



YOUR GUIDE TO SAVVY SPENDING

Everybody loves touring, but these days, we all have to keep a close eye on the pursestrings. Follow our expert guide for brilliant tips on saving – everything from buying a 'van to staying on great-value campsites

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CUT OUT
AND KEEP
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Also available as a FREE ebook
see www.practicalmotorhome.com/know-how to download yours!

NEED TO KNOW...

MONEY-SAVING TIPS

As the cost of living rises across the board, it's essential to watch your spending where and when you can, and that includes touring. If you'd like to save a bit of cash on your next motorhome trip, read on for some handy hints!

Ferry crossings for less

When you're booking ferry journeys, shop around as much as you can – and if you're flexible in terms of timings, try searching for various days and times (late at night, for example) to get the best deal.

An online search facility, such as Travel Supermarket (travelsupermarket.com/en-gb/ferry), should allow you to select motorhome-specific deals.

Don't assume you'll get the best deal with a return ferry ticket: buying two singles with different operators can sometimes save you money. Likewise, you can also consider different routes, such as travelling from Dover on the way out, but returning to Newhaven.

It can be tempting to simply take the most direct crossing, but using a less obvious route can actually work out cheaper, even once you've added any toll costs in France. You can find the price of motorway tolls in France by going to autoroutes.fr.

Another good way to save is to take a packed meal to eat on board, rather than paying for expensive food from the ferry's restaurants.



Save money on campsite fees

In Europe, low-season camping schemes, such as the ACSI Camping Card (campingcard.co.uk), will save you lots of money if you're planning to travel out of the high season. This scheme gives you access to a special discounted rate when you pay at a campsite.

In the UK, if you stay on sites run by The Camping and Caravanning Club (campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk) or the Caravan and Motorhome Club (caravanclub.co.uk), you should consider membership. The non-member fees that are added to your bookings



can quickly add up, and if you join, you'll also gain access to a number of other excellent benefits.

Do try our fantastic Nightstop network (see p9), too – it features 34 motorhome-friendly places across the UK where you can pitch up for nothing, or just a small fee. We run them in conjunction with the Motor Caravanners' Club, but the Nightstops are open to everyone, and they're fully licensed.

Motorhome-friendly France provides some brilliant alternatives to campsites, even during the height of summer. In fact, if you are fully self-contained, you can tour without using campsites at all, unless you want to catch up on laundry or decide to settle in one place for more than a night or two.

France is known for its *aires* – public parking places where you can stop overnight, often for free. These are normally on the outskirts of villages and towns (you should avoid staying overnight at those on the *autoroutes* or other busy roads).

Many also have a service point for fresh-water collection and grey-water disposal, for which they may charge a few euro. Those near popular tourist destinations might charge more – up to €20 for an overnight stay and water.

You could plan your whole tour using the *All the Aires* guides by Vicarious Media (vicarious-shop.com). The comprehensive guide to France is published in two volumes – North and South – which can be purchased together at a reduced price.

Another way to minimise the cost of your overnight stays is to join France Passion (france-passion.com). Membership of this scheme is annual and runs from March to Easter the following year. It costs €30 to join for 2022 and for that, you receive a stopover guide, a window sticker for your motorhome and a membership guide. This gives you access to 2100 safe overnight

'Take a packed meal to eat on board, rather than paying for expensive food from the ferry's restaurants'

stopovers in vineyards, orchards, farms and artisanal land – for free. You are guaranteed a warm welcome by the landowner, but when you arrive, you must find them, to say hello. You'll also get to taste their wine, cheese and honey, and see unique crafts.

There's no obligation to buy, but it's a great way to say thank you if you do. Using the guide is wonderful for exploring rural France, but be sure to renew your membership – the host properties can change.



In the market for food and drink

Find out whether the town you're visiting has a local market – it's often much cheaper to buy produce direct during your stay, rather than stocking up at the supermarket before you go. Chances are that the goods will be fresher, too.

If you're tempted by souvenir food and drink from regional vineyards or producers in France, first take a look in the local supermarket. You'll often find locally produced honey, chocolates and wine much cheaper there than the prices you'll be asked to pay at the major tourist attractions.

If possible, cook your favourite meal before you go away and freeze it – then put it in the fridge before you leave, and it should have defrosted by the time you arrive. It'll save you being tempted to go out for a meal or get a takeaway!

Fuel price checker

The Petrol Prices website (petrolprices.com) is simply fantastic for finding the cheapest fuel in your area – enter your postcode and it'll tell you where you can get the best deal at the pump.

It's free to sign up, and you can have a daily update listing the cheapest prices in your area, too.

Motorhomes need a lot of fuel, so be sure to use a loyalty card (such as Nectar or Clubcard) each time you fill up. You won't always save money at the pump (although certain vouchers allow you to do so), but you'll soon save up enough points to get serious amounts of cash off your grocery shopping bills.

