

Help us to buy...

twin-dinette first-time family van for £11k

ON TEST

Bailey Ranger Series 6 500-5

Price £10,995

Berths 5

Lunar's range-topper comes with a wide body and blacked-out windows. Lighter materials allow for a larger van

Xplore 495

Price £10,995

Berths 5

Still in its first year, Xplore is a brand new marque in the Explorer portfolio, promising an exciting modern van with high comfort levels yet no unnecessary frills



THIS MONTH WE HELP

The Lord family, from London

CARAVANNING HISTORY

Christopher and his wife Marie-Christine happily admit they have never owned a caravan. But, since the arrival of their two boys, they need affordable family holidays, especially when visiting Marie-Christine's native France. Unfortunately Chris was called to work just before we visited.

LOOKING FOR AND WHY

Despite her husband's absence, Marie-Christine assured me that the ultimate decision lies with her and their son Joseph! A twin dinette van appeals to give the kids their own area by day and give parents space when the kids are in bed in the evening.



OUR EXPERT

Andrew Ditton has been caravanning since he was in nappies and has been touring the country in his own caravan for many years. As a result, his critical eye is very much appreciated by readers and even some manufacturers



CARAVAN BUYER 2008

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1

BAILEY RANGER SERIES 6 500-5



The luxury lounge belies Bailey's bargain price tag



Removable draining board frees up a sizeable section of workspace in the kitchen



New fridge door is bang-up-to-date

CARAVAN SPEC

PRICE

£10,995 plus £485 OTR

CONTACT

Bailey Caravans, South Liberty Lane, Bristol, BS3 2SS
 t 0117 305 2939
 w bailey-caravans.co.uk

BERTHS

5

DIMENSIONS

Internal length 5.06m

Overall width 2.19m

Shipping length 6.73m

WEIGHTS

MIRO 1044kg

MTPLM 1268kg

User payload 228kg

BED SIZES

Front double: 6ft 7in x 4ft

3in/201cm x 130cm

Or two front singles: 5ft 10in x

2ft 2in/178cm x 68cm

Rear double: 6ft 7in x 4ft

0in/210cm x 122cm

Rear bunk: 6ft 2in x 2ft

0in/74cm x 61cm

WARRANTY

6 years body integrity, 3 years component

HEATING

Truma mains/gas space heater with blown air

Andrew says

I LIKE

Superb value, sensible spec level, comfy lounge, practical, great storage, solid rear partition door, stylish fridge

I DISLIKE

Centre of van is narrow, front single beds are short, no securing strap for table, no spark ignition to hob

EXTERIOR

There is no mistaking the tell-tale beige Bailey bonded bodyshell. It is not the most exciting exterior to a caravan, but crucially it is strong (thanks to a thicker grade aluminium than some competitors) and solid enough to warrant a six-year anti-ingress warranty. Unsurprisingly there are few bells and whistles gracing the exterior; coupling head is a standard issue, not a stabiliser type, there is no window in the door, and there is no underslung spare wheel carrier. However, there is space for the optional spare wheel in the large front locker, and that still leaves enough room for two large gas cylinders. A gas strut to the door here is a sweet touch.

6/10

LOUNGING

Covered with material called 'Mendip' (ie beige), the Bailey's deep cushions provide a comfortable touch of class, especially now that the front bolsters are standard issue. Sons Joseph and Adam were more interested in the corner TV shelf that folds down to reveal the heating and hot water controls all neatly mounted together in one area. Mind you, playing with these switches proved an irresistible draw for the boys. They were quickly led to the rear dinette which would be used as their daytime den. A small table is provided, but be aware that thanks to the Bailey's budget price tag there is no mains socket here. A dealer will be able to install one if you require.

8/10

DINING

For an early tea, the small table at the rear dinette is ideal for the boys. Later on when Chris and Marie-Christine eat they only need fold out the generously-sized top to the front chest for an intimate *dîner à deux*. Family mealtimes will call for the main table to be erected, and this is stored in the cupboard under the kitchen sink. However, there are no straps to hold the table in place, so if the locker opens en route, the table could fall out and damage adjacent furniture. I speak from experience of my Bailey Ranger Series 5, which also lacked table fixings. When lined up with the chest top the table comfortably accommodates six hungry diners.

7/10

NIGHT TIME

Some couples would be able to use the two 5ft 10in long single beds up front. But for Marie-Christine and her 6ft 2in husband, pulling out the double is the only sensible option, and what a comfortable bed it made!

At the rear of the caravan, two berths are provided in another comfortable double bed, and the 5th berth is a Pullman bunk. Erecting the bunk requires stripping the cushions from the entire area, stacking them in the middle of the van, then pulling up on the bunk. Having tried it, our tester was very glad that she only has two children! 'I think their friends would have to sleep in the awning if they ever came on holiday with us,' she decided.

