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myAutomate

# YOUR GUIDE TO THE BASICS

More and more people are discovering the pleasures of touring, but there's a lot of information to take on board. In the first of our new series of cut-out-and-keep supplements on a selection of hot motorcaravanning topics, we look at the basics!

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**Also available as a FREE ebook**  
see [www.practicalmotorhome.com/know-how](http://www.practicalmotorhome.com/know-how) to download yours!







myAutomate

# The perfect **travel companion** for your touring holiday



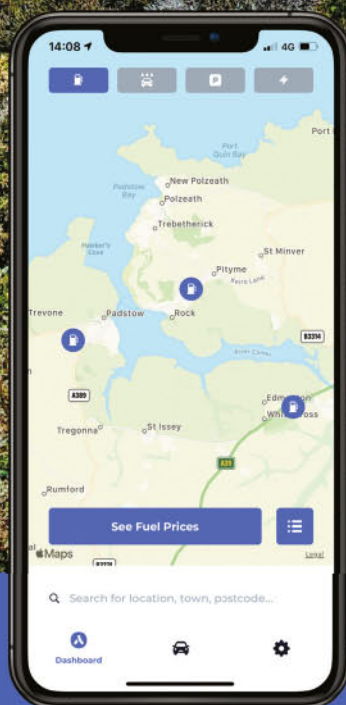
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ESSENTIAL FIGURES

# NUMBERS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Before you start looking for your first motorhome, you need to know some crucial facts and figures – here’s the lowdown on weights, speed limits and more

## Which motorhomes can I drive?

**Did you pass your driving test before 1 January 1997?**

✓ You can drive a motorhome up to 7500kg on your B+C1 licence. When you reach 70, you must submit a medical form to renew your licence to continue driving a motorhome over 3500kg, and you will need to do this every three years.

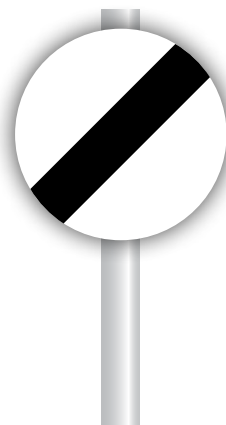
**Did you pass your driving test after 1 January 1997?**

✓ You can drive a motorhome up to 3500kg on your B [car] licence. To drive a motorhome heavier than 3500kg, you must take a C1 test.

## What’s the speed limit for motorhomes?

In the UK, motorhomes with an unladen weight of more than 3050kg are restricted to the following speeds.

**Built-up areas: 30mph**  
**Single carriageways: 50mph**  
**Dual carriageways: 60mph**  
**Motorways: 70mph**






## How do I load my motorhome correctly?

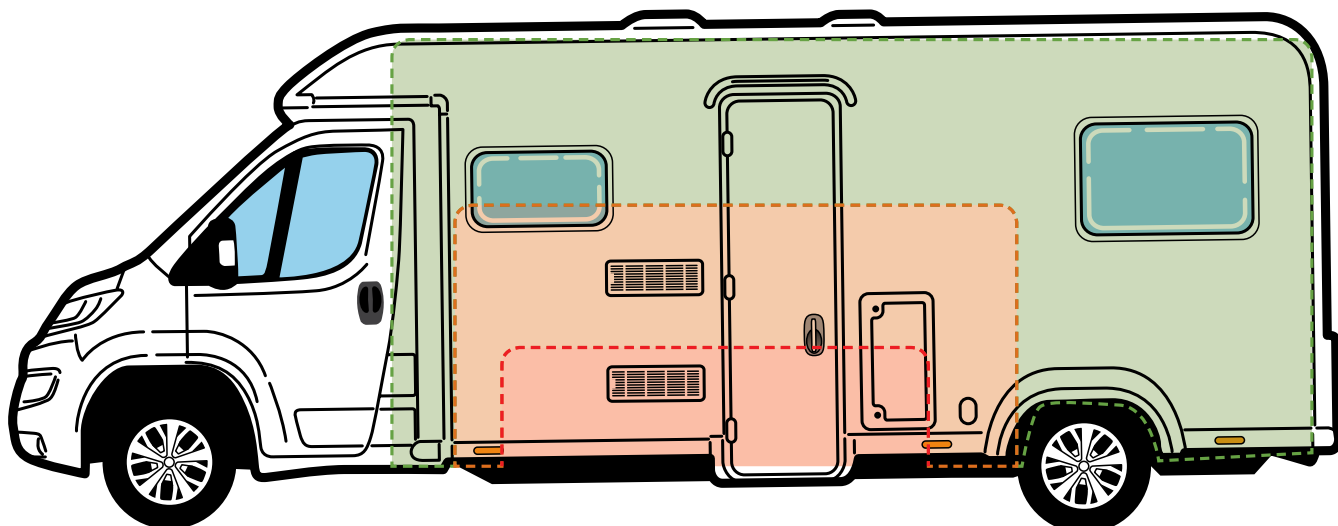
**Heavy items** such as TVs or boxes of wine should be stowed low down, as close to the floor as possible.

**Mediumweight items** such as clothing should be loaded below head height.

**Lightweight items** are the only things that should be stored in overhead lockers.

If your motorhome has a rear garage, do not exceed the manufacturer’s stated weight limit. For more information about how to load your ‘van, go to [practicalmotorhome.com/loading](https://practicalmotorhome.com/loading).

