



# STYLE TRIAL

Volkswagen's Transporter has regenerated. **George Hinton** tests one of the first conversions on the road

I'VE ALWAYS had a soft spot for small campers, having lived with one for over 80,000 miles in my younger days. Both the vehicles and their equipment have improved vastly in the intervening years, as do one's needs and expectations, but it is good to know there are still dedicated small teams of craftsmen dotted around the country, willing and able to craft a vehicle from a basic package to suit your exact needs.

One such team can be found at Concept Multi-Car of Hythe in Kent, which specialises in German Reimo motor caravans, which it builds up from kits. Sometimes known as CMC-Reimo, it will build you a conversion on a new or used VW van (other makes are available, but

this is still by far the majority favourite). Or, if you fancy your carpentry and metalwork skills, plus gas, electrical and flooring expertise, you can just buy furniture to fit to your own van.

However, what took us down to Hythe on a damp February day was the chance to see CMC's impressive new premises at the front of its business estate just off the seafront road, and to take a first look at the brand new VW Transporter, here sporting a versatile TrioStyle conversion.

First, let's look at the new VW. The 2010 incarnation of the T5 gets a new nose, reflecting the latest style of the manufacturer's passenger models, and a new dash featuring white-on-black liquid crystal instrumentation. More

importantly, it receives a new range of diesel engines to comply with the latest Euro 5 emission requirements. In one sense it is only one engine, as all variants now share the same 2.0-litre, four-cylinder block, saving cost and weight over the outgoing five-cylinder models.

It is available with four different power ratings, from 82-178bhp (84-180PS), and three gearboxes – five-speed manual on the two lower power options and six-speed on the rest, with a new seven-speed DSG automatic alternative or 4MOTION all-wheel drive on the twin-turbo 178bhp.

Fuel consumption and emissions are greatly improved, with CO<sub>2</sub> at 198g/km for the 82/100bhp motors and 203/205g/km for the larger pair. Annual road tax is thus only £125.

All models now include Electronic Stability Program (ESP) with hill hold assist as standard, driver and passenger airbags and automatic hazard light activation under emergency braking.

The downside is a huge £3000 price increase over the previous model, which probably means something over £24,000 to drive the bare van out of the showroom. As a VW-approved converter, CMC has access to the special motor caravan spec base vehicle which, raised to SE spec, has body-colour bumpers, full

wheel trims, electric windows, electric folding and heated mirrors, heating ducted to the rear via the B-pillars, factory-fitted windows and upgraded radio/CD player.

The 82bhp unit is not available in this spec, which starts at 100bhp and comes in a choice of seven colours apart from solid white or red. CMC is also looking at converting basic van-spec vehicles if there is a demand.

### CONSTRUCTION AND LAYOUT

The conversion is 'classic VW' – that is, with all the furniture along the offside, with a variable floor area, 3ft 1in to 5ft 4in long, depending on where you position the bench

seat on its floor tracks. The Reimo bench has inbuilt three-point belts for three passengers and in this latest version has recessed head restraints that don't need to be removed at bed time.

There's never a huge amount of storage in an elevating-roof model (fixed high-roof option is the same price), so once you've filled what there is, including under the rear seat, you have a large concealed area under the rear hinged bed cushion, where many people nowadays stow lidded plastic storage boxes.

Furniture is in grey laminate-surfaced lightweight plywood, solid enough that it can have tracks machined into it to guide the sliding wardrobe door vertically downwards. You get space for two 'large' Campingaz 907 cylinders in the ventilated cupboard aft of the wardrobe and there's another storage cupboard above this.

Gas bottle, toilet and mains cable are available as a 'starter pack' if you don't already own such items.

The Reimo roof is well-proven, and in this rear-hinged form gives plenty of headroom – over 7ft at the front, tapering to 5ft 6in as far back as you can stand. Once it is pushed up on its gas struts, you can ease the optional roof bed's hinged baseboard back and up out of the way on its own struts to give you full headroom.

Water storage is beautifully simple – two 12-litre jerrycans with submersible pump live under the bed extension. There's no built-in waste tank, a 20-litre flexy-tank being supplied to connect to the sink waste tube on site.

The insulated ply floor has a non-slip vinyl surface while the cab comes with black carpet courtesy of Volkswagen. Both cab seats swivel and the rear bench can be brought close enough for four to eat together.

### ON THE ROAD

CMC had an unconverted 140bhp vehicle for us to try and it is a very willing performer with the same slick six-speed gearbox its five-cylinder predecessor >>

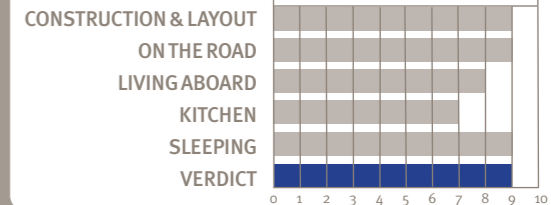


Well-designed driver environment



Useful stowage space at rear

### RATINGS



RRP/as tested	£36,525OTR/£38,201
Base vehicle	VW Transporter T5 SWB Motorhome window van SE
Engine	1968cc in-line 4-cyl TDI common-rail. Transverse
Power	100bhp (74.5kW) @ 3500rpm
Torque	184lb ft (250Nm) @ 1500-2500rpm
Drivetrain options	138bhp engine £1763; DSG gearbox* £1645; 178bhp engine £3643; 4MOTION all-wheel drive* £2585. * On 138/178 only
Transmission	5-speed manual, FWD
Overall length	4.89m (16ft)
Overall width	2.26m (7ft 5in) inc mirrors
Overall height	1.98m (6ft 6in)
Internal headroom	2.13-1.68m (7ft-5ft 6in)
Fuel/econ/tank	Diesel/34.4mpg/17.6gal (80 litres)
MRO (inc driver, 90% fuel, 50% water)	2255kg (44.4cwt)
MTPLM	2800kg (55.1cwt)
User payload	545kg (10.7cwt)
Options fitted	Climate control £881; overhead roof locker £325; roof bed £470
NCC approved	No – meets all ECE requirements

