

The Folding Camper Ultimate Guide



*Everything You Ever Wanted To Know
About Buying, Using, And Getting The
Most From Your Folding Camper*



www.foldingcampers.net

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The Folding Camper Ultimate Guide

Introduction

Guide author; Alan Young, is the Managing Director of Blue Sky Recreation Limited, a company who's business revolves primarily around the world of folding campers, and, to a lesser extent, trailer tents, and camping as a whole.



The **Blue Sky blog** and **web site** were established to provide advice and assistance to anyone looking to either enter the world of folding campers, or to maximise the experience they receive from their existing camper.

The purpose of this guide is to pull together all of the most important aspects of the Blue Sky blog and web site, into one concise, yet comprehensive, all inclusive, guide.

This guide aims to take the reader through all aspects of the folding camper world, from the various options available, to what distinguishes a folding camper from a trailer tent and some of the more frequently asked questions. We will, also, consider some of the key things to look out for, when buying a used folding camper, and, of course, what we need to buy to fully kit it out, once we've brought it home, including the type of tow bar and electrics we will need to fit, if we don't already have one on our current towing vehicle.

In addition to a wealth of practical information on running your folding camper, both on and off site, we will, also, take a look at all of the various legalities of towing and camping, including what we are legally allowed to tow, guidance for towing in Europe and the day to day practicalities, such as; do we need to insure our folding camper? and what to do if you buy a camper that turns out to not be as expected.



Whether you are brand new to folding campers, or an experienced camper with years of ownership under your belt, hopefully, there is something here for everyone.

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Folding Campers. What's It All About?

There seem to be a lot of misconceptions as to what a folding camper actually is, and, for a lot of people, what the difference is between a folding camper and a trailer tent.

Many potential buyers who view our campers simply had no idea they even existed.

A folding camper is a self contained folding unit which is comprised of a standard caravan style base, coupled with a folding canvas top. The main difference between this and a trailer tent is the fact that everything is contained within the main body of the trailer, including beds, seating, kitchen, storage etc. This means it can be used on its own, without the optional awning. A trailer tent, in contrast, will normally have, at most, a couple of beds, and maybe, a couple of bench style seats in the main body of the trailer, with everything else, including the kitchen and main living area being contained in the attached awning / tent. This makes the folding camper much more flexible in its accommodation, as it can be set up in 10 - 15 minutes for a quick weekend away, or, for longer breaks, there is the **optional awning**, which sets up in around 40 - 50 minutes (depending on model) and doubles the size of the accommodation.

A Typical Folding Camper. The Luxury Of A Caravan, With The Fun Of Being Under Canvas.



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Folding campers have a number of advantages over alternate forms of camping:

- They represent a whole new level of luxury, when compared to even the most expensive of tents, with comfortable, off the ground beds, 'proper' settees and fully equipped kitchens.
- Although way more luxurious, a folding camper can be set up in a fraction of the time of a normal tent. 10 - 15 minutes and you're up and ready to go.
- Everything packs away in the trailer, including personal effects, so no more wedging of children and pets onto the parcel shelf for the journey.
- One of the key advantages over caravans is that they can be folded into a much more compact format, thereby allowing them to be stored in a normal domestic garage.
- This smaller size and reduced weight, compared to caravans, means vastly improved rear visibility, greater stability on the road, easier maneuvering, both when hitched and unhitched) and, consequently, less impact on the fuel economy of the towing vehicle.
- Because they are lighter, and lower profile, they can be towed by a far smaller car.
- Anyone who has kept abreast of developments over time will have seen a noticeable change, in recent years, in caravan / motor home design, with a general shift towards the fixed double bed layout (as opposed to having to constantly make up beds from settees). Folding campers have adopted this principle for years. Not only do they have permanently made up double beds, but retaining straps hold all bedding in place, thereby allowing the beds to remain made up, even when the camper is folded away. This also speeds up setup times, as the beds can simply be opened out, ready made.
- Also, because the beds fold outside the main footprint of the camper, this means that the entire floor area can be used as living / storage space. A typical 6 foot x 9 foot folding camper will normally sleep 6 in total comfort. The equivalent sized caravan will almost always be 2 berth only.
- We have yet to find a camp site in the UK that doesn't take folding campers. Many sites will only take caravans, but not tents. These sites treat the campers as folding caravans, and allow them on. Likewise, other sites will take tents and motor homes, but are not licensed for caravans. These sites treat folding campers in the same way as trailer tents, and, again, will allow them to pitch there, so folding campers are allowed, as far as we can tell, anywhere they want to go.

Compact, convenient, comfortable and economical. That's folding campers in a nut shell. To find out a little more about them, please feel free to browse the rest of this guide.

Choosing A Folding Camper. What Are The Options?

When choosing our first / next unit, there are five main options:

- traditional trailer tent
- pram hood style trailer tent
- solid floor, 'Combi-Camp' style trailer tent
- four berth, rear entry folding camper
- six berth, side entry folding camper

Obviously, this guide is only concerned with the folding camper models, however, for comparison purposes, we will, briefly, consider the trailer tent options, also.

(1) Traditional Trailer Tent

The traditional trailer tent, as the name suggests, is, by far, the most common form of trailer tent available. Manufacturers include; [Cabanon](#), [Conway](#), [Jamet](#), [Raclet](#), [Sunnecamp](#) and [Trigano](#). Traditional trailer tents have been around for over 60 years, and are still the most common type in production today, so the design and appearance can vary significantly, however, they all operate in the same way.

The trailer opens out to form two beds and a central floor space, which may, or may not, include basic bench seating, and some limited storage. The canvas is then pegged out, and awning is added, to form the main living area. The kitchen unit (where included) is, usually, free standing.

Sometimes it will be a standard camping kitchen, as would be used in any normal tent, and, sometimes, it will be an integral unit that is attached to the trailer in transit, and then either lifts off or swings out, in use, when on site. The main advantage of this type of unit is that it offers more overall living space than the vast majority of the alternatives. On the down side, it takes far longer than the other options, at, usually, considerably over an hour, all in, to set up.

Due to the limited facilities within the trailer area, itself, it won't, ordinarily, be practical to use it without the awning attached, other, than, maybe, for a quick one night stopover, and, hence, the extended setup time.

Whilst most traditional trailer tents are four berth, as standard, the majority will also have the under bed storage / sleeping compartments, to, potentially, increase their capacity to eight berths.

Examples of modern traditional trailer tents include the [Cabanon Mercury](#) and the [Raclet Safari](#).

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(2) Pram Hood Style Trailer Tents

The pram hood style trailer tent is a trailer tent in every sense of the word, however, it is much quicker to set up than a traditional trailer tent, although that will, often, come at a compromise, in respect of living space available.

The most prolific manufacturers of this type of trailer tent are **Camp-let**, along with former competitors **Comanche**, who are now sold, in the UK, by Camp-let, and, also, **Trigano**, who, like Comanche, produce a wide variety of different model types.

This type of trailer tent is very different from the traditional models. The trailer opens out to form two beds, in a similar way, however, there is, usually, no central space between them, as the beds are right adjacent to each other. Having opened out the beds, the canvas then pulls over the entire living area (not just the beds) much like the hood of a pram (and, hence, the name).

These models fall somewhere between the traditional style and the **Combi-Camps**. They are much faster to set up than the traditional models, but without the same degree of space. In contrast, they are larger than the Combi-Camps, in the main, but not as quick to set up. The pram hood style of trailer tent is popular with couples and families alike.

Although, not, generally, as large as traditional models, one notable exception is the **Trigano Olympe**, which, as well as being the largest model of the genre, also has under bed sleeping / storage pods, unlike the smaller Camp-lets, giving it a total berth capacity of up to twelve people. Other models include the **Camp-let Premium**, **Comanche Kenya** and **Cabanon Malawi**.



A Typical Camp-let interior. The two adjacent rear beds, one being utilised as a settee, with living area to the front. Unlike some models, there is no under bed storage / sleeping area in the Camp-lets.

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(3) Combi-Camp Style Trailer Tents

So named, because of their original and, subsequently, prolific manufacture by **Combi-Camp**, of Denmark. Similar styled models have, also, been manufactured by a variety of other manufacturers, including, to a lesser extent, **Comanche**, **Conway** and **Raclet**.

The main distinction with this genre is that, unlike all others, the roof of the trailer opens out, not to form a second bed, but to form a solid floor to the main living area.

This makes them extremely quick to set up (Combi-Camp themselves, quote a setup time of 60 seconds, plus awning).

Even the awning is quick to set up, as the awning poles slide out from the main unit, however, as we have seen from the previous types of trailer tent, there is, usually, a trade off between speed and space, and these are no exception. The Combi-Camps are by far the fastest type of trailer tents, but, also, therefore, the smallest. Indeed, because the top of the trailer becomes the floor, rather than a second bed, many are, in their standard form, two berth only, with additional berths being created by the use of optional awning annexes.

That said; there are a large number of four berth options available, as well, with the beds being turned through 90 degrees, and protruding out into the living area. This does allow the extra berths, but at the cost of available floor space.

Current examples of the genre include the **Combi-Camp Country**, the **Comanche Montana** and **Raclet Solena**.

Current model **Combi-Camp Country**, shown without the awning set up.

This is a two berth model, although additional berths can be added, with the optional zip on annexes.



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OK, so that's the trailer tents, briefly, covered, so what about the folding campers, which is, after all, the main focus of this guide? The last two of our five trailer tent / folding camper classifications are the four berth and six berth models, respectively.

Folding camper models are less common than trailer tents, particularly current models. The choice of manufacturers (outside of the US) is limited to **Conway**, **Dandy**, **Opus**, **Pennine**, **Raclet** (Tamaris only) and **Trigano**. Of those, only Pennine and Opus are still producing folding campers, and they are down to just four models and one model, respectively.

(4) Four berth, Rear Entry Folding Camper

The four berth options are all rear entry, and, usually, comprise a double bed either side, with kitchen at the front, directly opposite the door.

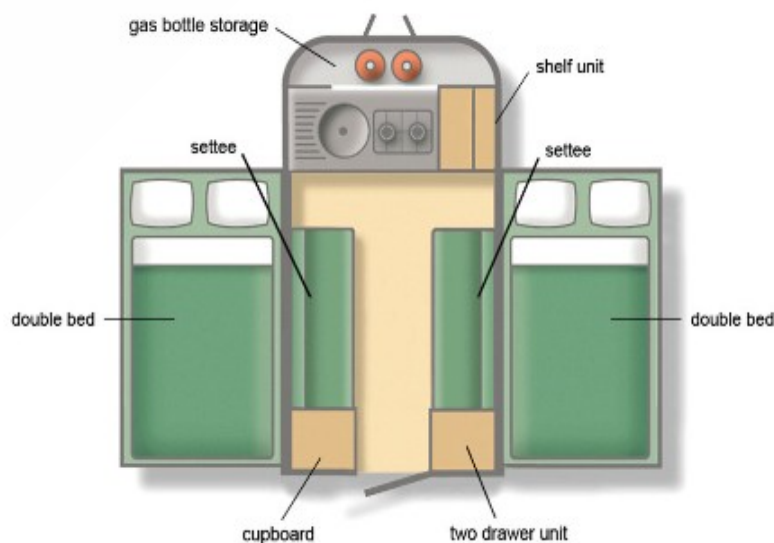
Most will have at least one settee, but many have two. Some are independent and fixed, whilst others may be made up from one or both of the double beds.

Where these gain over the trailer tents is that they are totally self contained, with sleeping, lounging and cooking all happening in one area.

Whilst many people consider this an advantage, others don't like the thought of cooking right next to a sleeping area, and some will prefer to cook in the awning, choosing not to use the in built kitchen at all.

Examples of this type of folding camper include the **Pennine Aztec** and **Pennine Fiesta**, the **Conway Countryman**, and **Trigano Randger 415DL**.

These are a similar size and weight to an average trailer tent, so exceptionally easy to maneuver, both when towing and on site, but include more equipment and facilities, thereby allowing them to be used in stand alone format, without the optional awning. If extra accommodation is needed, it is usually available in the form of under bed tents, although, to be fair, these are, usually, best suited to children. Most have a gross laden weight of between 500kg and 750kg, and can be towed by all but the smallest of vehicles.



The Conway Countryman
A Typical 4 Berth Layout

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(5) Six Berth, Side Entry Folding Camper

These models best typify the definition of folding campers as canvas topped caravans, as they are a similar layout to many caravans, and incorporate the familiar side door entry.

Most models will have a fold over or slide out bed at either end.

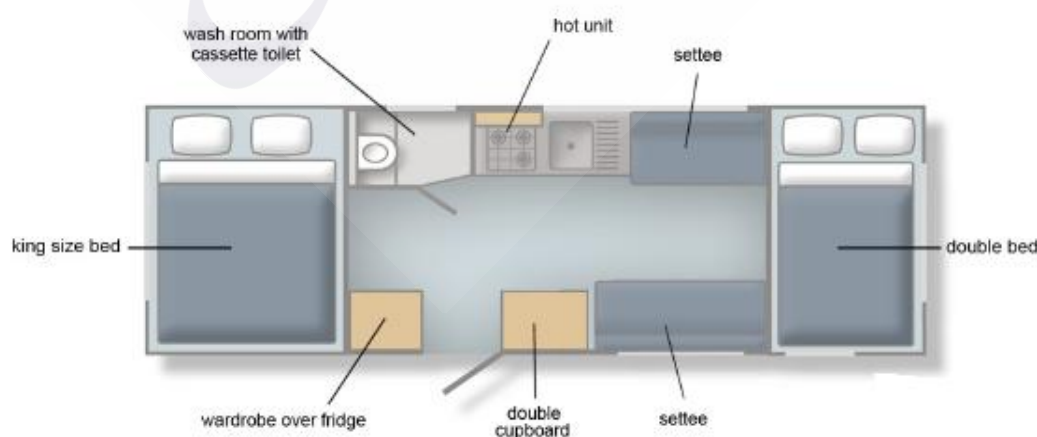
Working from the rear of the unit, you will normally have a double or king size bed, dinette seating, converting to an additional double, kitchen, with door and cupboards / wardrobe opposite, and, finally, a second fold / slide out bed at the front. Certain models, such as the **Pennine Pathfinder** will also have a toilet / washroom facility, as well, in between the kitchen and front double bed.

Although having a similar footprint to the average two berth caravan, these folding campers are even easier to tow, as they are lower and lighter, and, yet, they offer full six berth accommodation, in three double beds, two of which can be left permanently made up.

These units offer the maximum internal space in any folding camper, and the accommodation can be further doubled by using the optional awning.

The six berth folding campers are heavier than other genres listed here, with the larger models going up to around 1,000kg, however, they are still, comfortably within the towing capabilities of most average family saloons.

Examples of this type of folding camper include the **Pennine Sterling**, **Pennine Pullman**, **Conway Cruiser**, **Conway Crusader**, **Trigano Randger 575LX** / **Randger 575TC** and the **Opus Camper**. Of these, the **Opus Camper** is slightly different, as it is a traditional six berth layout, but with only four berths as standard. Unlike most other models, the settees do not convert to a double bed, however, a single bed option is available for them, if required.



The Conway Crusader A Typical, Larger, 6 Berth Model, With Toilet / Washroom

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it is also worth mentioning, at this stage, a small section of six berth folding campers, featuring the wind up hard top design. This is, by far, the most common model type in the US, and, in the early eighties, UK manufacturer; **Conway**, worked in conjunction with American company, **Jayco**, to produce a small range of hard top models for the UK marketplace. These models included the **Tardis** and **Laser** models, as well as the later **Cardinal** and **Clubman**.

The bodies were imported from the US, and then fixed onto the UK legal AL-KO chassis by Conway. Production of all hard top models ceased in 2002, when the company was acquired by major competitors; **Pennine**.

Whilst on the subject of hard top campers, there are a significant number of these produced in the US, by the likes of **Coleman**, **Fleetwood**, **Jayco** and **Starcraft**.

Although these model ranges are extensive, and diverse (some even including showers, as well as toilets) very few make it into the UK, partly due to prohibitive import costs, and partly due to the fact that US legislation is different from that of the UK and Europe, and most American imports require modifications to be made to brakes, trailer lights and electrics before they can be used here.

One other small section of the market place worth mentioning is the motorcycle / small car trailer tent.

This is a small, but popular niche market for ultra small / lightweight trailer tents that can be pulled by a motorcycle or very small car.

Manufacturers **Campmaster** specialise in this field, with their current models including the **Campmaster 2 / 4**, the **Campmaster Tipi** and the **Campmaster Air**. The only other major manufacturer who deals in this type of trailer tent is **Comanche**, with their offerings; the **MC Camp** and the **Petit**.

More Trailer Tent Than Folding Camper, The Campmaster Models Show That You Don't Always Need a Car To Enjoy The Whole Experience.



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Folding Campers: The Main Players

Background

Folding campers have been around since the early 1920s, although they really started, in mainstream production in the late '50s, and early '60s, in the US. It's fair to say that most manufacturers have produced both folding campers and trailer tents, in their time, however, in recent years, a geographical pattern has emerged, and we now find that all folding campers are now made in the UK and US, whilst all trailer tents are, currently, produced in continental Europe. There is, also, a fairly sizable number of RV producers in the Far East and Australia, but these rarely, if ever, enter the UK marketplace.

Conway were prolific manufacturers of both folding campers and trailer tents for over thirty years, however, this ceased in 2002, when they were acquired by **Pennine**. Pennine were only interested in the folding camper aspect of the business, and production of all trailer tent models, in the UK, came to an end. Likewise, on the Continent, one or two trailer tent manufacturers ventured into the production of a limited number of folding campers. These included the **Trigano Randger** models and the **Raclet Tamaris**. These were, however, relatively short lived, as the Continental preference is for trailer tents, rather than folding campers, as the weather there, in the main, lends itself more to the outdoor living and cooking afforded by the trailer tent lifestyle. Conversely, the UK and American markets tend to favour the folding camper propensity to have all key facilities internal to the main trailer area.

Sticking purely with the folding camper side of the market, the key players in the UK market (starting with those still producing) are as follows:

Pennine Outdoor Leisure

It is probably fair that Pennine take the number one spot in this section, as they are not only the main producer of folding campers in the current market place, but they have, throughout their lifetime, only concentrated on the production of folding camper models, with the only, short lived, exception being a folding caravan, called the Pennine Artemis.

The original Pennine company started out in 1977, with its first model, the **Alpine**, being produced from 1978 through to 1981. In 2002, the company acquired major competitors; Conway, and continued to produce both ranges until early 2014, when the original Peninne company ceased trading. A management buyout, lead by two former employees, of 25 years standing, followed, and new company, Pennine Outdoor Leisure Limited, then took over the business of the old company.

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Following the management buyout, in 2014, the company moved to new premises and rationalised the product range, reducing it down to just four models; the **Conway Countryman** and **Crusader**, and the **Pennine Fiesta** and **Pathfinder**. In order to keep production costs to a minimum, the company utilises one four berth trailer / canvas, and one six berth one. It then amends the interior layouts and equipment levels, in order to provide a more comprehensive choice of options. For the last few years, all models have featured the Isabelle acrylic fabrics in both the main trailer canvas, and that of the awning, giving them improved water repellent qualities, and increased resistance to mould and mildew. **Pennine Outdoor Leisure** are located in Accrington. All of their contact details are available on their web site; www.pennineoutdoorleisure.co.uk

Opus

Opus Campers are part of Purple Line, the caravan accessory designers and manufacturers. A few years ago, it was decided that the company should not just design for the recreational vehicle market, but should actually get involved, directly, with it and the **Opus Camper** was conceived. The Opus camper originally found fame in the BBC series of The Apprentice, which is where most people will recognise it from, and, more recently, on Dragons' Den. Unlike many manufacturers, Opus decided to manufacture just one base vehicle, offering a series of options, to create different specification models, including replacing one cupboard unit with a toilet compartment, if required. The latest addition to the Opus range is the Opus Moto, which is designed for Moto Cross enthusiasts, and includes a reinforced roof to carry two motor cycles, and a built in crane, with a winch capable of lifting up to half a ton. Opus are based in Wherstead, Suffolk, and their contact details can be found on their web site; www.opuscamper.co.uk

Conway

The original **Conway** company was Conway Trailers Limited, a privately owned company, that started production in 1968, with a trailer tent model called the Roadmaster. The company continued to expand, manufacturing three distinct product lines; trailer tents, commercial trailers and steel security cabins, and, in 1980, it was sold to the James Halstead Group plc. Production continued for another 30 years, until a factory fire, in November 2000 halted production, and the company ceased to trade. It was, effectively, split three ways. The trailer division was taken on by Computerised Sheet Metal Limited (a Conway supplier) and continues to trade to this day. The folding camper models were taken on by **Pennine**, and, eventually, absorbed into their own model range, and for a number of years, the Conway trailer tents continued to be made by **Cabanon** of France (who had always made the Conway canvases).

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Conway first got into the folding camper market (as opposed to their core business of trailer tents) through a collaboration, started in 1980, with American manufacturers, **Jayco**. Initially, Conway, simply, imported the hard top Jayco models into the UK, and converted them for domestic usage, however, they soon developed their own models and expanded into canvas topped, as well as hard top models.

Conway were, by far, the most prolific of the UK manufacturers, with over forty trailer tent models, and nine folding campers, in their thirty four years of manufacturing. The folding camper Conway name lives on, now, only as part of the Pennine range. They do, however, have a very active, and informative owners club, which can be found here; www.conwayowners.org.uk

Dandy

The **Dandy Caravan** (as it was originally known) made its debut in 1965. Like Pennine, **Dandy** have only ever, really, focused on folding campers, as opposed to trailer tents etc. What has always differentiated the Dandy models is their unique construction. Not only is the trailer body extremely well insulated, but, uniquely, the main canvas is constructed not of cotton, but of PVC, giving it unrivaled water proofing qualities, and making the Dandys the only model that can be folded away wet, and left that way, long term, without issues of mould and mildew.

Early model Dandys were named after their number of berths, for example, the Dandy 4, the Dandy 4/5 etc. Later models were given specific names (all beginning with 'D') including the **Dart**, **Delta**, **Designer**, **Discovery**, **Dimension** and **Destiny**.

The company ceased trading in 2003, and was taken over by former employee, Ian Smith, under the new trading company; Riva Leisure Products Limited. This company continued to trade for a further five years, but that, too, ceased in 2008, at which time, a new company was formed; **Riva Dandy Sales Limited**, still owned by Ian Smith, but specialising in repairs and servicing of pre 2008 Dandy models, as opposed to the manufacture of new units.

Riva Dandy Sales are based in Wigan. Full contact details are available on their web site; www.rivadandysales.co.uk.

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Sunnecamp

Sunnflair are prolific manufacturers of camping equipment, in general, and the trailer tent side of the trading is, now, a relatively small division of the business as a whole, with just one current model in production, at this time. The core business of the company is awnings and camping accessories, particularly the Airvolution range of products.

They are, however, the only other UK manufacturer to have produced folding campers in the last 50 years, albeit just the two models, and for a very short period of time.

In 2000, Sunnecamp brought out two folding camper models; the four berth **Millenium 1000** and the six berth **Millenium 2000**, in order to mark the start of the new millenium. These models ran for a very short period of time, and were never replaced.

Trigano

Trigano have been manufacturing trailer tents for over 40 years, and their current design and production facilities are in their Mamaers plant, in the Sarthe region of France. They are much better known for their trailer tent models, of which there are, currently, four, however, they did manufacture three folding camper models up to 2008. These were comprised of the **Randger 415DL**, a four berth model, the **Randger 575LX**, a spacious six berth and the **Randger 575TC**, a six berth model with toilet compartment.

At present, they have no folding camper models in the range, as, like all other European manufacturers, they have reverted back to the production of trailer tent models only.

If you did want to check them out, regardless, their web site is; www.trigano-trailertents.com

Others

The only other folding campers to make their way onto the UK market tend to be the occasional American hard top import.

The main manufacturers concerned are; **Coleman**, **Fleetwood**, **Jayco** and **Starcraft** (now owned by Jayco). These makes tend to be far less common, due to the prohibitive costs of importing them, and the further costs of converting them for UK use.

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Buying A Pre Owned Folding Camper: A Basic Guide

Introduction

This section is aimed at those people considering the purchase of a folding camper, possibly for the first time, although, obviously, much of the advice, herein, is pretty generic, and could be applied to most makes of folding camper, trailer tent, or similar.

Of course, it can only be a basic guide, and there is no substitute for having a full professional review done, just as there is for a car, however, forewarned is forearmed, and, hopefully, this guide will help the user spot some of the more common problems associated with the purchase of any second hand camper.

Unlike the average family car, there is no official document to give us comfort that the item we are buying is even fit for purpose. Campers are not required to obtain an MOT certificate, nor do they, legally, have to undergo any formal method of servicing.

The other problem with this type of purchase is that, unlike when buying a car, there is no official point of reference for what is a fair value for the item concerned. There is no Parker's or Glass's Guide to prices, and we have to check out the market as best we can, in order to get a feel for what is a fair price. This can, however, work in the purchaser's favour. Often, we have been able to acquire a good, sound, 1996 - 1998 **Pennine Aztec**, in excellent condition, for between £500 - £600, when identical models are selling for, £1,200 - £1,500, simply because sellers had not researched the market properly.

The difficulty for the first time buyer is that, when they see a camper for an apparently very low price, they have no way of knowing if that camper has anything wrong with it, or if it is simply an exceptionally good deal, due to the vendor's lack of knowledge or research.

The aim of this guide is to help you identify some of the key problems that can arise, to help you make an informed decision.

What To Look For

Certain problems will be more model specific, whilst others will depend more on the age of the camper concerned, but most will be fairly generic, and easy to spot, if you know what you're looking for.

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(1) Canvas



Mildew stains can be very unsightly if not properly covered.

With the best will in the world, it is not always possible to avoid the mildew and other staining issues that are an all too common problem with many older campers. Once a camper is folded away, it is very tightly compacted, with no way for moisture to escape, or air to circulate, and even the most conscientious of owners can easily miss that one patch of damp, whilst packing away, that can cause some pretty horrendous staining in the long term. The most common staining is caused by mildew, but long term dampness can lead to rust and other stains on the canvas as well. Make sure you check for these stains, particularly on the interior of the canvas, as they can easily be hidden by bed pods, curtains and roof linings.

As mentioned above, this is a very common problem, and you shouldn't dismiss a camper simply because of it, especially if it is covered by soft furnishings etc, as it is extremely unlikely to affect the performance of the canvas and may assist you in any subsequent pricing negotiations with the vendor. It is always best to be as informed as possible, though, when purchasing any such item. Remember, also, that, in spite of the claims of many manufacturers of proprietary cleaning products, mildew and staining is notoriously difficult to remove. Its effects can be improved, but be prepared to live with something very similar to the condition in which you buy the camper.

In addition to any staining, it is worth checking if the canvas has any other physical defects, such as tears or repairs and unsound stitching on the seams.

Aside from their cosmetic impact, they may well affect the waterproofing integrity of the canvas itself.

If this is the case, they should, probably, be avoided, unless you are prepared to have them properly repaired yourself.

At all other points around the main trailer perimeter, it should be attached by means of Velcro strips. Ensure all of these are in good condition, and, again, check that the seal is good.



Missing 'O' rings can be easy to miss, but are fiddly to replace.

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(2) Main Trailer Body

Most folding camper trailers are built on the super tough AL-KO chassis, and are, generally, pretty bullet proof PROVIDED they don't suffer from any water ingress.

By way of example, we will occasionally buy a completely beyond repair camper, and strip it down for parts. We did this for one 1998 Sterling back in 2013, and stripped it down to the basic trailer, ready to sell on. This trailer was stored outside, over Christmas 2013, with its transit cover on, to keep the weather out, and, within 2 months, it had deteriorated so much, that, when we tried to move it, the sides completely collapsed. Such is the devastation that can be caused just by a little water ingress.

This is fixable, in the early stages, either professionally, or using home de-lamination kits, but is best avoided if at all possible. The signs are fairly easy to spot. Check for a spongy feel to the main structure of the camper. Do the panels move more than you would expect? This is easier to spot on the interior, as the exterior metal cladding can mask this in the early stages.

