

BUYING SECONDHAND CARAVANS

This leaflet is prepared as a Club service to members. The contents are believed correct at the date of publication but please raise any queries with The Club's Information Office.

February 2011

Buying a secondhand caravan should be a pleasant experience and the start of a new chapter in your holiday and leisure activities. However, you do not want to find that the roof leaks or the appliances do not work on your first trip away with the caravan. In order to buy with confidence, ask yourself some questions before setting off to look at the caravans available.

Should I Buy Secondhand?

Economics dictate that for many people, buying a new caravan just is not practical, but there are other reasons why buying secondhand makes good sense.

- the caravan will not depreciate as quickly
- if minor wear and tear occurs, it is less significant on an older caravan - useful if you have children or pets
- there is a wide choice of style and specification to suit most tastes - often at local dealers
- no need to travel to franchised dealers - as when buying a new model
- delivery delays are less likely

However, it is a good idea to look at the new models, as they are a good source of ideas for desirable features, but make sure you leave your cheque book at home!

Where should I buy from?

DEALERS

The law offers greater protection to an individual purchasing from a dealer. In this case, the caravan's condition must be *as described by the seller*; it must be *fit for its purpose* and it must be *of satisfactory quality*. However, this latter stipulation does not apply to defects specifically brought to the purchaser's attention, or to defects that ought to have been revealed by any examination the purchaser or another may have made. Goods are of satisfactory quality if they meet the standard that a reasonable person would regard as

satisfactory, taking into account the description of the goods, the price, age and all other relevant circumstances. The distance selling regulations may also apply, giving the purchaser an opportunity to return the goods in certain circumstances.

Caravans purchased from a dealer may be offered with a warranty; if so, make sure you check when the warranty expires. Read the small print carefully to make sure there are not too many exclusions or restrictions. Even if you do not plan to take advantage of a warranty, always ask if one is available. The absence of a warranty may indicate that the seller knows there is something wrong with the caravan.

The caravan should also be given a thorough check before it leaves the dealer's premises to ensure all brakes, road lights, appliances etc are working and safe. Note that once the caravan is on the road, its roadworthiness becomes your responsibility.

New? Consumer Legislation which came in during 2003 gives additional rights to purchasers, The 'Sale of Consumer Goods Regulations' allow purchasers to request repair or replacement of any item which is not of satisfactory quality. It also gives new powers to the courts to order the seller to replace or repair defective goods. Crucially, the new regulations introduce an assumption that any defects found within 6 months of the sale must have been present at the time of sale, unless the seller can prove otherwise.

PRIVATE SALE

Where dealing with a private individual, the rights under the Sale of Goods Act in relation to the quality of the product do not apply. The principle of *caveat emptor* ('let the buyer beware') should be your starting point. Although the caravan must be *as described* by the seller, it is for buyers to satisfy themselves they are buying what they think they are buying. It is essential, therefore, that you make a thorough inspection of the caravan and associated documents before agreeing to buy. It is also a good idea to prepare a check list before you purchase a caravan (an example is given at the back of this leaflet) and, if possible, take a friend along who can independently verify the answers given to your questions and the provision of any receipts or documents relating to the servicing and history of the caravan.


If you buy privately and the seller has no service records, then you should have the caravan serviced before you take it on the road. As this is likely to cost from about £165 (and considerably more if any problems are found), these costs must therefore be weighed up when comparing dealer and private sale prices.

CARAVAN CLUB CLASSIFIEDS

This is the place to discover that unexpected bargain from the 1000s of items for sale, or sell your unwanted caravan, motor caravan, towcar or accessory.

Caravan Club members can advertise here FREE and The Club take no commission on these sales. For a small fee members can have their ad highlighted or have it appear on the Classified's home page.

The Club has partnered up with Caravan Selecta, part of the Friday-ad group, to produce this service, which means that any ads placed on Caravan Club Classifieds will also automatically appear on the **Caravan Selecta website** guaranteeing extra exposure.

