

# Take Combi-Camp's 15 second challenge

**Mike Thomson**, a confirmed motorhome enthusiast, is completely won over when he visits Mangine Ltd, the UK retailer of Combi-Camp's high-quality folding camper/trailer tent hybrids.



The attractive headquarters of Mangine Ltd. The trailers are normally left closed, so that proprietor, Siggie Jokumsen, can demonstrate the 15 second challenge

Two particular factors conspire to make the writing of these features especially rewarding.

One is a proprietor's enthusiasm and in-depth knowledge of his products, and the other is a product which seriously impresses. Mangine's Danish proprietor, Siggie Jokumsen, came to the UK in 1963 to work for Isabella, the awnings manufacturer, but left in 1976 to start up on his own. He was approached in 1978 by Combi-Camp to import their trailer tents and he has done so ever since, apart from their unsuccessful two-year trial with another importer, after which they asked Siggie once more to be their distributor in the UK. He agreed on one condition: that Combi-Camp made trailers to his specification. More of that later, but for now we might consider why Siggie has been so supportive of the brand.

When you visit a trailer tent dealer, you rather expect that the display models will be fully erected and equipped so that you can imagine yourself relaxing in the sun with the family. Although such visions could easily be conjured up on the large lawn of a private house in the country, Siggie doesn't find this necessary. His Combi-Camp trailers are left closed because he likes to demonstrate to a

customer that you can open up a Combi-Camp and be inside in 15 seconds. "You can't do that with anything else", he assured me. "People phone us up and say you can't open a trailer tent in 15 seconds, and I say that if you come up and I can't open it in 15 seconds, you can take the trailer away with you."

The key to this elegant efficiency is the way the roof rack is used as a counterbalance. You swing it over on its hinge to a point where it leans over the other side of the trailer. Its weight now provides enough leverage for you to lift the trailer lid with your fingertips to a half-way position. You walk round to the other side and with a gentle touch, tip the nascent structure fully over, so that the roof rack now supports the upturned lid, forming a sturdy raised floor. It now looks for all the world like a fully assembled and erected trailer tent – a full-grown adult hatched from a shell. And indeed, apart from a few minor bits of tidying, the assembly is complete. It is totally painless and no pegging is required. At 15 seconds this whole operation takes but a fraction of the time I need to park my campervan, turn on the gas, plug in the hook-up cable and extract a can of cold beer from the "fridge".

Although fixing the stays might require an adult's

reach, the rest of the job is so easy that a ten-year-old could do it - but as you can never find one when there's work to be done, a decrepit old hack was deployed instead. And yes, it really is as easy as I've described - no doubt one of the reasons why Siggie's customer base includes so many senior citizens. Combi-Camp have a patent on the way the roof rack swings over as a counterweight, and nobody else has been able to use that. It is this clever leverage that enables almost any user to manoeuvre the heavy fibreglass lid without assistance.

If you're persuaded of the merit of the concept, and I for one found the demonstration entirely convincing, you might consider the various models and options. The Venezia is numerically far more popular than its stablemate the Country model. Mangine import the basic units by the container load about every two weeks, along with replenishment stocks of the components required to customise the trailer to specific requirements. This work is carried out at Mangine's factory warehouse near Thame, and so experienced are the engineers that you can specify your own variant of the Venezia in the morning and drive off with it later the same day. The "Quick Standard" version of the Venezia omits the kitchen, as





*Siggi Jokumsen demonstrates the ease with which a Combi-Camp can be erected within 15 seconds. All that is left to do is a bit of tidying up*

The interior floor, raised above ground level by the upturned roof rack, is made of silver birch veneer, a very flexible material made exclusively in Finland. Although it flexes as you walk on it, it is evidently stronger than you'd imagine. "In Copenhagen about 15 years ago we did a test with a Combi-Camp without its canvas. We just opened the trailer and we had an elephant walk across the floor. The floor was OK but the roof rack buckled due to the weight of the animal!"

The Venezia as it is today was basically designed for the UK and is now sold as a standard unit throughout the world, along with the more expensive Country model which was designed by Combi-Camp themselves in Denmark. Modifications to the design have been driven by the responses to questionnaires, which had particularly revealed a desire for gas and running water. A separate guest annexe was also requested, ideally with two doors to allow entry and egress without disturbing those slumbering in the trailer. You can walk straight through the trailer into the resultant back awning (which incidentally also covers the towbar). Personally, I'd be tempted to put in a plea for spark ignition on the hob.

