

Practical

2018 SEASON PREVIEW
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September 2017

Motorhome

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& Cornwall's
top cream teas

TESTED
Auto Campers'
VW T6-based
MRV

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CONTINENTAL TOUR TIPS

FROM VAN TO MOTORHOME

AUTO CAMPERS

MRV on Volkswagen T6

The popular camper brand has moved its usual stylish offering onto the VW base. Can all the flexibility translate to make this another success?

WHERE WE STAYED

Pennymoor Camping and Caravan Park
Tel 01548 830 542

Web www.pennymoor-camping.co.uk
This is a fairly small park near Modbury, south Devon. The touring area is mainly on grass, but the facilities are well-kept and there's a drive-over motorhome service point. The entrance lane is a little narrow, but the views are great.

Price as tested £53,836 OTR • Sleeps 2/4 • Belts 3/5 • Base vehicle VW T6 • Engine 2.0-litre TDI 150PS (148bhp) DSG
L/W/H 4.90/1.90/2.0m (16'1"/6'3"/6'7") • MTPLM 3000kg • Payload 500kg • Water 21 litres • Battery 115Ah • Gas Camping Gaz 907

Designed to be as flexible as possible, this camper can compliment a whole variety of lifestyles, and offers everything you need from your motorhome; despite this, it's small enough to squeeze under most height barriers. Basing it on the VW T6 – it's also available on the Ford Transit Custom – has pushed the price up a fraction, but fans of the brand will like what Auto Campers has done with it.

Our test 'van came with one rear travel seat (an £800 option), but another two can be added. Without them, though, you'll get an impressive amount of space beneath the bed set-up in which to store your kit.

The flexibility to configure your perfect camper is increased by Auto Campers' innovative four-rail floor system (£1200) which allows you to secure the travel seats. It can also be used to anchor items so that they don't slide around as you drive, via D-rings and straps.

Auto Campers is a small enough company for you to be sure that every detail will have been checked and the conversion of the highest quality. It's put together at the company's workshop in Winnersh, Berkshire.

DESIGN



The sleek grey exterior reflects the modern feel inside the 'van, which has been carefully designed for a simple, stylish look. Inside, the cabinets are gloss-white as standard, or you can choose from three colours (£300): driftwood, orange or green. If you want

a bolder look, you can jazz up the 'van further by adding graphics to the exterior.

VW does a great range of colours for the T6, too, including Bamboo Garden Green metallic, and Blackberry metallic. The 'van we tested was in Indium Grey metallic.

The rest of the design has been kept simple.

The privacy glass in the rear windows is a nice touch, and will help keep the 'van cool during hot weather.

There are no garish flourishes here, just nicely subtle branding.

ON THE ROAD



The size of this 'van really is a positive: it's approximately the width and length of a large car, but allows for an elevated view of the road which lets you navigate around obstacles with ease. The rear sensors are a big help, too.

What's more, the roof is low enough to pass under some height barriers. That makes finding parking much easier.

The optional seven-speed DSG automatic gearbox (£1920) really impressed us: we tackled quite a few hill starts and steep climbs without it breaking into a sweat. The 2.0-litre engine purled along nicely on the motorway, and it was a welcome relief not to hear too much rattling and noise from inside the 'van as we drove along. When customising your order, you'll get the chance to add a tow bar (£486) and a reversing camera (£300) if these options appeal. ☺



WHAT MOTORHOME? Rising-roof campervan



ONLY THE BEST INSIDE

Our test T6-based model was kitted out with VW's Highline spec, which includes steering wheel controls and rear sensors



POWER UP ON THE MOVE

The cab's kit list includes a USB port and two 12V sockets – handy for charging gadgets when you're on the road



ALL IN THE DETAIL

The doors both have two pockets, ideal for stashing maps or guide books. We found the cab seats to be really comfortable



TWO LEGS GOOD

The table comes with two lengths of leg, which also help support the bed; they are stored behind the driver's seat



