



And the WINNERS ARE...

During an intensive four days of testing in late April and early May, motorhomes from British and European manufacturers went head to head in The Caravan Club's annual Design & Drive competition. One of the design judges, Steve Rowe, and one of the driving judges, Danny Cobbs, bring you the results in all six categories

With around 20 tonnes of ballast moved by hand, more than 200 tyre pressures checked, some 8,000 gear changes made, over 2,000 cupboard doors opened and more than 160 judged criteria contributing to 8,000 individual scores, The Caravan Club's 2012 Motor Caravan Design & Drive competition was no lightweight event. Ironically, as the technical judges found out, some of the motorhomes tested were no lightweights either, leaving little room for any payload!

During the event, the technical judges scrutinised each of the 50 entrants, checking aspects such as payload capacity and compliance with industry regulations as well as the safety and installation quality of gas and electrical systems. Meanwhile, a team of design judges looked at everything from the kitchen layout to the calibre of the locker catches. In addition, four driving judges took each motorhome out on a set

driving route and manoeuvrability/reversing course, taking note of aspects such as interior noise levels, all-round visibility, stability, front and rear travel-seat comfort and suitability of gear ratios.

Why does the Club – with an assembled team of expert judges, including volunteer members – go to so much trouble to test motorhomes? Well, the aim is to find out which are the best models currently on the market.

Hopefully, this will help members make the best buying decision when they choose their next vehicle, while at the same time help to promote and reward high standards in the manufacturing industry.

This year's top award went to a company that, while relatively new to the motorhome business, has a long history of producing touring caravans. Step forward Bailey and its Approach SE 745. Read on for full details of all the winners in the competition's six classes...

Class 1

VAN CONVERSIONS up to £40,000

1st East Neuk
Fifer Touring S

2nd Hyundai i800 by
Wellhouse

3rd Wheelhome Skarpa EBS

Although a relatively small manufacturer, East Neuk Campers has enjoyed great success in recent Design & Drive competitions, mainly thanks to the innovation and sheer quality of its conversions.

This year, its Fifer Touring S, based on the short-wheelbase Citroën Relay,

successfully defended its 2011 class win.

This model's unique layout includes a slide-out

interior wall that forms a toilet

cubicle. There's also a small kitchen unit containing a two-burner hob and sink plus a small fridge, and a spacious rear seating area that converts into comfortable sleeping berths for two. Attention to detail in this baby Fifer extends to a small fire safety cupboard, complete with fire blanket and extinguisher.

"Seems ahead of competitors with the quality of finish it offers for the price," said one expert design judge. Another concluded: "A quart into a pint pot; a very clever design, quite brilliantly executed."

Runner-up in this class was the Hyundai i800 from Wellhouse, a compact van conversion that offers space



Class-winner Fifer Touring S (main images); third-placed Wheelhome Skarpa EBS (left)

for four people to sleep and provides five belted travel seats. Offering a versatile layout and high build quality, it can either be used as an MPV or a holiday campervan.

Third place in this category went to the Wheelhome Skarpa EBS, based on the Fiat Doblo Combi Maxi. It's an incredibly innovative design featuring sleeping space for three adults, including a lengthy single bed that folds down from the elevating-roof space. There's even a diesel-powered hob, so you don't have to rely on gas for cooking.



"A quart into a pint pot; a very clever design, quite brilliantly executed"

ON THE ROAD

Powered by a 2.2-litre turbodiesel engine, the Citroën Relay-based Fifer Touring S constantly amazed the driving judges with its ease of manoeuvrability, good power-to-weight ratio and super build quality.

It wasn't all plain sailing for the East Neuk, though. Points were deducted for the limited driver's seat

adjustment and for an obstructed view of the bottom of the nearside door mirror by the interior night blind surround. Yet, as an overall package, the Fifer remains a worthy winner.

I also really enjoyed driving the Hyundai i800-based Wellhouse camper and Wheelhome's Skarpa EBS on the compact Fiat Doblo.

