



TOUR DE FRANCE IN A BAILEY PEGASUS 534

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“The Bailey Pegasus 534 was our passport to adventure”, say Liz and Dave King.

We took a prototype model on an extended trip to France to test the on-road performance and practical features of this award-winning new model.

We’d been asked to sign a confidentiality agreement before participating in the Pegasus Project; oh what fun this was going to be, we decided. What a privilege, too.

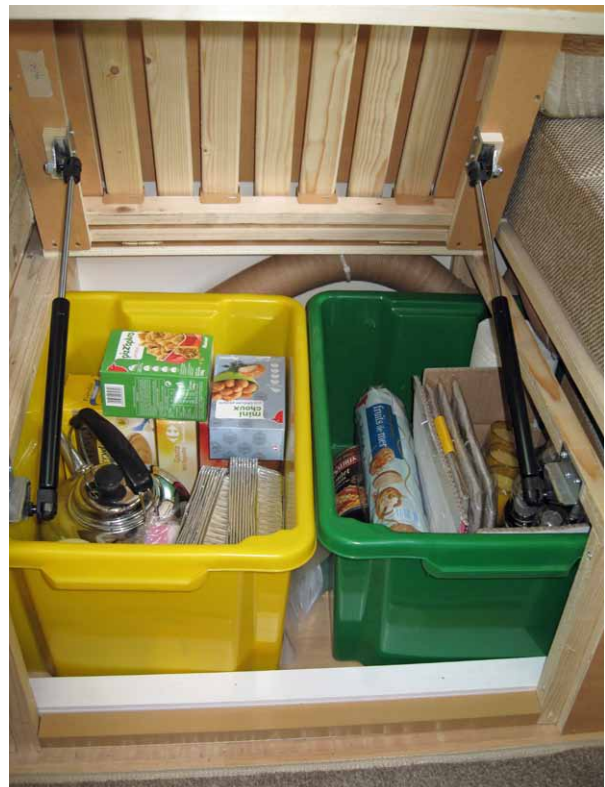
“Where can you rigorously test a caravan and can you keep it under wraps. Can you do incognito?” asked Team Pegasus leader and Bailey’s managing director, Nick Howard. We thought hard for just a second and replied simply.

“France, yes and yes, we’ll do our best”

“Treat it hard” was the nebulous instruction at the briefing when we collected the caravan from its safe house in Bristol. To our surprise it had some decals on it and the Bailey logo on the gas locker and wheel caps. Incognito, eh? Gee, thanks, Team Pegasus.

The first job was to create some disguise for the gas locker door; a black bin bag did the job well. We unloaded the contents of our Bailey Senator Arizona into the Pegasus 534; initially we thought we wouldn’t be able to find homes for the paraphernalia that we keep on board; well a caravan is a touring home isn’t it? We needn’t have worried as the 6ft 5ins internal headroom, achieved by the flat panel roof construction





gave increased space in the overhead lockers, and the new design lift-up front bed boxes held more than we expected. And there was the under bed storage space too; we used plastic storage crates from our local DIY store in all the low level spaces and ice-cream style plastic boxes in all the overhead lockers. What a doddle.

The interior walls are not designed to be drilled into, so another quick trip to the DIY store saw us purchase baskets with suction hooks to be used in the kitchen and shower room, and suction hooks for towels in the shower room.

Smuggling the Pegasus 534 out of, and back into, the country was achieved with the assistance of leading Dover-Dunkirk ferry company Norfolkline; the secret nature of the mission was explained and we were asked no questions but the company sectioned off part of one of the freight decks for this covert assignment.

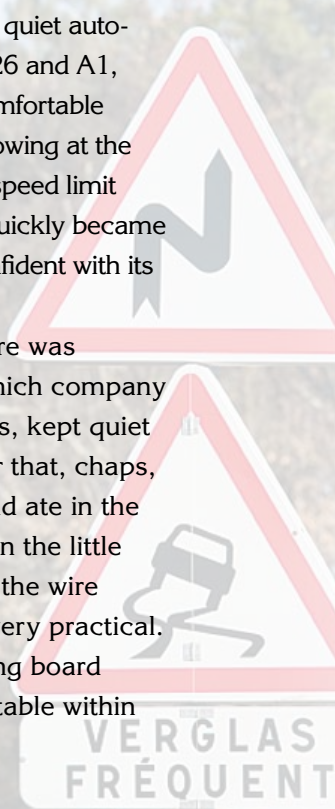
we heard a loud popping sound; we knew immediately what had happened but in case we didn't, a beret wearing French man informed us "vous avez une crevaison!"

We planned our route carefully to cover 2000 towing miles and we drove off the ferry at Dunkirk in warm sunshine, just a taste of the weather that was to accompany us all through France, and headed south to our first campsite, east of Paris at

Berny-Rivière. The Pegasus towed well down the quiet auto-routes A26 and A1, it was comfortable relaxed towing at the national speed limit and we quickly became more confident with its

performance.

