

# A NEW Dimension

The Swift Group is to launch four ranges for 2011 which it says will 'shape the future look of touring caravans'.

**Gary Martin** gets an exclusive preview and talks to the company's designer, Chris Milburn, to get the inside story on these stylish new models



**THE CLUB** was lucky enough recently to gain a sneak preview of an exciting new range of models from the Swift Group, before anyone else had even caught a glimpse of them.

Swift sees the unveiling of its 2011 Conqueror and Challenger – and Sterling counterparts Elite and Eccles – as its most exciting and important launch EVER. The Hull-based giant says these models will

"shape the future of touring caravans". That's a pretty big boast, but after seeing these models in the flesh at a venue in Manchester in July, you can perhaps see where the company is coming from.

Immediately, your eyes are drawn to the curvaceous new front end, and that sunroof which follows the smooth roofline – a black finish either side not only accentuating the sweeping curves but also providing a feel of integration with the front windows. Step inside and you'll soon realise that this panoramic sunroof not only has an aesthetic benefit, it allows natural light to flood in, giving a true feeling of spaciousness. You'll also note a smart new lounge roof locker assembly, with flowing lines.

It should be mentioned at this point that this sunroof/roof locker combination is standard-fit on the top-of-the-range Conqueror and Elite, but an optional extra on Challenger and Eccles.

With these 2011 models, Swift is one of the first UK manufacturers to achieve European Whole Vehicle Type Approval for its touring caravans, which ensures compliance with strict weight, dimension and safety regulations. The new models have also attained the Grade 3 insulation standard for heating and thermal insulation after comprehensive cold chamber testing.

I don't want to babble on for too much longer, as I believe the accompanying photographs tell the story much better. But before you look at the pictures, do read the following interview with Chris Milburn

(left), the man behind the design of these attractive new models...

#### What is your design background, Chris?

I am a graduate of Coventry University, which had a transportation course that specialised mainly in automotive design. I then got sponsorship from the Rover Group to study at the Royal College of Art, where I got a Masters degree, again specialising in automotive design. Since graduating I spent about 18 years in the car business before entering the caravan industry, joining Swift in 2003.

#### What were the main design ideas behind these new Swift/Sterling ranges?

The design ideas were really to try and bring the caravan into the 21st century. I think car design has moved on considerably and I didn't feel that caravans were really matching the aesthetic qualities that you see in current cars. So I wanted to develop a caravan that really matched the modern towcar, something that customers could be really proud to tow.

#### Can you tell us about the techniques that you've used to get the results that we see?

We use the same 3D software that the car industry uses, so the surfacing of the GRP panels has been very well controlled. We can then send that data directly to a milling machine, which will mill the panels. So the finished product has a degree of accuracy and surface tension



that more accurately matches what we intended at the initial design process. We can develop whole caravans in 3D CAD to make sure that everything functions correctly. We can ensure the gas locker door opens correctly, that the windows all open correctly and that the grab handles are at the right height, to get a really good feel for what the product is going to look like. The visualisation software that we have is very good, so we're able to literally spin the caravan in 3D on the screen with all the graphics on, with all the colours representing exactly what we see at the end of the day. That gives us a lot of control over what we expect when the product is finished.

#### I understand that you've borrowed some techniques from motor caravan design too.

The motor caravans have perhaps been an easier product to try and bring in some of the automotive styling with, especially with the exterior shapes. We've put a lot of effort into making sure that the interior mouldings are of as high a quality as we can possibly get, so that they feel upmarket and luxurious. The motor caravans have allowed us to experiment with those things and we've now put these techniques into our caravans. So you'll see in the new caravans the sculpted look of the mouldings that blend in seamlessly with the wooden furniture. I think the modern sculptural shapes of the mouldings and the more unified shapes of the furniture really create



quite a contrast which would look at home in a luxury car or yacht. I don't think a caravan should be on its own as a design statement but should bring in influences from other transportation products.

#### What aspects of your car design experience have you been able to call on?

As well as cars, I've also designed a number of business jets and yachts, so all of those influences have come together. I think this new design really puts the caravan in among that calibre of product.

#### Is there one part of the design that you are particularly proud of?

I think the panoramic sunroof is the most exciting part. Not only does it look great from the outside but it's also a really dramatic interior feature. As you walk into the caravan, the light floods in, giving a real impression of space. The sculpted interior mouldings around the front of the caravan also give that lovely feeling of an open, airy space. That's really what we've tried to focus on with these models. So, not only does it look different, it feels different too. We're trying to pick up on all the senses. The lovely tactile nature of the woodgrain that we've chosen for example, and the new optional light Impala fabric that we've used for the upholstery, which is a very easy clean, high stain-resistant material, has allowed us to experiment with slightly plainer colours, contrasting with nice, patterned cushions. This gives something

that is slightly different, that is slightly more in keeping perhaps with luxury products such as yachts, cars and business jets.

#### Where does caravan design go from here?

This is only the beginning. We've moved the caravan onto another stage, but there are a lot of exciting new areas to explore.



#### EXCLUSIVE

Read the very first test of the all-new Swift Conqueror 530 in the October issue of the *Club Magazine*

**Now turn to p49**  
to see how you could win a brand-new Swift Challenger 570, with sunroof, in our fantastic free prize draw