



# Our motorhome

Carol and Anthony Kubicki look for a simpler way of life with a smaller campervan

## 2021 DEVON CONVERSIONS FIREFLY SWB



**W**e were idling around France and found ourselves looking longingly at small campervans on the campsites. The conversation began, and sauntering around Brittany we decided we wanted to return to a more modest and simpler way of camping. Back home away from the French sunshine, the decision to downsize from our 5.4m-long Renault still felt right.

We fine-tuned our wish list to a Euro 6 compliant, five-metre-long campervan that had a high-top and toilet. Most vans around this size have a VW-style side kitchen and a pop-up roof, rather than a high-top; having

got used to a washroom in our big-to-us Renault, doing without a toilet was a step too far towards simplicity. The search began for our next perfect campervan in the secondhand market.

After some fruitless days, we landed at Todds Motorhomes in nearby Preston. Here we asked for a trade-in valuation on our Devon Tempest and, while chatting to the salesman, learned a two-year-old short-wheelbase Devon Firefly would soon be available.

We have owned two Devon Conversions campervans and they suit us. We know the Firefly is a high-top

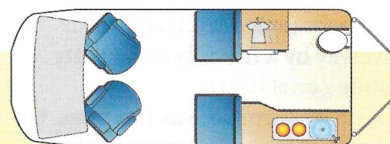
with a toilet hidden behind a privacy screen, so it matched our wish list.

With a good price for our Devon Tempest secured, we went home to do some heavy thinking. By the time the dealer rang to say the Firefly was available, we pretty much knew if it had four wheels and moved we would be buying it!

Climbing in the silver Firefly, we immediately sensed this was a 'van that hadn't been slept in much; the conversion was like new, although the 'van had driven 18,000 miles.

Even in our excitement we couldn't ignore the evidence on the bodywork; those miles had not necessarily ►

**Price from:** £45,000 **Berths:** 2 **Travel seats:** 4  
**Base vehicle:** Ford Custom Transit Limited  
**Length:** 4.97m **Gross weight:** 3,000kg







Sitting, eating and reading is comfy at the table

### Why we bought it

To return to a more simple way of camping and have a vehicle that meets the emission standards in clear air zones

### What we love

The Firefly cleverly fits everything we need in such a dinky space, is easy to park and economical to drive

### How we would change it

Even though we use its full capacity, we would remove the noisy compression fridge and change it for a more versatile three-way fridge

### When we buy our next 'van

We will probably stay small

been careful ones. We traded in a Renault that had been lovingly polished and cherished every day of its life and knew we were taking on a camper that needed some TLC.

### FOUR WHEELS ON MY WAGON

Back home, Anthony couldn't rest until he had given the 'van his own thorough wash and polish. This was an opportunity to check every inch of the Transit.

Our last two campervans had been bought from new. Buying secondhand saved us a lot of money and we accepted that we were inheriting some bodywork issues.

Although the bodywork warranty should still have been valid, Ford requires owners to pay for an annual inspection and the previous owners had not bothered to do this, so we were paying. A sliding door that snagged slightly was annoying and our local Ford garage quickly fixed this; a tiny patch of corrosion on the edge of one of the rear doors was professionally repaired at the bodyshop and a slight dent on the passenger door was fixed on our driveway by a friendly and chatty mobile panel beater.

A nasty surprise was the tyres. On closer inspection, these looked as if

those 18,000 miles had been off-road; they were pitted and battered!

We had traded in a 'van with four almost-new tyres so we both had to take some calming breaths before booking it in for new tyres.

Fortunately, we haven't inherited any major mechanical issues and our Silver Machine has run well for the last 12 months (touching wood!).

### 21ST CENTURY TECH

We haven't owned a car since the 1990s, but we guess the Ford Transit feels car-like to drive. Compared to our Renault, it has more bling than we can fathom and tech-wise we have jumped from the twentieth to the twenty-first century!

The Ford connects to our phones via Bluetooth, even if we don't want it to, has a rear view camera and throws out warning beeps about blades of grass. It came with heated seats, folding electric mirrors and even a heated windscreen.

This is the first vehicle we have owned with an alarm system and it was inevitable that we would set it off on our first trip. Giving the campsite an early morning alarm isn't the way to make friends with the neighbours and we dread doing this again.

Less stressful is the tracker we

added. This gives us peace of mind if anyone untoward takes a fancy to our little campervan.

