

Getting Started

FREE



A Beginner's Guide to Touring

- How to choose, use and look after your caravan, motor caravan or trailer tent
- Setting up on site
- Touring at home and abroad





I'm delighted that you are thinking of taking up caravanning, as I have had over four decades of enjoying this leisure pursuit, initially with a young family and now with my wife Janette and occasionally the grand children! Like many people, I find work can be very hectic and stressful and caravanning is a great way to unwind and relax. Whether for long holidays, short breaks or just a weekend away - you don't have to travel far, but getting out to a beautiful site just enables you to forget about the jobs you should be doing at home, and truly relax.

As Chairman of The Caravan Club, I have the opportunity to give something back to this pastime through an organisation that does its best to make caravanning accessible to all. From providing the largest private network of sites in the UK, to arranging trips abroad or practical courses, producing information leaflets, DVDs and videos, and of course this booklet, we want to help you through the initial stages of a great new adventure.

I hope you do take the plunge and give caravanning a try. I am certain you will have a great time.

Robert Black MBE
Chairman, The Caravan Club



'Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'
(Mark Twain).



Caravanning has many forms, and one of them is bound to suit you. Whether you choose a touring caravan, motor caravan, folding camper or trailer tent, the same opportunities await: places to stay in breathtaking locations, the options of long holidays or short breaks, and an escape from airport delays, hotel regimes and crowded beaches.

Choose where you go, how long you stay and what you do. Dictate the pace, destination and budget yourself, and change your plans as often as you wish.

Flexibility, freedom, fun: three words that describe caravanning perfectly.

This booklet has been produced by The Caravan Club, an acknowledged expert and leader in the field of caravanning, to help you decide which kind of caravanning is right for you. If you are not sure whether you would prefer your caravan towed or driven, this booklet describes the options you can choose.

So read on, and make this the year you discover the delights of caravanning and achieve your dreams.

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Location, Location, Location

Once you have a caravan or motor caravan, there are so many places to go, you could never visit them all in one lifetime.

The Caravan Club has around 200 sites nationwide, and can organise bookings on a similar number of inspected sites in 16 countries overseas. Over 2,500 privately owned Certificated Locations can also be found across the UK for exclusive use by members.

Each Club Site has its own unique flavour, and those near heritage attractions are high on our members' list of favourites, making Chatsworth Park, Sandringham and Bladon Chains (on the Woodstock Estate) very popular. Sites in country parks are another Club speciality, including those at Longleat, Clumber Park (within Sherwood Forest), Cirencester Park, Ferry Meadows at Peterborough, Pembrey in South Wales and Craigie Gardens in Ayr. However, all offer the same high standards and quality our Club members expect, and some features are common to most.

What to expect on a Caravan Club Site

The reception area is generally located at the site entrance near the security barriers. This is where you sign in on arrival and where you can find basic provisions such as milk, bread, sweets and ice cream, maps of the area etc. There may

also be information on local attractions and things to do, although some sites have a separate information room.



The majority of Club Sites have one or more facility block. These generally contain toilets, showers with curtains, most have washbasins inside privacy cubicles with curtains or doors, general communal washbasins, hand dryers, hair dryers, shaver points and vanity mirrors. Blocks are centrally heated and offer an unlimited supply of hot water. Invariably you will also find separate vegetable preparation areas with sinks and draining boards and a laundry room with a washing machine, iron and ironing board. On over 130 sites you can also expect self-contained washroom facilities with wheelchair access, and a growing number have dedicated mother and baby rooms with a small bath and nappy changing area.

Some sites have a games room and drying rooms for wet weather gear. If there are two blocks on the site, one may offer more facilities than the other so if, for instance, the mother and baby room is of particular importance to you, request a pitch near this block.



Some facility blocks remain unlocked all the time, some require a key and others have a button-pad that requires a specific code. Disabled facilities often require a special key. The warden will tell you which applies. Facility blocks are closed daily for about an hour for cleaning and the times are posted on the door. Make a note of these so you can avoid the cleaning times although many sites have a second block or individual toilets that will be open when a block is closed.

A very few sites do not have a facility block, and these are advertised as such in the members' Sites Directory & Handbook. They might not suit everyone, but with a fully equipped caravan or motor caravan they often provide a quiet and peaceful retreat for those wanting to get away from it all.

Dotted around all sites will be a number of service points. This is where you go to dispose of your waste water, empty the cassette toilet and fill up your fresh water container or tank. They also serve as fire points.

Most sites offer hard-standings, which are generally covered in stone chips. These will usually be level, and ideal for year round use.



Some sites allow only hard-standings to be used during the winter months, to avoid damage to the grass pitches.

Nearly all pitches have a mains electric hook-up facility included within the pitch price. A single electricity bollard generally supplies three caravans or motor caravans, each having an individual supply limit of 16 Amps unless otherwise stated.

A small number of pitches on selected sites are fully serviced in that they have fresh and waste water, electricity and sometimes TV aerial facilities located next to each individual pitch. Details are in The Club's Sites Directory & Handbook.

Many sites have NPFA (National Playing Fields Association) inspected play areas for children. These offer traditional equipment such as wood and rope climbing frames, a hanging tyre or swing, Wendy house and slide, with bark, sand, grass or rubber chippings underfoot.



Dogs are welcome on Club Sites at no extra charge, and many sites provide a dedicated dog walk on site or close by.



Although tent owners are not eligible to become members of The Caravan Club, around a third of Club Sites permit tent camping, and these generally have a separate area and quite often a separate facility block.

Many Club Sites now offer car hire with a pick-up and drop-off service direct to the site, which is ideal for motor caravans. Special rates are available for members and the daily hire rate for a small car is typically £28, with reductions for 3 or more days.

What to expect on a Commercial Site

There are so many different types of caravan site, it is difficult to give an example of a typical one. Some are basically caravan holiday home sites that offer space to a small number of touring caravans or motor caravans. These often have extensive on-site facilities such as indoor and outdoor swimming pools, sports clubs, shops, bars and restaurants. Others may be restricted to touring caravans, motor caravans and tent campers, but offer more in the way of shopping or eating facilities than you would usually find on a Caravan Club Site. Naturally the more facilities the site offers the more you are likely to pay per night in fees, so check what is included in the fee and if you have to pay extra to use any of the facilities available, or for dogs, awnings etc. Also bear in mind that if you intend to spend a fair amount of your time off site, visiting local attractions, theme parks, beaches or local restaurants/pubs etc. then an all-inclusive pitch fee at such a site may not represent good value for money.

Certificated Locations

At the opposite end of the scale are Certificated Locations, or CLs. These are small, privately owned sites licensed by The Caravan Club and permitted to

have up to five caravans or motor caravans per night on their land, and are strictly for Club members only. The owner sets the nightly fee, which is generally all-inclusive and around £4 to £5 per night, regardless of how many people are in the caravan, and the facilities offered can vary. The minimum facilities the owner must provide are a fresh water supply and a waste disposal point. Some provide electric hook-ups, one or more toilets and occasionally showers. CLs can be on farms, private estates, gardens, nurseries, vineyards, pubs; in fact anywhere with spare land that has been deemed suitable for caravan use. The beauty of CLs lies in their variety of type and location and The Caravan Club has over 2,500 to choose from, exclusive to its members and all listed in The Club's Sites Directory & Handbook.



Arrival on Site

When you arrive at a Caravan Club Site, there may be an area marked out before the barrier, where you can park. If there isn't, pull over somewhere that won't cause a problem to other site users and go to the reception desk. There you will meet one of the wardens or assistant wardens who live on site and ensure the facilities are kept clean, the site is kept tidy and all runs smoothly. They will also have good local knowledge and can advise you on public transport, local attractions and a good place to eat. If the office is closed follow the instructions on or near the door.

Give the warden your name, and show your membership card, if you are a member. Some sites are 'Members Only' but members also pay less on sites open to all (typically between £5.00 and £17.00 per night for two adults, depending on the time of year, although some sites do charge less and occasionally a little more.) If you are not a member, you can join on site if you wish, and save on nightly fees. If you haven't pre-booked you will be asked how long you plan to stay. You don't have to commit yourself to an extended stay out of peak season, but you might qualify for a free night on some sites if you stay a certain length of time, so do ask. You will be asked to pay for the number of nights booked, but if you want to extend your stay later, that won't be a problem providing the site isn't full and you don't exceed the maximum permitted stay, which is 21 days.

Next you will be given a map of the site, and the warden will indicate where the vacant pitches are. Say if you would like anything in

particular, such as a hard-standing, a pitch close to the children's play area, dog walk, or close to a facility block or service point. If a member of your party is disabled, then do say so and you will be directed towards the most appropriate pitches. Except at peak times, you are likely to have a choice of quite a few pitches, so the next thing to do is either walk round to find a pitch you would like, or drive round. Most sites have a one-way system in operation and all have a 10 mph speed limit, so watch for the one-way arrows and keep an eye on your speed.

Each pitch has a marker in the ground with the pitch number on it. When you have chosen your pitch, reverse on to it. It is often advisable to reverse so that the pitch marker is centred on the rear of the caravan. This allows plenty of room to erect an awning on the door side. However, providing you stay within the confines of your pitch, you may arrange your outfit how you choose.

On your next trip past reception (or sooner if requested), tell the warden which pitch number you have chosen.



*The world is a book and
those who do not travel
read only one page*

(St Augustine)



Going Abroad

A caravan, motor caravan or trailer tent is an ideal way to explore further afield and getting across to France, Holland etc. couldn't be easier with the choice of boarding a ferry or travelling through the Channel tunnel. When booking a ticket you will be asked for details including dimensions and your vehicle registration number, and you will pay according to the space you occupy.

On arrival at the port report to the check-in desk, well in advance of the scheduled boarding time. You will then be directed to the waiting area for your departure. The gas supply should be turned off at the cylinder before boarding. You will not be allowed to carry spare petrol cans or extra gas cylinders over the stated limit by the Ferry operator.

If boarding a ferry you will be told when to drive on and where to park. Some Ferry operators may ask you to switch off all car alarms when leaving your vehicle. Alarms are

often activated during crossings (when people brush past) and if the crossing is long distance this can result in a flat battery. Note the deck and staircase number for when you return. You will not be permitted access to the vehicle during the journey so take with you everything you may require, including passports and tickets. Claim your cabin or seats immediately upon boarding or find the general lounge or restaurant areas. An announcement will be made when it is time to return to your vehicle.

If going by tunnel, approach one of the booths for high vehicles, if applicable, (over 1.85 metres) and show them your tickets. Having checked in, you can visit the terminal to make any last minute purchases, then follow the signs to passport control and customs. Your LPG valves will be closed and sealed as a safety precaution, and you may be asked to open the roof vents. You are permitted a maximum of 50 kg of LPG in properly secured cylinders. You can then join the waiting area allocated for your departure and will be directed on to the single deck wagons of the train, and told to park in gear with the brake applied. You will remain with your outfit for the journey, but can stretch your legs in the carriage. On arrival, remember to close the roof vent, re-connect the fridge to 12V and when driving off, remember to drive on the right.

Note that vehicles running on LPG are not permitted in the Channel tunnel.

