

Words and pictures by
Andrew & Rona Bromley



CI CARIOCA 400



BUNKING OFF

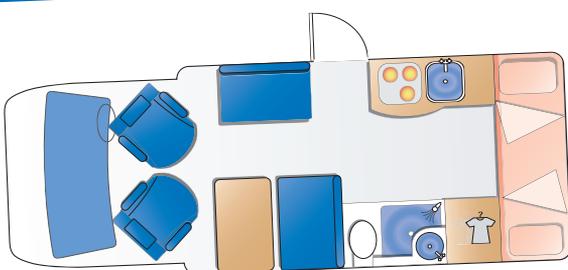
Compact family-friendly 'vans compared - one an Italian coachbuilt, one a brand-new British high top



This month, two very dissimilar converters tackle the perennial problem of providing compact family accommodation with bunk bed-based designs.

Both 'vans are around six metres long, carry four travellers and cost under the psychologically important £40,000 mark - almost 'budget' 'van territory nowadays. However, more diverse products, from more different companies, would be hard to imagine.

The Solaris is the latest of a range of three panel van conversions produced by WildAx on the long wheelbase Citroën Relay. This young company has just moved from Keighley, West Yorkshire, to larger premises nearby in Elland, to cope with burgeoning demand. Unusually, WildAx chooses Citroën Relay base vehicles, though they're nearly identical to Fiat's Ducato, and even closer to Peugeot's Boxer. All are built at the Sevel factory in Italy. Only the double chevron on the nose distinguishes the Relay externally from the others, but Citroën does



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 6.19m (20ft 4in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)



1 The Ford cockpit is well specified, with cruise control and twin airbags

2 Production 'vans will have the reversing camera, cruise control and passenger airbag missing here

WILDAX SOLARIS



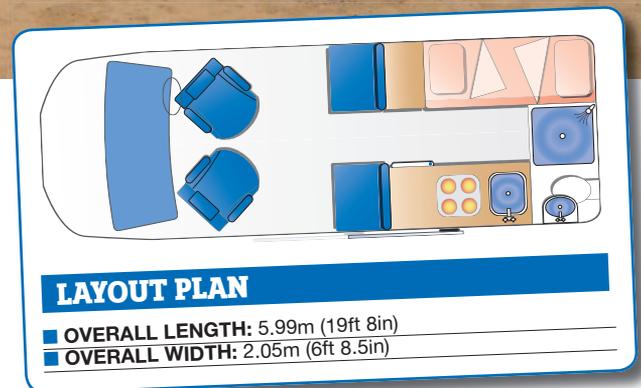
add some very desirable standard fittings.

Swivelling cab seats and two forward-facing travel seats, one on each side, form the Solaris lounge. Aft of the (UK nearside) side sliding door is the kitchen and across the rear, the washroom. Aft on the offside, is a floor-to-ceiling storage unit, then two longitudinal bunks.

CI's 400 (CI is part of French giant, Trigrano's empire), produced in Tuscany, is named Carioca 400 for 2010 - although our example was badged Cusona (the 'van is also available as a Roller-Team 400). Apart

from different upholstery and decals, they're all identical - as is the price, which comfortably undercuts Solaris.

The Carioca is based on the Ford Transit front-wheel drive chassis cab. A modestly sized coachbuilt (seeming larger because of its hefty luton), it claims five berths, but only has four travel seats. CI 'vans reputedly provide excellent value for money - economics



helped by large-scale production.

The (UK offside) habitation door - with inset step - accesses a typical half-dinette-based layout, with wall-mounted table on the nearside, two swivelling cab seats and an inward-facing 'dickie' seat forward of the doorway. Aft of the dinette is the washroom and wardrobe. Opposite is the kitchen: two bunks sit across the rear.

MOTIVE POWER

All front-wheel drive Transits are powered by 2.2-litre turbo-diesel engines - just with varying output: in Carioca's case, 115bhp. A more powerful 140bhp variant is an option, and both have six-speed gearboxes.

