

Value challenge

The Conqueror is at the very top of Swift's line-up – but can the Challenger give you a similar caravan at much lower cost? **Doug King** finds out

SPECIFICATION

Price: £13,995 including VAT
Berths: 4
MRO: 1290kg (25.40 cwt)
Total user payload: 210kg (4.20cwt)
MPLM: 1500kg (29.60cwt)
Internal length: 5.50m (18ft 1in)
Overall length: 7.18m (23ft 7in)
Overall width: 2.29m (7ft 6in)
Overall height: 2.70m (8ft 10in)
Headroom: 1.95m (6ft 5in)
Warranty: Six year body shell, three years SuperSure manufacturing defects

TOWMATCH D

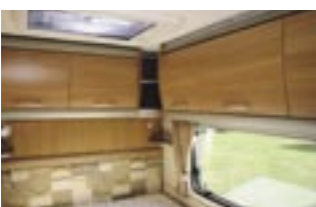
FOR & AGAINST

PROS

- Thetford C250 swivel toilet
- Radio/CD/MP3 player, with iPod/MP3 player connection
- AL-KO wheel lock

CONS

- Awning entry points poorly positioned
- Restricted room in washroom
- Lack of kitchen surface



The fixed bed area is bright and airy thanks to this large window and a panoramic roof light



1. Well-equipped kitchen with Omnivent fan in the ceiling 2. Plastic concertina door divides bedroom and living space at night 3. Large dresser provides much-needed worktop 4. Control panel is well located – out of reach of children and animals

QUESTION: what's the difference between the 2008 Swift Challenger 540 and the 2008 Swift Conqueror 540? Answer: the Challenger is a bit lighter and costs less. So can it be that the Challenger offers a way to buy a caravan very close to Swift's top range model and at £1500 less? Time to take a good, detailed look inside.

Like all 2008 Swift caravans, the Challenger 540 has thicker one piece aluminium sides. And like most things there's an up and a downside to this. The upside is that there is much less chance of

water ingress; the downside is that repairing major damage is likely to be much more costly.

The 540 is a single-axle fixed bed four-berth caravan. Externally, it has a wet locker and a gas barbecue point just to the rear of the nearside front corner, plus a large exterior door to the storage area under the fixed bed at the rear nearside of the caravan, whilst just behind the offside front corner are the flue to the Ultrastore boiler and the Whale water socket. Also on the offside are the battery compartment, the Thetford fridge ventilator grills, and the waste



You have to walk through the shower to reach the toilet

outlets. I have to criticise Swift's decision to put the awning entry points at about half a metre and two metres above ground level when all that's needed is one entry point at about 1.60m (5ft 3in).

You enter the caravan through the door just forward to the axle on the nearside, the door being a stable type with a fixed window and a built-in waste bin. To the left is the lounge area with a bench seat down either side and a two drawer chest of drawers between them. Facing the door is the offside kitchen with the wardrobe next to it. To the right of the door is a large dresser and then the fixed bed. The shower/toilet compartment is in the rear offside corner of the caravan.

Technically, the two bench seats in the lounge can become single beds at night but in fact I think this will only happen if children are to sleep here since the length of the seats is only 1.67m (5ft 6in) – nearside – and 1.59m (5ft 3in) – offside. However as a double bed you're looking at a size of 1.92m x 1.38m (6ft 4in x 4ft 6in). There are roof lockers and shelves above the seats and above the windows across the front of the van. The two lockers here are separated by a



The basic layout of the Challenger 540 comprises a front lounge with bench seats and an offside centre kitchen

small open compartment which incorporates a very attractive clock and ceiling light unit.

The seats can be lifted to gain access to the storage space below them – the battery compartment, water socket and Ultrastore water heater being sited under the offside seat, and the wet locker under the near side seat. However there is also a drop down door in the front of each panel as an alternative means of access. It's also worth noting that the seat panels and the chest of drawers meet at 45 degrees enabling the PIR to be fitted at the offside, and a mains socket on the nearside. Blown air outlets are also sited here.

