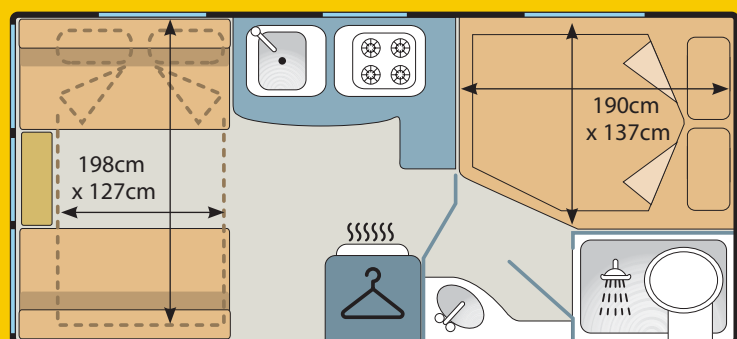




£9,775

Bailey
Ranger Series 5 460/4



Shipping length	6.24m	MiRO	972 kg
Shipping width	2.19m	MTPLM	1184 kg
Shipping height	2.71m	User payload	212kg

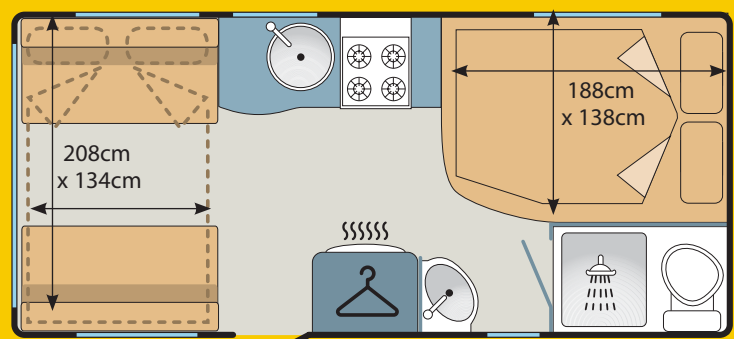


PHOTOS: PHIL RUSSELL ILLUSTRATIONS ALAN ELDRIDGE & ANDY PETERS



£9,995

Sprite
Alpine 4



Shipping length	6.4m	MiRO	995 kg
Shipping width	2.23m	MTPLM	1216 kg
Shipping height	2.7m	User payload	221 kg



BIG CARAVAN TEST



Lightweight fixed-bed vans are ideal for older caravanners who don't want to buy a large towcar

Fixed-bed tourers have only recently made inroads into the UK market, despite having been a Continental staple for years. Their late arrival in the UK means the original high-spec, heavy and, therefore, pricey fixed-bed vans are still a comparatively rare occurrence in the second-hand market, so you will be hard pressed to find a two- or three-year-old van for around £10,000.

Over the last few years, however, the layout has really taken off and there are now choices when buying new to suit every budget. We've selected two models that offer fixed-bed comfort for under £10,000. We've chosen these two models as they are both current and won't be superseded by new models for 2008. The Bailey Ranger Series 5 has been with us for over a year in its current guise, while the Sprite range was refreshed in early 2007. Both are very popular and represent a great value way to acquire a fixed-bed caravan.

Pitching and setting up

Bailey Ranger 460/4

4444444

Sprite Alpine 4

4444444

There is little difference between these when it comes to setting up. The Bailey's MTPLM is lower than the Sprite's, but only by 32kg; and the Alpine offers 11kg more usable payload. Both vans manage with regular rather than stabiliser hitches and one-way, button-assisted handbrakes. The Ranger's white plastic A-frame cover differs from the Alpine's by having the customary cut-outs and non-slip coating to allow owners to stand on the frame for cleaning. If you stand on the Sprite, all you'll have is a broken cover.

They remain neck-and-neck with the convenient location of their steady nuts: there's access through the sidewall at the front and they're easily reached at the rear.

Waste drains count against the Ranger, which has its openings tucked under the offside. You'll have to do get on your knees to make your connections. On the other hand, Sprite has mounted its drains flush with the sidewall.

The hook-up on the Bailey connects above the wheelarch on the nearside of the van, which is great for weight distribution as the battery is right over the axle, but getting the battery in or out of the locker is a pretty difficult job as a result. The Sprite's battery is more conventionally located, in a locker on the offside.

Inside, both vans have the main 12V power switch located right

next to the door, exactly where you would expect it to be. The Bailey groups all the main 12V controls here, with clear labelling and an analogue battery meter. In the Sprite, the controls are a little more spread out, with a light switch on the right-hand side as you enter; one improvement is that the battery meter is digital. The switches for the mains, water and space heating are tucked under the fixed bed, so they are difficult to get at, compared to those in the Bailey, where the controls are at the foot of the bed. With only minor criticisms of each, the scores are even for this round.

