

Park the tractor! Light twin-axles for the car

We pick three twin-axle models which don't need a heavyweight 4x4 towcar, in three price ranges, and with three different spec levels



BAILEY RANGER 620-6
GT60 **£13,404**

LUNAR QUASAR 616
£15,495

**TEST PHIL STEPHENS**

WE'LL start with the car options. Some examples: The new top spec Toyota Avenis Diesel Estate weighs close on 1700kg. Conversely Mitsubishi's 4x4 Outlander, a much bigger car, weighs 1690kg and Nissan's X-Trail 2.0Tdi 4x4 positively waif-like at 1545kg.

Point is, it's the car's weight that counts, not the number of driven wheels or even its size.

Clear? Medium-sized run-of-the-mill rep-mobiles with big

diesel engines have the mass to pull some serious kit. That's because they have high spec that adds weight and estate bodies (that adds more weight).

Shock horror, you may stray over the 85% 'advisory' guideline (11th commandment to some). The rule tries to cover all car/caravan ages (therefore dynamic ability) weights and power as well as driver experience in one grand figure. But the fact is that, with a

modern car and caravan, a 100% tow match in some circumstances can be safely achieved.

Furthermore, few caravanners load right up to the MPTLM figure (even I fall short of it, with two kids and all their holiday gear). This reality makes the kerbweight/MPTLM maths a bit redundant.

It's a simple fact that these twin axles are dynamically superior and safer to tow than many single axles that actually weigh less.



SPRITE QUATTRO
FB £12,741

OUR CRITERIA: We test three twin-axle family models light enough to be towed by vehicles under the heavyweight 4x4 class. The prices differ, so does the level of specification... take your pick



This bedroom is the cosiest of the three. Better partitioned, too



The side dinette forms a useful family area



We'd prefer a panoramic window here but there's plenty of light in the lounge



The Bailey's fuss-free interior will suit modern tastes



The central dinette keeps the interior feeling wide open



BAILEY RANGER 620-6 GT60

PRICE **£13,695**

TOWMATCH D

LAYOUT 8/10

The Bailey and Sprite share the same basic layout. That's a rear fixed nearside double with shower/loo alongside. Forward of here lies the washbasin and vanity area.

Over the axles sits a nearside kitchen, with dinette (and pullman bunk) opposite. In the nose and making up beds five and six is a traditional lounge with parallel settees.

The layout is now so familiar it not only appears in twin axles, but right down to many small single axles. Each area just gets shrunk to fit into smaller lengths.

Bailey differs with competitors' designs in that it attempts to section each living space more obviously. A bold structure at the bed's foot leaves you in no doubt where cooking ends and sleeping begins.

STYLING/COMFORT 8/10

Comfort? There are not many six-berth layouts out there that can truly claim to be comfortable when six bodies demand the services of a small space.

But, apart from the new generation of triple-bunk layouts, this fixed-double layout really does remain one of the most practical and comfortable for large families.

Decoratively, the Bailey benefits from modern flush-fit, handle-free lockers, contemporary gun-metal colour fridge door and other smatterings of chrome that's become de rigeur. No problem with that. But my personal tastes sees upholstery, curtains and bunk curtain all too close to the woodwork tone, leaving a sort of goldy-colour saturation. Would it stop me buying the Bailey? Don't be daft. You can change the whole appearance of any caravan with a few quid spent on scatter cushions.

TOWING 9/10

Not content with the added stability twin axles give you, even down here in entry level territory Bailey has added a stabiliser and shock absorbers, which also help to stabilise the caravan. Coming in at 1333kg MRO, the Bailey tops out at 1566kg MTPLM. My bet is most buyers won't get anywhere near that load figure.

KITCHEN 9/10

Somewhat surprisingly, the fridge is the same Thetford unit as in the substantially cheaper Sprite but with manual controls. The free toys must come later then. One you don't have to wait for is the microwave which, although welcome, does look like an after-thought among neat rows of smooth locker fronts. This is a cracking kitchen to use and, had visual appeal matched its practicality it would have scored a perfect ten.

