

road and
site test no 184

VIKING FIBRELINE Mk II

shapely newcomer has overseas pedigree:
unusual body construction

FOR GOOD PRACTICAL REASONS caravan design has changed relatively little over the last few decades. Only recently has the semi-angular appearance adopted by so many motor manufacturers been accepted by some sections of the industry; even so it has been restricted to the larger holiday and static models.

It is not only refreshing to see a smaller manufacturer offering an unusual design, it becomes exciting when one recognises that the design has a good chance of being a success.

This month's test van—the Viking Fibreline Mk II—was conceived in another part of the world. Not in Scandinavia, but in Africa, where basically the same van has been produced from South African and Rhodesian factories as the Gypsy for many years. The African company, Africaravans, was sold in 1964 to Caravans International and the present directors of Viking Fibreline are the former board of Africaravans now entirely divorced from CI. The Fibreline retains its overseas appearance—that's what makes it interesting.

The van is unconventional in its construction—reinforced plastic mouldings are used for the roof and the base—and in its styling treatment, which is futuristic and attractive. But the Fibreline is not angular, it has smooth contours.

The three models in the Fibreline range retain the same basic shape. The Mk II is the middle van of the three, 12ft 8ins, and selling at £445 without toilet compartment (all three are available with the compartment for an extra £15). In standard form the 10ft 9in Mk I comes out at £385 and the 14ft 4in Mk III at £520. In the smallest van the addition of a toilet compartment reduces the number of berths from three to two. The Mk III is a four berth and the Mk II a three berth, with an optional pull-out four berth arrangement. The test van was the three berth with toilet.

Let's go inside. The interior is not as striking as may be expected from the exterior, but the four cream venetian blinds fitted as standard equipment on all Fibrelines add a touch of character—they work very well too.

Generally the finish is good; although the manufacturers have managed to keep the cost of the van down to a reasonable figure, there is no skimping of materials. The ramin-edged oak woodwork is bright but unpretentious. Clubmen may not go for gas piping which can be seen running neatly along the top of the roof shelving, but there is no doubt about the accessibility of the system. If the manufacturers act on our suggestion for more roof lockers the problem could be solved, but more about this later.

The offside front single bed is only 5ft 8in long

and hardly big enough for an adult although one member of the crew slept for three nights on it without complaint. The padded and fluted backrest is wrapped around above each end of the bed. A four-berth version in which the backrest consists of an extra mattress section to convert the single into a pull-out settee double bed is available at £8 10s extra. The 5in plastic foam, moquette-covered mattresses are of a good density for sleeping, although some members of the team thought them a little too soft for sitting.

The single berth has a vented, one-piece plywood locker lid that extends the full length of the bed. The big problem is that both this and the dinette locker lids are the full depth of the seat and consequently both the seat and backrest mattress sections have to be removed completely to gain access to the lockers beneath. This fact combined with the general lack of clothes storage space in the van as a whole means that mattress sections need to be humped about far too often. The manufacturers have agreed, following the test, that the lids can be modified and hinged well forward to allow the mattresses to be stood on edge to facilitate access to the lockers. The single bed has a drop flap in the centre of the front but this is too small for convenient access.

At the foot of the single bed is the generous wardrobe which offers ample hanging space

from a sliding rail to a bottom shelf; there is space beneath the shelf round the wheel arch for shoes. The gas fire point is fitted here and the wardrobe door finishes an inch or so clear of the floor to allow a fire hose to come out under it. On the side wall of the van at the rear of the wardrobe are two substantial coat hooks. The wardrobe door has a key lock and a full-length mirror sensibly placed on the outside. The door, in common with all the other furniture units, has a piano hinge and a neat, well-designed handle. On the inside of the door is a curtain on a swinging steel arm which, together with the door itself, forms a rudimentary partition.

The double-panelled table has sensible, strong hooks and offers ample dining space. The outside corners are cut back to facilitate access to the dinette. A heavy single leg with locking hinge provides good support, though on the test model the leg had not been trimmed to length and was about an inch too long, giving the table a noticeable slant. Stowage on the outside of the toilet room is provided for the table when out of use. To complete the bed base with the table, there is a fixed shelf between the rear dinette seats; the shelf is also useful for glasses, ashtray, etc.

