

TRAILER TENTS, FOLDING CAMPERS/CARAVANS AND POP-TOPS

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August 2010

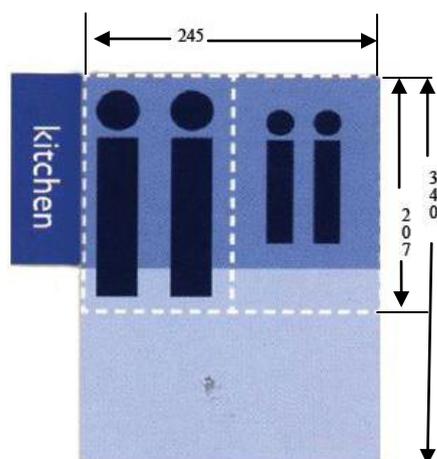
Owners of all these types of 'caravan' are welcome to join The Caravan Club, and this leaflet looks at both the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a fold-away home from home.

1. Trailer Tents

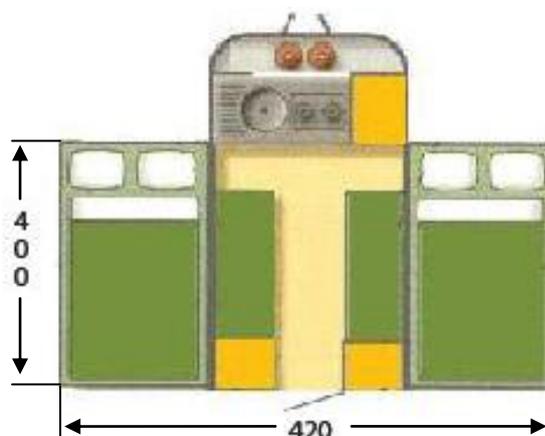
(Defined as a folding caravan of which the whole outer covering is pliable)

These have a trailer body with a lid which either folds out rather like a pram hood to form the floor, or folds out like two flaps of a box top to provide raised sleeping areas. The sides are flexible, and are generally made of canvas or a man-made equivalent. Typical layouts of trailer tents are (*measurements in centimetres*):

a) Combi-Camp Venezia



b) Conway Countryman



NB Drawings not to scale

Those that use the pram hood method are generally larger on the road, as the trailer body forms the sleeping and/or seating area. This provides good insulation against cold and draughts and is extremely quick to put up. The box lid type can fold down to a very small trailer indeed, which may be a distinct advantage if you have a small car, or little storage space available. The latter type generally takes longer to erect, and may require pegging out. Both types can have the living area increased by the

addition of an awning, which will require pegging. The canvas part can either be permanently attached to the trailer body, or zipped. If the latter, the canvas can be removed for the winter and stored in a warm, dry place to prevent mildew and rotting. The zips take a fair amount of strain, so examine carefully for missing teeth etc. if buying a used model.

eg. Combi Camp erection procedure



The law requires brakes on a trailer if it has a maximum permitted weight in excess of 750kg, or if the maximum permitted trailer weight of the trailer exceeds half the towing vehicle's kerbside weight. The light weight of the trailer tent generally means there is no requirement for brakes, which makes maintenance easier and cheaper.

Some trailer tents have a fully equipped kitchen unit, often attached to the rear of the trailer so it is accessible when the tent part is folded away - useful for picnic stops on the journey. This unit separates when on site and stands alone in the 'awning' part. Those without kitchen units as standard often have a facility to add one to the drawbar which also detaches when on site. Lighting is provided by stand-alone lamps, or strip-lights powered from the car battery. There are also portable mains powered units for connection to electric hook-ups, but check that these comply with BS 7671 (1992 and subsequent amendments).

There are disadvantages to trailer tents, particularly if they are to be used in the UK, where climate is at best unreliable! Lack of insulation means many trailer tents are not suitable for year-round use, (consider instead a folding camper which has many of the trailer tent qualities, but more comfort). Also there will be times when you need to fold the trailer tent away wet. Provided it is aired properly within 24 hours this should not present problems. However, if left, it can lead to damp mattresses and damp anything else you have stored in the trailer body. The trailer tent should not be stored in this condition for any length of time. It will have to be dried out before packing away properly otherwise mildew will result.

