

CI CARIOCA 694



POUND STRETCHERS

Make your precious cash go a bit further with money conscious low profiles from Italy and Germany



With the recent, and highly publicised, credit crunch impacting on us all, and with fuel prices going stratospheric, we need to take a hard and scrupulous look at the economics, when purchasing our next motorcaravan. Bulky lutons indisputably have an adverse effect on fuel consumption - the sleek, more aerodynamic shape of the low profile coachbuilt seems suddenly to have acquired added appeal. As many folks admit they never sleep above the cab, preferring to

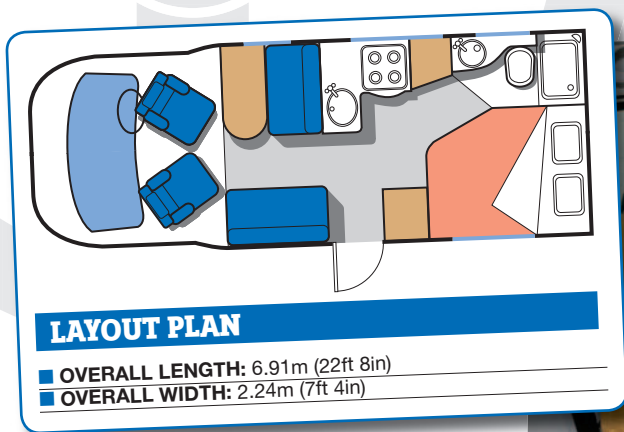
use it purely for storage, doing without that diesel-gobbling protuberance could become more and more popular.

Paying less for a motorhome doesn't necessarily mean it's not as good: it very much depends where the economies are made. With some 'budget' models, evidence of savings is not obvious, while others scream 'penny-pinching' as soon as you climb aboard.

Hmm... Which of these categories will our two cost-cutting low profiles fall into?

Italian CI (Carioca) has a deserved reputation for producing good value motorhomes, with

- 1 We both found the driving position in the Fiat excellent
- 2 Neat car-like steering wheel, but with no adjustment



Words by Di Johnson, pictures by Pete Johnson

CARADO T337



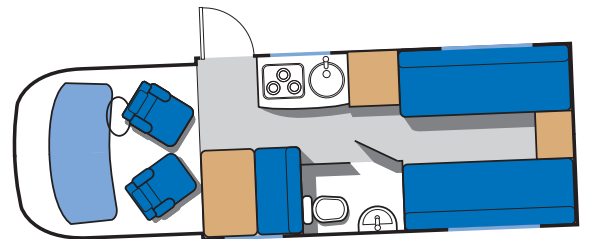
savings made in the right places - though, of course, that's partly a matter of opinion. German-built Carado (part of the Hymer Group) is pitched at the entry-level end of the market.

Pitting the Carioca against the Carado also gives us a chance to compare base vehicles. In the Carioca's case, this is the industry's favourite, the Fiat Ducato, while Carado's platform is the Ford Transit.

When walking around in the rear of both vehicles it was noticeable that there was more 'rock-and-roll' in the Ford. Fitting rear steadies would easily cure the problem, but it's an added

expense. Opinion was divided about general appearance. Pete liked the metallic light blue-coloured Ford cab, with the white body decorated by strong red and dark grey graphics, while I preferred the more integrated looks of the Carioca, with its painted front bumper and dark tinted windows.

Incidentally, the Carioca has the best outside-locker catches I've ever come across: no wrestling or fiddling required, they're



LAYOUT PLAN

- OVERALL LENGTH: 6.86m (22ft 6in)
- OVERALL WIDTH: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)



positively slick. However, the Carado wins the outside storage space competition as it has a proper garage, fit, even, for a scooter.

Commendably, our Italian provides (UK) nearside caravan entry, with hinged flyscreen door. Inside, there are two double beds and four three-point belted seats. An offside half-dinette, together with side settee, provides one of the double beds - the other is in the rear, fixed and longitudinally placed. A rear offside washroom and L-shaped kitchen complete the accommodation.