We were noticed on site and there was speculation about the model and which company made it. We absorbed the comments, kept quiet and had a few giggles, so thanks for that, chaps, if you're reading this. We cooked and ate in the caravan; we kept herbs and spices in the little slide out top locker and we thought the wire basket storage under the sink was very practical. We liked the new style sink, chopping board and drainer, and found the pull-out table within





the multi-position chest of drawers useful. The seating was comfortable and after a couple of glasses of wine we extended the foot rests and passed a quiet evening.

We moved on to stay with friends, who own campsites only a few miles apart, Camping du Pont de Bourgogne and Camping de Tournus, both quiet sites just off the A26 autoroute. Although another Bailey caravan pitched right next to us, during the evening (there were dozens of empty pitches) Pegasus didn't seem to attract the owners' attention. So far, so good, phew.

We left to continue south down the busy autoroute and up into the Ardèche mountains, via steep and narrow roads, with some bumpy surfaces; it's a route we've travelled many times in the past and we knew that Pegasus would be tested, but it was not daunted at all.

We settled quickly on a fully serviced pitch in the shade at Kawan Village Domaine Les Ranchisses. It was still only late May and we were experiencing temperatures in excess of 30°C each day. We headed for the swimming pools and Wellness Centre, before sampling a glass of chilled wine from the campsite's own vineyard.

It was here that we discovered another benefit of the Alu-Tech body shell profile, the extra wide window shelf for birthday cards! By now we'd slept in the Pegasus 534 for several nights and

found the bed quite comfortable.

We stayed for six nights, not long enough to enjoy this largely unexplored area of France, but it was time to move on further south to the beautiful medieval town of Sommières. This journey was not without incident, but we blame the French for that. We approached across the narrow bridge and as we turned right, to drive along the river side, a tight turn given the traffic on our right queuing to cross the bridge, we heard a loud popping sound; we knew immediately what had happened but in case we didn't, a beret wearing French man informed us "vous avez une crevaison," a puncture; the nearside tyre had hit the high and very sharp kerb edge.

It was lunchtime in the small town, with the riverside cafés full of diners, the kitchens on the opposite side of the narrow street, waiters darting through the traffic and the French heading home for lunch. The spare wheel carrier was on the offside, so were in the middle of the narrow street extricating the spare wheel. We caused chaos for several hundred metres in the narrow street as we changed the tyre and it was bit dodgy when a bus came along! We realised that thanks to the new construction method the caravan was very rigid and made it easier to jack up.

Castel Camping Domaine De Massereau was our base for the next few days and it was here



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that we were blogged! This was not unexpected, but if you're reading this "Malc", thanks for making us laugh, how wrong your assumptions were! Thanks too for your kind comments sent to Bailey after the official Pegasus launch; we were just doing our job!

It was during a day out to Aigues-Mortes in the Petite Camargue that we fell in love, no not with each other, but with the pretty medieval city with its 1650 metres of fortified walls that are still intact, many restaurants, shops and cafés. We walked the little streets for hours and indulged in some local gastronomy.

It was time to head north via the Millau bridge to Castel Camping Le Caussanel on the banks of Lac de Pareloup for a few nights; we visited Rodez which didn't impress us.

Heading further north, homeward bound, we met strong winds on the A75 but the caravan was stable all the way on our way to Camping Indigo Royat near Clermont Ferrand a city famous for its chain of volcanoes. We visited The Puy-de-Dôme one of the highest of these and well-known for its highly visible telecommunication antennas. The city is home to Michelin tyre corporate headquarters.

Castel Camping Manoir de Bezolle an English owned site in Burgundy was our next stop and again there were plenty of English people on site;

we pitched as far away as we could, and enjoyed fantastic views, but nobody asked us about Pegasus.

The blogging continued and the caravan was "very obviously an unfinished model with a bin bag on the front." What fun!

A newly built campsite, Kawan Resort le Lac d'Orient was our next safe haven, also run by friends of ours and it was nice to catch up with them. Pegasus 534 was now well and truly our touring home and we began to feel a little sentimental that we'd be returning it to its Bristol refuge, in a few weeks time.

Kawan Village Château du Gandspette only 30 minutes drive from Dunkirk was our last retreat on this tour de France and it was here that we here that we finished our detailed report on the Pegasus as requested by Team Pegasus leader. We highlighted several key points we liked and some we really felt needed reviewing. Some of these aspects were relevant to the Pegasus 534, others to the model range.

And so it was Mission Accomplished and in discussion with Nick Howard when we returned the Pegasus 534 to Bristol, he told us that from our report he'd identified 24 issues and these were changed in production models.

Pegasus passed the rigorous test with flying colours, and one day all caravans will be made this way.

WHERE WE STAYED



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Dave and Liz King are experienced writers and caravanners who have worked in the caravan industry for many years. Their interest in travel, tourism, fine food and wines has led them and their caravan to some of the finest locations, especially in France.



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