

Second-hand Shoot-out

Price £6699 **Payload** 209kg **MTPLM** 1113kg



The Celeste's exterior is in excellent shape, except for some kerbing on the alloys
BELOW The central bed slats slide out from the middle of the front chest of drawers



The decor is dated, as is the use of fitted carpets, but it is in near-mint condition. That's a sure sign that the previous owners were exceptionally careful in using and looking after it

2003 Swift Celeste 13/2

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This month we visit Cranham Leisure

ONE OF THE few places with a large selection of used caravans inside London's M25 motorway is Cranham. This family-run business always offers a selection of second-hand tourers, and holds the franchise for new Swift, Sprite and Elddis caravans. The site also boasts a large accessory shop.

As with most dealers, Cranham is keen to take your old caravan in part-exchange, and the best of these may find their way onto the used forecourt.

Before being sold, all used vans undergo full interior and exterior valeting. In addition, each is given a full pre-delivery inspection, which includes a chassis inspection, gas safety and electrical system checks, and tests of the appliances, lights and other equipment.

We met caravan sales manager Neil Smith who, along with his friendly staff, is always

pleased to show customers around the new and used caravans to find one to suit individual requirements.

Usefully, the caravan display is sorted by the number of berths so you can easily compare several four-berth or two-berth models without having to hunt all over the forecourt. While you're looking, you can enjoy free coffee from the vending machine (it's not bad, either!).

Cranham's large workshop also services caravans, with special customer discounts for work on tourers that were initially bought from the dealership.

Cranham Leisure

Old Gailey Park, Southend Arterial Road, Upminster, Essex RM14 1TJ

Tel 01277 222 444

Web www.cranham.co.uk

BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION of fashionable fixed-bed layouts, caravans built for two were more compact, with front lounges that converted into transverse double beds – a far more efficient use of space than a fixed bed. Their layouts varied in other ways, though.

This month we set out to find luxurious two-berths with such layouts for less than £8000.

The contenders

2003 Swift Celeste 13/2

Although it's getting on, this small van is the definition of 'mint condition'. The Celeste name was used by Cranham on dealer specials based on Swifts, so a few extras were thrown in.

2006 Coachman Amara 450/2

This Coachman was a real find: it had just been reduced from £8750 to £7750. A new Amara 450/2 will set you back £16,095, so it's less than

WORDS AND PHOTOS: STEVE ROWE

Two-berth vans for under £8000



Two-piece aluminium sidewalls and ABS end panels make up the Amara's bodyshell
BELOW The bed is made up as in the Swift, but the seat slats appear to be less durable



Price £7750 Payload 175kg MTPLM 1335kg

Much lighter, more contemporary upholstery is used in the Coachman than in the Swift. The wood-effect laminate floor is practical; drop-in carpets are included with the Amara

2006 Coachman Amara 450/2

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half the price of a 2012 model, but the interior was practically as good as new. Slightly larger than the Swift, the Coachman features a full-width rear washroom, an offside kitchen and the front lounge/double bed.

Pitch and set-up

2003
Swift Celeste 13/2

7
10

2006
Coachman Amara 450/2

8
10

With plastic feet on its wind-down corner steadies, the Celeste is easy to set up, even on the muddiest pitches. It's fairly light and compact, making it easy to position on site. At the front, the 12N and 12S hook-up cables are of the coiled type, so they won't drag along the road when you're in transit.

The Celeste's two-piece aluminium sidewalls are still in great shape, as are its front panel and, at the rear, the aluminium panel, ABS lower skirt and high-level brake light clusters.

Useful dealer extras include external gas and mains electricity connections.

The alloy wheels look great from a distance, but closer inspection reveals scrapes where they have touched kerbs. The spare wheel looks to be in good condition, and is in an underfloor carrier near the axle.

In comparison, the Amara's alloys look new, as does the spare wheel, which is stored under the floor. The body consists of ABS front and rear panels, and two-piece aluminium sidewalls. In familiar Coachman style, two waste-water outlets are at the bottom of the rear panel. This is fine on level pitches, but the Swift's set-up, with waste points on the offside, allows better drainage on slopes.

As with the Celeste, the Amara offers external gas and mains points. It also boasts a large plastic-lined external storage locker, which occupies space under the nearside bench seat and which is ideal for storing muddy walking boots and other outdoor kit.

