



RIP ROARING FORTY

Romahome R40 on 2.0-litre Citroën Dispatch

Compact and capable, the latest motorcaravan from the Isle of Wight is also the epitome of style and made to last



The name R40 is a stupendously unassuming moniker for such a very impressive motorcaravan. We'd have called it the Romahome Ritz - it was that aspirational. I have been acquainted with this baby since it was just a doodle on the back of the proverbial fag packet. From its infancy, I thought that Romahome had a winner here

and I wasn't wrong! An incredible number of advance orders placed (before the prototypes were complete) was only surpassed by the level of interest and commitment shown by prospective purchasers at February's NEC show.

Flora and I were beginning to think we were the only ones railing against the seemingly ever-increasing length of coachbuilts. According to some pundits the 'around

six-metre' market seems to have shrunk considerably, whereas the 'eight metre-plus' market has expanded out of recognition. I did wonder whether manufacturers are building what customers actually want, or just what the manufacturers think they want? Length is important to us, because we sometimes use our own motorcaravan as a car. In order for this to be achieved reasonably easily, it has to be possible to squeeze it into a standard



Words and pictures by Jonathan Lloyd



- 1 Entry to the living area is via the rear panel
- 2 Not quite car-like, but definitely MPV-esque, the Dispatch offers a relaxed drive



R40 is now in Jonathan and Flora's list as a possible replacement for their current motorhome

AT A GLANCE

- PRICE FROM: £37,995 OTR
- BERTHS: 4
- BASE VEHICLE: Citroën Dispatch platform cab
- LAYOUT: Overcab bed ahead of convertible twin-dinette lounge, nearside kitchen, offside wardrobe and washroom
- ECONOMY: 38mpg overall



parking space, but the 'van also has to be comfortable enough to live in during trips of up to two months duration. Further, we require safe (belted) and comfortable rear passenger seats and envisage needing them for the foreseeable future.

So, whilst the R40 is the biggest ever coachbuilt made by Romahome, it's still small enough to be called a compact 'van by today's standards: as such, it should suit us, and many others...

Now that Auto-Sleepers seems to have almost abandoned one of the things it was renowned for, the building of monocoque GRP coachbuilt bodies, the 'body beautiful' title may be heading south to Romahome on the Isle of Wight.

GROOVY BABY

Well, one thing's for sure, not many will be ambivalent about the interior colour-way: it's like it or loathe it. We adored the R40's decor from our first stolen glance and after a week's

intimate contact can report that in no way at all did familiarity breed contempt.

Incidentally, our initial stance was that we strongly disagreed with the brochure describing it as 'modern.' Surely the reverse was the case? Ain't it pure Mary Quant in style? Actually, the more time we spent in this 'van, the more we were unsure about this. On reflection we decided that it was a modern interpretation of typical 1960s interior decor, and, as such, was a successful synergy of tradition and modernity

High gloss, predominately GRP, wipe-clean walls and a lack of visual clutter - in the shape of floridly grand cocktail cabinets or over-ornate drapes and pelmets - left the interior with a fresh and opened out feel. Not convinced? Fortunately, other furniture finishes and a less in your face fabric are available.

Building on the supremely competent Citroën Dispatch brought far more positives than negatives, but we did find that the cab

seats were much lower than the rest. Although the passenger seat does swivel, we kept the dividing curtain closed most of the time, just using the cab as a store for wellies and the industrial-sized containers of junk that seem to accompany our travels. Further, as it was decidedly chilly for the duration of the test and the cab is the least well-insulated bit, by isolating it we kept snug in the living quarters.

The rear door (and its electrically-operated exterior step) is centrally placed in the rear panel. On entering, the kitchen is on the nearside, with the washroom and wardrobe opposite. Single Pullman dinettes are placed either side of the aisle behind the cab and that's it really, apart from the overcab bed.

READY TO ROLL

Although the cab seating position is lower than that of the Relay (Citroën's version of the larger Peugeot Boxer/Fiat Ducato base vehicle), it's higher than that in most saloon cars. This 'van drives like a modern MPV: no



surprise there, because it shares the major mechanicals and the important bits of the floor pan with an MPV.