This is particularly prevalent anywhere that the water could gain access, and a particularly common example is when number plates have been screwed on and then removed. Even a small screw hole such as this can cause absolute devastation internally, if not properly sealed.

Another common site is the area around the door, or the door itself. As a result, many older models will have had their door replaced at some point (not a problem, if it has been done well, but worth checking). Water will usually find its way in where the hinges marry up to the door surround, and, if water gets in here, the hinges will have a tendency to move around a bit, and, more importantly, the door will not shut properly. This can be a sign of bigger problems. Beware.

Be advised that, generally, folding campers are extremely well built, and the damp issue is a lot less prevalent than the mildew problem, but apparently insignificant things like the number plate issues mentioned above can create additional problems. Perhaps it is worth noting, also, that, surprisingly, some of the newer models can actually have more problems than many of the older ones.

Other than the water issues, there isn't too much that, generally, goes wrong with these units. Check for obvious signs of impact damage, on the corners, mud flaps, etc and take a look at the graphics to make sure they are reasonably intact, as something very minor like that can really impact on the overall look, feel and ultimate resale value of any given camper.

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(3) Chassis Etc

The industry standard AL-KO chassis is, as already suggested, pretty much bullet proof, and you are extremely unlikely to find any major issues there. Like most trailers / caravans, these folding campers spend a lot of time sitting in one place, so it is not unknown for the brakes to begin to lock up. Check, if you can, that the trailer is easy to maneuver and isn't stiff, as this will affect not only your ability to move it around, on site, and for storage, but, also, your towing vehicle's fuel economy.

Check the function of the towing mechanism thoroughly. Does the jockey wheel wind up and down easily? Does it have a breakaway cable fitted? Do the electrics work, when connected to a towing vehicle? Check all lights on both the front and rear of the trailer to ensure you are not only safe, but fully legal. Also, does the hand brake work? Can you push the trailer around with the hand brake engaged?



Check that all corner steadies are working

Take a look under the chassis, itself. All campers come with four wind down corner steadies. Are they all working? Ask for a demonstration. Are they all easy to wind down, and do they make an awful screeching noise when they do? That could be an easy fix with a little grease or WD40.

Check the tyres, including the spare. Due to their low level of usage, many campers, even older ones, will often have an unused spare tyre, but just make sure all look OK and legal.

At this point, it is worth opening the front gas locker to check what is inside. Are there any gas bottles? Do they come with a regulator? Is there a leisure battery inside? (certain models only).

Finally, check the serial number plate on the A frame at the front of the trailer. This is usually located on the right hand side (looking from the front of the camper) in between the towing hitch and the gas locker. This plate will, usually, contain two numbers. The top number is the maximum gross weight of the trailer. The lower number is the serial number. The serial number is usually (but not always) comprised of up to four digits, then a space, then two digits. The digits before the space represent the serial number, and the two digits after the space represent the year of manufacture. This will help you to verify the age of the camper, as specified by the vendor.

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(4) Interior

Most interior issues are an easy DIY fix. Check all cushions, mattresses etc for signs of mildew and make sure there are no issues with the stitching on the edges. Check all handles, hinges, catches etc, but don't be overly concerned if there are issues, as these are all easily replaced. Make sure the original table is also included, as this may be integral in making up one of the beds.

Ideally, the following should, also, be included. It is not an issue if they aren't, but they can be difficult to source, if not included:

- Bed pods; there should be one for each double bed in the camper.
- Roof liner; normally, just one, to cover the roof between the two bed pods.
- Curtains; ideally, there should be a pair of curtains for each window, and, in most models, to seal off the beds. Each set of curtains should come with either a curtain pole, or curtain wire, with which to mount it to the interior of the camper. (This is also true of any awning curtains).



A well maintained interior is a good sign that the camper has been well looked after.

Check the general condition of the cabinet work. Is there any discolouring or signs of excessive wear? Look at the shelves inside the cupboards. Are they bowed at all? In certain models, one of the double beds is used to make up a settee, by propping the back up with two poles. Many of these are lost or broken. The C clip, which is the part that usually breaks, is a very easy replacement, but it is something to watch out for. Carpets, curtains, soft furnishings etc can all be replaced, but their general condition is often a good indicator as to how well the camper has been, generally, looked after during its lifetime.

(5) Gas / Electric / Water Systems

Wherever possible, ask for a demonstration of these. All mains sockets should work (you may wish to take a small lamp, phone charger or something similar to check them) as should all 12V sockets.

Check all 12V lighting, to ensure it works properly.

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The water system should be easy to check, as long as the vendor has the water containers and pumps available.

If they haven't, not only does this mean you can't be assured that the water system is working, but it will also involve extra cost in you sourcing them once you have acquired the camper.

The gas system should, also, be fully tested. The hob and grill should be lit and demonstrated, and the 3 way fridge should be shown as working.

When selling a camper ourselves, we always ensure the fridge is turned on at least an hour before a viewing, if at all possible, to show that it does get down to the required temperature.

(6) General Points To Consider

Wherever possible, it is best to ask for a demonstration of setting up, and / or taking down the camper, as this will often expose issues that were hidden when it was dressed, ready for sale. Check that all of the poles seem to work OK, are not bent, and have the buttons in situ, to lock them in place.



Penn-Vents are often forgotten

Check whether the camper comes with the components for the Penn-vent system (Pennine campers only). This is the pole system that keeps the windows open to allow ventilation into the camper.

Most owners have lost theirs, and many we speak to don't even know they exist (even those who have them in the camper but weren't aware as to their purpose).

Check the transit cover to make sure it fits tightly, and appears to be in sound condition, overall with no obvious rips, tears or leaks.

Check any extras that come with the camper, including awnings, bed skirts etc. Often, it will not be possible to check these thoroughly, but a quick check for obvious problems is always advisable. Pay particular attention to the awning sides, and, if at all possible, make sure the zips are in full working order.



All systems should be tested, if at all possible.

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In addition to the main awning, there should, ideally, be two curtains and one curtain pole for each window. Don't forget the separate skirt for the camper either. This slots into a rail under the camper door, and prevents any draughts coming into the awning via the underside of the camper. In larger models, it also covers the wheel as well, and is an awkward thing to try and replace, if missing.

Check, also, for the following. None of them are essential, some of them you may never use, and all are very easy to source, but their combined cost, new, will be around the £200 - £300 mark, so it's a real bonus if they are included:

- Gas bottles (ideally a main and a spare)
- Leisure battery (Not usually included on some entry level / older models)
- Fresh water container
- Waste water container
- External Whale type water pump (only required on newer / larger models with an electric water pump)
- Electric hook up lead
- External step
- Hitch lock or wheel clamp
- Levelling ramp(s)

Aside from the obvious issue of replacement cost, you might want to just consider why some of these are not included. It might be that the person is upgrading their camper, and needs these items in the new one, which is fair enough. It might also be that they have decided to sell them separately, in order to raise more money, in which case, you may be able to strike a deal on them. If neither of the above is true, then just be a little wary.

No gas bottle means you cannot see the gas system working. Likewise, with a mains lead or water pump. If these can't be tested, you are significantly increasing your risk of arriving home with something that isn't as expected. This is a particular issue if you have travelled half way across the country to get what you were looking for.

It is always worth asking what paper work comes with the camper, as this can be over looked, Invoices, manuals etc are all useful, and will aid future resale potential.

These points are intended as a guide only. We hope you find them useful in your search for a new camper.

They are no substitute for professional guidance when viewing any camper, but are designed to arm you with a little more knowledge than you might otherwise have been able to utilise.

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We've Just Bought Our First Folding Camper. What Else Will We Need?

Having looked at the main things we need to consider, when buying a used folding camper, we now need to consider; "What else am I going to need?"

In order to answer that question, we will need to assume that the camper has come with nothing at all, other than its most basic components and soft furnishings, and we will look at each distinct area in sequence, starting with the essentials. Remember; you may not want or need a large proportion of these items, but it's good to have as extensive a list as possible so that you can narrow it down to the items you actually do want.

Basics

Although these are fairly basic requirements for the camper to operate at maximum efficiency, that does not mean they are absolute essentials. Many entry level campers, for example, will not have a mains electric system, or, in some cases, even a 12V one. You don't have to have electrics to have an enjoyable trip, but they are preferable, if at all possible. Likewise, an external step is not essential, but a lot more convenient.

The basic requirements, once you are ready to kit out your campers are;

- A fresh water container (with submersible pump, if applicable) plus food grade connecting pipe.
- Waste water container and connecting pipe
- If the water containers are not of the Aquaroll style, you may wish to take a small trolley as well, to assist when the containers are full
- External entry step
- Hitch lock or wheel clamp, for use both on site, and in storage
- Levelling ramp(s) for when pitching on uneven sites. It is also useful to have a small spirit level to make sure you are level on your pitch. This is particularly important if you have a 3 way fridge on board, as they need to be as level as possible, when in use.

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- Electric hookup lead. The type of lead will depend on the individual camper. If it has its own, on board, electrical system, you will just need an EHU lead that plugs into the side of the camper. If it does not, you can buy an EHU lead which has normal domestic sockets on one end, thereby allowing you to plug appliances directly into it.
- Leisure battery. As stated above, this is not essential, but very useful for campers with 12V lighting, sockets or water pumps.
- Gas bottle. Even the most basic of campers will, normally, be fitted with a gas cooker / grill (if not, then they are probably trailer tents, rather than folding campers) and higher spec ones will also have a three way fridge, and, potentially, a space / water heater as well. A gas bottle is a pretty vital piece of equipment for most folding campers. You will also need a gas regulator to prevent the gas pressure from damaging the camper's system. Don't forget a gas spanner to change the cylinder, if it runs out while you're away.
- Dining table. Very often, this is an item that is either lost or damaged when buying a second hand camper. Although not absolutely essential, the table will be a key part of the on board equipment, especially if it is used to make up one of the double beds.

Kitchen Equipment

Most of this is pretty obvious, but easy to forget when heading out for the first time, so it never does any harm to have a check list to tick off. Some of the key items include:

- Kettle (gas or electric)
- Saucepans (2)
- Frying pan (2, if you like big breakfasts)
- Grill pan
- Mugs (melamine might be preferable, but all down to personal preference)
- Glasses (again, plastic might be wise - there are lots of designs available today)
- Crockery; large plate, small plate and bowl for each person (again, melamine is good)
- Cutlery for each person
- Place mats / coasters
- Scissors
- Chopping / kitchen knives
- Spatula
- Serving / mixing spoons
- Fish slice (useful for turning those morning eggs as well)
- Chopping board
- Food storage containers / Ziplock bags

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- Bottle opener / tin opener / cork screw
- Matches or lighter
- Potato peeler
- Potato masher
- Washing up bowl
- Washing up liquid
- Washing up sponge / cloth / mop
- Tea towels / Hand towel
- Hand wash
- Kitchen roll
- Bin bags
- Kitchen foil / cling film
- Ice tray. (Very important for those glasses of the chilled stuff). If your ice box is too small, then buy a cheap plastic ice cube tray, and cut it into two halves. Sorted.
- Bleach or other cleaning spray to keep the table, kitchen area etc clean
- Basic food items. Obviously, most of these will be bought for each individual trip, but there's no harm in keeping a few staples in the cupboards, like tea, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper, spices, cooking oil and a few tinned goods. If storing these long term, make sure they are in air tight containers.



Hardly essentials, but you may also want to take a few other little luxuries, like an electric toaster, microwave or electric oven (assuming your camper doesn't have a gas one fitted).

Bedding Etc

Preferences will vary, in terms of bedding requirements. Some will opt for sleeping bags (especially for the kids) whilst others prefer the full duvet experience.

I'm in the latter category, especially as the beds can be left made up permanently.

Either way, the basic requirements will be;

- Pillows
- Fitted sheets / duvets / other bedding, or sleeping bags. Remember to allow for those cold British nights
- Torch. Useful for those night time excursions to the toilet block)
- Alarm clock (assuming we are not using our phones)
- Night attire
- Dressing gown or similar, again, for those trips to the toilet block

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Recreational Items

From books to televisions, there's bound to come a point when we want to sit back and relax in the camper, especially if the weather outside isn't what we hoped it would be. A few suggestions here include;

- Television, ideally, this will have a built in DVD player, and, if you want to be really flash, you can go for a 12V set, which is great for those sites without an electric hookup. Don't forget the DVDs as well.
- To go with any TV, you will need an aerial and booster. Again, to be flash, you could take a mobile satellite dish as well, but an aerial will be sufficient, as long as you are in a decent signal area.
- A bit of music never goes amiss, whether that's a radio, CD player or ipod with external speakers, it's always nice to have.
- Don't forget your chargers too. Phones, ipods, Kindles, all need charging at some point.
- Books and / or a Kindle or similar advice, likewise, may also be of use.
- Whether you're reading or not, a decent reading or similar light will be of use. Often, the standard 12V lighting will not be strong enough for this, so you may wish to get a small 240V lamp, for when an electric hookup is available, or a decent 12V LED lamp for when it isn't.
- Games / playing cards. This will also involve outside games, including football, tennis, cricket etc.



Toiletries, Clothing And Personal Effects

These aren't really covered in this feature, as they are the things you will take with you each time you go away, rather than being things that will remain in the camper, and they are, also, things you would take on any kind of holiday, rather than a folding camper specific one.

Just make sure you're covered for all the usual holiday items, just as you would for any other holiday, including some decent towels for the shower block, and don't forget the bug spray and sun cream.

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Other Items

There are a number of things that experience has taught us can be useful, for a break away. Their application can be pretty diverse, but they are worth considering:

- Mallet and extra tent pegs (only applicable if you have an awning, toilet tent, etc)
- First aid kit (cos you never know)
- Sewing kit
- Glue
- Repair kit (Patches for canvas, and windows, in case of unexpected damage)
- Small tool kit
- Gas or electric heater. (The latter for when there is an electric hookup, and the former for when there isn't, but be aware of inherent safety issues)
- Small fan, for when we get those occasional glimpses of sun.
- Solar panel. This can be invaluable if you have a leisure battery. 15W plus will keep a leisure battery ticking over, but for the serious users, 80W plus will be needed to run a full compliment of 12V appliances
- Talking of appliances, there are a vast array of 12V appliances available now, including TVs, microwaves, ovens, hair dryers / straighteners etc.
- Clothes airer
- If you're lucky enough to have a toilet and wash room in your camper, then don't forget the water additives for the top and bottom tanks, and, of course, the toilet roll.
- BBQ & accessories
- Fire extinguisher,(if not already fitted) and, maybe, a fire blanket, just to be safe
- Spare batteries
- Folding chairs, or similar for sitting outside
- You may wish to purchase a table for use outside / in the awning, but this is not essential if you have the original camper dining table, which can be used either internally or externally
- External lighting. This can be gas or electric. solar lighting is becoming increasing popular these days.
- A useful piece of kit, on any site without an electric hookup, is a small power inverter. This converts 12V power into 240V, thereby allowing you to use a 12V power source, such as the camper's leisure battery, or a car cigarette lighter, to run a 240V appliance, which can be anything from a phone charger to a small TV. These can be bought online, or from Halfords, and can be picked up for prices starting from under £20.
- A windbreak is always useful, not only to protect you from the wind, but also for added privacy and to segregate your own pitch.

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In addition to your normal holiday clothing, remember to take a waterproof coat, or, at least, an umbrella. Boots or wellingtons are also advisable.

There's no worse combination, in a heavy storm, than a full bladder and inadequate rain protection. Be afraid!!

Finally, don't forget those little personal touches that make the camper 'yours'. For a few days or weeks a year, this is your home away from home, so make it feel like it. Cushions, place mats, ornaments, or even a bowl of fruit, all help to make the place feel more homely. Don't neglect that part of things.

There's no reason why at least 90% of the above can't be left in the camper permanently (though you may wish to remove bedding etc if not being used over the Winter) which means your camper is ready to just hitch up and go, whenever you are. All you need is your bag of clothes, toiletries and personal effects, just like any other holiday.

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Installing Tow Bars & Electrics. What Are Our Options?

Tow Bar Types

There is a lot of confusion as to what our options are, in terms of tow bar types available, and a number of misconceptions, especially where specialist hitches, such as the AL-KO hitch are involved.



So. What are our actual options, and how / when can they be used?

In actual fact, all tow bar balls are the same, regardless of hitch type. They are all the standard 50mm tow ball, and have been since the late 1970's. What does vary, depending on usage, is the way they are mounted, and, in particular, the clearance provided between the ball and the towing vehicle.

In reality, there are only, really, two main types of tow bars (although they can be sub divided into various sub categories).

The main types are;

- Flange tow bar
- Swan neck tow bar

Flange Tow Bar

This is the most common type of 'standard' tow bar in the UK, and consists of a tow bar, attached, using two 24mm bolts, to a flange plate, which is, itself, usually, permanently attached to the towing vehicle.

These tow bars are the most cost effective, and, also, the most versatile on the market, as they can be used with a large number of accessories, such as bike racks and all standard stabilisers.

Other advantages include their relatively universal application, to most vehicles, their low price, and the fact that they can be height adjusted, using a drop plate.

Some flange tow bars come with removable balls for different applications, although this is not to suggest that they are quickly and easily interchangeable, and the flange tow bar is a relatively permanent set up.

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The down side of this is that they are constantly on display, and, as many will know, knocking your shin on one is just marginally ahead of child birth, in the pain stakes, only without the gas and air). Also, this type of tow bar is a little wider than the swan neck type, and, therefore, more likely to trigger rear parking sensors on some cars.

The big problem with flange tow bars is that the vast majority are not suitable for use with a stabiliser hitch. Contrary to popular misconception, this is not, actually, due to an incompatibility with the tow ball itself, it is because the flange tow bars, generally, are mounted too close to the towing vehicle, and do not give adequate clearance for use with an AL-KO hitch. Also, the clearance below the tow ball may be inadequate, giving rise to further problems. In this case, you will need to consider the use of a swan neck tow bar.



Swan Neck Tow Bar

Not difficult to see where the name comes from, this type of tow bar is the most common type in the EU, but is becoming increasingly popular, here in the UK.

This is, largely, down to the fact that they do look better than their cheaper counterparts, they are less likely to trigger parking sensors, and they can be used with AL-KO stabilisers, without modification.

On the down side, they are less flexible as they are not height adjustable, and cannot be used with bike racks etc, a(at least, not whilst towing).

They are also equally as painful when in contact with unwary shins.

Removable Tow Bars

Whilst it is possible to have removable flange tow bars, it is, probably, fair to say that the vast majority will be of the swan neck type, as it lends itself far better to that type of installation



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Flange tow bars can be fitted with a removable neck, which, as well as the convenience of being able to remove them, means that they can be adapted to use with an AL-KO tow hitch, unlike their non removable cousins.

Removable swan neck tow bars are far more common, and come in a variety of connection types, including vertical, horizontal and nut / pin systems.

The key advantages are that they are discreet, can be removed for tight parking situations, and are far easier on the shins, once removed. Also, because they can be fully removed, there are no issues, at all, with rear parking sensors.

AL-KO Hitches

There is much speculation about whether there is a need for the use of specialist AL-KO tow bars when using an AL-KO stabiliser hitch. The simple answer is; 'No. We don't need a specialist tow bar'. That said, some tow bars will not be suitable, and there are a number of things we need to be aware of, if we are using an AL-KO stabiliser tow hitch, as opposed to a standard tow hitch.

Firstly, as already mentioned above, in the main, you will be unable to use an AL-KO hitch with a standard, fixed, flange tow bar.

This has nothing to do with the size of the tow ball (this is a very common misconception, but they are all 50mm) it is, mainly, down to the clearance between the tow ball and the towing vehicle.

If the ball is too close, then the hitch will make contact with the rear bumper, causing problems ranging from damage to the vehicle / tow bar, to, in extreme cases, the detachment of the trailer unit.

The clearance needed will depend on the model of hitch used, but, for the anoraks amongst us, the minimum clearance between the centre of the tow ball and the rear bumper is shown on the [AL-KO web site](http://www.foldingcampers.net).



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OK. So we know that the swan neck tow bar is likely to be the most appropriate type of tow bar, but what else do we need to consider?

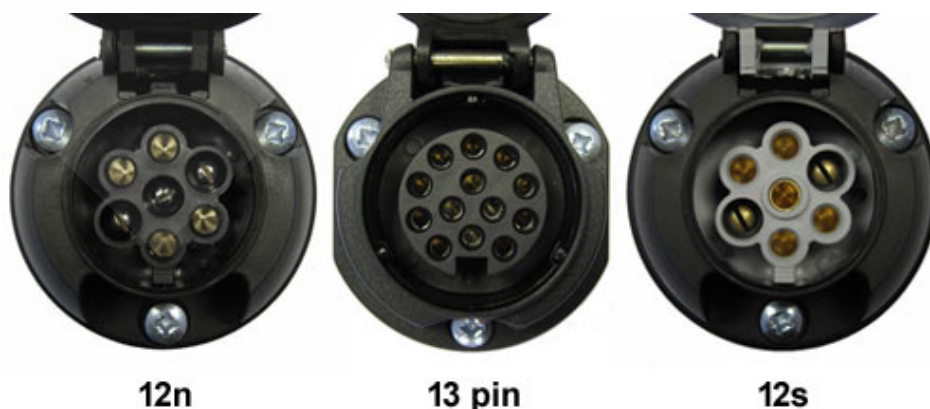
Well. There a number of things we need to be aware of, if using an AL-KO hitch, rather than a standard one. The AL-KO hitch attaches to the tow bar in the same way as any other hitch, however, when you activate the red lever, it engages the stabiliser pads, which grip the tow ball and provide a dampening effect on any excess movement. This means the AL-KO hitch needs very different conditions, in order to operate effectively.

A standard tow hitch will move around freely, and the recommendation is that the tow ball should be well greased, in order to avoid excess wear and tear. With an AL-KO hitch, however, the situation is totally the opposite. In order to work, effectively, the pads need the tow ball to be totally clean, and free of grease. Any traces of grease should be removed, using brake cleaner or equivalent. Never use metholated spirits for this, as they will leave a greasy residue on the ball. It is, also, imperative that any and all paint is removed from the tow ball, prior to the attachment of any AL-KO hitch. This is because the pads on the hitch rub the paint, causing it to clump together in tiny balls, which then dig into the ball, scoring, or pitting it.

Whatever tow bar we do fit, though, it is important to make sure it is 'type approved'. This means it meets EC regulations and is designed for your car. A type-approved tow bar will have a label with an approval number and details of the vehicles it's approved for. If your car was first used before 1 August 1998, your tow bar doesn't need to be type-approved.

Tow Bar Electrics

We can't really look at the topic of tow bars without covering the basics of the electrics, as well. Most cars are either fitted with single, 7 pin electrics, or the dual electric system, and these will be compatible with the vast majority of folding campers, trailers and trailer tents. Most modern caravans, however, are fitted with the Euro plug system, comprising one, single, 13 pin plug and socket, and this is a system that is, currently, expanding into other forms of trailer, albeit at a far slower rate.



12n

13 pin

12s

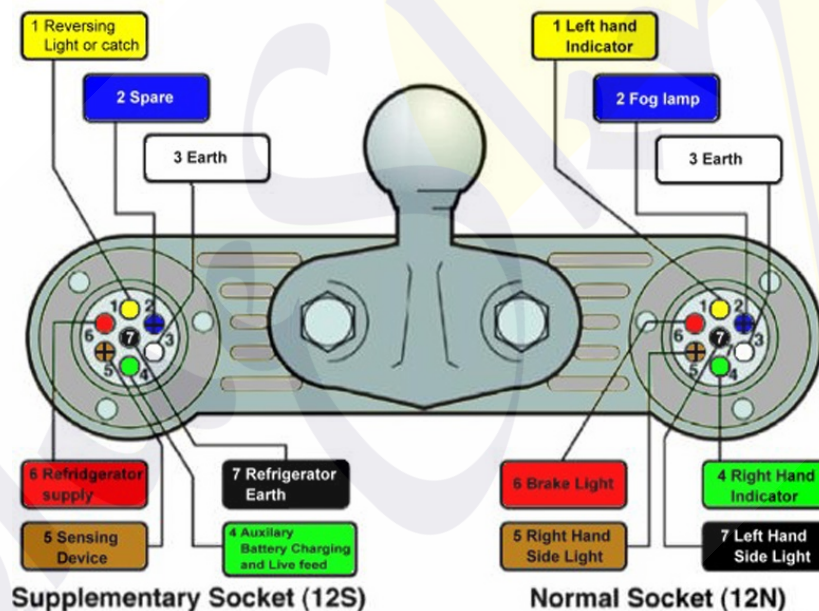
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Single 7 Pin Electrics (12N)

This involves one single socket on the towing vehicle, and / or a single connecting lead into the trailer unit. This system will power the trailer lights, including the side / brake lights, and indicators on the trailer, and nothing else. The lead and socket are, usually, both, black.

Twin Electrics. (12N+ 12S)

This system has the same single electrics described above, but with the addition of a further lead / socket (usually grey or white, which is used to power the additional electrics in the trailer. The three main functions this will perform are to run a fridge, if fitted, charge the leisure battery, again, if fitted, and operate the reversing lights on the trailer.



Typical Twin Electrics Wiring Configuration

13 Pin Euro Plug.

This, basically, performs exactly the same functions as the twin electrics system, but it does it in one single Euro plug, with one single lead. As already mentioned, it is particularly prevalent in modern caravan manufacture.

13 Pin Electrics



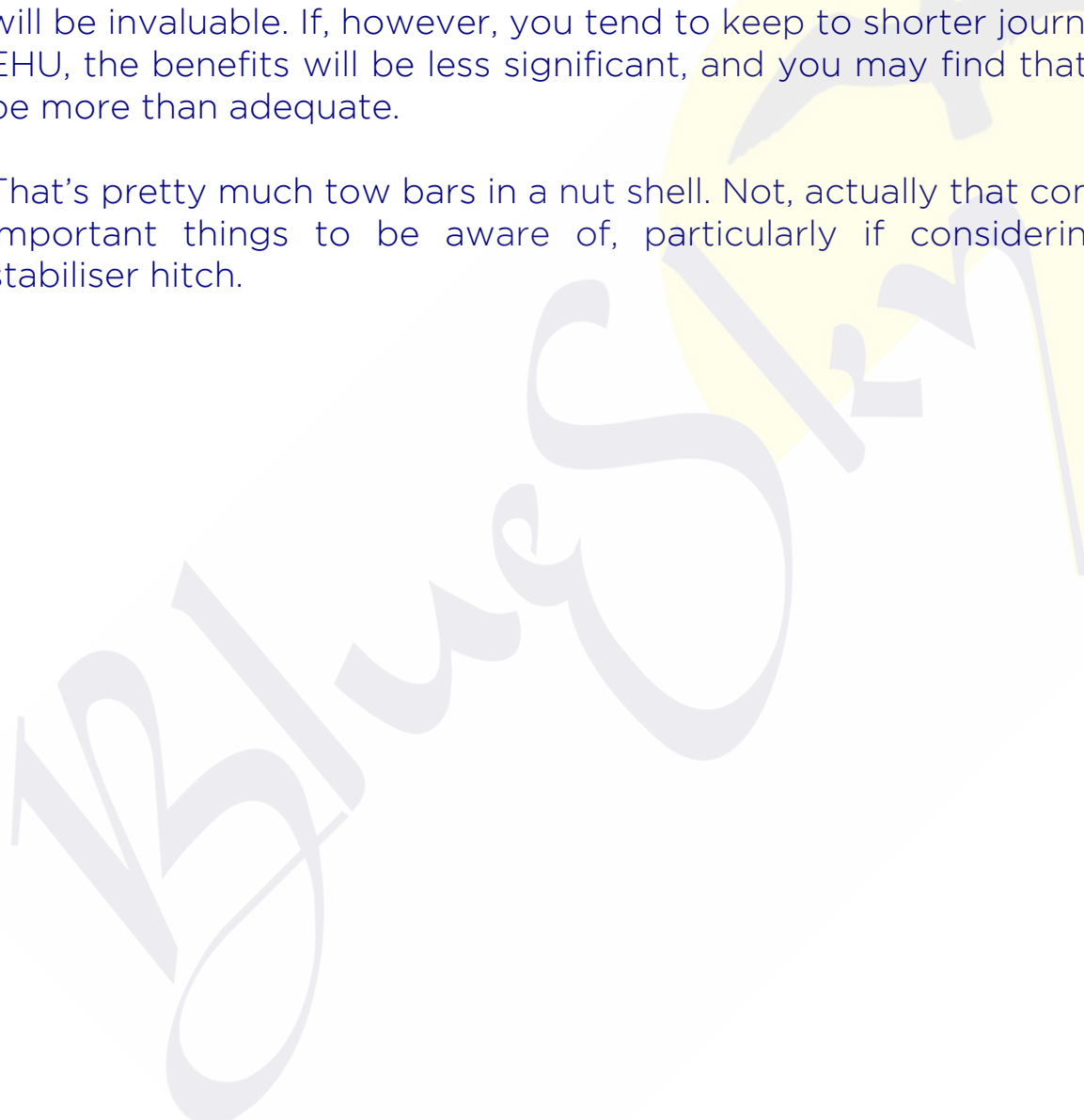
Pin Number	Function	Colour
1	L/H Indicator	Yellow
2	Rear Fog Lamp	Blue
3	Earth for contacts 1 through 8	White
4	R/H Indicator	Green
5	R/H Tail Light & Number Plate Lights	Brown
6	Stop Lights	Red
7	L/H Tail Lights & Number Plate Lights	Black
8	Reverse Lights	Pink
9	Continuous Power	Orange
10	Ignition Switched Power	Grey
11	Earth	White/Black
12	Spare	
13	Earth for contacts 9 through 12	White/Red

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If you have either twin electrics, or the Euro plug on your car, it is possible to obtain an adaptor to run it with twin electrics or a Euro plug on the trailer. What you are unable to do is to connect a single car socket to twin / Euroelectrics, as it will still only power the rear lights.

