



Guide to... NEW SEASON KNOW-HOW

There's so much to look forward to when the new season sees everyone back on the road again, and our expert guide will help you ensure that you and your caravan are all set for exciting adventures!

52

Get back on the road

Quick checks and fixes to prepare your caravan after winter touring or storage

56

Cleaning your caravan

Time to give your tourer a good spring clean, to regain that showroom sparkle!

58

Air-conditioning options

Air con is pretty much a summer essential, and now is a great time to fit a new system

60

Essential new kit

We round up some of our favourite up-to-the-minute gadgets for touring

62

Go somewhere new

Looking for new horizons? There are some fantastic road trips in the UK

64

Top sites for a spring stroll

Here are 10 of our favourite sites for perfect walking in the spring sunshine

66

Top tips from the team

Tips and hints from the *Practical Caravan* team to help make your new season the best ever!

52



60



64

Also available as a FREE ebook - see
www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how/ to download yours!



READY FOR THE ROAD

Whether your caravan has been in storage over the winter or you've continued touring, now is a great time to give everything a thorough once-over. Here's our handy guide



Future Publishing Limited, the publisher of *Practical Caravan*, provides the information in this article in good faith and makes no representation as to its completeness or accuracy. Individuals carrying out the instructions do so at their own risk and must exercise their independent judgement in determining the appropriateness of the advice to their circumstances. Individuals should take appropriate safety precautions and be aware of the risk of electrocution when dealing with electrical products. To the fullest extent permitted by law, neither Future nor its employees or agents shall have any liability in connection with the use of this information. You should check that any van warranty will not be affected before proceeding with DIY projects.



2

THINGS WITH WHEELS are, of course, designed to move, but low-season weather, high-season crowds, pandemics and more can result in your caravan becoming something of a garden ornament.

Idleness causes things to deteriorate, rather than wear out, but being aware of the potential problems and carrying out some preventive maintenance will help to avoid difficulties later on.

With a few simple potions and tools, you can give yourself a great chance of ensuring the first trip out this season is memorable for all the right reasons.

We are taking for granted that your van has been serviced in recent memory, and laid up for an extended period.

Essential tools and kit

We aren't doing any heavy lifting here. You won't need loads of tools or specialised kit, but a few items go a long way in ensuring that first tour is a smooth one.

Depending on what you are planning to do, you should get yourself the following:

- ☐ Warm water
- ☐ Car shampoo
- ☐ WD-40 or equivalent
- ☐ Silicone spray
- ☐ White lithium grease
- ☐ Graphite grease
- ☐ Surgical spirit
- ☐ White vinegar
- ☐ Cotton buds
- ☐ Petroleum jelly
- ☐ An old toothbrush
- ☐ Microfibre cloths
- ☐ Cotton cloths
- ☐ A nailbrush

- 1 Whether your caravan is stored on your driveway...
- 2 ... or at a storage facility, you can make sure you are road-ready

CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!



Check and charge the batteries

Experienced caravanners know that a neglected battery quickly becomes an expensive annual bill.

If you want to avoid replacing batteries on a regular basis, you need to put some effort into looking after them. If most of your touring is on sites with hook-up, then as long as the battery has enough puff to power the control panel, the hook-up will take care of things.

If you have a motor mover, or you brave stays away from the sanctuary of hook-up, battery health really matters. Before worrying about the charge level, it makes sense to look at the batteries' physical condition. All you can really do is visually inspect for bulges or physical damage, check and replenish the level of charge, and ensure that the terminals are clean.

There will also be some sort of battery restraining strap. Make sure it is in good shape and tight enough to do its job. You don't want a loose battery trying to escape from the locker. There is enough weight to cause damage to the locker and cabling.

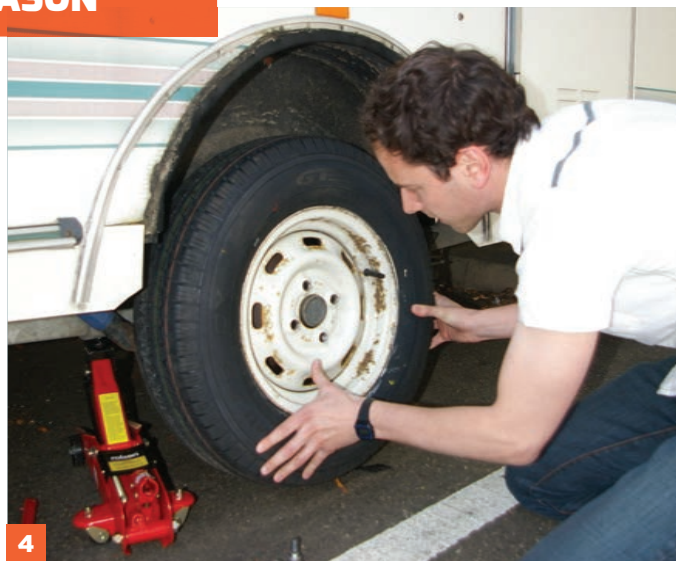
Flat batteries are the main concern, however. Batteries lose charge while they are in storage, a phenomenon known as self-discharge. Compound that with batteries deteriorating and permanently losing performance when stored in a poor state of charge, and you can see why it's vital to keep them brimmed.

If your caravan is stored on hook-up at home, or you have a solar panel, that's the big headache, and most common problem, taken care of. If that's not the case, you'll need to keep on top of your battery care. >>

'If you have a motor mover, or you brave stays away from the sanctuary of hook-up, battery health really matters'



3



4

If you have one fitted, you can use the built-in meter on the caravan to check the state of battery charge. If not, hook up a multimeter between terminals to check the voltage.

A reading of 12.6 or higher is healthy enough, but anything much lower means you want to get the battery on charge.