Since each of these conversions starts out in life as a passenger car – not a commercial vehicle like the East Neuk – they were more refined in terms of handling and offered a better fit and finish in the cabin.

Having said that, the Hyundai's automatic gearbox seemed a little unnerved by the extra weight of

the conversion and the Fiat felt a touch top heavy.

However, irrespective of these minor idiosyncrasies, these two innovative models cleverly demonstrate what can be achieved within the confines of a limited floorspace while preserving a car-like driving experience.

Class 2

VAN CONVERSIONS over £40,000

1st Murvi Morocco

2nd Vantage Sol

3rd Auto-Sleeper County
Sussex EB

Devon-based converter Murvi won this class 12 months ago with its long-running Morello, but chose to enter its new Fiat Ducato Maxi 35-based Morocco this year. The result, however, was the same.

Morocco's versatile interior layout centres around a large settee along the offside wall, which pulls out at night to provide sleeping space for two – in the shape of one large double or two roomy singles. At the rear, a well-equipped L-shaped kitchen sits opposite a generously-sized wardrobe and corner washroom.

Each individual area is well designed and the finish is to Murvi's usual high standards. Extending its versatility, Morocco can be equipped with kitchen facilities to suit an individual buyer's requirements.

Judges' comments included, "Usual excellent Murvi, with understated interior" and, "Great for a touring couple, with full cooking facilities." Another judge simply concluded, "very, very good."

In second place, the Vantage Sol is also based on Fiat's ubiquitous Ducato. Its interior layout comprises a large,



Class-winner Morocco (main images); third-placed County Sussex EB (below left)

U-shaped rear lounge, offside washroom and nearside kitchen. With double-glazed acrylic windows all-round in the living area, Sol should make a great all-season motorhome for a couple.

The third-placed Auto-Sleeper Sussex EB was also well liked by the judges. Its star feature is probably the full-width rear washroom, with shower cubicle, fold-down washbasin and cassette toilet. It also boasts a well-equipped kitchen and versatile front seating area, offering a settee and forward-facing seat that convert into berths for two people at night.

“Usual excellent Murvi, with understated interior”



ON THE ROAD

Although Murvi's impressive Morocco took top honours in this category, it didn't pass its driving test without criticism.

We driving judges are a pernickety bunch – the Morocco's semi-automated manual gearbox managed to split opinion; some liked it, while others, including me, felt it made the Fiat Ducato's 3.0-litre

turbodiesel engine perform well below its capabilities. Indeed, it even felt a little lacklustre.

Gearbox issues aside, Morocco has impeccable on-road manners and offers good visibility all round.

Another Ducato-based conversion, Vantage's Sol was powered by the smaller 2.3-litre turbodiesel motor mated to a

six-speed manual transmission.

This gave noticeably reduced performance compared with the Murvi, in spite of the latter's gearbox issues.

Indeed, the Morocco delivered a surefooted and confident drive that the judges didn't experience at the wheel of the Vantage or the 2.2-litre

TD-powered, Peugeot Boxer-based Auto-Sleeper.

The County Sussex EB was the most flawed of the podium finishers in this class in terms of its on-road behaviour. Excessive wind noise from the rooflight and badly-designed travel seats cost it dearly.

Class 3

COACHBUILTS
up to £45,000

1st Bailey Approach SE 745

2nd Bailey Approach SE 625

3rd Tribute T715



“Spacious, comfortable, easy to use; true value for money”

A long-established manufacturer of touring caravans, Bailey is a newcomer to the motorhome scene, so even some of the judges were surprised to see just how well the Bristol-based company did in these awards. With a combination of good build quality, featuring the company's innovative Alu-Tech body construction, and remarkable value for money, Bailey scooped both first and second place in this category.

Class-topper Approach SE 745 also took the overall winner's spot after a secret judges' ballot (judges selected their number one model from the six category winners).

Based on Peugeot's Boxer, four-berth Approach SE 745 features a fixed French double bed at the rear, with a washroom alongside. It also

boasts a large, well-equipped central kitchen and spacious front seating area with two belted seats for travelling. This area converts into an additional two berths at night.