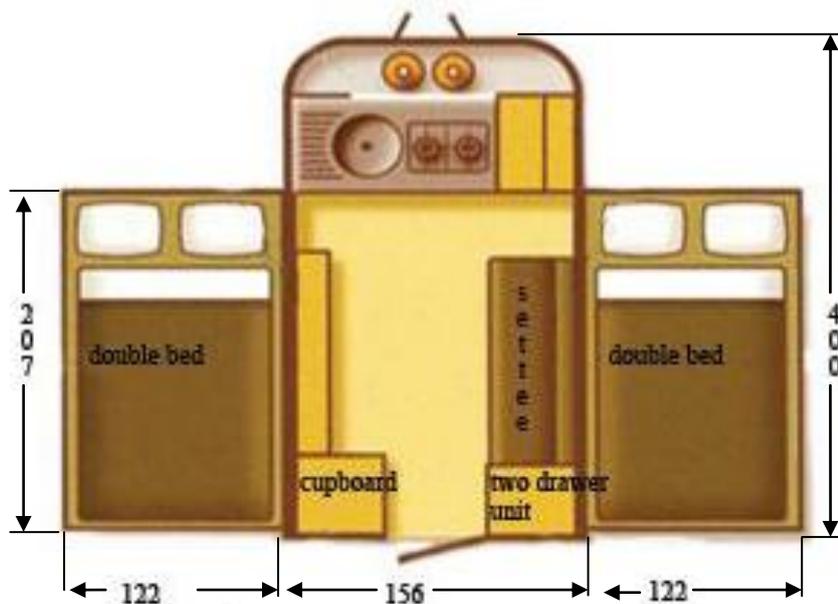
2. **Folding Campers** - also called **extendible folding caravans**.

(Defined as a folding caravan, the extendible part of the sides of which is made of pliable material)



These are generally one step up from a trailer tent, and so cost more! The trailer body is better insulated, and the fold-out walls can be canvas or more recently, waterproof plastic (eg. Dandy). The roof may be flexible or rigid. Underfloor heaters can usually be specified as an optional extra, with the kitchen unit a permanent feature of the trailer body, often with refrigerator. Some models even include an on board washroom, incorporating electric flush cassette toilet and hand basin. The sleeping areas normally fold out either side of the trailer, which can then give a row of seats on each side, and room for a central table. Extra storage or sleeping accommodation can often be provided by a tent that fits under the bed extensions. Some models (eg. Rapido Confort-matic (no longer manufactured, but still available secondhand)) extend the floor area before unfolding, to give a much larger caravan on-site than the size of the trailer would indicate.

Example of folding camper layout: Pennine Fiesta



Generally heavier than a trailer tent, and a fair size on the road, folding campers usually come equipped with brakes, 12V lighting and water pump via an on-board battery, lpg hob-top cooking from on-board cylinder(s), optional heating system and optional mains electrics.

3. Folding Caravans

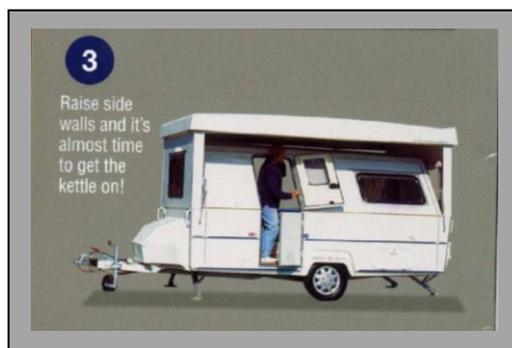
(Defined as caravan of rigid or other construction, the dimensions of which can be reduced)

These look like folding campers when on the road, but when on site appear more like a conventional caravan, with rigid roof and sides. The roof 'lid' sits over the body rather like a chocolate box and to open the box one end is raised and the wall is pulled out into position. This is assisted by gas struts and can be managed by one person. The other end is raised in a similar fashion, then the side walls are pulled into place. The walls are fastened inside by clips in each corner and the cupboards, wardrobe, pelmets and kitchen unit are raised into position. Early models require the units to be manhandled into place, later models have levers which makes it all very simple and easy to do.

