




The Higgins family

Conversion type Auto-Sleeper
Windrush from  auto-sleepers.com

Engine Euro 5 2.2HDI

Power 130bhp

Economy 30mpg

Gearbox 6-speed manual

Travel seats 4

Berths 4

Leisure battery 110Ah

Length x width x height 5.99m x 2.26m x 2.60m

Equipment Metallic Golden White paintwork, alloy wheels, cab air-conditioning, Dometic climatic air-conditioning in the rear, Al-Ko Air Top air suspension system, multifunction steering wheel, central locking, electric windows, electric mirrors, CD and DAB radio, rear view camera, cruise control, swivel driver and passenger seats, privacy glass to sides, bunk beds, beige/green upholstery, Seitz concertina blinds to side windows, curtains in front windscreen and rear doors, Truman Combi 4 E blown-air heating and water heater, Thetford Triplex hob and oven, Dometic cooker hood and extractor fan, Daewoo microwave oven, sink, Thetford fridge/freezer, shower, basin and Thetford cassette toilet, 230V hook-up, gas barbecue connection point, 25-litre LPG gas tank, cooker and fridge, rear speaker, Avtex TV and connection point, floor and step lighting, Carefree Freedom RM awning, Sargent EC500 power system and control panel, Whale Aquasource water filler

Family fun

in an Auto-Sleeper Windrush



After taking a career break to travel the world introduced Justine and Paul to vanlife, there was no turning back. With the arrival of a baby, the hunt was on for a family campervan...

Words and photos by Justine Higgins

As a couple, we loved the simplicity of camping in our two-person tent. The low cost, spontaneity and freedom to escape to the countryside was fantastic. So, how did we become campervanners? Well, it all started with a momentous decision to take a career break to travel the world! We divided the year into three stages: first, snowboarding in Canada, then six months backpacking in Australia and Asia, then buying a campervan to travel around Europe.

Although it was a large financial outlay, the campervan would be our transport and home for three months and could be sold on our

return home to recoup most of the money.

We bought a nine-year-old Auto-Sleeper Rambler GL on a Talbot Express base and had a memorable and relaxed time travelling through Greece, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany and France, seeing many wonderful sights.

We loved the layout and quality of the interior as well as its compact size, which made parking and narrow roads a breeze. However, it had its foibles, some of which were quite scary for campervan newbies, including fading brakes on the downhill and the engine overheating on uphill!

After years of camping, we were sold on the luxury of a campervan. It was hard to

beat the ease of being able to park up and relax with a glass of wine within a few minutes of arriving on site. No unpacking and packing the camping gear from the car, plus no more sitting in a wet tent in the rain! The campervan lifestyle was for us and we decided to keep the Rambler.

We enjoyed many years of holidays and weekend breaks in our first campervan and then upgraded to an Auto-Sleeper Duetto back in 2009.

Our beautiful daughter was born in 2010 and, as she grew into a toddler, the Duetto started to become a squeeze for the three of us. Returning to camping wasn't an option,



Playing inside at a small table



Enjoying walking in Engelberg

so it was time to find a campervan that would be comfortable for a family.

The search is on

The non-negotiables of a new 'van were a well-finished interior and a compact size to fit on the drive and down narrow lanes and be convenient to park. It had to sleep three people comfortably and have a seating area for the adults in the evening. For these reasons, we favoured a van conversion over a coachbuilt motorhome and were determined to find one that was perfect. During 2011, we visited dealers throughout the southeast in addition to trawling the internet and were

surprised by the small number of family-orientated van conversions that met our requirements at that time.

Having had little success, we decided to visit a major show as a way forward and chose the Caravan and Motorhome Show at the Birmingham NEC. It was an exciting opportunity to see and compare all the latest models from across the industry.

And there it was, on the Auto-Sleepers stand – an innovative new van conversion; the Windrush. It had a perfect layout with transverse bunk beds at the rear and a double bed converted from the front seating/dining area. Auto-Sleepers' build quality and

attention to detail had impressed us right from our first Rambler GL and the Windrush certainly did not let the side down. It ticked all our list of features – its six-metre length would fit on the drive, it was narrow enough to negotiate country lanes, there was seating for evening relaxation for mum and dad, four fully belted travelling seats and, to top it off, it felt very luxurious! It also looked very distinctive and stylish from the outside.

On our return, we visited our nearest Auto-Sleeper dealer, Marquis Suffolk, and, after a second look around the 'van and a test drive, we purchased a dealer version of the Windrush, a Sussex BB. Our only addition

was a rear bike rack and some minor adjustments we made to toddler-proof the campervan internally.

