



# Top-notch nosh

Dine like a king with these practical kitchens, says **Phil Stephens**

## FLEETWOOD MERIDIEN 640-EKB v SWIFT CHARISMA 560 v ELDDIS AVANTÉ CLUB 362

**WE**VE identified these caravans as having top-notch nosh-making facilities. Brilliant kitchens come in caravans of all sizes. To make the point, we've looked at the kitchens and the overall package offered by a two, a four and a six-berth.

Firstly there's the tiny Elddis Avanté Club 362, with its 3.73-metre interior length. It's now priced at £11,740 on-the-road. Larger than this, but still on a single axle, is the Swift Charisma 560. An additional 1.73 metres in internal length and two more berths will cost you £13,720 on-the-road. Finally, there's the

beefy twin-axle Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB. At £17,990 on-the-road it's expensive, but it sleeps six and brings a bit of luxury to proceedings.

### EXTERNAL STYLING

**Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★**  
**Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★**  
**Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★**

It has been a long time since the Meridien's front and rear panels (shared with the ultra luxurious Heritage) had any meaningful

redesign; credit to Fleetwood for producing something that's standing the test of time. On-site, the Reef Shark snout still looks refreshingly different, while wheels, windows, door and graphics combine to create a thoroughly modern exterior. The rear, in particular the lights, now look a little dated, but it's not ugly.

Go back three years and you'd never believe that Swift's entry level Charisma could look like this; back then if any caravan had the wrong name stuck on its cheeks it was the Charisma. But now the full height rear panel,

quirky lights, one-piece sidewalls, alloy wheels and simple vertical rear graphic add up to make the modern Charisma look anything but entry level. I'm unsure about those upside-down side windows, in particular in the main lounge unit. The shape goes against the flowing rake of the front panel and the result is aesthetically confusing.

Small caravans can be just as imposing as eight-metre-long giants, but some end up looking stumpy and like a garden shed. Thankfully, the Elddis has all the design features of its larger cousins. There's a new,

simple GRP front panel. The rear light stack loses last year's reflective sections at the top and bottom, replaced by simple grey transfers. The windows (what few there are) are simple in design.

### TOWING WEIGHT/DYNAMICS

**Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★**  
**Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★**  
**Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★**

The little Elddis comes in below the magical four-figure barrier at 997kg MRO, rising to

1154kg MTPLM. Natural rivals such as the Swift Charisma 220 (MRO 1026kg/MTPLM 1200kg) and Lunar Ariva (MRO 828kg/MTPLM 980kg) sit either side of the Avanté in terms of weight. The standard fit Winterhoff WS3000 stabiliser and tiny sideways surface area make for a decent tow.

The Charisma comes in at 1250kg MRO and, if you choose to load it fully, leaves at 1460kg MTPLM. The Fleetwood joins us at 1420kg MRO and can be loaded to a top whack of 1700kg MTPLM.

SPECIFICATION

Price: £17,990 (inc. del)  
 Berths: 6  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 MRO: 1420kg (27.9cwt)  
 MTPLM: 1700kg (33.4cwt)  
 Payload: 280kg (5.5cwt)  
 Internal length: 6.35m (20ft 10in)  
 Overall length: 8.00m (26ft 3in)  
 Overall width: 2.21m (7ft 3in)  
 Internal height: 1.94 (6ft 5in)  
 Overall height: 2.72m (8ft 11in)  
 Bed sizes: Front double: 6ft 6½in x 6ft 0in or singles: 6ft 0in x 2ft 2in  
 (x2) Fixed bunks: 5ft 9in x 1ft 10in  
 (x2) Side bed: 5ft 9in x 1ft 10in

TOWMATCH E

MANUFACTURER

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 Suffolk CO10 9JP  
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 Web: www.fleetwoodcaravans.co.uk



Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB



It's imposing, isn't it?



There's loads of room in here but access is only average

FOR & AGAINST

- PROS**
- Kitchen
  - Fixed bunks...
  - ...and a separate shower
- CONS**
- Seems expensive
  - 7ft 3in body taxes the layout

Some aspects of the Meridien need updating, whilst others are a modern tour de force



Washroom is basic, decoratively speaking, but it does have a separate shower



Inside the narrowest caravan of the three



Flying buttress bunks dare to be different



It grabs your attention; who said grey's drab?