Carado has a UK offside caravan entry with a pleated, cassette-type flyscreened door and an electric cassette step. Inside, there are two (fixed) single beds in the rear, plus a centre kitchen and washroom and a nearside half-dinette upfront, with two three-point seatbelts. There's room under the (raised) beds for a roomy garage.

MOTIVE POWER

Carado's Transit base doesn't have some of the niceties we expect in our cabs these days.



You'll have to wind the windows manually and likewise adjust the mirrors. The seats have non-adjustable single armrests and, when swivelled, the headrests touched the ceiling, as did Pete's head (he kept informing me) when he got into the cab. Despite the narrower cab the seats swivelled without fuss and they both have height adjustment, but the passenger will have to take his or her chances as there's no airbag.

Our test Carioca had seats with adjustable armrests and padded headrests. There was no lumbar adjustment, but they were very comfortable and both were height-adjustable and swivelling. Here, a front passenger airbag is standard. The half-dinette provides two three-point belted seats for your passengers but there's a hole in the dash where the music usually comes from, leaving you free to make up your own mind about which system to have installed in your new 'van.

I have to admit to being a bit of a Fiat Ducato fan, but the Ford does have its advantages too. Carioca's Fiat has a more refined musical note to its engine, while Carado's Ford is more gruff. Carado does come with a radio/CD player, though Brownhills doesn't fit same until the 'van is sold, as it's been found that they go 'walkabout' if left unattended. Taller drivers won't have the same problem, but in order to reach the pedals I needed the seat pushed right forward. This put me rather too close to the wheel and I found I had to slide the seat back to be able to move into the rear, as the gearshift assembly juts out and blocked my way. Pete found that his rather long shinbones caused his knees to scuff the underside of the (non-adjustable) steering wheel. That said, the gearlever, with five forward gears, is on the dash where it ought to be and the handbrake is on out of the way the driver's right. I found having to lock the Ford's cab doors individually a nuisance. On the Fiat, standard-fit remote central locking will save you this chore.

On the top of the Ford dash, in the centre, is a flap that hinges over to form a 'table,' giving enough space for sandwiches and with holes for two cups. I wish Fiat could come up with something similar to this most useful feature. Both cabs have enough storage space for all sorts of clobber dotted throughout.

ROAD MANNERS

When all's said and done, both of us agreed we preferred driving the six-speed Fiat. It felt



3 Unusually, the Carioca is UK handed with the caravan door on our nearside

4 The interior of the Carioca is open and airy

5 Modern trim and pleasant upholstery make the lounge a good place to relax. Five could dine at the table

I LIKED

- Base vehicle
- Bright and spacious ambience
- Price, considering the equipment and quality
- L-shaped kitchen
- Effective washroom for its size
- Novel and effective table extensions
- Easy outside locker catches
- Smart vinyl flooring

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Extractor fan in kitchen
- Showerhead riser in washroom

I DISLIKED

- Having to fit silver insulating screens for cab blackout
- The fiddly-to-make dinette bed

more committed through bends and has, for both of us, a way more comfortable driving position. Neither converter offers a choice of engines: Fiat's 2.3-litre 130bhp power unit is extremely popular and it's only speed freaks, like me, that lust after the three-litre (157bhp) version. The Ford unit's capacity is 2.2 litres, but here only produces 110bhp. If loading up to the maximum authorised weight of 3500kg, this amount of power may disappoint some. However, the five gear ratios are well matched to its intended use.

The change up and down the five forward gears on the Ford is delightfully smooth, while reverse is easier than most to engage. I liked the feel of the steering wheel as it's small and car-like, with the added bonus of the cruise control tabs fitted to the wheel. Commendably, both vehicles have this helpful driving-aid fitted as standard. Some adjustment on the Ford steering column would have been welcomed by both of us, for different reasons, as we're at different ends of the height spectrum.

