



Ducato, a landmark still on top

We met Roberto Fumarola, Head of Recreational Vehicles Department of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, to talk about the new Ducato, with refreshed engine range and a new automatic transmission. We also discussed the issue of possible alternatives to diesel. Once again, it emerged that Ducato is not only the benchmark for technical and construction quality but also a winner for the wide range of services for end customers.

Words Antonio Mazzucchelli - photo Enrico Bona

The new Ducato confirms its excellence with targeted solutions, a well-differentiated engine range and a new automatic transmission. We talked about it with Roberto Fumarola, who has been heading the Recreational Vehicles Department of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles for some years. He reasserted that the validity of Ducato is not only in its technical proposals but also in the services provided to customers. Fiat





Professional supports camper van users and invests resources to continuously improve products and services, all created in collaboration with Mopar, the reference brand for services, Customer Care, genuine spare parts and accessories for FCA brands. The close ties of Fiat Professional to the sector is also confirmed and bolstered by the presence of recreational vehicles in European motor shows and by the dedicated website www.fiatcamper.com (garnering 86,000 average monthly visits) and the presence on Facebook (more than 60,000 fans) and Instagram.

Aboutcamp BtoB: What balance can you draw from your first three years at the helm of Fiat's motorhome division? What main changes you were able to implement?

Roberto Fumarola: The balance of these first three years is a positive one. It was a new area for me to explore and most certainly an interesting and motivating one. I had the opportunity to try my hand at fast evolutions, situations to manage on the fly and issues of various nature. I can say that we succeeded in our intent, fully confirming our leadership in the sector and always offering solutions to all needs. Several changes have been implemented. Certainly, we improved logistics and ensured a greater integration between the various realities which follow this business area but also dedicated greater attention to market developments, in terms of trends and numbers, to adapt them to logistics and production of our plant.

Aboutcamp BtoB: The Ducato Model Year was launched on the market a few months ago. What are the improvements of greatest interest to camper van end users and which are the most valuable for converters?

Roberto Fumarola: The new engines are surely decisive. We offer a wide choice, with four engines ranging from 120 to 180 hp, with better fuel efficiency and lower emissions, higher performance and improved driving comfort. The four engines comply with the latest Euro 6d regulations. They are more ecological and with even more relevant performance, especially in terms of torque. The other innovation is the new fully automatic nine-speed gearbox, which is smooth and powerful and delivers up to 480 Nm of torque (+12.5%). The new AT9 (that stands for Automatic Transmission 9 shift) is derived from a ZF product and fully meets the needs of our customers. We previously introduced a robotic gearbox, which was a bridge between manual and automatic, and now we have a fully-fledged automatic. Operators and customers have test-driven it. The satisfaction they expressed was excellent. The transmission ensures excellent performance, the vehicle drives smoothly and powerfully. It has proven to be absolutely capable even on challenging uphill roads. And it is remarkably quiet, which is not a secondary factor. The new Advanced Driving Assistance Systems (ADAS) are another interesting innovation. In addition to the existing ones, we have devel-

oped new features (such as Full Brake Control, Blind Spot Assist and Rear Cross Path Detection) to make Ducato more modern and safer. We are always very sensitive to the issue of safety and we want to offer all the updates on the subject because we always try to protect our customers on our vehicle to the fullest. As for the converters, I can say that in the past FCA has already fully responded to their needs, with advantages such as lighter frame and widened track, for instance. Now, also for converters, we are taking a step forward with the long-awaited automatic transmission and with the improvements to the ADAS. Ducato is certainly in line with what motorhome manufacturers demand, that is a versatile, convertible vehicle which is perfectly compatible with the living pod to achieve great interaction, ease of connection and a host of technical solutions designed to facilitate the conversion activity of our converter customers.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Do you think that the performance of the new transmission could spur an increase in its diffusion? What is the percentage of Ducato-based motorhomes purchased today with automatic transmission and what will it be in the future according to your most optimistic forecasts?

