

Choosing the right caravan

Think about what you want to do with the van

With caravans, there are two main factors to consider: does the van match the size and weight of the towing vehicle and does it have the required number of beds? You must also think about what you want to do with the van.

There are three basic types of caravan: on-road, off-road and on-site.

On-road

If you know you will only be travelling on sealed roads, most caravans are suitable for this purpose. If you wander off-road, even onto a gravel track, few standard touring vans will cope with the extra strain this places on the caravan chassis and suspension.

Off-road

These caravans have higher clearance from the ground and heavy-duty suspension and chassis. They should also hold extra water, have space for a jerry can, spare wheels, extra gas bottles and tinted windows to cope with baking hot days.

On-site caravan

When a caravan is to be left in one place as a holiday home, you need to look for such features as comfort and space in the living quarters. Comfort will outweigh travelling requirements such as suspension, aerodynamics and ease of handling.

Advantages and disadvantages

Caravans come in various shapes and sizes and it's important to consider the ways you intend to use the caravan.

One other important consideration is the compatibility of the van with your towing vehicle.

Camper trailer

Advantages - light and low wind-resistance, good for smaller towing vehicles.

Disadvantages - longer to set up, limited storage and living, more moving parts than fixed caravan structures so vinyl or canvas sections and wind-up mechanisms suffer wear and tear.

Pop top caravan

Advantages - moderate wind resistance, lower centre of gravity (greater stability) higher ceiling, medium weight.

Disadvantages - limited wall cupboard space, longer to set up than fixed models, lower door height - a pain for tall folk - low cupboard height.

Full caravan

Advantages - less setting up needed on site, more room for storage and living, stronger construction.

Disadvantages - higher wind resistance than the caravan types mentioned above.

Fifth-wheel caravan

Advantages - these caravans have all the advantages of the full caravan with the added bonus of more living space with room for serious creature comforts like a full size lounge.

Disadvantages - very large object to tow so it needs a large, sturdy towing vehicle.

Relocatable or park van

Advantages - generally a large caravan unit, considerable living area, high ceiling, room for top-notch living comfort.

Disadvantages - cumbersome and unstable, high centre of gravity, high-wind resistance, difficult to move - so doesn't fit the bill for a touring expedition.