Lounge

Bailey Ranger 460/4

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Sprite Alpine 4

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These are fairly compact caravans and, with a fixed bed at the back, the lounge and kitchen are the areas that are likely to be compromised. In both cases, though, the seating areas are quite comfortable. The Sprite's recent range refreshment definitely makes the Bailey's interior appear more traditional. There's nothing wrong with the Bailey, but the darker woodwork makes the interior feel more cramped, even though there is very little difference in available space.

Where the Ranger scores very well is with the lighting. We've become accustomed to seeing Bailey interiors with lights almost everywhere. That's certainly the case here, with two spots under the roof lockers, two in the top corner, and four recessed lights in the wooden skylight surround. The Sprite boasts two under-locker lights, two mains-only lights in the corners and a single roof-mounted light, but it doesn't feel as well lit as the Bailey.

Along with the excellent lights, the Bailey's lounge has a large Heki skylight, making it a lovely, light place to sit. When the table is not in place, however, there is nowhere to rest a cup or glass, whereas Sprite has found space for a small folding shelf in the Alpine, which is a great addition.

The tables in both are a good height and just right for two people to dine. But things will get cramped for four people to sit at comfortably. Both vans make

provision for TV viewing, although the Sprite's fairly recent revamp embraces a hi-tech arrangement. Both vans provide a TV cabinet: the Sprite's will accommodate a flat-screen TV on a folding arm, while the Bailey makes do with a turntable in a cupboard large enough for a conventional television. That's fine, but it makes the area at the foot of the bed feel a lot more cramped.

From a practical viewpoint, the fitted carpet in the Sprite is an inconvenience. The Bailey has removable carpets, which gives you the option to leave the carpets at home, or remove them when inclement weather turns your site into a sea of mud.

The Sprite and Bailey both score well but in different ways in the



Fixed beds in both vans are very close in their size and amenities

lounge: the Sprite's table shelf and clever television treatment are cancelled out by the Bailey's removable carpets and better lighting throughout.

Kitchen

Bailey Ranger 460/4

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Sprite Alpine 4

4444444

The first sign of daylight between these two big-selling ranges opens up in the kitchen. The Bailey has a four-burner gas hob, oven and separate grill. This line-up trumps the Sprite's three-burner hob and combined oven/grill. In truth, though, we feel that this won't be a major issue for most caravanners. How often do you use four burners simultaneously? The Sprite



Well-arranged storage space and four-burner hob feature in kitchen



Dark décor makes the interior feel cramped



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Front dinette makes up easily into a comfortable bed. You can't pack things too close to the fusebox in nearside seat box. Lid of the fixed-bed box lifts high to make access fairly easy



has the larger fridge of the two, but with 96- and 113-litre units, you could argue that both have plenty of food storage for a couple, which is the number of people likely to be using these vans, despite their having four berths.

Away from the appliances, the Sprite loses ground. There is more storage space in the Sprite, but it's not as well used as in the Bailey. For example, in the large cupboard under the kitchen worktop, there is a good cutlery drawer, but beyond that is a fixed wire tray, and a bracket for holding the detachable sink drainer. With the gas taps in the bottom of the cupboard, the rest of the space is quite difficult to use effectively. Contrast this with the Bailey, whose equivalent cupboard has two wire drawers in addition to the cutlery drawer, a shelf and enough clear floor space for a large box of breakfast cereal.

Little separates the two when it comes to roof-locker space. The Sprite does have more food preparation space in normal use, but the fold-down flap over the foot of the bed in the Bailey boosts

the amount of work area substantially. Seeing both vans together, the Bailey just has the edge in the kitchen.

Washroom

Bailey Ranger 460/4



Sprite Alpine 4



The vans feature a very similar arrangement in their washrooms: corner toilets and shower cubicles are located alongside the head of the bed, and a corner sink in the bed area. The most immediate difference between the two is the



Steady nuts are in sidewall RIGHT Exterior hatch gives bed-box access

washroom door, with the Sprite's appearing to be far more substantial and sporting a domestic-style door handle.

Inside, though, the reverse is true. The Bailey's shower control is mounted solidly on the wall, while the Sprite controls are attached to a lightweight plastic moulding that seems flimsy. The Sprite's shower cubicle and toilet room are larger than the Bailey's, which gives less room next to the bed, and less space around the sink. Both vans have shower curtains, but the Bailey's pulls across the front of the toilet, while the Sprite's undoes from the door end. In both cases, anyone using the



Bailey Ranger 460/4
Pros and cons...

You'll like...

- ✓ Great fixed-bed and dinette that converts easily
- ✓ Flexible storage
- ✓ Well-equipped kitchen

You won't like...

- ✗ Staid appearance
- ✗ Restricted bed access
- ✗ Smaller washroom



toilet after someone has had a shower will get wet feet.

