

BESSACARR E480

Well-built, well-specified and well-priced, Bessacarr's E400 range is another strong mass-market 'van from the Swift Group

- ⊕Price £43,175* ⊕Sleeps 4 ⊕Belts 2 ⊕Base vehicle Fiat Ducato
- ⊕Engine 2.3-litre HDI ⊕L/W/H 7.49/2.24/2.9m (24'7"/7'4"/9'6")
- ⊕Economy 23.5mpg ⊕MTPLM 4005kg ⊕Payload 701kg
- ⊕Water fresh/waste 90/68 litres ⊕Battery 95Ah ⊕Gas Two x 7kg
- (*Price as tested £43,680.76)

Bessacarr's E400 range was re-launched earlier this year at the February NEC show, alongside its near-identical twin, the Swift Sundance range. The Swift Group exceeded all expectations with this latest iteration of its former entry-level offering now upgraded to take on mid-market rivals. The 'vans were praised for looking the part,

with their attractive low-profile mould and classy stylised rear panel, and for being well-equipped and cannily designed, despite all coming in under the £46,000 mark.

The E400 range is a mix of classic British layouts – the end-kitchen E435 and rear lounge E460 and E495 – and Continental-flavoured fixed-bed layouts with the British

twist of a facing-sofa lounge up front. There are two of these: the E450, which has a French bed, and the E480, which has a rear transverse double bed with a garage beneath it. The E480's 7.49m length means that there is ample interior room for two – which is the maximum you can carry, since despite having four sleeping berths the side-facing lounge keeps the

'van's belted travelling seat count to two.

We enlisted our reader testers Vera and Peter Whalley to take the E480, and their labrador Blue, to Peterborough for a mobility show, where they tested its suitability for a touring couple in need of garage space and extra bed space for guests (or a big, friendly dog).

DESIGN

The E480's habitation body sports what our testers dubbed a 'modern low-line design'. Despite not being as low a low-profile as they would have liked, Vera and Peter were impressed with the looks.

"The prominent brow of the habitation mimics the Ducato cab design, making the whole design look quite cohesive and classy," said Peter.

"I think the high-gloss sides and tasteful decals make it look very stylish," Vera agreed. "In fact, it looks like it should cost more than it does."

The Whalleys found that entry into the habitation was slightly challenging, especially for those with mobility problems, due to the standard-height chassis and single entry step (prior to the relaunch, the range had a double step). The flipside to this is that the habitation floor has only one level, so movement within the 'van is very easy. The interior was praised for being restrained and elegant, without

Our testers

Peter and Vera Whalley and their labrador Blue hail from Lincolnshire. They have been camping and caravanning for most of their lives and worked in the leisure industry for many years. Two years ago they bought their first motorhome, a Chausson Flash 08, and have travelled extensively ever since.

We stayed at...

Ferry Meadows Caravan Club Site,
Ham Lane, Peterborough PE2 5UU
Tel 01733 233 526

Web www.caravanclub.co.uk

Located within a country park with steam trains, lakes, cycle and walking trails.



Swift Group Limited, Dunswell Road, Cottingham, East Yorkshire HU16 4JX
Tel 01482 847 332 Web www.swiftgroup.co.uk



FOODIE HEAVEN
The E480's sizeable kitchen has decent workspace and ample equipment - a big sink, a microwave and a cooker with a full oven and grill



CLIMB TO BED
The height of the garage means that you need to climb two steps to get to the fixed-height double bed. Some will find access to it narrow



STAYING IN CONTROL
Swift have been using this LED-heavy control panel for a few years now - it's intuitive to use, very clear and easy to handle



WARM SPOT
Swift pioneered the use of warm, power-thrifty LED lighting, which creates a much nicer ambience than older, white-light LEDs



CARAVANGUARD
INSURANCE
QUOTE
£229.75*

TWEAKED TRADITION
Swift has balanced the Continental-style garage bed with the British-style facing-sofa lounge, although the dresser by the door eats into washroom space



