

Edward John Eyre, who in 1841 was the first European to successfully cross the Nullarbor Plain, described it bluntly as “a hideous anomaly; a blot on the face of nature; the sort of place one gets into in bad dreams”.

Despite his less than flattering critique, thousands of Australians in caravans and motorhomes make the pilgrimage across the Eyre Highway, named in his honour, each year – many on a lap of Australia, others just to tick it off their bucket list as a quintessential outback experience.

Crossing the Nullarbor, which literally means ‘treeless plain’, was an achievement in itself until the Eyre Highway, which stretches 1668km from Port Augusta to Norseman, was carved across the continent in 1941.

Today, the highway, which contains the longest straight piece of tarred road surface in Australia (146.6km) on its western side, is just a bitumen bore. The other problem is the limited quality accommodation, or even quality caravan park facilities, so if you are a creature of comfort, you’ll need to bring your own, which is exactly what my wife Wendy and I did.

QUALITY COMFORTS

Our up-market solution was a brand new, British-built Bailey Unicorn Pamplona which added a further five to the million stars we travelled under. Despite becoming Britain’s best-selling caravan, Bailey remains largely unknown in Australia and was not until last year that the company marketing the brand here – Bailey Australia (a division of newly-formed Caravans Australia) – formally launched it on our market.

Its four-model Australian range is

IN BRIEF

- Bitumen burner from Britain
- Can be towed easily by 2WD family cars
- Smart European look and decor
- Loaded with creature comforts

RATINGS

Build quality ★★★★★
 Creature comforts ★★★★★
 Value for money ★★★★★

dramatically different to those sold in the UK, incorporating 37 specific changes to suit our conditions, such as heavy-duty axles and drawbar and more. By the time feedback from our marathon test and the comments of the first Australian owners to take delivery since February this year are fed back to the Bristol factory, there will be more still.

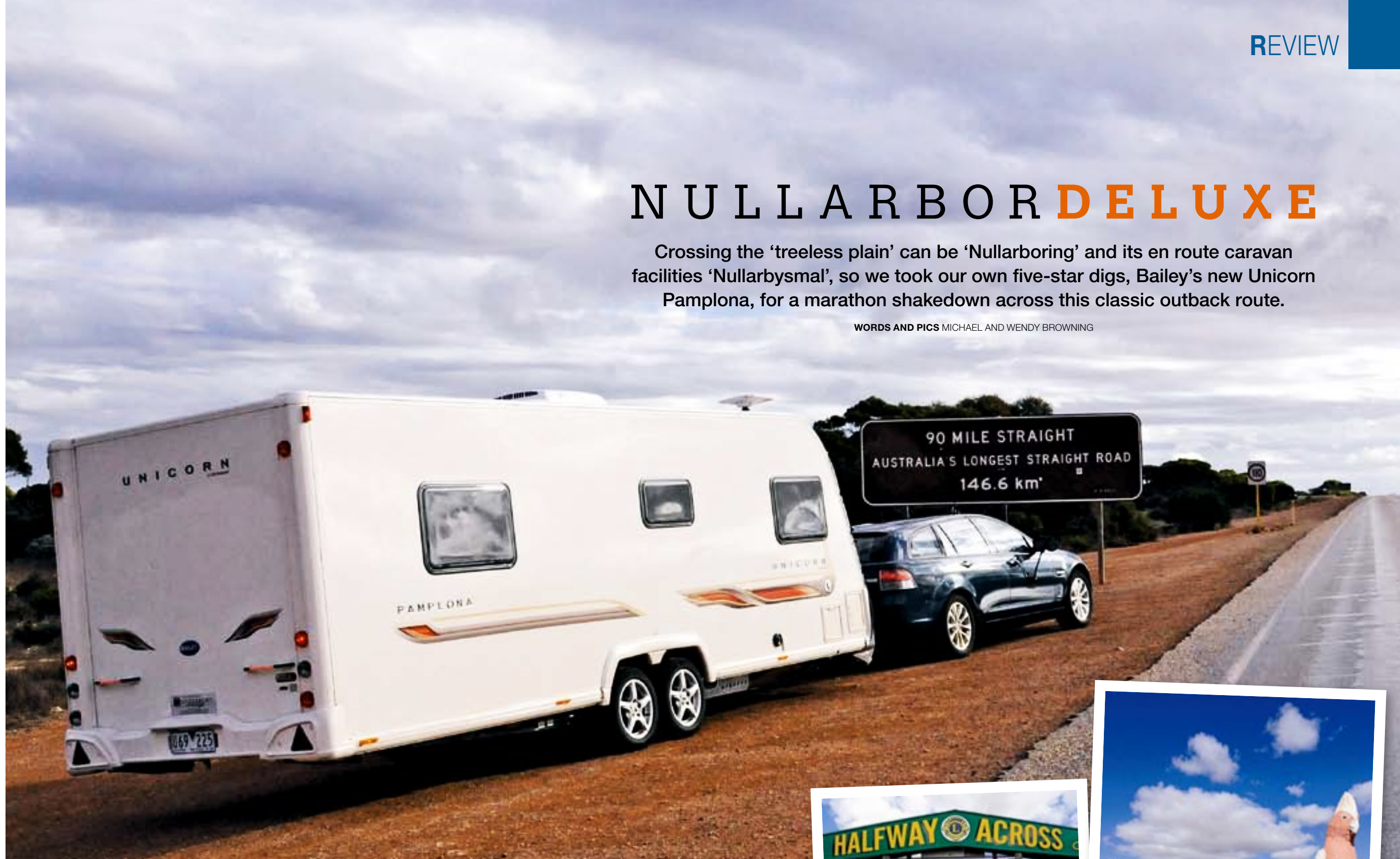
The 6.3m (20ft 8in) tandem-axle Unicorn Pamplona we tested sits at