TOTALLY FLEXIBLE

The cab seats swivel around to create a comfortable living and dining space, and the table position can be easily adjusted



EASY-ACCESS CHILLING

The kitchen benefits from a 50-litre drawer fridge that can be accessed from outside, via the side



NOTHING IS SURPLUS

This bracket, fixed to the kitchen unit, can be used either for setting up and moving the table, or for



STAYING IN CONTROL

Controls for the lights and the heating are handily located in the kitchen, with 12V and mains plug



ABLUTION SOLUTION

The optional portable toilet (£100) is stored in the kitchen unit. It needs to be gently turned around

| LIVE-IN TEST |



NIFTY STOWING

The table top is neatly stored in the passenger-side sliding door. It uses a lightweight clip-in fitting to secure it to the table leg



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Lighting in the MRV is plentiful, and includes two movable spotlights above the cab seats so that you can read in comfort



LET THE SUN SHINE IN

The pop-top bed has mesh 'windows' that can be unzipped to provide a breeze, while the front flap also reveals a window

A BURST OF COLOUR

These bright-orange kitchen and cupboard units give the 'van a fun, quirky look and make the interior much brighter



The cab is also really well organised, with usefully located door pockets, alcoves and shelves, including two cup holders – you can reach your coffee cup from the driving seat with ease. The steering wheel features handy controls, and there is a pair of 12V sockets in addition to a USB port, so you can easily have your sat-nav unit, phone and tablet all charging at once.

Above the driver's seat there is a case for keeping your sunglasses to hand, and an alcove for anything else that you might need to grab quickly.

LOUNGING AND DINING

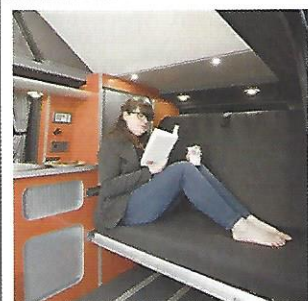


The number of chairs that you opt to have fitted very much affects the use of the lounge area: we found that with the single travel seat fitted, and the cab seats swiveled, the lounge area was comfortable for three people. However, to swivel the driver's seat you do need to put the 'van in gear, release the handbrake and drop the steering wheel.

Another small niggle is that the lever for adjusting the position of the seat doesn't turn along with the chair, so it can be awkward to move the seat back and forth when you are swivelling it round.

The dining table is stored in the sliding door, with the legs secured behind the driver's seat. They slot into the support bracket that is fitted to the kitchen unit. There are two different leg lengths that can be used here: one provides a dining height, and the other supports the bed when it is in the lower position.

During our stay, the heating was really put to the test by damp and miserable weather. We're happy to report that the



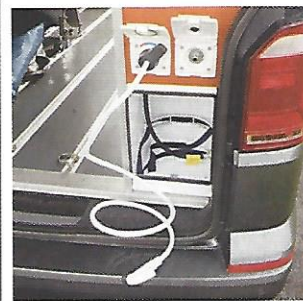
PUT YOUR FEET UP

When in the lower position, the rear part of the bed can be propped up to make a comfortable sofa – ideal



SET UP FOR SLEEP

Getting the bed ready at night is simple, but you can only have it in the lower position if you don't have



DOUSING STATION

At the rear of the cupboard unit is space for a gas bottle, as well as an exterior shower point and the inlet

WHAT MOTORHOME? Rising-roof campervan



blown diesel heating system (£1000) rose to the challenge. While it is a little loud, it's a constant sound that you soon get used to. The warmth generated makes the whole 'van very snug – even the cab (provided that you've fitted the thermal screens, which come as standard). One of the many benefits of diesel heating is that it is safe to use while you're on the road.

The lighting here is better than in a lot of campervans that we've seen, including the stylish and practical spotlights above the swivel chairs. There are also LEDs in the base of the roof bed, and units above the kitchen and in the rear of the 'van.

You won't be throwing any parties in the lounging space of the MRV, but it is perfectly suited to a couple. Plus, when you remove the travel seats and bed system, the 'van can be used for shuttling larger items from place to place.

