

Help us to buy

An affordable, lightweight caravan

ON TEST

Adria Altea 390 DS

PRICE £11,190

BERTHS 4

Adria's tiny little Altea has had a bit of an interior makeover, but still manages to cram four berths into a lightweight and compact footprint

Bailey Orion 440-4

PRICE £12,995

BERTHS 4

Bailey's brand new Alu-Tech baby. With a striking curvy profile, upmarket interior and some clever innovations, the entry-level Orion is anything but basic



THIS MONTH WE HELP

David and Sandra Dalton,
from Daventry, Northants

CARAVANNING HISTORY

Dave enjoyed many a happy caravanning holiday with his parents as a child and now he wants to rediscover the freedom of caravanning with his wife Sandra. They have borrowed Dave's parents' caravan for holidays, but now want their own.

LOOKING FOR AND WHY

They need a two-berth caravan for weekends away and longer summer breaks and want to future-proof their investment by buying a four-berth van for when kids come along. They only have a modest family hatchback, so they need something quite light, with a flexible layout.



Our expert

A lifelong camper, Mark Sutcliffe converted to caravanning when he got too old for tents. With two little tearaways of his own, he knows exactly which layouts work for both couples and families and understands the importance of value for money. ►

1 ADRIA ALTEA 390 DS



Kitchen is well designed, with mains electrical sockets close to hand for kettles or toasters



Washroom is quite small



Only the kitchen lockers are fitted with positive locking catches

SPECIFICATION

PRICE £11,190 includes 20% VAT but excludes delivery charges of £495

CONTACT Adria Concessionaires Ltd, Hall Street, Long Melford, Suffolk, CO10 9JP

T 01787 888980

W adriaconcessionaires.co.uk

BERTHS 4

DIMENSIONS Internal length 3.95m, Overall width 2.07m, Shipping length 5.81m

MIRO 938kg

MTPLM 1100kg

USER PAYLOAD 162kg

BED SIZES Front double 6ft 4in x 4ft 1in/194cm x 124cm, Two singles 6ft 3in x 2ft 8in/194cm x 83cm

WARRANTY Six years water ingress guarantee, three years' component

HEATING Truma mains and gas blown air heating and Truma water heater

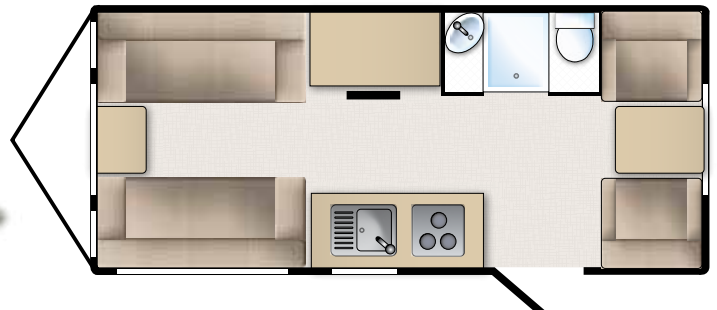
Mark says

We like

Flexibility the layout offers, towability, good payload, modern looks, value for money

We dislike

Tiny, plastic-filled washroom, lack of worktop space, plain white worktops, feeble lighting and cheap stabiliser



EXTERIOR

That nicely curved front panel immediately identifies the little Adria's Continental origins, but the couple remarked on how similar the two vans looked.

The very basic fairing over the A-frame looks cheap and there's only an AL-KO 1300 stabiliser on the hitch. However, unlike the Orion, the Altea does get an easy-off handbrake. Steel wheels and an absence of side skirts and a windowless two-part door indicate the Altea's budget status and there are no external lockers, save for the battery box. Dave thought the Adria's big front locker offered better external storage than the Bailey's small rear locker.

The decals have been toned down a little for 2011, with simpler lines.

7/10

LOUNGE

The Bailey's body is over a metre longer than the tiny Altea and almost 10cm wider, so there's a significant difference in the amount of space on offer.

The front lounge is pretty compact, with only just enough room for four adults to perch. There's a flimsy occasional table and a shelf above the bed box which isn't really suitable for a full-blown meal. The telly has to perch on the kitchen worktop and the LED ceiling lighting is pretty feeble. The cushions are firm, but a little on the thin side and, in truth, the lounge is more like a large dinette which isn't really conducive to kicking back and relaxing in the evenings.

The interior has a utilitarian feel which Dave and Sandra didn't really like.

6/10

DINING

With a reasonably proportioned standalone table, which lives in a dedicated slot next to the offside settee, the Adria measures up well when it comes to dining. The lounge table is fine for two and will accommodate four at a pinch.

With just the two on board, the rear dinette offers an alternative dining area and the table here is a bit more sturdy.

