



The lap of LUXURY

Beauty, practicality and all the trimmings – what more could Andy McPhee have wished for as he spent his time testing out this top tourer? It could almost be seen as decadence...

Touring in a top-end caravan is not something I get the chance to do very often so it was with delight that I went off for my break in a Carlight Commander 162 EW, a new model we first reviewed last month. In the event, it gave me the chance to put the firm's newest product to the test 'in the field'.

I decided to take the caravan to Woodland Waters, a 32-pitch caravan park nestling midway between Grantham and Sleaford, in

Lincolnshire on the A153. It's a fairly new park, which has only been open for the past three or four years and features two lakes and woodland. If you like fishing, you won't want to miss it – there are 31lb carp and 28lb pike in the lakes.

In these surroundings, the Carlight looked really at home and its glass-like exterior finish really shone. There's certainly no mistaking this visually distinct luxury tourer.

TOURING LINCOLNSHIRE

Anyone who thinks Lincolnshire is uninteresting is deluding themselves. Based at the Woodland Waters park, you have the option of visiting either the attractive little market town of Sleaford, or going into Grantham, a larger town for your daily shopping needs. Both have their attractions, and Grantham has some delightful old buildings, including its Guildhall and churches. In Sleaford, pop into the tourist information centre and pick up some of their 'Sleaford Trails' booklets – they'll guide you around some of Sleaford's most charming architectural delights.

Nearby, too, is the village of Belton, including Belton House, a beautiful National Trust property just off the A607 set in 1000 acres of wooded deer park. Its gardens feature a small Palladian Temple and an early 19th century orangery with exotic and rare plants.

Don't forget to investigate some of Lincolnshire's recent past, too. There are aircraft museums and redundant World War II bomber airfields not far away and it's easy to get good guides from local tourist information centres.

Practically beautiful

Beauty is not just skin deep, though. There's a kind of practical beauty in most of the Carlight's external services which is not to be found in any other caravan I've stayed in.

Let me explain what I mean. To begin with, pitching was a doddle. Once unhitched, the van's Carver Motor Mover made an effortless job of positioning the tourer, and although it's a £1000 option, if I could afford to spend £27,000 on a caravan I don't think I'd be worried about the extra cost.

The best facility, though, was the Fiamma waste water system. A huge, expandable tube twist-fits onto both waste tank and caravan, so



Our Carlight Commander was an easy tow with the Land Rover Discovery V8i ES

that all the waste collects into the one tube. All is contained, and there are neither leaks nor smells. The only niggle is that the waste tank isn't huge and so needs regular attention. Both the waste and fresh water tanks can be stored inside the spacious boot at the rear.

The water filter, fresh water ports and gas taps are housed in a separate locker next to the battery box. It's ideal, because everything is together and pitching time is kept to the minimum. Everything is to hand and it's a pity that other makers haven't incorporated this idea. Likewise with the battery box: if anything goes wrong, the battery simply slides out on rails allowing unhindered access. The gas box features a similar mechanism for gaining easy access to the bottles.

Living area

From the moment you set foot inside the Commander you know that you are in a luxury tourer. But it's not so opulent that you feel overwhelmed. Just the opposite, in fact.

The woodwork is light and lends a coachbuilt, airy ambience to this tourer but the feature which enriches it most is its lemon-coloured upholstery and satiny-red cushions. Mind you, it wouldn't matter if this colour scheme didn't appeal to a potential buyer because Carlight uses a local fabric supplier, so customers are able to choose their own soft furnishings.

How about day-to-day living in a luxury tourer? It's an eminently practical van. For instance, you need never faff about with cushions again: if you choose to sleep in two single bunks, all you do is pull the bunk out six inches from the wall and it's ready for use – easy; need to make it a double? Just pull the nearside bunk out until it meets the offside

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bunk and... well, that's it. There's your double bed. No back-breaking gymnastics needed in this tourer.

Carlight really seems to have thought of everything, even down to the set of bed-end light switches so you don't have to get out of bed to switch the lights on and off.

