



The standard of the finish is very good.

The new Turas 700 minicoach

Rob Orchard gets his hands on one of the new Portuguese built mid-range contenders from Noones/Minis-to-Midis

REPORT BY ROB ORCHARD

One of the fall outs of the loss of the Mercedes-Benz Vario has been an upsurge in interest in reasonably priced 25-29 seat minicoaches. A number of dealers have already introduced new product to this sector and others are looking at it closely. One of the first off the mark was Noones with their Turas 700 which is marketed exclusively in the UK by Alan White's Minis-to-Midis operation.

The main route for replacements for the Vario has been the use of the Mercedes-Benz Atego range of truck chassis in order to achieve the holy grail of 33 seats. There is no doubt that the Atego chassis represents a major advance over the outdated Vario in all aspects. The quality of its engines, transmissions, suspension and handling for example. Perhaps of even greater

importance is its ability to provide much better axle loadings and GVWs especially on the rear which in recent years has been the Achilles heel for the Vario. However that upgrade comes at a considerable increase in price. The Atego chassis, for all its benefits, is substantially, typically £25 - 30,000, more than a Vario based product.

For that reason some operators are looking closely at their operations to see whether they really do need to have 33 seaters or whether, for much of their work, they can manage with cheaper 25-29 seaters. It isn't only the question of initial purchase price difference; the smaller vehicle should have better fuel economy and lower maintenance costs.

The base vehicle for the Noones/Minis-to-Midis Turas 700 is the excellent Iveco New Daily, now available with the spectacular Hi-Matic eight-speed automatic transmission which has replaced the Agile six-speed automated unit.

For the production of the new Turas 700 Noones turned again to Irmaos Mota of Portugal who already produce their Mercedes-Benz Sprinter based Turas 500 coachbuilt model. Irmaos Mota have also been producing the Sprinter van conversion Turas 500C, but production of that model has now switched to the Turkish builder, Erduman, and is branded Turas 500C Envoy. Erduman is also producing the 33 seat Turas 900 coachbuilt vehicles.

I recently visited Minis-to-Midis at their Doncaster base to evaluate the new Turas 700. I've known Alan White, boss of Minis-to-Midis for many years and it is always a pleasure to visit this well run family business.

The basis of the Turas 700 is the 70C17 Iveco New Daily chassis with a 4,750mm wheelbase. A feature of the Iveco New Daily is that the chassis versions are not simply the base of the van model with the panelling omitted, they are proper ladder frame



The interior provides seating for 29 plus courier.

units giving them greater strength and rigidity. This gives a vehicle 8.495m long; 2.410m wide and 3.050m high. The unladen weight is 4,807 kg and the maximum permitted GVW is 7.2tonnes.

Power is provided by the excellent 3.0-litre Iveco direct injection, common rail, turbocharged four cylinder diesel engine. This engine is available in a variety of forms with either Euro5+ or Euro6 emission standards and power outputs of 146bhp or 170bhp. In the Turas 700 Noones have opted to use only the 170bhp version to Euro6. This version uses a variable geometry turbocharger. Emission control uses a mixed EGR/SCR system with the addition of AdBlue. The engine produces a maximum torque figure of 400Nm across a wide speed range.

Two types of transmission are available; the well respected Iveco six-speed manual box or the new Hi-Matic eight-speed automatic. Although in their literature Iveco show these as being Iveco products they are in fact manufactured for Iveco by ZF.

The vehicle has independent front suspension with torsion bar and shock absorbers whilst the rear suspension on the Turas 700 is full air with stabiliser. Braking is a dual circuit hydraulic system using discs all round. A Telma retarder is standard. Steering is powered and the coach comes with a 115 litre fuel tank and a 25 litre AdBlue tank. Electrics are 12v.

The body structure is constructed of welded steel tubing heavily corrosion protected and meets all current EU regulations on structural integrity.

Cladding uses fibreglass mouldings for the front, rear and roof.

The design incorporates a large rear boot with lift up access door and illumination. In addition there are underfloor side lockers with lift up doors and internal illumination. In total the vehicle has four cu.m. of luggage space with an allowance of around 120 kg when carrying a full complement of passengers and the flexibility to fully load with 25 to 27.

