

## VAN TEST

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# Clansman's high price countered by its quality

FOR MORE THAN 60 years the Thomson family and staff have been building in Scotland 'T-Line' caravans, a marque which has now reached the stage where it is world famous. This year the range comprises 10 tourers — four of which are two-berths — with prices that slot into the middle-upper bracket of the market.

The subject of this month's test, the T-Line Clansman, is a luxury two-berth tourer which is now just one year old. It has two features which clearly distinguish it from the rest of the range. The first is its top-of-the-range £1,094.50 ex-works (inc. VAT) price tag and the second is the absence of the magic prefix 'Glen' which for many years has been associated with all Thomson tourers.

The 16 cwt. (ex-works) 13ft. 9in. by 6ft. 9in. Clansman shell incorporates a shallow Vee-roof which offers 6ft. 4in. of headroom in the centre of the van. The Thomson shape should, by reducing drag, be a petrol saver and it also minimises the chances of side winds deflecting the van from a straight course.

Front and rear panels above and below the waist level in the pre-finished 22 swg aluminium exterior are raked inwards to produce the quite distinctive Thomson 'T'-line. The hardwood interior framework in which all joints are half-lapped and screwed has a particularly rigid feel and there were no ripples anywhere on the exterior walls.

Mineral wool, 25 mm thick, is used to fill wall and roof cavities between the metal exterior and the 2.7 mm printed-ply, fine limed-oak interior. One inch thick expanded polystyrene which is standard insulation on the underside of the ½in. tongued-and-grooved floor can be fitted to the walls and roof instead of fibreglass wool for an additional sum of £5.10.

Including the fixed unit in the stable door the van has six anodised windows by Ellbee.

Only two of these can be fully opened. These are the units at the front of the side walls which also include drop-back vents at the top. Apart from louvred vents fitted into the windows along the rear wall all other windows are fixed. Purchasers are not given the option of having an opening window fitted into the front wall.

The van is mounted on a B & B chassis including B & B Mark III independent suspension, a Sigma coupling (when available), 9in. rod-operated Lockheed brakes and 6.70 by 13 (4-ply) tyres on 4½-13, 4-stud wheels. Thomson recommend a maximum load, without restriction of speed, of 20 cwt. The tyres will certainly cope with an additional 1½ cwt at speeds below 62 m.p.h.

The hitch-height to the centre of the coupling for level ride is a rather low 15½in. and nose weight ex-works is 112 lbs. Thomson recommend a touring nose weight of 142 lbs which might be heavy for some cars.

Other external features of note include a compact drawbar gas bottle chest with lock, a drawbar shroud, a stoneguard along the front wall, awning and part side-wall channel, number plate, rubbing strakes and four inlet/outlet sockets in the rear wall to supply water services to the kitchen and toilet room at the rear of the van.

Nothing new here as the Clansman incorporates all the well-proven traditional ideas in its layout. These include two full-length single beds separated by a bedside chest of drawers at the front, cocktail cabinet with fridge unit

below on the nearside wall and the wardrobe on the offside wall. The kitchen and self-contained toilet room is along the rear wall.

Pre-finished limed-oak printed plywood walls and an all-white ceiling make a striking contrast to the darker polyester 'Teak'-finished surfaces of the table, working tops, refrigerator door and fronts of certain shelves. Man-made tweed mattress and backrest covers and looped pile floor carpet were in a rather bright purple and red with curtains to match.

Although the curtains do not have overlapping rails they are generously cut to ensure complete window coverage. The curtains are attached to rather ornately patterned nylon rails. However, it is good to note that stout plastic curtain retainers are fitted to each window instead of the time consuming cords found in so many vans.

The five-inch thick single beds measure 75in. by 24in. and 72in. by 24in. on the near and offside respectively. They are comfortable for sleeping and seating and have cleverly raked backrests which at night fall back flat to the walls. The Melamine surfaced 36in. by 27½in. table hooks on to the bedside cabinet so that its length is effectively increased by another two feet.

Dining space for four is generous and when not in use the table is stored in a special toilet room wall rack. The settees will seat six in comfort and with a little bit of ingenuity it is possible to arrange them laterally to make up a double bed.

Life can be difficult in a caravan with poor or inaccessible storage facilities. The arrangements in the Clansman are virtually faultless. Bedding locker tops in ½in. thick chipboard are sensibly hinged to allow easy access with the mattresses resting parallel to the side walls. The locker floors are covered with PVC and very thoughtfully Thomson insulate sections of the wheel box that fall in here with carpet.

No fewer than seven head lockers encircle the front half of the van, from the doorway on the nearside to the wardrobe attached to the opposite wall. Two short gaps that are left between the front and side wall lockers serve as 'library' space.

As the side wall lockers do not touch the ceiling there is additional shelf space above. Each fall-front lid — like most Thomson doors — has a piano hinge and a strong anti-spill catch. The lockers are an aid to tidiness on site but care must be taken not to overload them



with heavy items that could upset stability when on the move. The locker closest to the kitchen is sub-divided for crockery and a small Melware set is provided as standard equipment.

The bedside cabinet has four lift - to - open drawers but why do these have to be three inches shorter than the available space? Some space too appears to have been lost below the bottom drawer.

A wardrobe of moderate size includes four very useful shelves, a mirror on the door and hanging space of 4ft. from a correctly sited rail to a plywood shelf below. With the shelf removed there is a 4ft. 10in. drop to the carpet-insulated wheel box below. Plenty of useful space remains around the wheel-box for items such as tins or shoes.

