

Change your view in a campervan

HOW TO GUIDE

Plan Your Campervan Build

So, you've taken the plunge and decided to convert your own van into a campervan.... How hard can it be, right?

People have been building their own campervans for decades, in fact as we found out from one recent client, the concept of a campervan has been around almost as long as the Automobile itself.

The client I refer to recently commissioned a full conversion with elevating roof from us. His father (who was in his nineties) was very interested in the end result, he remembered going away on holiday in a campervan as a young lad – he was the first to admit that things had moved on from the van he grew up with in the 1920's. The pictures below show him as a young lad sitting on the wheel arch of his father's beloved campervan, and in more recent times with his son's newly converted van.



Converting your van into a campervan can be a really exciting project, and the satisfaction of heading out for a weekend break in the van you've created is hard to beat. But don't be fooled into thinking it'll be a quick and straight transformation.

The truth of the matter, like any DIY job, is the end result can be excellent.... or a bit rough around the edges - depending on your planning and research! Campervan design has come on leaps and bounds in the last 10 years with lots of off the shelf products that can be fitted straight into your van.

To give you an idea of time scale, we spend around 120 hours transforming a standard panel van into a 4 berth Campervan – that's an awful lot of weekends and evenings if you're tackling it yourself.



BEFORE YOU START ANY ALTERATIONS TO YOUR VAN, HAVE A THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- How you will be using your van
- What is your budget
- What features are the most important to you
- What jobs do you feel comfortable completing yourself

In the past we have had customers visiting our show room with a wish list of appliances and facilities so long that the only things they'll be able to fit into the van once it's converted is a toothbrush and a spare pair of pants!

We also often have clients who originally think they want an integrated full side conversion, but on further discussion with us in regard to how they plan to use the van, realise that a smaller more flexible conversion would suit their requirements better.

The reality with smaller campervans is that there is always a trade-off between facilities and storage. If your campervan is kitted out to be self-sufficient for a month away, you also need to be able to fit enough luggage and essentials to make your trip comfortable.

If your average trips away are likely to only be for a long weekend, then it may be more practical to keep the van more versatile. The addition of a small removable pod unit and seating system are proving to be a very popular alternative. This is a quicker, cost effective way of converting your van and also easily allows the removal of facilities if you ever sell the van or need the van for other purposes...perhaps your friends rely on you to be their "Man with a Van" every once in a while.

Our Modular Pod Units are perfect for this scenario, maintaining maximum versatility of your van while giving a professional look and finish.



Once you've nailed down the type of conversion design that best suits your requirements then it's time to start to consider the order of installation.

GENERALLY, CAMPERVAN CONVERSION CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO 4 MAIN STAGES, AS LISTED BELOW:

- Fitting Windows / Elevating Roofs
- 1st Fix Electrics
- Panelling, Insulating, Lining and Flooring
- Installing Facilities, Units and Seats

We have a range of Clearcut Campervans: How to... Guides that cover the various practical elements of your van conversion. The focus of this How To Guide is directed at planning and design considerations before any work is undertaken.

Let's look at the first phase;

FITTING WINDOWS AND ELEVATING ROOF

Here at Clearcut Campervans when we start to convert a van in our workshop the first stage of the fit is the elevating roof and window cut-outs. These are obviously the most disruptive jobs of the build (and for most people the most nerve wracking)



Cutting in a roof or window is a messy job that requires a good amount of preparation and fore-thought. It will be necessary to remove the headlining (if you're fitting an elevating roof) and to cover and protect all exposed areas of the van internally and externally, we use a full external cover and a series of plastic covers for the internal cab. Cutting the windows will require similar but more localised preparation.

When installing an elevating roof many self-builders undertake the services of professional campervan installers. Some companies offer a partial fit on elevating roofs, undertaking the trickier part of the fit such as installing the strengthening frame, roof hinges, air struts and roof cap. The finishing and trimming of the roof is then left to the self-builder to keep costs down. Companies such as Westdubs offer such a service for the fitting of their roofs.

It is possible to add an elevating roof at a later date, *but we don't recommend this* unless it can't be avoided, for example because of budget constraints. If you have to go down the route of fitting the roof at a later date expect considerable extra work and expense in the roof's fitting. Re-trimming, furniture reprofiling, rewiring and potential damage to existing conversion furniture are all points of issue.



