



Current Amara interior



Compact Elddis

YOUR

Coachman Amara 380/2 v
Elddis Avanté 362

VIEWS

Mike Steer gauges owners' opinions on a pair of compact models from two leading UK manufacturers

Elddis' Avanté 362 was consigned to the graveyard of obsolete models in 2011, leaving the lower-specified Xplore 302 as the company's compact, entry-level offering. On the other hand, its opposite number in this report, the Coachman Amara 380/2, is still very much available.

A bit of background... the Explorer Group (owner of the Elddis marque, among others) acquired the Coachman Caravan Company in 1997. Four years later the management team at Coachman negotiated the purchase of the business and took it back into independent ownership.

These Coachman Amara and Elddis Avanté models are trim two-berths with corner washrooms and rear kitchens. The Amara is about a foot longer inside and an inch wider overall. Back when both models were available brand new, the Amara was the dearer by some £1,000.

Forty Club members completed our questionnaire (thank you!) and provided a wealth of comment and opinion on the merits and drawbacks of these two caravans. All the percentage scores we

refer to are computed from members' 'box-ticked' marks.

LIKES AND DISLIKES

Amara owners were delighted with the build quality and compact nature of the 380/2. They said the Amara is "extremely comfortable" and "incredibly well insulated". Despite being "built like a tank" it remains "easy to tow". The model's durability was praised by the owner of a 2008 model who said it "still feels like new", and for those with a driveway, the Amara's dimensions made it all the more feasible to be stored at home.

Water-pump faults, insecure cupboard catches, power-hungry halogen lighting and occasional issues with general build quality were the prevailing concerns on Amara's 'dislikes' list. One Amara owner thought the spare wheel would be better sited in the front locker and not slung beneath the chassis. The member having difficulty in getting the noseweight down to 75kg would disagree.

Both under tow and for ease of storage, the "light and compact" Elddis Avanté won acclaim. The "full-size fridge and good-size cooker" pleased one member,

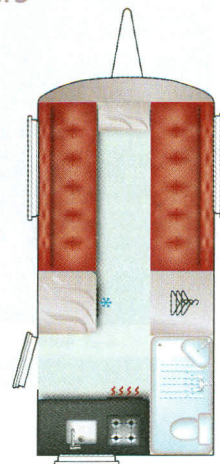
and its "layout, good kitchen and bathroom, comfy settees and lots of light inside" delighted another. One ex-camper praised Avanté's comfort "when compared to a tent". Hardly a great compliment.

Avanté owners presented their list of dislikes, many minor but others quite depressing. Water ingress and a consequential loss of confidence was a "massive disappointment" for one member with a 2010 model. "The build quality is very poor," wrote another.

The lack of through-vision was a frustration for one owner, while another was so annoyed by the shower curtain which "keeps sticking to you", that after just one use he opted to abandon his Avanté's "small" shower in favour of the site toilet block.

ON THE ROAD

Towcars ranged from comparatively lightweight Astras and Golfs to comparatively heavyweight Freelanders and similar 4x4s. A vast majority of owners expressed satisfaction with the way their chosen towcar could pull their chosen caravan.

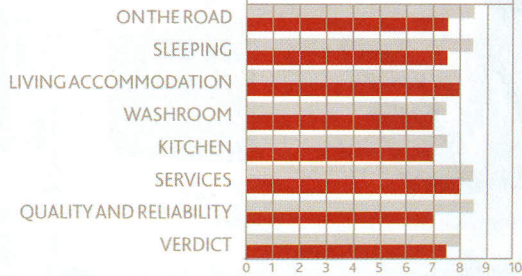


Coachman Amara

TECHNICAL

RATINGS

COACHMAN ELDDIS



	Coachman	Elldis
Internal length	13ft 2in (4.02m)	12ft 3in (3.73m)
Overall length	18ft 8in (5.68m)	18ft (5.48m)
Width	7ft 5in (2.26m)	7ft 4in (2.24m)
Headroom	6ft 5in (1.95m)	6ft 5in (1.95m)
MRO	1,067kg (21cwt)	1,002kg (19.7cwt)
MTPLM	1,195kg (23.5cwt)	1,135kg (22.3cwt)
Berths	2	2
New (ex wks) price	£15,495	£10,500 (2011)
Caravan Club insurance quote	£283*	£199*

Above figures from manufacturers' literature

AVERAGE USED PRICES

Year	Coachman	Elldis
2008	£6,613	£6,525
2009	£7,725	£7,325
2010	£8,513	£8,300
2011	£9,400	£9,200

OWNER PROFILE	Coachman	Elldis	Avg
Age	68	63	66
Driving experience yrs	49	44	47
Towing experience yrs	29	22	26
Mileage	7,590	3,898	6,230
No. of contributors	25	15	Total 40

* Standard 5Cs cover based on four years' no claims discount, £100 excess, £500 contents cover and assumes fitting of tilt activated or corner steady alarm. Subject to terms and conditions and Insurers' acceptance of the Risk. The Caravan Club Ltd is Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Call 01342 336610 for further details and to obtain a quote.

