

SPRITE MUSKETEER C

Longest-running model re-tested

IT'S ALMOST A DECADE SINCE THE stepped-roof silhouette of the now famous Sprite Musketeer appeared on the scene. Compared with most vans produced during the fifties the styling was bold and a few of the dealers seeing the newly introduced model at the '58 Motor Show raised their eyebrows. Those with more foresight put in orders. The Musketeer was to become a best-seller.

In fact Sprite's Newmarket factory, probably the most sophisticated caravan manufacturing plant in the country, has turned out no fewer than 24,000 Musketeers in various forms.

Although the basic outline of the model has changed little over the years—the Musketeer has one of the most characteristic bodyshapes—the early vans and '68 versions are as alike as chalk and cheese. We last road tested a Musketeer midway through 1959 and a comparison of specification then and now makes interesting reading.

Ex-works weights have dipped from 14cwt 14lb to 13cwt for the new C-type although the net body length has increased by three inches to 14ft 6in. The original Musketeer was a restyled Sprite 14, continuing a layout that had been running for some four years. Independent suspension by transverse wishbones with coil springs was an exclusive Sprite feature on the early models. Telescopic shock absorbers were options.

In 1962 Sprite went over to a leading arm independent system—again of their own pattern—which lopped something like half a hundredweight off the ex-works weight. The end windows were lowered to provide a better view-through and by this time a choice of layouts was available.

Among other developments during the life of the Musketeer, one of the most important was the introduction of RF (radio frequency) glueing, which greatly reduced the time taken to glue inner panels to wall frames, etc, and ensured greater structural rigidity. Then, for 1967 models, came a change to a trailing arm independent suspension with built-in provision for tracking adjustment.

For 1968 Sprite have made another big stride. Aluminium panel jointing has been greatly simplified. Presses newly-installed

in the Newmarket works turn out shaped, interlocking sections that produce more effective panel joints. The external appearance is cleaner, panel replacement is easier, rigidity is increased and weatherproofing is improved.

Vertical joints on the sidewalls disappear. The panels now have C-shape interlocking edges which are keyed together with a rubber or plastic extrusion.

But perhaps the most noticeable panel developments are the curved end wall pressings, with recessed window apertures allowing the use of flat glass windows, and pressed wheel arches. A slightly redesigned roof line, with the headroom-pinching frontal step brought forward almost a foot, and a new 'silver sage' centre colour band also distinguish '68 Musketeers. Upper and lower panels continue white.

Another innovation making its appearance on models from the Caravans International stable is the use of vacuum-formed thermo-plastic mouldings, produced by the group's own machine. Three items in the new Musketeer are products of the venture—a clear acrylic sheet roof-light and shaped retainers which insert into the crockery locker and cutlery drawer.

Many parts are specially made for CI by outside component manufacturers. These include flush-fitting injection-moulded plastic cupboard finger grips, sink and drainer units, angular gas light globes, and alloy door locks, bolts and grab handles.

Under the floor there have been some changes too. This year sees the introduction of an improved method of wheel alignment. Now the owner can align each wheel individually simply by adjusting an eccentric cam on the section connecting the trailing arm to the chassis.

Brake rods, corner legs and door hinges get an anti-corrosion zinc plating. And, as extra cost options, the Sprite buyer can specify double glazing and underfloor Fibreglass insulation. The underfloor Fibreglass is protected by pvc sheeting which fits between the floor joists and the floor, meaning that the option has to be fitted during the manufacturing stage.

Road performance of the Musketeer C is impeccable. Loaded the van presented a noseweight of



1cwt 14lb, and stability under all conditions was good. Sprite's suspension, which uses Armstrong coil spring and shock absorbers, counters bad road sections well and on the few occasions when the van moved an inch or so out of line it could be attributed to gusts of wind.

