

Twin test

Entry-level family vans for caravanners who don't want the hassle of a heavy tow

BAILEY Orion 440-4



Berths.....	4
Shipping length.....	6.39m
Width.....	2.19m
Overall height.....	2.63m
MiRO+.....	1102kg
MTPLM+.....	1249kg
User payload.....	147kg

Price
£12,995

ELDDIS Xplore 304



Berths.....	4
Shipping length.....	5.34m
Width.....	2.15m
Overall height.....	2.73m
MiRO+.....	893kg
MTPLM+.....	1050kg
User payload.....	157kg

Price
£11,299

*Terms explained in 'Caravan basics' (glossary, page 150)

THESE ARE TOUGH times for young caravanners. In addition to the rising cost of fuel, they face other barriers, such as the towing test for those whose licences were issued after 1997 (details on page 150). Perhaps it's no surprise that there has been real innovation to ease their entry into our pastime. Elddis showed the way last year

with the ultra-compact, two-berth Xplore 302. Its new 304 extends this by providing space for four but having an MTPLM of 1050kg.

Bailey responded with the four-model Orion range. This returns the brand to a market occupied by its Discovery range until 2006.

The line-ups are marketed differently. Elddis promotes the

Xplore 304 as a low-weight, good-value family van. Bailey is pitching the Orion as a "leisure support vehicle", ideal for young, outward-bound caravanners.

The Xplore 304 and Orion 440-4 both have side dinettes and rear washrooms but differ outside. The

Elddis has classic construction and traditional looks. The Bailey's Alu-Tech bodyshell is topped by a roof you'll either love or hate.

If you need room for four, drive a Ford Focus and are looking to spend around £12,000, which of these vans should top your list?

Turn over for full reviews, our verdict and specifications >>

BAILEY
Orion 440-4



Lockers are tall and the slant of the doors adds to the room inside

Lounge seats are firm and the large windows flood the caravan with natural light

There's plenty of under-seat storage space in the Orion's front lounge

Showroom >> Twin test



FROM TOP Good storage for CDs or DVDs. Handy tall kitchen cupboard

Belfast basin in washroom sits under tiny - and see-through - window

“The seats are comfortable and deep enough for long-legged adults, and there’s enough headroom for standing”



The curved sweep of the kitchen worktop and the round sink add refinement - there's plenty of work surface, too



Good

The Orion's interior décor isn't very racy but it feels inviting and comfortable. Bailey has improved specification rather than downgraded it, as in the original Pegasus. Storage space is generous, given the caravan's size.



Bad

A sealed shower unit would inspire more confidence. The shower lining wallboard is sealed, but you'd be wise to keep an eye on the condition of the sealant to prevent water ingress in future.



BAILEY Orion 440-4



Centrally-located gas locker improves weight distribution but access will not be easy for older caravanners



Rear dinette is a real highlight - a family of four can easily fit around the table and the large window rounds it off nicely



Make up the bed in less than a minute by dropping the table and arrange the cushions (in-fill cushions not shown)



The front lounge takes slightly longer to set up, but once it's done you've got a very comfortable place to spend the night

8
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Pitch and set-up

The Orion is built on an Al-Ko chassis and features the Al-Ko AKS stabiliser as standard – a good touch on a budget van. The gas bottles are mounted over the axle, so there is no front gas locker, but Bailey has added a storage locker on the nearside. All corner steadies are easy to access and wind.

The service outlets are on the offside, which lacks an awning rail. The LED awning light above the two-piece door is operated from the control panel just to the left as you enter. The heating controls are to the right of the door, as are a TV point and a mains socket.

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Lounge

The lounge comprises parallel sofas, with a small clip-on table between them. This can be removed when making up the bed or when using the larger table for dining. The seats are comfortable and deep enough for long-legged adults, and there's enough headroom for standing.

The front window and large Heki rooflight allow plenty of light in. Artificial light is provided by a large ceiling light and two spots. There's no central chest for storage, but a wide cupboard up front will easily accommodate DVDs/CDs and books. A TV shelf is at the end of the nearside bunk.

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Kitchen

The 440-4's well-equipped kitchen is a highlight. A triangular hob and round sink are finished in brushed metal, and there's a chrome mixer tap. The wood-effect worktop curves outwards and the work area is generous when the plastic chopping board is fitted onto the sink. Below are a 107-litre fridge, a cutlery drawer, a combined oven/grill and a small-pan cupboard. Between the fridge and oven is the dedicated table storage. Behind the sink are a double socket and controls for the water heater.