Above this shelf is a full-width, flat-topped storage unit with the window shelf above it. The storage unit, which is accessible when the

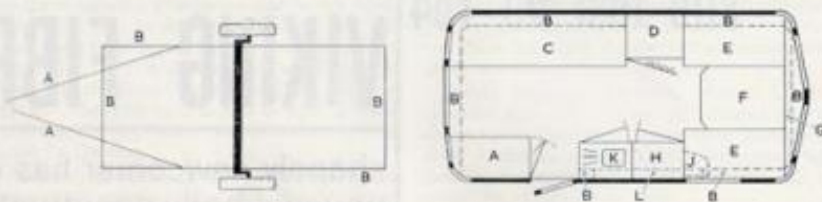


Dimensions

Length body net	12ft 9in
overall	13ft 0in
shipping	15ft 11in
interior	12ft 8in
Width overall	6ft 8in
interior	6ft 2½in
Height overall	7ft 10½in
Max headroom	6ft 1½in
Floor height	18in
Window sill height front	51½in
rear	51½in
Height to centre of coupling ball for level ride	16in
Weight ex works	14cwt 28lb
as tested	15cwt 77lb
Noseweight as tested	1cwt 49lb

VIKING FIBRELINE Mk II

Recommended price £460



Left to right: the rear end dinette is supplemented by a full-width clothes locker; note the healthy-sized roof light. View to the front shows the single bed and a second roof light. The roof is painted polyester-glass. Flaps up and down for a good look at the kitchen. Lids are melamine top and bottom. Venetian blinds all round serve their purpose admirably

double bed is made up, is the only clothes storage space in this model apart from the wardrobe. The version without the toilet room has a chest of drawers which the makers say can be accommodated in the three berth as tested under the front window; this would not be possible with the optional settee double described earlier. The addition of the chest of drawers would cost an extra £7 10s in the toilet room model and we would consider it almost essential. Indeed the manufacturers could well consider it as a standard item.

Roof shelving runs right round the van apart from where other furniture intrudes and a small beading, cut away at the corners to aid sweeping out, acts as a fiddle rail to prevent articles falling off on tow. The shelves are covered in an off white pvc to match the walls of the van and the underside is padded and covered with a restful green pvc. Useful as this shelving is, it seemed to the testers that roof lockers along all the available side wall would be of far more use. On the dealer's show ground the inside looks attractive but in actual use we found that sweaters, electric razors, sponge bags, etc, all in sight created a very cluttered impression.

The kitchen, on the nearside, has a Perspex sink and drainer unit on the cook's right and an Argyll hotplate on the left. The hotplate is unusual in being mounted on the stove-enamelled base plate supplied for cottage use; most manufacturers dispense with this and mount it directly onto the aluminium-lined base of the recess, thus saving weight and probably cost.

The lids to both sink and hotplate are topped with a green-patterned melamine and have a plain white melamine balancer on the underside. The hotplate lid is rear hinged while the sink top hinges at the right of the drainer and is retained against the full height bulkhead next to the entrance door; sturdy and practical turnbuckles hold the lids in the open position. A Whale angled water pump is mounted behind the sink close to the side wall of the van but it is not inconvenient to operate. Additional work surface is provided by a melamine-faced



hinged flap which folds out of the hotplate recess and rests on a gate-leg extension over the dinette seat.

Space for odds and ends is provided behind a fall-front to the sink unit. The division of the two shelved cupboards under the kitchen seems logical; that under the sink has a low shelf on which two water cans could stand and the feed pipe for the pump is terminated here. There is space below the shelf for pots and pans. Under the hotplate is what would normally be termed the larder. It is odd that the low-level wall ventilator is in the former rather than the latter but airspace round the central vertical division between the two cupboards ensures some circulation of fresh air.

The double roof locker above the kitchen has bottom-hinged doors and is lined with pvc. Half of the locker is fitted for crockery—five cup wells and two plate racks—but the locker is just not tall enough to take large dinner plates upright and so each rack takes fewer plates than

could otherwise be accommodated.

The toilet compartment is sited in the near-side front corner and takes in the porch in use. Headroom is a little inadequate. A frosted window opens for ventilation and there is also a fixed Perspex wrap round window and a pvc-covered shelf.