A practical genius of a kitchen

As you'd expect, all get stabilisers, but only the Avanté and Charisma wheels get shock absorbers.

Believe it or not, the narrowest caravan here is the mighty Fleetwood, at 2.21 metres. And the widest? That would be the little squirt called Avanté Club 362.

INTERIOR STYLING/COMFORT

Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★  
 Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★  
 Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

Fleetwood's mix of grey upholstery, grey chintzy curtains and rich honey-coloured cabinets is certainly an eye-catching event. Whether you like it or not is down to personal taste. It doesn't do much for me. Lighting plays a big part in here, with blue LED strip lights in the kitchen and LED spots in the lounge and bunks mixed with more traditional white lighting in the lounge and overhead along the caravan's length, which, alongside the decor, competes for control of my senses.

The lounge seats are extremely comfortable, noticeably more rigid and feel superior in

quality to the Charisma's. The caravan's relatively narrow width for its length means you're sitting closer to the person opposite; it's strange when the two smaller caravans here feel so much wider inside.

The Charisma's French-mustard-brown, cream and oatmeal toned upholstery helps keep the interior bright. The darkest addition is the removable carpet, which is light brown. It's a reserved but not traditional theme – plain but not bland. It's the perfect neutral base for adding your own cushions or other decorative effects.

Cabinetry is modern and dressed with light metallic handles, lower valances and secondary trim including lights and switch/socket surrounds. This two-box living space (cabin and washroom) gives the van a more open-plan feel than the larger Fleetwood, with no central full-height structures in your line of sight. The Charisma has a nice decorative theme for an entry-level caravan which looks more expensive than it is. It may be a medium-sized tourer, but it still feels big.

Climbing aboard the Elddis, two things hit you: it's noticeably shorter, and yet doesn't feel as

short as you expect it should. Reasons? Firstly, it's the widest caravan here. Secondly, a two-berth's demand for storage is less and so upper lockers can be thinner, giving more headroom and the illusion of space. Decoratively, it can be best described as restrained, but there are only two seats and three windows that need any sort of furnishing anyway.

The porthole-style roof light and silver valance on the lip of the roof lockers are attractive. I wonder how much weight the Charisma saves by using moulded plastic instead of metal; that said, they feel just as solid to the touch as the Avanté's.

PRACTICALITY/FLEXIBILITY

Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★  
 Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★  
 Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

All three get Truma's dual fuel 10-litre water boiler. It's perfect for the two-berth Avanté, and fine in the four-berth Charisma, but not so good on Fleetwood's expensive six-berth family van. On a cheaper six-berth, with small unitary shower and token kitchen, it

wouldn't matter. But here Fleetwood gives you a full-on kitchen and separate shower, built to be used. That's why it needs Truma's 14-litre unit. It seems incongruous that there's the same hot water supply in the two-berth Avanté as the six-berth Fleetwood.

In terms of practicality, the Fleetwood's width can be a hindrance in this six-berth set up; particularly as the layout means the fixed bunk structure and adjoining long washroom form what feels like one, long side room. In turn, that entire side always feels cut off, excluded and out of bounds to everyday living.

But clearly this is a wonderful family layout complete with separate dinette, top kitchen, separate shower and fixed bunks kids will love. It just needs to be wider than (or as wide as) the competition to give the design the real justice it deserves.

The Avanté has two mains sockets (any more would be pointless in 3.74 metres of internal length) and the Charisma three thoughtfully located sockets.

Both the Charisma and Avanté have easy access fuse and consumer units behind lower drop-down flaps, whilst the Fleetwood hides it

away in the front corner. The Fleetwood also has drop-down flap access, but it's not full-length, making access less easy.

You've paid a bit more for the Fleetwood so you will get four 230v mains sockets, barbecue point, large gas locker, wet locker with mains and three Vario wind rooflights.

STORAGE SPACE

Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★  
 Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★  
 Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

All three vans give you what you'd expect in terms of storage in proportion to their berths and sizes.

The Elddis doesn't have vast cubbies and caverns for surf, ironing or plaster boards; it just doesn't need them.

The Swift majors on storage in the washroom and kitchen, and it's sufficient elsewhere. The big bonus is that access to all areas has been well thought out.

