

# PREMIUM IN PINK



MOBIpeople's new Premium looks stylish, modern and well-proportioned. **JONATHAN WELCH**

**Jonathan Welch** looks at the latest offering from MOBIpeople, its new MAN-based Premium high-specification touring coach, the first of which has been delivered to Anthony's Travel

**A**nthony's Travel of Runcorn is no stranger to uncommon coaches, having operated a number of Barbi Galileos since 2016, and has always worked closely with the manufacturer and with importer BASE Coach Sales to improve and develop the product. When manufacturer Barbi Bus and Coach decided to concentrate its production on

smaller vehicles, BASE set about looking for an alternative supplier for its larger vehicles, and existing relationships naturally led it to Portuguese manufacturer MOBIpeople, whose Explorer and Midi Explorer it has offered in the UK market since 2014. Once it had been established that production would transfer to Portugal, BASE brought together a group of operators who had taken

the Galileo and flew them out to meet the designers to explain what they wanted in a coach, what they liked about the Barbi and what they thought could be made better. Richard Bamber of Anthony's Travel said that the firm jumped at the chance to be the first to operate the new vehicle, specifying it as a 12.5m 32-seat team coach with tables, rear servery and centre sunken toilet. It is this first vehicle that CBW was invited to drive shortly after delivery to the operator. Nick Dodgson of BASE Coach Sales explained that the MOBIpeople Premium is a bespoke product designed around the needs of operators who want something

less mainstream but still with a great level of support and back-up. Instead of trying to compete with the other makes, Nick said that with MOBIpeople they were able to offer a much more tailor-made coach to each operator's specification. BASE's attitude, he explained as we chatted before making our way outside to the coach, is that if a customer has a request, the answer is yes, and BASE then just has to work out how to make it happen.

## A bespoke design

As a result of its bespoke nature, this is not a bargain-basement product, although nor is it prohibitively expensive. A 53-seat executive-

specification PSVAR-compliant version would retail at around £260,000, explained Nick, whilst the version we are driving today, equipped with extensive kitchen facilities as well as tables and a comprehensive entertainment system, would nudge past the £300,000 mark, depending on exact specification.

I have to admit that I always found the design of the Galileo somewhat sad-looking, especially from head-on. I am pleased to say that initial impressions of MOBIpeople's new Premium offering were much more favourable, and first thoughts were that it had an air of Setra to it. As we approached the coach from the rear, the pale pink livery highlighted the upward tick of the dark-tinted glazing at the rear. The silver strip below the saloon windows ends within the tick, in a neat downwards point, which is a pleasing and unique yet still restrained design feature.

## Practical design

The remainder of the sides are flat with little in the way of detailing to get in the way of logos or livery. A large grille is located on the nearside at the rear, in front of which is the Adblue filler flap. Usefully, the 480-litre fuel tank can be filled from either side, the filler flaps being located above the trailing edge of the front wheelarch. The wheelarches themselves are slightly squared, another discrete touch which adds to the overall impression that the coach has been well-designed but without being over-styled. The smooth lines are uninterrupted by locker handles, these operating electrically via switches on the dashboard. Side marker lights are fitted as standard, which flash along with

the indicators for added visibility and safety.

Arriving at the front, on the nearside the downward swoop of the tinted window line continues onto the door glazing, below which an additional diagonal window provides a kerb-side view for the driver, a welcome safety feature. Richard had said that one thing operators liked about the Barbi design was the opening front panel: effectively the whole front end below the windscreen cantilevered upwards to allow easy access for maintenance, but being a single-piece moulding meant that it could be expensive to repair. MOBIpeople has taken this idea and refined it, and now the whole front end opens up but as three segments. The central section lifts, whilst each side hinges open to allow quick and easy access to the lighting units, with replacement of any of the panels being easier and quicker should there be a minor knock or scrape. All lights are LEDs, including headlights and full beam, whilst the neat front fog lights mounted low down look smart and add a touch of sharpness to the design. The spare wheel can also be found here, stowed beneath the front overhang.