Judges' comments ranged from, "Spacious, comfortable, easy to use" to, "Good layout and equipment, at a keen price." One judge concluded, "This is true value for money."



Class runner-up: Approach SE 625

Runner-up Approach SE 625, also based on the Boxer, is a smaller two-berth, offering a large, U-shaped rear lounge and a central kitchen and washroom. As with its stablemate, this Approach received high marks from the judges for build quality and value for money.

In third place, the Tribute T715 from the Auto-Trail stable is based on the Ford Transit and

features a front lounge with two inward-facing settees. A central kitchen, rear corner washroom and permanent rear double bed complete the interior picture here. At £38,148 it offers great value for money, too.

ON THE ROAD

Not only do the driving judges take into account the way a motorhome behaves on-road, we also award points for passenger safety. That's one of the reasons why both the Baileys did so well in this class.

The Approach SE 745 demonstrated that the safety of all occupants is as important as a clever and workable layout, illustrated by its crash-tested – and comfortable – rear travel seats. These same merits helped sister model, Approach SE 625, to second place.

While Bailey has done much to hide the commercial origins of the 2.2-litre TD Peugeot Boxer base, the pseudo-wood veneer stuck onto the dash does give it the sense that this is as good as it will ever get. And it's only after driving the third-placed Tribute T715, based on the new Ford Transit, that the Boxer seems, dare I say it, a bit dated by comparison.

Driver ergonomics are better in the Transit and all four driving judges felt the Ford chassis gave a more compliant and comfortable ride. Not that this should detract from the many qualities of the Approach SE 745, which is why it still managed to romp home as the class winner.



Class 4

COACHBUILTS
£45,000-£55,000

1st Bentley Cerise

2nd Bentley Amber

3rd Bessacarr E582

A relatively new name in the motorhome world, Bentley is run by a team that has worked in the industry for many years – and it certainly knows how to build a quality product. The company also goes against the industry grain by building on a Renault chassis cab rather than the more common Fiat/Peugeot.

Traffic-based Cerise is a compact coachbuilt with its entrance door in the rear wall. Despite its diminutive dimensions, Cerise offers good washroom and kitchen facilities, as well as providing sufficient room for two people to sleep comfortably.

Step inside via that rear door and you pass a washroom cubicle on your left that houses a shower, fold-down washbasin and cassette toilet. This area can be divided off from the rest

of the interior to make a handy dressing room. A pair of inward-facing settees up front combine with the swivelled cab seats to create two single beds or a double at night.

One judge commented of the Cerise, "Renault Trafic is a joy to drive; good to see rear-door coachbuilts making a return." A second judge concluded, "Another good-quality motorhome from Bentley."

“Renault Trafic is a joy to drive; good to see a rear-door coachbuilt”

Cementing Bentley's domination of this class, Cerise's Traffic-based sister, Amber (with side entrance door), boasts a similar front twin-settee layout, plus a rear corner washroom and well-equipped

kitchen. In third place, the Bessacarr E582 is a luxurious and well-built motorhome. Its full-width rear washroom, behind a fixed double bed, is a joy, while the kitchen is well-equipped.

We felt the door mirrors were a little on the small side which obscured rear vision a tad, but that's nitpicking – or is it?

Third-place Bessacarr E582 scored well for lack of interior-generated noise (pointing towards good build quality) and for impressive performance from its 2.3-litre TD Fiat engine, especially in third gear – it's a long, unyielding cog which hardly puts any strain on the engine and makes relaxed town driving a cinch. However, the lack of seatbelts for rear passengers (this is marketed as a four-berth model) was an issue and it was marked down accordingly.

ON THE ROAD

Both Bentleys are based on the Renault Trafic and have 2.0-litre TD engines under their bonnets. An ideal donor vehicle, the Trafic offers a confident and smooth ride, damping any humps and bumps.