The toilets in both vans are identical Thetford cassette models, with a manual flush and a swivel bowl. One big difference though is the seat height. Sprite owners will sit a lot lower than those in the Bailey, so we'd suggest prospective buyers who are tall should investigate this before buying. Washroom storage is limited to



Slightly smaller washroom gives vanity area (right) a bit more space



a shelf in both vans, but the one in the Sprite is bigger and better than that in the Bailey. Under-sink storage at the corner vanity is significantly better in the Bailey, though, due to the extra room.

It's another category where it is virtually impossible to separate the two vans. The Sprite has a larger washroom with a good door, while the Bailey has the toilet at a better height and

the shower controls are more solidly mounted.

Beds

Bailey Ranger 460/4



Sprite Alpine 4



Fixed-bed vans have no excuse for a poor-quality bed, and it appears

that both manufacturers are aware of this and have made an effort to ensure their beds are excellent. Both vans have one-piece, 15cm-thick mattresses for their fixed-beds, and they are within a couple of centimetres of each other on their surface dimensions.

There are spacer boards for both beds to minimise condensation between the mattress and the wall. What the Sprite has over its rival is significantly better access to the bed, because the cabinet separating it from the kitchen is much smaller than the Ranger's.

Both beds also sport a pair of reading lights, although those in the Bailey both appear to be towards one side. The vans also have small shelves above the beds that are large enough for a cuppa and pair of glasses, but not so big that they get in the way. They also have curtains to separate the bed area from the kitchen and lounge.

The front beds in the Alpine and the Ranger are also impressive. The dinettes are made up with minimal effort into flat double beds using pull-out slats. Once again, there are spacer boards,

although in both vans there is only one light for the head of the bed.

Both vans look after their occupants well at night, but the better access in the Sprite and the more open feel in the bed area nudges it ahead in this round.

Storage

Bailey Ranger 460/4



Sprite Alpine 4



One of the big advantages of a fixed-bed tourer is the enormous amount of storage that is provided under the bed. Typically, the storage area is a long way back so it can't be used for stowing very heavy items. But certainly for bulky, lightweight items such as water and waste containers, bedding and outdoor clothing, it's useful space.

The bed bases in the Ranger and the Alpine lift up on gas struts for easy access. The Sprite's fixed bed has a rugged-looking aluminium frame, but the less hi-tech Bailey is actually better. Its base lifts



Good worktop, storage and big fridge make up for three-burner hob



End of the bed pedestal creates a more open layout



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Pull-out slats make converting the lounge to a double bed simple. Seat boxes are carpeted but the lids stay up on their own. The fixed bed frame is rugged, but access to the inside is difficult



much higher, permitting excellent access to the area underneath, and the space is largely unobstructed.

The Sprite has its water heater and Shurflo pump at the foot of the bed, while the low bed base makes getting to the back of it an exercise in contortion. Meanwhile, the Ranger has arranged this space far better and even provides an exterior door to it.

Up front, the Ranger remains in the lead with its seat boxes. The Sprite's bed boxes are carpeted, which isn't a problem unless you need to put damp or dirty items in them. The offside seat box has an unlabelled fusebox and the battery locker, which reduces the available storage space. There's a mains unit in the nearside box, but this barely has any impact on space at all. You can pack personal effects around it without worry, because you access the switches through a small door in the front of the seat base.

The Bailey fusebox is in the nearside bed box, and can't be packed in too tightly in case you need to get at the switches. The offside locker is unencumbered,

however, aside from a plug socket for the fridge. The Sprite has the advantage of self-supporting lids for the lockers, whereas those in the Bailey need to be held up.

The competitors come out fairly equal in their other storage arrangements. These are likely to be used as two-berth tourers and, consequently, there won't be a great deal of pressure on space. Both have plenty of roof lockers, plus space for a television. The front gas bottle lockers run about equal in terms of their size and usability.

The only other area worthy of comment is the wardrobe, which in both models sits adjacent to

the main access door opposite the kitchen. The Sprite's wardrobe is marginally taller and deeper than the Ranger's, and has the advantage in ease of access. The Alpine is much more spacious in this area of the van, plus its wardrobe is hinged on the left and opens towards the rear of the van. This makes getting at the contents easier and allows more light to illuminate the wardrobe from outside. The Bailey wardrobe door loses these benefits by swinging towards the right. Despite this, the Bailey wins this section because of the exterior access to the fixed-bed locker and the extra space available under the seat benches.



Drains are flush with sidewall RIGHT Gas locker is only outside storage



Sprite Alpine 4
Pros and cons...

