly don't feel that the specification requires a careful read of the optional extras list, as with most of the German-built alternatives.

Extras fitted to this demo model included a steering wheel with radio and Bluetooth controls, climate control in the cab (rather than just on-or-off air-con), leather trim for the steering wheel and gearlever gaiter and a mattress cover for the rear bed. Have you ever noticed how expensive these motorhome bedsprings always are, irrespective of the maker?

Brownhills' decision here to upgrade to the 150bhp motor (the 177bhp engine is also available but only 130bhp is standard) seems like the right one, but gross vehicle weight will be down to individual needs and driving licence demands.



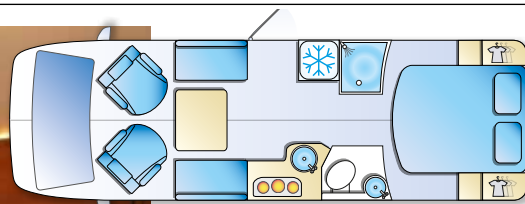
Plenty of kit but a little lacking in worktop

The standard 3,500kg chassis will be enough for some couples (with a 380kg payload), while a move to 3,700kg could be a good compromise for those taking extended tours or travelling with more than two folk aboard. If you're serious about leaving nothing at all behind, though, there's always the Ducato Heavy chassis and a whopping 1,220kg payload. Consider your needs carefully before you decide which is right for you.

Whichever you choose, the garage is limited to 150kg, but it's definitely not restricted in volume. With maximum dimensions of 2.16m by 1.13m and headroom of 0.89m, you'll not be short of capacity for all your gear. And if you need more height, say, to accommodate bikes or a lightweight motorbike, you can press a button and the bed rises electrically to increase the garage's height to 1.18m.

Still not enough room to store all your stuff? Then there's the 190mm-deep double floor with external hatches on either side and trapdoors hidden below the living area carpet.

Here, then, is an A-class motorhome that stands comparison with bigger and pricier alternatives. Our advice is to get one while your nearest dealer still has stock available, and before post-Brexit exchange rates push up the price.



FACT FILE

PRICE FROM £71,000

PRICE AS TESTED £73,790

EXTRAS FITTED 150bhp engine upgrade (£1,500), climate control air-con (£530), multi-function steering wheel (£310), mattress cover (£230), leather steering wheel and gearknob (£220)

TYPE APPROVAL European Whole Vehicle

BERTHS 4

TRAVEL SEATS (INC DRIVER) 4

DIMENSIONS 7.49m L, 2.35m W, 2.94m H

INTERIOR HEIGHT 1.97m

MAXIMUM WEIGHT 3,500kg (3,700kg and 4,400kg options)

PAYLOAD 380kg (standard spec)

BEDS Drop-down cab bed 1.88m x 1.37m (max headroom 0.78m), rear island bed 1.95m x 1.58m

FRESH WATER 130 litres (in double floor)

WASTE WATER 110 litres (underslung, heated and insulated)

GAS 2 x 6kg

LEISURE BATTERY 100Ah

MAINS SOCKETS 2

BASE VEHICLE

FIAT DUCATO AL-KO CHASSIS-COWL

ENGINE 2.3-litre, Euro VI, 150bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual

COOKING/HEATING

COOKING Three-burner in-line hob, combined oven and grill

FRIDGE Dometic 160-litre HPC fridge/freezer with AES

HEATING Truma Combi 6kW gas/mains blown-air (Alde option)

BOILER Truma Combi, gas/mains

RIVALS

Bürstner Elegance i 745

Dethleffs Magic Edition I 3 DBM

Pilote Galaxy G741C

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What motorhome says ★★★★★

The star of the 2017 Rapido range? Certainly the 8096dF has masses of appeal to island bed aficionados. It's very classy but surprisingly well priced.

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