

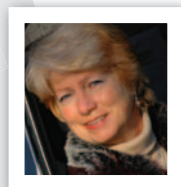
On Test Bilbo's Design Lezan on 2.5TDI LWB Volkswagen T5



HOT HIGH TOP

Di jumps at the chance to try out an MMM Award winning camper





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WE LIKED

- The car-like drive
- Highly specified base vehicle
- Side settee
- Full-height side-hinged rear doors
- Webasto diesel-fired water and space heater
- The toilet and wheeled cassette
- Quality, lightweight, well-finished cabinets
- Well-supported tables
- Tough upholstery
- Central aisle

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- A shower
- Larger washbasin
- A flip-up worktop behind nearside rear seat

WE DISLIKED

- Sink/drain/hob compromise

Bilbo's Design has an enviable reputation for building compact campers, but the company has excelled itself with the Lezan. Bilbo's designers have solved the biggest camper conundrum. And what's that, you may ask? Well, it's the toilet-in-a-cupboard syndrome.

The most inconvenient feature of many a small camper is the lack of separate toilet facilities. Dragging a little Porta Potti portable loo from its cupboard, then asking anyone else in the 'van at the time to get lost while you make yourself comfortable, is less than convenient. Of course, you have to draw all the curtains as well. Woe betide you if you forget to drag the toilet out before making up the bed. If you do, you'll have to brave wet grass in the middle of the night and visit the campsite facilities.

Into the length of a long wheelbase high-top camper, Bilbo's has successfully shoehorned a very commendable washroom and toilet. This is positioned in the rear, and while not five-star (there's no shower), it's practical: there's also a wardrobe fitted within the compartment.

The Lezan could be the answer for a whole raft of buyers who desire a small camper with a civilised toilet and wash area that can be sectioned off for privacy. The Lezan also has one of my favourite layout features, a side settee. This faces the sliding side door: great for viewing the outside world in comfort.

ONLY THE BEST

The Volkswagen T5 is one of the most civilised bases for a motorcaravan, and its shape and styling is something I catch myself admiring all the time.

The Lezan demonstrator's Fresco Green metallic paint is my favourite of the colour range. There are no unnecessary logos spoiling its good looks either, simply a discreet model name and a small manufacturer's plate on the rear.

The Lezan is perfectly viable as a sole-use vehicle if you've no room or cash reserves for an additional car. You can take a couple of friends off for a picnic one day, do the shopping the next, then go off for a week's camping. It will perform all these tasks with alacrity.

The old T4 was good, but the T5 has made giant strides forward in terms of driver comfort, performance and ease of use. Anyone nervous of driving a motorhome would be well advised to try taking a T5 for a spin. The gearbox is good, and the steering composed and positive – making it easy and very car-like to drive.

With the VW roundel on the front end you'll be sure of a good experience behind the wheel.

Remember, the Lezan's not much longer than some estate cars. An estate car however, will have no cooker, sink or toilet. Additionally, the estate will probably depreciate quicker.

SUPERLATIVES

Enter from the nearside through the sliding door and via an inset step. Modern, unfussy décor greets you. Greys predominate, with a pattern of squares, noughts and crosses on the automotive-grade upholstery. There are small subtle spots of green, yellow, red and blue to brighten things up a bit. This tough material should not fade or look scruffy after only a couple of years holidaying on the Mediterranean either.

On the Lezan we tested, two full-length

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single beds featured. This layout is becoming more popular, as it makes it possible for two friends to holiday together with a degree of decorum and is cooler for couples in summer. It's also possible to have a double bed version if you wish to be cosier.

Well-made weight-saving but solid cabinets are constructed from factory-laminated plywood in a serviceable mid-grey. Light, silvery-grey curtains are fitted, which cover all the windows apart from the two in the VW factory high top roof: these benefit from Seitz blind/flyscreens.

SUPER SEATING

The two cab seats are VW's own. They are easily swivelled, using a lever located centrally at the front. Excellent: you'll always know where to find it.

Behind, there are two forward-facing seats with three-point seatbelts. The joy of these is that

the backrest rake is infinitely adjustable, as is the seat squab, giving decidedly more comfortable seating and ease of access (they swing upwards) to the bedding storage space beneath.