Further information on travelling abroad can be obtained from The Caravan Club's Travel Service on 01342 336766.

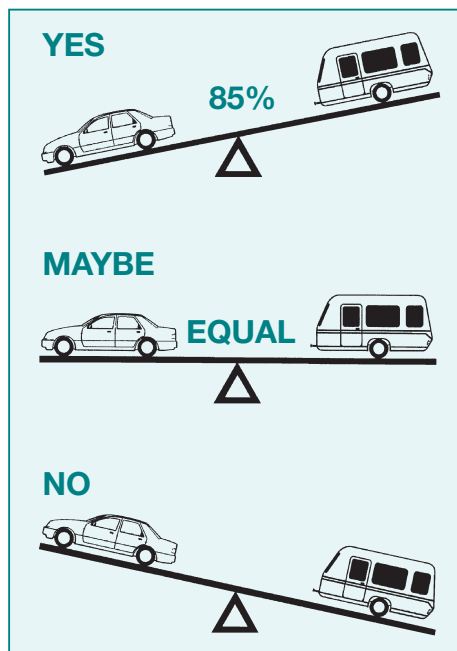
TOP TIP

Remove your towing mirrors once parked, and re-fit them only just before setting off again. Otherwise, you can guarantee one of the other passengers will walk into them, due to the limited space around the vehicles.

Caravanning

Matching Your Outfit

As a newcomer to caravanning, you would be wise to stick to the generally recommended guideline of towing a caravan weighing no more than 85% of the empty or kerb weight of the car. If you can't find this figure in the vehicle handbook, ask your car or caravan dealer to look it up or phone The Caravan Club's Technical Advice and Information Department, giving the make, model and year of your car. The Club bases all of its testing on this guidance, which almost invariably results in an outfit that is safe and comfortable to tow.



If you have a substantial car, like a Volvo Estate for instance, with a kerb weight of around 1500 kg, then you can tow a caravan that, when laden, weighs up to 1275 kg (1500 x 85%). If the car is a more typical family saloon, like a Ford

Mondeo or Vauxhall Vectra, the kerb weight is likely to be nearer 1200 to 1300 kg, and to keep within the 85% ratio the laden caravan would be 1020 to 1100 kg. Remember the actual laden weight of the caravan is its empty weight plus any contents you add, and not the maximum weight it is capable of carrying (see glossary of terms on page 28).

When considering how much weight you are likely to add, allow a minimum of 100 kg for 2 people, and this will include items like the LPG cylinders, leisure battery, awning and poles, step, fire extinguisher, water carriers, cooking utensils, bedding, clothing, crockery, cutlery, and other basic essentials. All these can be weighed on the bathroom scales for accuracy. For each additional person, allow at least another 25 kg taking care not to overload the caravan. You can often put heavy items, like the awning, in the car. It's a good idea to check your caravan on a public weighbridge first time out, just to make sure you are within the recommended and compulsory weight limits (see glossary for definitions of weight terms).

If you drive articulated vehicles for a living, or are an experienced tower with other types of high-sided trailer, then a ratio of up to 100% is acceptable under normal road conditions. However, it is not recommended to exceed this as the outfit is likely to be a potentially unstable one. It may also be illegal for you to drive it (see the section on legal matters).

Once you have established the weight ratio requirements, you must check that the acceptable caravan figure does not exceed the car's recommended towing limit, which is determined by the vehicle manufacturer, usually with the car's hill starting ability, engine power or

cooling capacity in mind. Hence two cars of the same make and model with different sizes or types of engine e.g. one diesel, one petrol, may have different towing limits. This information should be in the vehicle handbook.

Since it's working harder than normal when towing, your car engine may well run at a higher temperature – this is not a problem as long as the temperature stabilises, and doesn't continue to rise. Some older cars, particularly automatics, may require additional cooling when towing over certain weights - consult your car handbook or dealer.

Another point you should consider is noseweight. This is the vertical load the caravan hitch imposes on the car's towball when stationary, and is a major (but frequently overlooked) factor in determining the high speed stability of a caravan. It will change according to the way the caravan is loaded, i.e. weight in front of the caravan axle will increase noseweight, weight behind the axle will decrease noseweight. When loading the caravan, heavy items are best carried low down over the axle or slightly forward of it, to achieve the desired noseweight figure and good stability. Both the car and tow bracket manufacturer will give a noseweight limit, typically 75 kg but sometimes less, and you must not exceed this. As a general rule, for good stability the ideal noseweight for a single axle caravan is 7% of its actual laden weight. Therefore an 1100 kg caravan would have an ideal noseweight of 77 kg: 75 kg would be acceptable. If you want a larger caravan, you may have to consider a twin axle. Aiming to achieve a 7% noseweight with these is a good idea, but may not always be possible. So aim to get the noseweight as high as possible without exceeding any of the manufacturers' limitations. If the limiting factor is the tow car, note that some conventional cars, such as a Rover 75 and most 4x4s have significantly higher noseweight limits.

Over the years The Caravan Club has tested a vast number of cars for towing, and has quizzed its members on many more. Therefore its Technical Advice and Information Department will have the ability to advise if the car you wish

to tow with is good at the job, and what size of caravan it would best suit.

If choosing a car from scratch, you can get involved with considering much more, such as torque curves, gearing, manual versus automatic and saloon versus estate, which is beyond the scope of this guide. However, The Caravan Club has produced an excellent leaflet 'Choice of Towcar' which goes into the subject in much more depth. Club members can request this from The Club's Technical Advice and Information Department or download it from our website.

All this might seem like a lot of information to absorb, but getting your outfit right at the start will ensure many happy hours of trouble-free caravanning. And don't forget help and advice is always at hand from The Caravan Club or a reputable caravan dealer.

Towing Brackets

To equip your vehicle for towing, you need a towing bracket plus at least one 12V electrical connector to operate the road lights on the caravan. Modern caravans have two 12V connectors – a 12N and a 12S – so if you want to fully utilise their potential, the car will also need two. However, quite a few new cars come with a single 13 pin connector which replaces the two. If your car and caravan don't match in this respect, you can buy an adapter or change the plug(s).

If your car was first registered after 1st August 1998 (i.e. 'S' plate or later), then you must by law only fit it with a 'Type Approved' towing bracket, which means that it has been tested to and has met a recognised standard. Such brackets can be supplied either by the car manufacturer, or by an independent manufacturer. If fitting a towing bracket to an older vehicle, try to ensure the bracket has been tested to and has met the requirements of BS AU 114b or the similar International Standard ISO 3853. While this is not a legal requirement, it does help to ensure you get a safe and durable product.

Fitting the towing bracket electrics to your car can range from straightforward to extremely complex, depending on the age and sophistication of the vehicle. Unless you are absolutely confident, this is a job best left to a professional fitter, especially with newer vehicles. Your car manufacturer should be able to supply a wiring kit for fitting by your dealer, or alternatively, there are specialist fitters (some offer a mobile service), such as those who are members of the trade body, the National Trailer and Towing Association (01926 335445, or www.ntta.co.uk).



Practical Caravanning Courses

Once you have a vehicle equipped for towing, you can take part in one of The Caravan Club's practical courses. There are two on offer: a one and a half day practical caravanning course that covers both classroom tuition and practical manoeuvres, and a one day manoeuvring course that just concentrates on the practical side. During both courses you will learn how to reverse the caravan and place it exactly where you want, using your towing mirrors and simple techniques, as well as how to guide it around obstacles allowing for the extra width involved.

The Caravan Club has also produced a DVD called 'Towing the Line' which is ideal for the beginner and covers all the necessary topics to get you and your outfit out on the road and to a site (also available in VHS video format). For more details of the DVD/video and the practical courses contact The Club on 01342 336808 or visit The Club website.

Choosing The Right Caravan

Caravans come in all shapes and sizes and you are bound to find something to suit you, your towcar, and your budget.

Having established the weight of caravan your car can tow you need to ask yourself a number of questions:

Are the beds a good size?

Generally, converting the seating area to a double provides quite a sizeable bed, but check the dimensions accommodate you. When used as single beds, one might be longer than the other, so ensure the tallest person can be accommodated. Bed width might also vary so again ensure you can sleep happily within the 70cm or so that is offered. Bed comfort is also important so look at the depth of the cushions and how much support they offer and how complicated it might be to convert from day to night time use, and vice versa.

Do I need a large washroom?

Some caravans have the complete rear end devoted to the washroom. This is great if you are going to make good use of it, but a waste of space if you intend



to use the on-site facilities most of the time. Check both the headroom and the general space available in the shower cubicle, especially if it's a separate unit. If the washroom is located over the axle, check the wheel arch doesn't take up too much floor space.

Do I need a large hob or oven?

If you are intending to do a great deal of cooking in the caravan, then an oven could be very useful, as could a four-ring hob. You also need to assess available work space. Some caravans have drop-down flaps to increase the worktop area.

However, if cooking is not a priority or perhaps you prefer to barbecue or eat out, an oven might add unnecessary weight and take up useful storage space.

How much storage space do I need?

A cocktail cabinet is very nice, but would you use it or would more conventional storage be better? Is the wardrobe large enough for your requirements, and where would you store the bedding?

What layout do I prefer?

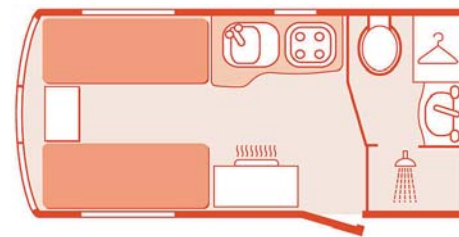
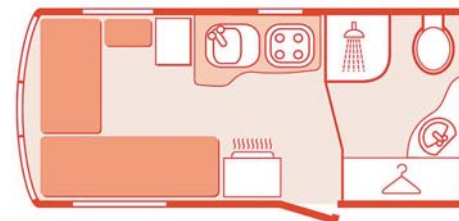
In two berth caravans the traditional layout is to have the two seating areas facing each other which can be used as a double or single beds.

The alternative is an 'L' shape, which can only be used as a double. The latter gives a bit more useable floor space and might be more suited to those caravanning with one or more dogs! With bigger caravans, you can also have the option of a permanently made up double bed, ideal for those wanting to use their caravan as a base for getting out and about. This means no bed making at the end of a busy day out.

If caravanning with children and looking at four or more berths, ensure you can adequately divide off the extra berth areas if the children have earlier bed times than you.



Also check that they won't be disturbed by you using the washroom. If an extra berth is provided by a bunk bed which folds down from the wall, ensure it is up to the weight you need it for and that any window adjacent to it can be properly secured.



Do I want a single or twin axle?

If looking at the larger or heavier models, then the twin axle option generally gives a more stable performance on the road and can reduce what would otherwise be an unacceptably high noseweight. However, they are more difficult to manoeuvre in tight spaces and are likely to increase your maintenance costs.

Try before you buy

One way to establish what you do and don't need in a caravan is to hire one for a week or so. This will give you a better idea of which layout suits you best and what facilities you will regularly use, and what you can live without. The Caravan Club's Technical Advice and Information Department has a list of hirers (send SAE) or view it on the website www.caravanclub.co.uk. Some dealers may offer a 'try before you buy' scheme, so do enquire.

