

TESTED

EXCLUSIVE

Smove operator



Dave Hurrell

A low-profile that thinks it's a liner? That's exactly what the latest offering from Niesmann+Bischoff sets out to be...

NIESMANN+BISCHOFF SMOVE 7.4 E

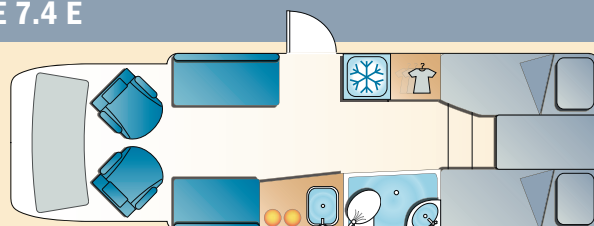
Price from: £72,138

Berths: 2 Travel seats: 2

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato AI-Ko

Length: 7.43m

Gross weight: 4,500kg





Leather is an option and there's a huge range of soft furnishings and trim details to choose from

Having already left sticky finger marks all over this very latest Niesmann+Bischoff model at October's NEC show, you could say I was rather eager to try the thing for real. And I'd not have long, as this left-hand drive model was due to be back to Germany in double-quick time.

N+B's brochure describes the four-model Smove (pronounced 'smoove') range as "a completely new kind of vehicle". Not quite – it's more like the lovechild of a high-end liner A-class and a more modest low-profile. And the result is very, very interesting.

The near seven-and-half-metre Smove motorhome presents with a pretty conventional twin single bed layout, which is currently one of the most popular around.

In the rear, those easy-access twin single beds are installed above a garage, while seatbelt-free sofas up

front mean it's a pure two-berth

Following conventional lines, the kitchen and washroom live between the lounge and bedroom, the latter providing an en suite. The alternative Smoves are conventional, too: there's one other single bed model and two transverse double designs. All have large garages.

SMOVE CLOSER

The Smove is a standout motorhome and, in the cold light of a Shropshire autumn day with rain on the menu, this was confirmed – it is definitely in the running for the title of 'prettiest motorhome ever.'

No prizes for guessing that Fiat's Ducato provides the foundations and I was impressed by how well N+B's designers have integrated the motorhome body to the cab.

Cunning or clever design? Well, probably a bit of both. It's the roof cap that first draws the eye as – with its black centre and silver frame – it compliments the Fiat nose and gloss black grille. Fiat nose? Look closer and you discover that applied panels to the cab doors are joined by subtly redesigned lower front wings and grille, while the door panels, in turn, help integrate the cab into the sleek, N+B-built body to the rear. Meanwhile, the roof cap has raised sides that hide things such as rooflights, satellite dish and solar panel from view. It's a superb design – both from aesthetic and practical points of view.

As you might expect, under the skin is pretty good as well: double-layered alloy with an extra-thick floor brings increased rigidity and, it's claimed, superior insulation.



Fiat's Ducato does it again and this time with the latest range-topping Euro VI motor



More light with the optional additional sunroof, which slides electrically



The high-set beds inside mean there is a very generous garage below



'Control central' also houses the TV. The finish on the panels below is an optional extra that will appeal to some

THE POWER TO SMOVE

The story of over £33,000-worth of fitted options starts in the cab, where the Chassis Pack provides climate control, front foglights and LED daytime running lights. It's the Multimedia Pack that brings the DAB/DVD/CD, which also has sat-nav and acts as the display for the reversing camera, which hides under the N+B fleur-de-lis badge until you engage reverse. Fancy? Yes, and practical, too, as grime is kept off the camera's lens.

Under the hood lurked the 177bhp version of the Fiat's Euro VI motor, which, like lesser engines in the range (130 and 150bhp), is now a 2.3-litre where previously the range-topper was a 3-litre. The big-capacity lump couldn't make the Euro VI grade, and this new downsized alternative is claimed to be 19% more economical.

So how does it compare? Well,

this was our first test of the 2.3-litre 180 Multijet and it performed very well and should only improve once some running-in miles have been covered. But is it as torquey? Well, official figures claim the same 400Nm maximum at 1,500 revs (previously 1,400rpm) so you shouldn't notice much difference. It didn't feel quite as gutsy but it was brand-new and it was smooth (Smove?), even in higher gears and at lower speeds, with plenty of power on tap.

In the rear, the Al-Ko chassis-supported body did well, with a lack of rattles and a genuine feeling of that claimed rigidity.

