



# Guide to... OWNING YOUR FIRST CARAVAN

When you decide to purchase a caravan, you are buying into a fantastic new lifestyle, full of exciting adventures. But it is a big step, so here's our expert guide to ownership, to help you on your way

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CUT OUT  
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Also available as a FREE ebook - see  
[www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how/](http://www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how/) to download yours!



# CARAVAN LAYOUTS

Before you head off to the forecourts, you need a clear idea of your ideal caravan, starting with the all-important floorplan

HERE IS OUR EXPERT rundown of some of the most popular caravan layouts, who they are good for and who would be better off avoiding them. Be sure to consider all of your potential requirements – both now and in the future – before deciding which is going to be the best for you.

For information on the weight of caravan you can tow, and tow car matching, see our guide at [www.practicalcaravan.com/advice/caravan-genius-weights-and-measures](http://www.practicalcaravan.com/advice/caravan-genius-weights-and-measures).

## 1 Transverse island bed, rear washroom

Island beds are a surprisingly recent addition to caravans, introduced from the world of motorhomes.

Caravans are a little bit wider than motorhomes, though, so it's far more common to see them with a transverse island bed, which takes up less length.

This floorplan, with an end washroom, is probably the most popular, particularly for those who tour as a couple, with only occasional guests.

You get a washroom more to yourselves, and the centre of the caravan feels more airy than it would if there were a central washroom spread over the axle.

■ **Good for** Couples who are mainly travelling on their own

■ **Less good for** Families with small kids who might need to use the toilet at night

## 2 Transverse island bed, central washroom

Transverse-island-bed layouts with central washrooms are slightly less common than those with end washrooms.

With that washroom usually spread right across the caravan, they do offer more privacy for whoever sleeps in the island bed. You can have a real den there.

Quite often, the central washroom is partitioned off on both sides, giving you what is, in effect, a dressing room as well as a washing room.

However, this arrangement can make the centre of the caravan feel rather dark and possibly a bit cramped.

■ **Good for** Family groups where the adults want some privacy

■ **Less good for** Anyone who is looking for a really airy interior

## 3 In-line island bed, central washroom

Some layouts offer an in-line island bed – in other words, one that runs lengthways from the rear wall of the caravan. For obvious reasons, these tend to be longer caravans, often with twin axles.

In-line island beds are usually easier to walk around, but one disadvantage in caravans is that the large storage area below them is often only internally accessible.

With a transverse bed, there can be an external-access locker door on the side of the caravan, but you never see such a thing on the rear panel.

■ **Good for** Confident tow car drivers who like a luxurious bedroom

■ **Less good for** Anyone hoping to travel with bulkier items stored in the caravan

## 4 Single beds, end washroom

This arrangement can often look almost like two separate lounges, and in fact, with just a couple of additional scatter cushions, you could turn the single beds into extra seating during the day, although there won't be a table here.

Having the washroom located at the end of the caravan leaves the central area feeling much more roomy.

There isn't always any kind of partition separating off the bedroom area, however, and the end washroom is a fair way away at night-time for anyone who is sleeping in the front beds.

■ **Good for** People who like airy interiors, or prefer the toilet to be out of the way

■ **Less good for** Those travelling with small children who need the toilet at night

## 5 Single beds, central washroom

This layout, with a central washroom spread across the van and two single beds right behind it, is just about hanging on among UK manufacturers.

With nothing beyond the beds at the rear, the back bedroom can tend to feel cut off, so this layout is very good for anyone who likes to get away from potential noise up front. You might find that the central area of the van feels less airy and more cramped.

■ **Good for** Couples who want luxury but also their own sleeping space, or friends who are travelling together

■ **Less good for** A sense of camaraderie while you're on tour

## 6 Rear corner bed, corner washroom

Rear corner beds take up less length and space than island beds, and are almost as popular. With a corner washroom, as in this layout, you can introduce them into relatively short caravans, because bed and washroom will take up the same amount of the length.

This layout is frequently found in caravans for larger families, where there is often more than one dinette, too. The adults get space, but not much privacy.

■ **Good for** Those who want a fixed bed in a shorter caravan

■ **Less good for** People looking for a van with a very spacious washroom >>

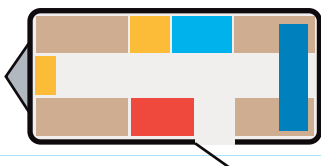
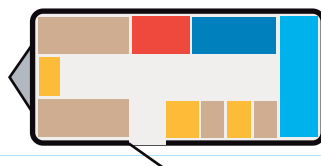
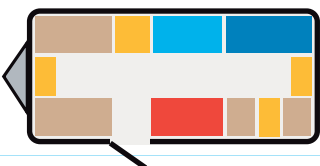
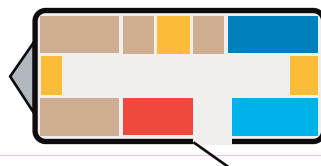
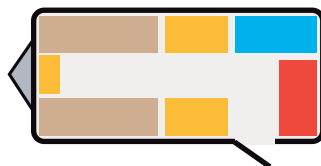
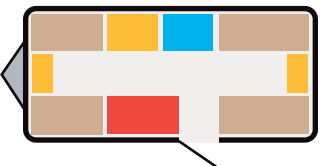
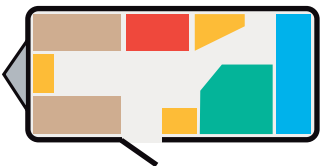
**'Be sure to consider all of your potential requirements – both now and in the future – before deciding which is going to be the best for you'**





- KEY**
- Seats/beds
  - Kitchen
  - Washroom
  - Fixed bed
  - Bunk bed
  - Table/cupboard

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GUIDE!