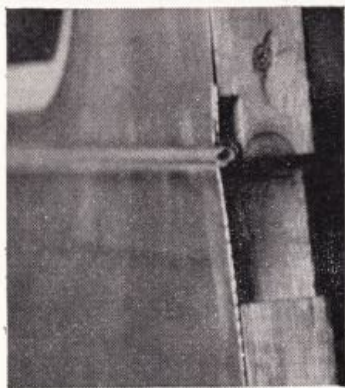
Due to the limited power provided by the editorial Morris Oxford, we were frustrated in not being able to take the Musketeer over 68mph on our test track. A Musketeer established a world speed record for trailer caravans at 102.2mph, so we know the van is capable of much higher speeds with complete safety.

Two B&B couplings are available for the Musketeer—the spring overrun Delta 17 or more expensive Beta IV with hydraulically-damped long-thrust overrun brake system. Basic cost of the Musketeer is worked out on the assumption that the Delta 17 is fitted, though unless the customer specifies other-

wise, the Beta IV is installed and, in fact, almost all vans leaving the factory have the Beta. This increases the cost of the van by £6 to £366.

Layout of the C version puts a transverse single bed with stretcher bunk above along the rear wall, with a large toilet room and wardrobe on the offside wall. The alternative Musketeer S has a five-berth layout with settee double bed and bunk above on the offside, toilet compartment in the rear nearside corner and a small table between. The remainder of the layout is common to both vans, with front end dinette converting to a double bed (or two singles) and nearside kitchen.

Apparent differences in mattress densities were confusing. Those on the front dinette were a good balance for both sleeping and sitting, but the mattresses on the rear single were harder and one member of the test crew found they caused stiffness when sleeping.

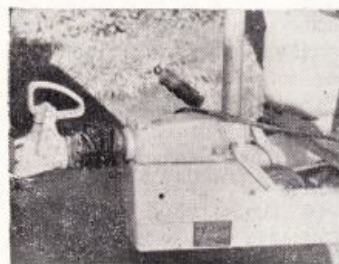


External panel joints by interlocking C-channels with a plastic filler strip ease construction and facilitate replacement of damaged panels

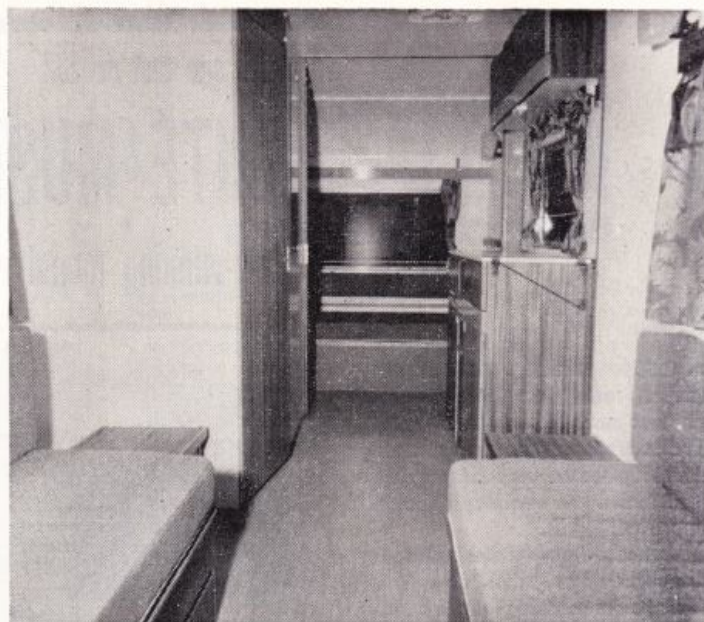
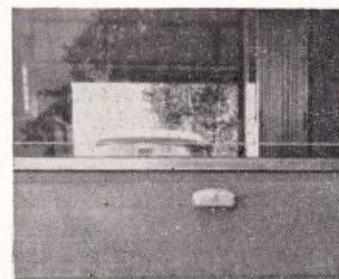


Pressed steel arms and combined coil spring and hydraulic damper units for the trailing arm suspension. Tracking adjustment for each wheel is built in

