



WIND OF change?

ROB MCCABE CONJECTURES WHETHER THE NEW 2009 CRUSADER TYPHOON WILL PUT THE WIND UP TO OPPOSITION?

ABOVE: Crusader's tinted privacy windows are shown to good effect in winter light; awning warmer outlet sits alongside fridge vent

PHEW – THEY haven't done it by half in compiling the new Elddis Crusader range for 2009: not one, not two, not even three but four new single-axle models join the apartment-sized four-wheelers to make an eight-strong upmarket range encompassing two-, four- and six-berthers.

Our test caravan this month is a new end-washroom four-berth that fairly packs in the goodies: stereo system, microwave, gas barbecue point, stabiliser – and more besides. So, does the Typhoon have what it takes to put the wind up its rivals?

CONSTRUCTION

Both front and rear full-height panels (GRP and ABS plastic respectively) are new out of Explorer Group for 2009. The rear is especially striking, in a square-jawed, cut-

yourself-on-the-sharp-angles kind of way. Both are joined to the sturdy aluminium side panels extremely neatly. The external wet locker with a mains socket inside is a welcome addition to the Crusader range.

There's not much to quibble with indoors, although some of the joinery inside is a wee bit rough round the edges. There's no beading around the internal dividers, for example, which looks a bit down at heel in a caravan that sets itself up to offer so much in the way of pampering and quality. Maybe that will be addressed in the even more-upmarket Buccaneer range, which is due to return in a matter of weeks?

We found a carpentry problem with one of the three drawers under the wardrobe in the washroom. The middle one refused all attempts to open it, even when subjected to the maximum amount of I'll-stop-now-

because-it-isn't-my-caravan violence. Obviously this would normally be sorted at the PDI and we expect press demonstrators to be given the fine-tooth comb treatment, but this item somehow escaped notice.

TOWABILITY

Single-axle it may be, but the Crusader name brings a lot of baggage with it – quite literally. Using all the MTPLM, the Typhoon's 85% weight is 1917kg, for which optimum 7% noseweight is 114kg, though the hitch limit is 100kg. Even star towcars such as the Freelander and Nissan's recently overhauled X-Trail don't have the weight to cope – you're into Discovery 3 and Nissan Pathfinder territory here.

Given an accomplished match, all should be well: the heavy kitchen equipment is

concentrated around the axle for optimum weight distribution, and there's a standard Winterhoff hitch stabiliser to keep a steady hand on proceedings.

USABILITY

The Typhoon gets lots of points here and, indeed, amasses a fair score before you even step inside. The gas-strut-assisted gas locker lid makes reaching in and out a breeze, and there's even a little interior light to smooth the passage of those essential night-time gas locker operations.

Awning-friendly features include an awning warmer outlet (more effective on cool evenings than you may think) and a mains socket that lives inside the exterior-access locker, thus shielded totally from muck thrown up from the road. There's a gas barbecue point, too, although you maybe don't want to be using that inside the awning...

The aforementioned exterior locker opens into the front nearside bed locker, which – like its counterpart on the opposite side – you can also get to via wide-opening internal front hatches. The spaces under the side dinette seats are made easily get-at-able thanks to the sprung-slat bases that stay open of their own accord.

The extendable table atop the front chest of drawers is of the best-of-all-worlds variety; ie, you pull it out from underneath the existing surface, meaning you don't have to move what's already there, as you do with the fold-over type.

All the carpet sections are compact enough to be easily manhandled out of the way – there's even a dinky little rug that services the side dinette, helping to make the big central carpet section more wieldy than is often the case.

At 7ft 6in wide, the Crusader is as wide as a 'normal' caravan can be – and, boy, does it feel it. The aura of roominess on board is palpable, especially around the caravan's midriff: you'll be able to breeze past the chef without fear of colliding and ending up with rather more chilli sauce on your quesadillas than you might have wished for.

