

# Design & Drive 2006

JONATHAN LLOYD REPORTS ON THE WINNERS AND OTHER NOTEWORTHY ENTRIES IN THIS YEAR'S CARAVAN CLUB MOTOR CARAVAN DESIGN & DRIVE COMPETITION



THIRTY MOTOR CARAVANS vied for honours in this year's Awards. The Club does not select the entries, but invites all UK manufacturers and importers to submit models of their choosing.

For three days, six design judges inspected, tested and reflected while marking objectively the various strengths and weaknesses. Each evaluated the quality, appeal and practicality of interiors and exteriors, together with the degree of design innovation, level of equipment supplied and, finally, value-for-money.

In addition, each judge also concentrated on their own specialist area: 'on board habitation systems' (gas, water and electricity), 'beds', 'seating', 'kitchens' and 'washrooms'.

But there was more! A team of highly qualified and experienced engineers and 'techies' scrutinised everything... and I mean everything. They weighed and measured entries, checking weights and dimensions were as stated. (You'd be surprised how many were not in past competitions.) In fact, the whole motor caravan (ie base vehicle, conversion,

plus the resulting combination) is examined to ensure it satisfies all the relevant rules and regulations and that it will be safe to use.

To score highly therefore indicates approval from some of the most demanding and experienced motor caravanners around, and a class win is not only a notable achievement but also a fine accolade. It is the rigour with which judges and scrutineers discharge their responsibility that ultimately provides the competition with its gravitas and reputation.

**OVERALL WINNER:** Autocruise Stardream



## LIST OF ENTRIES

### VAN CONVERSIONS UP TO £28,000

Adria Twin 2.3 Classic  
Devon Moonraker

### VAN CONVERSIONS OVER £28,000

Timberland Endeavour XII  
Timberland Freedom XL  
Murvi Morello  
Devon Monte Carlo  
Auto-Sleepers Trident City  
Volkswagen California SE 2.5TDI  
174ps Tiptronic

### COACHBUILTS UP TO £34,000

Romahome Outlook Exclusive  
Elddis Autoquest 180  
Auto-Sleepers Mezan Low Line  
Auto-Sleepers Mezan  
Auto-Sleepers Nuevo ES  
Ace Genova  
Orian Dorado  
Home-Car PR 59  
Hymer Van 522

### COACHBUILTS FROM £34001 TO £45,000

Adria Izola 687 SP  
Autocruise Stardream  
Auto-Sleepers Eton  
Auto-Sleepers Sandhurst  
Auto-Sleepers Windsor  
Dethleffs Esprit RT 7014  
Ace Firenze

### COACHBUILTS OVER £45,000

Mobilvetta Kimu 122  
Orian Saturn  
Bürstner Delfin Performance 821  
Swift Kon-Tiki 660

### A CLASS

Adria Vision I 707 SG  
Carthago M-Liner 57 LRH

**CLASS 1: WINNER AND BEST IMPORT** Adria Twin Classic**CLASS 1****VAN CONVERSIONS  
UP TO £28,000**

**1ST AND BEST IMPORT:** Adria Twin Classic Fiat 2.3 JTD £27,799  
**2ND:** Devon Moonraker VW 1.9TDI £27,966

What better example than the class-winning Adria Twin? An extremely 'together' Fiat Ducato LWB four-berth panel van conversion with rear permanent transverse double bed, a user-friendly kitchen and a shower room of sufficient volume for those of us built for comfort rather than speed. It wasn't just the interior layout that impressed, the inclusion of dual-purpose kit pushed all the right buttons: both cab seats swivel for comfortable on-site lounging, while the table also clips on the outside of the kitchen base unit to facilitate al fresco dining without having to carry an additional table.

The cleverness and attention to detail comes with neither a premium price, nor a pared specification. The Twin had the 2.3-litre JTD engine upgrade, plenty of toys, but an encouragingly slim price tag below £28,000 OTR, ignoring the optional metallic paint. Not surprisingly, it was also voted the overall best import.

