

GET PRACTICAL...

with Deputy Editor Rachel Stothert



I've just got back from France in our long term test Jazz, it was a hectic few days, but was so much better not having to rely on hotels, airports and restricted luggage. The team got

sweets, crisps and cordial (don't ask) from a SuperU supermarket and Andrew got twelve bottles of excellent local wine (both in quality and price) from a cave right next door to the Pilote factory. You'll read about the reason I was there in this month's new model news.

This month, we're looking at two different van conversion stories from two very different readers. David King decided on a self-build project and paid particular attention to his power consumption while Alan Bell knew exactly what he wanted (going to the extremes of making a model) but wanted the experts to build it for him. These are two very viable options if you want a camper to suit your very exacting specification.

And we've got a cracking variety of letters in this month's Interchange - from the downright dangerous to the Houdini mouse. Or if you have some spare time why not attempt some of our simple DIY jobs; first timers can read about swapping over your gas cylinder and if you need some more storage take a look at our ideas for fitting a shoe rack.

Finally, we have a comprehensive list of safety and security accessory suppliers, fitters and manufacturers in our monthly Services & Supplies directory. This covers everything from alarms to fire extinguishers.

Remember to keep writing in with your own suggestions and ideas for DIY articles, from simple two-hour jobs to fully involved self-build projects.

Rachel Stothert

FROM THE FORUMS

Now I've got the responsibility of looking after and running a motorhome for six months, courtesy of Autocruise (read more about this in our first of many features on the Jazz and its adventures in the Buying section), I'm taking an active interest in the online forums. This is especially the case with any hints or tips for space saving ideas.

I've come up with a few of my own which you'll read about in due course, but here's what others suggest...

LIGHTING

Use one of those solar garden lamps for trips to the bathroom during the night. It avoids waking up other occupants of the motorcaravan by negating the need to switch on any lights. Just put them outside the motorhome during the day to charge them up.

Kimu122

Finding your 'van on large and poorly lit sites can sometimes be a problem, so we use a solar-powered garden light, which we place on top of the roof through the skylight. The lights are cheap and effective with a distinctive blue colour. It's never a problem finding our way back to the 'van but don't forget to remove it before driving off. (RS - this could also be used at the outdoor shows after a night in the bar)

howie

Are the lights/LEDs on your control panel annoying at night, emitting a distracting green/red/blue glow, but you need to keep the switches on? Just put some blobs of Blu-tack over the lights. Just remember to switch off those that you don't need on anymore in the morning. Make sure you stick the blu-tack on really well though, because if it drops off in the middle of the night into the step recess it may just give you a scare!

Mel B

STORAGE

A roll of yellow dusters from the local 'Everything for a pound' shop make good covers to stop your pots and pans rattling about in your lockers.

Febbie

Go to your local £1 shop and buy a few rolls of non-slip matting (or you can visit your local caravan dealer and possibly pay more for it). Line all your shelves and cupboards. This will stop items moving about and rattling while on the road.

Starspirit

A paper plate placed in non-stick frying pan during storage prevents abrasion from pans or anything placed on top.

Peterthebruce



STORAGE

Fishing around under the fixed bed for bits and pieces is a real pain. Firstly, use the stick/clip on pouches that you can get for use in car boots. Ours is the long, thin holdall-type thing that has several pockets and usually press-studs or velcros to the back of the rear seats in the boot. I've put ours along the side edge of the underbed storage (the side you access it from). We keep hook-up leads, various connectors, tent pegs, a small tarpaulin, in fact virtually anything that you may need to get at easily.

I also have several of the small cargo-type nets - that you can use on the back of bicycles and motorbikes. They have several hooks on them, which I fix onto the slatted base of the bed. I can slot in lightweight items such as frying pans, trays and small plastic table. They'll take whatever you can think of that's not too heavy (you still have to be able to lift the bed base!). I also have bungee straps stretched across parallel with each other and use these for longer items such as walking poles and the umbrella. It keeps them accessible and saves scrabbling around in the cavern that is the bed base.

