

Great Expectations!



***We had great expectations
of the Carado T449, but
could it live up to them?***

by Richard Robertson

Mrs iMotorhome and I had been seriously looking forward to our eight day trip in the Carado T449. Not only was it a chance to revisit NZ by motorhome for the first time in four years, it was to be our first experience living in an imported European model. So no pressure then...

The vehicle came from Wilderness, the rental arm of SmartRV – NZ importers of Bürstner and Carado motorhomes. It's a clever symbiotic business relationship that helps spread brand awareness, allows prospective buyers to try some of the models and also provides a steady stream of young and relatively low mileage used models. We picked up in Auckland and dropped off in Christchurch, and along the way were reminded of why New Zealand is the perfect motorhome destination.



Carado might sit below Bürstner in the prestige stakes, but the T449 is a good looking motorhome that's well built, well equipped and easily able to stand in the market on its own merits.



Car Who?

Carado is the entry-level brand of the Erwin Hymer Group from Germany. Hymers are widely regarded as the best mass produced European motorhomes and while Carado is entry level, it's a relative term. Carado motorhomes benefit from the same design, engineering and manufacturing expertise as all brands in the Hymer Group, which includes Bürstner. Where most money is saved is on things like a limited range of floor plans and the Group's buying power. There's certainly nothing cheap or basic about Carado motorhomes.

Wilderness calls the Carado T449 an Outlander 4 in its rental fleet, which makes it easier for customers to remember and means they can use any suitable vehicle under that name. In line with other fleet model names, the '4' refers to its seating and sleeping capacity. In our terms this is a B-class motorhome but Carado calls it a Low Profile. They also offer Coach Built motorhomes, which we'd call C-class because they have an over-cab bed.

Finally, like all motorhomes from the Erwin Hymer Group – including all right-hand drive models it sells in the UK – every Carado has its main entry door on the driver's side. I'd read much about the disadvantages of this in a right-hand drive environment and it was an aspect I was keen to experience first hand, but more on that later...

Our test vehicle was part of the rental fleet of Wilderness, which is owned by SmartRV. Being able to try a specific vehicle, or even just the style or brand, is a terrific way to get to know just how suitable it might be for you.





Mechanically

Carado is a Fiat-only motorhome brand and all models ride on a single version of the Ducato cab-chassis: the Multijet 130. This uses the least powerful version of the 2.3-litre engine, producing 96 kW (130 hp) of power and 320 Nm of torque, but with a gross vehicle mass of only 3495 kg it's okay. Importantly, it qualifies for a WOF in private usage. While on weights, the tare is 2945 kg, payload 550 kg and the braked towing capacity is 2000 kg.

While it might be the baby of the Ducato range power-wise, on the safety front it still has dual front airbags, anti-lock brakes, electronic stability control, traction control and a hill holder. It also comes with a reversing camera, cruise control, day running lights and all the usual Ducato niceties like cab airconditioning, heated electric mirrors, electric windows and even a leather wrapped steering wheel (although no wheel-mounted audio controls). Interestingly, it has an aftermarket touchscreen audio system that displayed the reversing camera image, but sadly no GPS. For navigation I used TomTom in my iPhone 6 Plus, held securely in place by the Ducato's excellent pop-up phone/tablet holder atop the dashboard, and used power from a dash



“Importantly, it qualifies for a WOF in private usage”

USB charging outlet just below. I was also able to Bluetooth my phone through the sound system, although it wasn't fussed on reliably broadcasting TomTom's navigation directions.



Investigating some freedom camping spots proved the value of the ground clearance afforded by the standard Fiat Ducato chassis. In this situation we got over a rise in the track that would have snagged a lower-slung vehicle.

The Carado T449 we had was one of a small batch of manual vehicles on the Wilderness fleet. It's a long time since I'd driven a manual Fiat Ducato and given the limited output of the engine I was keen to see how the 'little' 2.3-litre engine and 6-speed manual worked; both in combination and at keeping the vehicle moving along in the real world.