By day, too, the front dinette was just as easy to use. There are two, light, clip-on tables to use. I used the short one for cuppas, simple snacks and light lunches. The full-length table was perfect for full mealtimes.

Up above, the mains control unit is the best I have seen in a tourer. Everything is contained in this one unit. Usually, switches such as hot water isolator, heater isolator, 12v master switch and the like are, for some reason best known to the maker, spread all over the caravan and require a map and compass to locate. Not so with the Commander – everything is to hand. The only separate switch – and I do mean only – is the water heater selector, which is tucked neatly beside the nearside bunk.

CARLIGHT COMMANDER 162 EW

£26,985

WHAT WE LIKE Baize-lined cutlery drawer. Bunk set-up. Wonderful kitchen. Unusual yet practical washroom. Exterior services.
WHAT WE DON'T No towel rail in washroom. Waste tank on the small side. Heavy first-year depreciation.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price	£26,985
Warranty	1-year factory/ extended warranty coming soon
Mass in running order	1280kg/25.19cwt
MTPLM	1600kg/31.49cwt
User payload	320kg/6.29cwt
Interior length	4.97m/16ft 3.5ins
Shipping length	6.52m/21ft 4.5ins
Width	2.16m/7ft 1in
Berths	2
Spare wheel	yes
Blinds/flyscreens	yes
Heating	Carver 5500
Blown air heating	yes
No of burners	4
Fitted stereo	optional
External mains/BBQ	optional
Cassette toilet/flushing	yes/electric
Alarm	optional

WE SAY...

The Commander is a genuinely 'class act'. Never brash or over the top, this luxury tourer oozes quality and, with some very practical ideas inside and out, points the way forward for other makers



Cooking up

Cooking and preparing my meals was easy in the big Carlight, as one thing it's not short of is worksurface. The drainer, sink and cooker are all enclosed by wooden flaps, so you have the entire length of the kitchen at your disposal for food preparation. Even if you are using all your kitchen appliances, the expansive sideboard behind you will cope with the extras. Believe me, space is not a problem in the Commander. Then, when you're getting rid of all your choppings and waste, you'll find the built-in bin next to the door an added bonus. And it's just like a domestic bin, hidden in its own cupboard next to the main door.

There's bags of storage, above and below the worksurface so it's unlikely you'll ever fill all of it. But take a look in one of the upper lockers and you'll discover a full set of Douilton china, complete with teapot – it's one of those finds that really brings home to you what kind of luxury caravan you're staying in.

When it came to preparing and cooking my main meal, I was made up. For a start, Carlight uses marine suppliers for its fixtures and fittings which means that they feel much more

solid than in other vans and they look classy, too. The oven and hob also look and feel solid and look impressive. In their stainless steel finish, which complements the sink, they look very chic – even professional. But the proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating.


A trip to a nearby supermarket furnished me with the ingredients for my first meal, a mouth-wateringly good steak pie which the superbly-efficient oven cooked thoroughly in only 20 minutes. So efficient was this oven that had I been less vigilant, the pie would have been cinders if I'd allowed it the 25-30 minutes recommended on the packet.

Ablution solution

The end washroom in the Carlight offers a number of solutions to traditional problems. For instance, next to the comparatively low

rear window, Carlight has installed a pull-out seat so you can sit at the adjacent dresser mirror in comfort. Also, you can separate the toilet, shower and deep, stainless steel wash basin from the rest of the washroom, allowing the natural light to flow through from the rear window and enabling a clear view to the rear of the caravan. An added bonus of this set-up is easy access to the large wardrobes. And, these have a Fanmaster exit which means that your jackets can be warm as toast before you go outside. The whole arrangement is convenient in every way. The water pressure is great, too: just like domestic pressure thanks to the 10-litre tank. The only thing I missed was a towel rail at the sink – genuinely the only complaint I can raise.

Verdict

The Commander is probably the most complete tourer, or at least the most well-thought-out van in which I've stayed. Practically, it's leagues ahead of most others. And stylistically it's unique. Whether you can justify spending £26,985 on a caravan is up to you but if you can afford it, this one is the cream of the crop. 

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