This layout really encourages you to spend time outdoors; if you fancy a little more comfort, the plethora of doors mean you can add awnings for extra space. A 2.6-metre cassette unit can be added onto your order (£600), as well as a Khyam Sleeper drive-away example (£600); although you do have to add the multi-rail on the passenger side (£240).

When the sunny weather arrives, the MRV really comes into its own. Break out your camping chairs and barbecue, and reach into the fridge – which you can do from outside the 'van – for your cold beverage.

KITCHEN



This small camper is surprisingly well-equipped when it comes to the kitchen unit. There is a two-burner gas hob

"The plethora of doors in this 'van means that you can always add awnings for a bit of extra space"

50-litre slide-out fridge. There's also a pop-up worksurface flap on the end of the kitchen unit, so you'll be able to keep everything to hand while you're working there. The table can be set up while you're cooking and put to use as further space if required. The flexibility to swivel it around is another advantage.

Above the work surface are two LED lights that provide plenty of illumination for you to see by when cooking at night, and a handy shelf for keys, condiments or books.

While you might miss having an oven or grill, the hob is a good size. The sliding doors also ensure that you can enjoy eating al fresco, and provide a comfortable cross-breeze on warm summer days.

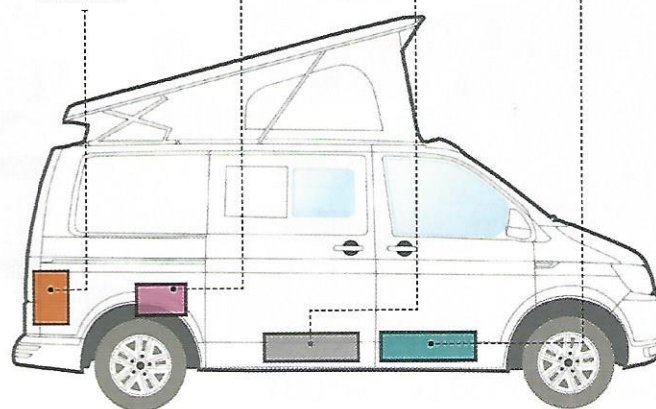
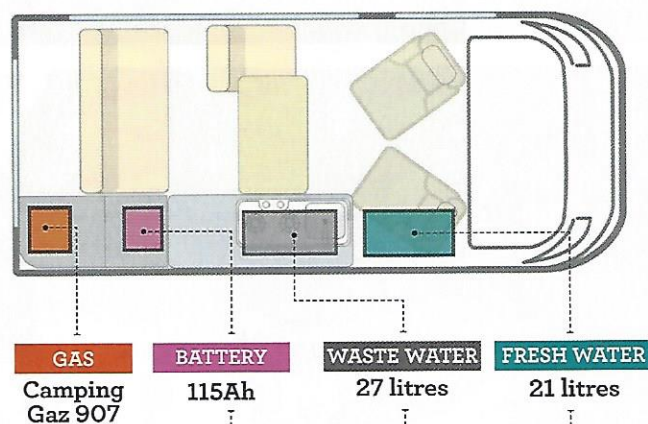
WASHROOM

As in most campers with these dimensions and layout, there is no washroom in the MRV; hence the lack of a star rating here. However, a Dometic 976 portable toilet is stored beneath the kitchen unit.

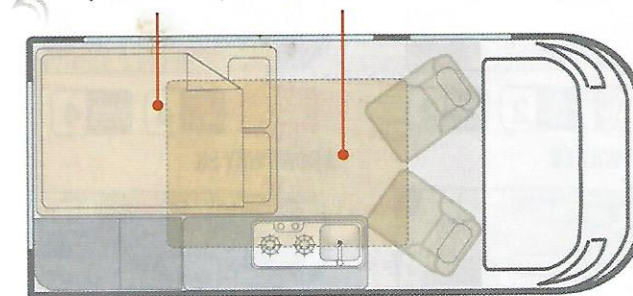
There is also no water heater, so the kitchen tap only supplies cold. It's stored in the 21-litre tank that can be filled via the inlet at the rear of the cupboard unit. There is also a 27-litre grey-water tank.

