

On Test Carthago C-Line 4.8



Words & pictures
by Dave Hurrell

SHARP DRESSER

Carthago Chic C-Line 4.8 on 3.0TD Fiat Ducato Al-Ko

The latest range from Carthago aims to offer high quality and good looks at an attractive price





Carthago and Chic rank among the UK's lesser known brands and ranges, even so, examples remain some of the best motorhomes I've tested to date. One thing that comes across when using a Chic is the high quality of construction: camping in an overcab coachbuilt example, proved the strength and integrity of fixtures and fittings,

while test driving an entrant to the Caravan Club's Design and Drive competition produced one of the quietest A-class vehicles I've ever experienced. In short, Chic seems just about as rock solid as a coachbuilt motorhome can be. With more than half an eye on the mainstream A-class market, German Carthago has decided to realign its Chic brand to offer more than one range: introducing a more affordable version that also has other, laudable aspirations.

Chic C-Line aims to meet competition from the likes of Hymer's B-Class head-on with a price expected to be some 12,000 Euro cheaper than the more upmarket Chics. Cheaper, yes, but the aim is to keep the Chic's high quality construction and distinctive good looks. In addition to this, Chic C-Line is designed to be lighter - in these days of looming driving license restrictions - thus giving a decent payload on a 3500kg MAW chassis.

At least in part, reduced price and weight saving go hand-in-hand: Chic C-line is less bulky than its more expensive siblings, while things such as the lack of double glazing in the cab and swapping wet radiator central heating for a Truma blown-air system save both cost *and* weight. Base vehicle choice keeps costs down too, but the Fiat Ducato that underpins, still does so with the aid of the more expensive Al-Ko low frame chassis. There's a double floor here too: its not as deep as the more expensive Chics, but it's still heated - enclosing all the tanks wiring and plumbing away from the cold and crud of the outside environment.

I NAME THIS CHIC...

Chic C-Line is due to be launched in the UK at October's NEC show, so I was very excited when I got the chance to visit Carthago's Service Center in Germany and be one of the first to test a prototype 'van, well in advance of the launch. The snappily named 4.8 model is actually 7.25 metres long and looks superb - its thickly-clad alloy walls curve towards the GRP roof in the same distinctive way as all the other Chics. Inside, the layout sees an L-shaped lounge upfront, while the galley and washroom take the centre ground. In the rear, a cosy-looking bedroom houses two single beds.

CLOTHES HORSE

The good looking bodywork dresses a Fiat Ducato chassis cowl - its nether regions sporting that low Al-Ko chassis: great, in that this galvanised frame gives independent rear suspension and better ride and handling. Not so great is the handbrake; a good pull is required on the lever to effectively prevent movement once you've parked.

Thankfully, a cab door is a standard fitting where some makers would lever yet more money from your wallet to have one fitted. Don't be disappointed that it's on the UK nearside (and away from the driver's seat on right-hand drive models), the caravan door is on the UK offside, so the nearside cab door provides essential UK kerbside access.

The cab is enhanced by Aguti captain's seats with inbuilt seatbelts, while the test 'van benefited from optional cab air-conditioning and reversing camera with monitor neatly installed in its own specially moulded housing. While on the subject of the rear view, the external mirrors are big, expensive-looking, electrically operated, and heated, all as standard. This is a good thing as the 'van's rear panel is blind: there is no view rearwards through an internal mirror.

The prototype test 'van was fitted with the 3.0-litre engine and six-speed gearbox - a match made in heaven, at least where going forward is concerned. The road test was a short one, and over very smooth German roads where integrity of build was never in question: all remained quiet and everything felt very solid. However, a future full Live-in test might give more opportunity to travel



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further and try a C-Line over more challenging surfaces. Aside from effortless performance and great comfort, this 'van really does give its occupants that special 'off on an adventure' feeling that all the best A-class cabs deliver.

CLASSIC CHIC

The interior benefits from classy-looking cabinets that are 'warm' enough to impart a comfortable atmosphere. The lounge/diner's design is a Continental classic - 'Euro lounge' having become the generic term used to describe the half-dinette layout and side sofa found here.

Reasons for its popularity are many-fold, but its use of swivelled front seats is even more welcome as cab becomes part of the living area and in an A-class it takes advantage of the full width of the interior too. Another skill of this layout is that it provides two three-point belted travel seats in the rear, on the forward-facing dinette seat. Those comfy Aguti cab seats deliver a double whammy, as, once swivelled, they become the best - adjustable armchair - seats in the house.