If your caravan is stored at home, you might be able to get the hook-up connected to recharge things; otherwise, you are likely to need to remove the battery, which is no bad thing.

Some modern caravans are fitted with multistage chargers to condition and charge the battery, but many more are not. In the latter case, a good standalone charger will be able to do the job.

If the terminals are covered in white fluff, that is oxidation, which will need cleaning off to ensure a good connection. Disconnect the battery leads (negative first) and use an old toothbrush to dust off the powdery lead sulphate.

If it is a bit more persistent, a couple of squirts of dilute vinegar and water (a 50/50 mix is ideal) will dissolve the remnants. Then a bit more brushing will soon have everything sparkling.

A smear of petroleum jelly across the top of the terminal, once refitted, will help to prevent recurrence and ensure the battery is able to give of its best.

Tyre checks

You read a great deal about tyre safety and you might think you know all about them, but we make no apologies for covering old ground. Nothing is as safety-critical or more likely to be ignored than caravan tyres. Unless a tyre is actually flat, many owners wouldn't know they might have a problem. Ten minutes spent regularly checking them over is time well spent.

The easiest check is the tyre pressure. A small digital pressure gauge is a toolbox must-have and can give you change from a tenner. An analogue one is fine, too, and of course, will never need a battery

3 Use a multimeter to check the state of the battery charge

4 Ten minutes spent regularly inspecting your tyres will be time well spent

5 Look for cuts in the tyre sidewall, caused by impact, or anything stuck in the tyre tread



5

change. Check your handbook and ensure your pressures are where they ought to be. If any are low, top them off and then check again a few days later to see whether they are staying in the correct place.

Soft tyres not only cause the tyres to get warmer in use: in severe cases, they can result in stability problems and limit the usefulness of motor movers if fitted.

Get an old sponge and a nailbrush, and some car shampoo in a bucket, and give the tyres a wash. Given the muck and grit that can be present, we'd advise keeping this mixture just for the tyres. This is less about actual cleanliness and more about giving your tyres a good inspection.

Examine the tyre walls for bulges caused by the tyre structure failing. Look closely for signs of cracking. Walls can crack and this is easiest to spot at the bottom, where the tyre wall is flexed the most.

Radial cracking is harder to spot, but for this, you need to look between the treads and search for cracks running around the radius (hence 'radial' cracking). The other

thing to spot is cuts in the sidewall, which are caused by an impact of some sort or anything stuck in the tread. Any of these will require immediate investigation by a tyre workshop.

You can't do this inspection properly with the caravan in one place, either. Roll it forward a few feet and clean the tread that was in contact with the ground.

There is also no alternative to sliding underneath (with all wheels chocked) and having a look at the inward-facing tyre walls. Your mobile is a bonus – it works as a torch and you can poke the camera into places your eyes can't reach, to look for damage.

Don't forget to check the spare tyre, too. Yes, it's a very unpleasant task to have to (safely) clamber underneath the caravan or wind down a carrier, only to discover that all is well, but if you need that spare at some point, you'll be glad you checked.

While you're there, ensure the carrier isn't red-rusty and apply a little grease to the clasp and the telescopic tubes if it is all starting to get a bit scratchy.

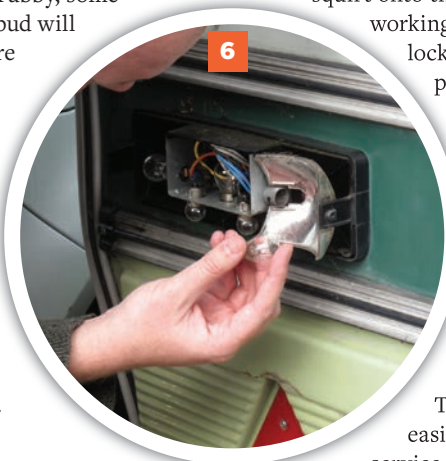
'There is also no alternative to sliding underneath the caravan and having a good look at the inward-facing tyre walls'

Light units

Vehicle bulbs don't usually fail through lack of use, although a spell spent on the sidelines can cause connections to become dirty and lights to stop working.

If road lights are not responding, get out the handbook for instructions on how to dismantle the light unit, inspect the bulbs and if needed, clean the contacts (6).

If they are just a bit grubby, some WD-40 and a cotton bud will do the trick. If they are really crusty, a strip of sandpaper might be needed to ensure a good connection is achieved. None of this applies if you have LED lights. Typically, these are not serviceable, but check your handbook for more information.

**Ventilation**

Clean the crud from around vents, grilles and outlets, to ensure everything that breathes can do so. Over the winter, in particular, leaves (7) and debris can build up around the fridge and heater vents, reducing performance and causing leaks or draughts.

If you have the chance, hook up the van and turn everything on. Investigating any non-working sockets, a warm fridge or a lack of heating is a lot more comfortable on your driveway or a local site, rather than when you are waiting to board the ferry, or stuck at a remote site.

Now do the same with the gas appliances. We assume you have the gas safety checks as part of your regular servicing, but ensuring that everything works correctly between services and after any lay-up is good sense. Light each appliance to ensure it starts up easily, has an even blue flame and is functioning as expected. If anything seems odd, it's workshop time.

**Windows**

Open windows one at a time, and do so carefully. Window rubbers can stick, and forcing the window can split the acrylic pane. Sticky rubbers can be treated with silicone spray, squirted on a cloth and applied around the rubber; if you don't have that, try some talcum powder.

Keeping the rubbers supple minimises the chance of leaks. Do the same for the locker door rubbers, too.

Locks and hinges

Caravan locks are not always of the most robust quality, so a bit of care helps ensure that everything works as expected.

A dab of graphite grease introduced to the lock barrels will keep the delicate innards moving freely, without leaving sticky muck behind to snare grit and grime. This is a dry lubricant that you squirt onto the key blade before working it in and out of the lock a few times. It will prevent seizing, sticking and bent keys, all of which are miserable.