the top of the Australian range and represents the sort of luxury blacktop tourer that will tempt many people – both nomads and new-to-caravanning types – to buy British. Incorporating all the latest luxury features and accessories in its \$59,680 national drive-away price and tipping the scales at a remarkably light 1680kg Tare, the Pamplona can be towed by most Australian family cars and many soft-rovers.

NULLARBOR DELUXE

Crossing the ‘treeless plain’ can be ‘Nullarboring’ and its en route caravan facilities ‘Nullarbysmal’, so we took our own five-star digs, Bailey’s new Unicorn Pamplona, for a marathon shakedown across this classic outback route.

WORDS AND PICS MICHAEL AND WENDY BROWNING



Above: The SA town of Kimba is halfway across the Nullarbor. **Right:** While it looks low, the Bailey’s ground clearance is similar to other Australian touring vans.





question as to the suitability of an LPG-only vehicle's ability to serve as a serious around-Australia tow car.

Our route from Melbourne to Perth took us just short of 5000km through the Barossa Valley to Port Augusta, and across the Nullarbor via the Eyre Highway. We then turned left at Norseman, travelled south to Esperance, followed the coast to Albany and finally made our way to Perth via Margaret River. We allowed just 16 travelling days, so with sightseeing and a decent daily distance to put under our wheels, comfort was important.

The Pamplona comes off the lot with all the right credentials, starting with its 21st century construction. Traditionalists may shake their heads in disbelief when they stick their heads underneath and see its relatively skinny Al-Ko galvanised chassis, which tapers from 60mm at the drawbar to 210mm at the axles, but these pressed-steel rails are there to work with the Bailey's unique unitary structure, rather than form the principal backbone as they do in traditional Australian vans.

With Bailey caravans, the upper body is constructed from large 37mm-thick panels constructed from high-density polystyrene, sandwiched between a smooth outer aluminium cover and an inner plastic liner, while the floor is a 44mm thick laminated ply and polystyrene sandwich. The entire roof and front of the van is a single panel, as are each wall, the rear panel and the floor, all of which interlock by a unique method



Clockwise from top left: The stone cover, while easy to fit, wasn't up to the job; storage space at the front of the van; the Bailey Pamplona provided luxury accommodation across the Nullarbor.



into an aluminium frame.

