

DESIGN AWARDS 2009 SPECIAL

April 2009

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CARAVAN
CLUB



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WELCOME FROM... LAND ROVER

Welcome to *The Caravan Club Design Awards 2009 Special* supplement, which this year is sponsored by Land Rover. These prestigious awards search for the most innovative and exciting caravans on the market. Everything from interior to external design and security is analysed by the judges and technical experts.

Land Rover knows what it's like to have its vehicles put to the test and the company has won an array of coveted awards from around the globe – testament not only to its vehicles' versatility but also to the continued strength of British engineering.

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CONTENTS

3 LAND ROVER PRIZE DRAW

Your chance to win a once-in-a-lifetime Land Rover experience in Morocco

4 CARAVAN DESIGN AWARDS 2009

Seven classes and over 40 caravans – what won and why...

11 LIGHTWEIGHT LEISURE TRAILER AWARDS 2009

If you're in the market for a lightweight leisure trailer, be sure to read this...



WELCOME FROM... THE CARAVAN CLUB

The Caravan Club's prestigious Caravan Design and Lightweight Leisure Trailer Awards are the only ones of their kind in the caravan industry.

The aim of the Awards is to provide Club members, and caravanners in general, with fair and objective assessments of the caravans and leisure trailers submitted for scrutiny – all manufacturers are invited to enter. The Awards are also intended to provide manufacturers with unbiased feedback, which helps them to improve the design of their products.

Well supported and respected by the industry, the Caravan Design Awards have been running for 14 years, while the Lightweight Leisure Trailer Awards are in their seventh year.

This year, 59 vehicles were submitted in the two categories, with judging taking place at February's National Boat, Caravan & Outdoor Show, held at Birmingham's NEC.

The panel of independent judges and technical researchers follows rigorous scoring checklists and assesses everything from sitting comfort, kitchen design, storage, switches, wiring, security and repair and warranty arrangements to general safety. No stone is left unturned.

We hope you enjoy this special supplement – it really is a source of essential information.



GO BEYOND



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- Only one entry per person will be allowed.
- Employees of Land Rover, their families, dealerships, associated companies and agencies are excluded from entry.
- The closing date for entries is 29.12.09. The draw will take place on 05.01.10. The winners will be notified by 12.01.10 by post. The names of the winners will be made available to those enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope and applying to Land Rover Administration, FREEPOST TK494, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 5UN in an envelope marked "Morocco Results".
- No cash alternative will be offered.
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STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

CARAVAN DESIGN JUDGE MICHAEL LE CAPLAIN REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS OF THIS YEAR'S GRUELLING COMPETITION

If it's February NEC show time, then it must also be time for the Club's highly-respected annual Caravan Design Awards.

This is a tough nut for manufacturers to crack, for the judging team examines and analyses absolutely every facet of a given contender, from both technical and habitation design perspectives. So in-depth is the judging that it

takes a team of two technical researchers and four design judges four days to evaluate all the entrants – 41 of them this year – on 10 different aspects.

If a given caravan impresses this hard-to-please team enough to take top position in its stipulated category, then it has certainly earned its place among the winners.

CLASS 1 ANY CARAVAN UNDER £11,000

WINNER: **Sprite Alpine 2**
Price: £10,371

In layout terms, the Alpine 2 is pretty much a direct rival for the second-placed Xplore, but one of the front settees is comfortably the biggest of the top three in this class (the nearside example is a whopping 6ft 3in, its offside counterpart slightly shorter at 5ft 11in owing to the presence of the kitchen), and the separate shower in the end washroom is simply enormous.

The kitchen's the best of the top trio, too, and build quality is superior – the sheer thickness of the washroom door in particular genuinely belies this caravan's budget status.

The little Sprite isn't quite perfect – my feet slipped occasionally on the loose-lay removable carpets, while I imagine even Swift Group would acknowledge that its exterior styling could use a bit of a nip and tuck here and there – but my scorecard conclusion was pretty emphatic: 'The ultimate credit-crunch caravan, perhaps?'



Exterior needs refinement but inside the Sprite is superb, boasting huge sofas and excellent build quality



RUNNER-UP Xplore 452 Price: £10,595

Xplore is Explorer Group's new entry level range to take on Bailey's all-conquering Ranger at its own game.

The 452 is the smallest Xplore, but still conforms to a popular and proven layout – end washroom two-berth, with separate shower cubicle and a pair of 6ft-long front settees that can, just about, be classified as potential single beds. This despite being a foot shorter than the Bailey overall.



Payload is down on the Bailey but it's the lighter caravan of the two.

Kitchen space is boosted by the dresser opposite – my notes only complain about a lack of positive-locking roof locker catches and bland exterior styling.

THIRD PLACE Bailey Ranger Series 6 460/4 Price: £10,517

The popular Ranger Series 6 – here in en-suite French bed 460/4 guise – is a cracking little caravan. Its front seats may not be big enough to act as single beds but for couples looking to occasionally entertain visiting family and friends, it's hard to beat.

New roof locker doors will polarise opinion, but there's no arguing with the storage space.



Kitchen worktop space is only average, but all the kit is there, including a full cooker.

