

# DESIGN AWARDS 2009 SPECIAL

April 2009

THE  
CARAVAN  
CLUB



# 59

ENTRIES IN  
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## WELCOME FROM... LAND ROVER

Welcome to *The Caravan Club Design Awards 2009 Special* supplement, which this year is sponsored by Land Rover. These prestigious awards search for the most innovative and exciting caravans on the market. Everything from interior to external design and security is analysed by the judges and technical experts.

Land Rover knows what it's like to have its vehicles put to the test and the company has won an array of coveted awards from around the globe – testament not only to its vehicles' versatility but also to the continued strength of British engineering.

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## CONTENTS

### 3 LAND ROVER PRIZE DRAW

Your chance to win a once-in-a-lifetime Land Rover experience in Morocco

### 4 CARAVAN DESIGN AWARDS 2009

Seven classes and over 40 caravans – what won and why...

### 11 LIGHTWEIGHT LEISURE TRAILER AWARDS 2009

If you're in the market for a lightweight leisure trailer, be sure to read this...



## WELCOME FROM... THE CARAVAN CLUB

The Caravan Club's prestigious Caravan Design and Lightweight Leisure Trailer Awards are the only ones of their kind in the caravan industry.

The aim of the Awards is to provide Club members, and caravanners in general, with fair and objective assessments of the caravans and leisure trailers submitted for scrutiny – all manufacturers are invited to enter. The Awards are also intended to provide manufacturers with unbiased feedback, which helps them to improve the design of their products.

Well supported and respected by the industry, the Caravan Design Awards have been running for 14 years, while the Lightweight Leisure Trailer Awards are in their seventh year.

This year, 59 vehicles were submitted in the two categories, with judging taking place at February's National Boat, Caravan & Outdoor Show, held at Birmingham's NEC.

The panel of independent judges and technical researchers follows rigorous scoring checklists and assesses everything from sitting comfort, kitchen design, storage, switches, wiring, security and repair and warranty arrangements to general safety. No stone is left unturned.

We hope you enjoy this special supplement – it really is a source of essential information.



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- Employees of Land Rover, their families, dealerships, associated companies and agencies are excluded from entry.
- The closing date for entries is 29.12.09. The draw will take place on 05.01.10. The winners will be notified by 12.01.10 by post. The names of the winners will be made available to those enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope and applying to Land Rover Administration, FREEPOST TK494, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 5UN in an envelope marked "Morocco Results".
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# STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

CARAVAN DESIGN JUDGE MICHAEL LE CAPLAIN REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS OF THIS YEAR'S GRUELLING COMPETITION

If it's February NEC show time, then it must also be time for the Club's highly-respected annual Caravan Design Awards.

This is a tough nut for manufacturers to crack, for the judging team examines and analyses absolutely every facet of a given contender, from both technical and habitation design perspectives. So in-depth is the judging that it

takes a team of two technical researchers and four design judges four days to evaluate all the entrants – 41 of them this year – on 10 different aspects.

If a given caravan impresses this hard-to-please team enough to take top position in its stipulated category, then it has certainly earned its place among the winners.

## CLASS 1

ANY CARAVAN  
UNDER £11,000

### WINNER:

**Sprite Alpine 2**  
Price: £10,371

In layout terms, the Alpine 2 is pretty much a direct rival for the second-placed Xplore, but one of the front settees is comfortably the biggest of the top three in this class (the nearside example is a whopping 6ft 3in, its offside counterpart slightly shorter at 5ft 11in owing to the presence of the kitchen), and the separate shower in the end washroom is simply enormous.

The kitchen's the best of the top trio, too, and build quality is superior – the sheer thickness of the washroom door in particular genuinely belies this caravan's budget status.

The little Sprite isn't quite perfect – my feet slipped occasionally on the loose-lay removable carpets, while I imagine even Swift Group would acknowledge that its exterior styling could use a bit of a nip and tuck here and there – but my scorecard conclusion was pretty emphatic: 'The ultimate credit-crunch caravan, perhaps?'