SPACE FOR SIX
Unusually, the E480 has two belted seats, four berths and lounge space for six; on site, though, the swivelled cab seats are still the most comfy



HANDY BIN
The rubbish bin is not the biggest, but it's handily located on the door, meaning it can be swung out and emptied outside the 'van



SHORT ON WASHROOM
The washroom is small for a 'van this size, and floorspace has to be shared between the shower area and the toilet – so expect wet feet



EASY DOES IT
Our testers were very impressed with the E480's optional awning, which costs £505.76 but is very easy to roll out and stow away

*FOR INSURANCE QUOTES TERMS AND CONDITIONS SEE PAGE 170

PICTURES: PHIL RUSSELL

LIVE-IN TEST

BESSACARR E480

seeming too cold in the style of many Continental 'vans. Swift has made use of contrasting colours and matt nickel inserts to keep the interior looking fresh. Our testers were particularly fond of the cream-fronted kitchen furnishings and the uniform use of warm LED lighting.

The only aspect of the interior design that left Peter and Vera unsatisfied were the wood-look dashboard inserts.

The four-tonne MTPLM and 7.49m length seem to smooth out the ride

ON THE ROAD

If you want an E480, then you'll have to have Fiat's 130 Multijet engine, since no other engine options are available, no doubt in order to keep base vehicle costs down for Swift. Our testers didn't find the 'van lacking for power or torque, though, and they loved the civilised motorway cruising offered by the sixth forward gear. In fact, they found the E480 to be a comfortable drive in all conditions.

"In our experience the Ducato tends to have a hard ride," said Peter, "but the 7.49m length and the four-tonne MTPLM of this 'van seem to smooth out the ride significantly."

On the subject of the E480's four-tonne MTPLM, Swift have taken a bold move by building this 'van on the Ducato Maxi base. This will prove an inconvenience to those who passed their test after 1997, and will need to retest to gain their C1 license category in order to drive it but it gives the 'van a mammoth payload of 701kg.

"Considering that this is a 'van for two people you

should have no problems taking everything you will need on tour," Vera said.

LOUNGING & DINING

The ample clearance provided around the swivelled cab seats allows up to six people to lounge comfortably in the E480's lounge. With this new E400 range Swift Group has been very conscientious about its occasional tables, so we weren't surprised to learn that our testers really liked the one in the E480, which is stable and light, and resides in a dedicated secure spot in the wardrobe. It's easy to retrieve and stow, and can be used for al fresco dining as well.

"However, we think that most people will only use the table for dining, as it does restrict access to the sofas," said Vera. "It would be nice to have aircraft-style drop-down trays on the back of the cab seats, on which we could place a glass or cup."

The light veneers on the furniture and light upholstery garnered a lot of praise from our testers. Peter felt that it helped create a greater sense of space in what is already a sizeable lounge.

