



Whatever Nexa?

TECHNICAL: Bilbo's Nexa	
RRP/as tested:	£27,950/£30,680
Engine:	1896cc, in-line 4-cyl Pump Düse, turbodiesel 85bhp
Options fitted:	1896cc 104bhp @ 3500rpm, 185lb ft @ 2000rpm £800
Other options:	2500cc, 5-cyl 130bhp or 174bhp TDI engines (£1800 or £3600)
Transmission:	FWD, five-speed on four-cylinder engines, otherwise six-speed
Overall length:	4.89m (16ft 0in)
Int length from dash:	3.25m (10ft 8in)
Overall width:	1.90m (6ft 3in) exc mirrors 2.242m (7ft 4 1/4in) inc mirrors
Overall height:	2.00m (6ft 6 3/4in)
Max internal height:	2.032m (6ft 8in)
Internal width at C pillar:	1.59 (5ft 2 1/2in)
Fuel/economy:	Diesel/34.2mpg/
Tank cap:	80 litres (17.6gal)
Max technically permissible laden mass:	3000kg
Mass in running order:	2280kg (est. inc driver, 95% fuel, 100% water)
Payload:	720kg (est)
Fresh/waste water:	35/35 litres (7.7gal)
Club Insurance:	Rural (EX6) £179, urban (N6) £289, both with £150 excess
NCC approved:	To be submitted
Options:	Metallic paint: £500, colour-coded roof £350, alloy wheels £480, offside sliding door £600, blown-air heating.
Vehicle supplied for test by:	Bilbo's Design, Marfield, Eastbourne Road, South Godstone, Surrey RH9 8JQ. Tel: 01342 892499



VERDICT

Construction	●●●●●
On the road	●●●●●
Living	●●●●●
Kitchen	●●●●●
Sleeping	●●●●●
Washroom	●●●●●
VERDICT	●●●●●

GEORGE HINTON GETS HIS TAPE MEASURE ON ANOTHER NEW VW T5 CONVERSION, THIS TIME FROM BILBO'S

ABOVE: The Nexa is ideal for getting close to nature
BELOW: Production kitchens will have longer worktops and a deep storage drawer below the sink

John Page gave you a fine introduction to the new Volkswagen T5 in February with his review of the Torbay conversion. We've since had a close look at one of the new offerings from Bilbo's on the same vehicle, also in prototype form. Bilbo's is effectively transferring all its established T4 conversions on to the new base

vehicle with new but recognisable names to differentiate them. Hence Celeste becomes Celex, and Nektar becomes Nexa. The new Komba is an introductory versatile multi-purpose model, ideal as a base station for the pursuit of active sports in remote places, while a new Breakaway is on the cards.

For this test we chose the Nexa, which contrasts nicely with Torbay's Fusion, having a rear kitchen layout and separate rear belted travel seats that convert to two decent single beds.

CONSTRUCTION

Although boxier than its predecessor and wider at roof level, leading enthusiasts to expect a bigger, roomier roof area on T5 camper conversions, that has not been borne out in practice. Some converters are adapting T4 elevating roofs but, while Bilbo's is new, it's not wider. This is largely because VW has so far refused to divulge the dimensions and position of the maximum permissible aperture converters can cut without invalidating the vehicle warranty.

Could this have anything to do with the fact VW is about to launch its own European camper model? (As far as we know this will be left-hand drive only and not available in this country).

Anyway, converters are playing safe and not cutting through anything except the roof sheet metal, and since there is wider structural steel in the upper cant rails than on the T4, there is no net gain in shoulder room when standing. The aperture measures 1840 x 870mm (6ft 1/2in x 2ft 10in). However, there are gains elsewhere: cupboards are deeper at the top and there is more 'shelf' area when on site. This also provides an area for the roof bellows to fold onto. Disappointing all the same.

Bilbo's side-lifting roof weighs just 22kg, so with twin gas-spring assistance it is very easy to operate and offers consistent headroom of around 6ft 8in along its length (1.48m/4ft 10 1/4in roof closed). Loops are now welded inside the bellows on all three sides so you can pull them in to prevent trapping under the GRP cap on closing, while a simple



modification has improved the securing system: instead of having to thread a webbing strap round a loop on the body, a pressed steel hook is attached to the webbing. Now just a quick tug on the end of the webbing pulls the roof down snug, while a thumb on the sprung snibber releases it with equal ease.

A third roof improvement is to the side window blinds. Instead of zips or Velcro, which eventually wear out, there

is now a metal tube pocketed in the top of the blind and this simply tucks up behind the tubular roof canvas frame. Simply perfect! It was the same on the road – rattle-free, with no wind noise when closed tightly.

The other major change is to an inboard water tank, partly to improve capacity and ground clearance, partly to improve frost protection and partly to avoid disturbing the polyester panels which the T5 has for underbelly corrosion protection (hence an eight-year VW warranty). It is located at the rear beside the gas locker, which now takes a 3.9kg propane cylinder or two Campingaz 907s, and saves another hole being cut in the bodywork (there is just one, for the mains hook-up inlet on the offside).

