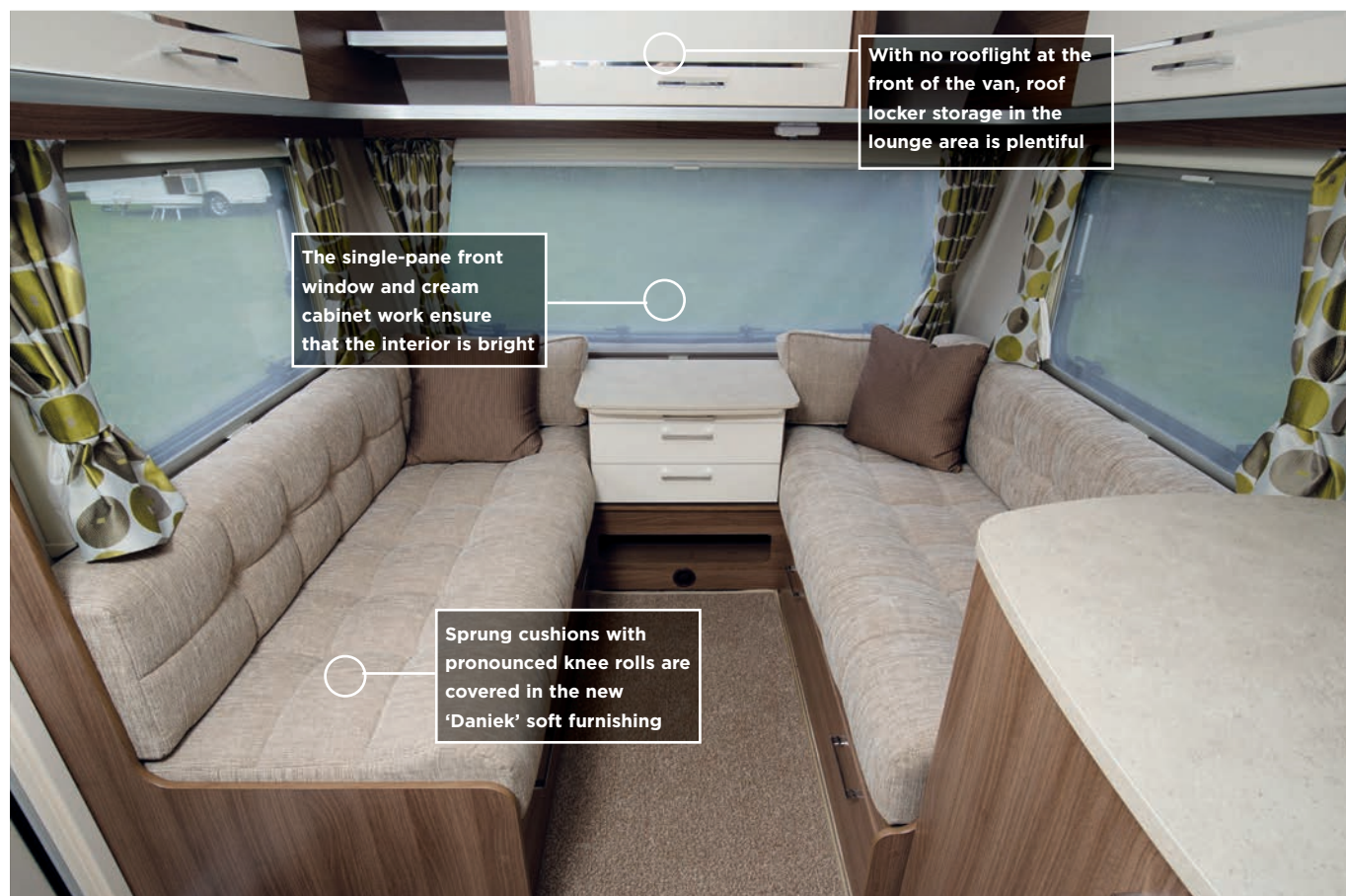


FIRST LOOK

Venus 570/4

The Venus range got a major facelift for 2015 to give it an upmarket feel at odds with its bargain price-tag. Does its new luxury layout work? **Alastair Clements** finds out



With no rooflight at the front of the van, roof locker storage in the lounge area is plentiful

The single-pane front window and cream cabinet work ensure that the interior is bright

Sprung cushions with pronounced knee rolls are covered in the new 'Daniek' soft furnishing

Price£15,699
Berths 4
MiRO 1165kg (est)
Payload 185kg (est)
MTPLM 1350kg (est)
Awning 1030cm

IT SEEMS AS if everyone who is anyone has a transverse island bed these days. And why not? The benefits of the layout are obvious: it means that couples who still prefer to share a bed but need to use the loo in the middle of the night can do so without disturbing each other, rather than having to clamber over your partner in a fixed nearside bed or being forced to opt for twin singles.