-  **Lightweight items**
-  **Mediumweight items**
-  **Heavy items**





## BUYING YOUR

# FIRST MOTORHOME

Whether you're buying new or pre-owned, there are key points to consider when you head for the forecourts. Sammy Faircloth offers some expert advice

**P**urchasing your first motorhome might seem a little daunting. There are so many things to think about, many of them completely new to first-time buyers. This article aims to outline those essential points, allay any worries and help to make buying an easier, less stressful process.

### Licence restrictions

First, and most important, does your licence allow you to drive a motorhome or campervan? This depends on your age and the vehicle's maximum authorised mass (MAM). This is its weight plus the maximum load it can carry, sometimes referred to as the maximum technically permissible laden mass (MTPLM).

The DVLA website explains the rules for licences as follows:

#### ■ Licences issued before 1 January 1997

To drive a 'van with a MAM of 3500–7500kg, you'll need a category C1 licence [which you should have]. To drive one with a MAM of over 7.5t, you must have a category C licence, which might require an additional test.

#### ■ Licences issued from 1 January 1997

You will hold a B licence, which allows you to drive a vehicle with a MAM of up to 3.5t (3500kg). To drive anything heavier, an additional test is needed.

Another point to note is that, as of 1 January 1998, if you are aged over 70 years and your driving licence has expired, you must pass a medical and an eyesight test.

So, before any thoughts of parting with your hard-earned cash, take a look at the reverse of your driving licence to see what permissions you have (1).

Visit [www.gov.uk/driving-motorhome](http://www.gov.uk/driving-motorhome) for further advice.



### Dealership or private sale?

Social distancing rules permitting, I would recommend beginning your research by visiting one of the many national shows (2).

This is a good place to view the latest motorhomes and campervans, from Europe as well as the UK, undertake a manoeuvring taster course, buy accessories and talk to the experts.

Dealerships will normally have the latest models on their forecourts (3), in addition to pre-owned 'vans (4). They also offer greater protection for buyers, with added warranties.

However, to maintain the warranty, you might have to service your 'van at that dealership, so make sure it is not too far from home. Unlike warranty work on cars, where any franchised dealer can put things right, motorhome owners have to return to the supplier.

Buying from an NCC-approved dealer gives you added peace of mind.

Purchasing from a private seller, at an online auction or through classified ads, can mean you pick up a bargain (5).

Useful extras, such as awnings, water containers, a leisure battery and so on, might be included. But check for an up-to-date service record, or that bargain could turn into a money pit!

### Inspections and checks

Always go and see the motorhome, don't rely on photographs. As well as checking the inside, do a thorough inspection of the outside – that means getting on your hands and knees and scrutinising underneath, too.

A motorhome has a service on the base vehicle, and a habitation service, which should be carried out annually.

Ask to see the service book. This will verify that it has been looked after and is in good working order.



#### Motorhomes

2011 Elddis Autoquest 180 6 berth

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Collection in person



Follow your nose – if you can smell damp, there might be a leak (although in winter they can smell a little fusty). Check the latest damp report from the habitation service.

If you can, carry out this examination with a fellow motorcaravanner – they will know through experience what to look for. Alternatively, contact a local mobile engineer; some are happy to offer their opinion.

Base vehicles and test drives

Bearing in mind hours spent behind the wheel, you need a vehicle that's a pleasure to drive.

In the past, some conversions and coachbuilds were underpowered. Now, more sophisticated power units, with electronic performance systems, are a feature on recent base vehicles.

Another question concerns imported vehicles, available in left-hand-drive form only. 'Left hookers' appeal to owners who take long tours abroad.

That might make sense, but trying to sell an LHD model in the UK at a later date can be a bit more tricky.

The matter of base vehicles could fill an entire book on its own, but the main point is that you should always insist on a test drive. Quite apart from engine

performance and road handling, there are less obvious concerns. For example, models equipped retrospectively with swivels on cab seats sometimes pose problems. The increase in seat height can upset a tall driver's eyeline.

In addition, shorter passengers using some types of swivel seat can find their legs don't reach the floor.

Motorhome design

The basic categories are conversions and coachbuilds. Conversions use an existing vehicle, such as a panel van. They can have a fixed roof, a high fixed roof (6) or an elevating roof (7).

Coachbuilds have a purpose-built bodyshell on a suitable chassis. They can be sub-categorised as overcab (8), low-profile, A-class and American (9).

Layouts

It is crucial to get the layout of your 'van right. Are you looking for a two-berth or a six-berth? Fixed bed or overcab bed (10)? Central or rear washroom?

As part of your research, sit down with those you intend to travel with, including any children. Make a wish list of what is important to you – bearing in mind there might have to be some compromises somewhere!

Involve the whole family in viewing. Lie down on the beds to check length and comfort (11), look under them to assess storage (12) and – although this might seem silly – sit on the toilet to check leg room. You'd be surprised how much this can vary (13)!

Additional costs

Owning a motorhome does involve some continuing costs. Here are a few things you might want to consider:

- Storage – at home, in a commercial unit, on a farm, or campsite storage
- Insurance and breakdown cover
- Annual habitation service (including damp check) and base vehicle service
- Gas cylinder, solar panel, leisure battery and 25m hook-up cable (not always included)
- Bike racks (14)
- Reversing cameras (15)
- Alarms/trackers

Final thoughts

This is a snapshot of some key things to think about before you make your decision. If you are still feeling a little unsure, there are plenty of 'try before you buy' schemes, where you can hire a motorhome for the weekend. ■





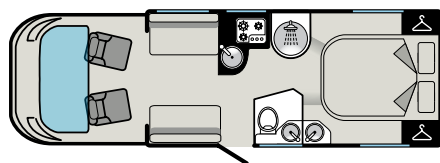
# MOTORHOME LAYOUTS EXPLAINED

Purchasing a motorhome or campervan is a major investment, and the most effective way to begin your research is by deciding on a floorplan, says Peter Baber

**H**ere is our expert rundown of some of the most popular motorhome layouts, who they are good for and who would be better off avoiding them.

