

Letters

Your chance to have your say

The writer of our star letter now receives a copy of our guide to Continental touring – *Caravan Europe*



STAR LETTER

Know your limit

AFTER ONE of the best holidays ever at Broadlands Caravan Club Site in Norfolk, we reluctantly packed up and began our homeward journey. We decided to stay at the Club's Milestone site near Newark-on-Trent on the return journey – what a hidden gem that is, too.

However, on our way home, we spotted a weighbridge. I thought we were really frugal packers and would often sit and watch as families arrived on site and unloaded an awning, gas barbecue and five bikes etc. We would sit and wonder how much over their caravan's payload they were?

Arriving at the weighbridge, we decided to weigh both our car and caravan together first. It's a lovely caravan and really light to tow. Our outfit weighed in at 3,740kg. Then we weighed just the caravan, confident that we would be well within its payload as we don't pack very much. Its MRO is 1,023kg and its MTPLM 1,170kg. So, imagine our shock when the chap said it weighed 1,320kg. We couldn't believe our ears. Our awning chairs, spare gas bottle, clothes, etc were in the car.

On arriving home, we decided to empty our caravan of all but the essential items – ie one gas bottle, spare wheel, battery, mover, electric hook-up cable, small travel kettle, lightweight cups and plates, some cutlery, waste water and clean water bottles, two sleeping bags and three pillows. We also emptied both the fresh and waste-water tanks and the toilet. Now, we would be well under!

Betting on who would be correct when we returned to the weighbridge, our caravan now came in at 1,160kg – leaving just 10kg (perhaps enough for both of us to pack a pair of shorts, a T-shirt and a flannel?).

Have any other members tried this experiment? If we had been pulled over to be checked and weighed, we would have never believed our eyes. From now on, all other items will be put in our car – lesson learned.

By the way, for those members interested, it's very easy to use the weighbridge and they give you a printed receipt of your weights (which cost us £5.10).

Lesley & Graham Crow, Lancashire

Title change?

I AM a fan of the wardens who manage our Club sites (although I mostly use CLs) and look

after the interests of members. However, I do wonder why they are called 'wardens'?

To me, the title 'warden' smacks of prison governors, that being the term used in some other parts of the Western world. I seem to remember a sadistic prison governor/warden in the film *The Birdman of Alcatraz* some years ago.

I have only come across one warden in my more than 40 years of membership who, even remotely, resembled that image. We surely don't want our site managers to be tarred

with a brush that might intimate that they are there to keep us locked in.

Is it not time to modernise the image and status of the people who care for and manage our sites and give them a title which properly reflects what they do?

Fred Cullingford, via email

A tall story

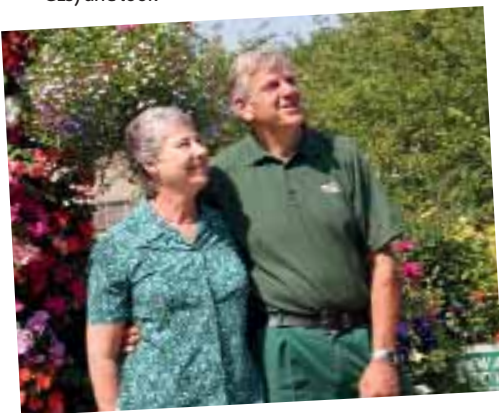
CARAVAN MANUFACTURERS realise that more people are becoming larger, which is why they have made caravans wider, with wider doors. They also realise that people are demanding greater facilities, such as showers and fancy bathrooms, which is why they are making the vehicles longer. But when will the industry wake up and

realise that the world's population is getting taller and design caravans to reflect this? I feel the internal height should be 6ft 10in and beds need to be 6ft 6in long. Even average height people will appreciate the extra space.

So, come on caravan manufacturers, don't just read this letter, take action! This can be your USP.

Peter Winfield, via email

Comment: Over recent years I think it's safe to say that interior height in caravans has become greater. A look at our recent caravan tests shows that most offer standing room of at least 6ft 5in (the Fifth Wheel Co Inos, 6ft 8in). There are also the issues of interior practicalities (taller caravans means higher roof lockers, putting them out of reach of many), as well as aerodynamics, weight and stability to take into consideration. It's a far more complicated issue than simply adding 5in or so to a caravan's height – Editor



Have you got something to say?

