

Sterling Elite Amber £19,072



A popular fixed-bed, end-shower room layout, with Alde heating and an inboard water tank – but you have to pay extra for the ATC stability control system

It's little over 10 years since the concept of the rooflight transformed caravans, creating lighter, brighter interiors than ever before. Now, by the introduction of sun roofs into its two top-end ranges, Swift has taken light and bright and turned it into brilliant.

The first day of the Elite Amber's stay with us was just about as good a test of the sunroof idea as you could get: dull weather in which a caravan interior could look gloomy. Yet the Amber's lounge was a bright, cheerful, delightful environment.

Light, bright and fantastic though the sun roof idea is, there is something perplexingly plastic that intrudes into the quality look. Two mouldings, below each of the front-side windows look out of kilter with the rest of the creation. And they're held in place by screws – with no plastic caps to disguise their heads.

Any more brickbats? We might as well get the biggest one out



Deep corner cupboards...
At the front corners are one of Elite's best features for 2011. Gone are the two shallow overhead lockers at the front. Instead, you get deep corner cupboards that reach right to the front of the body line. There's space even for cereal packets.

Top kitchen cabinets...
Beautifully fitted tableware cupboards flank the microwave. Clips for six glasses and two bottles are fitted in a cupboard forward of the kitchen.

Mealtime convenience...
Working surface isn't enormous but is sufficient to make meals without juggling with food and pans. And we love the big, round sink which has become a Swift Group hallmark.

Pods for phones...
Along the front are recesses to place phones – and two sockets, plus TV connection points. This practical feature appears in many Swift Group caravans.

Kitchen storage...
Kitchen storage space is miniscule. There's enough space for utensils, and two little wire pull-outs – but table-setting cutlery and most kitchen items will find homes in the dresser opposite.

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Sparkly lights and little shelves, plus deep head-height lockers in the bedroom



Microwave level...

A trend for positioning microwaves slightly lower has emerged this year – and the Amber is among models which places the unit at eye height to people of shorter stature. It's a bonus on both convenience and safety.

The grooming zone...

Just forward of the door into the full-width shower room the grooming area hidden here alongside the wardrobe gives you shelves, a large mirror – and, importantly, a power socket.

Hidden heating

The Alde system is hidden in the wardrobe. Background heating on 1kw operation, major heating on 2kw – and if you want it to heat up speedily, you can switch it to gas as well. And all the time you're cocooned in a silent heating system that warms the caravan evenly.

Strength needed...

The bed doesn't rise as far as most, making reaching for stuff underneath difficult. And the table is stored on top of the bed frame, so you have to remove the table to get at what's underneath it. Lifting a table in and out of this horizontal position takes a fair amount of strength – far more than sliding a table into a vertical slot.



A view at head-height as well as window-height!

A sink with a small built-in drainer, and just about enough space for food prep



Cabinets galore in the washroom



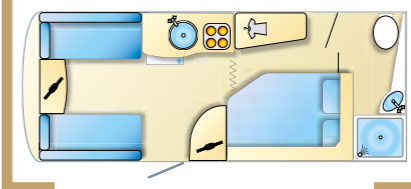
Go caravan says ...

We love Alde. We love sun roofs and larger doors and lower microwaves and wheel arches that are more heavily insulated than previous models. The Amber behaved stably on its test tow – but there are some things that remain on our wish list.

ATC, heated towel rail, a vertical slot for the table to make life less strenuous... But you can't have it all, even at this price. And the Amber, with its superb layout and the eye-catching exterior and interior styling, ticks a lot of boxes for a lot of caravanners. Which is why we chose this model as winner of the Innovation Award in this year's Go Caravan Awards.

Sterling Elite Amber

- Price: £19,072
- Lengths: Body 5.60m Overall 7.32m
- Width: 2.31m
- Headroom: 1.95m
- Weight: 1486kg (MRO) 1,650kg (MPLM)



of the way – and it has nothing to do with appearance. It's the absence of the AL-KO ATC trailer stability control system; at this price and with this level of equipment, we'd have liked to see ATC as standard, especially on a single-axle model. It's on the options list, though, at £444.

But the Amber scores points with us in other areas of its ample array of equipment. Top of this list comes the internal fresh water tank. Its capacity is only 15 litres (twin-axle models in the range have tanks double that size), but it does render the Amber truly suitable for year-round use, even if you have to be vigilant about topping up the tank frequently.

The other major feature of the Amber that's hidden from view is the Alde heating system, secreted away inside the wardrobe to send warm air silently circulating around the caravan.

So, the Amber is toasty and we are chalking up its high points. Even before we'd stepped inside we were noticing that the entrance door is higher (by 7.5cm) and wider (by 5cm) than previous years' Sterlings and indeed most other caravans. Six-footers will still have to duck – but five-foot seveners can walk straight in.

The shower room is across the rear. The shower is rectangular and large; there's plenty of space for dressing and ample cupboard and shelving. But we think Swift has missed an opportunity in the shower room. In most Alde-heated caravans there's a heated towel rail as part of the system. There isn't one here. There's an outlet for the warm air to rise – but not even an ordinary towel rail or loop to take advantage of it.

We see-saw back to the positives as we get to know the Amber better. Just forward of the bed is a real star feature. It's the TV housing. When you click the buttons to release the catch, you just stand back and watch your TV descend at a slow pace, to watching height. How refined!

The positives continue when we load our things into the wardrobe. The doors hinge completely back, so that you can still walk alongside the bed when the wardrobe doors are open. The hinges are enormous, giving you the impression that, like many things about this caravan, heavy engineering had played its part in the construction.

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