

Buying the 'best' is never cheap. **TONY BRADFORD** samples the feel-good-factor – but he knows his place



THE UPPER



ABOVE: The rear boot houses both standard water carriers and a wheel skirt



RIGHT: Restrained lounge design should age well

RIGHT: All the services are neatly grouped behind lockable panels



You won't get much change out of £26 grand if you buy one. It won't have an alarm system or an Omnivent, a fashionable full-opening rooflight or even a Status TV aerial unless you order them as extras. It will have a traditional coachbuilt body, carefully matched oak veneers, piano hinges on all the doors, a 23-piece Wedgwood crockery set and a dozen glasses.

So why would you opt for a Carlight in preference to one of several alternative and considerably less expensive makes that seemingly come with a much more lavish equipment specification? Well it's for the same reason you would wear a £10,000 Rolex watch when a £30 Casio tells you the time with equal accuracy. Have your shoes made by Gucci rather than slip into Hush Puppies. Depending on your viewpoint you may call it style or you may call it snobbery; either way you are in no doubt as to your place in the scheme of things.

heavy-gauge aluminium exterior panelling and polystyrene insulation. The floor is 12mm. plywood on timberjoists with Styrofoam. insulation. Carlight doesn't completely eschew modern materials. The end panels are moulded in GRP as is the unique lantern roof; this caps the end and side walls, ensuring a leak-free joint, and features wedge-shape shoulders to divert rainwater clear of the walls.

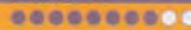
The latest Seitz windows incorporating blinds and flyscreens are used, with a wide single unit across the front. Strangely, the windows are very shallow and the only simile that comes to mind is of looking out of a blockhouse or gun emplacement, however inappropriate that may be in terms of the surrounding luxury. Drop-back vents in the lantern roof have flyscreen covers retained by elementary but effective brass hooks. The entrance door closed gently with a reassuring click but jammed at the top on opening. We were assured this simply needed adjustment.

A drawbar locker in the centre of the front panel houses two gas cylinders on a slide-out tray and the rear panel has a substantial boot which is large enough to accommodate the separate fresh and waste water tanks that come as standard. It is home also for a GRP panel which locks into the nearside wheel arch when

on site to present a neat appearance under the awning.

Internally, traditional construction means mortice and tenon-framed furniture, real oak veneers with locker fronts being machined out of the surround so that the grain matches exactly. Doors have full-length piano hinges and drawers have dovetailed joints. Finish and build quality are excellent.

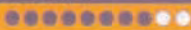
TOWABILITY



Carlight makes its own galvanised steel chassis which is fitted with an AlKo Euro axle and AKS stabiliser coupling.

The spare wheel is fitted in a lockable carrier under the floor towards the front, resulting in a noseweight as tested (including battery and one gas cylinder) of 72kg. In keeping with the image, Carlight talks of an ex-works weight (MRO) of 1095kg and a maximum gross weight (MTPLM) of 1300kg. This results in a user payload of 205kg but an upgraded axle can be specified.

USABILITY



Basic equipment matches the industry norm with the Truma gas space heater having the mains electric-powered blown

SPECIFICATIONS

CARLIGHT COMMANDER 132

RRP: £25,985
 INTERNAL LENGTH: 4.10m (13ft 5in)
 SHIPPING LENGTH: 5.73m (18ft 9in)
 OVERALL WIDTH: 2.16m (7ft 1in)
 OVERALL HEIGHT: 2.44m (8ft 0in)
 INTERNAL HEIGHT: 1.89m (6ft 2in)
 MASS IN RUNNING ORDER: 1095kg (21.5cwt)
 MAX TECHNICAL PERMISSIBLE LADEN MASS: 1300kg (25.6cwt)
 USER PAYLOAD: 205kg (4.1cwt)
 BERTHS: 2

CONSTRUCTION



Although it was first to introduce bonded sandwich construction with the Casetta back in 1964, Carlight production today retains traditional coachbuilding techniques for the side walls: wood framing with halved and glued joints,

