

# Help us to buy...

...an easy-to-tow family 'van for £15k

Swift Charisma 565  
£14,555 **2**

Bailey Olympus 525  
£14,595 **1**

**ON TEST**

**Bailey Olympus 525**  
Price £14,595  
Berths 5

A contemporary tourer using the latest construction technology, with a really flexible and family-friendly twin-lounge layout

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**Swift Charisma 565**  
Price £14,555  
Berths 6

Lightweight, stylish, nicely equipped and very family-friendly, this triple-bunk tourer has room for six to sleep on board



## OUR EXPERT

A lifelong camper, Mark Sutcliffe converted to caravanning when he got too old for tents and his kids came along. He's been writing about caravanning for five years and knows exactly which caravan layouts work for both couples and young families

## THIS MONTH WE HELP

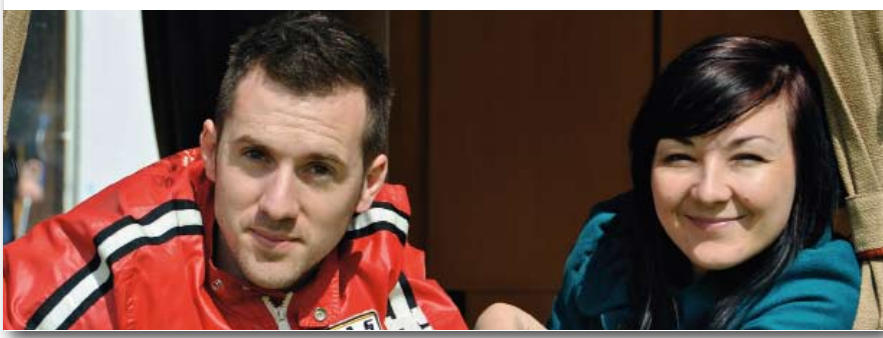
**Luke and Julie Brackenbury from Peterborough**

### CARAVANNING HISTORY

Luke and Julie 'inherited' an elderly Adria last year and were struck by how much easier it made holidays with their four lively children – Jack, Alfie, Madeleine and Lewis.

### LOOKING FOR AND WHY

Luke and Julie would like something more modern, but it needs to be affordable, easily towable and flexible enough to meet their family's needs. They want something that will provide hassle-free holidays.



**Caravan TOWCARS** Turn to our towcar section for news and reviews of the latest caravan towcars **Starts on page 63**



1

# BAILEY OLYMPUS 525



Just about enough room up front for the whole family



Look at the huge space available on the worktop!



Washroom has a separate shower and much more room than the Charisma's

## CARAVAN SPEC

**PRICE**  
£14,595 (includes 17.5% VAT but not delivery charges, £495)

**CONTACT**  
Bailey of Bristol, South Liberty Lane, Bristol BS3 2SS  
t 0117 305 2939  
w bailey-caravans.co.uk

**BERTHS**  
5

**DIMENSIONS**  
Internal length 5.53m  
Overall width 2.19m  
Shipping length 7.1m

**WEIGHTS**  
MIRO 1238kg  
MTPLM 1463kg  
User payload 142kg

**BED SIZES**  
Front double; 6ft 6in x 5ft 6in/198cm x 167cm. Rear double; 6ft 6in x 4ft 5in/198cm x 135cm. Rear single bunk; 6ft x 2ft/182cm x 0.62cm

**WARRANTY**  
10 years body integrity, three years component

**HEATING**  
Truma mains/gas blown-air

## Mark says

**WE LIKE**  
State-of-the-art construction, LED grab handles, integrated water tank, superb kitchen, long warranty

**WE DISLIKE**  
Handle-less overhead lockers, the rather complex rear bed make-up, fairly low user payload

## SCORES

10 BEST I'VE SEEN 9 TOP NOTCH 8 REALLY GREAT 7 PRETTY GOOD 6 CAN LIVE WITH IT 5 AVERAGE 4 BELOW AVERAGE 3 QUITE POOR 2 NOT WORTH CONSIDERING 1 LEAVE IT ALONE

