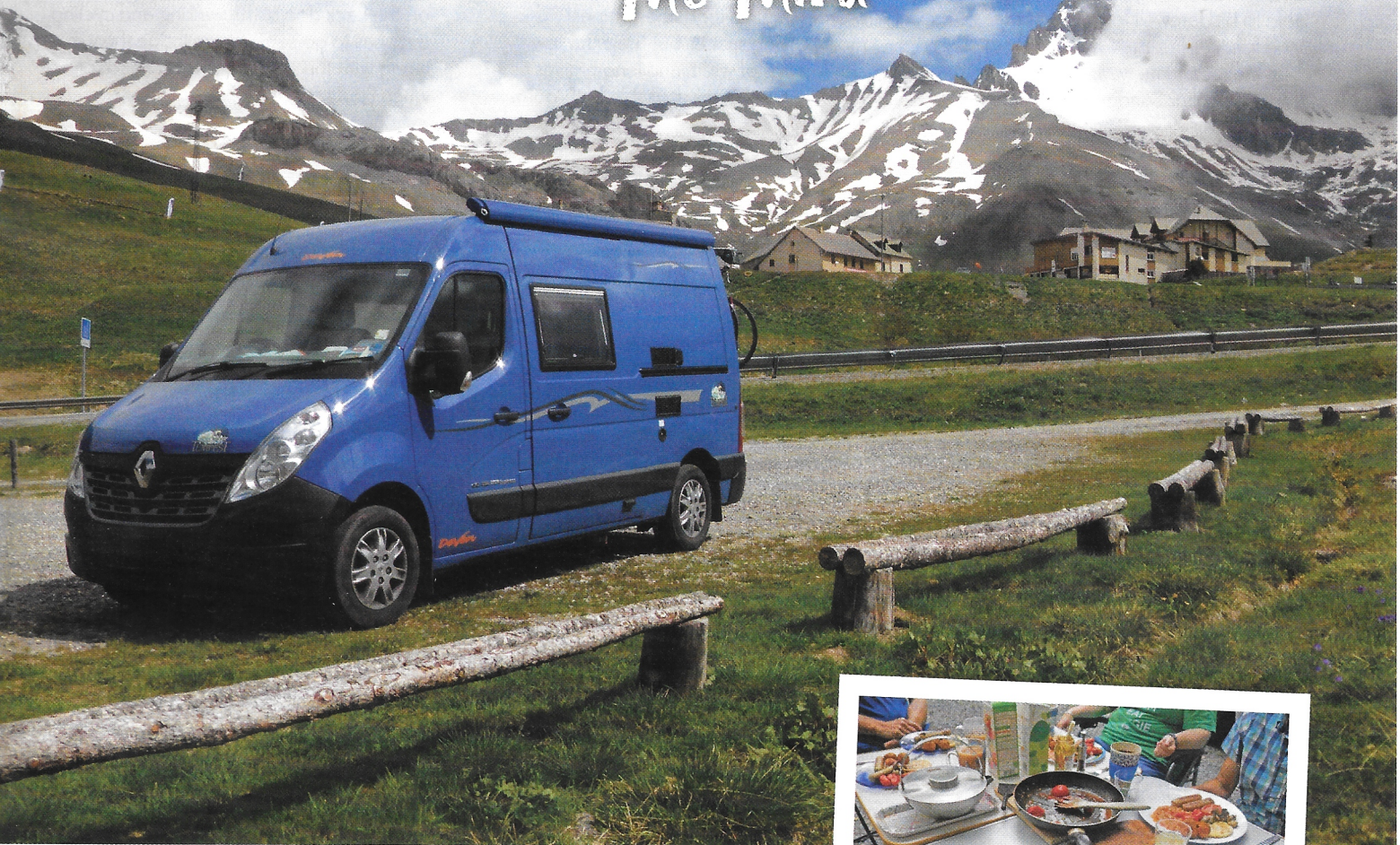


# Blue Bus

## The Third



Carol and Anthony reckon it's not the destination that matters, it's all about the glory of the ride in a blue campervan...

**WORDS & PHOTOS** Carol Kubicki



Our shared al fresco campervan breakfast with friends are legendary!

Own-  
ing a campervan was a dream that took 32 years to fulfil. My journey began when I was an impressionable teenager and my parents borrowed a motorhome from a family friend for the week. The five of us drove north to Scotland and meandered without a plan, mostly wild camping. At a beachside car park near the lovely town of Ayr I trailed behind my dad as he went over to say hello to a couple in a nearby van. I joined the adults around the table, enthralled by the couple's stories about their travelling lifestyle; they had sold up and were full-timing, following the sun, learning

languages on the way and sending the occasional postcard to their adult children. I was inspired and immediately knew what I wanted to do when I grew up...

