

# Changing pitch

Once a caravanner, always a caravanner – **Shane Barratt** explains why there really is no alternative to the touring lifestyle

Ordinarily, my end-of-year lists are designed to leave you breathless as I count down my Top Five ‘Most Emotional Moments In An Awning’, ‘Wild Bean Cafés I Have Queued In’ or ‘Banal Conversations With Strangers In A Shower Block’. The sense of anticipation is unbearable as I round off each list with a trumpet fanfare and announce the Number One.

This year the formula is different. My chosen topic is ‘The Top Five Forms Of Holiday Accommodation I Have Patronised During 2010’. And for a change I shan’t beat around the bush nor leave you guessing. Instead, without further ado, I’ll get straight to the point. Nay, even cut to the chase. Ladies and gentlemen, the caravan wins. Quelle surprise!

When it comes to the crunch, caravans are going to win every time. It’s an emotional thing and I’m an emotional man, as anyone who has seen me reversing our Swift in the dark after a 200-mile journey can attest.

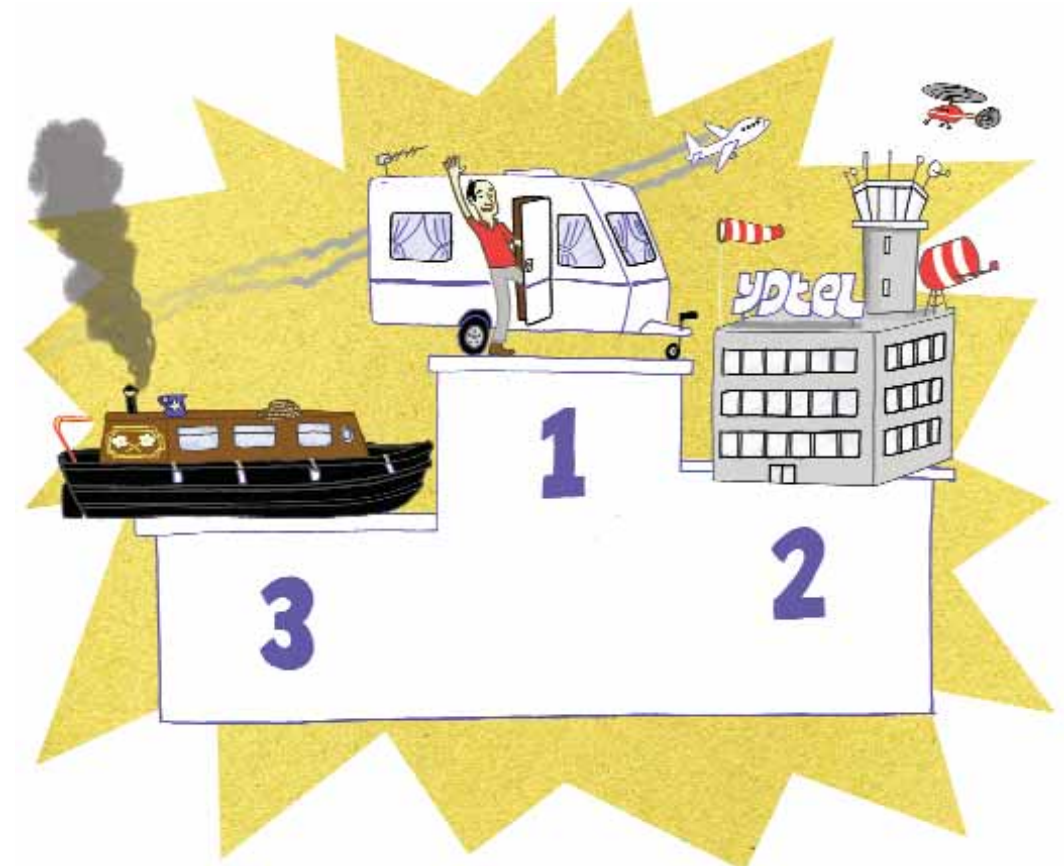
In terms of destinations and holidays, I can’t say it’s been a vintage caravanning year, though. Dorset was a wash-out, Anglesey was a bit too far away for a long weekend, while Lincoln was most memorable not for its remarkable history and beautiful architecture, but for an agonising afternoon spent trawling the shopping centre for hair straighteners.

Sandra had left them at home and neither she nor Louise could function as human beings without them. My suggestion that they struggle through the weekend with their natural curls met with a horrid rebuke from Sandra along the lines of: “How would you feel if you forgot your comb for your comb-over?”

Despite all this trauma, there were enough sublime times sat on deckchairs watching the sun go down or playing charades in the awning with the rain pelting down to remind me how much I value this hobby. In terms of fresh air, family fun and pure escape, nothing else comes close.

Something I find amusing about caravan magazines in general is the complete denial that the readers ever sample other types of holiday accommodation. B&Bs, holiday cottages, package tours – collectively they are like a big, dirty family secret that must never, ever be mentioned.

Well, I’m sorry, but I can conceal my shame no longer. Damn it, we



Barratts did stay in non-caravan accommodation in 2010! All I ask is that somehow, some way, you can find forgiveness in your hearts.

With our Swift safely ensconced in the undisputed number one spot, how does the rest of the Top Five look?

#### ■ Number Five – Posh Hotel

Sandra somehow persuaded me to part with the equivalent of 35 nights’ worth of Club site fees in order for us to have a romantic time at a top London hotel on her birthday. Now, I enjoy the odd country hotel stay, especially where good food and spa facilities are concerned, but this seemed like a vulgar amount of money to spend for the privilege of using something called a ‘pillow menu’. I tried being romantic but Sandra’s stunning dress, pouting lips and fluttering eyelashes kept getting obscured by the pound signs floating in front of my eyes. Well, okay, not totally obscured.

#### ■ Number Four – Holiday Cottage

People take the mickey out of caravanners ‘moving their living rooms into the countryside’ at weekends, but what does that say about holiday cottage lovers? We went halves with our friends during Whitsun on a place on the Kent coast. The company and the open fire were lovely but the rest of the facilities left me wondering exactly what this place and the surroundings had that our own home in Norfolk hadn’t.

#### ■ Number Three – Boat

When you live as close to the Broads as we do, it’s rude not to visit. We hired a craft for Louise’s birthday in July. It was great fun during the day, coasting along, enjoying the novelty and the odd ale. Not so much fun at night with Louise and her mates getting tipsy on Shandy Bass. It was damp and claustrophobic but an experience never to be forgotten.

#### ■ Number Two – Yotel

For those who don’t know, a ‘Yotel’ is like a cross between a luxury hotel and a rabbit hutch. I stayed in the one at Heathrow and loved every minute of it. We caravanners are used to the economy of space, but this is like taking the challenge a subterranean step further... and boy is it both fun and cheap. Mine cost £50. Yes folks, it really is possible to enjoy your time at Heathrow Terminal 4.

So there you have it. Unless Yotel plans on opening outlets in hundreds of rural beauty spots throughout Britain, I think my holidaying destiny in 2011 is pretty obvious. As Frank Lampard Senior, the great philosopher and 1970s left-back once opined about West Ham United: “You’re just claret and blue and that’s how it is.” I may not have Frank Snr’s beard nor cult status, but I feel exactly the same way about caravans. I’m pretty sure you do, too.

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