## 7 Corner bed, end washroom

Locating an end washroom behind the rear corner bed overcomes the problem of the washroom being at all poky, because they are often huge – although that does tend to make for a longer caravan overall.

Moving the washroom back also often provides more wardrobe space, or a larger central dinette, and there's sometimes extra storage capacity on the way down to the washroom door.

That does mean the washroom is a fair way for anyone who is sleeping at the front to reach at night.

■ **Good for** People who want the luxury of a large fixed double bed with a huge washroom close to hand

■ **Less good for** Anyone who travels with children who are liable to need the toilet during the night

## 8 Rear lounge

Caravans with two lounges – one at the front, one at the back – were once the mainstay of all tourer ranges. But they have almost entirely petered out now.

They make sense if there are just two of you and you want a smaller caravan for towing purposes, but you might also occasionally take a grandchild along with you. If there are just the two of you, it can be appealing to leave the bed in front made up and then relax in the little lounge at the rear during the day.

■ **Good for** Large families, or couples with an early riser or who occasionally bring a grandchild along with them

■ **Less good for** Anyone who finds putting up beds a bit of a chore

## 9 End washroom

This layout, with a large and usually luxurious end washroom at the rear of the caravan, has become increasingly popular in recent years.

This arrangement can provide a very comfortable touring experience – so long as you don't mind making up the bed every night – because moving the washroom to the back usually leaves enough space on the nearside rear for a large sideboard, providing extra storage capacity and a handy place to put the TV.

Although this layout is most common in two-berths, there are some vans on the market that include a side dinette here, which can be converted into a single bed or a pair of bunks.

■ **Good for** Couples who usually tour by themselves and still want some luxury

■ **Less good for** Anyone who prefers not to be making up beds every night

## 10 End kitchen

If you think the stricter confines of a caravan should not prevent you from rustling up a quick cassoulet, then this layout, with the kitchen spread most of the way across the back of the interior, could be just the right one for you.

The kitchen in this floorplan is usually L-shaped, which is excellent for ergonomics, and has loads of storage space.

You do, however, have to make some sacrifices as a result. The washroom in this floorplan is often squashed into the corner, so can be poky. Some Continental models had the kitchen across the front, but this proved unpopular in the UK.

■ **Good for** Chefs in the caravan

■ **Less good for** People who think that a comfortable washroom is more important

## Caravans with bunk beds

Fixed bunk beds are a regular feature in UK and Continental caravan.

If you are taking a large party with you on tour, you have a choice of three, possibly four, different layouts.

## 11 Lateral bunks, corner washroom

Possibly the most popular option, here you have a pair of bunk beds in one rear corner and a corner washroom in the other, with the two usually being separated by a large wardrobe for storage.

In longer caravans, having so much at the rear does mean you have extra space further up front for a second dinette, which can sometimes be made into further bunks, or a bed for a child, and a larger central kitchen.

Bear in mind that there isn't much privacy, even with curtain partitions, and you will have to sneak past sleeping people to reach the toilet during the night.

■ **Good for** Larger families with children of widely differing ages

■ **Not good for** Anyone who values their privacy above all

## 12 Children's room

This layout, with a pair of bunks in the rear offside corner next to a small dinette that can be turned into two more

bunk beds, appeared in the past couple of seasons and has been rapidly gaining popularity among buyers.

It leaves the children with an area that they can call their own, and not just at night-time. You can have this floorplan with a central kitchen opposite a central washroom, which is fine if you are content for the adults and the children to be a fair way apart from each other.

■ **Good for** Adults and children who like to have some space of their own

■ **Less good for** Anyone who prefers to be together, or feels that the adults should have a fixed bed

## 13 Lateral bunks, end washroom

As with rear corner beds, this option, with the washroom spread right across the rear of the van, is also popular.

It does mean you get a larger washroom, and sometimes with the washroom pushed right to the back, you can then have the second dinette (and possibly a second set of bunks) opposite the fixed bunks.

That creates, in effect, a sort of children's zone, which you could potentially partition off for more privacy.

However, you still have the issue of having to get past this area to reach the toilet during the night.

■ **Good for** Families who need a large washroom, or where the children want to be together

■ **Less good for** Adults who want easy access to the washroom

## 14 Transverse bunks

This arrangement, with bunk beds spread across the back of the caravan, has disappeared from UK ranges, but is still offered by some Continental brands.

