

# VIRTUOUS VOLANTE

DISTINCTIVE AND CLEVER ARE JUST TWO ADJECTIVES TONY BRADFORD USES IN HIS DESCRIPTION OF FLEETWOOD'S LATEST MODEL



MAIN PICTURE: 560-4 is one of three new Volante models from Fleetwood  
RIGHT: A closer look at the towbar – stabiliser hitch is standard  
FAR RIGHT: No through-vision with this rear bedroom layout



Originating in the sleepy Suffolk town of Long Melford, Fleetwood Caravans Ltd is certainly not the country bumpkin of the tourer scene. It was among the first volume manufacturers to realise the aerodynamic benefits of rounded vertical front corners, in the days when caravans were more boxy than they are today, and its current front-end profile takes caravan streamlining further than most.

The new single-axle Volante range comprises three models, the largest of which, the 560-4, offers the space and luxury usually found only with a twin-axle configuration. We managed to lay our hands on the 560-4 immediately after the NEC Show in February, along with the news that of the 35 units planned for production in 2003, only 10 remained unsold.

## CONSTRUCTION



The 560-4 is certainly a lot of caravan for a single axle, the distinctive shape of the one-piece ABS front panel merging into a rounded drawbar cover. A full-height ABS rear panel incorporates a high-level spoiler with repeater brake light and introduces chrome-look trims and number-plate surround, together with hard rubber rubbing strakes at bumper level to absorb minor bumps without damaging the moulding. Bonded sandwich floor and side walls and a partly-laminated roof are conventional, but the hinged or removable drawbar locker access hatch is unusual.

Side windows are Seitz white-framed units with integral blinds and flyscreens, the 560-4 having no window in the rear wall. The large Remi top rooflight is supplemented by an Omnivent unit over the kitchen and a full-screen door is fitted. An exterior access wet locker set in the nearside wall includes a mains electrical socket, while an awning warmer outlet from the blown hot air system is located close to the door so that it is within a porch awning.

## TOWABILITY



With a maximum laden weight of 1460kg on the single axle, the 560-4 needs 14in wheels and 165x8 ply tyres, which in some areas may not be readily available, so it is fortunate that the spare wheel comes as standard. Mass In Running Order is shown on the plate as 1230kg, leaving a user payload figure of 230kg.



Noseweight of the test caravan in its factory gate trim was just 50kg. The Volante is built on a fully galvanized BPW chassis and comes with a Winterhof stabiliser coupling and gas strut-assisted handbrake.

## USABILITY



The door of the 560-4 is forward of the axle and leads straight into the living area. The interior décor of the test caravan was distinctive with purple upholstery and light green curtains, but alternatives are available. The floor is carpeted with three separate shaped and edge-bound mats, which are easily removed for cleaning. To the rear of the kitchen, the washroom in use occupies the full width of the interior, separating the bedroom from the living area.

The pressurised water system is conventional, drawing from an outside container and with domestic-style mixer taps for the sink, handbasin and shower. A Truma Ultrastore with gas/mains electric operation is located in the offside front seat locker but close to the axle, where it has limited effect on the noseweight.

Storage space is good, with large areas under the front seats and the rear beds, a fair size wardrobe and roof lockers all round. The drawbar locker has space for an awning, although care should be taken not to send the noseweight into orbit.

## LIVING AND SLEEPING



Although nominally a four-berth, the 560-4 is really a two-berth with a put-you-up facility, formed by arranging the L-shape seating as a somewhat lumpy double bed 6ft 9in by 3ft 9in. By contrast, the two single beds in the rear compartment provide luxurious (by caravan standards) sleeping accommodation with two singles 6ft 2in by 2ft 7in on slatted bases and with the facility of raising the head end to form a lounger for an afternoon nap. A double bed can be specified as an option when ordering.

The novel round table on a pedestal leg is an interesting feature, but is difficult to negotiate and would benefit if its diameter were reduced. Storage space is provided for it in the room divider unit. A rectangular free-standing table, stowed in a locker by the wardrobe, is a better bet for mealtimes. We wondered whether this table could be used between the rear beds, but there is insufficient width.

Provision in the form of mains, aerial and satellite sockets is made for a TV on the room divider and at high level in the bedroom. A stereo radio/CD player is built into a roof locker.

## KITCHEN



An extension hinges up over part of the front seat and without it the kitchen

ABOVE: The L-shape seating transforms into a double bed

## SPECIFICATIONS

**FLEETWOOD VOLANTE 560-4**  
RRP: £17,495  
INTERNAL LENGTH/SHIPPING LENGTH: 5.68m (18ft 7in)/7.34m (24ft 1in)  
OVERALL WIDTH/HEIGHT: 2.21m (7ft 3in)/2.72m (8ft 11in)  
INTERNAL HEIGHT: 1.94m (6ft 4in)  
MASS IN RUNNING ORDER: 1230kg (24.2cwt)  
MAX TECHNICALLY PERMISSIBLE LADEN MASS: 1460kg (28.7cwt)  
USER PAYLOAD: 230kg (4.5cwt)





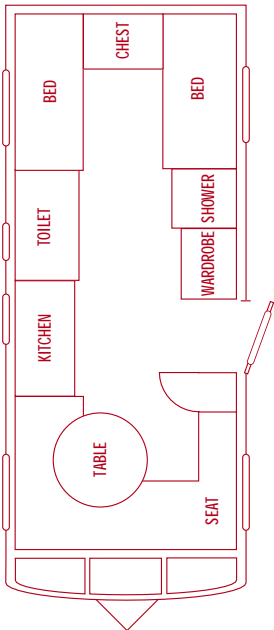
ABOVE: Luxurious sleeping quarters would endear this Volante to many – if only Fleetwood could build them fast enough

would be somewhat short of usable work surface. The glass-topped stainless steel sink and drainer has an integral faucet which hinges up in use, but those of us owning a jug kettle may find difficulty getting it under to fill it.

The full oven cooker unit has a hob with three gas rings and an electric hotplate, a mixed blessing if you prefer sites without, or with very little, mains power. Kitchen storage at both low and high level is adequate and Fleetwood continues to use the Dometic fridge, but with a wooden outer door to maintain the look of the unit.

WASHROOM

Between the rear bedroom and the front living area is the cleverly designed washroom, providing full showering and dressing space while taking up the least possible room when not in use. On the offside is the toilet and handbasin facing



the shower cubicle on the nearside and leaving a corridor between them. The toilet can be accessed during the day, while at night its door can be opened across the caravan, effectively making the bedroom and washroom en suite, yet allowing it to be used from the forward end without invading the privacy of the rear bedroom.

The toilet area has an opening window and two downlights over the basin. Our only criticism is that the towel rail is too close to the toilet for good hygiene. The shower is large enough for you to pick up the soap if you drop it, which is more than can be said for many cubicles these days.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

Lighting is mainly by domed fittings inset in the ceiling and supplemented by downlights in the kitchen. The new Remi rooflight with built in lights is particularly good for creating an atmosphere, but hardly brilliant for reading, so eyeball lights are fitted round the front seating. Neat mains lights are in the front corners with matching 12v fittings serving as bed-head lights at the rear. Mains power sockets with TV aerial points are at the front end and by the shelf in the bedroom. The RCD unit is reachable in the rear of the wardrobe.

VERDICT

With its distinctive exterior styling and clever layout, the Volante 560-4 has already made quite an impact on the market, and its single axle manoeuvrability and weight benefits are easy to recognise. Reports indicate that it might have a scarcity value, but time will tell.