## NEW CARAVANS



Kids loved the ability to partition off 'their' space



Spacious layout, but the centre kitchen means the kids will often be squeezing past mum



Rear lounge has loads of room for kids to play



Converting the rear lounge into a bedroom takes a while



### EXTERIOR

Bailey's Alu-Tech body is unique among British-built caravans, but it's really only distinguished by the muscular buttresses flanking the rear panel and the slightly more pronounced ridgeline where the sidewalls meet the roof. Detail touches such as the LED strips integrated into the grab handles, AL-KO ATC anti-snaking device, the twin front side lockers and the removable inboard water tank, add to the impression that the Olympus is a genuine 21st-century tourer. Luke was impressed with the improved rigidity and strength which Bailey's new construction technique offers and also liked the reassurance of the 10-year body integrity guarantee.

8/10

### LOUNGING

Take your pick of the front or rear lounges as they're both comfy places to stretch out. However, the three older children made a beeline for the rear lounge. They loved the idea of being able to partition it off and quickly made themselves at home. Meanwhile, Luke and Julie stretched out in the front lounge and marveled at how light and airy it seemed – thanks to big windows and a large rooflight. The rear lounge has a 230V socket for computer games or a TV/DVD player, but the main telly station is up front. Luke and Julie thought the upholstery was comfortable and they liked the modern patterns. They loved the reassurance of the 10-year body integrity guarantee.

8/10

### DINING

Both front and rear lounges can be brought into play when it comes to mealtimes. There's only a small lean-to table in the rear lounge, which is fine for a couple of children to enjoy a snack at, but the main stand-alone table will also slot in here, for more substantial meals. With five or six people on board, the best catering solution is to have two sittings, for children and adults. A family of four could sit around the main table in the front lounge, but realistically the 525 is better geared up to different mealtimes at separate tables for children and grown-ups. Either way, the Olympus' outstanding kitchen will definitely be equal to the task of feeding the hungry masses.

8/10

### NIGHT TIME

This much living space comes at a price, come bedtime, with a complex cushion-shuffling ritual to make up the beds. Little Jack shares Luke and Julie's bed, but to create three berths for the three older children requires extensive re-arrangement of the rear lounge to set up the bunk. Smaller families might get away with simply using the rear settees as beds for two younger children – or there's even the option of leaving the rear double made-up like a fixed bed. The combination of ceiling lights, spotlights and ambient LED lighting creates a nice mood after dark and the large front double is more easily assembled. The wooden partition across the rear gives extra privacy.

7/10

### STORAGE

The Olympus has no fewer than 14 overhead lockers and there's also a generous wardrobe, but a low-level storage is a little limited as much of the underseat storage is filled with items like the water heater and inboard water tank. On the plus side, the Olympus has generous storage under the kitchen worktop and the fridge will also hold a lot of perishables. Externally, the Bailey's gas locker is significantly smaller than the Swift's, but it does have a substantial wet locker on either side, accessed through the sidewall. Both our 'vans have only around 150 kilos of personal effects payload; so, with five or six on board, you'll have to keep clutter to a minimum.

7/10

### KITCHEN

The kitchen is huge, with ample preparation space on those faux-granite worktops. There's a four-burner gas hob, separate grill and oven and a microwave, so the self-catering options are endless – which is important for a young family on a budget. The 107-litre Thetford fridge has a useful capacity and a big freezer compartment, which is important for children's treats like ice lollies. The storage space above and below the worktop is equally generous and the rectangular stainless steel sink has a draining board and large chopping board conveniently integrated. It has a huge capacity for dirty plates, so the postprandial trek to the 'pot-wash' won't be necessary.

9/10

### WASHROOM

This is a practical, no-frills affair, but it's quite long and has a separate shower, though this might struggle to cope with three or more children. The toilet is crammed into the rear corner, but there's just about enough legroom for an adult to perch on it. The central sink and vanity unit is illuminated by a couple of spotlights, but, when it comes to tooth-brushing time, the children will have to take it in turns. The blown-air heating does find its way in here, however, so it can be used to air damp clothes, even when the ambient temperature drops. It's a functional washroom with few extras, but it offers more than simply a loo for night-time emergencies.

