

A VAN CALLED REBUS



"Okay Rebus, take us home!" The voice-activated sat-nav, programmed especially to respond to that command, sprung into life and Rebus, a brand new VW T6 campervan conversion, pulled away from Minehead in Somerset on its maiden journey home to Cambridgeshire.

For new owners Marie and Cameron Edgar, their 15-year old son Jack and two year old Tibetan terrier Hugo, it was the start of a new adventure, but for Glaswegian Marie it was also the end of a journey that began over 20 years before.

Nelly the campervan

"I had some experience of campervanning in the early 90s. I was in my early thirties with nothing but a small flat and a job to look after. My friend Christine had a yellow and white VW Type 2 campervan called Nelly Van. We

would get away a couple of weekends each month. Christine's knowledge of Scotland was vast, and she introduced me to many beautiful places, always within walking distance of a pub; a matter of necessity..."

But the friends' lives changed; Christine had a baby, Marie met Cameron and Nelly Van suffered 'serious health problems' resulting in Christine taking her off the road.

The experiences and memories of her time in Nelly Van never left Marie and she is excited that campervanning is going to be part of their lives again: "I have wanted one for a long time, but never thought this was something Cameron would be interested in, so I didn't push it. But when friends started talking about getting one the spark was lit and I began to think seriously about it."

Sea to land

The first step along the journey came much later for Cameron who was sailing the west coast of Scotland in the days before meeting Marie, and who had never been camping or campervanning: "Although I love the outdoors, especially the coast, I'd never really had the opportunity. I guess I have done the equivalent of campervanning but on the sea. I grew up on the west coast of Scotland so love the scenery and changeability of it all."

So when psychotherapist Marie began to express interest in buying a campervan, Cameron was at first cautious. But with Jack having outgrown kids' clubs and beach holidays, and Cameron's stressful Chief Engineer job at a printer manufacturer taking up huge amounts of time he was attracted to the idea of doing





The Edgar family show us around their funky Autohaus VW T6 conversion that was inspired by author Ian Rankin's detective novels...

WORDS & PHOTOS MIKE TRIPPITT



THE EDGAR FAMILY

VW T6 SWB Transporter Highline

Owned since 1 March 2018

Drive Front-wheel drive

Engine 2.0-litre turbo-diesel (Euro 6)

Power 102bhp

Economy 47.1mpg (estimated VW figure)

Gearbox 5-speed manual

Travel seats 4

Berths 4

Leisure battery 100Ah

Length x width x height 4.90m x 1.94m x 1.95m

Equipment Indium Grey paintwork, front splitter and rear spoiler, black GRP pop-top. 18-inch black alloy Assassin wheels. Chrome side-bars, black multi-rail. Highline specification includes climatic air-conditioning, heated front screen, multi-function steering wheel, central locking, electric windows, electric mirrors, CD and DAB radio, front fog lamps, leather gear knob and steering wheel, rear parking sensors, cruise control and Bluetooth. Driver's captain seat and passenger swivel captain seat, privacy glass to sides and rear, tailgate with rear wiper, RIB bed, black leather upholstery with green double-vertical stitching, black leather trim on bed board, fridge and panels to match. Black pine units, Dometic combination two-burner hob and sink, Webasto fridge. Pumped cold water, including rear 'beach shower'. 240V hook-up, 100W solar panel, rear speakers, floor and step lighting, Vango Cruz II driveaway awning.

Insurance £758 (Caravan Guard)

Best trip so far

First weekend away at Sizewell in Suffolk. Further 2018 trips planned to Derbyshire, Dorset and Pembrokeshire.

COSTS SO FAR

Vehicle cost	£44,600
Awning cost	£700

"something very different and the opportunity to be free and spontaneous."

He says: "We wanted an escape, but didn't want to be tied to one place. We wanted our weekends back and also to spend time as a family again, especially before Jack starts thinking about leaving home in a few years time."

So what was it that persuaded him? "Threats of violence from my wife!" he jokes. "Friends of ours got a camper in 2017. Marie now had influential backup to work on me, so I knew there was little chance of escape. It was now a matter of 'when' rather than 'if' we were going to get a campervan."

Hire before you buy

But Cameron says he was not giving up without a fight and before he committed to buying one thought the couple should hire one for a holiday. "We are so glad

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1 The Edgars with their new 'van

2 Bespoke embroidery designed by Cameron Edgar

we did, as it gave us the chance to experience the changeable British weather and find out what specific campervan features worked and, more importantly, didn't work for us as a family. The week of living in a rain cloud was make or break for the deal; you could sense Marie was on tenterhooks wondering what Jack and I thought."

Marie admits she had been a little anxious: "I felt Cameron was not sure what to expect, and Jack wasn't saying too much at all. My biggest fear was that Cameron would hate it, and that that would be the end of the idea. But I knew he would give it a go with an open mind, so that gave me hope. Jack on the other hand didn't look happy at all."

"First impressions? It was different to what I thought it would be," says teenager Jack. "I wasn't really sure what to expect, but I didn't expect it to be such

hard work; lifting roofs, pulling beds out etc. Dad told me it was just the features of that particular hire van. Ours would be much easier. After a couple of days I got into the rhythm of the 'van, and packing up and setting up became easier for all of us. If only the weather had been a little better, we would have had a lot more BBQs and I would have learned to cook. That's still the plan for this summer."

Despite the weather, the trial holiday was a great success. The family stayed at a number of sites and got a real sense of what campervanning was all about; in Cameron's case for the first time, and for Marie after a 25-year break.

Rebus is specced

Once home, the couple's discussions moved on and Marie's 'long game' paid off: "I don't think we had a definite 'yes we will buy a van chat'," she says with a

wry smile. "But we began to specify the van we would want, and as if by magic, we had specced Rebus!"

