



The Carousel is well put together

DID YOU KNOW?
The Gobur Owners' Club was inaugurated at a rally in 1998

Life is a Carousel

Nick Harding sings the praises of a beautifully-made folding caravan

WELCOME TO a Great British institution. From its sleepy Norfolk village base, Gobur is into its 26th year of building Carousels, the best folding caravans you can get. I can say that with all authority, because nobody else makes them any more.

But who buys Carousels? Typically, purchasers are in the 50-80 years age bracket, with more than a generous proportion in that last decade. You might be surprised to learn that a fair few younger couples with children use them, too.

Generally, they'll have some kind of tenting or caravanning background. It's a welcome step up from canvas into a folding caravan, but a surprising number of caravanners turn to a Carousel – for two key reasons.

First, they're a whole lot easier to tug and in turn don't need a powerful, heavy, fuel-guzzling towcar. Secondly, there's the storage factor; you can keep them at home, in the garage even.

Carousel is the name Gobur gives to all its models, and the current line-up comprises 10. However, the company has been known to build new versions of previous designs to individual order – customers have a major say in what items

are fitted and there's also a generous choice of upholstery schemes, curtains and carpets.

The Clubman model tested here is available in two layouts – L and Standard. We have the latter, its key attribute being the flexibility of the lounge seating, which offers three choices of bed arrangement. The exact same layout is available on Standard Width and Slimline Carousels.

The company also does a storming trade in second-hand units that it refurbishes to refreshingly exacting standards. Indeed, if you're thinking of buying a previously-owned model, unless you're buying from a very good friend, this is the only place to go.

CONSTRUCTION

For those caravanners among you who believe they don't make 'em like they used to, you're absolutely right. And here's the exception that proves the rule.

Certainly nobody builds them like this (although Carlight might have something to say here). Briefly, from Al-Ko components, Gobur produces its own chassis to which it adds the floor and the lower half of the caravan body. The vehicle then goes on its side so that plumbing and wiring work can take place.

Gobur has a reputation for rejecting components, too. I saw this for myself on a brief factory tour, where some aluminium was in the process of being rejected for having the minutest of dings. Those aluminium sides, incidentally, are scratch-resistant, which explains their lack of glossiness. Also, walls are made 'freehand' and there's no bonding, to alleviate any risk of anything coming unstuck.

Furniture, constructed in-house, of course, uses a minimum-thickness 9mm ply. Cupboard doors on this test model are ash-framed, and look all the better for it. But, new for 2010, models will have composite single-piece fronts, for the simple reason that real wood frames are no longer available. The latest models also get new windows.

Struts take care of any heavy lifting and, there's a reassuringly solid feel to items such as tumbuckles and even the rubber surround to the roof section.

If you've had construction and spare parts issues with your tourer, you'll look at these hand-built Carousels in a whole new light, believe me. This is a company that's virtually never heard of water ingress, and certainly delamination doesn't feature in the Gobur lexicon.



The Carousel can be set up in just 15 minutes

TOWABILITY

The hitching-up process is as per any caravan, but out on the road you'll immediately feel a difference. There's virtually no drag and it's far easier to tow than the full bulk of a conventional caravan. It'll reflect in your fuel usage, too. In short, the VW Tiguan I used here barely felt the presence of its trailer (although you still need towing mirrors).

Unhitched, it's far easier to manoeuvre than any normal caravan – not least because the grab handles at each of the four corners feel man enough for the job.

USABILITY

The weather was calm and mild, so I wasn't able to test the unit's resistance to wind. But I did the next best thing, consulting Carousel owners Mr and Mrs Norris from Leicestershire, purely coincidentally on the pitch next to mine.

They set the tone: "These are brilliant." To put that into context, that's compared to a standard mainstream caravan, a couple of campervans, boats and even a Morgan car they've owned at various times. Their Carousel is 15 years old and, while it's fair to say not a lot has changed over that time, the key point here is the durability of the original design. And yes, it can withstand all kinds of high winds and stormy weather, I'm assured.

After arrival on your pitch you could have that all-important first brew on the go in as little as 10-15 minutes – it really is that straightforward to set up a Carousel. Front then back ends go up, followed by side walls. You then get inside to put up the washroom, kitchen (the latter really is a neat piece of work, pulling up easily on

struts to sit on top of the permanently located fridge and double cupboard) and lockers that sit on rails. You can use as many lockers as you want (you can subsequently order more) and indeed select the type – a major attribute is that they are designed to store items in transit.