I thought the ergonomics of the Trafic better than those of the Ducato/Boxer, with switchgear more conveniently sited. The Renault cabin also seemed to be a lighter and airier place to be. As for the way it drives, the 115bhp turbodiesel engine offers plenty of enough low-down grunt to take either of these Bentley coachbuilts to the national speed limit.

Bentley Amber was runner-up



Class 5

COACHBUILTS
over £55,000

1st Bentley Oulton

2nd Bentley Mallory

3rd Auto-Sleeper
Cotswold FB ES

Another remarkable one-two for South Yorkshire-based Bentley.

The winning four-berth Oulton is built on Renault's Master and features a permanent rear double bed, with corner washroom adjacent. Of particular note is very well-planned storage – for example, the wall next to the bed houses a wardrobe with a useful stack of drawers beneath it.

The central kitchen is a well-planned and well-equipped affair, while a spacious seating area/double bed just behind the cab completes this model's very workable interior living accommodation. However, the technical judges did feel that Oulton's gas regulator was in a most inaccessible position – a little thought and a bit more copper pipe, and this problem would be solved.

Judges loved the luxurious feel and good build quality of the



Class-winner Oulton (main images); third-placed Cotswold (right)

Oulton. "A good blend of contemporary and traditional," said one judge. Another added, "Excellent quality, but the bathroom is a bit dark." Talking about the whole package, a third judge concluded, "Renault Master base vehicle combined with an Al-Ko chassis; an inspired choice."



Another Master-based coachbuilt, runner-up Mallory features a U-shaped rear lounge and central washroom and kitchen facilities. The washroom, in particular, is very well designed for this type of layout.

Third-placed Auto-Sleeper Cotswold FB ES features a permanent rear French bed, corner washroom, well-equipped central kitchen and storage units, plus a front lounge area which boasts a pair of forward-facing seats with seatbelts for travelling. Cotswold is another truly luxurious motorhome.

“A good blend of contemporary and traditional”

ON THE ROAD

The Bentleys sit on identical Renault Master chassis, and both are powered by a 2.3-litre 150bhp turbodiesel engine. It's only when you get a chance to drive a Renault against a similar Fiat or Peugeot that the differences become apparent – it also highlights the sense in taking a motorhome out for a test drive before making a purchase.

Without doubt, it is the Renault that gives a better all-round driving experience. Despite the Peugeot-based Auto-Sleeper boasting much the same engine and power specifications as the Master, it still had a tough job to out-manoeuvre and out-perform either of the Bentleys.

The steering on the Cotswold felt heavy, while the suspension jarred a little to give a skittish ride. Engine noise from the 2.2-litre HDi motor was noticeable and there were a few annoying rattles from the furniture and fixtures – surprising from an Auto-Sleeper product.



Class 6

A-CLASS

1st Carthago E Line I49

2nd Dethleffs Esprit I 7010

3rd Pilote Référence G640 LR

Models featuring contrasting layouts and prices competed in this sector of the competition.

The victorious Carthago E-Line (main images) is a really opulent motorhome, featuring a permanent rear double bed above a large garage area. Its impressive split-washroom facilities are positioned in front of the bed – you'll find a separate shower cubicle on one side and a toilet compartment on the other.

The large door to the toilet compartment can be opened so that it divides the front of the layout from the rear, making for a spacious private bedroom area with washing and dressing facilities.

Chefs should find the central kitchen to their liking, while



comfort is assured in a large front lounge. The model supplied for test was equipped with a host of luxury extras which pushed the Carthago's price tag to a tad under £110,000 – so you may need to win big on the lottery to bag this one!

"Well constructed and thoughtfully finished," said one judge of the class winner. "Even though it's over £100,000, it's very good value for money," said the same judge.

Runner-up Dethleffs Esprit I 7010 is well worth a look if you're in the market for an A-Class with low-level single beds rather than the usual higher 'over-garage' beds at the rear. Esprit's full-width washroom is luxurious, its kitchen large and its seating area spacious.

Completing the podium, Pilote's Référence G640 LR (below) boasts not only a large rear washroom and central kitchen, but a roomy front lounge, too. At £59,995, it also offers good value for money.