### Vanlife becomes a reality

Of course, growing up and fulfilling the dream took a while but in 2005 my partner, Anthony, and I bought our first campervan. On the off-chance that Anthony didn't share my passion for the lifestyle, our first van was a cautious purchase: a secondhand VW Leisuredrive, our first Blue Bus.

Our campervan is our only vehicle (living in Salford, we can use public transport and

bikes to get around) and we needed something that would easily fit in a parking space. Starting small was a good plan but, two years later, Anthony was equally hooked and we up-sized to a van that was usable all year round, and more suitable for wild camping. We chose a blue Devon Sundowner, built on a long-wheelbase VW with the luxury of an on-board rear toilet behind a privacy screen...

We kept the Sundowner for seven years and, in this time, I fulfilled my ambition to live in the van full time when we left our jobs and hit the road for southern Europe for twelve months. We both loved the relaxed



nomadic lifestyle, seeing new places and meeting new people and have never lost the feeling that 'It's not the destination, it's the glory of the ride.' What we missed was our friends and family (as well as crumpets and British tea bags!) so, after a year, we returned to Salford. Job-hunting with a long-term plan to save for early retirement began. Saving our pennies took seven years and, in our late 50s, we had enough stashed away to be able to bid farewell to the tie of the nine-to-five.

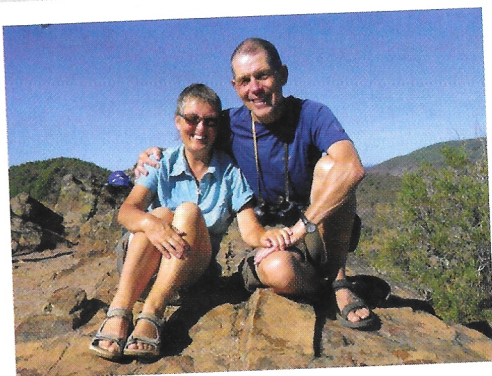
In the meantime we traded in once again. We adored our Sundowner but wanted to

try a slightly bigger campervan with a bathroom. We toured the shows and dealers, and considered all the options, but didn't find a converter that ticked all our boxes more comprehensively than Devon Conversions. We both liked the clever use of space, simple and sturdy design and affordable price tag that Devon specialise in.

Blue Bus III is a Devon Tempest built on a medium-wheelbase Renault Master. Still only 5.4 metres long, the Tempest fits in most parking spaces but the extra few centimetres of width and length gives us the privacy of a good, usable bathroom.

### Life in a Tempest

Devon Conversions have a lot of experience of building campervans and seem to anticipate how we will use the van. We find the Tempest makes full use of every cubic centimetre, providing space to both live in and store everything we need for a long tour, either in summer or winter. Our favourite activities are walking and cycling. The bikes are carried on a Fiamma bike rack on the back doors, the walking and cycling gear has to go somewhere inside the van, along with the stack of novels I need for when I put my feet up!



