

Big Mac

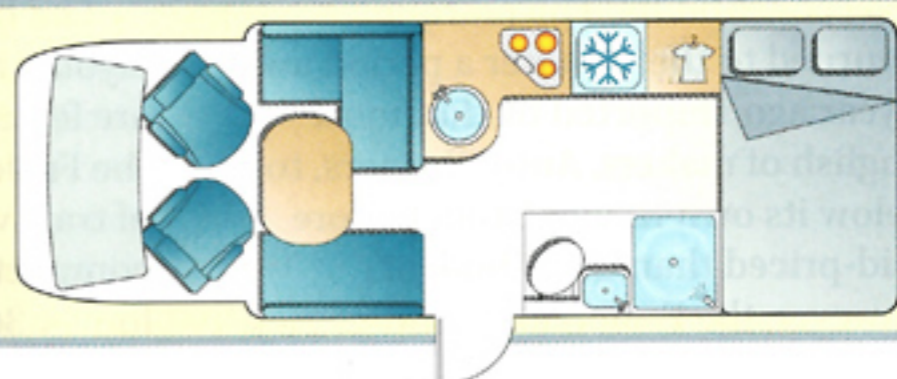
If you want a big garage in a sub-7m motorhome, this Anglo-Italian McLouis could be for you



Peter Vaughan

MCLOUIS FUSION 360

Price from: £56,995
Berths: 4 **Travel seats:** 5
Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato
Length: 6.99m
Gross weight: 3,500kg





The lounge comfort is light and airy; note the step up into the cab

If you're wondering about the origins of the brand McLouis, the title comes from the merging of two neighbouring airport restaurant names (McDonalds and Louis) spotted when its founder was waiting for a flight. It sounds British, Scottish even, but is no more Anglo-Saxon than *linguine alle vongole*, although the latest models do aim to suit our tastes with on-board ovens and now, for 2020, UK-handed layouts with a nearside habitation door, too.

McLouis motorhomes, which hail from Tuscany, like most Italian 'vans, first came here in the early Noughties when the Italians majored on entry-level coachbuilts. The marque returned to the UK after a period away a year ago, imported by that most English of makers, Auto-Sleepers, to fit below its own range. A touch more mid-priced than truly 'budget', however, the Fusion low-profiles kick

off at £53,995 and top out at £58,995 (before options). A-classes are expected to follow in due course.

For now, though, there are five models, all equipped to the same high spec, with lengths varying from 5.99m to 7.41m. Even the Lux Pack (including a 120W solar panel amongst other valuable kit) is thrown in, so the only extra-cost items listed in the brochure are a chassis upgrade to 4,400kg (priced at £2,000) and an automatic gearbox (also £2k).

You'll need to talk to your dealer about a bike rack (for which fixings are already in situ) or an awning, TV or satellite dish.

The fixed single bed and island bed layouts that you see in every brochure are featured from McLouis, too, but the Fusion range also includes a pair of transverse double bed models, the compact 331 and the one-metre-longer 360, which we're testing here.

LOADS TO LIKE

There's little that's remarkable about the McLouis' styling; it simply comes from the modern low-profile coachbuilt rulebook, with all-white finish (including skirts and bumpers) and a big overcab Sky Dome window.

The alloy wheels and framed, flush-fit habitation windows give a hint of upmarket flair, while a glass-fibre finish underneath and on the roof (which you can walk on) talk of the practical side. Body construction is referred to as WPS, the key features of which are Styrofoam insulation, a 70mm-thick floor, polyester inner walls and a complete absence of wood.

Not only is the entrance on the UK side but it forgoes any external step, thanks to the lower Fiat Camper chassis. Inside, two small steps take you up to the living area, which is all on one level, bar a step up into the cab and the washroom.



The lockers at the side of the sunroof are much better than the usual open shelves



The twin-section pull-out pantry storage is a great feature in the kitchen



The electric drop-down bed leaves galley and entrance undisturbed

SECOND OPINION

"The transverse bed layout here has particular appeal for tall buyers as the bed is a whopping 7ft 2½in long."

DANIEL ATTWOOD EDITOR

It's also worth noting that the offside gas locker is mounted low, and it places the cylinders side by side, so swapping gas will be relatively easy. But the really crucial exterior feature is the garage, which comes with large loading doors on either side, plus heating, lighting, four fixed corner-mounted lashing points and a small hatch into the living area. Internal width at floor level is 1.09m and headroom is 1.20m, so there's plenty of room for a couple of e-bikes.

