



CAMPERVAN CONVERSION



on a
≡ Budget ≡



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Intro

Campervan conversion has grown in popularity since the pandemic, as many people look for a cheaper and quirkier alternative to traditional holidays, whether in the UK or abroad.

But undertaking a DIY conversion project is no mean feat. We caught up with campervanner Lucinda Norris to get her insider tips and expertise on converting a campervan.

Whether you're a seasoned campervanner or about to embark on your first campervan conversion journey, this guide will provide a world of inspiration while highlighting some of the most important things to look out for during the process.



About Lucinda Norris



With six years of experience and three conversions under her belt, Lucinda is a campervanning expert. A freelance photographer, travel and lifestyle writer, she traded in the conventional ways of living for a life travelling the open road. As a self-taught DIY enthusiast, her brand Vanlifewithluci documents her travels and van renovations. Currently travelling in her Short Wheel Base Mercedes Sprinter, Alanis, she opens up about her experiences with converting campervans and gives us some insider tips.



[Vanlifewithluci Blog](#)

Expert interview with Lucinda

What got you into campervanning?

"I have always loved exploring and the freedom that travel offers. I had previously done some backpacking, but this sometimes felt unsafe as a solo female. You're travelling in unknown environments, often with no fixed idea where you'll be sleeping, so security was always on my mind. Having my own space that can be locked up at night seemed like a great solution, and this led me to consider campervan life."

"Travelling in a campervan gives you a real sense of autonomy, as you can go whenever and wherever you want. I loved the idea that I could plan a journey the night before and set off the next morning, with an endless scope of destinations available to me."



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Why did you decide to convert your campervan?

“I wanted to see the world and push myself to do physical challenges such as hiking or biking. But traditional travelling can get very expensive, and I needed to stick to a budget, so converting a campervan made the most sense.

“At that time, I was teaching in a primary school and had also been a lecturer. As you can imagine, those professions didn’t require anything remotely DIY—although I may have put up a shelf once at university! So, it was all a big learning curve.”



Where did you get your inspiration?

“Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest were great sources of inspiration for colour schemes and décor especially. My first van had a rustic theme as everything was repurposed, while my current van has a cleaner and more open aesthetic. Social media had lots of ideas for both.

“My biggest influence was campervan forums, which became a knowledge hub I still use today. They were invaluable when it came to planning the layout in particular. They helped me understand how to maximise space, the best furniture options and how to set up. For example, did I want a power shower? What kind of toilet could I include? This is where the forums really helped, providing a great way to see in real-time what others were doing.



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“Not only were they a brilliant place to gather ideas, but I also built a support network around me—especially with other inspirational female DIYers. I would think, if they can do it, so can I!”



Once inspiration had struck, how did you go about buying a van?

“Choosing which van to buy can be overwhelming. I found it useful to be guided by my budget, as this cut down the potential number of models to sift through. Luxury campervans can set you back anything between £60,000–£80,000, and you could easily let spending soar, so having a budget as a starting point helped narrow the options.

“As a teacher, I wanted to work on my van outside of term time, so knowing I had a time limit of 6-9 months was very helpful. This meant I needed a van I could get my hands on ASAP—such as an ex-delivery van, which are in large supply and readily available.

“Specific vans also suit different needs. For my first van, I wanted something small that was easy to drive but still liveable for trips and holidays. My second van needed to be bigger, as I wanted to take a year off to travel in it, but also a good size to park anywhere—especially in central spaces like supermarkets. Based on this, I decided a Sprinter would be the best option, and bought one at an auction.”

Did you start building right away?

“It’s vital to have a plan, so the first thing I did was make a list. Not that you always stick to it exactly—I like the build process to feel organic and to learn as I go, but it helps keep you on track.

“I also did lots of sketches in a dedicated planning notebook, which I lovingly call my ‘Build Bible’. This helped me visualise where everything should go. I personally love pen and paper, but for someone starting out, it might be worth trying Computer Aided Design (CAD). The software allows you to input dimensions and see a more accurate model, which can be helpful to avoid silly mistakes.

