

Highbridge on a high

With a rather unusual 2007 season drawing to a close, **Phil Pickin** paid a visit to one of the South West's busiest caravan centres to find out how it had affected sales.

HIGHBRIDGE Caravan Centre has once again been voted South of England Dealer of the Year - for the second year in succession. After visiting their extensive premises, just off the A38 in Somerset, I can easily see why they have proved to have such popular appeal. The site comprises a number of large display areas which exhibit a wide range of products ranging from caravans, motorhomes, awnings, folding campers, tents and a very extensive and impressive accessory shop.

The business has been gradually developed over 40 years and although it is now one of the largest dealerships in the country, it still retains the character of a genuine family business. The range of products on offer is large, to say the least, and includes one or two products that are unique to Highbridge. However, it was interesting to hear about this year's successes, in a season that has hardly been kind to any business that relies upon active participation in the leisure market.

It would seem that awnings have been



Coleman Canyon 8 now reduced to £84.15



Highbridge Caravan Centre now has all the latest 2008 Swift tourers in stock

very much in demand this year and the display at Highbridge certainly provides the prospective buyer with a wealth of choice. Highbridge stock both the traditional and also the increasingly popular stand-alone variety, with a good selection of all types being subject to discounts and special offers. Quite why these have remained popular this year is unknown, but this may be due to owners wanting to maximise the space available to them rather than buying a new van, which might also have the knock-on effect of requiring a bigger towcar. Another factor could be the less than kind weather this year.

With cooler and damper conditions taking up most of the 2007 season, caravanners need the added protection if they want to sit outside and also somewhere to store damp and muddy clothing.

This year's poor weather has had an obvious impact on the traditional type of camping and it is hardly surprising that Highbridge noticed a drop in sales compared to previous years. This has been apparent throughout all parts of the country, but at least it is good news for the buyers as better than usual discounts are on offer. Despite the weather problems, or perhaps even because of them,



See the website for massive price reductions



Sales of folding campers have remained steady despite the poor weather



The Coastline series has proved to be a major seller for Highbridge



The Coastline offers exclusive upholstery and a high specification

of folding campers has remained steady with good numbers of second hand units being sold over the last few weekends of the season. Perhaps a few of the previously committed tent dwellers have been convinced that sleeping safely above ground level does have its advantages. This is one reason why there are fewer on show in the outdoor display area, but if you venture indoors you will find a number of new examples, all well worth a look at and presented with all the style and flair that you would expect to see at a major exhibition.

"Customers are prepared to travel long distances and it is easy to see why"

The latest 2008 caravan models are now arriving, including the latest versions of the Swift Coastline, which is Highbridge's dealer special.

The range is based on the Charisma, but built in conjunction with Swift to the dealership's own specification. The result is a very impressive range of highly specified caravans, all with a unique choice of upholstery colours, materials and including several unique interior design elements. The range has proved extremely popular, which is not surprising, as it provides well laid out caravans that provide comfortable accommodation at very competitive prices.

These have proved to be very popular this year and the trend looks set to continue into 2008, with prices starting at £12,520 for a two berth, rising to £15,285 for a six berth, twin axle version. All of the Coastline range offer special fabrics, a microwave, an alarm system, dimmer switch, special interior design elements, electric flush cassette toilet, radio/cd/mp3 player, digital controlled fridge, heavy duty steadies, mains, 12v and aerial socket,

wet locker box, exterior barbeque point and extra scatter cushions. The twin axle version also includes an onboard water tank.

If you require an alternative choice, Highbridge also offer the distinctive Lunar range,

with a good number of the 2008 versions now in stock. Apart from being very well appointed and with a continental influence to the interior, the most obvious stand out feature is that they have very heavily tinted windows. This might not appeal to everyone but, once inside you hardly notice and from the outside it does reduce the attention of nosy neighbours. They are very modern in their design and, although slightly more expensive



The Highbridge website is one of the best in the business, being extremely easy to negotiate and offering many attractive price reductions

than the Coastline range, they do represent very good value for money.

Late demand had reduced the stocks of secondhand motorhomes, but you can save thousands of pounds on several new Chausson models. The models being specially promoted are the Allegro 83, the Flash 09 and the Welcome 83, some of which also have cab air conditioning installed at no extra cost.

The accessory shop at Highbridge is deceptive and has just about everything you could possibly need inside its various alcoves. Don't forget to look in the smaller indoor showroom above the shop, in which you can still view some of the smaller tents throughout the winter months. In addition, this site also houses an extensive service and repair facility where prices for a service on a single axle caravan start at £145, excluding parts and VAT.

If you wish to discover the full extent of All of this information, and a lot more, is available on Highbridge's web site, which is exceptionally easy to find your way around and which holds all the latest stock lists, as well as servicing and special offers. We are told that customers are prepared to travel considerable distances to visit Highbridge and it is easy to see why. ■

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Move quickly and you can save thousands of pounds on current Chausson models