



QUARTZ IN A PINT POT

Easy to store, cheap to tow – this smart convertible caravan squeezes in all the essentials and more, says **Nick Harding**

Vehicle supplied for test by: Casey's Outdoor Leisure, Grosvenor Garden Centre, Wrexham Road, Belgrave, Chester CH4 9EB. Call 01244 682002.

FOLDING CAMPERS have many merits, but if you desire something that's just a bit more caravan-like in terms of its specification, yet still want all the other benefits, perhaps this is what you're looking for.

Under its twin brands Pennine and Conway, Pennine Group is the UK's leading maker of folding campers (not to be confused with trailer tents, although it does them, too). But that hasn't stopped it looking for pastures new with some subtle changes to its normal themes. Pennine gave us convertible caravans as recently as 2008, initially under the Conway banner, but, as success seemed assured, it soon added some Pennine versions. When the three-strong Quartz

range came along for this season, it took up position at the top of the portfolio.

My test took place at the Club's Chester Fair Oaks site, during a particularly good spell of June weather. It certainly boded well for the test experience...

CONSTRUCTION

That the Quartz 6 only came second in the Club's latest Lightweight Leisure Trailer Awards – even if it was sandwiched between Pennine's own Conway models, Crusader and Countryman – should be of small concern to the Lancashire-based company. If nothing else, it highlights the consistent pedigree of its manufacturing.

Sure enough, the Quartz 6 uses tried-and-trusted techniques, and then

some. For starters, it certainly has a rather snazzy look to it. The silver finish to the caravan bodywork, the alloy wheels and the complementary blacks and greys of the materials certainly draw the attention.

It's on a standard Al-Ko chassis complete with hitch stabiliser, rated at just 1,000kg, which suggests versatility where towcars are concerned. Everything you see here is standard, too, from the stabiliser and lock to the underslung spare wheel and carrier. There's some 180kg of payload, which could easily be used should you decide to take advantage of the considerable storage space, even when the caravan is folded down for travel.

As for the 'canvas', the sidewalls are a breathable acrylic that certainly gives the

Quartz a rather warm ambience when you're actually living under it. Pennine calls it Isatex, a breathable, coated polyester supplied to its own specifications by well-known awning manufacturer Isabella.

There's a real quality feel to this fabric, which also claims superior waterproof and wipe-clean qualities.

If you're left in any doubts, Pennine has recently increased its warranty to a full three years for the Quartz range.

TOWABILITY

If you've ever had any concerns about towing a large white box, perhaps the solution is a small silver box...

Weighing just 820kg when it leaves the factory, this really is simplicity itself to hitch up and tow away, and many owners will probably be happy enough to manhandle it into position.

On the road, there's no hint of buffeting and there are certainly moments you could quite forget you're towing anything at all (but don't, please). A hitch stabiliser might be part of the package, but the unit has impeccable road manners.

USABILITY

Although storage is easy, that's not to say you won't have plenty of living space and the benefit of two double bedrooms once on site. It's easier to set up than you might expect (it's actually the additional awning, which most will consider an essential for longer breaks, that really takes the time).

If you like fresh air, a large section of the side can be unzipped and rolled back. Plus, there's the Penn-Vent system of ventilation at all the main windows – poles bow out to allow fresh air to circulate as required.

You might disagree, but I think the feeling of being surrounded by light and airy canvas is actually preferable to the more enclosed ambience of a typical solid-sided caravan. Insulation is another matter – having said that, the two-speed blown-air heater doesn't half give a blast of warmth when required.

Everything folds out in a logical fashion via a system of supports. Because the main unit does not require pegging out (the key point that distinguishes a convertible caravan/folding camper from a trailer tent), you can use hard-standings or, as here, grass. If you think I've pitched incorrectly, or broken any rules, let me say that we were allowed to position the unit like this purely for photography.

LIVING AND SLEEPING

Two separate bedrooms in a unit just 15ft 9in long when it's ready for the road? Some mistake? Not at all.

Both rooms are the same width – a healthy 6ft 6in – but the bed at the front is slightly wider, so we will designate that the parents' sleeping area. Also, it seems, the nearside settee finds favour with some customers as a single bed for a child – a kind of unofficial fifth berth.

If I have one criticism here, it's of the mattresses. The springs feel as though they're of the cheaper variety and I'd prefer firmer support, or even memory foam if Pennine isn't prepared to go as far as some of the excellent pocket-sprung mattresses sported by mainstream caravans.

In fairness, Pennine admits it's had a few 'issues' with mattress supply recently, something that already has been addressed. It's definitely something to check out for yourselves when you go to see a Quartz.