Romahome uses the platform cab version of the Dispatch, which is known for its rigidity. A strong, moulded body mated to a platform cab is usually the recipe for a creak-free conversion and so it proved to be.

A trip to the local weighbridge confirmed Romahome to be absolutely spot on with its payload figures (other, less diligent manufacturers please note). This prototype had rather too much weight on the rear axle to allow full advantage to be taken of the commodious kitchen storage. It was within the base vehicle manufacturer's limits, but we dedicated followers of the 'chuck it all in and slam the door' school of packing may have to limit ourselves to only a couple of cases of Bolly per weekend trip. Seriously though, Romahome has already designed in weight saving measures at the rear for production models, which will not only address this issue,

but also further increase an adequate, but not over-generous payload by nearly 100kg.

All R40s will arrive equipped with the 2.0-litre 120 horsepower Euro IV-compliant turbo-diesel engine, mated to a six-speed gearbox and driving the front wheels.

I've already said that it was like an MPV on the road (with just a bit more body roll), and I found the whole driving experience to be a relaxed affair. Engine speed compared to road speed revealed sixth gear to be what us old-timers would call an overdrive ratio. In other words, it's designed for economical high-speed cruising, so a downward cog-swap or two is usually required for overtaking.

Modern diesel engines bear little resemblance to previous efforts, even when compared to the last generation of power units. They are all now much more economical, kinder to the planet and more civilised to drive, but can suffer some lack of tractability when the turbo is off boost. Which brings us around to the controversial subject of hill starts... *Juddergate*, as it has been referred to, is the reluctance of the latest Fiat Ducato to reverse uphill without some nasty vibration occurring: time to do some testing...

We live in the Fens and most of our testing is conducted in East Anglia where our version of mountainous terrain is called a speed hump. Nevertheless, after a significant detour, I did manage to find a one-in-ten hill on which the fully laden Romahome smoothly re-started in reverse. Funnily enough, it was less confident on *forward* hill starts: didn't even shiver, let alone judder, but it did scabble for grip.

Just as important, but in a more positive vein, was the achieved fuel economy. Testing vehicles (even on flat terrain) rarely produces optimum fuel consumption figures: in fact they are more representative of a worse case scenario. So the over 38mpg achieved is notable, especially as we had the diesel-fuelled space heater on all day every day. I fully expect 40-plus mpg to be attainable.





3 General view forwards from rear door. Kitchen on left, wardrobe and washroom on right. Gloss black cabinets create a feeling of 1960s modernity

