

George and Me

Were this tale laced with fond memories of childhood holidays onboard a splitscreen, or with enthusiastic, if not passionate, talk of a labour-of-love restoration...

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS: MIKE TRIPPITT



Then my romance with campervans, and especially that with our VW T6 'George' might be more easily understood. But the fact is camper-vanning passed me by, at least for most of my fifty-something years.

'What's Needingworth Campers?' I asked my new neighbour Steve, when I noticed the words on his corporate polo shirt three years ago.

'It's my business', he said, as if stating the obvious.

'I thought you owned a car dealership?'

'I did' he continued candidly, 'but we have moved into campervan conversions'.

Campervan conversions, I mused. Our brief exchange changed history. That evening, a new world opened

▲ George with porch looks towards the Isle of Arran

● Gordale Scar, Yorkshire Dales

○ George with Outdoor Revolution T2 MoveLite awning and porch

up when I scoured Needingworth Campers' website. My learning curve was gloriously steep: VW campers were all conversions; they had four berths (two up top); some were new vehicles, others new conversions on pre-owned panelvans. Most joyous of all, they started at £26,000. How reasonable, having spent the last 2 decades sailing, I had become accustomed to drooling over yachts commanding a six-figure price tag. I could feel an expenditure coming on.

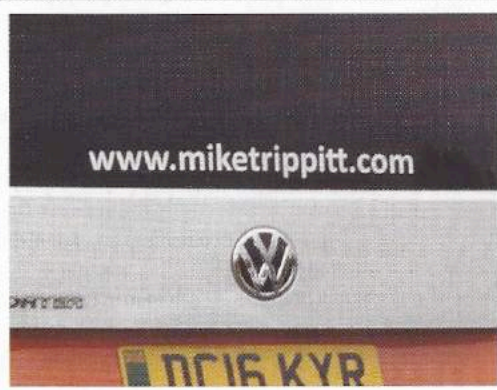
Twelve months later, George arrived. Of course, my wife Clare and I did our research beforehand, and the more we delved, the more choices appeared. We did an earnest appraisal of what we would use a camper for: weekends, short holidays in the UK, and ☺





All in the detail...

Let's take a closer look



Top Nicely detailed & coloured BK Racing BK170 wheels
Middle We do like to see perfectly matched interior colours.
Bottom A bit of self promotion never hurt anyone



crucially, as our second vehicle. Unlike a motorhome, a campervan is attractive to so many because it will go on a driveway, in the parking space at the supermarket, or under overhead height restriction at many car parks.

Inevitably we had the heart-overhead dilemma: should we go for an old T2 bay-window, a Brazilian VW, or possibly a brand new 'Danbury' T2. Romance as we might, we could not escape the reality, that my vehicle maintenance skills have yet to reveal themselves. No matter whether a T2 is a classic, an import or a 'new' one, it is the technology of a generation ago. The need for reliability tipped the scales in favour of a modern T6. I planned to use the camper in my work as a freelance writer. I had no time, or margin, for unforeseen breakdowns and delays. Practicality triumphed over nostalgia, but it was a close call.

We bought George from Steve Tingey at Needingworth Campers. They're on our doorstep, and their Camper King conversion, is a good

