

# Caravan Test

## Thomson Clan 1600

# Scotland for the caravanner

Sampled with a  
Scottish Caravan  
By Stuart Bladon



Thousands head for Scotland each summer for their holidays, many of them with caravans or tents. Just how crowded is it, and is it necessary to book up months in advance? On tour with Thomson's Clan 1600 and a Rover 3500, an uncomplicated, low-cost van and a first class tow car.

HOW QUICKLY one gets out of touch with the touring scene in a part of the country not visited for a while in holiday time! After a succession of holidays abroad or in the West Country, we decided last year to give Scotland a whirl and enjoy the deserted roads and open spaces. In contrast to what had been expected we found that almost everyone who had any sort of home on wheels, it seemed, had decided to do the same. There were so many motor and trailer caravans on the roads that we certainly had no reason to feel anxiety about adding our Thomson Clan 1600 to their numbers.

Scotland has developed its camping areas very well, tucking them away into wooded parts of the countryside so that they are not an eyesore; but they are desperately short of accommodation. We were told we would have to book, but having chosen the Forestry site by Loch Morlich near Aviemore, we then learned that bookings would not be accepted anyway.

The answer, we found, was to schedule arrival for Sunday or Monday, when many people were moving out; and to arrive early in the morning. This either meant an uncomfortably early start for the last leg of the trip to the area, or an overnight halt at some layby or quiet place off the road in the vicinity. Others, we noted, were doing exactly the same,

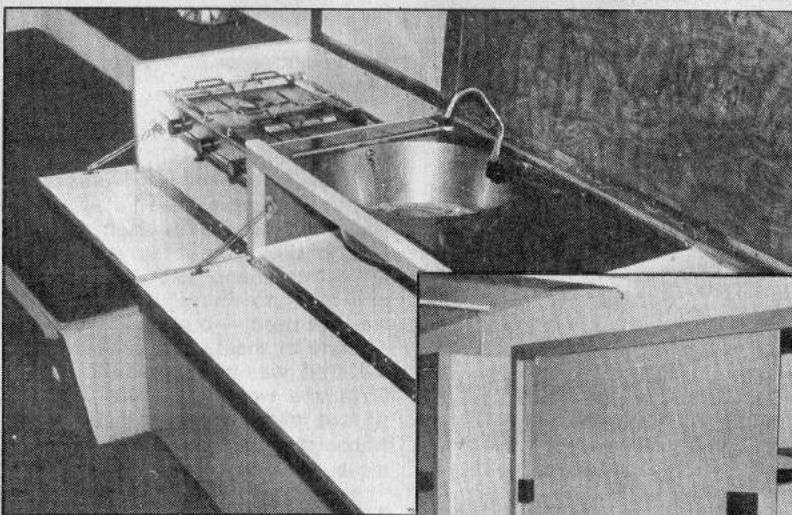
and we never saw signs of anyone being moved on. If there's nowhere for one to go, due to underestimation of the growth of caravanning and camping and failure to cater for it, the authorities don't gain much by moving people on.

caravans any more than by slow-moving commercial traffic. Even with the big 17ft Clan 1600 on tow, our Rover 3500 had ample power for easy overtaking, and the outfit proved stable for towing at 60 mph.

We always tried to be conscious of

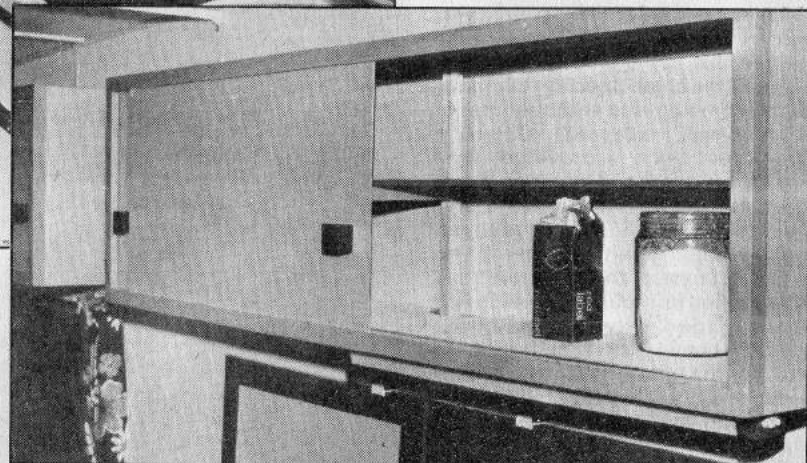
the fact that a trailed caravan, with its big slab back and restricted through vision, is the bane of other car drivers, who want to get past it as soon as possible. With a little thought, keeping in, maintaining a good gap from the next vehicle ahead, and using the left indicator to show when it's clear, we found it easy to avoid ever being followed for long.