4 The two single travel seats proved to be more roomy than double-seat alternatives

5 Twin dinettes are upholstered in 'groovy' fabric

6 TV/DVD player drops down just aft of the cab

7 One or both of the dinettes can be converted into inward-facing benches

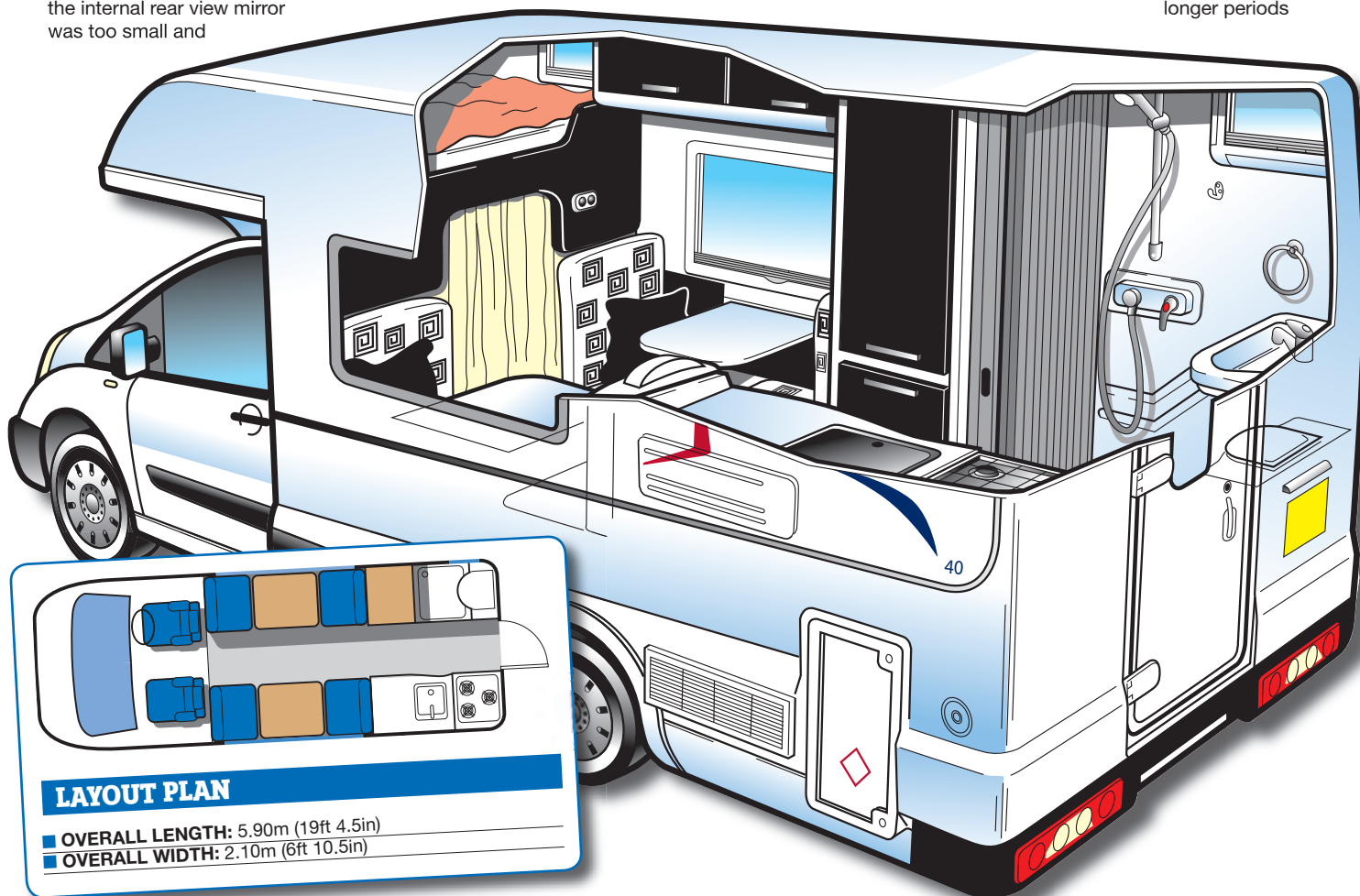
The less important feature that came in for some criticism was the rear vision system. Combining a rear view camera, a digital distance readout, and an audible warning of variable intensity, it should have been really useful, but it wasn't. This was principally because the monitor picture contained within the internal rear view mirror was too small and

all but obliterated by reflections during the daytime. What a shame.

Those heard muttering: If that's all he's got to criticise, it must have been mightily impressive to drive have accurately précised my findings.

R YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Yes, thank you. Coming and going seats looked fearsomely upright at first sight, but actually were very accommodating, though the backrests did require the deployment of a scatter cushion for a bit of lumbar support. Due to the chilly weather conditions, we spent longer periods



On Test Romahome R40

WE LIKED

- The concept
- Immensely strong, leak resistant moulded GRP body shell
- Flawless high-gloss finish to coachwork
- Vast amount of kitchen worktop
- Sink with draining ledge
- Three 230V sockets
- MPV-like drive
- Almost silent progress
- 40mpg attainable (possibly)

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Option of cab seat covers to match interior
- Proper backrest when in settee mode
- Easier bed making
- Option to close heater outlet in loo

WE DISLIKED

- Lack of handbooks
- No safety net for overcab bed

sitting than is usual when we go away - hours on end in fact. And no numb bums! Quite a recommendation.

Rear seat passengers gave the single forward-facing seats the thumbs up, commenting that the wide central aisle meant that two adults could sit comfortably, something they felt was rarely the case on Pullman double seats.

