

Bailey have re-insulated their factory roofs to help cut down heating waste

Going Green

What can caravanners and the industry do to help the environment?

Caravan's assistant editor Victoria Heath looks at how Britain's caravan manufacturers are reacting to global warming, plus she talks to caravanners to see how they feel about the issue. She considers just how 'green' a caravan holiday is in terms of its carbon footprint, and talks to the two major clubs to check out their environmental policies.



Explorer staff recycle their factory's waste



Separate bins for rubbish at Bailey

Manufacturers: are they doing their bit?

Manufacturing caravans is a labour-intensive, dirty, messy business. You need big warehouses, lots of wood, glue and metal and plenty of scary-looking power tools. All this means lots of waste and lots of energy used. We talked to three caravan manufacturers to find out if they are adopting environmentally-friendly policies in their business.

Reducing waste

In the last six months, caravan manufacturer Bailey recycled over 100,000kg of cardboard, plastic film and floor vinyl, equivalent to the weight of over 100 caravans. Sounds a lot, doesn't it?

Especially when you consider most of this waste was going straight into landfill sites until quite recently.

Bailey is based in the West Country, on the outskirts of Bristol. The factory produces around 200 caravans a week, which, you can imagine, creates a lot of rubbish. They have recently invested in a new recycling scheme which cost around £115,000, and allows them to process timber, aluminium, polystyrene, paper, cardboard and plastic film. Their main purchase was a huge new 'sorter and crusher' which sits in the factory yard. Timber is thrown in at the bottom, shredded up and then 'sucked' up a big tube to an electro-magnet at the top. This traps the

metal and stray nails, allowing the shredded timber to be sorted into bins ready to be taken away for recycling.

Bailey's office workers haven't been let off the hook, either. All individual waste bins in the office buildings have been removed and replaced with a central system for sorting rubbish. 'It makes us think about what we are throwing away,' said Simon Howard, Bailey's marketing director.

The Explorer Group is another large manufacturer also doing its bit for the planet. Based in County Durham, it produces Compass, Buccaneer and Elddis caravans as well as motorhomes. They have entrusted their recycling to their business process development manager, Alan Beel.

Be a greener caravanner

There are loads of ways to help the planet on holiday. We talk to some keen caravanners to find out how they stay friends with the environment



Amanda Carr owns a Charisma 540 and comes from Northumberland

'We tow with a very economical saloon car, and as well as this we use very few electric appliances while away on any holidays we take. We don't pack a telly or radio in the van, which also saves energy. We walk a lot more than we used to, buy our food from farmers' markets and therefore eat fewer goods from convenience stores and takeaway meals, which means less packaging.'



Stuart Quiney owns a Sterling Europa and lives in Worcestershire

'If we were all to stop caravanning and fly off on holiday I think the world would become very warm very quickly! When I tow, I tend to drive at a sensible speed, and load my car more carefully than non-caravanners. I tend to use less water when caravanning, because I have to go and fetch it. I do not litter, I keep the noise down and try to blend in with what is around me: it's a pity you can't buy a camouflaged caravan!'



William and Shirley Billing are from Cambridgeshire and tow with a Citroen C5

'Caravanners want to preserve the environment for themselves and others. We plan journeys, referring to decent maps, ensuring our SatNav is correctly set up. We also ensure tyre pressures are correct, load correctly balanced, with nothing to add wind resistance when towing. To reduce noise pollution, we keep our telly inside, on low volume and watch it only during 'social hours.'



Keith Woodward has been caravanning for over 20 years and owns a Northstar caravan

'I don't use as much fuel on holiday as a plane, train or ship. We are a family of three and tend to buy local produce to barbeque on sustainable charcoal. Therefore, we use less electricity. The caravan manufacturers could go 'greener' by making lighter caravans that smaller cars can tow. These might well be smaller, but add a big awning and you'll be encouraged to live more of an outdoor lifestyle.'

6 ways to become a greener caravanner

Think about electricity

A 12v hook-up means you are already aware of your electric use. Put an extra jumper on instead of using the heater. Turn the telly to 'off', not 'stand-by'.

