

JERBA

Sanna

There are numerous small-camper converters in the UK, so can Scottish-based Jerba stand out from the rest with its Volkswagen T5-based Sanna? We deliver our verdict

Price as tested £45,834 Sleeps Two Base vehicle Volkswagen Transporter Engine 2.0-litre turbodiesel 138bhp (option) L/W/H 5.3/2.3/2m (17'4"/7'5"/6'5") Economy 32mpg MTPLM 3200kg Payload 690kg Water fresh/waste 38/NA litres Battery 120Ah (option) Gas Two x 3.9kg (propane)

The UK motorhome market seems to overflow with campervan converters, many of whom are seasoned motorcaravanners who were dissatisfied with the state of the models on offer from established manufacturers, and decided that they could do a better job themselves. That's certainly the story behind

Jerba Campervans, a small outfit based in North Berwick that focuses primarily on Volkswagen T5 conversions. In the six years since it started out Jerba has made quite a name for itself, exhibited at several NEC shows and grown its range to six models, the latest of which is the Sanna: a long-wheelbase rising-roof camper with four belted passenger seats and a cassette

toilet in the rear. We headed up to Jerba's HQ to see for ourselves whether the plaudits that this small firm has been getting from its customers are deserved.

DESIGN

★★★★★ Spend a little time around the Sanna and you will unavoidably be reminded of another UK Volkswagen

WHERE WE STAYED

Gibson Park Caravan Club Site, Melrose
Tel 01932 562 405
Web www.caravanclub.co.uk
The Gibson Park site is located just off the high street in Melrose, so it's close to all the amenities. It's a very convenient base for the wider Borders area.



camper manufacturer, Bilbo's. There's no denying that Jerba takes many of its design cues from its rival. Outside, there are zero embellishments, with an understated front-hinged elevating roof that dips in under the magic 2m mark when lowered (magic because most height barriers are 2.2m high) and no tacky decals. Like Bilbo's, Jerba lets the clean lines of the Transporter speak for themselves. Volkswagen has some great paint hues available, too - we loved the fetching green of our demonstrator model.

Step inside and you'll find an interior awash in businesslike greys, which is another quality the Sanna shares with Bilbo's vans. To us, it's the best approach in a vehicle this small and practical, which is capable of being used as a daily driver and likely to take a lot of abuse as a result. The durable grey surfaces found throughout the Sanna feel very automotive - which makes a huge difference on long drives, particularly for the rear passengers - and will bear fewer visible scars from school runs and the like.

We also love how precisely Jerba's furnishings are cut to fit the T5: there are no nooks and gaps where you wouldn't want them, such as between the kitchen unit and the van wall.

If the Sanna's floorplan seems familiar, that's because it's a tried and tested long-wheelbase T5 layout, found most famously in - you



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GREAT GUTTERS
Jerba's attention to detail is evident in these retro-fitted gutter pieces, which help channel rainwater so that it doesn't enter the cab area