Do make sure that you consider all of your requirements – both now and in the future – before deciding which one of them will be best for you!

## 1 Island bed, central washroom

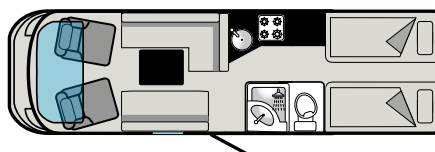


Although fixed-bed 'vans have only been around for the past two decades or so, the rear island bed has become the staple of many of the low-profile and A-class motorhome ranges.

It is almost always an in-line bed (transverse island beds are popular in caravans, but motorhomes tend to be narrower, so they are much rarer here), and that can mean the front lounge is not as big as it could be.

- + GOOD FOR** Couples who want real luxury
- LESS GOOD FOR** Large families or anyone looking for a roomy kitchen

## 2 Single beds, central washroom



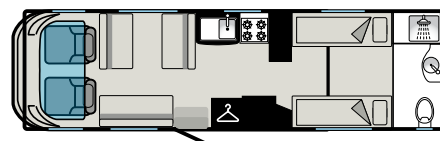
This has probably become the second most popular fixed-bed layout after the island bed. The single beds are usually (not always) high, to allow enough room for a garage underneath. They can often be joined together to form a sort-of double, usually by pulling out a central platform and inserting an infill cushion.

## 2 Single beds, central washroom



- + GOOD FOR** Couples who want luxury, but also prefer to have their own sleeping space, or friends travelling together
- LESS GOOD FOR** Large families or older people who might have difficulty climbing up into a high bed

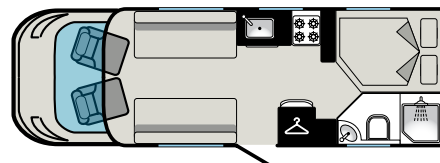
## 3 Single beds, end washroom



With low-level beds, this arrangement moves the washroom to the end of the motorhome. That usually leaves the central area of the interior feeling much more spacious. And as a bonus, you can even use the single beds as additional seating if it's a wet day and everyone wants to spend time inside.

- + GOOD FOR** People who like their motorhome interiors to be airy
- LESS GOOD FOR** Anyone who values their privacy, or people travelling with children who are liable to need the toilet during the night

## 4 French bed, corner washroom



French beds – double beds tucked into one rear corner – were once as popular as the island-bed layout, especially because they take up less room than the latter.

But people seem to have tired of either having to clamber over their partner to get out of bed at night, or having to sleep on the side of the bed that is a lot shorter.

As a result, French beds are now less common, although they do still hang on in various guises.

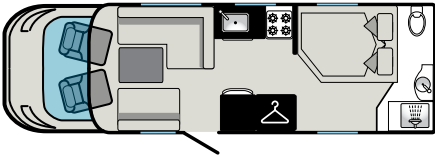
French beds with corner washrooms, for example, remain a useful solution where the length of the 'van is the critical point, because you can have a fixed bed, as well as a washroom, in a shorter vehicle.

## 1 Island bed, central washroom



- + **GOOD FOR** People who want a fixed bed in a shorter motorhome, or larger families where the parents want some privacy
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Those who are seeking a really luxurious washroom: the corner washrooms here are usually small, and often involve a toilet that is only accessible by going through the shower, or vice versa

5 French bed, end washroom

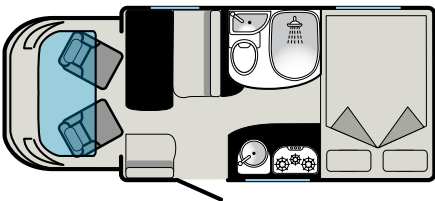


French beds are also just about hanging on with this type of layout, where the end washroom is tucked away out of sight behind the bed.

This arrangement gets over the problem of the washroom being poky, because these end washrooms are often huge. There's sometimes extra storage on the way down to the washroom door, too.

- + **GOOD FOR** People who still want the luxury of a large fixed double bed and a washroom on hand
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Anyone travelling with children who are liable to need the toilet during the night

6 Transverse bed



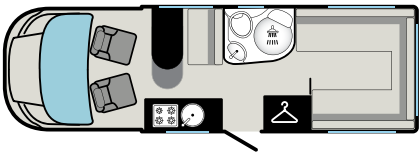
This is another layout that was once very popular, but has lost out because you have to climb over your sleeping partner to get out of bed at night. However, transverse beds are an even better way of saving space than French beds, so they remain popular in van conversions.

- + **GOOD FOR** People needing a shorter 'van but still lots of living and storage space
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Anyone who doesn't want to have to clamber over their partner to get out of bed

6 Transverse bed



7 Rear lounge

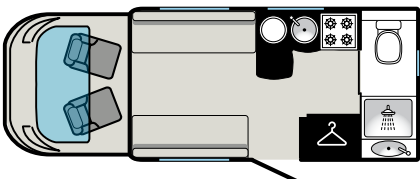


Rear lounges offer a very sociable space for the whole family to gather together in, away from the cold.

If you go for a layout with a separate front dinette as well, the children can have their own area – or if it's just the two of you on tour, you can leave the double bed that you make up from the rear lounge in place and only use the dinette during the day.