LOUNGE AND DINE

Carioca's hinged, flyscreen-protected entry doesn't require an electric external step as there's an inset step fitted, while a big grab handle helps you safely aboard. Tinted acrylic windows, (which weren't too dark) offer privacy and shelter from the hot British sun; pause for hollow laughter! As the latest Fiat cab is wider, it feels roomy and there's plenty of space to swivel the cab seats to form part of the lounge/dining area. An inward-facing nearside settee faces a half dinette, located forward of the mid-offside kitchen. There's a pleasant modern feel to the interior with plenty of satin aluminium trim, while the flooring (under the bound-edge carpet) is vinyl strip-plank-effect, with silver dividers; very tasty. With the green and pale gold patterned upholstery and two matching cushions, the lounge is somewhere you could happily entertain friends. Despite only having a mid-sized rooflight, the lounge was bright and airy. The wall-hung table is novel as it is multi-extendable. Not only does it have a pullout section to reach the side settee, but it also has a slot-in extension for the front passenger seat. There's a bracket for a flat screen TV that enables it to be viewed from lounge or bedroom. Seven could sit in the lounge and five dine.

The cab seats were the most comfortable

CARADO T337



I LIKED

- Ford gearbox and handbrake
- Car-like steering wheel
- Big garage
- Cassette flyscreen door
- Storage bins over cab

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Steering wheel adjustment
- Electric windows
- Remote central locking
- Adjustable backrest in dinette
- More 230V sockets

I DISLIKED

- Upholstery
- Lack of social seating
- Clip-on cab privacy screens

6 Lots of dark wood made the interior seem smaller than it actually was

7 Midships kitchen and washroom see a twin-single-equipped bedroom in the rear

8 Another half-dinette, but no side sofa An extension to the table allows four folk to dine

On Test CI Carioca 694 & Carado T337

9 Smart curved-front oven added a classy feel to the well-equipped kitchen

10 Well thought out washroom lacked only a riser for the shower head



lounging choice in the Carado, as the only other pews, on the forward-facing half-dinette, proved rather too upright for comfortable lounging. I discovered an extension for the wall-hung table in the wardrobe. Once this is slotted in, three could eat at the table - maybe four at a stretch. Socialising would be limited to four. The rear single beds are not suitable for daytime seating as they are too high, situated as they are, above the garage: there's a price to pay for having all that lovely storage space. The Carado has the distinction of sporting my least-liked upholstery ever; it really offended me. Peter, on the other hand, thought it was 'marvellous' and kept going on about it, even suggesting the pattern as wallpaper in our office. It was at this point I smelled the distinctive aroma of a wind-up! Getting back to the décor: it was all a bit dark, despite its midi-sized rooflight. Large areas of darkish wood and

blue upholstery with stripy-blue scrollwork-patterned inserts made it a bit claustrophobic. It was the stripy bits that I objected to; they were all different, in a jarring concoction of patterns and colours. Time to stop ranting: the point is, if I really liked the motorhome the upholstery wouldn't stop me choosing it.

COOK'S QUARTERS

The cook in the Carioca has an L-shaped kitchen to work in, with the oft-found round stainless steel bowl, but then the kitchen takes a style turn. There's a snazzy-looking four-burner hob (with spark ignition), under an attractively-patterned hinged glass cover and above a curved-fronted stainless steel oven/grill. There's no extractor hood, but an opening window behind the hob should help disperse the steam. There's also a light and a 230V socket over hob and worktop. They've thought of nearly everything in this kitchen.

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

CI CARIOCA 694

PRICE

- From: £34,368 OTR
- As tested: £35,302 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Berths: 4
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 3 years base vehicle, 3 years conversion, 4 years water ingress
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: Yes
- Construction: GRP clad sandwich construction low profile coachbuilt
- Length: 6.91m (22ft 8in)*
- Width: 2.24m (7ft 4in)*
- Height: 2.90m (9ft 6in)*
- Wheelbase: 4.04m (16ft 3in)*
- Rear overhang: 2.0m (6ft 7in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg*
- Payload: 665kg (after allowance for driver and 90 per cent of fuel)*

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Fiat Ducato Camper chassis cab
- Engine: 2.3-litre common-rail turbo-diesel producing 130bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Front: Independent. Rear: Rigid axle
- Features: Cruise control, cab remote central locking, ABS, EBD, electric windows and mirrors, driver and passenger airbags, swivelling cab seats, twin door bins, central storage locker, spare wheel and jack