SMOVE CAMPING

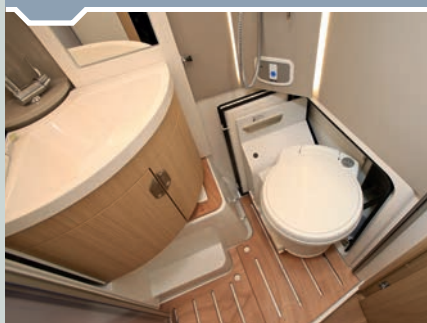
The exterior is unblemished by such mundane things as fillers and hook-up point. So, out with the key and start

opening hatches. Aha! One lid reveals everything to feed, water and drain – all neatly grouped, frost-proofed and heated and locked away when not needed. Excellent.

Modernity reigns inside with plenty of styling cues that display the Smove's N+B DNA. Soft furnishings here are in leather, but you can mix and match a whole range of other fabrics to customise – 18 different fabrics and leathers are on the menu. Real grass is another N+B signature item that's been around for a few years – encapsulated in panels in the washroom door and at bedheads. It's a conversation starter if nothing else.

The kitchen bucks the trend as it's a new design and unlike those found in N+B's A-class Arto and Flair. Twin lids cover the unit – an idea that creates a sideboard and is reminiscent of Auto-Sleeper designs of old. The lids ►

LIKED



- Clever washroom
- Superb style and quality

DISLIKED



- Low-looming lockers at the single beds' heads
- Toilet locker intrudes, making kitchen drawers quite small

WANTED

- At this price, Alde heating as standard



The kitchen design is new and more practical than in many rivals



The washbasin and toilet both hide away. The space left behind becomes a huge shower

open to left and right. One lid comes to rest vertically against the adjacent bathroom wall, the other sits above the nearside sofa, making a pretty big working surface in the process. The unit's main worktop is bang up-to-date – a very 'Smove' design, with an all-over black glass top that incorporates gas hob and stainless-steel sink. There's also quite a bit of usable preparation area in front of the two burners.

Below are three drawers that appear large, until you open them, then discover that it's merely the fronts that are big. A chunk of width is lost to something intruding into the space below the sink. More on that later...

Diagonally opposite, the fridge is a tall-and-slim model from Thetford – one of the latest with a large bottle drawer in its base. Auto energy selection (Thetford's SES system)

provides turn-on-and-forget talents and its capacity is huge.

SOPHISTICATED SMOVES

No rear seatbelts, so lounging and dining is easy and the twin sofa layout makes the whole space feel uncluttered. It's bright and airy, too, thanks in part to the expected overcab sunroof, but also partnered with an electrically operated unit from the options list.

The beautiful leather-clad seats give a sophisticated vibe, but if you're not keen on cow hide or its hefty price tag, then fun can be had mixing and matching the alternative fabrics to make things a little more cosy.

There's seating for five, while the adjustable table is plenty big enough for good dining for two or more. Of course, it's permanent and can get in

the way somewhat, but the circular shape makes it a lot easier to navigate around than others we've seen.

The TV has a home next to the habitation door, sharing space with management panels, all nicely concealed behind doors.

Further down, another option, the Natural Look decorative panelling appears to be made of pieces of compressed fabric. And it costs £427. It's not my cup of tea – the material or the price – but it sure to appeal to some buyers.

Right at the base of this unit, a handy drawer seems spot-on for some shoes. Press a button on the kitchen unit and it and the kitchen drawers are locked electrically. 'Crashing in the rear' is an all too regular event in my 'van as I forget to lock drawers and cupboards before leaving site, so this idea certainly gets my vote.



Nights at the round table? You'll certainly be able to live like a king in here

SMOVE SCRUBBING

Now to assess the delights – or otherwise – of this new Smove's bathing experience.

One clever feature in here is also the one that robs the kitchen of that drawer space. On the right, a bi-fold locker door opens to allow the toilet to slide out for use and it's this locker that lives beneath the kitchen.

I found operation was a tad tricky on this test model, but this will not be an issue on production Smoves as the deployment of the loo will be thanks to electrical power.

The rest of the washroom appears conventional, albeit in fine fashion, with a generous basin – cupboard beneath – a couple of mirrors, shelves and good lighting. That's not quite true, however, as the basin does the same trick as the loo, swinging away out of sight and into a cavity to the

rear. Now there's a wetroom with nothing but the doorway needing protection from splashes. This is taken care of by a bi-fold screen. What's left is a simply massive shower – surely the biggest ever in a motorhome of this size.