Getting Out and About



Hitching Up - a step by step guide

The hitching up procedure is covered in The Club's practical courses and in the DVD 'Towing the Line'. Your caravan dealer will also be happy to explain the do's and don'ts to you. However, basically, when hitching up you should:

- 1 Ensure the caravan handbrake is on and the corner steadies are raised.
- 2 Raise the caravan hitch height until it is higher than the car tow ball, by winding down the jockey wheel.
- 3 Reverse the car, until the tow ball is either underneath, or just beside the caravan hitch. It helps to have two people; one to give directions to the driver. Put on the car handbrake.
- 4 Raise the hitch lever and lower the hitch on to the tow ball by winding up the jockey wheel, giving a sideways push to the caravan if necessary to locate the hitch over the ball.

- 5 Keep winding the jockey wheel up until the hitch fits over the tow ball, and the hitch safety mechanism pops out, showing green, or in older types, until the handle clicks back into place.



The red button pops out and shows green when the hitch is safely in place.

- 6 To check you have locked on properly, wind down the jockey wheel until the rear of the car starts to lift.
- 7 Return to winding up the jockey wheel, then stow it in the correct position beside the A Frame, and tighten its retaining handle.



- 8 Attach the 12V connector(s) for the road lights etc.

- 9 Attach the breakaway cable.



- 10 Release the caravan handbrake.
- 11 Check all caravan road lights are working, the steadies are fully up and windows, roof lights and doors are properly secure. Also check that the fridge door has its locking lever or peg in place.
- 12 Ensure the towing mirrors are properly adjusted, then off you go!

*"A window of opportunity won't open itself."
(D Weinbaum)*

Everything you ever wanted to know about the breakaway cable – but were afraid to ask...

(OK, you can skip this bit for now, but don't forget to read it before you hitch up, because it is important!)

Modern caravans must use a 'breakaway cable' while being towed (it's a legal requirement). The safety cable pulls on the caravan's brakes in the unlikely event of it becoming inadvertently unhitched from the car, and then breaks. The caravan (and possibly towing bracket) manufacturer's literature should have guidance on how to use it. However, in general, the cable should ideally be passed through a designated attachment point on the towing bracket, and then clipped back on to itself. Alternatively, the cable can sometimes be threaded through the towing bracket structure, and again, clipped back on itself. Don't clip the cable directly to the towing bracket or attachment point unless this is specifically permitted by the caravan manufacturer's guidance - the hook on the end of the cable may not be sufficiently strong to work properly if used like that. Don't loop the cable around the neck of the tow ball, unless there's no other viable means of attachment, since it's possible the cable could slide off the ball, rather than doing its job. If you have a detachable tow bar, don't attach the cable to the detachable part. Make sure the cable runs as straight as possible, and goes through any cable guides on the caravan chassis. Make sure it won't snag on the caravan hitch or stabiliser etc. Finally, make sure that there's enough slack in the cable to allow the car and caravan to fully articulate without the cable ever becoming taut, while ensuring that it is not so slack that it can ever drag on the ground. Get it too tight, and it will pull on your caravan's brakes unnecessarily, risking damage to the brakes and axle. Leave it too loose, and the cable may scrape along the ground, and be weakened so that it fails before doing its job.

Setting Up On Site

1 Levelling



For your first few trips you can save yourself any worry about side to side levelling by selecting a hard standing pitch which will usually be nice and level anyway. However, it really is a simple procedure and if you would like to use grass pitches, it is something you may need to do. A quick glance at your pitch should tell you if you are likely to need side to side levelling i.e. levelling across the axle. If using a hard-standing, this is unlikely. First you will need a ramp. Reverse on to your pitch about a foot further back than you wish to end up, then place the levelling ramp in front of the wheel that needs to be raised. Place a spirit level parallel to the axle on the A-frame, or just inside the caravan door. It helps to have two people at this point. One should drive the car very slowly forward up the ramp, and the other should indicate when the spirit level bubble is in the middle. You then need to secure the caravan handbrake (make sure the lever is pulled fully on into a vertical position) and chock the raised wheel before unhitching and parking the car, usually next to the caravan furthest away from the door side.

The next step is front to back levelling, which is much easier. Place the spirit level pointing front to back just inside the caravan door or on the A-frame, then raise or lower the jockey wheel until a level attitude is achieved. If there is a significant front to back slope, you may need to place a block under the jockey wheel. Then lower the corner steadies until they are firmly set against the ground, and again some or all of these may need to have blocks underneath. You can now get the caravan step, which should be kept just inside the caravan door or in the car, place it outside the caravan door making sure it is stable. It is now safe to get in.

TOP TIP

If the shower tray doesn't drain properly, a small adjustment to the levelling of the caravan usually cures the problem!

Setting Up On Site

2 Hooking-up to the Mains

One of the greatest advances in caravanning comfort was the addition of mains electricity. It is now commonplace in all caravans and on most pitches, and can be used to power lighting, water heating and the refrigerator. It also enables the use of various appliances from home, such as hairdryers and cooling fans. All pitches include the charge for electricity in the standard pitch price, and most outlets permit up to 16 Amps of power. 1000 watts or 1 KW is equivalent to 4.3 Amps. Remember that the site supply will assume that not everyone will use the maximum power at the same time, so it makes sense to use only essential equipment at peak times to ensure everyone gets a fair share and the supply does not fail.

Your caravan will probably have been supplied with the required cable, or you can buy one. The Caravan Club recommends 25 metres of flexible cable (three core each 2.5mm²) coloured orange with blue connectors (one male, one female) either end to BS EN 60309-2.

To Connect:

- 1 First ensure your caravan mains isolating switch is in the OFF position, together with all the electrical switches in the caravan.

- 2 Open the cover to the mains inlet on the caravan exterior and insert the female blue connector.
- 3 Locate your electricity supply bollard (ask the warden if you are not sure which one to use) and, ensuring the cable is routed out of harm's way, raise the cover on the individual outlet and insert the blue plug (male). On Club Sites, turn the plug clockwise until it locks. On other sites you may simply need to push it home firmly.
- 4 Place any surplus cable underneath the caravan in large loose loops; a tightly coiled cable can overheat.
- 5 Switch to ON at the caravan mains isolating switch.
- 6 Check the Residual Current Device is working by pressing the test button. Reset, check the fridge and water heater are switched to mains operation, then you are ready to relax.

To Disconnect:

Switch to OFF at the interior mains isolating switch. Release the plug from the site bollard (on Club Sites, press the plug release button first). Disconnect from the caravan end and store the cable in an appropriate locker.



Setting Up On Site

3 Connecting the Water



Fresh Water

- 1 Take the fresh water container plus filling hose to a fresh water tap. You will find them at service points and also on the wall of a facility block
- 2 Fill the container and replace cap
- 3 Return to your caravan and stand the container upright near the external water inlet on the caravan. Remove cap and put this and the filling hose somewhere safe – don't leave them on the ground, as they may contaminate your fresh water next time you use them!
- 4 Get the connecting hose or pump and lower into the container until it just touches the bottom



- 5 Push the connector into its socket and secure with plastic clamps if it has these. (Some caravans have an on-board pump and a smaller connection than the one illustrated)



- 6 In the caravan, switch car/caravan 12V switch to 'caravan'. Some caravans have a waterpump switch on the control panel - so move this to the 'ON' position
- 7 Later, when the waste container is coupled-up, turn on the tap and let the water run through for several seconds, so that fresh incoming water can replace any residual water that's been in the pipes

Waste Water

The portable waste container(s) collects water from the kitchen sink, shower and wash basin.

- 1 Get the waste container, remove cap and store cap safely
- 2 Place the container under the caravan close to waste outlets



- 3 Get the waste pipe and place in the outlet and then into the container, avoiding loops or sags. If there is more than one outlet close together, you can use several individual pieces of pipe and for neatness you can connect them together with Y or T pieces

If you have outlets in more than one location, you may need two waste water containers. Remember to check them regularly so they don't overflow; empty at the designated waste disposal points.

*Have you ever noticed,
anyone going slower
than you is an idiot, and
anyone going faster than
you is a maniac (G Carlen)*

Setting Up On Site

4 Connecting to LPG

Caravans have an externally accessed LPG locker, usually over the A-frame, to carry one or more LPG cylinders. Cylinders are likely to be blue (Butane) or red (Propane). The two types of LPG function in a very similar manner, but Butane is only effective at temperatures above freezing, whereas Propane can still turn from the liquid in the cylinder into a gas at temperatures well below freezing. They require different regulators, which you must remember if swapping types from summer to winter. However, if you do caravan all year round, including in sub-zero temperatures, you might just as well stick with Propane. The most commonly used size of cylinder in caravans is 7 kg Butane and 6 kg Propane.

All but the smallest Butane cylinders have a simple clip on regulator which should have the instructions stamped on it or supplied with it. Smaller Butane and all Propane cylinders need an appropriate spanner for connection so make sure you have one in a safe place. The newest caravans will have a regulator which is fixed to the caravan and connected to the cylinder by a flexible hose. Before connecting, ensure all the gas appliances in the caravan are switched off. Also ensure there are no naked flames about, then remove the safety cap on the cylinder and fit the regulator. If using a spanner don't over tighten Butane connections, although with Propane you should ensure it is really tight. Be careful not to cross-thread, and remember to check whether a left or right hand thread. When on securely, you can open the valve: anticlockwise for handwheels, clockwise for clip-ons. You can now check the hob will light and, if not using mains electricity, switch your water heater and refrigerator operation to gas.

To disconnect or change a cylinder, ensure all gas appliances are switched off and reverse the above procedure.



On the newest caravans, you may find the regulator is fixed to the bulkhead of the gas locker, and is suitable for both Butane and Propane. In this case, the regulator is connected to the gas cylinder using a flexible hose which attaches in a similar way to that described for separate regulators.

Setting Up On Site

5 Emptying the Toilet

Modern caravans have a cassette toilet that seals the waste tank between uses, and keeps it sealed for when you need to dispose of its contents. This emptying operation is done from outside the caravan with minimal fuss:

- 1 Make sure the slide valve in the bottom of the toilet pan has been completely closed; then move outside. Next open the outer locker door and release bottom or base catch securing cassette.
- 2 Remove cassette, ensuring the flap is in the closed position, and place on a trolley if required. Secure with the strap (this trolley can also be used for taking waste water tanks to the disposal point).
- 3 At the chemical toilet waste disposal point remove cap and place safely away from emptying point.
- 4 Press air release button near handle before you tilt the tank to empty contents.
- 5 Rinse well and then leave some water in and replace cap.
- 6 Back at the caravan, add a chemical treatment product. Replace cap and fold the emptying pipe away.
- 7 Slide back into locker until catch locks.
- 8 Close and lock door.

For further information, please request The Caravan Club's information leaflet 'Back to Basics'.