Measuring 7.43 m (24' 5") long, 2.3 m (7' 6") wide and 2.91 m tall (9' 6"), the Carado T449 is not a small motorhome, especially

by European standards. One benefit of the Fiat chassis, especially compared to the AL-KO chassis fitted to some Ducatos, is the substantial ground clearance. This allowed us to explore some freedom camping locations that would have been out-of-bounds in other vehicles and with a set of all-terrain tyres I think you'd be surprised how far you could get in this vehicle. That increased ground clearance does require the inclusion of an electric entry step, however.



Body Building

The sleek body is made using walls that sandwich solid XPS foam between external aluminium sheeting and internal ply. The roof and rear wall use glass reinforced plastic (fibreglass) on both sides of the foam core, as does the floor. Windows are double glazed acrylic swing-outs, but without integrated insect screens and privacy blinds. For these items Carado fits a separate internal window frame with pull-down blinds. However, in our rental situation only the kitchen window was thusly equipped. Fortunately, the six roof hatches – all of varying sizes and spread between the cab, above the roof bed, over the kitchen, above the main bed and in the bathroom and over the shower – were all screened.

Our rental Carado T449 had a number of differences from one you'd buy new. Apart from the window screens this meant it missed out on the 4-metre wind-out awning, 150 W solar panel and pair of 9 kg gas cylinders.

At the rear of the body a tunnel boot (or garage depending on your terminology) runs the full

Above: The sleek Carado T449 is a B-class motorhome (no over-cab bed) and its appearance is enhanced by factory black alloy wheels and a pleasing colour/stripping package. **Below:** Thanks to its 122-litre fresh water capacity, filling the water tank wasn't an overly regular task.





The tunnel boot runs under the main bed. Its size would easily handle a couple of sets of golf clubs or even a pair of mountain bikes and it comes with strong tie-down points. LPG cylinder storage is in a cupboard just inside the smaller door on the far end.

2.2 metres across the vehicle, below the main bed. It's 1.23 m deep at its maximum and 0.96 m tall, providing plenty of bulky item storage for things like golf clubs or a mountain bike or two, and comes with heavy-duty tie-down points on an adjustable slide track. Large doors on either end – the biggest is on the driver's side – provide good access and the gas cylinders are located in their own compartment just inside the kerb-side door.

Fresh water capacity is a commendable 122 litres, although as seems to be the norm with European motorhomes no mains water connector is fitted. Grey water capacity is 92 litres and hot water 10-litres. While as mentioned the standard LPG provision is 2 x 9 kg cylinders, for rental purposes the fit-out is 1 x 9 kg and 1 x 4 kg; the latter sized for easier external use with a barbecue.

The water heater is a Truma Combi 6E, a gas/electric system that also provides heating to

the living area and which proved very efficient. I counted four adjustable and three fixed heater outlets and it worked a treat. The location of the hot water/heating controls, however, on an angled corner of the main bed base where it's dark and usually concealed by the doona was perhaps the most inconvenient I've encountered. I know it's there because the Truma unit is underneath the bed and it keeps costs down, but seriously? A few extra Euros spent on putting the controls at head height on the bathroom wall would be money very well spent! A last thought on the LPG system: The 9 kg cylinder lasted us the full 8 days and ran the two-door fridge freezer when we weren't driving or plugged into mains power; provided cooking every day for up to 3 meals, hot water and lowish-level heating used every night. It took 8.1 kg when topped up on the last morning, so I'd say a week from one cylinder would be realistic. Just watch it in winter if using the heating more seriously.



"With a set of all-terrain
tyres I think you'd be
surprised how far
you could get in this
vehicle"

Behind the Wheel!

First impressions are funny things. Driving out of Wilderness' Auckland depot my first impression was, "This is a bit of a slug". A few hours down the road I'd changed to "This is fine," and after a couple of days it was "What was the question?". By the time we were into our last days I'd have happily lived with that engine/gearbox combination forever.