Citroën's 2.2-litre Hdi engines are based on the same Ford design, here delivering 120bhp and again, through a six-speed 'box. Solaris also offers the 3.0-litre (157bhp) engine as an option.

Both 'vans are on 3500kg chassis, giving excellent payloads: Carioca claims around 790kg, Solaris (not yet weighbridge-tested) is expected to carry around 650kg. Both should be ample for four occupants and clobber.

2



CI CARIOCA 400



3 Here, the bunks are arranged across the far rear

4 Midships kitchen and washroom lead on to a half-dinette front end

5 The table is a stretch from the swivelled cab seats

6 The kitchen is quite well equipped, but storage is compromised

WE LIKED

- Good value for money
- Base vehicle and its high specification
- Comfy, spacious beds for four
- Spare wheel included

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Adjustable steering wheel
- Easier to read trip computer
- A combi oven/grill
- Reading lights

WE DISLIKED

- Flimsy washroom fittings
- Obstructive curtain tracks
- Rough finish to some woodwork

ROAD MANNERS

Solaris is a more aerodynamic panel van, and the engine coped well with the steep Pennine roads surrounding Keighley. Already run-in, our test vehicle was super to drive. I love the Sevel driving position, with its comfy seats, steering wheel adjustable for reach and sweet gearchange. There's no interior rearward vision, but door mirrors give good visibility, while production 'vans will benefit from Citroën's reversing camera.

Solaris was reasonably quiet on the move, only the television bracket rattling. Lacking cab blinds (WildAx supplies insulated internal screens), visibility was unimpaired; helpful, as the Relay's thick A-pillars mean care is required at junctions. Reversing uphill produced some clutch smell, but no vibration - indeed, our own Transit would behave similarly. Fuel consumption? The short test route we drove was - unrepresentative of a mixed-conditions test - steep and crowded: I'd normally expect around 30mpg, rather than the mid-20s achieved.

Carioca had but twelve miles on the clock (so I didn't press the motor overmuch), but it accelerated briskly to around 60mph. Above that, the big Luton made its presence felt: the 'van would do seventy or more, but fuel consumption might become prohibitive. 22.3mpg was unimpressive, and should improve over time. However, we drove a flat, Shropshire route and were unladen, so I'd only expect around 25mpg.

The Carioca drove nicely - the Transit's supple suspension giving a smooth, un-wallowy ride. Long-armed door mirrors, though less useful than Citroën's 'elephant ears,' gave a reasonable view, while a small, low-mounted rear window offered useful glimpses of the road immediately behind. If positioned more centrally, it'd be better still. The usual Transit cab characteristics feature a good gearchange, comfortable seats (if rather too high, even on lowest setting) and driving position dictated by a fixed steering wheel. Again, no cab blinds - Carioca also relies on internal insulated screens - so visibility proved unimpeded.

For a coachbuilt, Carioca's interior was commendably quiet and, having a relatively short (3.30-metre) wheelbase, it manoeuvred easily.

Carioca had good levels of cab equipment, with passenger airbag and cruise control. These 'our' Solaris lacked, though production 'vans will have them, plus Citroën's standard-fit Traffic-Master satnav, a tracking device and a reversing camera.

Cab air-conditioning is optional on both.

As expected, and although both vehicles drive and handle well, the panel van had better all-round road performance than its bluff coachbuilt opponent. But will its slimmer body compromise interior space and comfort?

LOUNGE AND DINE

Featuring blond wood furniture, soft pale upholstery, beige-speckled removable carpets (over a brown parquet-effect vinyl floor) and fawn fabric-covered lounge walls, Solaris' interior has a pleasing subdued appeal, though it will probably mark easily.

With cab seats turned, and the two large recline-able travel seats, Solaris has the makings of a cosy lounge, although this prototype had unresolved problems. For instance, the driver's seat-swivel collided with the applied handbrake (a revised swivel design is promised) and when turned, the seats are close to a substantial step down: dangling legs result. The large, soft rear seats can be moved forward (via awkwardly-

placed handles and stiff mechanisms: improved systems are in design), allowing the seats to recline. Pull out and flatten the offside seat, fetch the backrest cushion from the bunk room and an excellent settee results. The travel seats have solid-looking metal frames, shortly to be crash-tested: WildAx is currently seeking Type Approval for its range.

