

Midlands motors on

MOTOR CARAVANS HOG THE LIMELIGHT AS BIRMINGHAM'S BOAT, CARAVAN & OUTDOOR SHOW BRINGS IN THE CROWDS



ACCESSORIES

■ Whale Water Systems chose the NEC show to launch its new water delivery system, AquaSmart. Promising better flow rates and reduced pulsing, AquaSmart combines pump and pressure switch in one unit and an external filter that replaces your submersible pump and drops into the water container. AquaSmart is claimed to be compatible with all external-pump water systems including those made by Carver/Truma. Inside the caravan you simply screw the pump to your caravan floor close to the wall socket, divert the pipework before the first branch and reconnect the wiring. The pump will not be damaged if it runs dry, says Whale.

■ RoadPro is now sole supplier of a range of Skymast antennae that enhance mobile phone performance in poor signal areas, either mast-mount for use on site, or suction mount for internal or mobile use. Available for most popular phones, they connect via an adaptor lead, so a change of phone only requires a new lead at most.

■ Waeco has more products than we can describe, ranging from reversing sensors and camera systems to battery conditioners (ideal for winter lay-up at £33.19) and air-conditioned seat covers (£43.52 each). All this in addition to the well-known range of portable and built-in refrigerators. Get the 80-page catalogue from Waeco on tel 01305 854000 or see www.waeco.co.uk.

New touring caravan launches were noticeable by their absence at the NEC this year, though motorhomes and the accessory people made up for the deficit. Meanwhile the Swift Group announced that it was going to start making static caravan holiday homes and Bailey said its Senator range will continue unchanged into 2005.

We still have to train manufacturers and importers alike to get news of their new products prepared and into the press office at the show in time for the start of Press Day. If they don't they can't blame us for missing things!

AUTO-SLEEPERS and MCC Reimo both launched new Volkswagen Transporter T5 conversions. Auto-Sleepers' Trooper, following on from the launch of the high-top Trident in November, unusually combines luxury mahogany effect trim and attractive fabric with its solid-sided elevating roof. With four seat belts, an optional roof bed, concealed toilet and 6ft 8in overall height, the Trooper, available from £30,945, should appeal to both couples and young families, whether they want to run one or more vehicles.

MCC Reimo of Manchester launched its new Cityvan as well as the Legacy, with either elevating roof or high top. With its super-flat elevating roof, the Cityvan can access many car parks while keeping a feeling of spaciousness overnight. Inside, it features slimline units incorporating a single-burner cartridge stove and small sink, as well as luxury velour linings with a choice of different interiors and finishes, and seats up to eight.

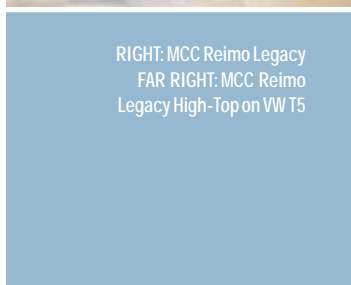


ABOVE: Auto-Sleeper Inca LE's interior
ABOVE RIGHT: The Inca exterior

Both the Legacys feature a double bed, a well-equipped kitchen with fridge and cooking facilities, a choice of upholstery as well as under-seat and rear boot storage. An optional second rear seat converts it to a true people carrier. The Cityvan is priced from £25,995 plus £2000 for an elevating roof, against £28,495 for the Legacy and Legacy Hi-Top. There are also two lower-priced conversions on the Renault Trafic, the new Amalfi with sliding seat (£25,535) and the Toscana with fixed seat £24,510. More details from www.reimo.co.uk. Tel 0161 839 1855.



FAR LEFT: Auto-Sleepers' new VW T5 Trooper
LEFT: Homologated towbar for Swift/AMC Al-Ko based motorhomes



RIGHT: MCC Reimo Legacy
FAR RIGHT: MCC Reimo Legacy High-Top on VW T5



Bilbo's showed the three All New Transporter models that made their debut at Earls Court: the entry-level Komba, the Celex and the Nexa (see test report elsewhere in this issue). All models are highly durable with a luxurious and contemporary feel and all feature well-designed kitchen units, seating for four people, two multi-position tables and generous sized mini lockers over the windows. Prices from £26,950. Tel 01342 892499 or see www.bilbos.com.