Send your letters to The Caravan Club Magazine, East Grinstead House, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 1UA. Alternatively, email us at magazine@caravanclub.co.uk. Apologies, but due to the quantity of post we receive we are no longer able to send acknowledgments on receipt of letters. If your letter is not intended for publication, please email or write to the appropriate department (eg Emergency Services, Finance, Insurance, Technical, Travel Services, Sites Operations etc) – see caravanclub.co.uk/contact for further details.

magazine@caravanclub.co.uk

Speedy recovery

I THOUGHT you might be interested in this positive story. On 23 September at 5.10pm, a suspicious Ford Transit van was seen travelling on the M5 near

Birmingham, towing a caravan. Two of my officers were able to locate this vehicle and, along with their colleagues, stop it at Hilton Services on the M6 in Staffordshire.

Once stopped, officers obtained the CRiS number and I attempted to contact CRiS to perform a check. Unfortunately, their offices had closed at 5pm (I am in no way criticising them, as for their offices to be open until 5pm on a Sunday is very good).

Following this, I contacted Ian Walker from Star Leisure Caravan Recovery. Ian immediately began to try and help us identify the caravan. I left him making some enquiries and spoke again to the officers at the scene. They had now found a Caravan Club membership card. Armed with this, I again contacted Ian Walker and he was able to contact The Caravan Club. Within minutes he had the caravan's owner on the phone – you can imagine their surprise when we said we had their caravan in Staffordshire when, to the best of their knowledge, it was in storage somewhere in Warwickshire.

Further checks revealed the Transit van towing the stolen caravan was also stolen and on false plates. The back of the van was full of equipment

that could be used to steal caravans. Two males were arrested on suspicion of theft of both vehicles and are being dealt with by Warwickshire Police.

This is a fantastic result for us. Had it not been for Ian's help we may not have identified this caravan as stolen and, if the Transit had not been stolen, there is a possibility that the caravan could have been allowed to continue on its journey and never seen again. It's possibly one of the quickest recoveries of a stolen caravan we have heard of.
Rob Barker, Central Motorway Police Group

Membership fee

I HAVE recently received my membership cards for September 2012 to September 2013, with an accompanying letter detailing the fee.

This letter does not inform that the membership cost has increased by £2 per annum, for the third year running, which I have to say I find a little underhand as I also do not remember The Caravan Club broadcasting this or the previous increases.

Surely, when almost everyone is having to find savings, the Club should be attempting to hold membership costs? It is making me seriously

consider whether to continue our Joint membership, which I find difficult to say after more than 25 years.

Robert Lawrence, via email

Comment: While we are always looking at ways to reduce costs without compromising the quality of service to members, we have had to increase the membership subscription in order to cover the increasing costs incurred in the running of the Club. We still think that £42 represents excellent value for money, as it covers Full and Joint membership, 12 issues of this magazine, access to our 200-plus sites and 2,500 CLs, the chance to take advantage of a variety of travel and insurance services, and a great range of offers that are only available to members. Just to reassure you, whenever there is an increase to Club membership it is detailed in the magazine – see p6 of the January 2012 issue for the story on the 2012 membership fee – Editor

Bike rack warning

IF YOU are having a bike rack fitted to your motorhome, check that your fitter is fully aware of the correct fixing points. We had a short rack fitted by a

dealer under the rear window of our new vehicle but checks had not been made as to the correct fixing points, resulting in the rack pulling through one side of the interior wall, leaving it badly damaged.

Fortunately, when it happened we were only a few minutes from our destination and were able to quickly remove the bikes – or the damage could have been a lot worse. I dread to think what could have happened if we had been travelling down a motorway and not been able to stop quickly.
L Thompson, via email

Got it covered?

I HAVE just read the article in the September issue about caravan insurance, in particular having cover all year. You mention the hailstorm in Leicestershire – well, I was there and it was horrendous (it lasted over two hours). I had a phone call from the site owner at my storage compound. He was contacting all owners to come and check their caravans, as a lot of damage had been done. Mine was one of 40 in the compound, and every one had substantial damage.

The roof on mine looked just like a huge sheet of bubble wrap, and both

sides had hundreds of dents. A few days later, I was talking to an insurance assessor on the site and he said that many of the caravans were not insured, and that at least 25% of them would be written off.

Thankfully, mine was covered. The cost of the repairs – £10,056.40!

Having insurance cover all the year really does make sense.