External locker hinges and latches often don't like being idle and when they seize, expensive door or body damage can be the result. These are not the easiest things to

service, either, although there are things you can do. If they are already getting a bit stiff, a quick drizzle of silicone-based lubricant on the moving surfaces will free things up. If that isn't working, tip hot (not boiling) water over them to ease the nylon/plastic bushings, and then reapply the lubricant.

Motor movers

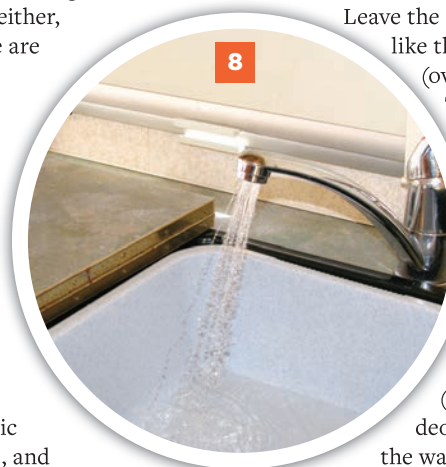
Motor movers are all different, so it is difficult to give general advice. Suffice to say, the vast majority of problems are battery issues, and the mover merely a symptom. Make sure the actuators work and shunt the caravan back and forth to ensure everything functions. Visual inspection of the mover units is worthwhile. Look for evidence of things appearing rusty or in danger

of seizing up. Scabby-looking surfaces should be cleaned and protected with a coating of light oil. Motorcycle chain oil is good – it is designed to be used in harsh environments.

Water systems

Ensuring your caravan's water system is fresh and safe is an easy DIY job. Dedicated leisure-vehicle tank cleaners, such as Puriclean or Pro-Kleen, will have instructions to detail the correct concentration. Fill the tank or container, depending on your configuration. Now jump in the van and turn on the water system. Go to the tap furthest from the tank and turn it on until the water runs through, then cut it off. Do the same for all of the taps.

Leave the system primed like this for a few hours (overnight is fine). Then run the system to drain the solution. Fill the supply tank or vessel with fresh water and run this through every tap until the solution can no longer be smelt (8). This will deodorise the pipes and the waste tank.

**Towball checks**

Most caravans have a friction stabiliser, but these are only effective on a clean, dry towball. Even with a cover, grime finds a way in, leaving you with a less effective, noisy stabiliser.

Give the towball a wipe with some paper towel to remove the worst of the grime. If the ball is rusty, flash it over with some emery cloth to restore the shine, then hit it with brake cleaner spray. It's designed to clean brake components to ensure their effective operation. It'll do the same for your stabiliser.

We'd advise doing this every time you tow. A squirt into the hitch head and a wipe around in there helps to clean the stabiliser friction pads, too.

CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!



'If the road lights are not responding, get out the handbook for instructions on how to dismantle the light unit'



CLEANING YOUR CARAVAN

Give your caravan some of the TLC that it deserves before you hit the road this spring! Here's our handy cleaning guide, and details of a selection of our favourite products

How to clean your van

Follow our top tips to get your caravan clean and sparkling!

■ First, you need to gather up everything you'll be using – this should include a hose, bucket, extendable brush, a (safe) ladder, specialist cleaners and polishes (see right), a soft cloth and some microfibre drying cloths.

You should never use a pressure washer – this can damage caravan seals.

■ Carefully rinse your caravan over with water to help loosen any stubborn dirt.

■ Mix your specialist cleaning fluid to the required dosage and clean the caravan all over, starting at the top and then working down.

Be careful when cleaning the roof – secure your ladder (with a product such as Slip Stop – www.mp-innovent.co.uk) and use a long-handled brush so you don't have to stretch.

■ Pay attention to skylights, which can harbour dirt.

■ Caravan windows should always be cleaned with a specialist cleaning product – and rinse them thoroughly to prevent streaking.

■ Finally, using microfibre cloths, dry the entire outside of the caravan, before applying a specialist finishing product – the latter should help to keep the exterior clean in future.



There's a variety of caravan cleaning products out there, so knowing which brand to choose can be tricky.

That's where the *Practical Caravan Awards 2022* come in. Using our decades of experience, we picked out the best products for your caravan, including the top brands.

Here you can see the winner of the best caravan cleaner, as well as the cleaning products that made our shortlist



Silky Cream Cleaner

As caravan cleaners go, this non-scratching, non-abrasive cream offers reassurance by remaining virtually unchanged for more than 40 years.

Silky Cream Cleaner will remove any dirt from your caravan without messing with the PVC or plastics when you're cleaning with it.

Price Around £9



Care-avan Caravan Shampoo

Tested and endorsed by Bailey, Care-avan Caravan Shampoo will let you quickly and easily wash your caravan and clean it up, as you wave goodbye to all of those stubborn stains that have been catching your eye.

Price £9.99

CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!



Dirtbusters Premium Wash & Wax with Carnauba Wax

Give your van a professional clean with this premium product. The quick-drying formula leaves a gleaming finish, as the carnauba wax creates a barrier that protects the paintwork. A little goes a long way – a five-litre bottle should make up to 1000 litres of cleaning solution.

Price £19.95



MB14 (Mudbuster) Caravan Cleaner

Cleaning with MB14 (formerly known as Mudbuster) will remove any stubborn stains from your caravan's exterior to ensure your next touring experience will be gleaming! Suitably diluted, it can also be used for interior surfaces ranging from seats, worktops and fridges to flooring, giving you a truly all-round clean.

