



The base vehicle has VW Trendline specification but came with Highline instruments on the dash

Mike Trippitt meets up with Steve Mathers to find out if he's a snob and why his snobby number plate matters...

WORDS & PHOTOS Mike Trippitt

Most of us wouldn't want to be called a snob, let alone advertise it. But it suits Steve Mathers fine.

The registration number spaced creatively on his VW T5 camper conversion certainly draws attention wherever he goes. It's been called "brilliant" and "absolutely legendary".

"It's a great conversation starter," says the auto-electrical and motor engineer from Northampton. "People have a smile on their face, and then you just get chatting."

Steve, a former owner of two VW T4 vans, has been a member of the online T4/T5 Forum for over a decade.

"When I bought my first T5 in about 2010 I went for a long Easter eekend in north Devon with the forum guys. Some said "Look at you, snob, with your T5. You won't want to come with us anymore!"

Some number crunching

Loving the banter and camaraderie, Steve kept the joke up long after getting his latest long-wheelbase T5 in 2015. One evening back in 2018, while wife, Elaine, was at work, he found himself experimenting with private numbers on the DVLA website. In a moment of inspiration, he typed one in... For under £300 it was available. Days later, A T5

SNOB was born.

But behind the funny number plate there is much more to the story of this VW campervan: "It was accidental, really. It was our wedding anniversary, and we'd just been out for lunch. We called in at the VW garage and got chatting to one of the guys in there. He said they'd got a pre-registered van, six months old, 400 miles on the clock."

Steve says it was a Trendline specification, but with Highline instruments on the dashboard. It had Bluetooth and a few nice extras. At £9,000 under the price of a new one it was a no-brainer, so a deal was done.

Initially, like the T4s and a T5 before it, the

new van was a work vehicle. Yes, Steve had converted the previous vee-dubs to day vans for work and play, but foremost the new T5 had to earn its keep... ..at least that was the original idea.

It wasn't long, however, before Steve decided that he would go the whole way to converting the latest van into a fully fledged camper and to keep it exclusively for holidays and leisure use.

Conversion time

"Most of the skills I already had from the auto-electrical side and from the car audio industry," he says. Whilst he was used to working out how things would fit, he did not have the carpentry skills himself to make the internal cupboard units. He found Dubplate Conversions at Southampton and asked them to build the cupboard unit.

"I said I wanted it 200 millimetres shorter than a long wheelbase, or if you look at it the other way, 200 millimetres longer than the short wheelbase!" Inevitably he was asked why...

"I wanted to put the rock 'n' roll bed

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slightly further forward, because I wanted to be able to put my awning in the back, and my bedding and my chairs in the back. I didn't want to be travelling somewhere with a load of loose stuff on the floor. If you've got someone on the rear seat the last thing you want is the floor between the front and rear seats full."

From the beginning Steve had very clear views about how he wanted the campervan to look and the features that were important. Having worked on countless T5s, including doing some camper conversion work for others, he had seen most things. He understood what worked and what didn't work, and regularly came up with ideas and solutions to maximise the usable space in the 'van.

The large open access to the upper bed in the long-wheelbase model troubled him; it seemed a waste of space. Sourcing parts from local breakers, including another

headliner, he modified the access: "I thought rather than have that massive cab open area I'll put a reinforcement panel in and put a headliner back in there. I then took an overhead locker from a VW Touran, grafted it into the headliner, trimmed it up and put it in." But he hit a snag; he hadn't realised how much wider the Touran overhead locker was compared to that on a standard T5! "My sun visors didn't fit; they were too long, so I did a little bit of homework. The breakers allowed me to take out some sun visors, go back to my 'van and physically check them until I got the right size. So I've got a factory T5 headliner, a VW Touran centre roof console and VW Sharan sun visors."