- + **GOOD FOR** Bigger families, and anyone who might like to have large gatherings of guests in their motorhome
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Anyone who finds it a chore to have to put every bed together

8 End washroom

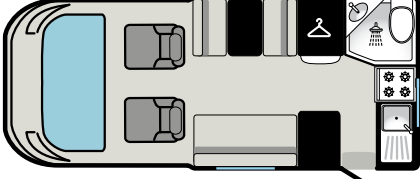


These are mainly two-berth models with no fixed bed, although coachbuilt versions can have drop-down beds to make them into four-berths.

You do get a lot of living and storage space inside here, although as these interiors don't always have rear seatbelts, they aren't necessarily that practical for family day-to-day use.

- + **GOOD FOR** Those who can't decide which clothes to leave at home!
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Those who don't want to make up a bed each night

9 End kitchen

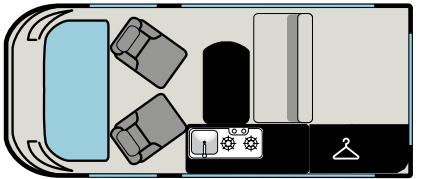


There are still a few motorhomes where much, if not all, of the rear area is given over to the kitchen.

This creates a much larger zone for food storage and cooking, usually well away from anywhere a bed might need to be made up, so the space will not be compromised early in the morning.

- + **GOOD FOR** Keen motorhome chefs who love to cook while on tour
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Those who want to have a large washroom

CAMPERVANS  
10 Rear bench, side kitchen

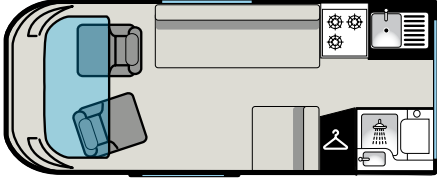


In this floorplan, you get a bench seat slung across the back of the vehicle, sometimes providing two travel seats, sometimes three.

Often the bench can slide forwards, to make room for carrying more luggage in the rear. It also folds out to make a double bed, usually in the rock'n'roll style.

- + **GOOD FOR** Anyone wanting to use the camper as a day-to-day vehicle as well
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Anyone who wants the comfort of having their own washroom

11 Side settee

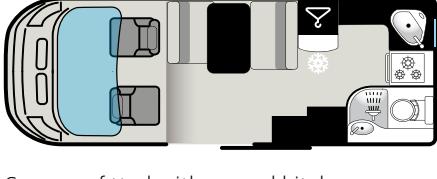


Touring in a campervan is supposed to be all about reconnecting with nature, and this layout lets you do just that, possibly more than any other.

Arrive on site, roll back the door, and you can sit and look out at the world... even if it is drizzling.

- + **GOOD FOR** Anyone who likes to turn up, sit back, relax and watch the world go by
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Anyone who finds putting beds together rather frustrating

12 End kitchen/washroom



Campers fitted with an end kitchen, or even having the luxury of an end washroom, are becoming more common these days.

In this layout, everything is usually tucked behind two forward-facing travel seats or a large bench.

The end kitchen in these floorplans tends to be L-shaped, and there is also often a hatchway out to the rear of the vehicle, so that you can easily serve anyone sitting at a table outside the 'van.

- + **GOOD FOR** Anyone who thinks campers can still have a bit of room for luxury
- **LESS GOOD FOR** Those who don't want to have to make up a bed each night

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE



## HOW TO BUY A USED

# MOTORHOME

Purchasing a 'van is a significant investment, even if you are buying pre-owned, so it pays to do some careful research before you part with your hard-earned cash, says David Motton



### 1 WHY BUY USED?

There are numerous excellent reasons for buying a pre-owned leisure vehicle, rather than a new one.

The most obvious is price. As soon as a motorhome hits the road for the first time, it starts to lose value. This steady loss in value is known as depreciation.

While depreciation has a negative effect on the first owner, it will benefit the second or third – you get the same vehicle, with the same layout, features and performance, at a reduced cost.

Just how much could you save? The rate at which a used vehicle depreciates will vary, depending on make and model, condition and mileage.

Some brands and certain models are more sought-after on the used market than others, and tend to keep their value better as a consequence.

Another upside to buying used that you might not expect is that owners of pre-owned motorhomes and caravans tend to be happier with their purchase.

In the 2020 *Practical Motorhome* and *Practical Caravan* Owner Satisfaction Survey, owners of used vehicles generally reported fewer faults.

We suspect this is due to the first owner identifying niggling problems and having them fixed under warranty.

### 2 CHOOSE THE RIGHT VEHICLE FOR YOUR NEEDS

As soon as you start your research, you will find there's a bewildering choice of layouts, makes and models to weigh up.

The best way to get to grips with the variety of models is to go to one of the big caravan and motorhome shows, or visit your nearest large dealership.

There, you will be able to take your time, and have a good look at a variety of vehicles, which will help you to get a better feel for what will suit you.

Basically, you are going to need enough berths and seatbelts for the number of people you plan to tour with. Then, think about how you will use the motorhome.

### 3 MAKE AND MODEL

When you've developed a reasonable idea of the type of layout that best suits your style of touring, you will be in a better position to start to research some of the makes and models that fit the bill.

Motorcaravanners can be very loyal to a particular brand, but do take a look at a variety of makes.

It's also worth your while to peruse the results of our most recent Owner Satisfaction Survey (issue 230), to find the most reliable motorhomes and the best places to buy them from.

### 4 WHERE TO BUY

Dealerships should have lots of choice, and the facility to service the vehicle before you purchase it. They are also likely to offer you a warranty.

Private sellers will typically be cheaper than a dealer, but they won't be in a position to offer you a warranty. So you will need to be very sure about the 'van's condition before you buy.