Looking After Your Caravan

Caravan Storage

While many people choose to store their caravan in the driveway or garden at home, not everyone wishes to do this and some home owners are bound by restrictive covenants preventing it. However, quite a number of caravan sites offer storage, and there are also independent caravan storage compounds nationwide offering a storage service. The Caravan Storage Site Owners' Association, or CaSSOA, runs a scheme whereby storage sites are graded according to the facilities and degree of security offered. The minimum requirement for a Bronze award is a site secured by perimeter fencing with single point access, but you are likely to find other security measures like CCTV cameras. At the other end of the scale are the Gold Award holders. These are likely to have security lighting, cameras, vermin control, undercover storage, caravan washing facilities and quite often a 24 hour security presence. Costs vary regionally, but expect to pay around £150 per year for Bronze standard storage and around £400 a year for Gold standard. For further guidance, contact The Caravan Club's Technical Advice and Information Department or CaSSOA on 0115 934 9826 or visit their website www.cassoa.co.uk

Security

Although over the past decade caravan theft has been down, there is no room for complacency and some form of security device is a must. Your caravan insurance will require you to take some security measure whenever your caravan is left unattended and your insurer may specify what they want you to fit. Failure to comply could invalidate your insurance. The two main mechanical options are a hitchlock or a wheel clamp.

Hitchlocks come in all shapes and sizes but to be effective they must cover the hitch-head bolts, otherwise a thief can simply unbolt the hitch and put on a replacement. Some hitchlocks can be attached when your car and caravan are

coupled. This is a useful asset when leaving your outfit to visit a motorway service area.

However, for safety reasons do not drive with the lock in place. Remember, no hitchlock can be considered a foolproof method of security - as if your caravan is valuable enough, a thief may bypass a caravan's coupling and bolt on a second one; others may use a large chain. For caravans stored at home, using a hitchlock to secure the caravan to a security post greatly increases the lock's effectiveness.

To prevent a caravan from moving, a wheel clamp offers better protection. Again there are many different types, so look for one that covers the wheel bolts, has robust parts that would take a long time to saw or drill through, and cannot be prised off simply by letting down the tyre. Some storage compounds may not permit the use of wheel clamps, as it may compromise their fire safety arrangements. If this is the case, make sure other security systems are in place and that your insurance will not be invalidated.

Sold Secure is an independent attack test house. Any products tested to their 'Silver' or 'Gold' standards have had to resist 'determined' and 'dedicated' attacks respectively, and are well worth buying. The caravan-specific products they list have been tested against standards specifically designed to replicate the techniques and tools used by caravan thieves, and are tougher than similar car security product tests. More information is available on their website at www.soldsecure.com



Other security precautions include alarms and/or tracking devices. An alarm is only worthwhile as a deterrent if someone will respond to the noise and a casual thief might be scared enough to think someone will. A tracking device may help to recover the caravan, but doesn't stop it being stolen in the first place. Also, bear in mind that while caravan door locks have improved in design over the years, the way caravans are constructed means they are generally unable to withstand a determined effort to get in, so don't leave them unattended for long periods with valuable items inside.

Since 1992, all touring caravans manufactured by National Caravan Council (NCC) members have been part of CRIS (Caravan Registration and Identification Scheme). A unique Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is marked on the chassis and on all windows. Since July 1997, electronic tags with the same number have been fitted to new caravans. Since 1999, this scheme has been extended to allow pre-1992 caravans to be registered in a similar way, and a DIY kit is available for the window etching and electronic tag installation. So, when buying a used caravan, make sure the registration paperwork is present and correct and that all the VIN numbers tally. If buying privately, contact CRIS to verify the caravan is not stolen, subject to outstanding finance or has previously been written off. A small fee is charged. Telephone 01722 411430.

The Caravan Club runs Theftcheck (01342 318813), a registration scheme that is free to members and logs individual caravan details against the owner, and has a proven record in assisting the recovery of stolen caravans.

Servicing

A touring caravan is a combination of road going chassis including hitch, brakes and tyres, as well as the habitation aspects which include electrical and gas appliances. For your safety, it is important all aspects are serviced at least annually by an Approved Workshop, where facilities and performance are independently inspected and monitored to ensure the highest levels of service



are maintained. Contact The Caravan Club or the National Caravan Council for details of the nearest Approved Workshops in your area, or for a list of workshops, visit their website at www.approvedworkshops.co.uk

Insurance

Most caravans represent a significant investment so naturally you will want to consider some form of insurance. Your car insurance will provide cover for any liability arising out of third party injury or damage while towing or if your caravan becomes accidentally detached. However, household contents insurance normally excludes any cover for caravans, even if parked on a drive. This means that specialist caravan insurance is needed to cover you against damage caused to the caravan while on the road, or theft or accident while the caravan is on site or in a storage compound. So some important questions to consider when looking at specialist caravan insurance are:

- what does the policy cover?
- what situations does it exclude?
- what security precautions am I obliged to take?
- what excess do I have to pay per claim?
- is the insurance valid abroad (if you intend to travel abroad)?
- are there specific conditions relating to storage?
- what value of contents is included?
- if it is a new or nearly new caravan, would it be replaced with a new one if stolen?
- can family or friends borrow it?
- will a replacement caravan or compensation be provided if its loss or damage means a holiday can't go ahead?

Once you have decided what type of cover is important for you, you can compare premiums and find the best deal, bearing in mind that cheapest is not always the best. For information on Caravan Club policies phone 01342 336610.

You may also like to consider taking out some form of roadside assistance package, such as The Caravan Club's Mayday service, which is designed to cope with both car and caravan breakdowns. Call 0800 731 0112 for details. There is also a Continental version called Red Pennant, which offers a range of very comprehensive insurance options for those caravanning abroad. For more information, call us on 01342 336633.

Finance

With relatively low interest rates around at the moment it can make good sense to finance your caravan purchase with a loan of some description. Most caravan dealers can arrange this for you and it is worth going through the figures with them to see what interest and total purchase price you will eventually be paying. They will offer a flat rate of interest and you should expect to pay a start up and closing fee, which will add around £50 to the first and last payments respectively.

You could also consider a personal loan from a club, bank or building society as some very attractive rates are on offer. However, be warned they may not always offer you the best rate they quote in their publicity material. Also look into how the rates vary with the amount borrowed. If you just want £10,000, but a better rate applies to amounts over this, then work out the sums and consider borrowing more. Loan rates are quoted as an Annual Percentage Rate (APR) which includes any fees associated with the loan. You also have the option of an additional monthly insurance premium which covers the cost of the payments should you be unable to meet them through ill health or job loss.

The best advice is to shop around for finance, do your sums, and keep in mind the total amount you will be paying for the caravan. Caravan Club members can benefit from a personal loan available through Frizzell, The Club's approved financial services providers. Call 0800 032 5000 for more information and a personal quotation.

Accessories...

Once you have the caravan, there are just a few items you need to buy at the beginning, as you will already have many at home. However, we have listed some you may like to consider under the headings of essentials and desirables.

ESSENTIALS:

Step

Unless you have a built-in retractable step, you will need a stand-alone step for getting in and out of the caravan. Buy one specifically designed and tested for caravan use from a reputable manufacturer. Caravans made in the UK since September 1998 will have a purpose-built step provided when new. If buying second-hand, make sure the step is included.

Water Containers

You need one for your fresh water, and the rollalong type is the most popular. You also need one, possibly two, for your waste water,



depending on how far apart your waste outlets are. You can either buy a waste container with built in wheels, or buy a wheeled carrier to transport them. The advantage of the former is that it has a

place for you to transport your cassette toilet tank at the same time. Your fresh water connector/pump should have been supplied with the caravan, otherwise you need to buy one. You will also need to buy some hose to connect the waste outlets to your container and perhaps a Y piece to make it all neat and tidy.

Mains Hook-Up Lead

If buying a new caravan, this will be supplied. If not, you should buy one, 25m long with the BS appropriate blue connectors either end.

Leisure Battery

If the caravan doesn't have one already, a 12V leisure battery will power your 12V lighting and any other 12V outlets when separate from the car. It is listed under essentials, but some caravans can operate without one by using a 230V to 12V transformer, which is sufficient providing you always hook up to mains electricity.

LPG Cylinder(s) & Regulator

Unless you always intend to cook using a microwave oven or some other electrical appliance and hence will always hook up to mains electricity, you will need LPG. Most caravanners use LPG to power the hob, oven and space heater, heat the water or power the refrigerator if not connected to electricity.

Towing Mirrors

Your rear view will be compromised by the caravan you are towing, so you need another way to assess traffic behind you, both to the near and off side. Towing mirrors come in various types, but the most popular is one that straps onto your existing door mirrors. Alternatives are door or wing mounted varieties, the latter sometimes being prone to vibration. An adequate view from the caravan is a legal requirement.



Torque Wrench

It is important to ensure the caravan wheels are tightened to the appropriate torque setting, to avoid the danger of them becoming detached while towing. The less sophisticated suspension on caravans means that their wheels are subjected to more vibration than are car wheels. If a car wheel started to come loose, you would probably feel it through the steering, but a loose caravan wheel would tend to go unnoticed. A torque wrench will ensure that the fixings are correctly tightened prior to every journey.

Security Device

Some form of mechanical device is essential and probably a requirement of your insurance. See the section on Security.

DESIRABLES:

Awning

An awning can double the size of a caravan's useful living area, can provide a place to sleep in summer by using an inner tent, or a dining room or children's play area. It is an ideal place to store welly boots, raincoats, bicycles, the barbecue and picnic chairs etc. All manufacturers will supply erection instructions with their product, but generally you need to thread the awning right through the awning channel before starting to arrange the poles. Some poles butt up to the caravan using rubber suction cups while others use special screwless brackets. (Avoid brackets which use screws, as this is likely to invalidate your caravan bodywork warranty). When buying the awning, you need to decide how you would prefer it to attach to the caravan wall and



choose an appropriate make. To measure for a full awning, with the caravan on level ground, get a piece of string and thread it through the awning channel. Make sure it touches the ground at both ends, then measure its length in centimetres. This is the awning size.

There are some drawbacks to a full awning – it can be heavy to transport, can take up quite a bit of space, it is more of a two person job to erect and can become damaged, or damage the caravan, in high winds. There are alternatives with half sized or porch awnings, or even sun canopies, which are smaller, lighter, easier to erect. These smaller awnings can still provide a good sitting area, or boot and bicycle storage area and being quicker to erect, might suit those who move about more.

Awning carpet is often used and this comes in various types. A simple plastic groundsheet does not allow grass to breathe, and you should look for a type that will reduce damage to grass pitches if you intend to use one. Even with 'grass-friendly' carpet, you still need to lift it regularly, say every third day for half a day, to minimise pitch damage.

Noseweight Gauge

It is important to ensure your caravan noseweight does not exceed the car limit, so until you are adept enough to 'know' how loading will alter the noseweight, you need to measure it prior to every journey. The easiest way to do this is by using a proprietary noseweight gauge, but you can also use the bathroom scales and an appropriately cut down broom handle.



Levelling Ramps and Chocks

These may not be needed if you intend to use hard standings but are desirable if pitching on uneven grass.

Television and TV Antenna

A desirable or a necessity depending on your point of view. You can buy a 12V or dual voltage television but if you are generally going to hook up to mains then a small one from home will work perfectly well. Generally you will only be able to use it in the UK; for use abroad you need a multi-standard set.