Exterior needs refinement but inside the Sprite is superb, boasting huge sofas and excellent build quality



## RUNNER-UP

**Xplore 452**  
Price: £10,595

Xplore is Explorer Group's new entry level range to take on Bailey's all-conquering Ranger at its own game.

The 452 is the smallest Xplore, but still conforms to a popular and proven layout – end washroom two-berth, with separate shower cubicle and a pair of 6ft-long front settees that can, just about, be classified as potential single beds. This despite being a foot shorter than the Bailey overall.



Payload is down on the Bailey but it's the lighter caravan of the two.

Kitchen space is boosted by the dresser opposite – my notes only complain about a lack of positive-locking roof locker catches and bland exterior styling.

## THIRD PLACE

**Bailey Ranger Series 6 460/4**  
Price: £10,517

The popular Ranger Series 6 – here in en-suite French bed 460/4 guise – is a cracking little caravan. Its front seats may not be big enough to act as single beds but for couples looking to occasionally entertain visiting family and friends, it's hard to beat.

New roof locker doors will polarise opinion, but there's no arguing with the storage space.



Kitchen worktop space is only average, but all the kit is there, including a full cooker.

The washroom is necessarily compact, but equipment extends to the latest Thetford C250 cassette toilet, complete with large-capacity wheeled holding tank.

## THE BEST OF THE REST

Just two further caravans remain in this class once you remove the top three: the Adria Altea 542 DT and the Caravelair Antares Luxe 425.

Of the two, the Slovenian-built Adria is arguably the better – rock-hard seats and cheap and nasty plastic locker stays notwithstanding – thanks to a general feeling of airiness and high build quality. The triple bunk layout, while nothing new, is particularly family-friendly, too.

## CLASS 2

FAMILY CARAVAN  
£11,000-£15,000

### WINNER:

**Bailey Pageant Series 7 Ardennes**  
Price: £14,995

In my personal scoresheet notes, I wrote: 'This is the first genuinely innovative caravan I've seen in years.'

The layout of the caravan, formerly known as the 'Brambler' (named after The Caravan Club members who designed it in Bailey's recent competition), will probably appear more familiar to anyone who has ever owned a motor caravan, but even then, the Ardennes' ingenious forward and rear lounges, central L-shaped kitchen and king-sized washroom – not to mention that massive sloping central dresser – will come across as something really rather special. What's particularly interesting about the Ardennes is that its floorplan shouldn't really work – the passageway from the kitchen through to the rear dinette, for one thing, should be prohibitively tight, but arching the unit away from the forward dinette to the main entrance door negates the problem altogether.

The unequal-length rear dinette, too, looks all wrong on paper, but somehow works really well in practice, while no-one will, we're sure, complain about the full-width end washroom and separate shower. The ultimate family caravan? Maybe, but couples will love it too.



## RUNNER-UP

**Sterling Europa 530**  
Price: £13,237

Swift Group entered no fewer than three caravans into this category, so it, like the rest of us, clearly feels that this is a crucial sector of the market to crack.

This Europa 530 sports the same basic layout as the Coachman Amara 550/5 which came third in this category, right down to the amidships washroom, separate shower compartment and nearside kitchen, and manages to include the same mains/TV aerial points in both dinettes, making it particularly family-friendly.

There's not quite the same feeling of utter hewn-from-a-solid-block-of-titanium solidity you get from the Coachman, but despite Swift's

oft-commented-upon lightweight space-frame locker design, it doesn't feel all that far behind overall. It seems a bit more modern in there, too, and lighting in particular is better than most, not least in the washroom.

Impressively, the combination of two dinettes squeezed into a single-axle caravan, measuring less than 24ft overall, doesn't compromise the kitchen, either, with perfectly acceptable worktop space opened up by Swift's usual removable plastic drainer. A kit list extends to a standard-fit microwave oven, a 107-litre fridge and a dual-fuel cooker.