Caravan Club Classifieds is open to anyone to advertise, however Club members' advertisements are flagged like this . Please note that Caravan Club Classifieds is not linked in any way to The Caravan Club magazine classifieds advertising. If you wish to place an ad in the magazine please visit the [magazine advertising website](#) .

eBay

It is always prudent to see the caravan 'in the flesh' before making a commitment to purchase, and most legitimate eBay sellers will normally be amenable to arranging a viewing by a serious purchaser. It is therefore important that you arrange for this before the option closes.

The Club's legal helpline advises that the online eBay auction site is no more than a forum enabling sellers and buyers to make contact, in the same way as an advertisement placed in a newspaper. Any offers or transactions which may take place between a buyer and a seller are contracts for the sale or purchase in the same way as if dealing directly with the customer.

There are no claims against eBay itself, although it is understood that it does try to mediate between buyers and sellers where disputes arise.

If using PayPal as a payment vehicle, there are certain protections provided. However, the purchaser would need to be very careful, as there are a number of terms and conditions applicable to the use of PayPal and often claims against PayPal fail because these have not been complied with. If the purchaser is able to use a credit card as opposed to a debit card or chargecard, then rights would exist under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act, which would make the credit card liable in the same way as the supplier of the goods.

Purchasers sometimes find it difficult to assert their rights against individuals, as of course any claim is only as good as the person against whom the claim is being made. Therefore, if the person is selling the goods from someone else's address or has no assets, then any claim would fail.

MANUFACTURERS

Refurbished models are sometimes available direct from the manufacturers of the most up-market models, although in most cases you would have to go to a private seller for these.

AUCTION

Caravans are not sold through auctions on a large scale, but check with local auction houses or the larger companies such as BCA for specialist sales. Details can be found in Yellow Pages under 'Car Auctioneers'. While some bargains can certainly be found, you would need to be confident of what you were looking for in order to reduce your risk of buying an unsuitable caravan.

AVOIDING SCAMS

The important thing is not to commit yourself until you know who you are dealing with (get hold of a name and address) and when you have to pay.