The washroom is necessarily compact, but equipment extends to the latest Thetford C250 cassette toilet, complete with large-capacity wheeled holding tank.

THE BEST OF THE REST

Just two further caravans remain in this class once you remove the top three: the Adria Altea 542 DT and the Caravelair Antares Luxe 425.

Of the two, the Slovenian-built Adria is arguably the better – rock-hard seats and cheap and nasty plastic locker stays notwithstanding – thanks to a general feeling of airiness and high build quality. The triple bunk layout, while nothing new, is particularly family-friendly, too.

CLASS 2 FAMILY CARAVAN £11,000-£15,000

WINNER: **Bailey Pageant Series 7 Ardennes**
Price: £14,995

In my personal scoresheet notes, I wrote: 'This is the first genuinely innovative caravan I've seen in years.'

The layout of the caravan, formerly known as the 'Brambler' (named after The Caravan Club members who designed it in Bailey's recent competition), will probably appear more familiar to anyone who has ever owned a motor caravan, but even then, the Ardennes' ingenious forward and rear lounges, central L-shaped kitchen and king-sized washroom – not to mention that massive sloping central dresser – will come across as something really rather special. What's particularly interesting about the Ardennes is that its floorplan shouldn't really work – the passageway from the kitchen through to the rear dinette, for one thing, should be prohibitively tight, but arching the unit away from the forward dinette to the main entrance door negates the problem altogether.

The unequal-length rear dinette, too, looks all wrong on paper, but somehow works really well in practice, while no-one will, we're sure, complain about the full-width end washroom and separate shower. The ultimate family caravan? Maybe, but couples will love it too.



RUNNER-UP Sterling Europa 530 Price: £13,237

Swift Group entered no fewer than three caravans into this category, so it, like the rest of us, clearly feels that this is a crucial sector of the market to crack.

This Europa 530 sports the same basic layout as the Coachman Amara 550/5 which came third in this category, right down to the amidships washroom, separate shower compartment and nearside kitchen, and manages to include the same mains/TV aerial points in both dinettes, making it particularly family-friendly.

There's not quite the same feeling of utter hewn-from-a-solid-block-of-titanium solidity you get from the Coachman, but despite Swift's

oft-commented-upon lightweight space-frame locker design, it doesn't feel all that far behind overall. It seems a bit more modern in there, too, and lighting in particular is better than most, not least in the washroom.

Impressively, the combination of two dinettes squeezed into a single-axle caravan, measuring less than 24ft overall, doesn't compromise the kitchen, either, with perfectly acceptable worktop space opened up by Swift's usual removable plastic drainer. A kit list extends to a standard-fit microwave oven, a 107-litre fridge and a dual-fuel cooker.

In fact, with the competitive price and real-world weights (comfortably less than 1500kg fully-laden) factored into the equation, I declared the 530's familiar layout to be a 'golden oldie' and 'highly impressive'.



THIRD PLACE Coachman Amara 550/5 Price: £14,637

Coachmans always feel beautifully made, and this family-friendly Amara 550/5 is a classic case in point.

Some will take kindly to neither the framed and handle-less locker doors that are bereft of positive locking catches, nor the kitchen, which is short on worktop space, but as a family layout, it's a winner. Twin dinettes at either end of the caravan

guarantee night-time privacy and day-time sanity for mum and dad on rainy days, while CLs suddenly become realistic holiday propositions when you clock the decent-sized washroom and entirely separate shower cubicle.

There are niggles – occupying the swivel toilet with the washroom door closed is best left to those shorter in the leg than the body, and you'll need a reasonably hefty towcar with which to tow it (one weighing a touch over 1870kg minimum to stick to the 85% recommendation), but if you're after quality, this is the caravan to buy.

THE BEST OF THE REST

The classic four-berth end washroom layout battle was contested by (in descending order) the Swift Charisma 560 (which only narrowly lost out to the third placed Amara), Lunar's Quasar 525 and the Elddis Avanté Club 524, with just 35 points difference between the highest and lowest.



CLASS 3

2-BERTH CARAVAN
£11,000-£15,000

WINNER:

Bailey Senator Series 6 Vermont
Price: £14,383

The Vermont takes perhaps the most impressive win of the competition, for two reasons: firstly, this model has been around for some time now, so it's hardly a ground-breaking newcomer; secondly, it was stacked up against some seriously talented competition.

Vermont, a two-berth end washroom layout, is relatively lacking in inches, meaning the front seats are a trifle short and the kitchen is lacking a little in worktop space in particular.

Yet, that end washroom is an absolute corker and largely makes up for any other minor shortcomings. The enormous walk-in shower cubicle, for instance, while nothing new by any means, is amazing – it seems almost absurd that such a small caravan could have such a massive shower room. Then there's the hotel-esque washbasin/vanity unit tucked neatly against the nearside wall, with the king-sized and walk-in (literally!) wardrobe alongside garnished with soft-close drawers and an array of shelves.

The killer blow, of course, concerns both weight and price – two areas in which Bailey traditionally scores highly over its rivals. The Senator Series 6 Vermont is no exception.