## Last minute change

Although this coach was destined to be Tranmere Rovers' team coach and specified as such, part way through the build Richard decided he wanted it to be PSVAR-ready. MOBIpeople was able to accommodate this request, and the coach is fitted with a nearside door behind the front axle, below which the locker door arrangement allows for a lift to be installed at a later date. Whilst undoubtedly a bonus once the coach moves on to other duties,



The rear end is neat and tidy. All lighting uses LEDs. **JONATHAN WELCH**



## TEST DRIVE / MOBIPEOPLE PREMIUM

it does mean that access to the front part of the luggage hold is slightly encumbered. The trade-off of course being that if a lift were fitted, that space would not be available for luggage at all and the coach would have to carry around the extra weight of the lift, and from that point of view it seems a sensible compromise. Depending on specification, the Premium has a luggage capacity of up to 15m<sup>3</sup>.

The bodywork makes extensive use of reinforced fibreglass and aluminium for strength and to minimise weight. The roof panelling, wheel housings and other mouldings are reinforced fibreglass, lower skirt panels are aluminium whilst the single-piece side panel is made of galvanised steel. The internal and external structure is treated with epoxy primer, and the underside coated with an underseal to ensure longevity.

### Stepping aboard

The entrance area is spacious, with four steps up to the driver and two more into the saloon. The courier's seat folds away unobtrusively to the right, and is at a good height in relation to the driver – the courier is not tucked away part way down the stairs. There are handrails at both sides of the door, with a long angled one to the left of passengers ascending the steps.

Turning into the saloon, the high specification and quality of Anthony's Travel's first Premium is evident immediately. All seating is arranged around tables which have the operator's logo inlaid and cup holders at each corner. Both tables and seats are finished in a black and pale grey colour scheme which looks smart and fresh without being dark or oppressive. The quilted stitching and deep base of the Kiel seats gives the impression of comfort before even sitting down; on our short journey they seemed supportive and comfortable. The headrests with

stitched Anthony's Travel logos add a further touch of class.

Moving down the aisle, it is impossible not to notice the built-in LED lighting at floor level, which is controlled from a dashboard-mounted console and can be set to a number of different colours which change the mood and complement the black and grey colours of the seats. The same LED lighting is also fitted to the front of the drinks console above the WC and in the stairwell by the continental door, giving a homogeneous tone throughout the saloon. The carpeted sunken aisle is flanked by wood-effect Taraflex flooring beneath the seats, which is both stylish and easy to clean.

At the rear, red LED lighting mounted under the counter tops complements the red curtains and soft trim of the interior. The full-width kitchen is comprehensively fitted out with microwave and oven, ample storage, a small sink and a fridge which can be used as a freezer if required. A further fridge is fitted in the





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front dashboard, along with a third part-way down the saloon between seat backs, meaning no shortage of space for cool drinks or pre-prepared meals when on the road.

### On the road

As we headed out of Anthony's Travel's depot, regular driver John Carroll took the wheel to give me chance to have a look around on the move and take some video footage for *CBW*'s YouTube channel. Having had a couple of weeks to get a feel for it, John spoke highly of the coach.

My first impressions were good: the MAN RR2 chassis rode very smoothly, its independent front suspension making light work of rough road surfaces. As I moved up and down the coach, I was impressed that the noise level in the saloon was low and although the 430bhp engine could be heard, especially towards the rear, it was quiet and the noise was never intrusive. The bonded side windows are double-glazed, which helps with both noise and heat insulation.

A number of other options have been specified on this vehicle for its role as team coach. A total of 11 monitors mean that all passengers can see a screen easily. Those screens can display Apple TV, Sky, or thanks to input sockets mounted above the front two tables, can be connected to a laptop to display presentations or allow the team to review footage of a game on the way home from a match. WiFi is fitted too for those who wish to use their own devices to entertain themselves on board.

