



RS Elysian

Long Distance Test - The Road to Morocco

We had been planning our 'dream motorhome' for some time. Looking for an A Class vehicle not more than 30' long, made in Europe and with Slide Outs to provide the extra living space we longed for having had our previous van for 5 years and being a bit fed up that one person had to sit down if another person stood up!!

After much searching including visits to Dusseldorf we chanced upon RS Motorhomes. They were based near Barnsley which is less than an hour from where we live in North Yorkshire. They were planning on building an A Class vehicle, the Elysian, would we be brave enough to be customer number one? I explained just what I was looking for in the vehicle. As we are now thinking about our retirement I explained I wanted a vehicle that would, if I wanted to, take me to the cold of Northern Alaska and the heat of the Sahara. Could they build this for me? Almost a year later, after much discussion, design and redesign, the vehicle rolled out of the factory. A 3 litre Iveco Base Vehicle with semi-automatic transmission (of which more later), 30' of A Class with Twin Slide-outs in lounge and bedroom. The main request from RS being to give them as much feedback as we possibly could on the vehicle before they went into full production.





Over the next few months we took the vehicle to Switzerland, Austria and Italy in temperatures down to -20 degrees C and covered over 8000 miles around the UK and Europe all the time feeding back our likes and dislikes to RS and seeing them incorporated into the new vehicle design. However, the ultimate test would be a trip to Morocco in September 2011 taking the vehicle on some of the worst roads we could ever expect to see and visiting the Sahara Desert where the temperatures would reach in excess of 40 degrees C.



Algeciras to Ceuta

Having driven swiftly through England, France and Spain (where the automatic transmission and cruise control proved indispensable) in just 3 days we arrived at the Port of Algeciras where we took the ferry to Ceuta. The vehicle is fitted with air suspension which was invaluable when driving on to the ferry; we pumped it up to the maximum and despite the quite large overhang on the vehicle we managed to clear the entry ramp. Repeating the exercise on departing the ferry 45 minutes later.



A quick fuel stop (much cheaper diesel in Ceuta) and then straight into the chaos which is the Moroccan border just a few kilometers further down the road. Ceuta actually still being part of Spain which surprises many people on their first visit. Lots of paperwork involving passports, log books and insurance and around 30 minutes later we drove across the border and into Morocco.

Mountain Driving

Driving the Middle Atlas Mountains

Base vehicle, engine and gearbox performance



Pictured top left we are perched at the top of the hill above Chefchaouen where there is a formal campsite (although the Moroccan definition of a campsite very much differs from our normal European understanding). Chefchaouen, the Blue City, lies in the Rif mountains in Northern Morocco. Not as high as the middle Atlas but a good first test for the vehicle in terms of how it would handle the rough and very steep roads in Morocco. The engine performed well overall taking the steep ascents in its stride and the semi-automatic box shifting smoothly up and down. On occasion, when overtaking, a quick flick to a lower manual gear proved invaluable. Morocco is not a place to be on the wrong side of the road for too long!

We moved to a wild camp near a lake (the van pictured left at sunset). Despite temperatures reaching the high 30's, and moving to an altitude of 4500 feet, the engine temperature gauge moved on occasion from mid to three quarters and back again. This despite having the cab air conditioning at full pelt all day long. The cab air con worked well for driver and passenger but doesn't really penetrate beyond the two front seats. I guess we didn't expect it to in any event.



The roads, as might be expected, are pretty rough and it can be a bumpy ride with some big potholes. The vehicle took these all in its stride without issue, along with the regular encounters with sheep and goats which were a recurring feature every day of driving.

The heat in the desert combined with the bumpy roads did manage to unseat two of the headlights by melting the sealant but these were swiftly put back in place and secured with some additional screws. Something RS will address from here on in. During the trip we also managed to nearly lose our front number plate on a rock, and the potholed roads were so bad that at one point we managed to smash some plates and glasses whilst they were still inside the cupboard! Overall though, given the very rough ride' the damage was pretty acceptable..



Slide Outs and Hydraulic Self Levelling

After a week or so of being in Morocco in a motorhome you begin to wonder if you will ever find a level piece of ground to stay on ever again. The twin slide outs provide so much more room when extended but if anything, exaggerate any uneven tilt of the vehicle in any direction. The hydraulic self-leveling must be one of the best bits of kit you can have on your motorhome. Park up, extend the slide outs, switch on the self leveling and hit auto, 30 seconds later the vehicle will be level even where necessary taking wheels off the ground.

