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Bailey Phoenix 650

CANDY EVANS is among the first to get a look at one of Bailey's latest caravans

IF YOU were expecting Bailey's new caravan to be basic, I fear you'll be disappointed. The new Phoenix range may technically be the company's entry-level range in terms of price, but this new 650 is anything but stripped down.

Even from the outside it looks superior to its predecessor, the Pursuit, in that it replaces the single front window with three windows. The large vertical opening one in the centre brings it in line with its sibling ranges, Pegasus and Unicorn.

Inside it's very smart with two-tone furnishings, dark wood laminate and a sleek black marble effect on the work surfaces. Bailey will even supply a Dressing Pack if you want it, with pure wool throws, scatter cushions, bolsters and a bathroom carpet. And its finishes now match those in the top-of-the-range Unicorn caravans and Bailey's Advance motorhomes.

The pre-production Phoenix 650 I checked out at Knights Folly Farm Certificated Site near Bristol has one of my favourite family layouts, with a rear washroom. There are bunks and a dinette for the youngsters at one end and a good-sized lounge for mum and dad at the front. As with all Bailey caravans, the gas locker is at the side rather than the front of the 'van and the kitchen is at the centre - for good weight distribution.



READY TO COOK

Occasionally you spot a feature in a caravan that makes you say: "Why haven't we seen this more often?" and the cooker cover in the new Phoenix is one. It's simply a piece of the standard work surface that lifts up to reveal the gas burners. In doing so, however, it gives loads of extra robust food preparation space. You'll also find a fully specified Thetford Caprice MKIII cooker here - with four burners and separate grill and oven - a microwave as standard and a substantial fridge, finished off with practical cupboards and a square sink with a removable draining board.



DURING THE DAY

The front living area of the 650 is spacious and the cushions now boast shaped backs, making them a little more comfortable for lounging. There's also a little extra space because it's lost the Pursuit's front shelf, meaning the seating goes right up to the enormous front windows. USB sockets are now an integral part of one of the spotlights in the front and another in the back, to help charge all those gadgets.



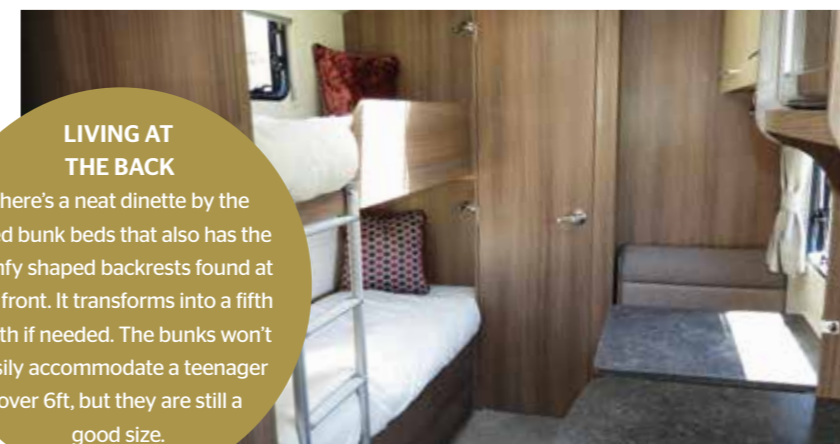
WASHROOM

It's quite narrow back here but it's still much larger than many washrooms in five-berth caravans.

The separate shower cubicle is a practical size and is a little different from the traditional white plastic caravan unit with its grey granite-effect finish.

The basin's quite small but another new feature is the large mirror that goes almost the whole way across the washroom, making things feel that bit more spacious.

The large wardrobe sits above the toilet cassette, meaning you have a bit of a stretch to reach the cassette from the outside and I'm not sure what you'd want to store in the external locker through which it passes.



LIVING AT THE BACK

There's a neat dinette by the fixed bunk beds that also has the comfy shaped backrests found at the front. It transforms into a fifth berth if needed. The bunks won't easily accommodate a teenager over 6ft, but they are still a good size.



at a glance

Prices start at £18,499

Club Care insurance £342

Berths Five

Length x width x height 7.37m x 2.21m x 2.62m

Mass in Running

Order 1,223kg

Maximum Technically

Permissible Laden

Mass 1,388kg

User payload 165kg

BE licence required

No with suitable

vehicle such as Kia

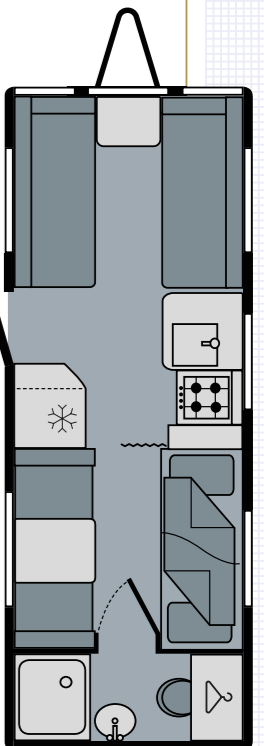
Stinger 2.0 T-GDi

GT-Line 5dr Auto

Manufacturer Bailey

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verdict

The Phoenix looks as if it will be a great range for creating wonderful family holidays over the next few years and it's certainly not basic.