Until recently, however, this floorplan has been the preserve of the luxury tourer, occasionally filtering down to mid-market

models. That all changed last year when the Swift Group dropped a bomb into the budget sector by launching its best-selling Sprite Major 4 SB, which brought all of the benefits of this domestic-style layout into a van that cost less than £15,000.

At the time we predicted that other manufacturers would follow suit and, sure enough, the first to enter the fray is Lunar's entry-level brand Venus with the new 570/4. It slots into the range between the fixed-twin-bed 550/4 and the six-berth 580/6, and extends the line-up to six models for 2016.

Pitch and set-up

The Venus range got a root-and-branch makeover last year, so fundamental changes for 2016 have been kept to a minimum.

The eagle-eyed will spot the new graphics with 'sheen' effect for the one-piece aluminium sides, and the more modern multi-spoke alloy wheels that come with the optional £499 Plus Pack fitted to our test van (and to the vast majority of Venus vans leaving the factory). As well as those wheels it includes an AKS hitch stabiliser, plus a spare wheel and carrier, a microwave, and a stereo/MP3 player.

An unavoidable consequence of this layout is the huge blank wall on the nearside, not aided by the minimal graphics on the Venus, but all of the services are relegated to the offside to prevent them cluttering up your awning and it's good to see proper cutouts to help you find your steady-winder bolts in the grey side skirts, which are

matched by a grey lid for the generous front gas locker.

Lounge

As well as that new layout, the big news inside is the all-new 'Daniek' soft furnishings. We were very keen on the stylish and modern Dove Grey theme that featured in the 2015 Venus, but this new oatmeal hue is more likely to appeal to traditionalists, and is lifted by some rather natty retro-style green curtains.

Like last year's Venus it still manages to feel more upmarket than its bargain-basement status suggests, and there's now a slightly taller freestanding table that better integrates with the front chest.

As ever with Lunar caravans, the sprung sofa bases with their pronounced knee rolls make very



The kitchen worktop is vast and accommodates a three-burner gas hob and circular sink



New graphics with sheen tie in with the silver-grey gas-locker lid

comfortable places to sit, but you'll have to turn them around at night to avoid a lumpy double bed. The large single-pane front window keeps things bright inside even on a dingy day, despite the lack of sunroof, and that feeling is aided by the use of cream cupboard doors and the pale fabrics throughout the van.

All of the lighting inside the 570/4 is by LEDs, and the shallow main lamp units are augmented by new brushed-aluminium spotlights for this year, plus there are new switches, though if you use a lot of electronic devices you may find the total provision of five 230V sockets a bit meagre.

Kitchen

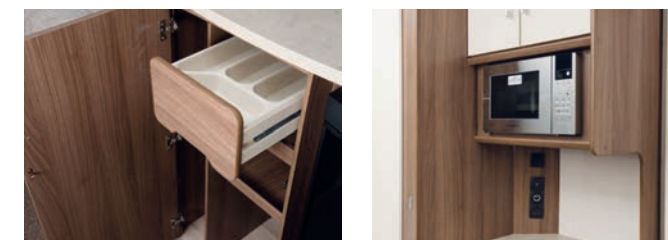
Only one of those sockets is in the offside kitchen, but there is now a strip of LEDs mounted

beneath the overhead lockers to give much better task lighting. Another improvement is the huge cupboards and drawers beneath, which make it easy to store bulky kitchen items such as pots and pans or cereal boxes.

This is an entry-level caravan, so there's the expected three-burner gas hob and a combined oven and grill, but the chrome mixer tap adds a touch of style to make up for the exposed screwheads of the stainless-steel sink. There's no pop-up worktop extension, but this is a van that doesn't really need it because the kitchen is a spacious affair – largely thanks to the decision to restrict the lounge to a four-seater. Bearing in mind that this is a caravan that will, for the most part, be bought by couples, that seems a sensible choice.



The made-up front double is larger than the transverse island bed



FROM LEFT Design touches such as the hidden cutlery drawer and the microwave set at a sensible height show Venus is thinking about the user



The island bed can be slid into day mode to create more space around it

On the other side of the van there's a good-sized and low-set sideboard with a TV point and a cupboard beneath, while above it you'll find that optional microwave, sited sensibly at chest height, with another locker above.

