

MMM REVEALS FIRST BAILEY MOTORHOME PICTURES

Here are the first pictures of the new Bailey motorhome as it undergoes final testing at the secret Millbrook vehicle test facility. Nick Harding reveals what went on

Crash, bang, wallop. Can this really be Bailey's measured approach to its first proper venture into the motorhome market? It certainly is. Prior to launching its new motorhomes in October, the manufacturer has embarked on the most intensive pre-production testing programme we have ever heard of, let alone witnessed.

This has included assessing its revolutionary bodywork construction that's capable of taking those aforementioned bangs, wallops and more, plus crash-testing exercises.

Factor in some initial "in the field" testing that has already been undertaken by key Bailey staff and their families. That goes right up to company boss Nick Howard, who took his family to France for some touring, in the process becoming a convert to the motorcaravanning way of life.

Meanwhile, as well as using the services of institutions such as the University of Bath, there has been an extensive formal testing programme at the Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire, one of the leading test centres for all kinds of automotive vehicles.

But, you could say the story starts some 63 years ago. From its Bristol base, Bailey has been manufacturing touring caravans since 1948. Today, it is the biggest brand name in that market. The company has long threatened to enter the motorhome sector, and the reality is about to happen, with an official launch firmly penned in for this October's Motorhome and Caravan Show at Birmingham's NEC.

But, as Bailey's marketing director Simon Howard explains, it was the move towards its Alu-Tech bodywork system in 2009, now used for all its touring caravans, that paved the way for motorhome production. Indeed, its applicability for motorhomes was very much part of the initial design and production brief for this, something of a revolutionary move in the caravan field.

Early proving of its motorhome potential was also considered key. "Given that we have a long established relationship with the internationally renowned Millbrook Proving Ground, this was the natural choice of venue at which to put our motorhome prototypes through their paces," explains Simon. "We remain committed to the completion of a comprehensive product validation programme prior to bringing any vehicles to market."

During the testing at Millbrook, the prototype motorhomes were subject to cold



The first picture of the prototype six-berth Bailey motorhome, which will be launched at the October NEC show

chamber (for insulating and heating performance) testing and accelerated life (road testing exaggerating real life conditions), as well as the crash testing of the body structure, rear seating, interior furniture and fittings of which we will report the results in a future issue.

ON THE WAY WITH ALU-TECH

"Alu-Tech has been the main driver," confirms Simon. "We have long harboured ambitions to enter the motorhome market and the development of the Alu-Tech bodyshell construction system provides us with the opportunity to do so.

"Whilst this new technology has performed admirably thus far in our new touring caravan ranges it is important that every element of the design is re-evaluated to assess its suitability for the Bailey motorhome." Hence the investment in this latest round of testing.

Alu-Tech is actually a timber-free construction that relies on bolt-and-bracket fixings at the corners to give the whole construction a uniquely high rigidity. The timber replaced by a plastic wood, and there are gloss-

finished GRP inner and outer walls with high-density styrene core insulation. Plastic corner sheaths are sealed on and a polyurethane bonding agent is used for the cab/caravan interface. The result is actually some 30 per cent thicker than conventional coachbuilt panels.

It doesn't completely nullify the possibility of water ingress (the bane of any coachbuilt motorhome), but the construction literally gives water nowhere to go so any ingress can be spotted immediately, and there's nothing in the construction for water to rot. Just as important, there are less opportunities for water to seep through in the first place. As Simon outlines: "A typical caravan (or coachbuilt motorhome) can have anything between 250-300 exterior screwholes, where water can get through. We've managed to get it down to around 20, for example around the battery box etc."

THE COLD CHAMBER

Here, the whole motorhome is in a controlled temperature room, and taken down to a positively chilling -15 degrees C. Sensors are placed throughout the interior to measure the exact temperature at key places, including the cab (the area where most heat loss is felt in any coachbuilt motorhome). Typically, also, it's the washroom that's the warmest place, not just because it's a smaller, enclosed area, and often early in the run of heating outlets, but because it benefits from the extra insulation of additional lining materials.

Turning on the motorhome's heating system brings the interior back up to 20 degrees C and results in as much as a 32-35 degrees C difference between the constant -15 outside and the cosy inside.

Here the aim is to attain an independent Grade 3 rating (where the company's caravans have already achieved this, and that was using their heating on electric-only setting).



The rear side profile of the prototype of the new Bailey motorhome



These internal pictures of crash testing reveal four belted rear seats

Earlier work with thermal imaging cameras, to find any cold spots, had already seen the provision of extra insulation in footwells and wheel arches, for example. And, underneath, the water tanks – located as near to the rear axle as each design allows – are double-skinned and fitted with baffles. The result is not just superior insulation, but also better handling when travelling. And Bailey is not falling into the trap of padded insulation covers for outboard tanks that can actually mean when their contents freeze they are a nightmare to thaw out again.

ACCELERATED LIFE TESTING

The near-finished motorhomes have been taken out on the test track for handling, speed and braking evaluations that are actually the equivalent of a structural durability testing programme equating to six years' use. The testing itself took place over 14 days, covering over 1,000 miles but is reckoned to be the equivalent of 60,000 miles' normal road travel. Bailey believes it is the only company to have undergone this level of testing (some others do this, but we've yet to hear any reaching these levels).

This includes driving over Belgian pave roading, hill work on inclines of seven per cent and 11 per cent (including reversing), driving through potholes, "twist humps" and driveway ramps.