Inside the vehicle has seating



Left: The mirrors are heated and electrically adjusted.

Below: The stylish Turas 700 is based on the Iveco New Daily.



for 29 using Sege 3060T coach seats trimmed in virtual leather and moquette and fitted with three point seat belts. In addition there is a courier seat similarly trimmed and fitted with a three point belt.

The interior is trimmed in a mix of moulded panels and soft feel suede finish. The suede finish is also used on the ceiling.

Full length parcel racks are fitted with the racks incorporating the main lighting and the usual individual passenger service panels

Glazing uses dark tinted, bonded, double glazed units for the main saloon. The front quarter lights are also double glazed. The rear window is single glazed to comply with emergency regulations. The windscreen is toughened and laminated and is also heated. The driver's side window is electrically operated. A roof mounted glazed emergency hatch is fitted in the ceiling. Saloon windows are fitted with full draw pleated curtains.

Lighting for the saloon uses LED units with three settings. There are additional individual LED lights at each seat.

Heating uses thermostatically controlled convection radiators down each side of the saloon. There is a forced air system with individual passenger controls. In addition the vehicle is fitted with an Autoclima air conditioning system with digital control of temperature and air flow. The cab utilises the Iveco in-dash system with separate air conditioning for the driver.

The passenger entrance has a three-step entrance with flat, wide, carpeted steps that are illuminated at night. The entrance is fitted with an electrically operated rearward opening glazed power door. Internally the floor is flat with one step towards

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Top left: The large rear boot with lift up door.

Top right: The front entrance is fitted with a glazed powered door.

Below left: The tip up, fully belted courier seat.

Below right: Neat grouping of body system switches, heating controls and rear view camera.

around £106,000 excluding VAT. The chassis carries a four year warranty.

On the road

First impressions of the Turas 700 are that this is a nicely styled minicoach, especially the way the Iveco New Daily front end has been integrated. The vehicle oozes quality and this is maintained when you enter the vehicle because the fit and finish of the internal trimming is very good.

The cab is spacious and well laid out. It utilises in the main the standard Iveco dash. I particularly like the panel to the right of the driver that incorporates all the body system switches, the air conditioning controls, the radio system controls and the reversing camera screen all within easy reach of the driver.

I have driven quite a few Iveco New Dailys in various guises and I have been struck before by how

quiet the latest Iveco Euro6 diesel is. This situation was maintained in the Turas 700 which is a quiet vehicle.

With Alan White accompanying me we set out on a tour of South Yorkshire on what had turned out for once to be a really nice day. Plenty of opportunity to test out the sunblinds!

Performance of the vehicle was as I had expected. The 170bhp engine has bags of power and torque but it goes about its business without fuss always seeming to be completely on top of the job.

The Iveco (ZF) six speed manual transmission was light and easy to use and had a nice spread of ratios.

Handling was exemplary even on deformed surfaces giving a feel of real security on the road. Steering was light but positive and the vehicle sat on the road perfectly making one feel very secure.

Vision through the large screen was unhindered and when combined with the good sized, well positioned vibration free mirrors gave great all round vision.

I was impressed with the quality of build and the complete absence of rattles, squeaks or vibration just a feeling of tightness.

Braking was to the usual high standard with smooth straight line stopping and plenty in reserve if needed. The fitment of the Telma retarder is a major bonus avoiding the need in many instances to use the service brakes.

Ride was excellent, particularly in the saloon where the benefit of the rear air suspension can be appreciated. The combination of the convection heating and the air conditioning made it easy to achieve a very balanced ambience with heat around the feet but a cooler fresher feeling higher up. The seats are very comfortable with the requisite level of support.

The Turas 700 performed faultlessly, it just simply got on with the job without any fuss or stress.

This is a very attractive small coach which should be economical to run and which will prove popular with customers. If you are looking for a 29 seater the Turas 700 is undoubtedly one you should consider seriously. ■

There are good sized lockers on both sides.



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