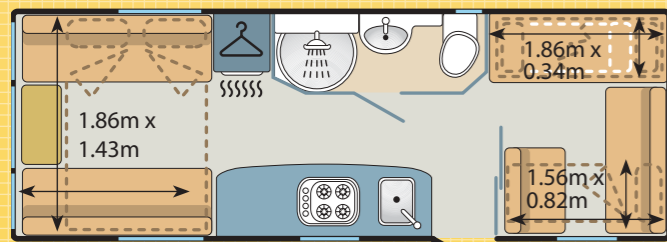


LIVE-IN

LAK WITH THE PRACTICAL CARAVAN ENTHUSIAST TEAM

Bailey Senator Carolina



Price £16,800
Berths 6
Length 7.89m
Width 2.28m
Height 2.58m
MiRO 1443kg
MTPLM 1759kg
User payload 263kg

Awning size 1088cm
Warranty 3 yrs parts, 6 yrs body
Options Chatsworth upholstery (£200); Sandringham upholstery (£150); Wrap-around seating (£225).

Practical Caravan Enthusiast Team

Practical Caravan's Enthusiast Team have been picked for their experience and passion for caravans and caravanning



Testing the Bailey Senator Carolina Adrian and Celia Reynolds, with their children Alice (13), Bethan (10) and Isobel (3)
Years Caravanning 6
Current Caravan 2000 Elddis Crown 505
Current Car 2006 Ford Galaxy 1.8TDCi Zetec (130bhp)
Caravanning History Ever since Adrian introduced

Celia to the joys of caravanning in a hired caravan, she's been hooked on the hobby. That's understandable, especially when you consider that Adrian's a bit of an expert, having been caravanning many times with his family as a teenager.

With Adrian working as a Baptist minister the couple can't get away at weekends, but they enjoy regular caravan trips in the school holidays. This suits the girls down to the ground because they all love caravanning, especially Alice, "who is fast becoming an expert", said Adrian.

With six years under their belts they're all richly experienced and were eager to test out the family credentials of this big six-berther.

Bristol-based Bailey is celebrating its 60th birthday this year, but far from resting on its laurels it continues to produce high-quality, well-specified and lightweight caravans. The Senator Carolina, is no different. Sitting at the pinnacle of its range this six-berth family van has a pioneering layout and a hefty price tag. So, those considering a twin-axle van on this scale can justifiably expect plenty of kit and few problems.

Bailey is dipping its toes back into six-berth waters after seeing healthy sales of its Ranger 620/6. Currently, the six-berth family van market is buoyant, and this trend hasn't escaped the boys in Bristol. Addressing a gap in the market the Carolina offers families the space and sleeping options of a big twin-axle, but with extra luxury and an innovative layout of three bunks at the back.

One perennial problem facing designers of six-berth vans is where to accommodate everyone at night. Rather than mess about with fiddly side dinette-cum-bunks, Bailey favours a trail-blazing arrangement of three stacked bunks. Alongside this is a dinette that doubles as a single bed, with a sliding door that gives the kids their own space. Up front is the usual assembled double for mum and dad, and in between you find an offside washroom and nearside kitchen.

At first sight this twin-axle giant is impressive. We love the glinting alloy wheels, fuss-free decals and trademark Bailey body shape. Its square front divides opinion, but



ABOVE Locker is easily accessed
 BELOW Exterior socket for awning



Unique triple bunks allow youngsters to go to bed while mum and dad relax



has a practical application: you can stand tall throughout.

Ignoring aesthetics, the true test is always how it performs inside. To assess the Carolina's family credentials we asked the Reynolds to take a trip in its cosy confines. With three girls and plenty of toys and kit to store, it was a fair test. Although they only total five it's families such as theirs that Bailey needs to woo. The bunks are perfect for the sisters, with the assembled single sleeping an extra friend or accommodating the girls as they get older. Excited by the end dinette the girls piled down the back, while Adrian began exploring up front.