On site, the swing-down flat screen remote-control TV/DVD player could only really be seen by two viewers unless one of the dinettes was converted to an inward-

facing settee. Just drop the table and cushion shuffle. This actually became our preferred layout option: probably because it is the same as that found in our own Auto-Sleeper Pollensa. We did wish for a proper backrest, instead of a row of scatter cushions, though. Apparently, this is under development.

As I already mentioned, a Webasto diesel-fired combination heater provided warmth and hot water. It's a new model and proved simple to use, very controllable and featuring an easy-to-understand control panel. I've no idea what the consumption of diesel was, but I've a good idea of its current needs as it completely flattened the leisure battery in two days, causing us to abandon our original plans and look for a site with a hook-up available.

Artificial lighting is by high-output LED units, which were switched from the control panel located above the offside dining table. I turned them all on and checked the current drain thanks to the Muvonics management panel, learning that it was a fraction of what would be taken by halogen units.

Natural light flooded in through the large side windows and the wind-up panoramic rooflight.

REAR KITCHEN

On delivery, the designers told us that on this prototype the kitchen was very much a work in progress. This made it all the more surprising when it functioned so well. In production models, the basic design will stay the same but the units will be in moulded GRP and cabinet fronts in a lighter weight material - though still in that wonderfully moody, gloss black finish.

It's often the case in motorcaravans that the most frequently reported moan over the kitchen is not the lack of equipment, or



of storage, but of worktop. Even the most cursory glance at this galley shows that no such criticism is valid here. However, we did disagree over whether the cover to the sink





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8 The kitchen got the thumbs up from both of us, spacious worktop an unexpected luxury

9 Hot, but not cross, cooking facilities feature a grill/oven combo

10 Washroom is well designed and proved easy to keep clean

11 The R40 is small enough to be happy in car parks

12 Single beds were comfy and generous in length. An all-over double is also possible

was a bonus or not. Flora felt that it gave draining dishes something to lean against, whereas as I thought it impeded usage of the worktop behind it.

However, we both agreed that the galley was a pleasant place to create in and were not at all bothered by the absence of a window and/or an extractor fan. Task lighting was perfectly effective, but (again) could only be switched from the control panel.

At a guess, I'd say that the prototype kitchen was constructed from domestic units, just to see if it worked, before going to all the bother of making a purpose-built GRP mould. In spite of this, the drawers did need stronger catches as twisty country lanes caused

them to empty their contents all over the floor. Again, this should not be a problem on production models, as they will have different mechanisms.

There was no dedicated crockery store, though all the overhead lockers have a lip to prevent contents from escaping when they are first opened after a journey.

ROOMY WASHROOM

Prior to this test we have always maintained that we hate those grey plastic tambour entrance doors, as they frequently come off their tracks and one of us (me usually) ends up wearing them! Now we have to modify our view to: we hate all of this type of door

we've experienced so far except this one. Congratulations to Romahome for engineering something that worked so efficiently and looked as though it would stand up to long-term (admittedly heavy-handed) usage by the Lloyd dynasty.

The door's fitness for purpose was also the portent of things to come... Wipe clean (or do I mean wipe dry?) GRP walls, plenty of elbowroom and an efficient spray from the showerhead, ticked all the boxes under showering, although, with no curtain to protect your clothes, you'll have to leave them outside the compartment.

The tip-up basin has its own mixer tap and is designed so that you don't need to empty the tank in order to have a sufficient depth of water to wash in. A bench-style electric-flush loo is set across the rear - its waste cassette equipped with a foldaway handle and built in wheels.

Clever overhead lights were switched on the unit themselves, not by a push-button or toggle control. They were turned on and off by simply placing your hand on them. They worked well for me, though my less tall partner-in-crime found them difficult to reach.

The opening high-level window offered light and ventilation without sacrificing privacy. Finally, it was good to see hooks, a towel ring and a loo roll holder fitted as standard.

So, it was all perfection then? Err, not quite! It's been a long time since we've experienced hot thighs (tepid is the best we can manage these days), but we both did in the washroom. The heater outlet came uncomfortably close to one's left thigh when sitting on the throne and it didn't have a butterfly flap fitted to reduce its scorching output.