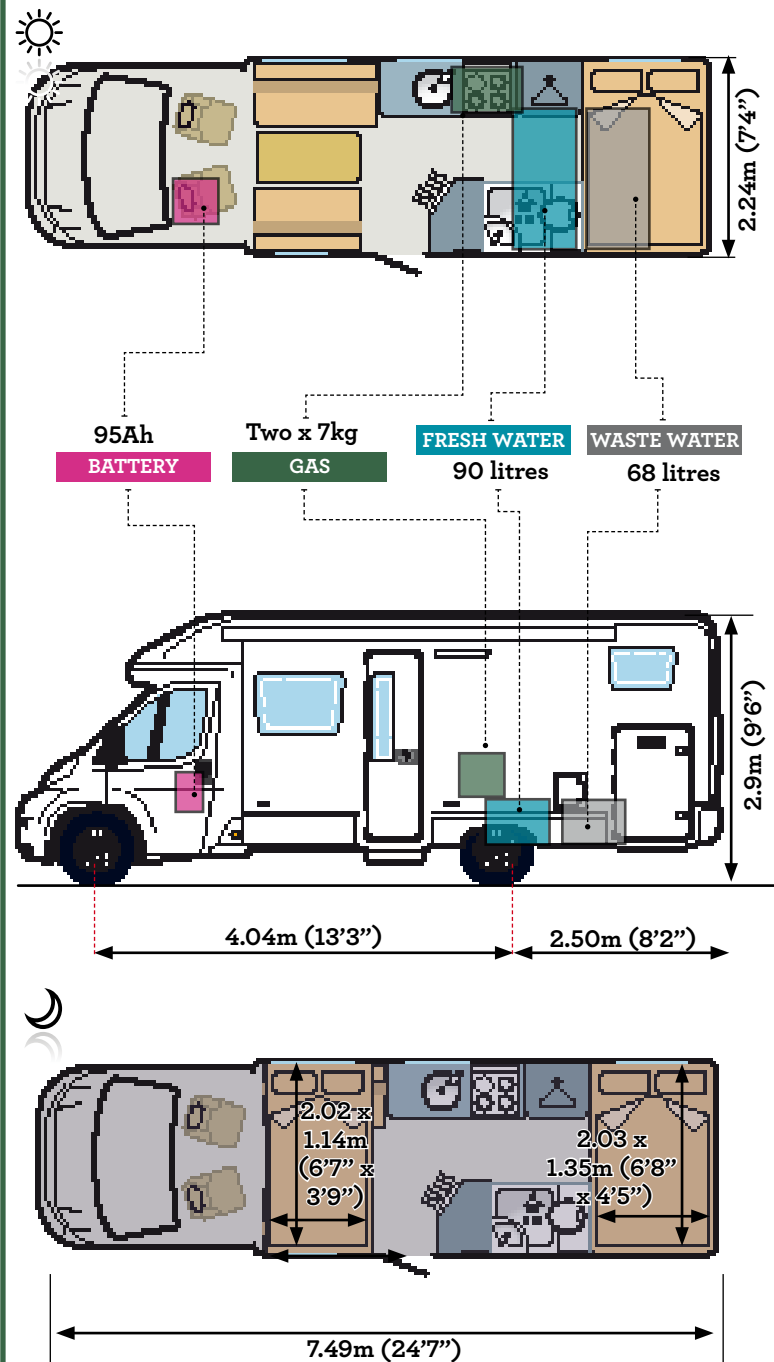
On the other hand, our testers singled out the lack of arm-rest bolster cushions for the lounge sofas as a negative point. However, this is an inevitable side-effect of a design that seeks to create as much clearance and space in the lounge as possible, particularly for those lounging in the swivelled cab seats.

KITCHEN

The Whalleys were "very impressed" with the E480's kitchen. There were no complaints about the levels of equipment provided – a three-burner hob with an electric hotplate comes as standard, as does an oven with a separate grill and an eye-level microwave.

As Vera pointed out, electrics for cooking means you'll need to use hook-up

Dimensions



History

Bessacarr started out as a Yorkshire-based mobile home manufacturer, which branched out into manufacturing touring caravans in the late 1950s. Through the decades, products built under the brand have become well known and much loved for their traditional look and feel, and their timeless elegance. In 1996, Bessacarr caravans was bought by the Swift group, who relaunched the Bessacarr motorhome manufacturing brand the following year.

Today, the group produces Swift and Bessacarr 'vans from the same factory. Motorhome layouts are designed and produced by the Swift Group and then re-badged after minor upholstery and graphic tweaks for each brand: the Bessacarr E480's sister motorhome is the Swift Sundance 630G.



GUEST ROOM
The facing-sofa lounge lends itself well to the creation of a spacious double bed, for guests – it's easy to set up and very comfortable



RESTING PLACE
The area around the large rear transverse bed has been thoughtfully designed, and includes ample shelving and lighting



ALL AND SUNDRY
The cupboard above the kitchen unit is a very versatile space, but the doors are a bit of a head-bump hazard when open



NEAT SEAT
Both of the sofas in the lounge offer storage space under their lift-up bases, and the space under the nearside sofa is particularly generous



SOCIABLE LOUNGE
Despite movement being restricted by the table, the E480's lounge is very comfy – the two large windows on either side provide good views and generous light



