



REVIEW | £23,555 + £565 delivery | MIRO 1495kg | MTPLM 1800kg | 4 Berth

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Red and shiny gold for the cushions and curtains – and just look at the sumptuous rug!

Sterling Eccles SE Sapphire

The décor involves stylish wallpaper. The furniture is white and linen-look pale fawn. The fridge is big and the heating is Alde. This is a true home-from-home caravan

Two new twin-axle fixed-bed models arrived for 2015 from Swift. They're the same layout, the same price, the same MTPLM and both have Alde heating. But they are very different in terms of interior styling.

These are the Challenger SE 640 and the Sterling Eccles SE Sapphire. The layout makes these caravans something of a rarity. They have island beds against the rear wall,

with the shower forward of the bed on the offside and a separate toilet-washbasin compartment directly opposite. Only one other twin-axle caravan offers the same layout. And that's the Buccaneer Caravel which, at £30,499, is in a different price bracket. Note: The newest Coachman Laser also has its bed against the rear wall but the layout is otherwise distinctly different from these three.

TESTED BY

Val Chapman

PHOTOGRAPHY

Richard Chapman

The layout isn't new, though. I owned and loved a Sterling Elite Explorer of the same layout, which I bought new in 2007 and is still in the family, now owned by my mum! When I spend time in her Sterling it still feels firmly like home. That's possibly one reason why I love these two new Swifts. And it's certainly why I know that these two new, now-rare layouts work really well in terms of practicality. It's not just the



position of the bed, the showering and washing arrangements are what make the difference.

Our review caravan, the Sapphire version of this layout, is distinguished by white doors and fawn walls. It's the sort of décor you'd associate with a house or apartment rather than a caravan. And nowhere is this styling point more emphatic than in the shower-washroom corridor.

SHOWERING

The pure white, very solid door of the toilet-washbasin room opens across the corridor, to completely close off the bedroom and washing department. The shower door is identical; they both have big, bold, brushed-steel, knob-style handles, again looking very domestic.

The toilet-washbasin compartment on the nearside has a large mirror

TECHNICAL STUFF

BERTHS 4
BODY 6.27M
OVERALL 7.93M
WIDTH 2.25M
HEADROOM 1.95M
WEIGHT MIRO 1495kg
 MTPLM 1800KG



with strips of lighting inset along each side. The exterior wall is clad in pure white, with a slightly raised shiny pattern; it looks just like wallpaper. Lovely!

Evidence that this caravan is Alde-heated is in the washroom; a radiator is on the rear wall, with a towel loop ideally placed high above it.

SLEEPING

If there's one criticism of longitudinally aligned fixed beds it's that one occupant can't get in and out of bed as easily as the other because they're sleeping against the wall. Island beds get around that problem. But most of them have wardrobes of unequal sizes.

The two new rear island bed Swifts, though, have wardrobes of equal size, on either side of the

bed. And there's plenty of space to walk around three sides of the bed.

The bed is 1.9m long and has a mechanism which enables you to shorten it by 20cm during the day, creating more walking space.

The triangular dressing table has two power points and television connections.

The fawn and white wall and cabinetry styling is enhanced in the bedroom by black and gold wallpaper on the rear wall, with a linear design that accentuates the feeling of space.

The deep headboard is well padded and edged in rich red, matching the red and gold upholstered panels alongside the windows.

This is a delightful bedroom-suite arrangement, practical in configuration and awesomely luxurious in looks.



Wallpaper on the bedroom wall – utterly gorgeous!



Two distinct rooms and a domestic-style door to separate them



A panel radiator (left), part of the Alde system, is on the washroom forward wall



The dressing table has an ample supply of mains and TV sockets



Stark pure white and with a flow-increasing air-inlet shower rose



Lighting under the edge of the kitchen surface illuminates the white cabinets



STORAGE

All beds which have a retracting mechanism present a slight restriction on the size and shape of items like folding chairs, so it's wise to make sure you choose chairs that are no wider than the space between the metal structures of the bed base. That said, the space under this bed is really easy to access because you can walk around three sides of it.

Wardrobes each provide 36cm of hanging width. Drawers and shoe cabinets are beneath, together with small shelves that are perfect for coffee mugs.