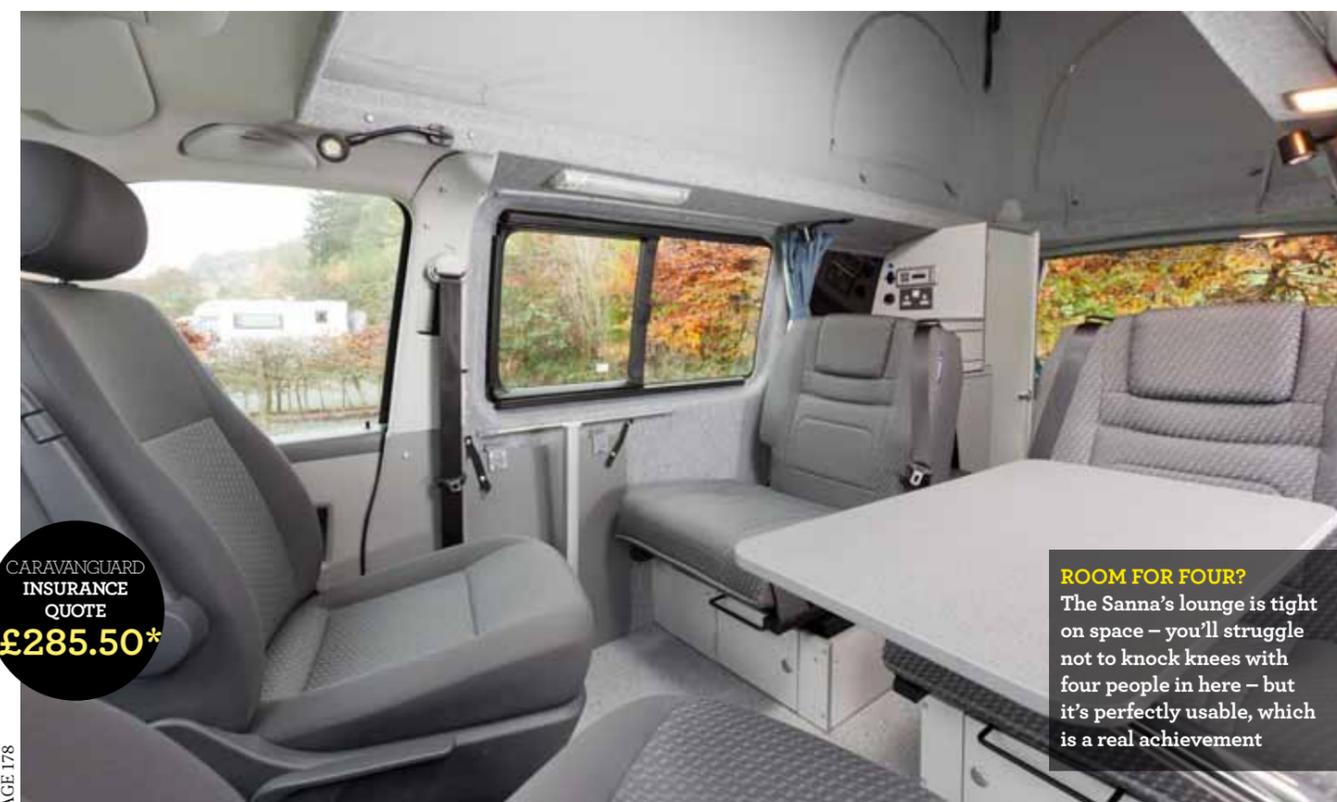
TIDY TABLE
The offside lounge table straps in place against the wall - it moves around slightly but the carpeted wall around it prevents it from rattling



BESPOKE BLOCK
Jerba has its gas lockers specially made by a UK firm - they're very durable and the location in the rear means it's easy to load gas bottles



GOOD POINT
The Sanna's facilities - fresh water filler and hook-up point - are neatly grouped behind a hatch built into the rear bumper. It's a great solution



CARAVANGUARD INSURANCE QUOTE £285.50*

ROOM FOR FOUR?
The Sanna's lounge is tight on space - you'll struggle not to knock knees with four people in here - but it's perfectly usable, which is a real achievement



TERRIFIC TWINS
The Sanna's twin beds are comfy and easy to make up; they preserve the van's central corridor, making it easy to access the loo at night



DOING THE DOUBLE
Alternatively, you could slide the two beds together into one large double. The gap between the cab seats remains, but otherwise it's a great feature



HALF A WASHROOM
The Sanna's toilet can be cordoned off, although it doesn't offer total privacy. We like the fold-down cover that hides the loo when not in use



CLOTHING CUBICLE
Instead of a wardrobe, the Sanna has this spacious cupboard, great for folded clothes and toiletries. The little mirror is for the washroom

*FOR INSURANCE QUOTES TERMS AND CONDITIONS SEE PAGE 178



SPACE TO SPARE
The Sanna's hob and sizeable sink only take up a small amount of space on the kitchen unit, allowing for masses of workspace



COOLING COMPRESSOR
The fridge offers loads of space in a compact package; but we're not sure the door should open this way, since it makes it hard to access from the lounge



COLLECTIVE EFFORT
The power sockets, heating controls and control panel are all grouped together just above the fridge, with worktop below for charging your gadgets



BLAST OF HEAT
The Webasto diesel heating (a £1175 option) lives under the driver's seat and has one vent. It's a little noisy and it doesn't spread the heat very well



RIGHT HEIGHT
The front-hinged roof provides masses of rear headroom, and Jerba has used this to build kitchen worktops that are the same height as household ones



FLEXIBLE LIGHTING
The reading lights are on flexible stalks, which we really like. You need to be careful to keep them out of the way when lowering the roof, though



SHOE STORAGE
The two lockers under the rear seats are ideal for shoes, or for other items you need to keep out of the way when you're using the habitation area



AN ALMOST PERFECT FIT
We love the precision with which Jerba's furnishings are cut to fit the T5, with one exception: a bed strut that sticks out near the sliding door



CASSETTE CUBBY
The toilet cassette is accessed by lifting the tailgate – since all of the 'van's facilities are located towards the rear, this is a convenient arrangement

guessed it – Bilbo's high-top Lezan. Jerba clearly believes that there's a gap in the market for an elevating-roof 'van with this layout, though. This is certainly an intriguing idea, since it blends several practicalities – a fully fledged loo, four travelling seats and a low overall height – that allows the Sanna to function well both on tour and when tackling the daily grind.