Whether it is worth going for twin electrics or the Euro plug will, largely, depend on the nature of touring done. If you tend to travel a lot, and over long distances, especially on sites without electric hookup, then the ability to keep the fridge cool, whilst travelling (it will not work on site) and to charge the battery on the move will be invaluable. If, however, you tend to keep to shorter journeys, and always use EHU, the benefits will be less significant, and you may find that single electrics will be more than adequate.

That's pretty much tow bars in a nut shell. Not, actually that complicated, but a few important things to be aware of, particularly if considering using an AL-KO stabiliser hitch.



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How And When Should We Waterproof A Folding Camper?

The water proofing qualities of any canvas are integral to its ability to function properly. We do, however, need to be very careful as to how we look after it and protect it. For example, any cleaning products containing detergents will automatically compromise the integrity of the canvas, as will many treatments for mold, mildew, etc, and these need to be avoided, if at all possible.

With respect to waterproofing, generally, the advice has to be; If it ain't broke, don't fix it". Waterproofing solution should only be applied when the canvas is leaking profusely, and cannot be remedied using any other means, and should never be used purely as a preventative measure.

The cotton fibres in the fabric expand and contract, depending on their moisture content. As the fabric becomes soaked, it begins to swell, thereby plugging any microscopic holes in the canvas, and preventing water ingress, just like the wooden slats of a water barrel expand, and fill the gaps, in order to retain the liquid inside.

Water proofing solution plugs those holes in much the same way as the fibres do. Unfortunately, in doing so, it coats the cotton fibres, making them rigid, and preventing them from expanding when they become wet. This means that we have, effectively, removed the natural waterproofing qualities of the canvas. Once we have done this, it is only the water proofing solution that is keeping the moisture out. As the canvas flexes and moves, and is exposed to the elements, the water proof layer breaks down, and, as we have now destroyed the canvas' own ability to keep water out, we begin to notice leaks appearing, once again. As a result, we find ourselves constantly re applying the solution, on a regular basis.

So. What is the best procedure when we spot a leak? Well. Most campers with non acrylic canvases will dry out, when placed in storage, for any period of time, and some will contract enough to allow water to start seeping in.

The best procedure is to set the camper up, and lightly spray it with a hose, until reasonably wet, allow it to dry a little, and then repeat, using a little more water each time. A normal canvas should self repair as it becomes saturated, and the leaks should disappear. On those rare occasions when it doesn't, then you may wish to consider the application of the likes of Fabsil etc, which can be either painted or sprayed onto the canvas.



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What Should We Do About Storing A Folding Camper (Particularly In The Wet)?

Folding campers have one main enemy, above all others and that is moisture.

It attacks the outer canvas, the soft furnishings and, even, the structure of the trailer, itself.

Never, under any circumstances leave your folding camper stored, when it has been folded away whilst damp. Opinion varies as to how long is safe to do so, but a conservative estimate is around 48 hours, before mould will begin to form in the airless confines of the folds of canvas.

Obviously, the best way to avoid this is to fold it away on a completely dry day, when the canvas has been thoroughly aired, but, regrettably, this is not always possible, so we need to look at the best ways around this, especially if we are storing the camper away for the Winter.

One of the big features of the Dandy trailer tents is their ability to be folded away wet. This is not a luxury shared by the vast majority of trailer tents and folding campers. The later Pennine models, in particular, now utilise synthetic canvases, made by Isabella, which significantly reduce the problem, but we still need to be aware of the key do's and don'ts, when packing our camper away.

The first, and most important thing is; don't be afraid to pack your camper away wet. Just be aware that you can't leave it that way for too long. Failure to observe this key rule will result in mould and / or mildew, and, in the longer term, will cause poles etc to rust, causing yet more staining to the canvas, which will, itself, eventually erode away.

Even if your camper was packed away on a lovely sunny day, there is no absolute guarantee it will be damp free, especially if previous days have been less than ideal. Damp can accumulate in the folds of the camper, inside window flaps, and in the interior of the camper, especially if there has been a couple of days of wet weather prior to leaving the camp site. Even the sunniest of days will not always be damp free.

Awnings in particular are in constant contact with the ground, and any moisture will be trapped underneath their lower flaps, which need to be dried out thoroughly, before storing. When eliminating damp, we need to operate a zero tolerance policy. Remember; a lot of damp = a lot of damage. A little damp = a little damage. Personally, I don't want any damage, whatsoever, to my beloved camper.



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Packing Away On Site

It goes without saying that we should always try and pack away when the canvas is bone dry, but, in the real world, that's not always possible, and many of us will have experienced the joys of packing away in the pouring rain.

If it is raining, or had been immediately prior to packing the camper away, then shake off as much rain as possible from the canvas, and wipe off with a clean, dry towel or cloth, before folding away. It is very important not to use one that has been washed in detergent, as this will damage the waterproofing of the canvas, and, once this has happened, it is almost impossible to achieve full waterproofing again.

This is also worthy of remembering when thinking of cleaning your camper canvas. Only use purpose made products, as the wrong detergent can do way more harm than good.

As soon as possible, when you arrive home, open the unit out to allow it to dry. If you don't have enough space on your own drive, get it to somewhere and open it out there, as this is extremely important. Allow the air to circulate throughout the camper, by leaving all vents and windows open, as well as the door and side panel, if applicable.

Do not attach the canvas to the body of the trailer, so that air can circulate here, also. If there is any damp, whatsoever, internally, this should be dealt with at the same time. Bedding, bed pods, mattresses etc, may all dry out adequately with proper ventilation, but, if this is not possible, then they will need to be removed.

More information on that below. At this stage, a small heater will help the camper to dry out, but be wary of leaving any such device on for too long, especially if unattended.

When everything in your camper is properly aired, then, and only then, should you pack it away again. Whilst I appreciate that some people do not have the space on their own drive to do this, it is always better to leave the camper set up, when it's pouring with rain, as this allows the air to circulate, even though it is exposed directly to the rain.

This is better than leaving it packed away, where the non ventilated atmosphere will quickly facilitate degeneration. In the past, I have had to leave mine set up, for almost a week, waiting for a day dry enough to finally air it properly, prior to packing away.

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Long Term / Winter Storage

This section is aimed, primarily, at those looking to store their camper away for an extended period, most commonly, over the Winter.

Some of these suggestions may also be appropriate for short term storage as well, whilst others may not be relevant or, even, possible for many, at any time of the year.

As always, our aim is to consider as many options as possible, so we can make an informed choice as to the best ones for us.

- The first, and golden, rule, as discussed above, is make sure all aspects of your camper, both inside and out, are fully dried and aired, prior to storage.
- You may wish to remove any electronics and soft furnishings, prior to storing. The extent to which you do this will be largely dependent on where the camper is to be stored. Personally, I store mine in a nice, dry garage, so I tend to leave as much in situ as possible, though I do tend to remove all electrical equipment, such as TV, microwave etc. If you are storing your camper outside, it is probably prudent to remove as many of the soft furnishings as you have space for. This will include bed pods, roof liner, mattresses, curtains and seat cushions. All of these simply unclip and lift out, so not a big job, if you have the space to store them. (Watch out for mice, though, if storing things in a loft or garage).
- Fresh and waste water containers should also be removed, and stored with their caps off. This ensures they are well ventilated, and prevents any residual water from stagnating. Obviously, this is not something you want to do inside your unit, as the evaporating water will increase the internal humidity.
- All water systems need to be drained down, both to prevent stagnation, and to eliminate the risk of pipe damage, through freezing. Open all taps in the camper fresh water system, to allow them to drain properly. Run the on board water pump for a few moments, to remove any residual water. Most pumps can be run dry for short periods, without causing damage, though it may be prudent to check this in your manual, if at all possible. If there is an external submersible pump, shake it gently, then wipe it with a clean dry cloth, prior to storing. If there is a water heater fitted, then drain that too, by opening the valve adjacent to the water heater. A really useful tip on this front is to, ideally, open all taps and valves, prior to leaving your last camp of the year, as the vibrations of the journey home will help to shake out the last few drops of water in the system. If this isn't an option, or you forget to do so, you can always hitch up at home, and go for a quick spin round the block.

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- Vacuum and clean the interior thoroughly, making sure that you only use specialist caravan products, where at all possible, as standard cleaning products can do harm to the interior surfaces and seals, in the same way as detergents can damage the exterior and water proofing of the canvas. Clear out all cupboards, paying particular attention to foodstuffs, which can attract in unwanted visitors, thereby causing further damage to the interior. Once cleared, leave each cupboard door slightly open, to encourage air circulation. A soft clothes peg attached to the door, will prevent it shutting by accident. Empty and clean the fridge, and, again, make sure the door is left slightly ajar. Most fridges will have a catch or button to hold the door in this position, thereby facilitating ventilation and reducing the risk of mould. Finally, having cleaned the kitchen area, make sure any damp items, such as dish cloths and sponges are removed, as these can really make a mess of your washing up bowl, if not removed prior to storage. Trust me; I know from experience.
- Although not essential, some users like to further protect hinges, seals etc by giving them a coat of WD40 or similar to help reduce rust or other wear.
- Caravan users may have the option of keeping a mains supply connected whilst in storage, in order to keep the leisure battery charged, and, maybe, even run a small heater, to help keep the unit dry and frost free. This isn't really an option with a folding camper, as, even a very low spec. heater would not be wise in such a tight environment. Your primary area of concern, therefore, is the leisure battery, which can suffer noticeably. A leisure battery should never be allowed to discharge significantly. If it is allowed to discharge by more than 50%, it is unlikely to ever achieve 100% charge ever again, and, once fully discharged, its ability to recharge is significantly compromised, and it will probably need to be replaced. The battery should be disconnected from all 12V appliances, and, if possible, isolated, using the isolation switch on the control panel. You should bear in mind, though, that even a disconnected battery will still discharge slowly, over time. Ideally, if possible, the battery should be removed, and stored in the house, where it can be recharged periodically (at least about every two months is recommended). The battery terminals should be carefully cleaned, and smeared with petroleum jelly, in order to protect them.

A Solar Powered Trickle
Charger Will Keep A Leisure
Battery Topped Up, Whilst In
Storage (As Long As Light
Conditions Allow.)



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- As with the electrical system, the gas system will require prepping for storage as well. The valve on the top of the gas cylinders should be fully closed, and, ideally, the gas regulators disconnected,(assuming they are the clip on type). Make sure end caps are placed on any open pipes etc. If you are storing your camper anywhere other than at home, then you will need to bear in mind that many storage facilities will not allow the long term storage of gas bottles, due to the safety issues associated with them, in the case of fire etc. My own is stored in a council garage, about a mile from my house, and this is a stipulation of my rental agreement. Just be aware though, if you do remove your gas bottles for storage, they should be stored in an open space, which is reasonably secure, and not too close to drains, cellars etc, as lpg is heavier than air. Also, common sense dictates that they should be stored well away from combustible or corrosive materials.
- Not everyone will have a toilet in their camper, but, if you do, it will need preparing for storage and, like all other water systems, it will require draining and cleaning. Remove the waste tank, empty it, and give it a good clean.(If this was not done prior to leaving your last camp site). The top water tank will also need to be drained. Most Thetford and similar toilets have a special tube for doing this. Alternatively, flush as much water as possible into the lower waste tank,(prior to cleaning it. Of course, at this point, it is worthwhile leaving the valve slightly open, to prevent it sticking shut in storage.
- Having sorted the interior of the camper, and ensured everything is correctly drained and aired, we can turn our attention to the exterior of the camper:
- The first thing we need to do is to give the camper a thorough clean. This will not only clean the camper, ready for storage, but will also help to prevent any marks from becoming worse, and will give you the opportunity of checking the camper over, for any signs of damage, or potential issues that might need addressing / repairing. Winter is the preferable time to have this done, when repair companies are less busy, and more open to negotiations on price.
- Once again, the key thing to remember here is only to use proprietary cleaning products, as anything too 'general' can seriously damage the integrity of the exterior. areas of black or green mould should be cleaner particularly well, as they have a tendency to get worse, if left unattended, and this can lead to permanent staining.
- For many, the camping season will end in September, and begin, again, around Easter time, however, for the hardened campers among us, camping is a year round affair. If this is you, then you may need to consider the extra attention a camper will need if it is being used in the Winter. The most notable requirement will be to ensure that any salt and other deposits are removed from the underside of the camper, as this can rapidly accelerate rusting of the components there. The AL-KO chassis is pretty robust, but there are plenty of vulnerable parts under there that will require protection from these contaminants, and a good hose down is always worthwhile.

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Having cleaned the camper, it is ready to be placed in storage (even if that is just on your own driveway). There are a few things to bear in mind, when doing so:

- Campers are not designed to sit still for extended periods of time, and we need to make allowances for this, during prolonged storage. Tyres, in particular, do not like to be left in the same position for too long. If at all possible, they should be rotated every couple of months or so, to evenly distribute pressure. Of course, this is an ideal, and will not always be convenient to do so. Some people choose to use Winter wheels, which are, basically, metal stands, which replace the wheels, over Winter. Although this will make a camper more difficult to steal, I've never been a huge fan of these, as it seems an unnecessary expense and inconvenience, when compared to the alternative, described above, of just moving the camper a few inches forward or back, every couple of months.
- As with most caravans, trailers, etc, the brakes can have a tendency to stick on, if left engaged for long periods of time. It's better, therefore, to leave the hand brake off, if the camper is not expected to move over the Winter period. One way to avoid excess movement is to place chocks under the wheels, whilst, also, lowering the corner steadies. This just gives that added bit of security, as well, as the corner steadies prevent the opportunist thief from moving the camper. Not the most comprehensive security device, as it can be bypassed with a wheel brace, but every little helps, and it will prevent the camper from moving of its own accord.
- Talking of corner steadies; this would be a good time to grease them up, in order to avoid seizing up, especially as they are in the down position.
- Even with the corner steadies down, it is prudent to fit a wheel clamp, or similar and a hitch lock will also act as a further deterrent. These are wise precautions, even if the camper is to be stored indoors.
- Electrical connections should also be protected from the elements, particularly if being stored out in the open. Connectors should be protected with a water repellent, such as WD40, and, ideally, covered with some form of hitch cover.
- When all the preparation has been done, you are ready to store your camper until its next excursion. Wherever you chose to store your unit, you are wise to ensure it is properly covered, to protect from the elements, or, if stored indoors, to keep out airborne dust and dirt, and, in larger storage facilities, the mess that inevitably results when birds are perching overhead. All campers come with some form of transit cover, and most will have been water proof when they left the factory, but these will break down over time, and water ingress will, eventually become an issue. Whilst they will be more than adequate for internal storage, it is worth the £150 or so investment in a proper, full length, Winter storage cover to protect the camper as well as possible from the elements. There is no substitute for storing a camper indoors during the Winter, but, where this is not practical, or prohibitively expensive, a proper cover will go a long way towards keeping your pride and joy as dry and safe as possible.

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- For those campers stored outside, it is important to avoid standing water on the cover, wherever possible. Whilst a good cover will withstand the worst of rain showers, standing water will, eventually, degrade the integrity of the cover, and, at best, will cause staining that may be difficult, or, even, impossible to remove. One way to reduce this risk is to store the camper at an angle, either by storing it on sloped ground, or tipping it, using the jockey wheel / corner steadies, so that the majority of the water runs off. Another popular method is to place something under the cover, (a football being a popular choice, to create a curved surface, again, to deflect any rainfall.

As stated at the start, these suggestions won't all apply to everyone, but, hopefully, they will give a few ideas of the kind of things we should be thinking about when putting away our folding camper, whether for a couple of weeks, or long term Winter storage, to make sure it's in top condition and ready to go when you take it out for your next camping trip.





Cooking On Gas.

Which Is The Best Camping Gas To Use?

There is a huge amount of speculation, and one or two myths surrounding the use of Butane versus Propane, so we thought it was time to take a look at the facts surrounding these two fuel types, and their applications.

Propane Versus Butane

Firstly, the basics; Butane is universally sold in blue gas cylinders, whilst Propane is sold in red / orange cylinders. These cylinders are available in various sizes, but the most commonly used item sizes, for camping, are 4.5kg and 7kg for Butane and 3.9kg and 6kg for Propane. Remember, however, this is the weight of the liquified gas inside. The total weight of the gas plus cylinder is likely to be some three times the weight of the gas alone, meaning that a 13kg cylinder will, actually, weigh as much as 40kg.

The bottles are maintained at different pressures, and it is imperative, therefore, that any gas cylinder is used with the appropriate regulator, in order to avoid damaging your on board gas system. This is not difficult to achieve, as, not only are the regulators colour coded, but they also have different connection types, and internal valve sizes; 21mm for Butane, and 27mm for Propane, so no problems with getting them mixed up.

The Myths

There are a couple of myths surrounding the use of these gasses, which are probably worth dispelling. The first is that Butane freezes at around zero degrees, rendering it unsuitable for Winter use. Whilst it is, indeed, true that Propane is far superior for usage in Winter temperatures, it is not true to say that either gas freezes. In order to burn, each product needs to be in a gas form. It will not burn as a liquid. At around zero degrees, Butane turns from a gas, back into a liquid, rendering it ineffectual for use in our camping equipment. Propane, on the other hand, has a boiling point of around minus 44 degrees Centigrade, making it far more suitable for Winter usage. Although Butane will cease to be a gas at zero degrees, it begins to lose effectiveness at around 10 degrees Centigrade, making it most effective only for Summer applications. For the record, and the anoraks among us, the actual freezing points are -140 degrees C for Butane and -188 degrees C, for Propane.

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The second myth is that one gas burns hotter than the other. I say; "one gas" here, because some people argue that Butane burns hotter, and others that Propane does. So, who is right?

To put things into perspective, the natural gas we use in our homes gives off 38 Megajoules of energy per cubic metre burned.

Compare this with 96 Megajoules for Propane and 126 Megajoules for Butane, and you can see that Butane does actually generate a lot more heat energy than the other two, and hence many will argue that it burns hotter, however, Propane regulators release the gas at a faster rate, to compensate (and hence the importance of using the correct regulator for the gas being used) which is why some people argue that Propane is, in fact a hotter flame. So what is the reality? Well, in these conditions, due to the function of the different regulators, Butane burns at 1,970 degrees Centigrade, whilst Propane burns at 1,967 degrees. So, in general use, contrary to popular opinion, there is no noticeable difference between the two gasses.

Common Terms & Gas Types

Butane

Butane is an LPG (Liquid Petroleum Gas) suitable for temperatures above freezing (and, ideally, above 10 degrees C). It is found in blue bottles, and modern regulators are also blue, to ensure ease of matching. This gas is most commonly used for barbeques and Summer camping applications. Common cylinder sizes are 4.5kg, 7kg and 15kg.



Propane

Likewise, Propane is an LPG, although, unlike Butane, it can operate, effectively, as low as minus 44 degrees C. It is found in red / orange cylinders, again, with matching regulator, and typical sizes are 3.9kg, 6kg and 13kg.

It is better suited to gas fired heaters and Winter camping applications than Butane.



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Campinggaz

Pronounced camping gas, this is a brand of Butane / Propane gas, manufactured by the French company, of the same name. It is available in two formats; the small, portable, disposable cylinders that many will recognise from the portable camping gas stoves and lamps of their youth, and this gas is still in common use today. These days, however, it is also available in refillable gas bottles, again, with their own specific type of regulator.



The Campinggaz regulator is easy to identify, as the cylinder attaches to the bottom of the regulator, as opposed to the side of it. These cylinders are smaller than their competitors, and are available in .45kg, 1.81kg and 2.72kg configurations. The main advantage of these cylinders is that, being French made, they are far more readily available on the Continent, should you find yourself running short on a European trip. The small, disposable, cylinders contain a mixture of Butane and Propane, whereas the larger cylinders are Butane only.

Patio Gas

Although a widely used term, particularly in DIY and gardening shops, it is, basically, just a marketing term for Propane, as it is suitable for all patio applications, from barbeques, to patio heaters.

In spite of the distinctive green and red bottles, it is no different to the Propane found in the red / orange cylinders, above.



Think that pretty much covers it. Remember though, whilst we can use all gas types equally safely in our camping situations; Butane = Summer usage, Propane = all year round, Campinggaz = best for continental travel. Slight over simplification, but those are the key factors.



An Introduction To Leisure Batteries

Whether you have a propensity for sites with electric hookup, or not, a decent leisure battery is an essential piece of kit to have integral to your on board electrical system.

There is plenty of information available, online, for those who wish to check it out, concerning the technical specifications and construction of the various battery types, however, in this guide, we will, simply, be looking at the basics of how they work, how to look after them, and the best ways to recharge them, when we need to.

Whilst it is, indeed, possible to operate 12v lighting and equipment in our camper, without a battery, using the on board power supply unit (PSU), this is far from ideal, particularly in the longer term (which is surprising, when you bear in mind that most manufacturers supply new units without a leisure battery installed, as standard).

This is because a typical leisure battery performs two main roles;

Firstly, it provides an independent 12v power source, for those times when electric hookup simply isn't an option, and, secondly, even when EHU is provided, the battery sits between the transformer, in the PSU, and the rest of the 12v system, smoothing any spikes and other irregularities in the supply.

It is a common misconception that standard leisure batteries and standard car batteries can be interchanged, and many see the latter as, potentially, a cheap alternative to the former. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as they operate in totally different ways.

A standard vehicle battery rarely, if ever discharges to any great extent. It is used to provide the high power surge, required to start an engine, and then, immediately, begins to re charge again, via the vehicle alternator, as the engine continues to run. A leisure battery, on the other hand, has no need to provide such a surge, and is used to provide the more consistent power output required for running 12v lighting and other appliances.

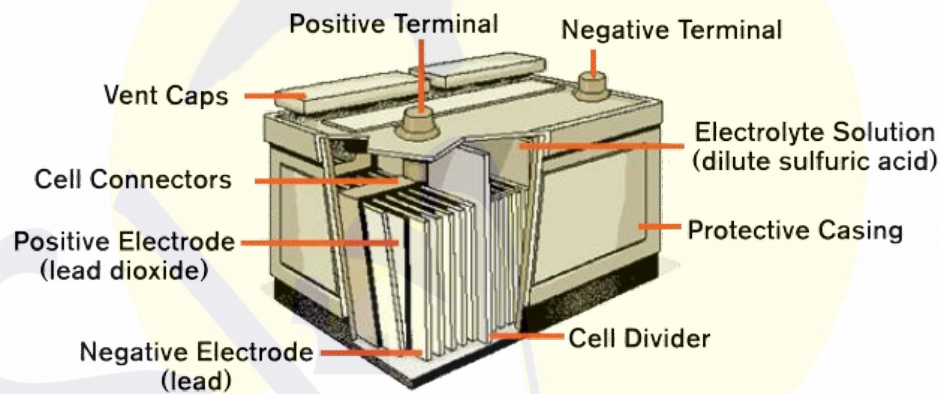
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A leisure battery is far more likely to be run for a period of time before being recharged, and it is this process of charging and discharging over a longer period that is known as deep cycling. Whilst vehicle and leisure batteries are interchangeable for short periods of time, neither will operate as efficiently or last as long if it is not used for its designated purpose.

Leisure Battery Options

Most leisure batteries are of the lead acid type. These consist of a series of six compartments, containing a number of positive and negatively charged lead plates.

Each of these compartments provides an output of 2.12v, with a total output, for a fully charged battery, being 12.7v (in fact, contrary to popular misconception, a leisure battery with an output of 12v will, actually, be pretty much fully discharged).



Leisure batteries tend to be measured in terms of Amp hours (Ah) with most ranging from around 65Ah up to around 110Ah. Obviously, a 110Ah battery will last longer than a 65Ah one, but, of course, will, also, take longer to re charge. The simple rule is to go for the largest specification battery you can afford, although, for some, size may be a limiting factor there, if they only have a smaller dedicated battery compartment.

As the rating of a leisure battery increases, the thickness of the lead plates, internally, also, increases, meaning that a 110Ah battery can be quite a bit larger, and heavier, than a lower specification one, so we should, perhaps, amend that rule to; go for the largest specification one you can afford, provided it will fit in your battery compartment. To make things a little easier, leisure batteries are now graded, in accordance with their performance levels; as follows:

- *Category A. As the name implies, these are the top end batteries, with the highest specification, and are designed for those who use their units often, without electric hookup.*
- *Category B. These are aimed at those who use EHU a lot more, but who, maybe, need a little extra power, occasionally, perhaps, to power a motor mover or similar.*
- *Category C. These are the lowest spec. batteries, and are mainly used where 12v requirements are minimal. They also help smooth out the power supply from the central PSU, in the same way as their larger siblings.*

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Battery Performance

As well as the Ah rating, there are a number of other factors that will affect overall performance and discharge times. These include;

- *Temperature.* Just like Butane gas, batteries will suffer a loss in performance as the temperature drops. In fact, a battery will, on average, lose 1% of its performance for every degree Centigrade of temperature drop. The specified Ah rating of any given battery is its equivalent rating at an ambient temperature of 25 degrees C. A drop of 20 degrees, from this, will result in a drop of, approximately, 20% efficiency.
- *Age.* This is another key factor, with batteries losing efficiency over time. Although life will vary, the general consensus is that the average leisure battery will have an optimum life expectancy of around five years.
- *Rate of usage.* Sounds like common sense, but it isn't simply a case of a 100w appliance draining a battery twice as fast as a 50w one. The higher draw rate of the 100w appliance will, actually, further impact on the overall discharge time of the battery, which will last less than half the time it would have with just a 50w appliance connected.
- *Charging regime.* A battery that is correctly maintained at an adequate level of charge will, inevitably, last a lot longer than one which is allowed to discharge too much, for too long, and is not adequately recharged.

It is very important to keep a leisure battery charged correctly (more on that below) and its current state of charge is relatively easy to measure, using a simple Volt meter. As mentioned above, it would be, you would think, common sense to assume that a fully charged battery would operate at 12v, but this is not the case. Due to its 6 compartment composition, a fully charged leisure battery will, actually, operate at 12.7v. The key stages of discharge can be summarised as follows:

<i>Charge Level</i>	<i>Volt Meter Reading</i>
100%	12.7v
75%	12.5v
50%	12.4v
25%	12.2v
Discharged	12v or less

Remember, when taking readings, to disconnect as many appliances as possible, as each connected appliance will affect the accuracy of the readings. It is also prudent to wait for three to four hours after charging, to allow the charge to 'settle'.