7/10

### FINISH AND BUILD

It could be argued that Bailey's revolutionary Alu-Tech construction technique has yet to stand the test of time, but the manufacturer itself is prepared to back the Olympus with a 10-year guarantee and thousands of customers seem to have been convinced by it. Additional innovations, such as the inboard water tank and the extensive use of energy-saving lighting suggest more thought has gone into the Olympus. Luke was impressed by the technology and also preferred the unfussy interior, which he felt was contemporary and understated. The handle-less overhead lockers, with their plastic, catches, divided opinion, but they seemed to work well.

8/10

# 2 SWIFT CHARISMA 565



Front lounge is slightly larger than the Bailey's



The Charisma's rear dinette isn't as roomy as its lounge, but the kids still loved it



Washroom is tiny and very basic

## CARAVAN SPEC

<b>PRICE</b>	£14,555 (includes 17.5% VAT but not £495 delivery charge)
<b>CONTACT</b>	Swift Group Ltd, Dunswell Road, Cottingham HU16 4JX T 01482 847332 W swiftleisure.co.uk
<b>BERTHS</b>	6
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	<b>Internal length</b> 5.50m <b>Overall width</b> 2.23m <b>Shipping length</b> 7.19m
<b>WEIGHTS</b>	<b>MIRO</b> 1258kg <b>MTPLM</b> 1489kg <b>User payload</b> 153kg
<b>BED SIZES</b>	Front double; 6ft 10in x 5ft 11in/208cm x 180cm. Rear single; 5ft 7in x 2ft 5in/170cm x 75cm. Rear bunks (x3); 6ft x 1ft 10in/183cm x 57cm
<b>WARRANTY</b>	Six years body integrity, three years component
<b>HEATING</b>	Truma gas/mains blown-air

## Mark says

**WE LIKE**  
Luxurious interior, triple bunks in rear dinette, upmarket appliances, excellent lighting, good kitchen layout

**WE DISLIKE**  
Tiny washroom, low payload, ATC anti-snaking device is an optional extra, less flexible layout than the Bailey

## SCORES

10 BEST I'VE SEEN 9 TOP NOTCH 8 REALLY GREAT 7 PRETTY GOOD 6 CAN LIVE WITH IT 5 AVERAGE 4 BELOW AVERAGE 3 QUITE POOR 2 NOT WORTH CONSIDERING 1 LEAVE IT ALONE

## NEW CARAVANS



The kids made a beeline for the bunks



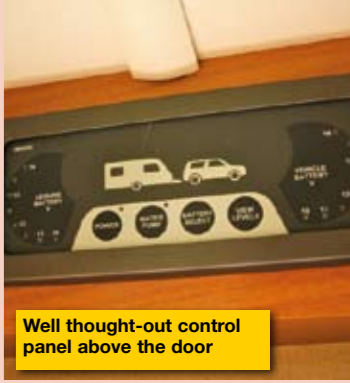
The rear has three bunks plus a large seating area for the kids



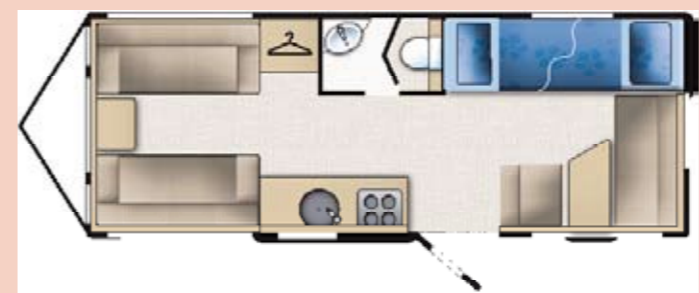
The kitchen offers good worktop space and upmarket appliances



Circular kitchen sink isn't as practical as the Bailey's



Well thought-out control panel above the door



### EXTERIOR

The Charisma is utterly conventional in every way, with the traditional raked nose and a shallower incline at the front end of the roof. Like the Olympus, it has alloy wheels and a stable door, but the Charisma doesn't have AL-KO's ATC anti-snaking device included as standard (although it is an option). At 7ft 4in wide, the Charisma is two inches wider than the Olympus and this, together with the lower front panel, gives the impression of a wider, lower profile van. The decals and badging are similar to the 525s, but the 565 lacks those additional little refinements like LED lights that are integrated into the grab handles, and the removable inboard water tank is a nice touch.