In fact, with the competitive price and real-world weights (comfortably less than 1500kg fully-laden) factored into the equation, I declared the 530's familiar layout to be a 'golden oldie' and 'highly impressive'.



## THIRD PLACE

**Coachman Amara 550/5**  
Price: £14,637

Coachmans always feel beautifully made, and this family-friendly Amara 550/5 is a classic case in point.

Some will take kindly to neither the framed and handle-less locker doors that are bereft of positive locking catches, nor the kitchen, which is short on worktop space, but as a family layout, it's a winner. Twin dinettes at either end of the caravan

guarantee night-time privacy and day-time sanity for mum and dad on rainy days, while CLs suddenly become realistic holiday propositions when you clock the decent-sized washroom and entirely separate shower cubicle.

There are niggles – occupying the swivel toilet with the washroom door closed is best left to those shorter in the leg than the body, and you'll need a reasonably hefty towcar with which to tow it (one weighing a touch over 1870kg minimum to stick to the 85% recommendation), but if you're after quality, this is the caravan to buy.

## THE BEST OF THE REST

The classic four-berth end washroom layout battle was contested by (in descending order) the Swift Charisma 560 (which only narrowly lost out to the third placed Amara), Lunar's Quasar 525 and the Elddis Avanté Club 524, with just 35 points difference between the highest and lowest.

**CLASS 3**

2-BERTH CARAVAN  
£11,000-£15,000

**WINNER:**

**Bailey Senator  
Series 6 Vermont**  
Price: £14,383

The Vermont takes perhaps the most impressive win of the competition, for two reasons: firstly, this model has been around for some time now, so it's hardly a ground-breaking newcomer; secondly, it was stacked up against some seriously talented competition.

Vermont, a two-berth end washroom layout, is relatively lacking in inches, meaning the front seats are a trifle short and the kitchen is lacking a little in worktop space in particular.

Yet, that end washroom is an absolute corker and largely makes up for any other minor shortcomings. The enormous walk-in shower cubicle, for instance, while nothing new by any means, is amazing – it seems almost absurd that such a small caravan could have such a massive shower room. Then there's the hotel-esque washbasin/vanity unit tucked neatly against the nearside wall, with the king-sized and walk-in (literally!) wardrobe alongside garnished with soft-close drawers and an array of shelves.

The killer blow, of course, concerns both weight and price – two areas in which Bailey traditionally scores highly over its rivals. The Senator Series 6 Vermont is no exception.



**RUNNER-UP**

**Coachman  
Pastiche 470/2**  
Price: £14,921

There was a time when seemingly everyone had a variant of the Pastiche 470/2's layout on its books: a standard parallel lounge up front and a full-width washroom (complete with separate shower) out back. The twist being the unlikely-sounding presence of an L-shaped 'end' kitchen sandwiched in between, opposite the main entrance door.

If its relative rarity on the UK market today is anything to go by, we

can only assume this layout wasn't a big seller. Yet, Coachman has persisted with it, and if it hadn't been for the seemingly ubiquitous contender from Bristol – just 13 points ahead in the final analysis – it would have stolen class honours with ease.

It's difficult to understand what's not to like about this caravan – portly demeanour on the weighbridge aside – for it seems to offer the very best of all worlds: a spacious lounge; a near Lunar Stellar-esque kitchen amidships; and an enormous rear washroom-cum-dressing room that's completely private. All squeezed into a caravan that's just a smidgeon over 22ft long.



**THIRD PLACE**

**Lunar Stellar**  
Price: £13,644

There are those who wonder privately quite how Lunar manages to keep one or two of its more niche-market caravans afloat in these hard-pressed times. The tiny, narrow-bodied Ariva is one such, and the Stellar the other.

Certainly, the Stellar's layout is unique here in the UK (although not on the Continent), but if you're the sort of couple for whom cooking is a big part of your holidays, then this lightweight two-berther really ought to feature somewhere on your shopping list, for its L-shaped offside corner kitchen is simply enormous.

Quite how two people could ever get the most out of the seemingly endless acres of worktop space and bewildering array of cupboards and lockers the Stellar offers is beyond us, but people seem to love it, and keep coming back for more.