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Battery Care & Maintenance

Batteries are, in the main, relatively, low maintenance. It used to be common practice to have to top up lead acid batteries with distilled water, to ensure the lead plates are covered. This may, on occasion, still be required, however, you tend to find, with modern batteries, and charging systems, that this is only, normally, required if a battery has been charged, for a while, at a very high rate, which can cause the electrolyte to over heat, and 'boil off'.

Any leisure battery should be firmly secured in place, ideally, in a vented battery locker, in order to allow for any escaping gases, which can be emitted during periods of higher charging levels.

This compartment should have high quality battery connectors.

The crocodile type connectors, common on many battery chargers, are not suitable for long term connection, as they can move, causing sparks, which, in extreme cases, can ignite the gasses venting from the battery.

(It is not unknown, also, for these gases to trigger carbon monoxide detectors, in enclosed spaces).



A Dedicated Battery Compartment, Complete With Retaining Straps, Storage Tray and Correct Terminal Connectors. The Door Will, Also, Incorporate Vents To Allow The Battery Gasses To Escape.



Typical Sulphation Of Lead Plates

A leisure battery must be kept at an appropriate level of charge.

If it is allowed to drop below 50%, it is unlikely it will achieve 100% charge ever again.

If it is allowed to discharge fully, for any period of time, without recharging, then the process of sulphation will occur.

This is when white powdery deposits of lead sulphate accumulate on the lead plates.

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Eventually, these begin to crystallise on the plates, rendering them unusable. This process is generally considered to be irreversible, and the battery will need to be replaced, although there is a possibility that it may be partially revived through the use of a 'pulse charger'. This is one of a variety of means of charging a leisure battery, and these are looked at, in more detail, below.

Lead acid batteries will have inspection caps, which allow the user to check electrolyte levels and top them up, with distilled water, where necessary. Although a relatively straightforward procedure, it is wise to take precautions when undertaking this task.

Protective clothing and glasses should be worn. Battery gas is highly explosive, and, if a battery does explode, the acid, inside, can damage clothes, as well as eyes, skin and other tissue, so just be aware of any flames or sources of sparks, nearby (including inadequate battery connections).

It never does any harm to apply a protective layer of Vaseline to battery terminals, either, and to keep an eye on them, to ensure they remain clean, and free of rust.

Battery Charging

As already mentioned; it is vital that a leisure battery is maintained at an appropriate level of charge, to avoid permanent damage to that battery.

It is, perhaps, worth mentioning that on board PSUs are designed to perform a number of functions, including powering the 240v system, the 12v system (via a transformer) and charging the battery.

Although the more modern 'intelligent' chargers are going some way to improve this, the modern PSU is a bit of a jack of all trades, and, as such, is not as able to fully charge a leisure battery as the more dedicated battery chargers are.

It is never a bad idea to remove a battery, periodically, in order to charge it with a proper leisure battery charger which will help to give it that extra boost, to ensure it remains in top condition. This is particularly relevant over the Winter period, especially if the camper is laid up in storage for a number of months.

It's important to remember that lead acid batteries will suffer from a degree of internal leakage, which means that, even if they are disconnected from the 12v system completely, they will still require a top up recharge every six to eight weeks, in order to prevent them from dropping below charge levels likely to cause long term damage. In this case, 50% is considered to be the minimum safe level of charge before the battery must be recharged again, if some degree of damage, or loss of function is to be avoided.

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If time is not an issue, then a slow charge, over a longer period of time, is universally accepted as being the preferable option, as opposed to a more rapid charge over a shorter period. A charger running at around 4 or 5 Amps is, generally, considered to be an acceptable rating for a charger of this nature. How long a recharge will take will depend on a number of factors, including, of course, how discharged it was, in the first place. An easy way to get around this is by the use of a 'smart' charger, which can be left permanently attached to the battery, maintaining its charge at the optimum level.

There are four main types of battery charger we can use;

- On board charger
- Standard charger
- Semi-automatic chargers
- Automatic chargers

On Board Charger

These have, largely, been covered above, and are part of the on board PSU, rather than being a dedicated charger in their own right. If the charge, from these units, was too high, it would 'boil' the electrolyte solution in the battery, causing 'gassing off' which is not ideal, as it means that not only will the battery need topping up with distilled water every so often, but, also, it will be emitting potentially explosive gasses, which is never ideal, at the best of times, and can, also, result in the false alarming of certain carbon monoxide detectors.

In order to avoid this over charge, on board chargers are rated so as to only charge a leisure battery to around 80% of its capacity at any given time.

More modern 'intelligent' on board chargers are able to increase this to 90% of capacity.

The theory is that the battery charge can be 'topped up' using the vehicle alternator, whilst in transit.

This is something that many aren't aware of, and it may, just, be a factor in deciding whether or not to opt for single or twin / euro electrics when installing a new tow bar. Going for option 1 may mean that you arrive on site with a battery that is considerably less charged than it could have been.



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Standard Charger

These are more akin to the old style chargers of a few years ago, and have, mostly, been replaced by automatic or semi-automatic chargers in the modern world. They deliver an unregulated charge, which can rise to very high levels as the battery becomes close to being fully charged. For this reason, they should not be used unless closely monitored.

Semi-Automatic Chargers

These are another, relatively simple, charger but they are designed to cut out once the battery reaches a pre determined limit. The idea being that they are able to provide a full level of charge, but without causing significant gassing within the battery. They, basically, achieve the same as the on board battery, only with greater efficiency and higher charge levels.

Automatic Chargers

I'm sure it will come as no surprise to learn that these are considered to be the best type of charger to use. They are, also, the only ones that can be left connected to the battery over a prolonged period of time (although low power 'trickle chargers' can, also, be left on for relatively long periods, but they are far less controllable than an automatic charger).

Rather than, simply, cutting out at a specified level of charge, these units will charge the battery in a number of different ways, depending on the stage of charging achieved.

Initially, the chargers enter the 'constant current phase' where a constant current is applied to the battery until a pre determined terminal voltage is achieved. Next the charger enters the 'constant voltage stage' wherein the voltage is maintained at that level, whilst the current drops, until the current stabilises. The final stage is the 'float mode' where the battery is kept at a constant voltage of around 13.6v, thereby ensuring the battery is maintained at optimum charge level, at all times.

In addition to their more standard features, some automatic chargers, also, have a number of enhanced features. An example of this is 'pulse mode', whereby the charger senses that sulphation has occurred in the battery, and delivers a controlled series of high frequency pulses which are designed to break down the lead sulphate crystals, thereby restoring some of the useful life of the battery. Another such feature is the ability to monitor the temperature of the battery, and regulate the charge supplied accordingly.

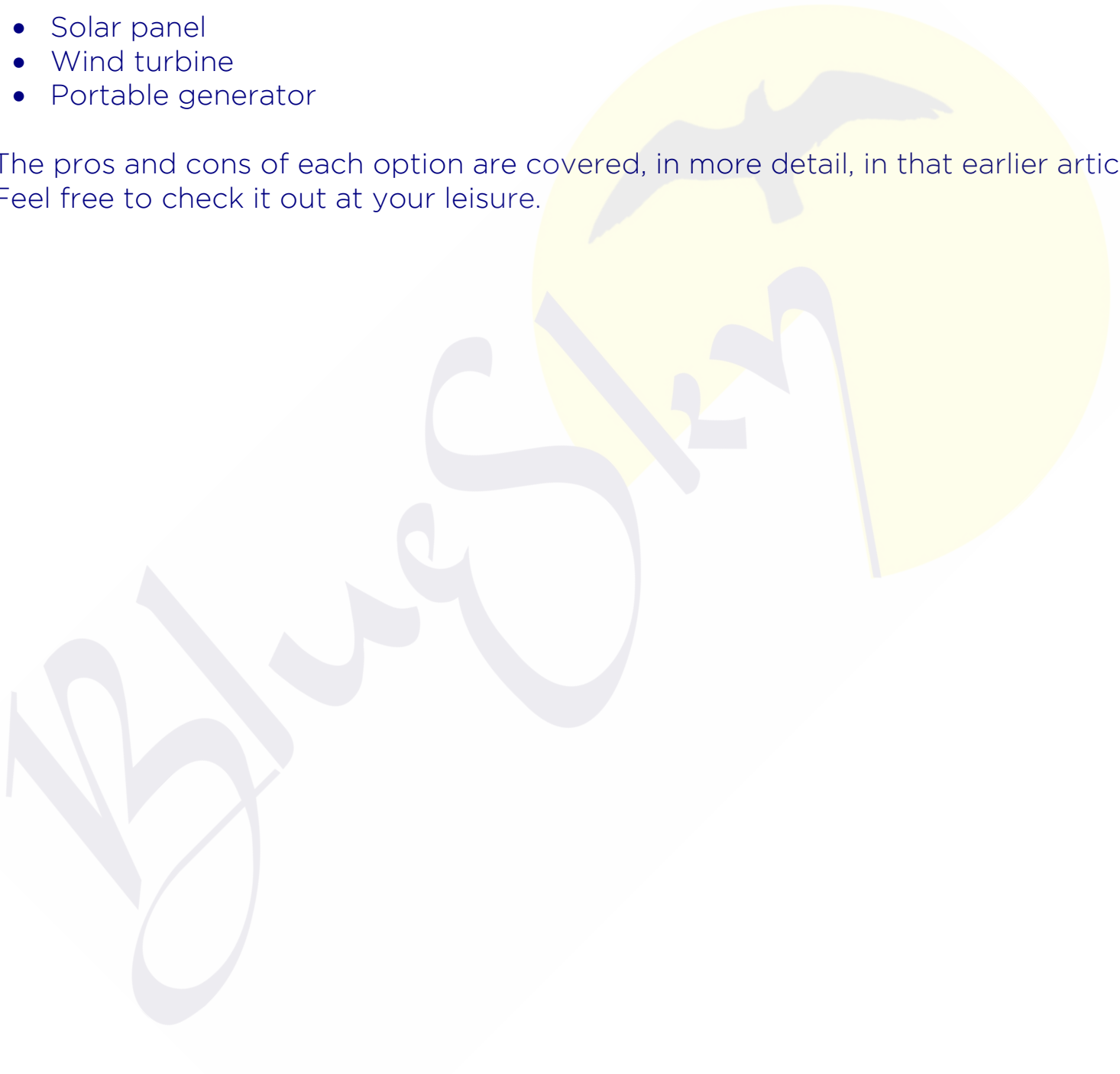
This facility also helps to prevent over heating of the battery.

Charging Without EHU

In the section below; Making The Most Of Life Without Electric Hookup, we look at some of the options of charging a battery, whilst camping without the benefit of EHU. The three main options here are;

- Solar panel
- Wind turbine
- Portable generator

The pros and cons of each option are covered, in more detail, in that earlier article. Feel free to check it out at your leisure.



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Understanding The Basics Of Onboard Electrics

The vast majority of us will have some form of on board electrical system(s) in our units, be it 12 Volt, 240 Volt, or both, however, it is apparent that many users still don't fully understand what systems power what appliances, and we regularly receive enquiries from people concerned that their three pin mains sockets aren't working when there is no electric hookup (EHU) or from those unable to understand why their fridge won't work on 12V, if there is no mains supply.

Most modern units will have two different electrical systems, a 12V system and a 240V system, however, it is more than likely, both systems will be inter linked to a greater or lesser extent.

What System Powers What Appliances?

Starting with the 12V system, this will, most likely, be powered by an on board leisure battery.



A 240V Mains Socket Will Not Work Without EHU

For more information on how these work, see our earlier article; [An Introduction To Leisure Batteries](#).

In most units, the 12V system will run the following;

- 12V sockets (these come in a variety of formats, depending on age of the unit)
- 12V lighting (some lights may be mains powered, but the vast majority are 12V)
- Water pump (for main / wash room water supply to taps etc)
- Toilet flush (where applicable)

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The 12V Switch, On A Fridge, Will Only Work Whilst Connected To A Car With The Engine Running

Please note; the 12V supply will NOT power the three way refrigerator, where fitted.

This is because it would drain the battery in a matter of hours, or, even, less.

Many fridges are not, even, connected to the leisure battery, for just this reason.

More modern fridges do tend to be connected to the leisure battery, but not for cooling, only to power the light(s) and electronic ignition.

The 12V setting on a three way fridge is only for use when connected to a towing vehicle, and, then, only when the engine is running (an on board relay will, normally, disconnect power to the fridge, as soon as the car engine is turned off).

The 240V system, on the other hand, is available for much heavier loads, especially those requiring some form of heating element. The 240V system (via the on site EHU system) will power the following;

- 3 pin 240V sockets (like those you have in the wall at home)
- Fridge
- On board heater (where fitted)
- Hot water system
- In some units, there may, also, be mains lighting, as well, although this tends to be more the case with caravans, as opposed to folding campers.

How Do The Systems Work, In Practice?

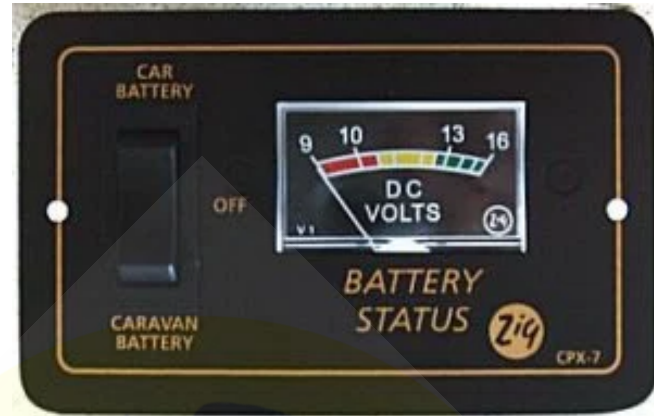
The way the electrical systems work will, in the main, depend on the age of our unit. The very oldest units may well have no electrics, whatsoever, relying on manual foot pumps for water, and gas for cooking and, maybe, a fridge, if you're lucky.

Slightly newer units will, often, have one system or the other, but not both, although you will, often, see one, or the other, or both, fitted as an after-market installation, by subsequent owners.

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If the on board electrics are 12V only, this is fine, but does present us with one significant challenge; how do we charge the leisure battery, without a mains supply?

Of course, these days, we have various options, such as solar panels etc, but the original answer, usually, came via the grey 12S lead, connected to the vehicle tow bar electrics.



A Typical On board Switch, Allowing Us To Select The 12V Source, From Car To Leisure Battery

This gives us the option to charge the leisure battery, whilst in transit, but, of course, is not ideal, for longer stays, when the car may need to be hooked up, for a while, in order to top up the leisure battery.

Some models, actually, take this a step further, and use the vehicle battery to power the camper's on board 12V system, thereby excluding the need for a leisure battery, at all. This is not ideal, as you need the car to be permanently connected, in order for the 12V system to work, but a surprisingly large number of models did, still, use this system.

On units with 240V power, only, there is no such issue with charging the battery, although, of course, there can be a bit of an issue, when visiting sites without electric hookup facilities.

So, of course, the ideal scenario is to have both systems installed, and, for the vast majority of modern units, this is the way they are configured, thereby enabling us to operate reasonably well, wherever we may be situated.



Typical Power Supply Unit, The Sargent PSU 2005

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Most, if not all, modern campers will have an onboard power management system. For most of the Pennine / Conway models, in recent years, this has been the very popular PSU2005 unit. These units perform three main functions;

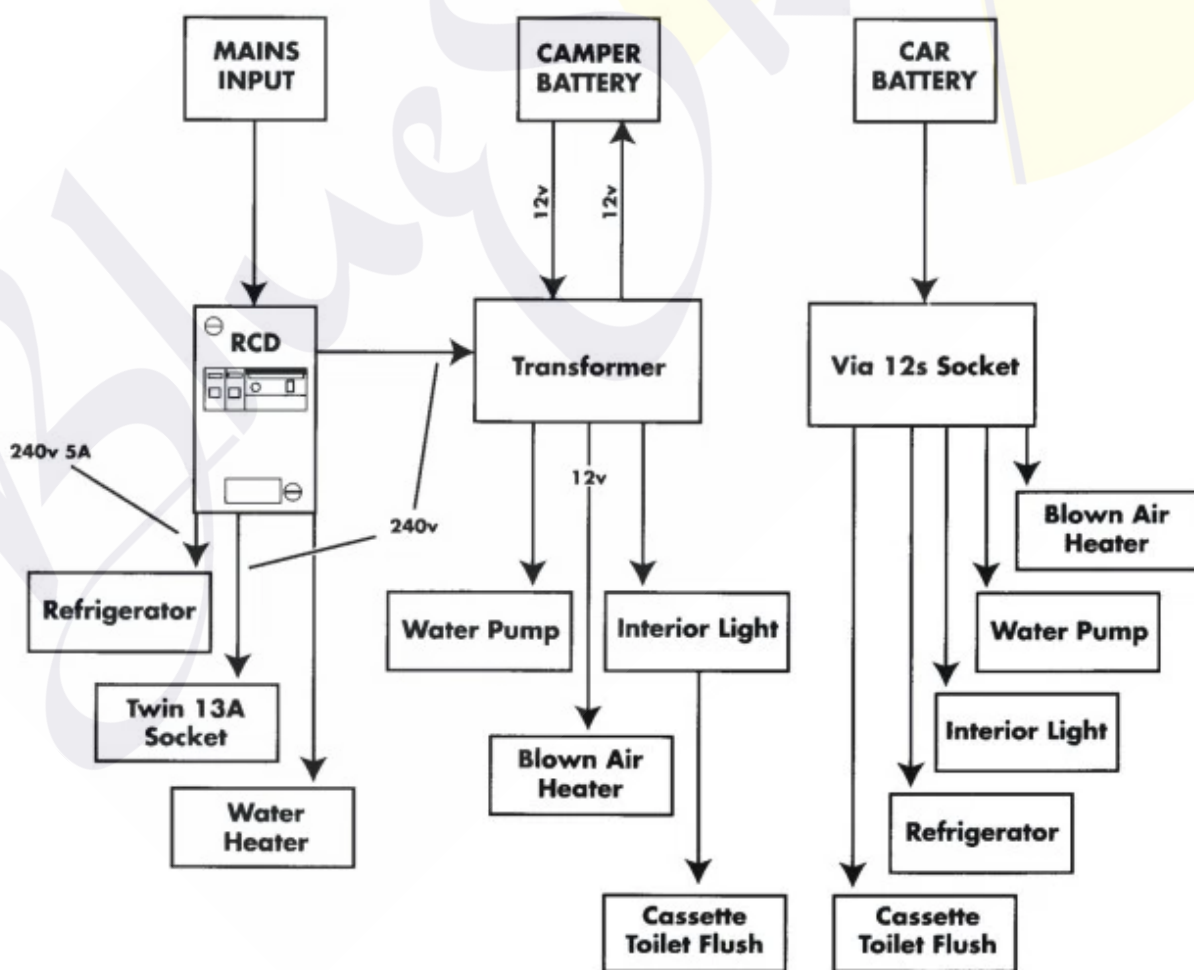
- To control and distribute the onboard mains electric supply

- To provide 12V power, via an in built transformer, to the 12V system

- To charge the leisure battery, where fitted

This unit, also, contains all fuses / trip switches for both 12V and 240V systems.

The PSU provides a bridge between the 12V system and the 240V system. It allows the mains supply to charge the battery, but, also, allows the 12V system to run, even without a battery in place. Whilst this facility is available, and can be used in the short term, it is not recommended for long term use, in most units, as the battery is not only used for storing 12V power, it is, also, used as a buffer, smoothing out the power supply from the transformer, and protecting any in line appliances from damage. Having a dual electrical system really is the best of both worlds, with the facilities needed to charge the battery, whenever we are on EHU, and the backup of a leisure battery when we aren't.



Typical Pennine Folding Camper Electrical System Configuration

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Working Without EHU

We looked at the general topic of working without EHU in our earlier article; Making The Most Of Life Without Electric Hook Up, but, for now, we are just looking at the specifics of what will, and won't work, when we have no external mains supply.

We have, already, covered, above, those appliances that will work on 12V power, from a leisure battery, but what about those that won't? The simple answer, to be honest, is that most will have to work on gas, in the absence of a 240V power supply. Typical examples of this include;

1. Fridge
2. Heater
3. Hot water

All of these contain a heating element, rendering them unsuitable to use on 12V, which is why many come with a gas option. If they don't, then you will be unable to use them without electric hook up. Unfortunately, all new model folding camper models, from Pennine, are provided with electric only heating / hot water, and only UK competitors, Opus, have electric only heating, and no hot water system, at all, so off grid camping, in modern units, can be a little more difficult.

Of course, if we are staying away without electric hookup, for any period of time, we may well require some form of battery charging facility.

The most popular of these, today, is the solar panel.

An 80W plus model should give you all you need for moderate to average usage over extended periods.

If you do need a little 240V power, whilst away, without EHU, this is achievable with the use of an inverter.

This converts 12V power to 240V, for running the odd domestic appliance.

Of course, we need to be mindful of the power usage of those appliances, and, once again, anything containing a heating element will kill the battery in a matter of hours, or, even, minutes. Consequently, it is best to keep to inverters of no more than 300W, in order to protect battery life.



A Solar Panel Will Help To Keep A Leisure Battery Topped Up

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It goes without saying that securing our camper against theft is an absolute must, and a certain level of physical security will often be a pre requisite of obtaining insurance with many insurance companies.

When it comes to physical security, there are, effectively, two main options; a hitch lock or a wheel lock / clamp.

Hitch Lock

Hitch locks offer two alternative forms of security. Some can be locked to the vehicle, whilst stationary, preventing it from being moved. Others simply provide a secure cover to the towing hitch, so that the unit cannot be hitched up to another vehicle and towed away.

Whichever version is used, it is important to ensure that it not only covers the hitch, itself, but, also, the securing bolts, to prevent the hitch from being removed / replaced, prior to the theft of the camper.

Wheel Locks

A wheel lock is different from a wheel clamp, insofar as it locks onto the wheel, and is fitted so that it extends through the wheel, and locks onto the chassis. Like hitch locks, they, also have a dual purpose; not only do they provide good physical security, but they, also, serve as a visual deterrent. Unlike some wheel clamps, because they are fitted through the wheel, itself, they remain effective, even when the tyres have been let down.

Wheel locks are, usually, chassis specific, and both Al-KO (from 2001 onwards) and BPW (from 2004 onwards) have their own specific locks, so it is worth making sure you are purchasing the correct one. It's also worth noting that, because the device fits through the wheel, they are only suitable for units fitted with alloy wheels.



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One of the biggest down sides with these locks is that they have to be correctly aligned with both the wheels and the chassis receiver, which can be a bit of a pain when you've just got your wheels in the perfect position on the levelling ramp.

Wheel Clamps

Unlike wheel locks, a wheel clamp fits around, rather than through, the wheel.

Wheel clamps come in a large variety of shapes and sizes, from heavy, bulky models, best suited to storage situations, to lighter alternatives, more appropriate to travelling / on site.



When choosing a wheel clamp, bear in mind that some models leave the wheel nuts exposed. This is far from ideal, as the wheel can still be removed, which, in many cases, renders the clamp ineffective.

Where the clamp does leave wheel nuts exposed, it is always prudent to ensure that locking wheel nuts are fitted, for added security.

Additional Security

In addition to the three main types of security mentioned above, there are a number of further measures we can take, and devices we can fit. these include:

- Alarm systems. These can be very straightforward to fit, and are an effective means of notifying those nearby that the unit is being tampered with. It's important to ensure the system is reliable, as a series of false alarms will not make you popular with your immediate neighbours, and will result in any subsequent alarms being ignored. This is where, as folding camper owners, we have to be particularly careful. Many generic caravan alarms include one or more PIR sensors to monitor the interior. This is all well and good in a caravan or motor home, but the canvas top of a folding camper is prone to movement, especially in high winds, and this renders it vulnerable to false alarms, as the sensors detect this unwanted movement. Alternate sensors, such as those detecting movement of the camper, or the winding up / down of a corner steady may, also, be worth considering.
- Security Posts. Obviously only suitable when in storage, particularly at home, these posts should be set in concrete, to avoid easy removal. It is possible to obtain these with a tow ball on top, to secure the hitch to, but they are, in the main, used as a physical barrier, to prevent removal of the unit.

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- Winter wheels. Some of these are designed to replace the normal wheel, during periods of prolonged storage, such as over Winter. Many assume that, because the wheels are removed, this provides additional security, however, it's no major issue for thieves to simply replace them with 'proper' wheels, again, so it's always best to ensure you have a locking version. Also, be aware that some insurance companies insist on the fitting of a wheel clamp. Failure to do so can invalidate the insurance. Winter wheels do not, usually, qualify as a wheel lock, and, therefore, could contravene the terms of your insurance.
- Corner steady locks. These are a relatively simple device that allows the corner steady to be locked in the down position, thereby preventing the trailer from being towed away.
- Secure storage. Where folding campers really gain is in their ability to be stored within a garage, which is not an option for most caravans or motor homes. Third party storage is difficult enough to find, as it is, let alone storage under cover and within a highly secure location. A folding camper can be stored within a normal, locked, domestic garage (assuming, of course, the garage isn't, already, filled with all manner of miscellanea)!

Extra Precautions

Unfortunately, whilst physical security may well deter many opportunistic thieves, it will only slow the determined criminal, and, given time, they will circumnavigate all security measures. If this happens, what other precautions can we take to minimise the impact of the theft?

- GPS tracking. The fitting of a GPS tracking device can be an effective way of securing your pride and joy, and may, even, help reduce insurance premiums, however, an increasing number of thieves are getting their hands on signal blockers, which can render these trackers ineffective. It is, also, important to ensure that the tracker unit has an adequate battery backup, in case the main camper battery is disconnected.
- Photographic evidence. It is always a good idea to take photographs of your camper, both internally and externally, paying particular attention to any distinguishing marks. It is also worth photographing any significant items of equipment, or optional extras, that may be subject to theft.
- Make sure you, also, have a photograph, or, at least, a note of, the unit serial number.
- Remove all valuables from the unit, when in storage, and take them with you, when going out and about, on site. A locked car boot is, always, a lot more secure than an unlocked camper. Even a fully locked camper is no barrier to entry, when the canvas can, simply, be unclipped. A small safe, secured to the floor or bulkhead, out of sight, will give an element of security, but not for long, when under attack from a particularly determined thief.

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No level of security will absolutely guarantee the safety of our unit, but it isn't designed to.

Most crimes of this nature are opportunistic (especially when in a mobile situation like this) and the majority of devices are designed to both deter the opportunistic thief, and impede the more determined one.

At the end of the day, they are steps worth taking, and with the added bonus that they may well have a significant impact on insurance premiums.

If you do see, or hear, anything of a suspicious nature, you can always call the free and confidential Crimestoppers line on 0800 555 111.

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Setting Up The Folding Camper

There are two aspects we need to consider, when setting up a camper. The first is where we are going to pitch, and the second is how.

Choosing A Pitch

There will be a number of things to consider, when pitching a folding camper, including; how close we pitch to the facilities, how flat / sloping the ground is, how sheltered it is (there will, often, be a trade off between views and shelter) is it a grass or hard standing pitch etc. These are some of the things we need to be aware of;

- **Grass V Hard Standing:** This is, largely, a matter of personal preference. If you are not using an awning, then there is no significant difference, although hard standing pitches may be more convenient in poor weather, as they aren't prone to muddy puddles, which can be an issue with grass ones. You are, also less likely to walk freshly mowed grass into the camper, as well. These advantages will also apply when using an awning, but pegging out will be more of a challenge on hard standing pitches, and specialist pegs will be required. When wet weather is less of an issue, grass pitches are softer on the feet, but longer term stays are not ideal for the health of the underlying grass
- **Pitch Slope:** Too much of a sloping pitch can be an issue for leveling the camper, and ramps will, almost certainly, be required. You also need to ensure that brakes are working well. A small plus side of a sloping pitch is that it will be less prone to flooding in the wet weather, but you do need to make sure that it isn't a water course for draining water, as well. A small river is no more welcome in an awning than a small lake.
- **Shelter:** This will be particularly relevant on coastal sites, but will apply anywhere with exposed pitches. Nothing beats the views from a cliff top pitch, but on a wet and windy day, the benefits are a little harder to appreciate. A sheltered pitch, on the other hand, will provide protection from the elements, but the compromise is always in terms of the view.
- **Trees:** On the general topic of shelter, it might, initially, seem a good idea to pitch up under trees, for a bit of extra shelter, but this is not always the best option. Falling branches / twigs, leaves and sap can all have an impact on the roof of a folding camper, and let's not forget that birds are prone to perching there (which is not the only thing they are prone to doing, and you don't want that all over your camper).
- **Facilities:** Something else to consider is the proximity to facilities. Pitches nearer to the main facilities block are likely to be less peaceful, even if they are more convenient. This is, of course, particularly true of the children's play area, and some people do prefer to find a pitch that is a little more secluded, even if it does mean a slightly longer trek to the facilities.

