



# Sitting pretty

You'll most often find it at the front, but when it comes to the lounge you do have options, says **Phil Stephens**

## ADRIA ADIVA 552PH v CARAVELAIR AMBIANCE STYLE 450 v HOBBY PRESTIGE 540 WLU

**M**OST UK caravans carry their lounge nestled beneath the tourer's raked front panel, but it doesn't have to be that way. What about central lounges? Not some pokey exaggerated side dinette, but one that dominates both sides of the caravan's middle.

In celebration of lounge diversity we've assembled three of Europe's finest loafing lounges: French, German and Slovenian manufacturers with lounges at the front, middle or back.

Representing the budget sector is the Caravelair Ambiance Style 450. Big it ain't,

but for a caravan with two large fixed single beds the rear lounge is surprisingly large. It'll cost you £12,185 on-the-road.

From Germany there's the Hobby Prestige 540 WLU. It's a layout with the UK's favourite front lounge arrangement and to get one you'll need to part with £15,675.

The Adria Adiva 552PH is £15,794. It puts the lounge in the middle. The Caravelair and Hobby have two fixed single beds whilst the Adria has a fixed double. They can't go directly head-to-head in comparative terms but their paths do cross.

### EXTERNAL STYLING

**Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★**  
**Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★**  
**Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★**

The Caravelair's exterior is typically French. They might be awfully playful with their food, elegant and glamorously dressed, but they like their caravans subtle. Ambiance badged Caravelairs won't grab the attention but they're stylish enough. Simplicity is the key; one-piece sides and no meaningless addenda. It's unpretentious, no frills styling.

The Adria is certainly stylish, cool even. The one-piece polyester sides look indestructible whilst graphics and windows all compete to fool the eye that this isn't really just a white box.

Underneath the quirkily shaped windows, the graphics make them appear even more swooping when you'll find normal-shaped windows cut out of the caravan's side. It's convention hidden by the unconventional.

Look at the wheels, front panel and privacy windows; each piece forms a complete jigsaw that, to my eye, equates to possibly the best looking touring caravan around.

Some caravans are instantly recognisable, even from a distance – the Hobby falls into this category. The blue side barges have changed little over time and give it a mean stance. You'll search in vain for an alloy wheel option.

### TOWING WEIGHT/DYNAMICS

**Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★**  
**Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★**  
**Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★**

I was surprised the Caravelair (MRO 1120kg/ MPTLM 1300kg) arrived with a naked hitch

head. When tested 12 months ago, not only was it cheaper (and with the same spec), but it came with AL-KO's 1300/2004 stabiliser. The Caravelair isn't a heavy tourer by any means, but I'd make a stabiliser my first addition; at around £180 it's money well spent. I'd usually have reservations about a manufacturer's ability to build its own chassis as dynamically competent as specialist companies, but you can be sure it knows what it's doing with its own galvanised steel foundation.

The Hobby sits on BPW's chassis so has Winterhoff's WS3000 stabiliser whilst Adria's

## SPECIFICATION

Price: £12,185 (inc. delivery)  
 Berths: 4  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 MRO: 1120kg  
 MTPLM: 1300kg  
 Payload: 180kg  
 Internal length: 5.00m (16ft 4in)  
 Overall length: 6.63m (21ft 8in)  
 Overall width: 2.30m (7ft 6in)  
 Internal height: 1.95 (6ft 5in)  
 Overall height: 2.58m (8ft 5in)  
 Bed sizes: Front 2 fixed singles  
 0.95m x 1.90m Rear double 1.20m  
 x 2.10m

TOWMATCH C

## MANUFACTURER

CARAVELAIR FRANCE  
 Web: www.caravelair.tm.fr

## IMPORTED BY

FREEDOM CARAVANS LTD  
 Queensville, Lichfield Road,  
 Stafford ST17 4NY  
 Tel: 01785 222488  
 Web: www.freedomcaravans.com



Wide beds are the real luxury

Rear lounge is very bright. The 23 metre body means it's wide too



Slimline kitchen capable enough

AL-KO underpinnings dictate it's clad with their own AKS 3004 unit. There's little to choose between them on the road. Both also commendably get shock absorbers.