Apart from streamlining production, this construction is claimed to make them stronger and more durable than conventional vans, while delivering excellent thermal insulation. With their standard Alde central heating system, Baileys are often used at European ski fields.

From the outset, the Pamplona felt at home behind the LPG Commodore, with the low 85kg ball weight barely dipping the Sportwagon's tail, while the van's total laden weight of around 1800kg and streamlined shape slipped easily through the air, even into the blustery headwind and driven rain we struck on our way to



Clockwise from top: The large front lounge with panoramic windows was a hit with curious caravanners; although well-equipped, the kitchen could do with more bench space; a sliding table to create more space.



Above: The double bedroom at the rear of the van is light and airy. **Right:** Central heating can also heat the bathroom towel rail.

the Barossa.

The Pamplona seems to sit very low to the bitumen, but it's largely an optical illusion and its ground clearance is much the same as many other Australian touring vans of the 1970s. The spare wheel in its low-slung, under-chassis cradle also looks vulnerable, but as it is located just to the rear of the nearside tandem wheels, it's unlikely to hit anything unless you are on a particularly rocky or rutted track, which would not be Pamplona territory anyway.

Admittedly, most of the service stations we used on our trip had shallow entries, but we never touched anything underneath during our entire trip, even during suburban refills. If the driveway is steep, the rear Al-Ko corner stabilisers

MEASURING UP

WE LIKED

- Lightweight, high-tech construction
- Layout
- Value for money

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More kitchen bench space
- A larger standard main water tank
- Better front stone protection

incorporate sacrificial rockers that are designed to protect the body from scraping and these stabilisers are also robust enough to be used as corner jacks for emergency wheel changes.

SETTLING IN

From the south, the outback for most travellers begins at Port Augusta, where the road forks to Alice Springs or Perth. We turned left, but instead of following the Eyre Highway all the way to Ceduna from the Whyalla/Port Lincoln turn-off, we cut across to Streaky Bay on the western side of the Eyre Peninsula for a short sea change before resuming our journey west.

By this stage, three days out of Melbourne, we had begun to settle

Below: An in-built radio/CD/MP3 with iPod jack is standard. **Right:** Multiple power-points make it easy to power everything.



into the Pamplona and had some early impressions of its strengths and weaknesses. On the plus side, the van was easy to tow, enabling us to maintain an indicated 95-100km/h whenever road conditions (and the wind) allowed without undue concern.

On the exposed Eyre Highway near Kimba we experienced some minor van sway as the Pamplona's large flat sides were buffeted by cross winds and passing B-doubles, but we soon learned that these were nothing to be concerned about, thanks to the van's in-built stability control system.

Like all Baileys, the Pamplona is fitted with Al-Ko Trailer Control which is engaged via a unique 13-pin trailer



plug. It comes into play when an under-van gyroscope senses an unacceptable amount of sway and then applies the caravan's brakes to a pre-set level until the sway is in check. We spent more than 3000km on the open road at the mercy of wind and heavy rigs and the system only activated once – a credit to the

sophistication of the Bailey's chassis.

On the negative side, the Bailey's optional British-made 'bra', while relatively easy to fit and remove via channels in the van's fascia, wasn't up to the job and the clear plastic sections covering the lower front clearance lights began rubbing through from day two.

Above: The Pamplona's in-built stability control system means van sway from cross winds and B-doubles is minimal.

We kept it on until we had cleared the Nullarbor, by which time the lower edge of the cover had begun fraying so we left it off for the remainder of the trip.

Some form of front stone protection for the Pamplona's comparatively unprotected 'face' is essential for long-term Australian touring and Bailey

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Bailey caravans have only been on the Australian market since September last year and the first owners began taking delivery from February 2012, so despite extensive overseas testing on industry proving grounds, their long-term use in Australia has yet to be experienced.

