



Ford Transit

Hard-working and often abused, minibuses are the unsung workhorses of the passenger transport industry. They have to contend with flocks of school kids determined to vandalise their interiors, work gangs that happily ignore the no smoking signs and stub their cigarettes out on the floor, and smiling pensioners who manage to upset the contents of their flasks all over the upholstery.

To survive that kind of environment you have to be able to absorb plenty of punishment and come back for more day after wearisome day. That's why Ford's Transit has once again won *What Van?*'s Minibus of the Year award.

You can have your Transit minibus as a nine-, a 12-, a 15- or a 17-seater. The last-named vehicle is on offer with a high roof as well as a medium-height roof while the Shuttle Bus nine-seater boasts over 2.5m³ of luggage space behind the rearmost seats and can be driven by anybody with an ordinary car-driver's licence.

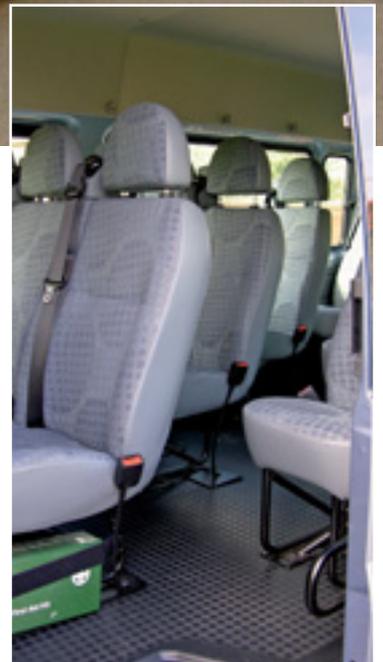
The two smallest models are front-

wheel drive and powered by a 2.2-litre Duratorq TDCi diesel developed by Ford in co-operation with PSA Peugeot Citroën. It produces either 110hp or 130hp with the latter option in the process of being replaced by a 140hp version with a six-speed 'box.

The 15- and 17-seaters are rear-wheel drive and come with a 2.4-litre Duratorq TDCi pumping out 100hp, 115hp or 140hp depending on the derivative you select. The two most powerful variants boast a six-speed manual gearbox.

Electronic Stability Programme is standard across the range along with disc brakes all-round and ABS, and it's worth noting that the ESP system is being upgraded to include Hill Launch Assist. It ensures you don't roll back when you're trying to move away on a hill.

The entire line-up meets M1 passenger car safety levels, all the



seats are fitted with lap-and-diagonal belts and adjustable headrests and the 12- 15- and 17-seaters come with a Schedule 6 pack.

It encompasses a fire extinguisher plus a grab handle that aids entry through the sliding side passenger door; the anti-slip step is illuminated. Also including are decals that tell you how many passengers the vehicle can carry, where the emergency exit is and whereabouts the first aid kit that also forms part of the pack is stowed.

Every Transit minibus comes with twin batteries. The second battery is there to power whatever accessories are needed when the engine is

switched off and means that you won't risk flattening the starter battery; and a flat battery is that last thing you want if you're miles from anywhere with a party of fractious school kids onboard and worried parents ringing you every five minutes.

Don't forget that there are two other Transit people-carriers; the upmarket eight- and nine-seater Tourneous. Just the job if you're looking for a bit more refinement and comfort.

If there's any drawback to Transit minibus it's the lack of either a fully- or semi-automatic gearbox as an option. Let's hope Ford does something about this omission soon. ♦