Roberto Fumarola: The automatic transmission was being very well received. We had the opportunity to have it tested both by specialised sector operators and end customers. We organised test drives at the Düsseldorf and Paris motor shows and gathered in very important customer feedback. Compared to the previous robotised gearbox, the automatic transmission expresses an even better mix. We are around 35-40% of the total of the Ducato, so I think that it is an excellent result. For the future, we are also counting on word of mouth among motorhome owners.

Aboutcamp BtoB: When changing the mechanics there is always a great deal of apprehension among converters for fear of delays in delivery. How did you handle this problem? Did everything go as planned?

Roberto Fumarola: We were the first to introduce Euro 6d engines. At first, it was a chance, because we wanted to meet the needs of converters, as we always do, giving them the opportunity to have vehicles to show at the conventions in June and to launch their new collections with new engines. We took a calculated risk and I can say that everything went as expected. Now, we have achieved normal delivery rates. We experienced some problematic moments, as can be expected when new products are launched, you have to take them into account, but we managed them successfully. Deliveries are now normal and all this is very positive. Merit for this goes to the engineers and the Sevel plant that worked very well. I can now say that we can supply the new Euro 6d engines with manual or automatic transmission according to the scheduled production and delivery times.



Aboutcamp BtoB: The competition of other mechanical bases appears to be on the rise. Is Ducato still the winning product for motorhome converters? Why?

Roberto Fumarola: Ducato is still excelling on today's market also because Fiat Professional was the first brand to set up a dedicated team with in-depth knowledge of the recreational vehicle world. Furthermore, we can guarantee a high level of specialisation, in terms of products and services, in order to offer the highest level of flexibility and freedom to customers. We have taken great care to make Ducato the winning product over time. Today, the line-up is being complemented with the new nine-speed automatic transmission and with the new Euro 6d-TEMP engine, while we are constantly studying and looking for new solutions to ensure that Ducato remains the undisputed leader in the sector for years to come. Yes, I am convinced that the





Ducato will remain a first-class vehicle. From the van point of view, as camper van base, Ducato offers excellent internal volumes and trademark manoeuvrability, with front-wheel drive and self-supporting body. All the solutions we offer feature what we call Chassis Special. With this truly powerful invention, Ducato gives converters the opportunity of a lighter base to equip their end vehicles even better. In short, I think Ducato is still the benchmark in the sector and it is our intention to make sure it continues to be so.

Aboutcamp BtoB: How can Ducato span across different price ranges making it suitable for entry-level outfits and high-end motorhomes alike?

Roberto Fumarola: This is a result of the numerous versions we offer in terms of bodywork types, engines, wheelbases and payloads. All vehicles are characterised by high-level product quality, with unique services offered to our customers, converters and motorhome buyers alike. For converters, we offer various solutions on price and content levels. Our range spans from 120 hp to 180 with manual and automatic transmission, so we have an array of alternatives.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Users do not perceive Ducato as a basic product even in the entry-level market segment. How did succeed in this remarkable feat?

Roberto Fumarola: In terms of finished vehicles, the Ducato line-up spans across all fronts. We have entry-level, mid-range and high-end solutions so we can meet all market needs. Ducato has built up a great reputation over the years and has gradually established itself throughout Europe as the go-to product (in terms of performance, consumption, reliability and so forth) and for customer care, especially in the critical after-sales phase. This is why Ducato transcends the entry-level classification even when it is used for making more basic vehicles.

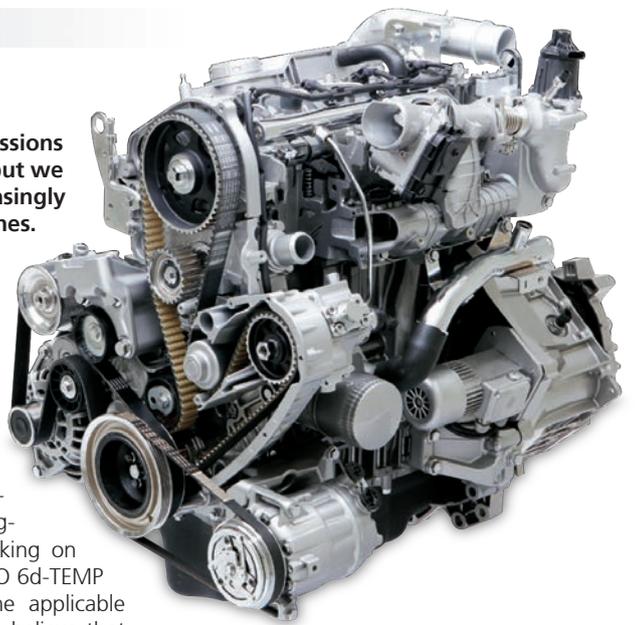
Aboutcamp BtoB: The new Ducato equipped with Euro 6 D-TEMP engine will certainly be a step forward on the