The microwave is set above the sink at a manageable height. It's to the left of a large, double-door cupboard with crockery racks. Two LED lights illuminate the area.

6
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Washroom

The full-width rear washroom is standard on all Orions and has enough space to move around comfortably. It has a Thetford C-250 swivel toilet, a Belfast basin and a shower. The shower has a bi-fold plastic door and three sides made from sealed wallboard – a fully moulded unit would have been better, though. A six-footer will have to stoop to use it and the controls are at waist height.

Bailey has added three hooks in the washroom wall, opposite the clear rear window. A shelf above the window and three shelves under the sink provide sufficient storage space.

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Beds

There is a variety of ways to use the four berths here. The front lounge converts quickly into a comfy double bed using pull-out slats but it can alternatively be used by kids as singles. The side dinette, which uses the tabletop as a support, can only be converted into a double, using the seat and fill-in cushions. But if the kids object to sharing, it may just be large enough for mum and dad.

Bedding can be stashed under the front seats when not in use, although you may find there's more room on the nearside.

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Storage

The Orion exploits its storage options well. There are five lockers at head height in the lounge, with a tall double locker in the kitchen and a shallow shelf above the microwave. The nearside seat bench offers full storage, minus the footprint of the fuse box. The space heater takes up a quarter of the offside seat bench. The dinette area offers good under-seat storage and there are three lockers.

The wardrobe, to the right of the kitchen, is three-quarter height but can only be accessed from the left-hand side. There are also three shelves behind the washroom door.

Opposite the kitchen are three curved shelves in front of the gas locker, and more work surface.

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Showroom >> Twin test

ELDDIS
Xplore 304



Portrait-orientated window is distinctive and offers a different perspective

Dark brown carpet runners and lino complement the lounge colour scheme

Central drawer steals valuable under-seat storage space



Washroom is neatly done, but it won't appeal to the claustrophobic



Lockers are tall and the bottom lip will stop items from falling out

“The seats are firm, back support is adequate and plenty of daylight can flood through the large windows”



The Xplore's kitchen transcends its tiny dimensions by using flip-up glass lids and a worktop extension flap that takes a bite from the lounge space

Good
The Xplore 304's tiny dimensions and ultra-low weight make it a cinch to tow and manoeuvre on site. The L-shaped lounge is compact but homely and easily converts into a spacious double bed.

Bad
Rear bunk looks untidy when stowed in its upright position - perhaps it's the lack of a window underneath. Fancy footwork will be required when performing the full range of ablutions in the tiny washroom.



Front locker is easily accessed through its large door and offers plenty of room for gas cylinders and other essentials



OUR
BEST
BIT

The 3+2 seating in the lounge comes into its own when the table is used and offers a very sociable dining space



Slats slide easily from the front seat and the cushions fit together snugly to form a spacious, comfortable double bed



Drop-down rear bunk is clever and user-friendly, but when stowed upright it isn't the most attractive feature of the van

ELDDIS Xplore 304

Pitch and set-up

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The Xplore 304 is built on a BPW chassis but a stabiliser is not included as standard. The battery locker is on the nearside, above the nearside steady winder. There's a large gas locker on the front of the caravan, and the inside of the locker is easy to access. Services are located at the rear. Access to the caravan is through a two-piece door, and the controls are to the left as you enter. Access to the corner steadies is good, although the ones on the rear of the caravan are mounted low down.

shouldn't be a problem. Some people may doubt whether the shower-tray floor will withstand heavy use by a family. There is a chrome showerhead and a soap dish, which is fitted to the riser bar.

A shallow cupboard and a towel ring are above the swivel toilet. A chrome rail runs the width of the shower for hanging wet clothes. The corner basin is deep and boasts a domestic-style chrome tap. There is just enough space behind it for a liquid soap container or make-up bag, and above it is a long mirror.

Lounge

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What makes the 304's lounge distinctive is its L-shaped seating and tall offside window, both borrowed from the Xplore 302. The seats are firm, the back support is adequate and plenty of daylight can flood through the two side windows and large one-piece front window. A large rooflight above the kitchen also helps.

In the evening, a ceiling light, two corner lights and two LED spotlights will provide plenty of options. The brown-and-cream fabrics works well with the dark wood-effect flooring. The controls for the space and water heater, plus one power point, are next to the offside window. When the table is up, the L-shape makes for sociable dining.

