

etc TRAVEL



Cold weather caravanning The heat is on as mobile living moves firmly into the 21st century

THOMAS HAWKINS

WINTER caravanning: two words that don't normally spend much time in each other's company. In fact, every time I mentioned the idea to friends or family I was met with the kind of blank stares that suggest you've said something vaguely ridiculous.

I couldn't understand their reticence. Though not a seasoned caravanner, I do look back fondly on summer holidays in a static caravan on the west coast of Ireland. My only other experience of caravanning, if I can even call it that, was spending a summer travelling the east coast of Australia in an old campervan.

"You do know what those experiences had in common, don't you?" my wife asked as we prepared for a weekend in the Borders as part of the National Caravan Council's Freedom to Go campaign.

"No. What?" I said.

"Summer," came the droll response.

Unfortunately, the weather was against us. High winds were battering much of Scotland, overturning lorries and shutting bridges. And when I heard the forecast was for heavy snow in the Borders over the weekend, it's safe to say I was beginning to suffer a crisis of confidence.

But when I spoke to Colin Chisholm of Crossburn Caravans, the family business

that was supplying our mobile home, he assured me we had nothing to worry about.

Indeed, he made a big claim. "Modern caravans are nicer than most hotels rooms these days," he said.

Before we tested that assertion, we had to think about the small matter of towing the caravan. We were staying at the Caravan Club Gibson Park in Melrose and, while I was happy to tow the caravan down from my home in Falkirk, it was decided – probably wisely – that Crossburn would take care of the transportation and from there I would be given a towing tutorial.

As it turned out, I needn't have worried about my lack of experience. My towing tutor, Forbes Chisholm from Crossburn, gave me a quick lesson and explained how straightforward the whole process is.

"You point the car where you want to go and the caravan will follow," explained Forbes. It sounds pretty obvious but, to an amateur like myself, it wasn't.

Parking it was another matter. While I wouldn't call it difficult, there is a knack to the manoeuvre. I am sure I would have got the hang of it eventually, but it might have taken a couple of dozen attempts.

Standing beside the caravan, a top-of-the-range Lunar Delta TI, the first thing that stood out was the design. The Delta is a space-age pod that wouldn't look out of place on a NASA expedition to Mars, all sleek, curved lines and tinted windows.

Indeed, the high-tech theme continued

Towing a caravan is the easy bit, as Thomas Hawkins discovered. Parking it, however, is a different kettle of fish

PHOTOGRAPH:
JAMES GALLOWAY

Travel notes

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inside as Kerry Holness from Crossburn explained the gadgets, technologies and smart designs that are packed into a modern-day caravan. "The heating system is the same as you use in your home," she explained. "You won't be cold in here." True enough, by the time we packed away our luggage and with the first flurry of snow settling outside, inside we were toasty.

I could tell you I got right into the spirit of things and made full use of the cooker to make our food for the weekend ... but that would be a lie. Instead, we made the short walk to Melrose High Street.

The great thing about heading out into the swirling snow was that when we arrived back at the caravan we were delighted by the fact it was still snug inside, the heating system quietly working away under our feet.

In fact, it was so hot I had to use the control panel to turn the heating down – a simple few taps of the touch screen was all it took. Considering I have tried and failed to adjust the heating in numerous hotel rooms, the fact it was so easy to do in the caravan only added weight to Colin's claim.

I can at least say that I put the fridge to good use – not long after we arrived I had put a few beers in to chill. So as the night drew in and with my family tucked up and fully insulated from the wild weather, all that was left for me to do was sit back with my feet up and watch the snowflakes melt away on the skylight – you can't do that in most hotel rooms.