If you're not planning a long journey, don't fill your fuel tank – it will add lots of weight and your fuel consumption

will go up accordingly. On the same note, don't fill the on-board water tank until you arrive at your campsite, and be sure to empty your waste tanks before you hit the road.

Toll-free touring

If you're not in a rush when driving through France, it's worth sticking to the *routes nationales* rather than using the *autoroutes* – they're generally free, and often more scenic. However, if you do want to use toll roads, take a look at autoroutes.fr before you go, to find the cheapest.

If your motorhome is less than 3m high and has a Gross Vehicle Weight of under 3500kg, you can buy a French *télépéage* tag via the UK Emovis website (emovis-tag.co.uk). This handy little tag allows you to drive through any non-height-restricted *télépéage* point, and the toll will be taken automatically from your bank account in sterling, via direct debit.

Small fees apply, but you won't have to pay a transaction fee on your credit card for each purchase, and you can drive straight through *péage* booths without needing to queue. In Spain and Portugal, you'll be allowed to use the VIA-T tag lanes.



'If you're not planning a long journey, don't fill your fuel tank – it will add lots of weight and your fuel consumption will go up accordingly'



CHEAP TOURING PITCH FOR LESS

Our round-up of nine sites that should prove easy on the pocket

1 Andrew's Field, River Avon

£11 per night

■ An attractive if basic site, Andrew's Field is in a fantastic location on the River Avon in the village of Eckington, and offers direct access to the river. Facilities are limited with no electricity on site, but there is a tap for drinking water and a waste-water disposal point. Wildlife abounds and you can see wild deer at the riverside, along with birdlife such as kingfishers, cuckoos and woodpeckers. The village is on the fringe of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding National Beauty, and there is an abundance of excellent walks. **Web** avoncamping.weebly.com

2 Parc Farm Caravan Park, Mid-Wales

£23 per night (inc electric hook-up),
based on two people

■ Found in the beautiful Tanat Valley in mid Wales and with the River Tanat running right through the site, this park has privately owned holiday homes and a separate touring area for 22 motorhomes or caravans. It's on the edge of the Snowdonia National Park and offers views of the Berwyn Mountains. Fishing for greyling and trout is available on the river, and facilities include a picnic area, toilet and shower block, launderette, a children's play area and a small football pitch. **Web** www.berwynscaravanparks.com/parc-farm-caravan-park

3 Berry Bank Farm, Peak District

£10 per night

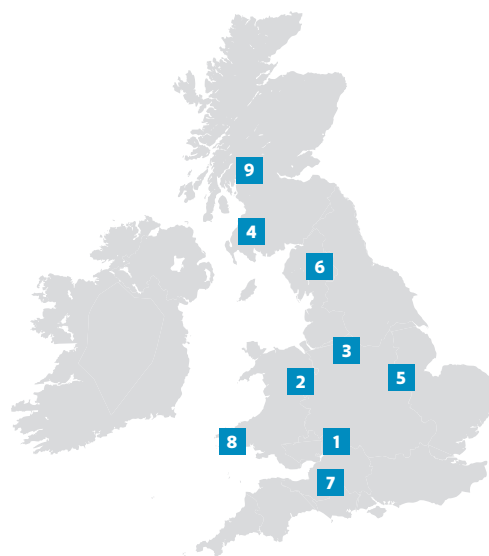
■ This small site five miles from the spa town of Buxton is located on a family-run working farm and offers no-frills pitches for motorhomes, caravans and tents. It's in a great position to explore the Peak District National Park with its abundant hiking trails and climbing sites. The farm has some excellent walks nearby, including Shutlingsloe – known as the Matterhorn of Cheshire – and Three Shires Head. Drinking water, toilets and toilet cassette emptying facilities are available on site.

Web www.berrybankfarm.co.uk

4 Balloch O' Dee, Dumfries and Galloway

£25 per night (inc electric hook-up),
based on four people

■ This beautiful site near Kirkcowan is just 10 miles from Galloway Forest Park and prides itself on offering a traditional campsite. Campfires are allowed in fire-pits and pitches are less regulated than at other



sites with friendly communal areas, and overall the site has a more boutique, bespoke feel than most. As well as touring accommodation, there are vintage caravans, a bothy, a Mongolian yurt, and a ranch house for hire. The local beach at Stairhaven is only ten minutes away and has been voted one of the best beaches in Scotland. Best of all is the delightful pair of Shetland ponies that sometimes wander around the site! **Web** ballochodee.com

5 Ashleigh Lakes, Spalding, Lincolnshire

From £15 per night (non-electric grass pitch)

■ This peaceful site in the Lincolnshire Fens has two angling lakes and is perfect for those looking for onsite fishing – the lakes are stocked with roach, rudd, carp, tench and bream. Facilities include toilets and showers and a chemical disposal point. It's a quiet site and great for bird spotting, as well as the occasional hare, rabbit and deer. You'll find a bus stop, shop and pub within walking distance, and it's less than half-an-hour drive to Spalding and Wisbech.

