

Charming progress

Phil Stephens finds plenty to impress him in such a small space, in Swift's brand new Charisma 220 for 2009

SPECIFICATION

Price: £11,695
Berths: 2
MRO: 1005kg
MTPLM: 1179kg
Payload: 174kg
Internal length: 3.83m (12ft 7in)
Overall length: 5.52m (18ft 1in)
Overall width: 2.23m (7ft 4in)
Internal height: 1.95m (6ft 5in)
Overall height: 2.70m (8ft 10in)
Layout: 4
Bed sizes: Front double: 6ft 10in x 6ft 3in or 2 singles 6ft 3in x 2ft 4in

TOWMATCH B

FOR & AGAINST

PROS

- Interior space
- Interior decor
- Kitchen ability
- Value

CONS

- I'm thinking...

ALTERNATIVES

- **LUNAR ARIVA**
£11,495
- **ELDDIS AVANTÉ CLUB 362**
£11,495

CONTACT

SWIFT GROUP
 Dunswell Road, Cottingham,
 East Yorkshire HU16 4JX



1. A full complement of sockets and well-placed controls are impressive 2. The delightful kitchen squeezes all the necessary kit and some worktop into a tiny area 3. This counter doubles as worktop or TV stand 4. Seating is comfortable

LUNAR'S Ariva has ruled the two-berth lightweight roost for so long, but now Swift has launched a contender to the throne. But is it really a serious rival, or just a pretender?

The Charisma has an MTPLM of 1179kg, which doesn't win the lightweight battle with the Ariva's 970kg. Neither does it win in outright size, with the tape measure telling us internal body length is 20cm longer but crucially 21cm wider than the Ariva – that's the width of all Swift Group's twin-axes just three years ago.

So is the new Charisma 220 the great pretender? It may not add up to a winner in the weight department, but with diesel fast becoming the fuel of choice, coupled with vastly improved towing performance, buyers don't need to struggle as much these days with finding a suitable tug for their tourer.

At £12,190 (on-the-road) it's just £200 more than the Ariva, though it clearly has a better specification than its Lunar rival. New 2009 Charismas gain built-in Sharp microwaves, top spec loos, more 230v sockets, shock absorbers

on the wheels and a clear attempt to upgrade existing components throughout the caravan.

But what really sets this new Swift apart from the opposition is the approach to the interior. It's not Airstream aloof or Adria alternative, but it is modern, it is contemporary and proves the target market doesn't always crave traditional.

Spaceframe cabinetry is light in colour and tactile; happily this doesn't equate to flimsy as gas struts and solidity of fixings provide confidence for long term use.

Everywhere else is chrome,



All white at the back! Looks better in reality

both brushed and polished, with light switches, thermostats and plug sockets all totally cohesive within the interior design. To my eye, Swift is the best in the game for attention to decorative detail; on this base model Halogen downlighters are quality alloy components, and not cheap plastic options. It's a simple example but one repeated in so many places around the Charisma's cabin.

I'm struck by the comfort and quality of those lounge settees. Sprung upholstery and beech slatted bases provide supportive and comfortable seating without becoming too firm after time. Believe it or not you'll seat six in comfort here, too.

The rear kitchen gains the aforementioned microwave, set immediately above the three-burner hob (plus 800w hotplate). The large circular textured sink, which avoids the premature scratched ageing of smooth finish,

sits directly alongside, whilst just over a foot of prep space allows for the kettle and dirty dishes.

In the centre of the caravan sits the fridge. This superb 107-litre Thetford unit is generous considering this is a two-berth. Being a small tourer, the fridge and main worktop above actually become an integral part of the kitchen space. We like also the fact there are two mains sockets in the kitchen, as well as a third a short distance away in the lounge. Three in this short space. Excellent. The result is a very small caravan with a small price, that delivers big results in a bright kitchen that's illuminated by a clear mini Heki above.

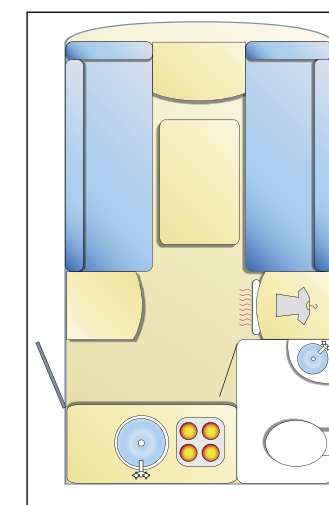
The washroom here is a unitary affair. Well sort of. Let me explain. The loo (Thetford's top rank C250,) sink and shower share one waterproof floor space. But avoiding the awkward shower curtains normally used to fend off water from everything else, here



The kitchen: Compact? Yes. Compromised? No.

the sink unit (complete with mirror) pivots out to meet a smaller screen and forms one solid partition from the loo. Neat! And as the sink (and thankfully mirror) now face the other way there's little to wipe down, other than yourself of course. Although the plastics supplied by Big Bear Plastic Products Ltd (new to me) are whiter than white, the room still manages a little charm too. The washroom's dry area, around the loo, has whitewashed effect wall boarding keeping the area fresh and bright even without a window.

Storage amounts to a wardrobe the size of which you see in many four-berths, whilst main storage (excluding upper lockers) is under the two settees. The offside offers little space for large stuff as the consumer unit has been pushed forward to avoid the wheel arch, whilst the water boiler sits further forward. But the nearside makes up for what's lost, and after all, this is just a two-berth. ■



OUR VERDICT



If you're limited on space in which you can store your caravan, or struggle along with a small towcar, then perhaps the Lunar is the best option for you. But here, with the Charisma 220, Swift clearly demonstrates you're paying a premium for that lightweight construction, a premium that doesn't necessarily reflect the higher spec or overall ability.

Outwardly the Charisma gains graphics almost identical to last year's Challenger and Conqueror, and taken together with its stylish alloys, it looks anything but entry level.

And that's my lasting impression. This caravan sits on the bottom tier of Swift's three levels and it's also the cheapest of that bottom tier. But it looks, feels and is kitted out as a luxury spec tourer would've been a few short years ago. Progress indeed. Here the new 220 price matches the lightweights and gives those who don't have weight issues the chance of a bit of modern luxury.



Better than many four-berths



Generous fridge - Thetford's N107



Half a dozen heads sat in this lounge is a real possibility