

# FAMILY VALUES

## Swift Sundance 630L on 2.3TD Fiat Ducato

*The popular Sundance range has had a minor makeover, and it's now looking better value than ever before. We meet up with the family-friendly range-topper*



### I LIKED

- Excellent specification to price to quality ratios
- Genuine improvements over outgoing models
- National Caravan Council approved and built to whole vehicle type approval standards

### I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More family-friendly fittings

### I DISLIKED

- Showering set-up



Words and pictures by Nick Harding



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- 1 Looking back from the cab, the kitchen and Pullman dinette give way to the amidships bathroom
- 2 Caravan door will have new lock with two locking points like this
- 3 The rear lounge is spacious and very comfortable



Let's put this into context. Swift's Sundance range is part of a family (Swift's words, not mine), which, with its Ace and Bessacarr E400 series siblings, represents what I am told is Britain's best selling

motorhome range.

Family is an appropriate word here, because it is the range-topping six-berth 630L we're looking at in this test. Catering for up to six people in the confines of a motorhome is never going to be straightforward, which is probably why Swift has chosen to stick with a successful format for this motorhome. The

layout certainly featured in the company's 2007 range - large rear lounge, offside centre washroom, nearside kitchen opposite double dinette - but what has changed is the specification, with much more included for the basic price (which has only increased by a smidgin).

The 2008 Sundance range can be found at Swift retailers now, but don't feel you need to rush off to look at one. You could always go online first and check out the [swiftleisure.co.uk](http://swiftleisure.co.uk) and [newsundance.co.uk](http://newsundance.co.uk) web sites. They're ideal for checking relevant facts, figures, measurements and more. Plus, and I love this, as you tick off which options you're



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considering, not only does it update prices it also recalculates mass in running order and payload figures. Superb. I'm sure there's even a button I've missed that tells you how much your wallet weighs once you've completed the whole transaction.

Seriously, aspects like this, alongside a wide network of UK retailers, add up to an excellent all-round Swift package. The Sundance range has been a bestseller since its original launch in 2002, and I'm confidently assured that this motorhome family (and its dealer special derivatives) currently accounts for one in ten of all new motorhome sales.

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

As you've no doubt noticed, Swift has used this latest incarnation to jazz up the exterior graphics a bit. The bodywork stays simple, with smooth aluminium sides. That large overcab pod is in GRP, while the rear panel is vacuum-formed ABS. Making a swan of Fiat's ugly duck Ducato was never going to be easy, but Swift's design team has achieved this with some aplomb.

A quick look underneath reveals both the

# On Test Swift Sundance 630L

4 Overhead locker provision is generous, and they're shelved

5 Wardrobe shares its space with, among other things, the freestanding table

6 Overcab bed is generous in its overall dimensions, including headroom and accessibility. One-piece, sprung mattress is on a slatted base

7 Front dinette includes four fully belted travel seats

8 Rear lounge can provide twin single beds or, as here, a large transverse double, with the comfort of a slatted base and sprung cushions

9 Dinette bed is the trickiest to make up, but you do get a usable double



fresh and waste water tanks are underslung. They look a bit near ground level to me, but Swift assures there's no problem and the waste tank towards the rear meets departure angle regulations. Incidentally, that waste water outlet is exactly how it should be – large bore, sturdy and easy to operate thanks to a handle that's man enough for the job.

Equally noteworthy is the new caravan door. It comes with a proper lock, plus there are now locking points at the top and bottom. It's an altogether more substantial affair than previous offerings – and a welcome one. There's also a relatively fuss-free flyscreen at this door, and the electric step retracts automatically should you attempt to drive off with it still down.

## APPROVAL RATINGS

As with all motorhomes from the Swift Group, this Sundance is built with forthcoming whole vehicle type approval legislation (as we already have with cars) in mind.

Base vehicle for the 630L is Fiat's long wheelbase Ducato 4005kg MTPLM chassis cab powered by the excellent 130bhp turbo-diesel engine with six-speed gearbox.

Keen to be seen to be doing the right thing, Swift has stayed clear of the temptation of using the 3500kg rated chassis, which was never going to bode well for a vehicle designed to accommodate up to six people. This is a laudable decision, giving the 630L a decent 695kg payload in standard trim, which is easily within the 'industry practice' 100kg per person guideline. Bear in mind, also, that Swift's mass in running order calculation includes 90 per cent of fresh water and gas capacities – so it gives a pretty realistic

payload figure.