READY FOR BED

The R40 sleeps four, either in two doubles, or in the overcab double and two longitudinal singles. To convert the seating into two single



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On Test Romahome R40

13 Operate the push buttons, pull on the handles, and out glide two very useful half-height wardrobes

14 The control panel is almost too cutting edge

15 The R40's moulded GRP body should shrug off moisture and have a long active life



beds, the dinettes must first be converted into inward-facing benches by lowering the tables. These benches are not quite long enough so an extension has to be used.

These beds were sound and well up to the job, though deploying them was a bit of an effort. Firstly, the cab seats had to be slid forward. Then the furthest forward seat squab cushion had to be removed: you need to put it out of the way and not just lift it up, as two hands are needed for the next part. The seat box locker lid has to be raised (and on the nearside, the leisure battery compartment door removed) before access to an over-centre catch can be achieved. This had to be released to allow the upstand to hinge down to provide a bed extension. The resulting beds were both of generous length and comfortable. However, we both felt that one shouldn't need to delve around in seat lockers in order to make up a bed.

The overcab bed access ladder could be



LIVE-IN TEST DATA

TYPE:

Overcab coachbuilt

PRICE

- From: £37,995 OTR
- As tested: £40,055 OTR

BASICS

- Vehicle: Citroën Dispatch platform cab
- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 2 years base vehicle, 1 year conversion

CONSTRUCTION

GRP double-skinned monocoque construction overcab coachbuilt. Caravan entrance in rear panel

DIMENSIONS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Length: 5.90m (19ft 4.5in)*
- Width: 2.10m (6ft 10.5in)*
- Height: 2.70m (8ft 10.5in)*
- Wheelbase: 3.12m (10ft 3in)
- Rear overhang: 1.80m (5ft 11in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 2963kg
- Payload: 368kg (after driver (75kg), 90 per cent fuel and gas)

INSIDE STORY

Overcab bed ahead of convertible twin-dinette lounge, nearside kitchen, offside wardrobe and washroom

- Insulation: Double skin GRP, Thinsulate in roof and walls
- Interior height: 1.99m (6ft 6.5in) min

Romahome

THE VEHICLE

- Engine: 2.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 120bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox with fascia-mounted gearlever, front-wheel drive
- Fuel consumption: 38mpg overall
- Brakes: Ventilated discs all round with ABS and EBA
- Suspension: Front: Independent with McPherson struts. Rear: Independent with trailing arms supporting coil springs
- Features: Electro-hydraulic power steering, remote central locking (cab only), driver's airbag, electric mirrors and windows, cab seats adjustable for squab height rake and reach, lockable glove box, radio CD/MP3 player with steering column-mounted controls

LOUNGING AND DINING

Two single Pullman dinettes either side of central aisle convert to provide longitudinal sofas

KITCHEN

- Located along nearside wall from amidships to far rear. Longitudinal in layout with a large radius-edged worktop above appliances, drawer storage below, lockers above
- Sink: Cramer stainless-steel unit with draining shelf, monobloc mixer tap, glass cover
- Cooker: Spinflo Compact with three-burner hob

deployed with the lower beds made as singles but not if it was made as a double. The bed up there was judged by twelve-year-old Kyle to be comfortable, though he wanted some curtains for privacy, and I wished for a safety net - especially important if younger children are going to use it.

Have you noticed how nobody has problems anymore, they just have issues? Well, we had 'issues' with each other concerning the control of the lights whilst in bed. The problem (sorry, issue) was not so much the fact that switching was via the management panel (or by hand held remote control), rather that the over-bed lights were either all on or all off. So we compromised over the reading/sleeping/lights-out situation with the predictable result that neither of us was totally happy.

REPOSITORIES

Voluminous high-level lockers run down both sides, plus all the seat boxes are available for storage. There was no exterior access to these and interior access is solely through top lids, so cushions have to be moved before anything can be stored or retrieved. We judged the storage to be adequate for a family of four and generous for a couple.

We first saw Romahome's slide-out wardrobes in the (Barry Stimson designed) Dimension high top. They are really clever and deserved to be included in this all-new design. OK, so this leisure vehicle can't accommodate full-length formal clothes, but who cares? Actually I do, as I sometimes have to attend posh bun fights when using our motorcaravan for business. No worries, I'll just lay out the white tie, top hat and tails in the luton!