### **CUSTOMISE YOUR COMBI**

Essentially, your Venezia will be built to your own specifications, starting with one basic model to which Mangine can apply variants in terms of specification and colour - a facility that may be hard to find elsewhere. The flexibility of the sleeping arrangements allows you to start with a two-berth version sporting a 2.4 metre by 1.7 metre mattress, but if you subsequently undergo a change of mind or circumstances, Mangine can supply and fit a different inner tent and mattresses to turn it into a 4-berth, or any other of the available configurations. You can then add on a guest annexe to sleep a further two people, go a stage further and add a

it is intended is for those who already have equipment they wish to use, but a kitchen awning with centre apex and legs is included as standard.

An obvious first upgrade, therefore, is the incorporation of a kitchen unit. This is so well designed to match the standard trailer - same colour, shape, graphics - that it conveys no visual impression of being an add-on. It is fully equipped with stainless steel sink and running water (cold only, but hey, this is camping, not the Ritz!). A submersible pump powered by two 6-volt lantern batteries goes into a large water container and feeds a microswitch tap so that water flows as soon as you turn it on. The stainless steel, three-burner gas hob is equipped with thermocouples to shut off the gas if the flame is blown out, although windshields either side, this is unlikely to happen. The lack of spark ignition might be a minor irritation, but this is camping after all, and as Siggi opined, "people have to do something themselves!" To put this in context, you could easily pay several times as much for a used motorcaravan and still not benefit from

spark ignition or hot running water. At least you are unlikely to run out of gas whilst lighting the hob, as the kitchen unit has room for two 907 Camping Gaz bottles. The Dometic three-way refrigerator is specially made to fit the Combi-Camp kitchen, but you can even disconnect it and use it in your car. Four storage drawers plus one for cutlery and a fold-down shelf complete the picture on a well appointed camp kitchen, which can be easily accessed en-route for a quick brew up in a lay-by.

The kitchen unit also stores the handle for winding down the trailer's rear stays. I timed Siggi's performance on this task at 28 seconds, but a skilled ten-year-old might shave a few seconds off this task that is only necessary only on uneven ground. Otherwise, the Combi-Camp will level itself on the roof rack and further stability is conferred by the springs inside the frames. You can put a guy rope down, but it is best not to make it too tight to allow some movement in windy conditions. Rubber rings attached to hooks on the trailer bodywork help to keep the fabric taut.





*The Venezia benefits from slatted bed bases and a durable hard floor*

*The Venezia's kitchen is easily accessible and can be used for stops en-route*



*This Country model is one of several variations on the Combi-Camp theme*

*All models can be fully customised to individual users' requirements*

back awning to form an 8-berth, and if that is still not sufficient, attach yet another awning at the front to create a 10-berth.

In the trailer itself you have the option of a slatted bed base to prevent overnight condensation and there is even a roll-up, slatted base accessory that can be used for a single bed. Supports can be provided to convert the edge of the sleeping area into settees for daytime use, although some might consider these less relaxing for lounging than a few folding canvas chairs. In any event there is no shortage of storage space for such auxiliary furniture, as there is a 265-litre box space under the bed and the cavity between the mattress and the lid of the trailer is about a foot high. Siggie can demonstrate this latter point by lying on the mattress while the lid is closed – just don't forget to let him out again!

If you really like your home comforts, you could carry a compact Porta-Potti (the smaller models are just a foot high) and even use an annexe as a toilet compartment. For the softies among us there is an optional insulation kit to fit to the sides, but Siggie told me he used to take the family to Austria for New Year's Eve with the Danish Combi-Camp Club, and that was long before there was any insulation: "Most of us just had a small gas heater inside and that was quite ample". Well, he's certainly still here to prove the point.

Space does not permit a full description of all the options and combinations available. Talk to Siggie or his colleague Brian Griffin and tap into their in-depth experience of the brand. They actually keep spare parts going back to 1957 - one reason why they are willing to entertain Combi-Camp trailers in part-exchange – and they take pride in getting parts as

quickly as possible to customers in need.

In summary, then, I was genuinely impressed by what I saw – the demonstrations, the in-depth experience and the irrepressible enthusiasm for what was clearly a mature product that had benefited from much careful thought and ongoing development. It may not be the cheapest way to go camping, but it sure looked like the easiest. Siggie Jokumsen is hoping to recruit a dozen or so UK dealers later this year, so you might soon find an enticing selection of Combi-Camps somewhere near you.

**i Contact details**

**Mangine Ltd, Red Roofs, Chinnor Road,  
Thame, Oxfordshire, OX9 3RF  
Tel: 01844 215900  
Website: [www.combi-camp.co.uk](http://www.combi-camp.co.uk)**