Info: coachman.co.uk ● elldis.co.uk

The Coachman proved to be "predictable and safe", as it "follows the line of the car without any problems". As mentioned, it had been problematic to reduce noseweight to below 75kg. The easy solution, according to one member, is to use a towcar with a higher limit.

One assured Avanté owner summed up his towing experience; "Absolutely fab, completely stable and follows like a dream." Another member expressed confidence towing the Avanté, even though he was "new to towing with just three-months' experience".

SLEEPING

Lumps and bumps in sculptured cushions were an issue for some Club members;

"greatly improved with a mattress topper" we were told.

"I prefer the old pull-out slats for making up the bed," said the owner of a 2012 Amara. "The pull-out mechanism is easy and substantial. So much better than slats," claimed another; just showing what challenges we give the design teams!

For one member, drifting off in the 2010 Avanté with its array of warning lights was "like sleeping under the illuminations at Blackpool". That allegation apart, many told us how comfortable they found their Avanté bed, whether converted to a double or left as adequately long singles.

LIVING ACCOMMODATION

We learnt that the living area in the 2010 Amara, although "comfortable and cosy", could benefit from additional lighting. Good news; it seems that the 2011 specification has addressed this issue – the "lighting is excellent", claimed our member. The lounge seating too was just the ticket; "We like the long seats so we can stretch out relaxing during the day."

Avanté owners also appeared to be a happy bunch when it came to their living accommodation. They declared that it was "excellent", "very good", and "fine – just what we wanted". One member "preferred the layout of this caravan" to a previous L-shape, while another, finding his Avanté somewhat draughty, said, "now I know why in many adverts people have their feet up!"

WASHROOM

With washrooms not much bigger than a phone box, the showers within can be challenging. "The loo and basin work well," we were told, but stripping off and dowsing one's person in what is hoped is warm water is another issue, leading to various members forsaking their shower for the benefit of extra storage. We quote the Amara set; "We look for sites with facilities", "the washroom is not suitable for showering", "adequate, but [we] don't use shower".

KITCHEN/COOKING

Given that these caravans are modestly dimensioned (okay, small) we expected a good deal of criticism of kitchen work space. Not entirely so. Although some contributors would have preferred a tad more room, many responded with praise for the way space had been maximised.

"[We are] very pleased with the four-burner hob, grill and oven. Fridge is great, too," said the owner of a 2004 Amara.

"Kitchen is great, four rings, grill and separate oven, good-size fridge and

storage for food and cooking bits," countered the man with a 2003 Avanté!

One owner branded the washroom in his 2010 Avanté, "Excellent!" but he was very much in the minority. Typically, others declared, "We understand why people go for end bathrooms", "Too small. Shower usable in emergency".

SERVICES

The Amara's Services score of 84% is about as good as it gets. "Drainage is excellent", "plenty of sockets", "everything works very well", "all great". There were one or two grumbles mixed in; owners of some earlier models would have preferred low-energy lighting, and heater controls to be more accessible.

Avanté owners were pretty generous with their marks too. Achieving 79%, it was close on the heels of Amara with contributors writing mostly in complimentary terms. There was, however, mention of plumbing leaks and faulty gas regulators.

QUALITY AND RELIABILITY

Members heaped praise on Coachman's Amara and gave its Q&R an admirable score of 87%. "It's brilliant!" said one, who went on, "Having owned a caravan for over 45 years I speak with some experience." "It has been fantastic so far," said the owner of a 2004 vintage (bought second-hand in 2008). "The construction of the caravan is superb", said the member of his Amara bought new in 2011. These comments were typical.

The Elldis set were not quite so happy. The Avanté achieved 68% and, while many owners wrote approving comments, the model suffered severe criticism from a minority.

The big question is whether our members would recommend their caravan to a friend?

Coachman Amara 380/2

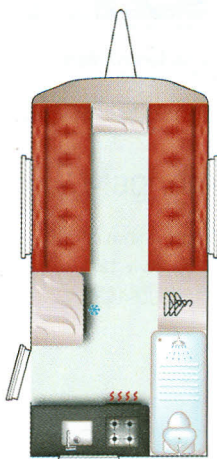
Yes: 22 (88%) No: 1 Didn't commit: 2

Elldis Avanté 362

Yes: 9 (60%) No: 3 Didn't commit: 3

VERDICT

Either of these models can provide a safe and secure tow, ample accommodation, two comfortable berths, a decent kitchen and a washroom that works. Despite it demanding a further raid on the piggy-bank, our contributors gave the accolades to Coachman's Amara, which the scores suggest it deserved.



Elldis Avanté