It's also ideal for breakfast first thing in the morning, with no need to worry about collapsing the bed before that all-important first cuppa.

When kids come along, the rear dinette converts to bunks, so it would be no good then for Dave and Sandra in the evenings, but for now they could use it all the time.

7/10

KITCHEN

The Altea has had a gentle internal makeover for 2011 and, while removing the bulkhead between kitchen and lounge opens up the interior nicely, from the chef's point of view it's a step backwards. Integrated into that bulkhead was a large drop-down worktop extension, which addressed one of the Altea's key weaknesses – lack of preparation space.

There's a three-burner hob, combi oven/grill, 81-litre fridge and a practical rectangular sink with mixer tap. The hob has a cover which could be used as preparation space, but otherwise there's only a narrow 15cm strip of space to the right of the sink. Sandra was quite impressed by the amount of storage though.

6/10

SCORES

10 BEST I'VE SEEN 9 TOP NOTCH 8 REALLY GREAT 7 PRETTY GOOD 6 CAN LIVE WITH IT 5 AVERAGE
4 BELOW AVERAGE 3 QUITE POOR 2 NOT WORTH CONSIDERING 1 LEAVE IT ALONE

Dave and Sandra weren't keen on the stark interior



Front dinette has room for four



Compact rear dinette is strictly for two, making twin bunks at night

NIGHT TIME

The ceiling lights comprise three smallish circular lights and eight tiny little LEDs arranged around them. You can switch between just the LEDs, which aren't very bright on their own, or supplement this feeble glow with the three larger lights.

In the front lounge, the ceiling lights are supplemented by a brace of spotlights, and there's also a reasonably powerful striplight in the kitchen, while the rear bunks have independently switchable individual lights on the side wall.

The front settees convert to a reasonably generous 4ft 1in wide transverse double, but are far too short to be used as twin singles, while the rear dinette offers a single bed with Pullman bunk above.

7/10

STORAGE

The Altea has eight overhead lockers and occasional storage in the front lounge, plus a large wardrobe over the heater and pretty generous kitchen storage. There's additional space for bedding under the seats in the lounge and rear dinette, but these have to be accessed by lifting the seat bases as there are no locker doors. Outside, the Adria has that huge front gas locker. Dave thought the gas locker was an important aspect of any caravan's storage space and preferred the Altea's traditional large locker to the Bailey's tiny affair on the nearside. There's little storage space in the compact washroom, which has just two fairly modest cabinets for your toiletries.

7/10

WASHROOM

The Altea's smallest room really is small. There's an old-style Thetford C-200 swivel loo in the corner with just about enough room for an adult to perch.

The floor is effectively a sealed shower tray and the mixer tap in the sink doubles as the shower head, with a bracket near the ceiling to provide hands-free showering.

There's quite a large obscured window in the sidewall, but no rooflight – just a simple circular vent in the roof to let moisture out. The only lighting comes courtesy of a tall corner light fitting behind the sink.

This is a basic washroom which is fine for night-time emergencies and brushing your teeth, but you'll probably use site facilities.

5/10

BUILD QUALITY

Adria's build quality probably has more in common with the German caravan manufacturers and while the Altea feels solid enough, it's not over-engineered. The Altea is built on the same AL-KO platform that most British manufacturers use and, like the Orion, has dent-resistant GRP laminate rather than aluminium sides.

The exterior finish inspires plenty of confidence while the interior is equally well screwed together, but it's the rather sterile interior décor that Dave and Sandra couldn't get along with. Adria can't however match Bailey's industry-leading 10-year warranty, but then again, neither can many other manufacturers, so this shouldn't be too much of an issue.

7/10

2

BAILEY ORION 440-4



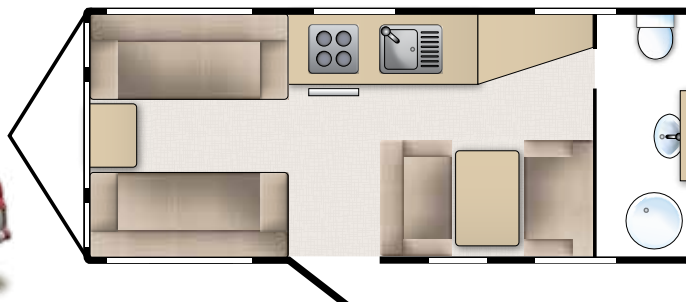
The rear dinette seating can be left made-up as a double bed if you're feeling lazy



Sandra liked the kitchen



A family of four could dine easily in the front, with the table clipped into place



