

Mallard malarkey

Murvi's latest Mallard – now on the new Fiat base – makes a transverse bed a realistic option in a van conversion, as **Suzie and Mike Dawson** discover



At a glance



Murvi Mallard
On Fiat Ducato
MWB 120 Multijet
Type: High-top
From: £30,558
on-the-road

Or try a ...

Bilbo's Nexa LWB (MW)
Danbury Active (Renault)
Westfalia Nugget (Ford)

The redoubtable Murvi brand has been a consistent winner of industry prizes. The Murvi Morello won its class in *Which Motorcaravan's* 2007 awards, while Murvi have been serial winners in the Motor Caravan Design & Drive Competition run by the Caravan Club. This may be because they develop their models in a considered way. There's no change for change's sake but instead their designs evolve progressively, with an attention to safety and security that really impresses.

They fit, as standard: fire extinguisher, fire blanket, first aid kit, smoke alarm,

carbon monoxide alarm, warning triangle, spare bulbs kit, wide electric step, Thatcham Category 1 accredited alarm and a locking strong box. Who else can match that?

Customer satisfaction is achieved by applying high standards and having a flexible approach. They are a respected company that has, for decades, been in the business of producing motorhomes to keep us Brits happy. Like other small manufacturers they deal directly with their customers, allowing them to tailor their build to the requirements of the buyer. With no barrier of dealership middle-men to filter information, they



Plenty of drawer space in the galley



Cab tweaks improve the driving experience



Plenty of storage lockers all around

can respond to customer requirements quickly. This is particularly useful when the buyer is disabled or has special needs.

Whilst their VW-based Mallard has impressive storage for its size, the new Fiat Mallard has the MWB Ducato 33 as its base. It's therefore significantly larger than short-wheelbase Fiat or VW conversions which usually feature this type of layout. This additional size provides scope for alternative bed layouts, and offers loads of extra storage space. It would make an excellent 'van for folk needing a wheelchair, and Murvi can adapt the Mallard specifically for this purpose.

Perhaps the Mallard ought to have a dark green head, white collar and quack a lot, but this Murvi has instead silver feathers. The silver has changed subtly from the old mushroom-silver to a blue-ish hue, described as aluminium-grey. I thought it looked nicely hi-tech, though of course the buyer has the choice of paintwork. Inside, the tough 'corporation-bus' upholstery is bombproof, and I'm not being derogatory. I have personal experience of this particular fabric. I left the door of our 'van open daily

to the blazing sun of Spain for two winters without any fading or signs of wear-and-tear. This durability is so important five or six years on, when you have to part with your pride and joy.

The MWB Mallard, at 17ft 9in, is a pretty big, small camper, if you get my drift. And the appearance of the new Fiat's slightly aggressive bulldog snout has made the old Ducato look decidedly dated; blast, we've got one.

Driving the new Fiat is a delight. Apart from the VW, it's as good as they get. The gearbox has been enhanced, with an additional gear to provide economical motorway cruising. The ventilation system, which previously was one of its shortcomings, has been redesigned to great effect. The other problem was the driving position, which wasn't comfortable for everyone. Fiat have addressed this, and it now suits even those who, previously, were vehemently anti-Fiat.

Of course the main improvement, in the Mallard we tested, is the extra space available; it's a bigger van, though it's still a classic camper with side kitchen – but no

washroom. Since many motorcaravanners mainly use campsite facilities, this isn't of any consequence to its intended audience. Murvi also have designed in some interesting features which make this 'van particularly practical. It's the versatility of the rear bench seat (fitted with two three-point seatbelts and one lap strap) that makes it novel.

There are shaped cushions down either side of the bench seat, so it's possible to sleep across the 'van. You won't need the extra cushion in the rear when sleeping in this fashion, you could leave it at home, though it comes in handy as a parcel shelf with storage under. Extremely tall folk need the extra cushion to make a massive longitudinal bed.