RUNNER-UP

Coachman Pastiche 470/2
Price: £14,921

There was a time when seemingly everyone had a variant of the Pastiche 470/2's layout on its books: a standard parallel lounge up front and a full-width washroom (complete with separate shower) out back. The twist being the unlikely-sounding presence of an L-shaped 'end' kitchen sandwiched in between, opposite the main entrance door.

If its relative rarity on the UK market today is anything to go by, we

can only assume this layout wasn't a big seller. Yet, Coachman has persisted with it, and if it hadn't been for the seemingly ubiquitous contender from Bristol – just 13 points ahead in the final analysis – it would have stolen class honours with ease.

It's difficult to understand what's not to like about this caravan – portly demeanour on the weighbridge aside – for it seems to offer the very best of all worlds: a spacious lounge; a near Lunar Stellar-esque kitchen amidships; and an enormous rear washroom-cum-dressing room that's completely private. All squeezed into a caravan that's just a smidgeon over 22ft long.



THIRD PLACE

Lunar Stellar
Price: £13,644

There are those who wonder privately quite how Lunar manages to keep one or two of its more niche-market caravans afloat in these hard-pressed times. The tiny, narrow-bodied Ariva is one such, and the Stellar the other.

Certainly, the Stellar's layout is unique here in the UK (although not on the Continent), but if you're the sort of couple for whom cooking is a big part of your holidays, then this lightweight two-berther really ought to feature somewhere on your shopping list, for its L-shaped offside corner kitchen is simply enormous.

Quite how two people could ever get the most out of the seemingly endless acres of worktop space and bewildering array of cupboards and lockers the Stellar offers is beyond us, but people seem to love it, and keep coming back for more.

There's a catch to this Wembley Arena-sized galley, of course,



although it's not, as you might imagine, in the lounge, which is surprisingly roomy and classy. No, it's the washroom that suffers: it's tucked unobtrusively in the nearside corner by the main entrance door, and obviously of the all-in-one variety. It's fine for nocturnal emergency visits, but less so for those who like to frequent basic CLs.

A great caravan, then, but one that's held back a little by its framed locker doors, but also – rather perversely – that kitchen. Is it possible that it's just a bit too big?

THE BEST OF THE REST

Interestingly, my personal scoresheet puts the fourth-placed Elddis Odyssey 482 a single point ahead of the third-placed Lunar Stellar, and the basically identical Sterling Eccles Topaz and Swift Challenger on dead-level terms, despite their final overall standings at fourth and sixth places, respectively.

CLASS 4

CARAVAN WITH DEDICATED BED(S)
£11,000-£15,000

WINNER:

Bailey Pageant Series 7 Limousin
Price: £14,667

The team from Bristol score yet another class victory. Value must surely have played a major role in the Pageant Series 7 Limousin's win – for the same sort of money that buys the all-in-one washroom contenders lower down the list nets, in Bailey-speak, a middle-ranking French bed model that somehow manages to squeeze in a full-width end washroom (complete with separate shower cubicle) – and all on a single-axle caravan that's 25ft 8in long.

That's pretty remarkable, when you consider two things: firstly, this sort of layout was once the sole preserve of huge great twin-axles like the Swift Conqueror; secondly, the Limousin manages to stretch to the same size French bed as the similar (but en-suite corner washroom) Loire, and sports front seats that are just a couple of inches shorter. And we repeat: this is a single-axle caravan.

Not that it's svelte and featherlight: sticking to the 85% outfit matching recommendation and loading it up to its MTPLM, then your towcar will need to weigh somewhere in the region of 1870kg.

But what a caravan – and what a layout.



RUNNER-UP

Coachman Amara 535/4
Price: £14,578

For once, the (yet again) bridesmaid Coachman isn't the heaviest in its class, and it managed to squeeze ahead of the third-placed Lunar by the narrowest of margins.

The fact it scored so closely to the Lunar is indicative of their broad similarities – not all of them positive. The Amara's washroom, for instance, is laid out almost exactly the same as the Lunar's, with the same potential problem if someone takes a shower. The lounge, too, feels similarly short relative to the rest of the caravan,

although in reality you can seat four people in there with consummate ease.

The kitchen does the best it can in the available space, and there's certainly no arguing with the domestic-standard cooker, digital 107-litre fridge and microwave oven (new for 2009), nor the soothing upholstery material and bound-edge removable carpets. A little more galley worktop space would be ideal, but where this could be achieved is, to be fair to Coachman, difficult to see.

The new handle-less framed locker doors won't, we suspect, garner universal approval, either, hardwood frames notwithstanding – they've no positive latching mechanisms.



THIRD PLACE

Lunar Quasar 534
Price: £14,379

The Quasar conforms to a layout that's taken a serious grip in this country over the past eight or so years: that of the en-suite French bed. Comprising a longitudinal double bed tucked into one of the rear corners (the nearside in this instance), with a washroom slung alongside, the kitchen amidships and the lounge up front, it's long since proved a winning formula, especially for couples.

Not all Lunars impress with their cabinetry, but the Quasar is high up enough in the hierarchy to warrant competitive standards of unitary woodwork, garnished with proper positive-locking catches.

