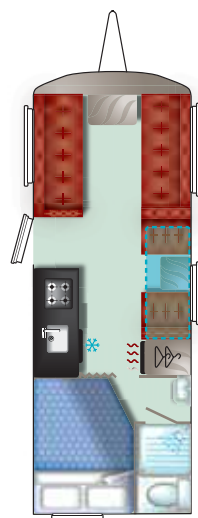




PLAYING BY ITS OWN RULES

Here's a caravan that, by breaking with fixed-bed convention, does things very much its own way. **Rob McCabe** is suitably impressed



NOW, HERE'S a thing – a fixed double-bed caravan with six berths. That's really not playing it by convention, which has it that fixed double-bed caravans shall be (nominally) four-berthers that are (de facto) two berths, used by couples with a disdain for slats and upholstery sections.

The Lexon 570's extra little something is the side dinette, which converts into a pair of bunks. This, of course, makes it well worthy of consideration as a four-berth family tourer, leaving the front lounge untouched and limiting bedmaking.

Plenty of options in this potentially very versatile caravan, then.

CONSTRUCTION

Another glowing performance from Lunar, with precision-fit panelwork, professionally-finished joinery and sturdy,

long-lasting materials used in important places. Locker doors have weight-saving ply infills rather than solid wooden panels, but you can't really tell just by looking.

There was a very prominent 'however' in the case of the test 570, though. The slats for making up the front double bed suffered a major derailment at the first time of asking – without the slightest whiff of provocation – and stayed derailed. I dedicated a substantial chunk of time and patience into trying to get them back on track, but eventually ran out of both.

TOWABILITY

A family of six will probably use up most, if not all, of the 570's available payload, so the 1,499kg MTPLM figure is an especially important one here.

While that doesn't exactly class it as a featherweight, there are plenty of good

seven-seater towcar options. The multi-talented Ford Galaxy, with the tough, smooth 138bhp TDCi engine, is a sound match, as is the 150 dCi version of the ever-likeable Renault Espace.

Al-Ko's hitch stabiliser is standard, while heavy built-in kitchen equipment is either right over or just behind the axle, promising fine balance.

USABILITY

Let's discuss the practicality of using the 570 as a six- or five-berth caravan. The assumption is, I guess, that mum and dad get the posh bed (family life is all about give and take, I know, but there are limits). The youngest two on board will take themselves off to the bunks, with the front lounge reserved for whoever's left (dubious slat engineering notwithstanding).

Okay, that all works – in theory. But what about at night time, when mum and dad may fancy sitting up a little later than the kids, relaxing over one last glass of wine? The only option is to take said glass into the bedroom or to call it a day and go to bed earlier than you'd really like to.

This scenario is precisely why the 570 works better as a four-berth. The little 'uns can be packed off into their bunks, literally drawing the curtain on another busy day, while the grown-ups unwind in the lounge.

The 7ft 6in body width is put to good use. As well as giving enhanced footroom in the lounge, the walkway from front to back is unimpeded – even with the bunk ladder in place. There's no need to shuffle past the corner of the fixed bed to get to the washroom in the rear corner either.

The three loose carpet sections are all easily manageable – good news if you want to lift them quickly after a day at the beach or on a dry, dusty pitch in some sultry corner of the Algarve.

At night time in said sultry corner, you'll be glad of the blinds and flyscreens that can be used at the same time on all windows. Equally, in the exposed rally field in October, you'll be glad of the blown-air vents dotted around strategically, including in the washroom and the side dinette.

No fewer than four opening sunroofs (a big one over the lounge, plus others serving the kitchen, bedroom and washroom) help make the Lexon delightfully light and airy, even if you haven't quite got around to opening the blinds of a morning.

Headline act on the storage space front is, of course, the usual expanse under the double bed, which can be reached via an outside locker or via the easy-to-lift-and-close mattress base. This big space is partitioned off – a good idea if you intend to use it for stowing lighter stuff on the move, because your cargo's potential to go walkabout is kept in check. The front bedlockers are every bit as user-friendly.

A second exterior locker on the nearside hosts a mains socket for use in the awning, sitting alongside a gas barbecue point.

LIVING AND SLEEPING

There's another wee compromise involved if we're talking five- or six-berth usage. While the compact lounge is decently accommodating for four, any more than that will be a squeeze. So, unless you want to use the good offices of the awning (if you have one), mealtimes will really need the bunks to be put away so that the two single seats in the side dinette can be used.

The sofas are comfortable enough in their own right, but the provided bolster cushions are floppier than a spaniel's ears, giving next to no support when you lean into them – ripe for an immediate user upgrade, assuming Lunar doesn't do the decent thing and sort it out for you first...

Sadly, I can't comment on the comfort of the front bed due to the aforementioned slat scenario, but the supportive nature of the sofas suggests it'll be just fine.