**‘You need to balance savings that you might make by not buying from a dealership against the peace of mind you get with dealer back-up and legal rights’**

## 5 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Wherever you eventually decide to buy your motorhome, make sure that you look over any vehicle very thoroughly before you commit to purchasing it.

At this stage, it's well worth taking a second pair of eyes with you, especially if you have a friend who's a competent home mechanic, or even an experienced motorcaravanner.

Water ingress can be an issue in any coachbuilt motorhome – keep a careful eye out for any sign of its presence. You can use a sign of damp as a bargaining chip, or better still, walk away and find a motorhome that displays no evidence of water ingress.

So far as possible, make sure everything is working as it should. Check all lights, electrical components, lockers, cupboard doors and so on.

It might not be practical to inspect every last feature and component, which is why it's also very important to have a good look through the vehicle's service history.

## 6 PAYING ON FINANCE

Financing your purchase is often easier than paying in one lump sum, but you do need to be careful not to spend more than you might have planned to.

Before you decide, think about your monthly income and outgoings. How much is going to be left to pay for the motorhome? Don't forget you'll need to budget for annual servicing, insurance, and storage if you don't have enough space to keep it at home.

Dealers can offer customers finance packages, but it's important to compare the interest rates with a personal loan.

Spend a few minutes researching this online and you will have a clearer idea of how much you would have to pay each month if borrowing from a bank, rather than arranging finance through a dealer.

## 7 YOUR RIGHTS

If your motorhome develops a fault, where do you stand? You'll be in a much better position if you buy from a dealership.

First, the chances are that the vehicle will have a warranty.

Second, your legal rights are stronger. Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, any goods (in this case, your motorhome) should be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose, and as described.

The term 'satisfactory quality' is the key here. What is and isn't satisfactory will vary, depending on the age and condition of the vehicle. A 10-year-old 'van can't reasonably be expected to be of the same quality as a new one.

Under the Act, you have up to 30 days to reject goods in return for a full refund. After that time, you can ask the dealer for repair or replacement.

For the first six months of your ownership, any fault is assumed to have been present at the point of purchase, unless the retailer can prove otherwise.

After that period of time, it will be up to you to show it was there all along.

In practice, it's best to work with the dealer to resolve any problem and stay on amicable terms if at all possible. Legal action is a last resort.

If you buy your motorhome privately, it must be 'as described'. But otherwise, you are not entitled to expect any repair, replacement or refund.

So you need to balance savings that you might make by not buying from a dealership against the peace of mind you get with dealer back-up and legal rights.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Buying a pre-owned motorhome can be the perfect route to acquiring an affordable, high-quality leisure vehicle. Just do your research first, and go into the purchase with your eyes open. ■

# KITTING OUT YOUR MOTORHOME

One of the many great things about motorcaravanning is being able to take plenty of kit with you – but you do need to be organised! Tony Brown shows you how

**H**aving put a good deal of thought and effort into researching your new 'van, to ensure that it meets your needs, and laid out a substantial sum to buy it, the next important step is to load it correctly and thoughtfully with items you are most likely to use during your travels.

If, like us, you are moving on from a previous motorhome, you will probably have most of your contents put together, ready to fit into the new vehicle.

If you're upsizing there shouldn't be a problem, as you will have loads of spare space; but if you are downsizing, careful selection (and some crafty ideas) will help you fit the essentials into limited space.

If this is your first 'van, a lot of thought will be needed to gather your essentials, ready for packing.

Most motorcaravanners keep the basic items permanently in their vehicle, adding specific perishable goods and everyday clothing when preparing for a holiday.

When first equipping a new 'van, I start by checking out my plastic storage boxes, to see which sizes will best fit into the cupboard spaces available. These can then be allocated functions according to their dimensions and where they are situated.

## Bedding

Depending on your personal preferences – and the space you have available – your motorhome bedding might consist simply of sleeping bags or duvets, or could involve a full domestic-style bedmaking kit.

Either way, one advantage is that items of bedding are very adaptable in shape, so storage boxes are not normally required.

One of my favourite ways to save space is to store a couple of pillows in large or bespoke cushion covers, so that they can be used both day and night, without taking up valuable cupboard space.

Other bedding can be stowed away in the underbed lockers or the overcab.

## Food

Perishable items can go straight in the fridge at the last minute, and we often store meat short-term in the freezer compartment – otherwise this area is sometimes underused.

Tinned food and drinks are relatively heavy and need to be stored low down, perhaps in a kitchen unit. For convenience of access, we tend to fit tinned goods into a suitably sized plastic box, which can be reached into, rather like a drawer.

## Cooking

If you can select pans and a kettle that fit inside one another (perhaps with a tea towel between each), so much the better, as you will certainly save cupboard space. A large plastic storage box would help to keep things tidy here.

For crockery, melamine – virtually indestructible – is a popular choice, but I prefer thin white glass crockery, such as Corelle, or Oftast, the Ikea equivalent.

Although they are quite heavy, plates stack very compactly and are hygienic, stain-resistant and pleasant to use.

Fitting out a bespoke crockery cupboard will minimise the space required and offer protection from chipping or rattling.

Cutlery might be fine in a cutlery tray in a drawer, but to prevent it from rattling about, use or make a tool roll to store it in.

A small kettle and toaster can be fitted into any spaces left in the kitchen, as can a small water-carrier for drinking water supplies, if like us, you prefer to keep the tank water for washing.

Oil, vinegar and washing-up liquids are best fitted into a small plastic container to keep them upright – you might also use this to store some 3-in-One oil, WD-40



A great deal of thought needs to go into storing your gear in your new motorhome, particularly if it is relatively small. But planning ahead will certainly pay off when you are out on the road!