While there's no disguising the lack of kilowatts and Newton metres, the real world reality is that when you're touring the prevailing speed limit and road conditions are usually the limiting factors. To this end the 'little' Fiat acquitted itself well, and surprised in steep terrain where second and third gears were highly effective. I've often wondered why Europeans choose lower powered vehicles considering the mountains all around them. Now I know and I'd have no hesitation buying this engine/transmission combination myself. The gearbox itself had a light clutch and slightly long, deliberate changes that I'm sure would free-up with use. I haven't driven this engine with the

automated manual and reserve my judgment on that for now. Maybe next time?

Outright performance aside the Carado T449 drove pretty much like every other Fiat Ducato motorhome I've driven – well. It's comfy, quiet when cruising, provides good visibility and is easily manoeuvrable. In other words it's civilised, modern and car-like. In the course of our travels we covered 1536 km at an average of 11.18 L/100 km or 24.4 mpg. The best was 10.7 L/100 km (26.4 mpg) and the worst 12.1 L/100 km (23.3 mpg). Considering it was a new engine, the terrain in many places and that I wasn't driving for economy, that's pretty good.

All-in-all I was sceptical of the engine's ability to deliver an acceptable driving experience, but by trip's end I was thinking it would be quite okay in Australia. Funny how sometimes you just need time with a vehicle to understand and appreciate its character, attributes and abilities.



Mrs iMotorhome was right at home behind the wheel and very happy to make a mile or two in the Carabao T449.



Us Indoors...

Moving indoors meant entering via the doorway on the driver's side, unless we felt like entering through the cab (which we did on a few occasions). As I said I'd read and heard comments on how unsafe this is and so was keen to discover the truth for myself.

Opening the door when parked on a busy street was no different to opening the cab door, and in fact it's easier as it doesn't stick out as far and folds almost flat against the body. When opening from inside, the windowless door has a prominent warning sign reminding you to watch for traffic and exercise caution. With that in mind it was easy to crack the door open an inch or two and peek out from inside. I think it took about five minutes to get used to the door being on the opposite side to usual. I also have to say that from the driver's perspective it's very handy having the main door just behind yours. Yes, there were times it would have been more convenient to have the door on the kerbside, but for us it didn't prove a safety issue at all.

Above: Despite tales of danger and woe we found living with a right-hand entry door a non-event that took about five minutes to adjust to. **Below:** The roof bed mechanism is strong and even when lowered there's still room to get in and out of the vehicle – if you duck!



Inside

Layout-wise the Carado T449 has a front dinette with secondary roof bed above, mid kitchen, slightly-aft split bathroom and rear main bedroom. In practice this translates into a highly liveable layout that we thoroughly enjoyed.

The design is typically European (so no surprises there!), by which I mean bordering on a little claustrophobic by Antipodean standards due to the maximum use of available space. Europeans have spent centuries learning to get the most from every precious and expensive space centimetre of land and housing, so it's no surprise they've transferred this obsession to motorhome design.

Decor-Wise the Carado T449 reflects middle ground contemporary European taste; that is mid-tone wood with light fabrics and design accents on things like door and cupboard handles and bathroom fittings. It's conservative yet stylish and won't date in a hurry.



Right: Her Majesty with a morning cuppa. Note the headroom to sit up under the overhead cupboards, plus the storage space in the front of the base of the non-lifting bed. The silver thing in the middle of the floor is a finger hole to remove the lid of an under-floor compartment ideal for shoes, etc. **Below:** Decor is contemporary, conservative and nicely done. White things on the cab bulkheads secure the lowered roof bed.

