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FACTS AT A GLANCE

Toyota Proace Verso Family Medium

Price: £41,195 OTR

Engine: 2-litre diesel

Economy: 35 to 40mpg

Power: 174bhp

CO2 emissions: 159/193g/km

0-60mph: 8.8secs

Top speed: 114mph

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HOW TO TRANSPORT EIGHT PEOPLE IN LUXURY?

By *Tim Saunders, Motoring Correspondent*

How to transport eight people in luxury? A conundrum for a large family or indeed business people. The answer: The Toyota Proace Verso Family Medium.

Toyota's been making vehicles like this for quite some time. When I was at school a friend of mine came from a large family who proudly owned a Spacecruiser, the equivalent of the Renault Espace at the time. The Proace is larger, more spacious and there's greater luxury with its all-round black leather seats, electric windows, air conditioning, rear privacy glass and even a cooled glovebox. But it doesn't stop there because the front seats massage the driver and passenger and are also heated as is the rear bench seat. My wife Caroline has also discovered that the sliding doors can be opened from inside simply by kicking them in the nicest possible way.

To look at it's basically a van with a sliding rear door on each side for easy access in tight spaces. But on further inspection it is a very cool van; reminiscent of the one used by the A-Team in that hit 1980s TV series. The middle row of three seats easily folds down and pushes forward allowing access to the rear three seats. This row of passengers also benefit from folding tables fitted to the back of the front seats. These tables are fitted with helpful straps that prevent water bottles from falling to the floor when tackling roundabouts.

When sitting inside the first thing

you notice is that it is very high off the road. It is so high that it even dwarfs Range Rovers, VW Caravelles and an old Renault Espace we drive past. The black leather seats are comfortable and supportive and it's quick to get the desired driving position thanks to the driver's seat being electrically adjustable. It is necessary to reverse it off our driveway and I am used to many cars these days having a camera view to ease this manoeuvre. I am surprised that the Proace does not have one and makes do with beeps to alert the driver to any obstacles. I would feel more comfortable with a camera view due to the rear headrests obscuring the view out of the back window.

We take it for a spin down to Abbotsbury in Dorset expecting the 75 mile journey to take the usual hour and a quarter but the sheer volume of traffic more than doubles the journey time. Shocking. It is literally nose to tail all the way. But when you have no appointments to keep and there are good tunes on the radio, plenty of food on board, life is less stressful. As we watch motorists undercutting and trying to barge their way in front of others, we calmly move forward slower than a snail. The children are busy looking out for breakdowns, emergency vehicles with their flashing lights and keeping an eye out for naughty motorists who are glued to their phones when they should be focussing on the road.

Tim Saunders is an advanced motorist and journalist. He has always been passionate about motoring and regularly reviews cars from the leading manufacturers. His first report on a BMW 520i was published in the Dorset Echo when he was 17 (just after passing his driving test) in 1995. He went on to become business and motoring editor at the Bournemouth Echo.