It does mean that you can accommodate a large number of people in a relatively short caravan, because the bunks take up less length than they would if they were laterally located.

Some manufacturers offer three bunk beds here, so you could tour with five, or even seven, people.

■ **Good for** Large families touring in smaller caravans

■ **Less good for** Families who like to spread out during the day

**'If you think the stricter confines of a caravan should not prevent you from rustling up a quick cassoulet, an end kitchen could be just the right one for you'**





# CARAVAN MANUFACTURERS

Once you've selected the layouts that meet your needs, it's time to get to know the caravan brands. Here's our round-up of some major players

IF YOU'RE PLANNING to buy a caravan, it really pays to do your research and seek out the right manufacturer. After all, a new tourer is a significant purchase.

Fortunately, there is plenty of choice, with many excellent caravan brands out there, so have a look online, go to a show, see the products and meet the manufacturers.

Here's our selection of some of the top caravan producers in the market – it's not an exhaustive list, but it will help steer you towards brands that are worth a look.

## Visit the caravan shows

If you find the sheer number of vehicles out there bewildering, help is at hand. There are UK shows you can visit where you can view a wide variety of models from many of the manufacturers listed here – all in one place.

The two biggest usually run at the NEC in Birmingham, with the larger show in October, when the season's new models are launched, and the smaller in February.

Two shows at Glasgow's SEC Centre take place at around the same time for buyers north of the border, although the most recent one has been postponed.

## Check out our annual awards

Our annual Owner Satisfaction Awards, run in conjunction with The Camping and Caravanning Club, provide great insight into the best manufacturers out there,

as our readers – and Club members – offer feedback to give us an accurate idea of the market, as well as highlighting the best dealers for the finest buying experience.

For our 2022 Owner Satisfaction Awards, we received 3449 responses – an increase from the figure of 2848 in the previous Awards. Learn more at [www.practicalcaravan.com/news/meet-the-winners-of-our-owner-satisfaction-awards-2022](http://www.practicalcaravan.com/news/meet-the-winners-of-our-owner-satisfaction-awards-2022).

We also run the *Practical Caravan* Awards ([www.practicalcaravan.com/awards](http://www.practicalcaravan.com/awards)), where our expert judges use their collective decades of experience to select the standout vans from the top brands, in a range of categories.

## ADRIA

Drury Drive, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 1WH  
▶ 01787 888 980  
▶ [www.adria.co.uk](http://www.adria.co.uk)

The UK is Adria's key market for the caravan ranges it produces. The Slovenian company must be doing something right, because it has a larger footprint in this country than any other Continental manufacturer.

As a result, it wasn't surprising to see Adria win Best New Caravan Manufacturer at the Owner Satisfaction Awards 2022, with a score of 89.5%.

The brand also performed well at the *Practical Caravan* Awards 2022, winning the Best 4-berth Caravan category with

the Adria Adora Tiber. This model's smart design touches and clever features, such as the well-laid-out washroom, really impressed the judges. The van was also shortlisted for two further categories.

## AIRSTREAM

Lowdham Road, Gunthorpe,  
Nottingham NG14 7GS  
▶ 0115 966 3838  
▶ [www.lowdhams.com](http://www.lowdhams.com)

These world-famous American caravans, with their distinctive silver exterior, have been through quite a few changes in terms of distribution in the UK in recent years. They are now exclusively sold through Lowdham Leisureworld.

## BAILEY

South Liberty Lane, Bristol BS3 2SS  
▶ 0117 966 5967  
▶ [www.baileyofbristol.co.uk](http://www.baileyofbristol.co.uk)

Bailey is one of Britain's biggest caravan manufacturers, with its Unicorn range in particular proving very popular. For the 2022 season, these have been improved with even larger front windows. The previous season also saw the brand start to produce more 8ft-wide models.

Bailey was a gold award winner in the Best Pre-owned Caravan Manufacturer category >>



Adria



Airstream





*Bailey*



*Coachman*



*Eriba*



*Erwin Hymer UK*

at our Owner Satisfaction Awards, with a score of 86.9% highlighting the brand's popularity with customers.

There were also silver awards in the Best Overall Caravan Manufacturer and Best New Caravan Manufacturer categories, where Bailey achieved totals of 83.3% and 81.8% respectively.

The brand was also the recipient of the Best Caravan for Families award at our *Practical Caravan Awards 2022*, thanks to the Bailey Pegasus Grande SE Ancona, where the spacious parallel-seat front lounge was just one of the features that impressed our judges. The model also made it onto the shortlist for three other categories.

#### COACHMAN

Amsterdam Road, Sutton Fields Industrial Estate, Hull HU7 0XF  
 > 01482 839 737  
 > [www.coachman.co.uk](http://www.coachman.co.uk)

Coachman has had a very successful year, being crowned the Best Overall

Caravan Manufacturer at our Owner Satisfaction Awards 2022, achieving a superb rating of 89.6%. In addition, the UK firm also received a very impressive score of 93% as it topped the Best Pre-owned Caravan Manufacturer category.