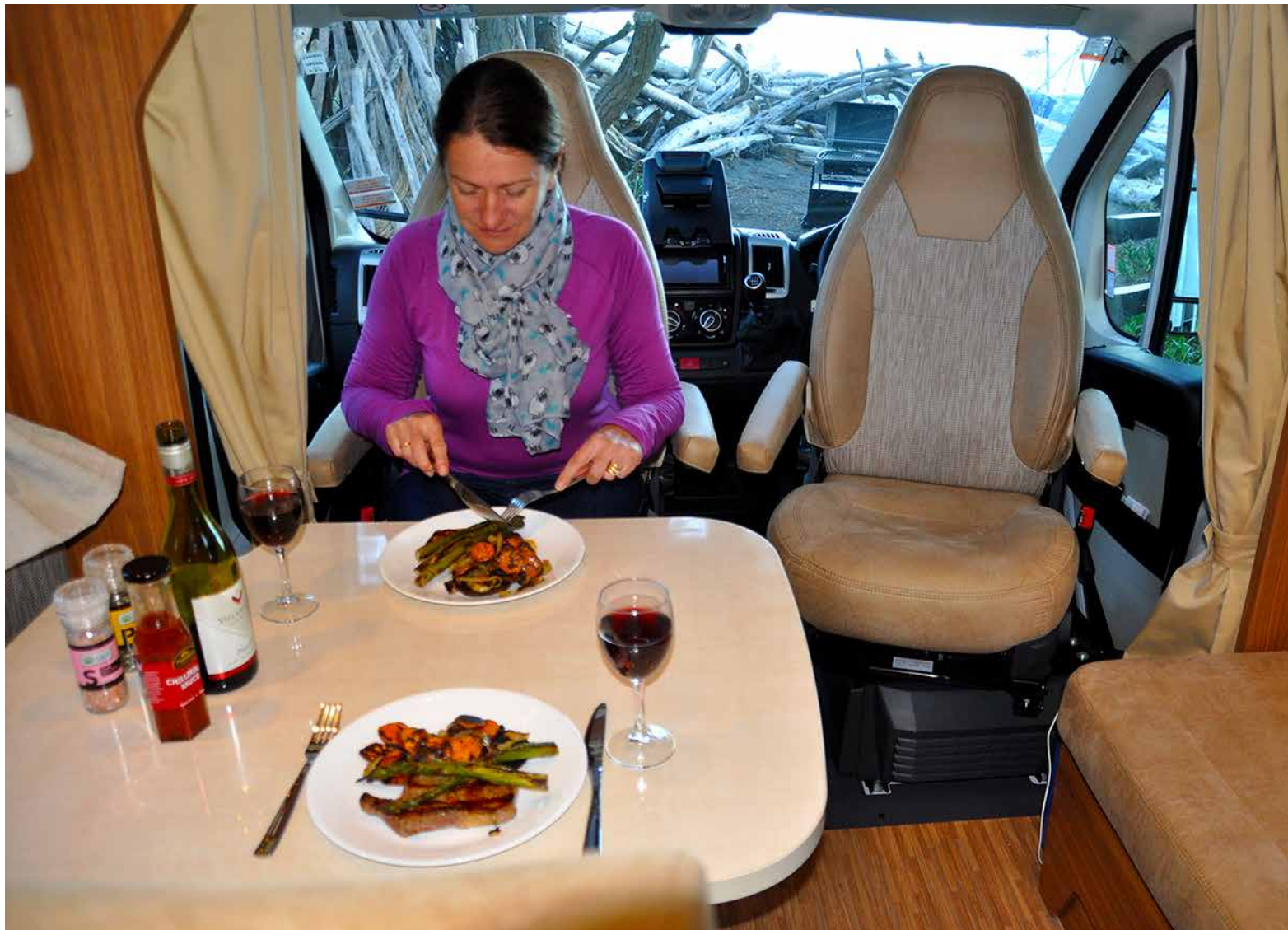


Dining

We both found the dinette comfortable and practical. The cab seats swivel to face the substantial, solid and adjustable dining table, while opposite them is the forward-facing two-place fixed dinette seat that is also seatbelt equipped. There's also an inwards-facing sofa on the wall between the driver's seat and entry door. Overhead are cupboards on both sides, while the cab has a big hatch that's great for extra light and ventilation, and thankfully can be screened against the sun and insects. Around the hatch are storage areas in the corners of the nose cone, plus there's a shelf running full width across the top of the windscreen. These proved ideal for my camera, rolled-up puff

jackets, maps, books and all the sorts of stuff you want to grab in a hurry.

