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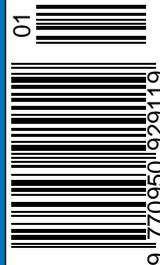


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We found the Exsis was small enough to park in the street in towns

# Return of the Exsis

Rachel Stothert takes the Exsis back to the place that it was first shown in the UK, a year later

**T**he Northern Motorcaravan Show at York was the site of the Hymer Exsis' UK debut in 2003. At first sight we raved about this new, but as yet untried, revolutionary motorhome. A year later it was a different matter – we've done over 5,000 miles in the Exsis over the past six months with its final outing being to the 2004 Northern Motorcaravan Show.

Over the weekend I gathered a few personal pros and cons of the Exsis. The grill doesn't toast bread very well, but is superb at melting cheese if you're not in a hurry. The bed is extremely comfortable – allowing me to have the required eight hours uninterrupted kip per night.

It's a little annoying having to lift up the whole rear section when you want to service the toilet – in the winter all your heat escapes so quickly.

The table is a little cumbersome, but the storage is immense – there are places to store shoes galore, so Exsis is definitely a motorhome that a girl could take shopping in Paris. It even has the looks to match.

That's my impression, but then I'm a 25-year-old shoe-obsessed woman, with minimalist tastes. What did other testers think about it? Here we look back over the last six months of life with Hymer's baby.

Size isn't everything in this day and age. The height of the Exsis was commented on by each one of our testers. All thought that this provided a lofty interior and plenty of headroom, but leaves you a little vulnerable to crosswinds. One Speedy Gonzales commented that: "You'd probably have to lob the Exsis into a hairpin bend at 80mph to get even close to ultimate disaster." I'm not sure I'd like to try it.

As Yogi Bear might say, "the Exsis is narrower than your average Hymer" or as our very own Peter Vaughan said in the August 2004 issue: "Being narrower than a full-sized Hymer means that the Exsis can boldly go where no Hymer has gone before." Another user also commented that its lack of length (and shorter wheelbase) made it more manoeuvrable than a long-wheelbase Fiat high-top van conversion.

Despite its compact external dimensions, storage is one of the most important aspects of the Exsis. All of our road-testers praised its stowage capacity. There are cupboards, airline-style drop down lockers, underfloor storage and drawers galore. You can even get to the underfloor storage from inside. My favourite comment sums it all up: "Whatever you want to store, there will be a perfect home for it in the Exsis."

The 'upstairs' bed was loved and unloved in equal quantities. Most found that a certain degree of athleticism was needed to get up that ladder and into bed. It's not like a drop-down bed in an A-class motorhome that simply requires a small clamber.

But a benefit of this bed is that bedding can be left *in situ* in the morning and the bed is just pushed back into place. The Editor said the bed is: "Simple to lower but pushing it back up requires a more determined heave, but it is not strenuous providing you're tall enough to reach." Some of us aren't tall enough – I found myself jumping while pushing the bed up simply to get it to lock into place.



The modern interior was widely admired for its well-planned and well-equipped design and especially for its plentiful storage

The kitchen was also both praised and criticised. On the plus side the fridge and oven are at eye-level, to which Di Johnson commented: "Hurrah no bending." The oven and grill proved rattle-free and Roger Mehan said: "This is one of the best kitchen set-ups you will find in any motorcaravan."

Most of our contributors mentioned the lack of built-in ignition for the hob and fridge. The lack of kitchen worktop when both the sink and hob are in use put a few of our testers off, and David Batten-Hill thought

that the smart upholstery would be in real danger of being stained while washing up. He suggested the fitting of a simple pull-up splashguard.

Although the lounge area is not huge, the cab seats swivel to create more space. The table can be folded and unfolded to use as a small coffee table or large dining table, but many commented that the table was heavy. Di Johnson said that she would "be tempted to leave it at home and take a lightweight version instead".

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

The Exsis broke down on a journey between Lincolnshire and the Peak District. It turns out that the jubilee clip holding the main pipe in place between the exhaust and the turbo stretched and came off when our tester put his foot on the accelerator. This was heralded by a loud pop, lots of whistling and no power. If you have the right tools, it's just a 10-minute job to fix the jubilee clip back into place.

