

Thule's new Omnistor TO6300 awning



Patrick Dehaen
Thule's Sales Director

For 2019 Thule is boosting its already compressive range of roll-out awnings with a new offering, the TO6300.

Words Terry Owen

Aboutcamp BtoB interviewed Thule's Sales Director, Patrick Dehaen, to find out more.

Aboutcamp BtoB - What's new about the TO6300?

Patrick Dehaen - It's basically similar to the TO6200 but sporting more progressive features to make it stand out from the competition. To this end it incorporates some of the advanced features of the TO5200. Firstly, there are the integrated tension arms, which stiffen the spring arms and allow the fabric to be tensioned by simply closing the awning slightly, achieving a much higher tension than with traditional springs. When the awning is fully open the tension arms can be easily pushed into place on a ratchet mechanism to form a triangular bridge between the spring arms and the front rail. This not only stiffens the spring arms, it increases the wind resistance and means the awning cannot collapse if a closing force is applied to the front rail. It also means the tension is achieved by pushing on four points rather than two, so there is less tendency for the front rail to bow. Without such arms the traditional way to tension an awning was to install one or more tension rafters. These are long arms that fit between the vehicle body and front rail to maintain the tension in the fabric. Secondly, we felt it important for all variants of the TO6300 to have the option of being motorised. The motor we use is a very reliable unit also used on the TO5200

and weighing just 1 kg. It can be easily retrofitted, adding just 3 cm to the awning. In the event of a power failure or flat battery there is a provision for easy manual cranking so the user will never be stuck. Thirdly, we felt it important to better integrate the provision of LED lighting. It's something that has taken off in recent years and we were keen to have a stylish solution for the TO6300 and one that was independent of the awning rail. We wanted to leave this free for other uses such as hanging a tent or storage bags. That was achieved by redesigning the LED and caravan fabric rail assembly, integrating barely visible side-illuminating LED's.

Aboutcamp BtoB - Why have you made these changes?

Patrick Dehaen - As with all our products we were keen to make it as user friendly as possible. Stability and fabric tension have always been important to us so the opportunity to move to integrated tension arms was one not to be missed. Similarly, the opportunity to motorise the awning. We are very proud of our solution which works really well and is quiet in operation.

Aboutcamp BtoB - How long has it taken to develop the TO6300?

Patrick Dehaen - The whole project has been some two years in the making.

Aboutcamp BtoB - Can the TO6300 be fitted to any vehicle?

Patrick Dehaen - In principle yes, but there are technical limitations that are sometimes difficult to overcome. Attachment is made via adapter plates that adapt the shape of the awning to the shape of the vehicle roof. We have a mission to continue to develop adapter plates for every likely vehicle. In many cases the adapters are the same but some are unique. A good example is the recent VW Crafter. This has a roof section that curves in three directions, and by quite a lot I can tell you. It was quite a challenge but we've risen to it and the adapters are available.

Aboutcamp BtoB - What about vehicles fitted with styling 'shoulders'?

Patrick Dehaen - In most cases the shoulders are merely cosmetic with no structural part to play. To attach an awning the shoulder is cut away for the required length and the awning fitted in between. End plates are then fitted to close of the remaining parts of the shoulder.

Aboutcamp BtoB - How do the adapter plates attach to the base vehicle?

Patrick Dehaen - In most cases we recommend they are bonded to the roof. We also propose to have very small screws in the front of the adapters that attach to the connecting profile between the sides and roof. This is often made of aluminium. The advantage of screwing into this is that there is no risk of water penetration.

Aboutcamp BtoB - Given that attachment is via adapter plates is it easy to remove the awning when not required?

Patrick Dehaen - Yes, although you will probably need two people to do it sensibly. It's just a case of undoing two or three small screws and lifting it out. It also means the awning can easily be transferred to another vehicle if the owner wishes.

Aboutcamp BtoB - Do you think we'll see vehicle manufacturers installing the adapter plates in the way that Swift installs the mounting point for a bike rack?

Patrick Dehaen - It could well be. One manufacturer, Hobby, has already made steps to ease the fitting of adapter plates and more may follow.

Aboutcamp BtoB - Is the TO6300 in production yet?

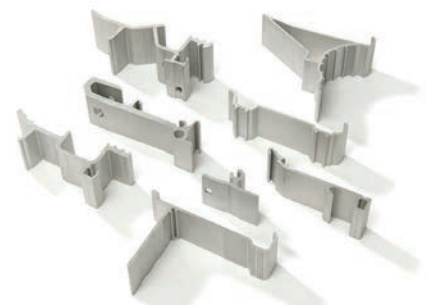
Patrick Dehaen - Production will start late summer, in time for Dusseldorf, where we will launch the awning. It will be available in nine lengths from 2.60 m to 5.00 m with projections up to 2.5 m and a variety of finishes.

Aboutcamp BtoB - Clearly, you've put a lot of thought into the design of this awning, what else can you tell us about it?

Patrick Dehaen - We have already talked about the importance of maintaining good fabric tension and with the TO6300 we've introduced a new technology first seen on the TO5200. It's a roller tube support system using a special lip along the entire length of the tube which prevents it from bending. This greatly improves the tension in the middle of the awning. On the subject of comfort, you will always find that our support legs extract vertically from the front rail. This may sound simple and obvious but not all our competition has this feature. With some you have to unroll the awning considerably before the legs can be extracted, and then they come out at an angle, with the risk of damaging the vehicle. Similarly, when extending the legs,



Front profile with drainage system



Adapter plates are available for a wide range of RV's



6300 manual box



Optional LED lighting

you ideally want the locking flipper to be directly facing you at a convenient height. With some competitor products it's at the bottom of the leg, so you have to bend down. What's more we've incorporated a drainage system to shed rainwater and make cleaning easier.

The whole assembly is designed to be strong and reliable because we know that our customers wish to expand their awning with panels, tents and other accessories and such constructions can put quite a lot of stress on the awning.

Aboutcamp BtoB - How do you go about ensuring your products are truly road-worthy?

Patrick Dehaen - To achieve strength, durability and light weight, Thule's products use a high-grade aluminium alloy with many parts being anodised. This produces an extremely tough finish that will last for many years. Further on, all Thule's products are subjected to crash testing at an in-house facility in Sweden. Testing also involves wear and tear simulations, exposure to extreme heat, cold, damp, sunlight and even harsh chemicals. These tests ensure a long life and maximum safety on the road. Only once they have been successfully completed are the products released to the market place - even if this delays a planned launch.



Thule at a glance

The Thule Group is the global leader in cargo carriers for automobiles, with approximately 50% of the market. It is also a leading company in the outdoor and bags market, owning such brands as Case Logic. From its headquarters in Malmö, Sweden Thule manages some 2,200 employees spread across nine production facilities and 35 sales offices worldwide. Its products are sold in more than 140 markets and sales in 2017 amounted to SEK 5.9 billion (€ 55.5m).