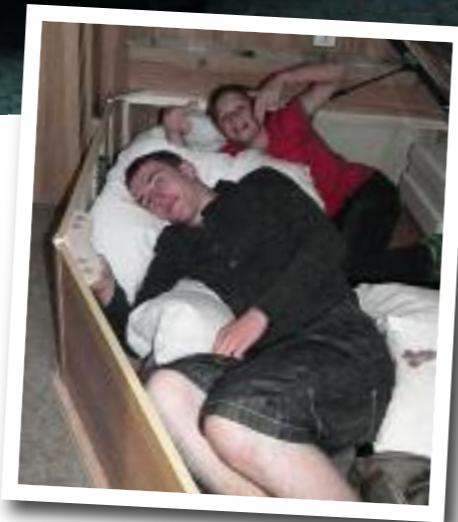




Vehicle supplied for test by: Bailey of Bristol, South Liberty Lane, Bristol BS3 2SS. Call 0117 305 2939.

Polished performer



After impressing with its first series, a refined MkII Olympus looks set to mount an ever stiffer challenge to its rivals. **Rob McCabe** reports

IHAVE a passionate dislike of professional football clubs' annual unveiling of the new season's kit, tinkered with for no reason other than to cajole the faithful into parting with yet another wedge of cash to make sure that they're sporting the latest replica top for the first home game of the season.

Caravan manufacturers have often been guilty of doing pretty much the same, changing the position of a tap here and adding an extra swoop on the exterior wall there to make This Year's Model different

from Last Year's. However, no such accusation can be levelled at Bailey with regard to the launch in the autumn of the Series II Olympus range, which offers a whole host of upgrades over its predecessor – new furniture, new windows, as well as new lights and other fittings make it a very different beast.

I took a four-berth, end-bedroom 530-4 to the Club's incredibly-popular Edinburgh site for an in-depth appraisal, together with three guest testers – my other half Rachel and sons Angus and Sol.

CONSTRUCTION

It only seems like five minutes since the caravanning world was first taking stock of Bailey's Alu-Tech system, the timber-free, no-exterior-fixing construction method that promises enhanced water-ingress protection and comes with a 10-year integrity guarantee.

All the company's touring caravans are made this way now, and they're looking good on it. The Olympus feels reassuringly solid, everything is joined together faultlessly and the joinery inside is first-class. When we'd set up our pitch, another caravanner wandered over for a chat, talking enthusiastically about his own new Olympus that he'd placed on order, largely on the strength of its construction.

The black-coloured gas locker lid that stuck out like a pimple on Series I models has gone, replaced by a more handsome, colour-matched, gas-strut-assisted fitment. The gas locker is designed purely to accommodate cylinders, its reduced size allowing space for two compact wet lockers, one on either sidewall.

TOWABILITY

To tow the new Bailey at or at about 85% of kerbweight, you'll need a motor of some substance: The Caravan Club Towcar of the Year AWD Under 1,800kg category-winning Volvo V60 D5 AWD would do the job with style and grace.

With fine weight distribution – all the chunky kitchen appliances are over or very near the axle – Al-Ko's ATC traction control system and the usual hitch stabiliser, hauling the Olympus around should always be a relaxed, fuss-free affair.

USABILITY

I'm no stranger to the vagaries of Edinburgh's own unique micro-climate; a climate to which the loose-carpeted Olympus is ideally suited. Yes, it rained (quite a lot), and I was glad to be able to lift the compact middle section of carpet and stuff it under the double bed, giving us the wherewithal to use the area of bare floor by the entrance door as a repository for wet footwear and dripping brollies.

That big lump of space under the bed is a real boon when it comes to keeping a tidy caravan. Indeed, there's so much room, I can reveal that it accommodates two boys comfortably (they even asked if they could sleep in there, and please believe me when I tell you that they weren't joking). Indeed, stowage facilities have been thoughtfully provided throughout, all concealed behind a new, walnut-effect furniture finish that looks commendably posh.

Regular readers may be aware of my fondness for the good old parallel sofa/front chest arrangement (although I'm less fond of the fact that you have to pay an extra £286 for it in the Olympus, which comes

with the attractive-but-otherwise-fairly-pointless wraparound seating as the default layout). The benefits bestowed by the additional storage and the extendable table top make life so much easier.

Thankfully, our test unit came thus-equipped and we made fulsome use of it for coffee breaks and for hiding away all sorts of gubbins, from a cluster of mobile phones and iPods to maps and tourist pamphlets. The deep front window shelf comes in very handy, too.

LIVING AND SLEEPING

The lounge is a comfortable and welcoming place to be, thanks to plump, deep upholstery and four good corners to slump into. We did wonder how the sleeping arrangements would work out, though. Rachel and I had the luxury of that big fixed double bed at the rear (so we're all right, Jack – thanks for asking!). But we had to break the news to the boys: "You two are sharing the double bed at the front." This bombshell was received in much the same way as it would have been had we told them that Facebook had closed down.

As it turned out, they got along just fine: the sofas transformed quickly and easily into a nice-sized double that gave them plenty of room to arrange their sleeping bags head to toe and claim their own space. Casting aside one minor grumble about a low-flying foot in the middle of the night, the lads gave their sleeping quarters rave reviews.

