



Long-established caravan manufacturer Carlight have recently entered the motorhome market, launching a compact Mercedes based conversion, as david Serpell reports

Carlight's

Why would a small company with a reputation for highquality, hand-built touring caravans want to launch itself into the hotly competitive world of the campervan? The answer comes in several parts, but the fact remains that the Cirrus 466CK won 'Motor Caravan of the Year' in the small converter's class at its first attempt.

Visiting their premises in Sleaford, I soon learned that Carlight have had an intermittent involvement with the world of Motor Caravans dating back to the 1930's, with early conversions on Bedford and Mercedes chassis.

More recently, as MD Robert Hodgson explained, the company have seen a significant number of their touring caravan customers arriving to collect their vehicles with campervans and, of course, the camper/tourer combination does offer owners the best of several worlds.

Retired couples can use a compact camper as their everyday vehicle, providing scope for snatched weekends or for the weekly shop, while a spacious tourer offers a tranquil base for a longer holiday. Identifying a niche in the market, the Carlight team decided to concentrate on a compact vehicle with an elevating roof

which would be well enough equipped for short breaks, and which would have access anywhere a normal car could go.

Road manners

With the company's emphasis on quality, the Mercedes Vito was an obvious choice, coming as it does with all-independent suspension and a choice of turbo-diesel engines. The standard Cirrus employs the 82bhp common-rail engine, but 110bhp and 122bhp versions are also available.

It's a reassuring vehicle to drive, with hardly any body roll and a firm yet smooth ride. The driving position is fairly high with good visibility, and the dash-mounted gearshift is slick and comfortably positioned right beside the driver's left hand.



This is a vehicle you could drive all day with minimal fatigue, though one of the more powerful engines is certainly required if you want to use the Cirrus as a tow vehicle, especially with a hefty Carlight caravan behind! All Cirrus models are fitted with a Reimo raising roof and have a roof-down height of just 6ft 6in, goalpost parking barriers present no problem when shopping!

Step inside

The Vito's lines give away its van origins, but inside Carlight have made strenuous efforts to create a pleasing atmosphere. Our test vehicle was fitted with the traditional oak-veneer furniture, for which Carlight are justly renowned, and there is something very satisfying about the precision of fit and the way the grain is matched.

For more contemporary tastes, the Cirrus models are available in modern grey laminates, instead of oak. Headroom towards the front reaches almost 8ft, and is more than adequate over the whole living area.

The Cirrus CK follows a tried and tested layout, with centre kitchen on the offside, leading to a series of cupboards,



Extra storage space, including the wardrobe, can be accessed via the tailgate

and culminating in a small wardrobe, most easily accessed through the rear tailgate.

A forward-facing settee is equipped with two seatbelts and, once on site, the fully adjustable passenger seat swivels easily to help create a surprisingly spacious lounge.

What marks the Cirrus out from others using this layout are two factors: the cleanness of the design, and the superb quality of the cabinetwork. The precision with which doors fit their openings, and the rock-solid feel of all the furniture ensures that the company's high reputation for build quality in its caravans has been carried over into its campervan production.

At bedtime, rather stiff but wellinsulated curtains provide privacy (couldn't we have some blinds, please?), and a single lever releases the settee and its backrest to slide forward and recline in one simple movement.



The two-burner hob and grill, in stainless steel, is fine for a vehicle of this size

fridge, with its cunning capacitor, can keep cool for up to eight hours after the vehicle has stopped before it begins to drain the leisure battery.

There is a charger on board, as well as a 50-litre fresh water tank and a tiny Porta-Potti which can be removed through the offside door for emptying. The twin 3.9kg gas cylinders and the waste water container are accessed in the same way.

Campervan owners often complain, with some justification, about the hard graft involved in conversion from daytime to nighttime mode. In the Cirrus, Carlight have made the exercise a doddle, and we congratulate them.

It's not cheap, but the Mercedes base almost guarantees long life, and although the basic specification leaves little to be desired, there is a huge option list ranging from alloy wheels to leather upholstery.

Specifications

Model: Carlight Cirrus 466CK

Manufacturer: Carlight Ltd, Church Lane, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 7DE. Tel: 01529 302120

Base vehicle: Mercedes Vito

Engine: 108 Cdi 82bhp four-cylinder common-rail turbo-diesel

Price: from £28,660 OTR

Interior layout: swivelling front passenger seat and forward-facing settee in the rear, with fitted kitchen and storage cupboards down the offside. Double seat converts into double bed; optional foldaway double bunk at van roof level

Berths: 2+2

Specification includes: mains lead, 12v and 230v sockets, leisure battery and charger, Truma space heater, 50-litre fresh water tank, two-burner hob/grill, 40-litre fridge, Porta-Potti, free-standing dining and picnic tables, two folding chairs, set of crockery, rechargeable torch, fire extinguisher

Dimensions: overall length, 15ft 3in (4660mm); overall width, 6ft 2in (1880mm); overall height (roof down) 6ft 6in (1980mm)

Weights: max authorised weight, 2700kg; unladen mass, 2160kg, max user payload, 540kg

camper

Two foamfilled inserts complete a very tolerable double bed, which is 3ft 1in wide.

Impressively, you can still get to the hob and the fridge for that vital morning cuppa without putting the bed away. Our Cirrus was equipped with the optional high-level bunk, which offers more space, but the mattress is skinny indeed, and access calls for circus standards of agility. Favourite grandchildren may apply in writing, but this bunk is certainly not intended for portly grown-ups.

With highly ventilated fabric sides to the roof, the Cirrus commends itself as a fair-weather machine first and foremost. However, the specification is comprehensive, and includes a 2.4kW Truma heater that kept us warm enough during a cold evening to avoid chattering teeth.

A two burner hob/grill takes care of the cooking. The diminutive 12v

Right: the Mercedes Vito base is a pleasure to drive, particularly with the more powerful engines

The Carlight Cirrus is a well-designed and very well-built vehicle inside and out

Price £28,660