Since the Sanna is also available with the option of a roof bed for two additional sleepers, on paper it offers a perfect proposition for a household of four who want a camper that will work as their everyday vehicle.

The Sanna uses a front elevating roof from German suppliers SCA, which has a very low profile when down, yet offers loads of headroom when raised. A front-hinged roof was definitely the way to go with this motorhome, since the kitchen is located towards the rear, and that's where you'll require the most headroom. The roof raises and

A front-hinged roof was the way to go with this 'van, since the kitchen is in the rear

lowers smoothly on sturdy pneumatic struts. Jerba offers the option of ordering your Sanna on VW's generic Window Van version of the Transporter, or the higher-specced motorhome SE version. The latter comes at a £900 premium, but the spec difference (which includes items that can't be retro-fitted, such as additional engine sound-deadening) makes it very worthwhile.

ON THE ROAD

The Sanna proved predictably able on the open road and we're huge fans of the T5's cabin. It's so far ahead of the pack in terms of ergonomics and comfort that VW didn't

alter it at all in the midst of the model's last facelift, which saw it gaining the new company nose and a Euro 5-compliant engine line-up. On the subject of those engines – or engine, to be precise, since there's only one 2.0-litre unit, tuned to four different power outputs – we loved the 138bhp lump in our demonstrator (a £2220 option), which was refined and powerful in equal measure, offering smooth acceleration with only mildly noticeable turbo lag.

The two rear passenger seats are made by the industry leader in travelling seats, French-based Scopema RIB. They're spacious and comfy, and will keep passengers comfortable on long trips.

Any converters that build on the T5 are setting a formidable challenge for themselves, since the 'van is such a docile drive that any unwanted noises become especially noticeable. We're pleased to report that the Sanna ably meets the high standards set by its base vehicle.

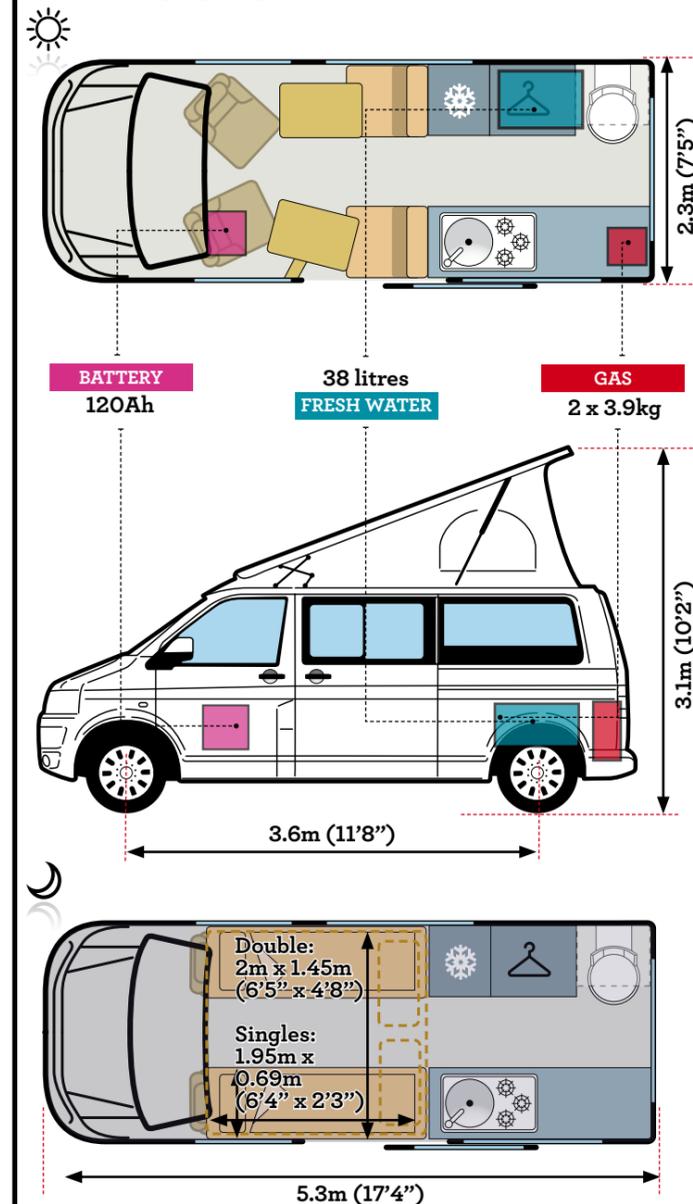
LOUNGING & DINING

The Sanna uses its swivelling cab seats to supplement the rear seats and create a four-person lounging area. Because of the front-hinged elevating-roof, there's a shortage of headroom over the swivelled cab seats, but otherwise the arrangement is perfect.