Work in the cab has been kept to a minimum. The seats are reupholstered to match the rest of the conversion, and there's a removable floor carpet piece. All the cab windows boast sliding blinds. Air-conditioning remains an option, but it isn't cheap.

## SUNDANCE KIT

If the bodywork is relatively straightforward, the interior spec has been given a real lift. It's not just a question of adding a few extra bits and pieces here and there; Swift has genuinely thought things through and taken the opportunity to add real improvement, albeit always keeping a wary eye on the all-important list price.

Take the Truma dual-fuel space heater, configured for use in transit as well as on site. This involves a modification to the flue plus a different regulator that shuts off in case of gas escape. You still need to turn it off at, say, fuel stations but, even if you haven't got rear passengers (in which case, are you sure you have the right model?) it can be used to warm the interior before you arrive on site and start putting the kettle on/corner steadies down etc.

I actually take issue with the warm air outlets, as I feel, at above ankle height, they are set slightly too high, but I'm happy to concede to Swift that it's never counted as a problem.

On with the kit count: also new in latest Sundances are central locking to the cab and caravan doors, roller blinds and flyscreens to the caravan windows, single-action push-buttons for the main locker doors, a bigger fridge... the list goes on.

Factory-fitted options extend to wind-out



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awning, towbar and electrics (again with type approval in mind), and lockable roof rack and ladder with 50kg load capacity. In unladen state, the rack is no higher than the existing heater cowl, thus adding nothing to the overall height.

A Blaupunkt satnav unit/reversing camera system with colour screen - and sound (you have been warned!) - looks something of a snip at £645. It even operates on infrared for night-time manoeuvres and there's now postcode entry for destinations (something frustratingly missing from earlier versions).

Even given the extra specification, the price rise is just 1.5 per cent over 2007 models. Indeed, this represents Sundance's first increase in some two years. How do they do it? 'Design and manufacturing efficiencies,' is the official Swift line. With the company on course to build some 2500 motorhomes this year, and caravan production taking its total leisure vehicle output over the 15,000 mark, it's easy to see there must be some economies of scale.

### KIDS TO BED

This may be a so-called budget vehicle, but the overcab and rear beds have the luxury of slatted bases. You've the option of twin singles or a transverse double at the rear. Whichever you choose, make up is easy. A real bonus is the generously spacious overcab bed. Simply remove the ladder from its clips (there's also some useful storage space here), pull the bed down on its struts and you have a superior double. The mattress is sprung, as indeed are all the cushions throughout. I would have liked a shelf or pocket up here.

My other key query regarded why the reading light was one side of the overcab bed and the window the other. Swift reckons this arrangement leaves the reader with clear wall as headboard, thus preventing anyone putting their head through the window blind!

The final bed is made from the dinette, and is the trickiest to assemble of the three areas, although it does provide another reasonably sized double.

Storage is another aspect where I think this Sundance is a real winner.

Of course, putting the tanks underneath leaves no end of storage in the seat bases, where it's nice and low down - a useful feature in such a tall vehicle.

Plus, there's a generous amount of roof locker space. There's even netting for use if you leave the overcab bed down. And there's exterior access to the nearside rear settee base.

The wardrobe looks large on the outside, but it shares its space with the table, heater and some of the gas locker, though this still leaves plenty of hanging space.

The rear lounge is where most of the living will be done. A mini Heki rooflight helps with daytime lighting over this area, while there's a generous provision of nightlights throughout.

### MAKING MEALS

A motorhome built with family use in mind needs a good kitchen, right? Well one's almost class leader - only lacking a little in worktop. There's a full Stoves cooker, including electric hotplate (ideal if you want to save on gas while hooked up to mains on site). Just possibly, Stoves makes the best motorhome cookers, though rival Spinflo may have something to



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say about this.

Complementing the cooking space, Thetford's fridge has a family-sensitive 112-litre capacity and automatic energy selection. The sink is good old stainless steel, with neat accompanying chopping board and drainer that store in the kitchen cupboard when not needed. This is the type of feature where British 'vans score over imported rivals, the latter rarely offering stowage for such items when travelling. (I dread to think what damage a flying chopping board could do in the event of an accident.)

