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Pennine Pathfinder

IAN HEWLETT takes a look at the 2015 version of the long-lived and popular Pennine Pathfinder folding camper

WITH AN ever-increasing tendency for cars to get lighter due to emissions legislation, considering the weight of your chosen home-away-from-home has never been more important. However many people don't want to move away from the level of comfort and equipment they're used to in a modern caravan. The answer could be a folding camper and the Pennine Pathfinder I tested recently is a fine example.

The Pathfinder has a similar footprint to a small caravan when towing, but without the extra drag and weight. At only 1.39m high and a maximum mass of 1,000kg it can be towed by a small family car such as the Vauxhall Astra. However, when pitched the two beds (one double, the other kingsize) don't encroach on the living area so there are no beds to set up, unless you want a third bed.

Set up: Once you arrive on site and roll away the cover, the beds are folded out, partially erecting the framework. Clip the lower edge of the fabric to the body and bedboards and push the frame up to take the tension, then the furniture needs to be positioned, but this is easy to do. There's no pegging out required for the main body and all this can be done by one person, thanks to the gas-assisted struts. It doesn't take long to do either.

External: The material is made by Isabella (known for its high-specification awnings) so it's great quality. It's also acrylic so the fabric won't absorb water and can be wiped clean. The fact it dries quickly overcomes a traditional drawback of folding campers and trailer tents. It's also lighter, making it easier to handle. Most of the windows have a mesh screen option and the window material can be propped out using poles to allow air circulation without the rain getting in.

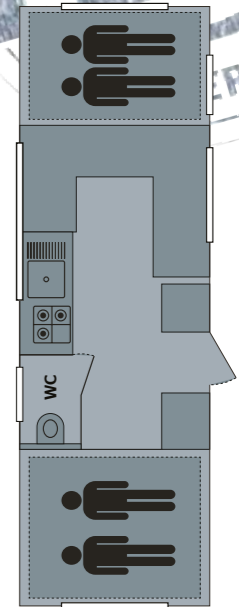
A locker is provided at the front for gas and other equipment. However, this isn't easy to access once the unit is unfolded. One of my favourite features is the removable front panel, which gives a great sense of space.

An awning is supplied as standard with Isabella GRP (fibreglass) poles and quick-release catches. It can be attached to the front of the unit, effectively doubling its size. A barbecue point and external 230V electric and TV aerial sockets are also on this side.

On the opposite side there's a handy external showerhead with hot and cold taps for muddy pets or equipment. If you're camping on a site with no facilities block this can be rigged up as a shower.

Kitchen The kitchen area is small but makes best use of the space. Both the sink and hob have glass lids giving usable working surface area. The sink and drainer are stainless steel, with a swivel mixer tap supplied with hot water via the Truma water heater. There is a cutlery drawer and storage space below the sink. The hob has three burners, with a couple of shelves and lighting over it. A separate oven is below the grill and there's a handy fan heater built in for chilly evenings, as long as you're on an electric hook-up.

Washroom: Like the kitchen, the washroom is compact but has everything you'll need - a cassette toilet, folding sink, hot and cold mixer tap, mirror, light and even a toothbrush holder. Opposite the washroom is the wardrobe with the fridge below.



Living area: The large wrap-around seating area provides a very convivial area with a couple of tricks up its sleeve. It can be converted to two bench seats so the freestanding table can be used on-board and secondly, by using the folded table as a bed base, two extra people can be accommodated, even before the awning has been fitted.

There are three cupboards, one drawer and one wardrobe plus the space under the seat bases so you won't have trouble storing all your knick-knacks. Lighting shouldn't be an issue either with nine separate fittings throughout the Pathfinder, five of which have LEDs. There are two 230V and 12V sockets as well.

The permanently-fitted inner tents help insulate the folding camper by trapping air between the layers.

at a glance

- Price as tested** £13,390
- Club Care insurance** £242
- Length x width x towing height** 4.88m x 2.12m x 1.39m
- Berths** Six
- Bed sizes** 1.98m x 1.37m, 1.98m x 1.22m and 1.98m x 1.12m
- Mass in Running Order** 840kg
- Maximum Authorised Mass** 1,000kg
- User payload** 160kg
- BE licence required** No with suitable vehicle such as Mercedes-Benz C 220 BlueTEC Sport Estate
- Warranty** One year
- Manufacturer** Pennine Outdoor Leisure
- Web** www.pennineoutdoorleisure.co.uk
- Tel** 01254 386978

verdict

The Pathfinder is easy to store and tow (with a fairly modest car) while still giving fixed-bed convenience. Great for couples and families.