Substantial catches are on all top lockers, operated by chunky push-and-release buttons at the centre of big, chrome handles.

You'd expect a caravan of this size to be good on storage, and it is. So good, in fact, that I think few buyers will need to use the under-settee spaces.

DINING

The four-seater table has its own cabinet aft of the 190-litre fridge-freezer, opposite the kitchen.

Rarely are table surfaces worthy of comment but this one is. Matching the kitchen and small, front pull-out table, it's white with a fine geometric filigree design in palest grey. It's another element of Sterling styling that's utterly superb and unlike anything I see anywhere else in caravans.

LOUNGING

Here again, styling is stunning; deep red combines with brown and gold shades. And there's a long-pile gold-brown rug; that's unique to Swift, too.

The offside settee is 1.86m long; the nearside one is 30cm shorter, at 1.56m. Bolster-shaped cushions are provided as well as square ones; getting cosy is easy here!

Only one small thing mars the awesome styling of the lounge. That's the presence of a bin on the door. As caravan bins go, it's prominent, so it doesn't enhance styling. Somehow, amid all this amazing décor, it's incongruous to

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WHAT WE LIKE

- ▶ The big fridge-freezer
- ▶ The two-room aspect of the layout
- ▶ The use of wallpaper in the bedroom and washroom
- ▶ The amazing styling and colours

WHAT WE DON'T LIKE

- ▶ The slight restriction on the size and shape of folding chairs you can put under the bed
- ▶ The bin in the lounge!



Awesomely elegant in style and rich in colour!

imagine rubbish in a receptacle in the lounge. If a bin is a necessity, why not attach it to the inside of the right-hand kitchen cabinet door where it would be out of sight? (When I bought this layout of Sterling, where the door is also very much in the lounge, I ordered the caravan without the bin; to this day it looks so much neater!)

KITCHEN

The kitchen has an impressive quantity of storage space. The tower fridge-freezer has a deep cabinet above it. There are two shelves in the slim cabinet that houses the table.

Opposite, two cabinets each give you 40cm of width. The left-hand one has two metal basket-style shelves, plus space beneath that's large enough for tall items. The right-hand cabinet also has metal pull-out shelves – this time designed for smaller items such as canned food – and, again, plenty of floor-level space for large items. The cutlery drawer is a good size, too, at 30cm wide, and with four compartments. There's a second, smaller cutlery drawer above the cabinet on the fore end of the kitchen.

I adore the back-lit acrylic panel on the kitchen wall; it continues the geometric filigree pattern theme of the table surfaces, this time with big, bold shapes but staying with the grey-white outline design.

The sink is set into an elliptical, white surround that fans out into a small drainer area around the tap. Brilliant in practicality and styling!

The microwave is centrally placed, between white cabinets that slightly slope towards the wall, away from the microwave. This feature serves no other purpose than styling,

which is fine; I love everything I see in the Sapphire.

TOWING

As expected of a caravan of this calibre, Sterling Eccles models are equipped with the AL-KO ATC electronic stability control system. With the advantage of twin-axle stability there's potentially less work for the sway-detection-and-correction system to do. But it's good to know it's there to enhance the safety margin.

The Sapphire's tow test was a brief one and, by chance, involved a lot of manoeuvring; an opportunity to illustrate that twins behave more precisely and predictably at slow speeds in reverse. And that's something to bear in mind if you're thinking of switching from one to two axles when you next change your caravan.

ALSO CONSIDER...

Swift Challenger SE 640; the same layout, the same price and the same weight

OPTIONS TO GO FOR...

AL-KO Secure wheel locks, at £255 each

OUR VERDICT

This brilliant, spacious, distinctly two-roomed layout has practicality in spades. The Sapphire's red, gold and white décor and long-pile ultra-cosy rug create what is surely one of caravanning's style icons of the current era. This is a caravan that may tempt new people to consider caravanning, appealing to potential buyers whose taste in holiday (and home) abodes is bright and modern and who appreciate a high level of equipment.

THE RED, GOLD AND WHITE DÉCOR AND LONG-PILE RUG CREATE WHAT IS SURELY ONE OF CARAVANNING'S STYLE ICONS