CRUST



LEFT: The kitchen features a proper cutlery drawer and slide-out wire baskets



ABOVE: Large lock-on flexible pipes complete the sealed waste system
 LEFT: An enclosable shower area and a stainless steel basin feature in the washroom





ELECTRICS AND LIGHTING



A control panel in a forward roof locker groups the mains RCD and charging equipment with 12v master switches and a meter which doubles for battery condition and water tank level. We were surprised to find that the only mains electric socket outlet was the one over the sideboard where, presumably, it must serve both the TV and the kettle, plus anything that needs charging, like a mobile telephone. Of course, extra sockets can be specified. There is a built-in TV aerial link from the sideboard to an input point for a freestanding aerial.

Interior lighting is mood setting, with two stylish mains lights and 12v downlights set into the ceiling, under the pelmets and in the washroom. A fluorescent fitting under the kitchen roof lockers lights the working area well and both the wardrobe and the glass cabinet have internal courtesy lights. A low-level light is useful.

hot air system, and a Truma storage water heater. The water system features a 7.5 gallon underfloor fresh water tank with pump filling from an outside carrier. Waste outlets are linked to a large diameter outlet with twist-off cap and concertina trunking, which locks on to both outlet and waste tank to provide a completely sealed system.

A plain claret upholstery with offwhite carpet and floral curtains was the decore chosen for the test model, but prospective Carlight owners usually go to the factory and choose from a range of options. The layout of the 13 2 is the timehonoured rear-end kitchen two-berth arrangement that is becoming rarer as the demand among couples for a larger washroom grows. Storage space is limited to the wardrobe, drawers in the sideboard and the forward roof lockers. The china and glasses have dedicated storage above the sideboard.

beds the feet go under the front window shelf where they are alongside the intrusion of the gas locker. To form the 4ft 4in-wide double bed, the whole of the near side locker, its floor and its contents, slides sideways to mate up with the other single which pulls out a few inches. No mattresses need to be humped about and the whole operation takes just seconds.

KITCHEN



The kitchen is conventional with a four ring hob, grill and oven, and a stainless steel sink and drainer unit, the lid of which is the only work surface. Cupboard storage space is adequate at high and low level and includes two slide-out wire baskets and a baize-lined cutlery drawer.

The Electrolux fridge is in the sideboard but we believe the door should be hung on the other side, not only so that it does not impede exit, to conform with current fire escape requirements, but also because it would be easier to access from the kitchen. The interchangeable hinges make rehanging simple.

WASHROOM



In the offside rear corner, the washroom has a Cassette toilet and stainless steel hand basin plus sufficient locker space for normal bathroom items. Its unique arrangement of domestic-type glazed shower panels completely encloses the shower area and a neat touch is a travelling position for the shower head in spring clips to avoid the risk of it being bounced off its mounting. A rooflight and an opening window provide good ventilation.

ABOVE: Traditional Carlight still complements a modern car well, making an attractive outfit
ABOVE INSET: A cover is provided for the wheel when an awning is in use
BELOW: Dresser comes fully equipped with china and glassware

VERDICT



In a world where a Jaguar is vulgar, a Mercedes pass~, and a BMW is for the nouveau riche, how does one classify the Carlight? It is a thoroughly workable caravan, superbly built. Is it value for money? That depends on what you value. Would I buy one? I think not, but then, I know my place.

LIVING AND SLEEPING



The test caravan had two different size hook-on tables but a free-standing unit is optional. These stow in the wardrobe when not in use. The seats have upholstered backrests which can be angled to provide a more comfortable sitting position, and no fewer than eight loose cushions were in our test model. Without a table in place there is a shortage of resting places for drinks, although a little hinged flap on the side of the wardrobe is a help.

The sleeping configurations are designed to be used with the sleepers' heads towards the rear of the interior. To obtain the full 6ft 4in of the single