It's a good-sized bed, too – at 6ft 3in by 4ft 5in – although the usual bugbear of the inner foot end of the mattress being chopped off



(to facilitate through-passage into the washroom) remains.

Speaking of the washroom, the 534's is of a decent size, and it's well-lit to boot, but its basic floorplan means that if anyone's in the shower, the toilet, which is located at the far rear of the room, is emphatically out of commission – bad news if you're suddenly caught short, and you're staying on a facility-less CL.

THE BEST OF THE REST

The Elddis Avanté Club 464 is a super single-axle compact four-berther with a pair of stacked rear bunks and a remarkably big corner washroom.

The Swift Charisma 565 and Sterling Europa 620 accrued broadly similar marks, and the Sprite Quattro FB in particular drew near-identical scores from two judges. The Adria Adora 612DP managed a strong fifth place thanks to its island bed and en-suite shower, leaving the twin single bed Caravelair Ambiance Style 450.

CLASS 5

ANY CARAVAN
£15,000-£18,000

WINNER:

Bailey Senator Series 6 California
Price: £15,226

At first glance, the California appears to be nothing more than an even more opulent Pageant Limousin – certainly, the layout is all-but identical – which, while appealing, wouldn't necessarily guarantee a class win against the likes of the Coachman and Swift.

Look more closely, however, and you realise that the Senator appears to have pulled off something of a magic trick, being a little bit shorter (at 23ft 7in overall) than its 25ft 8in-long Pageant counterpart, yet managing to offer exactly the same 6ft 4in by 4ft 6in rear bed and front settees that somehow bear close comparison (one 5ft 8in long and one 5ft 3in long compared to the twin 5ft 9in-long affairs in the Limousin).

The kitchen isn't exactly over-endowed in the worktop stakes, but the kit is all there, including a new 115-litre (122-litre with the freezer removed) fridge and a microwave oven.

On-road stability, too, is enhanced by the standard-fitment of Al-Ko's ATC trailer control system, allied to fitted dampers and an AKS 3004 hitch-head stabiliser. It's even a bit lighter, overall, than its Pageant sibling.

My scoresheet remarks say it all: 'This is a strong class contender'.



RUNNER-UP

Swift Challenger 580
Price: £14,995

Just to prove how unpredictable caravan design really can be, Swift Group entered its own take on the Class 4-winning Bailey Pageant Limousin theme (the Sterling Eccles Ruby) in the same class as the island-bed Swift Challenger 580 – and the Challenger finished up two places higher!

Impressive as the Ruby is, however, the Challenger 580 is actually the better caravan, although the judges' scores across the board were painfully tight between the two. There is a lot to like: island bed

single-axle caravans are still comparatively rare on the UK market, especially ones with a washroom as good as the 580's side-mounted affair. The washroom is roomy enough for teeth-brushing and using the loo, and the cylindrical separate shower is of a good size for even six-footers like me.

The kitchen opposite is well designed, with the usual Swift Group lift-out drainer making the most of the available worktops.

Its extra body-length inches relative to the similar (and also island bed) Challenger 560 also solves the age-old problem from which this sort of layout usually suffers: that of a short lounge. The 580's isn't big enough to offer up two single beds, but makes up into a double that's a whopping 7ft long.



THIRD PLACE

Coachman VIP 545/4
Price: £17,563

No Coachman feels cheap or nasty inside, but once you get to the rarefied echelons of the aptly-named VIP range, you really are reminded of the old sales adage: 'Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten'. Not that it's easy to forget the VIP's £17,500 price tag, you understand...

The same lack of positive-locker catching that afflicts the rest of the Coachman range remains a bit of a disappointment here, but the cabinetry feels hefty and is finished in a rich, mid-toned hue that really comes to life after dark when the VIP's profusion of lights is switched on.

As is often the case with fixed-end bedrooms, the 545/4's layout feels a bit rear-biased, but the pay-off is



what must rate as one of the best-executed island bed designs currently available.

The bed itself, though, isn't the headline, but rather the unusually generous amount of walk-around space on offer – all too often with this design, it's a squeeze to get around the bed.

Better still is the washroom design. The washroom itself is quite small, but the shower cubicle is entirely separate, and relocated into a corner of the bedroom. Close over the washroom door, and you're left with a superb, fully en-suite end bedroom.

THE BEST OF THE REST

The new Sterling Eccles Ruby – which apes the class-winning California's basic layout – was closest to a podium finish, losing out to the Coachman by just 12 points.

The Compass Rallye 524's less adventurous four-berth end-washroom layout was enlivened considerably by Explorer's posh, new tiled, separate shower, while the Lunar Lexion SE's California-alike layout somehow seemed to include a bigger-than-average lounge.

CLASS 6

ANY CARAVAN
Over £18,000

WINNER:

Airstream International 684
Price: £53,326

The biggest Airstream is all about big numbers: unladen, it weighs nearly 200kg more than a fully-laden Conqueror 630, is the only model in the competition – fifth wheelers aside – to tip the scales at over 2000kg fully laden, and has an asking price with which you could buy two Swift Conqueror 630s and still have over £15,500 change.