Price Around £11



Rhino Goo! Caravan & Motorhome Cleaner

Not only does Rhino Goo! get rid of unpleasant algae and mould, it can also prevent future growth, making the cleaning process quicker and easier down the line. A five-litre bottle should give you up to 50 litres of cleaning solution, while the hydrophobic wax finish will help to repel water.

Price £27.25



Autoglym Caravan & Motorhome Cleaner

This caravan cleaner can be used on a wide variety of surfaces, including metals, plastics and carpets. That means you'll be able to use Autoglym Caravan & Motorhome Cleaner to remove algae and black streaks, returning your caravan to squeaky-clean condition with minimal effort.

Price £12.48

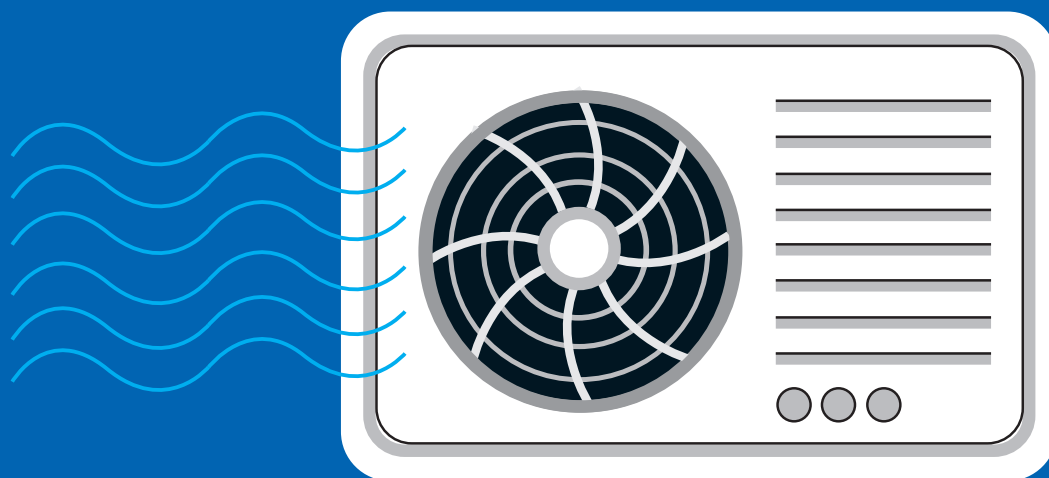


WINNER Fenwicks Caravan Cleaner

Key considerations when you're looking for a caravan cleaner are likely to be its effectiveness, the likelihood of it damaging the caravan, and whether it will leave streaks. Step forward, Fenwicks Caravan Cleaner. Made specifically for use on caravans, it's suitable for cleaning off all manner of dirt, ranging from black streaks and green algae to traffic film and general muck. The cleaner is also safe to use on all caravan surfaces – whether you're looking to clean plastics and sealants or acrylic windows and aluminium, Fenwicks Caravan Cleaner will attract the grime, returning the bodywork to its original glory.

We also like the fact that there are no aggressive agents in it. This limits the prospect of damage to the caravan, which is always a potential risk when using harsher cleaning agents.

Price Around £9



CHILL OUT!

Air-con is pretty much essential for enjoyable summer touring, and now is the perfect time to get it fitted. Here's our guide to everything you need to know

AS SUMMERS APPEAR to be getting hotter, and more of us tour on the Continent (when pandemic rules allow), caravan life can sometimes feel warm.

Hot caravans are not much fun to be inside, and sleeping in one is nigh-on impossible. You have to balance the relative merits of opening the windows and rooflights (mossie bites) or battening down the hatches (an unwelcome sauna).

But as well as cooling, air-con is great for allergy sufferers, because most units will clean and dehumidify the air. Pet owners will appreciate that they can leave animals in comfort if they go out on a hot day.

The pre-season is a great time to get a system fitted, ready for the year ahead.

Considerations

The best permanent systems are made by Truma, Dometic and Sinclair, but there are portable options, too, such as the one from Cool My Camper.

When choosing your unit, you need to consider weight, price, power, size and fitting.

Weight

If you want to retain as much payload as possible, remember an air-con unit can weigh more than 40kg. If you have a motor mover and an awning, you could easily have used up 100kg of payload, before you even think about wine and beer!

The portable unit from Cool My Camper (CMC) weighs 19.4kg, and can be carried in the car, so needn't affect your payload.

Price

The CMC system costs £735, while permanent units start at about £1500. Professional fitting will add £200-plus.

Power

The power of an air-con unit is measured in kW. The compact CMC unit pumps out 0.7kW of cooling power. Roof-mounted systems offer the following: Sinclair, 2.5-3.5kW; Truma, 1.7-2.4kW; Dometic, 1.7-3.2kW.

While more power equals more effective cooling, it also means more weight, cost and power consumption.

Each unit is designated to cool a particular size of caravan, so check online to see which one would be right for you.

Size

The CMC unit is in two parts: one hangs outside the van, the other inside. They are connected by a cable/tube arrangement, which can be fed between the

seals of a closed window. They are usable on almost any van.

Roof-mounted units must fit between rooflights, vents, aerials and satellite dishes. Measure your roof space carefully!

Another type of permanent unit can be fitted in a locker or storage space, bearing in mind safe weight distribution.

Fitting

Roof-mounted systems require a large aperture to slot into. In some cases, they can be a direct replacement for a 400 x 400mm rooflight; otherwise, a bespoke hole will have to be cut.

Check the positioning won't affect cabling or any structural supports. They also need to connect to a power feed from the van's electrical system.

'As well as cooling, air conditioning is great for allergy sufferers, because most units will also clean and dehumidify the air in your caravan'



Truma

Truma's range provides three Aventa roof-mounted systems and two Saphir units, which can be fitted under a sofa or bed. All are iNet-ready, so can be controlled remotely via an app.

These are high-quality and highly effective. In our experience, they heat just as well as they cool, and can give a quick heating boost while the Alde warms up.

