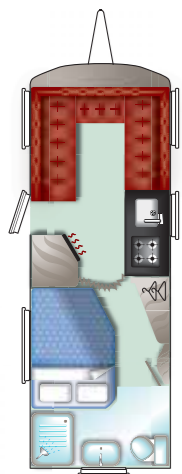




PEAK PERFORMER

Bailey's Alu-Tech revolution is gathering pace. Rob McCabe climbs aboard a four-berth model from the new Olympus line-up



WHEN WE tested the Bailey Pegasus 514 in the January issue, we reported how the Bristol-based manufacturer was so proud of its newly-launched, revolutionary Alu-Tech construction process that it proclaimed: 'One day, all caravans will be made this way.'

Well, it's still early days, but it has at least reached the point where we can safely nip down to the bookie's and put on a few bob that one day all Baileys will be made this way. Such has been the demand for anything Alu-Tech, the long-running – but decidedly traditional – Senators have been dropped from the line-up.

So, our subject this month is an Alu-Tech caravan that should attract a lot of interest, given its fixed-double bed layout – a

configuration that has dominated sales of caravans to couples ever since Day One. There's the added enticement of a full-width washroom at the back, too.

CONSTRUCTION

Its Alu-Tech credentials mean that the Olympus 534 is completely timber-free: bodywork is wrapped around a composite plastic frame, so there's nothing to rot should there ever be any water ingress. But the hefty, super-thick exterior panels, of which there are just five, are joined together by interlocking aluminium extrusions that are devoid of any external fixing points – so there's little chance of any moisture getting in in the first place. The end result is a caravan that feels as tough as old boots.

It's much the same inside: the shiny, smooth finish to the walls and ceiling is right on the money – solid, clean, unfussy, classy and unlikely to date any time soon. The cunningly-concealed overhead locker handles (they're behind the lower edges of the doors) also impart a restrained elegance, and they work well. All the lockers spring open nice and uniformly.

The Olympus is a marvellously well-built caravan, but we can't leave the subject of construction without mentioning the not-so-good-looking fabric-covered magazine rack thing on the lounge wall. It not only looks like an afterthought that spoils the otherwise showhome-fresh appearance of the glossy walls, but the one in our test model was coming loose.

TOWABILITY

Find yourself a sweetly-matched towcar, and you'll be hauling the Olympus along Easy Street. There's the usual Al-Ko hitch stabiliser built in, but the fact that this is such a well-balanced caravan to begin with is of greater significance. The overhead microwave and the fridge are situated just forward of the axle, with the cooker and space heater directly over it – pretty much perfect.

A swift, accomplished cruiser such as the 3.0 V6 HDi version of Citroën's C5 Tourer would be terrific when put in charge of this Olympus.

Oh, and don't be surprised if you find yourself wanting to tow at night, just so you can see the rows of LEDs in the grab handles illuminated: they're white at the front and red at the back, allowing them to be used as road lights.

USABILITY

Here are three examples that give a fine illustration of how user-friendly the Olympus is. The standard stereo radio/CD player sits on the outside of the overhead-locker woodwork, so there's no need to open and close locker doors every time you want to swap discs or hop channels. The recessed kitchen sink is so big, you can fit

the supplied washing-up bowl in it and still have easy access for draining or rinsing. And the portable, onboard fresh water container guarantees running water first thing on a frozen winter's morning, as well as providing useful back-up if you choose to bring in your water via the traditional Aquaroll-style method.

They're little things, I know, but I'm sure I read somewhere once that removing all the tiny irritations from your day-to-day business can add years to your life. These examples have got to be worth a few months by themselves.

Once you've added things like the exterior hatch under the fixed double bed opening to reveal a big plastic tray (perfect for muddy wellies, wet-grass-covered footballs and the like), a key shelf directly above the entrance door, sensibly partitioned loose-fit carpets, the door-mounted waste bin and a pair of ever-useful, sealed lockers (one on the front edge of either sidewall)... well, you'll have increased your lifespan so much, you may as well start looking forward to the telegram from Buckingham Palace.

Storage is more than generous for two people, remembering that couples are the target audience for this layout; the lounge-derived double bed is unlikely to see much use. The plethora of cupboards and lockers is backed up by open shelves, some of which are so deep, it's a tiptoe job to reach the back.

The big fixed double bed base lifts up smoothly with little effort and supports itself securely on its hydraulic strut while you gaze in awe at the huge stowage space before you. Suffice it to say, you'll have no problem keeping a tidy caravan here.

You'll have no problem keeping warm, either. The gas/electric space heater is supported by blown-air outlets in the lounge, the bedroom and the washroom, the latter sited strategically to serve both the shower cubicle and the loo.

The concertina-style blinds on the side windows look fantastic when they're in use, but the sad thing is that you can't use the flyscreens at the same time: not great for bug-free ventilation in high summer.

