



Double time

Mike Steer reviews feedback from the owners of used two-berth models from Bailey and the now-defunct Avondale

THEY SAY good things come in small packages. While this might be true of diamond rings, we decided to see if the expression could apply equally to caravans. For this month's 'Buying Used' our gaze settled upon the Dart 380 from the now-extinct Avondale and the Bailey Ranger 380/2. Clearly these two models are from the 'petites' department, strictly two-berth, light in weight and short in length.

Twenty-three Club members (15 Dart and eight Ranger owners) gave us the benefit of their impressions of owning and using one of these mid-spec models.

The 'Buying Used' questionnaire invites owners to mark no fewer than 81 caravan features as 'excellent', 'good', 'acceptable' or 'bad' and we compute the results into percentage scores. It rapidly became clear that in overall terms there was little to choose between these two models.

LIKES AND DISLIKES

It was Dart's dimensions that particularly captured owners' hearts, and its towability and manoeuvrability were praised by many contributors. "Small and light but no compromise on equipment" wrote the owner of a 2006 model. The Dart is "light, manageable, comfy and tows well – just the

job for the two of us" confirmed a 2004 owner. The side-locker gas bottle storage and under-floor spare wheel compartment were the favourites of another member, this one with a 2005 vintage.

However, the Dart came under fire from a few quarters for "terrible reliability", a "rubbish finish" and an apparent lack of durability; these comments were made by owners of 2005, 2006 and 2007 models, respectively.

A couple of members reported difficulty in controlling noseweight, stating it was too high with the caravan unladen. Furthermore, the single beds were criticised for being too short, and "useless" for anyone over 5ft 8in. This was not a bother to the self-confessed 'vertically challenged' husband and wife team whose main complaint was that the Dart's height necessitated the transport of a step ladder simply to erect an awning.

Bailey owners chose towing stability as their favourite feature, together with the ease of manhandling the Ranger 380/2 once unhitched. The internal dimensions, not large by any stretch of the imagination, were, in the view of our members, more than ample, one calling his Bailey "a real home from home". On the downside, Bailey build quality was called into question

by one member, who felt his 2005 caravan's exterior finish and windows left something to be desired. Issues with the Ranger's "meagre" load allowance and its small washroom were singled out by others.

ON THE ROAD

A big advantage with a small caravan is that the majority of family cars will have the weight and muscle-power to tow it.

Apart from the aforementioned noseweight issues, the Dart proved to be a delight to tow. "Hardly know it's behind me," wrote the member with a BMW 120D doing the pulling, while another contributor enthused that the experience was "fantastic – even when going fast!" towing with a Skoda Fabia.

The Ranger was equally steady; "Excellent!" exclaimed the owner with a Saab saloon at the fore. And with a road behaviour score of 74%, the Ranger proved to be a match for the similarly-rated Dart.

SLEEPING

Among Dart owners, some liked the comfort of sleeping on the foam cushions (rolled edges the exception) and found double-bed making "straightforward".

Above: Bailey Ranger's kitchen scored quite well

Below: Dart owners were happy with the living space offered by their caravan

DID YOU KNOW?
Bailey celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2008

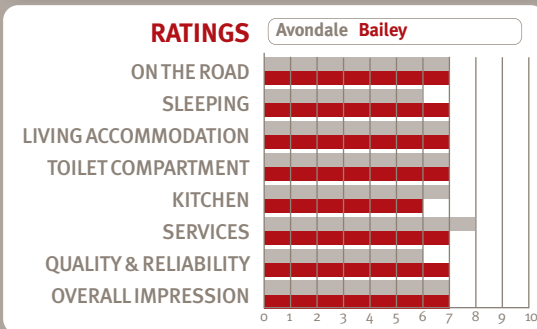




The 2008 Dart 380



The most recent incarnation of the Ranger 380/2



	Avondale	Bailey
Internal length	3.86m (12ft 8in)	3.67m (12ft 1in)
Overall length	5.32m (17ft 5in)	5.34m (17ft 6in)
Width	2.09m (6ft 10in)	2.19m (7ft 2in)
Headroom	info not available	1.90m (6ft 3in)
MRO	826kg (16.2 cwt)	827kg (16.2 cwt)
MTPLM	1000kg (19.6 cwt)	997kg (19.6 cwt)
Berths	2	2
New price ex works	£10,670 (2008)	£10,495 (2009)

AVERAGE USED PRICES

Year	Avondale	Bailey
2003	£3963	£4138
2004	£4475	£4613
2005	£4963	£5086
2006	£5500	n/a
2007	£6075	n/a
2008	£6675	n/a

OWNER PROFILE

	Avondale	Bailey	Average
Age	69	69	69
Driving Experience Yrs	49	44	47
Towing Experience Yrs	31	25	29
Mileage	5208	3150	4492
No. of Contributors	15	8	Total 23

Club insurance: 01342 336610 • Info: bailey-caravans.co.uk

At five years old, one Dart's upholstery was beginning to show its age and becoming "misshapen", though others of similar vintage received no complaints.