When it's time for grub up, the free-standing table can simply be eased out of its hatch right next to the lounge and erected on the spot – it could only be more user-friendly if Elddis provided a little man to come and put it up for you.

Storage facilities are very good. As well as those easily accessed bed/seat lockers, there are 10 overhead lockers and a good, deep wardrobe. A special mention should go to the almost-secret pair of little cupboard doors in the washroom, next to the door. Their location means access is tight and they're very narrow – but there would

otherwise be an awkwardly proportioned space that would just go to waste, so credit where credit's due for making something out of nothing. It almost goes without saying that every window is blinded and flyscreened, although all bar the fronts have the combined one-or-t'other operation that so underwhelms me. As well as that, the two-handed operation to separate them always results in a 300mph parting of the ways that seems so unnecessarily violent.

But the nice little touches definitely have the upper hand. As you come in through the entrance door (which has a compact waste bin attached to its inside), there are coat hooks laid on for you; and the big mirror that lives on the same wall boasts its own downlighter.

With the Typhoon, you can't help but get the impression it's been designed by folk who use caravans themselves.

LIVING AND SLEEPING

Approaching the lounge for the first time, you have to overcome the visual shock of the two very furry cushions that look rather like giant hairy caterpillars compressed into square cushion shapes. They're actually a wee bit scary until you get used to them; and even then I wasn't quite sure whether I should lean on them or feed them.

Mostly, I tended towards the former option, which helped reinforce what a nice lounge this is. The upholstery offers lots of comfort and support and, of course, legroom isn't an issue here.

The slats whoosh in and out with impressive precision to help make bed construction easy; or you can opt for two



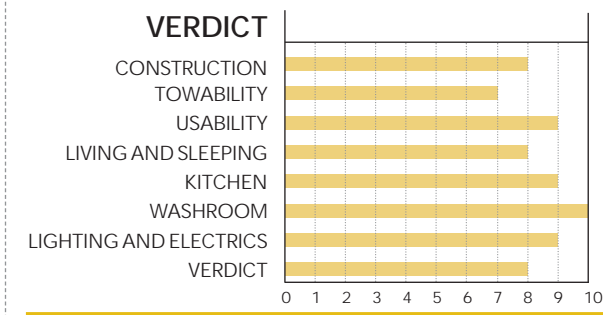
ABOVE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Maximum permitted width makes luxurious lounge; wheelbox robs dinette of legroom; spring assisters make seat-base access easy

good single beds. The drop-down shelf on the edge of the offside sofa robs a tiny bit of length, so anyone of six-foot-plus dimensions should claim the nearside bed.

The side dinette should very much be regarded as an occasional seating area for anyone other than children. There's not a lot of room to sit there, and the short, uncomfortable backrests leave you feeling especially perched. I guess most families would leave the beds made up all the time, anyway, so it's maybe not such a big issue.

The bunk is easy to make up and all the supplied upholstery for that and the bed below it fits nice and snugly. >>

| Technical | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| RRP (inc 15% VAT) | £15,945 ex works |
| Internal length | 5.34m (17ft 6in) |
| Shipping length | 6.18m (20ft 3in) |
| Overall width | 2.29m (7ft 6in) |
| Overall height | 2.58m (8ft 6in) |
| Internal headroom | 1.91m (6ft 3in) |
| MIRO | 1360kg (26.7cwt) |
| Payload | 270kg (5.30cwt) |
| MTPLM | 1630kg (32.0cwt) |
| Berths | 4 |





“Tell you what – it’s very nice in here”

ABOVE: Rear washroom packs loads of storage, so watch your weight distribution; shower sets new standards for Elddis
BELOW: Glass lids are vital parts of the worktop anatomy

KITCHEN

Guess what? The lighting’s lacklustre. I could save myself a bit of time here every month by just copying and pasting what I wrote about the caravan in the last issue, and the one before that, and...