Putting it in perspective, this Bailey kitchen when compared with competitors' six-berth products with this layout, has hugely more upper locker space (even with the bulky microwave), tonnes more lower storage and acres of work top, especially when the bedroom partition is dropped.

WASHROOM 8/10

Nice one, this. Top-end Thetford swivel loo shares space with the shower. But there's clear demarcation between zones with the two-part solid partition which pulls out to screen the loo. The perfectly square space you've just created in which to hose down is generous enough for all but irredeemable salad dodgers.

SLEEPING 8/10

The bedroom itself gets off to a good start by providing more width than the Sprite in that short but important corridor past the bed to the washroom.

The cocooned nature of the bed's construction is inviting, while dimensions and mattress quality are up there with many more luxurious tourers. Light not only comes from the roof-light but through the kitchen's superb mini-Heki just 30cm from the foot of the bed. As you'd expect, personal reading lights and small twin shelves complete the picture.

STORAGE 7/10

Whilst not quite matching the overall capacity of the Sprite, the Bailey still performs outstandingly well in its ability to lose six people's gear. Indeed, it betters it in areas such as washbasin area and kitchen.

BUILD QUALITY 8/10

No complaints here. The ABS front and rear panels will never extol the tough rigidity of GRP but I wonder if that really matters these days in the quest to save weight.

To me, Bailey is the Skoda of the caravan world - the make has been around a long time but, in days gone by, not quite up to the build of others. Then, like Skoda's acquisition by the giant Volkswagen Audi Group, quality climbed steeper than 90s interest rates while value increased too. Which is why Skoda joke jockeys have been hanging their heads in shame for sometime.

EQUIPMENT 9/10

So just why is this Bailey £1149 more than the Sprite? Evidence is everywhere: shock absorbers on alloy wheels, a spare wheel shackled behind the rearmost axle - and you won't pay a penny more for that stabiliser hitch. Inside, you'll find an extra 230v socket, more blown air vents (thankfully including the washroom) and Heki roof-lights the Sprite can only dream of. There's a radio CD/MP3 player and, of course, that microwave.

VALUE FOR MONEY 9/10

Those worried about the extra you'll pay over the Sprite should read the list above again. It really is comprehensive for a caravan priced only just above what's considered entry-level.

When you combine it with the attractive exterior (which Bailey have mastered at this lower end) and the pure value represented by the layout's ability, then you really do have a lot of caravan for the money. ➤



Plenty of room here in the washroom for family showering and dressing. Storage is good, too



The protective hatch tray under the bed is useful but may hinder loading large items



The aperture is narrow - and the door wobbles a bit. It's light in weight, though

SPRITE QUATTRO FB

PRICE **£12,429**

TOWMATCH D



Diamond pack gets you a spare wheel and cradle



A minor point, but twin mirrors beat the Bailey



Basic but there's enough room to shower



Under-bed storage is easy to access



Sturdy build quality revealed by the front locker



Stable door but no window. The amount of light let in by the panoramic front ensures it's not missed

LAYOUT 9/10

It's essentially the same layout as the Bailey but with a more open feel to its interior. For that you can thank the wider body, panoramic window and absence of tall gable end to the nearside lounge settee seen in the Bailey.

There's an open feel, that is, until you venture rearwards where lack of roof light over the bed makes this part of the caravan feel stuffier than the Bailey's bright boudoir.

The Sprite's designers have created a space where lounge, kitchen, dinette and bedroom all seamlessly flow into each other with little, if anything, interrupting line of sight. The kitchen/bedroom bulkhead structure has been kept to the minimum.

STYLING/COMFORT 9/10

"It's a bit John Major," said one. "Too bland," opined another. Testing on Caravan Club sites never leaves you short of second or third opinions. But as I'm the one with the pen and am utterly adverse to bling, I have to say I like its neutral tone.

