

The huge Commander 184EW is that rarest of beasts: an all new Carlight. Michael Le Chaplain towed it to suitably salubrious Cambridge

# Posh

Carlight Commander 184EW

## IN BRIEF

✓ **FOR**  
Titanium build quality  
Unparalleled image

✗ **AGAINST**  
Staggering price  
Considerable weight

CARLIGHT - A NAME THAT carries with it the same ring within the caravan industry as does Rolls Royce within the car industry. A trite comparison, perhaps, but in a world overspilling with gung-ho marketing tripe, a valid one nevertheless.

They are remarkable machines, too. In a production run spanning some 60 years or more, Carlights have always remained true to their roots. Witness the persistent use, even today, of the company's patented lantern roof (the raised centre section containing tiny 'lantern' side windows), single-piece front window and the same tail lights that have been fitted for over a decade.

Step aboard, and the rich aroma of quality wood (leather, too, on some models) fills your nostrils. Open the lockers, and marvel at the millimetre perfect shutlines, the lovingly crafted mitring, the sturdy locks and catches, and the hand finish to every visible wood surface. Find a roughly hewn edge in a Carlight, and you'll have done



Navy/yellow scheme works well in. Almost any colour combination is possible, though

what no one before you has managed to do.

Of course, you pay for the privilege of relaxing in such elegant, sumptuous surroundings. Our test" Commander 184 EW costs a not-inconsiderable £28,985 in standard form. Add the Wedgwood china (£468.83), engraved crystal glassware (£202.19) and superb Carver Euromover (£1157.80) with which ours also came equipped, and you're looking at signing a cheque for over £30,800...

# Space



## EXTERIOR DESIGN AND STYLE

★★★★★

My task this month is easier than usual, simply because anyone who finds any Carlight visually distasteful probably needs new spectacles.

The 184 is not modern, by any stretch of the imagination, but then nor is it meant to be. It does, however, look hugely impressive - like it's hewn from a solid block of granite. In fact - and those new flush-fit Seitz windows really do look the part.

One of my fellow caravanners likened the caravan to 'Kensington Palace on wheels', and she was just one of seven (yes, seven) fellow campers who wanted a proper eyeful of a Carlight in its true and proper surroundings. I was even ambushed by three seriously impressed blokes at the site's exit barrier.

Design-wise, you'd think the Commander would lag a year or five behind more svelte rivals, but nothing could be further from the truth.

There's a boot, for one thing. Treat it, as I did, as nothing more than somewhere to stow your fresh/waste water containers, corner steady blocks and submersible pump, and it will have no detrimental effect on stability whatsoever. Attempt to squeeze your full awning in there, though, and you're asking for trouble. Moving closer to the nose, one of the side lockers opens to reveal a neat collection of labelled gas taps, an inboard tank fill point, a Whale tap and a Hozelok electric pump nozzle, while the adjacent battery locker has a void beyond in which to store your hook-up lead.

All four steady winders (Carlights run on ALKO chassis, these days - they don't even have heavy-duty legs) have exposed bolts. Surrounded by a halo of rubber-edged GRP, while the Fiamma large-bore waste-water pipe has custom-fit screw-on flexi-pipe, the other end of which screws firmly into a (rather small) bespoke waste tank. And everyone knows about the ingenious slide-out gas locker tray, of course.

“ Carlights have always remained true to their roots ”

I never did get the hang of the main door handle - the circular locks turned and clicked just fine, but only seemed to actually lock or unlock the door every third attempt.





## INTERIOR STYLE AND LAYOUT

★★★★★

Our 184 was a pre-production prototype, so we can safely ignore the side bunk (which fouled the U-shaped seating, and will probably be removed), the wasted space over the rear window (production models will have a mirrored locker there) and the recalcitrant window stays.

Elsewhere, the Commander deserves every one of the five stars we've awarded it in this section.

In terms of bare-bones design, it's nothing special. It's more the way the 184 goes about cossetting its occupants that impresses.

There's a spacious front dinette, slightly less accommodating side dinette, a gigantic nearside galley, and a true end washroom.

I say 'true' because past Carlights bearing the 'EW' moniker have usually sported a small side washroom containing shower, toilet and sink unit, with the shower cordoned off via a complex arrangement of folding frosted doors. The 184 has a proper example, but more on that later.

The first thing that strikes you about the main body of the 184 is the overwhelming profusion of halogen lighting. There are, in fact, 18 separate lights in the main saloon alone, not counting the three roof halogen spots and shower dome light in the washroom, and the courtesy light inside the wardrobe.



Switch all the lights on, and you could almost be about to bed down in a very tasteful discoth~que. Flick on the good quality Pioneer CD/tuner, and the illusion is (almost) complete.