But that, surely, is the whole point at this rarefied level of caravanning. When you're making this sort of financial commitment, you want to make an entrance wherever you go and – let's be honest here – you want to show off its amazing interior to onlookers at every opportunity.

What an interior it is. The washroom may be a little on the small side, but you get a ceramic toilet and (enormous) washbasin, together with chemical-free biodegradation of waste matter and aircraft-style suction. The front lounge is rendered more jaw-dropping by the presence of the trademark wraparound tinted windows, while there's a 6ft-long transverse double bed at the rear.

You buy an Airstream for its looks, though, and I doubt you'd ever tire of the polished aviation-style construction, aluminium, exposed rivets and weapons-grade bulkhead doors.



RUNNER-UP

Swift Conqueror 630
Price: £18,884

Much of what I go on to say about the third-placed Sterling Elite Explorer applies to this Conqueror 630, simply because, layout differences aside, the two share an awful lot of DNA, including the same uprated chassis and high interior specification.

That layout was just enough to lift the 630 above its corporate stablemate. Broadly speaking, it's good news: Swift arguably pioneered

the French-bed layout in the UK, so it's hardly surprising it's really got its design down to a fine art, while the end bedroom – despite being a little disappointing on the storage front, given its size – sports a huge separate shower cubicle and a C350 cassette toilet around which there's room enough to host a game of five-a-side football!

Yet... my closing comments suggest that, for all its many unquestionable strengths, the 630 still somehow lacks that little extra je ne sais quoi needed to really shine at this end of the market: 'Very good, but superb single-axle variations on this layout seem little inferior'.



THIRD PLACE

Sterling Elite Explorer
Price: £18,884

The Explorer is built on the biggest of Swift Group's twin-axle chassis (at just over 26ft stem-to-stern), which allows for its super-opulent rear island-bed layout allied to a central split washroom (nearside toilet room, offside shower) and a decent-sized parallel lounge. Unfortunately, the settees are necessarily (owing to the presence of the main entrance door) of unequal length, the nearside example being quite a bit shorter than the one opposite.

Lounge issues aside, though, this is one serious caravan. Elites have never exactly been stripped-out bargain-basement specials, but the kit list on this latest derivative is positively mindboggling: 175-litre fridge-freezer, dampers, higher-rated tyres, power-saving LED interior lighting, positive roof locker



catches and even a Thatcham-approved Europe-wide tracking system are all standard-fit, together with the desirable Alde Hydronic Compact 3010 programmable 'wet' central heating system.

In many ways, it's hard to fathom quite why the Explorer didn't fare better, but my personal notes perhaps give an implicit clue: most of my scores for the caravan were on the high side, but in a category where the 'wow' factor is perhaps as crucial as equipment and size, my only comments were 'island bed layouts seem to have improved apace since their launch', and 'hard to fault, really'.

THE BEST OF THE REST

In my own scoring, Buccaneer's super-posh Schooner managed an honourable draw with the winning Airstream, while quite a few of the design judges came away from the leather-lined Lunar Delta TI mightily impressed. The Coachman Laser 655/6's twin enormous lounges carried a fair bit of favour, too.



CLASS 7 | FIFTH WHEEL CARAVANS
WINNER: Fifth Wheel Co Celtic Rambler
 Price: £46,000

You'll need to find another £25,000 or so if you want to include the Nissan Navara pick-up truck displayed on the Fifth Wheel Co's NEC show stand, but even then it represents startling value for money.

The lounge isn't quite as massive as the KountryLite's, but that's a bit like saying a cruise ship isn't quite as big as a super-tanker – it's still mighty spacious with the slide-out deployed.

What really marks the Celtic Rambler apart, though, is its fantastic en-suite bedroom – you could almost be in a hotel room, with its ultra-solid, non-slip flooring, enormous shower and storage-tastic washroom proper, while a panoramic rooflight means you can lull yourself off to sleep with a spot of star-gazing.

Factor in the Rambler's serious build quality, and there could only be one winner in this category.

RUNNER-UP
KountryLite 26
 Price: £28,018

There may have been just two entries in this ultra-niche area of the caravan market, but yet again scoring was mighty close, with the all-American KountryLite finding a great deal of favour with the judges.

The 26 sports a massive (with the slide-out wall extended electrically) lounge-cum-kitchen area at the rear,

with a small washroom (albeit complete with slipper bath) amidships and an island bed up front.

This is proper home-from-home caravanning, with even a domestic-style electric fire, air conditioning, a big TV and huge, comfy settees in which to relax. You really feel, too, that you're in a small apartment, rather than a big caravan – it's that spacious.

The washroom is a little disappointing, but there's no arguing with the island bedroom up front.