Carol & Anthony

**Base vehicle** 2015 Renault Master MWB

**Conversion type** Devon Tempest, by Devon Conversions [devonconversions.co.uk](http://devonconversions.co.uk)

**Owned since** 2015 (from new)

**Drive** Front-wheel drive

**Engine** 2.3cc Energy DCI Eco turbo diesel

**Power** 130bhp

**Economy** 37mpg

**Gearbox** 6-speed manual

**Travel seats** 3 **Berths** 2

**Leisure battery** 1 x Lion 110Ah

**Payload** 720 kg

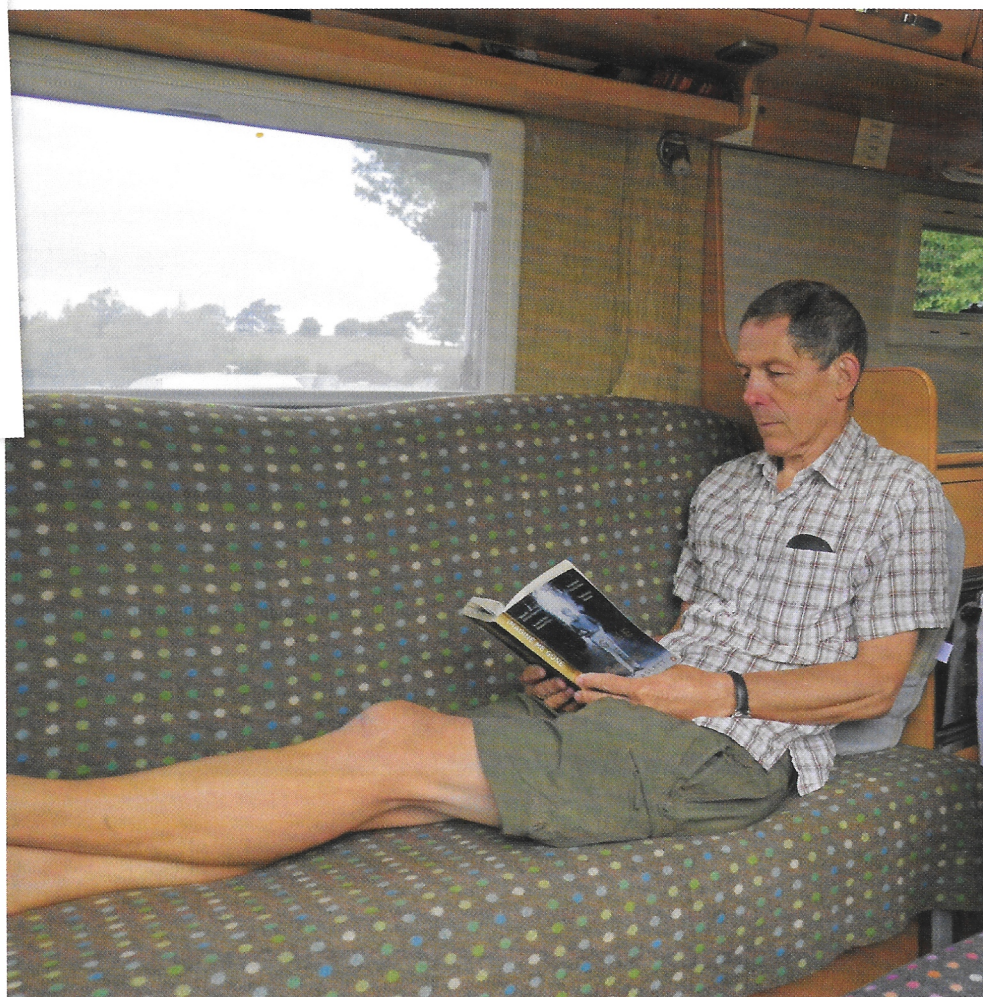
**Length x width x height** 5.4m x 2.2 m x 2.6m

**Equipment** Fiamma awning, vehicle tracker, reversing sensor, cab air-con, Fiamma bike rack, 11kg Gaslow refillable gas cylinder

**Insurance** £691 (includes 12 months European breakdown)

#### COSTS SO FAR

Fully converted van with awning, bike rack and designer pack..... £44,358  
Tracker with five years subscription .. £703  
Repairs to interior roof liner..... £123  
New front tyres..... £214  
Front and rear brakes pads..... £303  
Total costs to date..... £45,701





and say hello! Being away in the campervan so much means that camping is our ordinary way of life and a different experience to the days when we grabbed holidays from work.

To stay within budget, we mostly cook meals from scratch, keeping eating out for celebrations. With a flip-down worktop the Tempest has plenty of space for preparing food, and buying a RidgeMonkey grill pan has revolutionised my cooking. I am the Delia of delicious one-pot meals, either on the gas or, when we are on hook-up, our low-wattage hot plate.

Winter evenings can be long and cold and we wouldn't be without the Truma Combi heating system that warms the van and heats water. Running on either gas or electric, the heater quickly warms up the small space and keeps us snug.

We joke that everything we carry on board has to have at least two uses and this is certainly the case with our laptop; on winter evenings we might curl up and watch a boxset or film; I use it to keep a travel journal and track our spending on longer trips, and it is essential for storing and editing photographs – I would be lost without it! Apart from our phones, we also carry a tablet, which doubles up as a navigation tool using OsmAnd (offline mobile maps and navigation) as well as for browsing the internet via campsite WiFi.

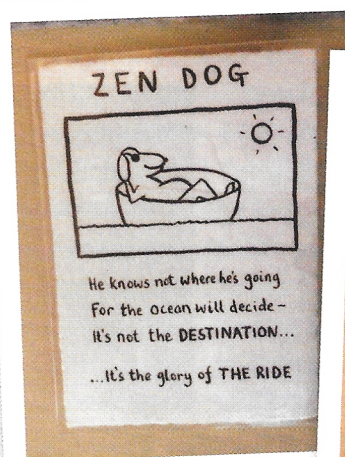
### Freedom to roam

Since we retired from full-time work we have settled into a pattern of using our campervan for two longer trips each year,

spending about two months at a time in different parts of mainland Europe. In the past we have toured Eastern Europe and spent idyllic times walking in the Alps and the Pyrenees. In our Tempest we have enjoyed amazing trips around Spain, Portugal and France and explored fascinating new (to us) countries such as Greece and Croatia. We have little planned and nothing booked for these trips; we follow our interests and the weather, and always find wonderful places.