However, if you want to carry a more potent two-wheeler, there's also an unusually generous 300kg weight limit for this garage (thanks to chassis extensions below). That might also encourage you to go for the no-cost upgrade to a 3,650kg gross weight, if your licence allows, thus upping the 360's total payload to 593kg.

We drove the Fusion very lightly laden (and with just delivery mileage

on the clock) but the experience was enough to suggest that, for many buyers, the standard 140bhp engine will be adequate. But for those travelling *en famille* and with the garage loaded to the max, plus perhaps the 4,400kg chassis option ticked, the 160bhp upgrade would be worthwhile (it's a £1,000 option, although not actually listed on the Fusion sales leaflet).

The cab could, perhaps, do with a bit more bling, too. The Fiat's black plastic fascia looks a little aged, especially here without any contrasting sections, chrome-ringed dials or a leather steering wheel.

The original seats are covered in a cream leather-look material, leaving the grey armrests also looking a little bit bare.

The cab specification is good, though, with a DAB radio featuring sat-nav, reversing camera, Bluetooth

and steering wheel controls.

Cab air-conditioning, cruise control, passenger airbag, Traction Plus and hill descent control are all standard as well, and the remote central locking includes the habitation door, which certainly gets a big thumbs-up from me.

DOUBLE CREAM

The cab's cream leather-style upholstery (for some it may not be the most practical colour) is continued in the lounge, where it seems better finished, complete with double stitching. The lounge seats are lower than the cab chairs, though, meaning that the former feel just a tad low in relation to the table.

The table itself is a permanent fixture but it's a good size for family dining and it rotates and slides in every possible direction, with just a >

LIKED



- Big garage with 300kg weight limit
- Very sturdy furniture

DISLIKED



- Cab seats higher than lounge seats
- Position of rear head restraints

WANTED

- Reading lights in cab
- Larger nearside lounge window



There's more worktop than in some rivals and an extractor hood is standard

single handle to operate it.

Five could sit in this lounge (a sixth person would fit but couldn't easily reach the table) and there's good natural light from the overcab sunroof and artificial lighting from a virtually unrivalled selection of LED strips and spots (none of them dimmable). There are no reading lights in the cab, though, and we did wonder why the nearside lounge window was smaller than expected and rather high up.

For travel, the L-settee includes two three-point belts, while the nearside settee converts into a rear-facing pew with a lap belt. There is no headrest here, however, and virtually no view – apart from a 'selfie' in the mirror by the entrance or of the TV.

On site, I also found the head restraints on the forward-facing bench too low but, as these are separate cushions, it shouldn't be difficult to remove them.

Net curtains add a bit of continental flavour to the lounge, while removable carpets (not shown) are part of the standard-fit Lux Pack.

Blinds are the simpler flat type, apart from in the cab, which gets concertina-style blinds rather than curtains or insulated screens.

The Sky Dome is one of the biggest of its type and the overcab area has cupboards at either side, which are so much more useful than the usual open pockets.

SOLID AS A ROCK

If this is the most Anglo-centric McLouis motorhome yet, it is also much more robustly built than some of its forebears. I was genuinely impressed by the feeling of solidity and durability throughout this Fusion, which seems to have a feeling of no-nonsense quality that's lacking in

some of its rivals.

Everything feels built to last and rattles are relatively few.

The kitchen is, perhaps, where you'll notice this most and the appeal here goes beyond the Thetford Duplex oven/grill and the tall, slim 142-litre fridge with automatic energy selection. There's a touch more (glossy white) worktop than you'll find in some rival L-shaped galleys and disappointment at an apparent lack of drawers is quickly allayed when you open the cupboard under the sink and find two slide-out sections (although the top one lacks a cutlery tray). Better still are the twin (high and low) pull-out pantry units found between the fridge and the cooker – they're ideal for bottles, tins and packet foods.

The spec here even includes an extractor over the hob and an *en vogue* illuminated splashback around the kitchen window.



Carpets are standard (although not shown), as is this cream leather-style upholstery

WASHROOM BLISS

When the first McLouis motorhomes landed here they were ahead of home-produced rivals in washroom design and that's still the case in this Fusion nearly two decades on.

Although you step up into this washroom, headroom is not an issue at 1.93m (slightly more in the shower) and, while all the Fusion 360's facilities are in one 'room', it is hard to fault the design. The toilet area has an opening window, plenty of room to use the swivel cassette loo and decent amounts of worktop and storage space. A toothbrush mug and soap dish are provided, along with a loo roll holder hidden in a cupboard, but you'll need to provide and fit your own towel hooks/rings.

Alongside, there's a proper separate shower with twin drains and a tiny roof vent, but the usability of this (well-proportioned) space is increased

by the step, which is perfect for feet washing, or even to act as a seat.