To complete its success, Coachman reached a total of 87.9% in the Best New Caravan Manufacturer category, finishing in second place.

The brand performed well at the *Practical Caravan Awards 2022*, too, where our panel of judges awarded the Best Caravan over £30,000 category to the Coachman Lusso II, with the model oozing quality, thanks to its comfortable and capacious interior, and high specification level.

The Best Caravan for Couples also went to the firm, courtesy of the Coachman VIP 540 Xtra, where features such as a dressing table help to create an opulent environment that is ideal for luxury touring.

#### ERIBA

Holzstrasse 19, D-88339 Bad Waldsee, Germany  
 > 00 49 7524 9990  
 > [www.eriba.com/gb/en](http://www.eriba.com/gb/en)

Famous for its miniature caravans with pop-up roofs, Eriba, which is Hymer's caravan brand, also produces very luxurious (and heavy) conventional caravans.

#### ERWIN HYMER UK

Delves Lane, Consett, County Durham DH8 7PE  
 > 0371 964 2113  
 > [www.elddis.co.uk](http://www.elddis.co.uk)

This is the company that produces Elddis, Compass, Xplore and Buccaneer caravans. Now part of the huge Erwin Hymer Group, it offers plenty of dealer specials, too.

The firm had a very successful *Practical Caravan Awards*. Xplore was awarded the Best Caravan under £20,000, as our judging panel picked out the 585 as a model that would appeal to new caravanners, as well as highlighting the good value it provides.

The Buccaneer Bermuda took home Best Caravan for Seasonal Pitches, thanks to the excellent kit and other features, including a comfortable island bed.

Seven of the Elddis caravans were also shortlisted, across six awards categories.

**'If you find the sheer number of vehicles out there bewildering, help is at hand. There are UK shows you can visit where you can view a wide variety of models – all in one place'**





Freedom

The brand also received a coveted gold award in the Best Pre-owned Caravan Manufacturer category at our Owner Satisfaction Awards, with a score of 85.3%, as well as a silver award for Best New Caravan Manufacturer and Best Overall Caravan Manufacturer.

### FREEDOM

Main Road, Little Haywood,  
Stafford ST18 0TR  
 > 01889 883 088  
 > [www.freedomcaravans.com](http://www.freedomcaravans.com)

A niche operation, Freedom has been selling specialised ultra-lightweight and budget Polish-built caravans for some decades. It has recently branched out, though, with new Spanish-built models.

The Freedom Jetstream Twin Sport clearly impressed our experts at the *Practical Caravan Awards*, with the model shortlisted for three categories.

The two-berth has a U-shaped lounge that combines with a MiRO of only 700kg to create a very attractive option for couples.

### KNAUS

Helmut-Knaus-Strasse 1, D-94118,  
Jandelsbrunn, Germany  
 > 00 49 08583 211  
 > [www.knaus.com/en-uk](http://www.knaus.com/en-uk)

German brand Knaus has been gaining publicity of late with its highly innovative

caravans, including the Sport & Fun and the Travelino. It was therefore not surprising to see the Knaus Sport 500UF ePower being shortlisted in the Best Caravan for Innovation category at the *Practical Caravan Awards 2022*, with the van offering buyers the chance to go all-electric.

The Knaus Südwind 580 QS 60 was another shortlisted model that impressed us, with stand-out features including a Dometic toilet and a stylish interior.

The manufacturer also produces more conventional tourers, through its range of StarClass caravans.

### SWIFT

Dunswell Road, Cottingham,  
East Yorkshire HU16 4JX  
 > 01482 875 740  
 > [www.swiftgroup.co.uk](http://www.swiftgroup.co.uk)

Over the years, the mighty Swift Group has acquired a range of other caravan brands, including Eccles, which celebrated its centenary last year, and Sprite, which remains a hugely popular budget range within the extensive Swift stable.

Look out, too, for the Basecamp, which is aimed at active outdoor types. The Swift Basecamp was deemed the Best 6-berth Caravan by our judges at the *Practical Caravan Awards 2022*, with the excellent spec helping to secure the win.

The manufacturer also won the Best 2-berth Caravan, with our judging panel



Knaus

very impressed by the spaciousness and contemporary interior of the Conqueror 480. We also awarded the Best Caravan under £30,000 to the Swift Challenger X 860, with the comfortable soft furnishings of the four-berth, combined with welcome features such as a well-equipped washroom, catching the eye of the judges.

Swift was well represented throughout the Awards, with seven models shortlisted across the categories.

The caravan-maker also proved popular at our Owner Satisfaction Awards, where Swift finished second in the Best Overall Caravan Manufacturer category, with a score of 85.5%. The UK brand also came second in Best Pre-owned Caravan Manufacturer, with a very impressive total of 90.1%.

### WEINSBERG

Helmut-Knaus-Strasse 1, D-94118,  
Jandelsbrunn, Germany  
 > 00 49 08583 211  
 > [www.weinsberg.com](http://www.weinsberg.com)

Weinsberg is Knaus's budget caravan brand, maintaining a strong focus on family layouts and family-friendly interiors.