When you have fixed bunks, dinette, separate shower and large kitchen, you'd expect storage to be neglected. Like the

Elddis, it hasn't gone overboard, and with all the berths taken you might find it a struggle to find a home for everything, but you wouldn't want to sacrifice any of the fixtures for the sake of an extra cupboard.

WASHROOM

Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★  
 Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★  
 Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

There are three totally different washroom layouts here. The Fleetwood has a rear, side-mounted room with separate square shower. The Charisma houses a fine full-width washroom with one of the Swift Group's cracking walk-in showers. Then there's the Elddis, which has to squeeze it in next to that rear kitchen. With limited space, this is where the engineers had the toughest brief. Even so, you still get a shower that can be separated from the bench loo and tip-up sink with a bi-fold screen for comfortable showering.

You'd think, given the size of the Charisma's shower, storage space in here would be compromised. It's quite the reverse;

## SPECIFICATION

Price: £12,990 (inc. del)  
 Berths: 4  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 MRO: 1250kg (24.6cwt)  
 MTPLM: 1460kg (28.7cwt)  
 Payload: 210kg (4.1cwt)  
 Internal length: 5.44m (17ft 10in)  
 Overall length: 7.12m (23ft 4in)  
 Overall width: 2.23m (7ft 4in)  
 Internal height: 1.95m (6ft 5in)  
 Overall height: 2.70m (8ft 10in)  
 Bed Sizes: Front double: 6ft 10in x 5ft 11in or two front singles: 5ft 11in x 2ft 4in and 6ft 3in x 2ft 4in  
 Side bunk: 5ft 11in x 2ft 4in  
 Side single: 5ft 10in x 1ft 11in

TOWMATCH D

## MANUFACTURER

SWIFT GROUP LTD  
 Dunswell Road, Cottingham,  
 East Yorks HU16 4JX  
 Tel: 01482 847332  
 Web: www.swiftcaravans.co.uk



Practical design makes most of space



Shower power – works great with the on-board pump



Even more storage this side

you'll never fill it all. It's not fancy in here, with snazzy tiles or Roman blinds seen on more expensive caravans, but it feels more expensive than it is – particularly that shower.

That fact is made even starker walking into the Fleetwood's washroom. It's never meant to compete with a full-width design that has space to play with, but even the ambience of the washroom in the expensive Fleetwood can't match the cheaper Charisma. Cheap towel ring, toothbrush holder and white wall panel caps dotted about don't help. However, in use it's simple and practical with enough storage for six. The separate shower is smaller than its competitors but doesn't want to be bigger to save robbing space elsewhere in the build.

## SLEEPING

Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★  
 Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★  
 Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

There can be no comparisons here. The six-berth Fleetwood makes the most of available

space by building fixed bunks (tapered towards the bottom) and a Pullman bunk above the dinette opposite. There's a conventional double in the front lounge, giving the final two beds. Is it crowded in the middle? Of course, which six-berth isn't? But it's a million times better than twin Pullman bunk six-berths. Give me this Fleetwood design any day, and ask the kids which they prefer. It's good to see Fleetwood putting some flair into bunk design with flying buttress styled side walls. There are LED lights to each bunk, best used as reading lights. Kids will love the dedicated TV cubby for each bunk, whilst the lower bunk has a TV arm swivelling out for viewing from the dinette opposite.

The wide body Elddis allows an equally large double bed, yet you'll still get two 6ft singles if that's what you prefer. It's comfortable enough and easy to make up.

The Charisma sleeps two more than the Elddis and two less than the Fleetwood, so it should make a pretty good fist of things given its decent length. And it does. Here the front double equals the Elddis in width, but the

tourer's extra length means you can have two longer singles at 6ft 3in. The Charisma also incorporates a Pullman bunk for its dinette.

## KITCHEN

Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★  
 Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★  
 Elddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

All three have simply brilliant kitchens.

The Elddis, despite its size, has produced a kitchen with storage space shaming many larger caravans; it's effectively two sections. The first, along the rear, contains the usual conventional kitchen stuff: full-size Spinflo separate oven and grill with side hinged door and three-burner hob and large combi sink/drainage, which is simply the most practical solution possible. Below the sink there's storage so large you'll laugh out loud when you remember how small the caravan actually is. Above there are two large lockers and two small shelves.

