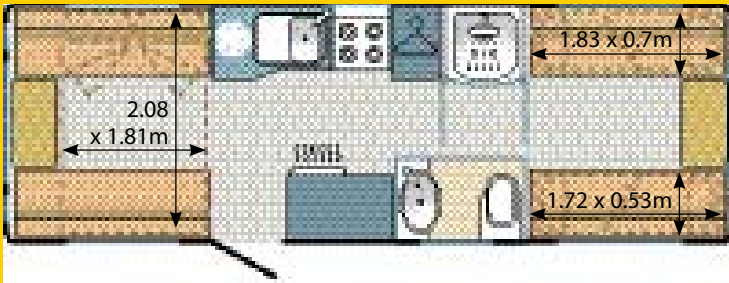




**Avondale**  
Argente 650-6

£15,995



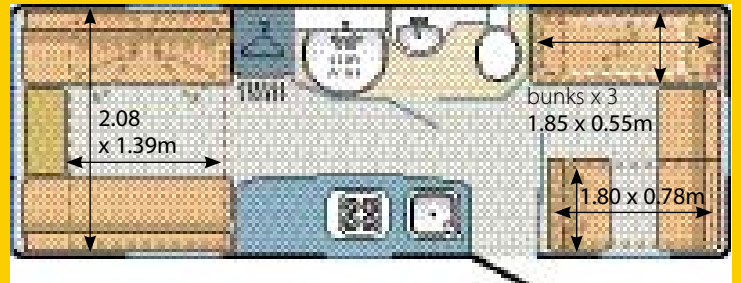
Shipping length	7.93m
Shipping width	2.22m
Shipping height	2.59m

MiRO	1451kg
MTPLM	1700kg
User payload	249kg



**Bailey**  
Senator S6 Carolina

£16,800



Shipping length	7.89m
Shipping width	2.28m
Shipping height	2.58m

MiRO	1443kg
MTPLM	1759kg
User payload	316kg



# BIG

## CARAVAN TEST



**Twin-axle six berths with a second lounge stop large families from getting under each other's feet**

**M**uch of the innovative caravan design over the past model year has been in the six-berth market. One of the vogue layouts that everyone has been introducing is a six-berth with a fixed double bed at the back of the van, such as Fleetwood's Sonata Symphony and Bailey's Ranger 620/6. But the limitation of that arrangement is that everyone has to relax in the front lounge. If the kids want an early night, or mum and dad want a bit of peace while a board game is being fought over, a six-berth with two separate lounge areas is the better bet.

We've pitched a pair of vans against each other that approach this problem from different directions. Avondale's Argente 650-6 takes a traditional tack, providing two bench seats at the rear that are converted into four bunks, two on either side of the aisle.

In the opposite corner, Bailey's designers have decided that three is the magic number and created an unusual triple-bunk arrangement in the new Carolina. The Argente is one of our favourite big six-berths, so how will it stand up to the new Senator?

### Pitching and setting up

#### Avondale Argente 650-6

📊📊📊📊

#### Bailey Senator S6 Carolina

📊📊📊📊

No one in the caravan market is as good at providing value for money as Bailey. As with last year's Pageant range, the new Senator makes comparable products from competing manufacturers look spartan. When setting up the caravan, this is at its most conspicuous. Unlike the Avondale, the Bailey has AL-KO Secure wheel locks supplied as standard, as well as satellite tracking and an alarm. To ensure you get to your site safe and sound, both vans are fitted

with AL-KO AKS stabilisers as standard, but the Senator also provides the AL-KO ATC active stability control system.

Inside, the Argente and the Senator are similarly specified, with standard-issue Truma gas-and-240V space and water heaters, and inboard water pumps.

But, besides falling short on security kit, you can find the Argente's other shortcomings if you look carefully. The Bailey has the benefit of heavy-duty corner steadies and more thermally efficient framed windows.

The Argente fights back by providing a single-piece exterior door, which we prefer to the Bailey's split stable door. The main entrance is also fitted with an

integrated blind and a sliding window, which are welcome additions as well.

To our eye, the Avondale looks better, too, thanks to its contoured GRP front-panel, stylish graphics and distinctive alloy wheels. We also appreciate the benefit of mounting the gas bottles in the centre of the van. That potentially moves 20kg away from the caravan's hitch head to the axle; it is great for stability but slightly compromises the interior layout.