Lounge

2003
Swift Celeste 13/2

7
10

2006
Coachman Amara 450/2

9
10

Both caravans have similar front lounges, with parallel seating and a central chest of drawers. The Swift Celeste has dark-green patterned fabric for its seating, as well as a dark green carpet, which is fitted, a good indication of age; drop-in carpets have long been standard equipment. Still, it is in very good condition, which is remarkable, because fixed carpeting is often the first thing to bear signs of careless caravanners, such as wine stains or pet damage. The carpet clearly marks the Celeste as a caravan that has had very careful owners.

Gold-coloured curtains are clean and complement the dark-green upholstery. There is also a single outlet for the blown-air heating system, plus a mains electrical socket, both mounted at the front by the chest of drawers. »

2003 Swift Celeste 13/2

Vital statistics

Price £6699
Berths 2
Internal length 3.94m
Overall length 5.54m
Overall width 2.16m
MiRO 904kg
Payload 209kg
MTPLM 1113kg

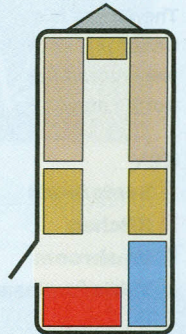
Kit list

- Al-Ko galvanised steel chassis
- Al-Ko AKS 3004 stabiliser
- Spare wheel and tyre
- External mains and gas points
- Truma dual-fuel space and water heaters
- Dual-fuel hob, grill and oven
- Thetford 80-litre fridge
- Blinds and flyscreens to all windows
- Full flyscreen to main door
- Heki rooflight
- Radio/CD player
- TV aerial
- Alloy wheels

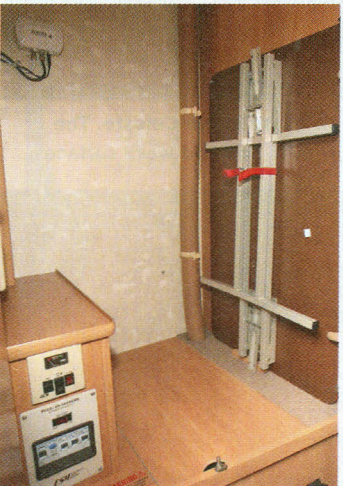
The Celeste 13/2 has a front lounge, end kitchen and corner washroom

KEY

- Seats/beds
- Kitchen
- Washroom
- Table/cupboard



Despite being compact, the kitchen is very practical, with clever touches. It is in excellent condition



The control panel and the folding table are in the wardrobe



The washroom is where the compromises on space were made. Its owners may well have stuck with site facilities

» At the top is a flip-over extension that's large enough for two to dine at, but you'll first have to remove anything that's on it. The other option is to use the free-standing table.

The Amara has much lighter-colour upholstery than the Swift and benefits from removable carpets. When lifted, they reveal practical wood-effect vinyl flooring. The carpet and upholstery are in good condition.

Another advantage the Amara has over the Celeste is a second blown-air outlet at the bottom of its front chest. The Coachman has a much larger sideboard than the Swift, with two drinks lockers, the fridge and the heater. Another bit of clever design is the sideboard's hinged worktop: it can be lifted to ease access to the back of the heater for servicing.

Beds

2003
 Swift Celeste 13/2
 2006
 Coachman Amara 450/2



At night, the Celeste's front lounge converts into a 2m x 1.45m double bed. Both seat bases have solidly fixed slats, which combine with those that are pulled out from the front chest to make the base. A chip is missing from the

finish of the leading edge of the pull-out slats, but it isn't noticeable when they're retracted.

The Amara's 2m x 1.5m double bed makes up in the same way as the Celeste's. The slats under the settees don't look as solid as those in the Celeste, but both caravans have drop-down

Caravan close-up



Swift Both vans have the old 12N and 12S plugs, but the Celeste has curly cables. These won't drag on the road. Properly set-up, this is a great idea, but one that now appears confined to history.

locker doors on the fronts of the seat bases to ease access to the space underneath, which is ideal for storing bedding. Both vans have spotlamps under their overhead lockers.

Kitchen

2003
 Swift Celeste 13/2
 2006
 Coachman Amara 450/2



There are two surprising things about the Celeste kitchen: it is thoughtfully designed to be very practical despite being compact, and it is in immaculate condition. There are some nice touches, such as the sliding tambour doors on one of the roof lockers and on a large cupboard under the sink. There's also a small cutlery drawer, with a moulded tray, plus a plastic holder for a kitchen towel roll.