For its spec and size, the Hobby can almost be considered lightweight. It sits in our Towmatch band D and whilst the MPTLM is a whopping 1600kg you don't have to use all of the massive 302kg payload. With a MRO of 1298kg most buyers will rarely load beyond 1500kg, perhaps even less.

Again, for its size, the Adria mirrors the Hobby's achievement by being much lighter than it looks. This highly specced Adiva arrives at just 1330kg MRO and departs at 1550kg if loaded fully; that's lighter than all direct UK competition whose tourers are shorter too.

## INTERIOR STYLING/COMFORT

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

Hold tight, there's much to discuss. Like the outside, the Caravelair's interior styling is

restrained. There are notable departures from the norm, like modern flooring with inlaid metallic patterning and unusual decorative detailing to the upper-level cabinetry.

But the Caravelair isn't about decorative niceties; it's about maximising space. Comfort? With two large fixed single beds up front you'd be forgiven for thinking a pair of deckchairs is all that will fit in the remaining space, but this rear U-shaped lounge really is big enough to slob out in. Sitting by the door, it benefits from more legroom, whilst the panoramic rear window adds light and will give you the best view.

Much has been written about this particular Adria's interior. Tone and graining of cabinetry is almost yacht-like. Opaque lateral strips to upper locker doors entwine beautifully with milk chocolate-toned joinery. Nearside upper cabinets are convex whilst opposite they're concave. Some cabinetry is flat fronted whilst in the bedroom unusual Dairylea-triangle-shaped drop-down lockers are something I've never seen before. Beauty of design is unashamedly the number one priority in this van.

But what of that central lounge? The offside has the larger U-shaped settee that, although comfortable enough, could do with a thinner cushion back under the window to give you more room to sit. Five will fit in comfort to enjoy the view out of a sizeable side window. The lounge continues opposite. It's not as big here as on the offside, but this slightly curved bench settee is, in many ways, more comfortable. Between it and the rear door, a small dedicated unit for the TV ensures that all occupants will enjoy a good view of the screen wherever they're sitting.

Critics bemoan the fact that its central position means traffic to the loo will pass through the middle of those seated. And it's true. But reality dictates that, although it's a four-berth in title, the Adria is just as likely to be bought by touring couples.

As the name suggests, the Hobby Prestige adds a bit of pomp to proceedings. There's glitz, there's glamour, not to mention glass-fronted units internally lit to show off your crystal. To my eye, cream centre panels to upper cabinet doors look superb,

## Caravelair Ambiance Style 450



Mattress overhang shows just how big they are



Full marks for functionality; no marks for colour



Three-drawer unit is kitchen's highlight



Unpretentious, no frills styling



Wide gas locker on a full-width body

## FOR &amp; AGAINST

## PROS

- Capable kitchen
- Unusual layout for price
- Full-width body

## CONS

- Pricing becoming less competitive
- Washroom colour

## PRACTICALITY/FLEXIBILITY

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

Caravelair and Hobby each have a Truma Therme; this basic five-litre capacity boiler has its restrictions, so with more than two aboard you're probably better off using site facilities. For a caravan of the Hobby's stature and palatial washroom at the rear, the capacity is insufficient for the demand and the price.

The Caravelair surprised us by fitting an onboard water tank. Unlike the previous model (where the tank was plonked in the middle of potential storage space) this one's cleverly designed to be long and thin so remaining space retains maximum usability. You'll get two 230v sockets (kitchen and bedroom) but, if you want to watch TV in the lounge, forget it unless you sit it on the sink.

The Hobby is by far the most practical of the bunch here, thanks to the thoughtful build. The gas locker is immense and

designed so contents are easily accessible. Inside plug sockets, rotating TV pod, storage and access is so well judged that the final scene is one of common sense.

The 50-litre water tank is only beaten in size by some larger TEC models I've tested and the noseweight gauge is another handy addition. Arguments will rage as to whether the tyre repair kit (compressor and tyre sealant) is a practical replacement for a heavy spare wheel and carrier.

