

Bailey Senator
Series 6
Wyoming £TBC

Has the new Series 6
improved on Series 5?

CARAVAN TEST

Bailey Senator Series 6 Wyoming

Bailey have just launched their all-new Senator Series 6 and Andrew Ditton brings you the exclusive first test of the four-berth Wyoming model

Price TBC (Circa £15,770)

Berths 4

MIRO: 1435kg

MTPLM: 1678kg

Bailey's Senator Series 5 broke sales records left, right and centre, thanks to a canny combination of high spec, great value, and ground-breaking layouts. Six popular layouts have been retained. Riding on a single axle are the two-berth end-washroom Vermont, the popular four-berth end-washroom Arizona, the innovative nearside-bed Indiana, and the island-bed Virginia. The twin-axle line-up features the island-bed Louisiana and the most radically altered of all the layouts, the centre-bed, end-washroom Wyoming.

Employing a sheer stroke of genius, Bailey has moved the Wyoming's bed to the nearside

à la Indiana which not only gives the van a lovely spacious feel, but also provides a new home for the Truma heater. This in turn allows for the provision of the more popular parallel seating arrangement in the lounge area.

Senator Series 5 was just so good, I could not wait to get my hands on the Series 6 to see just how this flagship could ever be improved.

EXTERIOR

Apart from snazzy new graphics, there is cosmetically very little difference over outgoing models. The familiar 7ft 6in wide bonded body-shell remains in a tasteful if not terribly modern cream colour scheme. But that familiar body-shell conceals a host of features which are hiding, quite literally, below the surface.

To start with, the skin itself is improved impact-resistant

smooth aluminium, although I decided to resist the 'awning pole test', lest I upset the good people at Bailey. The most exciting development of all is the AL-KO ATC Traction Control System. Sadly, this was not fitted to our pre-production prototype van, but my Guru Mike Cazalet informs me that this really is exciting stuff. ATC is a little bit like a car's Electronic Stability Programme, which uses brake applications to control a snaking caravan. As it is almost practically impossible to simulate such conditions even on a race track, it's really down to computer modelling to test the effectiveness of this system.

Either way, just like a stabiliser, ATC does not relieve the driver of the responsibility of making sure the caravan is correctly loaded and a safe match for the towcar.

It's a sad fact of life that a desirable twin-axle caravan

such as the Wyoming is appealing not only to honest caravanners, but also to low-lives who don't believe in paying for their goods. With that in mind, a Tracker Monitor tracking system is now fitted as standard. Despite the £99 per year subscription that's payable from year two onwards, my experience has shown that there really is no better way to protect your caravan when used in conjunction with 'heavy metal'. Al-Ko Secure receivers are also standard, but employing these involves the incredible faff of jacking up the side of the caravan to line up the wheels. Would you really bother to do that for every overnight stop?

Otherwise, the exterior carries all the toys you'd expect, such as an AKS stabiliser, exterior access to underbed storage, and a spacious gas locker big enough for BP and Calor gas cylinders.

Low sideboard adds to spacious ambience, and the fitted TV is a touch of class



INTERIOR

Muted and brown the standard colour scheme may be, but it's hard not to emit just a little 'wow!' as you enter through the classy two-piece door with window and bin. Three upholstery schemes are available, one of which is a cost-option upgrade to a suede-effect velour. I have not yet seen it in the flesh, but from the pictures I've seen it looks stunning.

A flat-screen TV is part of the caravan's specification and this flashy unit swivels on a plinth to give optimum viewing angle to the lounge, or to face the bedroom. However, when viewing from the bed, I kept wishing I could pivot the screen on a horizontal axis for added comfort, but this is not possible.

Watching a DVD from the lounge is great, but it was then that I came to grief with the sexy new bolster cushions. Stylish and smart they may be, but I found them really uncomfortable on my back when reclining.

Gone is mains lighting, and in its place are five chains of low-energy LED lights above certain windows. They most certainly look the part, and mains-free ralliers will delight in their battery-friendly low wattage. But the lack of continuity with these lights (there are none over the front windows) leaves the Senator trailing a little behind any notable German competitors.

The latest 115-litre Dometic fridge stars in the kitchen, but as a payback for the additional volume (there is no wheel arch provision at the rear) the sink has to sit in a slightly awkward place, right where you'd want to stand the kettle. Another Bailey trait that wins no friends is the awkward position of controls to the cooker, which also leave the area difficult to clean. A minimal amount of workspace is the price you pay for the decadent buffet unit opposite, above which sits

the eye-level microwave. Kitchen storage, while not overly-generous, is cleverly arranged thanks to a pull-out chrome basket unit.

Come dishing-up time, it's not just good food providing the treat in store. Concealed in the kitchen cupboard is the best caravan table we've seen for a long time. Simple yet effective drop-leaves allow easy access to seating when the table is in the up position, yet they may be lowered to provide a stunningly spacious banqueting area for four. The table doesn't line up with the fold-out top of the chest unit, but it really doesn't need to. It's worth inviting the neighbours around for dinner just to show it off.