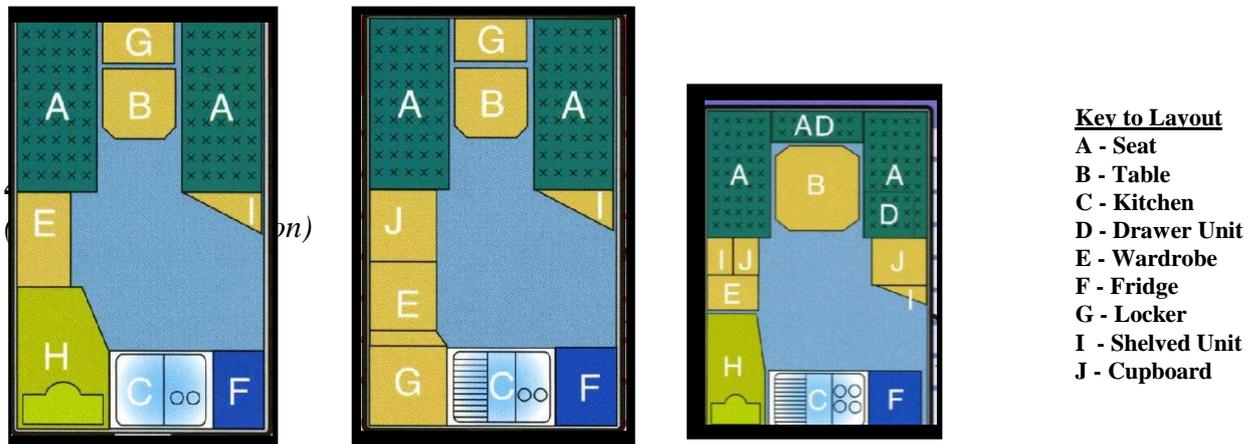
When inside the raised folding caravan it is difficult to distinguish from a conventional caravan and any number of facilities can be included, like refrigerator, hob, grill, heater, 12V lighting, mains electrics and so on. Smaller folders tend not to have a separate toilet compartment, but there is usually a cupboard which can house a portable toilet if required. An awning can be added for extra space, and this can be threaded through the awning channel before the folder is raised - again making it possible for one person to manage.

Procedure for raising folding caravan:

eg. Gobur Carousel



Typical layout of folding caravan. Eg. Gobur Carousel



Nearest to a conventional caravan, these have a roof section which raises when on site giving full standing room inside most of the caravan. Being lower profile on the road, they are less likely to be upset by passing vehicles and will also have less of an effect on fuel consumption. The door height may be lower, so beware if the users are tall, but generally on site they offer the same facilities as a conventional caravan.

eg. Eriba



Roof retracted



Roof elevated

5. On the Road

The biggest plus-point of the folders is their on the road behaviour. Their low height means overtaking coaches and lorries cause little upset, and fuel consumption does not suffer as it would when towing a conventional caravan. Some trailers permit good vision behind using the driver's internal mirror, so additional mirrors are not required. If width worries you, many trailer tents and some folding campers and caravans are no wider than the average car, although in the latter this may compromise interior living space.

6. Storage

Where all these types of caravan score points over the conventional trailer caravan is when storing. They are all low enough to fit in the garage, and most trailer tents and some folding campers can be tipped onto their sides using special storage brackets, to take up very little room.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
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TRAILER TENT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lightweight - no need for brakes. • Can store on side to occupy minimum space. • Easily extendible to suit large family. • Large living and sleeping areas possible. • Kitchen unit (if fitted) accessible when folded down. • Through vision usually possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not well insulated. • May have to fold down wet. • May not have kitchen unit. • No integral 12V facility. • Low security on site. • Some require pegging out, which takes time. • Separate toilet tent may be required (or use site facilities)
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FOLDING CAMPER

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailer body generally better insulated. • Often braked, easy to tow. • Integral kitchen unit. • Some extend considerably from a small trailer when on site • Heater may be optional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some physical effort required to erect on site, depending on model. • May have rigid locking door but canvas sides still insecure on site. • Canvas sides/roof means rain can be a problem when folding down. • Toilet compartment not generally available, except on some 'top of the range' models.
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FOLDING CARAVAN