In terms of weights, the Avondale is 59kg lighter than the Bailey, but it has less equipment, so that's understandable. There is an extra 67kg of payload available in the Bailey, too.

Both these caravans are very conventional, and simple to set-up and use. All told, though, the wealth of security equipment, ATC stability control and the other differences in specification help the Bailey to draw first blood.

### Lounge

#### Avondale Argente 650-6

📊📊📊📊

#### Bailey Senator S6 Carolina

📊📊📊📊

In terms of front lounges, each of the rivals does a good job. Typical of its approach, Bailey has festooned the Senator with loads of lights, including four spotlights under the front lockers, two mains lights in the front corners and four recessed halogen spots in the surround of the Heki rooflight. The Argente provides a pleasantly bright place to sit, too, with four spotlights and two mains lights, supplemented by a small, roof-mounted fluorescent.

Handsome furnishings are used inside both, with attractive upholstery, bolsters and throw cushions. The Bailey has more room in the front lounge, with longer seat benches.

The TV stands are roughly the same, although the Argente reserves a spot for the set on the far side of the entrance door; this distance helps everyone in the front lounge get a good view. Whoever sits nearest the tube in the Bailey stands a good chance of getting square eyes from being too close to the standard 17in screen. However, the Bailey's free-standing table is the best we've seen in any caravan.

At the rear, the Avondale has generous seating, and the drawer

unit in the centre provides plenty of room for a TV set; the aerial and power connectors are next to the bottom drawer. It's short on lighting, however, with two spots under the lockers and a single roof-mounted fluorescent. The backrest cushions are too low to offer optimum comfort.

The Carolina looks like a clear winner, except the three fixed bunks rob the area of a lot of space: you may be able to seat four at the back, but they have to be on good terms. The high-mounting point for a flat-screen TV is excellent for the three people who can see it. If your kids like to plug the PlayStation in when they are on holiday, this arrangement works brilliantly. There's good



**Kitchens in the Bailey (top) and the Avondale have similar spec**

illumination and a separate table especially designed to be used here, although in the Avondale, the main table can easily be deployed at either end of the van.

The standard television and superior lighting nearly won this round for the Bailey, but the flexibility for daytime use built into the Argente's layout helped it finish neck-and-neck.

### Kitchen

#### Avondale Argente 650-6

📊📊📊📊

#### Bailey Senator S6 Carolina

📊📊📊📊

Despite putting their kitchens in different places, the two manufacturers provide basic



Toilet and shower cubicles are on opposite sides of the gangway

arrangements that are very similar, and consequently, they are hard to separate. Both have Spinflo cookers, with Avondale favouring the full-size, counter-to-floor unit, whereas the Bailey has a recessed hob with an undercounter separate oven and grill. Both have four gas burners, electric ignition and little to complain about. Both vans also come complete with standard issue microwaves mounted high up. There are similar amounts of workspace, too.

Once again, though, the Bailey outscores – rather than knocks out – its rival, this time with the large

fridge and flexible storage. No matter how clever the Dometic series 8 fridge is, at the end of the day, it keeps food cold, much like the Thetford fridge in the Avondale. What does make it better is the extra capacity. You can get a lot more food into the Bailey's 115-litre fridge than in the Avondale's 81-litre model.

Elsewhere, while high-level storage for plates and cups in both vans is roughly equivalent, the Bailey is a bit more thoughtful lower down. The large cupboard under the worktop is deep and you could struggle to reach things at the back. But there is plenty of



Nearside gas locker reduces noseweight and puts those 20kg over the axles



Shower cubicle gets no natural light, so it feels claustrophobic



Main table can be used in either of the Argente's two dinettes

room for large cereal boxes and other bulky items, while the pull-out wire trays on the far left are great for storing fresh produce and let you see what is in the bottom drawers without having to scabble around. Still, the cutlery drawer is hardly generous for a six-berth caravan. The Argente's large storage cupboard works well, but on the whole, kitchen storage here is limited.

### Washroom

Avondale Argente 650-6

444444

Bailey Senator S6 Carolina

444444

Aside from the rear lounges, the place where the layouts of these two vans really differ is in the washrooms. The Avondale approach is to split the shower and toilet areas on either side of the van, leaving a walkway between them which can be closed off for greater privacy. Bailey has opted for a more conventional side washroom.