Our 5000km Melbourne to Perth trip in a Unicorn Pamplona was the longest undertaken by a current Bailey model in this country and it was done in open co-operation with Bailey Australia, who wanted to know what worked, what didn't and how they could improve it for our conditions by channelling the feedback to the factory in Bristol, UK. What worked' has been covered in the accompanying article. Here's what didn't...

STONE COVER

Although fitted correctly, flapping had already worn through the plastic covering the nearside front light of the van by day two of the trip. The other side light cover followed and then it began ripping around the lower edges. We removed it as we left the Eyre (Nullarbor) Highway in WA. **The fix:** Bailey Australia is developing a more robust Australian bra that will allow easier access to the front boot which houses the gas cylinders.

STABILISER WINDING MECHANISM

The Al-Ko corner jacks need up to 50 rotations to wind down. **The fix:** Live with it, as they double as

rockers to save the rear bodywork from being damaged when entering service stations or steep driveways. They can also double as jacks for emergency wheel changes.

BATTERY BOX

The battery box is need of a supplementary catch. **The fix:** A lockable latch is being fitted to future vans.

GRAB HANDLE

An outside grab handle to the left of the door would be appreciated. **The fix:** One is being fitted to future vans.

INTERIOR HARDWARE

Screws from the front offside window frame and one of the kitchen drawers fell out during the trip. **The fix:** The UK factory is incorporating a stronger fixing system for Australian vans in its production.

MATTRESS

The mattress is not attached to the rear bed and therefore slides forward when travelling. **The fix:** Locating straps are being fitted to future vans.

WARDROBE RAILS JUMP OFF

The rails in both the bedside wardrobes consistently jumped off their U-shaped fixing brackets when travelling. **The fix:** A new rail fixing system is now being used.



Caption: Kitchen drawer screws fell out during the trip.

SMALL KITCHEN BENCH-SPACE

Wendy found the bench space relatively small in the Pamplona. **The fix:** This is a model-specific issue. Other Baileys have more bench space.

SMALL WATER TANK

A 65L main water tank is pretty small these days and even with the 23L portable supplementary tank filled, 88L is marginal for an ensuite van for regular free camping. **The fix:** Order a second 65L tank to be fitted to your Bailey.

HEATING SYSTEM

The Alde heating system is complicated to use compared with other comparable systems. **The fix:** Make sure you and your partner both attend the caravan handover and briefing, and take notes.



Clockwise from left: The Bailey covered 5000km and three states from Melbourne to Perth; clever storage space; the spacious 190L fridge/freezer is a hit with travellers.

layout to be limited. The mixer tap is not central on the sink, potentially causing water to overflow onto the adjacent lounge. However, everyone agreed that the centrally-located ensuite was a winner.

By cleverly folding the doors, you could annex the ensuite to the bedroom or allow the cassette toilet and its adjacent washbasin to be accessed from the kitchen/lounge. The shower also has a separate bi-fold screen to avoid water splash into the corridor; however, while there are generous-sized cupboards and drawers in the ensuite area, bench space is limited.

Back further, the double bedroom with its large windows and huge Heki ceiling hatch, is light and airy, while retracting block-out blinds and flyscreens everywhere allow it to be isolated from insects and daylight – important when travelling in warmer climes.

BAILEY UNICORN PAMPLONA

- Overall length** 7.86m (25ft 10in)
- External body length** 6.3m (20ft 8in)
- External width** 2.28m (7ft 6in)
- Travel height** 2.86m (9ft 4in)
- Internal height** 1.96m (6ft 5in)
- Tare** 1680kg
- ATM** 2000kg
- Ball weight** 85kg
- Frame** Interlocking aluminium
- Chassis** Al-Ko galvanised steel
- Suspension** Al-Ko independent with telescopic shock absorbers
- Cooktop** Thetford four-burner gas cooktop/grill/oven
- Fridge** Dometic 190L three-way
- Microwave** Daewoo 800W
- Shower** Separate cubicle
- Toilet** Thetford cassette
- Lighting** LED 12V
- Gas** 2x9kg
- Fresh water** 65L main plus 23L portable tanks
- Price as reviewed** \$59,680 (drive-away, Vic)

SUPPLIED BY

Canterbury caravans, 140 Canterbury Road, Bayswater, Vic, (03) 9729 8188
www.canterburycaravans.com.au.
 For more information about Bailey, visit www.baileyaustralia.com.au



Australia has already begun developing a much superior locally-made bra.