Beds

7
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The lounge converts easily into a roomy, comfortable double bed using slats pulled from the seat at the front and the cushions, which all fit snugly together.

The side dinette can be turned into a single bed, using the table to bridge the seats and the cushions, which fit easily into place. Above it is a bunk that folds down from the offside wall, which is a convenient solution. When stowed, however, the bunk's base is a plain, unsightly expanse of wood. It would have been better had there been a window just below it to let some valuable light into the dinette area.

Storage

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There are four overhead lockers in the lounge, plus two in the kitchen. Underseat space is tight in the lounge, where the nearside seat bench is mostly taken up by the fuse box and the front seat houses a blown-air pipe and a drawer. As a result, no place is big enough to store bedding, apart from the half-length wardrobe, as long as it's not full of clothes. Storage in the side dinette is limited, because the seat boxes contain electrical equipment.

In the kitchen, there's a large pan cupboard below the oven and a spacious, double-door cupboard with a full-length shelf below the sink. The cutlery drawer is here, but it has no tray, and is so low that there's almost enough space above it for another drawer.

Kitchen

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The nearside kitchen looks straightforward and functional. A three-burner gas hob sits next to an oblong stainless-steel sink with a domestic-style mixer tap. Both sink and hob have Chinchilla glass lids, which are needed because there is virtually no worktop. A flip-up extension offers valuable workspace. Under the hob, you'll find a small combined oven and grill. On the offside, there's a 115-litre fridge. The area is illuminated by a striplight under the roof lockers and a window runs almost the length of the worktop.

Washroom

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The small washroom is in the nearside rear corner. It is cramped but if you use site facilities then it

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Verdict

The Xplore 304 and Orion 440-4 are pitched at value-conscious caravanners who want a family van but not the hassle of a heavy tow. The reality is that these caravans will have more appeal at the other end of the age range, to older caravanners who are

downsizing and want something easy to use. Each van has a decent double bed at the front, and the side dinettes convert into beds ideal for the grandchildren.

This view seems supported by the traditional interiors in both the Xplore 304 and the Orion

440-4. The fabrics and finish are conservative and inoffensive, clearly designed to appeal to as wide a range of buyers as possible.

The Xplore 304 may attract them with its £1696 lower price tag and 199kg lower MTPLM, although the price advantage

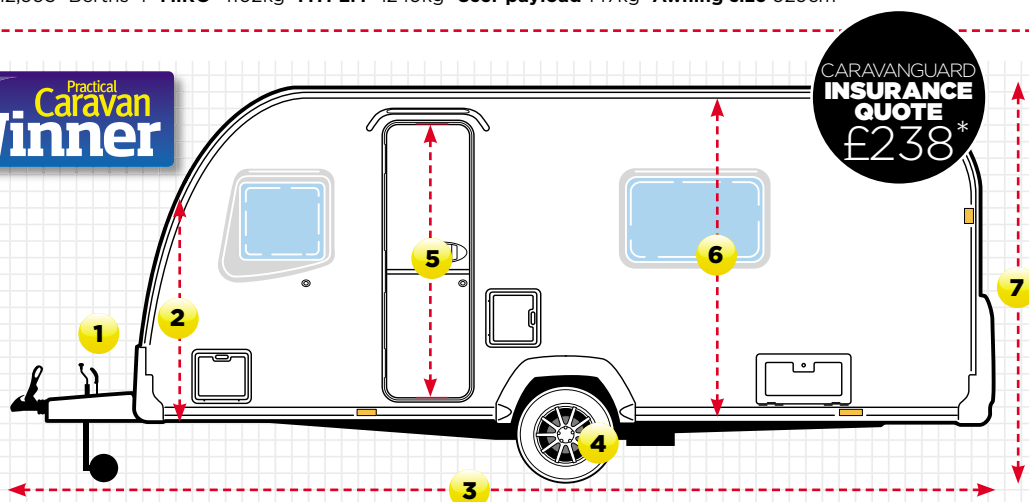
drops by £400 if you take the SE pack – which we recommend.

The difference between the vans' payloads is not as wide, though. The Orion trails by only 10kg here. However, it leads the Elldis in its provision of space for stowing all those personal effects.

