



FAMILY VALUES

HOW DID JO VAUGHAN GET ON HOLIDAYING IN A CARAVAN WITH GRANDPARENTS, KIDS AND DOG? READ ON TO FIND OUT...

IT ALL started out quite innocently. I wanted to spend a week walking along the South West Coast Path, so I asked my father to come and babysit my little 10-month old baby, Ariane, while I hit the trail. Mum said she could get time off work too, and then my little two-year old nephew, George, got involved as he loves the beach. So it was that we ended up in a six-berth Bailey caravan with three adults, two children and my mad little dog, Dino.

The chosen Bailey was the new Pageant Loire model introduced at last October's NEC show. Aimed directly at families, it offers a fixed bed at the rear with a bathroom beside, an amidships kitchen along with a single dinette and a front lounge with the ubiquitous drawer unit

between the two inward-facing benches. It seemed ideal for us all as there is plenty of room as well as some privacy at the rear, thanks to the solid divider doors between the kitchen and fixed bed. It even has a separate dinette (perfect for George to play in away from the lounging adults). The cooking facilities are perfect for camping en-masse too, with a full domestic-style cooker, a microwave and a large 115-litre Dometic fridge.

The sleeping arrangements were discussed long and hard, but as my parents don't like dogs (poor Dino!) it was decided that I would share the double bed at the back with Ariane in her travel cot and Dino in his basket. That way I could shut that divider door and Dino wouldn't worry

them while they were asleep. Mum and Dad (otherwise known as Grumps and Nona according to George and Ariane), shared the lounge double while George had the single dinette bunk.

With a bed-full there was little space for me, but when I did drop off on that comfortable mattress Dino frequently woke me up licking my face and ears – I soon remembered why sleeping in the bedroom is an absolute no-no for him at home. He was also a challenge in the mornings as, however quietly George crept into my parents' bed upon waking up ridiculously early each morning (around 6am), Dino would hear and bark until we were all awake and ready to play!

I had already been motor caravanning

ABOVE: The Pageant Loire was given a big thumbs up by all... INSET:... including the younger members of the party

many times with Dino and Ariane in tow, but this would be their first time caravanning – and mine since Ariane started on her way. But I still packed the same kit as I would take on my motor caravanning exploits, including Ariane’s collapsible play pen, her travel cot that also packs down into an amazingly small bag, and the bright pink pushchair which I never go anywhere without. I also decided to erect my Kyham Motor Dome awning, which as well as being used as an attachable accessory to motor caravans can be used free-standing. The weather, which included incessant rain, wind and storms for four of our six days (and partially for the other two as well), didn’t prove conducive to sitting under canvas, though, and my planned evenings outside playing board games after the kids had gone to bed were abandoned.

The awning did provide a huge amount of storage space for all our outdoor gear, although the underbed locker would have done this job just as well. There’s a small exterior door leading to this massive space, and just inside the hatch a plastic-tray separates the rest of this locker from wet and muddy gear – of which we had plenty. Inside, the bed frame lifts up on gas struts, making it a doddle to insert items large and small.

I don’t need to tell you what a great hobby caravanning is for the kids, but my chosen site was particularly good for the little ‘uns. Hillhead Club Site in Devon offers a large children’s play area with a fort that George just loved, and had the weather been good he would have been equally enthusiastic about the outdoor swimming pool for toddlers (situated alongside a larger pool for grown-ups). There’s also a bar and restaurant complex offering food and entertainment.

All ages are catered for, although one hour each night is dedicated to children. At 7pm we headed down to the complex to meet the clown that soon had George adorned in a super spaceman suit, complete with helmet and ray gun – all made from balloons. I coveted a little girl’s red flower, also created from balloons, but when, embarrassingly, George went up to ask for one on my behalf (an action condoned by my parents but discouraged by me) I was deemed too old and Ariane too young. You’re never too old for balloons, surely!

The caravan proved a great base for our days out, whether it was to the beach or on the excellent steam railway from Kingswear to Paignton. A regular bus service runs from the site into Kingswear, but for the purpose of my test BMW had lent me a practical and powerful 530D Touring. This not only transported all my kit but also coped with both the children’s forward-facing car safety seats, as well as



my parents, as we toured around the countryside. It proved economical too, doing around 40mpg – not far different from my parents’ nearly-new Mini!

The two days it was mainly dry we headed to the beach. The first of these we spent at Broadsands, just outside Paignton. This beach, with its concrete ledge around the promenade, proved perfect as my little sand-eating monster (Ariane – not Dino!) was unable to get her hands on the golden beach. The second day, spent at Bigbury-on-Sea, we had to be more careful as we had no option but to let her crawl about the sand – although the little natural pools were perfect for paddling and there is an area where dogs are allowed, too. Dino made a great start on digging the next Channel Tunnel, although in order to get somewhere he must learn to stick to one spot!

Other days were spent walking, sometimes with and sometimes without Ariane, but always with Dino, leaving the others to either relax inside the caravan or to visit local sights. For hikes around the coastal path I left Ariane behind as the going is strenuous and slippery, but we all enjoyed a group stroll around Berry Head with its hill-top fort and glorious views along the coastline.

There was only one aspect of the Bailey that I cursed, and it was a minor

ABOVE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Lounge with bonus separate dinette; bad weather meant plenty of story time; fixed bed at rear was comfortable – pity about the canine alarm clock; beige carpets perhaps not suited to babies
BELOW: En-suite washroom was a handy feature

misdemeanour. The Loire’s colour scheme is light cream and beige, and as most baby foods are orange this just isn’t practical for a family caravan. We had to keep the removable carpets in because of Ariane’s poor knees (she’s still only crawling), otherwise they would have been stored safely in the underbed locker within moments of arrival for their own protection. I wished I had packed a couple of throws for the settees, too, which would have protected them from ‘baby spillage’. But otherwise the Loire was perfect.

At the end of the trip I asked everyone to put a thumbs up or down for the Bailey. It was a unanimous thumbs up, accompanied by a cheer from George. I think they liked it – I certainly did. ■