7/10

### LOUNGING

The Charisma's extra width is noticeable in the front lounge, which feels more open and spacious. It is also slightly longer than the one in the Olympus and will seat four adults in comfort. The upholstery is firm and supportive and feels perhaps more lavish. At the back, the rear dinette isn't as comfortable for grown-ups, since the seatbacks are more upright and the squabs aren't as deep. It's designed specifically for children to eat and play at and Alfie, Madeleine and Lewis soon made themselves at home here. Like the Olympus, the rear lounge can be partitioned off from the front, albeit with a less robust fabric concertina divider.

8/10

### DINING

A family of four could all dine together in the front lounge, but the rather modest free-standing table isn't really big enough for five or six and the youngsters would be better off in the rear dinette, whose table is better suited to mealtimes than the smaller one in the Olympus. Like the Bailey, the Swift is better geared to separate mealtimes, or at least separate tables for larger families, and it has a similarly impressive kitchen to cope with the demands of such ambitious catering operations. We think most parents would be happy enough to feed the children before bedtime, settle them in their bunks, close the partition and uncork the wine for their own dinner.

8/10

### NIGHT TIME

The Charisma has less flexibility in terms of sleeping arrangements, but it's better suited to the demands of a family of five or even six, when the rear dinette forms a fourth child's bed, alongside the triple rear bunk. Luke and Julie's three older children made a beeline for the bunks, but there were soon the inevitable arguments about who went on top! Each bunk has its own window and individual light, so older children can read in bed without disturbing the others. The fourth bed is made up in seconds and, if one child wants to get up before their brothers and sisters, there's still room for them to play at the dinette table without disturbing mum and dad in the front.

9/10

### STORAGE

Like the Olympus, the Charisma suffers a little here, with the bunks consuming a lot of potential storage space high up and low down. This is partially compensated for by the plentiful storage under the dinette seats, plus a couple of huge overhead lockers, in addition to the eight standard-sized ones. There's a big, deep wardrobe next to the washroom, but the three-quarter depth could arguably be better utilised with some shelves to store kids' clothing rather than mum and dad's jackets and frocks. Kitchen storage isn't quite on a par with the Bailey, but, in any case, the personal effects payload of 153 kilos will restrict the amount of clutter which can safely be stowed.

7/10

### KITCHEN

This is another impressive, family-friendly kitchen, which makes self-catering for a large family a realistic proposition. There's a great Thetford oven with separate grill, four-burner hob and 700W microwave at eye-level, plus an SES fridge with digital readout and 107-litre capacity. The storage space available is slightly less generous and the worktop space isn't as extensive as the Bailey's, but there's still enough room and equipment to produce first-class food for a big family. The circular granite-effect sink perhaps isn't quite as practical as the Bailey's huge rectangular affair, but it does come complete with chopping board and drainer that can be fixed on the side.

7/10

### WASHROOM

While the robust domestic-style door suggests a substantial washroom, it's actually a cramped, plasticky affair, which is much smaller than the Olympus' more practical offering. Although the grey and white mouldings look superficially attractive, there's no escaping the fact that this is a tiny washroom, with a bench loo and a sink mixer tap that doubles as a shower head. There's no separate shower tray, only a flimsy perspex partition to separate it from the toilet. Realistically, this is somewhere for nocturnal emergencies and only the briefest of ablutions. Serious washing will need to take place in the facilities block, which is fairly normal with families.