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats ahead of offside half-dinette with extendable wall-mounted table, and nearside settee. To the rear, nearside fridge/freezer ahead of fixed longitudinal double bed. Offside kitchen and wardrobe, with corner washroom. Caravan entrance on UK nearside
- Insulation: Floor 70mm, walls & roof 30mm,
- Interior height: 2.0m (6ft 6.5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Round stainless bowl, mixer tap with swivel spout, no drainer
- Cooker: Smev four-burner hob under glass lid, oven and grill below, all with spark ignition
- Fridge: Thetford three-way fridge/freezer. Capacity 150 litres



WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford electric-flush swivel-bowl cassette
- Basin: Grey plastic elliptical bowl with stainless swivelling mixer tap, set in counter-top with cupboard and storage above and below
- Shower: Separate semicircular cubicle with bi-fold door, mixer tap, flexible hose, showerhead on fixed bracket

BEDS

- Rear fixed double
- Length: 1.96m (6ft 5in)
 - Width: 1.28m (4ft 2.5in)
- Dinette double
- Length: 1.84m (6ft 0.5in)
 - Width: 1.25m (4ft 1in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water: Inboard 100 litres (22 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung 105 litres (23.1 gallons)
- Space and water heater: Truma Combi boiler with blown-air, gas only operation
- Leisure battery: 85 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity 1 x 13kg & 1 x 7kg cylinders
- Lighting: All 12V. Four fluorescents: three diffused ceiling lights (kitchen, washroom, lounge), awning lamp. Five spots: two over dinette table, two reading lamps in bedroom, one lamp in kitchen
- Sockets: 230V: Four (under dinette bench seat, in kitchen, in cupboard above fridge, beside TV point). 12V: One (beside TV aerial socket)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- Fitted to test vehicle
- Base: Cab air conditioning (£934)
 - Conversion: None
- Other options
- Base: None
 - Conversion: None

E&OE

There's a big 150-litre fridge/freezer opposite and, just when I thought they'd forgotten something, I found a big drawer with more than enough space for a family's cutlery. The only thing missing in this kitchen is a drainer for the sink. The attractively textured silver-grey table and worktops complete the Italian look.

A smaller, and not so well equipped, side kitchen is fitted to the Carado's offside. The three-burner hob lacks spark ignition, while the fridge is a smaller, but adequate, 100-litre model. As there is a Smev oven fitted it was surprising to discover that there is no grill included. I can't believe that omitting a grill would have made a huge price difference, as the oven is fitted anyway. And we Brits do like our toast and grilled bacon, don't we? This galley proved to be well lit and has an opening window. Part of the reason I preferred the Carioca's kitchen (apart from its higher levels of equipment), is that it's

formed as a very useable L-shape. The cook can be 'tucked in' and not obstructing through traffic.

BATHING SPACE

Carioca's small, but well designed washroom lacked only a riser for the showerhead. Loads of high 'n' low storage, surface, a good towel rail on the door, opening opaque window, mirror, hooks and heater outlet. Ah, no toilet roll holder, I thought. Oh yes there is, it's fixed to the inside of the low-level cupboard's door - a practical solution in a small washroom. Although it's undeniably small it works. When you need to bend for tooth brushing, there's room for y'r bum. The separate shower (with bi-fold door) has plenty of shelf space and a small rooflight above.