Resembling a Transformer, the front panels all open wide to allow for access to the rear of the LED lighting units and other equipment. A spare wheel is also housed beneath the front overhang. **JONATHAN WELCH**



The 430bhp MAN engine is powerful and quiet. **JONATHAN WELCH**

Two icons of Runcorn - the Premium in Anthony's Travel's unique livery in front of the town's Silver Jubilee Bridge. **JONATHAN WELCH**





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### Behind the wheel

With the video footage and some pictures in the bag and having had chance to speak a little more to Nick about the specification and features of the coach, it was time to take the wheel myself, with John looking somewhat nervous in the courier seat as we squeezed our way out of our photo-stop. Thankfully, all-round visibility is very good and the large mirrors well positioned, meaning I was able to negotiate my way through a line of parked cars with relative ease. A low sun meant that I needed the electric sun blind down, and in this situation the additional third mirror by the side window is a boon. The nearside sunblind is an opaque gauze, meaning that when it is down the driver still has a view into the nearside mirror. A small touch but the tailswinging markers were helpful in providing reassurance that the back end was clear of obstructions – a rear-view CCTV camera is also fitted which means

reversing can be done in safety, whilst the in-dash Bosch monitor will switch to displaying an image of the continental door when it is open, another good safety feature.

Manoeuvring through the narrow streets in the centre of Runcorn, the excellent steering lock was a major plus, I was actually surprised at one point to make a 90-degree turn at a tight junction without needing to shunt back to pass a badly-parked car. The steering wheel itself felt good too, an important consideration since it is the thing a driver will touch more than any other. The common arrangement of a right-hand stalk to control the powerful but smooth ZF intarder and a left stalk for indicators and wipers means that a driver has everything to hand, and the steering wheel buttons for the cruise control could not be simpler or easier to operate. Additionally, I found the steering had just the right balance of weight and feel without being too heavy.

### A pleasant workplace

Driver comfort is assured thanks to the air-sprung drivers seat with arm rests, and the controls are logically laid out on the wide curved dashboard. What appeared at first sight to be a slightly bewildering array of switches to my left turned out to be a combination of switches and information lights to show the status of various functions.

Overall, I found the cab to be a very pleasant workplace, although I noted that in common with many buses and coaches from various manufacturers, that it was impossible to see the full speedometer from my driving position. I accept that I am probably not an 'average' driver, and tend to sit further forward and higher up than most, however it is an irritation that dashboards seem often not to take such a position into account and place the dials quite high up in the binnacle. That said, I can imagine that for the majority

of drivers there would be no issue. On a much more positive note, the tachograph was well positioned within both reach and sight of the driver, something which can't always be taken for granted.

### Smooth and safe

In terms of handling, the ZF Ecolife gearbox and MAN engine seemed well-matched.

Pulling away from junctions or onto busy roundabouts was accomplished with ease, the gearbox doing both what I expected and what I asked of it constantly during my drive. Power delivery was smooth throughout the speed range, and there was no sign of roll-back when setting off or stopping on hills.

Safety features abound too on the Premium, with lane guard and brake assist systems fitted as standard, and Anthony's Travel's example was due to be fitted with a Wheely Safe tyre pressure and wheel loss monitor shortly after CBW's visit.

On the whole, I found the driving experience good, and setting aside the speedo visibility issue I would have no hesitation in saying that this is a coach which drivers will enjoy driving – and being seen driving. For operators, it is a coach which will stand out amongst the crowd and not look out of place in a coach park of top-end coaches, and with both the enthusiastic backing of BASE, the high degree of bespoke design and the two-year MAN warranty, there is bound to be an option for most operators who want something proven, reliable yet a little different. //



The stylish quilted and embroidered seating is set around tables, giving a capacity of 32. At the rear is a full kitchen with sink, cooker and fridge/freezer. **JONATHAN WELCH**



The number of switches on the dashboard looks complex at first, but the top row are actually lights indicating the status of vehicle functions. The layout of the controls seemed logical and all were sensibly positioned. **JONATHAN WELCH**



Anthony's Travel Managing Director Richard Bamber and regular driver John Carroll in front of the impressive new MOBipeople Premium. **JONATHAN WELCH**