Last year's class and overall winner, Devon's VW Moonraker, was a creditable runner-up with a very high score.

**CLASS 1: RUNNER-UP**  
Devon Moonraker**CLASS 2: RUNNER-UP**  
Timberland Freedom XL**CLASS 2: WINNER** Murvi Morello**CLASS 2****VAN CONVERSIONS  
OVER £28,000**

**1ST:** Murvi Morello 2.3 JTD £38,838  
**2ND:** Timberland Freedom XL 2.8 JTD £35,975

'If it ain't broke don't fix it', could well have been Murvi's mission statement. The impeccably integrated Morello, a former award winner more often than not, this year returned to the podium as class leader of the more expensive panel van conversions, yet on the same base van as the Adria.

Instead of rushing out new designs for the sake of it, Murvi concentrates on incremental improvements to a design that has been universally well-received by press and public alike. This has kept the Morello looking fresh while retaining the core values attributed to the practical design and layout.

Last year's winner, Timberland's Fiat-based Freedom XL was just pipped by the Murvi. However, its Renault-based Endeavour XII brought most comment from the judges. Although an early prototype (and therefore a work in progress) it is a great concept and its twin fixed rear bunks offer something genuinely new for young families. With a little tweaking it's likely to be a future winner, not just in this competition but with the purchasing public.

## THE WINNERS AT A GLANCE

<b>OVERALL</b>	Autocruise Stardream
<b>CLASS 1</b>	Adria Twin Classic
<b>CLASS 2</b>	Murvi Morello
<b>CLASS 3</b>	Hymer Van 522
<b>CLASS 4</b>	Autocruise Stardream
<b>CLASS 5</b>	Bürstner Delfin Performance
<b>CLASS 6</b>	Adria Vision

### CLASS 3

#### COACHBUILTS UP TO £34,000

**1ST:** Hymer Van 522 Ford 2.0 TDCI 125 £33,662

**2ND:** Home-Car PR59 Renault 2.5 dCi £33,250

Hymer builds great 'A'-class motor caravans on Fiat and Mercedes for the well-trousersed, but that isn't all it does. The Hymer Van 522 isn't a 'van' at all, but a low-profile two-berth coachbuilt on the Ford Transit. Featuring a permanent double bed over a garage and a striking paint job, the Van 522 is both compact (under 6m long) and, at £33,662 OTR, much less expensive than the rest of the Hymer range. A deserved winner of the class.

VFM (value-for-money) was judged to be a principal advantage of the runner-up in this class, the Renault Master-based Home-Car PR59. To say competition was fierce would be very much an under-

**CLASS 3: WINNER** Hymer Van 522



**CLASS 3: RUNNER-UP** Home-Car PR59



**CLASS 4: RUNNER-UP** Adria Izola 687 SP



statement. Just two marks in almost 3000 separated the two!

Yours truly is keen on family-friendly motor caravans, which at long last are catching up touring caravans in this regard. Three cheers then for the Elddis Autoquest 180. Six travel seats (each with high backs, head restraints and three-point safety belts), six adult sleeping berths, and two living areas. Plenty of payload and a £30,290 OTR price tag added 'Brownie points'. Even though it came bottom of this group, small wonder they are proving so popular.

### CLASS 4:

#### COACHBUILTS FROM £34,001 to £45,000

**1ST:** Autocruise Stardream Peugeot 2.2HDI £43,512

**2ND:** Adria Izola 687SP Renault 2.5 dCi £39,999

Autocruise just seems to have the touch at the moment and Stardream, its low-slung AI-Ko converted ground-hugging silver dream machine, stole the judges' hearts. The rear 'U'-shaped lounge is great for having a few friends in for a drink or for feet-up fooling. The well-executed silver paint job also made a pleasant change from white, but adds £3500!

Adria's Renault-based Izola 687SP was a close runner-up, followed by Auto-Sleepers' VW Sandhurst.