Adjustable coupling box casing enables the coupling height to be varied. Height to the centre of the towing ball for a level ride is 18in as shown; with the casing on the upper set of holes it is 16in and with the casing removed completely 15in



View through from a Morris Oxford is adequate in depth and the lateral field of view is better than with previous Musketeers

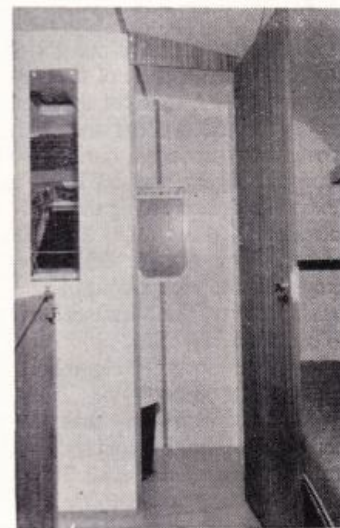
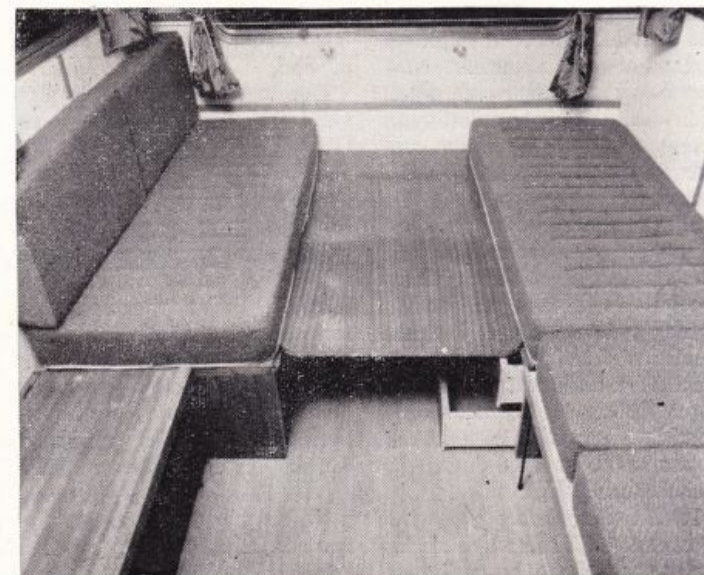


The C layout gives an impression of increased space and there is more usable floor area

The kitchen opened up for demonstration purposes. The moulded plastic cutlery tray can just be seen in the top drawer and the cups and plates are in the plastic crockery tray in the roof locker. Note also the bottle well on the larder door. Kitchen tops are shown swivelled out but can be fixed vertically



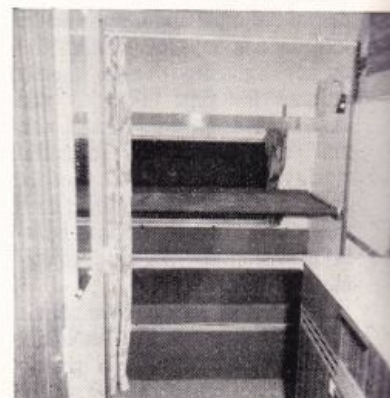
Front-end bed arrangement can be either a double or two singles; the pull-out single extensions are simple to operate and provide extra storage. Note the two drawers under the offside dinette seat



Toilet room (above) and wardrobe (below) are combined in a single unit. The non-opening toilet window has a 'hit and miss' type adjustable ventilator at the top and floor space and head-room are ample. The wardrobe is larger than in the S type Musketeer and incorporates four shelves



The Tygan stretcher bunk stows during the day in the upholstered backrest of the rear end transverse settee



The mattresses, all 4½in thick, have a non-ruckable fluted covering.

The backrest of the rear transverse settee houses the Tygan stretcher bunk. When erected—plastic-capped steel poles engage with sidewall supports—there is 17in between the two berths. The bunk is sturdy and capable of holding the heaviest of adults.