The Carado had a lot to live up to when compared with the Carioca. Sadly it didn't manage it. It looked cheap, and though all the

11 The small kitchen offers an oven, but no grill

12 The washroom lacks a separate shower



HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

CARADO T337

PRICE

- From: £32,995 OTR
- As tested: £32,995 OTR

BASICS (*manufacturer's figures)

- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 4 (incl. driver)
- Warranty: 2 years base vehicle, 2 years conversion, 6 years water ingress
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Alloy clad sandwich construction low profile coachbuilt
- Length: 6.86m (22ft 6in)*
- Width: 2.30m (7ft 6.5in)*
- Height: 2.76m (9ft 0.5in)*
- Wheelbase: 3.75m (12ft 3.5in)*
- Rear overhang: 2.20m (7ft 2.5in)
- Maximum authorised weight: 3500kg*
- Payload: 710kg (after the vehicle in running order)*

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Ford Transit platform chassis cab
- Engine: 2.2-litre common-rail turbo-diesel producing 110bhp
- Transmission: Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Front: Independent, Rear: Rigid axle
- Features: Cruise control, manual door locking, manual windows and mirrors, ABS, ASR, driver airbag, swivelling cab seats, radio/CD player, door bins, flip-over table, 'Fix and Go' puncture repair kit (no spare wheel)

INSIDE

- Layout: Swivelling cab seats, nearside half-dinette with extendable wall-mounted table, offside kitchen and wardrobe, nearside washroom, twin longitudinal single beds in rear above garage. Caravan entrance forward on offside
- Insulation: N/A
- Interior height: 1.95 (6ft 4.5in)

KITCHEN

- Sink: Stainless round bowl, mixer tap with swivel spout, no drainer
- Cooker: Three-burner hob with hinged glass lid, oven below, no grill, all manual ignition
- Fridge: Dometic three-way. Capacity 104 litres

carado

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford electric-flush swivel-bowl cassette
- Basin: Grey plastic bowl, mixer tap, cupboard below
- Shower: Wet room type using basin mixer tap/pull-out shower head, tri-fold door screens off toilet, fold-out panel protects door

BEDS

- Twin singles, each
- Length: 2.00m (6ft 6.5in)
- Width: 800mm (2ft 7.5in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water: Inboard 127 litres (28 gallons)
- Waste water: Underslung 86 litres (19 gallons)
- Space and water heater: Truma Combi boiler with blown-air, gas only operation
- Leisure battery: 85 amp hr
- Gas: Capacity 2 x 13kg cylinders
- Lighting: All 12V. Eight halogen spots: two in kitchen, two in washroom, two directional lamps over dinette, two over beds. Diffused ceiling lamp at doorway, awning light
- Sockets: 230V: One (in kitchen) 12V: One (in kitchen)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Fitted to test vehicle

- Base: None
 - Conversion: None
- Other options
- Base: None
 - Conversion: None

E&OE

CI CARIOCA 694



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15



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13 Well lit, comfy fixed rear bed

14 The dinette converts - jigsaw fashion - into a second double bed

15 Caravan door has storage pouches and a flyscreen

16 The hinged mattress lifts to reveal the Truma boiler and plenty of cargo space



essentials are there, it is very much a plasticky washroom with small high and low cabinets, also made of plastic. It has a mirror, hooks, lights, a toilet-roll-holder and that's about it. The outward-opening door could easily leak water when showering, so a fabric hinge cover and a fold-over panel is fitted. Not nice! It does have two drains in the shower tray but no separate showerhead. The basin has a pullout tap/shower head, but I could find nothing to attach it to when extended. Then I came across a fitting, knocking about in a cupboard: something to be sorted out by Brownhills.

BED TIME

The nearside-located permanent double is the principle bed in the Carioca. It's comfy, has side and rear windows, a light for each occupant (plus one overhead) and curtains to make it snug. That's the easy bit: the dinette and the side settee produce another double. Slide the base of the settee out and drop the table, then there's a jigsaw of cushions to puzzle you. Two additional infill cushions live in the wardrobe. This job is not something I'd like to tackle every night, but if the grandchildren wanted a stop-over... Whoops, I hope they don't read this and get ideas!

Things are simpler in the Carado, as there's only the two rear singles over the garage to worry about and it's quite reasonable to leave them made up, so you don't have to store the bedding. There was room for me to sit up and read at the forward end, despite the height of the beds, though it was too low a ceiling for Pete. Shame they put two reading lights only at the rear, under the overhead lockers. Both the lights and the lockers would prevent you sleeping heads at that end. Bit of a re-think required, methinks. Two substantial steps lead you safely up to the land of nod and there's a cushioned area and a flat wooden space between the beds, which could have acted as a bedside table if only you could sleep easily, heads to that end. A short privacy curtain separates the rear bedroom. Two pieces of blue material are provided for you to press-stud into place around the cab. Sadly the fabric didn't quite match up with the studs.

