

The Sundance family goes upmarket

Swift's Sundance range enters mid-life maturity with a 2010-season overhaul that takes it into mid-market territory. Has the company pulled it off, asks ROB GANLEY

The big reason to visit the Swift Group's motorhome stand at February's NEC show is the chance to see the brand-new Swift Sundance and Bessacarr E400 ranges. We'll call them the Sundance family for the purposes of this review – after all, Swift and Bessacarr are badge-engineered motorhome brands that share the same base vehicle platform, caravan body and interior layouts, with just minor cosmetic differences such as graphics, upholstery and furniture veneers.

This mid-2010 season overhaul is the latest in a long line of evolutionary tweaks that the family has undergone down the years. Swift has been using the name Sundance since 1997, and E400 since 1999, but perhaps the most significant, radical overhaul was its relaunch at the Earls Court Show in October 2001.

THE TIMELINE

I remember it well – the Swift Group's assault on the sub-£30,000 motorhome market that was under siege from budget Italian coachbuilts. It was a simple, well-specified range (for the price), with aluminium rear panel and sidewalls joined by

uncapped aluminium extrusions, and ABS skirts.

It was a major sales hit, but since then, the Sundance family has been creeping upmarket with every minor specification tweak, every improved body panel, and every cosmetic upgrade.

By 2006 it looked substantially more grown-up, with a more upmarket overcab section and high-level road lights incorporated into an end cap.

For the 2008 season it got remote central locking and push-button catches on its locker doors. And of course, steadily increasing prices reflected this extra kit.

THE REALIGNMENT

With the launch of the budget Escape brand to huge success in February last year (which incidentally takes a lot of its styling cues from Sundance in its 2002-season glory), the Sundance family seems to have completed its journey upmarket. While Escape battles budget rivals at the £30,000-£35,000 price point, Sundance is entering its mid-market mid-life maturity, with prices starting at around £35,000.

Both brands will have a new six-model line-up that includes two new low-line models: the rear French-style fixed

Since 2001, the Sundance family has been creeping upmarket



Sundance over the years

2002 SEASON

Swift launched its attack on low-cost Italian family motorhomes with the ground-up overhaul of the Sundance. Simple, stylish and firmly focused on that crucial £30,000 price point, it was a big sales hit over the subsequent years.

2005 SEASON

The most obvious changes are the new front and rear GRP mouldings, providing additional high-level road lighting. Now equipped with a full oven and grill, the impressive spec list included a Heki 2 rooflight over the lounge, blinds and flyscreens, removable carpets, and a solar panel plug-in provision to the leisure battery.



2007 SEASON

The overcab and rear panels are developed: rather than just GRP caps, Sundance gets full GRP overcab moulding and a stylish rear panel with high-level brake light and reversing camera mounting position. The front bumper is finished in gloss white and sidewall graphics are refreshed. Inside, a new smart energy-selection fridge, and push-button locks on overhead lockers, complete the revamp.



WHAT MOTORHOME? Mid-market Sundance family



BEEFED-UP GRAPHICS

Swift branding on the overcab is huge, while Sundance graphics and Swift logos are bigger and bolder everywhere they're used



OVERCAB IMPROVEMENTS

Although the mould is the same as last season, the overcab gets windows on either side, and integrates with the rail caps neatly

NEW ENTRY

Previous Sundances had a double electric step. Now the door height is lowered, the footwell is cut from the new GRP sills, requiring just a single electric entry step. It's fitted with a buzzer and auto-retraction. The door has a window and flyscreen, and gets an integral waste bin. Both cab and habitation doors lock with the push of a key fob



EYE-CATCHING NOSE

Colour-coded bumpers, a grey insert around the grille and replacing Fiat's badge with the Swift logo make for a stylish front end



WATER WORKS

The 68-litre waste tank has its own wide-bore drain tap, but to drain the 90-litre fresh tank, pull its plug through an inspection hatch in the floor



STYLISH NEW REAR PANEL

Back in the 2002 season, the Sundance had a flat rear panel, and aluminium extrusions where the walls bonded with the roof and rear panels were on show. For the 2010 season these joins are capped, and this one-piece GRP rear panel, with integral road lights and built-in reversing camera viewfinder, gives the motorhome a much more upmarket feel



★ FIRST LOOK

corner-bed Sundance 620FB/ Bessacarr E450, and the 630G/ E480, a familiar-enough transverse fixed bed over rear garage floorplan, only this time in low-line form only.

