

Sterling Europa 550

▶ PRICE £14,452 ▶ www.swiftleisure.co.uk



AT A GLANCE: A full-width end washroom, a fixed bed - and a unique cabinet room-divider design that gives you a television port

TEST & PHOTOGRAPHY VAL CHAPMAN

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FIXED bed, full-width end washroom and enough kitchen surface space to make meals without juggling plates - the new Europa 550 seems to cram a lot of features into its mere five and half metres of body length.

How? The compromise is in the length of the settees - they're not long enough to give you the alternative of two singles (except for small children).

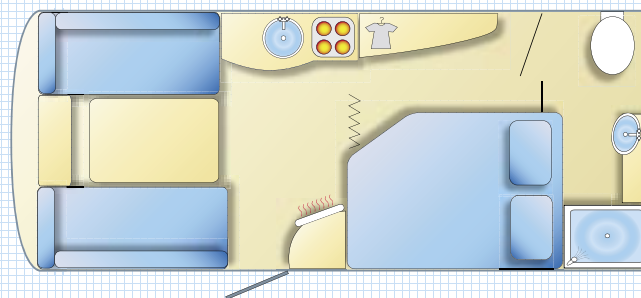
Swift has high hopes for this new model as one of its best sellers for 2010 and it's not hard to see why. Best of all its features is the clever styling of the cabinet to the right of the door as you walk in. It forms the divider between bedroom and living area but does much more than this. Its front, which contains the heater unit, is angled to maximise on floor space in the entrance. Above the heater is a surface plenty large enough to augment kitchen space. And above that is a neat drop-down TV housing.

The kitchen gives you the usual array of oven, grill, microwave, three burners, plus a mains hotplate. You have a cupboard with tableware fitments plus a two-shelf unit to its left. The fridge is a Thetford 107-litre model, with grey metallic-look front. The sink is large and circular and the dark brown surface into which it's set gives you enough space for food preparation - provided you make use of the chopping board cover that turns the sink into usable surface.

Kitchen cupboard space is limited to a slim central unit with a basket-style shelf. There's a cutlery tray in here; it's a useful size for

▶ LAYOUT IN A NUTSHELL

- ▶ Full-width end washroom
- ▶ Fixed bed
- ▶ Short settees
- ▶ Drop-down television cabinet



cooking utensils. And in the drawer above the heater opposite you'll find a cutlery tray.

The brown kitchen surface colour is a feature of the whole décor. It extends to all surfaces including the surround of the washbasin in this caravan's other star feature: its full-width rear washroom. Rectangular shower in the nearside corner, loo on the offside; in between, the washbasin set into a cupboard-and-shelf vanity unit. Floorspace is ample to justify describing this area as a dressing room. And, talking of clothes, the wardrobe, set at an angle to ensure there's enough corridor space alongside the bed, gives you good hanging length. Underneath is a cavernous shoe cupboard. Shelves run down the right hand side of the wardrobe, although access to these would be difficult if you had a rail full of clothing to block the route to the shelves. It's not a problem, though, because the three

bedroom head lockers are huge. Two have splitter shelves but the locker over the bed head has no shelf. That's our only criticism of this caravan. And if the only negative we can find is the lack of a mid-way shelf in a locker, surely this must be one great caravan. And of course you've also got that under-bed cavern in which to hide all sort of items.

The new Europa 550 is a lot of things to a lot of desires. It's luxurious beyond its price expectation. Its layout features put it in a class of its own. And its upholstery gives light and warmth in its cream, peach and terracotta colours. Pale woodwork with feature dark strips that match the surfaces complete the superb design.

Things that matter more are the AL-KO Secure Wheel Lock receivers, under-slung spare wheel, hitch-head stabiliser and directional TV aerial and the option to have an AL-KO ATC trailer control system fitted. ■



Your flatscreen television hides in this slim room-divider cabinet



Tie-backs match the upholstery; the whole look is light and bright



Spotlights hide under the dark chocolate brown cupboard edging



The large granite-look sink looks even more sparkling set into a dark surface

► FOR & AGAINST

PROS:

- Clever TV housing
- End washroom

CONS:

- Wardrobe shelves difficult to access
- Head lockers need shelves

► SPECIFICATION

Axles: 1
Berths: 4
MRO: 1283kg
MTPLM: 1495kg
Width: 2.23m
Overall length: 7.29m
Headroom: 1.95m



The bedroom has three good-sized lockers overhead

► OUR VERDICT

If you're impressed by solid build, good storage and a fixed bed, end-washroom layout that's quickly become a classic, you'll like the new 550. If you like cleverly-designed gadgets that hide away television sets and then pop them down right before your eyes, the 550 will impress you. And if you are also looking for good styling and good practical layout, the 500 may just be made for you.