Most importantly, if you're packing in six people and are set on this fixed-bed layout, then the Sprite's is the version with the best-sorted interior dimensions for the job.

TOWING 8/10

The test model arrived shod with the shimmering splendour of the 'Special Diamond Pack'. At £290 for £575 worth of kit, don't leave home without it.

Ignore the Diamond Anniversary decals you get with the pack, the important thing is that you get an AL-KO stabiliser. Not because of our choice of tow-cars for this feature, but being without a stabiliser on a caravan of any size is folly.

If it helps, a quick reckon up on the abacus shows our family of four would probably load and tug this Sprite at between 1475kg and 1505kg, depending on where we were going and how long for.

KITCHEN 8/10

It strikes me that a 107-litre digitally-controlled fridge on a bare bones value caravan is pretty good, as is the handsome Spinflo separate oven and grill. Lower kitchen storage is plentiful and, with the absence of a microwave, there's also a truck load of upper storage space. Alas, that's three cavernous voids without a sniff of a splitter shelf. Come on, Swift Group, these flimsy things cost less than a pick 'n' mix Gob Stopper so don't chuck us any cost-saving argument. Prep space is easily enough for a family of six even without using the dinette table conveniently behind you.

WASHROOM 6/10

From a manufacturer with a history of making these awkward soulless little spaces at least a little appealing, this one is surprisingly dour. Basic is to be expected - but so also is the Sprite's main cabin, and, to my eyes, that

manages to remain appealing. Still, as long as it does its job (which it does), it's fine. It's at this price level you'll still find shower curtains rather than screens, and basic manual flush loos, but shower space and foot space around the loo enables comfortable use of the facilities. And you may find the basin with cupboard beneath will struggle with the demands of half a dozen people.

SLEEPING 7/10

Where the Bailey feels more snug and well, bedroomy with its more 'separate' feel from the rest of the caravan, the Sprite's fixed double feels more integrated. That benefits daytime living but doesn't help you at night or times of daytime snoozing. Bed dimensions match those of the more costly Bailey, though the mattress feels less robust.

STORAGE 9/10

Here the Quattro FB is extremely well packaged by designers who've created loading aplenty for the end user. Apart from the split shelf issue, the kitchen has already proved its worth for packing. The trend continues around the cabin and the upper lockers can swallow a lot of gear. Better still is the immense under-seat space and, while other competitors may match the total litres of space available, access to it is often difficult.

BUILD QUALITY 8/10

It has the same gauge one piece sides you'll find on Swift Group models which cost six grand more, same chassis, same space frame build to the internals, same washroom door and door handle. Point is the Sprite is built like the Swift Group's premium products, just with less kit or cheaper versions of that kit.

All in all, the Sprite Quattro FB represents a quality ground-up design.

EQUIPMENT 7/10

Of course at this price there's not much to shout about here other than perhaps the generous fridge and Flojet water pump.

There's no disputing the Quattro FB is a big caravan and to have only two 230v sockets - particularly as one will serve the TV - strains the interior's overall practicality.

Factor in that Diamond Pack, though, and you'll welcome, among other things, spare wheel/carrier, radio/CD player, stabiliser and flyscreen.

VALUE FOR MONEY 9/10

The level of equipment may make the Sprite seem lacking but this is in a sense the whole point. That mediocre score of seven for equipment is actually some achievement given the £12,245 price. And it's not all about kit. Here for reasonable money you'll get a wide, mostly bright, well-thought-out design that can house, sleep and feed six people in comfort while not needing a truck to pull it. That's as important to value as any price stuck in any front window.



Wide seats... but so is the wheel arch



The lounge shows off the caravan's 2.23m width - it looks and feels spacious



The open-aspect layout makes the Sprite feel even wider than it is



Work top space is ample for making meals for a family of six



They didn't forget a proper six-berth wardrobe either!



