

roads and the Caravan Club has one million members. That's enough to bring the highway network grinding to a halt behind a barricade of net curtains and swirly patterned upholstery.

But surely those thousands of owners can't all be wrong? After all, younger buyers are the driving force behind the latest boom. Go-slow thirtysomethings are now the target audience for manufacturers, who tempt them with trendy interiors and flatscreen TVs.

The rising price of air travel and a fear of being 'packaged' on holiday are also key selling points. Whether it's the Glastonbury Festival or Le Mans, a camper van makes the perfect getaway vehicle for weekend events, too.

Still not convinced? Famous motorhome owners who have caught the bug include radio presenter Jeremy Vine, Olympic gold medalist Dame Kelly Holmes, singer Jay Kay and Steve McFadden, aka

**Some, and it is only** a matter of opinion, of course, accuse them of being big, white and ugly. Yet there must be something about motorhomes. Why else, last year, did thousands of families fork out up to £30,000 on one?

Despite being the butt of endless jokes and despite leaving frustrated road users cursing in their wake, sales of both caravans and camper vans are soaring, reaching an all-time high of 11,646 new motorhomes sold in 2007. Add to that the 69,000 caravans snapped up in the same year and you begin to get some idea of their popularity.

If you, like me, think that figure doesn't sound too alarming, consider this: experts say there are now a staggering 141,000 motorhomes registered on UK

*EastEnders* tough guy Phil Mitchell. Even Robbie Williams has succumbed, according to the Motorhome Information Service. 'With everything on board, a motorhome takes you closer to the action,' reckons spokeswoman Ruth de Mierre.

'They're powerful vehicles, with turbo-diesel engines, giving decent fuel consumption as well as on-road performance. It's a "living" vehicle for people who enjoy living in style, any time, any place.'

If you can't beat them, join them. Which is why I'm writing this from the luxury 'lounge' of my £40,000 Auto-Sleepers Sigma EK. Based on a Peugeot chassis, it's a popular mid-price model for four people. For that sort of money I could have bought a Porsche Boxster or three months of pampering at The Dorchester.

I should point out that I did once own a truly trendy Volkswagen Split Screen Camper, the same as chef Jamie Oliver's. It was cool, while the Sigma, for all its luxuries, still looks like it's only missing a giant slot on the front for washing powder.

However, parked up in an Oxfordshire campsite, I'm already beginning to see why it's easy to



## Places to park up

**Llangollen, Wales** Great touring and plenty of beautiful sites. Try Wern Isaf Farm near Castle Dinas Bran ([www.wernisaf.supanet.com](http://www.wernisaf.supanet.com))

**Yorkshire Moors** They're wild and rugged but breathtakingly beautiful, too. Osmotherley is a bustling village. Try Cote Ghyll Caravan and Camping Park ([www.coteghyll.com](http://www.coteghyll.com))

**Batcombe Vale, Green Hills, Somerset** It has won countless awards, with garden walks and private fishing ([www.batcombevale.co.uk](http://www.batcombevale.co.uk))

**Norfolk** boasts long, sandy beaches and wonderful skylines. Enjoy a big sunset at Deepdale Farm Camping in Burnham Deepdale ([www.deepdalefarm.co.uk](http://www.deepdalefarm.co.uk))

**Llanthony Priory near Hay-on-Wye** Reached only by a single-track road – so make sure you can reverse first. There's a pub in the Abbey cellars ([www.llanthony.co.uk](http://www.llanthony.co.uk))

Caravan and motorhome sales are booming in the UK – so what's the attraction of a 'box' on wheels? Road hog **Jeremy Taylor** finds out...

# Room to Roam?

The VW Type 2 camper van is a true classic



## Vantastic!

There are plenty of companies making motorhomes and each model can be customised to suit your requirements. The MIS ([motorhomeinfo.co.uk](http://motorhomeinfo.co.uk)) website has links to all of them. Here's our pick of the three best-selling vans to suit all pockets...



### Danbury Rio Volkswagen (from around £20,000)

Retro-look camper van imported from South America and fitted out in the UK. ([danburymotorcaravans.com](http://danburymotorcaravans.com))



### Pilote G690 TP (£49,000)

Mid-range model that sleeps up to five and can be fitted to a variety of chassis, including Peugeot and Fiat. ([pilote.co.uk](http://pilote.co.uk))

### Winnebago Vista (£85,000)

Monster 32ft American mobile with a V10 engine. ([dudleys-rv.com](http://dudleys-rv.com))



◀ become a van fan. For starters, there's a distinct lack of naff cloth and oodles of space for a family.

It's ridiculously easy to drive and, apart from almost ripping the roof off under a low country bridge, very manoeuvrable. If you are more used to reversing a supermini and not a 21ft monster like this, parking sensors are an option.

The standard 2.2-litre engine can be upgraded to a 3-litre, so the quieter engine won't annoy every other holidaymaker who is facing an uncertain night ahead in a B&B. Cruise control, air conditioning and different upholstery are also available.

What you can't rush in your home on wheels is reading the instruction book. Just like a new tent, trying to convert the inward-facing seats into a double bed and fathoming the electric system will have you cursing if left until the last minute.

The Sigma sports a bed above the driver's cab, which your kids will love. There's even a net to stop them landing on top of you in the middle of the night. And, if the thought of waking up in a remote field is worrying, this model has a full kitchen, shower and electric flush toilet.

Perhaps more importantly, if you don't like the view from the window or your fellow camping pals prove noisy in the night, it only takes a few minutes to cook a full English breakfast, pack up and move on.

And that's the best reason to buy a camper van: freedom. If only they didn't paint them all white, then perhaps we would see even more on the road... ■

\* Statistics courtesy of Motorhome Information Service

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