Web ashleighlakes.co.uk

6 Eden Valley Holidays at Newby End Farm, Cumbria CA10 3EX

From £18 per night, based on two people

■ Located in Newby End Farm, this site provides a great base for exploring the Lake District National Park, with spectacular scenery guaranteed. It's set in Cumbria's Eden Valley, between the Lake District National Park to the west and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the east.

1



2



4



On-site there are electric hook-ups and free Calor Gas powered showers, and the park can accommodate up to 24 caravans, campervans or tents, spread over two fields.

Web www.newbyendfarm.co.uk

7 Tucker's Grave Inn, Knoll Lane, Faulkland, Bath BA3 5XF

From £16 per night, based on two people

■ Cockingford Farm Campsite is sure to give you a relaxed touring experience. While there's no electric hook-up on offer (unless you choose to stay in the Cockingford Caravan), staff should be able to help with charging devices or bikes. There are three fields on-site – heading to the top of the third will give you spectacular views of Widcombe Valley, and it's also a good spot for star-gazing. It is easy to reach the moorland from the site, while the charming village of Widcombe is only a 30 minute walk away.

Web tuckersgraveinn.co.uk

8 Parke Farm Camping, Merriion, Pembroke SA71 5DU

From £19.50 per night, based on two people

■ If you're looking to explore the Pembrokeshire coast and take in some stunning sea views, Parke Farm Camping could be the site to pitch up at. The family-friendly campsite gives you the option of staying in an adults-only field if you feel like some real peace and quiet, too. Located in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the dog-friendly site is ideally placed for heading

to the picturesque village of Angle, exploring Pembroke Castle, visiting some of the many breathtaking beaches in the area, and more.

Web parkefarmcamping.co.uk

9 Cobleland Campsite, Station Road, Gartmore FK8 3RR

From £18.50 per night, based on two people

■ Nature is all around you at this campsite, with the River Forth and the Loch Ard Forest creating a beautiful, peaceful setting for the 126 pitches found on-site. Be sure to pack comfortable footwear, because there are various outdoor activities in the area – Ben Lomond is just 13 miles away, and there are numerous forest walks to explore, too. You could also head to Stirling Castle to learn about the area's history, or take a trip to Blair Drummond Safari Park if you fancied doing something a bit different.

Web www.campingintheforest.co.uk

Try out our Nightstops!

The Nightstop Scheme is run by *Practical Motorhome* in conjunction with the Motor Caravanners' Club (MCC), and the sites are certificated locations (CLs) – you don't need to join any club to use them. You'll need to ring the relevant site to confirm whether there's space for you before you visit: you'll find information at www.practicalmotorhome.com/nightstops, or see p10.

EXPERT ADVICE

SAFE USED-'VAN BUYING

By John Sootheran

'If you are buying from a dealership, aim to pay for all of your purchase, or even just the deposit, on a credit card'



Motorhomes are one of life's big buys. This means a considered used purchase can save you money, but it can also potentially expose you to the activities of unscrupulous sellers and scammers, especially if you buy from a private vendor.

But if you follow our tips for buying used, you should be able to find an absolute peach – at a bargain price – and get as much as possible for your hard-earned cash.

■ Typically, a used motorhome can be bought from a major dealership with full facilities, a smaller dealership, or a private individual via a small ad or a portal such as eBay or Gumtree. If you are buying from a dealership, aim to pay for all of your purchase, or even just a deposit, on a credit card. This ensures that your entire outlay will be covered by Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act (between £10 and £30,000). Different legislation offers protection above this amount.

■ Large dealerships have reputations to protect, so buying from one is seen as being a pretty safe bet. Also, check our Owner Satisfaction Awards (www.practicalmotorhome.com/news/owner-satisfaction-awards-2022-winners) to find one that's impressed other readers. Dealers can help if something goes wrong in future. If you buy privately, you'll have little comeback if there's a post-purchase problem.

■ However you decide to buy, do your research – get a rough idea of how much you should expect to pay for the 'van that you want, from online sites such as *Practical Motorhome* (www.practicalmotorhome.com/forsale) and *AutoTrader*.

■ Private sellers can sometimes throw in lots of extras with the sale, but with dealers, you might have to negotiate. If you're not happy with what's being offered in any sale, you can always walk away.

■ Think carefully about the layout of any motorhome you might be considering. Is it going to fulfil your requirements?

