

Isabella Transit



Outer space

Do you need more room while you're away on tour? Then it's time you invested in a caravan 'extension' – or awning. Before you take the plunge, though, read Nick Harding's essential guide

We've all had a little chuckle at the travails of others as they've struggled to put up an awning. Chances are the laughs were on you once, too. Equally, isn't it gratifying when fellow caravanners come to your rescue in such situations?

Well, there's no reason to stop smiling this season, as there's a massive choice of awnings available – porch, full or something in between. Before you rush out and buy, take time to read our essential guide...

THE MANUFACTURERS

Unless specified, the companies below supply both full and porch awnings, as well as a full range of accessories – from annexes to tie-down kits.

■ **Bradcot** (bradcot-awnings.co.uk) – this long-established Bradford-based

company's extensive range includes the Modus, a recently-introduced porch awning with a patent-pending modular design

■ **Dorema** (dorema.co.uk) – like Bradcot, this company is well into its third decade of awning production

■ **Gateway Leisure** (gatewayleisure.com) – specialist insurance provider that also includes awnings in its accessories portfolio

■ **Isabella** (isabella.net/uk) – the big name in caravan awnings. An interesting new model is the Transit, which starts off as a sun canopy but to which you can add sides and a front to make a part-awning. Also, the classic Ambassador is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a modern makeover

■ **NR Awnings** (nrawnings.co.uk) – UK manufacturer offering a five-year



Quest Leisure Berkeley



Pyramid Tuscany



Bradcot Sport

warranty with its products. Full awnings are in the £500-£1,000 bracket, with Balmoral, Pullman and 4Season the names to look out for. The Combi is a 'three-quarter' awning, while Coniston, Coniston Luxe and Vivaldi are porch awnings

■ **Outdoor Revolution** (outdoor-revolution.com) – latest models added to an already extensive range include the New York porch, with steel or carbon poles, in anthracite/mercury colour finish

■ **Pyramid** (pyramidoutdoor.co.uk) – Tuscany, a full awning, was a new model for 2011 but upgrades for 2012 models include heavier-duty UV-reflective roof, patented tension peg system, external privacy blinds to all windows and two-year warranty against manufacturing defects

■ **Quest Leisure** (questleisure.com) – four new models this year. Windsor Plus, Kensington Plus and Snowdon all feature the latest Quest Tec5 material, a coated polyester, plus heat-reflective roof with five-year anti-fade warranty. The Snowdon is a one-piece porch awning designed for year-round use – features include a double-coated PVC roof, extra framework and full stormflap. Also new is the Berkeley, designed for one person to pitch, but with removable panels which allow it to be set up in any of six configurations

■ **Starcamp** (starcamp.co.uk) – a sister brand to Dorema making low-cost models

■ **SunnCamp** (sunnflair.com) – offers ranges under the titles of 'acrylic' (Ultima, Mirage and the half-porch Galaxy) or 'active' awnings, which divide into the Platinum and Classic portfolios

■ **Ventura** (ventura-camping.com/uk) – budget ranges from Isabella

■ Other names to look out for include Eurovent, Harrison, Herzog, Kampa and Trio. Look out also for specialist retailers such as Camperlands, Riversway (with its own Riviera range), Towsure (Insignia, Portico, Panama), and others

PORCH OR FULLAWNING?

It's fair to say that porch awnings have grown, literally, to the point where larger models aren't significantly smaller than full-size versions. Weight and packaging are key elements here. Your selection will depend on exactly what you want to use your awning for, when and how often.

Many caravanners have both – on short breaks you just want a light, easy-to-erect unit such as a porch awning, while on longer trips you want to make the most of all that extra living and storage space that a full awning offers.

SPEAK TO A SPECIALIST

You'll get great advice from fellow members on site, of course, but it's also worth seeking out a specialist. We spoke to Sue Crookson, from Midlands-based caravan dealership, Broad Lane Leisure.

She says: "We sell lightweight awnings priced at £150 upwards, which offer very good value for money should customers only want something for possibly one night, that's quick to erect and folds away into a small bag etc.

"When you start talking to a customer, the first few questions are the most important. This way you can direct them to the correct product. I always ask them how much they know about awnings. Those customers new to caravanning need a lot more guidance.

"It's also important for me to know whether or not a caravanner tours in their outfit or pitches the caravan in one place for most of the year. Once I understand their needs, my job is to direct them to the most suitable awning.

"I also need to know what make, model and year of caravan a customer has, so I can ensure they get the correct size of awning."

Sue lists the following three awnings as good buys, and then explains why:

■ **Isabella Magnum** – "You can pay a lot less for a porch awning, but if you want the best, this is it. It is lightweight but strong, and the IsaFix locking clamp makes it very easy to erect. All materials are top quality."

- **Bradcot Sport** – "A three-piece awning, with one-piece, heat-reflective, coated-polyester roof and the option to add an annexe. Excellent value for money."
- **Isabella Commodore Concept** – "Absolute top quality and luxury. You can actually get bigger, but this is of a size that still makes it feasible for touring."



Sue Crookson of Broad Lane Leisure

The awning you choose will, of course, come down to individual model and colour preferences. Your decision will be influenced by things such as the location of the door, removable panels, window size, pole material and annexes, as well as weight and 'packability'. Look for things such as inners (ie bedrooms), draught skirts, wheel-arch covers, the quality and type of pegs and the clarity of those all-important instructions.

It goes without saying that awnings do vary in quality, both in terms of materials and workmanship – so do make careful checks of any awning you're interested in. They vary in price, too (from under £200 to around £2,000). Even though the new touring season has just started, there are already plenty of deals to be had.

Finally, do remember that, even though some models are designed for all-year use, awnings are temporary structures. Put up perfectly, and maintained that way, they'll cope with a lot, but they do need looking after. ■



IsaFix clamps from Isabella replace telescopic couplings and wing nuts for easy tensioning of the company's awning frames



Tectum Pro is a new simple-click assembly system used in Isabella's latest awnings



Isabella Magnum



SunnCamp Mirage