The freestanding table (stowed behind the nearside rear seat) overwhelms available floor space, and is too low for use from the cab seats. Indeed, with table positioned, the cab seats must face inwards - there's nowhere for your legs, while access is awkward even to the travel seats. WildAx, keenly aware of this, intends pre-production revisions. Lighting is good, with a Remis rooflight overhead and opening acrylic windows in the sliding door and opposite wall. Two LED ceiling light clusters are on either side, augmented by LED spotlights for reading and WildAx's trademark, blue LED 'mood-lighting' behind overhead cabinets. Lastly, a high-level 15-inch LCD TV is bracket-mounted. Production models will have a dedicated television cupboard.

Carioca's décor also features pale wood, with contrasting cream stripe on overhead locker fronts. The woodwork doesn't ooze quality, like its rival's, but is serviceable. There's no carpet (an optional extra) the floor being practical, strip-wood-effect vinyl. The upholstery is more patterned beige, feeling firmer and more wear-worthy than in Solaris.

The half-dinette-based lounge in Carioca is typically Continental, comprising a forward-facing seat containing two belted travel seats, and a heavy, wall-mounted table with folding leg. The table is a stretch from the swivelled cab seats, but if the extension leaf is deployed, it's reachable from the inward-facing side seat. The step up into the cab is lower than that in the Solaris, and there's room to move around the table, courtesy of the 'van's greater width. The dinette seatback isn't raked though, and only one person could lounge, feet-up, using the cab seats facing together (possible in Solaris, too, which also boasts the lounge settee conversion).

Carioca's lounge lighting is less futuristic, providing a ceiling fluorescent dome and fluorescent strips under the overhead lockers above the seats. There's a small, wind-up rooflight, but the effect is less bright and upmarket than its rival's. However, we must remember the price difference; this is unashamedly a budget family 'van.

We preferred the greater lounging comfort of the British machine, but Carioca has a table where four or five could dine - Solaris' current (prototype) table proved problematic.

COOK'S QUARTERS

Carioca is a Continental motorhome, so one expects a more Spartan kitchen - and this is the case, though it has more kit than some competitors. A combined stainless steel sink (with mixer-tap, but no draining board) and three-burner hob have glass lids. They're set into a slate-effect worktop with some usable surface to one side. A 230V socket is set into the unit's front. Under the sink, there's a good-sized cutlery drawer, with

WILDAX SOLARIS



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WE LIKED

- Base vehicle and its high specification (production 'vans)
- Practical, sturdily made washroom
- Quality and finish of woodwork
- Tambour cupboard doors
- Spare wheel included

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A work-surface/drainer next to the kitchen sink
- Easier mechanism to move lounge seats
- Modification for carrying bikes in lower bunk space

WE DISLIKED

- The current table and dining arrangements
- Lack of footrest for swivelled cab seats

7 Lounge, looking forward, with over-large table

8 Solaris' bunks are sited lengthways on the offside

9 Offside travel seat also makes a comfy settee

On Test CI Carioca 400 & WildAx Solaris

a large un-shelved cupboard below. Under the hob - where you'd expect more storage room - a big door reveals a shallow space above a plain sheet of board, held very insecurely by magnetic catches. When it's removed (or falls off!) the Truma Combi heater is revealed: a very odd design!

Rearwards, a cabinet protrudes into the aisle, and houses a Thetford three-way fridge, topped by a Smev grill. Above, a useful surface (with fiddle rail) has its own mains socket.

Solaris is a British 'van, and proudly so, therefore it must have a *proper* cooker. In the middle of the kitchen unit (under a small window) stands a full-sized Spinflo Caprice stove, with four-burner hob, oven, grill and pan cupboard. The cooker is set into a durable mottled-effect work surface that's of higher quality than Carioca's. In the corner sits a stainless steel sink with 'Chinchilla' glass lid. A small metal draining-rack attaches, when the lid is raised. There's a small (removable) plastic draining board, but to use it, the cooker lid must be down - and cool. To the cooker's right is the fridge - the same Thetford design and size as Carioca's. Above the fridge is the main work surface and a most useful pull-out extension. On the offside, opposite the fridge, is a fancy larder unit below a capacious drawer. There are more ceiling-mounted LED light clusters above the kitchen, and a small over-sink LED strip-light.