John Glover, Leicestershire

Red Pennant praise

I AM writing to you regarding the excellent service we received from Red Pennant insurance when our Auto-Sleeper motorhome unfortunately developed a mechanical fault while we were on holiday in France.

The fault developed during the first day of our holiday when we were travelling from St Malo to Quimper

(approximately 145 miles). By the time we arrived in Quimper, the van was losing power and caused a lot of attention as we noisily approached our site. This appears to have been caused by problems with the head gasket.

On telephoning the Red Pennant Emergency Call Centre, they immediately took over our case, promptly and efficiently dealing with all necessary telephone calls on my

behalf, both to a local garage and our camp site. They made the necessary arrangements for our vehicle to be transported to the local Peugeot main dealer by low-loader and arranged alternative accommodation for my wife and I while our vehicle was inspected and hopefully repaired.

Our motorhome was subsequently returned to the site, again on a low-loader, so that we could continue

In the picture 1

IN THE article entitled 'Fine Tuning' by Lee Davey in the August issue, there is reference to an Easy Find Satellite Finder which has coloured lights indicating when the specified satellite has been found for TV reception. This is interesting because it seems to find only the specified satellite, making it much easier to locate it.

I have searched on the internet for the satellite finder shown in the photos, but cannot find it and the illustrated type is not on the Aerial Shack website. I have only found an LNB with this feature, but it can only be used with an Easy Find receiver.

I would very much like to locate the actual Easy Find satellite finder to use with my Avtex TV which has a

built-in satellite receiver similar to the TV referred to by the author. This would make it much easier to find the Astra satellite.

Dennis Watts, via email

Comment: The Easy Find system with the red/green/amber lights is only available as part of the LNB (as shown in the pictures) and Dennis is correct in stating that the LNB needs an Easy Find receiver to operate it. A traditional satellite finder will tell you the strength of a satellite signal, but on its own won't let you know if you've got the correct satellite. After using an Easy Find kit, personally, I'd say it's money well spent – doubly so as I sold my old, smaller, satellite kit on eBay for £65, making the complete Easy Find kit more affordable. Once the Easy Find receiver has found

the correct satellite, it's possible to plug the LNB lead straight into the TV and use the TV's own built-in receiver – that's what I do on my Cello TV to reduce clutter in the caravan – Lee Davey

In the picture 2

LEE DAVEY'S 'essential guide' to satellite television left out a piece of vital information. Good satellite reception depends on combining the

correct dish direction and elevation angle and the skew (of the LNB). Go to dishpointer.com and insert the post code or place name of where you are or will be and it will provide you with all three numbers using Google maps. For a really comprehensive guide to setting up satellite TV, go to satelliteforcaravans.co.uk – a web site set up and maintained by a fellow caravanner, David Sullivan.

Colin Thom, via email





WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

Unfortunately, we can't print all of your letters – so why not join in discussions at caravanclub.co.uk/together? Here's a taster of what members are chatting about.

Discussion:

Dover Port or stay in France?

"Any advice from those who have done either would be gratefully received."

Bebo

"I prefer an afternoon crossing and then get a couple of hours' driving in before an overnight stop. Then you're fresh to do more driving in France the next day."

JimE

"We always drive down to Folkestone and stay at Capel Farm CL. It is nice and flat, the facilities are close to the pitches, and there's no need to unhitch. It's just 10 minutes to the tunnel."

bestboy

"We have stayed at Black Horse Farm on one of the ferry pitches and the site is very convenient for a ferry. There is also a nice pub just outside the entrance."

Francis

Discussion:

Heading off late in the season

"We're planning to head off in the motorhome next week [posted 1 October]. We'll be meandering south from Scotland to Hampshire and then on to South Devon. Our first stop will be Enlethwaite Hall for the night and then perhaps somewhere in Yorkshire, but does anyone have any favourite sites to recommend?"

Mrjingles

"Putts Corner is handy for Sidmouth and Exmouth [with parking for motorhomes] and, of course, Hillhead for Brixham and Torquay. The weather is usually better over there. Cheddar is a lovely site to stop off at too, with an easy walk into town."

t4ford

to use it for the remainder of the holiday, as the garage was unable to deal with the repair.

At the end of our holiday, Red Pennant arranged car hire for us, with an overnight stop, to enable us to return to the UK as arranged. Our van was then transported back to a garage local to us in the UK the following day to enable the repairs to be carried out.