### LIVING IS EASY

Devon Conversions has built a layout that uses the limited space cleverly. The Firefly has two rear passenger seats with seatbelts. On site, we turn the front seats around, fix the table to the wall and we immediately have a comfortable and practical seating area for eating and working.

The table tucks away tidily when we are travelling, but can't be used outdoors, so in summer we carry another folding table.

When we are relaxing with a book we put our feet up on the other seats and, should we have visitors, there are even seats for them.

What we call the 'big lights' are flush-mounted fixtures that illuminate the whole 'van. These are only used when we have dropped something on the floor!

Touch-controlled spots over the rear seats provide softer lighting. Frustratingly, there are no reading lights above the front seats so we have a clip-on light here. We had a diesel heater fitted for chilly days.

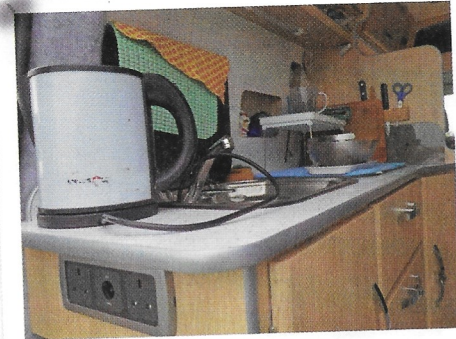
In the evening, we spend five minutes making beds. The two rear





Looking in from the rear doors, the kitchen is on the left, the toilet on the right

The kitchen area is compact



seats fold flat, an extra cushion is added to meet the front seats and we have two comfortable single beds.

The driver's side bed is a tad shorter than the other but, fortunately, I am a few inches shorter than Anthony's 5ft 8in, so this is mine. The helpful Facebook owners' group is full of practical modifications and gave us the idea for pocket holders above the beds. These are handy for phones, specs, hearing aids, keys and hankies, etc.

### COOKING UP A STORM

Although buying used saves money, we are stuck with the extras someone else has chosen. Our Firefly came with a water heater, which was no better than a kettle and took up a whole shelf, so we had this removed.

It also came with a compressor fridge. We had been happy with the three-way fridges in our previous campervans and would never have chosen a compressor fridge, but switching is an expensive palaver.

I think compressor fridges are the work of mischievous and slightly evil campervan conversion elves.

We no longer relax with only the sound of birds singing and wind rustling through the leaves; at any moment the fridge will whirr into

action and disturb the peace.

With the beds made up, the fridge is immediately behind my head. The first night I was determined to sleep through its gurgles and chuntering, but this was a route to fridge rage and now we switch it off overnight.

The 80-litre fridge is cavernous. It easily fits our cheese horde and vegetables for three or four days and still has space for things that have no need to be chilled, but go in just to fill it. I guess these fridges are great for self-converters, but if I could change one thing in our Firefly it would be this fridge!

In a small campervan, the kitchen is a minimalist affair, but we are well-practised in rustling up good food with limited space and this is simple camping at its best.

There is a striplight over a two-burner gas hob and sink, both with glass covers, so they double up as workspace.

There are two three-pin plugs and

with hook-up we use an electric kettle and hotplate and are masters of delicious one-pot meals.

There is no oven in the 'van, something we knew, but forgot on our first night away. We had put garlic bread in the huge fridge but had nowhere to cook it!

Worktop space is limited and the folding shelf we built over the toilet's flush tank has been a real bonus.

This additional space is invaluable as somewhere to stash everything not actively involved in the meal preparation.

