

NEW MODELS



Have you ever seen a caravan as opulent as this? Any qualms about a leather-clad caravan being on the tacky side should be put to rest by this unquestionably stunning dinette

Step inside a world of leather

New models brings you two firsts this month: this is the first time we've featured a similar caravan two months in a row; and this is the first 1999 caravan we have seen so far this year.

First, how can we possibly justify featuring what is ostensibly the same caravan – and a darned expensive one at that – twice in a row? Well, the fact that this particular £30,000 Carlight also happens to be a 1999, £30,000 Carlight, is part of the answer.

It takes rather more than that to make a Practical Caravan writer and photographer undertake the considerable haul up to the company's Lincolnshire factory, however, and believe us, there's more to this Commander than meets the eye.

Outwardly, this is little different from last month's

Commander 182 EW, although those new, five-spoke alloy wheels, a first for Carlight, hint at the dash of modernity lurking inside. Otherwise it's all familiar stuff; handsome, lantern-roofed profile; pneumatic jockey wheel, Al-Ko hitch stabiliser; hewn-from-granite door; and rear 'boot'.

Open that incredibly heavy-feeling door however, and it's your nose, not your eyes, that give the game away instantly. It's the sort of smell you get in Rolls-Royces and Daimlers; it's heady and expensive-smelling; it's...leather?

Unbelievable as it may be, Carlight's first 1999



Lavish hide inside dinette, too (above): note the leather curtain tie-backs / pelmet trim

demonstrator is swathed in Connolly leather upholstery – the same stuff the boys at RR swear by – together with a scattering of contrasting window surrounds and pelmets in similar material. It sounds appalling, but it looks – and smells – absolutely terrific.

We first heard about this Commander a month or so ago, and have to confess to being somewhat underwhelmed at the prospect of something as desirable and exclusive as a Carlight being swamped in the sort of tacky leather found in cheap, foreign 4x4 cars. Any thoughts of plastic-look hide were dispelled the second our eyes and nose took in the '99 Commander, however.

The bad news is, the leather of this unique (as we went to press), week-old demonstrator was still drum-tight, and not especially comfortable as a result.

Carlight Director Mandy Hodgson assures us that the hide will mellow over the years and attain that delightful patina of age hitherto confined to



Washroom has had a myriad of tweaks; note the complex, but effective, shower doors

expensive, post-war classic cars, however. It will also soften, she told us, and get a sight more comfortable a sight more quickly.

Closer, examination of the main dinette, the main focal point of this exclusive Commander, reveals the cream-coloured leather to be cool to the touch, contrasting well with the dark greens of the scatter cushions (optional), curtains (complete with leather tie-backs in the same material and colour



Detachable wooden oven cover can double up as a handy tea tray when not in use

as the seats) and rich, warm wood combine to draw the leather out and make what can sometimes be a dark interior uncharacteristically airy and well-lit.

The front seats have also been modified during the past eight months or so to accommodate tilting backrests, which can be adjusted at a more acute angle for comfortable daytime use, and folded flat against the walls for greater bed space at night.

As an incidental note, we were also shown a 1999 single-axle 152 EK model, which features a pull-out double bed, freeing up walk around space along the nearside wall. The 182's tiltable seats are apparently unviable within the smaller bodyshell.

Back in the 182, Mandy took great trouble to point out the other modifications made to the Commander for the new season.

Starting in the end corner washroom, the painstakingly designed shower doors, which



Stainless hob and sink will look familiar, but re-profiled and flush-fitting covers are new



A neat pull-out stool in dressing room is typical of Carlight's thoughtful touches

effectively make a separate shower compartment, have been joined by new, brilliant white cabinets, together with a bigger shower tray, rigid shower hosing and a proper fitted soap dish.

The possibility of all-weather touring is boosted by the simple idea of extending the blown air ducting into the roof lockers. Why this should be the sole preserve of Carlight is unclear; it can't be that expensive a modification for more mainstream manufacturers to make to their caravans, surely.

The new-look kitchen units now sport flush-fitting worktops, the cantilever mechanisms of which operate so smoothly, and with such inch-perfect clearance of surrounding lockers and cupboards that they are a credit to Carlight's cabinet makers. Locker shut lines and door hanging in this thrown-together prototype was just about faultless, by the way.

More additions like the new shelf arrangement over the gas fire, different-style edging to the kitchen work surfaces and a new rear external wet locker, are not quite so evident to the untrained eye, but represent extensive change in Carlight-speak.



Optional five-spoke alloy wheels are only external clue to 1999 model year Commander. The Carlight build quality is as high as ever

Fact file

CARLIGHT COMMANDER 182 EW

Price as tested £29,985

Berths 4

Ex-works weight 1475kg/29cwt

Loading margin 285kg/5.6cwt

Body length 6.1m/20ft 1in

Typical towcar

Range Rover 4.6