5/10

### FINISH AND BUILD

In terms of overall build quality, the Charisma lacks the Bailey's modern body construction methods, but it doesn't necessarily follow that it's any less robust and it's backed by Swift's six-year body integrity warranty. Inside, Julie thought the Charisma felt that little bit more luxurious and homely and appliances like the fridge, oven and microwave were slightly more upmarket. The cabinetry also feels slightly more substantial and the more conventional lockers, with proper metal handles and pelmets underneath, will appeal to more traditional tastes than Bailey's 'floating' lockers. Lighting options are also more extensive than in the Bailey.

8/10

# NEW CARAVANS

## OTHERS TO CONSIDER

### LUNAR QUASAR 546

Price £14,965

Berths 6

A bit pricier than these two, but Lunar was the first to introduce this layout and is the past master at building big 'vans with ample accommodation, which are significantly lighter than their competitors.

### ELDDIS AVANTE CLUB 556

Price £14,599

Berths 6

Identical layout to the Charisma and solidly built with a nicely finished interior, but not quite as many innovations as the Bailey Olympus 525.

### ADRIA ALTEA 542 DK

Price £11,239

Berths 6

The budget option. This little Adria is very basic inside and only has the one lounge, but it will sleep six, costs significantly less and can easily be towed by a family hatchback.

### GEIST AKTIV 565

Price £13,995

Berths 5/6

Solid German build quality and a more conventional layout, but still capable of accommodating a large family at an extremely attractive price tag.

# Final scores



### BAILEY OLYMPUS 525

Practicality ..... 9/10

It has a very flexible layout plus a bigger kitchen and more usable washroom

Value for money ..... 8/10

The Bailey has valuable innovations like ATC fitted as standard and should hold its value

**Caravan**  
Our rating

**79/100**

### SWIFT CHARISMA 565

Practicality ..... 8/10

You can't beat triple bunks for big families and the rear dinette is ideal for kids' meals

Value for money ..... 7/10

Feels more expensive than the Olympus, but the Bailey has a better standard spec

**Caravan**  
Our rating

**74/100**

## OUR TESTERS' CONCLUSIONS

There's little doubt that Bailey's Alu-Tech construction represents a significant step forward in caravan design. However, once you step inside, the Olympus's cabinetry doesn't feel quite as robust as the Charisma's and equipment like the oven, fridge and microwave aren't quite as high spec. So, while the Bailey has technological superiority in the build department, Swift scoops the interior décor award.

The children loved the idea of having their own space at the back of both 'vans, and were quick to pull the partition across to do their own thing. This was great, as it gave Luke and Julie some dedicated space of their own in which to unwind. But, come bedtime, it's clear that the prospect of re-engineering the rear lounge to create three lively

children was always going to be a bit of a chore for the adults.

In other areas, the Bailey's kitchen is better than most of those we've seen in a family caravan. The Charisma's biggest let down was probably its poky and rather plasticky little washroom, which would really come under pressure if all the family wanted to use it. However, large families are usually resigned to using site facilities when it comes to showering, if only because a water tank soon gets drained down if four or five people want a shower in the caravan.

The main reason for the small washroom is so that the triple bunk layout can be fitted in the Swift, and this is one part of the 'van which is really well designed, beating the Bailey when it comes to bedtime set-up.



TOTAL INSURANCE®

### INSURANCE QUOTE

Bailey Olympus 525 £14,595  
from only £181.05

Swift Charisma 565 £14,555  
from only £180.51

'New for Old' cover.

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We would like to say thanks to Ferry Meadows Caravan Club site and Pioneer Caravans at Eye, near Peterborough, for supplying the Swift Charisma.



## WE CHOSE

### Bailey Olympus

It's virtually impossible to choose between these two. They offer a huge amount of accommodation in a lightweight body, which can be safely towed behind a fairly modest family car. We think the Bailey just edges it for the vast majority of families, who only have two or three children. For those blessed with four little 'uns, we think the Charisma would be the better buy with its triple rear bunks.

**NEXT MONTH** We pitch the luxurious Buccaneer Schooner against the Lunar Delta Ti