The Aventa range is light, yet it still delivers 1.7kW of fast and effective cooling. Once your target temperature has been reached, it automatically maintains low-level cooling, while drawing a current of just 2.8A. The Aventa is super-quiet and has a built-in sleep function.

The award-winning Saphir weighs in at 23.5kg, with up to 2.4kW of cooling. They are relatively quick to install and will cool caravans up to 6.5m in length.

➤ truma.com



Dometic

Dometic's FreshJet systems are available in various sizes and output levels, for 6m- or 7m-long caravans.

The FreshJet 1700 is ideal for use in smaller spaces, such as more compact caravans. It costs £2290.

Meanwhile, the mighty FreshJet 3000 is perfect for use in larger caravans, and comes in at around £3070.

In between these two are the 2000 and 2200 models, so you should be able to find one that will be ideal for you.

The exterior units are aerodynamic and stylish. Inside, sleek housings are fitted with smart LED lighting.

Dometic also offers the FreshLight 2200 roof unit, which has a built-in rooflight, and the highly effective FreshWell 3000. The latter is installed under a bench or bed, and provides a whopping 2.7kW output.

➤ dometic.com



Cool My Camper

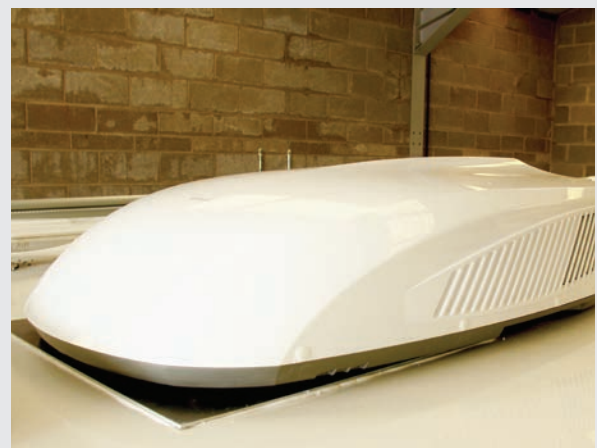
The portable CMC unit runs on 230V mains electricity, drawing a relatively low current of 1.88A. It weighs in at about 22kg.

CMC offers two fan speeds and four levels of cooling, along with a handy timer. The units are thermostatically controlled, and will automatically switch over to a lower setting when the desired temperature has been achieved.

The literature says this unit will cool a space of 16m³, and online reviews seem to back this up, saying it is very effective for cooling a space before you go to sleep, but perhaps not designed to fully cool the interior of a big, 6m-long caravan (approximately 24m³) in the heat of the day. However, pop it into a closed-off bedroom for an hour before bedtime, and it should cope admirably.

Users have described the unit's noise levels as being similar to a fan, registering 46dB at full power inside the caravan.

➤ coolmycamper.com



Sinclair

Sinclair manufactures a range of high-quality, roof-mounted air-conditioning units that are specifically designed for use in caravans and leisure vehicles.

These stylish and substantial systems can be controlled via Wi-Fi and are designed to cool vehicles measuring up to 10m in length – in temperatures up to 43°C.

The Sinclair ASV35AS air conditioner, for example, weighs in at a whopping 42.5kg and provides 3.5kW of cooling capacity. This is a serious piece of kit, operating with what the company describes as 'soft-start technology'.

This means that the unit will happily run on 6A current, or even DC battery power. It comes with a handy remote control, LED lighting and a timer, and retails for around £2300.

➤ sinclair-world.com



ESSENTIAL NEW KIT

Fancy treating yourself to some new kit, ready for the new season? Here's a selection of gadgets and accessories that the *PC* team love

THERE'S A WHOLE host of brilliant caravan accessories available out there, so it can be difficult to know exactly what you should be looking for. But if you're keen to upgrade or update your kit for the new season, we can help – here are just some of the great products that made it onto the shortlist for the Best Caravan Gadget category in our recent Awards (practicalcaravan.com/awards), and a number of other top picks from the *Practical Caravan* team.



iTrack Mini GPS Tracker

This nifty little device monitors the position of your caravan and sends Google Map reports via SMS or tracks live on the free app. Suitable for monitoring your vehicle, bike, or any other asset you might want to track.

Price £45

Web www.amazon.co.uk



Garmin eTrex 22X GPS unit

The Garmin eTrex 22X handheld GPS unit has a clear, sunlight-readable 2.2-inch colour screen. It comes preloaded with TopoActive Europe maps, with routable roads and trails for cycling and hiking.

Price £173

Web www.amazon.co.uk



Milenco Security Handrail

This robust, large handrail has a unique twin-locking design for ultimate security. In the open position, it provides a sturdy grab handle. High-security locks provide countermeasures against bump keys.

Price £76.40

Web www.milenco.com



Electronics Organiser Bag

Straps, USB sticks, earphones and cables are just some of the items you can keep in this Bagsmart carry case, which measures 24cm by 17cm. The water-repellent fabric, with padded foam, protects electronics accessories from dust, water and shock.

Price £15.99
Web www.amazon.co.uk



Outwell Collaps Kettle

When space is at a premium, an innovative item such as this collapsible, lightweight kettle makes for the perfect gadget. Designed for use on the hob, the kettle opens and folds easily, and is break resistant and easy to clean – it's a worthy winner in our most recent awards.

Price £42.95
Web www.amazon.co.uk



MP-Innovent Slip-Stop

If you need to reach your caravan roof, Slip-Stop is definitely worth a look. Using lanyards and carabiners, it secures your ladder to the side of the caravan, and you to the ladder, meaning that you'll be kept safe in the event of any slip or fall.