Work surface arrives courtesy of the unit behind the cook. The lower part houses the 115-litre fridge with the top used for your

## Swift Charisma 560



The lounge is the size of a barn



The Swift's interior reveals a practical four-berth



You'll never fill all the storage in here



Swift and Elddis show Fleetwood how to do lights



Mustard tones keep the interior bright

## FOR &amp; AGAINST

## PROS

- Another great kitchen
- Spacious main cabin...
- ...and a huge washroom

## CONS

- Interior bland to some
- Don't cook? Lot of space wasted

main prep space. Above, and courtesy of BCA, is probably the best looking flush-fit microwave in the business. It's powerful enough and solidly constructed.

The 362 clearly demonstrates that a kitchen doesn't have to be compromised in any of its functions just because the caravan is small.

The Charisma's kitchen has a large worktop space, which it doesn't have to share with the TV as it has its own place on the offside. If you do find yourself needing more space, there's the central dinette behind, with another half-metre of tabletop space.

You get Theford's 107-litre fridge unit sitting right under your worktop. The cooker is the stylish Stoves unit which has separate oven and grill, three-burner hob and 800w hotplate. Directly above is a quality Sharpe microwave. Like the Avanté, it sits high up which is not where I like to find it.

This Charisma's kitchen is the most contemporary here by a mile and, although set in the busiest part of the caravan between loo and lounge, central width is so great that the cook won't notice you're passing unless you pinch their bum.

It has been said all three kitchens are brilliant, but one is utterly brilliant... and that's the Fleetwood.

The kitchen is almost a separate room entirely. Sat in the rear nearside it only has the toilet opposite that could potentially attract traffic. This is the cook's own space. It could be your kitchen at home. It has a vast nearside picture window, set high so there's no ducking down to check on the kids. Sneaked round the back? Well you can look out of the kitchen's second window in the rear panel. Both windows have swivel LED bar lights above and depending on what sort of light you prefer (bright, subdued or direct) you rotate it to suit. Above there's a third Vario wind clear roof light (as if it weren't naturally bright enough here anyway) featuring a built-in extractor which looks more like a mini air-con unit; it's so much more attractive than ugly Omnivent extractors.

So the environment is about as perfect as you can get. Does the equipment match up? Fleetwood hasn't come this far to deny the cook a practical office in which to ply his or her trade. The microwave is at chest height which

is exactly the right place for it. Below, the work surface is raised slightly allowing the fridge to squeeze below. Yes, the cream-fronted Dometic 85-litre fridge is dismal at the money, but even that can't spoil this superb space. There's a further 0.75m of worktop before the brushed chrome pillar tap gives way to a north/south sink. Like the Charisma, you'll have to add the separate drainer but there's so much space it simply doesn't matter.

The Spinflo oven and grill colour codes with the cream-fronted fridge and is more traditional than the modern Spinflo in the Charisma. The three-burner hob is missing a useful 800w hot plate. Finally, open the cupboard door beneath the sink and it's another laugh out loud moment: kids/wife/husband doing your head in? Open a bottle of wine and go and hide in here; they'll never find you.

I've given it 10 stars and would have given it 11 if I could. So does 10 out of 10 imply perfection? No, there's no such thing in caravans as we all have differing priorities. The microwave looks desperately cheap and that fridge... The best bit? If you don't want a six-berth but want the exact same kitchen you can

SPECIFICATION

Price: £11,990 (inc. del)  
 Berths: 2  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 MRO: 997kg (19.5cwt)  
 MTPLM: 1154kg (22.6cwt)  
 Payload: 157kg (3.0cwt)  
 Internal length: 3.73m (12ft 3in)  
 Overall length: 4.55m (15ft 0in)  
 Overall width: 2.24m (7ft 4in)  
 Internal height: 1.90m (6ft 3in)  
 Overall height: 2.72m (8ft 11in)  
 Bed sizes: Front double: 6ft 9in x 4ft 6in or two front singles: 6ft 2in x 2ft 3in



MANUFACTURER

**EXPLORER GROUP**  
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 Consett, Co Durham DH8 7PE  
 Tel: 01207 699000  
 Web: www.explorer-group.co.uk



Family size waste cassette... for two



Simple decor is just fine



Tip-up sink better than any alternative

find it in the single-axle four-berth Meridien 560-EK (£15,995); now that sounds appealing.