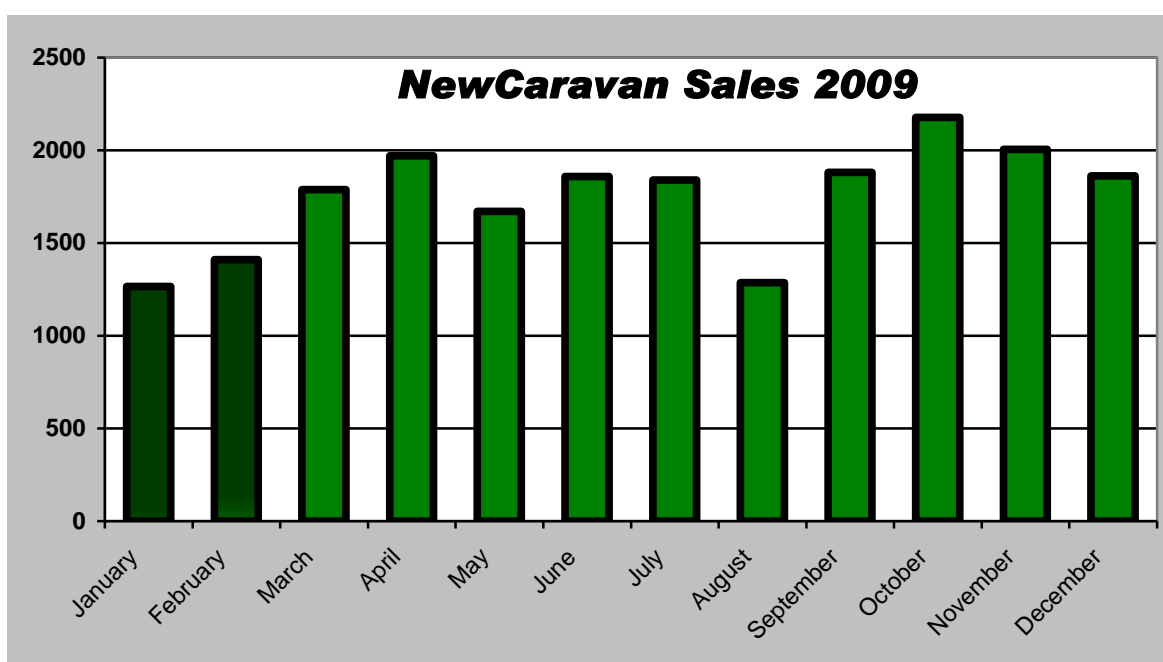
OVERSEAS FOR PRIVATE IMPORT

Make sure the caravan meets the legal requirements for use in the UK. Check that spares and servicing are available, and that insurance will not be a problem.

When should I buy?

A strange question perhaps, but not insignificant, particularly if you are buying from a dealer. The most popular time for new caravans to be delivered is March, April and May. During this period, the sales and aftercare staff at dealers are probably working flat out coping with new caravans. To make room for these new deliveries and the associated trade-ins resulting from new sales, dealers need to clear their existing stock. So check during the 'dead' period for sales around Christmas and the New Year. You might find a dealer desperate to clear space for his new spring stock.

Similarly, once the rush of new caravan deliveries is over, dealers' forecourts may be full of traded-in caravans, many of which will have had only one owner. Choice should therefore be good, and with fewer new sales to make, the salesman might be more willing to do a good deal on a used caravan. An additional benefit is that you will find it much easier to book the caravan in for a service outside the March to May 'season' - the time when large numbers of one year old caravans need a service to maintain their warranty.



Which Make and Model

MID-RANGE

Clearly personal preference has a large part to play in this, along with availability. If you stick to the mass-market, mid-range makes and models, there is obviously more choice available. Be aware too that spare parts may be harder to find if the original caravan manufacturer has ceased trading, merged or been taken over. Similarly, avoid anything too unusual, unless you are prepared to accept some difficulty reselling at a later date. If the layout, style or finish is unconventional, it may be a bargain to buy, but will anyone else want it?

TOP-RANGE

The most up-market models of caravan can make excellent secondhand buys, but quality and image come at a price - they may cost as much as a new caravan from a standard manufacturer. Note too that demand often exceeds supply so be prepared to travel and act quickly to avoid disappointment.

CONTINENTAL

A smaller number of continental-manufactured caravans can also be found. These may offer a wider range of styles and are often of a high quality, but check whether;

- Spares are readily available
- Make sure features like mains wiring are to UK specifications, and check carefully if a previous owner has done a DIY conversion of a privately-imported caravan
- If the door is on the 'wrong' side, this is not usually a major problem, but take care when exiting the caravan at the roadside.
- Check that the seat cushions comply with UK fire safety regulations. This is a legal requirement if the caravan is sold to you in the UK. If you privately import, this is not essential, but may make the caravan harder to sell on again.

SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications in general have become more comprehensive over the past few years. Unless looking at the oldest and cheapest caravans, you should normally find a hot water system with shower, cassette toilet, oven, fridge, heater and mains electrics.

If these facilities are missing, be prepared to negotiate on the price. Although it is practical to add these features to a basic caravan, check the likely costs of purchase and installation beforehand. It would also be wise to treat obvious DIY additions with a degree of scepticism.

Look for design features which will make the caravan easy to live with. Smooth body panels are easier to clean than textured ones. A generous user payload allows greater flexibility for personal items. Are the water and waste connections easy to get to? How easy is the bed to make up? Don't be afraid to try setting the bed up yourself, or ask the

seller to demonstrate it. Are there enough work surfaces in the kitchen area, and enough cupboards?

SIZE

Do not assume that bigger is necessarily better - remember you have got to tow, manoeuvre and store the caravan, so pick a size and layout which suits your needs. For example, 2 berth caravans are a popular choice when bought new, but are not ideal for families. However, if your budget or car cannot stretch to a 4 berth secondhand caravan, consider a spacious awning or separate sleeping tent for the children as a good alternative.