Lounging about

The first thing that caught his eye in the front lounge was the drawer under the nearside sofa. "I much

prefer these wire trays as they hold things in place and make accessing what's stored under the sofa that much easier." He added: "The top-notch stereo is good to have, too, especially as it also plays DVDs." Celia was impressed as well but rightly observed that she'd, "expect nothing less when

spending close to £17,000". Other kit in the lounge includes the clock. This was appreciated, but Adrian would prefer it was powered by the mains so he wouldn't have to "change the batteries every five minutes". With the kids reclined up front it was clear there was plenty of

room for five, with more than enough left over to seat six. The nearside shelf above the fridge is perfect for a TV. However, the one plug socket there is shared by the kitchen, which Adrian felt was an oversight. "First, there aren't enough sockets in the kitchen, and second, it limits where you

can place your TV." He added: "To be honest, we don't watch much telly when caravanning but I could see it annoying others."

Celia broke things down, saying: "The main thing for us is that it's a comfy space with lots of storage. In our van we store food in the lounge lockers, but with the huge food cupboard in the kitchen that's not necessary here. And I could stroke this Alcantara (faux suede) all day." The couple couldn't fault the easily assembled double bed, with its supportive cushions.

Cooking for six

Moving into the kitchen Celia was perplexed by the lack of 240V sockets. "I can't believe there's only one kitchen socket in a van of this size," she lamented. "It seems a bit stingy to me." Casting her eyes over the rest she was extremely positive. "Storage is terrific with the huge central cupboard for food. I love the slide-out wire tray with a



ABOVE Top-notch stereo also plays DVDs
 LEFT Excellent storage in under-sofa wire drawer. Cushions are supportive



Luxury washroom has walk-in shower, but not enough storage

combined cutlery drawer. The freestanding table stows beside it, freeing up space elsewhere."

Adrian was impressed, too, especially with the specification. "The Dometic 8 series fridge is top end, and with a four-burner hob, oven, grill and microwave we'd be able to cook as well as at home." The 700W microwave seemed a little "weak" to Adrian, but he was happy nonetheless.

Celia's only other reservation was the mini bin on the back of the habitation door, which in her opinion is only big enough "for a couple of tea bags". But she gushed praise for a practical space that's great for preparing food and cleaning up afterwards: "There's plenty of worktop and room for the draining board, which stows behind a clip on the wall. Bailey has even provided a wire kitchen roll holder."

Luxury washroom

Opposite the kitchen is a large offside washroom. Bailey favours a separate shower with a sink



Plenty of food preparation space but Celia bemoans the lack of mains sockets



Plenty of food storage space in the large undersink cupboard

alongside and the new swivel-bowl Thetford C250 toilet. This has a higher seat and the cassette is on wheels, making it easier to drag to an emptying point.

Alice went into the washroom first, before quickly beckoning her

sisters. "Look, it's got a heated towel rail!" she exclaimed, highlighting a feature that impressed the kids and parents in equal measure. With an analytical eye she moved onto the storage, saying: "I like having a cupboard under the sink, but there should also be shelves higher up. Without them, I can get to all the toiletries under the sink, which could include pills and Dad's razor blades."

More positively, everyone agreed the walk-in shower is first-class. There's plenty of headroom for six-footers, a powerful head, a seat and a deep, solid tray. However, the question remains whether

WHERE THEY STAYED

Chertsey Camping and Caravanning Club Site

Bridge Road, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 8JX
Tel 01932 562 405

Web www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk

Despite enjoying rural peace this site is just a half-hour train ride from London. If you'd rather avoid the big smoke then there's plenty to see and do in the local area. The site has the River Thames running by it on which you can canoe, and is alive with wildlife.

Nearby attractions include Kew Gardens and Hampton Court. But if you prefer relaxing close to the site then pop into the local pub, where campers get a discount.

The site has all the usual club site facilities, including a pristine washblock. This, added to the welcoming wardens and verdant grounds, make Chertsey a delightful base for your holiday.



Room for one more: front dinette easily accommodates five for lunch



Assembling the double bed is a cinch, it's big and comfy, too



buyers really need a separate shower. "It's great for ralliers," said Adrian, "but we predominantly use the washroom at night-time. These days most sites have great washblocks, which saves us refilling the aquaroll for five showers." Alice agreed saying: "I'd prefer a wet room because losing the shower would free up more space around the sink and toilet."