Volkswagen UK was apologising for the late UK arrival of RHD T5 chassis-cabs for the coachbuilders by guaranteeing £2500 cashback to anybody who buys an enhanced-spec T4 coachbuilt now and finds a UK-spec T5 on sale anywhere before October 2004. That timescale means you will be unlikely to see a T5 coachbuilt at Earls Court this year.

Auto-Sleepers also showed a second layout for its new wide-bodied Inca range. The low-profile EL has a U-shaped end lounge layout that uses the 20cm extra width to good effect, the washroom incorporating a circular shower. Prices from £35,338 (2.OHDi) with an overcab bed model still to come.

Swift Motorhomes announced so much interest in the two specially-painted models they exhibited in 2003, that customers can now specify them as a special order option, carried out in-house. Taking a lesson from Henry Ford, you can have your Swift Kon-Tiki in any colour so long as it's blue or your Bessacarr 700 in green. Don't all rush, though: it adds 18 weeks to delivery and costs a cool £5000 extra!

A bit more affordable (and functional) is the homologated towbar, now available for £850. Just the job if you wish to haul a small car behind.

One completely unannounced piece of show news was the return of the Carlight Motorhome, but not as anybody knows it! It was on the Van Master stand and the nice chaps at NuVenture Campers had more than a little to do with it. A second model is already well under way with a GRP rear body extension containing a washroom with shower, but the simpler Elisia show model is already expensive, priced from £39,750.

Winning all the way with The Caravan Club

CLUB MEMBERS crowded our stand at the NEC show, which attracted some 135,000 visitors during its nine-day run. Friday was Caravan Club Day when, apart from reduced admission prices, members were able to chat to a number of celebrities. Seen here (bottom

right) are TV's weather girl Sian Lloyd with Peter Ebdon, the 2002 World Snooker Champion; and winning athletes Matt Elias (400m hurdles), Katharine Merry (200m and 400m) and Jamie Baulch (400m). Keeping everyone smiling were our Ali G and DelBoy look-alikes.



WARNING IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTICE PRODUCT RECALL UK HOOK UP ADAPTORS

Models incorporating a white 13 amp 3 pin plug carrying the name "Volex". May have been purchased any time since October 2001. A fault relating to the 13amp plug and the incorporated fuse is likely to lead to overheating of the plug in normal use. This may present danger of fire and electric shock. Adaptors should not be connected to an electrical supply for any reason. **It is essential that you return this product to its place of purchase immediately.**

Note- white plugs that are of a different colour and brand and do not carry the name Volex are not affected by this recall, if you are in any doubt, please contact your retailer.





It's based on the Ducato LWB high-top van with a 'Symphony-style' layout and plenty of standard luxuries including flatscreen TV. Meanwhile Van Master confirmed to us that its caravan order book is so full that plans to make Carlight trailer caravans are on hold for the foreseeable future. For more information on the motor caravan call NuVenture Campers on 01942 238560.

Then again, you could find similar luxury £4000 cheaper on the Dreamfinder stand. This Barnsley-based company, just three years old, though with origins in the original Bessacarr some 20 years earlier, made its first appearance at Earls Court last year with its Galaxy SE, also Ducato LWB van-based. The layout places the kitchen by the side sliding door with a rear lounge. SE kit includes TV, Panasonic sat-nav and radio with DVD/CD player and Dometic's new vacuum toilet. "Britain's best-equipped motorhome" is priced at £36k. The regular Galaxy does without these but still has a five-year warranty, metallic paint, cab cassette blinds, heated waste tank etc, all for £28,995. A new Junior model, built on the Vauxhall Vivaro 1.9 dTi Renault Traffic clone has the classic VW layout with side furniture, priced from £24,300otr. Call 01226 380555.

Bürstner was next on our visiting list for the UK debut of the new Renault Master, carrying its 640 low-profile body design. Very good it looked too, with 136bhp 3.0 dCi power, for £40,450 otr fully loaded with ABS, driver's airbag, cab air and central locking (2.5litre 120bhp £39,030). This classic luxury two-three berth has a fixed rear bed, L-shape kitchen and front cab/dinette plus settee. A nice touch is slide-out storage in the washroom, with adjustable trays and straps to keep things secure for travel. Dealer details on www.buerstner.com or tel 01388 537960.

