

# LIVING WITH A...

## ...2006 Concorde Charisma 830F

Long-time motorhomer Clive Mott-Gotobed and wife, Janet, reveal what their Concorde is really like



The Concorde boasts loads of living space, a large motorbike-swallowing garage and big payload



### AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £133,230 (nearest current model, Charisma 840F)
- **BERTHS:** 2
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 616 CDi long wheelbase chassis cowl
- **ECONOMY:** 18mpg
- **COST OF SIMILAR AGED 'VAN TODAY:** £79,995



**O**ur Auto-Trail Scout had stood us in good stead for some 11 years or more, but with our passion for the independence that a couple of small motorcycles gives, and with Janet passing her motorcycle test, our bikes had grown a tad larger.

The downside of this was an increase in weight, which had already forced us to abandon the rack on the back of the Scout and tow a small trailer. I don't like towing (and reversing a trailer), especially when one gets retrospective directions from the 'ship's navigator'. For example: "We should have turned left there,"

as we sail past a junction!

So, the quest was on for a new 'van that had a garage big enough to take the bulk and weight of our two bikes, plus all our clutter and still remain legal. Our research covered A-class motorhomes from Niesmann+Bischoff, Frankia, Carthago, Hymer and Concorde. Subsequently, we arrived at the Düsseldorf Caravan Salon, to haggle over a N+B Flair 8000i on an Iveco Daily.

There were a few special details that we wanted to include and the Flair was missing one of those. But we discovered that the new Hymer Liner, which had the required piece of kit as standard, was a Flair in disguise (Niesmann is part of the Hymer Group). So, we ordered the Hymer Liner instead.

### FORWARDS AND BACK ON THE DEAL

Sadly, over the following weeks, various details agreed at the show became unavailable until we were left with a standard 'van at the same price. The order was cancelled, our deposit returned, and our quest started again.

We went to view Carthagos at Lowdham Leisureworld (with no result) and Concordes at Southdowns in Portsmouth. At Southdowns, Janet popped her head into one example of a two-year-old Concorde Charisma. It had the oven

under the hob and the microwave she wanted, plus the social seating area that we both wanted. There was oodles of payload, a massive garage at the rear and a desirable Mercedes star on the front. We also discovered a built-in generator. Janet whispered in my ear: "Buy it," which I took to be a serious hint. And so I haggled.

We had already been lectured by Dave Hurrell about the amount of cash we could save by buying nearly new and he was right. So the 'van, with only 5,800 miles on the clock, became ours.

Apparently the previous owner had had all the goodies fitted, then decided it wasn't big enough for his needs and upgraded to a larger one. On handover day Nigel Mansell was also in the showroom, ordering yet another new motorhome from Southdowns, so we felt in good company.

### TEUTONIC TUNE-UP

We left Southdowns and went immediately to Van Bitz to get a tracker-system fitted - required to keep our insurance company happy.

Janet did not like the original Teutonic-style dark-blue/purple upholstery, so we arranged to call at Regal Furnishings in Ilkeston on our way to the Pickering show.

I can't say how much the job cost, but it



was worth a haggle to get the best price. Thankfully, 'her indoors' was pleased with the job and so was I.

Next, the dining table, which always seemed to be in the way, had to be replaced. We decided to try and find one similar to that fitted by Niesmann to the Flair, as it was both moveable and expandable. Niesmann+Bischoff dealer, Travelworld, ordered one for us with no problems, and after drilling a few holes in the steel base it was suitable for the fixings in our Charisma.

### CAMPING AND KIT

I often wonder - these days - what camping actually means? Certainly, our Charisma is a fully-featured home on wheels, with no daily making up of beds, as there's a comfortable fixed lengthways double (also known as a French bed) over the garage.

A 100-litre bulk gas tank, wind-out awning (with safari room) and SOG - niff-busting - toilet filter were all part of the deal with Southdowns, who also took our Scout in part-exchange.

The kitchen is fully-fitted, including a large fridge with separate freezer. There's a three-burner hob, grill and oven (as demanded by Janet) with electronic ignition, along with an 800W microwave and a separate Nature Pure filtered water tap for drinking water. Two mains

sockets and a single 12V outlet in the kitchen are handy for the toaster and kettle when we are hooked up. However, the built-in generator or our inverter will also power these devices.