HIGH LINE: THE EXTERIOR

We enjoyed an exclusive pre-NEC show preview of the Sundance 630L, and credit is due to Swift Group as the changes are substantial. On first, external impressions it looks a good deal more upmarket. A large part of that is to do with the stunning new rear panel, which always seems to be an indicator of a motorhome's status: flat rear panel equals budget 'van; scoops and swoops worthy of a supercar equal upmarket 'van. The latest panel is full-GRP and has new road light clusters. The sidewall graphics are a burgundy and silver swoosh. We're told the E400s have classic green Bessacarr graphics.

Up front, the overcab mould remains the same as that of

Credit is due to Swift Group as the changes to the Sundance are substantial

last season, only carrying bigger and bolder manufacturer graphics and getting windows either side, instead of just one.

Under the skin, stronger body panels and an improved jointing system are new to both ranges, and there's a stepwell at the lowered entrance door now, rather than a double electric step. New, smooth and colour-coded GRP sills complete the seamless floor-to-roof look.

The 630L is one of two family-orientated models based on the long-wheelbase Ducato, powered by the 130 Multijet as standard (the other is the 630G) and with an MTPLM of 4005kg, that may



THE STAR TURN

The kitchen has real showroom impact: its lockers have a cream veneer, there's a new granite-look GRP sink, a 112-litre fridge, and a chrome-finish tap under which a kettle will fit



CABIN COMFORTS

The 630L is powered by the 2.3-litre 130 Multijet engine as standard, with six-speed transmission. Cab air conditioning and cruise control are on the options list



OVERCAB OPULENCE

The one-piece mattress is supremely comfortable. The aluminium ladder stashes neatly beneath the bed base when not in use, which itself raises on gas struts



KITCHEN EXTENSION

The kitchen is compact but highly useable thanks to this hinged worktop extension. The clip-on plastic drainer is a standard, very useful item in Swift Group motorhomes



HEAVY DUTY EXTENSION

In some 'vans the lounge bed extension is too flimsy to take an adult's weight. Not here: the solid steel bars, with infill cushions, grow the bed by 31cm, so are suitable for all



DEDICATED DOUBLE

The lounge double measures 1.82 x 1.23m when extended. But there's the problem of using the ladder to the overcab, and nowhere dedicated to stash the table when not in use



★ FIRST LOOK

require the drivers in some young families to retest and gain the extra C1 category on their licence.

The 620FB/E459 is also on the long-wheelbase Ducato, but is powered by the 100 Multijet, and has a 3500kg MTPLM. The 580PR/E480 and 590RS/E435 are on the MWB Ducatos, and are also powered by the 100 Multijet; the 530LP/E410 is on the SWB Ducato, with an MTPLM of 3300kg.

THE INTERIOR

We'll let our pictures here point up the real detail changes, but let's take an overview here. Inside, Sundance models have Tanganica walnut furniture with attractive matt nickel inserts. Overhead lockers have push-button catches, while lighting throughout is the same LED system we've already seen in Swift's more expensive ranges. One of the more interesting design details is the decision to give the kitchen its own distinctive colour treatment. That is, rather than the wooden furniture throughout the

Overhead lockers have push-button catches, while the lighting is LED throughout

rest of the 'van, the kitchen gets cream locker doors and new work surfaces, with an attractive granite-look sink. There is a full oven, grill, dual-fuel hob, large stainless steel-look smart energy selector fridge, and a built-in microwave as standard.

The washroom has a folding partition door to keep the wood panelling separate and dry from the lined shower. The latest Thetford electric cassette toilet with electric flush and wheel holding tank is fitted, along with a thick, locking washroom door.