Come mealtimes the - somewhat obtrusive - table adjusts to provide dining for four. Finally, a touch of luxury is provided by two features, one visible, the other hidden. Very visible above, twixt lounge and kitchen, is a sexy-looking display cabinet, complete with two (Carthago monogrammed) glass tumblers and two wine glasses. Another crowd pleaser is the flat screen TV that pops up from behind the side seat to rest at just the right viewing height. The TV's an option, but once installed, you (or anyone with nefarious intentions) would never know a TV, or even a locker, was fitted.

CHIC CUISINE

Move aft to the kitchen and you're greeted by enough drawers to keep even a dedicated fan like me happy. Drawers in motorhomes are

simply a great idea: no grovelling into the back of cupboards for this Chic's owner, simply look down and you can see anything you might want within easy reach. There's even a slide-out with recycling bins fitted. No less than nine drawers in here - superb!

Latest motorhome fashion dictates cream door and drawer fronts in the kitchen (several brands' have a similar feature for 2009) and I'm told these have 10 coats of paint.

Mmm, as long as the red wine and tomato sauce wipes off okay, I don't mind! Kitchen appliances include a desirable big fridge/freezer; the hob, however, lacks electronic ignition. Oh dear. The sink's drainerless as usual, but at least there's a slab of worktop in front: with some kitchens of this type it's in the back corner, which is less than ideal. Whether there's room for an oven in here I don't know - the curvy kitchen unit might preclude it.





I LIKED

- A Carthago at an attractive price (hopefully)
- Stylish good looks
- Excellent build quality
- Al-Ko chassis
- Double floor
- Cab door as standard
- Captain's seats
- Drawer-based storage in kitchen
- Pop-up TV
- Full-sized garage
- Excellent A-class bed
- Comfy single beds

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Lower set toilet

I DISLIKED

- Shower panel covering washroom lights

- 1 View forward shows L-shaped kitchen behind the classic Euro lounge up front
- 2 Cabinets and upholstery ooze class - Carthago display cabinet with monogrammed glasses add style
- 3 The lounge benefits from an adjustable table and handy side seat
- 4 The galley has comprehensive drawer-based storage
- 5 Big fridge/freezer boasts automatic energy selection
- 6 The compact washroom utilises space well with a semi-separate shower

C-LINE LATHER

The C-line washroom saves space, weight and money, as it's of the semi-separate shower variety and slightly plastic-y. The room is entered via a sliding-panel door that, when left open, allows the deployment of a concertina screen that makes the washroom an en-suite part of the rear bedroom. There's not much floor area behind the screen, but this is a useful feature nonetheless. The main

washroom feature is a swinging panel that hinges across to cover the basin at shower time. A multi-panel sliding screen completes the job of enclosing the shower area.

In spite of being the poor relation of the average Carthago bathing space, this washroom still has all the right bits and bobs. There's a good-sized vanity basin, plenty of countertop, big mirrors and lots of sensibly arranged storage space. The toilet is the latest swivel-bowl model

from Thetford that comes complete with easy-to-service cassette on wheels.

Downsides? Well, this washroom will not be very good for those of generous proportions and the toilet is set a touch too high for comfortable use. Strangely, the swing panel seemed to obscure the lights when in showering mode: an after-dark investigation will be the only way to sort that one out. But, there's always the oft-used phrase: 'this one's a prototype sir!'



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7 A-class bed is easy to deploy and has good headroom

8 Twin single beds have multi-zoned mattresses

9 Flat screen TV pops up from behind the side seat. Heating is courtesy of Truma's latest Combi boiler

10 A dropped rear chassis gives good headroom in the spacious garage

11 Chic C-Line retains the look of its more expensive - and bulkier - siblings



CHIC KIT

The C-Line's double floor is crucial to its success as an all-year-round motorcaravan as it encloses all the tanks, pipes and ducts in a heated environment. Heating is courtesy of Truma's latest Combi unit, which provides hot water and blown-air space heating. The test 'van had a gas-only unit fitted, but I'm told that the gas-mains powered versions will be an option and maybe even standard on right-hand drive UK models.

Lighting is best described as comprehensive: I counted 22, while Carthago has dipped its toe into the uncertain new world of energy saving illumination with a pair of LED-equipped reading lamps in the bedroom.

Less impressive is the rather small leisure battery. Rally and basic campsite fans should budget for an upgrade.

CONCLUSIVELY CHIC?

The C-Line 4.8 is - initially - part of a range of just three models (C-Line 4.2 is a conventional garage model, 4.6, has an island bed layout) even so it made a very favourable impression on me.