STORE ROOM

There was no shortage of space for clobber in the Carioca. There's inside access to the settee's base, a little room in the sides of the overcab, four overhead lockers in the lounge and six in the kitchen and bedroom. Under the rear bed is a big space which can also be accessed from outside.

The Carado has the cavernous rear garage space to fill, and above the cab is a range of deep open pockets that will accept books or even food stores, as the kitchen isn't overly blessed with space. There are four overhead lockers in the kitchen/dinette area and three across the rear, above the single beds. Beneath the foot of the beds - either side of the steps - are two large cupboards. A hefty wardrobe is located above another large cupboard. All these and the big garage, make the Carado the superior kit-carrier.

LIFE SUPPORT

The excellent instruction manual provided with the Carioca is clear, illustrated in colour and the best we've seen. Would you believe, there are four 230V sockets (though the manual said three)? A Truma Combi boiler with blown-air (gas-only operation) provides

water and space heating and there's room for one 13kg and one 7kg cylinder in the offside-located gas locker. The light-count is nine and all have their switches attached: this is delightfully simple, as you know where to find them. Silver insulating screens have to be battled with to insulate the cab at night and to provide privacy. Important for some, a proper spare wheel is supplied.

There's only one 230V and one 12V socket to be found in the in the Carado. This 'van also uses Truma Combi (blown-air, gas-only operation) for space and water heating, which is fitted in the garage together with locker space for two 13kg gas cylinders. The light-count here is also nine. Sadly, there's one of those Fix-and-Go (aerosol can of inflator/sealant) kits rather than a spare wheel. If I were miles from home in a foreign country, give me a spare wheel every time. There's the big garage, so there's no shortage of space for a wheel should you decide to buy one. Both vehicles have fresh water tanks inboard, but the Carado has the larger capacity of 127 litres against 100 litres for the Carioca. Payload for the Carado is greater by 45kg, but it saves weight by not supplying the spare wheel.

CONCLUSION

The £35,302 (with the optional cab air-conditioning) that you'll have to cough up for CI's Carioca seems very good value for money, as all sorts of details which I expected to be missing (due to its price) are in fact fitted. There were only two things absent: a radio/CD player and a riser rail for the shower.

The Carado was so different in its accommodation and base vehicle, that choosing between the two is a question of horses for courses. It has the big garage and the two single beds, which are the main differences between the two 'vans.

The levels of equipment, features and décor are superior in the Carioca and when you consider that you're only going to pay around £2000 more for it, it looks more and more the winner.

However, if what's important to you is to carry a couple of bikes, or a scooter, securely tucked away in the garage and you need single beds and no more berths, then without question, the German-made Carado is the one for you.

If you require a sociable lounge and desire a certain level of equipment (such as electric windows and mirrors, passenger airbag and plentiful 230V sockets, and want to overnight friends or grandchildren, then the Carioca would be the one to go for. Of the two motorhomes, we both preferred the layout, equipment levels and décor of the CI Carioca 694. ■

VEHICLES LOANED FOR EVALUATION BY:

CI Carioca 694
CI Motorhomes, Trigano House,
 Genesis Way, Europarc, Grimsby,
 North East Lincolnshire DN37 9TU
 (tel: 01472 571075;
 web site: www.ci-motorhomes.co.uk)

Carado T337
Brownhills Leisure World,
 A1/A46 Junction, Newark,
 Nottinghamshire NG24 2EA
 (tel: 0845 603 3394;
 web site: www.brownhills.co.uk)

CARADO T337



17 Two singles above the garage are Carado's only beds

18 A scooter, or bikes, plus masses of kit could fit in the garage

19 Overcab storage is usefully subdivided

20 A sliding flyscreen door and cassette step grace the (UK) offside entrance