A large full-width roof locker on the front wall has a novel set of sliding doors. The arrangement consists of three sliding panels with grips on the outer two. When either of these is moved to an open position the centre section moves also, which allows a larger opening than would be possible with just two sliding doors. It's an ingenious arrangement that we would like to see more often. There are two large drawers in the offside front bedding locker.

The wardrobe is big and practical. In addition to a shelf provided by the boxing in of the wheel arch, four large-capacity lipped shelves are placed inside the cabinet on the right hand side.

Our only criticism of the wardrobe concerns the hanging rail. Although it sensibly presents suits end-on, much of its length is unusable because it passes over the top of the nest of shelves. The rail—a wooden rod—also tends to flex due to its length and the U-shaped metal retaining brackets fitted each end are not really man enough for the job.

We believe a more stable rail would result from repositioning the top shelf to act as a support for a shorter length of rod. This way the unusable section of rail is eliminated, flexing is reduced and a more sturdy method of fixing could be provided. Sprite are investigating the possibility of a modification.

A genuine 6ft of headroom is available in the large toilet compartment, but there is no shelf or provision for night-time illumination.

The cook gets a large divided roof locker with twin drop-down doors, plus space for tea towels, etc above. A thermo-plastic section inserted into the right hand compartment is shaped to hold crockery and is removable for easy cleaning. Storage space in the main kitchen area consists of two large shelved cupboards (one of which will take an optional RA10 fridge), a fall-front compartment and three drawers which are designed so as not to come out on tow. One of the drawers—it nestles directly under the drainer—holds a thermo-plastic cutlery tray, which again is removable. A bottle carrier is incorporated on one of the larder doors.

The Dudley hotplate is fitted with Sprite's patented adjustable simmer taps. Although the Dudley

has the advantage of being particularly easy to clean, we found boiling a kettle took a considerable time. The unit, which also has a griller, sits in a recess lined with white-finish aluminium and features a short, fold-flat, aluminium splashback. A roof-light is placed over the kitchen, taking away all cooking fumes.

Both sink and hotplate lids are of the ingenious Sprite pattern that enables either of them to pivot horizontally so that no work surface is lost when they open, or they can be raised to the vertical position if no work surface is required. On the test van the small spring bolts that hold the pivoting hinges closed were not very positive and one of the hinges gave up the struggle when we tried adjusting it by brute force. The little striker plate against which the bolt locks seems to be merely a press fit on the metal rod of the hinge and at the end of the test this just spun round ineffectively.

The table hooks on to alloy brackets screwed to the front wall. Access to the dinette seats is good and the bed locker sides have a covering of tough Storoflex plastic as protection against accidental kicks.

Two number two Morco gas lights, with futuristic angular globes, are supplemented by a 6w electric light above the kitchen—giving excellent lighting for late night cooking.

Cotton curtains fitted to the Musketeer are attached to wire strainers by nylon runners. A second strainer retains the bottom edge at night, while cords hold the material by day. A curtain partition, in a contrasting colour, shuts off the rear berths at night leaving the kitchen and dinette free. The sapele mahogany furniture finish is relieved by pinky-orange, plastic-laminated pelmets and kitchen trim and Lemon Stormur plastic covering applied to a wardrobe wall. Walls and roof have a pre-painted hardboard covering and lino covers all exposed flooring. The overall interior appearance is light and bright, yet tasteful.

Each Sprite leaves the factory with an 'accessory box' containing such things as nape plates, a towing ball, gas mantles and a plug and socket. The box should also hold a wheelbrace, but this was missing from the kit supplied with the test van.

It is not hard to understand the fantastic success scored by the Musketeer. After nine years of continuous production the bugs are out and the van offers one of the most practical family layouts and many refinements not found in models costing a great deal more. No superlative could describe our verdict.