In Carioca, a combi oven/grill would have been appreciated, rather than just a mere grill, while placing the heater elsewhere would improve storage.

Clearly, Solaris has the better kitchen, and many Brits will love the ability to produce a full roast. Rona had doubts, considering the cooker too big for the 'van and its likely use, and preferring a work surface next to the sink, where it's most needed.

BATHING SPACE

CI has placed Carioca's washroom amidships, behind a grey tambour door, which reveals



10 The shower head doubles as basin tap and gets in the way. A rigid screen encloses the showering area

11 Dinette 'tadpole' bed is very narrow at its foot



11

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

CI CARIOCA 400

PRICE

- From: £35,028 OTR
- As tested: £35,728 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Berths: 4/5
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle 3 years, conversion 2 years, water ingress 4 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Overcab coachbuilt, GRP clad sandwich construction. Caravan entrance on UK offside
- Length: 6.19m (20ft 4in)*
- Width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*
- Height: 2.90m (9ft 6in)*
- Wheelbase: 3.30m (10ft 10in)*
- Rear Overhang: 2.00m (6ft 7in)
- Maximum Authorised Weight: 3500kg
- Payload: 790kg (after the vehicle in running order, driver @75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, 100 per cent gas)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Ford Transit chassis cab
- Engine: 2.2-litre TD producing 115bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: Rigid axle on leaf springs
- Features: Spare wheel, electrically-operated and heated mirrors, electrically-operated windows, adjustable cab seats, cruise control, trip computer, driver and passenger airbags, remote cab central locking, fog lights, front mud flaps, fittings for bike rack

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats and luton overcab bed, ahead of nearside half-dinette, offside single seat, nearside kitchen, offside washroom, transverse bunks/garage at rear
- Insulation: Floor 48mm, walls and roof 31mm
- Interior Height: 2.01m (6ft 7in)

KITCHEN

- Sink and cooker: Smev stainless steel sink combined with three-burner hob with glass lids, mixer tap, manual ignition
- Fridge: Thetford N106 three-way with freezer compartment. Capacity 97 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford C250 swivel-bowl with wheeled cassette
- Basin: Fixed plastic unit, shower mixer/head doubles as tap
- Shower: Integral shower has curved, sliding and folding translucent plastic screen, mixer tap as above

BEDS

- Overcab double
- Length: 2.01m (6ft 7in)
- Width: 1.68m (5ft 6in)
- Headroom: 690mm (2ft 3in) max
- Dinette single
- Length: 2.16m (7ft 1in)
- Width: 1.18m (3ft 10.5in) max, 460mm (1ft 6in) min
- Rear bunks
- Length: 2.08m (6ft 10in)
- Width: 790mm (2ft 7in)
- Headroom: Top: 660mm (2ft 2in). Bottom: 700mm (2ft 3.5in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh Water tank: Inboard 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste Water tank: Underslung 105 litres (23.1 gallons)
- Space and Water Heating: Truma Combi 4 boiler with blown-air, gas-only operation
- Leisure battery: 85 amp hr
- Gas: 1x 15kg cylinder
- Lighting: 1 small fluorescent to each bunk/overcab bed, fluorescent ceiling domes over dinette, between kitchen and washroom, in washroom. 2 halogens above washbasin. Strip fluorescents above kitchen, dinette, side seat
- Sockets: 230V: 4 (1 in single seat base front, 1 above dinette, 2 in kitchen) 12V: 1 (above dinette)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: Dynamic Pack - central locking, electric windows, radio/CD, passenger airbag, front fog lights, colour-coded grille (£700)
 - Conversion: None
- Other options
- Base: None
 - Conversion: Gas/mains powered heating (£595), caravan door flyscreen (£212), carpets (£106), bike rack (£130), anti-frost pack (£249), roof rack and ladder (£457)