Only when both sides of the Adria's lounge are in use will the table need shifting for people to get by to the loo. Use just the large offside, as most people probably will, and the table won't impede access. The L-shaped corner kitchen keeps everybody away from the chef whilst the sliding unit between bedroom and lounge doubles as a display cabinet in a similar way to the Hobby's glass-fronted rotary unit.

A handy addition is the light under the fixed double bed. It's fitted just inside the service hatch for illumination of this large and important storage area whatever time of the day.

## SPECIFICATION

Price: £15,675  
 Berths: 4  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 MRO: 1298kg  
 MTPLM: 1600kg  
 Payload: 302kg  
 Internal length: 5.87m (19ft 3in)  
 Overall length: 7.37m (24ft 3in)  
 Overall width: 2.30m (7ft 6in)  
 Internal height: 1.95m (6ft 4in)  
 Overall height: 2.57m (8ft 4in)  
 Bed sizes: Rear 2 fixed singles  
 2.00m x 0.80m Front double 1.95m  
 x 1.45m

TOWMATCH D

## MANUFACTURER

HOBBY-WOHNWAGENWERK  
 Germany

## IMPORTED BY

AMBERGATE CARAVAN CENTRE  
 Ripley Road (A610), Ambergate  
 Derbyshire DE56 2EP  
 Tel: 01773 853900



Before the euro's recent attack, this was just £12.5k



Adding pump with cream locker fronts



50-litre water tank gives plenty of reserve

## STORAGE SPACE

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

Because the Caravelair's water boiler and water tank are so well packaged, storing larger gear here is simple. It's also easy to access with the bed's light steel frames lifting easily on gas struts. Some UK caravans get drop-down flap access here, but on this fixed single bed model I'm convinced it doesn't matter. My only gripe is that not one of the upper lockers around the cabin has a single splitter shelf, meaning my socks have masses of wasted space above them.

Both the Caravelair and Hobby have huge upper lockers above the front panel that need to be believed. Their capacity is incredible with duvets, sleeping bags and pillows easily stuffed in here. The Hobby has the largest wardrobe and the most lockers. The approach flies in the face of current styling in many tourers, where the number of locker doors are reduced by making them bigger.

Whilst there's heaps of space beneath that rear double in the Adria, I'd forget about using all the space below the central lounge. It's OK for travel storage but retrieving anything on a regular basis is a game. Huge cushions with Velcro make it a battle. Upper storage is easily sufficient for four berths and an absolute luxury of choice for two. The wardrobe is a little narrow and uses an east/west rail.

## WASHROOM

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

Caravelair's centrally mounted shower unit is a practical but sadly cheerless space. Remember the avocado, beige, pink and blue bathroom suites of the eighties? This is the beige one. Oh dear. But conquer your vanity and it's a rather useful space for the money. Thetford's 402C bench loo has a large wheeled waste cassette and electric flush. Shower space is fine, but this washroom was never designed for frequent use, and so the

space is allocated elsewhere.

Compared to natural UK competition, the Hobby's full-width rear washroom is aesthetically every bit as good. The huge wall mirror not only fulfils its obvious purpose but doubles the feeling of space. The separate shower is average in size, whilst storage in here is anything but. Stylish, oval, built-in cubbies will house fresh towels and look so much better than a cheap plastic unit. The large sink is something you can actually get your head right over and the entire interior is clad with tasteful wallboarding.

This washroom, like the kitchen, feels expensive. Give it a shower like some of the UK's best, plus one of Thetford's latest loos and this would be a 10-star beauty.