The Avondale has a good toilet area. It's compact, but the space



has been well used. The Thetford C200 swivelling toilet sits towards the back of the compartment, with a vanity unit occupying the front wall. This has mirrors on three sides, a useful amount of counter space and storage underneath. Across the walkway, the door to the shower compartment swings across the walkway and locks off the front of the van from the rear, with a concertina curtain separating the rear of the van. The



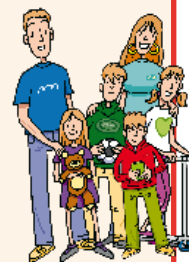
Ample seating in the rear lounge still falls short with low backrests

**Avondale Argente 650-6**

**Pros and cons...**

- You'll like...**
- ✓ Flexible layout
  - ✓ Great exterior appearance
  - ✓ Good storage

- You won't like...**
- ✗ Loses out on equipment
  - ✗ Very dark shower room
  - ✗ Bunk bed mattresses are very thin



Argente's storage options include a clothes cupboard that may well be more useful than a wardrobe



MAIN Rear bunks lack reading lamps and bottom mattresses are thin INSET Double bed in front is spacious and comfortable

shower cubicle is less successful than the toilet. With no window or rooflight to provide natural light, it feels dark and a little claustrophobic for our tastes.

The Bailey's washroom suffers for providing restricted space, but it has a substantial door, handle and lock, which are just about up to domestic standards. The headline-grabbing aspects are undoubtedly the heated towel rail and the new Thetford C250 toilet.

This has a larger waste tank and wider seat than the C200 in the Avondale, and there is just enough space alongside the vanity unit to use it comfortably. The sink is fine, although we'd like some more storage for small items. The cupboard under the sink is OK, but difficult to see into or access when the washroom door is shut. The shower cubicle is excellent.

In large family vans, the washroom is unlikely to see as

much use as in a small van used for rallies so we can forgive both vans a few shortcomings in this area. Both have their pluses and minuses, but we can't split them. The Avondale's shower lets it down while the Bailey needs better storage and is short on elbow room.

**Beds**

**Avondale Argente 650-6**



**Bailey Senator S6 Carolina**



There was a dead heat finish in the main double-bed part of our test. In both competitors, the front lounge converts easily into a good-size bed. With the cushions arranged in the best way, you get a flat, comfortable place to spend the night.

It's at the back of the vans where things shape up differently. The Bailey's three fixed bunks are great in as much as they are uniform in size, the mattresses are adequate and each has its own light and window. This way, they don't feel too cramped. The floor-level bunk

may seem like the short straw when beds are being given out, but many youngsters will enjoy the novelty of scrambling into it.

The fourth bed in this area is a wide single bed, which is made up of the dinette table dropping into the seat bases and the cushions being arranged on it. We tried several combinations of cushions before we found the best. The result here is a wide, adequately long single bed that will be highly prized among older children and teenagers who don't want to be stuck in a seemingly constricting bunk.

Although well planned for day use, the Argente's rear quarters are not as good by night. The bunks that are assembled here are a pretty standard arrangement, with the top bunk stowed against the wall by day and unfurled and pulled into place at night. The top bunks are only suitable for younger kids, but the lower ones suffer from quite thin mattresses which may reduce the comfort of young adults sleeping on them. There is also the issue of storing the bunk cushions. The ladders 



There's plenty of lighting throughout, including rooflights and spots

and mattresses for the top bunks need to be put away during the day, eating up valuable wardrobe or locker space. Factor in that bottom bunk dwellers don't have their own lights, and the Argente's rear bedroom falls behind the Bailey's in terms of comfort and convenience.

### Storage

Avondale Argente 650-6

👉👉👉👉

Bailey Senator S6 Carolina

👉👉👉👉

Both these caravans are designed to accommodate six people so

storage is a serious concern. In both cases, there are plenty of roof lockers to go around, both front and back. But the Avondale in particular is a little light on wardrobe space. There is a full-height wardrobe, but it is rather narrow, and the bunk ladders are stored inside, too, further restricting storage. It is redeemed slightly with the shelved area at the bottom, accessed through a separate door which is great for keeping shoes out of the way.