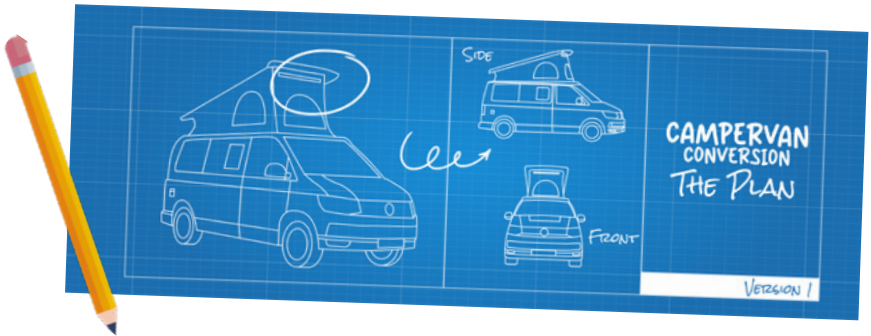


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“Although the planning stage may seem extensive, it’s the best opportunity to decide on placement of your essential, non-negotiable elements. For me, it was a night heater and a plug for my hairdryer—even though I was going to be on the road, I still wanted some home comforts.”

“I’m also very environmentally conscious, so during the planning process, I wanted to ensure I could substitute any materials for more eco-friendly ones. This is when I decided to install a compostable toilet and use lambswool instead of plastic for the insulation.”



What happened next with your campervan conversion?

“I started by completely stripping back the van. Commercial vehicles sometimes come with extra inside panelling, so that was important. It always feels like a chocolate box—you’re never quite sure what you’ll find! Seeing it as an empty carcass is quite a shock, which is why it’s so helpful to have a plan.

“The main things to look for at this stage are rust and any exposed areas—it’s best to get these things patched up early before they cause any serious trouble down the line.

“Next, I decided where I wanted the openings, whether that be for windows, skylights, or ventilation. This should be an early priority, as you’ll be cutting holes in the van. It also means you can see where your appliances and electricals will fit.”

You did all your own electrics. As someone new to DIY, were you nervous to take on such a big task?

“The electrics were an exciting part for me as I had to learn what felt like a new language—understanding the difference between volts and amps, for example.

“I did the physical labour myself but hired a consultant to help me along the way. Having [Tiny Build Electrics](#) for support was brilliant. They created an electrical diagram, meaning I had something tangible to refer to. I also got them to provide the technical hardware, such as my inverter box and leisure batteries.

“You have to be smart when doing a conversion and understand your limits and knowledge. Although I had studied YouTube videos and spoken to others on forums, there were some things that felt beyond my capabilities and the tools I had available. It’s better to be safe than sorry.

“Finally, I spoke with an electrician to get an official certification on my electrical work. This means if I ever sell the van, I can prove everything is safe.”



Were there any parts of the build you weren't looking forward to?

"I had heard a lot of horror stories about rust—and it's something I'm still wary of. If you don't properly strip down your van and inspect all areas, rust can create serious damage to the frame.

"My biggest fear was spending my entire renovation budget, only for hidden rust to cause an issue later down the line. This is why I always urge people to shop around and not settle for the first van they come across.

"With any DIY project, it's also important to remember that it's never worth cutting corners. It may save time and money now but it could turn out to be the opposite in future.

"When fitting my windows, for example, one option was to choose cheaper glass and glue it on. But, for the sake of spending a little more, I invested in a window glass kit. It gives me peace of mind knowing everything is solid, and there won't be any leaks."



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What have you learnt from your campervan conversion journey?

“One key lesson is that ventilation is far more important than you might think, especially if you’re going to have a toilet on board. Planning the best areas for ventilation in the early stages will save a lot of time, mistakes, and money later down the line.

“Also, being eco-friendly doesn’t have to be expensive. In my first van, I picked up most things either second-hand or for nothing—such as pallet wood, which I got free from a pub.

“Sometimes it’s a toss-up between aesthetics and practicality. It’s easy to get carried away with how the van looks and the mod-cons you want to include. But remember you need to drive it. My current van can carry 3.5 tonnes, but I’ve been smart with my choices, using lighter materials and smaller appliances to stay well under this weight. This means the van is more spacious, easier to handle, and, even more importantly, has better fuel consumption.



Being eco-friendly doesn't have to be expensive.”