**CLASS 4: WINNER** Autocruise Stardream



**CLASS 5: WINNER** Bürstner Delfin Performance T821



**CLASS 5:**  
**COACHBUILTS OVER**  
**£45,000**

**1ST:** Bürstner Delfin Performance T821 Renault 3.0 dCi £53,600  
**2ND:** Swift Kon-Tiki 660 Fiat 2.8JTD £48,760

Occasionally a motor caravan appears that makes even a hardened cynic go 'wow', and there were two in Class 5. The winning pretty and palatial tag-axle Delfin from Bürstner was one of them. Perfect for extended touring or for wintering-out on the Iberian peninsula, the Renault-based Delfin had style and charisma aplenty. Add in a massive payload, impressive build quality and a well-thought-out interior layout and it's easy to see why it was a class leader and the highest-scoring entrant in the whole competition.

The second with the wow factor was the runner-up in this class, Swift's Kon-Tiki 660. Smart fabrics and finishes, a stratospherically high level of standard equipment, plus close attention to detail, enabled the Cottingham crew's well-developed fixed-bed product to snap at the Bürstner's heels.

**THANKS TO**

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**CLASS 5: RUNNER-UP**  
Swift Kon-Tiki 660



**CLASS 6: RUNNER-UP**  
Carthago M-Liner 57LRH



**CLASS 6: WINNER** Adria Vision 1 707



**CLASS 6:**  
**A CLASS**

**1ST:** Adria Vision 1 707 SG Renault 3.0 dCi £51,499  
**2ND:** Carthago M-Liner 57LRH Iveco 3.0JTD £103,320

Our star 'A'-class was the Adria Vision 1 707 SG. An interesting combination of modern interior laminate finishes, very radiused cabinetwork and a striking exterior taking cues from Audi. Twin cab doors and an electrically raised and lowered cab bed also scored highly with judges.

Finally, although the most expensive entrant was splendidly well put together, with exquisite furniture, the stately Carthago M-Liner showed that a hefty price tag is not necessarily a guarantee of satisfaction.

Having been a judge on this competition for most of its last 11 years, it remains a fundamental conviction of mine that if the designers used their company's motor caravans more (or at all), they wouldn't make so many easily-avoidable gaffes. Further, one would assume that all manufacturers entering their motor caravans in this prestigious competition just might have had the foresight to inspect and test-drive their entrants beforehand, though some obviously hadn't. A leading manufacturer submitted two new models without gas drop-out vents and any method of securing the habitation door open!

# DRIVING REPORT

## HERE IS OUR OWN GEORGE HINTON'S SNAPSHOT OF DRIVING THE TOP ENTRIES

AN INTERESTING collection of base vehicles busied the four 2006 driving judges, of which I was one, over three hectic days.

The monster Iveco Daily-based Carthago rode and manoeuvred impressively, spoiled only by indifferent side vision and the stiffest manual gearchange.

Three Fords included a single Transit 125 front-wheel-drive variant carrying Hymer coachwork, which was also easily the best of the trio. British converters do us a disservice by ignoring this chassis, because it drives brilliantly, with lively performance and a lower centre of gravity than the rear-drivers. Two judges found the cab seats a bit too high or unyielding, but at 6ft I was quite comfortable. Just over 15 seconds despatched our 30-60mph acceleration test, and this engine is only a two-litre. Good value too, from just over £30,000 without extras.

A clutch of Volkswagen T5 Transporters ranged from the Auto-Sleepers Sandhurst coachbuilt to last year's overall winner, the Devon Moonraker. All were very car-like in their ride, handling and braking characteristics, with ABS standard across the board and very effective handbrakes. The Moonraker gave an excellent performance with the lowest-powered 104bhp engine of this group, despatching our test in around 13 seconds, and impressed with its lack of rattles and good value.