Also, on the opposite side of the Argente, there is an unusual, but very welcome shelved cupboard. this could prove to be ideal for



Washroom is cramped, but the shower is actually quite good



Carolina's table is the best we have seen in any caravan tested

folded shirts, jumpers and similar items. This is an unusual storage space for a caravan but it works very well and is arguably more useful than a huge wardrobe.

The Avondale also scores well on low-down locker storage. The bed boxes in the front lounge have lids that lift to reveal generous quantities of space, while at the back, remove the seat cushions to get at the sliding slats. These are more fiddly to use, but they do provide good storage for clothes, bedding and other lightweight though bulky items.

You will find quite ample storage options in the Senator Carolina's front lounge as well. The selection here includes an excellent drawer on metal runners; this feature makes it easy to get at the space under the beds, but it also reduces the amount of usable space.

At the rear, the seat lockers for the Senator's small dinette provide good storage, albeit not quite as much acreage as in the Avondale. That said, the bedding for the three bunks can remain in place during the day, so it could be



argued there is less need for storage than in the Avondale. If required, the bottom bunk in the Bailey can be stowed, to provide space when the bed isn't required. For items in plastic crates or bags, this is useful, although it might not be as usable or tidy as a bed locker.

Although this part of the test has ended up being pretty tight, the Avondale still nudges the Bailey out on this one. Six-berth



Front locker lid lifts on a gas strut to reveal plenty of storage space



Four can squeeze in at the table, but they have to be on good terms

**Bailey Senator Series 6 Carolina**

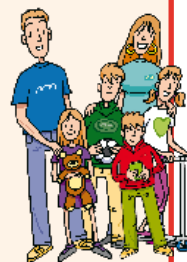
**Pros and cons...**

**You'll like...**

- ✓ Innovative six-berth layout
- ✓ Great value for money
- ✓ Excellent security

**You won't like...**

- ✗ Won't win any beauty contests
- ✗ Could use extra storage
- ✗ Washroom is cramped



**Burglar alarm and other security kit will add to the value of the Series 6 Senator as a trade-in**



Three fixed bunks face wide single bed in the rear (above)



Easy to arrange cushions to get comfortable front double

caravans are often a little tight on storage, but the Avondale does the better job in providing it.

**Buying and owning**

**Avondale Argente 650-6**

👉👉👉👉

**Bailey Senator S6 Carolina**

👉👉👉👉

Bailey is pretty unassailable when it comes to buying and owning. Lots of dealers sell them and even

those who don't are very happy to take them in part exchange, because they are very popular on the second-hand market. The fact that the Senator range is packed with goodies will certainly amplify this further.

The only fly in the ointment could be that the Senator isn't as attractive as the big Argente, and some people will wince at the ongoing cost of the Tracker subscription. If that's the case,

you can simply not pay and not have the protection but we think that's very short-sighted.

Argente is a very well-known range from a big name manufacturer, so there will be few problems in finding either a dealer from whom to buy it, or one who'll take it as a trade-in.

Where the Avondale misses out is with the extra specification that is standard on the Senator. Bailey has shoehorned so much stuff into the Senator that it is stunning value for money new, and will be attractive second hand. For the money, the Argente looks a bit light on extras and consequently loses out here.

new layout. It's not quite that clear cut, however. The Argente certainly loses out badly on general features, but the Bailey's innovative take may turn out to be a handicap. The rear of the Carolina, with its three bunks and small dinette, is great if you have three or four kids to pack away at the end of the day.

But if you just want a spacious caravan for four, with occasional extra beds, the Avondale is a more flexible prospect. The Avondale's super-conventional rear lounge will suit some buyers much more than the Bailey's fixed triple-deck arrangement, regardless of the baubles that come as standard.

Despite that reservation, however, the Bailey is the winner of this test. With the exception of the staid exterior appearance and a concern about storage, we feel that, if buyers liked both layouts equally, the Bailey would be the one most would tow home. We would agree.

**Verdict**

**Avondale Argente 650-6**

👉👉👉👉

**Bailey Senator S6 Carolina**

👉👉👉👉

Looked at on paper, it appears that the Bailey is a clear winner of this test. The all-new Senator range has a super spec list and very keen pricing as standard, but in the Carolina, it also adds an innovative

**Turn over page for full caravan specifications**