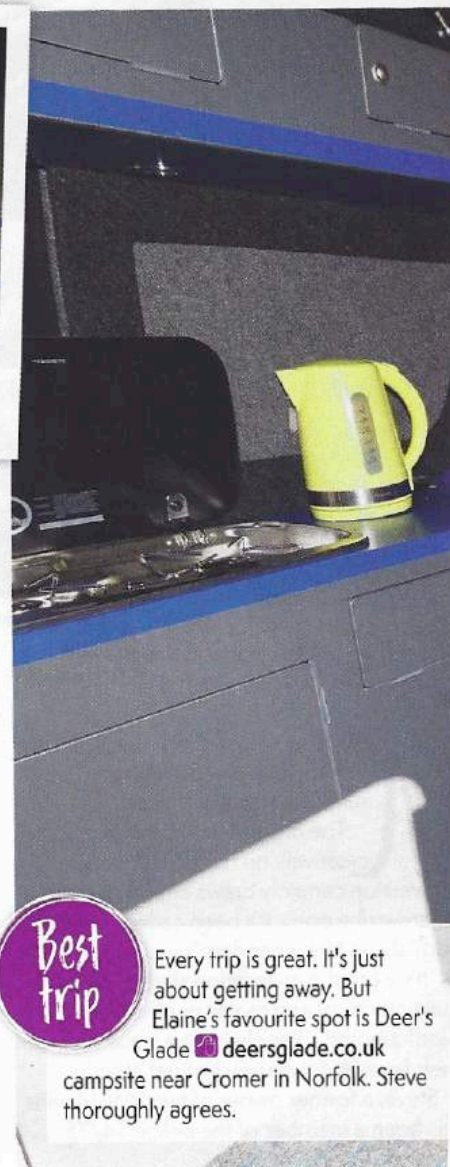
The individuality of this T5 is apparent on close inspection, both inside and out. Dark windows, two-tone linings, grey sidebars, a custom grille and matching honeycomb splitter, blue dashboard trim – all fitted by Steve – show his attention to detail. Even the



The kitchen has a basic sink and hob but we usually cook outside and use a coolbox in the awning, too



Steve and Elaine often use their camper for going to festivals, all year round!



Every trip is great. It's just about getting away. But Elaine's favourite spot is Deer's Glade deersglade.co.uk campsite near Cromer in Norfolk. Steve thoroughly agrees.



rock 'n' roll bed was carefully thought out. Though he wanted to store a cassette toilet underneath, he also had another idea...

The big problem with a lot of rock 'n' roll beds, says Steve, is that you either load them from the front or the rear. Take or leave it. I wanted a slide-out drawer. It's not yet finished. With a full-time job and two grown-up children at home, there's not enough time for everything, especially as Steve has needed to watch online videos to learn how to use a router!

Such a snob

Wherever possible, Steve has done the conversion at home after shopping around for the best prices on parts and materials, but he says WestDubs fitted the pop-top, Camper King supplied the bed frame, Metrol Springs supplied the hydraulics for the bed board, and Mid England Retrims did the upholstery.

Though Steve and Elaine have been using the campervan for a couple of years now, at weekends, for bank holiday trips and to do several festivals, there's still work to be done.

Though it has a hob, Steve intends to fit an exterior connection so they can keep the gas bottle outside. They boil only water inside, preferring to cook outdoors. The couple have no plans to install a fridge because of the storage space they would lose. With three dogs on-board, most weekends involve putting up the awning, so they prefer to use an electric coolbox in there.

The process of getting the camper to where it is and what still needs doing is an evolution. Steve regularly asks himself: "What do I need to take with me, and where can it go?" He says: "It's one of those vehicles that I think will only ever be finished the day I sell it!"

Until then Steve knows that a police officer might point out that the spacing on A T5 SNOB infringes the regulations, so when he and Elaine go camping he always carries another set of registration plates that can be put on easily.

If you fancy becoming a A T6 SNOB, the DVLA number AT65 NOB is available for £399... Steve already has his eye on it.



Elaine & Steve

Base vehicle 2015 VW T5.1 Transporter LWB Trendline

Conversion type Self-build, with elevating roof fitted by West Dubs westdubs.co.uk cupboards supplied by Dubplate Conversions [@Dubplateconversion](https://www.facebook.com/Dubplateconversion) bed supplied by Camper King camperking.co.uk and upholstery done by Mid England Retrims mid-england-retrims.co.uk

Owned since March 2015

Engine Diesel (Euro 5)

Power 102bhp, remapped by Only Revo onlyrevo.com to a selectable 102, 140 or 180bhp

Economy 32 – 34mpg

Gearbox Five-speed manual gearbox

Travel seats 5

Berths 4

Leisure battery 2 x 110Ah

Length x width x height 5.29m x 1.90m x 1.98m

Equipment Standard Trendline specification, but with Bluetooth and Highline dashboard

Added Equipment Parking sensors, foglights, reversing camera, sat-nav, custom grille, body kit and splitter, 18in alloy wheels, sidebars, swivel double passenger seat, 10-litre container with 12V submersible pump, cupboards, rock 'n' roll bed, new upholstery, headlining, overhead locker, awning rail, Eberspächer diesel heating, sink, hob.

Insurance £220

COSTS SO FAR

The van (plus VAT).....	£17,500
Pop-top	£2,500
Cupboards.....	£1,000
Bed.....	£375
Upholstery.....	£1,000
Engine remapping.....	£500
Sundries.....	£2,500
Awning (secondhand off eBay).....	£140
Total costs to date	£25,515