Red Pennant dealt with my problems efficiently and I was kept fully informed of all developments. Nothing was too much trouble for them and they made all necessary phone calls and arrangements on my behalf to enable my holiday to continue smoothly.

I will certainly continue to use Red Pennant insurance in the future and have no hesitation in recommending their services.

Ron Hewson, West Sussex



Weighting game

NORMA PEJSAK (September issue Letters) is correct that weighing is the best way to find out how much gas is left in a bottle, but unfortunately I believe her assumptions are wrong. The tare (empty) weight varies, but it's stamped on each individual cylinder. The accompanying photo shows a Calor 7kg butane bottle, marked unhelpfully in pounds and ounces. This one is 20lb 4oz or 9.2kg, not the 8kg Norma believes. More simply, just weigh the full bottle when you buy it. The empty weight will be 7kg less, or likewise for other cylinder sizes.

John Cole, Devon

Rally treat

I'D JUST like to say a big thank you to event organisers Bob and Joan Stockily and their assistants Brian, Mavis, Alan and Elaine of the South Essex Centre for such a great holiday in Brittany, France. It was our first time caravanning abroad, but we had a wonderful time and have nothing but praise for the aforementioned people. It was such a beautiful part of France that we hope to return.

Can I just say to anybody who loves caravanning and meeting likeminded

people, do attend rallies. They are a wonderful way to make new friends and see some lovely places.

Ken & Julie Smith, South Lancs Centre

Helping hands

I'D LIKE to thank two fellow Club members who helped us out of a terrible predicament in August.

We were tootling along in our campervan en route to the Club's Park Coppice site when it started to pelt it down. Indeed, by the time we got on the Hawes-Ingleton road, water was raging downhill past us.

We drove carefully through a few hollows full of water but came to one which was deeper than we thought. We were suddenly engulfed by a mini tsunami and the van stopped dead in the middle. Although we had Green Flag cover, we had no signal on our mobiles to be able to call them.

The rain then stopped for a while and the water went down to knee-high level. Several vehicles went past without acknowledging us, until a knight in shining armour – or a driver of a Range Rover – stopped and asked if he could help.

Fellow members, he and his wife were on their way back to the Club's Brown Moor site. They kindly took me to a public telephone box, waited while I called Green Flag and then took me back to my husband and our stranded

motorhome, which by now had been pushed out of the water by a couple of soldiers and another vehicle owner.

We learned a few lessons that day:

1. Do not try and estimate how deep a dip of water is.

2. Do not think because you are sat higher in a motorhome that the engine is also at a higher level.

3. Finally, never travel without recovery cover.

Typically, it was a member who helped us – we're a friendly lot, aren't we? Thanks a million to our helper.

Joan Procter, via email

Hooked on caravans

WE STARTED looking for a cheap caravan at the end of last year, with the idea to try out this lifestyle to see if we were suited. We have no knowledge of caravan holidays as neither friends nor relatives had ever had a vehicle, but as our children have reached the ages of eight and 12, we thought that if we didn't try it now we never would.

To cut a lot of caravan-hunting days short, in January we ended up buying a not-so-cheap 2006 Abbey Advantage which had hardly been used – and what a good choice it has been.

We have been away for six weekends and a fortnight during the summer. As I write this, we have a week's holiday planned for October and have also booked our sites for a

Early starter

I WRITE in response to Katrina Morris's letter (August issue). I too am a 'young one' having recently celebrated my 24th birthday at the end of July. I bought my first caravan, a Freedom Jetstream (called 'The Toaster'), when I was 18. For my 19th birthday, I traded it in and replaced it with a Sterckeman Starlett which I then had for two years.

Then, when shopping for an awning, I came across a Bessacarr Cameo that took my eye and

ended up leaving the dealer having bought a new caravan instead. I had the Bessacarr for just over 12 months when I fancied a change back to a fixed-bed model.

My current caravan is a Lunar Lexon (see photo) and I am planning on keeping this one for a few years. It is such a shame more people our age don't take up this fantastic hobby – it would be so good to see more of us out there. I have yet to meet a fellow Club member my age on site.

Matthew Charleston, via email



Christmas break – so, it seems that caravanning suits us after all.

The nicest part of this lifestyle is the people. We have had help from fellow members with our awning and been given some excellent advice on all the finer details of caravanning.

