



Frances and Michael Howorth joined the visitors at the NEC to seek out what is hot and what is not at the start of the show season.

February at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre saw the 2023 edition of the Caravan, Camping and Motorhome Show take place over six action-packed days. Billed as the UK's largest start of year showcase of motorhomes, campervans, caravans, tents, trailer tents, caravan holiday homes and luxury lodges all under one roof, it is the baby sister to the October Motorhome & Caravan Show.

Traditionally very few new motorcaravan models make their debut here and this year that number was lower than normal. Scarcity of stock and a slow supply chain made sure that sales staff, who are normally over attentive when visitors show any interest in a van, looked rather glum. Elsewhere, especially on stands selling accessories and services,



Morelo Empire Liner

the anticipatory atmosphere matched the buoyant mood of show attendees who had flocked to Birmingham for their springtime injection of motorcaravan fun and enthusiasm.

New vans

Companies that did bring new models to the show included Coachman, who introduced not one but two new models of motorhome.

Their new, 4 berth, Travel Masters 545 and 565 both sit on a Mercedes-Benz base and AL-KO chassis, combined to provide a comfortable driving experience and a well thought through interior. The range has a choice of two popular layouts that offer practical and flexible living solutions, including an island bed within the 545 and twin beds in the 565. Sterling Automotive Design displayed their all-new Roamer with its wonderfully modified front-end that gave the Renault Master a completely different and rather fetching look that was, said managing Director Carl Williamson, "The product of many days' output on the company's 3D printer."

The Campervan Company brought their new all electric 2 in 1 campervan to the show. Based on a zero emission Toyota Proace van, this 7-seater MPV converts into



Ecowagon VW Transporter conversion

clever 4 berth campervan in just minutes. In the same eco-friendly vein, Eco Wagen, a van converter based in Cornwall, displayed their new Slim Van. Based on a VW T6 body, the new model has a larger bed than previously seen and the company's eco ethos is backed by its use of sheep's wool insulation and sustainable wood interiors.

At the upper end of the scale, it was the Morelo Empire Liner 1 with its price tag of half a million pounds that was the most expensive and largest of the new models on display. As the show opened, it was announced that this was the motorhome that had won first places in the NCC Design Awards.



Roamer, a modified Renault Master by Sterling Automotive Design

With a name like Morelo, the brand sounds more Italian than German, but Germany is where it comes from. The 12-tonne, 15-metre-long



Coachman travel master 5655

vehicle is fully customisable allowing customers to change most things except the side on which the steering wheel is mounted. Those with an HGV licence and half a mil burning a hole in their pocket will however still need some patience. There is a two year wait before production can start on one ordered today.