Marie says that as much as she loved old 'Nelly Van', a VW T2 would not be big enough for their needs, nor would it have "all the mod cons". So they began to look at current vehicles, with Cameron especially doing research and once again keeping an open mind. He even considered a motorhome thinking how much more they could get for their money. They ruled one out, though, wanting instead to use a camper as their second vehicle, not just at weekends or for holidays.

They looked at Mercedes conversions as well as Ford Transits, but Cameron says they kept coming back to a VW T6: "It has a certain heritage and lifestyle that the others don't have, but of course this brings with it a price tag. We knew of two good campervan specialists. During May and June 2017 Marie started to gather ideas on what we wanted and we honestly thought we were sorted. Then we discovered Autohaus' website and things changed."

During a week's holiday in August, Marie and Cameron drove to Autohaus in Minehead to meet managing director Tony Payne and his team to talk campervans. "We were blown away by what they could offer, the quality of it, and the fact that they do everything in-house," says Cameron.

Autohaus in Minehead, Somerset, has been converting VW vans into campers since 1994. The company produce 150 campervans a year, but with a new

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factory aim to increase that to 300.

After the successful day trip in August Marie and Cameron met Tony at the Motorhome and Caravan Show in October and placed an order.

Show spending

They opted for a brand new T6 Transporter in Indium Grey, and while lower running costs and lower emissions were a consideration, Cameron says there were other reasons for buying new: "It allowed us to choose exactly what we wanted and gave us the added protection of a full warranty. As we intend to keep it for several years, reliability and value are important."

For Marie, impressed with the detail of the finish provided by Autohaus, it meant the 'van could be made just as they wanted: "I didn't want Rebus to look like

a works van from the outside, so we decided to have a black roof and to have a green pinstripe on the front grille and green trim at the bottom of the wing mirrors. Rebus has black gloss door handles and light surrounds. The Autohaus decal that incorporates a green pinstripe looks lovely."

On 3 December the Edgar family visited the Autohaus factory again to finalise the interior specification. "I had a great time specifying Rebus. Having the knowledge of the hire van, I knew exactly what would work for us, and choosing the colour scheme was great. I'm happy to say I got my choice!" says Marie.

Finishing touches

Autohaus agreed that their new vehicle would be registered new on 1 March 2018, which meant the Edgar family

3 Pitched up with awning at Beech View, Sizewell

4 Well you'd be grinning if this was your camper!

5 The finished interior



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could travel down to collect it on Saturday 3rd March. They decided to name him 'Rebus' after Inspector John Rebus in the Scottish detective novels by Ian Rankin. They also thought that acquiring the new number plate 'RE18 BUS' might be fun, so from work on the first morning that the new numbers were available, Cameron visited DVLA's website to buy it. It had already been sold! He could not mask his disappointment and rang Marie at home to tell her it had already been sold.

"I know. I've bought it!" she grinned.

Hiring a camper initially, gave Cameron and Marie the experience to pinpoint their essential features for Rebus. Although the looks and height of the high-rise / low-profile pop-top roof on the hire vehicle impressed them, they were less impressed by the fact that it had visible retaining screws. The convenience of two conventional straps at the front made them plump for a traditional pop-top.

Perhaps surprisingly, they chose not to have a grill, though it was not a decision they took lightly: "We thought long and hard about the grill, but decided in the end that we would prefer more storage space. Most people seem to just store stuff in it rather than use it as a grill. We'll hopefully get to use the barbecue outside!"

Rebus even has an outside shower, although Marie admits that it is a bit of a luxury gadget: "We'll see how effective it is in keeping the dog clean after a run on the beach!"

As 3rd March approached, the Edgars hopes of bringing Rebus home in spring sunshine were dashed. The 'Beast from the East' wreaked havoc on East Anglia and the West Country. Rebus was buried under several inches of snow. Common sense won out and the decision was made to delay the handover a week.



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6 Rebus certainly cuts a dash on the campsite

7 The exterior shower; great for the beach and the dog!

8 Pick a campsite without a phone signal to see your teenagers again...

9 Hugo the dog is undecided about all this campervanning business...

Delivery day

So on the following Saturday, 10 March 2018, Marie, Cameron and Jack met Rebus for the first time. Fred from the Autohaus team took two hours running through the 'van's systems and handover procedure.

"I can't believe how great he looks," said Cameron, being unable to conceal his delight. "He has exceeded all my expectations."

Marie reflected on the journey since August last year: "The experience of buying Rebus has been a very positive one. Tony and his team are friendly and professional, and we've had a laugh."

But have Marie and Cameron Edgar been typical customers and is Rebus a typical van?

Tony Payne says there is no such thing as a typical customer: "Our customers range from 30 years old to those in their

eighties, with job backgrounds varying from doctors, solicitors, military, shop-workers; the list goes on. We try to treat all as individuals."

That individuality is reflected in the build process. Tony says that Rebus is 'typically individual with personal touches', contributed by the Edgars. He says that from their first meeting communication was excellent: "Marie has made a few tweaks along the way, and I've enjoyed the banter. She's been like an expectant mum!"

Tony enjoys the handover of new vehicles in the same way that customers do: "I love making our vehicle look smart on the outside as well as being practical on the inside. The best part of my job is meeting the customers and seeing their reactions. It makes me proud of all the hard work my team does each week. When buying an Autohaus you are joining our extended family."

Living the dream

After their first weekend away in Rebus at Sizewell in Suffolk and a long weekend at Stonehenge, they see themselves touring further afield and are planning a three-week holiday to France.

Rebus will be a way for the family to put aside the pressures of challenging work, long hours at the office and the inevitable school homework. Marie reckons good self-care is important: "I like to be able to get the most out of our weekends and I feel having Rebus will ensure we all do."