It's subsequently not surprising to have seen the German brand come top in the Best Caravan under £15,000 category at the *Practical Caravan Awards 2022*, with the Weinsberg Caracito 390QD offering an excellent level of spec and importantly, clear value for money.



Swift



Weinsberg



# ESSENTIAL KIT

With so much great gear to choose from, it would be easy to overload yourself with accessories – so here's a selection of touring must-haves

## 1 Camping chairs

A comfortable camping chair is worth its weight in gold on tour. These two Summer padded camping chairs weigh in at just 3.3kg each, and come with a handy drinks holder and a useful pocket for stashing your latest copy of *Practical Caravan*.

**Price** £89.99

**Web** [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

## 2 Gas spanner

Spare your knuckles and unnecessary effort by investing in a really good gas spanner. This heavy-duty example is well priced and should make changing your gas bottles a doddle.

**Price** £6.35

**Web** [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

## 3 Fresh-water container

When you're pitched up on site you're sure to notice fellow caravanners wheeling their fresh-water containers to the nearest tap – this 40-litre Aquaroll is a popular size and brand.

**Price** £59.99

**Web** [www.primaleisure.com](http://www.primaleisure.com)

## 4 Water hose

If you have a portable fresh-water container, you'll need a suitable hose that connects to the van and also has a submersible pump, to bring the water onboard. This is the Whale Watermaster Caravan Water Pump; other brands are available.

**Price** £76.95

**Web** [www.towsure.com](http://www.towsure.com)

## 5 Hook-up cable

Unless you plan to spend your entire tour off-grid, you shouldn't forget a hook-up cable to connect you to the mains. A 10m cable should do it in most cases, or to be doubly sure, you could go for a 25m one.

**Price** £22.27

**Web** [www.towsure.com](http://www.towsure.com)

## 6 Steady winder

Some caravanners use a drill attachment, but if you're just starting out, a manual steady winder is a must-buy. This well-priced example from Towsure should do the job nicely.

**Price** £7.50

**Web** [www.towsure.com](http://www.towsure.com)







### 7 Outwell Collaps Kettle

Get one of these and in a few days, you'll be wondering how you survived without it. It's collapsible, can be placed on direct heat, is dishwasher safe and, of course, makes you a cracking cup of tea.

**Price** £42.95

**Web** [www.outwell.com](http://www.outwell.com)

### 8 Waste water container

If you're not hooked up to mains water drainage, you'll need something to empty your waste water into, so it can be wheeled away and emptied. There are various types available; the Wastemaster brand is very popular.

**Price** £55.75

**Web** [www.towsure.com](http://www.towsure.com)

### 9 Milenco Aero 4 Towing Mirrors

Towing mirrors are an absolute essential, and Milenco is well known for producing excellent examples. The Aero 4 Mirrors feel sturdy and should happily stay in place when you're on the road.

**Price** £67.50

**Web** [www.pioneeracaravans.co.uk](http://www.pioneeracaravans.co.uk)

### 10 Fire extinguisher

This 950g BC Powder 34B extinguisher is suitable for both liquid and electrical equipment fires. Note that it is not suitable for use on deep fat fryers; you should consider a fire blanket, too, and ensure that working fire and carbon monoxide alarms are fitted.

**Price** £17.50

**Web** [www.motorhomeshop.co.uk](http://www.motorhomeshop.co.uk)

### 11 Weber Traveler Gas Barbecue

A barbecue is a wonderful enhancement to a touring holiday. This gas-fuelled model can be folded for easy storage, yet has a large cooking area and provides a low-to-high temperature range.

**Price** £465

**Web** [www.weber.com](http://www.weber.com)

### 12 First aid box

This well-stocked 220-piece first aid kit includes antiseptic towels, butterfly closures, safety pins, sticking plasters, fingertip strips, first-aid tape, eye pads and more. Enough to treat most minor injuries.

**Price** £24.99

**Web** [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

### 13 Milenco 3004 hitchlock

You can't fit too many security gadgets to your caravan - they will help prevent theft and keep your insurance valid. If you have an Al-Ko hitch, take a look at the Milenco Super Heavy-Duty lock: it fits around the hitch to help stop thieves towing the van away.

**Price** £102.95

**Web** [www.towsure.com](http://www.towsure.com)

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8



CUT OUT  
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GUIDE!



9



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**14****15****14 Aqua Kem Fluid & Rinse Concentrate Duo Pack**

Keeping your toilet facilities in good condition is a key part of ensuring an enjoyable tour. That's where these useful products from Thetford come in – they prevent unpleasant odours and will keep everything just as it should be.

**Price** £15.49**Web** [www.autoleisure.co.uk](http://www.autoleisure.co.uk)**15 Torch lantern**

Even with an awning light and a flashlight app on your mobile, a torch that you can put down to provide light while you adjust the gas bottle or empty a locker is a godsend.