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Setting Up The Camper

This is a, relatively, simple process, that can, easily, be completed by one person. The aim, here, is to give you an idea of the overall process, to show what is involved. It is not intended to be a detailed and comprehensive guide, and it may well be that your own preferred sequence will vary.

In this example, we are looking at a **Trigano Randger 575LX**, a traditional layout 6 berth folding camper model. The principles will be the same for most 6 berth models, and the overall procedure for the 4 berth models, likewise, is very similar.

Trigano Randger Trailer



(1) Remove Transit Cover



You are now ready to begin assembling your camper, starting with the beds.

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(2) Open Bed 1 And Attach Supports



(3) Open Bed 2 And Attach Supports



(4) Roll down canvas and push poles up to first position



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(5) Attach canvas to camper, using velcro and bungees and fully extend poles



(6) Lower Corner Steadies



(7) Camper interior, with wardrobe folded down



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(8) Pivot wardrobe up and slide into position. Note all roof liners, bed pods etc are already in position. Bedding can, also, be left in place, if preferred.



(9) Hang curtains



(10) Make up settees from seat cushions and remove table, to reveal kitchen unit.



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(11) Lift cooker / sink unit up on to kitchen cupboards, connect to gas, electric and water supplies and open up ready for use.



(12) Relax and enjoy



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Assembling A Folding Camper Awning. A Pictorial Guide

Below is a step by step pictorial guide to setting up a folding camper awning. This guide is based on the older, heavy duty awning poles, and the smaller awning style, associated with the four berth Pennine models, such as the **Aztecs**, **Apollos** and **Fiestas** (the one in the pictures is a four berth Pennine Apollo, but the principles will be the same for most Pennine and similar model awnings, and the six berth models are pretty much identical, other than the fact that they have five roof tensioners, as opposed to three).

Also, please be aware that manufacturers have used a number of different jointing systems for their awnings, including hooks, C clips and push button fittings. The awning in these pictures uses hooks to attach to the camper, and a twist and turn plastic connector to connect the roof tensioners to the frame. Regardless of connection type, the basic procedures will be the same.

This guide details one of many methods of setting up these awnings.

Opinion varies as to which method is preferable. This is just the one which, in our own experience, is the easiest to perform.

(1) Arrange Awning Poles

Lay out awning poles and all corner extension pieces.

All models should have three upright legs, two front frame poles and three roof tensioners.

The six berth models will have two further roof tensioners to bring the total to five.



There should also be a number of 'T' pieces, for where the poles join, and canopy extension tubes, one for each roof tensioner pole.

If in any doubt, take a look at the schematics at the end of this guide).

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(2) Layout Main Canopy

Lay the main awning canvas, with the long zip pointing towards the camper.

If this has not already been done, it is best to remove the awning side pieces, and set aside.

This will make it far easier to handle, particularly if it is being placed over the roof, whilst the framework is being assembled.

(3) Attach Awning Zip To Camper

Lift the protective flap, which protects the zip on the main camper canvas.

This runs along the entire upper edge of the camper, from the extreme edge of one bed, over the door, to the edge of the opposite bed.

Sometimes it can be a little tricky to get the zip started, with such a weight of canvas, but persevere and it will engage with practice.



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(4) Run Zip Along Entire Length Of The Camper

Once the zip has fully engaged, draw it the whole length of the upper edge of the camper.

In the picture, a length of yellow cord has been attached to the zip pull, in order to assist with the closing of the zip, as it passes over the apex of the camper.

A small set of steps also helps with this, although the less vertically challenged will find that they can reach this reasonably well by standing in the doorway, but, as with most aspects, it's about seeing what works best for you.



Continue to draw the zip all the way across the top edge of the camper, until it reaches the opposite side.

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(5) Attach Under Bed Awning Skirts



The under bed skirts are attached to the awning canvas, and are used to block off the gap underneath the beds for both privacy and insulation. Each bed edge has a zip on it that marries up to the equivalent zip on the skirt. Just like with the main awning canvas, join the zips at the outer edge, and draw them in towards the door to close. Do this for both under bed skirts.

(6) Assemble Main Awning Framework

We are now ready to start setting up the poles. Many people find it easier to do this with the awning canopy folded back over the camper roof, to keep it out of the way. Whilst this is certainly slightly easier for the novice, we find it just as quick to work with the canvas in situ, especially with the smaller four berths like this Apollo.



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Just under the main zip, where the awning canvas meets the main camper canvas, you will see a series of holes in the camper canvas (there are three in four berth models and five in six berth models - one for each roof tensioner pole). These holes are normally hidden from view, in everyday use, by the same flap that covers the long zip (mentioned in step (3) above).

Initially, these holes will be covered by a protective flap, as in the left hand picture. This is used to keep the wind and rain out, when the awning is not in use. In the middle picture, this flap has been moved to one side to show the canvas support pole inside the camper, complete with mounting hole for the roof tensioner.

Each roof tensioner will have a hook on one end, which can then be hooked into the mounting hole, thereby fixing it to the camper. The other end of the roof tensioner can then be laid on the floor, whilst the process is completed for the remaining tensioners.



Once all roof tensioners are attached, and their ends laid on the ground, we can start to look at assembling the front frame.

Assemble the front frame on the ground, ready to stand up and connect to the roof tensioners.



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Stand the frame up, and attach each roof tensioner in turn. In the left hand picture, the two outer tensioners, only have been attached, and, in the right hand picture, the centre tensioner has also been attached, which has raised the canvas in the middle.

This is a job that can be done by one person, but, particularly with the six berth models, and in high winds, it is always preferable to have two people involved, even if one is a young child, who is simply holding a pole in place for you.



Unfurl the awning canvas, if it has been folded back over the camper roof, and stretch it out to cover the entire framework.

(7) Adjust Awning Frame, And Tension Canvas

The canvas may well now be draped over the awning frame, but it is unlikely to be anything like the right shape, initially. The awning frame can adjust three dimensionally and it will be, largely, a case of trial and error to get the tension right, so that the awning is both stable, and aesthetically correct.

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Every pole has a thumbscrew tensioner which allows us to lengthen and shorten each one, until they are perfectly positioned within the canvas, to give it the right height, depth and width, so that the exterior looks as good as it possibly can.

This can take a bit of playing around with, especially for the uninitiated, but it is always worth the effort, to get the awning looking as good as the rest of the camper.



Once the poles are almost aligned, insert the canopy extension tubes into the connector at the end of each roof tensioner. (Left picture). The hooks can then be inserted into the brass eyes on the awning canvas, and the length of the extension tube is then adjusted to get the canopy to the perfect tension (right picture) so that it doesn't flap around unduly.

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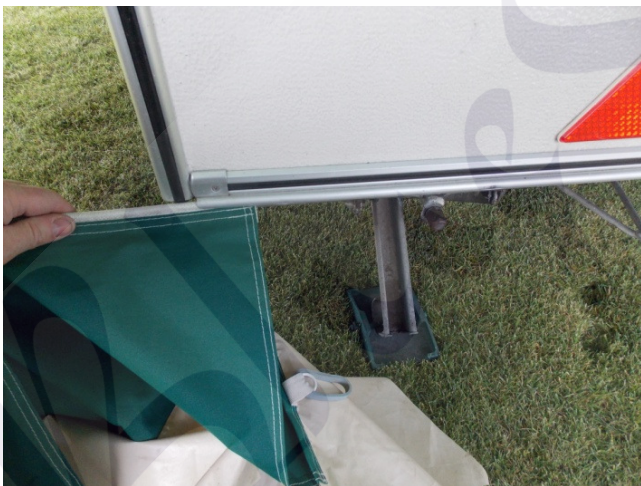


(8) Hang Remaining Sides, Skirts Etc.

The awning canopy is now set up and positioned exactly how it should be.

That's the hard part over and done with. Those of you not now divorced, murdered or institutionalised can take your time to get the finer adjustments done, hang the side panels etc.

The first of these jobs is to attach the final skirt to the edge of the camper. We have already attached the two under bed skirts, but this leaves a small gap, under the camper, in between the two beds. This skirt simply slides into a mounting rail on the underside of the camper, just below the door.



Next, we need to hang the four awning panels, to turn it from a sun canopy, into a full blown awning.

This is something that is, usually, a little easier to do, prior to the final pegging out of the canvas, and simply involves zipping them into place.



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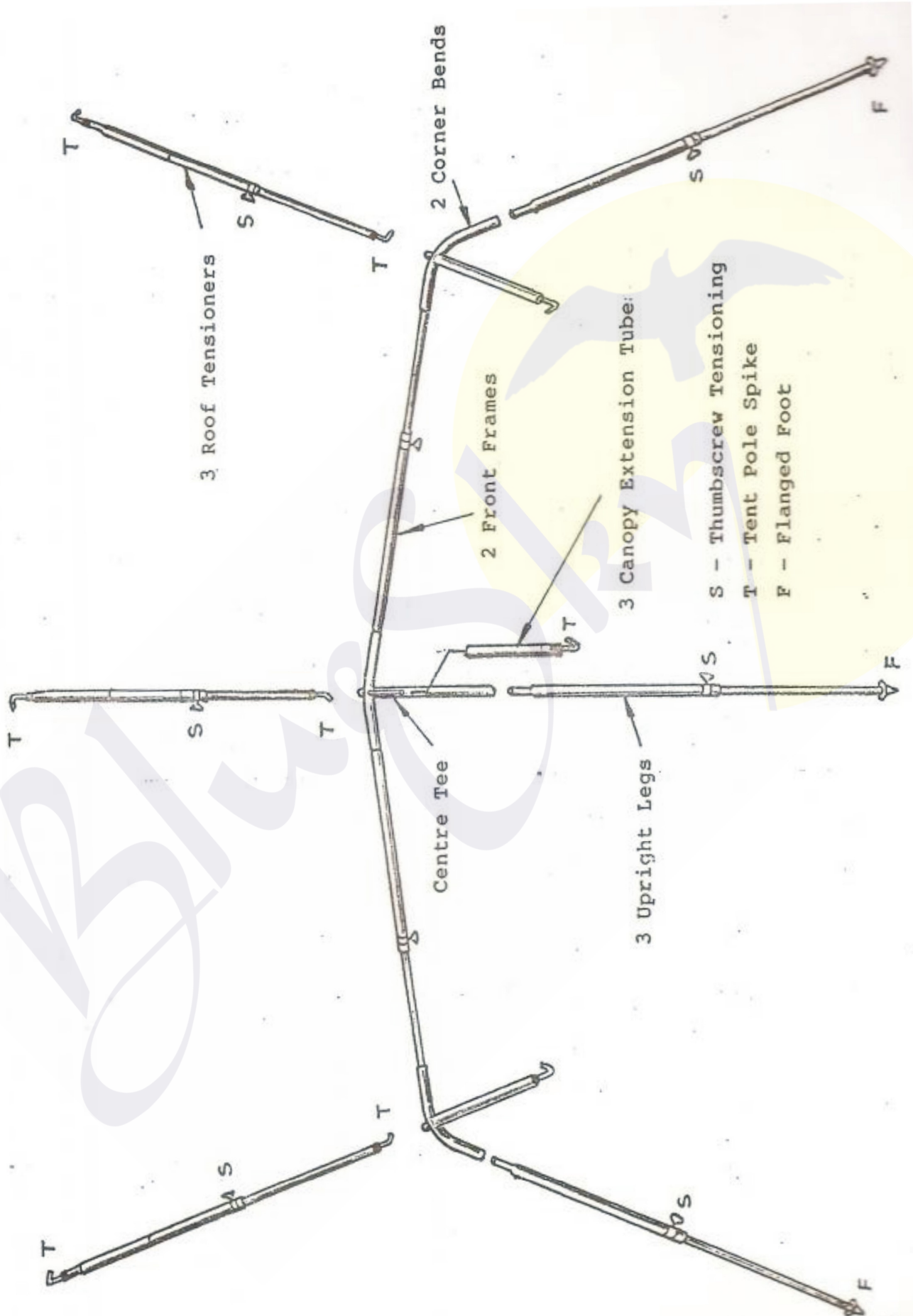


Finally, we peg out all parts of the awning, skirts etc to tension the fabric, seal as many draughts as we can, and give the awning that 'finished' look, at least externally.

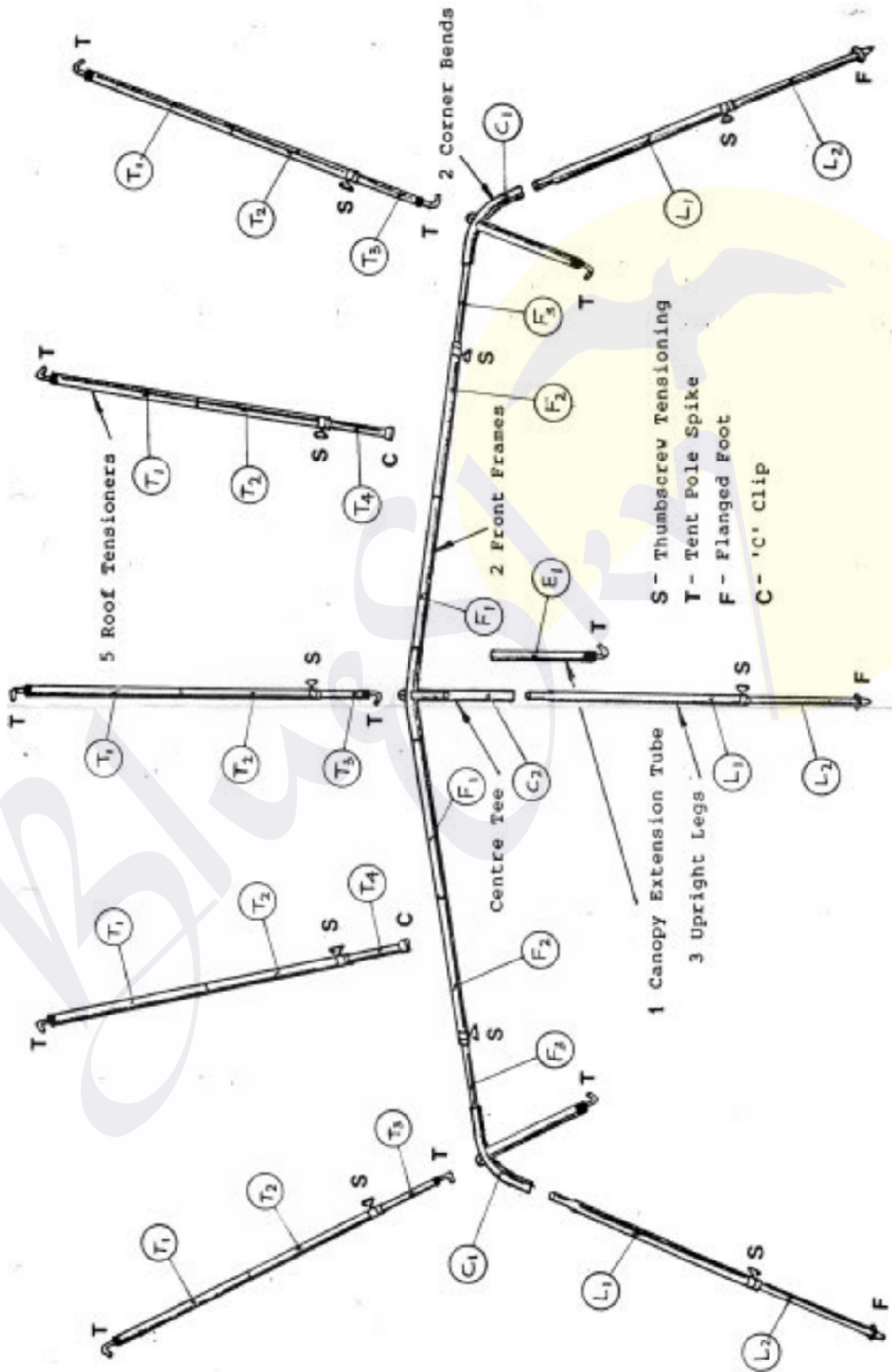
All that remains to be done now is to add the finishing touches to the interior of the awning, including curtains and ground sheet.



Finished awning, with ground sheet down and curtains hung. The skirts and zips should provide a nice snug environment, with no draughts, and the curtains make the whole area feel more cosy. Just add furniture and you're ready to go...



Pennine Awning Pole Configuration: 4 Berth Models



Pennine Awning Pole Configuration: 6 Berth Models

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Making the Most Of Life Without Electric Hookup

These days, even the most basic of tents can incorporate the benefits of electric hookup, when on site, and it's easy to become overly reliant on them to enhance our routine camping experience.

Many of the most picturesque sites, however, don't have an electric hookup, or they are very limited and always pre booked.

So. Does that mean we should avoid them, or does it have to mean that we can't get the full benefit from those sites as we will have to leave most of our electric appliances at home?

The simple answer is; No, we don't. There are many alternatives to 240V appliances, and we will be looking at a few of them here.

Cooking

To be fair, for many, 240V electricity won't play a huge part in our catering, unless we have an electric mini oven or microwave, although, for many others, the camper will be heaving with slow cookers, toasters, electric kettles, grills, etc. Most of us will have, at least, a one or two burner hob and grill, but, if not, there are plenty of portable models out there, with, or without grill, powered by a small LPG cylinder, and most of us are familiar with those, as well as the traditional camping staple; the barbeque. There are, however, a couple of cooking alternatives that many people are not aware of, that offer a little extra luxury, and, even, a bit more fun to campsite catering.

The first of these is the 12V microwave, the most popular of which is the Wave Box, a tri powered microwave, which can be run from a 240V power supply, a cigarette lighter socket, or, via a set of crocodile clips, directly on to the battery terminals. The Wave Box was originally designed for truckers to use when sleeping in their cabs, but is ideally suited to the camping environment, as it is compact and robust, and its benefits are not just confined to 'off grid' camping.



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The second, and much more fun, means of cooking is on a rocket stove, such as the **DK Rocket Stove**.

I have one of these, and they're a great way to cook, with no electricity, and without wasting any of your own LPG. Just a few twigs and you're cooking on gas (so to speak).

More fun than traditional burners, not as messy or slow to heat up as a BBQ and really easy to use. Just makes a bit of a change.



In addition to these, there is a huge array of ancillary products hitting the market place at the moment, particularly from the US, most of which, like the Wave Box above, were originally designed to cater for the trucker market.

These include such items as kettles, filter coffee machines, sandwich toasters and slow cookers, to name but a few.

The only thing to be aware of is that, because many of these were originally designed to be used in truck cabs, with their dual battery systems, some will only run on 24V, as opposed to 12V, but there is still a wealth of options out there. We always carry a 12V filter coffee machine and a 12V kettle, just in case of issues with the gas supply.

On the general topic of cooking, we need somewhere to store our food, prior to use. Whilst many campers will be fitted with a three way fridge, many will not. One option is the 12V cool box. These will draw around 40 - 50W, on average, and, so, would fully drain a leisure battery, on their own, in around 8 - 10 days, if not recharged. They do, however, represent a great way to keep food cool for long periods, as long as the weather is not too extreme. An alternative to the cool box is a portable, gas powered fridge. On the plus side, these are every bit as good as the three way fridges installed in many campers, and some will even have a small freezer compartment. However, on the down side, they are bulky and heavy to transport, require a gas supply to work (not too much of a problem if you have an external BBQ point) and they cannot be used in the main camper area, due to the risk of potentially harmful fumes.

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Lighting

A lot of campers, these days, will have a 12V lighting system, even if, like the Fiestas, sterlings and early Pullmans etc, it was just a single light (usually on the wardrobe, where fitted). Even if you do, it is likely you will want to supplement that with additional lighting, especially if you are doing something close up, like reading.



There are a number of alternatives here, the main ones being gas lamps and high power 12V LED lighting.

Gas lamps are a little retro these days, but still throw out a lot of light, and a surprising amount of warmth, as well, on slightly cooler nights.

For some, the potential fire and fume issues of gas lamps rule them out, but, now, you can get hold of some pretty powerful 12V LED lamps, many of which are fully rechargeable, and most are bright enough for reading etc.

In addition to the free standing lamps, many are now opting for 12V LED lights to provide the ambient lighting in the camper. These are inexpensive, relatively easy to fit, and can be mounted pretty much anywhere there is a flat surface. They also look pretty cool as well.

Another popular addition to the modern camping arsenal is solar lighting, whether is solar lanterns for the awning, or the ever increasing numbers of solar powered fairy lights we are seeing dotted around most camp sites in the UK.



Heating

Heating options are far more limited, due to the issue of potentially dangerous fumes, and much has been made, recently, of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning from the use of BBQs to heat a tent or awning.

Again, the more fortunate of us may have a gas powered heating system built in to the unit, but, if not, we will need to consider our options carefully.

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If we don't have a built in heater, there are two main alternatives to heating a camper without 240V power. The first, and most popular is by the use of a portable gas fire.

These come in various guises, but, within reason, the smaller the better, as any heater used has to be transported to the site, and then used in the camper without causing an obstruction.

The most common type uses a small individual gas cylinder, which, although very cheap to buy (at around £1 each) will usually last just a couple of hours on full heat, so make sure you take plenty with you.

The other thing to be aware of with these small gas heaters is that they are not designed for use indoors. Indeed, most manufacturers actively advise against it.

We have used these, without incident, in tents and campers, for many years, but it would be irresponsible to include them without mentioning the potential risks.

If you do chose to use these heaters in your folding camper (as we do) then make sure the space is well ventilated, and a carbon monoxide detector is never a bad idea, in any situation.

The second, and far less common, option is that of the 12v heater.

These are useful for taking the chill off a space, but can't come anywhere near the performance of alternative heaters.

The average power output of a 12v fan heater is around 150w, whereas the average power output of a small gas fire, as described above is is more in the region of 1,300w.



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Entertainment

In the marketplace, today, there is an increasing array of equipment available to operate on a 12V system. The main one is the 12V television, many of which seem to come with built in DVD, which is fortunate, as you can't always guarantee a strong signal when moving from site to site.

To go with the 12V TV, you can, also, buy a 12V signal booster to enhance the performance of the aerial, and, even, 12V satellite TV / Freeview systems.



There are numerous options on the audio front, including radios, CD players and ipods / MP3s. Radios can be battery powered (chargeable or standard) solar powered or wind up. Although most docking stations are currently 240V, there are a large number of surprisingly powerful little speakers that will run directly from your device. Many people, myself included, may also have a car stereo fitted in the unit, for added convenience.

These days, there are plenty of things we can take with us to keep ourselves entertained, without a mains supply, including Kindles, laptops / tablets, smart phones and hand held games consoles. Of course, we don't go camping to sit indoors all day, but, sometimes, the British weather doesn't give us a huge amount of choice.

Always remember that many devices will require regular recharging, so make sure you have an appropriate charger with you.

12V System & Accessories

A 12V system can be anything from a couple of lamps to a full blown electrical system, powering water pumps, a TV, microwave, computers etc. You won't achieve the latter using a standard leisure battery, with no charging facility, as it will be dead in a matter of hours, so you need to consider your usage requirements carefully, before making any purchases.

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The single most important thing to consider, if making the most of your 12V supply, is a means of recharging the leisure battery.

By far the most common method is the solar panel, which are an increasingly common sight at the moment. Whilst smaller panels are good for trickle charging the leisure battery, if you are planning on giving it any serious usage, you should be looking at an absolute minimum of 50w, but, ideally, at least 80w.

Obviously, the higher the wattage, the more appliances you can run, and for longer, so it's always best to try and buy the highest specification unit you can. The most convenient type of charger for those of us on the move is the briefcase style, which is more compact, when folded, and more robust, as it is designed to be moved around.

Something that is less common, but worthy of, at least, some consideration, is the wind turbine. These now come in a very compact format, are easy to set up, and, pound for pound, give approximately three times the power output of a similarly priced solar panel. Of course, they require a decent wind to power them, but in the UK, that is often in greater supply than copious amounts of sunshine.

Finally, the method with, by far, the highest power output is the petrol generator. These have a much more usable output, with most small, portable, generators producing between 1,000W and 4,000W of power.

On the downside, they are not a renewable resource, like the other two, have the cost and inconvenience of refuelling, and are not welcomed at many of the more tranquil and remote sites that don't have EHU, largely due to the fact that even the 'silent' ones do produce a fair bit of noise, which can prove to be quite intrusive.



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Remember, though, whatever method of charging you use, make sure you keep the battery charged at all times. Once a battery has been discharged by more than 50%, it is unlikely to ever achieve full charge again.

Having decided on our external power source, there are a number of accessories that we can use in order to make the most of it. These include:

Inverters. As already mentioned, above, these can be used to convert a 12V power source into a 240V one. This is particularly useful for appliances that aren't available in 12V format, or where, perhaps, the 12V equivalent isn't quite up to the mark. A classic example of this is that of the domestic hair dryer.

There is a significant difference in performance between a standard 12V model, with some 150W - 200W of power, as opposed to a professional quality model, running in excess of 2,000W.

Of course, therein lies the classic dilemma; if something needs that much power, then what kind of inverter will you need, and will a standard leisure battery cope? More on that later.



Most campers with a 12V system will have a number of 'standard' 12V sockets dotted around. Unfortunately, many of the 12V appliances on the market come with a cigarette lighter socket plug on the end, for use in cars, trucks, etc.

It's well worthwhile, therefore, obtaining at least one adaptor to convert a caravan style socket into a cigarette lighter socket.

Once you have one of these, there's nothing to stop you buying a multiple cigarette lighter socket, and charging as many devices as you want.



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As a backup to the main leisure battery (or, even, in some cases, as an alternative to it) you can also take a portable power pack with you.

These are great for a bit of extra power, and can be charged by a 240V supply, a car cigarette lighter, or, even, a solar panel.

The one I use (pictured) has a built in light, cigarette lighter socket to power devices, and can even be used to jump start a car, should the need arise (hence it is a permanent fixture in my boot, even when not camping).

As with the cooking side of things, there are plenty of accessories on the market, running on 12V power, including, amongst others, vacuum cleaners, hair dryers / hair straighteners and fans / heaters.

If you bear in mind that most of these are running at about 10% of the power rating of their 240V cousins, though, there is bound to be an element of compromise, when it comes to performance.

Understanding The Numbers

The amount of time a leisure battery will last before being recharged will depend on its Ah (Amp hours) rating, it's voltage 12V, in most cases, obviously) and the power drawn (Wattage).

As a guide, a small, portable inverter will, normally, run at around 150w - 200w, whereas a typical larger inverter will run at around 2,000w average (4,000w peak).

You may find, however, at this level, the leisure battery will not last for too long. In fact, a standard 75Ah leisure battery, running a 2,000w electric heater, will last, at best, half an hour, before becoming fully discharged



Conclusion

Venturing away from sites with electric hookup does not have to mean 'slumming it' too much.

There are a wealth of options out there to make our lives that little bit easier, without the permanent umbilical attachment of an EHU. The only thing we need to avoid is domestic 240V appliances with a heating element, such as heaters and hair dryers, unless we are happy to invest in a petrol generator, and don't mind a little extra noise and inconvenience.

Otherwise, we don't have to miss out on those little luxuries, even in the remotest of places, although we may need reasonably deep pockets if we're going to equip ourselves, fully, for the 12V lifestyle.