One critical aspect here, and frankly one where so many motorhomes simply fail to pass muster, is the dampening of noise. At one point, we were allowed to sit in the back to listen out for any unwanted noises during travel. Sure enough, the cooker was one source of rattles (but watch this space for more news here), as was just one smaller rooflight over the kitchen area. The rest? Well, maybe you should take a test drive for yourselves, when you get the chance. Suffice to say we were seriously impressed...



The prototype motorhome, which uses a Peugeot base vehicle and sits on an Al-Ko chassis, emerges from cold chamber testing

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

This is a seriously determined approach to ensuring the utmost best practice in terms of manufacturing, product performance and safety. Despite the intensive testing, Bailey says it's got some way to go before perfecting its motorhome range. For example, there's the setting up of production lines back at the factory, even the timing of pre-ordering a significant number of chassis from both base vehicle manufacturer and Al-Ko. And, yet another piece in the jigsaw, the appointment of a national network of dealers.

We can't tell you any more – yet – because actual vehicle details are under strict embargo, although we are allowed to say Bailey is working

towards what will be a market-leading ten-year bodywork guarantee for a range of coachbuilts.

In fact, we'd go as far as to say there's yet to be a motorhome from a British manufacturer that's been subjected to so much independent pre-production testing.

FIND OUT MORE

You can see all the of the pictures from the testing of Bailey's six-berth motorhome at Millbrook in motorhome news on the outandaboutlive website or just type in this link: www.outandaboutlive.co.uk/Motorhomes/News/_ch1_pg1 Find out more about Bailey's Alu-Tech construction at www.baileyalu-tech.co.uk

DO YOU OWN AN AUTO-TRAIL TAG-AXLE COACHBUILT?

Our next Motorcaravanners' Report will feature all Auto-Trail tag-axle Al-Ko coachbuilts. These will include the Seminole, Chieftain, Arapaho and Cheyenne 840 of any age and the new Comanche (2010 model year onwards).

This is your chance to tell us about your purchasing and ownership experience. All information will remain confidential.

Please request a questionnaire from Fen Leisure Services, 16 Cartmel Way, Eye, Peterborough, PE6 7XA or by email from fen.leisure@ntlworld.com Alternatively, visit www.mmm-report.co.uk to download a questionnaire. If requesting a questionnaire by email, please state whether you wish to receive it by email or by post (SAE will be included).



WHAT'S ON IN AUGUST

2 AUGUST

■ **Planning a herb garden workshop & lunch, Waterperry Gardens, Oxfordshire**
Learn how to create the perfect herb garden from Jekka McVicar, who has written numerous books on herbs and will provide inspirational advice plus the chance to ask questions before a buffet lunch in Waterperry House. Numbers for this event are limited so book early; tickets cost £29.50 per adult.
■ Tel: 01844-339254
■ Web: www.waterperrygardens.co.uk

13-14 AUGUST

■ **LANDROVERmax! Stoneleigh Park**
LANDROVERmax! will be packed with things to do throughout the entire weekend, whether you're looking to browse the stands, rummage around the autojumble, watch the live shows in the arena, or take on the famous off-road course – there will be something for everyone. The 2011 show will host a very special concours d' elegance for vehicles of the highest standard of restoration or preservation. Camping is available for the duration of LANDROVERmax! and there will be a real ale tent and catering, plus excellent live music, all contributing to the festival atmosphere.
■ Web: www.lrmshow.com

26-29 AUGUST

■ **Treefest Westonbirt, The National Arboretum**
The new four-day Treefest will incorporate the best of Westonbirt's signature summer event, the Festival of the Tree, with exciting



new elements including camping, creative workshops and local live music. Traditional favourites, including wood carving demonstrations and craft sales, will compliment the new activities. Hands-on learning, local food, falconry displays, Morris dancing, demonstrations from the Westonbirt tree team and a medieval village will all add to the festival line up. Visitors to Treefest will also have the rare opportunity to camp in the stunning National Arboretum. Festival weekend and camping tickets start from £35 for Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum members and must be bought in advance. Standard daily tickets will give access to the exciting daily line-up and also allow free of charge admission to the evening's live music.
■ Web: www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt-treefest

26-29 AUGUST

■ **West Dean Festival, West Dean College and Gardens, West Sussex**
This family-friendly festival celebrates all aspects of the arts; people can come together to share their love of making, music, ideas, performance, dance, film, storytelling, cooking and eating. The festival takes place in the beautiful West Dean Parkland within the heart of the South Downs



near Chichester and, for the first time this year, visitors can camp in the parkland – bring your own 'van or tent, or hire a yurt or tipi.

29 AUGUST

■ **Bank Holiday Regatta River Severn, Shropshire**
Ironbridge Coracle Regatta, held between 12-4pm for one day only, attracts coracle makers and paddlers from all over Britain. Featuring team games, coracle polo matches and other competitions, it takes place along the picturesque stretch of the River Severn at Dale End Park, Ironbridge. Novice paddlers can have a go in the water for free using traditional coracles handmade by the Green Wood Centre charity, or anyone with their own coracle can bring it along and join in the races (life jackets provided). There will be a variety of shore-based activities and arts and crafts stalls to browse and buy. Best of all? The regatta is free to watch!
■ Tel: 01952-432769
■ Web: www.greenwoodcentre.org.uk

These entries are received well in advance of events. Readers are advised to check dates with organisers or local Tourist Information Centre (TIC).