Sleeping

Those pale cupboards can also be credited with adding to the spacious feel in the bedroom, but it's genuinely roomy as well. With the transverse island double bed slid back in 'day' mode there's a fair amount of space around it to get to the washroom, and it's easier than most to convert to 'night' mode by sliding out the base and flipping over the hinged part of the mattress. It's not the biggest bed of its type, however, at 6ft when extended (though that's

only an inch shorter than the Sprite offering), so check that it's long enough for you!

The bedroom is well-appointed though, with a reading light and a proper shelf for each side, and above the window there's a television mounting point and the third aerial socket in this van, joining those to be found on the front shelf and the sideboard.

Should you have guests, the front lounge can swiftly be turned into two short singles, long enough only for kids, or a very generous double using the slats that slide out from beneath the front chest.

Washroom

There's a sliding door to the washroom with a fairly narrow aperture and, once you're in, >>>



FROM ABOVE Transverse double has good storage beneath; all the services on the Venus are relegated to the offside; one wardrobe is vast; basin looks upmarket but shower is not fully lined

the toilet also feels a little snug, with the shelves on the side of the vanity unit encroaching into kneeroom. Otherwise, it's a good-sized washroom and it's given a welcome dose of style – something that tends to be lacking in many caravans at this price point – by the cream bowl sink, the tall chrome mixer tap and the curving theme to the shelving that carries through from the rest of the van.

We're pleased to see an obscured window to add a bit of privacy, and the shower unit is enormous, with a bi-fold door and useful drying rail built-in – though it's a shame that it isn't fully lined.

Storage

One of the benefits of having no front panoramic sunroof is that you have more space for overhead lockers, and the Venus

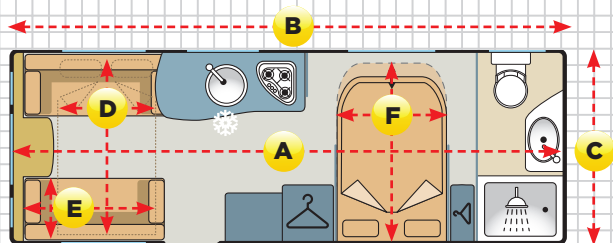
features a trio of large lidded storage spaces flanking a pair of open shelves.

There are plenty of touches in this tourer that show it was designed by people who go caravanning themselves, such as the fact that you can access the under-sofa storage via large drop-down doors as well as by lifting the cushions. There's a cavernous area beneath the double bed, too, though it would have been nice to be able to gain access to some of these under-bed storage spaces from outside the caravan.

The 570/4 has plenty of room for your clothes, too, with the usual 'his and hers' wardrobes flanking the bed. The unit closest to the washroom is fairly narrow, but the forward wardrobe is unusually large, with plenty of hanging space, plus a cupboard and drawer beneath.

Venus 570/4

Price £15,699 **Berths** 4 **MiRO** 1165kg (est) **Payload** 185kg (est) **MTPLM** 1350kg (est) **Awning** 1030cm **Contact** Lunar Caravans
Address Sherdley Road, Lostock Hall, Preston, Lancashire PR5 5JF
Tel 0800 056 2280 **Web** www.lunarcaravans.com



- A** Interior length 5.79m **B** Shipping length 7.37m
- C** Overall width 2.21m **D** Front double bed 2.01m x 1.53m
- E** Front single beds 1.53m x 0.69m
- F** Rear island bed 1.83m x 1.34m

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Or try these alternatives



- Sprite**
Major 4 SB
Price £14,850 (2015)
The first 'value' model to offer the transverse island bed layout. It's 47kg heavier than the Venus.
- Adria**
Altea 552UP Trent
Price £14,190 (2015)
If you're tall, this is the island-bed bargain to have at 6ft 4.4in. Its 1400kg MTPLM can be updated to 1500kg.
- Bailey**
Pursuit 530-4
Price £14,205 (2016)
At 1377kg and a shade over £14k, this traditional fixed-nearside-bed layout is light and good value.

Verdict



If you are tall then you will have to check that the fixed bed in the 570/4 is long enough for you, but that is a common trait of this floorplan. The Venus is a budget van that has upmarket aspirations. And that sense of affordable luxury is only heightened by being mated with this layout, which has been opened up to buyers with lighter tow cars – and lighter wallets – with this new Venus.



Good

It feels more special than its price-tag would suggest; can be towed by a wide variety of cars



Bad

There's limited headroom for six-footers; only a 2kW system for the space/water heating; short fixed bed