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What's The Best Heating To Use In Our Folding Camper?

With the advent of any new year, many of us will start looking forward to the start of the new camping season.

For some, that will begin in February, for many others, Easter marks the start of the main camping period.

Even those of us who don't venture out until late March / April are going to notice a distinct chill to the Spring evenings, and considerably more so, at night.

There are many heating options available, on the market today, but what are the pros and cons, and which ones are the safest to use?



The first, and most obvious distinction is gas versus electric.

The simple answer with gas is; DON'T(at least not in the long term).

Some units will come with their own, inbuilt heater, many of which will operate on both gas and electric.

These units are externally vented, and are the only ones that are reasonably safe to use for any period of time.

If you don't have a fitted heater in your camper, then other forms of gas heater are best avoided, as the risk of fumes and the potential fire hazard render them unsafe for prolonged usage. That said, even if you do have your own on board heater, whilst this is fine, where there is no EHU, why pay for your own gas, when you are already paying,(in most cases, a flat rate for your electric hookup.

For the purposes of this review, we will look at the ultra portable gas heaters, that utilise the mini gas canisters, as in the picture above, although the principles will apply to any such portable gas appliance.

The issue here is that these heaters are not designed to operate indoors, in spite of many misconceptions to the contrary. They should only be used in an extremely well ventilated area, and, in extreme cases, if faulty, can emit harmful, and, potentially, lethal doses of carbon monoxide.

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Having said that, it is only fair to put this into perspective. These heaters are no more or less dangerous than the gas hob and grill found in most folding campers on the market today. This means that they can be used for short periods of time, but are not recommended for prolonged usage. The same is true of the gas hob. Many people believe that these can be used to heat the camper, in the absence of an alternative form of heating. Once again, this is true for a short period of time, but is not a safe option as a primary form of heating, due to the lack of external venting.

So, gas is best avoided, if you are looking for a safe, long term heating source, in which case, it is likely to be preferable to seek out a site with mains hook up, when camping outside the Summer season.

Ok, so we've established that electric is the way to go, from a heating perspective, so what are the options? Effectively, there are four main alternatives, when it comes to portable electric heating;

- Fan heater
- Convector heater
- Halogen heater
- Oil filled radiator;

Looking at each example individually:

Fan Heater

The fan heater is one of the oldest and most established forms of heating, compared to the other three main options, and has been around for years. It remains a very popular method of heating, as it is compact and powerful, and is, possibly, the fastest available method of heating any given space. Because fan heaters are, generally, very compact, and take up little space when packed. Another benefit, unique to this form of heating, is that they can also be used to blow cold air, meaning that they can be a welcome addition to the appliance list across the whole camping season.

The downside with this form of heating is that the noise of the fan can be a little intrusive in an enclosed space, and the heating element, although well protected, can be vulnerable, if anything combustible is drawn into the heater accidentally..



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Also, if left on for prolonged periods, they have been known to overheat, which will often cause them to burn out, and cease to work.

This means that they are best suited to heating larger spaces, such as awnings, where the fan is able to distribute the heat more quickly than other forms of heating.

In smaller spaces, however, the fan heater can be a little uneven in its heating pattern, as it emits a hot blast of air, heating the space quickly.

The thermostat then causes the heater to cut out, it cools quickly, kicks back in, another blast of hot air, and then repeats the process.

In confined spaces, it can lead to a slightly more inconsistent temperature than other heating methods. Some users have also complained of dry throats, etc, when using them constantly over night.



The simplest way to describe this form of heater is that it is, effectively, a fan heater, without the fan.

The vents in this heater point upwards, rather than horizontally, as in a fan heater.

This is because the hot air from the heating elements rises out of the vents, at the top, drawing in cold air, from the bottom, to be heated inside, and so the process repeats.

This is the process of convection, from which the heater gets its name.

Because there is no fan in this heater, it does not heat a space as rapidly as a traditional fan heater, but it does allow for a more consistent temperature, in smaller spaces, and, because it creates air movement, it is still fairly effective in heating larger spaces, such as awnings.

Like the fan heater, it will, also, often have a thermostatic controller.

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Halogen Heaters



Halogen heaters use light as the delivery method to provide the heat.

Unlike most heaters, they don't just heat the air around them, they heat everything the rays of light land on. The warming light rays add a kind of soothing nature to the environment, unlike other forms of heating.

Halogen heaters, in the main, are very compact, and lightweight, and look much like the old electric fires they have, effectively, replaced.

They are normally switchable between one or two heating elements, rather than being controlled just by a thermostat. Most incorporate an automatic cut off switch, in case they fall over unexpectedly.

Oil Filled Radiator

An oil filled radiator is the closest we can get to our home heating. It is safe, consistent, and controllable.

Unfortunately, a folding camper isn't a warm, insulated, double glazed home, and, sometimes, we may need just a little more, if the weather outside is not at its best.

A radiator provides a steady heat source that is plenty for most campers and small caravans, however, it will struggle to heat a large awning, and, even if it does, it will take a lot longer to get up to temperature than most alternative heaters.

Where the oil filled radiator really gains is in the evening / at night. There is no exposed heating element, they can be thermostatically controlled and are the safest of all heating methods to be left on overnight.

In fact, from a personal perspective, they are the only ones I would feel totally comfortable in leaving on over night).



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Conclusion

So. There is no ideal heater that covers all requirements. The oil filled radiator is the safest, but lacks the power to heat larger spaces, and is slower to heat up. At the other end of the spectrum is the fan heater, which is much quicker to warm up and is capable of heating large areas quickly, however, the temperature is less consistent in smaller spaces, noise can be intrusive, in some models, and they are not safe to leave on overnight. Ideally, we are likely to be looking at taking two heaters with us, if we are going away during the colder months.

One of those, should, most definitely, be an oil filled radiator, for safe, consistent, overnight heating. The second is entirely personal choice, but halogen heaters and fan heaters are, in the main, a lot smaller than convector heaters, so easier to stow. All depends on whether you prefer the slightly noisier power of the fan heater, or the more subtle warming glow of the halogen heater. If you have an awning to heat, as well, then, probably, the fan heater will be the better option. There's nothing to stop you using both, at the same time, as long as you are mindful of the power ratings of both the heaters, and the electric hookup.

The Technical Bit

OK. So, what heaters can we actually use on electric hookup, and how many can we use together etc? Obviously, the answer to that will depend on the power rating of the appliances, and, of course, the site. Most heaters, regardless of type, will range from 400W for a small oil filled radiator to 3KW for a high power fan heater. Obviously, we can use six 500W heaters for the same power usage as one 3KW one.

Most sites are either rated at 10 Amps or 13 Amps. $\text{Watts} = \text{Amps} \times \text{Volts}$, so a 10A site, with a 230V supply will support 2,300W of power. ($10\text{A} \times 230\text{V}$). Likewise, a 13A site will support 2,990W of power.

A decent 1,500W heater should keep the camper reasonably warm, whilst still allowing you to boil a kettle (600W) without having to turn the heater off on a 10A site. It will, also allow you to run the heater with an additional 500W radiator to back it up.

The radiator can then be used, on it's own, as an overnight heat source. Obviously, on a 13A site, the ratings increase proportionately, but, if you work on the 10A specs, you will be covered for most sites. Most appliances will have their power rating on a label somewhere on the unit. If not, it will be in the manual, or advertising literature. Worst case, you can, usually, get a reasonable idea by searching online.

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By The Way...

Whilst on the subject of overnight heating, it is probably worth mentioning another alternative; the electric blanket. These are a safe, and increasingly popular, alternative to the oil filled radiator to keep you toasty at night. The only downside to these is that they don't heat the surrounding environment, so getting up for that early morning cuppa can still be a little chilly.

There have been questions raised over the suitability of electric blankets when used in conjunction with memory foam mattresses. These are, in fact, perfectly safe to be used together. In some ways they are, in fact, actually better, because of the way they work. The concerns around the memory foam ones stem from the fact that they are temperature sensitive, and adjust in line with the temperature around them.

This means that they are firmer in cold temperatures, and softer in warm temperatures. The fact that they absorb warmth is a bit of a bonus, as it keeps you warm underneath, as well, though it is recommended that you place a normal blanket between the electric one and the mattress, and that you start with lower settings and work up until you get the balance right.

In this section, we have tended to look at the alternative types of portable heating that you can take with you to heat your camper, or other unit. There is, of course, one other option you may wish to consider, and that is the installation of a plinth heater. These are designed to work in kitchens and bathrooms, and are, effectively, a fan heater, built into the units.



They are increasingly common equipment in new folding campers these days, and are a very effective way of heating the main camper cabin. At between £50 and £100, on average, they are a cost effective, and relatively simple installation. They have all the advantages of a traditional fan heater, but with reduced noise levels, and no heater or wires to trip over in a confined space.

Be aware, though, that they are designed for use in kitchens and bathrooms, where heating tends not to be a 24/7 affair. However great they may be for daytime / evening use, the oil filled radiator still stands out as the safest over night option.

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Whatever method of heating you use, it will significantly extend and enhance your camping season, whether that means an extra Winter break, or just making the camper a little more comfortable for the Easter break, which, for many, represents the start of the main camping season.



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Camping / Domestic Appliances: Typical Power Usage

When camping on a site with electric hookup, it is always handy to know just what electrical appliances you can use on any given camp site. Obviously, the total power you can use will depend on the rating of the site involved. Most sites, in the UK, are either 10 Amp or 13 Amp, although some can be rated as highly as 16 Amp, and, for safety purposes, some sites may have their output limited, as low as 6 Amps, in the UK, and 5 Amps in Europe.

OK, so how do we calculate the power of any given site? Well, Watts = Amps x Volts. In the UK, mains power is now at 230 Volts, therefore, the available Watts are equivalent to the site Amps x 230V. For example, a site rated to 10 Amps will allow the use of appliances up to a maximum of 2,300 Watts (230V x 10A).

As a quick guide, the most common site ratings, and their equivalent Watts are as follows:

<u>Site Rating</u>	<u>Watts</u>
6 Amps	1,380
10 Amps	2,300
13 Amps	2,990
16 Amps	3,680

The main appliances we are likely to take camping with us, and their respective power ratings are as follows:

<u>Appliance</u>	<u>Average Wattage</u>
<u>Entertainment / Leisure</u>	
Clock Radio	10 - 50
LED / LCD TV	50 - 60
DVD / Blu-Ray Player	15
Satellite Dish / Receiver	20 - 30
Laptop	20 - 75
Phone Charger	2 - 5
Games Console	30 - 50
Stereo / Docking Station	150 - 200
Hair Dryer	1,000 - 1,900
Hair Straighteners	80 - 120
Curling Tongues	1,200
Iron	1,000 - 1,500

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<u>Appliance</u>	<u>Average Wattage</u>
<u>Heating / Cooling</u>	
Oil Filled Radiator	500 - 1,500
Convactor Heater	750 - 2,000
Fan Heater	1,000 - 3,000
Halogen Heater	400 - 1,600
Electric Blanket	200 - 400
Small Aircon Unit	800
Electric Fan (16")	85
<u>Cooking / Food Preparation & Storage</u>	
Mini Oven	1500 - 3,000
Electric Hot Plate	1,200 - 3,000
Microwave (600W - 1,000W Cooking Power)	1,000 - 2,000
Toaster	800 - 1,500
Slow Cooker	250 - 650
Kettle	600
Coffee Maker	600 - 1,200
Mini Fridge	500 - 700
Mini freezer	400 - 800
Cool Box	50 - 60
<u>Other</u>	
Dehumidifier	350
Electric Shaver	20
Hand Vacuum Cleaner	100
Flourescent Light	15 - 40

These are, of course, average ratings, designed to give a guide as to what you can, and can't, use together on a site with mains electric hookup. They do not take account of low wattage options that are available, as alternatives, in many cases. Of course, many are also available in 12V versions, as well, including kettles, hair dryers, and, even, microwaves.

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The Definitive Guide To Towing In The UK.



One thing that seems to cause more confusion than anything else in the camping and caravanning world is the issue of what we are legally allowed to tow, and what regulations we need to comply with, when we do. Our blog post, from September 2014; *Towing With A Car In The UK. What Are The Current Laws?* Received over 10,000 views, in the first week alone, confirming that this is, indeed, a topic that many people wish to clarify.

A lot of the confusion seems to arise from the use of so many different terms and classifications of the various 'weights' involved. To help explain this, without clogging up the main guide, we have included a glossary of these terms, and their meaning, as the end of the guide.

The Basics

Our LEGAL ability to tow, in any given situation will depend on two main factors:

1. Our own legal limits, based, primarily, on the date we passed our driving test, and;
2. The physical and legal capabilities of the towing vehicle, as stated by the manufacturer

These are the ONLY legal limits that determine what we can tow. Much is made of the guidelines quoted by the main camping organisations, based on a percentage of the towing vehicles kerb weight (more on that later). Whilst these may be sound advice, it is important to realise that these are just recommendations. In the majority of cases, you can legally tow more than this, but, with some vehicles, the legal limit is less, so it is always best to be clear on exactly what your car is allowed to tow.

(1) Driver Restrictions

The weight and nature of trailer you can tow, will, ultimately, depend on the date on which you first passed your driving test, as follows:

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Licences Held Before 1 January 1997

If you passed your car test before 1 January 1997 you are generally entitled to drive a vehicle and trailer combination up to 8.25 tonnes MAM. (Maximum Authorised Mass).

This is the weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load that can be carried safely when it's being used on the road.

You also have entitlement to drive a minibus with a trailer over 750 kg

Licences held from 1 January 1997

If you passed your driving test after 1 January 1997 and have an ordinary category B (car) licence, you can:

- drive a vehicle up to 3.5 tonnes (or 3,500 kg) MAM towing a trailer of up to 750 kg MAM
- tow a trailer over 750 kg MAM as long as the combined weight of the trailer and towing vehicle is no more than 3,500 kg

For anything heavier you need to take a category B+E driving test.

OK, very confusing, so what does that actually mean? The key thing here is the weight of the trailer. If the MAM of the trailer is less than 750 kg, then a combined MAM of 4,250 kg is permitted (3,500 kg vehicle, and 750 kg trailer).

If the trailer exceeds 750 kg, then the combined MAM is reduced to 3,500 kg (in line with the maximum 'actual' weight allowed).

For example; if your vehicle has an MAM of 3,200 kg, and your trailer has an MAM of 600kg (total: 3,800 kg MAM) that IS legal, provided, of course, the actual, physical weight of the combination does not exceed 3,500 kg.

On the other hand, if your vehicle has an MAM of 3,000 kg, and your trailer has one of 800 kg, that is NOT legal, even though they have the same combined MAM. The distinction is that the MAM of the trailer is over 750 kg.

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Licences issued from 19 January 2013

From 19 January 2013, drivers passing a category B (car and small vehicle) test can tow:

- small trailers weighing no more than 750 kg
- tow a trailer over 750 kg as long as the combined weight of the trailer and towing vehicle is no more than 3,500 kg Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)

If you want to tow a trailer weighing more than 750 kg, when the combined weight of the towing vehicle and trailer is more than 3,500 kg, you'll have to pass a further test and get B+E entitlement on your licence.

You'll then be able to tow trailers up to 3,500 kg.

Still confused? Take a look at the Highways Agency 'Fit To Tow' video
It might make things a little clearer.

Larger trailer? Might be worth checking out the
Fit To Tow - Larger Trailer video

Finally, do you have a caravan, and need to know the specifics? Yet another Highways Agency video might help; Fit To Tow - Caravans



If in any doubt, you can go to the Gov.uk web site, and check out one of their online tools.

The first of these can be found at;
www.gov.uk/towing-rules

If you enter your basic details, it will tell you what you can legally tow.

To avoid any confusion, whatsoever, you can go to;
www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence

If you enter your licence details, the site will tell you everything about your licence, including what you can legally tow, any endorsements, etc.

(2) Vehicle Restrictions

There seems to be even more confusion and misconception over the legal limits for a vehicle than there is over those for drivers. This is, in part, down to the fact that there is far less information available online.

In an attempt to clarify this matter, we contacted both the DVLA and VOSA, neither of whom were able to help, and they advised us to contact the Department of Trade directly, which we did.

The information below is based on the reply we received, 'straight from the horse's mouth'.

The key measure we need to be aware of, when calculating our vehicle's maximum legal capacity is that of Gross Train Weight (See glossary at the end of this guide). This is specified by the manufacturer, and represents the maximum allowed weight of the vehicle, plus trailer, plus load.

Whatever the specified GTW is, that is the total allowed combined weight. The manufacturers will, often, also, specify a maximum towing weight, which is, of course, the GTW, minus the weight of the car itself. This is usually specified in the car's manual, or V5 document.

This legal limit pays no heed, whatsoever, to the kerb weight of the towing vehicle (which many consider to be the legal basis for vehicle towing weights).

The main towing organisations, including the Caravan Club and Camping & Caravanning Club both specify 85% of kerb weight of the towing vehicle as the recommended maximum towing weight of any trailer or caravan especially for those who are new to / not entirely comfortable with, towing, however, many still believe that this is the maximum legal limit, which, of course, it isn't.

OK, so this can create a number of anomalies, and is, no doubt, one of the key reasons why there is so much confusion on this matter. Let us, by way of illustration, take a look at two completely different vehicles.

The figures used are approximate, and for illustration purposes only.

Scenario 1: Land Rover Defender.

Kerb Weight:	2,000kg
Recommended Safe Limit (@85% of kerb weight)	1,700kg
Manufacturers' Specified Towing Limit (Braked)	3,500kg

In this scenario, we can, clearly, see that the actual legal towing limit, of 3,500kg is more than double the recommended safe figure.

Whilst the 85% recommendation is there for a reason, and we would not question its validity for a second, it is important to remember that it has no basis in Law, whatsoever, and this explains why will often see one Land Rover towing, for example, another, identical Land Rover, on a trailer, which, obviously, by definition, must exceed the 85% guideline.

Scenario 2: Honda Jazz 1.4CVT

Kerb Weight:	1,100kg
Recommended Safe Limit (@85% of kerb weight)	950kg
Manufacturers' Specified Towing Limit (Braked)	800kg

In this second scenario, we have the opposite, and far more serious situation.

In this instance, we have the issue of the 85% rule giving us a figure that is actually over the legal limit.

In this case, the unwary driver could apply the 85% rule, believing themselves to be legal, when, in fact, they are not.

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Common Misconceptions

There are a number of misconceptions around both the license laws, and the vehicle weight laws. Some of the more common ones include;

- If you passed your test after 1 January 1997, you need to take an additional test in order to be able to tow anything. – Not true. Even if you passed your test after that date, you can still tow a vehicle up to a combined weight of 3,500kg (as above).
- I cannot legally tow anything that weighs more than 85% of my car's kerb weight – Again, not true. The 85% figure is purely a recommendation, and, whilst it is prudent to always keep it in mind, it may be a fraction of the actual legal limit.
- I know that the 85% rule is just a guide. The legal limit is actually the kerb weight of the car. – Yet another very common misconception. Kerb weight is not relevant to the car's legal ability to tow.
- I always stick to the 85% rule, because that is what bodies like the Caravan club argue is safe, so, if I exceed that, and have an accident, I could be prosecuted for driving dangerously, even though I was under the manufacturers' limit. – We're hearing this increasingly at the moment. At the risk of repeating ourselves, yet again, the kerb weight has no legal bearing. Provided you are within the manufacturers limit, have not loaded in a dangerous fashion, and are within the constraints of your own licence, you are not going to be prosecuted for dangerous driving. (This advice becomes somewhat less relevant if you were also eating a pizza and texting at the same time).

Obviously, it goes without saying, that, when determining what you are legally allowed to tow, you will always look at the minimum figure. In other words; it is no use towing a 3 ton trailer which is within your car's towing limit, if it is in excess of what you are allowed to tow on a post 1997 licence.

As with all things, common sense is key here, and, if in doubt, it is always best to check, as the consequences of failing to tow within the law can be quite severe.

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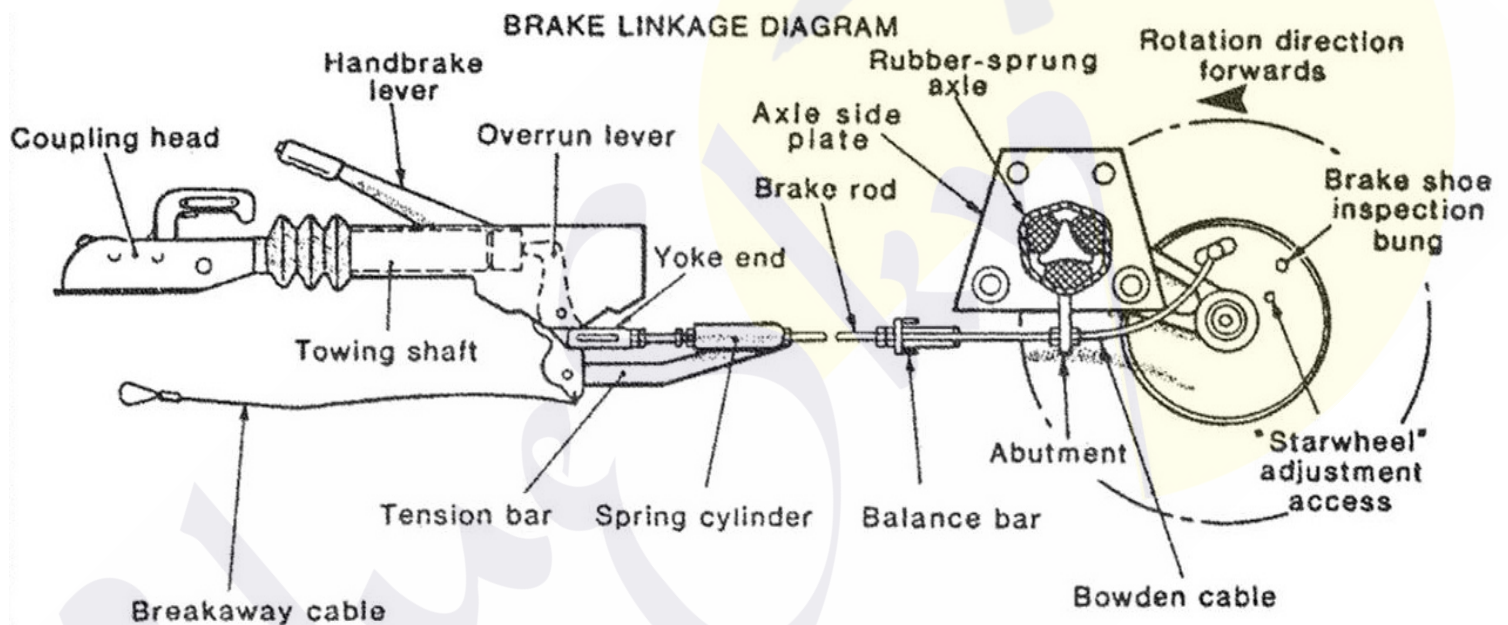
Other Towing Legislation

OK, so we've looked at what you and your car can actually tow, but there is plenty of other legislation in place to comply with, when towing, including;

Overrun Brakes

Any trailer weighing in excess of 750kg must be fitted with a satisfactory braking system. This comes in to play, either when the towing vehicle brakes sharply or if the trailer becomes disengaged from the tow hitch.

A full schematic of a typical trailer braking system is shown below.



The easiest way to tell if a trailer is braked is to look at the hitch itself. In between the coupling head and the towing shaft, there is a rubber concertina sheath, which flexes as the towing vehicle slows down or speeds up.

As the vehicle begins to slow, the inertia of the trailer keeps it coming forward. The sheath flexes, and the towing shaft is pushed backwards, where it engages the overrun lever, thereby applying the brakes. Likewise, if the trailer becomes separated from the tow bar, the car will pull on the breakaway cable, again, engaging the overrun lever, and braking the trailer.

If there is a rubber sheath, and breakaway cable, it means your trailer is braked, otherwise, it isn't.

Below a Gross Laden Weight of 750kg, there is no legal requirement for overrun brakes, though many trailer tents and small folding campers have them fitted, regardless. It goes without saying, of course, that any brakes fitted to a trailer / caravan must be in sound working order.

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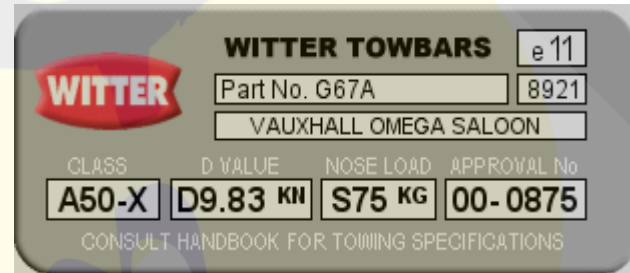
Trailer Width & Length

Most of us are aware of maximum weight limits, even if we're not 100% sure what they are. Many, however, are not aware of any legal limits on the external dimensions of the trailers and caravans they are towing. The maximum trailer width for any towing vehicle is 2.55 metres. The maximum length is 7 metres for a trailer towed by a vehicle weighing up to 3.5 tonnes (3,500 kg).

Tow Bar

If you get a tow bar for your car, it needs to be 'type approved'. This means it meets EU regulations and is designed for your car.

A type-approved tow bar will have a label with an approval number and details of the vehicles it's approved for.



If your car was first used before 1 August 1998, your tow bar doesn't need to be type-approved.

Towing Mirrors

You must have an adequate view of the road behind you. If your caravan or trailer is wider than the rear of the towing vehicle, you will need to fit suitable towing mirrors.



If you tow without proper towing mirrors you can be:

- prosecuted by the police
- given 3 points on your licence
- fined up to £1,000

Number Plate

You must display the same number plate as your towing car on the trailer. According to the legislation; if you tow more than one trailer, fix the number plate to the trailer at the back. (It's in the legislation, so, presumably, it must happen!!). Also, it's easy to forget, on a trailer or caravan, but the number plate must be illuminated at night

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A Frames & Dollies

If you attach an A-frame to a car in order to tow it with a larger vehicle, the car plus A-frame counts as a trailer.

If you use a dolly to tow a broken-down vehicle, the dolly counts as a trailer.

In both cases the usual safety regulations for trailers apply.

You can find out more in the 'A' frames and dollies' fact sheet on the Gov.UK Website.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408927/a-frames-and-dollies.pdf

Those are the key laws appertaining to the towing of trailers etc with a car. They will apply to most types of vehicle and trailer combinations, with one notable exception;

American trailers and caravans don't always meet European safety regulations. If you want to use an American caravan or trailer in the UK or the EU, you must first check that it's legal.

Read more in the 'American caravan/trailer brakes and coupling up to 3500kg maximum laden weight' fact sheet.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408947/american-caravan-and-trailer-brakes-coupling.pdf

You may also find the following DVLA guides useful:

INF30 - Requirements For Towing Trailers In Great Britain;

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/333088/INF30_020514.pdf

INS57P - Information On Driving Licences;

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/208103/ins57p.pdf

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Glossary Of Weights

Unladen Weight

The unladen weight of any vehicle is the weight of the vehicle when it's not carrying any passengers, goods or other items. It includes the body and all parts normally used with the vehicle or trailer when it's used on a road. It doesn't include the weight of the fuel or, if it's an electric vehicle, the batteries.

Gross Laden Weight

Gross laden weight means the weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load that can be carried safely when it is being used on the road. It will be listed in the owner's manual and is normally shown on a plate or sticker fitted to the vehicle. The plate or sticker may also show a gross train weight (see below).

Permissible Maximum Weight

This is simply another term for gross laden weight.

Maximum Authorised Mass

Also commonly known as MAM, this is the term most commonly used in towing legislation, it is, however, simply another term for gross laden weight.

Gross Train Weight

This is, simply, the total weight of the towing unit, plus trailer, plus load.

Gross Combination Weight

Another term for Gross Train weight

Kerb Weight

The usual definition of kerb weight is taken as a vehicle, in its ready to use condition, with all standard tools, spare wheel, oil and a full tank of fuel. Many manufacturers, however, are now adopting EC Directive 95/48/EC which defines kerb weight as; 'a car, in ready to drive condition, with the fuel tank 90% full, a driver on board, weighing 68kg and luggage of 7kg'

(Slightly random allocation of weights, admittedly, but that is the current definition, for EC purposes).