The Adria has a combined loo and shower next to the bed in the Adiva's front corner. Whilst providing excellent shower space and easy-to-dry-down bench loo, it's sterile blandness hits you after the style of the main cabin. Luckily the sink and vanity area is what you'll see the most of and it keeps up the trend set elsewhere in this Adiva. It incorporates even more tasteful curved

## Hobby Prestige 540 WLU



Now that's how to do a front lounge



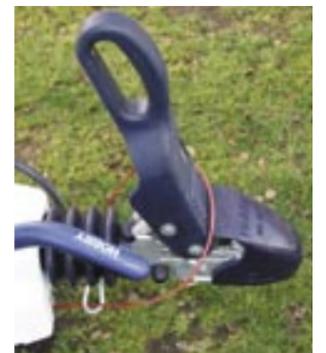
The shower is average but the room is plush



Even I'd want to cook in here



External access to storage is a real plus point



Hobby sits on a BPW chassis

## FOR &amp; AGAINST

## PROS

- Build
- Feels special
- Decent weights

## CONS

- Jealous people say it has an image
- Not quite the bargain it was

cupboards and a tall unit with perfectly rounded edge that joins my list of favourite furniture pieces.

## SLEEPING

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

The two front-mounted singles in the Caravelair have a brochure width of 0.85m but inexplicably measure a massive 0.95m. Both have sprung bases topped by thick but rather soft foam mattresses. The rear lounge will make a double with the neat telescopic table forming the base, but its 1.20/1.30m by 2.10m size isn't spectacular and it's a hint that the 450's buyers will certainly be sleeping at t'other end.

The Hobby's fixed rear single beds are longer than the Caravelairs and have higher quality sprung mattresses. But more importantly both the German beds are some four inches narrower. The Hobbys aren't small, but it simply demonstrates how good the Caravelairs are in dimensions.

All three lounge beds make up the same way by utilising the lounge's drop-down table for the base. In reality, this will probably never happen, which is a good job as the Adria is too fiddly, the Caravelair too small and the Hobby... well actually it's brilliant and makes a cracking double bed.

That leaves the Adria, which as you'd expect has a bedroom that's a nice place to be. Decoratively it's soft and soothing with nets, voiles and subtle LEDs creating a calming space. The mattress is sprung, and feels good quality and quite hard.

## KITCHEN

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

Caravelair packs a very compact kitchen into the 450, and you hardly need move your feet to grab anything. The three-burner hob and sink unit isn't the prettiest around, but it does the job and is extremely space efficient. Prep space comes from using the stylish double shelved unit sat above Dometic's RM7270 75-litre

fridge replacing last year's Thetford unit. It's an improvement, too. Given the kitchen's restrictions it's surprisingly easy to use, if not blessed with gadgets and acres of space.

In the Hobby you'll find high-end motorhome style, for an instant and strong visual impact. Smev's spectacle-shaped three-burner hob and sink covered by tinted glass top looks resplendent under the gaze of LED lights. Smev also provides its combined oven/grill unit which again is tinted and fashionably mated to the cream fridge and cupboard doors.

It not only looks great, but is practical too. Storage space, particularly at higher levels, is perfect, with all cupboards getting splitter shelves and at different levels in each cupboard. The fridge is a respectable 115-litre Thetford unit whilst prep space is perhaps the only thing lacking. However given the huge lounge table that's just 12 inches from the kitchen worktop you can easily use that.

Neither Hobby nor Adria have microwave ovens, which at this price in the UK market is like not bothering with wheels. Like it or not, in order to remain competitive each must

SPECIFICATION

Price: £15,794 (inc. delivery)  
 Berths: 4  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 MRO: 1330kg  
 MTPLM: 1550kg  
 Payload: 220kg  
 Internal length: 5.54m (18ft 2in)  
 Overall length: 7.44m (14ft 4in)  
 Overall width: 2.29m (7ft 6in)  
 Internal height: 1.95m (6ft 4in)  
 Overall height: 2.61m (8ft 11in)  
 Bed sizes:  
 Front double 2.05m x 1.44m  
 Fixed double 2.10m x 1.05m



MANUFACTURER

ADRIA MOBIL  
 d.o.o Nova Mesto Slovenia

IMPORTED BY

ADRIA CONCESSIONAIRES  
 LIMITED  
 Hall Street, Long Melford  
 Suffolk CO10 9JP  
 Tel: 0870 774 0007



Clever sliding box unit doubles as storage



Looks even more inviting at night



More space than you'll need for bits

surely fit one for the new season.