The biggest drawback as far as the kitchen is concerned is the lack of worktop space on the kitchen unit. However, opposite, on the nearside, is the dresser with a top which more than makes up for this. As with other caravans in the company's 2008 ranges, a circular stainless steel sink has been fitted with a separate drainer and cutting



There's not much room on top of the kitchen unit, but there's a separate drainer

board, the latter fitting neatly into the top of the sink. A 107-litre digitally controlled Thetford fridge is fitted in the unit, together with a cutlery drawer and a cupboard alongside it.

Next to the kitchen unit is a Stoves hob and grill with electronic ignition. The hob has three gas rings and one electric hotplate. Below the grill is an oven and there is also an 800watt microwave in a housing above the dresser, opposite. Whilst I think a microwave is an asset to any caravan, once again I have to criticise the company's positioning of it at ceiling height. It's only fair, though, that I congratulate Swift for fitting the Ultrastore and Ultraheat controls on the wall above the top of the dresser – well out of the way of tiny hands and animals. Congratulations for fitting a two-way three-speed Omnivent fan in the ceiling in the kitchen area.

The wardrobe is sited next to the cooker on the offside of the caravan. It's a good size with a full



The dresser has a large worktop as well as two drawers and two cupboards

height door and in addition to the hanging rail there are two shelves, in one of which the consumer unit has been fitted where it can be easily accessed – again a plus point. And I also liked the way in which the freestanding table is stored in the wardrobe without you having to fight your way through a rail full of clothes to get at it.

Beyond the wardrobe and the dresser is the fixed bed area which is closed off from the front of the caravan at night by a plastic concertina door. The fixed bed is along the nearside wall with the headboard against the back panel. In the offside rear corner is the washroom, where to reach the toilet, you have to walk through the shower and then close a plastic translucent glazed door. I'm not enamoured by this arrangement but do accept that caravan design always involves compromise and you don't live in the compartment.

At the front offside of the fixed bed area, forward of the washroom, is a base unit into which the basin has been built. There's plenty of room for toiletries below and there are two large mirrors at right-angles to each other on the walls above.

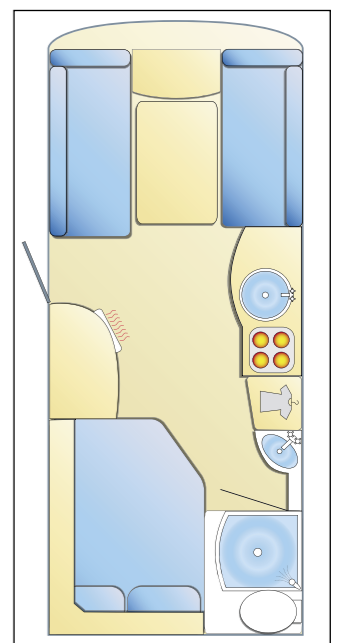
At the same price, the Challenger 530 has a large end washroom and no fixed bed. See page 67. ■

OUR VERDICT



There are a number of things I liked about the Challenger 540, not the least its build quality. Unfortunately, apart from the latest Thetford C250 toilet with its 18-litre wheeled holding tank, the radio/CD/MP3 player, and an iPod/MP3 player connection point, it doesn't really have anything stunningly new for 2008.

I was less than happy with the washroom and the position of the microwave. The 540 is designed to take four people in comfort but I believe that some sales, at any rate, will be to couples, not families, who want a fixed bed and more room to themselves. In all, I feel that it represents better value than the Conqueror 540, which sells at £1500 more. It's 100kg lighter as well.



ALTERNATIVES

● AVONDALE COACHCRAFT ARGENTE 555-4S £13,795

Virtually identical in specification to the Challenger 540 but with an MPLM 100kg less. Although there are some differences in terms of OEM equipment between the two caravans you would be hard pressed to notice them.

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