■ If buying privately, meet the vendor at their home when you view the motorhome.

■ Once you've decided on a motorhome to look at, and organised the viewing, print out a screen grab to take with you so that you can double check the vehicle you're viewing is the same year as stated in the advertisement, and that the bodywork is in the same condition as the photograph.

■ The *Practical Motorhome* forum (www.practicalmotorhome.com/forum) offers useful advice and



'Dealers can help if something goes wrong with your motorhome in future – if you buy privately, you'll have little comeback in the event of an issue'

1

1 Buying from a reputable motorhome dealership can offer greater peace of mind



Absolute bargain!

Nice little runner,
low mileage.

One careful owner.

Full service history

First to see will buy!

in-depth detail about problems to look out for – use the knowledge of others to help you get the very best deal possible!

■ Make sure that you view the motorhome in daylight and when it's not raining. Give the exterior a good once-over, looking for any evidence of problems such as dents, cracks, scratches, filler and mismatched paintwork. For more on interior and exterior checks, see p75.

■ The paperwork is also very important – be sure to inspect the most recent service and MoT documents to check for any advisories.

■ Triple check that you have the right driving licence for the vehicle you're planning to buy. For more on licences, see our downloadable *Basics* guide at www.practicalmotorhome.com/know-how, or p103 of this issue.

■ Remember, any 'van that's been used for one two-week holiday once a year, rather than five UK tours and a trip to Spain, will have experienced much

less wear and tear, but might have suffered from spending long periods kept immobile.

■ Before parting with any cash, you should get an HPI check on the vehicle. This uses the registration number to allow you to get up-to-date information on whether the vehicle is an insurance write-off, has had any numberplate changes, has any outstanding finance on it, and much more. It's worth paying for the most comprehensive check possible – see hpicheck.com.

■ Check all of the 'van's ownership and service documentation. Has it been regularly, properly serviced? Has the servicing been carried out by a reputable technician? Ask about who has done the



‘There are some brilliant bargains available if you take your time when buying’

2

2 Be sure to do your research on both the model and the specific vehicle

3 Only when you're sure that everything is as the advert described and fully above board should you shake on a deal

servicing when you call the seller, then check the service firm out online.

■ Check the motorhome's condition matches its declared age and usage.

■ Always take a proper test drive to get a feel for the cab controls and an insight into how the vehicle runs.

■ Use any problems you find, along with the associated repair costs, to negotiate on the price. Take a pen and paper with you to make notes, and factor in the time and travel that the repairs will incur, as well as any lost touring time.

■ Take care when buying online. Many is the buyer who has found themselves tempted by a cheap vehicle advertised on the internet...

A few years ago, I spent a lot of time dreaming of car purchases, scanning the trade magazines for my perfect motor. I soon became adept at spotting the scams. It turned out that it wasn't rocket science – they were simply too good to be true, with a bargain price, always a tale of woe, and often based abroad.

The vendor usually had a very English name, too: Amelia or Caroline, say, and a surprising number were doctors. All contact was by email: “Send the money,” they'd write, “then we'll deliver the car”. All in strangely flawed English!

More recently, I saw a motorhome advert along the same lines – a choice used model at an extremely low price. The story? An acrimonious divorce, an aggrieved wife wreaking revenge by flogging her ex's pride and joy. And, oh, the motorhome was in Holland.

Well, what a stroke of luck, I was visiting that town next week – I contacted the vendor to ask if I could pop by and pick it up, and pay cash on delivery. Of course I couldn't. The vehicle didn't exist, except in pictures.

Always remember the golden rule: if a deal looks too good to be true, it almost certainly is! And never get involved in sales with motorhomes which are “abroad at the moment” – it's likely to be a scam.

Conclusion

Buying a used motorhome is a great way to save money, and there are some brilliant bargains if you take your time and you're prepared to walk away.

Apply our advice and your purchase should be as safe as any can be. The price of buying from a private vendor should reflect the fact that you have little or no comeback – we'd say a minimum of 15–20% less than a large dealership price. Buying your next 'van from a keen motorcaravanner, who feels their beloved vehicle is worth more than a dealer will offer, can be a good way to get a bargain – but you always need to take care. ■



3

EXPERT ADVICE

USED 'VAN
MUST-CHECKS

Tempted to buy your next 'van privately? Don't miss our handy lists of checks to ensure you're spending your cash wisely

There are some important choices and checks to be made when you pick your next used motorhome, especially if you're buying privately.

