

French finesse

Malcolm Street takes a close-up look at Pilote's Le Voyageur and discovers practicality, spaciousness, and plenty of style.

Over the last few years, there seems to have been a steady increase in the number of A-class motorhomes available in New Zealand, something to make those Aussies across the Tasman quite jealous because they have almost none.

Blenheim-based DeLuxe RV Group has added to that number with their Le Voyageur motorhome. In case you haven't guessed, it's French-built by the Pilote group, DeLuxe being the New Zealand agent for Pilote motorhomes.

Even a brief look over Le Voyageur reveals that it's a quite a classy motorhome, with an external length of 8550mm and a GVM of 5000kg, which suggests plenty of capacity for a considerable number of features.

MOTIVE POWER

Starting with the underpinnings, Le Voyageur is powered by a Fiat Ducato 180 Multijet cab bolted to a tandem axle Al-Ko AMC chassis, the latter being an essential item for the load-carrying capacity. Given the weight factor, it's also useful that the most powerful of the 2.3-litre turbo diesel, the 130kW/400Nm engine, has been fitted.

A result of the Al-Ko chassis and Fiat Ducato mating is that the motorhome does sit fairly low to the ground. For most road driving, that is not going to be an issue but steep gutters and undulations on minor roads might be more of a problem. So an angled approach should be kept in mind.

CONSTRUCTION

Being a European-manufactured motorhome, it's built for a cooler and damp climate, which suits New Zealand

quite well. Consequently, it has features such as a one-piece fibreglass roof that is slightly cambered to cater for rainwater runoff, 25mm styrofoam insulation all round, and a double floor that not only allows for insulation and underfloor heating but also the 200-litre fresh and 120-litre grey water tanks as well. In motorhomes such as this, it is often the bits that cannot be easily seen that are just as notable as those that are. Standard are the double-glazed acrylic windows and the Euro-style habitation door, which, with the passenger side cab door, has remote central locking.

GARAGE CAPACITY

A feature of many larger European motorhomes is a large garage at the rear and Le Voyageur has that naturally for sporting gear, folding bikes, and camping chairs. One of the many little not so obvious features of Le Voyageur is fitted to the bottom of the garage door frame in the form of an angled metal plate, protecting the lip, which makes it easier for lifting gear in and out. Forward of the habitation door, there's a second smaller storage bin. Complete with a shelf, it's handy for smaller ready-to-use items.

Just behind the entry door is a handy utilities bin, which gives easy (i.e. minimal bending over) access to the main electrical controls, house battery, and mains cable socket. For the power cable, the entry hole is underneath the motorhome, so the plug/socket connection is completely weatherproof. Like the garage door, the battery mounting also has a piece of angled metal to aid getting it in and out over the lip of the door.

A TOUCH OF CLASS

Stepping inside Le Voyageur reveals a spacious interior par excellence. Even with the drop-down bed above the front cab, there is a palatial feel to the interior. The white leather upholstered seating is a positive invitation to sit down and admire the surroundings, which, to say the least, are quite easy on the eye with—among other features—curved wood cabinetry, muted colours, and an extensive semi-concealed LED strip lighting. The mid and rear areas of Le Voyageur consist of a fair sized kitchen, split bathroom, and a generously sized bedroom with an island bed.

All the cabinetry doors are handle-less, relying on the simple catch system that ▶▶

Specifications	
Vehicle make/model	Le Voyageur
Engine	2.3L 130kW/400Nm turbo diesel
Transmission	6-speed AMT
Berths	4
Approx. overall length	8550mm
Approx. overall width	2350mm
Tanks	200L fresh 120L grey
Gas	2 x 9kg
GVM	5000kg
Price (as reviewed)	\$259,990

Images supplied



The layout is easy on the eye

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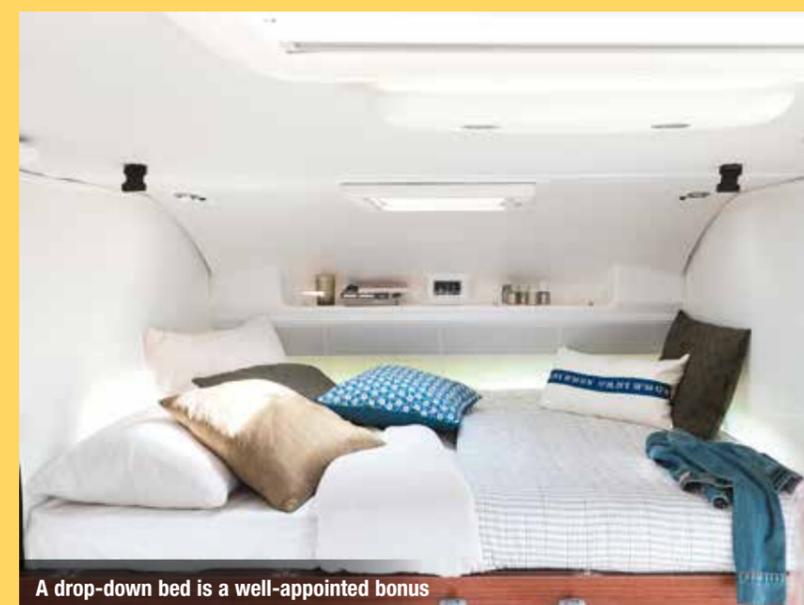
An inviting lounge to just sit and relax



