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LIVING WITH A...

...2008 Jerba Tíree

Beth Mellor tells her tale of empty-nest downsizing from a six-berth coachbuilt motorhome to a compact campervan from north of the border



Some good friends encouraged us to start camping in 1995. We towed a trailer tent and then a folding camper, with three children and five bikes, plus at least two small tents.

We finally admitted defeat after pitching and breaking camp six times in one holiday across northern Europe. What we needed was something more straightforward, and having exhausted the adventure of towing, we chose a Benimar six-berth coachbuilt, complete with microwave, full oven and extensive showering facilities inside and out. Even with all three teenagers on board, 'Beni' was fabulous and we all loved him, but a few years later we found ourselves more often a three, occasionally a four, but never a five, so we swapped 'Beni' for 'Monte'.

A Renault Master-based Devon Monte Carlo van conversion, Monte slept four and was exactly what we wanted. The motorhoming adventure continued.

However, far too soon we found ourselves driving two unused berths around the UK and Europe once more. Now, we were looking for a good quality VW van conversion with five

travelling seats and an occasional overnight guest bed, and we found ourselves on the road to North Berwick.

CAMPERS IN A 'VAN

We are primarily campers, so we fit shelves in 'van wardrobes and store stuff in the ovens, dedicated TV cupboards and showers. We like a 'van that enjoys narrow roads and parks discreetly in small villages. We also enjoy the lack of wet canvas when moving on!

Simon Poole and Cath Brookes founded Jerba Campervans in 2005 and on visiting their North Berwick workshop, we were instantly impressed with both the quality of the build and design and by the fact that they, like us, are 'campers' when in a motorcaravan. Simon talked us through options, offered solutions, discussed possibilities and then built our campervan just as we wanted it.

We decided a double bed was more important to us than a private toilet, so we opted for the Tíree layout. The decision to go for a high top over a rising roof was a good one for us: no wet canvas, lots more storage, less setting up. With the serious bits sorted, I had fun choosing fabrics, flooring and furniture.



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AT A GLANCE

- **PRICE FROM:** £28,000
- **BERTHS:** 4
- **BASE VEHICLE:** Volkswagen T5 short wheelbase window van
- **LAYOUT:** Compact high top campervan with rear bench bed/settee, boot area in rear
- **ECONOMY:** 30mpg

1 Pitched and barbecuing at Le Colombier, Moyaux in Normandy

2 On Jerbi's first trip in Reeth, North Yorkshire

3 Easily swivelled, the cab seats are exceptionally comfortable and the perfect distance from the rear seat for friendly conversation



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On Test 2008 Jerba Tíree

In July 2008, 'Jerbi' was ready to take us to Brown Moor Caravan Club Site in Hawes and help us continue our motorhoming adventure.

CAN I DRIVE NOW PLEASE?

The 'van' is easy to drive around town, use for work or to visit friends and grown-up children. It's also comfortable for long journeys and great fun to drive.

We chose the short wheelbase 2.5-litre 130 horsepower (six-speed manual) version of Volkswagen's T5 and have found it enjoys both top-gear driving on motorways and the ups and downs of Derbyshire and the Welsh hills. We could improve on fuel economy, but most of our journeys are long so we push on! We both enjoy the driving and take turns on longer journeys, each finding the driving position good, despite my other half being considerably taller than me.

The VW mirrors do the job well, the rear view mirror gives a rear view and there is also vision all around through the windows. The

reversing sensors give reassurance and were a good options-list choice.

We opted for a third rear seatbelt allowing safe transportation of the original gang-of-five. The RIB rear seat is a clever crash-tested bit of kit and was one of the reasons we initially looked at Jerba. Although slightly higher off the floor than ideal (we carry a step for any small dangling legs), it's comfortable for travel, lounging and sleep.

Driving Jerbi is definitely part of the holiday experience and we feel 'on holiday' as soon as we pull off the drive.

MAKING CAMP

On arrival at Hawes for our maiden mid-July trip, there wasn't really much that needed doing.

We thought about which way to pitch, opened the big side door and tailgate, plugged the electric cable into the socket (hidden in the rear bumper) and swivelled the cab seats while the kettle was boiling.