Vital stats

Bailey Orion 440-4

Price £12,995 Berths 4 MiRO† 1102kg MTPLM† 1249kg User payload 147kg Awning size 929cm



CARAVANGUARD
INSURANCE
QUOTE
£238*

Standard equipment

Construction

- Alu-Tech bodyshell finished in GRP

- Moulded rear panel
- Al-Ko chassis

External equipment

- Al-Ko AKS 3004 stabiliser
- Alloy wheels
- Button-operated handbrake
- Awning light
- Two-piece door with flyscreen

Heating

- Truma Ultrastore water heater
- Whale floor-mounted space heater

Lounge

- Blinds and flyscreens to all windows

- Drop-in carpets
- Heki rooflight

- Directional TV aerial

Kitchen

- Thetford 107-litre fridge
- Three-burner gas hob
- Combination oven and grill
- Sink with removable drainer
- Microwave oven

Washroom

- Thetford C-250 swivel cassette toilet
- Shower cubicle
- Belfast basin and mixer tap

Security

- CRiS identity number etched to all windows and chassis
- Smoke alarm
- Receiver for Al-Ko Secure wheel lock (optional)

Warranty

- 3 years parts
- 10 years water ingress

Options

- Al-Ko Secure wheel lock (£194)
- Fabrics upgrade (£203)

Measurements

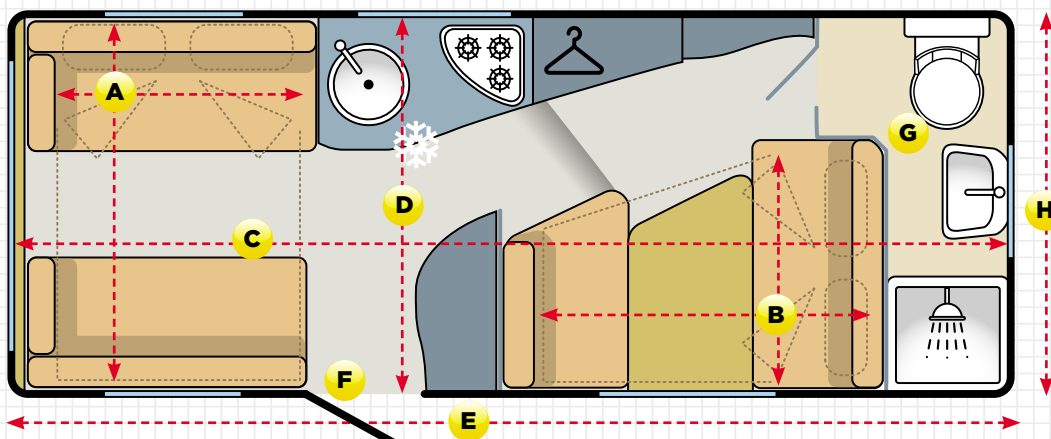
1 Gas locker height n/a	A Front beds
2 Headroom at locker 1.92m	Double 1.98m x 1.42m
3 Overall length 6.39m	Twin singles 1.42m x 0.69m
4 Tyres Size R14 96N	B Fixed bed 1.93m x 1.37m
Load index 96	C Interior length 5.23m
Pressure 42psi	D Interior width 2.04m
5 Door height 1.73m	E Body length 5.45m
6 Interior height 1.96m	F Door width 0.54m
7 Overall height 2.63m	G Toilet legroom 0.38m
	H Overall width 2.19m

Perfect partner

With an MTPLM of 1249kg, the Bailey can be towed safely with a:



Volvo C30 D4



Manufacturer Bailey of Bristol Address South Liberty Lane, Bristol BS3 2SS
Tel 0117 305 2939 Web www.bailey-caravans.co.uk Dealers 80

We say



Claudia Dowell says

I like the simple bunk mechanism in the Xplore 304, but the twin-dinette layout in the Orion is flexible and its kitchen is better.



Rory White says

The Xplore is a clever design, but I take lots of outdoor kit with me when touring and there isn't much space to stash it in the 304.

This is largely thanks to the Bailey's parallel front seats, whose bases offer more storage space.

The Orion's side dinette is better executed than the Xplore's and, despite its shortcomings, the full-width washroom isn't as cramped as its rival's wet room.