Lots of small standard-fit extras throughout add up ➔



SUNKEN STORAGE BINS
The leisure battery is housed in a plastic bin under the rear bunk, which raises on struts. There's a second storage bin, too. Notice the rear free-standing table also stashes here



REAR-LOUNGE LIVING
As well as a free-standing table, the 630L comes with a dresser that extends as a place to put your coffee mug. Drop-in carpets, and wallboards to back the cushions, are nice touches



REAR SLEEPING
A slatted base pulls out from beneath the dresser. The bed measures 2.04 x 1.34m, and is partitioned off with a curtain. Alternatively, it can be used as single beds of 1.87 x 0.66m



CONCEALED TV BRACKET
This concealed, slide-out, adjustable bracket can accommodate a 15" flatscreen TV. It's well-sited for an evening's viewing from the comfortable rear lounge



LINED WASHROOM WALLS
A 35mm-thick door with mortice lock opens onto the washroom, where the walls are lined, and a partition door keeps the rear wall dry. The shower tray has two plugs



WASHROOM STORAGE
The large circular basin houses storage underneath, by removing the whole fascia. The tap doubles as the shower head on a nylon-lined extension cord



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LOW-LINE SUNDANCE 620FB
The all-new low-line mould is a massive visual improvement on the outgoing low-line model

to a decent specification: new additions include a passenger airbag, slide-out storage and adjustable bracket for a 15" flatscreen TV, LED lighting throughout, and a microwave oven that's built into a kitchen locker. There are also concertina cab blinds, a new door and flyscreen, remote central locking, plus en route and on-site heating. All habitation windows get flyscreens and blinds, but not of the pleated variety.

ALL-NEW LOW-LINE

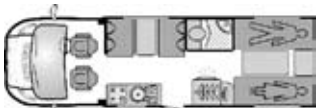
We also managed to get a sneak preview of one of the all-new layouts at the factory as it approached completion. The 620FB, pictured here, has a fixed, French-style corner bed, with parallel facing sofas up front. Unlike the overcab models, the low-line mould is completely new. Looking at it face on, it has a gull-wing shape, rising higher to meet the roof and sidewalls, and rounding toward the nose. Visually, it's a massive and stylish improvement on the flat, horizontal line of the previous low-line mould. And like the new low-line mould for sister brand Autocruise, it's not just form over function: it's designed to create a large internal locker for bedding and the like. This locker is set within a moulded, leather-look fascia, giving it the appearance of the luxury Kon-Tiki range. For other low-line layouts, see our table, left. ©



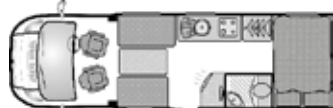
620FB INTERIOR This dedicated two-berth motorhome has parallel sofas up front, and a substantial overcab locker for bedding; the corner bed and corner washroom layout is hugely popular



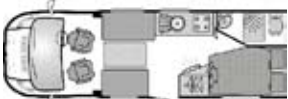
SWIFT SUNDANCE & BESSACARR E400 LAYOUTS



630L/E495 low-line; overcab, front dinette, rear single beds



630G/E480 low-line; overcab, front dinette, rear double bed



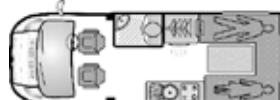
620FB/E450 low-line; fixed bed corner bed, front seats



59ORS/E435 high line; overcab, new end kitchen detailing



530LP/E410 low-line; new end kitchen detailing



58OPR/E460 low-line; wrap-around rear U-shaped lounge

PRICING

The E400 range, nominally the more prestigious, will be around £200 more expensive than Sundance, thanks to more expensive upholstery and different dash trim. On-the-road pricing ranges from £35,000 to £44,000

KEY FACTORY-FITTED OPTIONS

- Roll-out awning
- Cab air conditioning and cruise control
- New winter pack: water tank heaters, insulated pipes, fridge vent covers
- Roof rack and ladder
- Detachable towbar

PRACTICAL MOTORHOME SAYS...

Swift Group, more than any other manufacturer in our industry, knows how to sell the sizzle, right from its upmarket advertising and microsite campaigns, down to the immediate-impact, showroom 'wow' factor that all its motorhomes possess in abundance. The question is whether it has done enough to the Sundance family, and added enough quality, to justify the hike in price that such a market realignment demands. We think Swift has pulled it off, but it's what you think that matters most.