The gas cylinder locker holds a single 13kg cylinder or one 7kg and one 907 Campingaz cylinder - useful when venturing abroad. Both fresh and waste water tanks are underslung and didn't appear to be insulated. Neither froze during our chilly test. Winter skiers and snowboarders may wish for an inboard tank, but the resultant loss in internal storage space would be a strong disincentive for us.

As keen club ralliers, we would require a second leisure battery (there is room for one), principally to power the heating system when not on hook-up and in very cold weather.

REMOTELY CONTROLLED POWER

The Muvonics electrical management panel was a new one on me. It seemed to perform everything required of it though the display's (changeable) coloured backgrounds didn't offer much help, and without an instruction booklet, I failed to deduce whether it would warn of a nearly full waste water tank, though I'm pretty sure it will.

The hidden bit of the system is the latest Power Guardian charger and consumer unit. These are also quite new and are a considerable improvement on earlier models. The newbies have better protection against power surges and voltage spikes, and are more efficient and quieter in operation.

R40 IN 40 WORDS

Award-winning British manufacturer has managed to distil the essence of motorcaravanning into this perfectly sized, design-led model. This prototype still required some development, but was so fundamentally right that it has gone on the shortlist for our next 'van. It's glorious. ■

ROMAHOME R40

over combined oven and grill. Electronic ignition
■ Fridge: Dometic RM2401 three-way, manual energy selection, full-width freezer compartment. Capacity: 97 litres

WASHROOM

Located on offside at far rear. Tambour door opens into moulded compartment with tip-up washbasin, electric-flush cassette toilet, shower, mirror-fronted moulded storage cabinet with shelves and fiddle rails underneath. High-level opening window, hooks and towel rail. Shower has riser rail and separate monobloc mixer tap

BEDS

Two lounge singles

- **Length:** 1.93m (6ft 4in)
- **Width:** 700mm reducing to 400mm (2ft 3.5in - 1ft 4in)

Alternative lounge double

- **Length:** 1.93m (6ft 4in)
- **Width:** 1.84m (6ft 0.5in)

Overcab double

- **Length:** 1.85m (6ft 1in)



- **Width:** 1.30m (4ft 3in)
- **Headroom:** 550mm (1ft 9.5in) max

STORAGE

Six deep high-level lockers, four seat boxes, two slide-out half-height wardrobes

LIFE SUPPORT

- **Fresh water:** Underslung. Capacity: 61 litres (13.4 gallons)
- **Waste water:** Underslung. Capacity: 64-litres (14 gallons)
- **Water and space heater:** Webasto DualTop diesel-fired boiler with blown-air
- **Leisure battery:** 85 amp hr
- **Gas:** Capacity 1 x 13kg cylinder or 1 x 7kg and 1 x Campingaz 907 cylinders
- **Lighting:** Nine LED downlighters, one double unit over cab bed, two single units in washroom. Two fluorescent lights in panoramic rooflight moulding. Four blue LEDs recessed into rear step
- **Sockets:** 230V: 3 (single switched outlets) 12V: 1 (in cab on dashboard)
- **Control panel:** Mounted above offside window with digital readouts and touch-screen operation.
- **Blinds/curtains:** Seitz cassette pleated blinds and flyscreens to all residential windows. Lined dividing curtain shuts off cab
- **Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant:** Yes

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- **Base vehicle:** Cab air-conditioning (£980),

- passenger airbag (£140),
- **Conversion:** TV and aerial (£480), reversing camera and monitor (£280), battery-to-battery charging (£180)

Other options

- **Base vehicle:** None listed
- **Conversion:** Reversing sensors (£230), alternative furniture finish and fabrics (FOC)

E&OE



VEHICLE SUPPLIED BY

Romahome Ltd, Prospect Road, Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO31 7AD (tel: 01983 292451; web site: www.romahome.com)

WE STAYED AT

Motor Caravanners' Club Essex Group Easter Rally, at Burnham on Crouch, Essex