The lower ceiling and width is noticeable in the lounge - and the deep, rich red colour in the soft furnishings will catch your eye



We love the timber-work tone. It's bright in here as well



The pampering zone is adequate for six. Needs more storage, though



Now these are handy. There's a lot to get in the way there though



These triple bunks are what the 616 is all about



Squeezy. That wheel needs an underslung cradle



Worktop length is sufficient to cope



Excellent versatility is a 616 trademark

LUNAR QUASAR 616

PRICE **£15,495**

TOWMATCH D

LAYOUT 9/10

This Lunar's still capable of sleeping six and yes, still has fixed-bed sleeping accommodation. Only this time it's a triple stack of fixed bunks. Lunar also puts a triple-bunk layout on a single axle but, for me, with six on board, I'll have the extra space in this twin-axle version please. It's a caravan of thirds. The rear third houses the bunks and huge four-person dinette (five if for small kids). The centre third sees a nearside kitchen and remarkably a washroom with separate shower. And there's the brilliant lower bunk that, courtesy of two gas rams, morphs into a sealed lower storage space. There's exterior access too.

STYLING/COMFORT 8/10

For those who make a caravan purchase on the basis of fabric looks, here goes... Rich terracotta in upholstery, cushions and tie-backs pick out the best in predominantly cream and fawn soft furnishings. Like the others in this test, metal is a big part of the environment with the silver-effect fridge door and chrome pin strip that runs the length of upper lockers.

I admit that before taking delivery I feared for this six-berth's comfort potential. It's the narrowest caravan here by some margin and they'd tried to squeeze a washroom with separate shower in the middle opposite the kitchen. But again the engineers have nipped and tucked in all the right places so that any risk of a tight hour-glass middle is avoided.

TOWING 8/10

To the Lunar's credit, this Quasar is several rungs higher in the food chain than the Sprite and Bailey. As a result it packs in more kit, too. But you'll be pleased to know that the Lunar's MTPLM still comes within a few kilos of the others and only the Sprite's MRO is noticeably lighter. That 2.16m body width plays a huge part in the weight. The stabiliser arrives free as you might expect.

A final thought: Given comparable car/caravan matching, this twin-axle will be a safer and more stable tow than the identical Quasar 546 on its single axle. Fact.

KITCHEN 8/10

Perhaps it's too late but I'm contemplating renaming this test 'Top Kitchens'. Honestly I never expected three six-berths to put in such a good showing when priorities lie elsewhere. The Lunar shares the same capacity Thetford 107-litre fridge as the others but this silver-fronted example makes the wood-panel versions look dated.

The Lunar lacks the advantage of a central dinette table as back-up, but no matter as work top length is easily sufficient.

WASHROOM 8/10

Negatives first. The sink's cupboard is too small for wash-equipment for six people. And perhaps a bit more decorative panache at the money would be nice.

But the business bits like the top-spec Thetford C250 loo and separate shower cubicle are all positioned and sized to make their use easy. It's bright in here, too, with a Mini-Heki illuminating the place.

SLEEPING 9/10

Three bunks all with personal lighting and two with dedicated windows. Headroom is ample with the top bunk mounted only a little nearer the moon than traditional double bunks.

The dinette's single seat (although it's huge) uses a second hidden base that, when pulled out, bridges the gap to the bench settee opposite, making a fourth very large single bed.

Again the front employs a traditional double bed built from those parallel settees.

Most will use this caravan with three children. That's 42 times you don't have to make up or pack away a bed during a week's holiday. Brilliant!

STORAGE 7/10

Seems all the good news is at the back in the storage category. The narrow gas locker means equipment stored in here in most caravans will end up inside this Lunar. The narrow width also means narrow upper lockers and they're not present in significant enough numbers for six. That triple bunk means no upper lockers here and neither will you find any along the back panel.

Lower storage for bulky objects regains some lost ground. Best of all is the true six-berth-size wardrobe. It has twin doors, it's very wide and certainly up to the job.