- You'll like...**
- ✓ Great looks
 - ✓ Stylish interior
 - ✓ Innovative television arrangement
- You won't like...**
- ✗ Limited kitchen
 - ✗ Limited external storage
 - ✗ Awkward bed locker access



Buying and owning

Bailey Ranger 460/4

👍👍👍👍

Sprite Alpine 4

👍👍👍👍

There is simply nothing separating these models in terms of buying and owning. Both vans are popular models from the two biggest names in the industry, which



Curtain shuts shower from washroom door RIGHT Squeezed-in sink



ensures plenty of dealers to choose from come trade-in time. Fixed-bed layouts are very popular and look likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, so resale is likely to be pretty simple, too, particularly given the caravans' low weights.

The only issue that might work against them is the fact that they both are fairly basic in equipment terms, and many fixed-bed buyers

are looking for a little more luxury while they are on tour.

On warranties the models are equally matched. Both offer a single-year warranty on any faults in parts or construction, while covering major components and appliances for two years beyond that. Both boast six-year cover against water ingress, providing the vans are serviced annually by an approved

workshop. If you are buying a caravan in the UK at present, buying models from either of these manufacturers is a very safe investment.

Verdict

Bailey Ranger 460/4

👍👍👍👍

Sprite Alpine 4

👍👍👍👍

These are both superb caravans, and the biggest compliment that can be paid to them is that they don't feel like budget models. If you have the knotty problem of wanting a fixed-bed caravan without the weight of a luxury tourer, you have the tricky but ultimately nice problem of choosing between them.

They are priced within a couple of hundred pounds of each other, are light enough to tow with an ordinary family saloon. Both have all the bases covered in terms of equipment and, as far as we can ascertain, are both free of major faults. That makes choosing a winner very tough.

The Sprite is undoubtedly the better-looking caravan, thanks to the smooth sidewalls, crisp graphic and colour schemes and the fashionably light woodwork treatment inside. It also boasts a more open layout, thanks to the design of the pedestal at the end of the bed, which intrudes far less into the walkway than the rival Bailey model. Despite this though, it's the Bailey that has the edge in our test.

The Bailey scores big in a couple of ways. First, the underbed storage area in the Ranger is much more usable and flexible than that in the Sprite, thanks to the vinyl floor, exterior access and a tray for enclosing soggy items. It also has less equipment inside restricting the available storage space. The same details apply to the front-seat boxes. Factor in the practical, removable carpets and a better kitchen, and the Sprite's trump card – a larger washroom – is not enough to pull it level.

Turn over page for full caravan specifications

CARAVANS



Bailey Ranger Series 5 460/4



Sprite Alpine 4



Price	£9775	£9995
Berths	4	4
Shipping length	6.24m	6.4m
Shipping width	2.19m	2.23m
Shipping height	2.71m	2.7m
Internal length	4.63m	4.74m
Internal height	1.9m	1.95m
MIRO	972kg	995kg
MTPLM	1184kg	1216kg
User payload	212kg	221kg
Awning size	911cm	895cm

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

External equipment	AL-KO galvanised steel chassis with one-way assisted handbrake, omni-directional TV aerial, two-piece aluminum sidewall.	AL-KO galvanised steel chassis with one-way assisted handbrake, omni-directional TV aerial, one-piece aluminum sidewall.
Heating	Truma dual-fuel blown-air and space heater. Truma dual-fuel water heater.	Truma dual-fuel blown-air and space heater. Truma dual-fuel water heater.
Lounge	Blinds and flyscreens to all windows. Removable carpets. Heki rooflight. Two directional spots and four recessed spots in roof.	Blinds and flyscreens to all windows. Fitted carpets. Heki rooflight. Two directional spots, two mains lights and one roof-mounted light.
Kitchen	96 litre Thetford fridge. Spinflo Midi oven and separate grill, and four-burner hob.	Thetford 107-litre fridge. Spinflo combination oven/grill, and three-burner hob.
Washroom	Thetford swivel bowl with manual flush. Chrome-finish separate shower control.	Thetford swivel bowl with manual flush. Chrome-finish separate shower control. Domestic-style door.
Security	CRIS ID number on windows and chassis. Concealed security tag.	CRIS ID number on windows and chassis. Concealed security tag.

OTHER FEATURES

Options	Spare wheel (£95).	AL-KO Stabiliser (£250). Spare wheel and carrier (£165). Door flyscreen (£75).
Warranty	3 years parts; 6 years body.	3 years parts; 6 years body.
Verdict	<p>For Ranger is good in all areas, especially storage.</p> <p>Against The centre of the van feels cramped and the looks are a bit staid.</p> <p>Verdict A really competent caravan with no major faults</p> <p>👍👍👍👍</p>	<p>For Sprite looks great, has a good specification and a great layout.</p> <p>Against Oven lacks a separate grill. Kitchen and exterior storage is weak, while access under fixed bed is difficult.</p> <p>Verdict A better floor plan than the Bailey and worth serious consideration.</p> <p>👍👍👍👍</p>

TURN TO PAGE 141 FOR A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Turn over for **The Perfect Match**