We also had concerns about a smokey exhaust when the Exsis was first collected. When the engine was cold the exhaust would occasionally chuck out black smoke on tickover. One of the testers noted that it was using a little oil, so we contacted a local Fiat specialist. He explained that if the 'van used a litre of oil in around 400 miles then there was definitely a problem. But at worst our Exsis only used a litre in about 2,000 miles, a more than acceptable consumption. Later it settled down to use little or no oil, and produce no sooty emissions.

Other than that, we had intermittent false warnings from the ASR dashboard light and a couple of unexplained alarms from the security system. But the Hymer side of things lived up to the marque's image for durability and quality with a totally clean bill of health. Absolutely nothing broke or went wrong in six months.

## EXSIS IMPROVES FOR 2005



A new cooker and sink feature in the redesigned 2005 Exsis kitchen

Two of the biggest criticisms of the 2004 Exsis have been the lack of gas struts to raise the rear boot panel and the protruding (rather than recessed) table leg socket. Both issues have been addressed for the 2005 model.

The new Exsis also has a redesigned kitchen with a fold-over chopping board cover on the integral sink, which should answer those who thought there was a lack of worktop. The cooker has been upgraded to a three-burner unit, while the concertina division for the rear washroom is now a folding wooden door. The upper bed is 150mm longer.



The Exsis SG has a new seating arrangement offering two rear passenger seats

Most significant of all the changes is the arrival of an optional alternative layout in the new Exsis SG. The SG has a shorter kitchen unit on the left-hand side in order to accommodate a double forward-facing passenger seat with two three-point belts. Combined with the side-facing seat on the right this makes into a low-level bed measuring 1.89m by 1.20m narrowing to 0.90m (an extra 200mm of width can be added with an extra cushion). The Exsis SG therefore offers a bigger lounge and a more family-friendly layout while retaining all the best features of the standard model.



At the Düsseldorf show the little Hymer provided the Editor and his wife with comfortable accommodation at the end of each long day

The rear washroom didn't really attract much attention. In my book that means that it did the job well. Winterisation was praised - the fresh and waste water tanks are inboard offering year-round practicality. Décor was described as "refreshingly modern".

**In conclusion**

In the end we all loved the Exsis. "It's the motorhome that not only tears up the rulebook but shreds it, burns it and throws away the ashes," said Peter Vaughan.

"I suggest that Hymer has but one concern - how will it follow the Exsis?" remarked David Batten-Hill.

"If Hymer changed a number of details such as the very high bed, the small door (the Morello has a big sliding one), the lack of worktop and the heavy table, we would like it even more" was the verdict of Di and Peter Johnson. and we'll leave the last word to the Exsis' new owners, Roger and Ann Mechan: "When everything is taken into consideration this is close to being a perfect conversion."

**EXSIS OWNERS**



We're not the only ones to be impressed by the Exsis. Pete and Glen Bridgewood from Scarborough bought their Exsis in July 2004. It's their very first motorcaravan, chosen because they wanted something Pete could stand up in - he's 6ft 3in tall. They also wanted something they could park on the road outside their house and something they could use in winter. The couple considered van conversions, but thought that the seating and headroom would be too restrictive. Pete and Glen had first seen the Exsis at last year's York show, but it wasn't until they visited Brownhills that they decided to buy their new motorhome. Their impression is: "It is very difficult to be negative about this 'van.'"

**A NEW HOME FOR OUR EXSIS**

Roger Mechan explains that he enjoyed using our long-term test Exsis so much he traded in his Swift Sundance to buy it! "Unlike the man who liked his electric razor so much he bought the company, we could only afford to buy the Exsis. After living in it on test for a week it became a 'must have' for us. We spend a considerable amount of time on the road, often wild camping or at sites without facilities. We need a 'van that is small enough to go anywhere, has a good bed to crash out in, will carry all our gear, and which sports a bathroom, kitchen, and an office-cum-lounge that is not compromised through a lack of interior space. By putting its newly designed shell on a Fiat platform-cab we think Hymer have achieved the perfect balance between space and function, a balance that fulfils all our current needs. I suppose it means we now own the most photographed motorcaravan on the planet, so give us a wave if you see us."

