

Caravan and Motorhome Club Magazine



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French lesson



Rob McCabe studies the merits of a stylish-looking six-berth from the mighty Trigano group

In life, generally, it's good to experience something different every now and again. Same goes for caravanning – and the distinctively-styled new Antares models from the French Caravelair brand certainly merit the use of the 'D' word.

The range is available via the well-known Marquis Leisure group, which has 12 branches across England. The new caravans come in two-, four- and six-berth forms, and it's the 496 six-berther with twin fixed bunks that comes under scrutiny here.

TECHNICAL RATINGS



89%

BUILD QUALITY

92%

TOWING

83%

DAYTIME

94%

NIGHT-TIME

75%

KITCHEN

88%

WASHROOM

77%

LIGHTING

85%

VERDICT

£

Price as tested
£17,995 OTR

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Beds
Front double
6ft 7in x 5ft 2in;
centre 5ft 11in x
2ft 9in and 5ft
11in x 2ft 1½in;
rear fixed bunks
(x2) 6ft 1in x
2ft 4in

⚖️

MRO
1,217kg
(23.96cwt)

MTPLM
1,400kg
(27.56cwt)

User payload
183kg (3.6cwt)

Overall length
22ft 8in (6.91m)

Overall width
7ft 7in (2.31m)

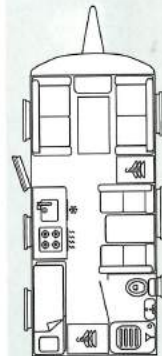
Overall height
8ft 6in (2.59m)

Max internal height
6ft 5in (1.96m)

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Caravan Club Insurance

Please see quote provided in the 'Did you know?' roundel on this page*



Figures from manufacturer's literature.

*Based on standard new-for-old cover, sum insured of £18,500 (caravan and equipment), £500 contents cover and £100 voluntary excess. Includes 4+ years no claim discount (not protected). Legal protection is an optional extra charged at £8.75 for the year. Subject to underwriting – a copy of the policy wording, including benefits and exclusions, is available on request. Caravan and Motorhome Club is a trading name of The Caravan Club Limited. The Caravan Club Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.



Clockwise from above left: on site at Ferry Meadows; side dinette; lounge in day and (inset) night modes; 496's kitchen is small but of good quality

BUILD QUALITY

Caravelair comes under the umbrella of the massive Trigano group, which has a history of leisure vehicle manufacturing going back more than 50 years. So it should know what its doing – and our experience of the Antarès largely backs that up. The GRP bodyshell is impressive – bright and sleek to behold, and super-sturdy to the touch. It's good to see heavy-duty corner steadies as standard too.

Inside, the only niggles were some untidy cabling and plumbing behind the scenes, and a fiddly-to-engage blind on the single-piece front window. Otherwise, panel gaps were good and consistent, and all doors opened and closed precisely and silently.

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DID YOU KNOW?

You can insure this caravan with the Club for £325.86* per year. Please see camc.com/insurance or call 01342 336610 for further details

The UK-specific Antarès caravans have the doors on 'our' side and are all NCC-approved.

TOWING

With a respectable MTPLM of 1,400kg, the 496 offers itself up to a wide choice of towcars. The Al-Ko chassis is equipped with shock absorbers to help dampen the worst of the bumps, and a hitch stabiliser offers a helpful, steadying hand. Both front sofa lockers have very good stowage where you can safely place heavier items when towing, and the fridge and cooker are clustered around the axle to help keep weight distribution on your side. Get the loading and the outfit match right and it'll be an altogether fuss-free ride.

DAYTIME

One passer-by at the Ferry Meadows Club site test venue remarked that he didn't like the small front

window because he thought it would make the caravan feel dark inside.

In fact, the Antarès feels pleasantly light indoors. That smaller-than-usual window doesn't make a huge difference, and the big sunroof above the kitchen/side dinette area lets in plenty of daylight.