Your home TV licence will cover you for viewing while on tour, but only if there is no-one left at home watching another set!

You can get directional or omni-directional antennae, and generally speaking a directional one will perform better (if set up correctly) than an omni-directional type.

Stabiliser

If you talk to a number of experienced caravanners you will get a range of opinions on stabilisers from 'absolutely essential' to 'not needed at all if the outfit is well matched'. For a well set up outfit and ideal operating condition, a stabiliser shouldn't be necessary. However, the real world isn't ideal and a stabiliser can prove a tangible benefit and gives peace of mind. Many caravans are now available with a self-stabilising hitch, and these have been shown to damp down swaying (induced in a caravan) more quickly than non-stabilised hitches. With these it is important to ensure the tow ball is clean and free from grease or dirt before hitching up.



Another common type is a leaf spring that attaches to the towing bracket and the caravan A Frame. This not only offers resistance to caravan side to side motion, but also reduces any tendency for the caravan to pitch up and down, which not all of the self-stabilising hitches can do.

Legal Matters

Here we touch on some of the basic legal requirements to bear in mind when caravanning. Further information is given in The Caravan Club's Sites Directory & Handbook, issued free to all members.

Driving Licences

If you have a Category B Licence obtained prior to 1st January 1997 you may drive:

- Any towed outfit, including a car or motor caravan/trailer combination, where the combined MAM (see Glossary) does not exceed 8,250 kg.
- Any rigid motor caravan without a trailer where the MAM does not exceed 7,500 kg

If you have a Category B Licence obtained on or after 1st January 1997, you may drive:

- A towed outfit restricted to a combined maximum allowable weight of 3,500 kg and the trailer MAM must not exceed the kerb weight of the towing vehicle. If this MAM is to be exceeded a B+E Test pass is required.
- A rigid motor caravan with a MAM of 3,500 kg. A pass of the LGV test qualifies a driver for a MAM of up to 7,500 kg.
- A rigid motor caravan towing a trailer providing the trailer does not exceed 750 kg and the combined MAM does not exceed 4,250 kg. If the trailer does exceed 750 kg, then (a) above applies. Otherwise an LGV test plus an E Test is needed.

For further information visit www.dvla.gov.uk

Speed Limits

Towed outfits may travel at up to 50 mph on single carriageway roads and 60 mph on dual carriageways and motorways. All these limits apply providing a lower speed limit is not in force. Towed outfits are not permitted in the outside lane of a three or more lane motorway unless inner lanes are blocked.

Dimensions

Cars may tow a trailer with a maximum body length of 7 metres (excluding drawbar) and a maximum width of 2.3 metres. Maximum overall length (car plus caravan) is 18 metres. A vehicle with a maximum gross weight of 3500 kg or more is required if you wish to tow in excess of this, and even the largest European 4x4s are significantly lighter than this.

Parking

It is an offence to leave a vehicle or outfit where it may cause an obstruction. A trailer separated from the towing vehicle must be securely braked or chocked to prevent movement. After dark, a trailer parked on a road must be illuminated, which normally means keeping the towing vehicle attached to a power supply. Lay-bys form part of the highway, so no overnight stopping. Observe local by-laws, which may prevent the parking of caravans in street bays. It is an offence to drive more than 15 yards off the road without authority in both urban and rural areas. Trailer caravans are not permitted to stop at parking meters.

Passengers

It is illegal to carry passengers in a trailer caravan. Although not illegal to carry animals, it is strongly recommended not to do so.

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined."

(Henry David Thoreau)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A Frame (also called a drawbar)	The triangular part at the front of the caravan's chassis, in between the main body and the hitch.
Actual Laden Weight (ALW)	The total weight of the caravan and its contents, when being towed. The only reliable way to determine this is on a weigh bridge.
Aquaroll	A proprietary design of fresh water container that can be pulled along the ground.
Awning	A tent-like structure of fabric over a supporting framework, which can be attached to the side of a caravan.
Berth	Sleeping place.
Breakaway Cable	A thin steel cable linking the caravan handbrake to the vehicle's tow bar. In the event of the caravan becoming detached from the car, the cable is designed to pull the caravan handbrake on before snapping.
Butane	A type of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) commonly used for caravanning when temperatures are above freezing. Usually sold in a blue cylinder.
Cassette Toilet (Chemical Toilet)	A form of chemical toilet found in modern caravans, where the waste holding tank can be accessed from the outside for emptying.
Certificated Location (CL)	Small, privately owned sites permitted to accommodate up to 5 caravans per night, and licensed by an organisation like The Caravan Club and exclusively for use by its members.
Corner Steady	The winding device built into each corner of a caravan chassis that is used to stabilise the body once set up on a pitch.
Coupling Head	Also known as the hitch.
Full Service Pitch	A pitch which has individual provision for fresh water supply and waste water disposal, in addition to mains electricity and sometimes TV aerial connection.
Gas Cylinder	A portable, pressurised container for the storage of LPG.
Gas Cylinder Locker	Compartment on the caravan for the storage of gas cylinders.
Grey Water	Waste water from sink/shower.
Gross Train Weight	Also known as Combined Weight. The maximum permitted weight of an outfit. This is often the sum of the gross vehicle weight and the braked towing limit.
Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)	The weight of the vehicle laden to its maximum, as defined by the manufacturer. See also MTPLM.
Hardstanding	A pitch which has a hard surface made of gravel, asphalt, concrete etc, rather than grass.
Hitch	The mechanism which allows a caravan to be attached to a tow ball.
Hitch Lock	A security device that prevents the caravan hitch being used.
Hook-Up	A facility on a pitch for connection to mains electricity.
Jockey Wheel	The small front wheel attached to the caravan A frame used to support the forward end when detached from the towing vehicle.
Kerbweight	The empty weight of a motor vehicle as defined by the manufacturer.
Layout	The arrangement of furniture and fittings within the habitation area.
LAV	Leisure Accommodation Vehicle: A general term which includes caravans, motor caravans, folding campers and trailer tents.
Leisure Battery	A 12V battery similar to a car battery, which powers the 12V lighting, water pump(s) etc in the caravan.
Levelling	The process of ensuring that a caravan is level when sited on a pitch. Important for comfort and also to ensure the correct functioning of the fridge and water systems.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG)	The fuel used to power the cooking hob/oven in most caravans. Can also be used for the fridge, water heater and space heater when mains electricity is not available.
MAM	Maximum Authorised Mass: the maximum weight limit as defined by the manufacturer/ converter – more recently MTPLM.
MIRO	Mass in Running Order: the weight of the caravan ex-factory with fuel and water, but without any passengers or caravanning equipment. Previously called Unladen or Ex-Works Weight.
MTPLM	Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass. The maximum weight which can legally be carried by the chassis, as specified by the manufacturer.
Noseweight	This is the vertical load that the caravan hitch imposes on the car's towball.
Outfit	The caravan plus its towing vehicle.
Payload	Also called User Payload. The difference between the MTPLM and the MIRO and is the weight you can add to the caravan.
Pigtail	A fixture on a tow bar designed to accommodate the breakaway cable.
Propane	A type of liquefied petroleum gas usually stored in red cylinders and suitable for year-round use.
Pup Tent	A small dome or ridge tent that may be erected next to the caravan, to be used as sleeping accommodation for children only.
Residual Current Device (RCD)	A safety device which disconnects the mains electricity supply in the event of an earth leakage fault.
Rear Suspension Aid	A device which enhances the standard suspension of a vehicle.
Regulator	A safety device which controls the pressure of LPG coming out of a cylinder and going into the caravan's supply system.
Seasonal Pitch	A pitch reserved on a Caravan Club Site where the caravan can be left for part of the year.
Single Axle	A caravan with a single pair of wheels on one axle.
Stabiliser	A safety device acting around the caravan hitch which may help to control instability.
Torque Wrench	A form of spanner used to set nuts and bolts to a specified tightness.
Tow Bar	Also known as towing bracket. The framework attached to a towing vehicle that supports the tow ball.
Tow Ball	The end part of the tow bar which the caravan hitch fits over.
Towing Mirrors	Additional rear vision mirrors added to a towing vehicle to compensate for the extra width of the caravan.
Twin Axle	A caravan with four wheels on two axles.
VIN	Vehicle Identification Number.
Warden	The Caravan Club employee in charge of an individual Caravan Club Site.
Waste Water	Water which has been used in the kitchen or bathroom areas.
Water Pump	Since caravan water containers are kept at low level, a pump must be used to circulate water around the system.
Wheel Clamp	A security device which should prevent a road wheel rotating or the wheel being removed.

Motor Caravanning



Motor Caravan Options

There are five main types to consider, all very different in respect of external size, internal space, facilities and price. A brief description of each follows, starting with the smallest.

Micro: a small conversion based on a car or light commercial vehicle. Micro motor caravans often have some form of elevating roof. Offering a good comfort level for one person and a slightly tighter squeeze for two, they can nevertheless be enhanced by adding an awning and by using full facility sites. A micro motor caravan is fine as an 'only vehicle' and can provide economical day-to-day transport.

"The time to relax is when you don't have time for it"
(Sydney J Harris)

Dismountable: Not currently very popular in the UK but very common in the USA, these comprise a pick-up truck with a living section on its back, which can be separated and left free-standing on site. Again, if this is to be your only vehicle then you have the advantage of a solo vehicle when the 'caravan' part isn't needed. The interior is a bit different in layout from a typical caravan or motor caravan but offers more room than a micro conversion.

These types are not something you would want to couple or uncouple on a daily basis, but are ideal for occasional holidays.



Panel van conversion: This is where the body shape of the base vehicle remains largely unchanged, usually except for the roof part. Sometimes a high roof variant produced by the base vehicle manufacturer is used, but quite commonly a moulded extension or an elevating roof is added by the converter. Fixed low or elevating roofs have the advantage of passing under most car park height barriers (about 2 metres high) and may also fit in your garage. High Tops generally offer better roof area insulation and often more facilities, but the height may prevent access to some places. Van conversions are a popular choice, bridging the gap between a car and the larger coachbuilts, and often serving a dual purpose.

Coachbuilt: When a caravan body is constructed on just a cab and chassis, it is called a coachbuilt. These come in various configurations and sizes but generally offer more interior space and facilities than van



conversions. A common sight is the overcab or luton style, which provides a separate sleeping and/or storage area over the cab. Low profile coachbuilts don't have this and thus give better aerodynamics on the road. They often look more aesthetically pleasing too, albeit at the expense of space inside. Coachbuilts are taller (2.8 metres or more) so there may be problems in some car parks and they are wider than conversions. For this reason coachbuilts may not be suitable as your only vehicle, unless you intend to spend much of the year motor caravanning.



A Class: The king of coachbuilts, A Class vehicles are constructed from the chassis up. The cab area extends the full width of the vehicle, giving extra space, and the front seats usually swivel to be incorporated into the living space. Insulation is good and on board facilities comprehensive. For extensive travelling they are ideal, and some can tow a trailer with a small car or motorbikes on, for instance. This provides more practical transport when sited. European-built ones tend to be based on similar vehicle chassis as used for coachbuilts, and typically have a maximum weight up to around 3.8 tonnes, with just a few models being larger. American-built models are generally considerably larger, and are often based on heavier truck and coach chassis. Again, these are not suitable as an only vehicle unless you are happy with utilising public transport or have other means of getting around.

