

Coaching quality

Doug King delves into the detail to deliver his verdict on this 2009 Coachman model, with an island bed on a single axle

SPECIFICATION

Price: £17,945
Berths: 4
MRO: 1444kg
MTPLM: 1635kg
Internal length: 5.80m (19ft 0in)
Overall length: 7.56m (24ft 9in)
Overall width: 2.26m (7ft 5in)
Overall height: 2.69m (8ft 9in)
Headroom: 1.87m (6ft 1in)
Warranty: Five-year factory backed and six-year water ingress and delamination

TOWMATCH E

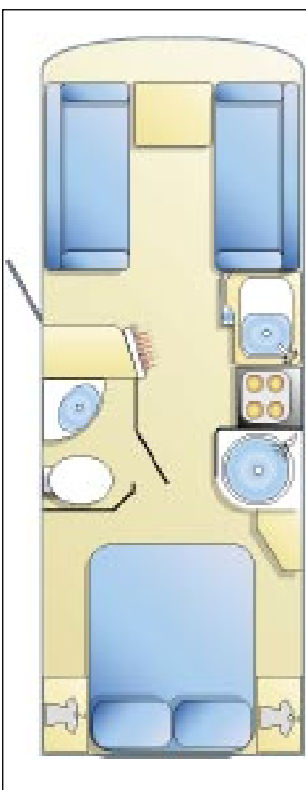
FOR & AGAINST

PROS

- Build quality
- 6ft 5in headroom
- Spec

CONS

- Pricey – but quality costs
- Heavy – but that's due to the quality too
- Waste outlets badly sited



A SUPERFICIAL inspection of any caravan is likely to leave you with the impression that it's been well built. But it's only when you take a more detailed look in the lockers and under the seats and beds that the difference in quality starts to show. There's no better example than this 2009 model from Coachman. It's a single-axle four-berth with an island bed and a price tag of £17,945.

The basic layout of the van is a front end lounge area with two bench seats, a centre offside kitchen and the fixed bed area at the rear. The van has an all-up weight of 1635kg, which means that it'll need a hefty tow car – a Kia Sorento or Land Rover Discovery for example.

Externally there is a 230V socket, a gas barbecue point, and a Truma awning warmer outlet sited between the door and the front nearside corner. The awning entry points are located at around 1m from ground level, which is a hugely preferable to the 2m points on some caravans.

Our one criticism is the siting of the waste outlets at the rear of the caravan. There's no problem if you're sited on a level pitch, but not all pitches are level and if the van is facing down the slope then the waste water has to be discharged uphill. Moving the outlets to the rear of the offside wheel would solve this problem.



1. Kitchen is well equipped 2. Island bed separated from the lounge area by the nearside washroom and offside kitchen 3. Dresser provides welcome worktop

In the doorway is a full flyscreen and the van's electric control panel has been fitted above the door. And here's the quality: the control panel has been fitted into a moulded timber housing with dark wood beads at each end.

There isn't a great deal of worktop space in the offside central kitchen unit, but facing it is a dresser whose top is large

enough to make up for this. The cooker is the latest Spinflo Caprice MKIII integral oven which has a four-burner hob and grill plus electronic ignition. Above the oven is a dedicated cupboard containing a microwave and there's a stainless steel cutlery receptacle hanging on the wall behind the kitchen unit which is a simple but useful addition to the



The 2009 Coachman VIP 545/4 needs a hefty tow car at this weight



There's not a lot of worktop space in the kitchen unit next to the Caprice MKIII cooker so you'll probably find yourself making use of the dresser opposite

kitchen equipment. At the left-hand end of the kitchen unit is a 107-litre stainless finish Thetford fridge. It has an 11-litre freezer, plus electronic ignition and digital display. And in the ceiling is a new style, two-way, three-speed Omnivent fan.