MATCHING THE CARAVAN TO YOUR CAR

The Caravan Club's UK Technical Information and Advice Department offers advice to Club members on choosing a suitable car for your caravan, and on caravanning in general. The following leaflets are a selection of those available. Please see the final page of the technical section of your current 'Sites Directory' for postage requirements.

- * Top 20 Caravanning Questions
- * Hints for Caravanners
- * Choice of Tow Car
- * Choice of Caravan
- * Noseweights
- * Getting Started

These leaflets, and a great many others, are freely available to Club members on our website: www.caravanclub.co.uk, along with a wealth of other advice and information.

Check out the 'Practical Help' section of the website!

How old is the caravan?

Many caravans have a practical life of 14 years or more if well cared for. The age of a caravan can often be identified from a serial number, most frequently found on the chassis or on a chassis plate. With this information, the caravan or chassis manufacturer can usually identify the year and model of the caravan.

If the plate is missing, or the manufacturer is no longer in business, the caravan's handbook may give a clue to the age, but make sure it is the correct booklet for the model. The Club may also be able to help with identification of some caravans. In 1992, the National Caravan Council (NCC) set up the Caravan Registration and Identification Scheme (CRIS). All caravans made by manufacturers recognized by the NCC have a 17 digit Vehicle Identity Number (the 'CRIS' number) stamped directly onto the caravan's chassis and also etched onto the caravan's windows. The owners are also supplied with a CRIS registration document (similar in style to car documents). The caravan's age can be verified by telephoning the CRIS enquiry service (see following section). It is now possible to register pre-1992 caravans under the same scheme. For further information contact CRIS. (see next section for contact details).

Is It Stolen?

CRiS Enquiry Service

This service provides a central point for checking the status of a caravan before purchase. The service is available between 8 am and 8 pm Monday to Friday, 8 am to 5 pm Saturday and from 10 am to 5 pm on Sunday and costs £14.95 cris@hpi.co.uk 01722 413434.

A CRiS check can not only identify a caravan reported as having been stolen, but can identify the age of the newer models of caravan (as mentioned previously) and also whether there are any outstanding HP payments on pre -1992 caravans. You should check, therefore, that the details of the CRiS registration document tally with those of the caravan. Similarly, you should be sceptical of any UK caravan built after 1992 without an obvious CRiS identification. Since a full CRiS check is not possible on pre-1992 caravans, make sure that the seller can convince you that they are the legitimate owner, particularly if the caravan has no chassis plate. Be aware that without adequate identification, The Club will not insure a caravan.