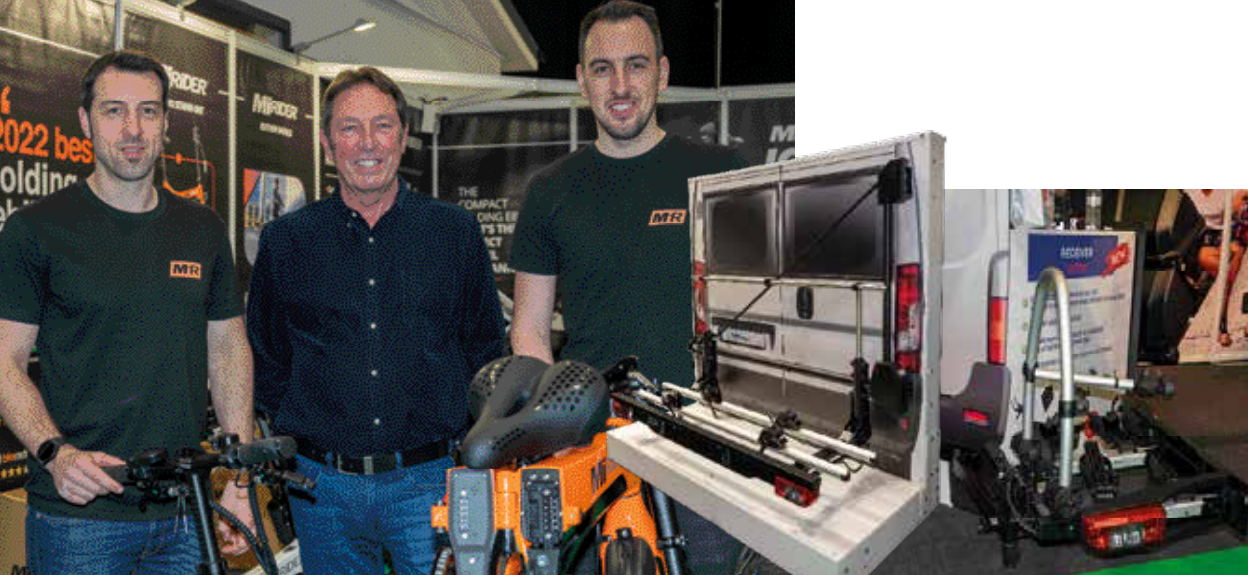
Not new

Whilst not quite as new, but interesting nevertheless, two other vans caught our attention. The first was the Auto Trail 68 Expedition motorhome, an entry level Fiat based model that comes with 4 interior layout options offering up to 6 berths. What caught our eye was, however, the clever use of heavy-duty sliding trays fitted to the garage under the main bed. These pull-in, pull-out trays allowed the carriage of electric mountain bikes or motor scooters and yet still allowed users to access storage lockers in the same space. The second attention grabbing attraction was on the Baileys of Bristol stand. There they had chosen to display their Ford-based, Adamo 75-4T motorhome. This is the vehicle they plan to use in their forthcoming Sahara Challenge which will see them set off on a 21-day crossing of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco to the very northern edge of the Sahara, the largest hot desert in the world. Now there is an adventure we would love to be a part of.

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Campervan Co
Toyota Proace
Eco Revolution
2-in-1 campervan





Above left to right: Matt, Mark and Martin Higginson at MiRider; Swing away bike rack from Sawiko and the Witter Receiver Hitch swing out bar for bike carrier or luggage box.

Product

Many visitors to the show are already proud and happy owners of a motorcaravan. With no desire to change or upgrade, they are still nevertheless keen to visit the show to catch up on what's new when it comes to supplies, products and suppliers. We undoubtedly fall into that category and enjoyed our tour of the stands that for the most part cling to the side edges of each of the 5 halls in use. It was there that we found Protec Covers. Not new but still inventive and ever improving. Based in West Yorkshire, this family-run business has forty years of experience in the textiles and sewing industry with more than twenty years of developing tailored campervan and motorhome covers. The fabric they use is made exclusively for them in Scotland and is both UV protected but also breathable, meaning your van stays safe under the cover however long you leave it there.

What was new and exciting, if toilets ever are, was a new compostable toilet from Arwinger. This small German start-up has come up with a clever kit that converts a conventional Thetford cassette toilet into a dual waste separation toilet that uses no chemicals, no water and allows solid waste to be disposed of in a dog waste bin or compost heap. Liquid waste gets separated

at point of use and is collected into a small, separate container and can be disposed of using a domestic waste disposal system. Clever? Yes. Easy to fit? Presumably so! The downside is, from our point of view, the heavy cost of toilet conversion. But, if that is the price you must pay for the freedom to wild camp over prolonged periods, then perhaps it is worth it!

Biking

The Higginson family are an inventive lot! Led by father, Mark and aided by sons Mathew and Martin they not only invented the Disklok Steering Wheel visual anti-theft deterrent but have also come up with a small wheel, electric bike. The MiRider is a versatile bicycle built in the UK that not only folds away neatly but was designed specifically to be carried in a motorhome. Perhaps the only one to have been designed especially for our industry.