New vanlife

Auto-Sleepers triumphed on the design of the internal space and the modern upholstery and stylish fittings make it a comfortable home from home. In the lounge/dining area, the two cab seats swivel and we keep the second unused travel seat in its bench position permanently. In this layout, we use the larger table for mealtimes or board games. There is also a choice of options for two smaller tables in other seating arrangements. We all have our favourite spots in the evening to lounge around or watch a movie on the Avtex TV/DVD player. The many lights and spotlights, including in the bunks, are well positioned and add to the internal versatility. Our daughter loves the blue floor lighting for a party vibe!

The bunk feels like a cosy bedroom and our daughter enjoys putting her toys in the little cupboard at the bottom of her bed and teddies on the cubby hole shelf. The lower bunk bed, with a maximum length of 1.80m, is slightly bigger than the top bed, which means this campervan should last us for many years as our daughter grows up. And, when she is tucked up in bed, we sit comfortably in the



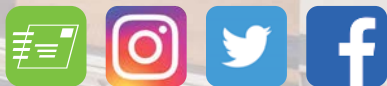
Justine using the pull-out worktop



Cycling in the New Forest, Hampshire



Do you have your own lovely campervan? Share your stories and photos with us at:



Difficult to say, as we enjoy them all but, if my arm was twisted, I would say the Dordogne in France and Engelberg, Switzerland!



lounge before transforming it into a transverse double bed for the night. Although permanent beds are popular, we are prepared to compromise on the daily task of bed-making to enjoy more flexible use of the internal space.

The kitchen is compact and well designed, with a Thetford Triplex three-ring gas hob and oven, plus a microwave. The sink has a glass cover and, to give even more surface space, there is a pull-out worktop. A convenient external gas point is especially useful for cooking outside with our Cadac Safari Chef gas barbecue. The fridge/icebox has a small capacity but I can carefully squeeze in enough food for a weekend break or for the start of a holiday.

The wet room makes clever use of space with some unusual ideas. For example, the basin slides out of the way along a chrome rail to a position above the toilet, making room to have a shower. However, some of the features may be a step too far, such as the showerhead doubling as the tap for the basin.

We were concerned about how often the LPG gas tank, used for heating and cooking, would need refilling and where to find a supply, but we needn't have worried. It has



It all started with a momentous decision to take a career break and travel the world!

proven to be a very efficient energy source.

When it comes to storage, we make the best use of every space – even the oven becomes an extra food storage cupboard on longer trips! We have to be a little careful packing but there is enough room for our belongings and any sports equipment.

There are only a couple of things that we would change about the 'van. The 130hp engine can lack power on long, slow gradients and Auto-Sleepers remedied this in later models by using the 150bhp engine as standard. We also find the water filling system is overcomplicated and requires both of us to complete the operation.

Our travels

The campervan is a fun and flexible way of spending family time together. As soon as school is out, we pack up and head off. France is one of our favourite camping destinations, especially the Dordogne, Brittany and the Alps, which are all perfect for lots of outdoor activities. The flexibility of travelling on dates we choose, staying longer in a place we like or moving on to find the sun are all reasons to love campervanning. In addition to flying along on the

motorway, the 'van performs well on steep, winding mountain roads with no doubts that it will make it to the top and safely down again. Those memories of the Rambler GL and the smoking brakes are always in the back of my mind!

We try to find campsites conveniently sited near attractions or places to visit and use our bikes, local buses or trains as transport. Checking out the cycling opportunities is an important part of the research for our holiday.

We love Camping La Plage, Vézac, situated on the Dordogne River between Beynac and La Roque-Gageac. There are lots of cycling options to medieval castles and towns, as well as the nearby Jardins de Marqueyssac clifftop 'hanging' gardens. There is also direct access to the river to swim or canoe.

We have also visited the island of Île-de-Ré on the French Atlantic coast, near La Rochelle, where cycling is definitely king. There is access to 200 kilometres of cycle tracks criss-crossing the flat island, efficiently linking the historic towns and ports. We explored the quaint towns with their white painted stone houses and muted green window shutters, as well as the countryside

near our campsite. The local buses, which have trailers or racks to transport bikes, can be used to reach places further afield. The island is perfect for a family holiday – traffic-free cycle paths and sandy beaches.

We also like to explore closer to home for a spontaneous or planned weekend break. The campervan is always ready to go with the essentials and we just add clothes and food. The New Forest, Hampshire, is a favourite and being in the forest brings us closer to nature. It is delightful to see the New Forest ponies, especially in spring when there are young foals, as well as spotting deer and the occasional more surprising pig! Brockenhurst has lots of cafés for a hot chocolate, coffee and obligatory piece of cake after a peaceful cycle. There is also a train station with links to Lymington to catch the Isle of Wight ferry. One of our family adventures starts with taking our bikes onto the train to the ferry and spending a day cycling on the island.

The research and care taken to choose the perfect campervan was certainly worthwhile as it is a major financial outlay and one that you want to definitely get right. A decade later, we love it as much as the day we brought it home.