So near, it seems, is the C-Line to its more expensive brethren, it must have been a cathartic experience for the designers, as they created a motorhome that seems to retain all the important characteristics of the Carthago brand in a lighter, cheaper package.

In the final analysis it'll be price that decides success or failure for this new range, as will have to compete effectively with the likes of Hymer's famous B-Class. I look forward to carrying out a full Live-in test on a C-line 'van and discovering the prices - in pounds Sterling - when the opportunity to place an order (probably at the NEC show in October) arrives. I, for one, look forward to seeing Carthago C-Line arrive in the UK. ■

CHIC BETWEEN THE SHEETS

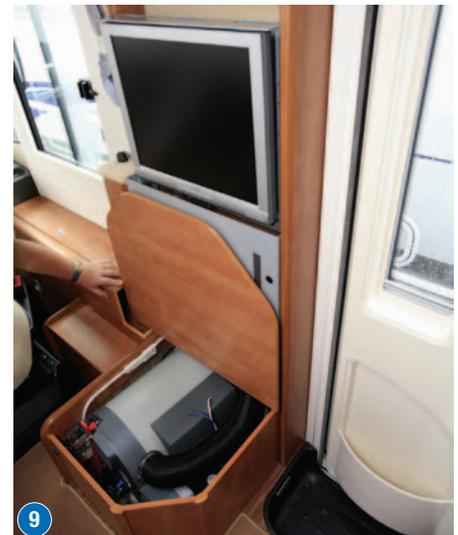
Bedtime brings two choices, with the classic A-class drop-down bed up front and the twin single beds in the rear. Those by-now-famous Aguti cab seats show their mettle once again, as a quarter-turn of their reclining control knobs allows the backrests to easily take a bow. A twist of a control on the underside of the bed's base sees it descent to provide spacious accommodation - coming nice and low down (making it easier to clamber aboard and offering good headroom).

Aft, it's the twin single beds that will be the main reason to buy this motorhome: although one bed is shorter than the other, they should suit most (different height) him 'n' her couples fine. Mattresses are 'zoned' for comfort: no less than seven areas provide different densities to cater for the pressure points of

shoulders, trunk hips, legs, feet, etc. Access to the beds is up some steps, but still easy. A slide-out panel and an extra cushion almost fills the lengthways space between the two - providing near-double status.

C-LINE CLOSETS

Step outside and open the big side-hinged door in the offside rear and you'll discover a 'proper' garage big enough for bikes and other kit - even a mobility scooter. A combination of raised single beds inside and dropped rear chassis outside allow the installation of this tall locker. Inside, overhead locker doors have positive locking with damped slam latches that are easy to use. Wardrobes are two in number, one twixt kitchen and (UK) nearside bed, one under the foot of that bed. opposite, another - shelved-cupboard lives under the other bed's foot.



TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

CARTHAGO CHIC C-LINE 4.8

- **Price as tested:** TBA
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato Al-Ko chassis cab, 3.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 157bhp, six-speed gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Two years base vehicle, three years conversion, 10 years water ingress
- **Dimensions:** Length: 7.25m (23ft 9.5in); width: 2.27m (7ft 5.5in); height: 2.89m (9ft 6in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 3500kg
- **Payload:** 400kg (after allowances for driver, fresh water, fuel, gas)
- **Belted seats:** 4 (including driver)
- **Beds:** In-cab drop-down double: 1.97m x 1.60m, headroom: 840mm (6ft 5.5in x 5ft 3in x 2ft 9in). Rear fixed singles: offside: 1.88m x 760mm (6ft 2in x 2ft 6in); nearside: 1.92m x 760mm (6ft 3.5in x 2ft 6in); headroom 900mm (2ft 11.5in)
- **Kitchen:** Cramer stainless steel sink with

- hinged glass lid and chrome swivelling mixer tap; Cramer three-burner hob with hinged glass lid, no ignition; Dometic RM7605L fridge/freezer with Automatic Energy Selection, capacity 142 litres; single-speed cooker hood
- **Washroom:** Thetford C 250 cassette with electric flushing, oval plastic vanity basin, semi-separate shower with swing-panel basin protector, rigid multi-panel screen, twin-outlet tray
- **Heating:** Truma Combi 6 water and space heating with blown-air, gas-only operation
- **Water tanks:** Fresh water: Inboard, capacity 110 litres (24.2 gallons). Waste water: Inboard, capacity 110 litres (24.2 gallons)
- **Options fitted to test vehicle:** Cab air-conditioning, 3.0-litre, engine, reversing camera and monitor, flat screen TV (prices TBA)

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VEHICLE LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

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