But, other than that common drawback, it’s all good. There’s decent workspace; and the heatproof, scratchproof Chinchilla glass covers for the hob and sunken sink are attractive and practical.

The mirror-finished cooker verges on the glamorous, and its beauty is more than skin-deep: it’s spark-ignited and there’s a switchable light for the oven. The hob features the default Explorer Group configuration of two regular-sized burners and a great, big one for woks or Desperate Dan-sized saucepans.

These days, you expect a microwave on caravans costing this much money – and, lo and behold, there it is. It looks good, too, due in no small measure to the high-quality stainless steel surround. Because this is a caravan that doesn’t want to leave much on the options list, there’s an overhead extractor fan, too (you could splash out another £1000 on air-conditioning if you were so inclined).

The microwave obviously swallows up an overhead locker all to itself, but that’s a price worth paying for the convenience of having such an appliance. In any case, kitchen storage is fine, with a decently sized pan cupboard under the cooker and some open shelving to accommodate the everyday essentials that you want close to hand.

WASHROOM

Tell you what – it’s very nice in here; it catches the eye the instant the door is opened, and that initial reaction is rarely too far wide of the mark, is it? Why, the shower cubicle is Swift Group-rivalling in its appeal (yes, it’s THAT good), with a classy, large grey-tiled effect on the walls. It’s very roomy and well-sealed, too.

Although there’s a tray on which you can plonk whatever bottles of stuff you take into the shower with you, there’s another little tray on the shower-head moulded console that inexplicably slopes downwards, meaning you won’t be able to put anything on it. How odd.

There’s storage everywhere, including a fabric laundry bag under the wash-hand

basin: this can be pulled free just by tugging on its Velcro attachments.

The washroom window, like all the side windows on board, features privacy ‘glass’ that is virtually 100 per cent effective. If you climb out the shower having first forgotten to pull the blind, your modesty is guaranteed to remain in situ, unless a passer-by happens to have his or her nose pressed right up against the window, in which case you need to ask yourself serious questions about the class of site you’ve booked yourself on to.

What with that, a compact, wide-opening sunroof and nice lighting, it’s a well-illuminated room, day or night. A nice place to be, day or night.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

The party piece here is surely the mood lighting function (although it’s not made clear whether you should activate this when you’re in a good or a bad mood). Flicking a switch in the relevant front corner illuminates a concealed strip of LEDs behind the overhead lockers on that side.

Actually, with all the other lights killed, a jazz CD on the (standard) stereo and a glass of chilled sauvignon blanc, it does impart a certain sense of well-being. Or was that the sauvignon blanc?

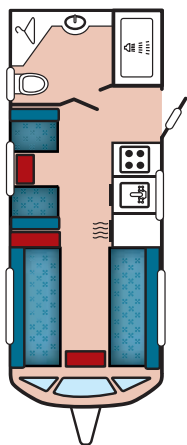
Whatever. The aforementioned stereo’s a good bit of kit: both the head unit and speakers are Sony-branded items that sound terrific, whether in CD or stereo radio mode. The four fixed-bed models in the Crusader range benefit from an additional pair of speakers in the bedroom, which is a real bonus.

The stem reading lights (four in the front lounge and a pair in the side dinette) are a welcome, elegant addition. Indeed, it’s a well-lit caravan throughout, with the exception of you know what (it starts with a ‘k’ and ends in ‘itchen’).

You get a choice of TV viewing locations; on the lift-up shelf between front and side dinettes, or on the front chest. Both are serviced by mains/12V/aerial sockets, this last-mentioned leading to the good old Status omni-directional aerial.

VERDICT

When you go to collect a new Crusader Typhoon (in your necessarily large towcar), you’ll be taking a heck of a lot of caravan away with you. But then you’ll have shelled out not far short of 17 grand for the privilege. It’s just a note of concern about that asking price that stops this excellent caravan from being a nine-out-of-tenner. Think of it as under £1000 a foot, and maybe it becomes a bargain? ■



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