This is standard procedure on any trip and, if it's hot or slightly rainy, we might roll out the Fiamma awning, while one of us takes the chairs from the upper 'boot' area and erects them on the pitch. With little to set up and little to put away, leaving site for an outing or moving on to another site are equally easily managed. The only difference being to remember to take the 'motor van using this pitch' sign if leaving permanently! This simplicity is a big attraction of the 'van.

We camped in November at Chatsworth Park Caravan Club Site – finding a surprisingly spacious feel inside the Tíree, even with the doors closed. The time spent setting up awnings and chairs in summer is instead used for turning on the Webasto heater, closing the curtains and plugging in for iPhone-generated music.

I COOK

Wherever we are travelling I'm the cook. I love to make our meal on the first evening on site, even after a long journey.

Jerbi has a brilliant kitchen: the two-burner hob is wide enough to accommodate big pans



and there is enough workspace to have the sink lid open – kettle in situ – and still be able to open the large top-loading food cupboard. Food can also be prepared on a small chopping board placed in front of the hob.

The utensils drawer is wide, shallow and easily opened with one hand – my other hand is sometimes holding a wine glass! To one side of the food cupboard are two mains sockets, one 12V socket and the control panel.

We love the compressor-type fridge, as it's far simpler to use than a three-way equivalent: switch it on while on the driveway before leaving, then switch it off when on the driveway at the end of the trip. It works, doing what a fridge is meant to do and we can just forget about it. We do not find it noisy.

There is a huge cupboard under the sink and lovely little lockers above the kitchen

I LIKED

- The VW driving experience
- Travel seats/double bed
- Excellent design with no wasted space
- High-quality construction
- Proper kitchen with practical storage solutions
- 12V compressor-type fridge
- Easy-to-use heating
- Onboard, fixed fresh and waste water tanks
- Secure steel gas locker
- Neat hook-up and water connections
- Our Tíree's overall loveliness!

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A slightly lower rear seat squab

I DISLIKED

- The five-month (but understandable) waiting time for the build



FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Conversion:** 2008 Jerba Tíree
- **Base vehicle:** Volkswagen T5 short wheelbase window van
- **Power plant:** 2.5-litre turbo-diesel producing 130bhp, six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- **Gross vehicle weight:** 3,000kg
- **Payload:** 598kg
- **Layout:** Swivelling cab seats, offside longitudinal kitchen, rear bench bed/settee, boot area in rear
- **Exterior dimensions:** Length 4.89m (16ft 0.5in). Width 1.90m (6ft 3in). Height 2.56m (8ft 5in)
- **Berths:** 4
- **Bed sizes:** Lounge double 1.88m x 1.20m (6ft 2in x 3ft 11in). Roof double 1.80m x 1.10m (5ft 11in x 3ft 7.5in)
- **Length of ownership:** 3 years
- **Supplied by:** Jerba Campervans
- **Mileage covered:** 21,000 miles
- **Fuel economy:** 30mpg
- **Accessories/extras:** Alloy wheels, opening

side windows, cruise control, rear parking sensors, removable towbar, alarm, high roof, roof bed, Webasto space heating, driver's seat swivel, safe, extra sockets, rear speakers, wind-out awning, Heki rooflight, fifth seatbelt, waste water tank

- **Base vehicle service:** £250 (every 2 years/18,000 miles)
- **Habitation service:** N/A
- **MOT:** £35
- **Recalls:** None
- **Insurance:** £600 (Safeguard)
- **Price new today:** From £36,150
- **Cost of similar aged vehicle today:** £28,000 (estimate)
- **What went wrong:** Two failed LEDs, rattling locker door
- **Further reading:** MMM Summer 2011 features a full test of the Jerba Tíree
- **Contacts:** Jerba Campervans, 1 Tantallon Road, North Berwick, East Lothian EH39 5NF Tel: 01620-890374 Web: www.jerbacampervans.co.uk

windows, perfect for Whittard mugs! We chose not to have water heating, preferring to use the kettle, but did opt for onboard fresh and waste water tanks, fitted under the 'van.

I have found some useful recipes in French Camping-Car magazines as, like me, the French don't take ovens on holiday. We do, however, carry with us a Beucaire portable gas griddle, which increases the culinary options and protects our bedroom from the lingering odour of griddled fish or sausages that are heavy on the garlic.