The side dinette gives good seating accommodation during the day and two good beds at night. The supplied mattress sections for the top bunk fit perfectly, unlike the seat cushions underneath. I tried several permutations, but couldn't prevent a 'bunching' in the middle of the lower bunk. In use, body weight dampens it all down, so it shouldn't be an issue, except maybe with especially lightweight children.

Full marks to Lunar for providing the lower-bunk occupant with a wall light. It's a good one, too, with a bigger lamp for reading and a smaller, less-powerful one for use as a night light. More high marks for the neat, tidy and efficient manner in which the privacy curtain shuts away out of sight in its little hatch when not needed.

Most folk will get along just fine with the double bed. The mattress should be a politician – it manages successfully to be as inoffensive to as many people as possible, being neither too firm for those who like a bit of squishiness, nor too soft for those who prefer a degree of support.

The occupant on the right-hand side needs to angle his or her legs inwards slightly in line with the curvature of the mattress, but it's an easy thing to get used to. This person benefits from the immediate use of the excellent shelf and cubby hole beneath; whoever's opposite will just have to reach across.

Both reading lights are up high, well clear of heads and shoulders, and the substantial headrest offers decent sitting-up support all by itself, before pillows are even taken into account.

A concertina door pulls across to separate the bedroom from the rest of the caravan; only you will know whether or not having this opened and closed by middle-of-the-night visitors to the loo – which is right in the back corner of your bedroom, remember – will be a pain. It's certainly something worth bearing in mind as you do your essential layout-pros-and-cons weighing up before buying.

KITCHEN

Here's a six-berth caravan with not much more than zero work surface. There's a modest few square inches to the left of the recessed, covered sink... and that's your lot. It would be worthy of comment in a two-berther, never mind a vehicle supposedly designed to accommodate three times as many. It's yet another reason to have the side dinette available in 'day' mode – so you can use the clip-on table as emergency work surface.

In all other regards, you're not short-changed. The three-burner hob offers enough space for a wok or huge saucepan



Side dinette provides much-needed worktop space



Front lounge gives way to sleeping if six berths are needed

“ The 7ft 6in body width is put to good use... the walkway from front to back is unimpeded ”

RATINGS	
CONSTRUCTION	8
TOWABILITY	7
USABILITY	7
LIVING AND SLEEPING	8
KITCHEN	4
WASHROOM	7
LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS	7
VERDICT	7

RRP	£16,990 OTR
Overall length	24ft 2in (7.36m)
Overall width	7ft 6in (2.28m)
Overall height	8ft 8in (2.63m)
Internal length	18ft (5.79m)
Max internal height	6ft 5in (1.96m)
MRO	1,290kg (25.4cwt)
MTPLM	1,499kg (29.5cwt)
User payload	209kg (4.1cwt)
Berths	6
NCC approved	Yes

Figures supplied by manufacturer

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Clockwise from top right: side dinette provides good seating and doubles as bunks at night; washroom has all the essentials; kitchen is well equipped but short on work surface; Goldilocks would be happy with this mattress – it's just right



and there are separate grill and oven compartments, all spark-ignited. The 700W microwave will help speed things along at busy mealtimes, while the Thetford fridge is spacious enough to hold a few days' essentials.

WASHROOM

Its position in a family caravan notwithstanding, this is a nice facility that packages all the essentials in a practical manner.

It's open-shelving-only in here, but there's plenty of it, and an easily removable hanging rail straddles the shower, offering a sensible home to damp beach towels. The shower itself shuts off from the loo by means of a folding, transparent plastic door that gives good protection from spray. It's a bit of a tight fit, though, and there's no more than a soap tray to accommodate toiletries.

A compact sunroof opens wide to dissipate condensation, while the single lamp is all you need after dark.

The wash-hand basin is outside in the corner of the bedroom, which at least means hand-washing and teeth-brushing can still be getting dealt with if the washroom's engaged.

LIGHTING AND ELECTRICS

You do more than all right for a choice of TV viewing locations here: all four interior mains sockets are multi-purpose items, with accompanying 12V and TV aerial sockets. You can watch the box from the lounge, kitchen, side dinette or – courtesy of a supplied wall bracket – bedroom.

Come to think of it, you do all right for lighting as well (with the all-too-common exception of the kitchen, which doesn't fare at all well). The two mains lights in the front corners provide a welcoming focal

point – and how refreshing to see four reading lights in such a compact lounge.

The three ceiling domes have two settings – useful if you need to preserve battery power when not hooked-up. The side dinette and the rear bedroom both have a pair of reading lights and there's a downlighter to serve the mirror above the wash-hand basin.

The 12V master control panel, plus the rotary dials for the space and water heaters are all by the entrance door. Not only is this right where you want them but it groups everything together, neatly out of the way.

VERDICT

An interesting variation on the six-berth theme, albeit one that works better as a four-berther: the front lounge is too small for six and kitchen workspace is... well, where is it, exactly? Slats apart, it's nicely built and a pleasure to use from day to day. ■

Supplied for test by: Lunar Caravans, Sherdley Road, Lostock Hall, Preston, Lancashire PR5 5JF. Call 01772 337628