Price £64
Web mp-innovent.co.uk



Defender plug-in TV

This clever little device is an effective security measure. Simply plug it into a mains socket in your caravan. Switch it on and its LEDs emit coloured light that makes it look as though you are watching TV in your van, when you are out and about.

Price £17.99
Web redlinesecurity.co.uk



Cadac Grillo Chef 2

This smart barbecue has a power burner with adjustable temperature control, and comes with a ceramic-coated grid, solid pot stand and storage bag. Piezo ignition means lighting the barbecue couldn't be easier.

Price £155
(with membership card)
Web www.gooutdoors.co.uk

CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!

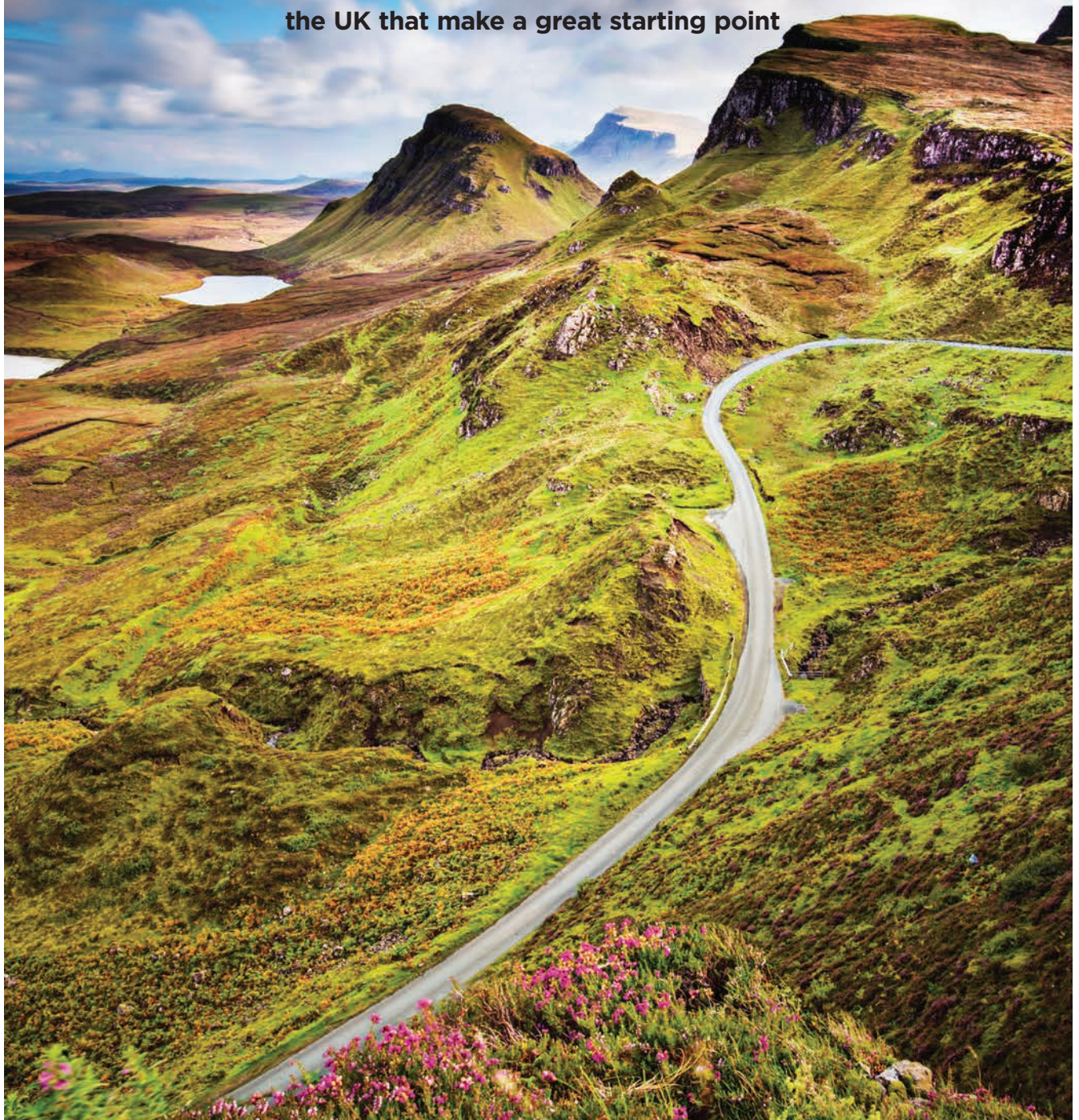


Find out more For latest, best prices on many of these products, and even more great accessories, see our special guide at www.practicalcaravan.com/awards/best-caravan-gadgets



TOUR SOMEWHERE NEW IN 2022

Want to try somewhere different this year? Why not give a road trip a go? There are fantastic driving routes around the UK that make a great starting point



IF YOU'RE PLANNING to hit the road for a long drive in search of spectacular scenery, you could do worse than the UK. While we may not have the distances of the US, with its iconic Route 66, there's plenty to enjoy – from Scotland's North Coast 500 to England's A272. Here are just a few classic routes to explore.

North Coast 500 Scotland

For many people, this is the UK's ultimate road trip. Following the north coast of Scotland, it begins and ends at Inverness Castle, and brings together just over 500 miles of truly stunning scenery. The NC500 follows main roads along the coastal edges of the North Highlands of Scotland, taking in Wester Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, Easter Ross, the Black Isle and Inverness-shire.

Visit Dunnet Head, the most northerly point in mainland Britain, or go dolphin watching on the Moray Firth. Try kayaking in the River Findhorn or take a break from the driving and enjoy a dram at one of the many distilleries. Whether you're looking for adventure, history, wildlife or food and drink, there's an itinerary to suit you.

Find out more about the NC500 at www.practicalcaravan.com/travel/top-uk-road-trips-our-pick-of-the-best-routes.

