Dealer-fitted 360° camera system

Richard Baldwin Motorhomes is first to market with this clever driver safety aid, for its Elddis-based Musketeer special edition range. Peter Baber checks it out.

Have you ever been startled out of your touring bliss by a car suddenly roaring past, sometimes on a sharp bend, when you hadn’t even realised it was behind you? Motorhomes with rear windows are not necessarily a help here, because they are often too high to give you a proper view. Side mirrors are the same: all too often these Lewis Hamilton-wannabes are so close behind you they are hidden from the mirror’s view. Even some reversing cameras I have tried don’t help much, because they are set either too low or at an odd angle.

In contrast, the new camera system fitted to all new Elddis Autoquest-based Musketeer dealer specials from Richard Baldwin Motorhomes this year is perfectly positioned to give you a full view of the road behind you.

The DPS 360 system is a 360-degrees camera system that is designed to display and, just as importantly, record all activity around your motorhome – not just at the back but the sides and front as well.

Richard Baldwin managing partner Gary Morgan first had the idea for it early last year, when one of his delivery drivers was run into from behind. He thought the ensuing brouhaha could have been stopped much sooner if the van had been fitted with a recording camera – and so an idea was born.

The system has a control unit that sits just behind the passenger seat. This connects to a rear view camera placed over the middle of the back panel, a front camera placed just under the mirror holder and two side cameras that sit at each back corner facing forward.

You don’t need to worry that such an apparatus might eat into your storage space with complicated wiring, because it’s some of the neatest I have seen anywhere, all tucked away in the corners of overhead lockers where you barely notice it.

The dealer has also been quick to realise that such a system works as a form of CCTV as well. So it has been wired to come on automatically whenever the engine is turned on, or when the Thatcham Category 1 alarm that comes as part of the package is activated. You can keep it running if you stop for a short time at a supermarket car park, and are worried that another shopper might knock into you. You can also adapt it so it will stay on for longer periods as well while your motorhome is in storage.

The system comes with only one SD card, but there is a slot for a second, and on a slightly lower resolution one of these should last for around seven days of recording. Once all cards are full, the system will simply record over what went before.

I gave the system a quick try on a spin around the windy Pennine lanes near where Richard Baldwin is based, in West Yorkshire.

**Trying it out**

You get a choice of five different views on the camera: each of the four sides, plus a composite showing all four of them on one screen. Although it takes a while to get used to, the composite is the view I’d stick with, except for when you are parking or manoeuvring slowly. You flip from view to view with the aid of a remote control fob. This has to be pointed directly at the control unit, so when you are on the move you might leave the controls to your passenger. There is an option to have a ‘magic eye’ fitted, so you can point the fob at the screen.

The reversing camera as a whole proved equally useful in general driving. You know those hairy moments when you need to squeeze past the man in the van but also need to avoid the Range Rover coming the other way? It’s a doddle with the DPS 360.

It also proved useful for manoeuvring around places such as pub car parks, because you could easily see where awkward welcome signs were. It was perfect at lining the ‘van up at the right point at a fuel station.

The system was also very helpful with parking, as long as you are moving forwards. If there is a soft verge you would rather your motorhome tyres did not stray onto, you can avoid it through the side camera. If you then have to reverse back, however, because of the position of the camera you have to remember that items coming towards you on the screen are actually moving away from you – and that, believe me, takes some getting used to. Gary admits that help in reversing is possibly the least useful of the system’s many functions at the moment.

Overall, it’s pretty useful. So how much is it? Since exhibiting the system at last October’s NEC show, the dealer has started offering it to some customers as a retrofit, depending on the motorhome. That costs around £1500, including the Thatcham alarm.

At that price, you might think it is really only something for peace of mind. But here’s a titbit to tempt you. Caravan insurer Caravan Guard is offering a 25% discount to anyone who buys one of the new Musketeers. Marketing director Craig Thompson says: “Manoeuvring mishaps are one of the top causes of motorhome insurance claims but we are confident that the 360-degree view provided by the DPS 360 system will help drivers avoid any otherwise difficult-to-see obstacles.”

It’s certainly something to think about, next time you are on the road.