Also hailing from Germany are the LMC-built Geist Motorhomes on Mercedes Sprinter chassis. Three layouts in three lengths all offer a fixed bed with a variety of front dinette arrangements and four to six berths (£43,280 to £44,263 otr). The company has decided to use the less-Germanic Spirit name on its Fiat-based five-model product line, which starts at a competitive £28,579 otr for the rear lounge S560, rising to £42,897 for the fixed-bed S6850. Further information from www.geistvehicleleisure.co.uk, tel 0191 488 2040.

Lunar had three new Continental Champ layouts on show, ranging from the compact 18ft 3in A521 with nearside rear L-kitchen at £23,995 (pictured overleaf) to the A670G garage model at £33,990. Lunar's own Roadstar looks all the better for a fashion makeover with more modern striping and some sensible layout improvements. The new 786 model features a fixed bed with washroom behind incorporating a separate rear shower cubicle and a centre kitchen. Wallboard has changed from vinyl to woodgrain and there's a choice of three fabrics. It's 7.84m (25ft 9in) long on a 3850kg Fiat chassis.

Hymer has re-invented the elevating-roof Eriba motor caravan, christening it the Style 586. It caught the eye largely from its striking Renault Traffic base vehicle and optional two-tone colour scheme. It features the classic rear lounge layout while an alternative 576 squeezes in a fixed bed.

Southdowns Motorcaravans of Chichester had a stand full of impressive Concorde products for the luxury or 'ski' market (Spending the Kids' Inheritance), ranging from the Iveco Eurocargo Tector truck-based Concorde Liner (€153-193k) downwards. (All Concordes are priced in euros "cutting out problems with fluctuating exchange rates" and include VAT but not UK delivery or otr charges, but that's roughly £105-£133k.) The 7.5-tonne truck chassis (also available on Mercedes Atego or MAN LE) is built as an A-class but 2.46m (8ft) wide, allowing a more luxurious interior, featuring solid wood throughout with a level floor

LEFT: Carlight's new Elisia motorhome on Fiat Ducato LWB van
BELOW: Dometic's new diesel generator and bigger fridge-freezer



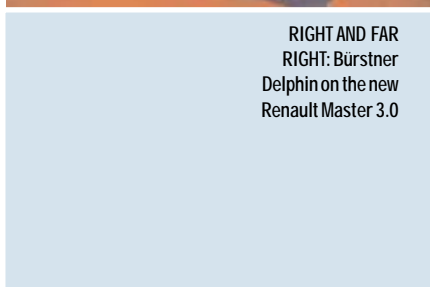
ACCESSORIES

■ Dometic now has a diesel-powered generator in its range, powered by a 232cc 4.5hp Hatz engine. Priced £4000 and weighing 70kg, the TEC 30 has a continuous rating of 2.5kW, while its sound-absorbing stainless steel enclosure limits noise to 60dBA at 7m. A new double-door fridge freezer offers a capacity of 142 litres with flat doors, rising to 150 with curved doors (£1000 retail). The freezer is 26 litres and has a seal heater to prevent the door freezing shut.

Long-distance travellers will be interested in the new Dometic water purifier, combining a carbon filter with a UV radiator to kill microbes. It has a very low consumption on 12V and can be installed anywhere; cost is around £300. Finally a new three-position Midi Heki polycarbonate rooflight is now available (also £300), 700 x 500mm and weighing 7.6kg. It has a pleated inner blind and flyscreen to prevent airflow pushing them out of place at speed. Crank and electric versions will follow next year.



FAR LEFT: A pair of Dreamfinders
LEFT: Geist Phantom shown in German LMC livery



RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT: Bürstner Delphin on the new Renault Master 3.0



ACCESSORIES

■ Transleisure is the UK importer for the German Oyster satellite system, whose top kit, available with 65 or 85cm dish, is a self-seeking, fully automatic true digital satellite system with a 'free to view' digital receiver at its heart. It offers thousands of channels, both video and audio, from up to 45 European satellites, and to improve it further, all UK spec systems have Twin LNB Technology, which receives two satellite signals simultaneously. What's more it's only 8in high when retracted.