In order to prevent the corridor through the centre of the 'van from becoming obstructed, the Sanna has two separate lounge tables, one for each facing pair of seats. The offside table has a permanent home against the offside wall, clipped to its supporting rail, while the nearside table has a single removable leg and slots into a hole near the front of the rear nearside travelling seat. When not in use, it has a dedicated home behind the kitchen unit.

We like the twin-table approach used in the Sanna, because it allows you to

DIMENSIONS



HISTORY

Jerba was started in 2005 by Simon Poole and Cath Brookes, motorcaravanning enthusiasts who bought their first camper, a VW Type 2, while travelling through Canada in the mid-'90s and lived in it for two months. They've also rented 'vans while touring various parts of the world. In 2002 they bought a VW T4-based camper, which they decided to upgrade to a T5 model in 2005. They couldn't find any existing conversions that satisfied their exact requirements, so they decided to buy a base vehicle and convert it themselves – and Jerba Campervans was born. The company undertakes bespoke conversions, primarily on the VW T5 base but also on a variety of other bases. Since its foundation Jerba has gradually built up an impressive portfolio of standard conversion models, the most recent of which is the Sanna.



easily tailor the 'van for two or four occupants. When dining with a full complement of four, the tables are a little on the small side, but they're not unmanageable; you're also aided by the fact that there's lots of worktop space in the kitchen area, which can be used as a staging area for food.

KITCHEN

Jerba's designers have put a lot of thought into the Sanna's kitchen and have elected to keep it heavy on storage and workspace, and light on equipment. The sink and hob are a combined, compact unit and there's no oven or grill.

To us, this arrangement makes the most sense if you're planning on travelling with four; storage will be at a premium, you aren't likely to cook too many meals for four in a 'van and the addition of heavy kitchen equipment will eat into your precious payload.

The Jerba's fridge is a 51-litre compressor unit supplied by Italian firm Vitrifrigo. Again, we think this is the right way to go, despite the buzzing-noise characteristic of compressor fridges. The Jerba's fridge is more space efficient than a comparable absorption

The Sanna's bed set-up is excellent – the beds are flat and spacious, and make up quickly

fridge, it can run on 12V, it cools more efficiently and it doesn't require any external ventilation holes to be cut into the bodywork. If the buzzing turns out to be a real problem, the fridge is sufficiently well insulated that we found you could turn it off at night when you're sleeping and still keep things cool.

SLEEPING

We didn't get an opportunity to try out the Sanna's optional roof bed as the 'van we tested

was strictly a two-berth. The bed space is provided by the two rear passenger seats, which unfold into twin single berths, with foot space provided by the swivelling cab seats. The Sanna's bed set-up is excellent: the beds are spacious and make up quickly. Plus, you can slide the two rear seats together, to create a double bed. It's not the finest double berth we've come across, but it's nice to have the option, and we've never seen anything like it before.

WASHROOM

Porta Pottis are a love-it-or-loath-it piece of kit, and those who fall into the latter camp will be pleased that the Sanna has a proper cassette toilet in its own dedicated compartment at the rear. The area is cordoned off by the door of the clothes cupboard, which swings across the corridor and secures against the kitchen unit.

It doesn't provide as much privacy as a proper cubicle, but it's miles ahead of a Porta Potti that you pull out from beneath a seat. There's no dedicated storage for toiletries, but there's a handy mirror built into the inside of the clothes cupboard door.

STORAGE

Fitting four people in a long-wheelbase camper is a difficult undertaking, and many 'vans fall flat when it comes to storage. Thankfully the Jerba isn't one of them: it has admirable amounts of storage under the seats, in the kitchen unit and in the clothes cupboard. There isn't a wardrobe for hanging your clothes, but that's understandable given the space constraints. The twin rear seats have ample space underneath them to house footwear. Our only concern with regards to storage is that there isn't any that's well-suited to chocks, leads and other bits of on-site gear.

You can store them under the kitchen unit, but be prepared for streaks of dirt on the floor.