SPECIFICATION

PRICE £12,995 includes 20% VAT but excludes delivery charges of £545

CONTACT Bailey of Bristol, South Liberty Lane, Bristol, BS3 2SS

T 0117 305 2939

W bailey-caravans.co.uk

BERTHS 4

DIMENSIONS Internal length 5.23m, Overall width 2.19m, Shipping length 6.39m

MIRO 1102kg

MTPLM 1249kg

USER PAYLOAD 147kg

BED SIZES Front double, 6ft 6in x 4ft 8in/201cm x 142cm; 2 x singles 4ft 8in x 2ft 3in/142cm x 69cm and 5ft 0in x 2ft 3in/152cm x 69cm; rear double, 6ft 4in x 4ft 6in/192cm x 137cm

WARRANTY 10 years body integrity guarantee, three years' component

HEATING Whale floor-mounted blown air space heater, Truma Ultrastore water heater

Mark says

WE LIKE Refreshing new exterior styling, clever use of space, pleasing interior, solid build quality, long warranty

WE DISLIKE Narrow end washroom, poor external storage

EXTERIOR

While the new Orion's exterior profile is unique among British manufacturers, it's very similar to the Adria's. Both vans have a curvy front panel and a less pronounced curvature at the rear. There's also function in that form: the curve from the roof is significantly more aerodynamic than a squared off back end, and in some tests, it reduced fuel consumption by 10 per cent.

The panels are finished in GRP and alloy wheels are fitted as standard. Up front, the Orion gets an AL-KO 3004 stabiliser and a nice fairing with steps integrated. The traditional front gas locker is replaced with a smaller dedicated locker on the nearside which only holds 6kg Calor Lite or 3.9kg standard Calor cylinders.

8/10

LOUNGING

Surprisingly, considering it's more than a metre longer than the Altea, the Bailey's lounge doesn't feel significantly larger. The extra width is noticeable, but any extra space in terms of length is taken up by the end washroom. The Daltons felt the Bailey was much more welcoming and comfortable, thanks to its superb interior décor and soft furnishings. There's plenty of room for a couple to sit back and relax in front of the telly, which has a dedicated perch on the low-level dresser.

This dresser and offside kitchen conspire to make the Orion's interior feel more airy than the Altea's and the Dalton's only real disappointment was the windowless door.

8/10

DINING

The Orion's large rear dinette is ideal for a candlelit dinner for two, or breakfast with two lively children. The large table has plenty of space and, with just Sandra and Dave on board, they could leave the front double bed made up and take all their meals back here.

The front lounge is perhaps a better option to feed four adults, and replacing the small occasional table with the larger lean-to table stored in a dedicated slot between the fridge and oven is easy.

So, when it comes to dining, with a choice of two four-seater dining areas, the Orion offers greater flexibility than the Altea, especially when children are on board, so this scores points with the Daltons.

8/10

KITCHEN

The Orion's kitchen is pretty compact, but the circular sink and curved worktop free up a little more preparation space. The faux wood laminate finish is much more attractive than the Altea's stark white worktops and this pleasant finish extends to the two tables as well.

The Orion's kitchen lighting is another strong point, with good natural light provided by the large rooflight and plenty of artificial task lighting.

The triangular three-burner hob saves a little more worktop space and, like the Altea, the Orion makes do with a compact combi oven and grill. The Orion's 113-litre fridge is larger than the Altea's but the real clincher for Dave and Sandra was the microwave.

7/10

SCORES

10 BEST I'VE SEEN 9 TOP NOTCH 8 REALLY GREAT 7 PRETTY GOOD 6 CAN LIVE WITH IT 5 AVERAGE
4 BELOW AVERAGE 3 QUITE POOR 2 NOT WORTH CONSIDERING 1 LEAVE IT ALONE

The couple loved the Orion's spacious interior



Washroom has a separate shower



Front lounge feels more comfortable than the Altea's

NIGHT TIME

The transverse front double is the bigger of the two double beds, and marginally quicker to set-up, but in some ways the rear dinette makes a cosier place to bed down for the night. Either the front or rear beds could be left made up as semi-fixed-beds, with meals being taken in the lounge or dinette, and logic suggests the rear is probably then better as the bed.

The rear bed is also more suitable for small children than the Altea's bunks and there's just enough room to get a travel cot between the dinette seats.

The Orion's lighting is more comprehensive than the Altea's, with two substantial ceiling lights and a brace of spotlights over the lounge and rear dinette areas.

8/10

STORAGE

Bailey's decision to swap the gas locker for more space inside the van compromises external storage space, but it's unlikely that Bailey could have shoe-horned the end washroom in at the rear without sacrificing the traditional gas locker.

Inside, the longer Orion has more options than the Altea, with a good combination of lockers and occasional space throughout the van.

As well as bedding storage under the seats, there are eight overhead lockers and a large wardrobe with two shelves underneath the hanging section, in the space freed up by using Whale's compact heater mounted underneath the van rather than the traditional Truma heater unit.