Our last trip took us to Blackwall Plantation and thanks to our neighbours, Dave and Sue, we are beginning to feel that we belong to this very special Club. We now just need to sort out next year's trips.

Simon & Heather Asquith, via email

Shower support

ALTHOUGH YOUR June edition arrived a few months ago, I have not since seen any responses to the suggestion made by a member, in a letter entitled 'Shower talk', that caravans do not need showers and that no one uses them.

Caravanning took on a new attraction for me when we first had a model with a shower cubicle, perhaps about 15 years ago. I can now turn the heating up, use as much water as I like, have everything to hand and shower at whatever time suits me.

Prior to this, I used to go and shower in the toilet blocks late at night so there was a bit more privacy and I could take as long as I liked without being conscious of a queue of people as there is in the mornings.

When we first caravanned in the 1970s with four little girls, we had to make do with bowls of water in the awning and a sort of shower hose worn around the neck.

So, please don't take a backward step and abolish on-board shower cubicles. We are actually using CLs a lot more these days as we do not use any of the communal facilities which we pay for in the Club site fee.

Janice Patient, via email



That sinking feeling

NICK HARDING'S interesting test article on the T@B 400TD in the August issue showed a photograph of a wide but very shallow sink in the kitchen unit (right).

We bought a Lunar caravan this year. It has many good features but it also has a very wide and shallow sink. I hope this trend will die a quick death as it has two main drawbacks:

1. It limits the amount of usable worktop.
2. It is impossible to buy a bowl that is shallow enough to fit in the sink (the Lunar top has a cover to the sink).

We searched for weeks to find one to fit and eventually bought a steel dog bowl which had a good, non-slip plastic base.

Jo Fowler, Hampshire



Super wardens

HAVING RECENTLY returned from three weeks at the Club's Hunter's Moon site, I wondered how often members recognise the work that is done on their behalf?

During our stay, I was reading the site comments book and was pleased to see some very positive words. Hunter's Moon is a wonderful site – it is perfectly maintained, well managed and is situated in a beautiful area of Dorset. It also has very hard-working and committed wardens. Having visited the site previously, it means such a lot to be welcomed back in a friendly and warm manner.

I decided to record this in the comments book and added a few words about the wardens. I said that wardens should be like football referees, there to see fair play, that rules are obeyed, be there when required but not really noticed. I reckon Hunter's Moon has the [top referee] Howard Webbs of wardens.

After we left the site at the end of our stay, and as we were on our way home, my wife discovered she had lost one of her earrings – a small gold one which had sentimental value.

After arriving home, we couldn't find it in the car or the caravan. As a last resort, my wife telephoned the wardens at Hunter's Moon and told them what had happened. Without hesitation, the lady warden immediately said she would go and have a look for it. Bearing in mind the size of a small earring and the size of a hardstanding pitch, we did not hold out much hope. Imagine our amazement when, within 15 minutes, we received a call to say she had found the earring.

How accurate my words in the comments book turned out to be. Many thanks to those wardens for their hard work and the willingness to do just that bit extra for members. The Club should be immensely proud of these wardens and all the others we so often take for granted.

Robin Searle, Worksop

Auto fan

I READ fellow member Mr Brown's letter ('Auto select', August issue) with great interest and would like to add my two-penny worth.

I decided to buy a 2008 VW Golf 1.9TDi (105bhp) with a six-speed automatic gearbox to tow my Lunar Ariva caravan. I read all the spec which looked right on paper, but I could not take the car for a towing test drive as no towbar had been fitted.

So, I took delivery hoping that it would be okay once I had had the

towbar installed. And boy, what a tow car it is. There is plenty of power, the auto change is so smooth and it is economical – it returns 33mpg towing and 50-60mpg solo. On motorways and the like, the cruise control is excellent, too. Another good feature is the ability to move into manual mode and select the gear I want if I feel the road conditions warrant it. It is all so simple and effortless. I am impressed.

If I go back to the 1980s, I towed with a 3.0-litre Austin with a four-speed auto box which caused me no end of problems – largely because I didn't realise that a cooler should have been fitted to the gearbox. Solo it was great, but nothing like as efficient as today's DSG gearboxes.

So, if anyone is contemplating buying an automatic car, then, as long as all the normal parameters and guidelines are observed, you should enjoy effortless motoring.

John Peers, West Sussex