Although their design is dated, the ivory-finish sink/drainage and matching hob, and their glass covers are nonetheless all in perfect condition. The previous owner must either have used these facilities very little, or been very fastidious in caring for them.

The Coachman's kitchen really only beats the Swift's in its sheer size. The main section, with the cooker, sink/drainage and their glass »

2006 Coachman Amara 450/2

Vital statistics

Price £7750
Berths 2
Internal length 4.67m
Overall length 6.35m
Overall width 2.18m
MiRO 1160kg
Payload 175kg
MTPLM 1335kg

Kit list

- Al-Ko galvanised chassis
- Al-Ko AKS 3004 stabiliser
- Spare wheel and tyre
- External mains and gas points
- Truma dual-fuel space and water heaters
- Four-burner gas hob, grill and oven
- Thetford 80-litre fridge
- Blinds and flyscreens to all windows
- Heki rooflights
- Radio/CD player
- TV aerial
- Alloy wheels
- Alarm

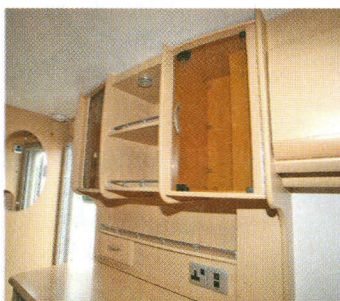
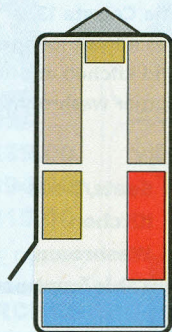


A raft of storage possibilities in the Amara's kitchen far exceed those in the Celeste. The matching sink/drainer and hob add a touch of class, and their glass lids add work surface

The Amara is a traditional end-washroom two-berth caravan

KEY

- Seats/beds
- Kitchen
- Washroom
- Table/cupboard



The nearside sideboard boasts plentiful storage and work space



The washroom is so good that it betters those in many current models, not just the Celeste's cramped wet room

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» covers, is on the offside, but the work and storage space continues across the gangway, where you'll also find the refrigerator.

Unlike the Celeste's, the cooker has just four gas burners, and doesn't have an electric hotplate, so points go to the Swift here. However, the quantity of worktop and storage options make up for this difference.

Washroom

2003
 Swift Celeste 13/2 6/10
 2006
 Coachman Amara 450/2 10/10

This is one category where the smaller Celeste can't compete. It only has space for a corner washroom, with a bench cassette toilet and a small plastic vanity unit.

When it's time to shower, you need to use a shower curtain. Unfortunately, this has been removed by the previous owners, suggesting that they never used the shower, perhaps sticking with site facilities instead.

Meanwhile, the Amara boasts a huge end-washroom, with a separate plastic-lined shower cubicle, a large wardrobe, stylish vanity unit and a swivel cassette toilet. Its wide range of storage options include lockers and shelves,

and a variety of mirrors increases the feeling of space. Everything is still in great condition.

The rear window has a blind, a flyscreen and a sheer net curtain. It really is a superb washroom and one that you'd find hard to beat, even on a new tourer.

Caravan close-up



Coachman Be wary of previous owners' DIY additions; badly fitted ones can devalue a tourer. Some are OK, though, such as this small mirror securely fixed inside the door of a washroom locker.

Verdict

2003
 Swift Celeste 13/2 7/10
 2006
 Coachman Amara 450/2 8/10

Although both vans have traditional two-berth layouts, each has features that will attract shoppers. From the point of view of cost, the Swift wins the day with its excellent condition and much lower price than the Coachman. It's also shorter and almost 200kg lighter than the Amara, which might be important if you don't want to tow a large caravan.

The star factor in the Amara's favour is the washroom, which is among the best you'll find on any caravan, new or old. If you prefer using a caravan's washroom to relying on campsite facilities, then the Amara is easily the better choice. It also boasts a bigger kitchen and a large sideboard, but all this comes with premiums in length and weight.

We'd go for the newer, posher Amara, but there would be that nagging thought that 'small is beautiful' when remembering the Celeste.

Looking for a used tourer? Make sure you check our For Sale site:
www.practicalcaravan.com/for-sale