Those are the options, so what points should you consider when narrowing them down?

Will it be your only vehicle?

Consider fuel economy, height and width, whether you want it to be garaged, or able to pass under height barriers and how many designated passenger seats it has.

Do you want standing headroom inside?

Would an awning outside compensate for lack of this?

How many berths (beds) do you need?

Would children be happy in an overcab area? Do you want a permanently made-up bed for convenience?

Is it to be used for year-round motor caravanning, or just the summer? In the UK only, or abroad too?

Consider heating, air conditioning, size of LPG cylinders accommodated, insulation and whether the waste/fresh water tanks include frost protection measures.

How many designated passenger travelling seats, with seatbelts, do you need?

Not all seats in the living area may have seatbelts, and you shouldn't travel without the driver and all passengers being properly secured. Are the seats and seatbelts suitable for children? Fitting baby or child seats to habitation area seats of many motor caravans can be difficult.

What kitchen/cooking facilities would you like?

How many hob rings do you want? Do you want a gas (LPG) oven, or is there space to put a microwave, if you intend hooking up to mains electricity? Some cooking areas won't include a grill (especially on imported models).

Is the fridge large enough? Does it run on gas as well as electricity?



Having got this far, further questions you need to consider are:

How much payload does it offer and will it be enough for my family?

The stated kerbweight (or mass in running order) should allow 75 kg for the driver and for a 90% full tank of fuel. You should then allow another 75kg per passenger plus more for personal effects - 100 kg minimum for 2 people and at least 25 kg for every subsequent person. Note that where you put payload is as important as how much. Don't exceed the vehicle's maximum weight nor the industry axle load limits which will be stated in the handbook and/or vehicle weight plate.

What is its Gross Vehicle Weight (MPTLM) and does my driving licence cover it?

See the section on legal matters (page 43) and the Glossary of Terms (page 45).

Do I want to tow anything with it, and if so, what can it tow and is a towing bracket readily available?

Not all motor caravans have been designed with towing in mind, and a bracket may need to be purpose built, if a manufacturer supplied or approved bracket is not available. In some cases, the vehicle cannot be equipped for towing at all.

What is its likely fuel consumption?

Figures may only be available for the unconverted base vehicle, and the addition of a coachbuilt motor caravan will have an impact on aerodynamics and therefore fuel consumption. Most recent models will be Turbo Diesel which should give you 25-30 mpg in typical use. However, either The Club or one of the independent motor caravanning magazines may have conducted a test on a similar vehicle, which will give you an idea.

What will it cost to insure?

Quotations are available through The Club's insurance service. For a no-obligation quote call 0800 028 4809.

Is it comfortable to drive?

Modern base vehicles are easy to drive with light controls, but with a driving position, performance, handling and refinement characteristics, which may well be different to your regular car.

What warranty is offered?

Look at the terms and conditions - some manufacturers may offer more comprehensive warranties. Note that the base vehicle is likely to have a separate warranty from the one issued by the motor caravan manufacturer

who has built and equipped the living area. Details in these respective warranties may be different too. However, both will require servicing work to be carried out in strict accordance with their guidelines. Ask where servicing facilities are available, especially for the base vehicle.

Hopefully you can narrow your choice down to two or three models, and then choose the one that has the most appeal, and suits your budget. While there are frequent cosmetic changes to models each year, the basic design can stay the same for much longer, so consider older dealer demonstrators or used models as a good way to save money. With a used model a service history is important; so is a comprehensive warranty from the dealer. Many motor caravans purchased as a second vehicle do very little annual mileage and there are some very worthy models on sale. The main thing to watch out for is signs of damp on wall panels, around windows, rooflights, poor body seals, external fixings etc. which can cause a fair amount of unseen damage, and be expensive to repair.

HPI Check call 01722 422422
or visit www.hpicheck.com
Fee £39.95 online or £42.95 by phone

Should you buy privately or from a dealer?

Buying anything privately carries a greater risk as most protective trading laws do not apply. However, prices are generally lower so if you take appropriate precautions it can be worth considering. Questions to ask if buying privately are:

- Is there a full service history, for the engine/running gear and living area?



- Does the seller have all the relevant registration documents and do they match the vehicle chassis number etc.? Never buy a vehicle without seeing the V5C registration form (and check the details carefully against the vehicle on sale).
- Are you viewing at the owner's home address - and does it match the details on the vehicle registration document?
- Are they happy for you to arrange a full mechanical inspection?
- Are the keys in order (too many might indicate new locks)?
- Does the interior smell clean, fresh and dry?
- Are they happy for you to check with HPI to see if the vehicle is subject to outstanding finance or is an insurance write-off?

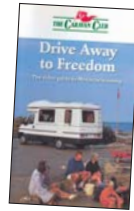
If all this worries you, then buy from a reputable dealer who will have already done the finance checks and will have confirmed that the motor caravan is in good order. You also have greater protection under consumer legislation should any dispute arise.

But remember, this is a seasonal industry and it is advisable to avoid negotiating a purchase at Easter, or in early summer because this is when prices are at their peak. Having said that, sales have been very strong of late and if you have set your heart on a particular make and model, you may have no alternative but to pay full price, without any hope of a discount.

Practical Courses from The Caravan Club

If all you have ever driven is a small car, you may be worried about driving a larger vehicle. Don't be! Most motor caravans are very car-like to drive and you just have to make allowances for the extra size, particularly the height. However, The Caravan Club runs a number of one day courses where you can obtain driving tuition in your own motor caravan, with the help of an instructor, who will guide you through any initial apprehension.

There is also a video entitled 'Drive Away to Freedom' which introduces motor caravanning; further details on this and the courses are available on 01342 336808 or via The Club website.



Hiring before you buy

Still not sure? Then you can always hire one for a week or more, which is also an excellent way of finding out what features and facilities you particularly want in your motor caravan, and which you can live without.

Some dealers who both hire and sell motor caravans may discount the hire cost against any future purchase, so do ask. Generally hire charges start from £500 per week, depending on the time of year and size of motor caravan. The quoted charge may or may not include VAT, unlimited mileage, insurance, gas, a recovery service and basic equipment, so do check. Charges are usually for UK use only and those going abroad may have to pay more. Most companies will require a deposit, which is fully refundable on return of the (undamaged) motor caravan. A list of motor caravan hirers is available from The Club's Technical Advice and Information Department and on its website.

TOP TIP

Make a note of your motor caravan height (in both feet and inches and metres) and stick it to the dashboard.

Setting Up On Site

1 Levelling

Motor caravanners have at least four wheels to sort out, so the prevalence of hard standing pitches on Club Sites is certainly a bonus and they are generally level. If you are on an uneven grass pitch, it does help if you can park so that only one slope needs to be sorted out. Generally it is easier to position with the slope running from the front of the motor caravan up to the back, then the front wheels can be driven up two ramps until it is level.

However, side to side levelling i.e. levelling across the axle, isn't too difficult. Reverse on to your pitch about a foot further back than you wish to end up, then place the levelling ramps in front of the wheels that need to be raised. Place a spirit level parallel to the axle just inside the motor caravan door (it helps to have two people at this point!) Drive the vehicle very slowly forward up the ramp until the spirit level bubble is in the middle. You can also reverse on to the ramps, whichever you find easier. Ensure the handbrake is fully on, the vehicle is left in gear, and for extra safety you should chock the wheels.

If your motor caravan has corner steadies, these should now be wound down, on to blocks if on a soft pitch, to prevent movement as you move around inside.

"Dare to live the life you have dreamed for yourself. Go forward and make your dreams come true."
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Setting up on site isn't difficult, but there are some steps worth knowing...



TOP TIP

If the shower tray doesn't drain properly, a small adjustment to the levelling of the motor caravan usually cures the problem!

Setting Up On Site

2 Connecting the Water

Most motor caravans have on-board fresh and waste water tanks.

The majority of sites have designated motor caravan service points and these make it a simple procedure to fill up your on-board fresh water tanks and empty your built-in waste tanks. There will be a fresh water tap with a hose connected. Simply remove the filler cap from the motor caravan inlet and fill.

To empty the waste tanks you need to position your motor caravan adjacent to or over the manhole cover, depending on the location of the waste outlets. Usually you can remove the manhole cover after you have positioned the vehicle, but be extra careful if you have to do it before not to drive down the hole! Once set up don't forget to switch your 12V operation to the on-board leisure battery.



TOP TIP
It has been known for people to mistake the fresh water filling point for the petrol/diesel inlet and vice versa! It is a costly business either way so take care.



Setting Up On Site

3 Hooking-up to the Mains

One of the greatest advances in caravanning comfort was the addition of mains electricity. It is now commonplace in all motor caravans and on most pitches, and can be used to power lighting, water heating and the refrigerator. It also enables the use of various appliances from home, such as hairdryers and cooling fans. All pitches include the charge for electricity in the standard pitch price, and most outlets permit up to 16 Amps of power. 1000 watts or 1 KW is equivalent to 4.3 Amps. Remember that the site supply will assume that not everyone will use the maximum power at the same time, so it makes sense to use only essential equipment at peak times to ensure everyone gets a fair share and the supply does not fail. Your motor caravan will probably have been supplied with the required cable, or you can buy one. The Caravan Club recommends 25 metres of flexible cable (three core each 2.5mm²) coloured orange with blue connectors (one male, one female) either end to BS EN 60309-2.

To Connect:

- 1 First ensure your motor caravan mains isolating switch is in the OFF position, together with all the electrical switches in the motor caravan.

- 2 Open the cover to the mains inlet on the exterior and insert the female blue connector.
- 3 Locate your electricity supply bollard (ask the warden if you are not sure which one to use) and, ensuring the cable is routed out of harm's way, raise the cover on the individual outlet and insert the blue plug (male). On Club Sites, turn the plug clockwise until it locks. On other sites you may simply need to push it home firmly.
- 4 Place any surplus cable underneath the vehicle in large loose loops; a tightly coiled cable can overheat.
- 5 Switch to ON at the interior mains isolating switch.
- 6 Check the Residual Current Device is working by pressing the test button. Reset, check the fridge and water heater are switched to mains operation, then you are ready to relax.

To Disconnect:

Switch to OFF at the interior mains isolating switch. Release the plug from the site bollard (on Club Sites, press the plug release button first). Disconnect from the motor caravan end and store the cable in an appropriate locker.



Setting Up On Site

4 Connecting to LPG



Most motor caravans have an externally accessed locker designed to carry one or more LPG cylinders. Cylinders are usually blue (Butane) or red (Propane). The two types of LPG function in a very similar manner, but Butane is only effective at temperatures above freezing, whereas Propane can still gas at temperatures well below freezing. They require different regulators, which you must remember if swapping types from summer to winter. However, if you do caravan all year round, including in sub-zero temperatures, you might just as well stick with Propane. The most commonly used size of cylinder in caravans is 7 kg Butane and 6 kg Propane, but some motor caravans have a locker that will only accommodate smaller cylinders.

