

on test

*Elddis Avante
has built a
following
since it was
launched eight
years ago.
Does the
Avante Club
uphold this
reputation?*

By Andy Jenkinson

Elddis Avante 544

Berths: 4

Price: £13,495

Length: 5.60 m

Width: 2.24 m

MTPLM: 1464 kgs

MIRO: 1268 kgs

www.explorer-group.co.uk

We liked: General profile, superb floor area, build quality, good spec, comfortable to live with generally.

We didn't like: Small Heki roof vent, only two spot lamps in front dinette, no spark ignition, silver trim on furniture edge, concertina room divider, tip up basin in washroom and carpet not a very practical colour.

Citroen C5 Exclusive

Price: £22,779

BHP: 173

MPG: 31 urban / extra urban 53

Top speed: 134 mph

Kerb weight: 1765 kgs

Towing limit: 1500 kgs

Mileage: 450 miles covered

Test: October/November 08

www.citroen.co.uk

Our thanks to: Citroen UK, the Explorer Group, Flintshire Caravans and the wardens of the Caravan Club site at Lady Margaret's, Geoff and Sue Brown

Forward thinking



Avante 544 has crisp styling and looks good in the early morning sun.

ELDDIS launched the Avante range back in 2001 as a budget model, designed to compete with Bailey's Ranger.

However things have moved on and the new Xplore, launched just over a year ago, has filled this slot. The Avante has moved up-market with extra equipment and it now looks more of a class leader than ever before.

This smart looking tourer needs a car on the same level and hot from the Towcar of the Year awards came Citroen's facelifted C5. The Exclusive 2.2HDi was a tough car, ideal for towing the Avante test with self levelling suspension, excellent interior space, load lugging capacity and a sweet 2.2 HDi diesel.

The Elddis was collected from the Explorer dealership, Flintshire Caravans, at Queensferry. Once again, the staff was most helpful with our test Avante ready and waiting as we arrived in the C5. With the Elddis fully loaded the C5 levelled itself correctly and the outfit was ready for the road, pulling away effortlessly as we joined the rush hour traffic on our way to Chirk.

The C5's engine made light work of the 544. Up gradients the 2.2HDi engine was smooth and delivered all the power needed to keep up with the rest of the traffic. In fact it had us up to and past the legal towing speed limit before we realised it! Stable and so easy to tow, the Avante rode a treat.

Once on site we found our pitch and as the daylight began to fade we tried unhitching the Elddis, but what a job we had. The Winterhoff hitch had proved troublesome before and it seems that it's a

case of if you don't just get it right first time the thing just wont come off! Luckily a fellow Elddis owner came to our aid and told us it could be a problem if you were not used to it, but eventually we were free! It's here that I must mention just how well Explorer had equipped the Avante. Plates, spare bulbs, pans and even a gas igniter for the oven! There was even a torch and everything worked on both vans - well done!

The 544 comes with a double front dinette, side kitchen with dresser opposite and nearside fixed bed plus corner washroom - it's proved to be a popular layout. With just three of us it wasn't going to be cramped by any means and though some frost and snow meant the Truma heating was kept



Side fixed double is comfortable and roomy too for two.

busy, there were times when we had to turn it down as it got hot at night! Our friends Ted and Joyce in the Compass next door would have liked the same problem - even though it was a smaller caravan.

The light wood effect for the Eddis is pleasant and finished nicely, though I'm not sure about the silver edging. Between the Compass and the Eddis, the Compass got our vote for being the better of the two with the furniture looking more expensive and having more of a quality touch. Floor



Avante's roof lockers offer good storage for such bulky items as cereal packets.

space in the Eddis was extremely generous and there was never a feeling of being cramped, even though we had five on board on several occasions.

Using the front lounge was an enjoyable affair thanks to its comfortable seating and spacious legroom. Twin blown air outlets kept our feet nice and warm too. Spacious roof lockers swallowed all our odds and ends, plus the odd cereal packet: one housed the CD/radio, which sounded good - but why don't manufacturers mount the speakers on the front of the lockers instead of underneath?

The lighting levels at the front end needed to be a little better - adding extra spots



would cure this - and the Heki rooflight needs to be the larger version so that more daylight floods into the Eddis. We found that the under seat lockers took all of our bedding easily and the access locker flaps mean you don't have to pull up the whole slatted seat base. Which is a bind - and this isn't unique to Eddis with this layout - is that the front double has to be made for the third occupant. It would have been far better if at least one front single was large enough to sleep on.

