



Branching out

George Hinton trials a prototype as caravan giant Bailey launches into the motorhome market

Vehicle supplied for test by: Bailey Motorhomes, South Liberty Lane, Bristol BS3 2SS. Call 0117 966 5967.

THAT A motorhome was undergoing a protracted gestation period in the depths of Bristol has been a fairly open secret among caravan journalists for a while. Now, in these tricky economic times, the Bailey motorhome has finally come to market. The timing may not seem propitious, but this looks like a winning product.

CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

Based on the Peugeot Boxer, the Approach boasts a high specification including twin

airbags, air conditioning and swivel seats with two folding armrests each. Power is derived from the special motorhome-spec 2.2-litre 130bhp unit, coupled to a six-speed manual gearbox. There is no automatic option.

The range initially comprises three models – a two, a four and a six-berth – and, unusually, each one is fitted with the Al-Ko AMC extended lowline galvanised chassis. It has been given a unique wheelbase for this model, where the rear axle is placed as far

back as the layout permits, to counteract the rear kitchen weight bias.

The other huge difference between the Bailey and other motorhomes is its body construction, a developed version of the Alu-Tech timber-free system Bailey Caravans pioneered in 2009.

Sandwich panels are framed in solid plastic and skinned with glassfibre sheet inside and out over a high-density 34mm polystyrene core in walls, roof and floor. Panels are joined to their neighbours by interlocking alloy extrusions.

Exceptionally, the upper floor surface is plywood, 9mm thick, while the underside has 1mm glassfibre weatherproofing. Roof lockers are fastened into the bodyshell, aiding rigidity.

The layout in this SE 620 test model is classic rear-kitchen two-berth, with parallel settees forming a double or single beds and a washroom in the offside rear corner.

ON THE ROAD

The Peugeot Boxer is pretty well glitch-free and a pleasure to drive. While the prototype was to Euro 4-emissions spec, all production models will be Euro 5, which should mean further improvements to performance and economy.

The prototype surprised with its lively performance, which we can only ascribe to its low unladen weight of just 2,782kg. With a licence-friendly 3,500kg chassis, this gives a class-leading payload of 718kg. Exploiting the handling potential of the Al-Ko chassis and a 0-50mph time in the order of 13 seconds, it wasn't quite as 'on rails' as we would have expected, due to the relatively short wheelbase and 'pendulum' effect of the rear kitchen – so Bailey has repositioned the rear axle a full four inches further back to improve the balance.

As well as reducing weight, Alu-Tech's rigid construction results in minimal body noise on the road. All locker shelves are fixed and all doors close tightly. External wind noise is virtually absent.

Excellent ABS braking includes EBF (Electronic Brakeforce Distribution) and visibility is generally good with, in this layout, a rear window for some through-vision.

What we haven't mentioned yet is body width: Bailey quotes this as 7ft 8in (2.34m), but this excludes such sticky-out bits as wheel arches and skirts, so the full width is 7ft 10in (2.38m), which is unusually wide. That's without the door mirrors' projections, which take it up to 8ft 10in (2.69m). If your mirrors go through a gap, the rest will follow, but you need to get used to taking up a whole carriageway width on many roads, and treat the Bailey more like a truck than a campervan.

With the well-equipped cab comes a standard Peugeot radio/CD player. High-quality JVC-branded rear speakers are fitted above the ends of the settees.

Steel 15in wheels have full trims, a fifth being underslung in a rear cradle. Ride quality is on the firm side, as you might expect from the weights quoted above.

Access from cab to rear is over 10in wide between the seats, while the low-profile Luton gives plenty of headroom.

LIVING ABOARD

The low chassis obviates the need for an electric step and saves weight, so you have just a 13in (33cm) climb up to the foam-insulated GRP inset step well. There is a

6in (150mm) step down from the cab, but its positioning should cause no hazard.

A few folk might be uncomfortable standing in the Bailey, its minimum headroom being 6ft 6in (1.98m), but they will be the exception.

The combination of wide body and tasteful, walnut-effect furniture, gives the Bailey a warm, welcoming ambience, aided by a Heki 2 sunroof orientated lengthways. A huge 29in (74cm) aisle width between both furniture and sofas means two people can move about with ease.

Sprung upholstery is divided into two on both sides for ease of handling, and supplemented by a pair of plump bolster cushions plus a pair of scatters. The Truma Combi boiler and water pump are located beneath the offside settee, while the rear end of the opposite seat houses the electrical centre, trip switches and battery charger. A new control panel set above the caravan door has a minimalist design but is simplicity itself to operate and understand.

Lighting is taken care of by six spotlights, two being in the Luton, and a single halogen ceiling lamp. There is pre-wiring for TV, leaving it to the customer to install their choice of aerial etc.

For clothes storage there are six main roof lockers, five being shelved, plus four smaller ones in the Luton. The wardrobe has an excellent 48in hanging length, though this means the rail may be out of reach for anyone in the lower height range. Two shelves are provided, unusually at the bottom, easiest for access and best for weight distribution. The large freestanding table (39in x 25in) stows in the wardrobe for travel.

A Whale Aquasource II in-built pump system fills the 22-gallon (100-litre) underfloor heated and insulated fresh water tank and prevents accidental filling with anything but water. The matching waste water tank has its large rigid drain outlet on the offside. No corner steadies are fitted, but there is hardly any movement when parked. Latest legislation dictates fitment of a carbon monoxide detector as well as a smoke alarm.