The rear-wall section of the kitchen has two Teak-grain worktops which cover a stainless steel sink unit and a Cairor B 600 full oven. A metal quadrant-shaped heat shield and a folding plate rack are attached to the underside of the oven worktop. When both lids are raised working surface is restricted to the top of the adjacent refrigerator cabinet.

The kitchen includes a single drawer (shorter than is necessary), a floor locker with a fall-front door and a massive two-door cabinet with a single shelf. A Whale Tip-toe pump and the spout at this point are linked to external sockets which are fitted well away from the awning.

## REFRIGERATOR

A RAM 24 Electrolux 2ft.<sup>2</sup> refrigerator which weighs 61 lbs-plus is housed in a cabinet sited slightly behind the axle and just forward of the main door which is on the nearside wall. Layout-wise this is about the only position where it is possible to site a fridge but I somehow wonder if wall ventilation — so essential to good refrigeration in hot climates — might not be impaired by the main door when it is opened and clipped back parallel with the exterior wall. A very useful cocktail cabinet links the top of the fridge with the crockery cabinet above.

Although headroom is restricted to 5ft. 11in. in the Clansman's 24in. wide by 43in. deep self-contained toilet room, it still merits very high marks for being such a well-planned affair. The PVC floor covering is hygienic and practical.

Other plus points include the use of lined walls, a fitted washbasin fed by a Whale pump, a glass and toothbrush rack, a vanity unit with mirror, a toilet roll holder, an 8-watt fluorescent light and a useful shelf along the end wall.

A mirror in the loo is particularly useful as it makes shaving possible without continual disturbance by the fairer sex which I find inevitable when forced to use mirrors attached to wardrobe doors.

The rear window has louvres and a curtain, and further ventilation is provided by means of vents in the roof, floor and side wall. Additional light reaches the compartment via two borrowed-light panels fitted into the door and the side wall adjacent to the kitchen.

The fluorescent light in the loo is backed up by no fewer than five other sensibly sited lights. Two of these are gas-operated Morco No. 2's and the remainder are Morley F8-8 watt units similar to the unit in the loo. A questionable feature is the inclusion of a gas point at the base of the wardrobe. In any case if this type of appliance is still approved why



Number of berths, 2; shipping length, 17ft. 3in.; exterior body length, 13ft. 9in.; exterior width, 6ft. 9in.; interior width max, 6ft. 4in.; overall height, 7ft. 11in.; maximum interior height, 6ft. 4in.; window sill height, front/rear, 44in. and 46in. respectively; floor height, 16½in.; height to centre of coupling for level ride, 15½in.; weight ex-works, 16 cwt; recommended gross weight, 20 cwt; nose weight ex-works, 112 lbs; touring nose weight, 142 lbs; tyres, 6.70 by 13 (4-ply); coupling, Automatic Sigma 'back-up'; brakes, Lockheed 9in. Rod-operated; wheels, 4½J-13, 4-stud, ½in. dia; extras, 'Export' polystyrene insulation, £5.10; Carver Trumatic heater with thermostat, £77; Holt Rogers Mini Continental Flued Heater, £39.60; Prices include VAT and are ex-factory; price of van, £1,094.50 ex-works; maker, Thomson T-Line Caravans, Thomson (Carron) Ltd., Carron, Falkirk, FK2 8ED, Scotland.

was the nozzle pointing upwards so that it can act as a trap for sand and dirt?

The highly efficient and completely safe Carver Trumatic Flued heater with thermostat control, or the Holt Rogers Mini-Continental Flued heater can be fitted as optional extras at the factory for £77 and £39.60 respectively.

The price to be paid for the excellent kitchen working heights at the rear of the van is rather limited through - the - van driving vision. However, Wingard long-arm doors restore complete confidence when it is time to overtake. With a hitch height of only 15½in. to the centre of the coupling for level ride many owners will be forced to fit a drop plate or to take other steps to achieve level ride.

On public roads the outfit was steady at speeds up to the legal limit but at higher speeds on the track one became increasingly aware of the amount of heavy-weight equipment sited aft of the axle.

When fully laden for Continental tour it would seem sensible for the heavier items to be placed well forward. Due to certain difficulties with the earlier models of the new Sigma 'back-up' hitch the test van was equipped with a B & B Beta IV hitch. By the time this article goes to press the Sigma problems will have been overcome.

The van has an ex-works weight that might deter some purchasers and sun-seeking Continental enthusiasts might be happier if more windows could be fully opened. However, if the above points are disregarded, the 2-berth Clansman is in my opinion a tough, good-looking van with a completely practical layout and a specification that is comprehensive enough to justify its rather high asking price.

THE TEST WAS VERY KINDLY ARRANGED IN CONJUNCTION WITH EASTBOURNE CARAVANS LIMITED, MAPLE ROAD, LOTTBRIDGE DROVE, EASTBOURNE, BN23 6NY.

## GEOFF'S MINI VERDICT

**EXTERIOR STYLING.** Incorporates the distinctive Thomson 'T'-line.

**CONSTRUCTION.** Soundly made, very rigid shell.

**LAYOUT/DECOR.** Traditional layout — decor for most tastes.

**STORAGE.** Lots of it; and easy to get at!

**TOILET ROOM.** Absolute winner. Full marks.

**KITCHEN.** Working surface very limited.

**STABILITY.** Satisfactory but 'forward' loading might be sensible for Continental speeds.

**'BUGS'.** Why so many sealed windows?