

Changing pitch

With a sense of pride, **Shane Barratt** relates how his Swift caravan became the talking point of a rather posh wedding recently

It saddens me to announce that, to the detriment of this column, common sense prevailed a few weeks ago when Sandra and I planned to stay with my parents in the caravan while attending our friend Dick's wedding in Cornwall.

When we first conceived the idea, it appeared to make a lot of sense. The wedding was in a remote village accessible only by back road or ferry, and the hotels and B&Bs, all of which were nearly half an hour away in Falmouth, were booked up by the time we got our act together. Being in the Swift would save us a few quid and mean that Sandra and I were right on hand if dad had problems with his leg bag (don't ask!) or mum had the sudden urge to vacate the reception in order to watch *Bargain Hunt*.

The bride's parents live near the wedding venue and they kindly allowed us to park the caravan in their large garden. They also insisted that my mum and dad stay in their guest room – and even gave mum a prolonged tutorial on how to use the remote control if and when she wanted to tune into Tim Wonnacott et al. It seemed disrespectful to tell them this was a waste of time: without fail my dad loses the remote control within five minutes of being in the same room as a telly.

It was the right decision all round. Our Swift Corniche is officially a five-berth – indeed, as recently as last July on Dick's stag do, it played host to four adult human bodies. The thing is, these were the bodies of middle-aged men who cared little about personal space or mirrors or hairdryers and who simply wanted somewhere to rest their brows at four in the morning. These were not men who gave two hoots about their fancy suits getting rumpled or their wedding hats getting crushed.

So it was to general relief that mum and dad got to share a nice big bed in a room with a lovely view of the River Fal, while Sandra and I had the run of the Swift out in the garden. The only downside was that we were asked to pitch the caravan right under the branches of a horse chestnut tree so as to avoid damaging the lawn, the result of which was dropping of conkers and, er, bird droppings on the roof of our cherished Corniche..

We also had our tranquillity interrupted by an unexpected visit from four friends we'd met up with at



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the wedding. It was around 12.30am, an hour after the wedding festivities had ended, when we heard giggling and loud whispers coming from the garden. Before we knew it we were putting the kettle on and playing host to our chums as they crammed into the Swift. A most peculiar sight: us in our pyjamas and them still in their wedding finery.

It transpired that there'd been an almighty mix-up with the taxis ordered to take guests back to Falmouth and half the wedding party were now wandering around the village in the small hours looking for shelter.

This was indeed a strange and satisfying turnaround. At our wedding table earlier in the day, word had got

round that the Barratts were, as usual, 'slumming it' in the caravan rather than staying in a plush hotel. Along with the sugared almonds, roast lamb and lemon tort, plenty of ridicule came our way; our offbeat accommodation even got a mention in the best man's speech – surely a first for a rather old five-berth caravan?

Just a few hours later here we were receiving grovelling platitudes and envious glances from the same people. Wedding days are gruelling affairs and our mates were desperate to get some shut-eye, but looking at another 45 minutes before a taxi arrived to take them back to their £150 per night hotels, airless rooms and over-priced breakfasts. Suddenly, our

'offbeat accommodation' didn't look so naff after all – although dad with his teeth out and mum in her hairnet might have changed that if we'd stuck to the original plan!

It never ceases to amaze me the unusual incidents you experience in the world of caravanning. I just don't think there's anything like it for finding humour, 'Blitz spirit' and generosity in people.

Despite our protestations, the bride's family refused to let us pay for my parents' stay in their guest room. That said, I fully expect to be sending them a cheque for the cost of a new TV remote control when they discover that theirs has mysteriously disappeared.