There's a catch to this Wembley Arena-sized galley, of course,



although it's not, as you might imagine, in the lounge, which is surprisingly roomy and classy. No, it's the washroom that suffers: it's tucked unobtrusively in the nearside corner by the main entrance door, and obviously of the all-in-one variety. It's fine for nocturnal emergency visits, but less so for those who like to frequent basic CLs.

A great caravan, then, but one that's held back a little by its framed locker doors, but also – rather perversely – that kitchen. Is it possible that it's just a bit too big?

**THE BEST OF THE REST**

Interestingly, my personal scoresheet puts the fourth-placed Elddis Odyssey 482 a single point ahead of the third-placed Lunar Stellar, and the basically identical Sterling Eccles Topaz and Swift Challenger on dead-level terms, despite their final overall standings at fourth and sixth places, respectively.

**CLASS 4**

CARAVAN WITH  
DEDICATED BED(S)  
£11,000-£15,000

**WINNER:**

**Bailey Pageant  
Series 7 Limousin**  
Price: £14,667

The team from Bristol score yet another class victory. Value must surely have played a major role in the Pageant Series 7 Limousin's win – for the same sort of money that buys the all-in-one washroom contenders lower down the list nets, in Bailey-speak, a middle-ranking French bed model that somehow manages to squeeze in a full-width end washroom (complete with separate shower cubicle) – and all on a single-axle caravan that's 25ft 8in long.

That's pretty remarkable, when you consider two things: firstly, this sort of layout was once the sole preserve of huge great twin-axles like the Swift Conqueror; secondly, the Limousin manages to stretch to the same size French bed as the similar (but en-suite corner washroom) Loire, and sports front seats that are just a couple of inches shorter. And we repeat: this is a single-axle caravan.

Not that it's svelte and featherlight: sticking to the 85% outfit matching recommendation and loading it up to its MTPLM, then your towcar will need to weigh somewhere in the region of 1870kg.

But what a caravan – and what a layout.



**RUNNER-UP**

**Coachman  
Amara 535/4**  
Price: £14,578

For once, the (yet again) bridesmaid Coachman isn't the heaviest in its class, and it managed to squeeze ahead of the third-placed Lunar by the narrowest of margins.

The fact it scored so closely to the Lunar is indicative of their broad similarities – not all of them positive. The Amara's washroom, for instance, is laid out almost exactly the same as the Lunar's, with the same potential problem if someone takes a shower. The lounge, too, feels similarly short relative to the rest of the caravan,

although in reality you can seat four people in there with consummate ease.

The kitchen does the best it can in the available space, and there's certainly no arguing with the domestic-standard cooker, digital 107-litre fridge and microwave oven (new for 2009), nor the soothing upholstery material and bound-edge removable carpets. A little more galley worktop space would be ideal, but where this could be achieved is, to be fair to Coachman, difficult to see.

The new handle-less framed locker doors won't, we suspect, garner universal approval, either, hardwood frames notwithstanding – they've no positive latching mechanisms.



**THIRD PLACE**

**Lunar Quasar 534**  
Price: £14,379

The Quasar conforms to a layout that's taken a serious grip in this country over the past eight or so years: that of the en-suite French bed. Comprising a longitudinal double bed tucked into one of the rear corners (the nearside in this instance), with a washroom slung alongside, the kitchen amidships and the lounge up front, it's long since proved a winning formula, especially for couples.

Not all Lunars impress with their cabinetry, but the Quasar is high up enough in the hierarchy to warrant competitive standards of unitary woodwork, garnished with proper positive-locking catches.

It's a good-sized bed, too – at 6ft 3in by 4ft 5in – although the usual bugbear of the inner foot end of the mattress being chopped off



(to facilitate through-passage into the washroom) remains.

Speaking of the washroom, the 534's is of a decent size, and it's well-lit to boot, but its basic floorplan means that if anyone's in the shower, the toilet, which is located at the far rear of the room, is emphatically out of commission – bad news if you're suddenly caught short, and you're staying on a facility-less CL.

