

Grace and FERVOUR

George Hinton gets to grips with a Swift that's light on its feet yet sturdy and powerful



Vehicle supplied for test by: Swift Group Ltd, Dunswell Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4JS. Call 01482 847332

STEPPING INTO Swift's Bolero after closer acquaintance with the budget end of the company's output earlier this year (see the Escape 696 test, May 2011 issue) came as a shock. Not because of any deficiency – quite the opposite – but because of how highly specified it is.

The low-profile Boleros effectively now top Swift's volume range, Kon-Tiki being the super-flagship model (now only available as a tag-axle). A number of improvements that appeared across the 2011 Swifts have been consolidated by a 10-year body integrity warranty (dependant on annual dealer service).

CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

Base vehicle, as for all Swifts, is the Fiat Ducato chassis-cab, but the Bolero 712 has a 4.4m (14ft 5in) wheelbase, Al-Ko lowline galvanised chassis and the new 2.3-litre Euro 5 engine, producing 148bhp with 258lb ft (350Nm) of torque.

Body construction is styrene foam sandwich for walls and the 34mm GRP roof, with impregnated redwood for body and floor framing, and sides in marine-grade aluminium with extruded alloy skirts. This is underpinned by a 44mm thick, 'Xyligen'-treated, Styrofoam-insulated, ply floor. Thermal insulation rating is Grade 3 – the highest.

The 712SB has a maximum plated weight of 4,250kg, giving a very generous 915kg payload. This could pose problems for newer drivers whose licence only entitles them to drive 3,500kg. It can also mean higher Continental road tolls.

Layout is a front lounge with short parallel settees, central kitchen, rear twin bedroom and full-width rear washroom. Settees can also form a transverse bed, giving greater flexibility, but there are only two belted travel seats in the cab.

ON THE ROAD

The prototype tested here was built on the only available chassis – a 3.0-litre,

180bhp unit, not available in production Boleros – so performance won't match what we experienced.

Euro 5 models are distinguished by a revised black dashboard (rather than grey) with high-gloss black centre console and imitation burr-walnut embellishments. The radio/CD player now has a USB input and an adjustable time-out feature, up to three hours. Not before time! As well as an interior mirror which doubles as a reversing camera screen, there are the usual excellent twin-lens power door mirrors. Swift has also specified a passenger airbag for this upmarket range.

Ducato is renowned for light and viceless controls. The new engine is lively (0-50mph in 13.1sec), more economical (29.4mpg) and quieter and smoother than previously. ABS braking with standard EBD/EBA is nicely progressive.

The 148bhp engine – a £1,695 upgrade – can be mated to the Comfort-Matic automated gearbox. The auto is included in the £1,095 Vogue Pack which also offers air conditioning and few other bits. There were no problems backing up a gradient, but reverse could, ideally, still be lower. Rear visibility should be good if the rear camera is working (ours wasn't).

Bolero runs on 16in alloy wheels with a steel spare and the heavy-duty rear chassis extension is all ready to add a £550 detachable towbar. Ride quality isn't bad, the Fiat front end feeling a touch softer than the steel torsion bars on the Al-Ko rear, while noise levels are very low.

However, we did suffer some rattles from the plastic sunroof mouldings and kitchen furniture. Naturally, we strategically placed tea-towels around the cooker. Elastic straps should keep the sofa cushions in place while driving, though their fixing studs on our prototype had been forgotten. Access from cab to rear is 11in wide between the seats.

LIVING ABOARD

The cab remote central locking (two keys do everything else) usefully also operates the flyscreened caravan door, and the low chassis means you step straight in (step height 13 1/2in). Headroom is 6ft under the Heki rooflight's frame in the forward lounge, rising to almost 6ft 7in elsewhere, a consequence of the stepped floor.

The lounge is tastefully decorated, the unequal-length short sofas sporting 'Toby' two-tone brown, buttoned, flatweave covers with semi-corded chenille edges and contrast panels. You also get two attractive floral scatter cushions. There's an optional scheme in stain resistant, easy-clean Impala fabric. The left seat is 41in long while the offside one is 48in, but if you want to party, the cab seats swivel rearwards. (We were surprised they lack map pockets.)

Walls are 'vermiculite' cream vinyl, while the detachable carpets are a dark beige mottled twist pile. Top-hung window blinds/screens are backed up by thin, but lined, dark brown curtains. For storage there are four main roof lockers, plus a limited overcab area.

Bulkier items can go into the seat bases, the offside one having external access – this also serves the 95Ah battery that lives in a double-size well beneath. There's a lot more storage in the bedroom, which we'll come to later. For dining there's a 3ft 3in x 1ft 9in free-standing table that stores in a washroom cabinet.

Lighting is all LED with four super-bright spots under the roof lockers, cab map lights on flexy stalks that can also serve the lounge, plus indirect over-roof-locker lighting. The result is a pleasing ambience. Ample daylight comes through the Heki 2 sunroof.

Heating is by the Alde wet radiator system, the programmable dual-fuel boiler housed under the offside rear bed. A special gas regulator allows the heating to be used while driving.

There's a new large, easy-to-read 12V control panel above the entrance with multi-coloured LED indicators, linked to a new mains consumer unit with mains isolators and 12V fuse board. A handy bedroom floor hatch gives access to the 94-litre insulated water tank, which can be heated and the waste pipes insulated as an option.

Outside, highlighting this model's comprehensive standard specification, you have the luxury of a recessed roll-out awning, integrated roof bars, pre-installed cycle rack mounting points, a pump socket for filling the water tank and solar panel preparation on the roof.