INNER GLOW

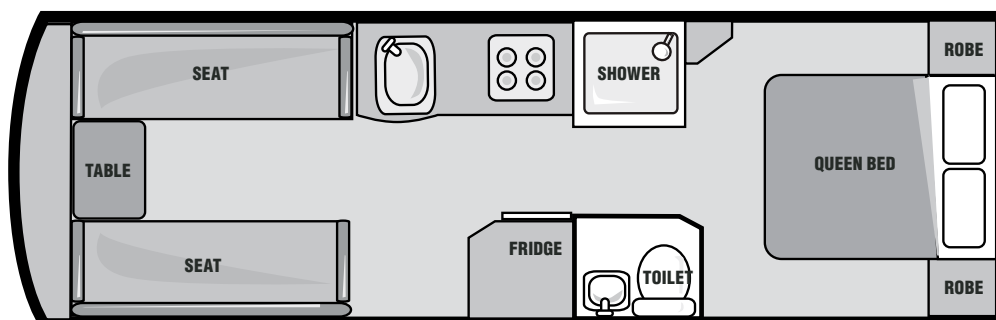
Inside, Wendy was instantly at home thanks to an inviting and logical layout, in which the substantial light-filled lounge room is located up front and the well-equipped kitchen in the middle. The bedroom is isolated from noise at the rear, with the separate shower and toilet/washbasin in between on either side of the van, forming a privacy and sound buffer.

The large front lounge with its

panoramic windows, smart Italian décor and Euro furnishings is a great place to relax and always brought 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the many curious caravanners who formed queues for the regular guided tours we conducted at many overnight stops on our trip.

They also loved the kitchen with its capacious Dometic 190L fridge/freezer, the galley with its Thetford four-burner gas cooktop/grill and glass-fronted oven below, as well as the van's standard 800W microwave.

However, in daily use Wendy found the available bench space with the Pamplona





Again, there is plenty of storage space in the two wardrobes either side of the bed, with separate drawers below and a cavernous space under the lift-up bed. However, the hanging rails in the robes jumped off their mounts, while the mattress kept sliding forward while

luxury feel was the Pamplona's three-piece (45oz pile) drop-in carpet set.

While the Pamplona excels in ventilation, with its two large, wide opening roof hatches, large side and forward windows, and its standard rooftop-mounted Dometic reverse-cycle air-conditioner, it is during cooler times when this Bailey really warms your heart and toes. During a cool snap across the Nullarbor when nighttime temperatures fell to single digits, we enjoyed the van's standard Alde Hydronic programmable central heating system which operates on either mains electricity or gas. It heats the air – and even the bathroom towel rail – through a series of ducts, while delivering piping hot water on demand.

But be prepared to devote some time to get a full run-through on the system's operation before heading off, as it is not totally intuitive! Also be sure the relatively small 65L standard water tank (that takes mains pressure through a Whale connection) and the portable 23L auxiliary tank are kept full if you are planning much free camping. Even better, specify an optional second 65L main tank with your van. [cw](#)

travelling. Bailey Australia is fixing both issues on existing and future vans.

A standard deep-cycle battery, an inverter and a profusion of 240V/12V powerpoints throughout the Pamplona made it easy to power everything, including the optional 19in LCD TV, which can be located at three different places in the van, including the bedroom. An inbuilt radio/CD/MP3 player with iPod input jack is standard. Adding to the

Top to bottom: The Pamplona can be towed by most family cars; the low 85kg towball weight barely dipped the tow vehicle's tail; a light-filled van.