The lounge is small for a family caravan but what it lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality. The upholstery is excellent, providing fine comfort and support, and the supplied cushions have a pleasingly substantial feel. Forget that 'seat' along the front window, though – 'perch' would be a better name for it. There is no way are you going to get six seated round here – I guess most larger families would consider an awning to be a near-essential.

If you don't have an awning to spill out into, you'll almost certainly have to convert the side dinette back into day mode each morning. It sounds like a pain but it's actually not that much



"The lounge is small for a family caravan but what it lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality"

Clockwise from above: bunks ready for the evening; close-up of the metal wash basin; and more of the washroom, including cupboard and shower



section into the gap. Its commendably comfortable too, thanks to the aforementioned supportive quality of the upholstery.

Arguably, the 496 makes an even better four-berth than a six. With just the fixed bunks in use, the side dinette can be left permanently as a seating-and-eating area.

KITCHEN

While good quality, the kitchen is tiny, the only saving grace being the side dinette table opposite – obviously not an option if you're leaving this area made up as a bedroom. There are three rings on the hob – one of which is an electric hotplate – and a compact, combined oven/grill. Given such modest cooking options, a microwave would have been a valuable addition. The mains socket is very oddly situated – on the underside of the overhead locker, right above the hob.

WASHROOM

Most families will largely use the site facilities for everything except night-time teeth-brushing. Given that, this is a perfectly decent little room – it's nicely lit, easy on the eye (I especially like the shiny, proper metal wash basin) and features good storage and a shower compartment that's fully adult-sized should you ever need to use it.

LIGHTING

Lighting isn't the Caravelair's strongest point. There are just two reading lights in the lounge, backed up by a compact ceiling-mounted lamp. But the main concern is the lack of any further illumination along the corridor leading to the back, making it feel somewhat gloomy in the evening. Each of the occupants in the side dinette benefits from a reading lamp, which is good – but when this area is made up into the bedroom, whoever's in the lower bed gets nothing at all. No complaints in the fixed bunks, where the stylish adjustable reading lamps offer commendably powerful performance. The little LED strip in the kitchen is adequate.

The washroom stands out, however – as well as the downlighter placed right above the mirror-fronted cupboard, there's a cool backlit panel in the shower cubicle that provides a bit of bling.

VERDICT

The small lounge and pinched kitchen are the main compromises in a refreshingly different, good-looking, robustly-made caravan that offers fine sleeping accommodation for up to six.

With thanks to

Vehicle supplied for testing by **Marquis South Yorkshire**, Rotherham Road, Dinnington, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S25 3RF. Contact: marquisleisure.co.uk, 01909 565 222.

of a chore: I put the stopwatch on and, without rushing, had the top bunk completely folded away – with the mattress sections, slot-in side portions and ladder all stowed – in about four and a half minutes. And you get two really good, proper seats here as a result.

Storage is excellent: all the seat lockers and the lower fixed-bunk locker offer lots of useable space, the latter also accessible from an exterior hatch. There are no hydraulic struts anywhere, though, so hauling stuff out through the top can be a bit tedious. Those big lockers above the front window are extra-deep but, if my experience is anything to go by, you'll need to be careful not to knock your head. The huge cupboard right at the back is good to see in a family caravan although it's a shame the freestanding table has to be manhandled all the way from here to the lounge.

NIGHT-TIME

The first point to make here is a fundamental one: if you have a full complement of six on board, everyone gets a good bed. The bunk mattresses are good quality and the supplied upholstery sections for the pull-out bunk in the side dinette fit snugly and feel supportive.

The lower side-dinette bed (get the salesperson to demonstrate how it's set up – there's a knack to it) is roomy and comfy, although it's a shame there is no light here. The pull-out bunk occupant has two reading lights from which to choose, while the fixed bunks both have dedicated lights and opening windows.

The double bed at the front is really easy to make up. Slide out the slats, lose one of the sofa backrests (both of them if you're over 6ft), turn around one of the squabs so that the kneeroll is at head level and insert the supplied, precise-fitting