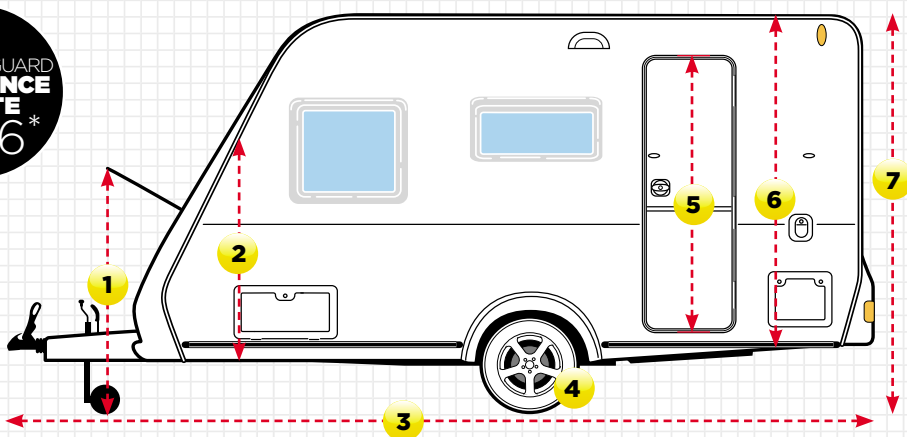
So as long as you can live with the curved rear roof, you get more space overall and more flexibility in using its four berths. Bailey's claim of 8% better fuel economy when towing the Orion should go some way towards paying back the price difference over a few seasons.

Vital stats

Elddis Xplore 304

Price £11,299 Berths 4 MiRO⁺ 893kg MTPLM⁺ 1050kg User payload 157kg Awning size 815cm

CARAVANGUARD
INSURANCE
QUOTE
£216*



Measurements

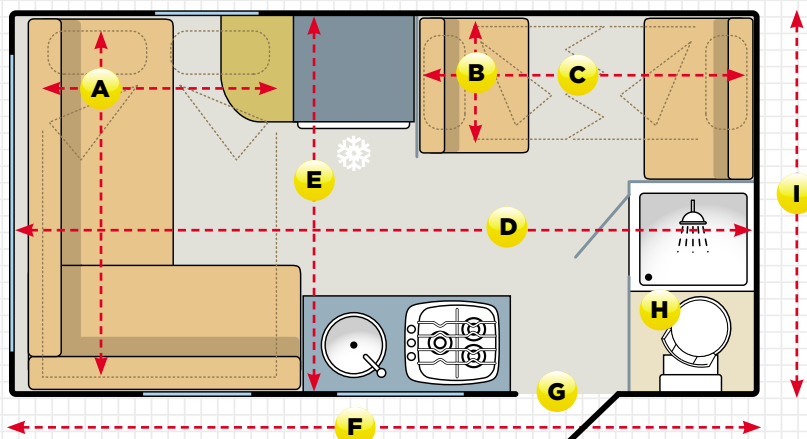
1 Gas locker height 1.24m	A Front double bed 1.98m x 1.32m
2 Headroom at locker 1.9m	B Rear single bed 1.8m x 0.7m
3 Overall length 5.34m	C Rear bunk 1.8m x 0.56m
4 Tyres Size R14 86	D Interior length 3.7m
Load index 86	E Interior width 2.03m
Pressure 44psi	F Body length 5.34m
5 Door height 1.64m	G Door width 0.51m
6 Interior height 1.91m	H Toilet legroom 0.32m
7 Overall height 2.73m	I Overall width 2.15m

Perfect partner

With an MTPLM of 1050kg, the Elddis can be towed safely with a:



Volkswagen Golf 1.6 TDI



Manufacturer Elddis **Address** Delves Lane, Consett, County Durham DH8 7PE
Tel 01207 699 000 **Web** www.elddis.co.uk **Dealers** 58

Standard equipment

Construction

- Aluminium sandwich sidewalls
- GRP front panel
- BPW V-Tec galvanised steel chassis

External equipment

- Button-operated handbrake
- Awning light
- Two-piece entry door

Heating

- Truma dual-fuel water heater
- Whale under-floor space heater

Lounge

- Blinds and flyscreens to all windows
- Drop-in carpets
- Directional TV aerial

Kitchen

- Thetford 115-litre fridge
- Three-burner gas hob
- Combined oven and grill
- Sink with removable drainer
- Heki rooflight

Washroom

- Thetford C-250 swivel cassette toilet
- 'Wet-room'-style shower
- Hanging rail for wet clothes and blown air duct

Security

- CRiS identity number etched to all windows and chassis
- Concealed data chip
- Smoke alarm

Warranty

- 3 years parts
- 6 years water ingress

Options

- Alternative fabric option (£199)
- Xplore SE pack: Winteroff stabiliser, alloy wheels, flyscreen to caravan door, shelf pack, spare wheel and carrier (£399) (Fitted to test van)