SPACE TO STRETCH OUT
The table has to be stowed in order to clear sufficient space to lounge in comfort – leaving you with no space to rest mugs and so forth



LOTS OF ROOM OUT BACK
The big garage is made more useful thanks to the E480's high payload – but the long overhang means rear axle weights might be an issue



BUILT-IN BLINDS
Cassette cab blinds are standard-issue on the Bessacarr, although our testers did find that they rattled a bit on the road



BIG STEP UP
The standard-height chassis results in two high steps up to the habitation, which might cause problems for some

LIVE-IN TEST

BESSACARR E480

to get the most out of the kitchen. Despite this, both our testers thought it was a very worthwhile asset, particularly since it comes as standard.

Our testers found the sink to be highly useable as well. "It's very deep," said Peter, "although it's so big that it eats into workspace a bit." They also liked the fact that it comes with a separate clip-on drainer that stows in a dedicated slot under the sink when not in use."

They did have one complaint about the kitchen, though - the 107-litre fridge/freezer

I love that you can curtain off the sleeping area. It's a generous space, yet cosy

provided only just enough space for all the sundries that they used during their tour.

WASHROOM

☆☆☆☆☆

Unfortunately, the space allocated to the E480's roomy facing-sofa lounge appears to be squeezed space in the washroom, which bore the brunt of our tester's criticisms. "It's a small space in a large 'van, and comes across as a sea of white plastic," Vera said. "The fact that you have to rely on the pull-out shower head to supply water to both the sink and the shower is a let-down in a 'van this size. We also found the fittings - such as the sink and toilet - to be a little flimsy, and the shower curtain is likely to do little to keep the toilet seat dry."

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SLEEPING

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The fixed bed is a generous 6'8" in length, which means even taller occupants should find it comfortable. The height of the garage means there are two steps up to it, however,

which could pose a problem for some.

Once you get up there, though, you find a cosy area with numerous amenities: a TV point, a power socket and shelves for mugs and books. "I love the fact you can curtain off the sleeping area from the rest of the 'van," said Vera. "It's a generous space, yet it feels cocoon-like and cosy."

Swift's designers have proved quite adept at designing lounge beds, and the E480 is no exception. "The two sofas join easily to form a flat bed," Peter said. "And spare bedding can be stored in the generous locker above the cab, too."

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STORAGE

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"Swift has positioned the fresh-water tank under the 'van," noted Peter. "Which means that the space under the two lounge sofas is largely free for storage. Beneath the farside sofa is where the boiler is located, but even there there's significant room for storage."

The Whalleys found ample locker and cupboard space around the 'van, although the half-length wardrobe wasn't entirely to their liking.

They were big fans of the garage, though, which, as Vera described it, has "lots of cubby holes in which to store cables, levelling blocks, walking boots and other paraphernalia."

She did note, however, that the 'van's long overhang means that you need to keep track of the rear axle weight when loading the garage.

EQUIPMENT

☆☆☆☆☆

Our testers found the E480 to be generously equipped - perhaps even too generously.

"It's a bit strange they've fitted Truma SecuMotion on-the-move heating, since you aren't likely to have passengers," said Peter. "But it will ensure the 'van is warm even before you pitch up."

The Whalleys also liked the pressurised water filling system, which uses a pump to fill the fresh water tank.

+ LIKES



AWNING LIGHT

"The LED awning light was bright and covered quite a wide area of the nearside exterior, while being power-efficient as well."



VEGETABLE RACK

"Some things are often neglected by motorhome designers, such as space to store irregularly shaped items such as vegetables. But the E480 has a very handy fruit and vegetable rack which will keep everything in one place on-site and on the road."

- DISLIKES



GAS LOCKER

"The gas locker is located too high up for our liking, and the door is too small to allow for easy swapping of bottles. The locker's small capacity means that you'll have to encounter this problem frequently."



WORKTOP SPACE

"The kitchen has an adequate amount of worktop, without being over-generous, but we feel they could have pared down the sink a little. This is a minor quibble, though."