The technical judges reported that while Carthago's payload was good, both the Dethleffs and the Pilote are far from generous in this department when travelling with four people and if carrying a spare wheel.



ON THE ROAD

We look at the prices in this category and believe that anyone who is about to spend the sort of money an A-Class commands should expect ride and handling to match the luxury of the fixtures and fittings within.

I'm not going to say I wasn't swayed, just a little, by the sumptuous interior of the class winner, because I was. Nonetheless, I was just as impressed by the well-appointed cab, the ultra-comfortable cab seats and the way it handled. It is a

beautiful thing to drive, Fiat's 180bhp 3.0-litre TD motor making light work of propelling Carthago's considerable bulk. It did show signs of bodyroll when a corner was taken with too much verve, though.

The Dethleffs uses the same running gear and engine as the Carthago, but this time bodyroll seemed more prevalent and the ride was a bit too 'floppy'.

For such large beasts, the top two are surprisingly nimble. They also seem to have been bolted together by people who care,

judging by the lack of chatter from the furniture.

Perhaps if Pilote hadn't used the smaller 2.3-litre TD Fiat engine in its Référence, it would have finished better than third. It would be all too easy to be seduced by the internal adornments the Pilote so brazenly displays, yet when it comes down to nitty-gritty of the drive, it is a disappointment – it offers less than startling performance and there's noticeable road and wind noise, too.

DESIGN & DRIVE 2012 ENTRIES

On-the-road prices are shown, including any extras

Class 1 Van Conversions up to £40,000

Autocruise Rhythm Sport	£36,350
Danbury VW Caddy	£31,896
East Neuk Fifer Touring S	£38,575
Globecar Campscout 636 SB	£39,995
Hyundai i800 by Wellhouse	£39,700
Reimo Sport Camper	£37,794
Tribute 669	£38,745
Wheelhome Skarpa EBS	£36,156

Class 2 Van Conversions over £40,000

Autocruise Quartet	£43,530
Auto-Sleeper County Sussex EB	£49,695
Auto-Sleeper Windrush	£48,995
Danbury Surf	£42,362
Murvi Morocco	£54,386
Rapido V56	£43,340
Reimo Multi Style	£50,608
Vantage Sol	£44,950

Class 3 Coachbuilts up to £45,000

Bailey Approach SE 625	£42,000
Bailey Approach SE 745	£44,000
Chausson Flash 10	£40,687
CI Motorhomes Carioca 695	£37,790
CI Motorhomes S Line 680	£44,390
Marquis Lifestyle 624	£43,831
Marquis Lifestyle 696	£39,881
Marquis Majestic 115	£42,689
Marquis Majestic 165	£38,329
Richard Baldwin Fitado SE	£39,795
Roller Team T Line 670	£42,890
Swift Hi Style 580PR	£42,689
Swift Sundance 590RS	£42,875
Tribute T715	£38,148

Class 4 Coachbuilts £45,000-£55,000

Auto-Sleeper Broadway EB	£54,495
Auto-Sleeper Nuevo EK	£49,485
Auto-Trail Tracker FB	£50,083
Auto-Trail Tracker RS	£48,194
Bailey Approach SE 760	£45,299
Bentley Amber	£46,995
Bentley Cerise	£46,995
Bessacarr E582	£54,540
Elddis Aspire 265	£51,349
Knaus Sky Ti 650 MF	£52,995
Rapido 646B	£48,900

Class 5 Coachbuilts over £55,000

Auto-Sleeper Cotswold FB ES	£61,745
Bentley Mallory	£59,995
Bentley Oulton	£62,995
Bessacarr E769 Low	£69,595
Dethleffs Magic Edition T EB	£65,085
Knaus Sun Ti 650 LF	£60,995

Class 6 A-Class

Carthago E Line I49	£109,088
Dethleffs Esprit I 7010	£77,031
Pilote Explorateur Diamond G742 LCE	£75,995
Pilote Référence G640 LR	£59,995