

Have you ever thought about escaping into another age by buying, restoring and touring in an historic caravan? Enthusiast Paul Genner of the Historic Caravan Club explains what's involved

The caravans of today did not just appear overnight but have evolved over many years. For some people the hobby has developed into an interest in the history and perhaps the purchase, restoration and use of early examples. It's an interest that can be triggered by curiosity, a chance remark, seeing an old caravan over a hedge, an article in a magazine such as CARAVAN MAGAZINE or even seeing displays of historic caravans at vintage rallies such as those put on by the Historic Caravan Club.

Once you have gained an interest in the subject you may decide that you too would like to go through the agony of restoring an early caravan, but where would you find one? They do not appear often, if at all, in the normal press and very rarely in the modern caravanning magazines either. Sometimes the odd advertisement will appear in vintage car



TOURING THROUGH TIME

Porch of the horse drawn Voyager and a 1928 Angela



magazines but less than a handful in total per year. Most vintage caravans for sale appear in the Historic Caravan club News Sheet which is issued to members every six weeks. Members wishing to sell their old caravan usually first offer it to other members before going to the expense of advertising nationally. Also, people approach the Club when they see dying caravans, advising location and contact details, or indeed if they have one of their own for sale.

As far as the Historic

Caravan Club is concerned, in essence, an historic caravan is anything built before December 31 1960 with the exception of some coachbuilt models of the 60's. This also includes the touring caravan's horse drawn ancestors. Yes, the earliest touring caravans were horse drawn but were not gypsy caravans. These caravans were plainer and much lighter than either the gypsy or even the showman's type and were built in a wide range of sizes.

Before you take on the responsibility of looking after an historic caravan you should be sure of the era you wish to immerse yourself in. The horse drawn time has a very leisurely pace and once your caravan is restored you can kit it out with Great Grandad's bits and pieces and transport yourself back to the turn of the century. You would, of course, need a trailer transporter if you wanted to travel any distance, or 'show' the caravan. Good horse drawn touring caravans are quite rare but so at the moment is the interest in owning this type of caravan. Those who bought and used them, such as members of the original Caravan Club, tended to refer to themselves as 'Gentlemen Gypsies' and were very often quite well off. Occasionally examples will turn up looking for a home but restoration costs greatly outweigh the commercial value of a restored example. It may be worth looking in such magazines as 'Old Glory' if you are interested in this type of caravan.

If, however, you are going to stick to a 'mechanical horse' the earliest caravan you can expect to find is one built in the 1920s. If you are offered anything reputed to be earlier it would more than likely have to be home built as the earliest production trailer is generally accepted as appearing in 1919. In order to be as sure as possible about age it is best to try to



**A 1926
Eccles
under
restoration**



**Restored 1931 Car Cruiser
model**

**1930
Bertram
Hutchings
Voyageur**



At the 1930 Motor Show the fashion changed almost overnight. All of a sudden the square caravan was 'old hat' and the streamlined era fully began. The caravan that probably did most to start the trend was the all new 'Winchester' model launched by Bertram Hutchings; this was streamlined both ends. This change of shape caused the conventional lantern roof to disappear for a short time but it soon returned in a curved form. Throughout this decade caravans generally started to get bigger and heavier with more features added in the more expensive models.

This is perhaps the best pre-war time period to look at

During the war years few caravans were made for leisure use as most manufacturers put their effort into war work such as Services vehicle repairs, mobile canteens, ambulance bodies, trailers and basic caravans to help with temporary rehousing. Therefore 1940s

discuss a particular caravan with someone who has studied the history of that particular make in detail.

If you like the cottage style of the square, straight or barrel sided caravan with lantern roof you will find these were built mostly in the general area of 1925 to 1932. Although there were a few models built in the early 20's with lanterns, such as by Angela or Hutchings, it became more fashionable as the decade progressed. However, in contrast the later 1920s saw a partly streamlined caravan offered by Car Cruiser which, although the front was flat, had a plain beetle shaped back.