**THE BEST OF THE REST**

The Elddis Avanté Club 464 is a super single-axle compact four-berther with a pair of stacked rear bunks and a remarkably big corner washroom.

The Swift Charisma 565 and Sterling Europa 620 accrued broadly similar marks, and the Sprite Quattro FB in particular drew near-identical scores from two judges. The Adria Adora 612DP managed a strong fifth place thanks to its island bed and en-suite shower, leaving the twin single bed Caravelair Ambiance Style 450.

**CLASS 5**

ANY CARAVAN  
£15,000-£18,000

**WINNER:**

**Bailey Senator Series 6 California**  
Price: £15,226

At first glance, the California appears to be nothing more than an even more opulent Pageant Limousin – certainly, the layout is all-but identical – which, while appealing, wouldn't necessarily guarantee a class win against the likes of the Coachman and Swift.

Look more closely, however, and you realise that the Senator appears to have pulled off something of a magic trick, being a little bit shorter (at 23ft 7in overall) than its 25ft 8in-long Pageant counterpart, yet managing to offer exactly the same 6ft 4in by 4ft 6in rear bed and front settees that somehow bear close comparison (one 5ft 8in long and one 5ft 3in long compared to the twin 5ft 9in-long affairs in the Limousin).

The kitchen isn't exactly over-endowed in the worktop stakes, but the kit is all there, including a new 115-litre (122-litre with the freezer removed) fridge and a microwave oven.

On-road stability, too, is enhanced by the standard-fitment of Al-Ko's ATC trailer control system, allied to fitted dampers and an AKS 3004 hitch-head stabiliser. It's even a bit lighter, overall, than its Pageant sibling.

My scoresheet remarks say it all: 'This is a strong class contender'.



**RUNNER-UP**

**Swift Challenger 580**  
Price: £14,995

Just to prove how unpredictable caravan design really can be, Swift Group entered its own take on the Class 4-winning Bailey Pageant Limousin theme (the Sterling Eccles Ruby) in the same class as the island-bed Swift Challenger 580 – and the Challenger finished up two places higher!

Impressive as the Ruby is, however, the Challenger 580 is actually the better caravan, although the judges' scores across the board were painfully tight between the two. There is a lot to like: island bed

single-axle caravans are still comparatively rare on the UK market, especially ones with a washroom as good as the 580's side-mounted affair. The washroom is roomy enough for teeth-brushing and using the loo, and the cylindrical separate shower is of a good size for even six-footers like me.

The kitchen opposite is well designed, with the usual Swift Group lift-out drainer making the most of the available worktops.

Its extra body-length inches relative to the similar (and also island bed) Challenger 560 also solves the age-old problem from which this sort of layout usually suffers: that of a short lounge. The 580's isn't big enough to offer up two single beds, but makes up into a double that's a whopping 7ft long.



**THIRD PLACE**

**Coachman VIP 545/4**  
Price: £17,563

No Coachman feels cheap or nasty inside, but once you get to the rarefied echelons of the aptly-named VIP range, you really are reminded of the old sales adage: 'Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten'. Not that it's easy to forget the VIP's £17,500 price tag, you understand...

The same lack of positive-locker catching that afflicts the rest of the Coachman range remains a bit of a disappointment here, but the cabinetry feels hefty and is finished in a rich, mid-toned hue that really comes to life after dark when the VIP's profusion of lights is switched on.

As is often the case with fixed-end bedrooms, the 545/4's layout feels a bit rear-biased, but the pay-off is



what must rate as one of the best-executed island bed designs currently available.

The bed itself, though, isn't the headline, but rather the unusually generous amount of walk-around space on offer – all too often with this design, it's a squeeze to get around the bed.

Better still is the washroom design. The washroom itself is quite small, but the shower cubicle is entirely separate, and relocated into a corner of the bedroom. Close over the washroom door, and you're left with a superb, fully en-suite end bedroom.

