

# Star turn

The recently-launched Bailey Orion range is getting plenty of attention, not least as an option for caravanners without BE licences. CANDY EVANS has a look at the 440-4 layout of this light, family caravan

The Bailey Orion was unveiled to the public at the Boat and Caravan Show at Birmingham's NEC in February. The next week I was able to take one of the more family-friendly layouts on a weekend trip to Canterbury Club Site in Kent, using it as a base while I enjoyed a school reunion. Magazine Designer Roy Broomhead then spent the next weekend in it with his wife and children to see whether such a compact caravan still works with four people inside.

**1 First impressions** The Orion range is seen by many as a replacement for Bailey's Ranger series. It certainly targets some of the same audience by being lightweight – making it a decent 84 per match with our Peugeot 3008 Exclusive HDi 163 auto test car – as well as compact and keenly-priced.

In other areas, though, the Orion outpaces the Ranger. The internal specification is better, with simple things such as the contrasting scatter cushions making it feel a more classy caravan inside. You'll also find a decent stereo fitted as standard and it comes with an AL-KO hitch, neither of which you might expect on an entry-level unit.

**2 From the outside** There are a couple of obvious differences on the outside of the Orion if you're familiar with Bailey's other Alu-Tech caravans. They're all designed with the main body panels clamped together in an aluminium framework and you may expect to see a very squared-off rear of this unit, as on the Olympus, Pegasus and Unicorn ranges. But the Orion's rear roofline is curved, perhaps more reminiscent of older caravans. Bailey's claim is that this slight design tweak could

save you as much as eight per cent on your fuel costs while towing, by improving the airflow around the caravan.

The second difference is there's no gas locker at the front. To make the most of the inside floor space the gas is stored at the side of the 'van, over the axle. This means the caravan can have a low noseweight and can match a wider selection of smaller family cars. It does restrict the gas bottle sizes you can use – only one 6kg or 7kg bottle will fit, with a second smaller one – but for most people it won't be too much of a compromise given the extra space that's available inside.

**3 Night and day** There are two distinct living areas in the 440-4. At the front are parallel sofas, which convert into a double bed, and a free-standing table for dining. There's also a tiny table at the front, though it's only suitable for a couple of cups of tea. One neat touch is the wider sections at the end of the front shelf, giving just enough space to put your morning cuppa when the bed is made up.

Further back is a large dinette, with two more seats and a good-sized table that converts into the second double bed with some cushion juggling.

Between the two is a small dresser-style unit (built around the gas locker) where you can stand a TV, so you can view it from either side.

The tables and worktops are wood-effect rather than the standard laminate you find in most caravans, giving a warm feel.

**4 Heating** This was the first time I've tried a caravan with Whale underfloor heating and I was impressed. Apart from the fact that there's no large heater to take up space, the main advantage is the simplicity of operation – one switch to set the fuel source (gas, 0.5kW, 1kW or 2kW electricity), another to set the temperature (low to high). It was the first time I'd used a new style of heating on a chilly night and not woken up in the early hours feeling cold, though the fan may drain your battery if you're not on a hook-up.

One disadvantage of the layout, however, is there's no divider between the two sleeping areas. As my colleague Roy confirmed when he travelled with his family, the result was no privacy between the adults and children's areas day or night.

**5 Keeping clean** I was surprised to find such a large rear washroom in a compact caravan like this. It inevitably takes up floor space but it would be useful if you enjoy camping away from site facility blocks. For once there are enough towel hooks for all the family to claim one each, though there are only three coat hooks on the back of the caravan's

entrance door – where does a fourth dripping coat go?

**6 Eating in** The kitchen area is well designed with a microwave, three-burner hob and combined grill and oven. The sink has a removable drainer and when it's in use the working surface is limited, but you can always use one of the tables that are close at hand.

I found myself using storage space outside the immediate kitchen area for foodstuffs but I'm happy to do this in return for the good-sized fridge that boasts a freezer compartment.

I'd prefer to see the 230V socket a little further from the sink but there's always the option of using the 'dresser' opposite for your kettle if you're concerned about its position so close to the tap. All in all, though, the Orion 440-4 fits an enormous amount into a relatively short shipping length.

## at a glance Bailey Orion 440-4

- Price as tested:** £13,540
- Club Care insurance:** £301
- Length x width x height:** 6.39m x 2.19m x 2.63m
- Sleeps:** Four
- Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass:** 1,249kg
- Mass in Running Order:** 1,102kg
- BE licence required:** Not necessarily (example match: Peugeot 3008 Exclusive HDi auto)
- User payload:** 147kg
- Manufacturer:** Bailey
- Tel:** 0117 305 2939
- Web:** bailey-orion.com



**Verdict:** A great family caravan that's surprisingly lightweight and sets the standard in this price range.

