

From a big country

They do things bigger in America – but are they better? Nick Harding went to the US RV Trade Show to find out

Awesome. That's one way of describing the stuff I saw on display at the 50th annual US RV Trade Show, which here encompasses RVs themselves

(that's motorhomes to you and me), trailers (touring caravans) and more. This burgeoning industry boasts some 300,000 new sales each year in the States,

which is approximately 10 times the size of the UK's combined caravan and motorhome markets. This three-day event at the end of November offered an

excellent insight into the types of leisure vehicle they produce across the Atlantic – and how they're coming to terms with the worldwide economic conditions.

Winnebago

Winnebago, a name synonymous with American motorhomes, launched its Via A-class models, which are based on a Mercedes chassis and wouldn't look out of place on the roads of Europe. The interiors are equally suitable – with a choice of twin singles or French double bed layouts, rounded cabinet work and even double-glazed plastic windows (single-glazed glass remains the norm in most such vehicles). See winnebagoind.com.



Roadtrek

This Nissan NV2500-based Roadtrek model was the only elevating-roof camper I saw at the show – mind you, it was also the biggest I've ever seen. See roadtrek.com.

Airstream

Simply stunning – that's the only way to describe the Landyacht concept from Airstream (right). Introduced in Europe first (see November issue's Caravan Salon report), it's the result of a collaboration with Italian firm Tecnoform, already the leading supplier of locker doors to our domestic market. The interior is truly yacht-like in its style.

Also aired by Airstream, the Mercedes-based Interstate (below) claims to be the best-selling 'class B' (ie van conversion) motorhome in the US. Although this is a small sector, accounting for just over 2,000 total sales each year, we understand that growth of up to 10% is expected in this area of the market in 2013. It was very interesting to see how many RVs are being built on the Mercedes Springer (also known as Freightliner). See airstream.com.



Design differences

There were plenty of examples of the way they do things differently in the US, such as this massive exterior hatch. You can gauge its size by the fact that it includes what amounts to a second kitchen – with sink, sockets, fridge etc – for use outside. There were also four-door fridges/freezers and slide-outs on slide-outs!



Livin Lite

Weights are (finally) an issue in the US as well as in Europe. Offering a range of trailer tents, demountable motorhomes and touring caravans, such as this compact Camp Lite, Livin Lite claims to lead the 'light trailer' sector of the market in the States. Featuring an all-aluminium construction, the models in the Livin Lite range are 98% recyclable according to the company. See livinlite.com.



Northstar

Demountables – known as truck campers over there – like the models from Northstar (a company which produces both fixed and elevating-roof variants) are still very much part of the scene in the States. Sales of this type of tourer are projected to rise by 3% to 3,500 units next year, which contrasts with the UK market where barely any are sold. See northstarcampers.com.

Little Guy (and T@B)

As well as making teardrops in its own name, Little Guy owns the rights to T@B (bottom) in America, although variants of the latter differ greatly from those supplied to the UK – despite starting off with

the same distinctive bodyshell. Little Guy's own products extended to an amazing off-road trailer (below), designed to carry everything from a canoe to rifles! See golittleguy.com and tab-rv.com.



Forest River

This r-Pod by Forest River is one of, I believe, a growing number of compact tourers with a retro appeal. Forest River has UK representation thanks to Midlands-based Signature Motorhomes – at present, though,

the company only imports motorhomes. The r-Pod range, which claims low towing weights, includes two folding camper-style models (one with a side slide-out) as well as seven travel trailers. See forestriverinc.com/rpod.



Aliner

Anyone remember Aliner? These folding caravans with their distinctive shape were once imported to the UK. The fold-up roof concept is little

changed, but could they make a UK comeback now that weight and fuel economy are increasingly important towing factors? See aliner.com.

...and away from the show

Downtown Louisville has plenty to offer the sightseer, too. For starters, it's the birthtown of Muhammad Ali – this sporting icon's amazing achievements are celebrated at the Muhammad Ali Center (see alicenter.org). Louisville is even more famous across the States as the home of baseball bat manufacturer Louisville Slugger, while the Kentucky Derby takes place here each May at Churchill Downs (inspired by our very own Epsom Downs course). See gotolouisville.com for further tourism information.