Mel B

A bottle of Soy sauce fell over, with a loose top, in a cupboard and above a window. This resulted in a long, brown stain down the blind and flyscreen. We now store all pots and bottles in those gallon-size ice cream cartons. Added security on the road and it's easy to lift out all the jams in one box for breakfast or all the sauces for dinner in another box.

Clive

The telescopic net curtain rods, which are tightened up across a high-level locker opening, are ideal to stop cans and other things dropping out when the door is opened. They can be bought in brass or white finish in various lengths. The small size is about 24 inches long and costs about £1.49 from most stalls or shops selling fabric.

Chas

Sew loops on all four corner of towels so that they can be hung up to dry in the washroom on those self-adhesive plastic hooks.

Derek Uzzell

We made some curtains from the silvered car cover material sold by Halfords/Argos, which are held on by Velcro. In hot sun, they act like silver screens and reflect the sun out of the side and rear windows. We have recently brought from Tchibo shops some fly screen material which is silvered one side to reflect the heat and black on the other. Initial trials seem to have the same effect as the above, and you can see out but not in.

Tonyishuk

I was looking at those screens that cover part of the front of your Fiamma roll-out awning to provide shade/windbreak at the Malvern show, and someone told me that shower curtains, hung upside down do just as well. The weighted bottom edge feeds into the slot on the front of the awning, and elasticated loops can be put through the eyelets to peg into the ground.

J9withdogs

GAS

Old trouser belts from a charity shop make good replacements for the straps in your gas bottle locker.

Fetch & Carry

RATTLES

I use a sheet of bubble wrap under my cooker pan stands and another on top under the glass lid to stop rattles when travelling. It easily folds and rolls up small when on site in my passenger door shelf.

Maggyd

FRIDGE

To stop your fridge going mouldy when not in use, crunch sheets of newspaper up and put them in fridge. This works even with the fridge door shut tight.

Carioca



When going on longer ferry crossings, when the fridge will be off for some time, freeze your bottles of milk and water before you put them in the fridge.

It helps to keep everything cold and has worked for us up to 24 hours.

Malc D



LEARNING FROM OTHERS

If you keep candles in a cupboard for emergency use, don't store your hob kettle in the same cupboard unless you make sure it isn't still hot underneath first...

Roon

For more tips about anything motorhome or travel related, log onto the forums on MMM's web site www.outandaboutlive.co.uk. You can also use these forums to ask for technical advice or pose a travel question, or write to us at the usual address.

NEW INSURANCE LEGISLATION

We've had some news that new legislation regarding vehicle tax and insurance is coming into play in 2011.

As of January, a joint venture between the Motor Insurers Bureau (MIB) and DVLA called Continuous Insurance Enforcement (CIE) will be introduced. The initiative will introduce a new offence - to 'keep a vehicle without appropriate insurance'. Essentially, if a vehicle has been taxed and not declared SORN (Statutory Off Road Notification), it must be insured.

Now, details of all vehicles that are insured are entered into a Motor Insurance Database, allowing the police to stop any vehicle that appears to be uninsured. And as from January the database from the DVLA regarding vehicle tax will be compared with the MID and highlight any vehicle that is taxed but not insured.

Those who are unable to confirm that the vehicle they own is insured, or declared SORN, may eventually be penalised through a series of measures, including a £100 fine, wheel clamping measures or even be prosecuted through the courts.

So if you lay up your vehicle over winter and take a break in insurance, then this information applies to you.

Richard Brewster from Comfort Insurance has this advice:

If your vehicle is taxed but not in use, either declare it SORN or make sure insurance is in force.

When you take out a policy, make sure the information you supply is accurate, and check the policy documentation when you get it to make sure it is correct.

If you are unfortunate enough to incur a fixed-penalty fine as a result of the CIE process, the vehicle will still have to be declared SORN or insurance cover arranged, otherwise you could face further action without warning.