Wheelarches often take up space in the living area and, here, the rear nearside item does just that. But usable space is far from lost as the moulding that covers it is made into a shower seat – and a good one, too.

This is a bathroom that's really difficult to criticise. Clever mechanisms and good design conspire to create a truly great set of ablutions. And, with the en suite-creating washroom door swung across the aisle, there's a decent changing area with access to two wardrobes – one conventional, the other beneath the foot of the offside bed.

SMOVE OVER DARLING

As much as the bathroom is innovative, so the sleeping department is entirely conventional.

Steps lead up to single beds that are wonderfully long – 6ft 7in for the longest, in fact. A high-quality mattress supported by the Froli plastic multi-spring support system should give a great night's sleep.

A central mattress section creates a semi-double bed – remove it and both sleepers have a surface for water glass, specs and book. So, all told, the bedroom is a pleasant place to be, although it suffers from the same problem as many of the type: the beds are set high to allow room for a properly tall garage beneath, which means sitting up in bed – or trying to – needs care so you don't hit your head on the overhead lockers. If only they weren't there. ►

TESTED *Niesmann+Bischoff Smove 7.4 E*



Twin high-level singles are conventional, even down to the oft-found head-bashing lockers above

SMOVE SERVICES

Life support is pretty standard fare at this level, with a heated technical double floor cossetting the water tanks and Truma's Combi providing the heat to do it.

But, with some far more lowly motorhomes including Alde wet radiator heating these days, I would have expected it to be a standard-fit item here. The extras list does include the Alde system, but it will add over £1,600 to your order.

Options also include the ability to increase fresh water capacity by 60 litres (to a weighty 200), add a gas tank to the standard supply from the conventional cylinder locker and even have the garage door as an electrically operated slider. The former two items were on board and might be good for long-time touring, significantly increasing the times between fill-ups of wet stuff and LPG – the latter adding the ability to replenish gas at service stations all over Europe.

But beware! The standard-dress Smove offers a decent 480kg of payload on its 3,500kg chassis, but all those options (and their contents) will add a significant amount of weight when fitted. Excellent payloads can

still be maintained, but only with chassis upgrades. The price list gives weights for all the options, so calculate this and check your licence; you will need to have the C1 category to drive this example. **MMMM**

THE **MMMM** VERDICT

A real departure for N+B and a great addition to the low-profile scene, Smove boasts superb style, detailing, and build quality, with some features we've rarely seen before. This is one of the very best low-profile motorhome ranges in today's market, but beware the options list; it can add lots of weight and lots of cost to the finished motorhome.



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FACTS AND FIGURES



PRICE

From: £72,138

As tested: £106,035



BASICS

Berths: 2

Travel seats: 2 (inc driver)

Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion two years, water ingress six years

Type approval: European Whole Vehicle



DIMENSIONS

Length: 7.43m (24ft 5in)

Width: 2.25m (7ft 5in)

Height: 2.77m (9ft 1in)

Gross vehicle weight: 4,500kg

Payload: 1,480kg



BASE VEHICLE

Type: Fiat Ducato Al-Ko

Engine: 2.3-litre, Euro VI, 177bhp, six-speed manual gearbox



KITCHEN

Cooker: Two-burner, gas-on-glass cook top/sink combo

Fridge/freezer: Thetford SES, 141-litre



BEDS

Nearside single: 2.00m x 0.78m (6ft 7in x 2ft 7in)

Offside: 2.00m x 0.76m (6ft 7in x 2ft 6in)



ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 200 litres (inboard)

Waste water: 130 litres (inboard)

Leisure battery: 2 x 95Ah

Space heating: Truma Combi 6E

Water heating: Truma Combi 6E

Gas: 2 x 11kg and 50-litre fixed tank

OPTIONS

Fitted to test vehicle: Chassis Pack (£1,847), 4,500kg upgrade (£1,252), 177bhp engine (£3,347), alloy wheels (£2,976), silver pack (£4,135), Clou Line Design Pack (£1,930), 'Maxi' external colour (£395), electric sunroof (£1,117), bedroom rooflight (£709), mains water inlet (£261), 200-litre fresh water tank (£391), Combi 6E heating (£543), gas tank (£1,327), second leisure battery (£222), solar panel (£1,037), central locking (£636), grass trim panels (£753), leather upholstery (£4,823), Comfort Pack (£1,606), Multi-media Pack (£4,590)

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