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good insulation in roof and walls. • Integral kitchen unit and 12V system. Heater optional. • Quite secure on site. • Fits into garage. • Toilet/shower compartment available in larger models. • Much like conventional caravan when on site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes about 15 minutes to set up on site. Some physical effort is required. • No access to kitchen whilst travelling.
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ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
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POP-TOP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fits into most garages. • Facilities can be used with roof down if necessary. • Very little effort or time is required to raise roof. • Toilet/shower compartment often available. • Very similar to conventional caravan. • Quite secure on site. • Heater standard or optional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More affected by overtaking vehicles than folder. • Fuel consumption also more, although not as much as with conventional caravan. • Entry door height lower. • Pop-up roof may not extend full length of caravan.
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**MANUFACTURERS/IMPORTERS OF FOLDING CARAVANS AND
TRAILER TENTS**

CAMPERLANDS

Mill Lane
Northenden
Manchester
M22 4HJ
0161 998 8523
www.camperlands.co.uk

CABANON

(Trailer tent made in France)
Manga, Manga DL, Venus, Venus DL,
Stratos, Mercury, Tabora

CAMPLETS

(Trailer tent made in Denmark)
Apollo, Apollo Lux, Concorde,
Savanne, Royal, Royal Acrylic

CAMPMASTER

*(Trailer tent for motorbikes made in
Holland)*
Campmaster 2 & 4

CCC PRODUCTS

19 Granada Road
Southsea
Hampshire
PO4 0RD
0239 282 8430
www.rvstop.co.uk

COLEMAN

(Trailer tent made in USA)
Spare parts and repairs

MANGINE LTD

Red Roofs
Chinnor Road
Thame
Oxfordshire
OX9 3RF
01844 215900
01844 214331
www.combicamp.dk

COMANCHE

(Trailer tent made in Spain)
Lince, Week Ender

COMBI-CAMP

(Trailer tent made in Denmark)
Valley, Country

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LTD**

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BB5 0SD
01254 385992
www.pennine-leisure.co.uk

CONWAY

*(Folding camper and trailer tent made
in UK)*
Cruiser, Countryman, Crusader

**MANUFACTURERS/IMPORTERS OF FOLDING CARAVANS AND
TRAILER TENTS**

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www.camperlands.co.uk

CONWAY

*(Folding camper and trailer tent made
in UK)*
Secondhand only

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Unit 15 Ainscough Business Park
Mossey Lea Road
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Wigan
Lancashire
WN6 9RS
01257 427221
www.rivaleisure.co.uk

DANDY

(Folding camper made in UK)
Dart, Designer, Destiny, Dimension

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Mill Lane
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M22 4HJ
0161 998 8523
www.camperlands.co.uk

DANDY

(Folding camper made in UK)
Secondhand only

ERIBA LTD

The Priory
A417 Farringdon Road
Lechlade
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GL7 3EY
01367 253453
www.eriba-uk.com

ERIBA

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Eriba Touring Range

GOBUR CARAVANS LTD

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GOBUR CAROUSEL

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www.pennine-leisure.co.uk

PENNINE

(Folding camper made in UK)
Fiesta, Sterling, Pullman, Pathfinder,
Continental

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Manchester
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0161 998 8523

www.camperlands.co.uk

PENNINE

(Folding camper made in UK)
Secondhand only

RACLET LTD

Gorrick
Luckley Road
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 3AU
01189 791023

www.raclet.fr

RACLET

*(Trailer tent made in France, adapted
in UK)*
Minto, Quick Stop, Super Quick Stop,
Santale, Jasmin, Solena, Flores 230,
Floreale 230, Tamaris, Allegra

CAMPERLANDS

Mill Lane
Northenden
Manchester
M22 4HJ
0161 998 8523

www.camperlands.co.uk

TRIGAMO/JAMET

(Trailer tent made in France)
Jametic Classic, Chantilly, Odysse,
Randger, Louisiana, Galleon, Olympe