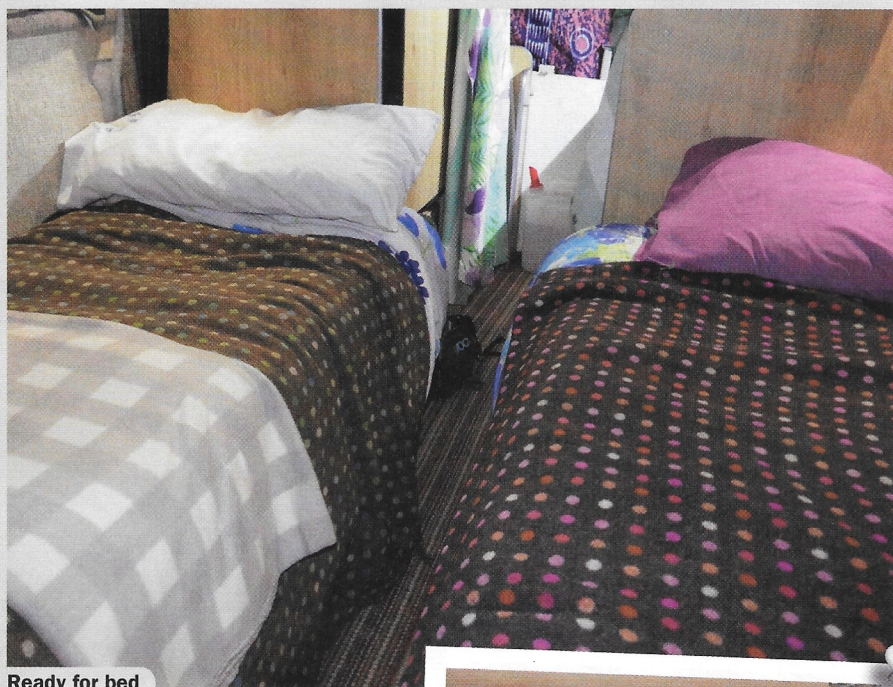
### FLUSH WITH FACILITIES

While we are at the rear of our Firefly, it is time to talk about the on-board facilities. Devon fits a rotating toilet at the back, hidden behind a clever (but heavy) folding door that opens out to provide a screen.

This screen is a smart feature but, in such a compact 'van, gets in the ►







Ready for bed

way and we, along with almost every other Firefly owner we have met, have removed it.

Instead, we have a privacy curtain held up by those always-useful bulldog clips.

### STUFF OF LEGENDS

Everything we carried in our Renault was laid out in the garage before we traded it in.

We considered every item, working out what we could ditch and what we couldn't to match our new back-to-basics approach.

We are not completely sure if it is a good or bad thing that we didn't get rid of much!

For a pocket-sized campervan, the Firefly has a generous amount of storage. Cupboards under the rear passenger seats are big enough for bedding, shoes and the outdoor table.

The living area has two overhead lockers for the things we need to be handy. The overcab takes the chairs and rucksacks and we stuff coats here on site.

In the kitchen, there is an overhead

locker and two large cupboards and a cutlery drawer under the sink.

These swallow our pans, crockery and food; they hold so much stuff they might as well be bottomless!

A slim cupboard in the kitchen with shelves holds picnic basics and ensures the tea and coffee are immediately to hand.

Under the fridge is a cupboard for snacks, and wine lives alongside the two 907 Campingaz bottles.

We have a shelf each for clothes above the fridge. This is sufficient but can feel a bit crammed with thicker winter gear.

Anything else easily fits in the infinite cupboard behind the toilet. Our emergency gear (tow rope, jump leads and spares) disappears into this space, while a shelf holds clean sheets

### FACTS AND FIGURES



#### PRICE

**Price new today:** Currently not available new due to unavailability of high-top Ford Custom Transits, but used vehicles can be converted

**Price of similar aged 'van today:** £45,000



#### BASICS

**Berths:** 2

**Travel seats:** 4

**Length of ownership:** 12 months

**Annual mileage:** 9,000 miles



#### DIMENSIONS

**Length:** 4.97m (16ft 4in)

**Width:** 2.03m (including mirrors) (6ft 8in)

**Height:** 2.42m (7ft 11in)

**Gross vehicle weight:** 3,000kg

**Payload:** On a weighbridge, with two adults, full fuel tank, full water tank and fully loaded for a long trip we had 200kg payload left



#### BASE VEHICLE

**Type:** Ford Custom Transit Limited

**Engine:** 2-litre 128hp

**Fuel economy:** 40mpg



#### BEDS

**Two singles:** max of 1.88m x 0.61m (6ft 2in x 2ft)



#### RUNNING COSTS

**Base vehicle service cost:** £250

**Insurance:** £578 (includes European cover and European breakdown)

**Habitation service:** £300

**Road tax:** £325

### OPTIONS

**Accessories added:** Eberspächer Airtronic diesel heater, Vodafone S7 tracker

### WHAT WENT WRONG

The sliding door was snagging, there was a tiny patch of corrosion on the rear door and a slight dent on the passenger door (all repaired for around £500)

and towels and our reading library.

Downsizing was a big decision and some friends predicted it wouldn't suit us. However, after a year we still think there is so much to love about the Devon Firefly.

We can be self-sufficient, we don't get cabin fever on rainy days and we are saving money on fuel. This is back to basics with knobs on! **MAAM**

### REVIEW YOUR MOTORHOME

Tell other readers what you love about your 'van and what you would like to change [motorhome.ma/ownersreport](https://motorhome.ma/ownersreport)