Theftcheck

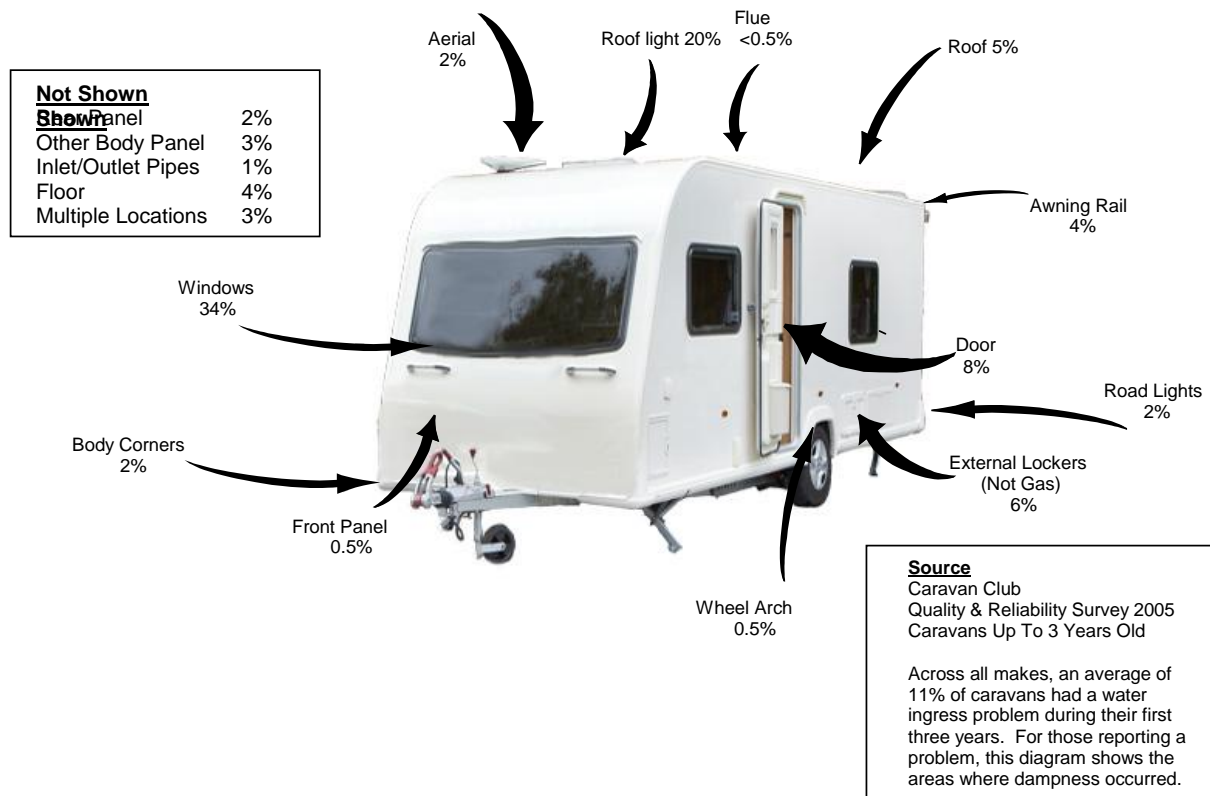
The Caravan Club also has a database of caravans known to have been stolen. If you contact the Theftcheck Service on telephone number 01342 336885 with the caravan make, model, year and serial number, we can run the details through the database to see if there is a match. Even if your caravan is not on the list, this doesn't guarantee that it has not been stolen; the owner may simply not have reported the theft to the Club. Nevertheless, it is a useful check to make.

Look for any signs of damage around the hitch or on the wheel rims/tyres which may indicate a security device has been forcibly removed. Ask to see any receipts or documents relating to ownership or servicing etc. Be especially cautious of large, twin-axled caravans sold cheaply - these are favourites with the caravan thieves. In general, be suspicious if you have to view the caravan away from the seller's house or premises, particularly if it is not in an authorised storage compound; also if the seller is reluctant to arrange a suitable time for viewing.

Does it leak?

One of the worse things that can happen to a caravan is water penetration of the structure. This can cause extensive damage to the caravan walls, floor and roof and may not be noticeable to the casual observer, and it is very expensive to put right.

If Water Ingress Occurs, Where Is It Likely To Be?



Ideally you should arm yourself with a moisture meter or damp detector; these can be purchased from DIY stores and cost around £20. Although not as sophisticated as the devices used by caravan dealers, a damp meter will give a general indication of damp problems, and improve your credibility as a serious purchaser with the dealer. You may be in a stronger bargaining position, should you suspect any problems. If there is any objection to you using a meter, ask yourself what is being concealed. Most caravan dealers should be quite happy to run their professional damp meter over any caravan you are interested in buying (if there is nothing to hide!)

When checking the interior, look inside cupboards, bed lockers etc and anywhere there is a corresponding outside seal on the caravan, bearing in mind water will work its way downwards. Mis-matching veneer or paper, or any obvious attempt at re-covering the wall should be a clue. Lightly press any suspect areas, as softness may well indicate rot. Use your nose too - if it smells mouldy, it probably is!

Ask for evidence of how long the previous owner has had the caravan. If it is only a year or so, be a little suspicious. It has been known for an unscrupulous owner to sell a caravan where a damp problem has been diagnosed after the first service, rather than pay for the necessary repairs.

Does everything work?