BED 'N' BATH

The rear seat turns quickly into a double bed – large, flat and welcoming! We store the bedding (two Vango cotton sleeping bags, zipped together in a friendly way) in the big open space above the rear seat, which also houses the extra upper bed sections (if needed for the trip) and any bulky coats used between October and March.

The bed-making process is easily organised by one, while the other sits comfortably in a cab seat. Reading lights are everywhere. The upper bed is comfortable – with a Heki hatch for light and ventilation – great for two children, fine for one adult, but very friendly for two.

We carry a Fiamma portable loo, stashed neatly in one part of the large cupboard under

the rear seat. This can be tucked underneath the end of the bed overnight and pulled into the open floor space if needed in the small hours. The sink is multipurpose – washing pots, faces or cleaning teeth. The final stage in turning the lounge into a bedroom is to close the fully-lined (plain navy blue) curtains, which block out light and keep in the warmth. Initially, we used Silver Screens for the cab windows as we had some in our last 'van, but have found that the Jerba-supplied cab curtain does the job better, so we now leave the screens behind, even in November.

MORNING ROUTINE AND STORAGE OF STUFF

Our clothing is stored in the capacious cupboard above the cab and is one of the many advantages of the high-top roof. There's sufficient floor-space to get dressed, between the end of the bed and the cab seats, without folding away the bed. The last one up puts the bed away, the first one back from the shower puts the breakfast kettle on!

There are several small lockers above the windows suitable for storing pegs, games, tea-light candles, chargers, wine glasses and tea towels. Above the rear seat (incorporating rear speakers) is what we call our library locker: it's filled with books, newspapers and magazines.

We keep a large bucket (for hiding the washing-up, washing the windscreen and housing wet brollies) in part of the large cupboard under the rear seat. Behind the loo and the bucket is room for levelling chocks, which haven't been used, badminton rackets and boules. Also under here is the 110 amp hr leisure battery, heater master switch and the switch for the mains-operated leisure battery charger. There are two further cupboards at the rear offside in which we store footwear.

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BOOTING IT IN

The lower 'boot' is situated underneath the rear section of what becomes the bed. In here is the purpose-built, steel gas locker holding two cylinders, which can be accessed easily, even in the rain, while sheltering under the opened tailgate.

Next to the gas locker there is space for two large crates. In one of these we store the hook-up leads (we can now do 38 metres from the site sockets, proved at Camping Château de Chanteloup in France), the 'motor-van-using-this-pitch' signs (one in English and one in French), a folding step (to reach those parts I can't otherwise reach), a brush and dustpan and some tools.

The other crate holds drinks and any holiday purchases, such as French wine.

The upper boot forms the head end of the bed and in here we stow the free-standing table (with adjustable legs) and the two folding chairs.

THINGS LEARNT

- Jerba's curtains work even in the cab. We didn't need to buy extra insulated cab screens
- You need plenty of air at night in a high top, so have a Heki rooflight fitted as original equipment. We went back for a bigger one
- Just because there is room to take loads of clothes doesn't mean you have to!
- Sleeping more than two people works, but you need to know each other very well
- The 'van can seat and feed up to five people easily, but if you have extra guests, eat outside
- We don't miss all the stuff we used to take away in bigger 'vans at all
- Going camping together, but without the kids, is even better than we'd hoped! ■

4 The RIB seat makes a comfortable, roomy double bed

5 Five belted seats and a comfy double bed are essential features

6 Water inlet and electric hook-up points are neatly concealed behind a section of the rear bumper

7 My lovely kitchen: Jerbi's galley includes lots of storage and switch-on-and-forget fridge

8 Plenty of storage space in the 'boot'

WANTED

TELL US ABOUT OWNING YOUR MOTORHOME

We want a report on **your** motorhome. Let your fellow readers know the good, the bad and the statistics. You could earn yourself £250 if your report is chosen for publication. Once you have used your 'van for at least six months, send us up to 2,000 words (including an 'I like', 'I would have liked', 'I dislike' panel) and details for our facts and figures box, plus a dozen good quality photographs - including one of yourself with the 'van (sharp prints, slides or best quality digital pictures on CD are all acceptable), and leave the rest to us! Send it to Rachel Stothert, MMM, Warners Group Publications, West Street, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 9PH or email rachels@warnersgroup.co.uk