I used the swivelled passenger seat as my on-road office chair, setting up my laptop on the dining table within easy reach of the inverter for 240 V power (Apple laptops don't have a 12 V charging option). From there I could also chat with Mrs iM as she prepared meals or just sat opposite and read or relaxed. I found it interesting that even with the secondary bed lowered – it lives in the ceiling above the dinette – I could still use my laptop as normal and easily duck under the bed to get to the kitchen, bathroom or main bedroom.



The swivelled cab seats work well with the dinette while the table is large, sturdy and practical. Note the cab curtains for nighttime privacy. We'd replace them with proper cab blinds.

Cooking

Mrs iMotorhome is an avid cook and was highly doubtful the small L-shaped kitchen so beloved by European motorhome designers could/would work. It's a feature we've negatively commented on when looking at this type of motorhome at shows or online and we'd come to the conclusion European motorhomers must dine out a lot. How wrong we were!

Over eight days Mrs iM prepared three meals a day with just a few lunchtime exceptions. Like me wondering about the small engine's ability to deliver a positive driving experience, she found the kitchen's ability to 'deliver' to be the same. Yes, the lack of bench space was a drawback, but the table is large and close at hand and she soon became accustomed to the limitations. Dedicated kitchen storage space is also a bit limited, but what there is is well thought out and (mostly) easily accessible when standing in the corner of the 'L'.

Because we free camped all but one night the lack of a microwave was irrelevant and the inclusion of an oven and grill more than compensated. From roast vegetables to breakfast toast these two items came into their own. On the separate three-burner gas cooktop Mrs iM rustled up everything from poached eggs and one-pot wonders to fluffy rice using the absorption method. Within a couple of days she was as familiar and comfortable with her 'little' domain as I was with the 'little' Fiat. We both came to realise that you really have to use something and keep an open mind before casting definitive judgments on what can and can't work in a motorhome!

Despite misgivings Mrs iM was soon right at home in the small kitchen, from where she prepared most meals during our eight-day adventure. Note easy drawer access and excellent lighting from the LED strip and rangehood.



Bathing

We're both fans of 'dry' bathrooms; that is bathrooms where you can use the loo after a shower without having to dry off the seat and/or floor. The split bathroom on the Carado T449, with the loo and handbasin in their own compartment and a separate shower across the aisle is the ideal arrangement. But this design takes it further.

The bathroom forms part of the greater bedroom area and you step up into it all from the kitchen. The loo compartment, which is on the left as you step up, has a solid door that can either give you essential privacy or open right out to block off the entrance from the kitchen you just passed through. In that mode you then have a totally private ensuite bedroom which, if you look at the floorplan, takes up more than half of the body's living area. While that might seem like a waste of space to some, to us it was pure indulgence.

The loo compartment has a swivel-head cassette toilet to the left as you enter and a decent semi-corner handbasin straight ahead, backed by a generous mirror. There was storage below the basin and a very handy shelved, tall cabinet in the corner behind the toilet. Well lit and ventilated, it proved highly practical.

Across the way the shower is a masterpiece. At first sight it appears small and impractical, but in practice it's a ripper. The first thing you notice is it has a removable board that sits in the shower tray and forms part of the bedroom floor. This is terrific as it provides easy walk-around across to the bed on the kerb-side; much easier than the squeeze between the loo cubicle and bed on the opposite side (especially with the mattress bolster in place).