There is an option to have an external shower fitted (£150), which could theoretically be used in conjunction with a tailgate awning; but we think that it is more likely to be used to clean

LAYOUT



Rear double: 1.22 x 1.90m (4'0" x 6'3")
Roof double: 1.10 x 1.90m (3'7" x 6'3")



THE AUTO CAMPERS STORY

Auto Campers is a spin-off from Roy Wood Transits, a Ford Transit dealer first set up in 1970.



Over the years it has developed a specialism in converting Transits, particularly for people with limited mobility. The company gained accreditation from Motability in 2011.

Roy Wood himself was a well-known regular on the Formula 2 circuit at the time. The business is now managed by his son Steve, who previously sold Kentucky Camp, Horizons Unlimited, Westfalia and Wellhouse Leisure motorhomes.

Along with the MRV, Auto Campers also produces the even more modular Day Van, and the Leisure Van. More recently it has established a firmer footing with Sheffield-based Firth Campers, which has become a partner offshoot for the company.



SLEEPING



Despite its small dimensions, the MRV can sleep up to four people. The pop-top allows for a bed in the roof (a £600 option) with a recommended weight restriction of up to 200kg.

Back downstairs, the main bed uses stainless-steel fittings and is suspended on webbing straps to ensure that you get a large, flexible storage area beneath. The rear end rests on alloy slats across two crossbeams; there are two height options, depending on what you need to store in the space underneath.

The slats are a considerable weight when you dismantle the bed, but they also provide a strong, stable parcel shelf when the bed is not in use, and are easy to fit.

The bi-fold mattress is thick and comfortable, and can be left in place during the day if you're not staying in the 'van. Additionally, the base of the bed can be propped up to create a bench seat.

All of the windows have privacy curtains, which help to insulate the 'van. Sliding windows in each of the sides allow you to get a breeze running through, too.

STORAGE



Once you've taken into consideration the sheer amount of kit in this 'van, there isn't a lot of space left for storage; but you'll find that what there is has been cleverly used to make the most of every inch.

There's a small cupboard beneath the sink, and a cupboard unit at the back of the 'van that can be used either as three shelves or as two shelves and a hanging space.

There is plenty of flexible storage beneath the bed, which can be easily organised using bags or boxes.

rear, which is accessed by opening the tailgate. This area is also where the external shower and inlet for the fresh-water tank are located.

When pitched up on site, small campervans can become untidy quite quickly. However, the roof bed, when not in use, could be the answer. Stowing kit in that space dramatically increases the amount of storage space available.

The vehicle that we tested had a payload of 500kg.

EQUIPMENT



The standard MRV comes with a 100W solar panel to support the leisure battery that's installed. The control panel is simple to use, and both the leisure battery and the solar panel controls are neatly tucked away: the former beneath the cupboard, the latter inside it.

We found it handy to have the heating and control panels together; there are 12V and plug sockets underneath, too. Unfortunately, this is the only mains socket in the 'van, so if you bring a lot of devices on tour with you, you'll need to take turns charging them.

The main selling point – and attraction – of the Auto Campers MRV is flexibility, and the opportunity to build the perfect vehicle for your requirements. As such, you'll find that there are a lot of options for adding on equipment, starting with the rear travel seats and encompassing pop-top insulation screens, a retractable step, bike racks and a cab carpet, to name just a few. You can also add wheelchair restraints.

It's not just major bits of kit, either: also among the options is the opportunity to decide whether any removable passenger seats have arm rests. You really

OUR TEST TEAM'S NOTES



BRYONY SYMES
"Height barriers have the potential to turn your campervan jaunt into a stressful search for other car parks. Fortunately the MRV gets around this problem by being short enough to get under many barriers you will come across."



