

New vans for less

Explorer Group has re-entered the budget tourer market with a bang. **Mark Bigault** casts an eye over the all-new Xplore line up

With the launch of the Elddis Avante Club and Compass Corona Club

ranges for the 2008 season, it left Explorer Group with a gap at the entry-level end of the market: enter the Xplore range.

Like Lunar's new Zenith, the Xplore range is competing with Bailey's Ranger, the Swift Group's Sprite range and the Darts from Avondale. It has five layouts, from the two-berth 452, weighing 1165kg, to the twin-axle six-berth 596 at 1530kg. Interestingly, it is the first range in the UK to come with the 13-pin 'Euro' socket as standard, in place of the usual 12N and 12S plugs on UK vans.

Xplore's starting price of £9995 puts it firmly up against the Bailey and Sprite offerings, and undercuts the Avondale and Lunar products.

We've got first look reviews of the 474, 495 and 546 models, and data for the 452 and 596 below.

Xplore 452

Classic two-berth end-washroom tourer

Price £9,995

Shipping length 6.03m

Internal length 4.54m

Width 2.2m

MTPLM 1165kg

MiRO 988kg

Xplore 596

Popular six-berth twin-lounge layout on a twin-axle chassis

Price £12,295

Shipping length 7.46m

Internal length 5.98m

Width 2.2m

MTPLM 1530kg

MiRO 1298kg

Xplore is available immediately from a selection of Compass, Elddis and Buccaneer dealers across the country. For details of your nearest stockist, call 01207 699 000 or visit www.explorer-group.co.uk

Xplore 474

Price £10,295

Berths 4

Shipping length 6.23m

Internal length 4.74m

Shipping width 2.20m

MTPLM 1235kg

MiRO 1036kg

Payload 199kg

Corner fixed beds are still selling well to UK buyers, a fact that hasn't escaped Explorer Group. Although the 474 is just 20cm longer than the two-berth 452, much more has been crammed inside.

The nearside work surface is smaller, but this frees up space for the washroom to run lengthwise and the large fixed bed to sit snugly in the offside corner. Underneath the mattress, which lifts on sturdy gas struts, is a deep and useful storage space.

The kitchen features the same specification as that of the 452, and up front the dinette serves buyers equally well when lounging, dining and sleeping. The washroom is



Worktop folds down over foot of bed

split, with the swivel-bowl toilet and separate shower in an en-suite room in the nearside corner. The basin is outside the washroom, near the foot of the bed.

This layout appeals to parents looking for privacy and luxury come night time. And with good specification at a reasonable price, the 474 is a viable option.



The Perfect Match

KIA CEE'D 1.6 CRDI LS

Price £14,295

Noseweight 75kg

Kerbweight 1367kg-1468kg

Match 85%



The Xplore 452 looks to be good value, and you can say

the same of the Kia Cee'd. It's much cheaper than the equivalent Volkswagen Golf but has a stronger engine and a higher kerbweight. Kia quotes a range of weights, but even working from the lower figure, the 452 will be an 85% match.

The diesel engine may be just a 1.6-litre, but it punches above its weight with 188lb/ft of torque. It should easily cope with the 452. The 75kg noseweight limit is higher than many small cars', to the benefit of towing stability.

Kia's seven-year warranty gives long-term peace of mind.



LEFT Corner fixed bed is a popular layout RIGHT Controls are clustered near the door

Xplore 495

Price £10,795
Berths 5
Shipping length 6.52m
Internal length 5.03m
Shipping width 2.20m
MTPLM 1300kg
MiRO 1088kg
Payload 212kg



TOP **Side washroom is compact**
 ABOVE **Storage in central chest**

The 495 employs a popular family layout, with a dinette at either end. Up front, the larger dinette is punctuated by a central chest of drawers, which adds storage and versatility at meal times. Moving back there's a well-appointed nearside kitchen, with a single wardrobe and side-washroom opposite.

The interior is bright with light upholstery and woodwork. As with the rest of the range it has

drop-in carpets and Seitz blinds and flyscreens to all windows.

Specification is comparable with Ranger and Alpine, too. In the kitchen there's a 108-litre Thetford fridge, three-burner hob and sink with recessed drainer. For some, the compact side washroom may limit the van's appeal, but we think that for most families, the flexibility of separate seating areas in a van with a five-metre body length will be more than adequate recompense.

The Perfect Match

VAUXHALL ZAFIRA DESIGN 1.9CDTI 150

Price	£18,075
Noseweight	75kg
Kerbweight	1569kg
Match	83%



As compact seven-seaters go, the Zafira has the

jump on rivals thanks to the compact size, easy stowage of the sixth and seventh seats and the willing performance of the diesel engine. With 236lb/ft of torque on tap, it'll haul the 495 along easily and maintain reasonable economy although it can be a bit gruff when worked hard.

Xplore 546

Price £10,895
Berths 6
Shipping length 6.92m
Interior length 5.44m
Shipping width 2.2m
MTPLM 1335kg
MiRO 1109kg
Payload 226kg



One of two six-berth vans in the Xplore range, this family affair is the smaller of the two at just under seven metres. Building on the popularity of the fixed transverse rear bunk layout, this is a great solution for larger families who want a

manageable van. It has four bunks and at the front an assembled double bed, but weighs in at an eminently towable 1335kg. The price also represents great value for money, considering how much caravan you get for just under £11,000.

As with the other Xplore vans, specification is competitive and the interior comfortable, if not luxurious. The washroom isn't massive, but is perfectly practical. The separate shower is roomy enough to wash off the kids after a day at the beach.

In the kitchen, cooks are blessed with the same competent specification present across the range. The one negative is the limited amount of worktop, which Explorer has tried to address with a flip-out section beside the sink.

The Perfect Match

FORD S-MAX 2.0 TDCI LX

Price	£18,995
Noseweight	75kg
Kerbweight	1736kg
Match	77%



Anyone who thinks MPVs are all dull has never

driven an S-Max. Sharp steering, agile cornering and plenty of grip make this the most fun people-carrier on sale. The same well judged suspension which fixes a grin to the driver's face helps keep the outfit nice and stable when towing, too.

Inside, there's room for seven, although space in the rear two seats is tight. If they're not needed, the seats can be folded into the floor to provide extra luggage space.

With prices just a fiver shy of £19,000, it's not a cheap choice to match to a budget van like the Xplore, but second-hand examples start from around £14,000.



ABOVE **Flip-out worktop section by sink and glass covers extend limited work area** RIGHT **Fixed bunks at rear make a haven for kids**