**Price** £22.99**Web** [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)**CUT OUT AND KEEP GUIDE!****16****16 Dometic awning**

If you're looking for extra space on tour, an awning is a must. The 260 Redux is one of two porch awning models in Dometic's latest Leggera Air Redux range: it's lightweight and uses recycled fabrics.

**Price** £525**Web** [www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)**17****18****17 Culinaire MagiCan tin opener**

A tin opener is an undervalued yet vital item, only fully appreciated when it isn't to hand. Make sure this doesn't happen to you by keeping this useful accessory in your caravan kitchen at all times.

**Price** £6.49**Web** [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)**18 Brunner Space tableware**

Melamine tableware removes any worries about having to clear up smashed crockery in the confines of your caravan. This rather eye-catching set weighs in at just 3.28kg.

**Price** £61**Web** [www.primaleisure.com](http://www.primaleisure.com)**19****19 Specialised caravan cover**

Keep your caravan clean and safe from damage with a good quality cover, to protect it when it's not being used on tour. Specialised Covers offers covers for all the leading brands, and can create a bespoke version if yours isn't listed.

**Price** From £399**Web** [www.specialisedcovers.com](http://www.specialisedcovers.com)**20****20 The North Face Slides**

Comfortable footwear that you can slide into is welcome on tour, ideal for just popping on when you need to go to the washrooms in the morning. This pair from The North Face provides comfort and style to create a really winning combination.

**Price** £35**Web** [www.thenorthface.co.uk](http://www.thenorthface.co.uk)





# COMMON ERRORS

Sammy Faircloth addresses some common mistakes made when touring and suggests ways to avoid them

CUT OUT  
AND KEEP  
GUIDE!



WHEN YOU ARE starting out in the world of caravanning, there is a great deal of new knowledge that needs to be acquired and put into practice, and occasionally, mistakes can be made. Personally, I prefer to see these mistakes as something of a learning curve!

So, without further ado, let's take a look at some of the most common caravanning errors.

## Tyres

The tyres are your only contact with the road and if they are not in good condition, or serviced regularly, you could end up anywhere but on the road.

Checking the tyres' condition is often overlooked, so if your caravan has been left stationary for a few months, do a visual check of the tyres (and the spare tyre). Are there cracks

in the side wall? Has any bubbling occurred (1)?

If there are any signs of degradation, then change the tyres immediately.

Before setting off on any journey, check the tyre pressure to ensure that the caravan is safe and stable. Bear in mind that the tyres must be cold before checking the pressure (2). Incorrect tyre pressure

could cause a number of serious problems, such as affecting the handling of the caravan and the fuel consumption, reducing the tyres' longevity and potentially causing a tyre to fail.

## Hitching up

In caravanning, hitching up is one of the most important stages, and if you get it wrong, this could be catastrophic. Don't ever rush this task – you could end up becoming separated from your caravan (3).

Make sure that the breakaway cable is in good condition and the correct length. The cable's job is to deploy the handbrake and (hopefully) stop the caravan in its tracks, thus preventing it from becoming a runaway van on the road. Finally, don't forget to take the handbrake off before moving away.

## Motor movers

To engage the motor mover, there are various steps to complete. First, turn on the power source; second, engage >>



1 Tyres that remain stationary for long periods can start to degrade and cracks or bubbling can appear on the side walls 2 Always check tyre pressures before departing on any journey 3 Never rush the process of hitching up, or you might end up losing your caravan 4 Disengage motor mover roller before driving away

## AREAS TO DOUBLE CHECK BEFORE SETTING OFF!

- ☐ Tyres
- ☐ Hitching up
- ☐ Motor movers
- ☐ Loading
- ☐ Corner steadies
- ☐ Waste and water
- ☐ Fridge
- ☐ Toilets
- ☐ Windows and skylights
- ☐ Dimensions







the roller and finally, take off the handbrake (obviously, do this in reverse once finished with it).

Before starting your journey, check that the roller has been released from the tyre (4). Forgetting to do this could damage not only your tyre, but the roller, too (5).

## Loading

Some people believe that they can simply chuck all of their belongings into a caravan and hit the road. But this is not the case, and there can be some serious consequences if the van is not loaded properly (6).

Too much weight at the rear will cause the caravan to snake

and in the worst-case scenario, tip over. Ideally, the weight should be low and located over the central axle.

Avoid packing the overhead lockers with items – following a bumpy journey, these can become dislodged in transit. A can of beans is quite painful falling from a height!

## Corner steadies

It might seem like stating the obvious, but remember to lift the corner steadies fully before driving away (7). Also, it is not advisable to step into a caravan without the corner steadies down – this creates a see-saw effect that can damage the axle.

## Waste and water

Drain down your caravan before storing, particularly in winter. Water expands on freezing and can split the pipes.

When bringing a caravan out of storage, take the time to give the pipes a good clean.

It is a common mistake to use Milton sterilising fluid for this. Although it is often used to disinfect baby bottles, it can leave a bit of a taste in a van's water system. Use products designed for leisure vehicles (8).