Plastic boxes in a range of sizes will provide organised and secure storage – choose them to suit the cupboard space you are filling



Bespoke fitting out of your 'van's crockery cupboards can pay good dividends in terms of saving space and preventing breakages





A medical kit is not the same as a first-aid kit – which only contains the essentials – and its size will depend on the space in your 'van and the range of your personal requirements

and a small bottle of methylated spirits, which is handy as a solvent for ink stains and sticky adhesive remains.

Medical

Medical kits should not be confused with first-aid kits, which you might already have as a motoring essential. A suitably sized box, or a small toolbox, is ideal to hold tablets and medicines for digestive upsets, headaches and pains, travel sickness, hayfever and so on, in addition to stocks of routine medication. Pack some sticking plasters and elastic bandages; tweezers, nail-clippers and small scissors are also sensible additions.

Toolkit

The size and contents of your toolkit will depend on the storage space available, as well as your DIY abilities. A small multimeter, sets of screwdrivers, spanners and pliers, and a small hacksaw will come in handy from time to time. Useful consumables include cable ties in various sizes, fuses and connector blocks. A small container of miscellaneous screws, washers, and nuts and bolts, and a reel of insulating tape, would be a good idea. A couple of old wire coat hangers can be cut up to perform various emergency tasks, and I never travel without a supply of duct tape and a couple of extra-strong plastic rubble sacks, for temporary repairs to a broken window or lost rooflight.

Pitching

Items needed for pitching can include levelling ramps, electrical cables and connectors, an aerial cable, water-hoses and water-carriers. Some of these are

quite bulky if your 'van is small, but fit what you can under the floor at the rear if storage is provided. I normally carry a full-length mains cable on a reel and a half-length one folded, which will often fit conveniently into a door pocket. Storing your folding camping chairs and table can require much thought to ensure easy access while keeping them out of the way when not in use. One possibility if there's space is to fasten them with straps behind the rear seat backrests.

Driving

If you are driving on the Continent, you will need high-vis jackets, which must be stored where they can easily be accessed before you leave the vehicle. Your warning



This handy additional pocket for maps and guides has been made to fit below the passenger's built-in front door pocket

triangles and first-aid kit should also be stowed in an accessible spot. No doubt there will be plenty of smaller items to accommodate, such as maps and guides, spare glasses and sunglasses. Most of these can be stored in the door pockets, except perhaps large map-books, which can be stored flat, possibly on the floor of the Luton roof or similar. Many 'vans have full-sized spare wheels under the rear, but if not, rather than depending on a 'gunge kit', you might consider adding a spare wheel, or at least the tyre, so you are not stranded with an irreparable wheel on the Continent on a bank holiday! These can be stored in a bedding locker or the garage, or attached to the rear doors – but check your payload.

Leisure

Cameras, laptops and binoculars require a safe place, while books and CDs can be fitted in remaining spaces, door pockets or underseat compartments. Some paper, envelopes and stamps, stored in a thin packet, might come in handy, as will a small sewing kit for emergency repairs. By the time you have accommodated these items in appropriate places in your 'van, you will be ready to add perishable food and your clothes – then you should be all set for that exciting first trip! ■



Crafty ideas to maximise storage include this underseat book tray, which can be tailored to fit some of those miscellaneous unused spaces that you'll come across in your motorhome

CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE



# HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT CAMPSITE

Choose the right site and you'll have a perfect holiday! Here's everything you need to think about to ensure you enjoy the ideal trip



CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE



**W**hen it comes to choosing somewhere to stay, there's a great deal to assimilate. But it's a really important decision – being unhappy with your campsite choice can ruin a trip. There are thousands of sites to choose from, so here's how you can narrow things down.

### Who do you think you are?

Start by considering your needs. A family with two teens will require quite a different set-up to one with under-10s to keep happy, or one that comprises just adults.

Interests are important, too. Will it be coast, rivers, lakes, countryside, moorland, mountains or towns?

Your idea of a break might be one with few decisions to make because activities are laid on and meals are available within a holiday park environment.

Alternatively, your family might prefer a campsite deep in the countryside or on the coast, where you make your own fun.

### Low on the readies?

Budget is going to be another important consideration. If the coffers are light, you might prefer a low-facility, eco-friendly campsite. Low season is a good time to tour on a budget, and you can also often find excellent deals for midweek touring. Bear in mind, too, that a stay of seven nights or more can sometimes earn you an extra night for free.

### What about pets?

Owning a motorhome means your pets don't have to go into kennels – you can take them with you. You just need to find a pet-friendly campsite with dedicated space to exercise your animal, on-site or on walks nearby. Some sites even have outdoor dog showers, so you can hose down your pet after a muddy outing.

Most sites require dogs to be kept on a lead, which ensures comfort and safety for all guests, and some limit the number of dogs allowed per unit.

### Join a club

Becoming a member of one or both of the major UK touring clubs – the Caravan and Motorhome Club and The Camping and Caravanning Club – gives you access to 4500 campsites (such as the C&CC's Slapton Sands site, pictured left).

The Clubs' listings include campsites that they own, affiliated sites and their Certificated Sites/Locations.

CSs and CLs are small, independent sites for members only, which take up to five units, often on farms or in the countryside; some are areas within larger campsites.

Most will provide a supply of fresh water, but you should always check the website listing for other facilities.

If you are thinking of touring abroad, both Clubs can help with arrangements, offering deals for ferries, European site bookings and vehicle insurance.

### The important stuff

Make a list of what you need from a site.