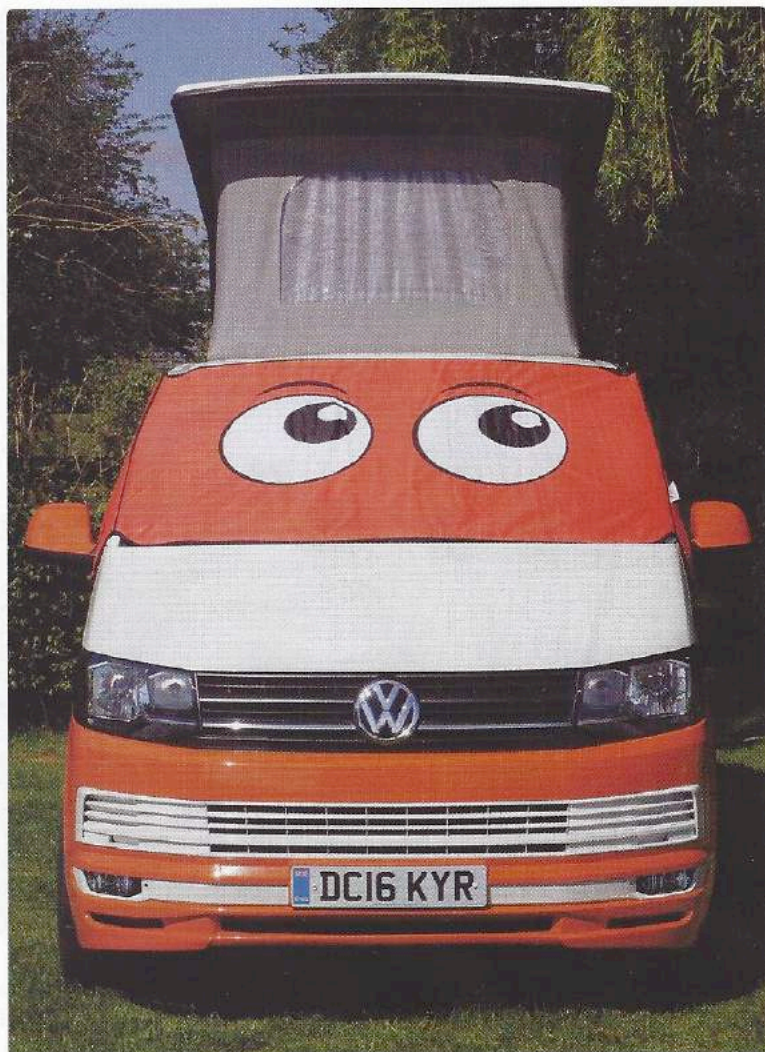




George and me at Ellerburn, North Yorkshire

George with windscreen covers

Inside George



product. But we had discovered just how big the market was and the massive choice that is out there. After looking at a number of converters and visiting a couple of shows, it was clear there were several great campers that fitted the bill.

With Needingworth Campers being close by, we were able to see our base vehicle when it arrived as a 9 month-old, 10,000-mile, 2 litre, manual panel-van, albeit in Highline specification, but before any conversion work. We test drove it and were happy with its specification and condition. We knew what we were getting.

Having the opportunity to choose colour, upholstery, bed options and cupboard finish all added to the sense of customisation, so that when George finally arrived, he was ours, and he had his own personality. The bond between us was instant.

We are now in our third season touring, and look back on the choosing and buying process with the satisfaction of having got it

right, at least in the main. Clare was keen to make sure that George (named after a character in Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men In A Boat*) stood out from the immeasurable number of works vans and hire vehicles that trundle along our roads. His two-tone white over orange certainly draws attention. But we accepted Steve's advice and decided against retro choquerboard flooring. With a dog onboard, and George in regular use, the pristine white 'tiles' would soon age. We're also pleased that we didn't opt for the additional cost of diesel heating. We hook-up as often as we can, so a small £10 electric van heater that stows comfortably in the aft locker is just the job, and saved many hundreds of pounds.

George's pop-top bed boards, in four sections rather than the more fashionable one-piece type on pneumatic struts, are a godsend. With just the two of us, we do not use the bed in the roof, but the four boards stacked two-on-two make great storage for clothes, rucksacks, etc.



camera bags and laptop once we're pitched. We'd struggle for space without this cavernous shelf. Since we bought our bus, we have added extras: the first deliberately omitted from the original conversion on a wait-and-see basis, and the second with the benefit of hindsight. We very nearly opted for a wind-out cassette awning when we first ordered the camper, but decided to wait. How right we were; it would have a mistake. Instead, after 4 months we fitted a Rejmo rail and bought an Outdoor Revolution Movelite T2 drive-away awning. It is big enough for our needs, provides enough warmth and shelter from a breeze, and houses our porta-loo. We even have a porch attachment that fits either the awning or directly onto George's rail, which acts as a shelter from the rain in inclement weather.

Solar panels were our second addition. On reflection, we should have included them from the outset. We now remain self-sufficient for longer without hook-up. In last year's heatwave we managed a week on the Jurassic Coast with just our batteries running the fridge, lights and charging our phones. The panels

My 'office' at Felixstowe

George with porch only attached

allow us to wild camp, or stay on a sleepy little site far away from the mod cons of luxury camping.

During 2017 and 2018, Clare and I toured Yorkshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Devon and Dorset using George as our holiday camper, but I always envisaged that I would work from him. I ensured that the dinette table was sturdy enough to write and do photo-editing from, and as a work vehicle George excels. Work first took me to Felixstowe in Suffolk to interview people for an article about pirate radio on its 50th anniversary. After interviewing an elderly lady who had witnessed Radio Caroline's

arrival off Felixstowe at Easter 1964, I parked George on the cliff top looking out to sea, popped the roof, and worked on the piece before my next interview later in the day. There are certainly shabbier offices. On another occasion when photographing and interviewing British Paramotor champion Paul Martin on Martlesham Heath, the heavens opened forcing us both to retreat into George to finish off our chat there. It's always good to have him on hand. 📷



With thanks to...

There's no denying that after two years Clare and I have a strong connection with George, and wouldn't be without him. Sometimes he gets me to the story, sometimes he is the story. But most of all, he's our camper and our getaway. Whether we're tucked away in some quiet country idyll, or he's huddled outside our house in the pouring rain, he is, as Clare put it recently, 'part of the family'.