More often the problem was that another outfit had caught up a slow lorry, sat right behind it with no gap, and formed a moving block. Then came the need for the accelerator to take one safely past the whole blockade in one bound — and at least



Working surfaces (above) are limited, but there is adequate storage space (right)

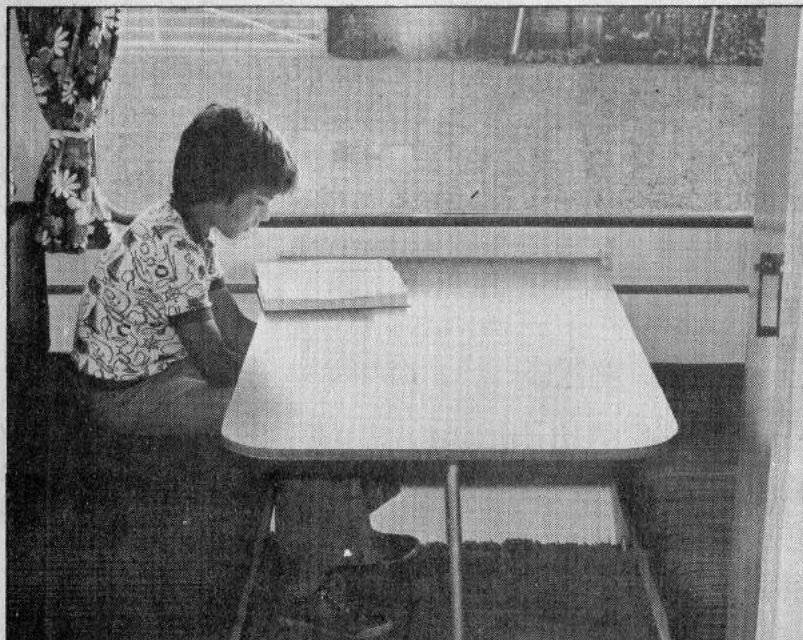
In spite of the extra tourist traffic on the roads in August, we certainly did not consider Scotland spoilt in any way. Most of the traffic congestion is on the main roads, and we were never aware of being held up by





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## Thomson Clan 1600



worry about, and on the more important matter of comfort and keeping out the weather, the Clan 1600 served us very well. Ventilation proved good, and there was no condensation on the few days of damp weather, while the last day drive through torrential rain revealed no shortcomings with the sealing. Most important of all, the beds proved adequately big and comfortably sprung.

Experience of other types has confirmed our view that the kind of layout in the Clan 1600 is the one that suits us best, with separate dinettes converting into a double bed at one end, and two singles at the other for the children. Between them is the

*Light and airy dinette (left) converts into big and comfortable double bed (below). Twin gas bottles (bottom) are accommodated on the drawbar but there is no enclosed locker for them*



Scottish roads soon straighten out to provide one with the opportunity to overtake.

The advantage of the trailer caravan, of course, is that it can be dumped in a suitable site leaving one then free to tour around in the car and explore the minor roads. Without any difficulty one can find the quiet loch at the end of a dead-end road where one can enjoy the scenery at leisure, sharing it perhaps with only two or three other cars.

Naturally it all depends so much on the weather, and there's no getting away from the fact that mountains attract rain. But we were lucky, and in three weeks there were at least 20 perfect days and only one really wet one — when we were on the way home — and that's the second time in succession that Scotland has been fine in August.