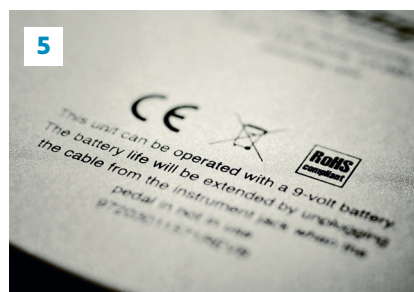
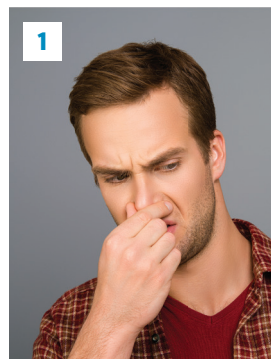
Take notes while you are assessing the 'van and use any repairs that are required to bargain the price down. Before viewing – and even if you're not intending to – ask the vendor if you can have the vehicle checked by an AWS-approved technician (see p79). If they have anything to hide, they won't get back to you to arrange your viewing.

You should ideally invest in an expert inspection (see panel, p77) but there are basic checks you can make yourself – both inside and outside the motorhome – once you've taken a test drive, and are happy with the 'van's performance.

Interior checks

- Take note of the interior smell – any dampness or mustiness should be checked out (1).
- Press the ceiling and walls to see if they are spongy anywhere (2).
- Look inside lockers, wardrobes and under seats for any signs of damp (3).
- Check all appliances work as they should, on gas, leisure battery and mains. Ask the vendor to chill the fridge before you arrive (4), and request that the space and water heating system is on when you get there (especially with Alde heating, which takes longer to warm up).
- Ask for the instruction manuals (5) for appliances (a careful owner will have kept them).
- Set up the freestanding dining table. Can the whole family sit around it comfortably (6)?
- Walk slowly across every inch of the floor (7) to feel for any soft areas – this can expose delamination.
- Ensure that the sealant around the basin and shower is intact. Look for leaks under the sink and basin, and around the base and edges of the shower unit (8). ➔

'You should ideally invest in an inspection, but there are plenty of checks to do yourself'



- Lie on all the beds to check that they are comfortable and the right size (9). Make up the non-fixed beds to ensure that you have all the cushions you need.
- Do all blinds pull out and retract properly (10)?
- Ensure the foam cushions in the upholstery haven't sagged or slumped from repeated use. Motorhome upholstery is generally very durable (11), but bad batches can creep through. Look for wear on edges.
- Check all decorative trims are properly fixed. Motorhomes have lots of colour-coordinated panels and elegant styling touches (12), but these can eventually come loose.
- Investigate the condition of the carpets (13). Dirty, damaged carpets are hard to hide, and a sign that the vehicle hasn't been cared for as well as the vendor is suggesting.
- Check that the radio/MP3 player (14) in the cab is functioning as it should.
- Check that all of the interior lights are in good working order (15).
- Do the hydraulic dampers on the bed bases (16) work properly? Can you lift them up easily?
- You might want to allow for the cost of a toilet renewal kit from Thetford. These include a new seat and lid, plus a fresh cassette. They cost around £100 to £150 (17).

Exterior checks

It's not ideal, but if you're operating on a tight budget and don't want to pay for an independent expert to check your prospective purchase, do make sure you give the motorhome a thorough inspection yourself.

This once-over should include all of the electrics (plugged into the mains and on leisure battery).

- Stand at either end of the 'van and look for dents or damage to the sides of the motorhome (18).
- Examine the exhaust and rest of the chassis for rust or corrosion (19).
- Check the motorhome thoroughly for oil leaks (20).
- Check that all paintwork matches around the doors, wings and bumper (21). If not, this could be the result of repair work after an accident.
- Examine the age of the tyres (22). You'll find this

‘Stand at either end of the 'van and look for dents or damage to the sides of the motorhome’





vital information displayed on the tyre wall. It comprises two numbers – say, 37 15 – which denotes that the tyre was made in week 37 of 2015. They should be changed after five to seven years. There should be no splits or cracks in tyre walls, and the tyre treads should have worn evenly.

■ Check that you're happy with any DIY modifications (23) that have been made by previous owners, particularly if they might have resulted in water ingress.

■ How old is the 'van's leisure battery (24), and is it a reputable brand? Is the gas bottle included in the sale?