Club insurance: 0800 0284809 • Info: reimo.com

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Hythe is an Old English word meaning 'landing place'

Vehicle supplied for test by Concept Multi-Car, Unit 1, Pennypot Industrial Estate, Hythe, Kent CT21 6PE. Call 01303 261062 or see conceptmulti-car.co.uk



used. The short-wheelbase TrioStyle conversion is not heavy, our test vehicle tipping the weighbridge at 2255kg; and, although it only had the base 100bhp engine with five forward gears, performance was not wanting, thanks to oodles of torque. A 0-50mph time of 11.6 sec confirmed this.

Some elevating roofs have a moulded spoiler in front to prevent wind noise, but the Reimo has only a bonded rubber blade. As a result, we experienced some low-frequency noise as the wind rushed over the smooth top edge, but it wasn't loud enough to spoil the trip by any means. Pleasingly, there was no additional noise from furniture or fittings.

The ride is comfortable, the VW as sweet to drive as ever, and economy a pleasing 34.4mpg, which could improve further with running-in. It is certainly viable as an only or second vehicle and the 545kg available payload (10.7cwt) would be useful for business or pleasure (200kg upgrade available if you forego the 20mm-lowered suspension).

**LIVING ABOARD**

It isn't feasible to fit an electric step to the side entrance, so if 16in, plus the 3in internal step, is an uncomfortable height, you would have to pack a portable step. When moving from cab to the rear, the comfort seats have only a 7½in gap between the armrests.

While the rear bench seats three for travel, it would be cramped for more than two to dine from. If you want a load-carrier, the bench can be removed completely in seconds, though it's no lightweight task.

The heavy table-top, stored in the locker above the bench, clamps to the front of the sliding bench using a cranked, chromed tube that stows inside the wardrobe. It is acceptably rigid for dining and the short length does at least leave room so you can slip around into your seat.

Hanging space is limited by the taper of the body sides: the 21in-wide wardrobe is 10in deep halfway up, but the front-to-rear hanging rail is actually a four-inch cupboard handle! There are odd spaces in which to stuff things: the top of the wheelarch cover lifts off, for example.

Ventilation should not be a problem: the roof canvas has a fixed open mesh strip above the fixed front flexible window, then there are huge mesh panels each side. Only one lower window – that in the door – slides open, but that on the offside can be specified as an opener as an option.

**KITCHEN**

You only have one sink, of course, so site ablutions are normally the order of the day. There's a good-size (13½in) matching



Dometic/Cramer stainless sink and basic two-burner hob (no igniter), both with glass lids to expand the 8½in of laminate work surface at the right-hand end.

A wide but very shallow drawer under the cooker and a deeper unfitted drawer alongside mean you can choose where you stow cutlery.

Cooking isn't too much of a chore once the table is up to give extra work space, and you have the ledge round the open roof, as well as two shallow shelves above the kitchen, on which to stow bits and pieces.

The adequate 40-litre Waeco compressor fridge is powered from a VW second 80Ah battery located under the passenger seat, and requires no external vent grilles. The mains electrical inlet is located under the rear floor, though you can have it inset into the body side at no cost. A larger 105Ah gel battery can be supplied as an option if required.

Water heating, like space heating, is optional, but balancing space and cost, you are probably better off with a kettle. The 3-litre Elgena compact water heater offered is electric only, but runs on both 12V and mains. VW's rear 'parking' heater has shot up in price to £2000, though that does include the second battery (£223 separately). An Eberspacher heater can be retro-fitted for £1725.

**SLEEPING**

Creditably, the Reimo's rear seat unfolds to make a longer bed than you find in many coachbuilt motor caravans at 6ft 5in

x 4ft 2in.

Curtains are provided all round.

The roof bed will please tall children too: there's only 40mm of padding, but it's 5ft 11in long and 3ft 7in wide.

Headroom up there is a generous 2ft 4½in at the head end, tapering to over 6½in at the foot. No lighting is there as standard, but various types of lamp with flexible stalks are available.

General lighting comes from a pair of 30-LED striplights, one over the kitchen and one beside the bench seat, and there will also be a reading light on a short stalk near the wardrobe in production vehicles.

**VERDICT**

If you know just what you want from a campervan, you are bound to be pleased with a Reimo conversion, as it can be built and kitted out to your exact requirements.

All told there are five different models all at very similar prices, including the Ci-Elle, which caters for those who need a fitted cassette toilet at the back, or six-seater options. Yes, you can buy a more luxurious coachbuilt for far less money, but these are different vehicles serving a different purpose. The choice is yours. ■

Top: glass covers provide extra worktop area

Above: longer bed than in many coachbuilts

