

# A family affair

Photographs by Bill Savidan



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 CARAVANS & DESTINATIONS

## Bill Savidan checks out the latest creation from UCC Motorhomes, the 7.4m Grassmere

I've been to the UCC motorhome manufacturing facility probably half a dozen times since Rob Floris assumed stewardship in 2008. Each time I have observed the development of the brand's products, both major changes and small incremental ones. The latest creation, the UCC Grassmere, was "a bit of both".

"Recently, enquiries have come from mums and dads in their early 40s with children," Floris tells me, "exploring the idea of a motorhome as a cost-effective alternative to a holiday home. They want beds for four people and comfortable forward-facing passenger seats up the front for the kids. Actually, my wife and I have two boys, and it was just what I wanted for our family, too. So I decided to build one and 'test' it."

As the project developed, it expanded. Local suppliers and manufacturers were introducing new products and Floris used a number of these in the Grassmere to test their suitability for inclusion in future production.

### BASE VEHICLE

Floris chose to build the Grassmere on the latest Series 5 Mercedes, the 519 with the 3-litre V6 diesel motor (Euro V) and automatic gearbox with dual rear-wheel drive. It is fitted with ABS brakes and an Electronic Stability Program (ESP) for added safety. With a maximum all-up weight of 4490kg (GVW), it can be driven by Class 1 (car) driving licence holders.

### INSIDE

This new Grassmere layout reflects UCC's experience gained previously, building for both rental fleet operators and private clients. Up front is the most noticeable difference: behind the driver's seat is a forward-facing metre-wide bench seat with belted positions for two people; behind the passenger seat is a two-seater sideways facing settee. The cab seats rotate to face aft, creating a front lounge. The entry door is beside the settee, with the bathroom to the right. Opposite is the fridge/freezer and kitchen bench, with a full-sized U-shaped lounge occupying the rear section. There are five "sleep-spots" in the Grassmere: a 1500mm wide queen-sized bed over the cab, a 1700mm-wide king-size in the rear lounge and the front dinette single.

There may be similar layouts around, but the attention to detail makes this one special. For



A full U-shaped lounge occupies the rear section

instance, the bench seat has sufficient legroom without taking up too much space. It is comfortably padded and not too upright – quite suitable for two adults for day-after-day trips.

With the cab seats rotated and the small dining table installed, this front area can serve as a cosy venue for “happy hour” or as a breakfast bar. At night, the settee and bench seat combine to create a generous and comfortable single bed. Alternatively, the driver’s seat and the bench seat combine to make a perfectly adequate bed for children up to around age 10.

Above, there are old-style railway carriage shelves each side instead of overhead lockers, ideal for stowing hats, coats and

jerseys. During the day, a sliding panel under the bed over the cab can be moved aside to provide easier access to and from the cab. This whole front section can be curtained off from the rest of the motorhome.

The bathroom has the toilet and shower together in a compact moulded unit, with a curtain to keep the toilet dry while showering. The toilet is a new Thetford cassette model that has a swivel bowl rather than a swivel seat – easier to use and keep clean. Floris fitted a folding clothesline that would be ideal for drying “smalls” overnight. A bigger bathroom, 300mm longer than the one reviewed, is available, allowing better separation between the shower and toilet. Though it means having a smaller wardrobe, it would be my choice.

Kitchen areas are the subject of much debate among motorhome purchasers – some like lots of bench space and are not impressed with the compact kitchens found in many motorhomes imported from Europe. Floris’ wife is certainly in this camp and her influence can be seen in both the size of the kitchen bench (and folding extension) and the other necessities of food preparation, a large

**Specifications**

<b>Base vehicle</b>	Mercedes Benz Sprinter Model 519 CDI
<b>Engine</b>	3L V6 turbo, five-speed automatic (with three years or 200,000km Mercedes warranty)
<b>Tare weight</b>	(approx) 3670kg
<b>GVM of chassis</b>	4490kg
<b>Length</b>	7.4m
<b>Width</b>	2.25m
<b>Height</b>	3.2m
<b>Internal headroom</b>	2.20m

Prices for the Grassmere on the Mercedes 511 start at \$159,995. The model reviewed on the S519 (including extras) is \$179,995.

fridge/freezer (175-litre Dometic RM7855), twin under-bench pantries and plenty of cupboards and lockers for food and beverages. However, she chose not to have an oven. Rather, the space under the four-hob grill unit has been used to house a microwave. The cabinetry is designed so if a



Lots of bench space for food preparation



- The separate front lounge
- The 519 Mercedes
- The space in the kitchen



- I could have stored my golf clubs in the full-width locker if it had had bigger hatches



As you can see from the photos, Floris has dressed up his Grassmere demonstrator for the up-coming round of motorhome shows and field days, so if you are interested, take the opportunity to view it at an event near you. Floris will be driving the Grassmere to these shows himself, and while on the road he is happy to come by your place so you can inspect the product and take it for a test drive.

buyer wants an oven, it can be installed below the hob and the microwave can be relocated or deleted altogether.

The left-hand locker over the bench is the “control centre”, containing the switchboard and stereo sound system.

The 150-litre fresh/200-litre grey water tanks should keep the kitchen and bathroom flowing for five or six days. The Grassmere comes as Certified Self-Contained with a CSC certificate.

There is also plenty of general storage. Opposite the bench, next to the bathroom is a wardrobe with shelves below. Next to that is a drawer cabinet, which also houses two

“ The Grassmere is well endowed in the creature comfort department ”

tubular dining table legs with ends that protrude slightly from the cabinet and look like rod holders. I thought I was in the company of a fishing fanatic until Floris explained their true purpose. There are large overhead lockers on the walls above the U-shaped rear lounge, and a total of three drawers under the side settees.

The Grassmere is well endowed in the creature comfort department. For audio news, sport and music there is a Majestic surround-sound entertainment centre, including a pair of external speakers for outdoor listening. Visual entertainment is courtesy of Majestic again, this time via the

latest model SATPOS20D auto-seek digital dome and two 19-inch TVs. The Freeview decoder also accepts Sky cards.

To maintain charge in the two 105amp/h Exide AGM batteries there is a 140-watt solar panel and a smart battery charger, and for the other 230-volt toys there is a 1500-watt inverter.

#### EXTERIOR FEATURES

Outside is the familiar, original UCC motorhome shape, but the incremental changes I mentioned before have worked their magic here, too, fine-tuning both detail and quality.

This Grassmere has a Tauranga-manufactured Shademaker awning. Robust and easy to use, it has a failsafe feature that makes it very suitable for New Zealand's windy conditions. When being closed, it flips shut with a bang before the wind can have its wicked way with it. There are two large external lockers and a full-width locker across the rear under the lounge seats. The house batteries, housed in a locker behind the driver's door, are fastened onto a slide-out for easy maintenance. A 2500kg rated towbar is fitted and the 140kW (190hp) V6 diesel should handle that with ease. But note that if you do tow anything with the

Grassmere, you will need to hold a Class 2 (truck) licence.

#### DRIVING IMPRESSION

On the road, the Grassmere is very quiet in the cab, making conversation or listening to the radio a pleasant experience. The 3-litre V6 motor allows for quick acceleration at traffic lights and plenty of power on the hills. The large, well-placed rear vision mirrors, combined with the rear vision camera set-up, give the driver excellent visibility when reversing. ■

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