CARAVAN DESIGN AWARDS 2009 ENTRANTS

- CLASS 1**
 ANY CARAVAN UNDER £11,000
- Sprite Alpine 2
 - Bailey Ranger Series 6 460/4
 - Adria Altea 542DT
 - Xplore 452
 - Caravelair Antares Luxe 425
- CLASS 2**
 FAMILY CARAVAN £11,000-£15,000
- Swift Charisma 560
 - Sterling Europa 530
 - Sprite Major 5

- Bailey Pageant Series 7 Ardenes
 - Elddis Avanté Club 524
 - Coachman Amara 550/5
 - Lunar Quasar 525
- CLASS 3**
 2-BERTH CARAVAN £11,000-£15,000
- Swift Challenger 480
 - Sterling Eccles Topaz
 - Bailey Senator Series 6 Vermont
 - Elddis Odyssey 482

- Coachman Pastiche 470/2
 - Lunar Stellar
- CLASS 4**
 CARAVAN WITH DEDICATED BED(S) £11,000-£15,000
- Swift Charisma 565
 - Sterling Europa 620
 - Sprite Quattro FB
 - Bailey Pageant Series 7 Limousin
 - Adria Adora 612DP
 - Elddis Avanté Club 464

- Caravelair Ambiance Style 450
 - Coachman Amara 535/4
 - Lunar Quasar 534
- CLASS 5**
 ANY CARAVAN £15,000-£18,000
- Swift Challenger 580
 - Sterling Eccles Ruby
 - Bailey Senator Series 6 California
 - Compass Rallye 524
 - Coachman VIP 545/4
 - Lunar Lexon SE

- CLASS 6**
 ANY CARAVAN £18,000 AND OVER
- Swift Conqueror 630
 - Sterling Elite Explorer
 - Buccaneer Schooner
 - Airstream International 684
 - Coachman Laser 655/6
 - Lunar Delta T1
- CLASS 7**
 ANY FIFTH WHEEL CARAVAN
- Celtic Rambler
 - KountryLite 26

LIGHTWEIGHT LEISURE TRAILERS

LIGHTENING THE LOAD

JUDGE PAT TAYLOR REVEALS THE WINNERS OF THE CLUB'S LIGHTWEIGHT LEISURE TRAILER AWARDS 2009

This is the seventh year that the Club has run a competition for lightweight trailers up to 1000kg. The aim is still to provide fair and objective assessments to aid members' buying decisions. So those manufacturers who do well can expect to find the results reflected in good sales figures.

Five classes were judged – two for trailer tents, one for folding campers and two for conventional caravans under 1000kg. Judges marked using a 25-point checklist that good design, day and night practicality, equipment supplied, ease of setting up, quality of construction and, most importantly today, overall value for money.

This sector of the market represents an important entry point for caravanners, many of whom start with a trailer tent or folding camper for ease of towing and storage. In these sensitive times it is also a way to enjoy the benefits of the outside life at low cost and with minimum environmental impact. There is also evidence from manufacturers in this sector that some caravanners and motor caravanners are now beginning to return to the simpler life offered by an easy-to-use trailer-based unit.

CLASS 1 | TRAILER TENTS UNDER £3100
WINNER: Sunncamp Holiday 400SE
 Price: £2820



This is a stylish and well-equipped trailer with a great kitchen unit and a highly-versatile layout. The vast, detachable main awning can be arranged as a half porch, a full-width porch or just a sun canopy. There are two double bedrooms as standard (with an option for two additional underbed tents). The main trailer bed area can be used on its own for, say, a single overnight stop and there are plenty of suitable storage areas in the main cabin in this event. The main awning area is all of 4m deep, which can comfortably accommodate the day-to-day space needed for a family of four on a fortnight's holiday. The push-out side awning is divided in two and one half can be used as a kitchen. The other half can be either a toilet tent or wardrobe. The kitchen unit features two burners, grill and a proper stainless steel sink. Judges liked the fantastic space for the money and thought it an attractive-looking starter unit. It did not look a quick job to erect the massive awning, but there is no denying the result would be well worth the effort. The Sunncamp handbook was a photocopied affair, but it was easy to read and useful, if a little thin.

RUNNER-UP
Cabanon Tabora
 Price: £2695



The runner-up and third place units were two-berth models from the same stable, with the Tabora just beating the Venus to the post by a handful of marks. They share the same double-bed trailer unit with the kitchen an extra cost option on both models. However, the simplicity of the Tabora makes it a good choice for a beginner and the simple equipment means there is little to do on arrival at site.

THIRD PLACE
Cabanon Venus
 Price: £2995

The Venus L has a smallish, 2.3m-deep detachable awning as standard. If you have a load of camping equipment in

the loft, both this and the above model make sense for the transition from tent to trailer-based camping. The big Cabanon handbooks feature a layout that is less than ideal when looking for detailed instructions but are produced in four languages, which can be helpful when touring abroad!



CLASS 2 TRAILER TENTS
OVER £3100

WINNER: **Camp-let Royal**
Price: £6199

The Royal four-berth is a stylish and well-made unit with a really easy, gas-assisted set-up. It features a GRP body with lockable hard top and the built-in luggage rack has a 75kg capacity. The cabin, awning and two double sleeping areas go up in one smooth operation which can be done fairly easily by one person. The unit displayed showed a very clean finish and high-quality construction with plenty of add-ons which were free at the show – such as an awning carpet, three-way main box and slatted beds. The space between the two generous length 2.15m beds in the cabin is cleverly used as a wardrobe which even came with rail and hangers on the show exhibit. Both bedroom cubicles have storage pockets and each has highly comfortable memory foam mattresses. The kitchen unit simply swings out and quickly detaches on set-up. It has a sink, draining board and trivet, good work area, removable wash bowl with 12V water pump and a three-burner hob. There is sufficient room in this well-finished kitchen unit for 907-cylinder storage. The 18 sq m main tent can be augmented with an add-on 10m awning and a 2.5m guest cabin. The handbook was comprehensive yet easy to understand, with useful pictorial explanations.