Body cavities are all insulated with closed-cell insulation (doesn't hold water), while the flooring is now 15mm plywood pre-laminated with vinyl.

ON THE ROAD

The Nexa came with the same 104bhp 1.9 turbodiesel powertrain as in February's test, so we won't repeat the comments recorded there. Having previously driven T5 Caravelles with both the 130bhp and 174bhp 2.5-litre engines, I would say the 104bhp unit, which

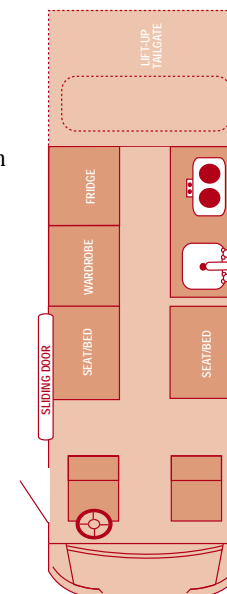
replaces the 2.4-litre 104bhp unit from the T4, has all the power most motor caravanners will want (0-60mph in 18 seconds), and it's a good value upgrade over the basic 85bhp unit.

The bigger motors are probably worth considering only if you plan to tow a caravan or heavy boat, of which the T5 is more than capable (100kg noseweight capacity). The only unusual thing about the test vehicle was that I stalled it twice moving off from standstill, which I suspect is due to the demands of the power steering pump; but you soon learn to compensate.

Steering is nicely geared at 3.3 turns between locks, with an 11.9m turning circle. As tested, the overall height is 2.01m (just over 6ft 7in), but VW will shortly be offering Camper-spec base vehicles with the option of suspension lowered by around 30mm, which might help a few critical garaging and parking situations.

LIVING ABOARD

One or two prototype features need explanation: standard Nexas will have only one sliding door on the nearside, and the table shown stored at the back of the vehicle will clip to a wall rail on the offside. A second door is £600 extra,



LEFT: Water filler and gas locker are accessed via tailgate

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Seats are relatively easy to convert to beds; latest T5 dash oozes VW quality; T5's large roof 'shelf' is visible here; alloy wheels are options



motor caravan test



ABOVE: Electric compressor refrigerator means gas is used only for cooking (optional heater is diesel fired)

including a second table on a cranked steel swivel-arm, as shown on the nearside of the prototype. Production models will also have Caravelle-style opening windows at the door positions; these pop inwards to slide, leaving a completely flush exterior window when closed. Further ventilation is available on site from mesh vents at the ends of the roof bellows.

Storage is mainly below the two RIB rear seats, the wardrobe being more shelf (two, measuring approximately 320mm x 310mm/13in x 12in) than hanging space (a 200mm/8in length rail only). The door opening is 780 x 360mm (30 x 14in). Space under the bottom shelf is shared by the Sargeant battery charger, while a new digital electronic control panel is set above the Waeco 50-litre compressor refrigerator. This draws up to 70W at 12V, so a hefty 135Ah battery is supplied, mounted beneath the wardrobe.

The largest Porta Potti 465 with electric flush pump is supplied, powered by dry-cell battery. A modesty curtain will screen the area behind the rear travel seats.

Space heating is available but water heating is not offered, even as an option. We check-weighted the vehicle at 2195kg including 75kg driver and 80% fuel, but with empty water tanks and

no gas cylinder. That still leaves a generous payload for two or two-plus-two.

KITCHEN

With both flush glass covers lowered, there is a useful workspace measuring 1110 x 535mm (3ft 8in x 1ft 9in). Two burners with piezo ignition and a separate SMEV under-counter grill unit provide the normal type of camper kitchen facility, matching the stainless sink with its fold-down tap.

A large, shallow drawer under the grill houses a plastic cutlery tray with space to spare, while main food storage will be in the shelved cupboard below the sink.

Production vans will have a mains power point on the end of the kitchen unit to complement the one on the forward-facing side of the wardrobe. Good lighting is by twin-tube fluorescent lamp set directly above the sink.

SLEEPING

Conversion to night use involves spinning the cab seats to face rearwards (armrests will appear on production), then doing the usual base and backrest flip with the double-sided rear travel seats. Both beds are 24in wide for most of their length, 6ft

1/2in on the steering wheel side and to be extended to 6ft 3in on the nearside. I always find RIB seats too hard as beds, so we carry a couple of Li-Los for the last word in comfort, but I know others appreciate a hard mattress.

Lighting is something else, with just two map lights in the living area, not easily reachable while sitting in bed reading. This too will be corrected in production. There are no window blinds or flyscreens, just plain grey curtains on Silent Gliss alloy track, with similar treatment for the cab area.

VERDICT

Like others sharing the same base vehicle, the Nexa offers a very durable conversion (no rattles apart from the usual grill pan) that's good to drive and compact enough to run as a sole vehicle.

Its twin beds will have a special appeal to many, while if you plan the sort of trip that demands more storage, long-wheelbase versions will be on offer later in the year at around £1500 extra, or there are fixed high-roof models with more storage 'upstairs'.

Insurance quotes: 0800 028 4809

Info: www.billbos.co.uk