Recycle on site

If there are facilities on site, use them. If not, voice your concerns to the warden. If enough people do it, it may be enough to get them installed.

Fight the packaging

If you feel a product is over-packaged, leave it and buy an alternative.

Take care towing

There are plenty of fuel-efficient diesels around which can give around 30mpg when towing. Don't waste fuel: build up speed slowly and don't brake suddenly.

Eat local

Buy food from local markets and shops. This reduces the product's 'food miles', and supports the local economy.

Keep the noise down

Keep your telly and radio at a sensible level so you don't disturb others, or local wildlife.

What's your carbon footprint?

We ask Alex Randall, an expert from the Centre for Alternative Energy, to roughly compare a typical caravan holiday to a fortnight in the Med

Package holiday



Fortnight in Menorca for family of four from Birmingham, staying in a hotel

Flights from Birmingham to Menorca
1470kg of carbon emitted per person during each flight.

Total carbon emitted:
5880kg, or 5.8 tonnes

Caravan holiday



Fortnight in Devon for family of four from Birmingham, staying in their caravan

Distance from Birmingham to Devon is 515km. A Ford Mondeo emits roughly 249g of CO2 per km when towing.

Total carbon emitted:
797.4kg or 0.80 tonnes



Manufacturers can turn waste paper into cash

'We embarked on the project as we realised we were sending too much to the landfill,' he said. 'Initially it cost us more money, but we realised we had to make the investment.'

'The first step we took was to get rid of the food in the office. We now just have one big yellow bin for all the food scraps.'

It takes more than just a few new bins to alter the way a factory works, though. Alan believes you have to change people's attitudes: 'The general rule of thumb is that it takes 100 days to change someone's behavioural patterns. Once that's taken care of, the job is nearly done.'

Swift Group produce Abbey, Ace, Bessacarr, Sprite, Sterling and Swift caravans, and have had recycling on the agenda for a long time.

'We take the environmental situation and global warming very seriously,' said Richard White, Swift's marketing director. 'To reduce global emissions associated with the production and use of our touring caravans is a key part of our strategy going forward.'

Swift recycle paper, cardboard, timber and sawdust. Various components such as windows and ovens are made by separate suppliers, who deliver them in returnable packaging, reducing waste. The company also only uses timber from sustainable sources, as do Bailey.

Money for old rubbish

All new initiatives come at a cost, but Simon from Bailey explained the great bonus about sorting out their waste means it can be sold: 'We get £20 for a bale of paper, £25 for plastic and £30 for floor vinyl.'

Alan is also keen to sell waste to recoup costs, 'We can sell plastic for £200 a ton, cardboard for £40 a ton and aluminium for £600 a ton – it is like gold dust.'

Reducing energy

To combat climate change, we not only need to 'reduce, reuse, recycle', as singer Jack Johnson would say, but we need to lower our energy use. That doesn't mean sitting around watching telly instead of going for a walk, instead we have to use less electricity and less gas in our homes and businesses.

Swift have made a good start in their factory: a 15 per cent reduction in the amount of electricity used in 2006 compared to the year before. And, two years ago, Bailey replaced all their factory roofs with better-insulated ones, which have halved the company's heating bills.

Alan from Explorer is not going to be left behind: 'What next? Well, we are going to look at reducing energy consumption, that's our next project'.

Nothing to landfill

Bailey currently recycle 50 per cent of their total waste, and aim to reach a point where 100 per cent of their rubbish is recycled. 'There's no reason why we can't reach that goal,' said Simon.

Alan from Explorer has the same idea: 'At the moment, we only recycle 50 per cent of our waste. My ideal? That we send nothing to landfill. At my last company, we got it down to half a skip a week, so that's pretty good.'



Wooden offcuts soon pile up



Bailey installed a recycling plant



Staff have to change attitudes about waste

What are the two big caravanning Clubs doing to save the environment?