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

NEW CARAVANS



7ft 2in body width is great for towing but makes the centre of the van quite narrow

'This solid partition is ideal as the kids are undisturbed at night'



The Bailey offers a fold-down shelf upon which to stand the TV



Basic washroom will suit most families' needs



STORAGE

Floating fascia lockers certainly look the part as they – er – float around the upper level of the caravan. Joseph and Adam opened every single one, and Mum decided that there was more than enough space for their bits and pieces. She was also thrilled with the generous wardrobe. Lockers under the seats will normally be filled with bedding and bunk cushions, so these are pretty much out of the equation. A couple of open nooks are provided at the rear of the Bailey, but in general everything has to be stowed away in a locker, which can become wearing when you want to keep everyday items to hand. Apart from the front gas locker there is no external storage.

8/10

KITCHEN

'I'm very impressed!' applauded Marie-Christine as she found her way around the kitchen. Indeed, there is little that could disappoint. Some seasoned caravanners would find it a chore to have to strike a match every time they used the cooker, but newcomers like the Lords will never miss the spark ignition they never had. New for Series 6 and a huge hit in the style stakes is the mocha-coloured frameless door to the 107 litre Thetford fridge. There's even a light inside the fridge now, too. Storage is taken care of by three thumping great big roof lockers, a pan store under the oven, and a spacious cupboard under the sink with a decent-sized cutlery drawer and two sliding baskets.

7/10

WASHROOM

Marie-Christine had already decided that they would use full-facility sites as a preference. 'That way I can take the kids out of the way while they have their showers and leave Chris in peace to make up the beds,' she added. For occasional ablutions, the compact washroom is adequate. An unexpected touch of luxury is the electric-flush Thetford C250 loo, featuring a wheeled waste tank. Storage is quite poor as the shower hose takes up half the limited cupboard space, and there is nowhere to hang out towels to dry in here. Having used one regularly for six months, I can safely say that there is nothing wrong with using a pull-out shower occasionally.

6/10

FINISH AND BUILD

Never a manufacturer to rest on its laurels, Bailey has invited furniture technology centre FIRA to give its interiors a good pounding. Upholstery is subject to repeated loads, and lockers are opened and closed 5000 times each. As a result, we could find precious little wrong with the Ranger. Our prototype van had no wall mountings for the Pullman bunk, and no bunk accessories either. In the washroom I spotted a couple of small gaps where the mastic gun had missed, and while the whole van felt very well screwed together, no new van is really child-proof and we all felt that any boisterous youngsters like Joseph and Adam could quickly break many components.

8/10

2

XPLORE 495



Bright and inviting rear dinette is also ideal for taking family meals



An all-in-one sink-cum-drainer saps the kitchen of workspace



Narrow kitchen cupboard and tiny cutlery drawer offer very limited storage solutions

CARAVAN SPEC

PRICE

£10,995 plus £495 OTR

CONTACT

The Explorer Group Ltd, Explorer House, Delves Lane, Consett, Co Durham, DH8 7PE

t 01207 699000

w explorer-group.co.uk

BERTHS

5

DIMENSIONS

Internal length 5.03m

Overall width 2.20m

Shipping length 6.52m

WEIGHTS

MIRO 1088kg

MTPLM 1300kg

User payload 212kg

BED SIZES

Front double: 6ft 6in x 4ft 6in/199cm x 137cm

Or two front singles: 6ft 0in x 2ft 3in/183cm x 69cm

Rear double: 6ft 6in x 4ft 0in/199cm x 122cm

Rear bunk: 5ft 11in x 1ft 11in/181cm x 59cm

WARRANTY

5yrs ingress, 3yrs component

HEATING

Truma mains/gas space heater with blown air with radiators

Andrew says

I LIKE

Great exterior styling, spark ignition to cooker, separate shower hose, hanging rail in shower, guard rails on bunk

I DISLIKE

Poor storage, inadequate kitchen workspace, precarious place to stand kettle, flimsy rear partition screen

EXTERIOR

Cutting a dash in ice white featuring smart modern graphics, chrome grab handles and funky oversized windows, it was the Xplore that won the Lords' vote regarding which van they would rather be seen arriving with. However, these good vibrations marry with the not-so-good vibrations borne by the Xplore on the road. Arriving on site we found cushions and loose curtain ties all over the place, and cupboards had fallen open. Smart looks aside, exterior spec almost matches the Bailey, although construction techniques and aluminium grade differ. Spoiling the show is the gas locker door's cheap, fiddly prop, but we were delighted to find lockable rear corner steadies.