KITCHEN

The L-shape kitchen is 3ft 8 1/2in long with a 3ft 2in protruding 'L' terminating in a round-ended, vacuum-formed carousel unit behind a curved door. There's a reasonable amount of work surface, 18in x 22in, but it's not ideally located, behind the protruding granite-effect GRP sink that comes with a nylon cover/chopping board. We did like the serving shelf, which is elevated above the sink/worktop.

The equipment list is exemplary, with a Thetford CK 13000 dual-fuel cooker, the big Thetford N175 fridge-freezer and a Sanyo stainless steel 700W/17-litre microwave oven, installed at a sensible 4ft 6in above floor level. There's no kitchen extractor fan, but a Mini Heki does the job.

Storage is plentiful, if slightly scattered, with three lockers over the cooker, crockery racks with elastic straps over the offside settee and a 10in-deep pan locker beneath the oven, where you will also find the gas valves. There's also a big cupboard >>

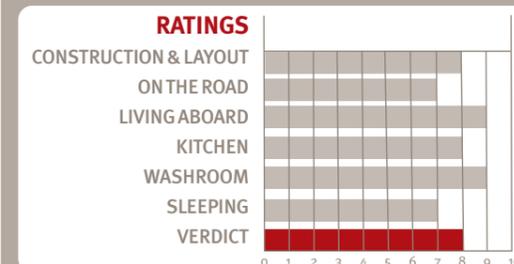


Parallel front settees make for a comfortable lounge/dining area



Twin fixed single beds are not overly long at 6ft

“ Lighting is one of the kitchen's big features ”



RRP/as tested	£53,845/£54,940 OTR
Base vehicle	Fiat Ducato Maxi/Al-Ko AMC
Engine	2,287cc Multijet 4-cyl DOHC 16v common rail
Power	148bhp (110kW) @ 3,600rpm
Torque	261lb/ft (350Nm) @ 1,500rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, FWD
Fuel/tank	Diesel/19.8gal (90 litres)
Overall length	25ft 3 1/2in (7.71m)
Overall width	7ft 8 1/2in (2.35m) exc mirrors 8ft 10in (2.69m) inc mirrors
Overall height	9ft 1in (2.77m)
Min internal height	6ft (1.89m)
MRO	3,335kg (65.6cwt)
MTPLM	4,250kg (83.7cwt)
User payload	915kg (18cwt)
Berths	4
NCC approved	Yes

Figures supplied by manufacturer

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Bolero's kitchen is not only stylish but also well equipped



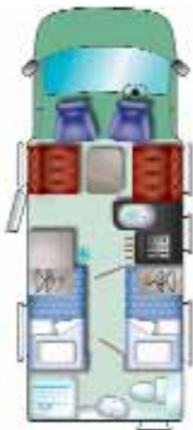
Cab seats swivel to extend lounging possibilities should you be expecting guests



End washroom is roomy, well designed...



...and offers a good amount of storage



above the fridge. A conventional cutlery drawer is substituted by a moulded tray in the carousel unit, which we found less convenient, and there are two 13A sockets above the left corner of the worktop.

Lighting is one of the kitchen's big features, with edge-illumination to the acrylic splashback and under the lip of the worktop, the main light coming from a strip of LEDs beneath the microwave and two ceiling downlights. Messy cooks can lift the kitchen's detachable carpet section if required.

One minor quality issue here: the ply plinth fell off the base of the fridge unit, apparently secured by two staples and a prayer. Overall, the kitchen is very practical, but not quite perfect.

WASHROOM

A central door between the two single beds leads to the end washroom, which is a generous 4ft x 3ft 4in excluding the corner shower and the table store. The overall impression is one of wood: it's completely panelled in woodgrained ply in this season's rich new colour, 'Mali Acacia'.

There's a rear opal window as well as a five-way rooflight, with recessed halogen spotlights over the oval handbasin and in the 30 x 22in shower cubicle. The Thetford C250 flat-top toilet is located against the offside wall, flanked on the forward side by a P-shaped heated chrome towel rail. Above is a towel ring and two gown hooks, with toothmug and toilet-tissue holders appropriately positioned. Behind and above the toilet, the double-doored table store's three shelves have no retaining lips.

There's a cupboard under the basin (unshelved) and a small wall cabinet between basin and window, linked by a useful shelf. The shower, with riser rail and two soap dishes, provides good pressure and the tray has two drains.

Naturally, there's a detachable carpet over the scratch-resistant lino. Need a mirror? There's a biggie, 13in x 32in, forming the basin splashback.

SLEEPING

Two permanent single beds are the whole raison d'être of the 712SB, but are meanly sized at just 6ft long by 2ft 4in wide. Triangular shelves at the head ends are sufficient for watches, rings etc.

As well as under-bed storage there are his-and-hers wardrobes, suspended 14in above the foot of each bed, both with 15in rails offering 37in drops. Six roof lockers swallow a lot more, their four loose-fitted shelves easily re-arranged.

Paired spotlights at the bedhead end allow for night-time reading, with continuous LED strips above the roof lockers. A vacuum-formed panel and appropriate sockets prepare for a slimline TV on the side of the nearside wardrobe.

The short singles are compensated by the 3ft 5in x 6ft 10in front bed, which Swift claims is a double, simply made by pulling alloy-framed slatted extensions out from the sofas and re-arranging cushions. Remis blinds close the cab windows.

VERDICT

Swift has gone to a lot of trouble in creating the 712SB, which offers comfort, convenience and a dose of luxury. With a 10-year warranty, it looks as sound a place as any to invest your pension. ■