The Adria's L-shaped rear kitchen is a cook's delight. Its position is perfect; nobody needs to pass by and so disturb the cook. The full oven and separate grill sit next to the chest-height fridge, which is the perfect place for them. There's no extractor fitted because it doesn't need one; set in the corner are two large windows, and there's a rooflight above. There's more than enough space to store your 10-pan Le Creuset set too.

BUILD QUALITY

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

Caravelair uses its own caravan underpinnings (rather heavy galvanised steel), relying on AL-KO to supply the axle and forward running gear. There's also the rubber membrane behind the awning channel for extra water integrity. The actual construction

and finish is best described as average, although in some areas some cheaper components are used. It's a simple caravan with simple construction. Is that bad? Look to Japanese car makers who've kept things simple, and look at their reliability record.

We've come to expect certain things from Adria over the years, one of them is quality. And the Adiva 552PH doesn't disappoint. Indications are that it's probably the best-built Adria ever. OK so there's the same underpinnings and body shell construction techniques used elsewhere in the range, but its combination here with high-end furniture and other components take it a step higher. But none of that is any good if it's stuck together with a wonky half-threaded screw or random indiscriminate splodges of sealant; it's not a problem I found.

If the Adria's composition is good (which it is) then the Hobby's is even better. There's an aura about the Hobby, an air that clearly confirms it hails from a major manufacturer.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Adria Adiva 552PH ★★★★★★  
 Caravelair Ambiance 450 ★★★★★★  
 Hobby Prestige 540 ★★★★★★

This is a difficult one for difficult times. Rewind several months and the Hobby must have been the bargain of the century. But now, with the current strength of the euro, it's clearly having a job to stay competitive. But it is... just.

If Hobby caravans hadn't represented such excellent value for money in months gone by they would be dead and buried by now. They may have lost the edge of low pricing but still it's better to be in the race than out of it.

And it's the same story with both Adria and Caravelair. The point is that imported continental bargains are now a thing of the past and there's a level playing field appearing for UK and continental competitors to play out their game.

Adria Adiva 552PH



Delicately different but devilishly dashing



Nobody will wander into the cook's space



The style chain's weak link?



External styling is indestructible



Wouldn't look out of place on a car

FOR & AGAINST

PROS

- Looks, inside and out
- Rare layout that actually works
- Kitchen location and ability

CONS

- Chunky lounge seat backs
- Needs more kit to keep up

CONCLUSION

Adria Adiva 552PH 88/100  
 Caravelair Ambiance Style 450 73/100  
 Hobby Prestige 540 WLU 85/100

The Caravelair's biggest boon is the amount of open space, and it's unexpected with space-sapping fixed beds around. Its biggest enemy is the amount of spec turning up on so-called 'budget' UK tourers; if trends continue, the Caravelair will start to seem pretty basic. If you like the idea of a rear lounge this one's good for comfort and practicality.

The Adria's central lounge worked better in practice than I'd imagined.

Fears of tripping over several sets of feet in the lounge when moving around the caravan came to nothing and, even if it had, I could probably forgive this plush interior anything.

The kitchen, although brilliant, still deserves a microwave and Adria will have to watch it competitors' lists of goodies if it wants to sell the Adiva for the same price whilst omitting some tempting standard sweeteners.

If you want a central lounge, make it a dual-sided one. The offside-only 552LT version just doesn't cut it as a full-on lounging space. It's deliciously different; the thinking person's alternative to mainstream rivals.

The Hobby's build is impressive, and this Prestige model's interior glamour and flamboyancy mean it's no shrinking violet. The front lounge layout is common to most UK models. The Hobby version is built to a standard, both visually and practically, that makes many home-grown examples look half-hearted. But value is key. At the moment it's holding its own and sits at a reasonably competitive level in terms of price; any more and the Hobby's got a battle. Either way these are seriously underrated caravans with quality as standard and a level of engineering only the best at home can hope to match.

Towergate Bakers Insurance Quotation www.towergatebakers.co.uk  
**Adria Adiva £262.25** **Caravelair Ambiance £253.14** **Hobby Prestige £339.09**  
Inclusive of NPT. The quotes include 3 years discount. Standard discounts for security, Age and 3 years NCG. For more information contact 0870 226 0900