The front lounge area comprises a bench seat on either side with a chest of drawers between them. The top of the chest doubles as an occasional table and below the chest is of course the bed slat compartment, plus two blown air outlets. In the base is a cupboard which, in our experience, is ideal for storing shoes. There are two lockers above each seat and a further two above the front windows. The second roof locker on the offside is where the radio is fitted and once again when you look at the way it has been done, Coachman's quality shines through. In fact our only minor gripe is that speakers are mounted on the underside of the front corner lockers which, to some extent, affects the stereo sound quality.

Next to the nearside dresser is storage for the free-standing table, followed by the washroom compartment and then the fixed bed area. The washroom has a

Thetford electric toilet and a huge washbasin mounted in a corner cabinet. The circular shower is fitted in a partial compartment on the opposite wall, where the only door is the actual shower door, so when taking a shower, the washroom door needs to be swung across the van to close the fixed bed area off from the rest of the living space.

The island bed has a single wardrobe at either side of the headboard. This means that there is room to walk down each side of the bed when it is made up – something which is not always possible with this layout. The bed base is on gas struts which enables the bed to be lifted easily via the handle at the front to gain access to the massive storage area under it. Because this is a permanent sleeping area the windows in the near and offside walls have net curtains. Above each window is a narrow shelf and a panoramic rooflight has been fitted in the ceiling above the bed. There is a small shelf unit in each corner above the bed with three roof lockers spanning the gap between the two wardrobes. Adjustable reading lights have been fitted on the underside of the lockers.

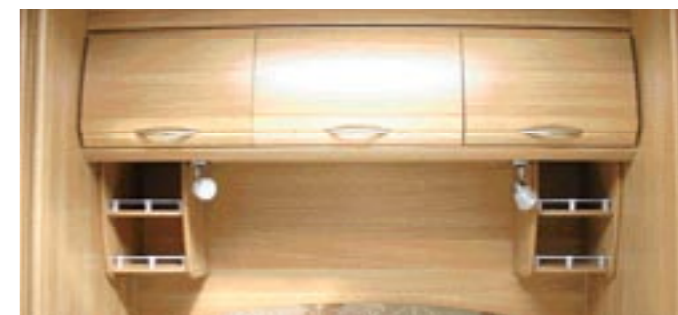
Generally, this is a good layout



There's a large washbasin and a Thetford electric toilet in the washroom, plus plenty of toiletry storage space



The front end lounge has a conventional layout with two bench seats with a chest of drawers between them



Above the bed are some small shelves and three good size lockers with two adjustable reading lights on their undersides



A microwave in its own dedicated roof locker is a standard fitting

with plenty of roof lockers but what it does lack, in our opinion, is more wardrobe hanging space. Bearing in mind that this is a four-berth, the two single wardrobes at the rear of the van are not really big enough for four people's clothes.

There are plenty of lights – both mains and 12volt – and the windows have been fitted with Seitz flyscreens and blinds. The cassettes completely surround the windows with the blinds contained in the bottom section and the flyscreen in the top one; the main feature of this type of system is that when the blinds are closed, daylight doesn't leak into the van in the same way that it does when there is no bottom cassette. The dresser incorporates a door which gives access to the blown air fan unit on the back of the Truma space heater mounted on the front of the dresser – very useful when servicing the unit. ■

OUR VERDICT



Coachman has come a long way in a comparatively short period of time to become one of the most respected touring manufacturers. It has put all its energies into improving the quality of its caravans.

When you open the lockers all the timber is edged and items such as the housing for the radio are superbly finished despite the fact that they are rarely seen by anyone. So many manufacturers tend to skimp on items which aren't on view all the time.

Naturally, this quality comes at a price – not to mention a higher MTPLM than many similar size vans. But you get what you pay for, and in this case you're getting a caravan which will outlast much of the competition at the same time as holding its value better.

ALTERNATIVES

- BAILEY SENATOR VIRGINIA £14,995
- GEIST 630 £17,495
- SWIFT CONQUEROR 645 £18,225

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