**THE BEST OF THE REST**

The new Sterling Eccles Ruby – which apes the class-winning California's basic layout – was closest to a podium finish, losing out to the Coachman by just 12 points.

The Compass Rallye 524's less adventurous four-berth end-washroom layout was enlivened considerably by Explorer's posh, new tiled, separate shower, while the Lunar Lexon SE's California-alike layout somehow seemed to include a bigger-than-average lounge.

**CLASS 6**

ANY CARAVAN  
Over £18,000

**WINNER:**

**Airstream International 684**  
Price: £53,326

The biggest Airstream is all about big numbers: unladen, it weighs nearly 200kg more than a fully-laden Conqueror 630, is the only model in the competition – fifth wheelers aside – to tip the scales at over 2000kg fully laden, and has an asking price with which you could buy two Swift Conqueror 630s and still have over £15,500 change.

But that, surely, is the whole point at this rarefied level of caravanning. When you're making this sort of financial commitment, you want to make an entrance wherever you go and – let's be honest here – you want to show off its amazing interior to onlookers at every opportunity.

What an interior it is. The washroom may be a little on the small side, but you get a ceramic toilet and (enormous) washbasin, together with chemical-free biodegradation of waste matter and aircraft-style suction. The front lounge is rendered more jaw-dropping by the presence of the trademark wraparound tinted windows, while there's a 6ft-long transverse double bed at the rear.

You buy an Airstream for its looks, though, and I doubt you'd ever tire of the polished aviation-style construction, aluminium, exposed rivets and weapons-grade bulkhead doors.



**RUNNER-UP**

**Swift Conqueror 630**  
Price: £18,884

Much of what I go on to say about the third-placed Sterling Elite Explorer applies to this Conqueror 630, simply because, layout differences aside, the two share an awful lot of DNA, including the same uprated chassis and high interior specification.

That layout was just enough to lift the 630 above its corporate stablemate. Broadly speaking, it's good news: Swift arguably pioneered

the French-bed layout in the UK, so it's hardly surprising it's really got its design down to a fine art, while the end bedroom – despite being a little disappointing on the storage front, given its size – sports a huge separate shower cubicle and a C350 cassette toilet around which there's room enough to host a game of five-a-side football!

Yet... my closing comments suggest that, for all its many unquestionable strengths, the 630 still somehow lacks that little extra je ne sais quoi needed to really shine at this end of the market: 'Very good, but superb single-axle variations on this layout seem little inferior'.



**THIRD PLACE**

**Sterling Elite Explorer**  
Price: £18,884

The Explorer is built on the biggest of Swift Group's twin-axle chassis (at just over 26ft stem-to-stern), which allows for its super-opulent rear island-bed layout allied to a central split washroom (nearside toilet room, offside shower) and a decent-sized parallel lounge. Unfortunately, the settees are necessarily (owing to the presence of the main entrance door) of unequal length, the nearside example being quite a bit shorter than the one opposite.

Lounge issues aside, though, this is one serious caravan. Elites have never exactly been stripped-out bargain-basement specials, but the kit list on this latest derivative is positively mindboggling: 175-litre fridge-freezer, dampers, higher-rated tyres, power-saving LED interior lighting, positive roof locker



catches and even a Thatcham-approved Europe-wide tracking system are all standard-fit, together with the desirable Alde Hydronic Compact 3010 programmable 'wet' central heating system.

In many ways, it's hard to fathom quite why the Explorer didn't fare better, but my personal notes perhaps give an implicit clue: most of my scores for the caravan were on the high side, but in a category where the 'wow' factor is perhaps as crucial as equipment and size, my only comments were 'island bed layouts seem to have improved apace since their launch', and 'hard to fault, really'.

**THE BEST OF THE REST**

In my own scoring, Buccaneer's super-posh Schooner managed an honourable draw with the winning Airstream, while quite a few of the design judges came away from the leather-lined Lunar Delta TI mightily impressed. The Coachman Laser 655/6's twin enormous lounges carried a fair bit of favour, too.