LIVING AND SLEEPING

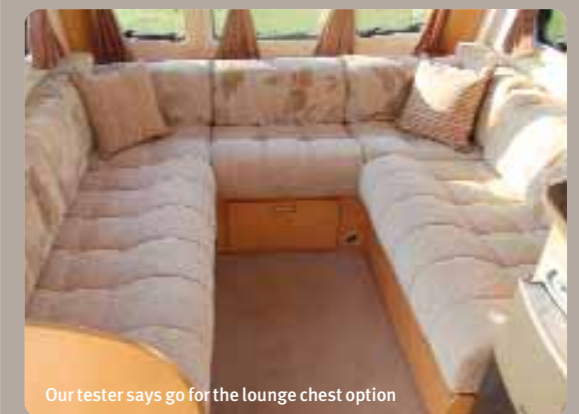
Okay, let's just get this out of the way first: the front portion of the wraparound seating is useless. Nobody can sit there in anything approaching comfort, so why bother with it?

Luckily, you don't have to – Bailey offers you the safety valve of a chest of drawers as an option, and I would urge anybody thinking of buying a 534 to exercise that option, even though you'll have to pay £280 to do so.

The deep discomfort of sitting along the front is in marked contrast to the front corners, which are very good. Because there's such a deep window shelf, your



There's little to fault in the well-planned kitchen



Our tester says go for the lounge chest option

“You feel good about the washroom the moment you open the very solid door”

RATINGS	
CONSTRUCTION	9
TOWABILITY	9
USABILITY	9
LIVING AND SLEEPING	8
KITCHEN	9
WASHROOM	9
LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS	9
VERDICT	9

RRP	£14,990 OTR
Internal length	5.68m (18ft 8in)
Shipping length	7.25m (23ft 9in)
Overall width	2.19m (7ft 2in)
Overall height	2.63m (8ft 8in)
Internal headroom	1.96m (6ft 5in)
MRO	1242kg (24.4cwt)
MTPLM	1458kg (28.7cwt)
User payload	216kg (4.4cwt)
Berths	4

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Above: convenient access to the portable water carrier – a massive plus point

Right: Olympus 534's spacious washroom exudes quality



head is well clear of the blinds and curtains that so often get in the way when you choose a front corner seat in most caravans. So, these are the seats of choice – but whoever's sitting on the nearside won't have the best view of the television, which is intended to perch on the nearside dresser top by the door.

The other corners – by the kitchen and entrance door respectively – would have been made more welcoming by a chunky bolster to lean into.

The lounge double makes up quickly and easily. A big solid wooden section on the

end of the slide-out base, which glides in and out without fuss, cuts down on the number of slats needed.

The permanent double bed is a good one. The mattress plays it safe, being neither too firm nor too springy, so most users should get a good night's sleep on it. The reading lights are mounted on the underside of the overhead lockers, well clear of heads and shoulders; they're adjustable, too. The thickly-padded headboard provides good support when sitting up to read, even without pillows.

The overhead shelf on the nearside is fine for specs and a paperback, but the lack of a lip around the edge means you'd be taking a bit of a risk putting your morning cuppa or a glass of water there. Still, it's not too much of a reach to the more substantial corner shelf next to the overhead lockers. The occupant on the other side can use the shelf beneath the mirror on the far wall.

A smart Venetian blind rolls up to reveal a hatch, through which you can watch TV in bed. If you'd rather watch stars, there's a sunroof directly above; so you can also let in some light in the morning without opening the window blind.

KITCHEN

All the essentials are included: spark-ignition cooker with three burners (one extra-large), separate oven and grill, fitted microwave and big fridge with full-width freezer compartment. The supersized sink

mentioned earlier can be covered by the supplied fitted acrylic chopping board to boost work/serving space – and you can still use the tap, albeit gently, when this cover's in place, thanks to the shaped recess for your fingers being in just the right place.

There's a modest-sized area of worktop between the sink and the hob that's perfectly adequate for meeting the needs of two people. Storage just isn't an issue – a tall, floor-mounted cupboard with two pull-out wire baskets and a drawer, an overhead locker and masses of open shelving are at your disposal. If your kitchen store cupboard is one that would rival Nigella Lawson's, however, there's an overhead locker on the offside that you could requisition, too.

WASHROOM

This has very much the feel of a full-on en-suite facility, being right at the back of the caravan, behind the bedroom. You feel good about it from the moment you open the exceptionally solid door and step in to be greeted by a room that's decidedly minimalist, but in the nicest possible way. It's clean, uncluttered and classy, with a thankfully carpet-free floor.

Storage is generous, as is the size of the sealed shower, which has a skylight directly above it to help clear condensation. There's just one little soap tray in here, though, which is a bit mean.

If a smart washroom with a spacious shower is high up on your list of priorities, you should certainly have a closer look at the Olympus 534.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

The main talking point here is the presence of so-called mood lighting strips, hidden from view on the underside of the overhead furniture and running along most of the lounge, kitchen and bedroom. It's not intended to offer serious illumination, but it does add a pleasant ambience of an evening.

The business of actually being able to see what you're doing is taken care of by three ceiling domes (with two brightness settings), one of which is in the washroom, operated by a pull-cord. There's a pair of reading lights in the lounge and in the bedroom, which also has a downlighter above the big mirror. Even the kitchen fares well, with the ceiling dome helping out and a striplight that almost – but not quite – extends to the hob.

The three mains sockets are where they need to be: one in the kitchen for the kettle, one on the dresser for the telly and one in the bedroom for the hair straighteners. The 12V master switch is by the entrance door.

VERDICT

This robust, handsome caravan has many excellent features. That wraparound seating isn't one of them, though. ■

Lift the fixed double bed and you'll reveal a huge amount of storage space