## Fridge care

When returning from holiday, it's an easy mistake to empty the fridge of its contents and

just shut the door. But once the fridge has been turned off, it is recommended to leave the door ajar, to prevent the build-up of mildew or mould (9).

However, if you forget to do this and need to give the fridge a good clean, avoid using any household products – they can damage the interior lining.

Instead, dissolve one heaped teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda in a litre of warm water (10). Alternatively, try Thetford Bathroom Cleaner (11).

## Toilets

Toilet cassettes can often be overlooked after returning from a trip. There is nothing worse

**5** Leaving a motor mover roller engaged can damage a tyre and the roller **6** Check the noseweight to make sure there is not too much weight bearing down on the towball **7** Don't forget to lift the corner steadies before driving away **8** Sterilise water tanks and pipes using products specifically for leisure vehicles **9** Leave the fridge door ajar when not in use, to avoid build-up of mildew **10** Make up a simple solution of one heaped teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda dissolved in a litre of warm water to clean the interior of the caravan fridge



**'When bringing a caravan out of storage, take the time to give the pipes a good clean, using products for leisure vehicles'**





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**'It can be easy to forget how tall and wide your caravan is, so it's wise to keep a note of the dimensions close to hand'**



**11** Thetford Bathroom Cleaner can be used on fridges **12** Products such as Dometic Tank Cleaner are ideal for treating the toilet cassette **13** Maintain the rubber toilet seal with silicone spray to prevent it from drying out **14** It is important to drain down the flush water tank, and this can usually be done via a tube near the toilet cassette **15** Smart-Trailer E-Switch module sends a warning to your phone if any windows or skylights are left open (Photo: Smart-Trailer) **16** The sun visor is a great place to keep a note of the caravan dimensions

than going on your next holiday to find that you have forgotten to empty the toilet cassette.

I give the cassette a deep clean every couple of months, using products such as Dometic Tank Cleaner (12). Not only does it tackle the scale, it also freshens everything up.

Following a good clean, don't forget to treat the rubber seal with silicone spray, to prevent the rubber from drying out (13). It will also maintain the smooth operation of the valve blades.

The flush water tank is often neglected and never emptied. This is a particular problem during winter, because residual water might freeze, potentially

causing damage. Some toilet systems have a drain-down tube to aid the emptying process (14). Alternatively, just keep flushing the water through into the toilet cassette until nothing more comes out.

### Windows and skylights

A costly mistake to make, and yet one that you see happening a lot, is to leave a window or skylight open on leaving a site.

The last thing you want is for your window or skylight to be ripped from its hinges and turned into a projectile.

Caravanners who regularly forget to close their windows and skylights might want to

consider using Smart-Trailer's E-Switch module (15).

One of the system's many security functions is a warning to alert you to an open window, skylight or door in your caravan, which is communicated via your smartphone. The modules are wireless and fit to any type of door, window or skylight.

### Dimensions

No matter how experienced you are, it can be easy to forget just how tall or wide your caravan is.

We nearly made a drastic error when towing around Paris. Anyone who has towed there will know that there are quite a few low tunnels. Luckily,

we were able to avert disaster and find an alternative route.

My advice is to keep your van dimensions close to hand, for example, in the sun visor (16).

### Final thoughts

These are just a few of the most common errors I have come across, but there are many more tales of woe out there.

Don't let this put you off touring, though – just use it as a checklist of what to avoid and perhaps share your views with others, so they do not make the same mistakes.

Remember, accidents can and do happen, even to very experienced caravanners!





# TAKING PETS ON TOUR

Touring is ideal for dog-lovers, offering freedom for you and your pets, and John Sootheran's tips will help everyone enjoy a relaxing holiday

PET-OWNING CARAVANNERS will have guessed this already, but research reveals that more than 65% of people like to take their dogs away on tour with them.

It makes perfect sense... with a van, you have total freedom to head wherever you want, the space is your own, hundreds of sites welcome well-behaved dogs (and other creatures), you save a bundle on

kennel fees and you get to share excellent quality time with the whole family.

Dogs are great ice-breakers, too – a really brilliant way to initiate conversations with fellow caravanners. We've also found that these impromptu chats can often lead to acquiring very useful information from other dog-owners, particularly if we're visiting somewhere new.

Pets on tour can enhance your sense of comfort and security, too, especially for solo travellers. Here's how to make your trip an enjoyable experience for all – family, dogs, and campsite neighbours!

## Hitting the road

First, the important question of safe travel for your pet. Rule 57 of The Highway Code states: "When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in [vehicles]."

In addition, when you're planning how much kit to pack in your van, bear in mind that you'll need space for your pet's gear (and food), and for a carrying crate if you choose that method.

Walk your dog before you head off on your trip, and plan to take regular breaks during the journey.

## At the campsite

Harnesses, crates and kennels can also be used when you're on site, as the pooch's spot on your pitch or in an awning, if you have one. Every dog is different, and only you know how well-behaved your hound is, but an adjustable tether and corkscrew ground anchor are great ways to ensure that your pet doesn't wander away or do anything to upset other campers.

