



CAR AND
DRIVING

Motoring Feature

Buying a used caravan

Taking a load off your mind

Jonathan Crouch On What To Look For When Buying A Used Caravan.

Buying a caravan is a big investment and with caravanning thefts on the up, owners can't afford to take any risks.

Buying rights

There are a number of precautions consumers should take when looking to buy a used caravan.

- 1) Don't judge a book by its cover; no matter how good a caravan may look, it could be carrying baggage that you can't see. It may be subject to an outstanding finance, so it could be repossessed by the lenders, leaving an unsuspecting buyer without their dream purchase and out of pocket. It could have been written-off by an insurer or worse, it could be stolen.
- 2) Bear in mind that consumer protection is far greater when buying from an established dealer than from a private vendor.

Buying Pointers

With these two things in mind, the following list of pointers should ensure that you don't go too far wrong in buying the caravan of your dreams:

- (i) Research the market place - compare prices between advertisements and your local dealer. Don't forget to budget for insurance and routine maintenance.
- (ii) Don't waste your time visiting vans that are not a legal match for your car.
- (iii) Don't deal in the dark - make sure you view the caravan in good daylight and don't go alone. Meet at the seller's house and NEVER agree to meet at a service station or lay-by.
- (iv) Request all documentation - ask to see the caravan's service history and Caravan Registration and Identification Scheme (CRiS) registration document. Also, check if the caravan is NCC approved.
- (v) Check the seller's details - make sure the owner is who they say they are. Contact the Caravan Registration and Identification Scheme (CRiS) with the make and model of the tourer and the owner's details to be checked against the information on the CRiS database.
- (vi) Is the caravan on finance? - Ask if there is outstanding finance and verify by checking through CRiS. If the caravan has not been paid off, it could still be the property of the finance company that could reclaim it.
- (vii) Don't buy a write-off - Has it been in an accident? Check panels closely for signs of repair and check the caravan's history with CRiS to ensure that an insurance company has not previously recorded it as a write-off. Write-offs that are rebuilt are not always safe to return to the road.
- (viii) Check the locks - Inspect all door and window locks for signs of force or replacement. This may mean the caravan has been stolen and look carefully at the CRiS window markings for signs of alteration or removal.

There are a couple of organisations you need to know about that should make life easier. Obviously, as we've said, you'll need to ensure that your caravan doesn't exceed your car's



towing limits. A mismatched outfit risks a £1000 fine, points on your licence, invalid insurance, and could also be a danger to tow. Towsafe is a computerised matching service that can inform consumers whether their car can legally tow a particular caravan and with minimum safety risk. There are two stages to Towsafe:

- 1) Towsafe Multiple Match service provides a list of appropriate cars or caravans based upon the vehicle they currently own, the criteria they have selected and manufacturer specifications.
- 2) The Towsafe One to One match gives customers a full breakdown of both the weights of the specified car and caravan and how they compare, complete with a detailed explanation of the results.

To complete an instant, online Towsafe match costs around £15 (for up to five combinations) if you visit www.towsafe.co.uk. Or you can do the transaction over the phone on 01722 411430 from around £10 per match.

The second key organisation we've already mentioned - the Caravan Registration and Identification Scheme (CRiS), run by HPI on behalf of the National Caravan Council. It is there to give potential caravan buyers and existing caravan owners the peace of mind that there will be no nasty surprises. For around £10, a call to CRiS on 01722 411430 can give used caravan buyers complete assurance that a tourer does not have a fraudulent history.

Once you've bought your caravan, it's important to then register it with the CRiS. This:

- provides a record of keepership
- helps the police to return a stolen caravan and its contents to the rightful owner
- provides registration documentation to prove your keepership when abroad

You might want to know that recently, CRiS has cut the price of installing extra electronic tags. From 1998, all CRiS registered caravans carry an electronic tag confirming their identity but now any registered keeper can add an extra tag for just a few pounds. Why would you want to? Well basically for added protection. The extra tag is hidden in a location of your choice and known only to the keeper and CRiS. Each electronic tag is individually programmed with the caravan's Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and can only be read by the police using a special hand-held scanner, making it easier to return a stolen and recovered caravan to its registered owner.