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MS-RT Ford Transit Custom – First Impressions

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Ford's MS-RT Transit Custom launched.
By Robin Roberts (Miles Better News Agency).

A stunning bespoke van has been developed by Welsh-based specialist coachbuilder MS-RT working in collaboration with Cumbria-based M-Sport, who run the Ford World Rally Championship team for Ford.

Founding director Ed Davies has been in the automobile business for 25 years, and worked with the rally-team for over two years supplying specialist support vehicles, before the idea of the road vans came to him.

"I put it to the M-Sport team owner Malcolm Wilson and he liked it so we came up with a plan," said Ed. "We were keen from the outset that the MS-RT van had to meet the highest



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standards and not affect the standard Ford warranty so it could be sold through Transit dealerships.

“We don’t modify the engine or transmission but have worked on the suspension and body-kit and the result is the Ford warranty is honoured.”



Each van supplied by Ford for the conversion is stripped out, new leather seat covers are fitted in the Welsh factory, a hand-built exhaust is shaped on site, suspension replaced and the bespoke body panels are moulded, trimmed, painted and fitted over about three weeks.

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At the moment, the team of 42 personnel at MS-RT turn out over 40 Transit vans a month but interest is growing from abroad and Ed has a plan to expand the business with experienced staff and specialist apprenticeships.

Key to the quality control is traceability of components and assembly operations and production manager David Hopkins stressed, "Everything we do follows a laid-down process, is documented at every stage, checked and rechecked and nothing leaves here without a final inspection including a short roadtest."

When everything is given a fully ticked scorecard a special production plate is fixed to the Transit's frame. "I wanted to put 'Made in Mamhilad' on it but that would be too long," joked David. "But in reality it has been, and all the guys and girls here can rightly feel proud of what they have achieved, making a model in this corner of South East Wales which carries the warranty of a world-class motor manufacturer."

Director Jo Pace came into the business from the highly quality conscious aero-industry and said, "We are averaging close to 50 Transit models a month but it fluctuates and in March we hit 108 registrations through the dealers we supply."

"The sales split is about 60/40 in favour of short to long wheelbase models and two-thirds will be double cab."

He believes the future is very good for MS-RT, adding, "We already supply a few for export but see this growing all the time and we will be working with an agent to feed into eastern Europe."

"Our customers want a reliable, respected van but also something which stands out and the MS-RT Transit Custom really does."

Prices go from just under £33,000 for the short-wheelbase eight-model vans and £34,500 for the selection of 16-Double Cab.



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First impressions

The eyes have it in any vote for the most striking Ford Transit you could buy, *writes Robin Roberts.*

The chunky front panel incorporating Ford-badged nose, deep sculptured vents and edgy wrap-around side sections take the standard headlights and driving lights.



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To the side the theme continues with the added wheel-arch enhancements and to the rear you have twin exhausts showing either end of a deeper valence.

Open the doors, front or middle row, and you see high quality seat covers with MS-RT detailing and that all-important personal build plate on the frame.

All MS-RT Transit Customs leave the Pontypool factory with standard wheels to meet homologation requirements but any optional wheels are put inside for later fitting by an owner.

Fire up the MS-RT and it sounds like any other Transit unless you specify the harmonic exhaust option and it then bellows a sports car sound.



On the road over a 90 miles test-drive through the Brecon Beacons National Park the MS-RT immediately felt firmer riding and more responsive, and turned heads.

The engine is a dependable slogger and you have to make use of the six-gears to make the most of the power underfoot. That comes easily and the clutch and gearchange are smooth and direct.

It slows and steers with confidence and I found the reversing camera fitted to the test model was very useful and clear.

There was not a lot of road or wind noise, engine noise was low, but our development test model did reveal a low-range whine when moving very slowly in traffic, which I am sure would be sorted before customer delivery.

VERDICT

A special and especially eye-catching Transit!



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