Your dog could have a basket overnight in the van, while hardier animals might prefer a HoundHouse collapsible dog kennel, which can be 'pitched' outside the caravan. We've had one for a decade, and it's great both at home and when on site.

We have also invested in collapsible, silicone dog bowls (ours are from Wacky Practicals, but other brands are available), which take up less space in, say, a daypack. These high-quality products are hygienic, very easy to keep clean and colourful, too.

Awnings are really useful spaces if you're touring with a dog. This can become your pet's domain, and they can eat and sleep







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**1** Dogs are the ideal companions on tour, particularly for solo travellers

**2** Touring and dogs make a really great combination!

**3** Canine friends are happy to use the shade of the van or an awning during the hot summer months

**4** A smart drying bag can make light work of tidying your dog after a walk

**5** Rod Farrendon and his wife, keen caravanners, take their beloved dog everywhere when they're on holiday

in there. Wet and/or tinned pet foods, in particular, can be very pungent!

Many sites have specified dog-walking areas on the periphery of the grounds. Carry out your research before you arrive, to ensure the destination is the right choice for both you and your pet.

Some posher campsites also offer little luxuries, including dog-showers! This might sound daft, but they're ideal if you've just taken your pet for a long, muddy walk, and your dog is now going to be venturing inside your nice clean caravan.

On this theme, we also really like the look of the microfibre dog-drying bags that are now on the market. These absorbent 'towels' cover the dog, keep it from running away,

and hold in hair, water and heat while you are rubbing your pet dry.

For example, check out the Henry Wag Dog Drying Bag (from £18.99 at innerwolf.co.uk). In fact, this website is an absolute goldmine of pet products that you didn't know you needed.

### Planning ahead

Taking a dog on tour with you does mean that you'll need to spend a bit more time planning your itinerary, to make the most of your trip. You'll also have to be very considerate of your fellow campers while you are staying at the campsite.

Remember, too, that many venues and attractions, particularly indoor ones, do

not allow doggie visitors. For example, caravanning canines are not welcome inside National Trust houses, although they can usually visit NT-owned land.

You'll also need to put together a suitable agenda for your leisure time, including being prepared to leave your dog in the van or on the pitch. Again, only you know if this will suit your pet, and only you can assess whether conditions at the time allow it.

In addition, bear in mind that some sites might charge a few extra pounds per night if you are bringing a dog with you, so you'll need to factor this in.

### Farmland etiquette

Remember that all dogs should be kept on a lead, and the more boisterous ones muzzled, if you are walking or staying on farmland, especially at lambing time.

Even normally placid dogs can become overexcited when they're around farm animals, and although you know that they wouldn't do any harm, the farmer doesn't. Always better to be safe than sorry.

**'Dogs are really great ice-breakers, a brilliant way to initiate a chat. This can also often lead to the acquisition of very useful information from other dog-owners'**



# JARGON BUSTER

Confused by some of the expressions used about caravans? We can help! Here's our guide to a few of the most important terms you need to know

## > Kerbweight

As defined by EU Directive 95/48/EC (which still applies), the car or other vehicle's weight with a 90% full fuel tank, all necessary fluids, 68kg for the driver and 7kg of luggage. This is the figure that is used to calculate a tow car match.

## > GTW

### (Gross train weight)

The maximum allowable combined weight of towing vehicle and caravan, as specified by the maker of the towing vehicle.

## > Maximum towing limit

The greatest weight that a car can legally tow, as specified by its manufacturer.

## > MiRO

### (Mass in running order)

The caravan's weight, with all of its factory-fitted equipment, when it leaves the factory. MiRO replaces the terms 'ex-works weight' and 'unladen weight'.

## > MTPLM

### (Maximum technically permissible laden mass)

The maximum weight that the caravan chassis can take, as stated by the chassis manufacturer. On pre-1998 caravans, this figure is referred to as 'maximum gross weight' (MGW).

## > Noseweight

The weight applied to the car's towball by the caravan. A car also has a towball limit, which is the maximum weight that can be applied to the towball. The lower of these two figures is the maximum you're permitted (dedicated noseweight scales are available).

Legally, this needs to be 4% or more of the weight of the trailer or at least 25kg, whichever is higher.

## > Payload

The weight of items you may load into your caravan. It's found by subtracting the MiRO from the MTPLM.

## > Snake

The term used to describe a caravan swaying behind the towing vehicle. This is most likely to occur when the caravan has been loaded badly, is going downhill or is travelling too fast.

## > Stabiliser

A device that suppresses unwanted movement of a caravan. Modern units mount to the towball and use friction to dampen the caravan's motion.

## > Hook-up

Cable connection to the mains electrical supply at a campsite. Provides power to mains sockets and appliances.

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

For full details on matching your car and a caravan, and all the weight info you need to know to tow safely and legally (including the 85% guideline), see [www.practicalcaravan.com/towcarmatching](http://www.practicalcaravan.com/towcarmatching)