The Camping and Caravanning Club



'The club prides itself on its policies. Our commitment is vast, ranging from supporting local producers, growers and suppliers through our 'eat local' campaign, to the using local materials to upgrade award-winning sites which seek to blend into local surroundings.'

How is the Club protecting the environment?

- Extensive recycling facilities are available where possible and if not, staff will be available to direct any green campers towards the nearest facility in which to recycle.
- A number of their club sites who entered into the David Bellamy Conservation Awards have obtained the highest 'Gold' Standard.
- Members, through the Countryside Care Scheme, regularly undertake voluntary work in and around Club sites to maintain and enhance the places which we all like to visit and camp at.
- The club preserves corridors for local wildlife, has set up feeding stations for many species, as well as instigating tree planting and encouraging native flora and fauna onto their sites.

TOP 3 'GREEN' SITES

Windermere Club Site

Kendal, Lake District

Pitches 250

Open 14 March to 14 January

☎ 01539 821119

Delamere Forest Club Site

Northwich, Cheshire

Pitches 80

Open 24 May – 31 December

☎ 0845 130 7633

Sandringham Site

Sandringham, Norfolk

Pitches 275

Open 8 February – 26 November

☎ 01485 542555

The Caravan Club



'Caravanning has always provided a holiday choice which appeals to those who appreciate the outdoors, the British countryside and its landscapes and wildlife. As such, caravanning is and always has been a 'green' and sustainable form of tourism.'

How is the Club protecting the environment?

- Biodiversity is encouraged, with the recommendations of professional ecologists and the efforts of site wardens (There are 23 'Boosting Biodiversity' sites). Out of season, many sites revert to green field or mixed woodland status.
- Club provides advice promoting fuel economies and Ecodriving. For towing, information is provided to ensure vehicle and trailer are correctly matched, and loading guidelines help fuel efficiency.
- Investigating alternative energy options such as solar units, geothermal energy, solar panels for shower blocks and rainwater harvesting.
- Recycling facilities (or directions to them) are on sites.
- Head office recycle paper, mobile phones and printer cartridges.

TOP 3 'GREEN' SITES

Nunykirk Caravan Club Site

Near Rothbury, Northumberland

Pitches 84

Open 5 April – 1 October

☎ 01669 620762

Trewethett Farm

Tintagel, Cornwall

Pitches 124, plus 24 hardstandings

Open 23 March – 5 October

☎ 01840 770222

Low Park Wood

Kendal, Cumbria

Pitches 161

Open 4 April – 5 November

☎ 01669 620762

Kelling Heath

'Traditional campsites are like a desert for wildlife'

Independent site Kelling Heath in Norfolk has long been held up as an award-winning environmentally-friendly park. I talk to Kevin Hart, environmental consultant for the park, to find out more

'You can be a commercially-viable business and yet still be environmentally friendly.'

This seems to be Kevin Hart's motto, a former estate manager, now the park's environmental consultant. The 250-acre park has holiday homes, caravan and camping areas and Scandinavian-style lodges, and is situated close to the sea, with open heathland on one side and woodland on the other.

'We have a high-quality natural environment, which we want to maximise,' said Kevin. 'When I first arrived 10 years ago, some of the holiday home owners were introducing non-native species.

'I started a programme to get rid of all non-native plants to protect the woodland.'

Becoming carbon neutral

With a huge clutch of awards under its belt, Kelling Heath is often held up as an example of good environmental policy, but that's not to say the staff there have become complacent. The park aims to become completely carbon neutral this year.

'We are looking at rainwater harvesting for a toilet block,' he said. 'Eventually, we want to use the backwash from our pools to flush all the toilets.'

Kevin believes a holistic approach is needed on site: 'I believe in implementing systems. You can't rely on staff members to turn the lights off at the end of the day.'

Testing the park's carbon emissions is very complicated. Different trees absorb



carbon at different rates: 'We have to take random samples from woodland, multiply that for a larger area and apply a formula.'

The future for Kelling Heath

For Kevin, the park's future is exciting. 'We are going to look at the systems we use, from what machines are left on at night, to whether we switch to renewable fuels.

'We have got to change the way we live on this planet.'