Renault Masters were definitely the flavour of the year, with eight entries, split equally between the 2.5-litre 120hp model and the 3-litre 140. The smaller engine versions encompassed a wide range, from Timberland and Devon van conversions to Dethleffs' coachbuilt and the A-Class Adria Vision. The vans were further divided by their gearboxes, the Devon having the



Not George Hinton but the Club's Director of Marketing Nick Lomas, who was keen to see this year's competition entries

automated shift, which showed in the acceleration figures: 30-60 in 25.5 versus 17.9 in the Timberland. The auto, which also exhibits strong 'creep' at idle, proved much brisker shifted manually, and for some reason has a conventional central handbrake rather than the 'fly-off' type the others shared. Fine ABS service brakes but indifferent handbrakes were also the norm, and both panel vans offered some through-vision, even where fitted with rear bunk beds.

The coachbuilts were naturally a bit more sluggish but still achieved 20-second acceleration runs, though running out of breath at the motorway limit. There were a few minor cooker rattles from the Dethleffs while the pretty A-Class Adria suffered a few squeaks where its large plastic dash mouldings worked against each other. It also had a slight mirror problem on the nearside for shorter drivers, with insufficient adjustment and an obstructive 'B' pillar.

Three-litre Masters were all coachbuilt, as in the £33k Home-Car PR59, £39k Adria Izola 687SP, £47k Mobilvetta Kimu 122 and £53k tag-axled Bürstner Delfin Performance T821. Excellent performance followed vehicle size, with 13sec times for the smaller pair, 15 for the Kimu and 19 for the tag-axle. For some reason the monocoque GRP Mobilvetta was noisier, adding a deep drumming frequency once up to cruise. The Home-Car would have had good

through-vision were it not for an its fixed headrest, several had rattly cookers and the dearest (Bürstner) had exceptionally rattly blinds.

To conclude these impressions, six Peugeot Boxers play five Fiat Ducatos. Now nearing the end of their lives, these well-sorted models impressed with their slick gear changes, but performance and braking varies considerably depending on engine spec and if ABS brakes are specified, though handbrakes are universally weak. Performance ranges from 15 to 21.5sec for the Fiats, whose 2.3 engine beats Peugeot's 2.2HDI.

Starting with van conversions, the good-value Adria Twin impressed all round, though we did manage to ground the low-slung water tank's retaining channel just by dropping off the road on to the verge to allow approaching traffic to pass. No such problems with the evergreen Murvi Morello, which was presented with the same 2.3 engine, keeping the price below £36,000 (£39k with extras). However, the front mudflaps ground when cornering! Timberland's Freedom XL came with a much higher spec for £36k, including the 2.8 engine, twin airbags and ABS brakes. Performance was better but one or two details needed resolving, such as an accessory mirror incorporating reversing camera screen, that was impossible to aim at the back windows!

Of the three coachbuilts, all from Swift Group, the Ace Genova and

Firenze both suffered conversion rattles, while the front washroom door of the Genova kept flying open from its useless magnetic seal, as did the side-hinged oven door. Do they never road-test these things before production?

Although at 7.5m the Firenze is big, it was unaccountably sluggish for a 2.8, taking six seconds longer than the 2.3 Genova to get from 30 to 60mph and struggling to hit 70mph. Tyre pressures of 5.5bar as specified didn't help its refinement or ride.

Clearly best of the bunch, as it should be for £49k, was Swift's Kon Tiki 660 fixed-bed model, which performed as a 2.8 should (17sec) but this proved not to be the latest model as declared, with ABS brakes, as it locked a rear wheel and slewed under test braking.

The Peugeots ranged from the pleasing sub-£30k Elddis Autoquest 180 2.2-litre to the £48k Orian Saturn Al-Ko 2.8, only the latter having ABS brakes. The odd one performance-wise was Orian's Dorado, declared to be a 2.0HDI, but which accelerated in similar time to the 2.2 Elddis and was 10mph faster. But did it rattle! The 2.2 Nuevo also struggled to exceed 70mph (30-60 in 19.8) with the wind howling through its rooflight. The bigger, winning, Autocruise Stardream was quicker with the same engine (18.6) but had the same top speed limitation, so we'd recommend you opted for the 2.8 with ABS brakes. Forget the £3500 silver paintjob and it won't even cost you extra!