

**A** camping van, also known as a Class B motorhome, combines the best features of a van and a fully equipped motorhome. It's a great base camp for weekend retreats, a pleasant means of discovering the joys of life on the road, and it functions as a first-rate second car. With a three-day weekend and tanks full of fuel and water, you can roam the highways as you please, unhampered by motel reservations. Discover road's end. Park and explore. Satisfy the romantic wanderlust that has echoed through our culture from the days of Daniel Boone. Come the workweek commute, you'll find your camping van not too different from other family transport vehicles.

If you're tired of roughing it, you will love the comfort of these portable bivouacs. Without sacrificing the spontaneity of tent camping, you'll enjoy a heated, well-lit living space with bathroom facilities, soft bunks, lots of storage and a built-in kitchen.



# VAN-tastic!

The marriage of a camping van and a fully equipped motorhome delivers maneuverability, livability and fun

BY JACK INNIS

Roadtrek 190,  
built by Home &  
Park, can sleep  
up to four.

Camping vans are converted by removing the roofs of new factory-delivered vans, replacing them with enlarged fiberglass shells, then cramming the interiors full of cabinets, closets, refrigerators, dinettes and other RV goodies. Often, the bulging new roof can add enough space to provide overhead bunkbeds, standing headroom and numerous additional overhead storage spaces.

You'll find vans available from the Big Three—Ford, Chevrolet and Dodge—plus Volkswagen. These companies work with RV manufacturers such as Winnebago, Jayco and Coachmen to produce the livability package or conversion.

Livability in camping vans includes two basic sleeping layouts. Vans with the more aerodynamic roof lines usually have twin or fold-down bunks that double as dinette seats or storage spaces; these are very comfortable for couples. Those with extended roof lines often enjoy permanent overhead sleeping quarters above the cockpit, along with large aft-end beds as available options or standard features; a family of four would find this type accommodating. While some of the aerodynamic vans have a slim chance of fitting into your garage, extended-top models—especially those crowned with a roof-mounted air-conditioning unit—have virtually no



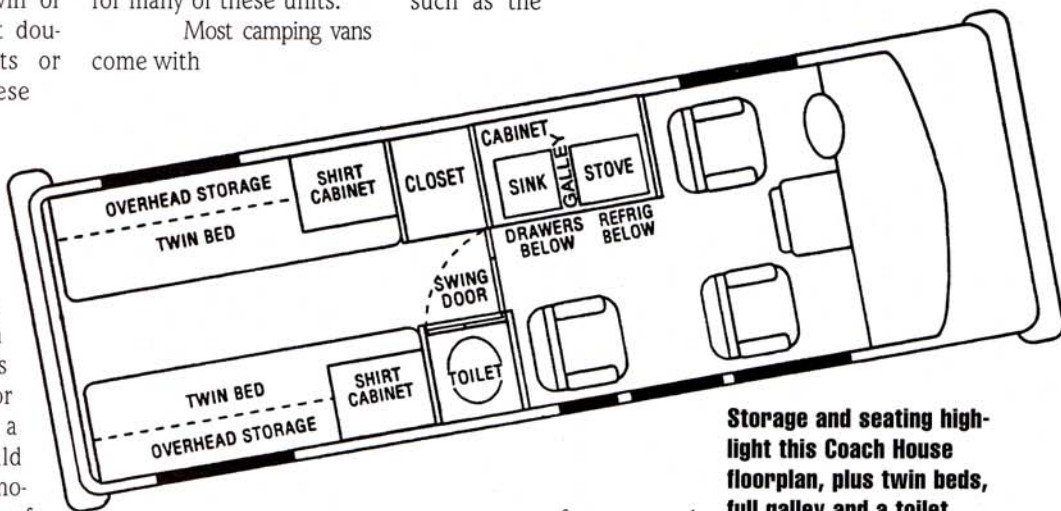
JEFF JOHNSTON

**Although interior space is at a premium, some well thought-out designs, such as this one by Sportsmobile, provide more than adequate room for relatively small families.**

chance: They top out at almost 10 feet high. Outdoor storage must be arranged for many of these units.

Most camping vans come with

between sundown and sack time. Power for interior lighting and appliances, such as the



**Storage and seating highlight this Coach House floorplan, plus twin beds, full galley and a toilet (no shower) are included.**

propane-powered, thermostat-controlled forced-air furnaces that keep the cold air at bay while you sleep or lounge during the chilly hours

furnace and water pump, is provided by an auxiliary 12-volt DC electrical system that is separate from the van's operating system, ensuring quick getaways regardless of how much power may

have been drawn from the auxiliary battery.

Within the heated confines of a camping van, you'll notice that you can move from cab to living quarters—and access nearly everything—without having to go outside (a bonus in bad weather). If you want a cup of coffee, for instance, you just go back and get one.

In general, camping vans vary in length from 16 to 20 feet and provide at least 6 feet of headroom. Most models carry 30 to 35 gallons of fuel; mileage varies from 15 mpg (EuroVan, V-6) to 8 mpg with a big V-8 or V-10 engine. Toilet facilities consist of either a portable potty (featured in many tent trailers) or a standard freshwater flush appliance. Most camping vans offer a three-year or 36,000-mile warranty on both the chassis and the coach.

On the road, camping vans

rank close behind sport-utility vehicles for drivability: Vans are fun to drive! Cornering is precise compared to the shepherding it sometimes takes to coax large motorhomes through the twisties. Braking and acceleration are good enough that you don't stress yourself by trying to think 30 seconds ahead of every contingency. These Class B motorhomes also sport large seamless windshields and high driver and passenger perches—one of the tallest saddles this side of a semi—so your view isn't obstructed by traffic or roadside fences and shrubbery. No wonder camping vans have been called the sports cars of motorhomes and are often seen on the freeways during the workweek commute.

Camping-van owners enjoy the same sense of security and convenience associated with Class A and Class C motorhomes, minus the larger vehicles' restricted movements and

higher price tags. Unlike people camping in tents, van campers can lock up their possessions while out in the wilderness and lock themselves in at night. They satisfy their romantic wanderlust with comfort and confidence.

These vehicles can, with their knack for delivering both weekend enjoyment and cross-country travel on open and unpaved roads, their serviceability as second cars and their average retail price of \$32,000 to \$52,000, rank among the most solid RV values. Whether traveling, camping or commuting, getting there is truly half the fun in a camping van. ♣

*Jack Innis began his writing career in 1990 and has since published more than 100 articles, essays and short stories, most of which deal with the great outdoors.*

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## Camping Van: What is it?

**A** tent trailer is easily distinguishable from a fifth-wheel or conventional trailer. But because motorhome categories tend to overlap one another, they are not quite as easy to tell apart.

Although room for disagreement exists, the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association defines a Class B motorhome (camping van) as a panel-type truck to which the RV manufacturer adds any two of the following conveniences: sleeping, kitchen and toilet facilities, also 120-volt hookup, freshwater storage, city water hookup and top extension to provide more headroom.

Camping vans are most easily confused with Class C (mini, low-profile, compact) motorhomes, in which the RV manufacturer completes the body section and attaches it to the cab section, and street van conversions, which are vans that are modified to include windows, carpeting, paneling, seats, sofas and accessories.—*J.I.*