



# LIVING WITH A...

## ...2007 Mercedes Murvi Morello

For Robert and Christine Flitney, happiness is an MMM - in more ways than one!



It was cold at the end of October 2008, with the temperature dropping to minus four degrees overnight, but we were snug in our very own MMM - our Mercedes Murvi Morello, spending its first anniversary at Bath Marina caravan site. This unplanned visit (for some urgent family business) neatly emphasised the ability to set off at short notice and use whatever facilities may or may not be available. After two years ownership 'Blue' - the first Morello to be built on the new-style Sprinter - has covered 24,000 miles, providing accommodation for 134 nights on everything from full-facility sites to secluded pull-offs in remote west Scotland, and six trips to Europe. It has also attracted a lot of attention from those looking for potential alternatives to a Fiat.

### CHOOSING A 'VAN

We were looking for something more self-contained than our rising roof (Mercedes Vito-based) Murvi Mirage, with better washing,

toilet and storage facilities. A day wandering round the NEC show convinced us that a high top 'van with large sliding door was the only way to go. Coachbuilts - with their single door - felt very claustrophobic by comparison. Being campers at heart and wanting something very practical led us away from the glitzy interiors of many 'vans, and in the direction of a Morello. We also had confidence in Murvi's service, practical approach and high quality, based on experience with our well-used Mirage.

Our decision coincided with the introduction of the new Fiat Ducato, but Murvi also offers the Morello on the Mercedes Sprinter. I admit to prejudice against Sevel-built models and misgivings about having front-wheel drive on a 3.5-tonne van. And we had another consideration: according to measurements a Ducato would neatly wedge its folded mirrors on the brickwork between our house and the neighbour's garage.

A day spent playing with a sylph-like Sprinter demonstrator proved that we could

back it in with inches to spare. In reality, the actual price difference between the two is very dependent on chosen options. The Merc comes rated at 3500kg GVW as standard, and also with ASR/ESP etc, which are extra on the Fiat. On the downside, the basic engine for the Sprinter is a measly 90bhp, which puts the power to weight ratio of a loaded van in Citroën 2CV class. Our experience with a 309 demonstrator was that even an empty 'van was struggling to maintain 65-ish miles per hour on the uphill bits of the M11.

### HOW DO THEY COMPARE?

Internally, the latest Sprinter is of similar dimensions to the old-model Ducato, so the layout is correspondingly close to previous Morello models. The L-shaped kitchen retains the separate drainer next to the cooker. We rather like this, as it's especially handy for odd slops, etc, while washing up. It's also useful to have a drainer away from the sink.

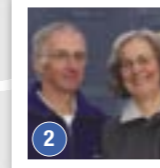
In the lounge there's a full-width internal step for the sliding door. At first this appears



In the sunshine at Egglestone Abbey, a convenient lunch stop just off the A66 near Barnard Castle

### AT A GLANCE

- PRICE FROM: £52,314 OTR
- BERTHS: 2
- BASE VEHICLE: Mercedes Sprinter medium wheelbase high roof panel van
- ECONOMY: 29-30mpg
- COST OF SIMILAR AGED 'VAN TODAY: £33,000



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- 1 Along Hadrian's Wall
- 2 Robert and Christine
- 3 The level floor and fold-flat handbrake make all seats easily useable
- 4 Our driveway is a Ducato no-go area, but the Sprinter squeezes in with mirrors folded
- 5 The kitchen has plenty of worktop and is light and airy

to have negative showroom appeal as it reduces the internal floor space, but we find it very easy stepping in and out without having to locate a shin-bashing step.

The front-wheel drive opposition offers a lower floor in the rear, which also gives a lower overall height. However, we have the big benefit of a flat floor through into the cab, which makes the swivelled front seats much more 'part' of the living area.