E&OE



HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

WILDAX SOLARIS

PRICE

- From: £39,995 OTR
- As tested: £40,920 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (including driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle, conversion and water ingress 3 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Steel-bodied panel van
- Length: 5.99m (19ft 8in)*
- Width: 2.05m (6ft 8.5in)*
- Height: 2.65m (8ft 8.5in)*
- Wheelbase: 4.03m (13ft 2.5in)*
- Rear Overhang: 1.01m (3ft 3.5in)
- Maximum Authorised Weight: 3500kg
- Payload: 650kg (estimated)

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Citroen Relay LWB high roof van
- Engine: 2.2-litre turbo diesel producing 120bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round with ABS
- Suspension: Front: Independent on coil springs. Rear: rigid axle on leaf springs
- Features: (Production vehicles) Spare wheel, electrically operated and heated mirrors, electrically operated windows, adjustable cab seats, cruise control, trip computer, driver and passenger airbags, remote cab central locking, Citroën satnav, tracking device and reversing camera

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats ahead of two forward-facing travel seats, nearside kitchen, offside cupboards and wardrobe, washroom in nearside rear, longitudinal bunks in offside rear
- Insulation: Floor, walls and roof 12mm
- Interior Height: 1.89m (6ft 2.5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: stainless steel bowl, mixer tap, 'Chinchilla' glass lid, removable plastic drainer, plastic bowl, metal draining rack, chopping board
- Cooker: Spinflo Caprice Mk III stove with four-burner hob under glass lid, oven, separate grill. All with electronic ignition
- Fridge: Thetford N104, three-way with freezer compartment. Capacity 97 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford C200 swivel-bowl cassette
- Basin: Drop-down plastic bowl with mixer tap
- Shower: Integral shower tray with single drain-hole, separate shower mixer/ head

BEDS

- Lounge transverse double
- Length: 1.84m (6ft 0.5in)
- Width: 1.30m (4ft 3in)
- Rear bunks
- Length: 1.84m (6ft 0.5in)
- Width: Top: 660mm (2ft 2in). Bottom: 730mm (2ft 5in)
- Headroom: Top: 660mm (2ft 2in). Bottom: 700mm (2ft 3.5in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh Water tank: Underslung, insulated, heated 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste Water tank: Underslung, insulated, heated 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Space and Water Heating: Truma Combi 4E boiler with blown-air, gas/mains operation
- Leisure battery: 105 amp hr
- Gas: Underslung tank, capacity 16 litres (approx 8kg)
- Lighting: 2 21-LED clusters to ceiling on both sides of lounge, 2 single LED reading lights under offside high-level cupboards, 2 LED clusters to ceiling above kitchen, 1 4-LED strip over sink, 1 LED cluster outside washroom, 2 LED clusters over each bunk bed, 1 LED cluster to ceiling above wardrobe, High-level blue LED mood lights in kitchen and lounge
- Sockets: 230V: 3 (2 in kitchen, 1 in bunk bed base) 12V: 3 (1 above lower bunk, 2 adjacent to control panel)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- Fitted to test vehicle
- Base: metallic paint (£325)
- Conversion: 3.70m wind-out awning (£600)
- Other options
- Base: Cab air-conditioning (£800)
- Conversion: External gas outlet (£80), bike rack (£220)

E&OE

wood-effect walls to the right, enclosing Thetford's C250 swivel-bowl toilet. Straight ahead (finished in grey and white wipe-clean plastic) is the shower area and fixed washbasin.