TECHNICAL DATA

BASE VEHICLE

Chassis Fiat Ducato **Engine** 2.3-litre Turbo Diesel **Power** 130bhp @ 3600rpm **Torque** 236 lb/ft @ 2000rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual **Features** Driver and passenger airbags. ABS. Remote central locking. Electric windows and mirrors. Radio/CD/MP3 player with auxiliary-in connector.

CONVERSION

Floor/32mm walls, sandwich constructed, styrene insulation; 32mm roof, sandwich constructed, styrene insulation; 44mm floor, sandwich constructed, Styrofoam insulation. Aluminium sidewalls, GRP roof and rear panel.

LOUNGING AND DINING

Furniture Birch veneer. 'Spaceframe' locker construction. Sprung seat cushions

Layout Rear transverse double bed. Front lounge with twin facing settees. Nearside habitation door. Farside kitchen and wardrobe. Nearside washroom.

Seats Two **Dining** Four

KITCHEN

Sink Granite look moulded GRP, with removable drainer. **Cooker** three-burner gas hob with electric hotplate. Full oven with separate grill. **Microwave** oven. **Fridge** 112-litre automatic energy selection fridge

SLEEPING

Fixed double 2.03 x 1.35m **Front double** 2.02m x 1.14m (narrowest)/1.32m (widest)

EQUIPMENT

Water and space heater Truma gas/electric storage water heater. Truma gas/electric space heating with blown air. **Leisure battery** 95Ah **Gas** Two x 7kg. **Lighting** LED lighting throughout. **Sockets** 240V five, 12V one.

OPTIONS FITTED

Awning (£505.76).

OTHER OPTIONS

Cab air-conditioning (£1190.33). Roof rack and ladder (£587.50). Detachable towbar and electrics (475.11). Reversing camera (£459.78). Winter pack - tank heaters, drain insulation, fridge vent covers (£190)



THE VERDICT

Our testers were very pleased with the E480. As Vera explains: "It's well made - apart from a few niggles - well-equipped and is available at a sensible price."

The underslung, relatively small, water tanks and the small gas locker capacity mean that it isn't ideal for 'heavy duty' distance touring, though.

"It's not a motorhome for roughing it on the road," Peter continued. "Which is sad, when you consider its high payload and comfort levels."

The underslung tanks also mean that winterisation levels aren't high, although Swift offers an optional

'Winter Pack', which includes tank heaters, for £190. All in all, it's a very strong offering from a company that's going from strength to strength; those looking for a spacious 'van for two, for short-to-medium length tours, need look no further than the E480.

DESIGN ☆☆☆☆☆

ON THE ROAD ☆☆☆☆☆

LOUNGING & DINING ☆☆☆☆☆

KITCHEN ☆☆☆☆☆

WASHROOM ☆☆☆☆☆

SLEEPING ☆☆☆☆☆

STORAGE ☆☆☆☆☆

EQUIPMENT ☆☆☆☆☆

OVERALL ☆☆☆☆☆

LONG-TERM TESTER NOTES



ROB GANLEY
"I've been consistently impressed with the Sundance/E400 ranges; you get a lot for your money; in fact, it's so good that it might even pose a threat to 'vans higher up in the Swift Group stable."



SARAH WAKELY
"A 'van with a lounge as comfortable as the E480's gains a lot of points in my book, but I wish that it wasn't such a chore to get up and access the kitchen and washroom when the lounge table is in place."



JEREMIAH MAHADEVAN
"A well-priced, cannily devised 'van, but I find it hard to pick the Bessacarr version over its Swift-branded equivalent; unless you prefer the styling, which to my mind is better on the Swift anyway."

OR YOU COULD TRY...



AUTOCRUISE SPORTSTAR

£40,979.72 OTR

☆☆☆☆☆

Another Swift Group 'van, this is Autocruise's take on the layout pioneered in the WestVan, from German converters Westfalia. It has a flip-up double bed in the rear which, when folded up and out of the way, clears masses of worktop space. This allows it to get away with having an overall length of only 6.09 metres.