The tracking for the seat runs from behind the front seats to the rear doors. This allows the bench to be pulled close to the front seats, providing a genuine dining area. Four can eat in comfort, though I couldn't reach the ground when sitting in the swivelled driver's seat; if I'd sat in the passenger's seat there's a drop-down footrest. The table is lightweight, with a



It's a much bigger van than the usual short-wheelbase VW – and it shows. This classic camper layout boasts a huge living area



Pushing the seats forward creates boot space

Spec check

- ▶ Cab air-con: X (£934 option)
- ▶ Airbags: 1 (passenger option)
- ▶ Swivel seats: 2
- ▶ Boiler: X (£411 option)
- ▶ Heating: Diesel-fired (option)
- ▶ Hob: 4 burners
- ▶ Grill: ✓
- ▶ Oven: X
- ▶ Fridge: 60 litres
- ▶ Toilet: Porta-Potti in cupbrd
- ▶ Mains sockets: 2

folding leg. It clips onto a rail fixed along the front of the kitchen units, and stores against a rear door. And it's not only in the dining department that the full-length tracking comes in handy. There are six locking positions, which are more useful than you'd think. Pull the seat forward and you have a 7ft 3in (2.20m) space to play with in the rear; a couple of bikes perhaps? Or push the seat to the rear to give space



Tracks allow you to slide the seats towards the front to create a dining area

Fact file

MURVI MALLARD

Price from: £30,558 on-the-road

Price as tested: £31,963 on-the-road

Options fitted: Metallic paint, passenger airbag, Webasto Airtop 2000S diesel heater, 12V Omnivent in lieu of 5-way ventilator

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato MWB 33 high-roof van

Engine: 2.3-litre Multijet producing 120bhp

Travel seats: 5

Berths: 2

Weights & Measures

Length: 5.41m (17ft 9in)

Width: 2.05m (6ft 9in)

Height: 2.54m (8ft 4in)

Internal height: 1.91m (6ft 3in)

Gross weight: 3300kg

Payload: 700kg

Bed sizes: Transverse double 1.88m x 1.37m (6ft 2in x 4ft 6in), or longitudinal double 1.95m x 1.88m max (6ft 5in x 6ft 2in max)

Fresh water: 55 litres (underfloor)

Waste water: 55 litres (underfloor)

for anchoring a wheelchair.

Down the offside are a Dometic 60-litre three-way-fridge, a grill, two drawers fitted with cutlery and crockery, a three-shelf cupboard and a locker suitable for a Porta-Potti. Above these are a Smev four-burner hob with spark ignition, a stainless-steel sink and drainer and two 230V sockets. Topping all this are two hinged solid worktops/lids and an additional flip-up worktop at the rear. It's little details like this extra worktop that can make life in a motorhome kitchen more relaxing.



Fiat's width makes transverse bed possible

Supplied by

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I loved the abundance of storage; there seemed to be cupboards everywhere. The list includes four high-level lockers along the offside, one on the nearside, two transverse high-level lockers, one in the rear [very big] and one over the cab, and a capacious drawer under the bench seat where we stashed outdoor kit and more. There's no wardrobe but on one of the rear doors is a hanging rail to take a posh frock or tuxedo. A grand total of 10 lights are provided, and an optional Webasto diesel-fired space-heater will keep your toes warm. Twelve-gallon fresh water and waste tanks are both underslung.

There's not room here to list all the extra bits provided in the Mallard. They include things you'd normally have to buy anyway before setting off on your first trip, so it's great that they're part of the inventory. It's a spacious van with loads of storage, all the kit you'll need, and a flexible and adaptable bench-seat/double-bed... at a very attractive price. 🏠

WHICH motorcaravan says...

The bed arrangement, copious storage and ability to take a wheelchair, make the Fiat Mallard suitable for the disabled as well as outdoor types. Lots of what would normally be deemed extras are provided as standard. And keen pricing and superb build-quality make the Mallard very attractive.

FIAT MURVI MALLARD ★★★★★

FIAT MURVI MALLARD £31,963 OTR

✓ Good value ✓ Build-quality ✓ Generous storage ✓ Big bed ✓ Equipment X Height of driver's seat when swivelled X Underfloor water tanks