It is often not practical to check every system in a caravan prior to purchase, but wherever possible, check that all features are intact and functional. Problems with the ‘mechanics’ ie chassis, brakes, suspension and hitch are thankfully quite rare.

Items like doors and door locks frequently cause problems, however. Make sure you try these out several times - you do not want the lock to break leaving your caravan full of unprotected belongings on your first trip away. Cupboard doors cause an unreasonable amount of trouble for such simple items. Hinges and catches frequently fail, which are small problems, but extremely annoying.

Most areas of the water and waste system are prone to trouble. Check that the taps work, the pump runs, that the sinks and shower drain without leaking, and that the interconnecting pipes are clean and in good condition. Examine the awning rail for damage or signs of separation from the wall - this is not only a problem when fitting the awning, but also is a possible source of water ingress.

How old a caravan should I buy?

The easy answer is ‘as new as possible’ in order to get the best specification, modern styling and up to date technology. If you intend to buy an older caravan, do some research on the availability of spare parts and check the condition of the caravan very thoroughly. For very old or obscure makes, find out if there is an owner’s club which can help with advice, information or finding parts.

The following table gives a few key dates when particular design improvements were made. Note that British Standards are generally advisory, rather than obligatory, but most manufacturers adopt them within a year of their publication.

BASIC DESIGN AS A GUIDE TO CARAVAN AGE	
1960's & earlier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caravans of this age are a specialist area, and advice is best obtained from: The Historic Caravan Club 07703 325835 (evening only) hccsec@o2.co.uk Period and Classic Caravan Club www.period-classic-caravanclub.co.uk
1970's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Standard (BS 4626) introduced for caravans, covering construction, space, ventilation and safety. Heavy painted steel chassis with coil spring and shock absorber suspension. Provision of enclosed gas bottle locker. Rear fog lamp required from October 1979. 12V lighting added, sometimes still with gas lamps as well. Acrylic windows adopted in 1978, quickly followed by double glazed units (glass windows phased out - almost impossible to get replacements now). Introduction of floor insulation 'Coachbuilt' body construction (aluminium and plywood covering a wooden frame) - robust, but often heavy.
Early 1980's 1982 mid 1980's 1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Sandwich' body construction (thin metal and plywood sheets bonded to an insulating core material) initially for floors, then for the rest of the body, giving lighter structure. Caravans from this transitional period can suffer structural problems. Lightweight steel or aluminium chassis introduced Wedge-shaped fronts become popular Separate gas lockers discontinued (absorbed into main body) Auto-reverse braking systems mandatory from April 1989 * BS 6765 Part 3 standard for interior 12V wiring
mid 1990's 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised codes of practice for sealing caravans (still room for improvement!) BS 4626 replaced by a range of European standards for caravans manufactured from 1999 model year onwards, covering further improvements to safety, durability, electrical installations and ventilation. Conforming caravans are marked with a badge containing the NCC logo (illustrated right) and the standard number 'EN 1648' below it
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major revision of gas system, with adoption of European Standard 'EN1949' for 2004 model year caravans. Identifiable by gas regulator being fixed to the caravan, rather than the top of the gas cylinder.



Has it got a handbook?

A missing handbook can be a major inconvenience. Where are the fuses? How does the heating system work? What should the tyre pressures be? In addition, a pack containing the handbook, instructions for individual appliances, purchase details, CRiS registration details and service history is a sign of a conscientious previous owner.

Can someone check the caravan over for me?

Members of the Institute of Automotive Engineers and Assessors can sometimes look the caravan over and produce a written report. This is likely to cost at least £60 plus their travelling expenses but, if parting with several thousand pounds for a caravan, is a worthwhile investment.

A list can be found on www.iaea-online.org or contact the Club for details.

How should I pay?

Some dealers may require a deposit if you are asking them to secure a caravan. This is a reasonable request but make sure you really have chosen the right model before you do this, and pay the smallest deposit they will accept. If you change your mind later, you are unlikely to get your deposit back. If you are asked to sign a contract, remember this is legally binding, so read the small print.