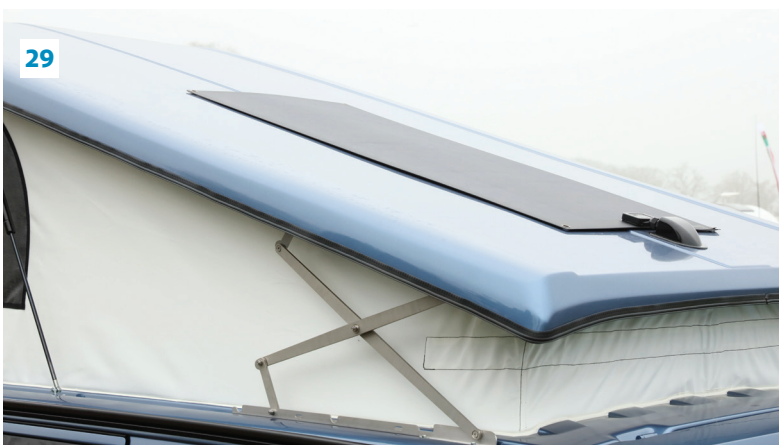
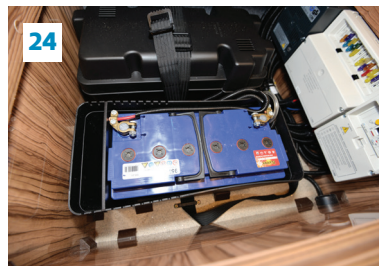
■ Have a close look at the windows (25), inside and out, to make sure they haven't been badly scratched.

■ Do all of the 'van's accessories work? This could include items such as auto-levelling (26), air conditioning, alarm, tracker, solar panel (27) and satellite dish.

■ Are all of the keys available, and do they function correctly (28)?

■ Check out the roof of the motorhome (29) for signs of damage, and likewise, make sure that you also (safely) look underneath for any potential problems with the chassis and the floor.

■ Be sure to ask the vendor for the V5C (log book), and check the V5C against the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), which is also known as the 'chassis number'. This can usually be found stamped on a plate under the bonnet or under the carpet by the driver's seat.



Use a pre-purchase inspection service

It makes a lot of sense to use a pre-purchase vehicle-checking service before you part with your cash, to ensure that the vehicle hasn't been written off in the past, has outstanding finance or has been reported as stolen. Companies that offer such services include those listed below – many also offer a physical inspection of the vehicle.

The AA www.theaa.com/vehicle-inspection

HPI Check www.hpi.co.uk

Dekra www.dekra-uk.co.uk/en/motorhome-inspection

Approved Workshop Scheme
www.approvedworkshops.co.uk/find-approved-workshop

Mobile Caravan Engineers' Association
www.mobilecaravanengineers.co.uk

The RAC www.rac.co.uk/buying-a-car/rac-car-data-check

EXPERT ADVICE WHERE TO BUY

Purchasing a motorhome can be expensive, but there's still money to be saved if you choose your dealer carefully

What's the best way to save money when you are looking to buy a motorhome? Of course, there's one simple answer – don't buy one at all! But we know such advice isn't practicable for most of us. We love motorcaravans, we love owning rather than hiring them, and we want to make the most of our vehicle while we can. And, despite the fact that demand for used and new motorhomes is currently high, there are still deals to be had.

So how can you get hold of such a deal? First things first: stick to your guns. If, for example, you have decided, after much research, that a rear-lounge model is what you are looking for, then you should only look for one of those, no matter how difficult it may seem to find one at the time. Buying a motorhome with the wrong kind of floorplan for you could prove a costly mistake further down the line.

That could mean you have to settle for a slightly older model than you had originally planned – or a used model, rather than a new one. If that turns out to be the case, Martin Spencer, technical manager at the Caravan and Motorhome Club, recommends you try if possible to get a pre-purchase inspection. This will both reassure you that there is nothing wrong with the vehicle, and could even help you negotiate down the price with the dealer. You can arrange for such an inspection through the Approved Workshop Scheme

'Our Owner Satisfaction Awards are a good place to start – they're based on dealer feedback from thousands of *Practical Motorhome* readers'

(see right) or via www.caravaninspectors.co.uk; you'll also find further information on the previous page.

But where should you look to get the best deal for your hard-earned cash?

If you want to buy a new model, the offers that manufacturers may tempt you with at the various industry shows (such as that at the NEC) can seem too good to miss. But bear in mind that, if you buy from a dealer at the show, you may need to take your 'van to that dealer for servicing – which could involve a fair amount of travelling (and fuel). We'd ideally recommend buying from a dealer located in easy reach of your home.

But if you go to a dealer, how to choose a good one? The Owner Satisfaction Survey (OSS) this magazine runs with the Camping and Caravanning Club is a good place to start. The results (which you'll find at www.practical

1 Choose Leisure in Kent won a gold award in our most recent Owner Satisfaction Survey





motorhome.com/news/owner-satisfaction-awards-2022-winners) are based on feedback from thousands of readers – so it’s like an extended word of mouth.

Your chosen dealer should also be very happy to let you come and see the vehicle. Martin Spencer says, “Be very, very cautious of buying – or even putting down a deposit – on a vehicle you haven’t seen.” There are numerous ways to check you are not being scammed, but Martin says one of the easiest is good old Google Maps. “If the dealership is not clearly visible there, it probably doesn’t exist,” he says.