“Campervan conversion teaches you resilience. You can sometimes feel like a failure when things don’t turn out how you intended. It’s a very humbling experience! However, the key is to not give up or be afraid to make mistakes. Ultimately, this is a project for you; it should be something that brings you joy.

“Finally, always seek advice. The people on forums are your best allies, as often, they’ve been through or are going through the same things as you. I’ve learnt that I should trust myself, and it is okay to make mistakes and learn from them.”



Costs to consider



Understanding your budget is a great first step to converting your campervan. Lucinda shares her personal cost sheet to give you an idea of the key materials you may want to invest in while staying on a budget.

Starter kit

If you are a complete DIY novice, then you may want to invest in some simple starter tools.



Item	Location	Price
Stanley tylon tape measure 5m/16 inches	Amazon	£6.06
Magnusson mixed VDE screw- driver set 12 pcs	Screwfix	£19.99
Stanley knife	Amazon	£2.88
Stanley fibreglass claw hammer	Screwfix	£12.99
Site 120 PU palm dip gloves black	Screwfix	£1.49
Safety goggles NEY223Clear- LensOverspecs	B&Q	£1.70

Tools

Item	Location	Price
Metal wholesaw 44m	Amazon	£6.06
Erburer HSS drill PK5	Screwfix	£19.99
Sealant gun	Amazon	£2.88
Erbauber x10	Screwfix	£12.99

* The information is correct as at 17/01/24

Building

Item	Location	Price
Wood screws 3.5 x 40	B&Q	£3.92
Cloth tape 27 mesh silver 50m	Screwfix	£3.98
Natural cable tie 200 x 4.6 pk 100	Screwfix	£2.21
Easydrive self tapping screws	Screwfix	£18.28
Zinc plates	B&Q	£8.30
Timber batons	Jewsons	£21.60
SikaFlex grey	Screwfix	£10.49
Wood	B&Q Jewsons	£34.43 £213.58
Flush hinge brass	Toolstation	£8.08
Adhesive spray	Screwfix	£9.98
Thermawrap	Screwfix	£22.49
Plywood	H & G Gould Timberyard Jewsons	£138.79 £19.67
Insulation wool	B&Q	£22.50
Hose clips	Screwfix	£6.59



* The information is correct as at 17/01/24

Electrics

Item	Location	Price
Flex cable twin core	Screwfix	£37.70
Electric tape 19mm x 33m	Screwfix	£0.98
Black tex Cable 2m 50mm	Devlin Wholesaler	£50.00
Flex cable three core 2m	Screwfix	£10.86
Trunking	Screwfix	£13.49
Copper lugs	Edmudson Electrics	£8.58
Driggs IP20 LED striplights	B&Q	£27.00

Decorating

Item	Location	Price
Gloss paint	B&Q	£8.50
Black satin paint	B&Q	£15.00
Varnish	B&Q	£13.00
Paint brush x2	B&Q	£7.00
Roller brush	B&Q	£3.50
Maple floor adhesive	Screwfix	£23.99

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Insuring your campervan

A specialist campervan and motorhome [insurance policy](#) can protect your vehicle against theft and fire damage as well as the cost of repairing your vehicle if you're involved in an accident.

It can also cover you and your passengers for personal injury and protect you against third-party claims if you're involved in a traffic accident and damage another person's property.

The cover you choose is up to you, but third-party liability is the minimum cover you need to legally drive your campervan on UK roads.

It's not easy to give an average cost for campervan insurance. As with car insurance, your quote is based on your individual circumstances, such as:

- ✔ **The age and price of your campervan**
- ✔ **Your personal circumstances (e.g. age, driving experience)**
- ✔ **Security measures (e.g. lockable garage, alarms)**
- ✔ **Where you live**
- ✔ **Additional drivers**
- ✔ **Annual mileage**
- ✔ **No claims bonus**



Here are a few tips for making your cover as cheap as possible:

- ✔ **Security** – using wheel clamps, alarms, trackers, and other security measures can help bring the cost down.
- ✔ **Parking** – storing your campervan on a driveway, inside a lockable garage, or within a secure CaSSOA registered storage facility is favourable to insurers.
- ✔ **Extra qualifications** – undertaking an [advanced driving qualification](#) could help you save money on your insurance.