■ **Top touring sites** Barns Highland (www.barnshighland.com), Scourie Caravan and Camping Site (scouriecampsitesutherland.com), John O'Groats Caravan and Camping (www.johnogroatscampsite.co.uk)

The A66 in the Lakes England

In the heart of the Lake District between Bassenthwaite and Keswick, the A66 is superbly positioned to place you in some of England's finest, most dramatic scenery. Take your pick from Derwentwater, Bassenthwaite or Ullswater; the route skirts them all. Follow it far enough west and it brings you to the coast at Workington (far enough east and you reach Middlesbrough).

It's one of the north of England's major routes, with access to significant tourist

attractions, as well as the Lakes, and puts you in the vicinity of Hadrian's Wall and many glorious walking routes in the area.

■ **Top touring sites** Troutbeck Head CAMC Site (caravanclub.co.uk), Derwentwater C&CC Site (campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk), Burns Farm Caravan and Campsite (burns-farm.co.uk)

Causeway Coastal Route Northern Ireland

Stretching from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast and taking in the Giant's Causeway and the nine Glens of Antrim, this magical route is a feast of beautiful countryside and an almost mystical land and seascape.

Explore Carrickfergus Castle before taking on the cliff-face pathway at The Gobbins. At Torr Head, you'll enjoy views of wonderful Rathlin Island and then, of course, there's The Dark Hedges, used to such great effect in *Game of Thrones* as the Kingsroad in Westeros.

Top of the bill is the Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site comprising 40,000 basalt columns – and almost as many myths and legends. A geological wonder and a place to inspire awe.

■ **Top touring sites** Ballyness Caravan Park (ballynesscaravanpark.com), Highview Holiday Park (highviewholidaypark.co.uk), Juniper Hill Holiday Park (causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/see-do/caravan-parks/juniper-hill-caravan-park)

The A272 Southern England

An east-west tour along the A272, from the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the western edge of the South Downs National Park, takes in beauty spots and loads of interesting places to visit. Starting at Five Ashes, near Mayfield in East Sussex, the road passes through Hadlow Down, a village sitting atop one of the ridges that make up the High Weald, with lovely views to the north

and south. The village is well known for its annual steam traction engine rally, which is held in May.

The road passes through the villages of Buxted, where the first cannon was made in the 16th century, and Maresfield, on the edge of the Ashdown Forest.

Heading west, the road reaches the pretty village of Newick, which like many of the villages in the vicinity, has a bonfire society that takes part in the annual Bonfire Night torchlight procession through nearby Lewes.

The county town of East Sussex, medieval Lewes is worth the 20-minute diversion. Highlights include a Norman castle, Anne of Cleves' townhouse and the ruins of a Cluniac priory. The town's steep narrow streets are best navigated on foot.

North of Newick, off the A275, you'll find the National Trust's Sheffield Park and Garden and the Bluebell Railway.

■ **Top touring sites** Graffham C&CC Site (campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk), Blacklands Farm Caravan & Camping (blacklandsfarm.co.uk), Sumners Ponds Fishery & Campsite (sumnersponds.co.uk)

The Coastal Way Wales

Weaving between oceans and mountains, the 180-mile Coastal Way runs the whole length of Cardigan Bay. Highlights include the Italianate village of Portmeirion, created by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis and famous as the location for cult 1960s TV series *The Prisoner*. Take in a visit to Bardsey Island, with its population of seals, or enjoy a spot of coasteering at The Blue Lagoon, not far from Abereddi, a former slate quarry that is now filled with sea water and a very popular spot for a range of exciting watersports.

■ **Top touring sites** Cambrian Coast Caravan Park (cambriancoast.wales), Morfa Farm Caravan Park (morfafarm.co.uk/en), Cardigan Camping and Caravan Site (cardigancaravansite.co.uk)

CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!





ENJOY A SPRING STROLL

Start the new season by blowing away the cobwebs with a walk in the glorious spring sunshine – here are 10 of our favourites

1 Walking on water

Take a break just north of the fabulous Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, at Alderstead Heath, and you can enjoy a wealth of good walking.

There are plenty of walks from the site itself across the North Downs, or you can head further into the AONB. The National Trust walk around Box Hill, for example, presents visitors with stunning views of the surrounding Surrey Hills.

Follow the River Mole and you'll come across the Stepping Stones. This is a great photo opportunity and a convenient spot to stop and admire the calm flowing water framed by elegant trees.

At the end of the trail, you'll pass by Box Hill Fort, which dates back to 1892 and now houses a colony of bats.

Stay at Alderstead Heath CAMC Site (caravanclub.co.uk)

2 Find the fairy glen

Among the many beauties to be enjoyed in the Yorkshire Dales National Park is a hidden gem, Malham Tarn. Aside from the glacial lake and rolling meadows, there is

a great walk up through woodland following Garsdale Beck to the enchanting waterfall, known as Janet's Foss, which is claimed to be the home of Janet, Queen of the Fairies. The secret cave behind the falls is magical.

Stay at Knight Stainforth Hall (knightstainforth.co.uk), a 45-acre estate that dates back to Norman times

3 Poetry among the trees

The awe-inspiring Lake District has long been a popular spot for getaways. Escape the crowds and stay at peaceful Lanefoot Farm to make the most of your break.

Hidden in nearby Whinlatter Forest Park, the Words in the Woods trail is absolutely perfect for a gentle stroll.

Keep your eyes peeled for the poetic quotations about trees that have been carved into the waymarked posts.

Stay at Lanefoot Farm Campsite (stayinthornthwaite.co.uk/camping)

4 Head in the clouds

While away a relaxing afternoon with a stroll on the beautiful beach at Anderby Creek, on the Lincolnshire coast near

Sutton on Sea. This unspoilt stretch of sand is a real treasure, as is the Cloud Bar that artist Michael Trainor has installed.