Most private sellers will require cash, and may accept a building society cheque or bankers' draft. If paying by cheque, expect the seller to hang onto the caravan until the cheque has cleared. If they will not accept a cheque under these conditions, ask yourself why.

Whether buying privately or from a dealer, always ask for a receipt and make sure this gives the seller's name and address, date, make, model and year of caravan, the amount paid, and is signed by the seller.

If extras like an awning, service or warranty are included, these should also be detailed on the receipt.

Try it out!

Having found and purchased your secondhand caravan, try it out as soon as possible, perhaps with a weekend away not too far from home. Any lingering problems should then show up, and can be quickly addressed without disrupting a major holiday.

Don't forget to complete and return the change of ownership details if your caravan is CRiS registered. This will make it easier to sell on at a future date, and significantly increase the chances of the caravan being recovered, should you be unfortunate to have it stolen.

Make & Model:

Age:

Asking Price: £.....

Seller's Details:

ITEM	COMMENT	
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Caravan make, model and age suitable and as described	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Phone CRiS and/or Theftcheck to confirm ownership <div>CRiS ☎ 01722 413434</div> <div>Theftcheck ☎ 01342 336885</div>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Service historyHandbookCRiS registrations detailsOther relevant paperwork	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Size & Weight	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Weight, length and width of caravan suitable for your car.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Style, layout and condition of the interior acceptable.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chassis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rust on galvanized chassis? - look for breaches in the galvanized process where rust may occur eg drilled holes. ('White rust' is unsightly but not harmful).Look for stress cracks:<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ where the coupling head bolts to the A-frame➤ where the A-frame joins the main chassis members➤ where the axle mounts to the chassisLook for bends or bulges - chassis may have been grounded, eg on a ferry rampCheck corner steadies operate smoothly and are not bentCheck jockey wheel winds smoothly up and down and the thread is not damaged.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Tyres & Wheels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Age of tyres - if over five years old they will need to be replaced.Check spare-wheel tyre matches other tyres.Look for stress cracks around wheel holes, or dents in wheel rim from kerb damage.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Check service history for maintenance and adjustment; if not available, have a detailed inspection carried out before or immediately after purchase.Check handbrake is effective.Check overrun damper is sound by pushing the hitch back towards the caravan body. A firm push to compress indicates a healthy damper.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

ITEM	COMMENT	
Coupling	Check the coupling action is smooth and parts are well lubricated.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Road Lights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for water in the light covers and signs of green mould. • Check the 7 or 13 pin cables and plugs are clean and free from damage. • Connect up to your vehicle and test lights if possible. 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Bodywork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for accident damage or new panels - may be more visible from a distance • Check sides of caravan run straight and do not bow in or out. • Check seams for signs of the mastic drying out or cracking. If one section looks chalky or dry, chances are all the mastic has suffered a similar fate. • Look for signs of stress cracking or cracking on plastic panels. A degree of surface crazing is acceptable but cracks will need attention. • Give grab handles a tug to make sure they are secure. • Check the inside with a damp meter if available or rely on eyes, nose and touch to detect damp. • Walk up and down the whole floor. If it feels bouncy, floor delamination may be a problem. • Try to see the roof - standing water or staining around openings may lead to damp problems. 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Electrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 12v system can only be checked if a battery is installed, or if you connect to your car battery. A seller should not object if you are a genuine purchaser. • Mains installation - is there an inspection certificate? If not, the installation should be checked over by a qualified electrician. If buying from a dealer, ask for this as part of the deal. 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
LPG System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for signs of perishing of the LPG hose and if in doubt, replace before using the caravan. In any case, hoses should be replaced every three years. • Inspect copper piping for signs of damage. • Check the appliances are working if possible (requires the attachment of an LPG cylinder and appropriate regulator). • Always have the caravan system checked over by a competent person before use. 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Water System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the function of taps, pump, shower etc. • Is the pipework clean and undamaged? • Look for leaks, and check drains work properly. 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

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