The oak veneered woodwork (and solid oak detailing and edging) is surprisingly pale, but is of top quality and sports solid hinges, stays and catches. Curiously, it's almost warm to the touch, and silky-smooth, to boot.

Underfoot, your toes really do sink in to the deep pile carpet, while the seats

are firm, but with the promise of breaking in nicely over time. The rather sudden blue and yellow colour scheme of our particular model shouldn't be viewed too dimly, either - it's actually very pleasant in the flesh, and is just one of countless material and colour combinations Carlight can offer its monied customers. We doubt any two Carlights are ever alike inside.

The factory craftsmen I spoke to weren't overly keen on the idea of cutting out a great swathe of structural roof material to accommodate a Heki 2 or a Remi Top, incidentally, but are willing to oblige if a customer specifically requests one.

## THE KITCHEN

★★★★★

Remarkably, this score represents a full house of marks, a full three sections into our test. There's little point in repeating what we already know - ie. the build quality is superb - but a closer look at what is truly a superb place to rustle up a meal is a must.

Moving from left to right as you look at the kitchen, there are two large overhead lockers, together with a pair of bespoke cabinets for the Wedgwood (six each of plates, saucers, side plates, bowls, cups, one large teapot, a hot water jug and a milk jug).

The silver and black cooker, while undoubtedly smart, looks a little incongruous in such palatial, and slightly quaint, surroundings, though,





the washroom – not because it's fatally flawed, but rather because we feel one or two opportunities have been missed.

Layout-wise, it's little different from any number of run of the mill 2002 caravans you can currently buy – there's an offside cylindrical shower, adjacent swivel loo, rear sink unit and nearside wardrobe – but you're nevertheless left in no doubt as to which make of caravan you're about to take a shower in.

I didn't much like the electric flush loo (which robs your fresh water supply every time you flush), and was amazed that there was nowhere to drip-dry a towel in the shower. There's no blown-air vent beneath the towel rail, either.

All that said, the shower head has a cut-off switch to allow you to maintain your preferred water temperature (although shutting off the single mixer tap would do the same job), the wardrobe is pretty huge, even taking into account the size of the caravan as a whole (the boot locker underneath is a nice touch, too), and the stainless steel sink is deep, and well-shaped.

and - shock, horror - the pan storage door fell off. Not at all cricket, chaps...

Moving further down, there are two three-shelf cupboards under the sink, together with a huge cutlery tray and a 'bin' locker by the door. A well protected TV point by the cooker and a new PowerFridge complete the well equipped picture.

It's difficult to miss the acres of worktop space, too, while the fold-over sink cover even runs to a custom-made hole to catch any stray drips from the tap. There's no standard extractor fan or Omnivent fitted, but you can specify an extractor fan in both the kitchen and washroom for £300.

### THE WASHROOM

★★★★★

The hitherto perfect caravan drops just one star rating as we move aft into



which encircle the Carlight from stem to stern, while over-burdening the kitchen's many storage orifices suggests you're carrying more supplies than you could possibly need on a holiday, weekend break or rally.

Bedding storage isn't a problem, either, as the water heater boiler and associated plumbing is tucked underneath the side dinette's forward facing seat. That said, the water inlet and external services lockers intrude a little into the offside bed locker.

### THE BEDS

★★★★★

I didn't sleep too well in the Carlight, as the double bed that I ended up with bore a depressing resemblance to a well upholstered irrigation channel, with the centre cushions considerably thinner than the outer ones.



Returning to the factory, I was shown the proper way of making up the bed (it involves the side dinette's bolsters, too), and sure enough, it's wide, flat and supremely comfortable.

I was mildly taken a back to find that the bed slats simply tumble into their resting place as you disassemble the bed (you don't expect that in Swifts or Baileys, these days), although the slats themselves extended and retracted with the oily smoothness you'd expect.

Top marks to the new Seitz blinds and flyscreens, which keep the entire caravan daylight-proof, too.

## BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

Well, come on: what did you expect? People buy Carlights for the innate quality which saturates each and every one, and the 184 is no exception.

All the drawers are dovetailed, all joints are morticed and tenoned (square peg in a tight square hole), and tough Deal wood is used in the 12mm thick floor (which is insulated with 50mm thick Styrofoam) and sides. Lighter Obeche and jelutong wood (not MDF) make up the furniture frames.

The resultant sense of utterly solidity which accompanies every hunt for a cup, or change of CD, is remarkable. Even the entrance door handle feels heavy and well weighted – just a gentle push clicks the door fully home.

## TOWING

★★★★★

What appears to be a Mercedes-Benz V-Class in our photos is a bit of a split personality: it's badged as a Vito van, but it's actually another Carlight: a Cirrus 466EK motorhome, in fact.

Before any 'Outraged of Tunbridge Wells' put pen to paper, though, I should state that a V-Class Merc is in essence a converted Vito, and is also available with the Cirrus' 108 CDi engine. The following comments, then, hold true for the V-Class.