This observation platform has seating, from where you can watch the clouds, and a 'cloud menu', so that you can learn about all of the different cloud formations that you spot up above.

Stay at adults-only Cherry Tree Touring Park (springsholidayestates.co.uk/cherry-tree-springs-touring-park)

5 Lake District wanderings

There are of course, numerous gorgeous locations to explore in the beautiful Lake District, and many of these wonderful places will be at their very best during the spring months.

For starters, try the trail from Ashness Bridge to Watendlath – it's just perfect on a sunny early-season day.

Stay at Borrowdale CAMC Site (caravanclub.co.uk), which is open to both members and non-members, and provides unfettered access to some of the most beautiful walking routes to be enjoyed in the area



CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!



'There are gorgeous locations to explore, and many of these wonderful places will be at their very best during the spring'

6 Legends of gallantry

Channel tales of damsels in distress and valiant knights in shining armour at the enchanting remains of Tintagel Castle.

Teetering on the clifftops, this medieval stronghold, rumoured to be the birthplace of King Arthur, is evocative of all the myth and legend that enshrouds him.

It might be a blustery walk, but you can't beat the atmosphere. If you visit at low tide, descend the cliffs to see Merlin's Cave.

Stay at Headland Caravan Park (headlandcaravanpark.co.uk), less than a mile from the castle, so you can visit as often as you like, or strike out along the trails of the South West Coast Path

7 Downstairs dalliance

Follow a real-life romance at Erddig Hall, historic home of the Yorke family. The love story between two servants at the house in the early 1900s can be traced through the grounds of the great estate, taking in the dovecote, the coachman's cottage, the monkey-puzzle tree and the Black Brook.

These gorgeous grounds are perfect for exploring on a bright spring day, but

if it's raining, it's no problem – just head inside to discover the fabulous house.

Stay at Plassey Holiday Park (plassey.com/holiday-park) for pristine facilities just a 10-minute drive from Erddig Hall

8 Seaside strolls

Botany Bay's flat, golden sand is spiked with tall chalk stacks to create a stunning destination for a beach walk.

As the white cliffs tower above you, don't forget to look down, too, and keep an eye out for fossils. Alternatively, you could dabble among the rock pools.

The tearooms and shops of the fine old seaside resort of Margate are just along the coast to the west, so you can warm up with a cuppa afterwards.

Stay at nearby Nethercourt Touring Park (nethercourt.com), which is just a mile from more beaches and makes a great base for exploring this corner of Kent

9 Romance in the ravine

The spectacular Falls of Bruar are worth the hike through the dramatic gorge. You can rest up at the picnic spot as the roar

of the water surrounds you and watch the falls as they drop down through the awe-inspiring ravine.

This glorious walk is less than two miles from Blair Atholl, where you can pitch up at Blair Castle Caravan Park.

The campsite, set in the grounds of historic Blair Castle, also has stunning views of the surrounding Cairngorms.

Stay at Blair Castle Caravan Park (blair-castle.co.uk/caravan-estate) for spotless facilities and superb vistas

10 Ancient oaks

The 12 lakes at Cosgrove Park provide some charming on-site walks, but head further afield for uninterrupted peace.

Walk among the trees of ancient Salcey Forest and you'll come across the fallen Church Path Oak, just one of the forest's 'druid' oaks, thought to be 400 years old when it fell 12 years ago. Follow the trail past the elephant pond (where circus elephants once bathed) to the treetop way for a bird's eye view of the forest.

Stay at Cosgrove Park (cosgrovepark.co.uk)



OUR TOP TIPS

Advice from the *PC* team about getting back on the road this spring

Keep it local

Instead of beginning the new season with a big trip, I prefer to start small and local, with a weekend nearby. This gives you the chance to iron out any problems with your caravan while you enjoy exploring closer to home. Sometimes we can miss what's right there on our doorstep.

Deputy editor Paul Critcher

Pack it in

Forget suitcases and holdalls, those big blue bags from Ikea (1) are the best way to transport your clothes and accoutrements to the caravan, and to store those things in underbed and underseat lockers.

We pack one each for our holidays, and we never run out of clothes. They're huge, lightweight, durable, easy to get into, and cheap. They also squish down a bit, so are simple to store in tight spaces.

Consulting editor John Sootheran



Extend your space

An awning (2) is a great way of gaining some valuable space when you're on tour. If you're not sure how to select the right one for you, check out our best awnings guide, on our website (www.practicalcaravan.com/buying-guides/best-caravan-awnings).

Content editor Peter Byrne

Slim down

Go on a diet – not you personally, but the van! We all keep adding stuff, but rarely take anything out. Lay out a groundsheet and empty the caravan's contents on to it. With the exception of essentials such as the first-aid kit, only put back what you have actually used in the past year.

Contributor Jack Bancroft

2



Focus on your hobbies

Instead of planning what to do on a trip based around where I have decided to go, I like to pick a location that will match my passion for cycling (3).

This way, I get to visit areas that I might not otherwise think of going to, usually heading back with my family having seen that there's so much more to do there than just riding my bike. But I always try to use cycling as the catalyst for exploring new regions in the first place.

Contributor Marcus Leach

Set a budget

When buying a caravan, set a budget you can afford, which should include extras,

such as an awning. And look for a layout that will suit your needs – for example, if you plan to use campsite facilities, a large washroom won't be a priority.

Contributor Andrew Jenkinson

Think on your feet

It might sound like stating the obvious, but choose appropriate boots.

If you're visiting somewhere new and you love the idea of a day spent exploring your surroundings, make sure you take the right type of footwear (4) with you.

After all, nothing can ruin a good walk quite so comprehensively as having to endure wet and cold feet.

Content editor Peter Byrne

3



4