First impressions count when you turn up at the dealership, too. Smart premises and a large accessories shop aren’t the be-all and end-all, but they does suggest that the dealership is here to stay.

Richard Baldwin Motorhomes, which came top among the gold awards for new motorhome dealers in our recent Owner Satisfaction awards, has just spent £400,000 on a new service centre at its site near Halifax. Even if your chosen dealer doesn’t have that, features such as the presence of a comfortable customer lounge where you can consider your options in an unpressurised environment are a good sign. As Richard Baldwin managing partner Gary Morgan says, “This kind of thing is very important when people are going to be spending a lot of money with you.”

You can also potentially tell whether the dealership deserves your cash by assessing its general vibe. Molly Fisher from Choose Leisure in Kent, another OSS gold award winner, says customers are particularly impressed by how seamlessly the different parts of the organisation work. “Value is not just about today. We have great cohesion between our sales and service departments, ensuring our customers feel looked after, recognised and welcome at all times,” she says.



And servicing, too

Getting a decent price for servicing and repairs should be a little easier than it used to be, thanks in part to the Approved Workshop Scheme that the National Caravan Council operates in partnership with the Caravan and Motorhome Club and The Camping and Caravanning Club.

The scheme’s 570-plus members must show that all workshop staff have gained four separate training certificates connected with motorhome repairs. They have to promise to provide a written estimate for any service-related repairs that come to more than £150, and should give realistic times for when work should be completed.

The AWS could potentially help you out if you want to buy from a show, but don’t want to have to go back to the dealer you bought from there.

Through the scheme you can arrange for a local workshop to carry out all warranty supporting repair work – although you will have to get approval from the original dealer. That’s not to say that non-AWS members won’t make such arrangements on an ad-hoc basis – if you speak to your dealer direct, they will be able to confirm if this is possible. It’s also worth noting that the AWS scheme only applies to service-related repairs. Bigger repairs such as damp work or crash damage are not covered.

Whatever your circumstances, and whichever dealer you purchase your motorhome from, you shouldn’t skimp on servicing. If it’s required for your warranty, you might void that warranty by doing so.

For more details on the Approved Workshop Scheme, visit www.approvedworkshops.co.uk.



- 2, 3 Smart facilities are a good sign when choosing a dealership
- 4 The National Caravan Council operates the Approved Workshop Scheme, alongside the two major clubs
- 5 Servicing will help ensure that any warranty continues to remain valid

NEED TO KNOW...

SERVICING

Having your motorhome serviced isn't cheap, but it is essential – Diamond Dave explains the costs involved, and how to save a bit of cash going forward

Charges for services and repairs are a common discussion point on motorhome forums. I often see folk complaining about what they view as excessive costs for simple jobs, such as an oil and filter change.

People sometimes compare prices to those of several years ago, or compare those from a much-lower-spec 'van. Another factor that can affect servicing costs is labour – both the rates charged and the amount of time required to carry out any given job.

It's easier to change the fuel filter on a 'van with a standard cab than it is on an A-class, and the extra time taken means a higher labour charge.

The many variables

I recently saw someone complaining about what seemed like a high quote for an oil and filter change on their motorhome. A little digging for information explained the cost, though.

The vehicle in question was a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter-based motorhome with a 3.0-litre V6 diesel engine. This beast takes 11 litres of high-spec oil – once you add the cost of the filter and labour, it was never going to prove cheap.

Labour rates

Rates for labour vary widely, largely depending on whether you're talking about main agent rates or small independent workshops.

I only have a relatively small workshop and office to pay for, along with electricity, water, business rates, insurance, a phone line, the internet, wages, and so on. A main agent, on the other hand, has much higher fixed costs: premises, staff, insurance, business rates, heating, lighting and more.

Little wonder they have to charge more per hour to pay for it all; only once everything is paid for can they begin make a profit.

Different types, different costs

Another point to consider is access to the various parts that mechanics need to work on. Air and fuel filters on the current Fiat Ducato, for example, are not in the most accessible locations, but with practice are not overly difficult to change.

It's not the same on an A-class body, though. I recently serviced a 2014 Rapido on a Ducato base, and after 90 minutes I had managed to change the air and fuel filters and adjust the driver's side headlight. Access was extremely difficult!

The fuel filter is on the (UK) passenger's side bulkhead at the rear of the engine bay, and the air filter is on the passenger side of the engine bay but down behind the original Fiat bonnet slam panel.

A-class problems

Because of the A-class body, though, access becomes very tricky. I could only just reach the fuel filter with my face planted firmly against the windscreen, meaning I was working blind. To get at the air filter involved removing the Fiat slam panel altogether.

The headlight adjustment is made via an access panel in the wheelarch liner, except it isn't terribly close to the headlight at all.