The next thing you notice is the two-piece folding shower screen, which looks flimsy but works perfectly. With the floor section removed you step down into the shower, although it



The split bathroom provides a private toilet cubicle with plenty of storage and room to move. The door in this position has closed off the living area and created an ensuite bedroom.

still has a wooden duckboard to keep your feet above the water and stops you slipping on the smooth moulded base. Unfolding the screens on both sides and extending them to meet in what is an unsupported corner closest to the foot of the bed, my first thought was, "This isn't going to be waterproof." But it was. The screens lock together firmly and after showering there wasn't a drop of leaked water on the bedroom floor. Impressive! Also impressive is that the shower floor area is only two thirds of the space you have to shower in,

34 TOURING TEST

the other third is recessed into the back wall. This space also houses the height-adjustable hand shower, mixer tap, and some shelves in one corner, plus it has a moulded step at the bottom which you can sit on or use for washing legs and feet. Above is a small roof hatch with a swing-down drying rack idea for a flannel, bath mat or single bath towel. Simply clever...

The 122-litre fresh water supply and 10-litre hot water capacity meant we only had to top up the water once on our journey; admittedly using it sparingly and carrying bottled water for drinking. One more thing about the water system: Carado uses a submersible water pump that is silent and always on. This means the water system is like being at home, you just turn on the tap and water comes out,

no need to go hunting for a water pump switch and no loud, droning pump noise that wakes everyone and sounds awful. On that score alone we'd buy this vehicle! Still on systems, the electrical control panel is simple and will be too simple for some as there are only red, orange and green indicator lights for things like water tank levels and battery condition. As a tech nerd who usually can't have enough information on what systems are doing, this basic display actually proved relaxing. Seriously. And it added to the laid back holiday feel we found ourselves slipping into. Psychologically it was an interesting and unexpected result and made me realise sometime too much information is just that. All-up the bathroom works extremely well. It's clever, convenient and an eyeopener we'd be happy to live with long term.



Although it looked small the shower worked well and the screen didn't leak a drop.



Sleeping

Measuring 1.9 m x 1.5 m the main island bed is a good size and comes with a foam mattress. It doesn't lift up but there is limited storage accessible via doors in the front of the base, which is also where the water heater lives. The Carado's windowless rear wall means you can sit up in bed and there's enough height between the bed and overhead cupboards to allow most people to do this, although with varying numbers of pillows required for support! There are bedside windows, wardrobes and shelves on both sides, but no power points from memory. Like lighting throughout the rest of the Carado, a nice mix of fixed, adjustable and LED strips provided more than enough illumination for our needs.

The secondary bed is very clever and when required is easily pulled down from the dinette ceiling. It's manually operated with spring assist and a large sturdy handle that makes operation in either direction simple. It runs east-west across the vehicle and is slightly longer

Above: The roof bed was comfortable and even had its own hatch. It was also easy to reach down and put the kettle on for the morning cuppa!

Below: The main bed was a good size and had plenty of storage at hand, plus good lighting both manmade and natural





at 1.95 m, but narrower at 1.1 m due to a tapering corner. When deployed it sits directly over the dinette, allowing full kitchen use and there's enough space underneath to let you get to and use the swivelled cab seats. It also has its own roof hatch that is only 'revealed' when the bed is lowered, a light, privacy curtains and safety nets if required. Access is via a ladder from the kitchen side. At least it should be, but I found ducking underneath and using the driver's seat as a step much more convenient. It also meant the ladder could remain in the tunnel boot.

How did I find out about accessing the bed that way? I'm an especially poor sleeper and at home we have a king bed that affords Mrs iM a degree of protection from my restless nights. We tried the main bed the first night and I lasted a couple of hours. In the end the lure of the roof bed proved too strong and its extra length accommodated my long frame better. That's the way I slept for the rest of the trip and Mrs iM said she felt like a queen in her own chamber, especially when I took her a cup of tea in the morning. That was easy to arrange as all I did was fill the kettle the night before and in the morning lean down from my lofty perch, light the gas and put it on. Which reminds me, I was surprised the gas cooktop didn't have piezo ignition. What's that about?