RUNNER UP
Camp-let Concorde
Price: £5399

The Camp-let Concorde four-berth was second in class, being a little less expensive but still reasonably well equipped. The main differences were the style of the awning and the less sophisticated kitchen unit. Both the Concorde and the Royal can be stored at home on their sides and moved on a small trolley.

THIRD PLACE
Jamet Jametic
Price: £3995

A very close third place went to the four-berth Jamet Jametic. At more than £2000 under the price for the class winner, this trailer represented excellent value. It came on a soft top trailer and showed great attention to detail and quality. The well-finished kitchen looked the business and a lift-up slatted bed provided plenty of internal storage. The very pale colour scheme was less practical (in the UK at least), and setting up looks rather time consuming when compared with the Camp-lets, but it is hard to beat on price. The Jamet handbook was disappointing, this time in six languages, and hard to read.



Attention to detail in the Jamet Jametic is impressive, while the lift-up slatted bed provides lots of internal storage space



CLASS 3 FOLDING
CAMPERS

WINNER: **Conway Crusader**
Price: £9780

This camper weighs almost as much as a small conventional caravan at 1000kg, but has a great 180kg payload – more than many a small caravan. It won its class by a good margin, thanks to an impressive washroom and a full six berths. Each end of the trailer features a fixed double bed, one of which is king-sized, and the seating in the middle can become a good double – though the disadvantage is that the occupants of the bed at the rear will have to climb over the centre bed to get out. Alternatively the seats can be used as two small single bunks for children. It is a flexible arrangement so four or five can sit for dinner when the centre bed is not made up. The Crusader is really well-equipped too, with three-way

fridge, mains electrics, full wardrobe, plinth heater and TV aerial point. The kitchen area has a three-burner hob and grill, separate full oven and hot water system. It easily detaches for travel, with quick-connect gas and water services at the rear of the unit. There are useful shelves above and good lighting is provided for this area. The full-height washroom is bright, airy and amazingly roomy for a trailer unit, and features a cassette toilet and fold-down sink. All furniture items are easy to stow for travel thanks to a clever slide and lower system. Crusader is well made from quality materials and uses Isabella acrylic weather-resistant awning material, while interior décor is pleasing and restful in blue-grey and light wood. The outside complements



this with its new graphics and a platinum colour scheme. The size of the unit means there is a lot of kit to set-up on site, but a good instructional DVD made it look fairly straightforward. Like everything, you will get better with practice. The Pennine Group handbook is helpful and easy to read, but the one supplied with the test vehicle did not include any written setting-up instructions for this model.

RUNNER-UP
Conway Cruiser
Price: £9290

Cruiser is similar to the Crusader, but without the bathroom or full oven. Whether this is worth the £500 lower price is debatable, but the result is

certainly a luxurious and spacious feel to the cabin area, and rather more storage space. The U-shaped seating area is huge and allows six or more to socialise in comfort. It is still a 1000kg unit though, just squeezing into the class weight limit for this competition, but offering an extra 20kg personal effects payload over the Crusader at a huge 200kg.



Six or more people can socialise in the Conway Cruiser's huge, U-shaped seating area

THIRD PLACE
Pennine Pentium
Price: £8900

Pentium (the 2009 name for the previous Constellation model) is again very similar to the Crusader, but

with a coffee and cream interior and exterior, and rather fewer touches of luxury. It is perhaps more suited to clement climates as it does not have hot water or electric heater as standard. Like all these Pennine Group models, it features a zip-out side wall which enables you to fully enjoy the view.



Zip-out side wall means you can take in the view when relaxing in the Pentium; coffee and cream colour scheme features throughout

CLASS 4 CARAVANS
750KG & UNDER

WINNER: **Stimson Multi Pod Sport**
Price: £3970

For inventiveness and 'off-the-wall' thinking, the trailer-based Multi Pod Sport takes some beating. It was a worthy winner in this class, beating an almost conventional caravan into second place by a whisker. The Multi Pod, as its name suggests, is a range of ingenious trailers and this version, the Sport, is designed for those who require a lockable, secure, dry unit for pursuing sport and leisure activities in a wide range of locations. Basically it is a trailer with an attached GRP monocoque body which provides the weather protection and space for bed and storage. There is even a galley area which will take a portable stove on a GRP table, and a full height fold-out rear awning which gives complete standing room at the rear of the trailer. The bed is a futon-type sofa bed which proved highly comfortable after a hard

day's judging, and a good-sized side window adds light and ventilation. There is also a standard roof window. The mattress can be inflated via a cigar lighter plug from the car. When the bed is folded the area is big enough for a family's mountain bikes or surfboards. The Sport has full headlining which extends down to include the storage area, which is in the form of a ring around the trailer perimeter. It looks small at first but proved surprisingly capacious for all that clobber you need to take fishing or surfing, say. There are also two slot-in cupboard units which fit neatly into the space between trailer side and body - these are designed to take smaller items of equipment or food supplies. There is a free-standing fold up table in the dining area and a second table can be adjusted in height to use as a preparation surface for