All but the smallest Butane cylinders have a simple clip on regulator that should have the instructions stamped on it or supplied with it. Smaller Butane and all Propane cylinders need an appropriate spanner for connection so make sure you keep one in a safe place. Before connecting, ensure all the gas appliances in the motor caravan are switched off. Also ensure

there are no naked flames about, then remove the safety cap on the cylinder and fit the regulator. If using a spanner don't over tighten Butane connections, although with Propane you should ensure it is really tight. Be careful not to cross-thread, and remember to check whether a left or right hand thread. When on securely, you can open the valve: anticlockwise for handwheels, clockwise for clip-ons. You can now check the hob will light and, if not using mains electricity, switch your water heater and refrigerator operation to gas.

To disconnect or change a cylinder, ensure all gas appliances are switched off and reverse the above procedure.

On the newest motor caravans, you may find the regulator is fixed to the bulkhead of the gas locker, and is suitable for both Butane and Propane. In this case, the regulator is connected to the gas cylinder using a flexible hose which attaches in a similar way to that described for separate regulators.

Setting Up On Site

5 Emptying Toilets with Removable Tanks

Modern motor caravans have a cassette toilet that seals the waste tank between uses, and keeps it sealed for when you need to dispose of its contents. This emptying operation is done from outside the motor caravan with minimal fuss.

- 1 Make sure the slide valve in the bottom of the toilet pan has been completely closed; then move outside. Next open the outer locker door and release the bottom or base catch securing cassette
- 2 Remove cassette and place on a trolley if required. Secure with the strap
- 3 At the chemical toilet waste disposal point remove cap and place safely away from emptying point
- 4 Press air release button near handle before you tilt the tank to empty contents
- 5 Rinse well and then leave some water in and replace cap
- 6 Back at the motor caravan, add a chemical treatment product. Replace cap and fold emptying pipe away.
- 7 Slide back into locker until catch locks
- 8 Close and lock door

For further information, please request The Club's leaflet 'Back to Basics'



Looking After Your Motor Caravan

Storage

While many people choose to store their motor caravan in the driveway or garden at home, not everyone wishes to do this and some home owners are bound by restrictive covenants preventing it. However, quite a number of caravan sites, including Club Sites, offer storage, and there are also independent compounds nationwide offering a storage service. The Caravan Storage Site Owners' Association, or CaSSOA, runs a scheme whereby storage sites are graded according to the facilities and degree of security offered. The minimum requirement for a Bronze award is a site secured by perimeter fencing with single point access, but you are likely to find other security measures like CCTV cameras. At the other end of the scale are the Gold Award holders. These are likely to have security lighting, cameras, vermin control, undercover storage, motor caravan washing facilities and quite often a 24 hour security presence. Costs vary regionally, but expect to pay around £150 per year for Bronze standard storage and around £400 a year for Gold standard.

For further guidance, contact The Caravan Club's Information Department or CaSSOA on 0115 934 9826, website www.cassoa.co.uk



Security

Your motor caravan represents a significant investment and you will want to protect it, and your insurer may require you to take some security measure whenever your vehicle is left unattended. They may specify what you should fit, or may offer a premium discount for specific products. Failure to comply could invalidate your insurance.

The main mechanical options are wheel clamps, steering wheel locks, foot pedal locks or gear locks.



Wheel clamps come in many different types, so look for one that covers the wheel bolts, has robust parts that would take a long time to saw or drill through, and cannot be prised off simply by letting down the tyre. Some storage compounds may not permit the use of wheel clamps, as it may compromise their fire safety arrangements. If this is the case, make sure other security systems are in place and that your insurance will not be invalidated.

Sold Secure is an independent attack test house. Any products tested to their 'Silver' or 'Gold' standards have had to resist 'determined' and 'dedicated' attacks respectively, and are well worth buying. More information is available on their website at www.soldsecure.com

Other security precautions include alarms, immobilisers and tracking devices. The motor insurance repair research centre, or 'Thatcham', approves various devices and some insurance companies will specify one must be fitted by an approved agent.

Also bear in mind that while the door locks on the 'caravan' body have improved in design over recent years, they are generally unable to withstand a determined effort to get in, so don't leave the motor caravan unattended for long periods with valuable items inside.

Servicing

There are two aspects to consider with a motor caravan service – the base vehicle and the habitation side. The vehicle manufacturer will have set service intervals and to maintain the warranty these must be adhered to. It is unlikely that most motor caravanners will meet the mileage intervals so you will probably be subject to time intervals. The habitation aspect should be inspected annually, including a gas and electrical system check and a damp check may also be required on some types for the bodywork warranty. The Club recommends choosing a workshop that is a member of The Approved Workshop scheme for habitation area servicing, unless the vehicle warranty requires you to use a specific service agent. See www.approvedworkshops.co.uk for details.

"Don't be afraid of the space between your dreams and reality. If you can dream it, you can make it so." (Belva Davis)

Insurance

A motor caravan represents a significant investment so naturally you will want to consider some form of comprehensive insurance, in addition to the mandatory third party. Important questions to consider when looking at specialist policies are:

- what does the policy cover?
- what situations does it exclude?
- can my partner drive it?
- what security precautions am I obliged to take?
- what excess do I have to pay per claim?
- is the insurance valid abroad (if you intend to travel abroad)?
- are there specific conditions relating to storage?
- what value of contents is included?
- if it is a new or nearly new motor caravan, would it be replaced with a new one if stolen?
- can family or friends borrow it?
- will a replacement or compensation be provided if its loss or damage means a holiday can't go ahead?
- are ancillary items such as the awning, barbecue, bicycles, roof box etc also covered?

Once you have decided what type of cover is important for you, then you can start to compare premiums and find the best deal. Remember that The Club offers policies specifically tailored to suit members' needs. For information phone 0800 028 4809.

“A good holiday is one that is spent among people whose notions of time are vaguer than yours”

(J B Priestley)

Finance

A personal loan from your bank, building society or one of the caravanning clubs is worth considering when looking to finance your purchase.

Your dealer will also be able to offer finance packages, and there are two main types on offer, HP and PCP. HP or Hire Purchase, is a straightforward way of putting down a deposit and paying off the remainder in monthly instalments at a set interest rate. By the end of the term the vehicle will be yours.

PCP, or Personal Contract Purchase allows you to make lower monthly payments but at the end of the term you won't own the vehicle. You will have the choice of handing it back or making a lump sum payment, previously agreed, to own it. The PCP may include servicing costs of the vehicle and the end value may depend on you keeping below an agreed annual mileage, so make sure you are aware of all the terms and conditions before you sign. Do your sums and work out the best package for you.

The best advice is to shop around for finance, do your sums, and keep in mind the total amount you will be paying for the caravan. Caravan Club members can benefit from a personal loan available through Frizzell, The Club's approved financial services providers. Call 0800 032 5000 for more information and a personal quotation.



Accessories...

Once you have the motor caravan, there are just a few items you need to buy at the beginning, as you will already have many at home. However, we have listed some you may like to consider under the headings of essentials and desirables.

ESSENTIALS:

Step

Unless you have a built-in retractable step, you will need a stand-alone step for getting in and out of the motor caravan. Buy one specifically designed and tested for motor caravan use from a reputable manufacturer.

Mains Hook-Up Lead

If buying new, this will be supplied, although some older vehicles (before September 1998) may have only a rather short 10m one. If not supplied, or too short, you should buy one, 25m long with the BS appropriate blue connectors either end.

LPG Cylinder(s) & Regulator

Unless you always intend to cook using a microwave oven or some other electrical appliance and hence will always hook-up to mains electricity, you will need LPG. Most caravanners use LPG to power the hob and oven, and heat the water or power the refrigerator if not connected to electricity.

Leisure Battery

Most motor caravans have two batteries, one to start the engine, and the other to run the 12V equipment on board, such as water pump and lighting. The second battery should be supplied with the vehicle and will be a leisure battery, specifically designed to power the habitation area equipment. This will be recharged every time you hook-up to mains electricity, and for most vehicles, as you drive along as well.

Security Device

See the section on Security.

DESIRABLES:

Awning

An awning or annexe can double the size of a motor caravan's useful living area, can provide a place to sleep in summer by using an inner tent, or a dining room or children's play area. It is an ideal place to store welly boots, raincoats, bicycles, the barbecue and picnic chairs etc.

The larger motor caravans often have a wind-out awning which is permanently fixed to the side. It can just be used as a canopy, or you can attach sides and a front to make it fully enclosed. Awning carpet is often used and this comes in various types. A simple plastic groundsheet does not allow grass to breathe, and you should look for a type that will reduce damage to grass pitches if you intend to use them. Even with 'grass-friendly' carpet, you still need to lift it regularly, say every third day for half a day, to minimise pitch damage.

Levelling Ramps and Chocks

These may not be needed if you intend to use hard-standings but are desirable if pitching on uneven grass.

Television and TV Antenna

A desirable or a necessity, depending on your point of view. You can buy a 12V or dual voltage television but if you are generally going to hook up to mains then a small one from home will work perfectly well. Generally you will only be able to use it in the UK; for use abroad you need a multi-standard set.

You can get directional or omni-directional antennae, and generally speaking a directional one will perform better (if set-up correctly) than an omni-directional one.

Your home TV licence will cover you for viewing while on tour, but only if there is no-one left at home watching another set.

Satellite dishes are frequently seen on site. For those travelling abroad, it is an ideal way to keep in touch with programmes from home.



Legal Matters

Here we touch on some of the basic legal requirements to bear in mind when motor caravanning.

Driving Licences

If you have a Category B Licence obtained prior to 1st January 1997 you may drive:

- Any towed outfit, including a motor caravan/trailer combination, where the combined MAM (see Glossary) does not exceed 8,250 kg.
- Any rigid motor caravan without a trailer where the MAM does not exceed 7,500 kg













If you have a Category B Licence obtained on or after 1st January 1997, you may drive:

- A towed outfit restricted to a combined weight of 3,500 kg and the trailer MAM must not exceed the kerb weight of the towing vehicle. If this MAM is to be exceeded an E Test pass is required.
- A rigid motor caravan with a MAM of 3,500 kg. A pass of the LGV C1 test qualifies a driver for a MAM of up to 7,500 kg.
- A rigid motor caravan towing a trailer providing the trailer does not exceed 750 kg and the combined MAM does not exceed 4,250 kg. If the trailer does exceed 750 kg, then (a) above applies. Otherwise an LGV C1 + E test is needed.

For further information visit www.dvla.gov.uk

Speed Limits

Motor caravans with an unladen weight of up to 3.05 tonnes and/or up to 8 passenger seats are subject to the same speed limits as ordinary cars. Larger motor caravans are restricted to 50 mph on single carriageways, 60 mph on dual carriageways and 70 mph on motorways. Towed outfits may travel at up to 50 mph on single carriageway roads and 60 mph on dual carriageways and motorways. All these limits apply providing a lower speed limit is not in force. Vehicles towing trailers are not permitted in the outside lane of a three or more lane motorway unless inner lanes are blocked.