If you are only stopping for one or two nights, this might be as simple as a nearby pub where you can get a meal.

If you are staying longer, look for easy access to public transport, which saves you the stress of driving into busy areas and having to park.

Washroom facilities on most campsites include showers, toilets and basins, family rooms and amenities for wheelchair users; many also have dishwashing and laundry facilities. Check the website for details and reviews from other guests.

Reviews and awards listed on websites are another very good indicator of how well a campsite is run. For eco-friendly credentials, look for the David Bellamy Awards symbol.

Super-clean washroom facilities can earn themselves a Loo of the Year Award.

Visit Britain and the AA grade campsites, while in our annual *Top 100 Sites Guide*, winning sites are voted for by their guests (download your free copy of the guide at [practicalcaravan.com/top100-archive](http://practicalcaravan.com/top100-archive)).

**'Make a list of what you need from a site. If you are only staying for one night, this might be as simple as a nearby pub for dinner'**

### Sites for the grown-ups...

Select an adults-only campsite if you are grown-ups who are seeking peace and quiet during your holiday. For example, Tranquil Parks ([tranquillparks.co.uk](http://tranquillparks.co.uk)) lists 43 independent, family-owned adults-only parks at a wide variety of locations across England and Wales.

Keen anglers will also find that fishing and touring are often bedfellows, with access to lakes at, among others, Eye Kettleby Lakes ([eyekettlebylakes.com](http://eyekettlebylakes.com)), in Leicestershire; Henfold Lakes (henfoldlakesleisure.co.uk), in Surrey; Sumners Ponds ([sumnersponds.co.uk](http://sumnersponds.co.uk)), in Sussex; Woodhall Country Park ([woodhallcountrypark.co.uk](http://woodhallcountrypark.co.uk)), in Lincolnshire; and Fields End Water ([www.fieldsendwater.co.uk](http://www.fieldsendwater.co.uk)), in Cambridgeshire.

### ... and for families

Families often prefer staying at full-facility campsites, providing children's clubs, play areas, fields for ball games, pools and a restaurant, café, bar or clubhouse. Some sites provide crazy golf and petting zoos; others, spas and a gym.

Take a look at holiday park operators such as Flower of May ([flowerofmay.com](http://flowerofmay.com)), which operates several family-friendly parks across Yorkshire.

Full-facility campsites usually also have a complement of static caravans, some privately owned, others available for hire. The ambience throughout the site will be busy and family-friendly.

Other holiday park operators to take a look at include Lancashire's Holgates ([holgates.co.uk](http://holgates.co.uk)), whose Silverdale site is a regular finalist in our *Top 100 Sites Guide*; Parkdean Resorts ([parkdeanresorts.co.uk](http://parkdeanresorts.co.uk)) – 32 of its 67 UK-wide holiday parks accept bookings from touring visitors; Park Holidays ([parkholidays.com](http://parkholidays.com)), which operates campsites in Devon, Essex, Kent and Suffolk; and Away Resorts ([awayresorts.co.uk](http://awayresorts.co.uk)), which has centres across England and Wales.

### Adventure, theme, location

Enjoyment of outdoor activities might also guide your choice. Adventure Campsites ([adventurecampsites.com](http://adventurecampsites.com)) lists sites across the British Isles offering adventures close by, such as walking in the Brecon Beacons, and a wide range of coastal or lake-based watersports.

Alternatively, you might prefer to select a location, in which case, the regional tourist board will have information about accommodation. Otherwise, a theme, such as Scotland's famous whisky trail, could be the way to go.

### Touring further afield

If you're thinking about travelling further afield – when Covid restrictions allow – there's plenty of helpful information to be found. As mentioned above, the Caravan and Motorhome Club and The Camping and Caravanning Club can arrange and book ferries and campsites abroad.

If you plan to tour in the low season, you might also consider an ACSI camping card ([campingcard.co.uk](http://campingcard.co.uk)), which can provide you with savings of up to 60% at many participating campsites across Europe. Eurocampings ([eurocampings.co.uk](http://eurocampings.co.uk)) lists 9854 sites inspected annually by ACSI.

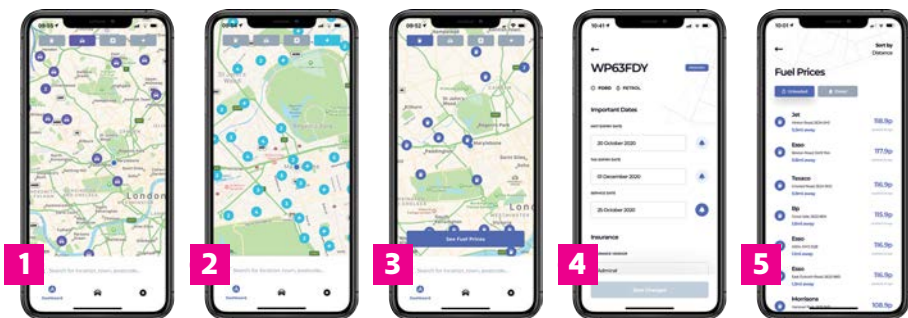
There are plenty of useful books, too, such as *Touring Europe 2021 in a caravan, motorhome or tent*, published by the Caravan and Motorhome Club.