There are two key overhead lockers for the kitchen - one considerably larger than the other (houses plate and cup racks) is unshelved, so there's space for the cereal packets etc. A cupboard between cooker and fridge has a slide-out drawer and wire tray. Plus, the floor locker under the cooker is ideal for pans. The cutlery drawer tucks neatly under the drainer. Everything is well thought out.

In the double dinette opposite the kitchen, a single-leg table attaches to the wall, with a slot in the floor for extra stability. There's also

a freestanding table for use in conjunction with the flip-over top in the rear lounge. Those tables give every impression of being sturdy, but pick them up and you'll note their lightness.

### WASHROOM

Swift has tried something different here, and I'm not sure it worked.

The washbasin is on a hinged false wall, the theory being it swings through 90 degrees and out of the way to create a properly lined shower cubicle. The final part of this manoeuvre is a splash-screen hinged from the back of the washroom door. It all takes a certain amount of dexterity. Space is at a premium, and when I tried this, my natural inclination was to step onto the wheel arch to give myself as much space as possible, but the cover here didn't seem too happy at taking my weight.

It's something you'll have to try out for yourself at a dealer or show. All feedback is welcome, of course. I tried out a similar arrangement that worked much better in an end-kitchen layout model.

On more positive notes, the washroom boasts Thetford's new C250 toilet, with wheeled holding tank, the acrylic floor and walls should be easy to clean, there are a couple of spotlights and a rooflight, plus an overhead locker. Oh, and the door has a proper, domestic-quality catch and handle.

I still take issue with all manufacturers of so-called family vehicles who fail to provide anything like the right amount of coat and towel hooks, although I did have a chuckle at Swift's assertion that, with six towels in the washroom, there's unlikely to be any space to get a person in!

### SWIFT CONCLUSION

The UK's most successful motorhome family grows up. It's a tried and trusted theme, simply enhancing what has been a winning formula for Swift.

Expect it to win most shoot-outs in the value for money stakes. Plus, with Euro-priced models taking a sudden hike in cost at the start of the year, this is beginning to look like, literally, one of the biggest bargains of 2008.

## TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

### PRICE

- **Price from:** £38,925 OTR
- **Price as tested:** £39,375 OTR
- **Base vehicle:** Fiat Ducato chassis cab; 2.3-litre turbo-diesel engine producing 130bhp; six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Warranty:** Three years base vehicle and conversion
- **Dimensions:** Length: 7.34m (24ft 1in); width 2.24m (7ft 4in, mirrors folded); height 3.05m (10ft 0in)
- **Maximum authorised weight:** 4005kg
- **Payload:** 695kg (after habitation allowance)

- **Belted seats:** six, including driver
- **Beds:** Lounge double: 2.07m x 1.47m (6ft 10in x 4ft 10in); alternative singles: both 1.90m x 700mm (6ft 3in x 2ft 3.5in). Overcab double: 1.90m x 1.36m (6ft 3in x 4ft 6in). Dinette double: 1.87m x 1.22m (6ft 2in x 4ft 0in)
- **Other features:** Stoves cooker with three gas rings, one electric hotplate, grill and oven; 112-litre Thetford fridge; stainless steel sink with removable plastic cover and drainer; Thetford C250 swivel-bowl electric-flush toilet; separate shower with door and hinged sink bulkhead; Truma gas/230V Ultraheat space

## SWIFT SUNDANCE 630L

- heater with blown-air; Truma Ultrastore water heater (10-litre capacity); 90-litre fresh water tank; 68-litre waste water tank; gas capacity 2 x 7kg cylinders
- **Options fitted to test vehicle:** Rear roof rack and ladder (£450)
- **Other options available:** Detachable towbar and electrics (£425), wrap-around seating (in lieu of chest of drawers) (£100), 16in alloy wheels (£725), cab air-conditioning (£875), Blaupunkt satnav system with colour reversing camera - including sound (£645), awning (£495)

E&OE

**10** In spite of Thetford's latest electric flush toilet, a decent sized hand basin, and acrylic walls, this washroom didn't quite work for me

**11** Kitchen boasts excellent specification, though it's a little lean on worktop

**12** With all the doors open, you can see that kitchen storage has been well thought out

**13** Roof rack and ladder are among a handful of tempting options

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