**BUILD QUALITY**

- Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★
- Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★
- Eddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

The Fleetwood's a van of two halves. The first half is an ageing shell and interior cabinets that need updating. The internal panel joints around that quirky nose now look a bit industrial compared with cleanly finished interior walls in caravans of this price elsewhere. A half-time chat sees Fleetwood emerge for the second half on much better form, with fine workmanship in the construction, mostly high or very high-grade components and attention to detail in areas such as lighting and visual appeal.

The tactile reward of Eddis' interior woodwork is twice that given off by the Fleetwood. It's a shame, though, that Fleetwood's ultra-thin door centres make each

piece feel flimsy. It doesn't matter that the units are actually nicely pieced together if they just don't feel it. And when the cheapest caravan here feels more sturdy, you've got a problem that needs sorting.

It's a close call between Eddis and the Swift. The Eddis feels more substantial throughout but the Swift more technologically advanced. Either way, the most pleasing aspect is that neither is recognisable in terms of build to its predecessors just six or seven years ago.

**VALUE FOR MONEY**

- Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB ★★★★★★
- Swift Charisma 560 ★★★★★★
- Eddis Avanté Club 362 ★★★★★★

Today, at nearly £18,000 I'd expect to find on-board pump water systems and a big fridge in the Fleetwood. Although you can point to other commendable goodies fitted, to my mind the basic and most practical issues need addressing first.

For example, Swift simply doesn't fit anything less than a 107-litre fridges (Fleetwood 85 litres) even in its cheapest £10,300 Sprite. On-board water pump systems appear right here in the Charisma range from £11,995 upwards.

There are plenty of toys in here but it's not quite up there with the competition in terms of any real practical innovation.

But you'll look in vain for a better kitchen and if this clever six-berth layout takes your fancy, cost suddenly looks less important.

Crucially, the little Eddis is right on the money with the competition. The Charisma 220 is slightly better specced but for £500 more. Lunar's Ariva is also more expensive, but that bags you a significant weight saving. This Charisma 560 is slightly more than the equivalent Explorer Group product but has the edge in terms of design and specification. The Charisma has come so far forward it's nearly in Bailey Pageant Champagne territory. For £500 more you get a full-width body shell and ATC that, amongst other things, comes as standard.

Eddis Avanté Club 362



It looks wide for a tiddler, don't you think?



Fine storage for larger objects



Redesigned tails lights are much better



What the 362 is all about – the contemporary kitchen



What could be simpler than this?

FOR & AGAINST

**PROS**

- Small but good 7ft 4in width
- Superb kitchen for size
- Quality feel of interior

**CONS**

- 7ft 4in width problem to some
- Decor a little dull

**CONCLUSION**

- Fleetwood Meridien 640-EKB 75/100
- Swift Charisma 560 84/100
- Eddis Avanté Club 362 81/100

The Fleetwood is a superb six-berth layout that's just crying out to be that bit wider. It houses what I believe to be possibly the best caravan kitchen money can buy, in terms of location within the caravan and execution of design. The Eddis and Swift's kitchens are superb, too, but even they pale into insignificance next to the

Fleetwood. It's nothing to do with cost, just design.

But my worries lie elsewhere. Some parts of the Fleetwood need updating. The cabinetry, for example, lacks the practical traits of most modern tourers, particularly for accessibility. In other areas such as electrics, lighting and some unique and appealing interior designs, it's a modern tour de force.

The Eddis seems to have everything right. It doesn't show off with a brash display of exuberant nonsense but quietly gets on doing its job well. But in terms of its kitchen ability, it goes the extra mile. It looks appealing and

functions better than many other larger caravans. What's more, you'll still get a large shower screened from the loo. Why buy any two-berth longer inside than this 3.74 metres?

The Charisma continues to impress me for 2009. Of all manufacturers that build this layout at or around this price, it's the Charisma that sits at the top of the heap for me. Hate the decor? That's fine, but you'll be losing a mammoth and capable kitchen with an interior that has to be one of the most practical four-berths around. And the washroom? For the money, to my mind, nothing on the UK market matches it in this layout.

Towergate Bakers Insurance Quotation

Swift Charisma £255.47 Eddis Avante £230.41 Fleetwood Meridien £337.77

Inclusive of IPT. The quotes include 3 years discount. Standard discounts for security, Age and 3 years NCD. For more information contact 0870 998 0190

www.towergatebakers.co.uk