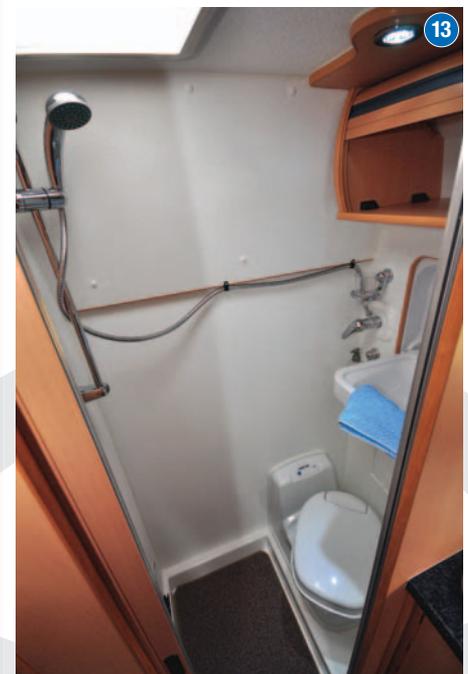
Above the loo there's an opening translucent (blind-less) window, an un-shelved wooden cupboard and two hooks. The shower area, within the one-piece moulded floor, is roughly circular, with one drain hole. A sliding plastic shower screen pulls round partway, then unfolds: it works, though seems somewhat waffly. The washbasin unit includes a plastic corner cupboard, with mirrored door and three useful shelves. The mixer tap/showerhead doubles as the basin tap using two not-very-strong-looking brackets, one at higher level for showering, the other mounts the showerhead low over the basin. This really interferes with washing or teeth cleaning. There's reasonable illumination in here, with two halogen spots and a fluorescent ceiling light.

Solaris' washroom is also entered via a tambour door that's colour-matched to the woodwork. Another Thetford loo is fitted, the older design C200 (though this still boasts a swivelling bowl). We were pleased to see a sizeable - space-saving - drop-down washbasin above the loo with its own tap. Above, there's an un-shelved tambour-doored cupboard for toiletries. With toothbrush 'mug,' soap dispenser, towel ring, robe hook and toilet-roll holder, this washroom is well equipped. The shower has good headroom and there's no clammy curtain, as the washroom door is plastic. The sturdy shower tray has a front-sited single drain hole.

We would have preferred smoother wallboard, but this is a practical washroom. We think it more durable than the Carioca's, and it has a better basin and tap arrangement.

BED TIME

Bunk beds are always popular with children, and are far better than expecting them - or un-mated adults - to share a double.



12 Kitchen landscape: full cooker, but no drainer

13 A practical washroom should do the job well

On Test CI Carioca 400 & WildAx Solaris



14 Big, comfy overcab bed, with good headroom

15 Carioca's bunks are bigger, with thick, supportive mattresses

16 The bottom bunk lifts, helping to create a narrow garage

Solaris' lengthways bunks slot alongside the washroom, twixt wardrobe and offside rear door. There's a short metal ladder to reach the top bunk and a (removable) guard to keep sleepers safely ensconced. The top bunk's hefty metal frame has sprung slats, and hinges upwards and away, enabling the (slightly wider), lower bunk to be used as a settee. These bunks are comfortable, but are slightly short for adults at 1.84m (6ft 0.5in). Both have reading lights, but no blind is supplied for the rear window - it would doubtless be kicked. Instead, there's a removable screen.

Solaris' lounge bed is formed by pulling the lounge seats forward 'till flat, then filling the central gap with a hard-backed cushion normally stored on the bottom bunk. WildAx accepts more work is needed on supporting this central cushion. We found the bed disappointing - the foam upholstery being rather soft and unsupportive. More importantly, the transverse bed will be too short for some - again measuring just 1.84 metres long.

Carioca's enormous overcab bed (rising on gas struts when not required) has two thick mattresses on a slatted base. With ample headroom, windows at each side (with blinds), a fluorescent light and a brown (rather lightweight) curtain, this double berth makes a comfy billet for two.

Below, dinette cushions and table make another tadpole-shaped bed, but at 460mm (1ft 6in) wide, its 'tail' is too narrow for comfort, and the ladder to the overcab bed then can't be used: much better to use the bunk beds, which stretch across the 'van's rear. Both have split mattresses (facilitating removal), lights and windows. Only the top bunk has a curtain, which fitted badly, and had an infuriatingly catchy track.

The coachbuilt's extra width makes a real difference to user contentment. Solaris' sleeping arrangements are imaginative, and if you're sensibly sized may do you well, but for tall me, the Carioca's larger beds (coupled with thick, supportive mattresses), win. If you were hoping to regularly sleep five, however, you'd have problems.