6/10

LOUNGING

Upon entering the Xplore you are immediately hit with a pleasing sense of openness and space, despite the fact that it is 7ft 2in wide, just like the Bailey. Seating is finished in an attractive and dirt-concealing fabric called Warwyck, in other words, you guessed it, beige. The lack of bolster cushions and a steeply raked front do not allow for relaxing into the front corners, but the TV lives on the front chest anyway. There is no TV shelf by the wardrobe and the necessary sockets are at the foot of the front chest. As in the Bailey, the brilliant rear dinette has a half table and no mains power socket, but quite honestly that is to be expected at this sort of price level.

7/10

DINING

Hosting the TV on the front chest could be perceived as a bit awkward come meal times, but in the Xplore there is a neat solution to employing the small table. It simply pulls out from beneath the chest top, leaving the TV and anything else on the top, completely undisturbed. Mind you, the resulting surface area is a bit on the small side. The main table may be found properly secured in a cupboard next to the wardrobe, and this also provides storage space for the rear half-table. This gives added flexibility, as the large table may be used alone at the rear (for four people) or together with the pull-out chest at the front for six people if you're ever dining in a larger group.

8/10

NIGHT TIME

When it comes to the length of a single bed, an additional two inches can make a huge difference. At six foot long, the single beds are still too short for Chris, but will be suitable for a wider range of caravanners than the shorter beds in the Bailey. Of course, a double front bed is still an option.

At the rear, the Xplore's bed arrangement looks identical to that in the Bailey at first glance, but again is slightly better thought-out. Ventilation boards are present to prevent condensation in the lower double bed, and guard boards to the Pullman bunk are already in situ, making the bunk erection process just that little bit less inconvenient for us.

8/10

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

NEW CARAVANS



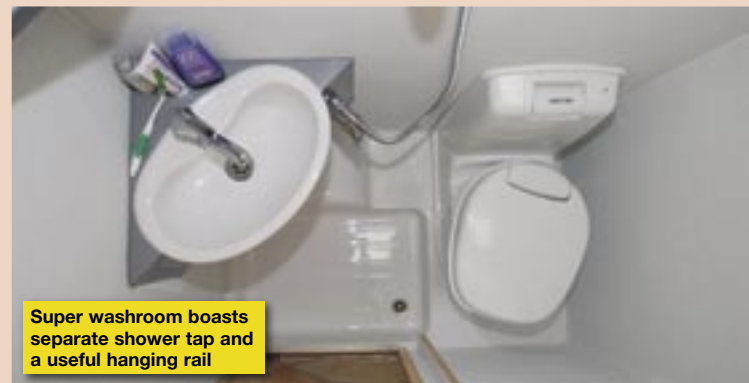
Room for six to dine, although access is impeded when the kitchen worktop is extended



Xplore offers an open, airy interior



Pre-attached bunk guards make putting up the bunk a little less traumatic



Super washroom boasts separate shower tap and a useful hanging rail



STORAGE

'Where do I put the boys' things?' asked a perplexed Marie-Christine, examining the rear roof lockers whose bases are a mere 5ins (13cm) deep. A narrow shelf runs across the rear bulkhead, but overall the rear dinette is woefully lacking in storage. Roof lockers at the front of the Xplore fare a little better as they are of a more useful depth (7in/18cm), but overall this van cannot hold a candle to the vast amount of storage that the Bailey offers. It's not all grim news though. Once again the wardrobe offers a good amount of clear hanging space, enhanced with a useful shoe locker and the aforementioned cupboard that can stow both tables at once.

6/10

KITCHEN

Fans of all-in-one sink and drainer units will delight in the fact that they can fold down the lid and hide the washing up, and stir-fry addicts like me will delight in the three-burner hob with an oversized burner. Incidentally, this cooker offers spark ignition so you can leave the matches at home. Compared to Bailey's cool offering, the Xplore's 102 litre illuminated fridge looks positively dated, due to its framed door, and the adjacent narrow cupboard and tiny cutlery drawer are inadequate. Worst of all is the fold-up shelf for the kettle right next to the dinette, which many visiting caravanners considered to be an accident just waiting to happen.

6/10

WASHROOM

There are a few classy touches in here, namely the cool grey sink and cupboard surrounds, a smart mirrored cupboard, and a separate tap for the shower, featuring a stylish chrome shower head and hose. Up above is a wonderfully generous roof light, but best of all is the eminently practical hanging rail for drying off the family's towels. Dragging the washroom back down to base level is a severe lack of storage and a manual-flush loo. But is a manual loo so bad? One director of the Caravan Club thinks not. He loves his manual flush loo, simply because his kids can't resist pressing the button on the electric type and draining all the flush water away.