The most interesting thing about this unit is that its floorplan is back to front. The lounge is at the rear, kitchen and washroom at the front end.

LIVING AND SLEEPING

Comfortable seating, generous flat beds – they're surely the two most important aspects of any caravan. Leisurelux foam contributes admirably to both, and I've always liked the idea of scatter cushions that can double as pillows.

As for making the beds themselves, the initial choice is bed boards or pull-out slats. It's the former on this example, meaning you can set up twin single beds or a double with seating at either end (or the third board can be added for a king-sized double).

Underfoot, there's fixed carpet on this example, although vinyl flooring can be specified. Arguably, the best is a compromise of easy-to-clean vinyl in the doorway/kitchen area and carpet in the lounge.

At mealtimes, there's a free-standing table, although a unit that attaches to the end wall can be supplied as an alternative.

If you want an awning, Gobur has this aspect fully covered. It has commissioned two manufacturers to supply awnings that suit the Carousel's exterior contours. Isabella and – a name from the past – Kingswood, since you're asking. >>

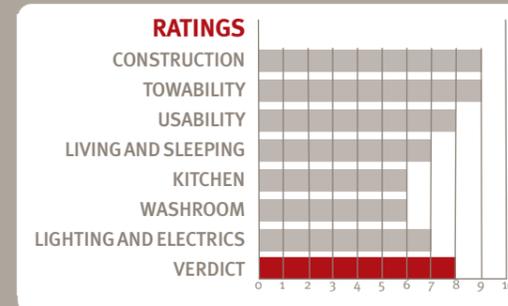


Folded down, the Carousel is easy to tow



Checking the interior rubber skirting

“This is a company that's virtually never heard of water ingress”



RRP	£17,895 OTR
Internal length	3.96m (13ft)
Shipping length	5.28m (17ft 4in)
Overall width	2.08m (6ft 10in)
Overall height	1.45m (4ft 9in) folded
Internal headroom	1.88m (6ft 2in) max
MRO	870kg (17cwt)
User payload	255kg (5cwt)
MTPLM	1125kg (22cwt)
Berths	2

Club insurance: 01342 336610 • Info: goburcaravans.co.uk

Vehicle supplied for test by:
Gobur Caravans, Melton Constable, Norfolk NR24 2BY. Call 01263 860031



Standard twin settee lounge is at the back



Washroom boasts a drop-down sink and bench-style electric flush toilet



Lockers are designed to store items in transit



Conventional water supply, via Aqua Roll



Kitchen features four-ring hob and grill

“ Carousels hold their price well and demand for all second-hand models is seriously strong ”

KITCHEN

You get a four-ring hob without spark ignition because this is the only set-up that can cope with the folding requirements. It's a proper-sized grill under the hob, however. To the right of the cooker is a sink/drain in complementary stainless steel, with a clever worktop that hinges up to provide a useful shelf above.

The three-way fridge is from Dometic and, again, it's as big as you'll get in a unit like this. Under the drainer there's just space for a cutlery tray in its own locker, plus there's a copious double-door locker at floor level.

WASHROOM

Gobur tells me at least 40% of new buyers go for the hot water and 20% for the shower options. I'd certainly consider the latter, which could then be run outside via the window for washing off

pets, dirty boots etc. Just a thought... What you do get as standard is a bench toilet with electric flush, a drop-down washbasin and a vanity unit with mirror doors. In other words, all the essentials.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

It's all straightforward stuff here. There's a mains input and leisure battery, servicing three 230V and two 12V sockets via a Power Management Centre with charger. There's also a TV aerial connection point. Night-time lighting is particularly generous – there are no fewer than three ceiling-mounted fluorescent units and there is a reading light in each corner of the bed area. Even the washroom gets two light units.

VERDICT

Let's get the bad news out of the way first. Hand-built to the most exacting of

standards and virtually bespoke – you've guessed it, they're not particularly cheap (although new prices do start at just over £12,000 for the smallest Slimline model. And there's always second-hand).

The good news is there's plenty of good news. Top-quality build; ditto after-sales service. Carousels hold their price well and demand for all second-hand models is seriously strong – the only thing that is cheap about them is the insurance. Then there's the abundance of storage; plus, they're a British manufacturing success.

If you want a verdict, then my own feeling is these more than justify their prices. I hardly need to say any more. Next time you're on a site, you'll spot the almost inevitable Gobur Carousel. Just go and ask the owners about it. Summed up in a good, old-fashioned British word – worthy. ■