I towed the Commander all the way from Sleaford to Cambridge and back, and found that the 108 CDi engine takes a while to wind itself up, and requires you to hold on to each gear all the way around to 400 rpm.

Once in fifth gear, though, the outfit remained rock steady, and even had a little power left in reserve.

I would have preferred the 'extra torque (184 lb ft plays 148 lb ft) of the 110 CDi, or better yet the 221 lb ft 112 CDi, though. There's a 113 CDi, too, but that majors more on horsepower, and actually delivers less torque than the 112.

# Carlight Commander 184EW

## THE FACTS...

### CARLIGHT COMMANDER 184EW

**Manufacturer** Carlight, 5-7 Tamson Way, Church Lane, Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 7DE.

**Tel** 01529 302120 **Fax** 01529 302240 **Website** www.carlight.co.uk **Email** mail@carlight.co.uk

#### GENERAL

**Price** £30,800

**Berths** 2/4

**Warranty** 3 years

#### QUALITY REGISTER

**Internal faults** Cooker pan locker

lid came adrift **10pts**

**TOTAL: 10pts**

#### WEIGHTS...

**Mass in running order**

28.7cwt (1460kg)

**Personal effects payload**

2.4cwt (121 kg)

**Essential habitation equipment**

1.7cwt (88 kg)

**Maximum technical**

**permissible laden mass** 35.4cwt (1800kg)

#### ...AND MEASURES

**Internal length** 18ft 3in (5.6m)

**Overall length** 20ft 1in (6.12m)

**Overall width** 7ft 1in (2.16m)

**Overall height** 8ft 3in (2.53m)

**Awning size (ground to ground)** 30ft 3in (9.25m)

#### EXTERIOR

**Chassis** Al-Ko galvanised steel chassis with Euro axle

**Construction** Aluminium-skinned sandwich construction

**Gas storage** Front locker, with cantilever lid, for 2 x 7kg bottles

**Windows** Seitz flush-fit all round with cassette blinds and screens

**Spare wheel** Optional

#### INTERIOR

**Electrics** Mains/12v system with earth-leakage circuit breaker and battery charger. 3 x 230v sockets, 2 x 12v socket.

**Lighting** 23 halogen lights throughout the caravan

**Refrigerator** Three-way Electrolux PowerFridge with full-width freezer

**Heating** Truma 3kW gas/electric space heater with ducted blown air central heating.

**Plumbing** Truma Ultrastore water heater. Micro-electric taps for kitchen and washroom.

**Bed sizes** Double: 6ft 4in x 5ft, or two singles each 6ft 4in x 2ft 3in. Bunks: 5ft 9in x 2ft 3in

**Cooker** Stoves domestic cooker with spark-ignition four-burner hob and integrated grill and oven

**Toilet** Swivel bowl electric flush Thetford cassette toilet

#### STANDARD EQUIPMENT

(As fitted to test caravan)

Wireless remote control Carver Euromover; Pioneer CD/tuner; full set of Wedgwood bone china; full set of lead crystalline glasses; clock and barometer; Status TV/FM aerial and 12v module; remote control awning/courtesy lights complete with keylob

## VERDICT ★★★★★

This is the first five-star caravan we've tested since I took over Caravan Life's helm back in October 2000, and had the cooker not shed its pan-store lid, it would also have marked our second-ever Quality Register nil-score.

We all know that Carlights are well-made, prestigious caravans that most of us can only aspire to, and we're equally aware of the eyewatering price tags that accompany them.

What this test has shown me, however, is that the price isn't that exorbitant considering the quantum leap in quality you get over and above a near-£22,000 Vanroyce 560IETIL.



Carlights are not everybody's cup of tea, certainly, and you need a serious towcar to go with them, but judging by this new, and crushingly superb 184 EW, not for nothing can Carlight justifiably lay claim to making the finest caravans in the world.

## TOWCAR VERDICT...Mercedes-Benz V-Class 108 CDi



The only other MPV (multipurpose vehicle) I can think of that is essentially a posh van with windows, is Nissan's woefully lacking Serena. And there's just no

comparing that car with our chosen towcar this month. I The Vito/V-Class/Cirrus (call it what you will) is quite clearly a superior

machine, but there's no getting away from its commercial vehicle roots: the steering wheel is huge, the gearshift sticky and the driving position upright.

That said, the 108 CDi engine lacking in refinement, is surprisingly sprightly and pleasant to drive, and coped admirably with the hefty Carlight sitting on its towball, in just about every on-road situation we threw at it.

Good though the Merc is, though, I prefer my towcars to be cars by birthright, and so, given the choice, I'd go for an M-Class Mercedes (or 4.6 litre Range Rover) everytime.