So, although most 530-4s will end up in the hands of couples seeking en-suite/ fixed-bed pampering, our experience is that families can pretty much get away with it, too. Certainly, if your kids are in their mid to late teens and will soon reach the stage where they'd rather go down the pit than go on holiday with mum and dad, buying a caravan with this layout can be seen as an astute bit of forward planning: when the day comes, you'll have your ready-made luxury accommodation, featuring what most couples regard as the ultimate 'two-berth' layout.

However many folk are on board, you won't feel short-changed by the fixed double bed, which is sumptuous and supportive in equal measure. The taller among you may want to stake a claim for the left-hand side, as there is a tendency for a foot to emerge into the cool night air where the mattress cuts away for easy access to the walkway on the right.

Whoever's on the left side also benefits from an over-the-shoulder shelf for spectacles/coffee mug or whatever: the lack of same for the other occupant is puzzling. Reading lights are well-positioned and easily adjustable.

KITCHEN

In the context of catering for two – which will be the lot of most 530-4s for most of >>



The Olympus kitchen is well-equipped



The standard-issue microwave enjoys an eye-level position

“...stowage facilities have been thoughtfully provided throughout”

RATINGS	
CONSTRUCTION	9
TOWABILITY	9
USABILITY	9
LIVING AND SLEEPING	9
KITCHEN	9
WASHROOM	9
LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS	9
VERDICT	9

RRP	£16,240 OTR
Overall length	23ft 9in (7.25m)
Overall width	7ft 2in (2.19m)
Overall height	8ft 7 1/2in (2.63m)
Internal length	18ft 8in (5.68m)
Max internal height	6ft 5in (1.95m)
MRO	1,275kg (25.1cwt)
MTPLM	1,443kg (28.4cwt)
User payload	168kg (3.3cwt)
Berths	4
NCC approved	Yes

Figures supplied by manufacturer

Club insurance: 01342 336610 • Info: bailey-caravans.co.uk

Above right: the McCabes junior find an abundance of invaluable storage space beneath the fixed double bed

Right: that fixed bed is both comfortable and supportive



Sumptuous cushions make the lounge a welcoming place in which to relax

the time – there's a reasonable amount of work surface on offer. However, it can be a bit of a juggling act when there are four hungry mouths to feed, even if the shaped cover for the big sink does help a bit.

Cooking for four is certainly not a problem. The Spinflo cooker, with a four-burner hob, grill and oven, is backed up by a handsome, stainless-steel, 800W microwave that sits on its user-friendly, eye-level shelf on the nearside, just above the TV shelf.

'Handsome' is also a good word to use for the new, contrastingly-coloured overhead lockers in the kitchen, resplendent with a plethora of downlighters that do a fine job of illuminating this oft-neglected area.

There's a compact sunroof directly above the kitchen area, perfectly situated to offer ventilation when cooking.

WASHROOM

Situated right at the back, this is first and foremost a luxury en-suite bedroom facility – so anyone sleeping up front will have to creep into your bedroom to visit it during the night. Having said that, we remained blissfully undisturbed during our week-long stay.

With facilities as good as the Edinburgh site's ("Best caravan site shower block I've ever seen," enthused my wife, with eldest son's immediate agreement), there was little chance of the Bailey's shower cubicle being pressed into action. But it would be well up to the job of regular use – on a rally site, say – marrying generous space and effective sealing.

It's an attractive room, the focal point being the Belfast-style wash basin that lives under the rear window. A big cupboard and a generous shelf take care of storage.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

The Olympus does a fine job of serving the well-connected 21st-century caravanner. The fitted stereo radio/CD player outputs via a pair of excellent speakers and includes an auxiliary socket so you can play your iPod or other MP3 player through it.

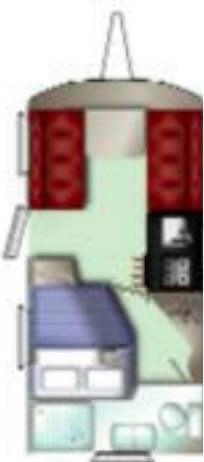
The nearside unit by the entrance door is where you set up your TV: a shelf underneath gives a neat home to your DVD or Blu-ray player (there are sockets for 12V and aerial, plus one of three mains inputs). We used a Freeview TV tuner attached to a laptop and got superb results from the standard-fit directional Status aerial. It's not the best location when four are watching, but is fine for two. A venetian blind covers the hatch that separates the bedroom off: with this raised, you can turn the screen around and watch TV in bed.

Lighting is great in all areas. Indeed, you have to be choosy when relaxing in the lounge of an evening, because it's just too bright when you have everything switched on. I've already mentioned the illumination that's been lavished on the kitchen, but I'm happy to mention it again...

All the lights are 12V-operated, so you've everything at your disposal if you're without hook-up – including the smart, flush-fitting wall lamps in the front corners.

VERDICT

The Olympus scores highly in all the vital areas – comfort, build quality, standard equipment, practicality and value for money. A family of four can stay in it with little compromise: a couple will have no such need. Highly recommended. ■



There's little to complain about with rear washroom