The free-standing table, for use inside or out, is one of the largest I've ever come across in any leisure vehicle. In fact, such is its size it's slightly awkward when used in the main lounge. It's a generous lounge area, too, seating up to five in a fair degree of comfort within its U-shape, and still leaves plenty of access to the kitchen area adjacent (table withstanding).

Based on sales to date, it's fair to say most Quartz buyers are likely to specify the full-size £1,375 awning that doesn't feature here but, of course, adds a whole new dimension to the living experience. >>>

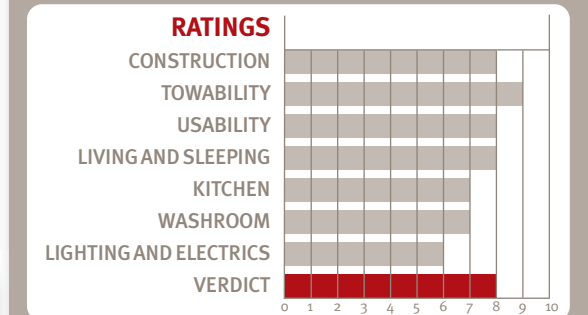


Oven, hob and sink/drainer are all part of the standard package



The kitchen units are physically lifted into their dedicated slots

“ This really is simplicity itself to hitch up and tow away ”



| | |
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| RRP | £12,750 OTR |
| Overall length | 15ft 9in (4.78m)/19ft 8in (6m) erected |
| Overall width | 7ft (2.12m) |
| Overall height | 4ft 8in (1.39m)/8ft 11in (2.70m) erected |
| Internal length | 19ft 8in (6m) |
| Max internal height | 7ft 11in (2.40m) |
| MRO | 820kg (16.1cwt) |
| MTPLM | 1,000kg (19.7cwt) |
| User payload | 180kg (3.5cwt) |
| Berths | 4 |
| NCC approved | No |

Figures supplied by manufacturer

Club insurance: 01342 336610 • Info: thepenninegroup.co.uk



Easy does it! The Quartz is simple to set up



Spacious lounge has a large table



The Quartz feels light and airy



Washroom has a folding sink and flushing toilet

KITCHEN

As part of the setting-up process, the kitchen units – Spinflo hob/grill and stainless steel sink/drainer plus a bulkhead for the cooker – are physically lifted up onto their dedicated slots. They are then simply plugged into the gas and electric services and there are sufficient clips and straps to ensure nothing's going to go anywhere.

There's also a small oven and a 55-litre fridge adjacent. Storage is pretty good, and even includes a proper cutlery drawer. True, there's a shortage of worktop if you have the lid of the sink/drainer up, but otherwise the level of kit for the chef is very encouraging.

Don't forget, there's also an exterior gas point for any outdoor cooking appliance as part of the standard spec.

WASHROOM

This is clever, and was certainly a surprise to one couple that came to have a look while I was pitched up at the Chester Fair Oaks site. It's a full-height, solid-sided washroom, complete with tip-up sink and Thetford cassette toilet with electric flush. It's hard to see how a locker can be squeezed in here but a few towel hooks wouldn't have gone amiss. There are toothbrush holders, however.

There's no shower, but it's easy to imagine this wouldn't be beyond the capabilities of Pennine's designers should there be public demand. For now, you'll have to content yourself with the external shower offering that can come in quite useful for washing off dirty boots etc.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

Mains hook-up is available (like any new caravan, you'll need to order a 12V leisure battery separately via your dealer), and there are sockets for 12V, 230V and even a TV aerial on-board. There's also an external mains socket.

Overall, it's definitely that bit more basic than a full caravan, but there's actually a decent spread of general lighting (energy-saving LEDs are yet to feature on the Pennine itinerary). If you like direct lighting for reading, you'll be disappointed. Likewise, there's the one bedroom light at the front, which is more for general illumination than reading in bed.

VERDICT

Pennine, with all its folding camper know-how, has come up with a clever and incredibly well thought out unit with the Quartz 6. Believe me, though, this is

more than just a folding camper in new clothing. It might just appeal to existing caravanners, especially those who are looking to 'downsize' their towcars. Indeed, Pennine reckons you'll save some £1,000 a year in terms of fuel used, insurance and storage (that sounds a conservative estimate to me) over an equivalent-sized caravan.

On the other hand, a convertible caravan represents a step up in luxury from current trailer tents/folding campers, or indeed just tents themselves.

The Quartz 6 isn't cheap but there's every indication these will hold their prices well and become much sought-after second-hand buys.

Finally, I'd like to thank all those visitors who dropped by to see what all the fuss was about when I was testing this unit. Without exception, they were impressed by the Quartz 6. ■



Set up, Quartz 6 offers good living space