7/10

FINISH AND BUILD

Modern tourers aren't really child-proof. Things like the flimsy folding partition screen to the rear dinette and the delicate blinds and flyscreens will stand up to very little abuse. However, the Xplore is generally a well-constructed van. The bodywork may not be up to the bonded standard of the Bailey, but does offer a great finish. Likewise, the quality of the thick, sumptuous soft furnishings was reassuring.

We found a couple of minor issues that did not inspire confidence, such as flimsy drawer bases, surface corrosion to the hitch, a spring to the kitchen extension flap that was already broken, and the Truma hot air circulation fan that did not work.

7/10

NEW CARAVANS

OTHERS TO CONSIDER

SPRITE MAJOR 5

Price £11,340

Berths 5

The most famous brand in the business, it even manages to out-cool the trendy Xplore. Good headroom but 50kg heavier and £350 more expensive than the Bailey.

[w spritecaravans.co.uk](http://www.spritecaravans.co.uk)

LUNAR ZENITH FIVE

Price £11,395

Berths 5

Lunar caravans are renowned for being light in weight, and the Zenith Five is no exception with an MTPLM of 1217kg. Combi-oven and grill appeal to keen cooks.

[w lunarcaravans.com](http://www.lunarcaravans.com)

ADRIA ALTEA 390DS

Price £8,695

Berths 4

A super-smart delicious twin-dinette van with an incredibly low price and equally low MIRO of 865kg. More compact than our test vans, but at this price and weight, who cares?

[w adria-mobil.com/uk](http://www.adria-mobil.com/uk)

GOING 450DD

Price £TBA

Berths 5

Super little tourer. On the basic side; MIRO 950kg. Electric heating only, and there is only one dealer in the UK; Red Lion Caravans in Lancashire.

[w rlcaravans.co.uk](http://www.rlcaravans.co.uk)



INSURANCE QUOTE

Typical insurance premium indication
Contact

www.shieldyourcaravan.co.uk
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Bailey R6 500-5	£10,995
£189.16 per annum	
Xplore 495	£10,995
£189.16 per annum	

(All New for Old cover quotes are based on 4 years claim-free caravanning, with the caravan secured on a CaSSOA)

Many thanks to Sue and Mike, and Pauline and Keith, the super-helpful wardens at Alderstead Heath Caravan Club Site in Surrey

Final scores



BAILEY RANGER SERIES 6 500-5

Practicality 8/10

Rear bunk is a faff to erect. 'Pinch point' at centre of van, otherwise easy to live with

Value for money 8/10

Raw materials are rising at an alarming rate, making this well-specified sub-£11k tourer fantastic value for money

Caravan
Our rating

73/100



XPLORE 495

Practicality 8/10

Well thought-out, but you will be forever wiping water marks from washroom fittings

Value for money 8/10

Terrific value with a slightly different spec to the Bailey, like spark ignition to the cooker but no bolster cushions

Caravan
Our rating

71/100

OUR TESTERS' CONCLUSIONS:

It quickly becomes apparent that, despite their budget price tags, these tourers offer everything that a first-time family could possibly need: Two separate living areas, two sleeping areas, somewhere to prepare family meals, blown air heating to extend the touring season, and an onboard loo and hot water shower for those gloriously remote back-to-nature, facility-free sites.

It's worth bearing in mind that these vans actually work far better for four people rather than the full complement of five. The fifth berth is a pull-up bunk that requires all the cushions of the rear dinette to be stacked in the centre of the van before its erection. Anyone with three kids may do better with a six-berth van offering fixed bunks. But the joy of the double dinette layout is its flexibility. For

snatched weekends away without the kids, parents or grandparents can leave the rear bed made up and enjoy the comforts of a semi-fixed bed tourer.

Unleashing Joseph and Adam made us all realise how vulnerable new tourers can be at the mercy of boisterous children. We felt that the Bailey would stand up a little better to abuse than the Xplore. The Bailey also offers far better storage, and a superior kitchen. Xplore puts up a good fight by offering those classy exterior looks, a better washroom, larger front beds, and a smoother bunk assembly at the rear.

Both vans will make for happy, comfortable caravanning families. For added space and enjoyment, remember to budget a few hundred pounds for an awning.



WE CHOSE

Bailey Ranger Series 6 500-5

'We like the Xplore's sleek style, especially given the wider centre section and the nicer shower facility. But I am really at a loss as to where I would store all the boy's things. The Bailey offers so much more storage, and I also feel it is a more solid caravan. But I would really prefer a more colourful interior than standard beige'

NEXT MONTH Two for two: High spec two berth tourers from Sterling and Coachman