So why else have we gone from a traditional British 'van to this German Goliath? Increased space, large motorbike-swallowing garage and big payload are important factors.

The Concorde's frame is aluminium not wood, so doesn't rot should water ingress take place. The double floor contains the massive fresh and waste water tanks, so they cannot freeze, especially as the superbly quiet and effective Alde wet-radiator heating system also heats the garage (and the rest of the interior). The furniture and fittings are substantial: if you use them to haul yourself up from the floor the furniture does not move.

There's space - a corner for her and one for me, but all this comes at a price: our Charisma is 8.5m long (27ft 10.5in) and, fully laden, weighs around six tonnes. We don't expect, or get, the economy of a panel van conversion!

Storage space is more than ample, but we seem to have been able to fill it with essentials.

The washroom is two rooms, one for the shower - which passes my 'pick up the soap' test - and one for the hand basin and cassette toilet. Handily, there is a spare cassette stored in the garage.

The number of days spent away so far have not been as many as we had hoped - because of the sale of our house, the purchase of another and the resulting list of jobs posted by 'she who must be obeyed'. Even so, we have covered 8,000 miles, with a few weekends away and visiting shows, including Düsseldorf, followed by three weeks in the south of France.

### CONCORDE FLIES

The Concorde has now notched up visits to Moreton-in-Marsh, Charmouth, the New Forest and Seend as well as a 1,000-mile tour of Ireland, both north and south.

Driving the motorhome is fine for me. I actually prefer its driving position to our other vehicles, a Landcruiser and Vauxhall Agila. Janet also shares some of the driving, but prefers the Agila because of her little arms.

In the mammoth Irish odyssey we found no roads that would cause our Concorde any problems - although a little care when manoeuvring was required and when entering some campsites. Our favourite site in the south was Moat Farm Caravan & Camping Park, County Wicklow.



### WE LIKE

- Smooth, comfortable ride
- Rear-wheel drive
- Mercedes engineering and world-wide support network
- Lots of living space
- Big carrying capacity and payload
- Double floor
- Large capacity water tanks
- Alde wet central heating system
- Sociable lounge
- Microwave oven
- Low-level, conventional oven
- Fixed bed

### WE WOULD LIKE

- More time to enjoy it!

### WE DISLIKED

- The original upholstery colour
- The table that was never in quite the right place

1 A rising cab floor brings the cockpit seats up to lounge level. Pictured, the new upholstery is in place, but with the old table

2 Aft, the kitchen offers top-notch appointments and handy microwave

3 Purple-blue cloth and fixed table both had to go

4 The new table's top moves and expands

### STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

Not much has gone wrong, however, stopping at the services for a comfort break on the way to the NEC, the engine took some time to start. The problem persisted, so Southdowns took the vehicle to a Mercedes dealer.

The problem was soon fixed when a fuel pipe to the diesel filter was replaced. Apparently, there is a 'quick' way to change the fuel filter, which involves simply bending the pipe out of the way rather than removing it. It's something to look out for.

The SOG system initially fitted was vented through the toilet compartment door and straight into the awning. This was not a good plan, so we had the SOG Mk 2 installed, which vents via an outlet on the roof.

The EFOY fuel cell from our Scout was transferred to the Concorde. However, this has had little use, since the solar panel has performed really well - especially after replacing



Mercedes base vehicle gives high quality engineering and desirable rear-wheel drive

# On Test 2006 Concorde Charisma 830F

all the internal filament bulbs with LED lights.

My only confession relates to fitting some equipment associated with my amateur radio hobby. This required new cables running to the rear of the vehicle for power and antenna feeds.

Laying under the vehicle, I became disorientated and, after treble checking, drilled two holes through the floor straight into the fresh water tank. Janet was not pleased - we were due to go away the following week.

I had to remove the tank and found a local plastic tank manufacturer (Tek Tanks), who could repair it on a 'while you drink coffee' basis. The tank was put back and my learning experience was complete.

I have also fitted various antenna on the roof of the vehicle, the tallest being over five metres high when up. This is lowered electrically to lay across the roof when travelling.