Access is improved as long as you have arms like an orangutan with 14 elbows in each.

Once, replacing the electric elements in a Truma C-series heater fitted to a Dethleffs took five hours in total – and all these hours of work had to be paid for.

Designs reduce access

Base vehicle manufacturers don't always help either. The X250 Fiat Ducato (November 2006 onwards) has a pollen filter mounted behind the central glovebox. It's a 10-minute job to replace, with just five screws to deal with. But when the Euro 5 models (all-black dashboards) came out, Fiat added



'Labour rates vary widely, largely depending on whether you're talking about main agent rates or small independent workshops'



1 Save money by conducting simple maintenance yourself, such as checking the oil or the windscreen wiper blades

2 A few simple checks can help prevent unexpected charges at the end of the service

another layer of plastic behind the glovebox involving an additional eight screws and adding about 10 more minutes to the job.

Help yourself save cash

With all that in mind, to help motorhome workshop mechanics do their job quickly (and therefore help you save money), you should try to do all of the basic, regular checks yourself: tyre pressures, oil level, tread depth and general condition should be looked at on a weekly basis, or at the very least before any long journey.

Check that all of your road lights function correctly. Rear-lamp fittings often suffer from water getting in and causing corrosion, so these require inspection often.

Windscreen washers will need to be topped up and working: if any jets don't give a clean shot, then a pin or staple will usually clear the blockage. Also, check that your windscreen wipers work effectively, have no splits in the rubbers, and can clear the windscreen without smearing.

Clear your garage and lockers

If you're also having a habitation inspection done, think about what the technician needs access to: trying to find a water pump, space heater or leisure battery beneath a mountain of camping clutter isn't fun, so empty everything out of the 'van that doesn't need to be there.

If there are specific jobs that need attention, tell the workshop about them when booking – it's

no good just turning up on the day with a list of extra tasks and expecting them to be accommodated.

A good habitation inspection will include a full electrics check; this should also mean an inspection of your hook-up lead, so ensure that it's present (and easily accessible) in the 'van when you drop it off.

Gas and fridge checks

Check that there is gas in at least one cylinder, because otherwise the gas equipment can't be tested.

When booking, ask whether the fridge is serviced as part of the inspection – if not, then you'll need to ask

for it to be done. The gas part of a three-way fridge needs annual servicing, or more frequent checks if it's used extensively.

If you present your motorhome in a state where everything is accessible to the engineer, there should be no surprise extra charges on the bill when you arrive to collect the 'van at the end of the service.



'Rear-lamp fittings often suffer from water getting in and causing corrosion, so these require inspection often'



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Getty

THE LAST WORD OUR ADVICE

Top tips from the *Practical Motorhome* team
on how to make your cash go further!

■ Campsite stays can be expensive, particularly during the high season, so make sure you're not paying for facilities that you won't use. A swimming pool on site is a nice idea, but will you actually spend enough time in it to make it worth the extra that full-facility sites cost? Similarly, if you're happy to use your 'van's onboard facilities, there's no need to pay for an all-singing, all-dancing site with fancy bathrooms – a more back-to-basics site might be better for your wallet.

Sarah Wakely Editor-in-chief

■ When it comes to campervans, many converters offer you the option of just doing the conversion – you supply the base vehicle. This can work out significantly cheaper, but make sure you do the research first, so you are aware of all the costs involved – taxes, registration costs, and so on. And be aware that you will be starting off with a vehicle that might already have considerable mileage on the clock (although motorhomes do not depreciate in value as quickly as cars). Second, you might be tempted to rent your motorhome out, in order to make some cash. However, there are hidden costs in doing so that you might not be aware of at first, and if you've bought a new motorhome you could invalidate the warranty. Be sure to do your (thorough) research first.

Peter Baber Reviews Editor

■ Stock up on dried pasta or noodles, along with pesto and sauce sachets. As well as being filling and quick to cook, they're cheap and can be kept in your lockers ready for when you need them. And why not take a bicycle on tour? It'll make trips to the shops for those urgent essentials that much easier, and you won't need to start up the engine, so you'll save fuel.

Simon Mortimer Art editor



■ Make sure your vehicle is in top condition before you set off. As a minimum, check oil levels, screen wash and tyre pressures (don't forget the spare). Setting the right tyre pressures won't just make you transport safer, it will reduce fuel consumption on your journey. And by ensuring you have plenty of fuel before you leave, there's less chance of having to dash to buy more, eating into your holiday time and burning even more fuel while you travel.

David Motton
Contributor



■ Travelling to Europe? Remember that the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which gives free or discounted medical care in the EU and Switzerland, is being replaced by the Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). Check your EHIC is still in date (bottom right of card) or apply for a GHIC before you travel.

Paul Critcher
Deputy editor