Passing the comfortable double bed takes you to the rear washroom, a place where even more treats await. To start with, the modern Thetford loo has a wheeled, 18-litre waste tank and a slightly larger seat than before.

The spacious shower and small sink hold no surprises, but look, a heated towel rail! And a decent laundry basket! Such thoughtful design additions set this washroom apart as perhaps the most practical on the market today. But I still don't understand this fashion for see-through windows in washrooms. Bailey cites this as an emotive subject, claiming that most caravanners prefer this to the more sensible opaque version. Is this true, dear reader?

Storage throughout the van is, as may be expected, very good for two people, although hanging space in the diminutive wardrobe is at a premium. My favourite neat touch is the enormous drawer that glides out from under the dinette seat. It is pure class, and such a refreshing yet practical change from fumbling around for the contents of the underseat locker. Another touch of true class comes in the way that all the drawers are now engineered to feature a 'soft-close' mechanism.

New Senators are wide, bright, spacious, and inviting

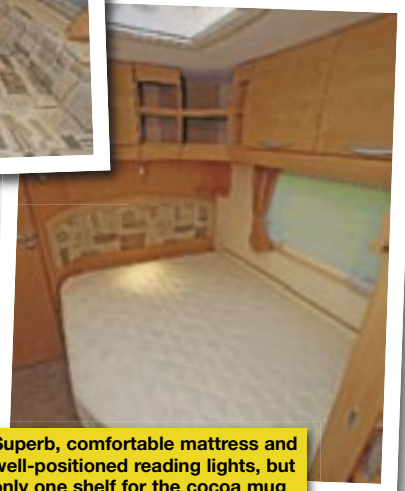


Dining table with drop leaves provides a mix of easy access and dining



Ideal for

Couples seeking a top-quality van for living in the lap of luxury, but who don't really want to pay more than around £16,000



Superb, comfortable mattress and well-positioned reading lights, but only one shelf for the cocoa mug

The larger fridge in the kitchen has meant a compromise for workspace there





Blinds in the washroom cover the window, but why isn't this frosted?



Shower hoses will be mounted a little higher in production vans

Provision of a laundry bin is typical of how much thought has gone into the Senator



Star of the show is the enormous washroom, featuring a luxury heated towel rail

CONCLUSION

Bailey has done it again. The Senator Series 6 is a seriously stunning van. Bailey's budget for 'bling' may have allowed for ATC, a Tracker, a flatscreen telly and a DVD player, but look hard enough and you'll see where the money runs out. For example, the Heki over the bed is the Mini version, although a full-sized one is available for £310. Mains lighting is absent, and controls to the Truma heater are at floor level, which is far from ideal.

Minor niggles apart, though, the new Wyoming is a great caravan that promises to offer great value for money if you're after a luxury tourer. Why not seek out the Senator road show at your nearest Bailey dealer and try for yourself?

Many thanks to the patient and hardworking team at the Camping and Caravanning Club's Normans Bay beachside Site, led by the formidable Nigel and Lynn Benn.

We like

Dining table, heated towel rail, TV and DVD, ATC system, pull-out drawer under dinette

We dislike

Small bolster cushions, hanging space and kitchen workspace



TOTAL INSURANCE®

INSURANCE QUOTE

Typical insurance premium indication
Contact www.shieldyourcaravan.co.uk
or call 0800 393 033

Bailey Senator Series 6 Wyoming
£TBC (circa £15,770)

Premium: £335.29 per annum
(All quotes are based on a 55-year-old man living in Solihull, Birmingham, and the van secured on a CaSSOA Gold storage site)

Our verdict

EXTERIOR 9/10

Classic looks conceal a host of features. ATC traction control is unproven, but Tracker worth weight in gold

LOUNGING 7/10

Small bolster cushions, and mood LED lighting that stops short of the front windows.

DINING 10/10

Superb drop-leaf table allows ease of access to seating yet ample dining space.

SLEEPING 9/10

Generous beds, comfy sprung mattress. Only one shelf by main bed for tea mugs though

KITCHEN 7/10

Area shows great compromise due to larger fridge. Socket may be repositioned in production; we hope so

STORAGE 8/10

Terrific amount of storage, thoughtfully laid out. We love the soft-close drawers, but hanging space is sparse

WASHROOM 9/10

Wheeled toilet cassette, heated towel rail, and laundry bin are good, a top washroom

BUILD QUALITY 8/10

Good for a pre-production van. Additional enhancements such as a guard protecting the Truma water heater would not go amiss

PRACTICALITY 8/10

10/10 as a two-berth, but as a four-berth we have to allow for the inconvenience incurred by those two extra bodies

VALUE FOR MONEY 9/10

Bailey promise a minimal price rise, so the Senator Series 6 will offer buyers supreme value for money

Total.....84/100

Caravan's rating

8/10