Bottle holders in the cab doors take our bike bottles, which is very useful. In addition to good-sized door pockets, there is plenty of dash stowage, including cup holders and a document clip that's very useful and helps avoid losing the credit card-sized boarding cards used by Norfolk Line - our preferred choice for Channel crossings. There is also storage space behind a panel in the bottom half of each door, plenty of space - via a small access hatch - in the passenger seat box and further storage behind a panel below the driver's seat. Above the sun visors there are useful A4-sized shelves that can take lightweight paperwork.

A trip to a weighbridge with the 'van empty (apart from half a tank of fuel) revealed a weight of 2860kg, leaving a grand total of 640kg to play with. A return visit when packed for a week (complete with bikes plus the two of us) gave a total of 3220kg, leaving around 200kg spare.

### A PARTICULAR MURVI

Murvis are built to order and so there are endless possibilities for trim and extras.

We are fully paid-up members of the 'It must be anything other than white or grey (sorry, silver) club.' It is interesting to note how well our Jasper blue 'van merges into the scenery, compared to big white coachbuilts. Murvi's understated approach - without any fancy graphics - has led to close inspection, a couple of times, to make sure we were a genuine campervan. Both occasions were on Caravan Club sites.

Five engine options are available for the Sprinter and the 'technical department' had a long think about this. Each twenty horsepower jump costs nearly £1000, so discretion was advised. The huge premium for the 184bhp V6



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(a power output that we would rarely use) did not seem worthwhile, so we selected the 129 horsepower 313 model. Other vehicle-specific options, with which we are well pleased, include air-conditioning, electric mirrors, comfort seats, a rear step and a passenger airbag.

To the conversion, and in the kitchen we opted for the hob/grill and larger 77-litre fridge, rather than the oven that we would very rarely - if ever - use. The standard Morello flooring is vinyl in the kitchen and carpet in the lounge, but we opted for vinyl throughout. This looks clean and smart after a quick brush and wipe, and appears to be excellent quality material. The Monarch Lupin fabric design is both cheerful and bright, but also looks rather classy. The multi-coloured pattern is very practical, not showing dirt.

We also specified a steel-braided hose



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from gas cylinder to regulator, as the safety implications of using a rubber hose that's exposed to full cylinder pressure seems to have been totally ignored by the regulations.

On the outside we specified an 85W solar panel and a bike rack: more on bike racks later.

**LIFE ABOARD**

The 'van has exceeded our expectations and is very comfortable to live in. Most of our use has been together, but also individually for business trips when it has proved to be very comfortable and relaxing. A friendly campsite beats being stuck in an anonymous business hotel.

The kitchen works extremely well. The fridge (with full-width freezer compartment) enables us to take several days worth of pre-cooked frozen portions of meat, fish etc, which is very useful when travelling or going off the beaten track. The grill can be a bit tricky to light sometimes, but cooks food very evenly without burning. A very useful addition to our kit is a small electric slow cooker, which

also doubles as a rice cooker. When using hook-up, we can breeze off for a day of walking or cycling and return to a tasty slow-cooked casserole.

The lounging area works superbly with the side door open or closed. As the bed (made from the sofa) can be made very quickly, the compromise in space with a fixed bed layout is one we fail to understand. We have found it very comfortable sleeping either way round (depending on slope), and also temperature: It's handy, in cold weather, to sleep close to the heater controls!

The Murvi table (on its multi-position leg) is rather an acquired taste, but with experience we now find it very useful. It can be set parallel for dining, swivelled for use as a coffee table and book-rest, or angled for use with a laptop. Have you noticed that when you find a nice quiet lunch stop it is often on a slope? This is no problem, just twizzle the pole to 90 degrees to the slope and then angle the tabletop level. No disappearing lunch and a full cup of tea. The table can also be left in place while



6 In just 22 seconds the bed is ready

7 Sunset over a mist-covered Brocken, the highest peak in Germany's Harz Mountains, viewed from the beautifully situated campsite at Schierke Stein

8 Experience has shown the table to be very useful, even when the 'van is on a slope

9 The modified bike rack - with home-made fork clamps - holds bikes securely and legally

10 Looking out over Mull from the small campsite at Kilchoan on Ardnamurchan in Scotland



travelling. For outside we use a 'concertina' table with fold-up legs that takes up very little space. But with the big side door open it can equally feel like being outside while in the comfort of the lounge.