Making up a double bed in a Bailey Ranger was described as a "minor nuisance" by one owner, while others and partners preferred to sleep on singles.

KITCHEN/COOKING

Just inside the doorway, each model sports a modest kitchen, each receiving a modest score. The kitchen in the Dart would have benefitted from a few wall tiles; it seems the area is too easily soiled by cooking splashes. The oven in the 2006 version was described as "poor" and with no auto-ignition; also the model lacks an Omni-vent extractor. Despite all this, the Dart kitchen was claimed by various owners to be all of "satisfactory", "good" and "excellent".

Bailey owners criticised the position of the Ranger kitchen sink tap, and thought the gas controls were set too close to the burners they were controlling, making the knobs hot to touch. The fridge area was draughty and a kitchen blind was buckled by the heat from the hob. Oh, and Bailey's kitchen needed a splashback too.

TOILET COMPARTMENT

"Small but adequate" was the message from the owner of a 2006 Dart, despite his surprise when the shower head bracket fell off the washroom wall.

Despite its limited space, Dart owners seemed satisfied with the washroom facilities, although one was put off from showering - "...only used it once, and the water went everywhere," he exclaimed.

"A window would have been nice," said the owner of a '98 Bailey Ranger, the oldest candidate this time (that's the caravan, not the owner).

An "atrocious design" made the Ranger's washroom a pig to clean, and the stepped toilet made the loo awkward to use.

Despite these issues, and with a bit of help from site toilet blocks, both models escaped with fair washroom marks.

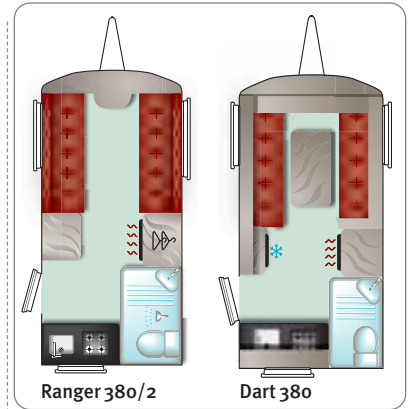
LIVING ACCOMMODATION

The Dart provided our members with an ample living area. Owners marked its main table generously, but they especially liked its small pull-out table up front, one member adapting it into a TV stand by wiring an aerial and mains socket nearby.

The Bailey was equally snug, one owner confirming the Ranger as "very comfortable", and others awarding high marks for its daytime practicality, ventilation and lighting.

SERVICES

The Dart's creditable 77% services score came despite a few annoying snags such as a mains power breakdown, airlocks in the



Ranger 380/2

Dart 380

water system, plumbing coming adrift, "poorly designed" siting of electrical controls and, unusually, a submersible water pump that failed to sink and instead "floats to top so the taps don't work".

Bailey's score too was in the 70s. One member described his Ranger's power and plumbing services as "excellent", although another had experienced thermostat failure, and a third complained that the waste water outlets were "too far underneath the caravan".

QUALITY AND RELIABILITY

Of the 15 Avondale Dart owners, six had something negative to say about their caravan's Q&R.

"The most unreliable caravan I have owned in 40 years" said one. "Extremely poor; door panels not glued but fixed with small staples" alleged another. It was left up to the other nine hopefully contented owners to bolster up Dart's score to a reasonable 65%.

Many members complimented the Ranger's build standard, though one told us of his 2005 model undergoing "an almost total rebuild" under warranty, and another with a 2002 vintage thought that Bailey could have used "...more common sense when on the drawing board".

But would our members recommend their model to a friend?

AVONDALE DART 380

Yes: 8 (53%) No: 6

Don't know: 1

BAILEY RANGER 380/2

Yes: 6 (75%) No: 2

Don't know: 0

VERDICT

An alarming number of owners were reluctant to recommend the Dart. It is hard to tell if this was due solely to dissatisfaction with the caravan or whether Avondale's demise had a big influence.

However, Bailey's Ranger 380/2 received considerably better feedback when it came to recommendations.

It seems that anyone in the market for a small, used caravan could be well served by either one of these models. But the advice is to check it out very carefully before parting with your cash. ■