We never tire of travelling in our home-from-home, whether near or far. In between our long trips abroad we will be away every few weeks in all seasons. From Salford we can easily get to so many beautiful parts of the UK including the Peak District, the Lakes, Wales and Yorkshire Dales. Always keen to climb mountains, my heart really belongs to Scotland and we will take a trip to our favourite parts of this stunning country a couple of times a year.

Although we like to do our own thing, we also enjoy joining friends on camping trips for short breaks and have made some of our happiest memories on these weekends. These are relaxed days where we share the cooking and take a walk together after a



'The glory of the ride' is our campervan motto!



The TV cupboard is really handy for storing the essentials

leisurely breakfast; over the years, our shared breakfasts have become legendary!

One of the good things about owning a campervan from Devon Conversions is the friendly owners club. We have made firm friends from this small band of folk who just happen to have bought from the same converter as we have. We meet regularly, spending a few days admiring the different conversions, talking about how we use our vans and chatting over drinks about stuff related to campervans and beyond.

The Devon Conversions logo is on the front of each camper and we've often been asked 'Are you all from Devon?' We always smile as, although Devon Conversions began life in Sidmouth in Devon in 1956, today they are on the other side of the country in County Durham.





Fortunately, the Tempest swallows all this stuff without a hiccup. The comfy side-facing sofa has space underneath for all manner of kit and caboodle; here we stuff cycling helmets, bike tools and panniers, a jump start kit, a jack and spare Renault bulbs for the van – even table tennis bats and balls for when we get the urge for a campsite tournament! The sturdy table Devon supply slides between the bathroom wall and the



Taking our Tempest as far as Greece and spending three weeks exploring the mainland of this beautiful and fascinating country!



I keep kitchen essentials like pasta, rice and couscous here, in one of the high cupboards

back door and, above this, we added hooks to hang our rucksacks, walking poles and cagoules.

The Tempest also has a large cupboard that runs underneath the front-facing rear passenger seat and the fridge, with access doors at the front and side. At first we struggled to fully use this space but, by adding a wooden partition, it became seriously practical storage. We stuff the duvets and novels at the front and keep laundry, beer and spare food (tea bags on the way out to Europe and olive oil and wine on the way home!) in the rear section.

The advantage of buying new from a small converter is that not only could we specify the colour of our campervan – it had to be blue – but we could also request modifications to suit our lifestyle. These included additional mains plugs for charging our electronics, a 12V charger off the leisure battery for when we are off-grid and an LED strip light over the kitchen area. We don't have a TV and so wondered what to do with the shallow TV cupboard above the rear passenger seat. The simple addition of a couple of shelves turned it into handy storage that is ideal for bottles of red wine, jars of olives, pasta sauce and spices.

Making the best use of all this storage has infinite permutations; we think we have it just right and then one of us will come up with another bright idea that works even better! What this means is that it is often difficult to find things, particularly those useful but little-used items like jump leads,

superglue or those spare specs we know we carry somewhere! Over the years we have spent hours searching for these and other items, our baffled brains trying to remember where we have secreted them. I tried having a list but every time we reorganise, it becomes out of date and, nowadays, I pretty much accept that some things will be lost until the next time we spring clean the van!

## Living the dream

What we really love about having a campervan is being able to pull over at a special viewpoint and put the kettle on. With the big sliding door open, sitting on the side-facing sofa with our feet up, there is no better place to be than in our van and we can sit here with a brew and just natter or read a book for hours.

This sofa and the front-facing seat convert into either two single beds or a large double at night. We prefer the two singles as this leaves us a narrow space to move through the camper, giving us the illusion of owning a bigger van! In good weather, we will eat all our meals outdoors and, if we're not moving on, we will often leave the beds made up through the day (continuing the big van fantasy by pretending we have fixed beds). This layout is perfect if we want to escape from the sun after a day out walking and just relax or take a siesta. One of the many benefits of a panel van conversion is that we have doors at the side and rear and, with the beds out, we can still use the back to get in and out.

We like campsites and use them for about 90% of our 140-ish nights away in our camper each year, but the van is also perfect for occasional wild camping in summer or winter, and music festivals – if you find yourself at the Upton Blues Festival come



*I fulfilled my ambition to live in the van full time when we left our jobs and hit the road for southern Europe for twelve months'*