



diff The same, but different



A new Carlight caravan will cost you £25,000 or more. Is it worth it?
BARRY WILLIAMS went to one of the company's open days to find out

FURTHER DETAILS
 Carlight is at 5/7 Tamson Way, Church Lane, Sleaford, Lincs, Tel: 01529 302120 website www.carlight.co.uk

MAIN PICTURE:
 Carlights through the ages, preserved at the factory
INSET: Furniture edging is real oak, with rounded corners fashioned from a solid block
CENTRE Body shell is made by traditional methods

There was a programme on TV recently in which a man promoting Jaguar's new X-Type saloon was justifying the fact that it shares parts with the Ford Mondeo. It's the same with caravans: Thetford toilets, Truma heaters, Electrolux fridges - you find them in new caravans costing £10,000 or £20,000. More to the point, they're all built in the same way.

Spend a bit more, though, and it's a different story. OK, same heaters etc, but if you can afford £25,000 to £30,000 for a new tourer you are in Carlight country, where body panels are hand-made by traditional coach building methods and you can choose almost anything you like in the way of furniture and fabrics. Carlight even makes its own chassis, though the running gear (brakes, couplings, suspension) are bought in.

Because the bodies and chassis are made in the 'old fashioned' way, Carlight craftsmen can take one of their caravans apart and put it back together - which is sometimes what they do with 'factory



warranted' used models. There's always at least a handful of these at the works, reconditioned and fully serviced, and normally at prices from about £8000. When I was there the cheapest was an eight-year-old 15ft two-berth for £7985. From the outside it looked like new.

Carlight aficionados would have noted that the rounded-top door and different windows marked it out from brand new models parked alongside, but the basic body shape is timeless. On the inside you could have guessed the caravan's age from the style of the upholstery

and some of its fixtures and fittings, but that's about all.

Factory-warranted used models are sold with a year's guarantee, after which an annual factory service should them on the road for years. A record is kept of each caravan made.

Carlight has a collection of its caravans from every decade since the 1930s. At the time of my visit the 1940s' representative was undergoing complete renovation by one of the company's skilled workers, most of whom have been with the company for years. Some are beyond retirement age but somehow don't seem able to tear themselves away!

In some ways the Carlight set-up looks old fashioned, but the new 132 demonstrator showed just what can be done by using modern upholstery materials and stylish items like light units.

The 132's interior could have come straight from an up-market fashion magazine, yet when you look at the detail it is pure Carlight - drawers with bowed fronts and dovetailed corner joints, produced by skilled cabinet makers; and solid oak furniture edging with rounded corners cut from solid wood. It's all part of the tradition, and long may it continue.

"you can choose almost anything you want in the way of cabinet work"