The red and black fleck carpet extends into the toilet compartment and lies on a plastic-covered felt underlay which helps to insulate the floor. Brown cotton weave curtains are fitted on all four of the Perspex wrap-round corner windows on a nylon hook and rail system. Two Morco No 1 gas lights provide good illumination throughout the van.

The body construction is unusual in having moulded glass-fibre-reinforced polyester resin section top and bottom with aluminium panelling between. The roof is a double-skinned moulding with a 1in cavity between the skins, vented to the exterior. In really cold Easter weather with little ventilation there was no spot of condensation

Undergear Rubery Owen welded steel chassis. A 3 x 1½ x ½ in rectangular tube. B 2 x 2 x ½ in square tube. Rubery Owen torsion bar independent suspension, trailing arms, no dampers. Brakes 8in Lockheed, rod and cable operated. Wheels 4-stud, tyres 5.90-13. Coupling 50mm B & B Beta III, jacking-type jockey wheel. Four brace-operated legs.

Layout A toilet room, B roof shelf, C single bed, D wardrobe, E dinette double bed, F hook-on table, G window shelf, storage below, H hotplate, J folding work surface, K sink unit.

Body construction Framing meranti, joints halved, screwed and glued. Moulded double-panelled roof in glass-fibre reinforced polyester resin. Side and end wall panelling 20g aluminium. Insulation vented

cavity in roof, Stillite in walls. Interior panelling hardboard, pvc faced. Glass-fibre reinforced polyester resin base section incorporating ½ in marine plywood floor. Glazed one-piece door 59 x 20 in, polyester glass inner moulding, Legge 9000 recessed thumb-latch cylinder lock. Windows by Percy Lane, round-cornered anodised frames, all opening, locking stays, three 30 x 20 in, two 14 x 20 in, one 24 x 20 in. Four fixed Perspex rounded corner lights. Two frameless amber Perspex rooflights 18 in square, scissor-type stays. Four grab bars.

Equipment Dinette double bed 74½ x 44 in, single bed 68 x 24 in, 5 in foam plastic mattresses, padded backrest to single, top access bedding lockers. Furniture oak, laminated. Hook-on table 36½ x 26 in. Wardrobe 24 x 20 in, hanging space 47 in, two coat hooks, shelf at bottom, mirror. Full width clothes

locker. All round roof shelf. Kitchen: Perspex sink and drainer, Argyll hotplate, individual lids melamine-faced, ventilated larder and water carrier cupboards, Whale angle pump. Two roof lockers, one fitted for crockery. Toilet room 44 x 21 in, two shelves. Four venetian blinds, corner curtains on Drape rail. Fitted carpet over vinyl-topped felt underlay. Two No 1 gas lights, outside cylinder connection, gas fire point, double cylinder carrier on drawbar. Full road lights and indicators, seven-pin plug and socket.

Makers Viking Fibrelite Caravans, Glencairn Mill, Heads Nook, Carlisle.

Towing cars for test Singer Gazelle Mk V automatic, 1592cc, weight inc crew 24½ cwt, Austin A60, 1498cc, weight inc crew 27cwt.



on the ceiling even when a large meal was being prepared for the four occupants. A slight trace was noticeable first thing in the morning above the single bed.

The aluminium centre section has a window depth band finished in silver metallic paint while the remainder is unpainted stucco-embossed sheeting, giving a rather dashing appearance. There may be a problem in keeping the unpainted section looking smart in coastal areas or where it is exposed to some industrial atmospheres.

The lower body section is painted glass fibre; in our case it was terra cotta. Lime green or yellow can also be specified. The roof is off-white. A hardwood rubbing strake runs either side of the wheel arches and two plastic covered grab handles are set at angles at each end.

The gutter channel turns and runs down in drainpipe fashion at the ends and round the door. The one-piece glazed door (59 in by

20 in) fits against a foam plastic draught seal, but on the test van the door gapped all the way down. The all-plastic thumb button locking latch was very stiff in its action; on closing the door it was necessary to put pressure on the latch before the lock would engage. In fact, soon after picking up the van the rear-hinged door came open on tow because we failed to see that the latch engaged properly.

In addition to the fixed wrap-round windows there are six opening windows and two excellent 18 in square amber Perspex roof lights on scissor stays, probably reflecting the maker's tropical experience where good ventilation is of great importance.

