



UCC Motorhomes and JAC offer cost-effective camping

What do you do when your base vehicle purchase price increases by over 50 percent in just four years? Rob Floris – managing director of UCC Motorhomes in Christchurch – thinks he may have found the answer.

Deals on Wheels went to Christchurch to try out the latest offerings from UCC Motorhomes, with a test run around the Alpine Pacific Triangle touring route.

Since 2008, Floris and his team have found the Mitsubishi Fuso Canter to be an excellent base for their Benmore and Coleridge designs and continue today to be a very popular choice. However, in his quest to produce a motorhome at a more competitive price-point for both the rental market and

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private users, Floris discovered JAC trucks. It soon became apparent that the JAC HFC1048K 4500kg to 5999kg GVM range easily fit the bill. The cab has very similar dimensions to the Canter – the chassis and wheelbase all measure up to within millimetres – and the UCC body moulds all fit with little or no modification required.

Floris says, “We can now offer a brand-

new, simple, easy-to-operate, top-quality motorhome for around the same price as we did four years ago, which should definitely help rental companies be more competitive”.

The UCC Benmore JAC base price is \$139,995, which is significantly less than even some five or six-year-old used motorhomes.

As mentioned previously in tests of the JAC HFC1061K 7999kg GVM truck, the cab exterior is reminiscent of the late 90s to mid-2000s Isuzu vehicle. Inside, the layout is very similar to the larger capacity truck, except the



There's plenty of room to move, especially considering how much stuff UCC has cleverly installed



Luke gives the UCC Benmore JAC the mighty thumbs up – he was a very happy camper



When its not a super king bed it's a very social lounge area, with satellite TV/DVD player and a panoramic view

dash layout is slightly different due to air pressure gauges not being needed. The JAC HFC1048K has hydraulic brakes, as opposed to the HFC1061K which has full-air brakes.

Inside the cab, apart from the fact UCC has removed the rear wall to allow free access to the motorhome interior, everything looks clean, simple and easy to use. The plastics, fit and finish are not up with the latest from some other manufacturers but they look good enough and should last, if looked after well.

The JAC uses a 2.8-litre Cummins engine which produces peak power of 110kW and peak torque of 360Nm – very similar ratings to the previous-generation Canter. To meet current emissions compliance, the JAC uses an SCR system and only requires periodic top-ups with AdBlue additive.

Floris says, “We did about 3000-odd km on the maiden trip and had to refill the AdBlue tank [18 litres] after about 2400km”.

To drive, the JAC feels like it has just the right amount of power: it never labours and travels up and down hilly terrain with ease. The exhaust brake proves effective, easily helping to hold the truck at a reasonable speed down the hills. Similar to late 90s generation light trucks, the fan noise is loud at higher engine speeds, although you can still hold a comfortable conversation across the cab. The latest Japanese light trucks are much quieter in that regard.

The thinly padded seats are deceiving. We travelled around 400km, driving for two to three hours each day over four days, and not once did any of us feel uncomfortable, even in the very basic half-sized middle seat. The ride is very comfortable, with only a slight pitching fore and aft, which is no doubt due to the long rear overhang, typical of most motorhomes.

Travelling northwest during our test, we followed the Waiau River up to Hanmer Springs. The scenery is stunning, with mountains and valleys all around – an inspiring viewing as you travel. The northwest winds experienced en route to Hanmer had us concentrating a fair bit, but this is typical of all motorhomes, given they have fairly large solid-sided bodies yet are reasonably light.

We didn't have any issues with manoeuvrability, even though some of the campgrounds were tight to get around. The motorhome didn't feel big to drive, either, and most car-licensed drivers should quickly feel comfortable behind the wheel.

We arrived at Hanmer Springs and checked in to a campground, the rear-view camera included within the satnav system proving really useful when parking at our site.

The U-shaped rear lounge easily converts to a super king bed, which my wife and I

found really comfy. There is a queen size bed above the cab in the Luton. The smaller lounge at the front also converts to a double bed, so the motorhome could easily sleep six adults. However, we kept this set up as our lounge/dining area.

Between the two lounges opposite the side entrance was the bathroom. We didn't try the shower as we had full-sized ones available at each campground. The toilet was very handy, though, particularly in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning when it was too cold (or we were too lazy) to go outside and use the campground facilities. With all the mod-cons of home, including satellite TV, full kitchen, etc, we were very comfy in our home on wheels.

We have never stayed in a motorhome before and were amazed and impressed by the cleverly-designed layout and build quality that UCC Motorhomes achieves. It seems everyone wants to check out each other's motorhome when parked at campgrounds and ours seemed to become quite the envy of others we encountered. We can really see

where Floris is coming from when he suggests the motorhome is the new holiday home for young families. They are just so much more affordable than your typical beachside holiday home and you can spend the night wherever you choose. We were fully self-contained and certified to camp wherever we were allowed to park – definitely appealing.

Next morning, we headed for Kaikoura, taking the inland road via Waiau and travelling through some more stunning scenery along fantastic roads. For some reason, on this leg of the trip the gearshift of the five-speed ZF Ecolite 5S400 transmission became very tight and difficult to use. However, strangely, the shifting was back to normal the next day and caused no further issues. Overall, the shifter was generally pretty stiff and notchy but easy enough to use, much like the bigger JAC truck we recently tested. You could put this down to the vehicle being brand new and yet to have any new-truck issues sorted at the first service.

Whale Watch Kaikoura provided a magical experience, where we saw seals relaxing,

dolphins playing and diving and twice a mighty sperm whale gracefully dive back under the sea. Heading south along the Kaikoura coast, we saw more seals lying around on the rocks right beside the highway.

Returning the motorhome just in time to get to the airport, we all agreed that it was an experience we shall repeat – it is definitely a great way to travel.

For those familiar with late 90s Japanese light trucks who are wary of the latest electronic, new-fangled technologies, you will find JAC trucks simple and familiar, yet they still meet all the latest requirements.

JAC trucks are starting to find their place in the market and are proving to be exceptionally well priced. Thanks to the forward thinking of people like Floris, light trucks and other vehicles, like motorhomes, with JAC on the front will no doubt become an increasingly familiar sight throughout the country. ■

**For more information contact
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UCC Motorhomes' factory in Christchurch was heavily affected by the quakes. It was repaired and kept working – great for staff morale.