STORE ROOM

Does Carioca have storage facilities to utilise its big payload? When not used for sleeping, the huge overcab is ideal for lightweight bulky stuff, and there's an excellent wardrobe aft of the washroom, with a 1.04m (3ft 5in) hanging drop. Additionally, the bottom bunk hinges up and clips to the back wall - the resulting space forming a large garage accessed from within the 'van, or through big exterior doors on each side. Bikes and outdoor equipment would fit here (subject to a 100kg weight limit). Even with the bunk lowered, there's still good storage room below it.

Otherwise, storage is a little disappointing. There are three high-level lockers and shelves over lounge seats, but no storage under the dinette (home for the freshwater tank), or 'dickie' seat (here lives the leisure battery). Because of the heater's position, there's only one low-level kitchen cupboard, plus two high-level lockers, and another above the grill. Yes, the cab has the usual Transit cubbies (new models have a driver's door-pocket), but no overhead shelf.

Solaris' Citroën cab has plenteous handy storage, and that useful upper shelf (which many dislike as a pate-basher!). Above the cab, a slim, but capacious open store will take



bedding. Storage under the nearside rear seat is good, and will improve further in production when battery and electrical control box are moved to the under-bunk area. Above the offside lounge window are two un-shelved lockers behind characteristic tambour doors (very useful – no hinges, catches or rattles, and smart in appearance), with three more over the kitchen. Between bunks and lounge, the adequate wardrobe has an 880mm (2ft 10.5in) drop. There's considerable room under the bottom bunk - accessed from above, through a drop-down door in the side, or via the 'van's rear door. If the end-frame were removable, and the bunk clipped up, you could carry bikes here. A slim oddments shelf on the washroom's back wall is accessed via the rear door.

LIFE SUPPORT

Both 'vans have 100-litre fresh water tanks - inboard on Carioca, underslung (insulated, and heated) on Solaris. Both have Truma (4kW) Combi space and water heaters: Carioca's standard fitting is gas-fired only, while Solaris' is gas/mains operation. With LED-powered lighting throughout and 105 amp hr leisure battery, Solaris should remain self-sufficient longer than Carioca, whose standard battery is only 85 amp hr. WildAx also scores with a 20-litre underslung gas tank - potentially cheaper and easier to refill than replacing Carioca's single 15kg cylinder.

Both 'vans, I'm pleased to say, have spare wheels fitted as standard.

CONCLUSION

An interesting comparison between two very different 'vans, yet with similar footprints and passenger count. Solaris scores well on standard equipment, fit and finish, its washroom and its traditional British kitchen. It's a 'work in progress' though, with much tweaking required before production. Even so, it's worthy of short listing by those wanting a workable, four-berth panel van conversion. However, make sure the beds are big enough. WildAx also offers these 'vans for hire: perhaps try before you buy is the answer?

Carioca is considerably cheaper than its rival and, being a built on a Ford Transit, provides a rare alternative to the ubiquitous Sevel family base vehicle. Less impressive in woodwork finish, kitchen and washroom, it's practical nonetheless, with much bigger, more comfy beds and more internal room.

In summary, these rivals show that compact bunk bed-based designs can be a civilised and practical means of holidaying *en-famille*, and can be accommodated in a panel van conversion, as well as the more usual coachbuilt motorhome. ■

WILDAX SOLARIS



17 Solaris bunks are comfortable, but could be slightly short for some adults

18 Useful seating is created with the top bunk raised

19 Lots of storage room under the lower bunk

20 Transverse double bed: cushions are soft, and it's short



VEHICLES LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

CI Carioca 400
LazyDays, A41 Sales Centre, Hinstock,
 Nr. Market Drayton, Shropshire
 TF9 2SY (tel: 01952 550 282;
 web site: www.lazydays.biz)

WildAx Solaris
WildAx Motorhomes, Eastgate,
 Elland, West Yorkshire HX5 9DT
 (tel: 01535 608555;
 web site: www.wildaxmotorhomes.com)