The heating works very well on either the diesel or mains power. Eberspacher heaters are not quiet, although the fitted silencer means that ours is much quieter than the standard version. However, it does sound rather noisy on tightly crowded (mirrors folded to get to the 'van) Continental aires. The permanent availability of hot water when travelling is a great boon and we always do the washing up after a meal stop. The system's ability to pre-heat the 'van and engine in cold weather is also a great benefit.

The solar panel facilitates reasonable stays away from hook-ups. During the summer (in July) we managed seven nights without moving, and without much effect on battery voltage. Three nights in Holland (during a gloomy early November, with plenty of use of the diesel heater) proved possible, but the leisure batteries were, by then, getting fairly flat.

**ROAD MANNERS**

Just about the most comfortable drive we have ever experienced. The comfort seats are well worth the £160 price, as the squab and lumbar can be adjusted while travelling. We have effortlessly clocked up 500-plus miles in a day on several occasions. Once up to speed we cruise along in regal splendour, and can even talk to each other on the concrete sections of the M25 and M20, which is quite a novelty. The latest Sprinter has stiffer suspension and does not sway like earlier models. However, this is at the expense of some thumping and crashing on what passes for roads in rural north-west Essex.

Our normal dual carriageway gait is around 60-65mph, which is extremely relaxing - just keeping clear of the trucks. When we need to get somewhere a steady 70 is no hassle, and does not seem to affect fuel consumption too drastically. Now the 'van is well run in we generally manage around 6.50 miles per litre. This equates to 30mpg.

The wide spread of torque from the two-

stage turbocharged engine makes for a very relaxed driving experience: sixth gear is quite useable from 50mph (1800rpm) upwards on the level. To maintain progress in sixth on reasonable inclines needs around 2400rpm (close to 65mph) - a speed at which, it will manage practically any motorway incline in the UK. If speed is checked for any reason then a drop down to fifth is no problem and progress regained. It is interesting that Mercedes still recommend a running in period, and after 14,000 miles the motor just gets better and more flexible. This is proved every time we come home when we reverse (through a tight gap) up a slope with the engine at idle.

The first service (with just over a year and 13,000 miles on the clock) was carried out within the dealer fixed-price deal. Mercedes

allows up to 25,000 miles, or two years between services, but annual visits make me feel rather more comfortable.

**CHALLENGES**

A couple of conversion related problems occurred early on. A circuit breaker with the wrong rating meant we could not use the heating and water at the same time, but Murvi soon fixed it. With the advent of warm weather, use of the Heki rooflight showed a slipping drive mechanism. We easily fitted the (supplied with instructions) replacement drive.

Our first trip out with bikes highlighted a problem with the position and design of the bike rack. The deep window in the rear doors rather limits the choice of rack, and Murvi had fitted an Omni-Bike deluxe (long version). This,



**WE LIKED**

- Viability as sole vehicle
- Very easy to live in
- Easy to make, comfortable bed
- Excellent kitchen
- Good washroom and shower
- The large side sliding door
- Choosing sites just for location -no worries about facilities
- Excellent for long journeys
- Being a 'blue rose' amongst the white-'van 'blots on the landscape'

**WE WOULD HAVE LIKED**

- Quieter sliding door (possibly the electric closing option)
- Level indicator for gas cylinder (now a standard fitting)

**WE DISLIKED**

- The quirky table (for the first few weeks)