A 105Ah battery is located in an external nearside locker that also houses the 16A mains hook-up outlet (a 25m cable is supplied). Two 6/7kg gas cylinders can be carried in the over-axle locker next to the caravan door. The body is prepared for installation of an awning and mountings for a rear cycle rack are ready-fitted.

KITCHEN

The worktop measures 4ft 5in (1.35m) long and 25in (65cm) deep. There is around 14in x 24in of work surface at the right side next to the similar-sized stainless sink, itself lifted straight from the Bailey tourer range.

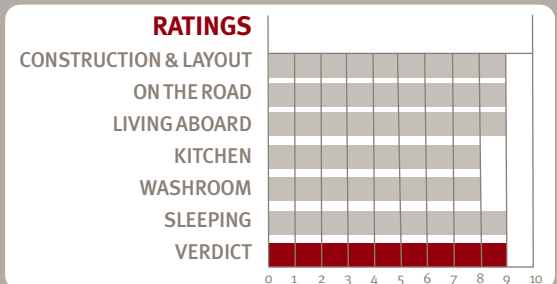


A warm and welcoming feel – plus at least 6ft 6in of standing room



Lounge settees convert into a massive double bed

“Alu-Tech's rigid construction results in minimal body noise”



RRP/as tested	£39,995 (approx) / £41,000 OTR (approx)
Base vehicle	Peugeot Boxer 3500 MWB
Engine	2,198cc HDi 4-cyl DOHC 16V common-rail
Power	130bhp (74kW) @ 2,900rpm
Torque	236lb ft (320Nm) @ 2,000-3,000rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, FWD
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/19.8gal (90 litres)/23.8mpg
Overall length	20ft 8 1/2in (6.02m)
Overall width	7ft 10in (2.38m) exc mirrors; 8ft 10in (2.69m) inc mirrors
Overall height	9ft 8in (2.94m)
Min internal height	6ft 6in (1.98m)
MRO	2,782kg (54.8cwt)
MTPLM	3,500kg (68.9cwt)
User payload	718kg (14.1cwt)
Berths	2
NCC approved	Yes

Figures supplied by manufacturer

Club insurance: 0800 028 4809 • Info: bailey-caravans.co.uk



Above: the end kitchen provides a practical meal preparation and cooking area

Above right: the washroom is stylish and pretty spacious



(137 x 91cm). The toilet is Thetford's improved flat-top C260 rotating cassette model with a separate header tank, for those who add flushing additive.

The shower tray measures approximately 18in x 32in (46 x 81cm) and the shower boasts its own water control with water-saving spray and riser-rail. There is a neat corner shelf/soap dish, a tailored shower mat, bi-fold doors and through-floor drains both ends. Storage is really generous for two, with a shelved cupboard under the sink and an ample wall locker in the front corner.

Fittings here include twin robe hooks, a tooth mug, towel/tissue holders and a long mirror. There's a clear window as well as a five-way rooflight in the separate shower compartment, with a striplight over the doorway.

SLEEPING

Beech-slatted bases simply lift at the front and pull out into the aisle to extend into a huge double bed at 5ft wide x 7ft 6in, with the addition of a small, folded infill section.

Alternatively, you can form a pair of unequal-length single beds by sliding the cab seats fully forwards and inserting a pair of lightweight infill panels behind them to support the two bolster cushions. Lengths are then 6ft 1in offside and 6ft 7in nearside, with a generous 2ft 4in width.

Lined purple curtains supplement the Horrex pleated flyscreen/blinds, while the cab is equipped with Remis window blinds all round.

VERDICT

It is not easy coming up with something different in today's established market, but with its Alu-Tech ace up its sleeve and the ploy of going to a really wide body, Bailey has quite clearly succeeded.

The final sweetener is the price, which in my opinion represents amazing value for money. If it appeals to you, I'd suggest you get in the queue tomorrow! ■

This comes complete with tailored polythene bowl and nylon chopping board and is covered by the grey plastic drainer, sized to fit precisely onto the available work surface. For your electrical appliances, there is a 13A socket in the right-hand corner.

The cupboard beneath the worktop houses the slide-out plastic cutlery tray and two wire baskets beneath. Occupying the space beneath the sink is the Thetford oven/grill unit, which the former Spinflo designers have been sweating over in an effort to make it rattle-free. Even the grill-pan's fret is designed to wedge tightly under the oven shelf in its lowest position, but anything made from numerous sheets of metal just has to be capable of resonances under some road conditions. A good effort though.

The four-burner Thetford hob occupies the left side of the worktop, with Dometic's RM8550 fridge beneath. Its large capacity of 122 litres gross belies its external size, but that's what you get when you unship the detachable freezer compartment.

The dresser to the left of the entrance is simply a 24 x 19in worktop, with the

external gas locker housed beneath. Bailey proposes it as a TV station and therefore has mounted the stainless steel Baumatic microwave above it at roof locker height, but this is entirely unsatisfactory for many cooks, as its base is 4ft 11in above floor level. That is my wife's height and there's no way she will cook anything above head height.

A Mini Heki rooflight provides extra daylight and ventilation, while three LED downlighters in front of the roof lockers give night-time illumination.

The centrally-locked Hartal door incorporates a waste bin at its base. Fortunately its lid can be left open, as it is just seven inches above floor level, so you can drop things in without bending.

Although the prototype had a one-piece detachable carpet, production models will be carpeted in two sections, which will both aid water tank access and give the kitchen a detachable carpet. Overall, it's very practical.

WASHROOM

The baby Belfast-style acrylic sink gives this room some style and it is generously dimensioned at 54in x 36in

