

OLD VALUES MEET NEW TECHNOLOGY - BUT AT THIS PRICE, NO WONDER IT'S THE ROLLS-ROYCE OF TOURERS

Back to the future

■ Superb detailing ■ All yours for £26,985 ■ But a TV aerials extra...



THE CAVALCADE of models displayed in photographs in the company's reception area underlines the fact that Carlight has been building its special breed of tourers in Sleaford since 1932. It is also very clear that the annual dance upon the catwalk that compels many volume caravan makers to make changes for the sake of it is not a factor at Carlight.

Indeed, apart from the gas bottle locker now being absorbed into the bodywork, the design has remained the same since 1980.

To some, this constancy is a virtue, as every year up to 30 buyers await with patient anticipation the delivery of their very own bespoke Carlight tourer. We have to agree - there is a bit of magic about these tailor-made, ultra-solid caravans.

A walk around the production area shows up some of the reasons why. Where mass-producers are investing big bucks in computerised machinery in the pursuit of precision combined with high speed, Sleaford's painstaking craftsmanship and hand tools are used to turn out a timeless product that is a delight to behold.

Our Commander 162 still retains established Carlight features but now modern technology makes a sudden appearance. For example, concealed behind a hatch is the water inlet for the insulated on-board water tank, as well as the all-service pitch connection. To the rear a sizeable boot opens to reveal the fresh and waste water - containers, the latter complete with a direct connection to the grouped waste pipes. A neat touch.



The excellent kitchen is up to Carlight's usual standards and also features a brand-new Smev oven and four burner hob, although as before the Wedgwood crockery service is an optional extra.



Inside, one of the reasons for the 162's popularity becomes clear - it feels extremely spacious. This is a two-berth with central kitchen and a dresser, consigning washroom and wardrobe to the rear, and the forward lounge is made more roomy by the absence of a chest of drawers (although if you really wanted one, we're sure Carlight would oblige...) Roof locker Finished with oak veneer from real trees and the grain matches right along each side: it oozes craftsmanship.

Comprehensive lighting comes from a rash of downlighters as well as three mains fittings, and warm air is well distributed from the latest Truma gas/electric unit. With plenty of power sockets it can be seen that the Commander is not short of modern creature comforts. However, we'd have been more comfortable if the 162 had been supplied with some good, supportive armrests. There are 230 and 12-volt points on the sideboard and an aerial socket - but, astonishingly, the TV aerial itself is an optional extra.

If there is a nicer caravan to tour in than we've yet to find it, the three photographs above show the interior of the 162 and demonstrate clearly the attention to detail that every Carlight has.

There's a unique solution to the nightly bedtime puzzle. You simply unlatch the nearside bedbox and slide it over the carpet on runners to nestle alongside its partner. It's brilliant.

As elsewhere in this individual caravan, the galley combines modern equipment with the fully boxed-in styling

of 20 years ago - and the chef will not be disappointed when the lids are lifted, as the posh Smev oven and four-burner hob both have spark ignition, and there is a lovely big fridge in the dresser opposite. Storage includes a practical double cutlery drawer plus a positive welter of cupboard space, and beautifully tailored racks will hold crockery for four. The lovely Wedgwood bone china service comes at extra cost.

The rear dressing area is flanked on one side by a generous wardrobe, and on the other by the washroom, which contains all the usual offices.

Later designs have successfully separated the shower from the handbasin and loo, but here again Carlight has provided all you could ask for by way of storage, and the unusual stainless steel handbasin is set in a neat vanity unit. The area can be rendered totally private by swinging the washroom door across the central opening.

It would be wrong not to list a few of the imaginative details that make the Carlight what it is. There's a pullout stool at the base of the wardrobe; a cupboard by the door opens to produce a rubbish-gobbling waste bin; while externally, the gas cylinders are set on a sliding tray, so to minimise lifting strain. It's all very special - and it feels it.

FIRST TEST VERDICT

The Carlight Commander of 2001 is a delicious mixture of styling cues from yesteryear and bang up-to-date technology. It is heavy - at 1600 kilos fully laden, you'll need a decent 4x4 to haul it with.

If this is no problem, and a price tag of almost £27 000 is not daunting, then maybe you could be one of the Carlight few who can revel in the sheer pleasure of owning something handbuilt to please just you - and to give a lifetime of similar service. Just make sure you have enough left in the bank account to buy that TV aerial...

Specifications

Price	£26,985
Internal Length	4.97m (16ft 3.5in)
Overall Length	6.53m (2ft 5in)
MIRO	1335kg (26.3cwt)
MTPLM	1600kg (31.5cwt)
Warranty	1 year