You may think that folding

or collapsible caravans are a recent idea but even in the 1920's there were various makes available such as Shadow or ATC and some models built by Eccles, where the top half telescoped over the bottom, the top being raised and lowered by a system of ropes and pulleys or long screws. If you like Art Deco, Charleston type music and 20's fashions this could be the era to choose. Good examples from this decade are fairly rare and are mostly already owned by enthusiasts, but are passed on from time to time. However, if you like a challenge, examples requiring resurrection in varying degrees are perhaps slightly more common.



Only known example of the first, 1930 Winchester model, and a Shadow Collapsible Caravan

for choice of size, type, quality and number of examples available. Again it is advisable for you to like the fashions and memorabilia of the time. Although most good examples are owned by enthusiasts there tend to be more of them and a better chance of obtaining a reasonable example. There are currently one or two known to be available such as the 1931 Car Cruiser shown in this article. It is still important, however, that people come along who are prepared to do extensive restorations as some important examples are still known to have been scrapped due to lack of interest or publicity or a dedicated enthusiast. We must try to prevent this as much as possible.



caravans tend to be fairly scarce being made from around 1946 only, at a time when materials were still hard to come by.

The last decade we tend to consider is the 1950s. This is the time when caravanning started to become more affordable for most people



**Interior of the
Voyageur
showing
typical
furniture**



Cottage type interior of the 1930 Winchester

and many of the seaside caravan sites started to grow in competition with the holiday camps. Examples from this period are relatively plentiful in a wide range of conditions and generally inexpensive. They are also the most likely to be seen rotting the other side of a hedge. The decision has to be made as to whether the amount of work involved in restoring a derelict example is warranted in view of the

caravans are generally governed by condition, model appeal and rarity and in the end will come down to individual negotiation. However values up to now are not excessive and could be compared to those of good modern secondhand caravans of similar quality with pre-war caravans being perhaps higher than post war.

After reading the above you may wonder why we do

use the oil stoves, wind up gramophones, non-plastic accessories and really take it easy in relaxing surroundings.

Even now there tend to be more early caravans in need of restoring than people prepared to commit time and money on restorations. Those that restore early caravans do it for the sake of the caravans and the enjoyment

past, there are many more. If you feel that you want to know more and are interested in becoming a vintage caravanner then contact the Historic Caravan Club who will be pleased to provide details of current availability to members of suitable caravans, membership details and club activities. The main aim of the Club is to 'encourage the Rescue, Restoration, Display and Use of Historic Caravans including the Horse Drawn

A 1933 Car Cruiser after its rescue and restoration



The lantern roof reappears as on this 1934 Winchester

other available caravans in better condition.

Values of historic caravans are difficult to tie down as there is no real market guide due to the small number changing hands. Generally a caravan in poor or derelict condition could be obtained for anything from 'free to a good home' to perhaps £1000 depending on rarity and expectations of the seller. Values of restored or good condition original

it. Perhaps it's because it's safer than 'climbing mountains' or more likely it's because many of us feel it is important to preserve our caravanning history and as many early examples as possible before they disappear for good. In so doing a great deal of enjoyment can be obtained in putting it together and using your own 'time capsule'. The caravan, filled with all the accessories of the era and attached to a contemporary towcar, can be taken to any secluded CL site well away from the influence of the 1990's. You can then

they get out of it. It is not a hobby where profits can be made as usually even material costs can exceed the price which is usually obtainable for a completed caravan.

We have only shown a small number of the many types and models from the

ancestors of the Touring Caravan'.

If you would like to read more about restoration projects and interesting articles on historic caravans

go to:-
<http://www.historiccaravanclub.co.uk/13.html>

for available copies of
Historic Caravan Scene Magazine
and further details of the
Historic Caravan Club

A 1952 Bertram Hutchings Winchester Royal