On the offside, a long inward-facing settee can be formed by turning the squab of the rear seat over, through 180 degrees. The back of the seat then hinges forward to help create the base. Three shaped cushions form the side backrest. When not in use, these can be stored in the cab. Both rear seats feature adjustable headrests and these have to be removed when making up beds or the settee.

I really liked sitting on the deep sofa. Its position - opposite the sliding door - allows you to relax with your feet up and admire the view. Such comfort features are rare in a 'van this size. It also occurred to me that if you don't mind obscuring the side door, the other rear seat could be made into a day bed for feet-up lounging. After all, you can always exit

through the full-height rear doors as there's a passageway right through the 'van.

DINING FOR THE DISCERNING

A small table serving the nearside cab seat can also be swivelled for use outside and left erected, as the top can be stowed, turned on its side, taking up very little room. It's plenty big enough for one to eat here. A second, larger table is retrieved from its home clipped to a rear door and snapped onto a rail positioned between the offside front and rear seats. Two can dine here. This table is agreeably lightweight, easy to fit and felt surprisingly stable once its fold-down leg was on the floor.

The table can be utilised as additional worktop by attaching it further along its rail, over the offside rear seat base and nearer the kitchen. Three could comfortably eat in the Lezan, perhaps four at a pinch.

COMPOSED COOKING

Behind the two rear seats is the kitchen. Though basic, it would be perfectly possible for an inventive chef to cook meals for four - a steamer would be useful. You could always cheat and heat up ready meals of course. On the nearside is a combination two-burner, drained hob-and-sink unit, under a smart glass lid/worktop. There's no spark ignition but Bilbo's compensates for this omission by supplying an 'electric match' to light the gas.

There's a cupboard over the sink and a small Smev grill/warming oven beneath. Two nicely engineered drawers complete the nearside of the kitchen. A 65-litre compressor fridge, with worktop over, takes up the available space on the offside. I'm not sure about 12V-only compressor fridges. If you're travelling a lot, or always stay on campsites with hook-up, it won't be too much of a problem for your battery capacity. However, the absorption type, although less efficient, has more flexibility. There's a choice of 12V, gas or mains power. They do, however, require vents to the outside, something that would rather spoil the smart MPV-looks of the Lezan.

Alongside the fridge is one of those great, easily accessed, slide-out wire-shelved units for tins, plus another two shelves. Above, is a further cupboard with room for lightweight provisions. The single 12Volt and two 230V sockets, fixed alongside the worktop above the fridge, are convenient for a small TV or electric kettle.

UN-BUMPY BEDS

The two contoured rear seats would make bumpy beds if it were not for the fact that you don't sleep on the part you sit on. With the bases rotated through 180 degrees, they reveal their flat undersides. It's the same with the seatbacks. Lose the headrests and drop them forward to expose their level reverse side.

All these manoeuvres are easily accomplished as the operating levers, though stiff, are accessible. With these RIB seat/beds, the mechanism for rotating them allows you to lock the seat bases in any position. This makes accessing the bedding stores under the seats simplicity itself.

The single beds, once made, leave a nice passageway between two sleepers. Night-time visits to the rear of the 'van, necessitated by one pint too many (as if), can be easily accomplished without disturbing your blissfully-slumbering partner.





The beds make use of the cab seats' squabs, which are slightly lower than the rest of the bed. I'd be tempted to take two thin, soft cushions to elevate them to the same height. Cushions are always useful for daytime lounging, so they'd be worth carrying anyway. The beds are a good length and, for the exceptionally tall, the front seats could be left swivelled to the side allowing the occupants' feet to dangle over the end.

WICKED WASHROOM

Step through the kitchen and, towards the rear, and you're entering the washroom zone. This area can be sectioned off using a concertina partition, which is closed with a magnetic catch. This door provides essential privacy, with curtains across the rear windows completing the modesty provisions. This is an altogether practical and usable wash and changing room.

For its size, it's very well kitted out. What looks like an upholstered seat-base in here removes, revealing a cassette toilet beneath. Not any old loo, but Thetford's latest revamped bench-type, which sports a cassette with a pull-out handle and wheels. What a great idea. A lot of ladies will think this

innovation has masses of appeal. The trip to the emptying point puts a strain on the arms of some of the smaller girls and, I should think, some older gentlemen too.