1ST FIX ELECTRICS

Running the main electrical routes before the side walls and ceiling is panelled and lined is something that can be easily overlooked. Planning is needed to consider where led lights, switches, sockets and 240v inlets will be situated, as well as all the main appliances. We usually include a centrally positioned earth point that cables can terminate at, rather than multiple earth points. You may well need earth points for appliances such as Fridges as well as 240v and 12v Earths to your Power management system. If these haven't been allowed for it can be problematic to find suitable Earth points once the van is panelled and lined.

PANELLING, INSULATION, LINING AND FLOORING

This will be covered in more detail in the other relevant How To ...Guides. However, points to consider are touched on below.

The ideal scenario would be to cut your window apertures and prepare the metal edges, then panel and line the van, and only once the lining is complete would you fit the windows. The reason for this is that the cutting in of the carpet lining is much easier without the windows, or any window trim in place. However, often with self builds the vans are used on a weekly basis and it isn't possible to have the van windowless for an extended period of time.

If you do have to fit the windows in before carpet lining the van then make sure the metal cut edges of the window have been properly rust treated, and that any trim required is added to the window opening before the window is installed – this is important, you won't be able to fit window trim after the window is installed.



We always fit the ply flooring after the panelling and carpet lining has been installed. This way you don't end up getting blobs of spray adhesive on the ply, and also it allows the carpet lining to be taken below the level of the plywood making it easier to finish the flooring edge later on. It's worth Pre-cutting the 12mm ply before the lining is carpet installed and test the fit to make sure it will easily drop in place once the carpet lining is installed. (Allow 3-5mm clearance – it doesn't want to be too tight otherwise you will damage the carpeting when the flooring is positioned.)

INSTALLATION OF FACILITIES

So finally, we get to the actual layout of the van and its facilities. By now you'll hopefully appreciate the planning required before you start building your campervan furniture. There can be a lot of frustration at this stage if thought hasn't gone into the end result you want to achieve. There are 3 main routes you can choose, and we hope that here at Clearcut Campervans Ltd we can be of assistance for all options.

- **Build from Scratch** – This is one of the most rewarding but challenging options. We sell everything you will need from sheets of Furniture board through the latches and furniture trim, and our shop staff and technicians can help advice on products and quantities needed for your build
- **Install a Flat pack** – There are quite a few companies that specialise in Flat pack furniture kits, but do your research, also don't under estimate how much work is involved in putting flat pack conversions kits together. Most Flat pack kits don't come with appliances. We sell a variety of Appliance kits that come with everything you will need for installation, this is the most cost effective way of purchasing the components needed. We can also customise appliance packages to your requirements. You also can benefit from downloading our Free How To Guides to assist with your appliance installation.
- **Install our Modular Pod units** – We have a wide selection of pre-built pod units that can be paired with a seating system to give a great look to your van. Combining a professional finish with the enjoyment of self-building your campervan. There are a multitude of finishes and colour to choose from and the pods can be delivered on a pallet for self-fitting or installed in our workshop by our experienced technicians.



When designing and building your layout and furniture be as creative and as individual as you like. A few bits of advice we have found useful over the years that hopefully will aid your own build.

- Don't over complicate things just for the hell of it, it sounds obvious, but in a small van conversion simple and stylish is generally best. If you're considering having sliding units, bits that pop up and twizzle and flash you'll also need to have a thick wallet and a serious amount of leisure time to direct at the project....and possibly a doctorate in engineering and electronics!
- If you can, have all the main components including your chosen seating system, fridge, hob and sink to hand before you start planning and measuring up your conversion....and definitely before you start building any furniture. Drawings, sketches and even CAD can be useful in planning your van conversion but be prepared to do alterations on the fly. Vans generally aren't square boxes and very often drawn designs overlook the more intricate problems that only arise as the conversion takes shape.

As an example, often customers will book in with us to have their seating fitted after undertaking most of the self-build themselves. Unfortunately, every year we have customers who have spent a lot of time fully fitted their side furniture only to have over looked door aperture positions or the width of the seat required. In these instances, it isn't possible to fit the seat and the whole conversion furniture needs to be taken out and slimmed down.... nightmare!

All said and done, don't be put off converting your own campervan, it's becoming more and more popular to do so. We continually see excellent self-converted vans visiting our shop and are always interested in the end result of your endeavours.

All you need to create a campervan are some modest DIY skills, a stack of free weekends.... Oh, and a list of our How To Guides.

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