OUR TEST TEAM'S NOTES



ROB GANLEY
"Comparisons to Bilbo's are inevitable, but Jerba has managed to carve out a unique niche in the market, at a lower price bracket. This is high-quality stuff, and well-priced for families."



SARAH WAKELY
"I'm not a fan of the sober grey interior, since it makes the 'van feel a bit less spacious – but I can see the logic behind it, especially for those who will use this camper as their sole family vehicle."



JEREMIAH MAHADEVAN
"I'm not sure I could survive for long in a camper with three other people, but that says more about me than it does about the Sanna, which is one of the best compact 'vans for taking four on tour."

+ LIKES



CRACKING CABIN

The Transporter's cabin is one of the best in the business, and its ergonomics in particular are outstanding – it makes equally short work of tedious city traffic and long motorway treks.

- DISLIKES



PROTRUDING STRUT

The Sanna's clever bed arrangement has one downside – this strut, which sticks out on the nearside and might impact the legs of people entering and leaving through the sliding door.



MESSY STRAPS

The roof has four securing straps, rather than the usual two, which doubles the hassle. Also, the straps need to be threaded through eyelets; Jerba has informed us that these will be replaced with hooked straps.

TECHNICAL DATA



BASE VEHICLE

Chassis Volkswagen Transporter
Engine 2.0-litre turbodiesel **Power** 138bhp @ 3500rpm
Torque 251 lb/ft @ 1750rpm **Transmission** Six-speed manual gearbox **Features** Front-wheel drive. Four brake discs. ABS with EBD. PAS. Driver and passenger airbag. Integrated radio/CD player. Alarm and electronic immobiliser. Cab air-con. Electric door mirrors and windows. Front fog lights. Hill-hold control.



CONVERSION

Volkswagen Transporter long-wheelbase panel-van chassis. Retrofitted SCA front-hinged elevating-roof with three windows and midge-proof netting. 15mm plywood furnishings, laminated on both sides. Insulation.



LOUNGING AND DINING

Seats Four **Dining** Four
Dinette Facing seats. Twin lounge tables. Vinyl floor.



KITCHEN

Three-gas burner hob. Sink. Vitfrigo 51-litre compressor fridge with 12V power option. Two power sockets shared between kitchen and lounge. Integrated cutlery drawer.



SLEEPING

Lounge double 2m x 1.45m (6'5" x 4'8")
Lounge nearside single 1.95m x 0.69m (6'4" x 2'3")
Lounge offside single 1.95m x 0.69m (6'4" x 2'3")



EQUIPMENT

Water heater None. **Space heater** None. **Electrics** Sargent EC328 12V and 230V power supply system. 2 x three-pin plug sockets.
Lighting Three fluorescent light fittings in ceiling. LED reading lights on flexible stalks.



OPTIONS FITTED

Upgrade to 138bhp engine (£2220). Metallic paint (£594). Webasto 2000S diesel blown-air heating; includes upgrade of leisure batteries to 120Ah (£1175). 'Appearance pack': electrically adjustable, heated, folding and body-coloured mirrors and body-coloured bumpers (£780).

OTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Built-in sat-nav (£708). DSG twin-clutch automated gearbox (£3900). Roof bed (£525). 29-litre waste water tank (£380). Additional internal 230V socket (£45).

OR YOU COULD TRY...



BILBO'S LEZAN

£44,550



The Lezan is in many ways the quintessential 'van with this layout, and the quality and prestige of the Bilbo's brand are second to none in the world of UK Volkswagen campers. It's pricey, though, and that high-top eats into the Lezan's practicality as an everyday vehicle.



HILLSIDE LEISURE CROMFORD

£40,995



Hillside Leisure has had the same idea as Jerba, and come up with a twin-rear seat, rear-washroom camper with an elevating roof. Hillside's conversion is less automotive in look and feel, which will be attractive if you're after a more traditional motorhome interior.

PRACTICAL MOTORHOME VERDICT



The Jerba Sanna is very similar, on the face of it, to the Bilbo's Lezan – but we think there are some crucial differences. The first is that this is an elevating-roof camper, rather than a high-top, meaning that it will be less able as an all-year camper, but more competent as a daily driver. The second big difference is the price – in standard spec, the Sanna is more than £5000 cheaper than the Lezan. It's rougher around the edges than the Bilbo's, but considering the price the difference is much smaller than you'd expect – and as a daily driver, there's no contest: the Jerba wins hands down. This 'van will appeal to both couples seeking a camper with a toilet and young families who are seeking a 'van they can use every day and go on tour with. This is a fine bit of kit.

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