

TIPS ON BUYING A VW CAMPER VAN

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Published in the website aidan.co.uk by Aidan O'Rourke July 2005

- Age: Up to middle of 1967 (E reg) 'Split Screen', Beetle type 1200-1500cc engines as standard, 6 volt electrics, although the last 'Splits' (most E reg) were 12volt. Swing-arm rear suspension (like the Beetle) using extra reduction gears on axles to increase ground clearance. "Barn Door' type side opening doors.

- Age: 1967 onwards (F reg) 'Bay Window', Improved rear suspension & handling due to universal joint rear axles, improved front suspension with ball joints. 12 volt electrics, sliding side door. Walk-through interior from front seats. The Bay is upgraded in most areas over the Split and generally drives better. Bays had the option of the type 4 1700-2000cc engines from 1972 onwards, a stronger & more powerful unit than the Beetle type 1 unit. Also some Bays are fitted with servo brakes - much improved braking.

- What to look for when inspecting:

The most important thing to look for on either model is rust as it the most expensive and time consuming in repairs. The bottom 6" usually suffers all round. Look for signs of serious rust on chassis box sections especially at the front near the front axle and up to the front bumper, but also on the front and rear outriggers up to the sills. The roof guttering, sills, rear bottom corners, front panel edges (especially at window bottoms), wheel arches - all can disappear with rust. Floors can usually be reasonable, but could have patches anywhere in front of the rear wheels and also a common floor rust place is side to side behind the front seats (above a box section that gets wet from driving wind blast. If there are cover plates under the floor this can hide a horror story of trapped moisture and rust. Look for signs of filler/repairs all around, because if they've been done badly, they'll rust through in no time, and it's expensive/time consuming repair work. Check for rips in lifting roofs.

Any car that has been 'lowered' be wary of, because badly lowered or adjusted suspension can be dangerous, and the ride may be harsh. It may look 'cool' but you'll be uncomfortable on long journeys and you won't be able to see over hedges or over other cars, which is part of the fun. Neither will you be able to crawl underneath for any impromptu repairs.

Engine oil leaks near the gearbox flange usually mean an 'engine out' job to change the flywheel oil seal. Gearboxes are usually tough and synchros usually last, but listen for bearing whines, floppy gearchange is usual, but check all gears work and don't jump out of gear (accelerate and decelerate sharply in each gear with warm engine). Engine should not blow out smoke. Knocks are bad, rattles usually less serious. Lots of oil inside the engine compartment is bad news. Pull and push the bottom pulley wheel - if you feel a loud 'clunk - clunk' the engine needs a rebuild and will not last very long. Very very small movement is OK.

Watch out for inoperative heaters and controls, that often means it needs new heat exchangers and/or lots of new cables/pipes/grazed knuckles.

Petrol tank leaks - a smell of petrol inside the car usually means the rubber breather pipes in the tank chamber (in front of the engine behind a fire wall panel) need renewing - an 'engine out' time consuming and fiddly job. Or it could be the flexible filler pipe. Also tanks can rust through underneath if exposed to other rusty bits of bodywork underneath.

Steering should be direct with hardly any play. The steering box can be adjusted or replaced, but check it hasn't been fully adjusted and it's still wonky.

- Where to get repairs advice:

Look for an experienced VW Camper repair shop that's been there for more than 5 years and you can inspect a car that have been restored there or get a customer reference.

I am prepared to answer peoples queries only by email as much as I can and have 25 years air-cooled VW experience.

- Where to find spare parts:

The best places are eBay UK for a continuous supply of most parts,

www.justkampers.co.uk and www.vwheritage.com

Alan Schofield for most body panels.

German and Swedish.

Read VW Motoring magazine for other leads.

- The prices

Split:

Totally original and unrestored with MOT £8000 - £20000.

Restored with MOT £5000 - £15000 (Watch out for hidden patched over horrors)

MOT'd but needing work £3000 - £6000

A 'basket case' £800 - £2000

Bay:

Totally original and unrestored with MOT £5000 - £10000

You can still buy new Bays built in Mexico, vans (c£9000), minibuses (c£12000) or campers (c£20000) - see VW Motoring or Volks World for prices.

Restored with MOT £4000 - £9000 (Watch out for hidden patched over horrors)

MOT'd but needing work £1500 - £6000

A 'basket case' £500 - £1000

Reasons why people shouldn't buy one:

- Because 'it looks cool' or restored but you haven't looked underneath or don't want to constantly maintain it. These are old vehicles and usually have strange quirky characters, even if they have been restored. They need lots of maintenance. It looks immaculate but it has been restored superficially (like changing rooms - It won't last).
- It has a 6 volt system when you want reliability. (However 6 volt systems are often easier to convert to 12 volts that people realise - see www.nls.net/mp/volks/).
- You think it will be fast and/or economical.

VW website I recommend:

www.nls.net/mp/volks/

This is Speedy Jim's VW technical tips. Excellent and easy to understand even if you're a beginner.

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