CLAUDIA DOWELL
"Campervan and motorhome manufacturers are sometimes so focused on the interiors of their 'vans that they forget how important the cab is. Not so with the MRV: the VW T6's is a delight to sit in, with everything that you need at hand."



PETER BABER
"The flexibility in the MRV is really inventive. It makes the 'van that much more versatile to use; either as a day-to-day transport vehicle, or as something you could really go away in for a week or so without ever feeling that you'd been short-changed."

+ LIKES



A BIT OF A CHAMELEON

The number of functions that this 'van can serve means that it can be an everyday runaround or home for a week in the sunshine



STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

In a market that is usually fixated on white exteriors and beige interiors, the colour options on this 'van are a refreshing change

- DISLIKES



BRUTE STRENGTH IS NEEDED

While the ability to remove the furniture is great, the weight of the seats and the alloy slats makes them very heavy to lift



WHAT MOTORHOME? Rising-roof campervan

PRACTICAL MOTORHOME VERDICT



This small but stylish 'van has been designed with acute attention to detail; no matter how you want your MRV to work for you, the extensive options list will allow you to get what you need. You'll have to watch the price tag as you do so – adding the kit on our test 'van takes the cost from £47,500 to £53,836. However, with its generous bed specification, innovative and flexible layout, and perky on-road handling, this is a lot of campervan for your money. What's more, the Volkswagen badge will be reassuring for buyers, and the quality of the conversion is impressive.

With so many options available, the MRV could well become your perfect 'van – as long as

you're happy with a few compromises, such as the lack of a water heater

DESIGN	★★★★★
ON THE ROAD	★★★★★
LOUNGING & DINING	★★★★★
KITCHEN	★★★★★
SLEEPING	★★★★★
STORAGE	★★★★★
EQUIPMENT	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

TECHNICAL DATA



BASE VEHICLE

Chassis Volkswagen T6

Engine 2.0-litre turbodiesel, Euro 6

Power 148bhp @ 3250–3750rpm **Torque** 251lb ft

@ 1500–3000rpm **Transmission** 7-speed dual clutch

Features VW Highline spec, including auto start/stop, dimmable dashboard illumination, electrically heated and adjustable door mirrors, rear parking sensors, multi-function steering wheel and air conditioning.



CONVERSION

High-pressure laminated worktops with a poplar ply core. Heavy-duty Altro slip-resistant flooring with stainless-steel trims and four rails for positioning seats. 12mm marine ply and Styrofoam insulation.



LOUNGING AND DINING

Front lounge and dining seats Three (including front cab seats). LED lighting. Fitted curtains to all rear windows. Thermal screens for cab windows.



KITCHEN

Two-burner gas hob, stainless-steel sink, 50-litre compressor drawer fridge with removable freezer.



SLEEPING

Rear double 1.22 x 1.90m (4'0" x 6'3")

Roof double 1.10 x 1.90m (3'7" x 6'3")



EQUIPMENT

100W solar panel, 21-litre fresh- and 27-litre waste-water tanks, thermal cab insulation screens.



OPTIONS FITTED

DSG automatic transmission (£1920), four-rail bonded floor system (£1200), roof bed (£600), Webasto Airtop 2000 blown diesel heating (£1000), external shower point (£150), sliding window (£300), bonded-floor quick-release load-restraint D-rings (£7 each), coloured furniture (£300), additional travel seat including armrests (£800)

OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Include tow bar (£360), reversing camera (£300), two further travel seats with armrests (£800 each), Dometic 976 portable toilet (£100), 2.6m cassette awning (£600), electric habitation step (£480), cab carpet (£40), Camping Gaz 907 cylinder hire and refill (£65)

OR YOU COULD TRY...



NOMAD RANGER

From £41,950



Also based on the Volkswagen T6, this four-berth has a rear kitchen, a double bed in the rising roof, and the travel seats create a spacious double; however, it has a less high-



SSANGYONG TOURISMO TOURER From £35,995



For quite a lot less money, you can get this two-berth with the option of having another two in the roof. The drop in price corresponds with a squeezed space that might not be