Storing A Folding Camper At Home. What Is The Law?

One of the key advantages of a folding camper is that it can be stored far more easily than an equivalent caravan, as it will fit, comfortably, into most domestic garages.

If a garage is not available, then it is far less obtrusive, when located on a driveway, or front garden.

That said, there are no, automatic, guarantees that we will be able to store it at home, and there may be legislation in place preventing this.

There are no actual national laws preventing us from storing our campers, caravans, trailers etc either on our own properties, or on the road / curtilage outside of it, however, that does not mean we will be able to, in all cases, as there may be restrictions imposed, at a local level, either by local councils, or, potentially, by restrictive covenants in the original property deeds.

Storing On Our Own Property

Covenants tend to be a lot less common, on older properties, although there will, occasionally, be exceptions, particularly if a house is located on land close to, or formerly owned by, the local church or parish. Newer properties, especially those on housing estates, are far more likely to contain restrictive covenants.

Examples of these include not building a fence or other boundary above a certain height, not operating a business from the property, and, more crucially, not storing a caravan, trailer, horse box, motor home or sign written van on the property.

These covenants were supposed to ensure a uniform outlook and maintain the 'quality' of the area, and the rights to them are, usually, owned by the original construction company that built the houses.

Where there is a restrictive covenant in place, it will be very difficult to overcome.



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If you choose to ignore a restrictive covenant, you could, potentially, face a claim in damages for the breach in addition to any injunctions granted. There are two types of damages that can be awarded:

- Compensatory damages to reflect the diminution in the value of the benefited land by reason of the breach
- Damages awarded in lieu of an injunction

It is possible to insure against any action arising from such a breach, but insurance is not available retrospectively, obviously, once the owner of the covenant is already aware of your breach.

You tend to find that most modern covenants on housing estates contain pretty much the same, general, provisions, including things like not constructing boundaries to the front aspect, no caravans on property, no sign written vans etc. So, as a general (but not cast iron) guide, if all of the houses in your street are lacking in any kind of boundary fence, hedge etc, in the front garden, it stands a chance there are restrictive covenants in place.

If, however, you want to check your own property, specifically, then you can request the information, for a fee, from The Land Registry.

As with many things, it will, partly, depend on who, if anyone, objects. In many cases, the covenants will be owned by the original builders, who may have built the property 20, 30 or more years ago.

They are unlikely to enforce these covenants, unless notified of them by a complainant (usually a disgruntled neighbour). A good indication as to the likelihood of this will be the number of other prohibited units on the estate. If every other house has a caravan on the drive, then it is far less likely to be an issue in your area, but be aware of the potential legal ramifications, if covenants are breached.

Also, we may find that folding campers are able to get around some covenants, where caravans, etc, aren't. Some covenants will only prohibit storage of units that are higher than the permitted fence height (usually anything from 3 to 6 feet).

Most campers are, obviously, below this level, and may, on occasions, be capable of being stored where other units can't.

Always worth checking the small print.

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One other thing that is, perhaps, worth mentioning here is that these covenants are inherent in the title deeds of the property, and are passed on from one owner to the next.

If a landlord lets a property to a tenant, and that tenancy agreement permits the storing of a caravan etc on the land (or simply doesn't mention the restriction) that does not alter the legality of the covenant, and it remains enforceable by the original beneficiary (ie the builders).

Very often we hear; "Oh. I'm fine. I'm living in housing association accommodation, and it isn't mentioned in the lease". That is, unfortunately, not the case. All subsequent owners, including large organisations like HAs are bound by these covenants, and cannot over rule them, by the creation of a tenancy agreement for their own tenants, so tenants beware.

Storing On The Road / Curtilage

It has to be said, this is never to be recommended, especially long term, however, sometimes we may need to do so, even if it is just overnight, ready for a long trip, early in the morning. So, what are the legal implications?

Once again, there are no national laws preventing you from parking a camper, caravan etc outside your house, however, other issues, such as local bye laws, issues of obstruction etc may still prevent you from doing so.

If we are parking our unit on the road, we must ensure that they do not deny access to the public, wilfully obstruct the highway without lawful excuse or make unreasonable use of the highway.

This is defined under section 137 of the Highways Act and Regulation 103 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Act of 1986.

In practice this means that a caravan, camper etc can be parked on the road as long as it does not block anybody's driveway or create a hazard to other road users, such as blocking visibility around a tight bend.

We are allowed to park our unit, with much the same restrictions as for a normal car. These are covered by The Highway Code, Sections 238 To 252 (Waiting And Parking) as long as we comply, then we are, technically, within the letter of the law.

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That said, even compliance with all of this is no guarantee we will be allowed to park outside our own house. Many local councils place high emphasis on the nuisance factor of caravans, trailers etc, and, often, there will be local bye laws, restricting their parking (in much the same way as we have local restrictive covenants on our own properties).

Another key factor, again, will be the involvement of neighbours. If no one complains, the council are far less likely to act. If, however, someone does complain, then you may find that a visit or letter, from the council may be forthcoming.

Parking Myths

There are a couple of urban myths surrounding parking on the roadside, that are worth dispelling.

Firstly; many people believe that you are only allowed to park a caravan on the road, if it is attached to a towing vehicle. This is completely untrue. Any unit can be left on the road, without being attached, provided it complies with the legislation above.

Secondly, many believe that a camper / caravan must be lit, if parked on the road at night, in much the same way as a skip needs to be lit and appropriately marked.

This is not helped by a recent police statement (often quoted in discussions on the subject) which states that; "The caravan **MUST** be lit at night if it is parked on a road and comply with the other normal parking rules". This is extremely misleading, as your unit **DOES NOT** have to be physically lit at night, in exactly the same way as cars don't. The more mature readers may well remember the parking lights that used to be compulsory on cars, but are no longer required.

The same applies with any form of trailer unit. In order to comply with the 'must be lit' requirement, we simply need to ensure that the van is pointing in the direction of the traffic, and that it has adequate rear reflective panels. Powered lighting is not a legal requirement*. The difference between this and a skip (which does require lighting) is that the skip does not have the same, street legal, reflective triangles etc on it.

Regardless of the law, it is never a good idea to leave a camper or caravan on the road for any longer than is necessary. If you do have to, it is always worth ensuring that your insurance policy, where applicable, covers you for prolonged periods of on road parking, as many don't.

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*- To say that it is not a legal requirement to have powered lighting is very slightly misleading, as there is a conflict in the legal system, here.

Rules 249 and 250 of the Highway Code actually state that a caravan MUST display parking lights at night, however, following the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement, a number of years ago, there has been a general move away from the criminalisation of trivial offences, such as parking contraventions.

In the real world, the Police will take a common sense approach, and ask the question; “Does it represent a danger to public safety”? If not, then it is not a criminal offence, and the Police have far more important things to do with their time.

Let’s face it; a caravan, parked, facing in the right direction, on a well lit street is hardly going to represent a ‘significant danger to public safety’, and this is why we never see any trailers, caravans, or, indeed, other vehicles parked up, at night, with their parking lights on, nor do we, any longer, hear of anyone who has been prosecuted for this offence. As this issue has been queried, recently, I thought it best to clarify the full position.

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Do We Need To Insure Our Folding Camper?

The first, and most common question is; “Do I need to insure my folding camper”?

Strictly speaking, the answer to that question is;

“No. You don’t NEED to insure it” (but we would very strongly recommend that you do).



The reason we say you don’t need to is that any trailer is covered for the minimum legal level of cover, as long as it is attached to an insured towing vehicle. The ‘minimum legal level’ of cover, basically, means that it will be insured third party only, and ONLY when attached to the towing vehicle.

Obviously, therefore, if you were to have an accident, involving your camper, and it were to cause damage to another vehicle, property, or, God forbid, person(s) then you are covered for their claim, but not for the costs of replacing your own camper (which is far from ideal).

Another thing to be aware of is the phrase ‘whilst attached to an insured towing vehicle’. Whilst it is not common, there have been instances of insurance companies refusing to pay because a trailer has become detached from the towing vehicle, and then gone on to cause damage to property, whilst no longer attached.

No point in giving the insurance companies another reason not to pay out, so another argument, perhaps, for taking out specialist folding camper insurance.

It is also true to say that some insurance companies will cover your folding camper, on your household insurance policy, against theft or damage, as long as it is on your property (although, sometimes, they may specify that it needs to be garaged).

Some will even cover it away from home, but, often, only up to a specified value (usually around £2,000, although you can pay to increase this).

The problem here is that many companies don’t provide this cover, and, then, there is the issue of contents etc, even if they do, plus, the majority won’t cover you for damage caused whilst towing.

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In the vast majority of cases, therefore, it will be preferable to look at taking out specialist folding camper / trailer tent insurance.

In doing so, you are, automatically, insuring yourselves and your pride and joy against a number of contingencies.

Most policies will include cover for such aspects as;

- Damage caused to the camper whilst towing, or due to vandalism, storms, accidental damage etc
- Damage to third party property
- Public liability cover
- Legal expenses
- Emergency accommodation costs
- Recovery and delivery to repairers, if damaged
- Recovery and delivery to destination / home, if the driver falls ill
- Family and friends option, so you can lend it to them (if you dare) and be covered on your existing policy

These are just some of the things a dedicated folding camper insurance policy can cover, and, with annual costs starting from around £1 a week, can you afford not to?

Be aware, though, that, due to the lack of physical security in a folding camper, or trailer tent, whilst many will cover you, some insurers will not provide cover for the contents of the camper, as they simply cannot be secured to any reasonable degree.

In these cases, it will be necessary to ensure adequate cover on your home contents policy, in order to protect TVs, laptops, phones, tablets, etc.

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Whilst we are looking at the overall topic of folding camper insurance, we, perhaps ought to look at one other matter that concerns insurance.

There has been a great deal of speculation, and numerous examples of sensationalist reporting, as to the implications of posting details of our current or upcoming holidays on social media sites, such as Facebook. Many insist it will invalidate our insurance, if we post any details online, that may be usable by potential burglars. So. Is it true, or yet another urban myth?

Well. The reality is that this is, for now, at least, another urban myth, although that does not mean it doesn't have some degree of foundation in fact. Insurance companies in the States are, indeed, using computer programs to check customers' social media profiles, before paying out, but this has not, yet, been introduced in the UK.

In spite of this, many journalists appear intent on trying to convince us that we will all risk having our policies invalidated if we, in any way, publicise our plans or holiday locations. In a recent article on ThisIsMoney.co.uk (financial website of the year, according to their own home page) they lead with the heading; "Going away? Don't tell your Facebook friends, or risk having your insurance claims rejected". Having then explained all the reasons why they feel we should be concerned, they then ended the article with the highly significant sentence; "A spokesman for the Association of British Insurers said no insurer has rejected a home cover claim on the basis of a social media post".

The Reality

Quite true; to date, no UK insurer has ever rejected a claim on the basis of a social media post, and this is a policy that is a very long way from being enacted. UK insurers are, however, concerned about this, and the Ombudsman has warned about the potential implications of not exercising the requisite level of 'reasonable care' (a key requirement for any insurance policy). However, the UK insurance industry is currently erring towards a somewhat different approach to the problem, by targeting insurance premiums, rather than insurance claims.

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Insurance company Hiscox recently told the Sunday Times that it does not insure celebrities who publish their holiday details and dates in magazines such as Hello and OK. It is currently considering extending this policy to regular home owners, as well.

Other insurance companies are looking at the level of premiums they will charge, and it is estimated that premiums will be in the region of 10% higher for those customers regularly using social media, as opposed to those who don't. The current proposition is to introduce additional questions into the original proposal procedure. "Are you actively involved in social media"? is likely to become one of the initial questions, in much the same way as; "Do you currently have an approved alarm system installed"?

Anyone who uses social media extensively could be refused insurance, or charged a higher premium for it. This proposal to ask questions at the initial stages avoids the need to reject claims at a later date. Any claims that are, ultimately, rejected are likely to be on the basis that the insured party misrepresented the situation when they completed the original proposal.

So. Simply posting your holiday plans on social media will not, in its own right, compromise your level of cover. That said, the 'reasonable care' clause will still remain valid, and common sense is, still, crucial. We are aware of a couple of insurance claims, currently being dealt with by UK insurance companies, that are being contested by those companies.

This is, however, due to quite exceptional circumstances. In each case, the insured parties had announced their plans, not just to their own friends, but the entire Facebook community, along with full details of where they lived. I think we can all agree that that is not exercising 'reasonable care'.

To put it in context, many of us many store our campers, caravans, motor homes etc on our drives. When they disappear for 2 weeks, during the main school holidays, it isn't rocket science to work out that we are away, but this will not affect our level of insurance cover.

However, if (as the Ombudsman loves to quote) you place a large sign on your front garden, saying; "Away on holiday. Please burgle" that is unlikely to meet with the same level of sympathy. It is the same with Facebook.

Posting to our own friends or closed special interest groups is not going to cause us an issue. Announcing it to the whole world, with shed loads of detail, is asking for trouble, and inviting rejection of any resulting insurance claims.

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Conclusion

Currently (and this may change in the long term) no UK insurance company has ever actually rejected a claim on the basis of a social media post, nor are there any plans to introduce it in the near future.

That is yet another urban myth. Of course, it is only common sense to be aware of what we are saying, and to whom, when online, so that we don't give burglars any more information than we need to about our holiday movements.

That said, this is an area of increasing concern to the insurance companies, and it is likely that it will become an issue in the foreseeable future. If it does, however, it is far more likely to be an issue of refusing insurance, or increasing premiums, rather than a matter of rejecting claims, which, at the end of the day, benefits no one.

It may well be a case of; "Don't believe the hype," when it comes to the rejection of insurance claims, but that doesn't mean we should not be vigilant, and wary of what we say within the public arena.

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Below are a list of some of the key players in the folding camper insurance market. We have no affiliation with any of these, nor do we recommend any specific one, and, hence, they are listed in alphabetical order, only. You will often find that the company offering the best deal on one day, may not offer the best deal on the next, plus, what suits one individual, may not ideally suit another. As with most things, it is always best to shop around, but these are those that, in our experience, are the most commonly used within the folding camper fraternity.

AA Caravan Insurance

www.theaa.com/caravan

Adrian Flux Insurance (Specialising in older and more unusual models)

www.adrianflux.co.uk/trailer-tent

Camping & Caravanning Club

www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/insurance/trailer-tent-insurance

Caravan Club

<http://www.caravanclub.co.uk/insurance/caravan-insurance>

Caravan Guard

www.caravanguard.co.uk/folding-camper-insurance

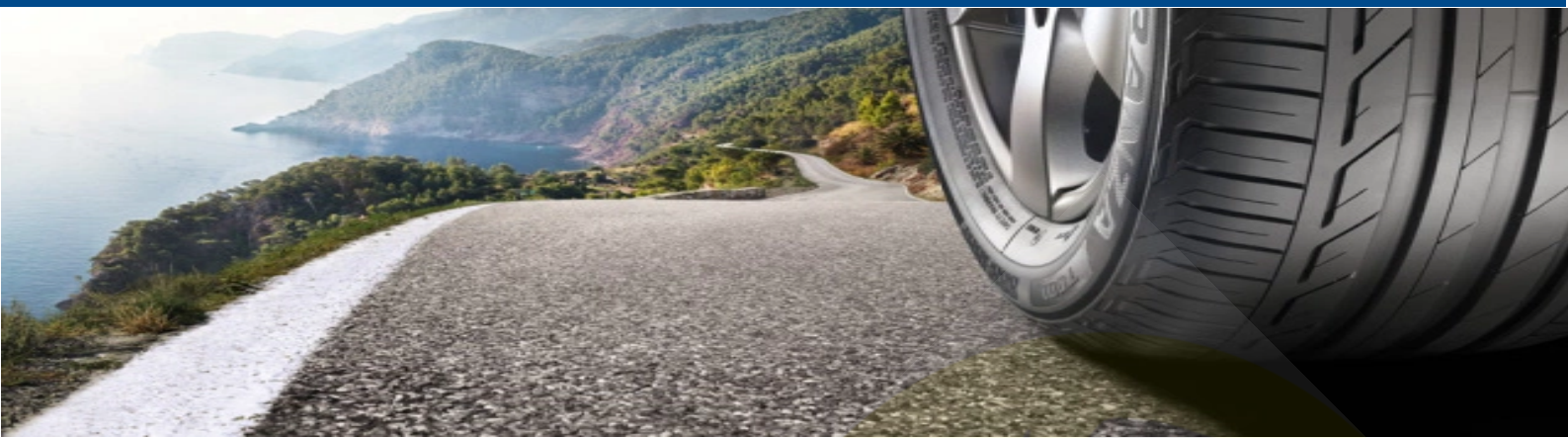
Insurance For Trailer Tents

www.insurancefortailertents.co.uk

Towergate Insurance (Up to 20 years old, only)

www.towergateinsurance.co.uk/caravan/product/trailer-tent-insurance

Feel free to give as many of these a call as you like, in order to get the most appropriate and cost effective cover for yourselves. Whilst it may not be a legal requirement, you know it makes sense...



How Old Are Our Tyres, And When Do We Need To Change Them?

Research shows that less than a fifth of us actually know how to tell how old our tyres are, even though it is, in fact, a relatively simple procedure to do so. There also appears to be a fair bit of confusion as to when we should, actually, replace them.

Contrary to popular misconception, there is no, actual, age at which point you must, legally, replace a tyre, however, they must, obviously, be of a roadworthy condition in order to be legal.

Determining The Age Of A Tyre

The age of your tyres is shown on the side wall of the tyre, and is represented by a series of four numbers, usually preceded by the letters; DOT. These four numbers represent the month number and year of manufacture, so, for example, the numbers 0915 will represent a date of manufacture of month 9 (September) 2015. It really is that simple, and will help you to ensure that your tyres will have the maximum possible usable life when you buy them.

When Do We Need To Replace A Tyre?

As already specified, there is no legal age limit for a tyre, as their degree of wear will vary significantly, depending on usage, storage etc, and the tyre's performance will, also, deteriorate over time.

Tyres contain a number of anti-oxidising chemicals, designed to slow down the ageing process, and extend the life of a tyre, however, crucially for anyone with a folding camper, caravan, trailer etc, the tyres need to be in use for these chemicals to be effective.

Infrequent use, or improper storage (both potential problems in leisure applications) can, actually, accelerate the ageing process, even though the tyres are not, in fact, being used. Low mileage, older units are particularly at risk of premature ageing.

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Many believe that you MUST change your tyres after five years, but this isn't, in fact, a legal requirement.

The recommendation of tyre manufacturers is that tyres should be checked annually (a simple visual check should be sufficient) once the tyre reaches five years of age.

They further recommend that tyres should be replaced after ten years, but, again, this is just a recommendation, not a legal requirement, and will depend upon overall tyre condition.

There are a number of key triggers that will determine when we should change our tyres;

- Following a puncture (advisable to get a professional opinion if this happens).
- When tread is down to the legal limit (currently 1.6mm).
- When a tyre shows signs of ageing (such as cracked side walls / deformation).
- If a tyre is damaged, for example, by kerbing, or hitting a pothole.
- Where there is abnormal wear. Uneven wear may be down to incorrect wheel tracking or balancing. It may, also, be down to incorrect tyre pressures.

At the end of the day, a lot of it will come down to common sense, and keeping an eye on the tyres (inside wall, as well as outer wall and main tread).

If we are, also, aware of the age of the tyre, we will have an idea as to the extent it is likely to need checking, so that we can remain as safe as possible on our breaks away.

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Driving In Europe

What Do We Need To Know?

There's plenty we need to know, when driving and towing in the UK, however, there is even more legislation involved with driving in Europe, and this can change over time, and from country to country.



These days, it isn't just a case of shoving on a GB sticker and hoping for the best. Matters such as speed limits, permitted alcohol intake, lighting requirements and equipment levels will all have a bearing, and must all be complied with, regardless of what country we are touring.

However, before looking at individual countries, we need to bear in mind some key items of advice which will be universal, regardless of the country being visited.

General Advice For Driving & Travelling In Europe

As with most things in life, it is our own responsibility to make sure we comply with the local laws of any country we may visit. This is particularly important when hiring a vehicle, as many hire companies do not always equip their vehicles with the requisite levels of equipment. Nothing ruins a holiday like a disagreement with the police, or the confiscation of a vehicle. One of the key laws we need to comply with is taking the correct legal paperwork with us. Regardless of which European country we intend to visit, we will need to ensure we take the following;

- Full, current UK driving licence
- Paper counterpart driving licence* (If you have a post 1972 photo ID licence)
- An International Driving Permit (if applicable)
- Passport
- Original vehicle V5 log book
- Confirmation of motor insurance (Insurance certificate)**
- Travel insurance documentation
- Passport
- Visa (if applicable)

* – Following its abolition on 8 June 2015, the advice of the DVLA was to destroy the paper counterpart, however, there is speculation that it might take a while for the message to filter through to foreign police authorities and car hire companies, so our advice would be to hang on to them for a little longer, just in case.

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** - Usually a good idea to check that your insurance policy covers you for foreign travel. Some companies require notification, prior to any foreign travel, in order to validate cover.

The AA produce a really useful downloadable Summary Of Compulsory Equipment, which covers the key items, for each country.

When travelling, anywhere, in the EU, you will also need to display a valid GB sticker (unless, of course, you already have a GB Euro symbol on your number plate). Failure to display one incurs an on the spot fine.



With respect to drinking and driving, the rules vary from country to country, but, if in doubt, the simple rule is; if you've had a drink, don't drive.

Some of the penalties are extremely punitive in some countries, and it simply isn't worth the risk.

Another issue common to many EU countries is the need to carry reflective jackets. These jackets must comply with EU Standard BS EN 471, 1994, class 1 or 2.

It is recommended that at least two be carried, but, ideally, one for each occupant of the vehicle.

In respect of towing, as opposed to just driving, it is important to ensure compliance with any laws pertaining to the towing of trailers or caravans in the EU.

Current Europe wide law states that; if your car was registered before 1 August 1998, then you are able to use a tow bar that has been tested to BS AU 114b. Any cars that are newer than that must meet the EU 94/20 directive.

By law, in any EU country, you need to have an audible or visual indication that your towing lights are working

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One other thing worth bearing in mind, when visiting Europe (whether you are driving or not) is the need to carry a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).

These are free from the Post Office, and entitle us to free (or, at least, reduced cost) health care, in most European countries.

Just bear in mind, though, that the treatment may not be as comprehensive as it is in the UK, in all countries, and it doesn't cover the cost of returning to the UK, which is why we need to arrange adequate travel insurance, prior to setting out on our journey.

Remember. Wherever you are travelling in the EU, there is one common emergency number; 112.

In addition to these general European guidelines there will be specific requirements and laws for each EC country. The AA have produced a series of excellent guides to each country, so there is little point reproducing all of the information, separately, here.

The AA advice on travelling in Europe can all be found here;

www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/overseas

In addition to the AA, the Gov.UK web site also has a comprehensive area dedicated to Travel Abroad, covering everything, from applying for an EHIC mentioned above, to what to do if you are a victim of crime abroad, or, even, get arrested yourself.

Finally, one of the most basic pieces of advice, is also one of the ones that most people driving abroad fall foul of; DON'T FORGET TO DRIVE ON THE RIGHT.

Sounds obvious, but, apparently, it isn't!

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Purchasing Faulty Goods. What Are Our Rights?

At certain times of year, particularly, there are a lot of potential bargains around, especially on the second hand market, and many people will wait until then to purchase their new to them unit.

Unfortunately, not all advertised items turn out to be the bargain they first appeared to be (hence, our Quick Buying Guide For Used Folding Campers) and, often, buyers can end up with items that turn out to be not as described, and, in extreme cases, illegal or unusable. So. What are our rights when this happens?

As usual, the quick answer is; it depends. In this case, it will, largely, depend on whether or not you have bought your goods from a trader or a private individual, and (to a lesser extent) whether the goods are new or second hand. I say; "to a lesser extent", as second hand goods sold by a trader still have to be 'fit for purpose' etc.

Purchasing From A Trader (New Items)

On the 1st October 2015, the Consumer Rights Act 2015 was introduced, and all purchases from that date onwards are now governed by this legislation.

The Act is the biggest re-vamping of consumer rights law in many years, and is intended to simplify, strengthen and modernise consumer law.

It has been introduced in order to replace three key existing pieces of legislation; The Sale Of Goods Act, The Supply Of Goods & Services Act and Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations.

- 30 day period to obtain a refund. This is the first time a specific period has been quoted, during which you can reject an item and get a full refund.
- A 'tiered remedy' system. which sets out your rights to a refund more clearly. Your entitlement to a refund will depend on how long you have owned the item.
- Failed repairs. A retailer has one attempt to repair a faulty item. If they fail, you are entitled to a refund or price reduction.
- Deductions from refunds. No deduction can be made from a refund in the first six months of ownership of an item. The only exception to this is motor vehicles, where a reasonable deduction can be made for the use you have had of the vehicle. It will be interesting to see if retailers attempt to apply this to new caravans and campers.

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- Digital content rights. This new part of the law gives consumers rights in respect of online digital content, including content that is provided for free, alongside paid for content.
- Unfair terms in consumer contracts. It will now be easier for consumers to challenge hidden fees and charges. Now, the key terms of a contract, including price, may be assessed for fairness unless they're both prominent and transparent.
- Pre-contract information The Consumer Rights Act states that if a retailer provides pre-contract information in relation to a service and the consumer takes this information into account, the service must comply with that information.

Product Quality

As with the Sale of Goods Act, under the Consumer Rights Act all products must be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose and as described.

The rules also include digital content in this definition. So all products – whether physical or digital – must meet the following standards:

- Satisfactory quality Goods shouldn't be faulty or damaged when you receive them. You should ask what a reasonable person would consider satisfactory for the goods in question? For example, bargain bucket products won't be held to as high standards as luxury goods.
- Fit for purpose The goods should be fit for the purpose they are supplied for, as well as any specific purpose you made known to the retailer before you agreed to buy the goods.
- As described The goods supplied must match any description given to you at the time of purchase.

Who Should You claim Against?

If the goods you have purchased don't satisfy any of the above criteria, you have a claim under the Consumer Rights Act. Your rights under this act are against the retailer, not the manufacturer, and so you must take any claim to the retailer.

First 30 Days

Provided you make a claim within 30 days, the Consumer Rights Act gives you the legal right to reject the goods, and get a full refund. After that period, you will not, automatically, be entitled to a full refund, if the product develops a fault.

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From 30 Days To Six Months

If you discover a fault within the first 6 months (but after 30 days) then, for legal purposes, it is presumed that the fault was there from the time of delivery (unless the retailer can prove otherwise). That is a key point, as it is down to the retailer to prove that the fault wasn't there at the time of delivery. It is NOT down to you to prove that it was.

In this situation, you must give the retailer the opportunity to repair or replace it. You may choose whether you want the product repaired or replaced, but the retailer can refuse, if your choice is disproportionately expensive compared to the alternative.

They are only allowed one opportunity to do so. If the repair fails, or the first replacement is also faulty, then you have the option of either a full refund, or a partial refund, if you wish to keep the product.

You are entitled to a full or partial refund, instead of a repair or replacement, if;

- the cost of repair or replacement is disproportionate to the value of the goods
- a repair or replacement is impossible
- a repair or replacement would be unduly inconvenient
- the repair / replacement would take an unreasonably long time to undertake
- the repair or replacement has failed
- If a refund is made, within the first six months, then no deduction from that refund may be made by the retailer, with the exception of motor vehicles, where a reasonable usage deduction may be made. If you prefer to keep the goods, then an appropriate price reduction can be requested.

Over Six Months

After the first six months, the emphasis shifts, and the burden of proof is now on the purchaser, to prove that the product was faulty at the time of delivery.

In practice, this can be difficult, and will, probably, require some sort of expert report, opinion or evidence of similar problems across this particular product range.

You have six years to make a claim, in England and Wales, and five years in Scotland, if a retailer refuses to repair or replace a faulty item.