Kitchen curves also mean a practical layout



Plenty of cupboard space in the bedroom



A drop-down bed is a well-appointed bonus

works on just pushing the door to open or close. I'm a bit of a fan of this arrangement. Not only does it look good but there are also some door handles around that are difficult to use by people who have large, arthritic or similar hands.

Down at feet level, one of the benefits of the double floor is that it allows for two floor hatches, more practical than decorous, allowing for easy access to the water tanks and a handy underfloor storage compartment.

SEATING

Lounging might be a more appropriate word here, with plenty of choice to sit down and relax. Two can easily put their feet up but there's certainly room for four and the flip-over table is out of the way when necessary but folds over to serve a meal for four or five people without a problem. Not really seating but the drop-down bed above the cab, supplies a two-berth extra bed at a moment's notice. Don't forget to fold the cab seat backs over first!

Placement of the TV for the best viewing is sometimes a bit of a lottery, but the 24.9-inch flat screen mounted into the cabinet by the habitation door works well. Above and below are cabinets for items such as wine glasses and smaller items such as torches and keys, which just need a handy place to be kept.

CATERING

Instead of the more usual L-shaped kitchen found in many European motorhomes, this one has the three-burner hob and washing up sink side by side. However, the subtle curve of the benchtop towards the rear not only allows for a bit more bench top space but also improves the kitchen storage underneath. That includes both a large cutlery drawer and a slide-out wine bottle/garbage bin holder. That fits neatly in adjacent to the grill/oven.

Across the aisle, the 160-litre three-way fridge has a cupboard above and a full height slide-out pantry alongside. It's not the wire basket variety but something more substantial with lipped shelves and a wine bottle rack to ensure that nothing falls out when travelling along.

EN SUITE

I don't know if anyone else has noticed but during the last 10 years, bathrooms have been getting bigger. This one being a case in point where we have a separate ▶▶



Large items can easily be accommodated in the garage



Bathroom facilities include a spacious shower cubicle



- 2.3L 130kW/400Nm turbo diesel
- Load carrying capacity
- Very stylish interior
- Extensive LED lighting system
- Remote camping ability



- Limited low ground clearance
- Low rear overhang
- Nominal amount of kitchen bench space
- Having to hand the keys back!

shower cubicle and fully kitted out vanity cabinet on one side and a toilet cubicle on the other. All are fitted out luxuriously with all the necessary items and more. With sliding doors on both ends, the bathroom can be completely closed off from the rest of the motorhome.

Included in the bathroom is a fully height two-door wardrobe, which has the option of hanging space or shelves. Not huge but large enough for the essentials.

REAR BEDROOM

With all the concealed and not-so-concealed lighting turned on, the bedroom looks more like something to be found in a mid-priced hotel room. Naturally, the island bed dominates but the curved ends not only enhance the overall look but also make it easier to

walk around the bed. Given the garage below the bed, it sits high but steps on either side sort that. At the foot of the bed, there's a decent-sized drawer and the light designed to illuminate the steps also does a great job on the drawer contents as well.

There's an interesting bit of design trickery with the bedside cabinets because they sit off the rear wall, thus allowing for a couple of bedside shelves behind the cupboard as well as the conventional one in front. It's quite a simple idea yet one that typifies the entire motorhome design philosophy.

REMOTE CAMPING

Certainly, Le Voyageur is well equipped for camping 'off the grid'. The generous payload, water tank capacity of 200 litres,

gel cell battery rating of 200AH, and 300W charging ability of the solar panels more or less guarantees that. For cooler seasons, there is the Alde gas/electric water/ducted space heater.

VERDICT

With a price tag just north of \$250,000, a classy motorhome is to be expected, and to my eyes, Le Voyageur fits that bill. It is packed with features and has an internal ambience that gives off a great deal of style as well as offering a spacious and practical interior. It's fitting also that the 130kW engine and six-speed AMT gearbox will ensure a relaxed cruising style when on the road. ■

For more details, contact DeLuxe RV Group on 03 578 3310 or visit deluxegrup.co.nz.

Tempting to hit the road or what?