### Bargain price space

We chose the Clan 1600 because the requirement was for a roomy caravan that is not too heavy, and we were prepared to forego the more elaborate fittings and equipment of the dearer Thomson Glen range in the interests of space and lower price.

Inevitably use of any moderate-price caravan reveals its problems; if it weren't so, there wouldn't be any point in buying something more expensive. In the Clan 1600 they were present but nothing much to worry about — the chief objection being the all-too-common one that the interior lighting was inadequate. Only one fluorescent light is provided, with wiring for a second. Working surfaces are rather limited and it was disappointing to find that the upper lockers came open on travel. Following collapse of the rear table I had to reposition its mountings which had not engaged properly with the wooden bracing strut in the body; and on the other table there was some anxiety about a split in the aluminium leg, but it survived our trip.

These snags were nothing much to

kitchen unit, with wardrobe, lockers and toilet on the other side. This way, the heavy items are over the wheels, and it is easy to load up keeping all the weight on or forward of the axle centre line.

Adequately big curtains, sturdy piano hinges for the drop-down fronts of cooker and sink unit and a useful high shelf front and rear were other features that were appreciated. It was also noted that the Thomson stood up well to use. Some caravans prove rather fragile and quickly show wear and tear, no matter how carefully they are used — but the Thomson is not one of them. The only damage suffered was a nasty dent in the Melamine working surface where a tin had fallen from the upper locker, whose door had come open on the move.

### Towing with the Rover

In the recent CI-promoted Tow Car of the Year contest, the Rover 3500 came out on top as best overall, and having used an automatic one on this trip to tow the Clan 1600, I was entirely in agreement with the majority decision of the panel of judges, on which I was pleased to be

called on to serve. We never had quite such effortless, confident towing as the Rover provided. It's too much to say that you can ever forget that the caravan is behind — you'd be in trouble if you did — but at least with the Rover you're not reminded of it all the time by the jerking and jolting and the restricted performance.

The automatic transmission gave no problems, but only because its selector is so good that it is no hardship to drive it as a semi-automatic, knocking the lever back to second whenever necessary. If this is not done, the dear old Borg-Warner stays in top through thick and thin — even when you go round a tight corner at about 20 mph, and accelerate away uphill with caravan and full load, it's still in top gear until you knock the lever back to second!

In fast touring without the caravan, the Rover 3500 automatic gave 21 mpg most of the time, occasionally improving to 23. On tow, again going pretty briskly but trying not to give car or caravan too hard a time, consumption was consistently within half an mpg either side of 17. Overall figure for the whole trip was a very respectable 20.3 mpg, showing a high proportion of solo mileage.

It was a holiday with fine scenery, good motoring, fresh air, walks, and even days lazing in the sun on the beach down near Kirkcudbright. As it was all such a success, a repeat trip to Scotland is in plan for this year. I keep explaining that this time we may not be so lucky with the weather! □

### Specification

#### Thomson Clan 1600

Dimensions	
Overall length	20ft 3in.
Body length	17ft 0in.
Width	6ft 9in.
Height	8ft 0in.
Interior width	6ft 3in.
Tow ball height (centre)	1ft 3½in.
Kerb weight	15.3 cwt

#### Recommended gross laden weight

20.2 cwt (2,270 lb.

1,030 kg)

**Tyre size** 6.40-13 (6 ply)

**Pressures** 30 psi

**Coupling** Sigma 50 mm with

automatic reversing

brake release

**Brakes** Rod-operated

Lockheed 9 in.

drum brakes

**Suspension** Independent B & B

wishbones and coil

springs, telescopic

dampers

*Minimum weight for tow car to qualify*

*for 50 mph limit = 20.2 cwt*

### PRICES

*Trailer caravan manufactured by Thomsons (Carron) Ltd., Carron, Falkirk, Scotland. Tel: Larbert (03245) 2202.*

Clan 1600 4-berth £1,645.00

VAT at 8 per cent rate £19.55

VAT at 12½ per cent rate £175.08

**Total (inc. VAT)** £1,839.63

**Extras (inc. VAT)**

Refrigerator £130.00

Oven £50.00

Extra berths (each) £43.70