way to curtail pollutant emissions and increase fuel efficiency, but we know that users are increasingly perplexed about diesel engines. What is your goal and what are you doing to get there?

Roberto Fumarola: It is a fact that today diesel engines are the best choice for the RV mission, as a result of fuel efficiency, performance, reliability and overall cost. We are working and continuously investing in the evolution of this technology according to all the new regulations. We are currently working on the future evolution of the EURO 6d-TEMP technology to comply with the applicable legal requirements. To date, we believe that alternative technologies, such as electric and hybrid, and the related infrastructure are not mature enough for the motorhome mission. However, we are currently developing these technologies in FCA (with the Ducato BEV and electrified cars) with the goal of offering them as new traction solutions for recreational vehicles. There is still plenty of work to be done on range, weight, battery disposal and additional costs. We also know that the possible delta weight resulting from the batteries in some countries will still allow the vehicle to be driven with a category B licence. If the additional 300 kilograms that take the overall weight to exceed 3500 kilograms are due to the electric batteries, the vehicle can still be driven with a category B licence.

Aboutcamp BtoB: You mentioned services in addition to products. How important is the service network for the success of the Ducato in the motorhome sector?

Roberto Fumarola: Listening and being close to our customers, both BtoB and BtoC, are the cornerstones of one of our values. Ducato is "Leader in Freedom" also because the brand offers a unique, unrivalled series of special services for the motorhome world. Ducato motorhomes are continuously progressing not only in terms of product but also of dedicated services that revolve around motorhome holiday making. The ability to listen to customers – which starts in the Customer Care Centre and continues in the Fiat Professional workshops – means being able to respond efficiently to current needs, but also to anticipate them. The basic assumption is that purchasing a motorhome means buying a holiday and not just a vehicle. For this reason, the service concept extends from product assistance to caring for customers on holiday by keeping in touch with them. We have an extensive, dedicated network, spread out along the routes most often travelled by motorhome users,



a competent and knowledgeable Customer Care Centre for all motorhome owners. Roadside assistance ready to spring into action across Europe and beyond. In case of need, camper van users can call the dedicated Customer Care Centre and speak with one of the twenty Fiat Camper Brand Ambassadors in their own language. Each motorhome owner can count on telephone support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 53 different countries, and is updated on repair times and methods. Customer Care also provides active workshop support to facilitate diagnosis and make spare parts delivery as quick as possible. Worth mentioning is the "Maximum Care Camper" international warranty extension, which provides coverage on all mechanical and electrical components of the Ducato offering different durations. We have worked hard on the services. We have pioneered this area as well and we have achieved a very high level of content and performance, to give the customer maximum safety and peace of mind. Ducato Motorhome users can rely on over 6,500 Fiat Professional workshops equipped to maintain and repair Ducato-based campers, including over dedicated 1,800 Fiat Camper Assistance centres.

Aboutcamp BtoB: The motorhome market appears very lively and this liveliness also translates into diversified products. Will Ducato remain the only base dedicated to the camper sector or can we expect other Fiat models to also be upgraded?

Roberto Fumarola: Ducato remains our main proposal but with the Talento we are also present in the segment of motorhomes derived from 2P commercial vehicles. In this market segment, we are addressing a particular customer base of young users who are looking for a small vehicle, sometimes without a toilet but which offers many advantages for a particular use. These vehicles often provide dual use, doubling as a car and as a motorhome, and we have sold very many. We offer Talento as a solution, a versatile, valid vehicle, with appropriate engines. We are ready to meet the demands of manufacturers.



Roberto Fumarola with the Ducato Electric