Last, but by no means least, do read the regular travel features in *Practical Motorhome*, where you're guaranteed to find plenty of touring inspiration! ■





myAutomate



1 Car wash map 2 EV map 3 Fuel map 4 myDriveway 5 Fuel prices

## MEET THE BUSINESS

# MYAUTOMATE

Download this free app and you can access essential, up-to-date motoring information for motorcaravanners, all in one place

**M**ost of us rely heavily on our phones, and in particular, apps, to help us in everyday life. Motoring is one area where there are plenty of device applications available. But what if you want a wealth of handy services in one easy-to-use app? That's where myAutomate comes in.

myAutomate is a free app that's available on both Android and iOS, and designed to make your motoring life that much easier – and cheaper. Within the app, you can search for your nearest fuel station, car wash, parking spot and electric vehicle charging point, making it brilliantly useful if you're travelling in an area that you've never visited before.

You can also check fuel prices – which are updated daily – so you can get the best deal for your money.

What's more, you can store all of your vehicle's details on your own 'driveway', providing you with useful reminders about when your MoT, tax, service and insurance are due.

### Early days

So how did myAutomate get started?

"We began as a company in 2020, and there were four of us involved from the start," says Managing Director Andrew Watson, whose business background is in fuel. "The app was developed in 2020, and was launched at the tail end of September last year.

Our launch coincided with the second lockdown, so it's been interesting! However, we've done well and things started to pick up in March this year."

So what was the thinking behind the app? "It grew out of discussions around making driving easier," says Andrew. "We wanted to incorporate lots of other, different elements in one app: electric vehicle points, car washes, and other day-to-day aspects that people use all the time. We wanted to get better information for everyone and put it all in one place.

We tried to target people who drive for leisure, including caravanners and motorhome drivers – particularly anyone who is travelling and who doesn't know where their nearest fuel station or parking spot is. Interestingly, the fuel price section is the one that is used most."

### Next developments

So what's next for the myAutomate app? "We want to increase the amount of data provided by the app, and make that information more filterable," says Andrew. "We're also

planning to look at facilities for the less able, and how we can incorporate that into the app – at the present moment, we're just at the beginning of that development work. And of course, we always welcome feedback from users!"



Andrew Watson,  
Managing Director

**Find out more about myAutomate at [www.myautomateapp.co.uk](http://www.myautomateapp.co.uk) and download it for free from Google Play or the Apple App Store**



# ESSENTIAL TECH TIPS

When you start out motorcaravanning, there are plenty of things to think about – here are our experts’ four top tips for your first tour!

## How to... Obtain fresh water

To comply with strict payload rules, it’s best to drive with your fresh-water tank only 20% full. You can fill up again as soon as you arrive, before you pitch up.

On some sites, super-pitches have their own water connections, but at most, the supply is in a central location that isn’t always easily accessible. You will need to bring a sufficiently long water-hose with you.

Make sure this is a ‘food grade’ hose (many garden hoses are not), because you’ll be loading drinking water. Also, be sure to identify the ‘van’s fresh-water filler point – don’t mistake it for the fuel point, usually inside the frame of the passenger door!

Some motorhomes also have a Whale connection, so you can fill the system from an external Aquaroll; in that case, check your handbook for instructions.

**Peter Baber**



## How to... Change a gas bottle

Motorhome gas bottles should always be securely strapped into their locker, and the regulator pigtail fitted and tightened with a 30mm spanner. It should be noted that gas fittings have a reversed thread, so you undo the connections by turning the nut clockwise, which might at first seem a bit counterintuitive.

Ensure the gas bottle is turned off at the top tap before removing it. When the pigtail pipe is separated from the bottle, you will smell a small amount of gas, but as long as the bottle is turned off, this is perfectly normal. Finally, screw the plastic stopper into the bottle’s brass thread, to protect it and help prevent minor leaks.

When retightening the pigtail nut on the gas cylinder, ensure it is hand-tight, but do not overtighten it, because this might damage the threads.

**John Sootheran**



## How to... Empty a chemical toilet

Unlock the cassette locker and open the hatch. Nip the yellow or orange handles together with the grey grip to release the cassette. The orange grip doubles as an extending handle, so you can wheel the cassette.

At the disposal point, twist the fill/empty nozzle and remove the cap. Put the cap well away from the disposal hole – you don’t want to have to fish it out. Now press the orange vacuum-release button on the cassette and pour the contents into the disposal point.

Rinse the cassette with water. Before replacing it, add diluted blue or green cassette chemical. Only ever empty at a dedicated disposal point.

**John Sootheran**



## How to... Drive along narrow streets

First of all, don’t panic! Before traversing the narrowest part, activate the rear-vision camera; reversing and finding another route is best. If that isn’t a goer and if you are accompanied, ask the passenger to disembark while they can still open a door. They should be in front of the ‘van, far enough away to see clearly along both sides up to the top corner edges. They should view clearances by looking up and down, so that protuberances, such as the wind-out awning, are taken into account. If solo, ask passers-by to assist. And in an emergency, remove window boxes from adjacent cottages!

**Gentleman Jack**



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myAutomate

# The perfect **travel companion** for your touring holiday



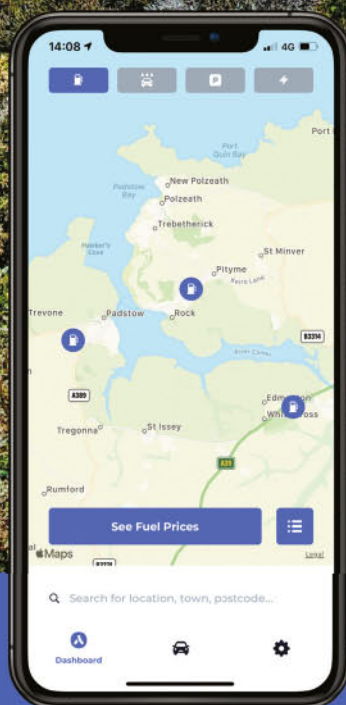
Find fuel & charging



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