Child's play

Sectioned off by a solid wood door the end area becomes the children's own. Alice liked the dinette because she "has somewhere to play my Playstation" on the flatscreen TV. Adrian was a fan, too, pointing out that it, "means they don't disturb us early in the morning. They can get up and have their own playroom right beside the bunks. It's great for tea-time as well, especially if we're eating at different points."

The bunks are the most notably innovative feature, and they were a big hit. Bethan loved them, saying: "It's cool that we all have our own lights and shelves. We all get a window, too, so whichever bunk you're on it feels light." The bottom bunk flips up if not needed, so the space below the middle one can be used for stowing toy boxes when in transit.

The only drawbacks related to access. Alice found it quite hard getting in and out of the top bunk: "It's tricky swinging out of the bunk on to the ladder, and isn't made any easier with the pelmet above the bunk. I'm not



The girls love the room of their own at the van's rear

sure why it's there, but I'll have to practice my limbo skills to get out." Isobel loved her bottom bunk and was able to slide in and out without help from anyone older. "It's mine!" she exclaimed, and is set at a safe height. "It's perfect for the kids," said Celia, "just perfect".

With four overhead lockers there's plenty of space to store the kids' clothes. And because the dinette converts into a single that's wider than the bunks, it's ideal for slightly older and bigger

holidaymakers. The girls dropped the table to make the bed, but because it slides out of its runners rather than unclips it was more of a challenge than need be. Overall, though, the three sisters loved the bunks and soon turned the area into their playroom.

Final thoughts

With the girls happily playing at the back of the van, Adrian and Celia settled down with a cuppa to reflect. "It's impossible not to love a van of this quality," said Adrian. "Its got a high specification, feels brilliantly put together and has a layout that really works. The lighting's great, too – even around the rooflight there are four extra spotlights with two settings!"

Celia addressed its shortcomings saying: "We have only minor criticisms. For instance, there aren't many cars capable of shifting its bulk – you'd need a 4x4. But then again if you can afford this van, you can probably stump up the cash for a four-wheel drive." Adrian agreed and was also a bit wary of having "the water tank placed so close to the nose" because it impacts upon the noseweight. "For me, this is the ultimate family van," said Adrian, but tempered his enthusiasm saying, "but is it the ideal family van?"

Naturally, this depends on the end-use of the van. Ralliers will

appreciate the spacious washroom, while others might prefer extra storage or space at the back. But overall the Carolina has a family-friendly layout that works well in practice. And with its stunning spec list and reputable badge the only things likely to put buyers off are the price and weight. Summing up Adrian admitted: "We're happy with what we've got for now. But if we were to buy a bigger towcar we would all happily holiday in this stunning van."



The Perfect Match

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY TDV6 HSE

| | |
|------------|---------|
| Price | £44,535 |
| Noseweight | 150kg |
| Kerbweight | 2718kg |



The Bailey's a true heavyweight, with an MTPLM of 1759kg. It demands a heavyweight towcar, and with a Land Rover Discovery, that's exactly what it gets.

The massive kerbweight of over two-and-a-half tonnes makes the Discovery a 65% match for the Senator Carolina, while the torque engine means it will happily tow at 60mph all day long. Well-judged suspension strikes a brilliant balance between comfort and control, and delivers superb stability.

Inside, HSE spec comes with all the bells and whistles you could want. And unlike some offroaders, which have seven seats but are very cramped in the back row, the whole family can travel in comfort.

The price is steep, but second-hand examples can be picked up from under £20,000. That's a bargain price for the best big 4x4 on sale.

Bailey Senator Carolina What the Reynolds say...

👍 "The build quality and specification are simply superb. The heated towel rail was a nice and unusual touch, too. But the best bit has to be the end dinette and kids' bunks. The girls loved having the back of the van to themselves and we loved the extra space and peace it affords."

👎 "Little niggles grate at this price, so just one 240V plug socket in the kitchen was a let-down. The lack of storage in the washroom was also a disappointment. But the main thing putting us off is the weight; we'd prefer a lighter, single-axle version."