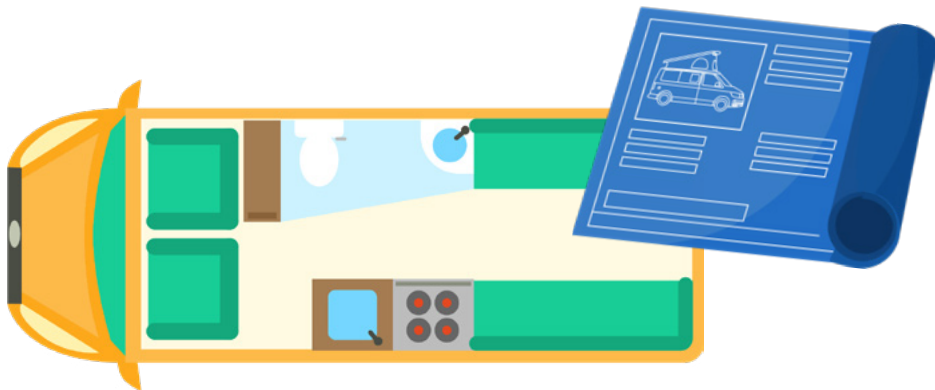
You can find out more about [specialist campervan and motorhome insurance here](#).



Campervan insurance is something you will need to budget for. To get a quote based on your specific requirements – [Find out more here](#).

Top tips for a successful project

Building a campervan is an exciting and rewarding journey. Whether you're converting a van into a full-time home on wheels or creating a weekend getaway vehicle, here are Lucinda's top 5 tips to consider:



Plan and design carefully

Before you begin, outline your goals for the campervan. Will it be for short trips or long-term travel? Are you travelling mostly solo? Who will be travelling with you and what are their needs?

Create a detailed floor plan, allowing you to consider factors like sleeping arrangements, storage, and cooking facilities. Don't forget to think about spaces for dirty washing, hanging wet clothes and if you want a toilet or washing space. Planning will save you time and money in the long run.

At this stage, devise a list of materials you might need, which means you can pre-order them to save time once you've purchased your van.

It's also worth considering where you'll be travelling. For example, if you want to travel in Europe, you'll need to make sure it's compliant with EU regulations.

Choose the right van

Ensure you select a van that suits your needs and budget.

Consider factors like size, fuel efficiency and reliability. Popular choices include:

- ✓ **Mercedes Sprinter**
- ✓ **Ford Transit**
- ✓ **Fiat Ducato**
- ✓ **Volkswagen Transporter**



At this point, you should also research the insurance you'll need for your new vehicle. More information can be found on [page 14](#).

When searching for a new van, don't forget to inspect it for rust and mechanical issues before you purchase. Get as much history as possible on the van's previous life. For example, service delivery vehicles can often have suspension issues from being parked on kerbs etc. They can also have problems with the gearbox and clutch issues due to their mileage and excessive use in short periods.

After purchasing your van, check whether you'll need to reclassify it—for example, if it's a commercial van but you're adding a bed, you may need to reclassify it as a campervan with the [DVLA](#).



Insulate and ventilate

Proper insulation is essential to regulate the temperature inside the campervan.

Use sound-deadening materials after you've stripped the van back to its original panels and make sure to treat any rust with iron oxide first.

Your van will also need to be ventilated to stop any potential mould. Use materials like foam boards, spray foam, or lambswool to insulate the walls, floor, and ceiling. Insulation foil over the top can also help prevent a build-up of excess moisture.

Additionally, install good quality windows and roof vents to provide ventilation and avoid condensation, especially when cooking or showering inside.

Elevating your mattress onto springs or cutting holes in the ply under the bed can also stop the excess build-up of moisture and lets the mattress breathe.