TALL STORY

Transverse fixed double bed layouts like this may be a relatively rare sight in 2020, but (as well as the big garage below) they have a key advantage for taller motorhomers – as the bed runs the full width of the 'van, mattress length is much better than you'd find with an island bed. Here, it's a whopping 2.20m (and headroom in the kitchen area also suits the long 'n' lanky at 2.08m).

The one-piece mattress seemed to offer excellent comfort, but some may find sleeping under the rear cupboards claustrophobic. Of course, access is more awkward for the person on this side, too, as they'll have to climb over their partner to get out, but you won't have to use a ladder – two

steps are built in, although you'll still need reasonably long legs to get up to a bed that's about 1.17m off the floor.

We'd also have liked to have the reading lights and opening window at opposite ends of the bedroom, as sitting up against a solid wall is preferable to leaning against a blind but, as there's plenty of bedroom lighting, it's not a big issue to sleep with your feet by the window. A net is provided to stop occupants rolling out, although there's no privacy screen or curtain.

There is, perhaps, an alternative to climbing over your better half, though – a double bed each! The second bed is an electric drop-down one over the forward lounge. It's operated by a simple switch on the side of the bed and lowers in seconds. Unlike many of its ilk, it doesn't interfere with the kitchen or access through the habitation door and there's no need >



Two fixed steps lead up to a very long rear double bed



The washroom design is excellent, complete with seat in the shower

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE
 From: £56,995
 As tested: £56,995

BASICS
 Berths: 4
 Travel seats: 5 (inc 1 rearward-facing)
 Warranty: Base vehicle three years, conversion two years, water ingress five years
 Type approval: European Whole Vehicle

DIMENSIONS
 Length: 6.99m (22ft 11in)
 Width: 2.33m (7ft 8in)
 Height: 2.95m (9ft 8in)
 Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg (3,650kg no-cost option or 4,400kg at £2,000 extra)
 Payload: 443kg (standard 3,500kg model)

BASE VEHICLE
 Type: Fiat Ducato Camper wide-track chassis-cab
 Engine: 2.3-litre, Euro 6d, 140bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual gearbox

KITCHEN
 Cooker: Thetford three-burner hob and Duplex oven/grill
 Fridge: Thetford 142-litre slimline with AES

BEDS
 Front drop-down: 1.90m x 1.25m/1.05m (6ft 3in x 4ft 1in/3ft 5in)
 Rear bed: 2.20m x 1.38m (7ft 2½in x 4ft 6in)

ESSENTIALS
 Fresh water: 100 litres (inboard)
 Waste water: 100 litres (underfloor, insulated)
 Space/water heating: Truma Combi 6 E gas/electric blown-air
 Leisure battery: 95Ah
 Gas: 2 x 13kg

OPTIONS
 Fitted to test vehicle: None
 Other options available: Automatic gearbox (£2,000), 160bhp engine (£1,000), chassis upgrade to 4,400kg (£2,000)

THE ALTERNATIVES

Carado T334 £48,799
 Hobby OnTour Edition V65 GF £55,111

THE MAMM VERDICT

If you're looking for a mid-range low-profile and the Fusion range isn't on your shopping list, then it should be. This 'van impressed with its build quality as well as its 'everything as standard' spec and the 360 model adds a huge garage, long double bed and excellent washroom to the package. Only the stepped floor in the lounge area and the lack of an alternative upholstery let it down.

to move any cushions (or even clear the table) before you deploy it.

You will, of course, need a ladder to reach this bed but, once up there, you have two individually switched spotlights, storage pockets for reading material, etc, and a mattress that's as thick and comfy as the one in the stern. The bed narrows towards the nearside, dictating which way around you sleep, but it's adequately sized for two, especially as kids are perhaps the likely occupants.

Headroom upstairs is restricted to 530mm but this leaves just enough room to sit below (only where the lockers suspended under the bed do not intrude) or to duck and scramble through to the cab (where headroom

is unaffected).

Ventilation for the front bed shouldn't be a problem as both the kitchen roof vent and cab Sky Dome are adjacent. Also worth noting is the unusually tall wardrobe (next to the rear bedroom), with hanging height to cater for the longest of dresses. MAMM

MOTORHOME SUPPLIED BY

Auto-Sleepers Ltd
 01386 853338
 mclouisfusion.co.uk

INSURANCE

0800 975 1307
 shieldtotalinsurance.co.uk
 Find quote details on Secondhand Choice



LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT MOTORHOME? Our buyers' guide has over 15,000 makes and models motorhome.ma/buyersguide

Out&AboutLive