

First look



Distinctive profile and interior make Bailey's latest van stand out from the compact crowd



Bailey Orion 400-2

No fewer than eight lockers, plus a kitchen that belies the Orion's entry-level status

The upholstery's bold colour scheme is, at least, bright and summery, but the 1980s-style pattern is less than subtle



Price	£11,995
Berths	2
Length	5.35m
Height	2.63m
Width	2.19m
Internal length.....	4.18m
Headroom	1.96m
Awning.....	825cm
MiRO	959kg
MTPLM	1076kg
Payload	129kg

BAILEY IS BETTING that its new Orion tourers will shake up the caravan market, just as its Alu-Tech Pegasus did in 2009. In a world where 'new' implies 'better', the Bristol brand is pushing the message that 'less' is 'more'.

However, the Orion's lower weight and cost put the four-model range within reach of more people with limited budgets or smaller towcars. The unusual curved roof line is the first thing

you notice. Bailey claims that this is not just a distinctive profile – it actually increases fuel efficiency when towing. Inside, a Whale space heater is fitted to save room and cut weight, while Grade III insulation permits year-round use. This combination makes the new range 'green' for changing times. This certainly applies to the two-berth Orion 400-2 we tested.

Pitch and set-up

We pulled the baby Bailey with our Subaru Outback test car and, thanks to the van's MTPLM of just 1076kg, it seemed as if there was no caravan there at all. Even a diesel Volkswagen Golf or Mazda 3 will find it easy tugging the Orion.

Once on site we made light work of manoeuvring the Orion by hand, while its prominent steady bolts further eased set-up. The gas locker is on the nearside over the

axle, rather than at the front. The small hatch may make swapping cylinders difficult for some, but owners of smaller towcars, which often have lower towball limits, will welcome the dramatic reduction in noseweight.

Lounge

Lounge space is something you get a lot of in the 400-2. In fact, it feels almost all-lounge. We got five around the table with ease, and six could sit down to eat in comfort. For two people there is plenty of overhead locker space, and a good-sized Heki rooflight lets in plenty of daylight.

The lounge upholstery's colour scheme is bright and inviting and complements the walnut finish of the cabinetwork, although the fabric pattern looks a bit 1980s. The interior shows that Bailey is trying hard to attract younger

caravanners, while still appealing to its established customer base. The windowless entrance door has handy coat hooks and the main controls are just inside to the left.

Kitchen

Even though the Orion is an entry-level model, its kitchen doesn't feel markedly different to those in the more upmarket Pegasus or Unicorn ranges. It's not as well specified, of course, but it's not so spartan that you'd be put off or inconvenienced by using it.

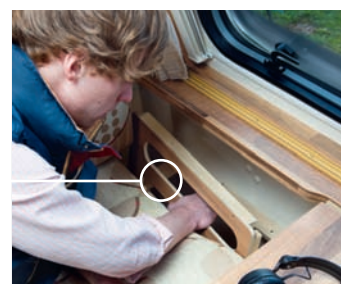
The only real difference is that the Orion has a smaller cooker with a combined oven and grill instead of separate units. You still get a modern microwave, a three-burner gas hob, stainless-steel sink and a 107-litre Thetford fridge, which is huge for two people. As in the lounge, the interior LED down lighting is superb. >>



The bolster cushions on either side of the bed hide extra cubby holes for easy-access storage



We seated five around the table comfortably. There's room for six!



Showroom » First look



There's plenty of height in the shower, despite the sloping roof



The window lets in daylight, but it's too low for an adult to look out



The microwave is far from a basic model, and it's at a safe height



Front overhead locker has unusual cream finish and raised-graphic logo

» Washroom

Washroom dimensions can suffer in compact caravans. Not so here. The Orion 400-2 has a spacious end washroom equipped with a separate shower, Thetford C-250 swivel toilet and a Belfast sink. Ample storage space is provided by a cupboard under the basin as well as by a wardrobe.

The full-size shower sustains minimal intrusion from the curving roof at the back, so a six-footer can shower without crouching. Roomy though it is, the cubicle is not enclosed in a fully moulded sealed shell. We also scratched our heads over the rear window. It's fine for letting in daylight, but it's fixed too low for an adult to look out.

Beds

Lounge by day, bed by night, the Orion 400-2 has been thoughtfully

designed. The bed is assembled quickly and efficiently by pulling out slats on runners and using the side cushions to create a double. Once in place, the bed measures an impressive 1.85m x 1.98m.

Storage

To save space, Bailey has fitted the wardrobe in the washroom. This won't be the ideal solution for some people, but at least it doesn't make the washroom feel small.

In the kitchen there's a cream-coloured cupboard above the hob, with shelving and a cupboard beneath the cooker for pots and pans, plus a spacious, soft-close cutlery drawer.

Bailey has been generous with its overhead lockers, fitting eight in total. There's even a little sideboard with a small shelved cupboard. Outside, you get a front wet locker, on the nearside corner.

Verdict

This is the most exciting small caravan since the Elddis Xplore 302. The Orion can be matched with the smallest towcars and, in its 400-2 guise, offers surprising amounts of space, plus a good kit list and build quality for the money. The 400-2 begs the question: do couples really need any more than this?

Good Low on weight but not on quality. Like the Elddis Xplore 302, the Orion makes caravanning an option for those with small towcars and post-1997 driving licences.

Bad The interior woods are great, but the upholstery pattern looks dated. The shower cubicle isn't a moulded unit.

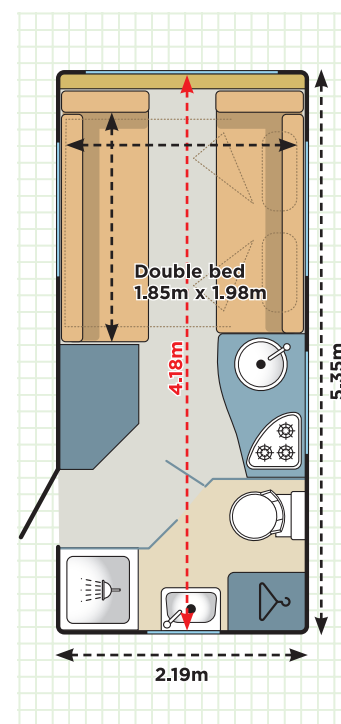


ILLUSTRATION: ALAN ELDRIDGE