



PREVIOUS PAGE: Sensational Aurora Borealis over the ice floes of Jokulsarlon Lagoon
THIS PAGE – CLOCKWISE FROM THE TOP: Natural ice 'sculpture' on Jokulsa Beach; Geoff and Sue's Ski-doo adventure; View across Reykjavik city; One of many unusual Icelandic churches; Dramatic Skogafoss Waterfall; Swift Elegance 570 parked near volcanic fumaroles



THE ADVENTURE: ICELAND

Our route took us from Harwich to Esbjerg by DFDS ferry, followed by a tow up to Hirtshals in the north where we boarded the Smyril Line ferry for our sailing to Seydisfjordur in north-eastern Iceland. It was certainly interesting how closely they packed us all in on the ferry deck and, in retrospect, it was helpful to get to know the new van with some intricate reversing practice...

After two nights full of anticipation (and mackerel) on the ferry, driving off the ramp at Seydisfjordur was a relief, though we weren't fully prepared for how extraordinary this land is.

Our first destination was Lake Myvatyn, and we quickly towed up beyond the snow line, then descended and headed for Hengifoss for a bracing walk to the waterfall surrounded by basalt columns. After more stops, including one to see fumaroles (steam vents and bubbling mud pools) we arrived at our first campsite in an old lava field, where we met by our tour guides.

The infamous black flies of Lake Myvatyn appeared in squadrons, so we bought insect nets to place over our heads and hats. This just added to the sense of adventure, amusement and group bonding, as it was almost impossible to recognise each other without getting close.

How to describe all this? We began to realise that we were, at last, in the land of ice and fire – and the midnight sun. Our first journey had been breathtaking and so it went on, day after day: a voyage of incredible discovery.

We were driving anti-clockwise around the country, largely using Road 1, which was mostly reasonably surfaced but quite narrow. Venture far off this route, however, and the roads quickly became more challenging, so some prior thought about 'side-visits' en route is essential.

That said, using the Touareg, we were able to leave the caravan on-site and make some forays further into the interior on 4x4 tracks, having checked out the weather and other safety requirements, of course. It was on these trips that we saw some really sensational scenery. These moments were quite special for us and confirmed in our minds that we will remain caravanners, at least for some while yet, as the motorhomers were confined to site.

It is really difficult to pick highlights out of so many experiences but here goes, taken in order of travel...



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- In the north, we walked up and around the active crater of Viti (Hell), formed in 1724, complete with nearby steam vents. On the way we visited the Leirbotn geothermal power station, which pipes the steam from vents in the area, the narrow road actually passing beneath the steam pipes. From Husavik, we sailed in a restored Icelandic oak schooner, photographing whales and puffins. We drove to the Dettifoss waterfall, which, with a drop of 45m, is truly spectacular. At 40km from the Arctic Circle we were enchanted by Iceland's most northerly town, Siglufjordur, near a fjord at the foot of steep mountain walls.

to the Blue Lagoon having already lazed in a natural hot spa in the north – so many difficult choices!

- Continuing south, we passed through the Golden Circle in driving wind and rain to reach Geysir, our new outfit proving remarkably stable in very poor towing conditions. The highlights here were the Gullfoss falls and the truly remarkable geysers right next to the site. One of the memorable magic moments of the trip was our walk to photograph the geyser Strokkur, spouting 30 metres of hot water in the midnight sun. It was in this area that we undertook our longest solo adventure on a 4x4 track (the 208) to visit Landmannalaugar, with its natural hot springs. On this fascinating trip we passed close to the active Hekla volcano and forded a flowing river in the Touareg.
- Our journey in the south again saw us driving through wonderful scenery between stops, including a vast moss-covered lava plain. Here we took a 'Superjeep' trip to Eyjafjallajökull, the volcano responsible for the 2010 eruption that brought European air traffic to a halt. We sailed on the astonishing Jokulsarlon Lagoon, where new icebergs are constantly forming, walked on glaciers and drove a Ski-doo on Vatnajokull, the largest European glacier. Before completing our adventures and embarking on the ferry to the Faroe Islands we were able to photograph puffins at very close range at Bakkagerdi, north of the port at Seydisfjordur.

After all of this we had a less than a full day on the ferry to try and focus on the next stage of our adventure.

HOMEWARD BOUND

Our journey home was a repeat of the outward leg without a stop in Denmark and with the high levels of anticipation being replaced by a feeling of sadness at the conclusion of a quite exceptional adventure.

The Touareg had been its usual ultra-reliable self and enabled us to get to places impossible to access by normal car or motorhome and the new Swift Elegance had been brilliant.

We had met some remarkable fellow travellers and fascinating locals. We had been guided by two great tour leaders but, most importantly, we had been privileged to travel in unique lands unlike any other on earth.



FROM TOP:
On the quayside after docking in Iceland; Superjeep tour; Strokkur Geyser

- In the west we circumnavigated the wonderful Stykkisholmur peninsula, including an unforgettable trip up to the glacier on a 4x4 track in the Touareg, the last leg of which now features on YouTube! From Stykkisholmur we travelled to Akranes where we stayed four nights, travelling to the capital, Reykjavik, once on a trip with the group and once again by ourselves: yes, we were captivated! From Akranes we explored wonderful 4x4 tracks between glaciers in the Kaldidalur valley, visited the largest hot springs in Europe, which provide community heating for Akranes and walked along the North American/Eurasian rift that runs across Iceland. We decided to forgo a day's visit

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ICELAND SWIFT ELEGANCE ADVENTURE