BUILD QUALITY 7/10

Lunar's cabinet shop turns out joinery that's very often beyond the quality of others. But the Lunar Quasar constantly contradicts itself. There are a few cheap components inside I don't expect at this money, then it puts in an extra full-size roof light at the rear and another smaller one in the washroom. Then there's the superb auto-control fridge but cheap-looking dinette table.

EQUIPMENT 7/10

A blown air system that serves the whole caravan is what sets the Lunar apart from the other guests here. Three sockets (front middle and back) take care of power demands and the caravan is equipped with a radio CD/MP3 player.

VALUE FOR MONEY 7/10

I'll use three measures here. One. This clever layout delivers immense value to the purchaser. Two. The caravan's weight with decent kit also delivers value to the customer who doesn't want to tow anything heavier. Three. The Lunar is nearly £2200 more than the Bailey. Same fridge, same loo, same oven, both have microwaves. Which of these measures of evaluation is most important is down to your needs.

► SCORES

	Bailey Ranger 620-6 GT60	Sprite Major 6	Lunar Quasar 616
	£13,404	£12,741	£15,495
Layout	8	9	8
Styling/comfort	8	9	8
Towing	9	8	9
Kitchen	9	8	9
Washroom	8	6	8
Sleeping	8	7	9
Storage	7	9	7
Build	8	9	7
Equipment	9	7	9
Value For Money	9	9	9
TOTAL	83	81	83

BAILEY RANGER 620 GT60 83/100

SPRITE MAJOR 6 81/100

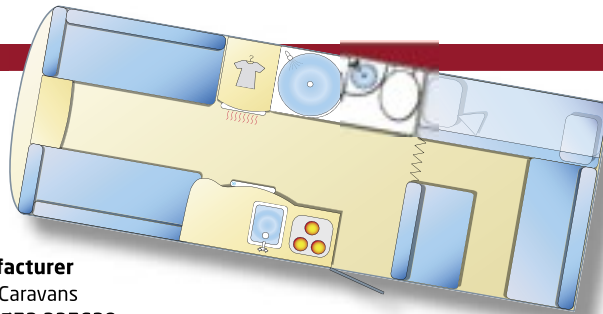
LUNAR QUASAR 83/100

► SPECIFICATION

► LUNAR QUASAR 616

Price £15,495
Axles 1 | Berths 6
MRO 1565kg | **MTPLM** 1346kg
Width 2.216m
Internal length 6.13m
Overall height 2.60m
Bed sizes Front double: 2.01m x 1.86m or singles 1.86m x .68m; rear single: 1.83m x .72m; rear bunk: 1.73m x .64m; rear bunk: 1.75m x .64m
Rear bunk: 1.78m x 0.64m

Manufacturer
 Lunar Caravans
Tel 01772 337628
Web www.lunarcaravans.com

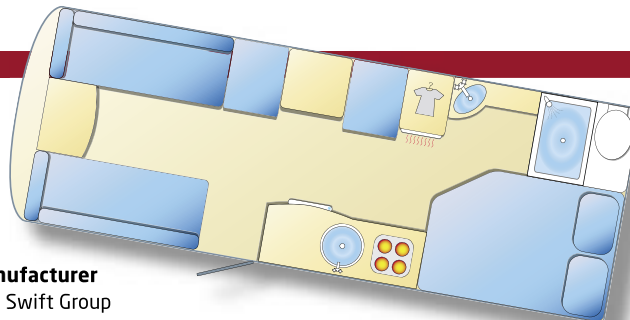


FOR & AGAINST **PROS** ► High spec low weight ► Superb layout ► Separate shower **CONS** ► Insufficient upper storage

► SPRITE QUATTRO

Price £12,429
Axles 1 | Berths 6
MRO 1296kg | **MTPLM** 1555kg
Width 2.23m
Internal length 6.27m
Overall height 2.70m
Bed sizes Front double: 2.0m x 1.80m or single: 1.80m x 0.72m and 1.90m x 0.72m; rear double: 1.92m x 1.33m; **lower** single: 1.80m x 0.70m bunk: 1.78m x 0.59m