7/10

WASHROOM

The narrow, rather gloomy little annex at the end of the van is bigger than the Altea's tiny washroom and has a separate shower, but it's far from luxurious. The curve of the roof seems to rob the washroom of some of its space and the shower is only just large enough to have a good old scrub-up, but the provision of an end washroom in such a compact four-berth is quite an achievement in itself. The Belfast-style sink is quite deep and practical and the Thetford C-250 loo has a larger wheeled cassette than the Altea's.

Admittedly, it's more functional than the Altea's washroom, and there's more space to towel yourself down after a shower.

7/10

BUILD QUALITY

The fact that Bailey is prepared to offer a market-leading 10-year warranty speaks volumes. The Orion's stablemate, the Unicorn, which employs a similar construction method, has just received European Whole Vehicle Type Approval, meaning it meets a whole raft of stringent quality criteria. The Orion is also undergoing the same compliance process and should earn approval soon.

The move to tough, dent-resistant GRP panels is also a welcome step. And, when it comes to the interior, the Orion sets new standards at the budget end of the market, although at more than £13,000 delivered it's not the cheapest budget 'van.

8/10

Others to consider

LUNAR QUASAR 464

PRICE £14,595

BERTHS 4

Another genuinely lightweight family caravan, the Quasar is built on Lunar's 7ft 1in wide bodyshell and makes a sensible choice for both young families and older caravanners alike.

ELDDIS XPLORE 304

PRICE £11,299

BERTHS 4

With an all-up weight of just 1050kg, the 304 can be towed by even a small family hatchback, but, while it does have four berths, its tiny footprint means living space is extremely limited.

SPRITE MUSKETEER TD

PRICE £12,260

BERTHS 4

The Musketeer is a great family 'van with a flexible layout. Lightweight, well-finished and anything but basic, it's also nearly £1,000 cheaper than the Bailey.

STERCKEMAN STARLETT 420CP

PRICE £9715

BERTHS 4

Like the Orion, this is a lightweight GRP family van with a quirky continental layout which could work well for young families.

With thanks to David Brown and his staff at Venture Caravans, Watford Gap, for their assistance with this article. venture-caravans.com



INSURANCE QUOTE

Adria Altea 390DS £11,190
From only £130.46 per annum

Bailey Orion 440-4 £12,995
From only £153.48 per annum

4-years claim free caravanning.
New for old cover with caravan stored on a CaSSOA Silver site.

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shieldtotalinsurance.co.uk

Final scores



ADRIA ALTEA 390 DS

Practicality7/10

The little Altea acquires itself very well as a lightweight compact tourer for two, which can be towed by most cars. With the addition of children, space becomes more of an issue.

Value For Money7/10

The Altea has increased in price by almost £1000 since last year without any significant improvements in spec. It still looks cheap against the Bailey though, which isn't such a budget buy.

Caravan
OUR RATING **73/100**



BAILEY ORION 440-4

Practicality8/10

The Orion really is a genuine all-rounder, that performs as well as a family-orientated lightweight tourer as it does as a couple's van with the option of a semi-permanent bed.

Value For Money7/10

While the tiny two-berth Orion 400 has an eye-catching sub-£12,000 price tag, the 440-4 costs more than £13,000 with delivery, which is edging nearer to mid-market territory.

Caravan
OUR RATING **76/100**

OUR TESTERS' CONCLUSIONS

When we tested the Adria Altea this time last year, we concluded that it was a practical little four-berth van with a very attractive price tag. A year later, and the twin scourges of inflation and a persistently weak Pound have forced the price of the little Altea up by almost 10 per cent. It's had a mild makeover, but there is precious little in the way of extra equipment – save for a cheap hitch head stabiliser – and in some ways, the re-worked interior isn't as practical as the old model's design was.

It still compares favourably in price terms with the relatively short list of direct British-built competitors, but in the Orion, we feel that Bailey

has moved the goalposts. With an attractive interior and some desirable standard equipment, the Orion feels anything but entry level and the price tag confirms this. In reality, the Orion is a replacement for the slightly more upmarket Ranger GT60 and, for this sort of money, we think Bailey has got the specification and trim more or less spot on.

But if Bailey has indeed shifted its new Orion range subtly upmarket, isn't there now a gap below the Orion for a simple, no frills, sub-£12,000 budget family van which would be a worthy successor to the best-selling Ranger? Perhaps this just isn't economically viable now.



WE CHOSE

Bailey Orion 440-4

Although the points tally suggests a close-fought contest, the outcome was never really in doubt. Dave and Sandra felt the Orion was much roomier inside and the décor much more welcoming than the Altea's rather austere interior. They also thought the Bailey's bigger layout offered more flexibility for the future.

NEXT MONTH Mark pitches an Elddis Avante 556 against a Lunar Quasar 546