A COUPLE OF ADDITIONS

In the pictures, you might notice two additions for this trip that spoil the beautifully clean lines of the Elegance: our faithful Fiamma Caravanstore awning and a wired rear-view camera. The camera allows me to reverse into all kinds of places without Sue having to leap out and wave her hands about. I fix it with strong velcro and it's not let me down so far. The Caravanstore awning has to be mounted on the awning rail and stays there. Of course, the rail is part of the structure on this van so it's strong, but it's good to know that, after cleaning it up and with the usual squirt of lubricating polish, the awning slid on without problems. We also replaced the supplied gas connector so we could use

Gaslight propane. Apart from these additions, and a Powrtouch motor mover for emergencies, the Elegance was exactly as it comes from Swift Group.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After picking up the van from Cottingham, we had two days to sort and load it before we departed, but that didn't stop us from having a good look around. The interior is simply stunning, not only beautiful but exuding an air of solidity. Pulling back the fixed front cushions reveals the GRP and Styrofoam panels, firmly screwed into the embedded polyurethane blocks ('PURE'). The furniture construction, with robust corner mouldings, looks to be more than up to the job. Opening the left-hand cupboard in the bathroom reveals the 'SRIM' corner jointing structure that enables the curved, aerodynamic shape.

TOWING

On this trip we towed in many different situations, many of them 'challenging'. Although much of the main Road 1 around Iceland is surfaced, occasionally we experienced sudden and unexpected ripples in the road, at exactly the wrong frequency for a caravan being towed at 50mph. We also, of course, travelled on a number of unsurfaced roads and, on one occasion in particular, high winds with severe gusting. On one occasion we hauled it out of a very, very muddy field with the Touareg. This caravan has had a rough ride!

We are used to towing a large twin-axle and we expected the single-axle Elegance 570 to produce a much more unsettled ride, but we were very pleasantly surprised. The real forte of this van is its stability. In severe winds, we can say, unequivocally, that this is by far and away the most stable van we

MAIN PIC: View across
Jokulsarlon Lagoon

ABOVE - LEFT TO RIGHT:
The Sun Warrior sculpture in
Reykjavik; Puffins on the cliffs at
Bakkagerdi; Ice on Jokulsa Beach

ROUNDEL: Jokulsa sunrise



have towed in our 30 years of caravanning. To be fair, the Touareg is a big beast and this gave a towing ratio not far above 70%. Even so, the results were quite remarkable. Road 1 is single track and quite narrow, so that approaching lorries travelling at above 80km/h pass very close indeed but failed to produce any reaction at all in the outfit. By the end of the trip we were quite happy to continue without reducing speed.

As expected in Iceland, there were some pretty heavy rainstorms and it was interesting to see how the spray tended to flow much lower along the sides of the van than normal, so that they tended to stay clean. Despite travelling through the blackfly-ridden area of Myvatn, in northern Iceland, there were no fly marks on the van above head height and the wide front 'sun-window' stayed clean. Computer-modelled aerodynamics at their very best – at least for this particular outfit. The van had the optional 'Supagard' paint protection and this did seem to make washing off the van extremely easy – which is really important to us in an extended trip such as this one.

LIVING IN IT

This was quite unlike any other extended trip we've undertaken. We normally cook and eat outside when the weather is warm but, although it doesn't get dark in Iceland in June, it's rarely warm enough. On top of that, there were usually few showers at the campsites and we ended up showering in the van each morning. The pattern of our

day became get up, shower, then either off to the next campsite or off with the Touareg, returning early or late evening, then usually cooking a meal after a chat with fellow adventurers. In these circumstances, the Elegance really became our home and had very heavy use, occasionally serving as a place for entertaining as well.

The 30-litre on-board water tank was excellent. I was initially worried about its location in the nose of the van but this didn't prove to be a problem in practice as, with a little under a quarter of a tank the noseweight sat at 85kg. In practice, this allows the noseweight to be adjusted assuming you have enough load margin. It also provides 70 litres of water with a 40-litre container attached. We left a small amount in the tank when running.

We shouldn't forget the sleeping arrangements either. The bed is excellent. We're used to this arrangement, if not the comfort, and it suits us well; as I often sit up and complete a travel blog, Sue can nod off without my disturbing her and, with the blinds drawn (it's still light, remember) I got to appreciate the mood lighting. While a more substantial room divider might be ideal, caravan design is a space/use compromise and we can say that we used the flexible divider almost every day with no issues at all. In the morning, Sue would insist on my turning on the music and we both became addicted to musical showers from the speakers in the bathroom... it's the little things in life!

The Alde heating worked perfectly, with uniform heating throughout the van. The new control panel is a big improvement on earlier models. We would leave it on while we were out for the day so that the towel rail dried the towels, as we couldn't rely on the weather to do so. The hanging rail in the shower was put into use on numerous occasions to dry our outdoor gear, too. We were worried that we would miss our large floor-to-ceiling refrigerator, but the 110-litre Dometic appliance met all our needs and, of course, used less gas. The 'acrylic stone' kitchen surface seemed to provide more working space than expected, increased by the solid fold-up flap – and it really looked good, too.

CONCLUSIONS

This van has been on a tough, taxing adventure and it's come through brilliantly. Nothing fell off, nothing broke, and the joints are as firm now as when we started out, despite the pounding. In fact the only thing that went wrong was that one of the cupboard catches became slightly sticky – really, that's all! We are convinced about the toughness of this design – enough said.

Living in the van is another matter. How we feel about our caravans and motorhomes is influenced by so many factors. I can only say that we really bonded with the Elegance. It became our home for a while, we loved living in it, we were proud to have it and we were delighted by the interest shown in it by other caravanners and motorhomers, a number of them Icelanders.