Manufacturer
 The Swift Group
Tel 01482 847332
Web www.spritecaravans.co.uk

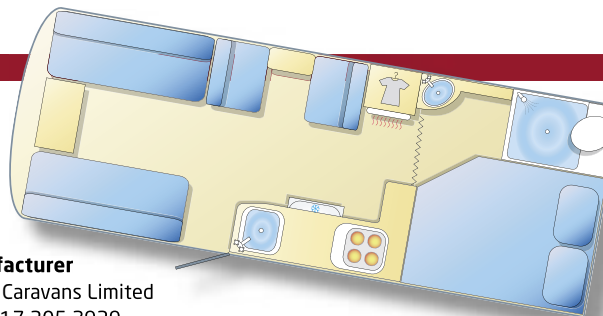


FOR & AGAINST **PROS** ► Contemporary decor ► Living space verses weight ► Price **CONS** ► No cupboard shelves

► BAILEY RANGER 620-6 GT60

Price £13,695
Axles 1 | Berths 6
MRO 1333kg | **MTPLM** 1566kg
Width 2.19m
Internal length 7.91m
Overall height 2.58m
Bed sizes Front double: 2.01m x 1.49m or singles 1.88m x .7m; offside single: 1.73m x .67m; bunk: 1.58m x .60m; rear double: 1.92m x 1.40m

Manufacturer
 Bailey Caravans Limited
Tel 0117 305 2939
Web www.bailey-caravans.co.uk



FOR & AGAINST **PROS** ► Value 'v' kit 'v' weight ► Looks more expensive ► Standard safety kit **CONS** ► Very little

► VERDICT

Firstly if you want a head-to-head, then the basic Bailey Ranger 620-6 will happily slug it out with the Sprite.

But here we prove that in the Bailey you can have a well-kitted twin-axle with most essential toys and more, yet you still have a lightweight tourer. Neither does it look entry level. The Sprite's exterior is a little bland but its interior (same Bailey layout) is easily the more contemporary and appealing of our trio. It's also the cheapest. It functions in much the same way and often better in most areas than the Bailey, just minus some spec. Again, weight figures are entirely acceptable given its size and wide body.

The Lunar is in a sector all on its own. You will not find anywhere else a caravan so narrow, well-equipped and with real wood cabinets at this weight. It's a bit of luxury without putting on the pounds. Kit and build, although good, don't seem to justify the price by themselves. Where you place your personal vote depends on what you're willing to pay for lightness of weight.

It's the Lunar for its layout and weight. The Sprite for interior price and usability - and the Bailey for the being the all rounder. In virtually every discipline this Bristol lightweight out-performs its rivals here. ■

► THE CAR



SKODA SUPERB 2.0TDI

From £21,540

Cheesy name aside, I see why this Skoda Superb made a splash at Caravan Club Tow Car of the Year. Its innovative feature is the boot/hatch opening which, depending on which buttons you press, either flicks up the boot saloon-style or the entire rear end hatch-style. A two-in-one loading option that other manufacturers haughtily sniffed at until BMW nicked the idea for the 5 Series.

You get a choice of VW's superb diesels: the old noisy, powerful but frugal Pumpe Duse unit (cheaper models) or the latest common rail unit that is the current benchmark in diesel refinement.

Opt for the 4x4 version (which uses Audi mechanicals) and you have a kerbweight of 1605kg. That would give you a powerful, practical and sure-footed load-lugger for a snip of what you'd need to chuck at an Audi dealer.

► SPECIAL THANKS

For the loan of the Bailey Ranger
Greentrees Adventure Store
 Dereham, Norfolk
Tel 01362 696434
Web www.greentrees-adventurestore.co.uk

YOU'LL FIND MORE INFORMATION IN OUR COMPREHENSIVE CARAVAN GUIDE ON PAGE 80