Delivery Of Goods

The retailer is responsible for the goods, until they are physically delivered to you, or someone authorised by you to receive them. Crucially, this means that it is the retailer who is liable for the delivery service, and not the couriers / delivery company who are employed by the retailer. If a parcel is left with a neighbour, who is not designated, by you, to receive it, then the retailer remains responsible for the item.

Unless a longer period has been agreed, then there is a default delivery period of 30 days. If the retailer fails to meet this deadline, then your options are;

If your delivery is later than agreed and it was essential that it was delivered on time, then you have the right to terminate the purchase and get a full refund. If the delivery isn't time essential but another reasonable delivery time can't be agreed, you're also within your right to cancel the order for a full refund.

Unfair Contract Terms

Your rights under the Consumer Rights Act make it easier to challenge hidden fees and charges.

Now the key terms of a contract, including price, may be assessed for fairness unless they are both prominent and transparent.

This is an improvement for consumers because previously such terms were exempt from a fairness test if they were written in plain language.

Terms may be deemed unfair if:

they are contrary to the requirements of good faith – meaning they must be designed, negotiated and entered into with the consumer in a fair and open way
they cause a significant imbalance between the rights of the retailer and consumer to the detriment of the consumer.

Purchasing From A Trader (Second Hand Items)

In actual fact, your rights under the Consumer Rights Act (as they were under the Sale of Goods Act) are exactly the same as they are for new items, although, of course, we must make allowance for a reasonable degree of wear and tear, when buying second hand goods. That said, the goods must still fulfil the three critical criteria described above. They must be of satisfactory quality (for their age) fit for purpose and as described. If they fail on any of these points, then you are entitled to the same rights as you would be for a new item.

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Purchasing From a Private Individual

Buying from a private individual is a very different scenario, and it is very much a case of; buyer beware.

Unlike traders and retailers, there's no obligation on the seller to disclose faults. But misrepresenting goods is not allowed.

For example, if a private seller describes a tent as; 'a green tent' and they send you a tent which is green, but badly stained with mildew etc, then you won't be entitled to a refund. However, if they describe it as; 'a brand new tent' and it arrives in a stained or damaged condition, then you may have recourse to request a refund or replacement. This is because they have misrepresented the quality of the tent.

Likewise, if someone sells you a; 'Pennine Pathfinder folding camper' and you turn up to view, if all looks OK, and you return home with your new purchase, only to find out a few days later that it is riddled with damp, and none of the appliances work, then you will have no entitlement to a refund or replacement (again; buyer beware). On the other hand, if the camper was described as; "In excellent condition, with no damp, and all appliances in good working order", then you are likely to be able to request a refund.

Next Steps

If the seller (private or trader) refuses to rectify the problem, then your next course of action is, probably, going to be to pursue a case through the Small Claims Court. The Small Claims Court can deal with claims up to a maximum of £10,000.

Cases involving traders are likely to be more straightforward, as the Consumer Rights Act has been brought in to simplify the whole system, and your rights are pretty clearly defined. Where private sellers are involved, however, then this is somewhat less clear cut.

For example; if a private seller describes a folding camper as; 'immaculate condition' and it turns out that there is a lot of mildew hidden behind bed pods, roof linings etc, then that is misrepresentation, and, hence a claim.

Likewise, if they describe all appliances as; 'in good working order' and it turns out some of them don't work, then, again, clear case of misrepresentation, as it would be an easy enough task for the seller to check them. (Even if they are not qualified to service them, they are able to determine if they are working, or not).

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In this case, a claim, through the Small Claims Court, will not be clear cut, however, there are two things to bear in mind here;

1. Whilst, in criminal cases, the prosecution must prove guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt', in a civil matter, such as this, the court will look at the most likely outcome, based on the 'balance of probabilities', so, as the claimant, you have less onus on you to prove that the seller deliberately misrepresented the facts. However, this, basically, means that, often, it can, simply, come down to how well each party performs on the day.
2. If the court are unable to come to a clear decision as to the actions of the seller, they are able to make a partial award, so, even if you are unable to prove that they deliberately misrepresented the facts, it is quite possible you will be awarded sufficient funds, in order to rectify any issues arising.

Summary

The rights we have will, largely, depend on who we bought from. If we purchased an item from a trader, then we have extensive cover from the newly introduced Consumer Rights Act.

If, however, we are buying from a private individual, then it is very much a case of buyer beware, as we will have little or no come back, unless the seller misrepresented the condition of the item being sold. Then, we MAY have recourse to a claim, but it won't be a clear cut affair.

The simple advice, therefore, will always be to make sure you check your potential new purchase VERY carefully, before buying.

Beware, too, of adverts that are very vague, and non specific. 'For sale. Bailey Pageant', makes no reference to condition, and, therefore, nothing to misrepresent. If you buy this item, and the whole thing falls apart on the way home, you will have no legal recourse, as there is no misrepresentation. Again; BUYER BEWARE!

Source: <http://www.which.co.uk>

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Wild Camping In The UK

Wild camping, as a term can mean a significant variety of things, depending on the perspective of the person concerned.

For many it involves striding out into the 'wilderness' with only the clothes, food and equipment we can carry with us. For many others, it is any form of camping that isn't on a designated camp site. The validity of those respective viewpoints is looked at below, as is the closest we have to a formal definition of 'wild camping'. Continuing on from our recent series of articles covering the legal aspects of camping, we thought it worth a quick look at exactly what the rules are that we need to adhere to, when wild camping in the UK.

Wild Camping On Private Land

Strictly speaking, all land in England & Wales is owned by someone, meaning that we should, ideally, seek permission prior to camping anywhere. In reality, however, a degree of wild camping is tolerated, especially in areas such as the Lake District, in England, and Snowdonia, in Wales. The main exception, in England, is Dartmoor, where wild camping is, actually, allowed, provided it is within pre defined parameters. Dartmoor has pre defined camping areas where longer term wild camping is allowed, however, even outside of these areas, it is still permitted, provided it is for no more than two nights, and it is not within 100 metres of a public road, dwelling or enclosure.

One area where wild camping is very actively discouraged is the Peak District, especially in very dry conditions, as the huge deposits of peat are an accident waiting to happen, in the vicinity of a camp fire.

The law for Scotland is, somewhat, different. Wild camping, there, was made legal, with the introduction of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This act made wild camping legal in any unenclosed land in Scotland.

Of course, in Scotland, as with anywhere else in the UK, consideration and common sense is key. In Scotland, the guidelines are laid out in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, but they apply equally well, anywhere in the UK, and are covered later in this article.

The only place, in Scotland, where wild camping isn't, currently, allowed is in the East of the Loch Lomond National Park, where it was banned in 2010 (along with alcohol) following a spate of vandalism and anti social behaviour.

'Rules' of Wild Camping

The general rule is clear, and simple; apart from the exceptions listed above, you are not allowed to camp anywhere in England and Wales “without express permission”.



The reality is, this is going to be virtually impossible to obtain, and most wild camping is tolerated, provided we stick to the rules listed below.

At this point, it is, of course, worth mentioning that; even if you do stick to these rules, the land owner does have the right to force you to abandon your camp, regardless of the time of day / night, and you must be prepared to accept this, as, without permission (and, technically, even, with it) you have no automatic rights to camp on any low level private land.

Of course, that is the rule. The reality may be a little different. Whilst the land owners will always have authority to remove us, with immediate effect, wild camping does tend, in the main, to be tolerated, as long as we follow the basic guidelines;

- Avoid over crowding, and move on to another location, where applicable.
- Carry a trowel to bury toilet waste, and keep well clear of water courses.
- Use a stove, or leave no trace of any camp fire. Never cut down or damage trees.
- Take away your own rubbish, and, where possible, any other litter you come across.
- If in doubt, ask the land owner, who may be able to suggest a better camp site.

These 5 key pointers are as listed in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, referred to above. They all relate to the central maxim of being unobtrusive whilst camped, and leaving no trace when you depart.

An extension of this is the unwritten rule of; ‘pitch late, leave early’. The less we are around to annoy local land owners, the more we are likely to be left alone to enjoy what we love doing.

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'Wild' Camping Other Than In Tents

For those of us with folding campers, caravans and motor homes, we are far more likely to be pitching up, in a lay by or similar, for the night rather than an obscure corner of woodland, or remote mountain peak.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code advises as follows;

“Wild camping is defined as lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two to three nights in one place. You can camp in this way wherever access rights apply but help to avoid causing problems for local people and land managers by not camping in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals, and keeping well away from buildings, roads or historic structures.

Take care to avoid deer stalking or grouse shooting. If you wish to camp close to a house or building, seek the owner's permission. Leave no trace by; taking away all your litter, removing all traces of your tent pitch and of any open fire (follow the guidance for lighting fires), not causing any pollution“.

So, by the closest thing we have to an official definition of wild camping, this doesn't really qualify, and will often be referred to, by those in the know, as 'off site camping'. OK, so, for those of us that off site camp, what do we need to know?

Firstly, the standard access rights, and those stated in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code do not apply to campers, caravans and motor homes.



The Road Traffic Act 1988 states that you can drive a vehicle up to 15 yards off a public highway, in order to park, but this does not confer any automatic right to park there.

Most unmetalled roads, unfenced land and beaches are private property, and, just like wild camping, you have no rights to park there, unless authorised by the land owner, either in person, or by way of signage. Again, much like wild camping, informal, off road parking takes place extensively, without causing undue concern.

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Common Sense Guidance – Do's:

- Always ensure your chosen spot is suitable for your unit
- Think about the cumulative effect of parking there, if it is obviously extensively used.
- Take care to avoid fragile ground and sensitive habitats, and never drive down onto beaches, or grass verges, as it can destroy the habitat.
- As with wild camping, avoid over crowding, and never park too close to another unit.
- Use only biodegradable detergents and drain waste water tanks in camp sites and designated areas, wherever possible. If you have to empty it in the wild, then keep well away from water courses, and be aware that animals may be attracted to the scent.
- Ensure your unit is self contained, with toilet facilities and waste water containers / tanks.
- Do a full litter pick before leaving, taking not only your own rubbish, but any found about the area, and dispose of it, properly, when you get back to appropriate facilities. Always ensure that litter is stored inside the unit, so that it isn't prone to having bags ripped open and contents strewn everywhere by the local wild life.
- Support a sustainable tourist industry – buy groceries etc in local shops.



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Common Sense Guidance – Don't's:

- Park in areas where signs state; 'No overnight parking', or where there is a camp site nearby.
- Park overnight, within sight of people's houses, even in car park bays.
- Park in an area where security may be an issue. Anywhere that looks a little 'dodgy' probably is, but anywhere too remote can also bring its own fair share of problems.
- Block access tracks to estates and fields
- Light BBQs or fires unless it is safe to do so, it can be supervised properly, and it is fully extinguished, when finished, with no evidence left behind.
- Empty any chemical toilet waste anywhere other than at a designated chemical waste area. Most camp sites have facilities for this. It is important to be aware that public toilets are not suitable places to empty chemical toilets, as it upsets the sewage treatment process.
- Cause any damage to trees, crops or other property.
- Make a camp of it. Chairs, awnings, wind breaks etc should not be used, unless you are extremely remote and not over looked. Anything that looks too 'permanent' is likely to illicit a knock on the door, and a request to move on.
- Be careful with your alcohol consumption. At least one person should remain able to drive, when camping off site. You could be asked to move on, at any time, and it won't help if you are unable to do so, due to alcohol levels. We also have to be careful of the potential to fall foul of the 'Drunk In Charge' law in the UK, as well as some European countries. Technically, you are committing an offence, just being in charge of a vehicle, whilst over the drink driving limit. Granted, if you are in your pyjamas, or (God forbid) a onesie, then common sense dictates that you probably weren't intending to go anywhere, but there are no guarantees, especially bearing in mind the issue of, potentially, being asked to move on.

'Wild' Camping On A Public Highway, Car Park, Etc.

Just like storing a unit on the roadside, outside our own house, there is no fixed national law preventing us from parking up on a public area, such as a lay by or car park. That said, there will, often, be local bye laws preventing us from doing so, and many public places now include the obligatory 'No overnight camping' signs on every car park and lay by in the area. If we follow the usual common sense rules of; arrive late, leave early, leave no mess, we are unlikely to be disturbed, but, if we are, we may have to smile politely, and move on.

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In the above section; [Storing A Folding Camper At Home. What is The Law?](#) we made reference to Rules 238 -252 of the Highway Code which governs all aspects of waiting and parking on a public highway.

As long as we comply with these provisions, we are, technically, within the law, but that won't help us, where local bye laws prevent any form of over night camping. Local authorities may, also, impose Traffic Regulation Orders which determine who may park overnight in areas under their jurisdiction.

For example, they might permit HGV drivers, only, to park over night in their lay bys, as they are required, by law, to take designated breaks, where the rest of us are not.

This really leaves us with two other alternatives to look at, for over night parking, in a public place. These two options are private car parks and motorway services.

As we saw in our other recent article; [Spacing On Camping Pitches. Just What Are The Rules?](#) any person or organisation offering overnight accommodation for campers, caravans and motor homes must do so in compliance with the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960.

Failure to do so can leave them open for prosecution, and this is why the major supermarkets and pub chains don't, officially, allow overnight camping in their car parks. If we chose to ignore this, as with any other camp site utilised without permission, we run the risk of action being taken against us for the civil offence of trespass.

Some motorway services, however, actively encourage overnight camping, for a fee.

The key advantage with these is that they are, usually, pretty much on the route to your destination, so little or no diversion from the main route, but with the ability to rest up for the night, and break up what would be an, otherwise, unduly arduous journey.



If you would like to check out a list of motorway services offering this facility, there is a comprehensive list of them on the [Lifesure Group Blog](#), which is worth a look.



Spacing On Camping Pitches. What Are The Rules?

There has been huge speculation, and, indeed, much argument in various groups & forums, in recent months as to just what are the current legal, and health and safety guidelines when pitching our campers, tents or caravans on public sites.

Once again, we thought it was worth looking into, to see exactly what the current position actually is.

Many people believe there is no actual law in place, and the distances often quoted (6 metres being the most popular) are simply a guide, devised by the Caravan Club, in much the same way as their '85% of vehicle kerb weight' guidance when towing, whilst others believe that this distance is set in stone, within UK Law. The truth is, actually, somewhat predictably, somewhere in between.

The actual legislation governing pitch spacing on UK camp sites is the snappily titled; The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. Not the most modern piece of legislation in the world, but it has had numerous revisions, since its inception over 50 years ago. The Act is, itself, an update on the original Public Health Act 1936 insofar as it relates to caravan sites, and mixed sites of caravans and tents. Tent only sites continue to be governed by the original 1936 Act, although the provisions are exactly the same, and delegate responsibilities at a local level.

For anyone wishing to read the legislation, in its entirety there is a link to it at the bottom of this article, however, the key point of the legislation, insofar as it relates to minimum distances is as follows:

The Act states that; "The local authority shall consult the fire authority as to the extent to which any model standards relating to fire precautions which have been specified under subsection (6) of this section are appropriate to the land".

Ok, so not the clearest of definitions, so what does it actually mean? Basically, it is the local authority who issue and control planning consents and licenses.

It is, therefore, their responsibility to liaise with local fire departments, in order to establish a clear policy which can then be applied to all camp site planning consents and licences issued by that local authority.

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What this, effectively, means is that, contrary to some opinions, there is no central legislation that specifically identifies the approved 'safe' distances between units. These parameters are decided on a local level. However, that does not mean there aren't guidelines out there to guide those local authorities. Just like the 85% towing rule, these are not fixed in law, but many local councils have adopted them as the basis for their own planning criteria. The guidelines are as follows:

- The distance between two aluminium caravans (or units of a similar fire retardant material) should be no less than 5 metres.
- Where the units are of plywood panelling, this is increased to 6 metres.
- If units are of mixed construction, then, again, the distance is recommended as 6 metres.
- These distances are total spacing between units. It is acceptable for these spaces to be partly filled by awnings, vehicles etc, however, there should be no less than 3 metres of totally clear space between units, to allow for the access of emergency vehicles, where appropriate.

Again, these are just guidelines, and the actual distances for any given camp site will depend on the stipulations of the local authority. So, to clarify;

- There is one central Act that governs the spacing of units on any camp site, however, it does not specify exact distances.
- All distances are determined on a local basis by the local authority.
- Those distances are then incorporated into any planning consents and site licences, and then become legally binding on the camp site concerned
- These limits can then be (and, often, are) enforced where health & safety issues arise, & the local fire authority have the power to shut down any site that fails to comply.

Although you would need to check with your local council as to what their own limits are, if a site is blatantly flaunting these, resulting in obvious health and safety / fire hazard issues, you can complain to site managers / owners, and ask them to resolve the issue. If they fail to do so, you can alert the local authority to the problem, and, in the majority of cases, they will act to force the site to comply.

Probably worth pointing out that, whilst actual distances may vary, the act covers all touring and static caravans, campers, trailer tents and tents, and, should you feel the site administration are trying to cram an unsafe number of units into any given space, you can complain, and you are able seek redress.

For those with a little too much time on their hands, you can check out the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 in full

With thanks to Wychavon District Council Planning & Licencing Department and DEFRA, for their assistance in the production of this part of the guide.

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Camp Site Flooding. What Are Our Rights?

Yet another gorgeous British Summer drew to an end, in 2015, with 22% more rain in August than normal, and 35 flood warnings in the South of England, alone, over the bank holiday weekend, so it's not too surprising that many of us have suffered a little, whilst camping.

From a personal perspective, I had been away camping three times in that year, and it rained on every single day, so, if you have suffered, I feel your pain.

One of the unfortunate side effects of all this liquid sunshine is the flooding of sites, and the associated mud baths that often follow, and tractors / 4 x 4s towing units on and off site have been an increasingly common sight.

OK. So. We arrive at a site, and it is not, in our opinion, fit for purpose. Our pitch is either water logged, or a mud bath. What are our rights? Can we refuse to stay there, and request a refund?

Whilst, of course, it is our own, personal, choice whether or not we decide to stay on site, our entitlement to a refund is not, in fact, an automatic right. The weather is a situation beyond anyone's control, and not something that the site owners can be held accountable for. As such, there is no generic law that obliges them to offer a refund, due to poor weather conditions, and inadequate pitches arising from those conditions.

The effective rights we have will, actually, depend on the site's own Terms & Conditions. If these specify that a refund will be paid, in the event of weather related issues with pitches, then you are entitled to a refund, and, if the site fails to pay, you can take legal action against them. If, however, the Ts & Cs make no mention of a refund, or specifically state that no refunds will be paid, then there are no legal rights to receive one.

Of course, this does not affect your statutory rights, and, if the sites are providing pitches that are genuinely not fit for purpose (polluted water supplies, dangerous electrics etc) then you can report them, and obtain compensation, but circumstances beyond their control, such as extreme weather conditions, will not, automatically, entitle you to a refund. Make sure you read those terms and conditions before you make a booking, because, by making that booking with the site, you are deemed to be accepting them.

With thanks to Trading Standards and CAB for assistance with the preparation of this article.



Electric Hookup Charges How much Is Legal?

Electric hookup is an increasingly popular element of the average family camping holiday, especially as more and more tent campers are now making the most of the extra little luxuries it affords.

There continues to be much speculation as to what is fair, and, indeed, legal to be charged when utilising a pitch that incorporates an electric hookup facility.

The answer is relatively simple. In 2003, Ofgem ammended the Maximum Resale Price. This is the maximum price that anyone can charge for resupplying gas* and electricity which has already been bought from an authorised supplier.

From 1 January 2003, the maximum price at which gas or electricity may be sold is the same price as that paid by the person who is reselling it (including any standing charges).

Anyone who charges more than the maximum resale price may face civil proceedings for the recovery of the amount overcharged, and may be required to pay interest on the amounts over charged.

The key thing with the MRP is that it applies in situations were the reseller is supplying gas or electricity, they have bought from an authorised supplier, to someone else for DOMESTIC purposes.

That includes a landlord charging tenants for their energy usage, a boat owner paying the mooring operator, or, of course, a caravan, motorhome, camper or tent user, paying a site owner for the likes of electric hookup.

Where it does not apply is in any industrial or commercial scenario, such as a factory or retail shop. Crucially, it, also, does not apply when a site makes a flat rate charge for a pitch, where that price includes 'all services or amenities'.

In these circumstances, the reseller will normally adopt one of two alternatives;

1. Offer all pitches at a single rate, regardless of whether they use electric hookup or not, or;
2. Offer the pitches at more than one rate, depending on whether the customer requires an electrical supply or not.

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The interesting thing here is that, in both cases, the customer is deemed to be entering into an agreement for the letting of 'inclusive' accommodation. Effectively, there is no separate agreement for the resale of energy, and, hence, the MRP will not apply.

This is, effectively, allowing the site owners to charge, pretty much, what they like for an electric hookup. In theory, there is nothing to stop them charging £10 as an all inclusive fee for a standard, non EHU pitch, and £30 as an all inclusive fee for a pitch with EHU. On paper, that is totally legal, as they are, both, all inclusive, even though there is clearly a £20 additional fee for electric hookup, although, of course, customers would be more likely to vote with their feet in those situations.

The law requires the reseller to take due steps to calculate costs as accurately as possible. Meters to each pitch, or prepaid meter cards will make this much easier, however, where these are not utilised, the site owner must take reasonable steps to estimate costs, and these calculations must be verifiable, should the authorities wish to question them.

Likewise, standing charges must, also, be correctly calculated (as much as possible) and appropriately apportioned between users. There are no hard and fast rules for doing this, simply that the procedures must be both reasonable, and verifiable.

OK. So. what does all that mean. Well. Basically, if you are supplied with energy by the site owners, on a meter or prepaid card, then that energy can only be at the cost to the owner (including any standing** costs) or they may face prosecution. If, however, the site owner charges an all inclusive fee***, then they can charge pretty much what they like, within that, for the energy element, and there is nothing we can do about that, except book elsewhere, if we're not happy.

Anyone seeking to look into this in a little more detail can take a look at; 'The resale of gas and electricity guidance for resellers' guide, produced by Ofgem. This has been subject to subsequent revisions, in later years, but nothing that has changed the underlying principles of the original legislation.

** The maximum resale price does not apply to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) sold on site, in bottles.*

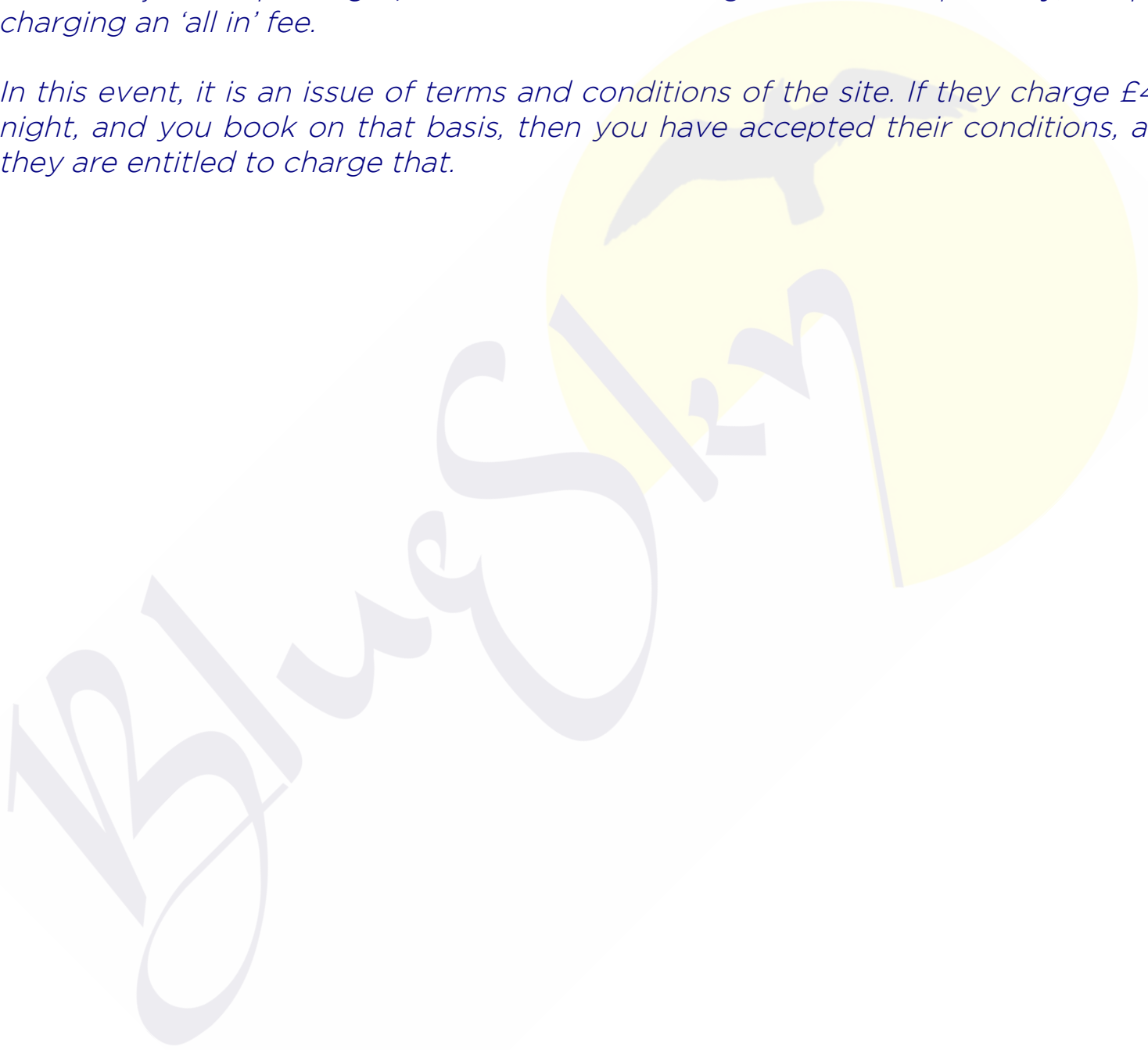
*** The reseller may only recharge on to customers the standing charges for the supply of gas or electricity. They are not allowed to recharge other costs, such as the cost of maintaining the electricity supply and equipment on site. If these are to be recovered, they must be done so by means of a general service charge, rather than a specific cost of the energy provided.*

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**** We have received confirmation, from Ofgem, that it is acceptable to show electricity separately, as long as it is a round sum amount, and is not charged on a per unit basis.*

So; "EHU: £4 a night" is totally acceptable and legal (even if the cost to the site owner is just £1 per night) as it is not itemising the units separately, simply charging an 'all in' fee.

In this event, it is an issue of terms and conditions of the site. If they charge £4 a night, and you book on that basis, then you have accepted their conditions, and they are entitled to charge that.



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In the pages above, we have covered a lot of the key issues relating to folding campers, specifically, and camping, and the law, generally.

There are, also, a number of other useful links, articles and features on the web site and blog, which may be of further use. Rather than reproducing everything, in full detail, here, below are a number of links to those items we think you may find of some interest, including everything from model and site reviews, to camping recipes and articles on the likes of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning and some of the key things to look out for, in order to avoid being scammed when buying or selling a camper online.

Internal Links:

Recipes & Reviews:

- [Camping Recipes](#)
- [Folding Camper Model Reviews](#)
- [Camp Site Reviews](#)
- [Equipment Reviews](#)

Recent Articles:

- [Camper Selling Scams On The Increase](#)
- [More Warnings On The Dangers Of Carbon Monoxide](#)
- [Choosing A Folding Camper Or Trailer Tent. What Are the Options?](#)
- [What Breakdown Cover Do We Need When Towing?](#)
- [Caravan Club V Camping & Caravanning Club. either, Neither Or Both?](#)
- [Customising Our Camper. What Are The Options?](#)

Other Links:

[The Folding Camper & Trailer Tent Definitive Guide](#)

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Thankyou for taking the time to take a look at this guide. We hope you found its contents useful. Whilst this publication is designed to bring together all of the key points and aspects of the world of folding campers, it is only a tiny proportion of the wealth of information that is contained on the Blue Sky web site and blog, including over 300 pages of specific model details, manuals, brochures, specifications and videos.

Please feel free to check them out at; www.foldingcampers.net



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