One item we have never used is the Truma air conditioning system. This kit is certainly quieter than all of the roof-mounted units we've previously come across, but neither Janet nor myself can tolerate the noise. I understand that the built-in Dometic generator was initially intended to run the air-con.

My present project is to make a table to sit across part of the dashboard, which is the correct height for use with a laptop when the driver's cabin is raised to the motorhome configuration. My first version works, but the management says it is lacking in aesthetic consideration (the actual phrase is too rude to be printed).

## CONCORDE PERFECTION

So, has our Concorde Charisma proved its worth? The answer is most definitely: a true luxury home on wheels, the 'van has long-term all-weather touring ability and with the capacity and payload to carry all our junk and our motorbikes. In short, our Charisma meets our needs in near-perfect fashion.

I did put the fully loaded vehicle on a



weighbridge and found it too close to the limit for comfort. This resulted in a paperwork exercise with a company called SVTech. Now the Concorde has a gross vehicle weight of 6.4 tonnes, leaving 300kg to spare, even with full fuel and water tanks, two motorcycles, two large gazebos (plus sidewalls), the necessary food, driver and passenger, plus all the clutter we often take away with us.

We use our Concorde as frequently as possible, attending most, if not all, of Warners outdoor shows, exhibitions at the NEC and visits to the Continent to soak up much needed sunshine. With our two motorbikes in the garage, the Concorde is the ultimate escape vehicle. ■

**5** In the rear, the bedroom was one of our must-have features

**6** Gear-swallowing garage, also has plenty of room for our pair of motorbikes

**7** On site - the big awning providing shelter for our bikes

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Conversion:** Concorde Charisma 830F
- **Base vehicle:** Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 616 CDI long wheelbase chassis cowl
- **Power plant:** 2.7-litre turbo-diesel producing 156bhp, automatic transmission, rear-wheel drive
- **Gross vehicle weight:** 6,400kg
- **Payload:** 1,890kg
- **Layout:** Swivelling cab seats (on an electrically-operated rising floor), ahead of L-shaped sofa and side seat (with non-removable dining table), centre kitchen and washroom, lengthways fixed double bed (above garage) in rear
- **Exterior measurements:** Length 8.50m (27ft 10.5in); width 2.40m (7ft 10.5in); height 3.40m (11ft 2in)
- **Berths:** 2
- **Bed size: Rear fixed double:** 1.97m x 1.48m (6ft 5.5in x 4ft 10in)
- **Length of ownership:** 15 months
- **Supplied by:** Southdowns Motorhome Centre, Anchorage Park, Portsmouth PO3 5UH (02392-674820; www.southdownsmotorcaravans.co.uk)
- **Mileage covered:** 8,000
- **Average fuel economy:** 18mpg
- **Accessories/options fitted:** Roof bars, radio-controlled bedroom clock, shelves in wardrobe and cupboards, rear-view and side/blind-spot cameras and monitor, Fiamma awning and safari room, 'ham' radio transceivers and antenna, 125W solar panel, Crystop fully-automatic satellite system with additional Skybox, two TVs, microwave oven, 1,500W pure sine-wave inverter, 2,400W Dometic TEC 29 built-in generator, Tracker vehicle location system
- **Base vehicle service:** DIY
- **Habitation Service:** DIY
- **MOT:** £54
- **Recalls:** None
- **Insurance:** £560 (Caravan Guard)
- **Price new today:** From £133,230 (nearest current model Charisma 840F)
- **Cost of similar aged 'van today:** £79,995 (main dealer)
- **What went wrong:** Rubber fuel pipe cracked (adjacent to fuel filter). Saggy front suspension (transverse spring), replaced for MOT (replaced under warranty)
- **Further reading:** MMM September 2008 issue, pages 184 - 185 (Get Practical: Van Bitz and Cornish Farm campsite feature)
- **Contacts:** Regal Furnishing, Quarry Hill Industrial Estate, Ilkeston DE7 4RA (01159-329988; www.regalfurnishings.co.uk). Travelworld, Halesfield 14, Telford TF7 4QR (08448-804938; www.travelworldrv.co.uk). Tek Tanks, Upper Froyle, Hampshire GU34 4JY (01420-520830; www.tek-tanks.com)



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