Above, and behind the loo, is a stainless steel basin. This is tiny, but it does the job. The mixer tap takes its supply from the inboard tank and the Webasto diesel-fired system heats the water as well as warming the interior. There's a small cupboard on the wall, which should accept all your toiletries. It even sports a little mirror on the back of its door.

As there's a central aisle, the side-hinged full-height rear doors are a good alternative entry point and it's behind these doors that access can be had to the bits of kit that need servicing. Items such as the gas locker and toilet cassette servicing point are easy to get at.

The washroom has no shower (other than using the pull-out mixer tap for a warm rinse outside) and I guess most Lezan owners will stay on campsites and use their facilities. Nevertheless, it's perfectly reasonable to have a good wash instead (when using less structured night stops), as there's plenty of room for manoeuvring with all the doors closed. You'll be warm too, as there's an outlet for the blown-air heating in the washroom.

1 Looking forward from the kitchen shows the four forward-facing seats in their travelling positions

2 A settee opposite the sliding door is a desirable feature. To the rear is the kitchen and washroom

3 With its modern décor, swivelling front seats and twin tables, the Lezan shows its pedigree. The excellent large table is stored inside a rear door

4 A warming oven/grill, two-burner hob and a reasonably sized sink, make a workable kitchen. Plenty of drawers, and a slide-out store for tins, will enable you to carry enough food and kitchen equipment for your travels

5 Covering the loo with a seat makes good use of space. The little washbasin above serves its purpose well enough

6 Twin beds of a good length utilise the cab seats. The central aisle makes the whole interior easily accessible

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Utilising intelligent design, Bilbo's has come up with a really useful separate washroom - a rarity in a small camper. Cleverly, it's been done without messing up the rest of the 'van. You also open the back doors to fill the fresh water tank, while above the fill point are shelves that provide a bit more space to stash possessions.

SPIFFING STORAGE

For a 'van of this size the storage is good. There's easily accessed space below the



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two rear seats, and behind two sliding doors above the cab. The two sliders can be removed, enabling loads of possessions to be jig-sawed into the space. The kitchen has lots of cupboards and excellent drawers fitted with stops, and lastly the rear has a better-sized wardrobe than can be found in many campers.

A HOT HIGH TOP?

While £40,640 seems like a lot of money for a camper, it's the Teutonic build of the base vehicle - married to the high quality and innovative design of Bilbo's Design - that carries it streets ahead of the opposition. A lower specified Lezan will cost you from £37,750, but there's no escaping the fact that if you want the best you have to pay for it. Such a camper should not only win awards, it should draw even more clients to its famous producer. ■

7 Easy-access storage under the rear seats could take your bedding

8 Not a bad size wardrobe for a small 'van'; the access was good



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TEST EXTRA SPECIFICATION

- **Price from:** £37,750 (OTR)
- **As tested:** £40,640 (OTR)
- **Base vehicle:** Volkswagen T5 LWB high top window van; 2.5-litre 130bhp turbo-diesel, six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive; Base vehicle three years, conversion two years/24,000 miles
- **Sizes and weights:** Length 5.29m (17ft 4in), width 2.04m (6ft 8in) height 2.46m (8ft 1in); maximum authorised weight 3200kg, payload 600kg (after habitation allowance)

- **Belted seats:** 4 (including driver): Offside single: 1.86m x 600mm (6ft 1.5in x 1ft 11.5in); nearside single: 1.87m x 600mm (6ft 2.5in x 1ft 11.5in) 65-litre compressor fridge, Smev warming oven/grill
- **Heating:** Webasto diesel-fired unit provides blown-air space heating and hot water: Fresh water: 35 litres (7.7 gallons); waste water: 34 litres (7.5 gallons)
- **Gas:** 1 x 4.5kg cylinder or 2 x 2.72kg Campingaz cylinders

BILBO'S DESIGN LEZAN

- **Extras fitted to test vehicle:** metallic paint (£880), air-conditioning (£750), cruise control (£180), alloy wheels (£660), trip computer (£120), rear parking sensors (£200), mud flaps (£100)
- **Other options available:** Thatcham Cat. 1 alarm (£400), upgrade to double bed (£395), child's sleeping hammock (max two) (£195), microwave to replace grill (£100), TV aerial pack (£100), living area carpet (£95), Fiamma roll-out awning (£425), awning colour coding (£200)



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