At meal times Jackie found the kitchen was equipped with enough worktop and storage to prepare a meal for five. We would, however expect to see spark ignition on the oven/hob on a tourer of this price. The Fridge coped well with some of our larger food shops and general storage was good.



Side kitchen has side flap for extra worktop, also lighting was considered poor for lighting up this area.

We found the microwave useful, especially for jacket spuds, but as in the Compass it is mounted a tad high. The lighting left half the kitchen in shade with the ceiling light not helping very much either. The OmniVent, directly placed above the kitchen area, proved its worth, removing steam and cooking smells. Jackie also found the glass worktops hit the tap if it wasn't set straight, just as in the Compass.

The Avante comes fitted with the latest Status aerial that picked up digital signals too. The TV can be placed either at the front of the caravan or on the side dresser, next to the water and room heater



The Avante has excellent storage all - round with the designers making use of every inch.

controls. The dresser has a cutlery drawer and more storage underneath. A small window is fitted nearby but at night again a down lighter would just add to the Avante's lighting levels. The side fixed bed was given the thumbs up for comfort and size, while the space underneath took our large storage boxes and more bedding. Exterior access is also possible with the side locker flap, and in the base of the double is another blown air outlet.



Heater controls were placed by the side dresser and also a second TV point was placed here to. Battery/lights panel was placed just inside the doorway.

There's easy access to the corner washroom, though the dividing concertina partition wasn't very good and could easily get damaged. The washroom comes with a tip-up washbasin - an old idea that works well enough but we would prefer a small hand basin unit with storage in the bedroom area. It was, however, fitted in a super moulded vanity unit that swallowed all our toiletries. Showering is okay with the use of solid doors instead of the dreaded shower curtain. We would have liked to have seen a window in the washroom area, letting in more daylight and added ventilation.



Tip up washbasin is old idea - just be careful when folding it back to empty it!

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Small mirror is situated just outside the washroom and Jackie found it ideal for doing her hair in.

We were pretty impressed with the Avante overall, its towing qualities were superb and the build pretty good too. We were comfortable in the very cold weather that we had on our test but felt that the carpet wasn't very practical in colour, showing marks easily - it was a good job we were on a hard pitch. However, the Elldis is a genuinely sound buy and its pricing makes it competitive too. Sure, it's got a few niggles but if these were addressed then we reckon the Avante 544 should be up with the rest of them on anyone's short list.

We still think that the Corona and Avante are different enough to attract different buyers. If it were our money then we would have no hesitation in buying either of these two Explorer products as the brands still hold respect in a very competitive market place.



Heki roof vent could do with being the larger unit.



Storage under the wardrobe was ideal for our shoes and boots.



The C5 has some excellent styling and comes with bags of kit to, it made light work of the Avante – can't believe it didn't come better off in the Tow Car Awards!

Our tow car, Citroen C5 Exclusive

SINCE the Xantia was dropped some years ago now, Citroen has had a tough job in replacing that towcar icon. Now in its revitalised form, the C5 looks as though it could regain some of those Xantia fans. The styling has been influenced by the Germans, yet still retains that French feel and the looks generated plenty of comment about the car's smart styling and cracking interior.



Rear seating allows good leg room – three can travel in comfort in the C5.

The car is powered by the same engine that was in the C Crosser we tested last year and it makes the C5 a superb drive. We were impressed with the quietness of the engine and the fuel economy - 45 mpg solo, dropping to 29 mpg towing. Solo the car drives well with the self-levelling suspension soaking up the bumps but on back roads with sweeping corners the car does roll, even with the suspension setting on sports mode.

The driving position and overall seating are very comfortable but the small side windows do restrict vision slightly. The instruments are packed in tight and the night-time lighting makes the dashboard look like an aircraft's flight deck! The loading area is brilliant - we loaded the car up good and proper with hardly an inch to spare but it swallowed all our stuff. The auto boot lid closing system is ok but we could see problems with it down the years and if you don't get out of the way soon enough it can knock you on the head, although its motion is only slow.



Steering wheel moves of course, but centre stays put! Dash is well laid out but has plenty of toys.

The leather upholstery and the general build quality do give the impression that you're in a VW-built car but the C5 does retain its French origins and it has the feel of the Xantia but on a much-improved scale.

Solo or towing the C5 is an impressive car - it pulled better than the Superb but didn't have the Skoda's handling. At a few hundred quid short of £23k it's not cheap, but you do get a fair amount of car for the cash and also discounts should see this price drop. The new C5 is a good car - with full electric seating, dual climate control and cruise control, there's enough extras to keep you occupied for months!



Rear boot is incredibly spacious and we really did load this right up, we found the self-levelling suspension works well to.