

Any room on top...?

Double-decker caravans aren't exactly 10 a penny, so when the **HISTORIC CARAVAN CLUB** discovered this amazing Berkeley Statesman, it just had to save it from a grisly end



Ever wanted a caravan that's head and shoulders above the rest? Then this double decker just might be the one for you. Christened in 1951 as the Berkeley Statesman, it is one of the very few vans ever to experiment with an upstairs. It's the caravan that really lets you go 'up to bed' and be 'down in a minute'.

Unique in its time, the Statesman is a rarity today, so the Historic Caravan Club (HCC) dived in to save this one from being demolished. Designed partly to cope with the housing shortage after the war, this unusual caravan was nevertheless fully road legal and could fulfil its true role as a tourer.

But funnily enough, this particular Statesman was used for an entirely different purpose – a Wendy House!



Worse for wear: the Berkeley Statesman prepares for its long journey to the Shuttleworth Collection (main pic); John and Hilary Armitage (above left) bought this very caravan as a playhouse for their children 25 years ago; the rescue team removes the rear legs (above)



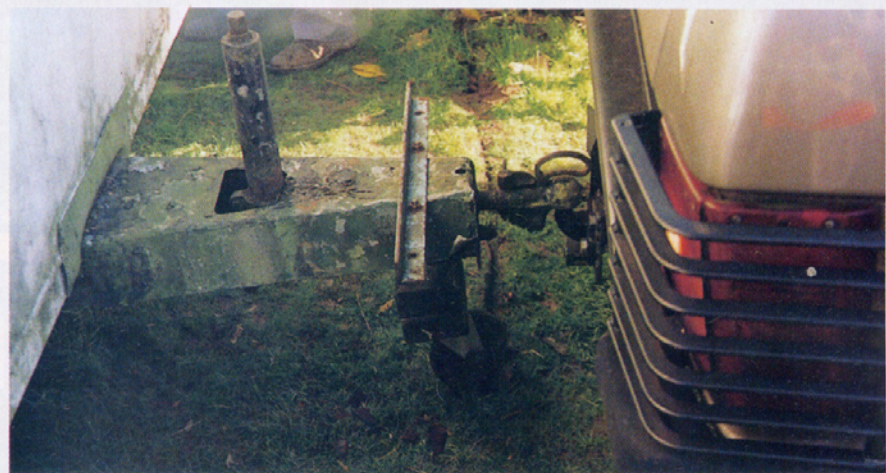
Bought in 1975 by Mr and Mrs Armitage, the double decker was given to their two children as a joint birthday present. It seemed the ideal gift, guaranteed to provide endless hours of fun and amusement. An extravagant wendy house, maybe, but it certainly did the trick – it was even the venue for Kit's eighth birthday party tea...

But over the years the Statesman's condition deteriorated with the children's loss of interest. The caravan was demoted to a store for scooter parts and garden tools. The novelty factor was forgotten and the van was effectively left to rot, until ultimately it posed a danger to young children playing in the garden. A far cry from the safe haven it was for them in times gone by.

So in true super-hero style, the HCC jumped to the rescue. With the support of *Caravan Magazine* and Berkeley Parks, this vintage caravan *would* have a future: the Statesman would be stored with the Shuttleworth collection at a museum in Bedfordshire while being restored. It now had a home, but the next hurdle was actually transporting it there. 'Mission Impossible' is something of an understatement.

Not only were the van's tyres buried from view, the A-frame was splintered and the only way out of the garden was through a brand-new fence (12 foot of which had to be removed). To get the van moving, a makeshift jockey wheel was strapped on to the A-frame and the wheels were jacked out of their resting place of 25 years. With the help of a rope, a Range Rover and many helpful hands, the Statesman was manoeuvred until the car could be coupled to the two-inch Brockhouse hitch on the caravan so towing could commence.

Unfortunately, within moments the A-frame broke, but splints were made from some scaffolding poles, allowing the Statesman to reach the lorry that



would take it away. The lorry had a four-foot-high loadbed so, with the 12-and-a-half-foot-tall caravan on board, the vehicle was extremely high. After negotiating a telephone wire it was safely on its way. The expedition had gone well, and the double decker was being hauled to safety where the HCC could reminisce about its days of glory.

The elder statesman

In its prime, this five-berth Statesman was priced at £1065. Weighing in at over two tons, the caravan is 22 feet long and more than 12 feet tall. A professional towing course would certainly be beneficial before taking to the roads with this beauty!

With walls separating the rooms downstairs, the Statesman really does feel like a home from home. It boasts a living room, a kitchen that stretches across the entire length of the van, a bathroom and two large bedrooms, one upstairs and one downstairs. Space is something this caravan is certainly not lacking – it's huge. Furniture would not have been fitted as standard, though.

Clockwise from top left: the double decker caravan is finally ready to be loaded on to the lorry; hitching up the van meant lots of preparatory work; a makeshift jockey wheel was strapped on to the A-frame before the car could be coupled up

For such a big van it's surprisingly rigid, even after nearly 50 years. The main chassis is an extension of the A-frame, designed as a girder assembly and using a one-and-a-half-inch steel angle braced to the sides with some five cross members for support.

The secret of the caravan's strength is the side panels. These form a very rigid box, with strong cross members from the spring hangers, to the sides, to the wheelarches. Even now, looking under the van from one end to the other, it is hard to see any curvature of the longitudinal runners at all.

Restoration of this double decker Statesman is now well and truly under way. The Historic Caravan Club has been hugely successful in its rescue, and the van should soon be on show with the Shuttleworth Collection. We'll be following its progress carefully.