What I Think

Towards the end of the trip we were sitting at the dinette one evening – me in my 'office' and Mrs iM in her favourite spot – with dinner done and the TV on, and it suddenly struck me: we were totally at home. I remarked that this was a vehicle we would buy ourselves and could live in without major compromises or modifications, right off the lot, and be happy. Mrs iMotorhome nodded. There is only one other motorhome I can remember thinking that of.

That's not to say the Carado T449 is perfect, but what is? I think the T447, which has an identical layout but with single beds at the rear, would be even better for us, and if Wilderness ever puts them on the rental fleet we'll be there with bells on (hint hint). We'd also like to try a range of other European imports as we are obviously in tune with the design philosophy, but as a first taste for us this was a winner.

Above all else this touring test reinforced how you can't truly know a motorhome until you live in it – and not just overnight. It also demonstrated how you must keep an open mind, lest you do yourselves a serious disservice. The Carado T449 met our great expectations and dismantled many preconceptions. Would it be right for you? By Dickens, rent one and find out!



“This was a vehicle we would buy and could live in without major compromises or modifications, right off the lot, and be happy”



Specs

GENERAL

Make	Carado
Model	T449
Type	B-class
Berths	4
Approved Seating	4
Licence	Car

VEHICLE

Make/Model	Fiat Ducato Multijet 130
Engine	2.3 L 4-cylinder turbo-diesel
Power	96 kW @ 3600 rpm
Torque	320 Nm @ 1800 rpm
Gearbox	6-speed manual
Safety	ESP, ABS, Traction Control, Hill Holder, Dual Airbags
Fuel	90 L

WEIGHTS

Tare Weight	2945 kg
Gross Vehicle Mass	3495 kg
Max Payload	550 kg
Braked Towing Capacity	2000 kg

DIMENSIONS

Overall Length	7.43 m (24' 5")
Overall Width	2.30 m (7'6")
Overall Height	2.91 m (9' 7")
Internal Height	2.10 m (6' 11") max
Main Bed	1.90 m x 1.50 m (6' 3" x 4' 11")
Roof Bed	1.95 m x 1.1 m (6' 5" x 5' - 3' 7")



Specs

EQUIPMENT	
Slide-Out	No
Awning	4 m wind-out
Entry Steps	1 x electric
Hob	3 x LPG burners plus grill and oven
Rangehood	Yes
Sink	Round stainless steel
Fridge	167 L 2-door 3-way
Microwave	No
Lighting	12 V LED
12 V Sockets/USB Outlets	Cab only
Air Conditioner	Cab only
Space Heater	Truma Combi 6E LPG/electric
Hot Water System	Truma Combi 6E LPG/electric
Toilet	Thetford cassette
Shower	Separate cubicle
CAPACITIES	
Batteries	2 x 90 AH
Inverter	800 W
Solar	1 x 150 W
LPG	2 x 9 kg
Fresh Water	122 L
Grey Water	92 L
Hot Water	10 L
Toilet	19 L
PRICE - ON ROAD NZ	
From and as-tested	\$132,900
Warranty – Vehicle	2 years
Warranty – Body	2 years plus 5 years water tight (conditions apply)
Warranty – Appliances	2 years

Pros

- Value
- Innovation
- Layout
- Inclusions
- Build quality
- Liveability
- Sleeping arrangements
- Split bathroom

Cons

- Smallest Fiat engine if towing
- Manual gearbox (auto optional)
- Not ideal for 'larger' people
- Some odd switch locations
- No piezo ignition for cooker
- Not available in Australia!!

Contact:

North Island

Smart RV Auckland

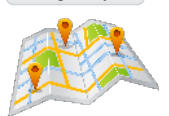
11 Pavilion Drive
Airport Oaks,
Auckland. 2022.

T: 0800 007 627

E: sales@smartv.co.nz

W: smartmotorhomes.co.nz

Click for
Google Maps



South Island

Smart RV Christchurch 3

Export Ave
Harewood.
ChCh. 8051.

T: 0800 007 628

E: ccsales@smartv.co.nz

W: smartmotorhomes.co.nz

Click for
Google Maps