View through the Viking from the towing car is prevented by sills which are high dictated by the structural design. The chassis, as can be seen from the diagram, is a simple rectangle of box section, but due to restriction within the moulded wheel arches the Rubery Owen torsion bar axle has to be spaced below the chassis level

by two inches. Viking are working from the original South African moulds and when these come to be replaced, the possibility of lowering the chassis directly onto the axle and thus reducing the overall height will be looked at.

Behind both the editorial cars used for the test the Viking Fibrelite towed happily and speeds up to an indicated 70 mph were achieved on the track. The slight incipient roll that sometimes manifests itself on vans fitted with this suspension is easily checked by fitting dampers. The B & B Beta III long thrust coupling provides progressive control of the 8 in brakes, usefully large for this weight of van.

The Viking Fibrelite was designed for an overseas market with conditions different from those in this country. It is interesting to note that the modifications necessary to fit this range into the pattern of caravanning in this country are few and small; it will be even more interesting to see if the unusual exterior styling catches the imagination of the British public.

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1967 RANGE

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VARIED USE OF POLYESTER GLASS IN NEW RANGE

AN INTERESTING and unusual combination of caravan construction techniques is used in the Viking Fibreline range which is built near Carlisle. The roof is a one-piece polyester-glass moulding with a further separate one-piece moulding inside as a ceiling liner and the two have a one-inch air space between them. The lower part of the body is rather like the roof, inverted, but with a rectangular opening in the centre in which is located the plywood floor.

The walls are of normal double-panelled construction on a timber frame but the inner lining of the door is another moulding of polyester-glass. The walls are insulated with glass-fibre. The aluminium outer panelling is unpainted, being principally stucco finish but with a plain smooth band of panelling at window depth. Rubery Owen torsion bars are used and 9in brakes are fitted to the 14ft and 12ft models.

When THE CARAVAN visited the factory a high standard of body construction was found, and the polyester-glass mouldings were seen to have a surface finish of higher quality than the prices might indicate. The specification includes venetian blinds to all main windows, 5in foam mattresses with good moquette cover on both sides, fitted carpet, water

pump and, outside, polished wooden rubbing strake.

Kitchen units tend to suffer from poor sink or drainer arrangements and THE CARAVAN'S representative thought that more shelves and unit tops should be lipped or given fiddle rails.

The Viking Fibrelines are British versions of the vans built in South Africa for some years, and still in

production, by Africaravans, the company sold last year to Caravans International Ltd. The present Viking directors are the former board of Africaravans. Among the works staff at Carlisle are supervisors from the original South African factory.

There are three body sizes, 10ft 9in Mk I at £385, 12ft 8in Mk II at £445 and 14ft 4in Mk III at £520. The standard layouts, some of which are unconventional to British eyes, have no toilet compartments but for £15 extra in any model a toilet is provided; in the smallest van this involves a reduction from three to two berths.



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white down to the glass-fibre-reinforced polyester resin base moulding, which together with the drawbar is painted ivory. All three models have additional side windows and wheel-arch spats for '67. Plastic coach piping forms three relief lines round the body.

Internal dimensions are unchanged. The 10ft 9in Mk I two-berth is now available with an extra berth, the 12ft 8in Mk II has been made into a four-berth with the addition of a bunk and the

14ft 6in continues as a four-berth. All three vans feature toilet compartments as standard; for '66 they were optional. Conversely, venetian blinds (standard this year) will be optional for 1967 at between £5 and £9, depending on the model. Prices of all Fibrelines are up.

1967 range	
10½ft Mk I	£440
12½ft Mk II	£515
14½ft Mk III	£589

PAINTED EXTERIORS NEW ON VIKINGS

The stylish Viking Fibreline range of vans—produced by the former manufacturers of the South African Gypsy tourers—has received a more sophisticated look for 1967. Biggest change to be made by the Carlisle makers is in dropping the bodies two inches on their axles. This, combined with lower and deeper end windows, corrects the poor view-through provision of the '66 Fibrelines.

Gone is the unpainted stucco-embossed aluminium waist paneling that characterised the 1966 vans; it failed to stand up to the British climate and proved too expensive to anodise. Instead, new plain aluminium panels are painted