## On Test 2007 Mercedes Murvi Morello

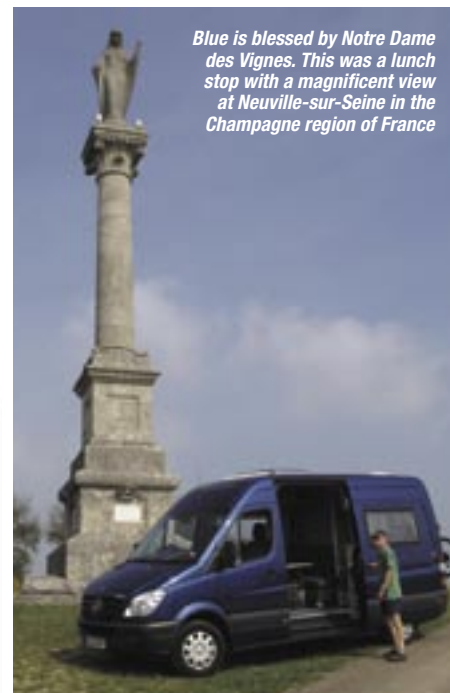
combined with the sub-two-metre width, presented a problem: the bike wheels obscured the offside rear light cluster. The ultimate solution to this was to remove the front wheels - clamping the bikes' forks directly to the carrier. Some bits from our local bike and motor accessory shop, plus some aluminium off-cuts provided a really good solution. We now have a conveniently low, and legal, rack with bikes securely attached - no bouncing around. One front wheel travels between the loo and back door, the other behind the driver's seat.

On the Mercedes front, we've come across a

problem with the cab seat height adjusters. We managed to snag our shorts on them whilst exiting the 'van - breaking them. Our local dealer assured me that they'd not had any other cases of this, so have had to adopt a modified exit policy. At about 14,000 miles we experienced a severe lack of power, while on the M4. The RAC man was unable to help and escorted us - in limp mode - to Rygor Commercial, the Mercedes-Benz dealers in Reading. The very helpful and efficient staff soon diagnosed a failed air mass sensor - getting us moving again, and just two cups of tea later.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Conversion:** Murvi Morello
- **Base vehicle:** Mercedes Sprinter medium wheelbase high roof panel van
- **Power plant:** 2.2-Litre turbo-diesel producing 129bhp
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** 550kg
- **Layout:** Swivelling cab seats ahead of offside L-shaped sofa (converts to lengthways double bed), wardrobe and washroom. Nearside L-shaped kitchen aft of side sliding door
- **Exterior measurements:** Length: 5.91m (19ft 4.5in); width: 1.99m (6ft 6.5in); height: 2.78m (9ft 1.5in)
- **Berths:** 2
- **Bed size:** N/A
- **Length of ownership:** 2 years
- **Supplied by:** Murvi Motorcaravans
- **Mileage covered:** 24,500
- **Average fuel economy:** 29-30mpg
- **Accessories added:** Bike rack, solar panel
- **Habitation service:** £80 (Murvi)
- **MOT:** N/A
- **Recalls:** N/A
- **Insurance:** N/A
- **Price new today:** £52,314 OTR
- **Cost of similar age van today:** £33,000
- **What went wrong:** Incorrect circuit breaker fitted to heater supply, Heki rooftop mechanism faulty, failed engine air mass sensor
- **Further reading:** The February 2003 edition of MMM includes a Test Extra report on the (previous model) Mercedes Sprinter-based Murvi Morello; in the October 2006 edition, MMM road testers Di and Pete Johnson write about Living With their (previous model) Fiat Ducato-based Morello; The February 2006 edition sees Di and Pete touring in Europe with the latest-model Fiat-based Morello (to purchase reprints telephone Tina Beaumont on 01778 391187)
- **Contact:** MURVI Motorcaravans Limited 4, East Way, Lee Mill Industrial Estate, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 9GE (tel: (01752) 892200; web site: [www.murvi.co.uk](http://www.murvi.co.uk))



*Blue is blessed by Notre Dame des Vignes. This was a lunch stop with a magnificent view at Neuville-sur-Seine in the Champagne region of France*

### CONCLUSION

We have been absolutely delighted with our Mercedes Murvi Morello. As it was to be our only vehicle, we debated carefully before moving up from the compact (4.70-metre long, 2-metre high) Vito. However, apart from the occasional niggle when looking for a parking space, the increased size is well worth all the benefits.

Apart from the engine fault and our vandalising of the seat height adjusters, the vehicle has, thus far, proved trouble free. ■

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