The price of technology? £2000 plus £235 fitting at Leeds, with other automatic systems available from £1400. Transleisure has also inaugurated a unique VIP satellite system warranty scheme, which guarantees attendance anywhere in the UK to sort out a breakdown and includes an annual service and software upgrade, plus shipping of parts anywhere in Europe for £117.50pa.



FAR LEFT: Lunar Roadstar's new look: this is the 786
LEFT: Lunar Champ A521

RIGHT: Style by name, Style by Eriba
FAR RIGHT: This neat Dutch scooter carrier comes from Nova Leisure, a ramp stowing under the deck



and a custom dashboard with integrated navigation system and LED displays.

The C1 880F takes the same chassis range but retains the original truck cab (€139-€156k), then the Charisma A-Class goes with a lighter Mercedes 416 or 616 (or Iveco 50/60) twin-rear-wheel chassis (€108-€135k), but has the novel feature of an electrically-raised cab floor that can be levelled with the rest of the interior. Lengths range from 7.2 to 8.8m and fresh water capacity is 245 litres (54gal), so you can shower all day!

The Charisma coachbuilt is basically a fusion of a lighter Iveco 50/60 or Mercedes 416/616 chassis cab with a 2.35m (7ft 8 1/2in) version of the C1 body (€71-€123k) while the newest model is the Concerto A Class on the same chassis with four floorplan options. Rear drive means a higher rear floor, capitalised on to provide interesting split-level layouts – automatics are also available (€82-96k).

Baby of the range is the Ducato MWB van-based Compact with GRP high roof containing a pull-down bed measuring 206 x 160cm (6ft 9in x 5ft 3in!) and a separate rear washroom/shower (€44-51k) on a 2.3 or 2.8 JTD. Further details from Southdowns on 01243 544251 or www.southdownsmotorcaravans.co.uk.

Staying with premium product for a moment, Transleisure of Leeds has begun importing an American motorhome called the Chinook. The Summit 2700 is a 27ft C Class, meaning a conventional coachbuilt to us Europeans, except the Chinook is unconventionally a GRP monocoque with twin hydraulic slide-outs and every gadget known. Great claims are made for quality and equipment, but even so, with the \$ currently at 1.9 to the £ and still falling, putting £115k upwards into a 6.8-litre V10 petrol Chinook might not be too sensible an investment. If you want the inside story try www.transleisure.co.uk or call 0113 252 2900.

The Fifth Wheel Co

A COMPANY that fulfilled every journalist's dream to perfection by sending us full information prior to the show was the Fifth Wheel Company. Fifth-wheelers are a rare commodity in the UK, and this Welsh-based company imported a few from the USA before deciding to do the job itself, better-tailored to Europe.

Named Celtic Rambler, the built-to-order apartment on wheels features a king-size double bed in the raised sleeping area and a huge living/dining room, which extends to 10ft 6in wide by means of an electric motor once sited, and can offer a second double bed. The unit measures 8m (26ft) long but part of this is superimposed on the bed of the pickup truck that hauls it, so shipping length is 2m less (19ft 8in). Width is 2.3m (7ft 6in) and height 3.1m (10ft 2in). What surprised us was the weight: 3.2 tonnes, which means only a 136bhp Nissan Navara is man enough to pull it (unless you want to go for an American import). Self-levelling air suspension allows a gross weight of 4.5 tonnes, therefore a huge 1.3 tonne payload, but it can be driven on a pre-1997 car driving licence, says FWC.

The weight derives from the high specification, which includes dual-fuel underfloor heating, marine toilet with 84-litre holding tank, 165-litre fridge-freezer, twin 214-litre tanks for fresh and grey water, 270Ah battery capacity and a 50A charger. Of obvious appeal to full-timers, with its detachable four-seater towing unit, they need to have upwards of £38,000 to invest in the trailer alone, while FWC can provide a suitably souped-up Nissan tug for the best part of £24k inc VAT. Enquiries to 01745 583000 or see www.fifthwheelco.co.uk.