RUNNER-UP
**Freedom Jetstream
Twin Sport**
Price: £8655

The Polish-built, two-berth Jetstream Twin Sport is the opposite extreme from the other entrants in this class, being a conventional caravan box. It is fully lined with a soft material in a colour not to everyone's taste, but contains all the necessary basic equipment such as heater, fridge, four-burner hob and electrics. The



washroom has a sink, shower and toilet, but this area was rather restricted in height. The Jetstream Twin Sport's main cabin was acceptably roomy with plenty of storage but it was rather stark in general appearance and the standard of finish was not particularly impressive. Seating was pretty comfortable, except that a half-height cupboard on the wall made part of the area unusable. As a really light unit (750kg), it does give the option of proper caravanning to owners of small cars, so scores particularly well from an environmental standpoint.



food. A mains hook-up facility can be provided at extra cost. The Sport is just one of the many units that can be made out of the Multi Pod concept - there is a huge range of options which will enable the user to have a purpose-built vehicle for the task. When not in use for leisure, all the fitted equipment can be removed to provide a cavernous space for transporting large items such as fence panels or furniture items. The Pod itself weighs only 280kg on a 750kg maximum capacity trailer, so there is a massive 470kg payload available - or nearly half a ton. The Multi Pod is a great idea with loads of possibilities.

Stimson Multi Pod has a surprising amount of room inside and full-height fold-out rear awning is a further bonus



THIRD PLACE
**Teardrop
Trailers Turtle 1200**
Price: £4695

This is a small but pretty unit with a main double bed which can fold up to form a seating area, and is provided with sophisticated entertainment equipment as options. Access to the cabin is from either side via wide doors. There's no feeling of claustrophobia thanks to good windows and a skylight for ventilation. A 240V main system is included and there is gas bottle storage in the front. A galley area cooker and space for a Porta Potti are found at the rear. A neat and clever package.

We should not leave this class without mentioning the Bed Bug (£3950) which, although just a teardrop shape with only a bed inside, represents a basic need for Glastonbury types. Shown in pink at the show, it can be customised to your own design. At only 180kg unladen it could be towed by two wheels or four and the free-standing awning could tempt you out of your ordinary tent into a more secure sleeping area.



CLASS 5 CARAVANS
751-1000KG

WINNER: **Lunar Ariva**
Price: £12,779

The judges were unanimous in their choice of the Lunar Ariva as the winner. Lunar build quality has improved vastly over the last few years and this model was no exception. Clean, neat and stylish inside, it looks like a 'proper' caravan with no sign of skimping on fixtures or fittings to get the weight down. It comes with full-sized fridge, ceiling-mounted Omnivent fan, blown-air heating and underbed drop-down lockers. It has alloy wheels, spare wheel and AKS stabiliser fitted as standard. The narrow body (2.02m/6ft 8in) helps to keep the weight down to a creditable 980kg, and makes it easier to store in the driveway, yet it still seems roomy in the comfortable lounge. The washroom has a good area for this size of caravan, and is light and airy inside.



Ariva feels roomy despite being just 6ft 8in wide; the washroom is light and airy



RUNNER-UP
**Bailey Ranger
Series 6 380/2**
Price: £10,495

This Bailey is cheaper than the Lunar Ariva by more than £2000, but does rather look it in some respects. For those who like the minimalist, clean-cut look, it will be pleasing to the eye, but it lacks the style and finish of its rival. That said, it is solidly built and, with a width of 2.19m/7ft 2in, you do get rather more interior space. However, the washroom was a bit basic and the storage was much more limited. At 997kg, it just scrapes into this weight category, but it does offer great value for money. Both Bailey and Lunar have good, comprehensive handbooks, but the Bailey's has a better layout and is easier to read.



LIGHTWEIGHT LEISURE TRAILER AWARDS 2009 ENTRANTS

CLASS 1
TRAILER TENTS
UNDER £3100
• Sunncamp
Holiday 400SE
• Cabanon Tabora
• Cabanon Venus L

CLASS 2
TRAILER TENTS
OVER £3100
• Apollo Lux
• Camp-let Royal
• Camp-let Concorde
• Jamet Jametic

CLASS 3
FOLDING CAMPERS
• Conway Countryman
• Pennine Fiesta
• Pennine Pentium
• Conway Crusader
• Conway Cruiser

CLASS 4
CARAVANS 750KG
AND UNDER
• Freedom Jetstream
Twin Sport
• The Bed Bug
• Teardrop Trailers
Turtle 1200
• Stimson
Multi Pod Sport

CLASS 5
CARAVANS BETWEEN
751-1000KG
• Bailey Ranger
Series 6 380/2
• Lunar Ariva