It is that foldability that has made the MiRider such a hit because for years now, carrying bikes on the back of a campervan with rear barn doors has been somewhat frustrating. Once the bikes are placed on a tow bar mounted bike rack, those rear doors cannot be opened without first removing the bikes. What was needed was a simple easy to use swing away bike carrier and several engineers have over the years

made them up in ones or twos and sold them by word of mouth. They were for the most part, cumbersome, heavy, expensive and downright ugly. Despite our looking, we have never before found one exhibited at a show. At this show there were four on display and we now know a fifth will be launched at the show in October.

Part of the AL-KO group, Sawiko had on display their Trigo bicycle carrier designed to fit onto Fiat, Peugeot or Citroen panel vans. This swing away system can carry up to three e-bikes and has a load rating of 80 kilos. Their Futuro, E-Lift carrier was even smarter, in that its bike deck drops down to road level for easy bike loading and then rises automatically using a remote control. The third swing away was the Agito, that can carry cargo up to 120 kilos meaning you can carry a motor scooter or motor bike on the back. Witter, part of the Westfalia Automotive group, also chose the show to launch their Receiver Hitch, a modular system to which can be fitted a wide range of attachments including what they call a swing out tow bar onto which you can affix a standard bike carrier.

Connectivity

Satellite TV specialists Oyster used the show to introduce a new entry level system they call the

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Les, Joyce, Jaci and Graham on the Motor Caravan Club stand

Oyster 70. Because dish size affects how many programmes you can receive, the quality of reception and how far you can travel in the transmitted footprint is important when choosing a system. Being only 17.5cm high when closed, the new unit is extremely compact, featuring a curved feed arm ensuring optimal signal reception across its entire surface. It is available with a single or twin LNB.

Pioneer, the electronics company, launched the latest model in their Avic-Z range of camper navigations systems. This one is designed to perfectly match the look and feel of the Ducato / Boxer range of cabs. It supports the latest in connectivity options for smartphones including Apple CarPlay, Android Auto and even WiFi connectivity.

Merchandise

Dometic, the multi-faceted supply giant, launched a slew of new merchandise on day one. As the show began, journalists were showered with press releases detailing each new product. Included in the long list was a new FreshJet FJX air conditioner aimed specifically at RVs and a new mobile power system. Tentbox did the same, announcing a range of new roof top boxes, some of which add an extra story on top of larger motorcaravans.

Our 'Cute Product of the Show' prize has to be awarded to Wonderfold for their VW4 Volkswagen Stroller. This imaginary prize is well deserved given that this rather groovy stroller was inspired by the vintage split screen VW and comes complete with bumper and

even working headlights. It can carry up to four kids weighing a total of 1,360 kilos and folds away, to stow neatly standing up when not in use. Not cheap, but very appealing indeed!

If the Compostable toilet collected our 'Most Innovative' award and the VW stroller, our 'Cute' award, then the 'Hard-Working' award has to go to the four silver-haired surfers who cheerfully manned our very own club stand in Hall 3. Unfailing with their smiles and warm welcomes, this group of volunteers worked unstintingly in their drive to recruit new members. And very successful they were too. Well done team!

Service

Don Amott is a new and used motorcaravan dealership based in the Midlands. Who better to ask about the state of the industry? Talking to us on their stand in Hall 3, Ben Amott explained how the shortage of new stock is affecting business. He told us that used motorcaravans are selling both quickly and for good prices. He added, "It is very easily possible that a campervan or motorhome in good condition will sell for more money now, than it cost new, two years ago!" He told us that to get good stock, the company has to pay 'top dollar' for used vans and the business has become so competitive that Ben has had to change his work pattern. He explained, "Now instead of working Monday to Friday, I work Sunday to Thursday. I use the Sunday to phone would-be sellers while they are still at home and before my competitors open their offices on Monday. That way I am ahead of the game and get the best stock."

The Caravan Camping & Motorhome Show in February may not be as large nor as broad in content as the show in October, but somehow its more compact nature and hall layout makes it a good show to attend. We are glad we did.



Far left: VW4 Volkswagen Stroller Wagon from wonderfold.

Left: Arwinger Cassette Separation Toilet (Composting toilet)