If the slope is very severe the levelling system indicates and allows for manual override which we did need to use once during our trip. It is then a matter of using the buttons on the panel to first of all level front to back and then side to side. Not difficult, just not as impressive to onlookers!



Sahara

Desert

**Outside temperatures at
42 degrees C**



Air Conditioning

We drove South of Zagora and entered the Sahara where the temperatures really began to soar. This would be a test for both the onboard generator and the air conditioning system. Even at night, the temperature outside stayed well above 33 degrees until around 5am when it would drop to mid twenties before starting to heat up again. Time to turn on the air conditioning unit which we powered either from the generator or when we had it, from electric hook up. Full on you couldn't call it quiet but it was certainly effective. We left it on overnight on its lowest fan setting and it managed to lower the temperature inside the van to as little as 18 degrees during the night making sleeping very comfortable. It was left running all day and night when we had electric hook up - not very green but it made the desert a more pleasant place to be.

Generator Electrics and Gas

We had the 2.5KVA generator converted from petrol to gas. This seemed sensible as it meant just taking on board two fuels (diesel and LPG) rather than three. Cost of conversion to gas was minimal whereas a diesel generator option would have been very expensive.

I was concerned that a 20Kg underslung gas tank wouldn't be sufficient for 4 weeks but despite using the generator for several hours, cooking, running



the Alde hot water and fridge on gas, we departed Morocco with gas to spare although I would say we were careful not to leave hot water on etc. A bigger tank is an option we would consider next time for peace of mind.

The generator started first time every time, operated from a simple switch located near the entry door. It is reasonably quiet but don't park right next door to someone you don't know and leave it running all night! I did notice that at high altitude (at times we were above 4000ft and even in the desert often at 2000 ft) the generator did not perform as well as we had been used to in England. The lower oxygen levels clearly affecting the rpm of the equipment which may need some minor adjustment for operation in a thinner atmosphere. However, this did not prove an issue as we have no single piece of equipment that gets close to requiring the full power of the generator and we would for example choose not to run the microwave and a hairdryer simultaneously.

The vehicle is also fitted with a 1.5kw inverter which powers 5 sockets permanently when switched on. We leave it permanently on whether hooked up or not, generator on or not. Extremely useful for plugging in phone chargers and other adaptors. when on the move or not on EHU. It also powers the Camos satellite system, a Mac Mini and two 23 inch HD televisions (also doubling as computer monitors) - one in the living area and one in the bedroom. Unobtrusive, it just gets on with its job

General living aboard

Everything was pretty easy overall and worked as expected. The size of the water and grey water tanks is impressive. With around 400 litres of water on board when full, wild camping for days at a time was not an issue even with two of us sometimes having two showers a day due to the heat.

The fresh water tank is matched with a similarly large grey water tank. We opted for two toilet cassettes rather than a black water tank and don't regret this. It is so easy to empty and we rarely need to use both cassettes unless we are away from facilities for over a week





We had a Nature Pure water filtration system fitted and used this for drinking water throughout our time away. This negated buying tablets to add to the tank or purchasing many litres of bottled fresh water which is so hard to carry and store.



In Summary

A great trip and a great test. The roads in Morocco are very rough and the vehicle was thoroughly tested for both durability and heat. Of course, not everything survived intact including some of our crockery that was literally smashed inside the cupboard!

This is a vehicle I am looking forward to taking to the extreme in my retirement - the cold of Alaska and the heat of Mexico. I think it will get me there.

...and for those that like the facts:

Length of trip: 4 weeks	MTPLM 7000Kg
Distance travelled : 4500 miles	Payload 1250Kg
Average speed : 38mph	Sleeps 4 -6 with 4 belted seats
Fuel consumption: 15.5mpg	Fresh Water Tank 400 Litres
Base vehicle: Iveco 65C18	Twin slide-outs Lounge and Bedroom
Engine 3.0L turbodiesel 176Bhp	Onboard Generator 2.5Kva
6 speed semi-automatic transmission	Alde Heating System
L/W/H 9.1/2.4/3.15 (29'10"/7'10"/10'4")	Automatic Hydraulic Self-Leveling system