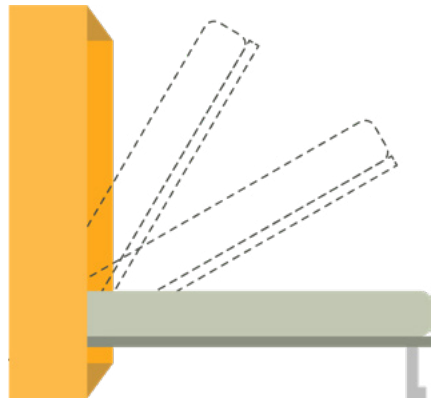


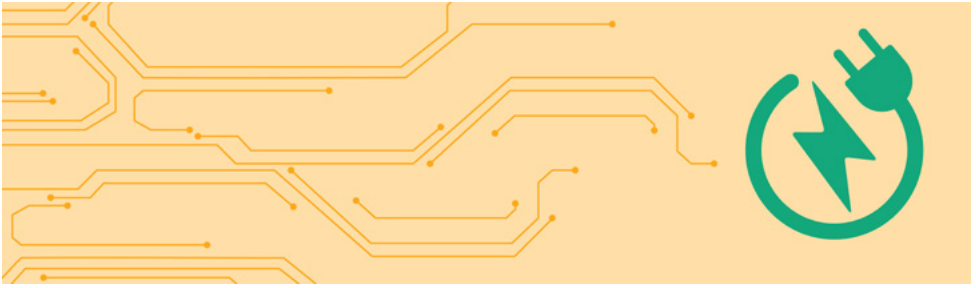
Use space efficiently

Maximising your available space is key.

Consider space-saving furniture and storage solutions, such as fold-down beds, built-in cabinets, and multi-purpose seating. Maximise storage with well-organised shelves and compartments.

Keep in mind that weight distribution is important for safe driving, so plan your layout accordingly. Leisure batteries and electrical components can be heavy, so try to distribute them evenly over your axle to avoid compromising the strength and handling of your van.





Install the right electrical system

Install a reliable electrical system to power your appliances and devices.

A leisure battery can store energy generated by solar panels or the van's alternator. Using solar power is also a great way of recycling energy. Proper wiring and safety measures are crucial to prevent electrical issues and fires, so if you feel unsure about this part of the build, outsource the installation to a qualified electrician. Alternatively, consider other power units that come in power banks as these are easier to use throughout your van.

Seek outside expertise

It's OK not to know everything when converting a van. You aren't the first and you won't be the last person on this journey learning new skills and knowledge.

Going to a professional is sometimes the best way forward. For example, if you're looking to install gas this must be carried out by a qualified and registered gas engineer and should not be attempted on your own.

You can also seek advice from experienced campervan builders or join online forums and communities for additional guidance and support. Or why not attend vanlife festivals this summer like [Vanlifewithluci](#) and meet others in the van community.



Bonus tips

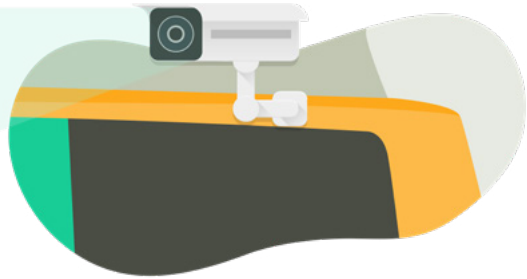


Security – adding deadbolts on your back and sliding doors is a great way to provide an extra layer of protection to your van.

A simple padlock on a plate of wood can be drilled in easily and is inexpensive. Wheel or foot locks are also good visual deterrents.

If you're short on budget, a simple ratchet tied through the door handles and fastened through your cab doors will stop them being opened from the outside in.

Mobile cameras can also be used for security, and some have night vision—so if you are inside your vehicle, you can see who's outside, especially at night.



An immobiliser is another way to protect your vehicle, which works with Bluetooth from your phone to allow you to start your vehicle—this makes it harder for thieves to start your engine.

I would also advise a stash or hide space in the campervan for your electrical or expensive goods. Behind the wheel arch covers, over the cab or under the footwells can be handy spaces to keep expensive items out of sight if you're leaving your campervan.

Don't forget you're a moving vehicle – since you'll be driving around, everything needs to stay in place safely. Stick down items with Velcro, use hooks and child locks for your cupboard and don't forget floor matting inside your drawers to secure items inside.



www.ripeinsurance.co.uk/campervan-insurance

We hope you found this guide useful. Why not explore our blog for even more inspiration? Make sure your campervan is fully protected with specialist insurance.

Ripe insurance is designed to be quick, easy, and can be purchased entirely online so you and your campervan can be protected in just a few minutes.