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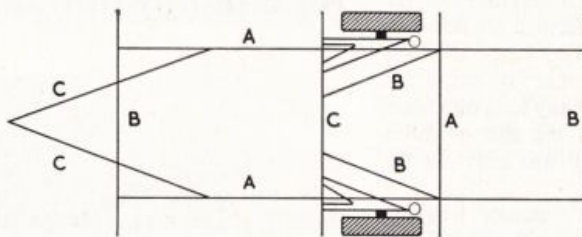
recommended price £360

DIMENSIONS

Length body net	14ft 6in
overall	14ft 7½in
shipping	17ft 8in
interior	14ft
Width overall	6ft 8½in
interior	6ft 1½in
Height overall	7ft 9½in
Maximum headroom	6ft 11in
Floor height	16in
Window sill height front	46in
rear	45in
Height to centre of coupling ball for level ride	15-18in
Weight ex-works	13cwt
as tested	14cwt 106lb
Noseweight	1cwt 14lb

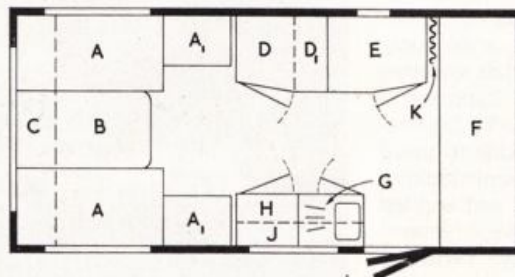
Sprite Ltd, Fordham Road, Newmarket, Suffolk.

UNDERGEAR



Own-make welded steel chassis A 3 x 1½ x 10g channel. B 3½ x 1½ x 12g channel. C 4 x 1½ x 10g channel. Sprite independent suspension by triangulated trailing arms, Armstrong coil spring and damper units. Brakes 9in Girling, rod operated. Wheels four-stud, tyres 5.90-13, 4PR. Coupling 50mm B & B Beta IV, jacking-type jockey wheel. Four brace-operated legs.

LAYOUT



A dinette double bed, A1 single bed extension, B hook-on table, C roof locker, D wardrobe with shelves, E toilet room, F single bed, bunk above, G sink and drainer, H hotplate, J crockery locker, K curtain partition.

BODY CONSTRUCTION Framing softwood, joints halved, screwed and glued. Exterior panelling 22g aluminium, insulation Fibreglass. Interior panelling stove-enamelled, pre-finished hardboard. Floor ½ ply, untreated. Unglazed stable door 20 x 65in, rubber draught seal, recessed cylinder latch, nylon action. Windows by Planet, anodised frames, round cornered, all opening, self-locking stays. Two 54 x 27in, two 36 x 19in, one 30 x 17in. White acrylic sheet roof-light 13 x 10in, scissor-type stays. Various wall vents, adjustable vent in toilet room. Four cast aluminium grab handles.

EQUIPMENT Dinette double bed 73½ x 72in, convertible to two single beds 72 x 24in. Single bed 72 x 24in. Mattress 4½in plastic foam, fluted, non-ruckable covers. Top access bedding lockers, two drawers. Stretcher bunk 70 x 20½in, 17in above lower mattress. Furniture sapele mahogany, pelmets and kitchen trim plastic laminate, wardrobe finish Stormur, bedding locker finish Storoflex, Hook-on table 45 x 25in, clear melamine finish. Wardrobe 23 x 19in, hanging space 48in, four shelves. Full width roof locker. Mirror. Kitchen: Injection-moulded plastic sink and drainer, Dudley hotplate with simmer taps, individual lids, melamine faced. Ventilated larder or fridge recess, cupboard, crockery locker, cutlery drawer, two drawers, fall-front compartment. Curtains on plastic-covered strainers, nylon curtain clips. Curtain partition. Lino. Two no 2 Morco gas lights, outside cylinder connection. twin drawbar carrier. Full road lights and indicators, 6w interior electric light, 7-pin plug and socket.

TOWING CARS FOR TEST Morris Oxford Mk VI automatic, 1622cc, weight including crew 25½cwt.