CATEGORY	MAX SPEED		
	M'WAY	DUAL C'WAY	OTHER*
(i) Motor caravans in general			
(ii) Motor caravans with unladen weight exceeding 3050kg or adapted to carry more than 8 passengers			
(iii) As (ii) but exceeding 12m overall length			
(iv) Motor caravan drawing a trailer			

* Unless the road travelled is subject to a lower limit.

Dimensions

Most motor caravans may (subject to any manufacturer's restrictions) tow a trailer with a maximum body length of 7 metres (excluding drawbar) and a maximum width of 2.3 metres. A vehicle with a maximum gross weight of 3500 kg or more is required if you wish to tow in excess of this. Maximum overall length (motor caravan plus trailer) is 18.75 metres. Owners of larger motor caravans may find it useful to record their vehicle's overall height on a note displayed in the cab. This has been a legal requirement for vehicles over 3 metres high since October 1997.

Parking

It is an offence to leave a vehicle or outfit where it may cause an obstruction. A trailer separated from the towing vehicle must be securely braked or chocked to prevent movement. After dark, a trailer parked on a road must be illuminated, which normally means keeping the towing vehicle attached to supply power. Lay-bys form part of the highway, so no overnight stopping. Observe local by-laws, which may prevent the parking of some motor caravans in street bays. It is an offence to drive more than 15 yards off the road without authority in both urban and rural areas.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A Class	Type of motor caravan where both the cab and habitation area bodywork are integrated and have been constructed by the converter, not the base vehicle manufacturer.
Actual Laden Weight (ALW)	The total weight of the motor caravan and its contents, when being towed. The only reliable way to determine this is on a weigh bridge.
Aquaroll	A proprietary design of fresh water container that can be pulled along the ground.
Awning	A tent-like structure of fabric over a supporting framework, which can be attached to the side of a motor caravan, or be free standing. Also called an annexe. Many motor caravans are also built with permanently fixed roll-out blinds, some of which can be supplemented with zip-in side panels.
Base Vehicle	The vehicle used as the platform on which a motor caravan is built.
Berth	Sleeping place.
Butane	A type of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) commonly used for caravanning when temperatures are above freezing. Usually sold in a blue cylinder.
Cassette Toilet (Chemical Toilet)	A form of chemical toilet found in modern motor caravans, where the waste holding tank can be accessed and emptied from outside.
Certificated Location (CL)	Small, privately owned sites permitted to accommodate up to 5 caravans per night, licensed by an organisation like The Caravan Club and exclusively for use by its members.
Chassis Cab	A common type of base vehicle on which a motor caravan may be built, consisting of a complete, driveable chassis with enclosed cab area.
Coachbuilt	When referring to motor caravans, indicates any form of construction where the habitation area is built on to a chassis cab.
Converter	The manufacturer who constructs a motor caravan from the base vehicle.
Corner Steady	The winding device built into each corner of a motor caravan chassis that is used to stabilise the body once set up on a pitch.
Elevating Roof	A feature of some smaller motor caravans, which provides greater headroom when on site, but gives a low profile to reduce wind resistance on the road and to facilitate garage storage.
Full Service Pitch	A pitch which has individual provision for fresh water supply and waste water disposal, in addition to mains electricity and sometimes TV aerial connection.
Gas Cylinder	A portable, pressurised container for the storage of LPG.
Gas Cylinder Locker	Compartment on the motor caravan for the storage of gas cylinders.
Grey Water (see Waste Water)	Waste water from sink/shower.
Gross Train Weight	Also known as Combined Weight. The maximum permitted weight of an outfit. This is often the sum of the gross vehicle weight and the braked towing limit.
Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)	The weight of the vehicle laden to its maximum, as defined by the manufacturer. See also MTPLM.
Habitation area	The part of the motor caravan which comprises the living space, as opposed to the external lockers or cab area.
Hard-standing	A pitch which has a hard surface made of gravel, asphalt, concrete etc, rather than grass.
High Top	A form of motor caravan where the base vehicle manufacturer or converter has added a fixed roof offering increased headroom.

Hook-Up	A facility on a pitch for connection to mains electricity.
Kerbweight	The empty weight of a motor vehicle as defined by the manufacturer.
Layout	The arrangement of furniture and fittings within the habitation area.
LAV	Leisure Accommodation Vehicle: A general term which includes caravans, motor caravans, campers and trailer tents.
Leisure Battery	A 12V battery similar to a car battery, which powers the 12V lighting, water pump(s) etc in the motor caravan.
Levelling	The process of ensuring that a motor caravan is level when sited on a pitch. Important for comfort and also to ensure the correct functioning of the fridge and water systems.
Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG)	The fuel used to power the cooking hob/oven in most motor caravans. Can also be used for the fridge, water heater and space heater when mains electricity is not available.
Low-Profile	A form of coachbuilt motor caravan which does not have an overcab area.
Luton	A term originally applied to lorries with an overcab load area, and also used to describe motor caravans with a bed over the cab.
MAM (now referred to as the MTPLM)	Maximum Authorised Mass: the maximum weight limit as defined by the manufacturer/ converter.
MIRO (formerly referred to as the MAM)	Mass in Running Order: the weight of the motor caravan ex-factory with fuel and water, but without any passengers or caravanning equipment. Previously called Unladen or Ex-Works Weight.
MTPLM	Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass. The maximum weight which can legally be carried by the chassis, as specified by the manufacturer.
Motor Caravan	A self-propelled caravan. Also called a Motorhome, Campervan or Caravanette.
Motor Caravan Service Point	A facility on a caravan site where motor caravans can fill onboard drinking water tank and empty onboard waste water tank.
Payload	Also called User Payload. The difference between the MTPLM and the MIRO and is the weight you can add to the motor caravan, including passengers.
Propane	A type of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) usually stored in red cylinders and suitable for year-round use.
RCD	A safety device which disconnects the mains electricity supply in the event of an earth leakage fault.
Regulator	A safety device which controls the pressure of LPG coming out of a cylinder, and going into the motor caravan supply system.
RV	Recreational Vehicle: an American term for motor caravan.
Van Conversion	A type of motor caravan based on a panel van.
VIN	Vehicle Identification Number.
Warden	The Caravan Club employee in charge of an individual Caravan Club Site.
Waste Water (see Grey Water)	Water which has been used in the kitchen or bathroom areas.
Water Pump	Since motor caravan water tanks and containers are kept at low level, a pump must be used to deliver water to taps and the water heater.
Wheelbase	The distance between the front and rear axles of a vehicle.
Wheel Clamp	A security device which should prevent a road wheel rotating or the wheel being removed.

Trailer Tents, Folding Campers, Folding Caravans and Pop-Tops

Not sure that a conventional caravan or motor caravan suits you? Keen to retain your small, efficient car, but tempted by the thought of caravanning? Enjoy tent camping but wishing for a little more luxury? There are some less common, but very interesting alternative options which might well suit your needs. All of these qualify for Caravan Club membership and sites usage:-

Trailer Tent



Trailer Tent: A folding caravan where the upper part of the structure is usually all fabric. A small to medium size trailer forms the floor area of the living space, and the upper part of the caravan, including generous bed area(s) unfolds from this using a simple mechanism. Advantages are light weight (typically 400-600kg) and small size when folded, making towing (even with a small car) and storage (often in a garden or garage) very straightforward. Larger models, especially with the addition of an extra awning on the front, can be some of the most spacious caravans available, making them ideal for family use. The downside is that equipment levels may be lower than for more sophisticated designs, and the fabric structure can never provide as good insulation or security as a rigid body. New prices are typically from under £2000 to around £5000. Readily available second-hand for far less.

Folding Camper: Looks superficially similar to a trailer tent, but has a more sophisticated mechanism allowing faster, easier setting up. May have a higher specification as well, with some models matching many rigid caravans for features, including full sized wardrobe, washroom, cassette toilet, mains electrics, fridge, underfloor heating etc.





As a consequence weights tend to be a little heavier, perhaps 500-1000kg, but still smaller and lighter than almost any rigid caravan. New prices vary widely, but most common models range from £4500 to around £9000. Plenty of cheaper ones available second-hand.

Pop-Top: A (usually) compact conventional caravan with an exceptionally low roof height but with a section of the roof being raisable with fabric or occasionally rigid folding sides to give normal headroom when on site. The lowered roof when travelling improves fuel consumption for the towcar, and enables storage in a conventional garage. Again, a relatively rare choice, with weights and new prices similar to small-medium sized conventional caravans (typically 700-1200kg, and £8000 to £13000).

These options are worth considering for anyone who needs or desires a small towcar, or who values highly the capability of storing their

Pop-Top



caravan at home without taking over the whole garden or drive, instead of paying for space in a storage compound. If your existing car would struggle with a relatively large and heavy conventional caravan, you shouldn't feel you need to change it before you can try a form of caravanning, and these choices let you do that. A second-hand trailer tent and associated equipment could cost less to buy than a modest two week holiday for a family of four in a hotel.... yet would be available whenever a free weekend or school half term comes around for minimal cost in fuel and site fees. For anyone who's used to camping, the convenience of a trailer tent or folding camper would be a bonus, while retaining the familiar feel of sleeping under canvas. Remember, these options are eligible for use at Caravan Club Sites and Certificated Locations – even those which do not accept tents.

Folding Caravan: A relatively rare sight, these look like a rather boxy rigid caravan, but have sides (and furniture) which fold down, and a rigid roof which drops down on top. They therefore have many of the advantages of a folding camper (ease of towing and storage), coupled with the improved weather protection and security of a conventional caravan. However, they tend to lack the space of their tent-type cousins (most are 2 berth only), and weigh as much as a small rigid caravan (800-1100kg). The folding features add to their cost, making them comparatively expensive (£10,000 - £15,000 new), but the combination of conventional caravan-like comfort coupled with the ability to store in a normal garage is still desirable.

Please note: if you are considering buying any of these alternative options, you will find useful points of interest in both the Caravan and Motor Caravan sections of this guide too.

With thanks to The Pennine Group for the use of the trailer tent and folding camper photography.

Further Sources of Information

The Caravan Club
East Grinstead House
East Grinstead
West Sussex RH19 1UA
Tel: 01342 326944
website: www.caravanclub.co.uk

Europe's premier club for touring caravanners, motor caravanners and trailer tenters, offering an unrivalled range of services to some 850,000 caravanners, including quality Sites in the British Isles, European travel services, help and advice, insurance and so much more.

The Motorhome Information Service
Maxwelton House
Boltro Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex RH16 1BJ
Tel: 01444 458889
website: www.motorhomeinfo.co.uk

The Motorhome Information Service is sponsored by the Motorhome Section of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. It provides information and assistance about motorhomes and motorhome leisure, especially for first-time buyers, but to all motor caravanners. It also represents the Industry and their customers with Government, public sector organisations and the media.

The National Caravan Council
Catherine House
Victoria Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 1SS
Tel 01252 318251
website: www.nationalcaravan.co.uk

The National Caravan Council is the trade body for the UK caravan industry with around 500 member companies comprising manufacturers, dealers, park operators and suppliers of specialist products and services.

