

# Downsizing – can you make it fit?

## Try before you buy

Motor caravanning and campervanning are essentially about the same thing, giving you the freedom to explore at your own pace and changing your mind at the last minute depending on weather or mood. The main difference is the size of the vehicle that you drive and what homely items it contains. Some friends couldn't bear the thought of not having a separate bathroom but others just find the thought of driving a large motorhome too intimidating and will quite happily cosy into a campervan.

So if your motorhome is due for an update or perhaps you've not been taking it out as often as you used to, maybe it's time to think about whether downsizing to a campervan

could be right for you, says Catherine Bunn, who runs Highland Campervans.

"We have a selection of campervans for hire with different layouts and sizes," says Catherine. "All our vehicles are automatic because we think it makes the drive more relaxing, plus some campervans are heated and have 4-wheel drive which is great for exploring Scotland in the winter months, but perhaps an unnecessary extra down south. Do you choose a 2 or 4-berth style? In ours the double-bed also acts as the main rear seats (with seatbelts), so you can still take the grandchildren along on the odd weekend.

"Do you choose a high-top or elevating roof? Elevating roofs can give better fuel economy and can be more discrete if camping off-road, but it means you don't have the permanent headroom and storage space like a high-top. Kitchen wise, a campervan can still offer a superb culinary feast if it's properly kitted out with fridge and running

water. Some recent customers of ours had steak, lamb chops and a host of other delights during their holiday just cooked on the 2-ring gas stove and with a miniature toaster you can still even have beans on toast for breakfast!

"Finally, but most importantly, the Porta Potti. Ours fit discretely into a cupboard space but if it's on-board you never have to worry about being caught short."

For some, downsizing to a campervan may be a financial choice by merging the car and the motorhome into just one vehicle, for others it may be easier to drive a campervan which handles like a car. But whatever your reasons, Catherine recommends that you 'try before you buy'. "Just like purchasing a motorhome or caravan, it's easy to make a wrong choice initially but if you have a holiday first, it will give you a great taster of what you can and can't live without."  
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# Downsizing

## - can you make it fit?

### Bongo - one size fits all

A large luxury limo with matching price tag and eco-hostile thirst is a prime target for downsizing in today's economic climate - and would be even more so if it were used for only a few weeks in the summer plus the odd weekend excursion. But parting with a car is one thing; parting with a beloved motorhome is quite another. Although downsizing to one manoeuvrable van conversion to replace both car and motorhome can work well when you retire, you don't want your daily commute to be a constant reminder of commercial mechanicals and agricultural suspension. Then again, you don't want to forego the flexibility to shoot off at a moment's notice for a few days in the scenery.

One solution to the "one vehicle fits all" conundrum is ranges such as the Mazda Bongo. The Bongo starts life in Japan as a compact people carrier, but as Japanese legislation discourages retention of older vehicles, many of the best examples have found their way via the strict used car

grading system to the UK, where they have proved ideal for conversion into campervans.

As passenger transport they tick all the boxes. They fit comfortably inside the footprint of a Ford Mondeo, so parking is easy, thanks also to the external rear-mounted mirror which furnishes a bird's eye view of everything within a few inches of your rear bumper. The 128-bhp diesel powerplant delivers athletic acceleration from rest, so there's no problem keeping up with the traffic. If you still crave automotive luxury, the Bongo's discreetly smooth automatic transmission - a source of relaxation you can get seriously used to after the first few minutes of test drive - leaves you free to enjoy the comfortable seats and elevated driving position. There's power steering, electric windows, plus air-conditioning for both front and rear, but the final trump card is the legendary Mazda reliability, which peels away the years from the carefully selected used examples imported by the Imperial Car Company, the largest Bongo dealer in the UK.

Of all the various manifestations of Bongo conversion, none is a match for the elegance and quality of the sculpted curves of the island unit and worktop in Imperial's top of the range Lulworth. This model sports a



Porta Potti, concealed beneath a cushioned seat. The Lulworth is not the only Imperial model to provide 3-burner cooker, capacious compressor fridge with freezing compartment, inboard fresh water tank and RCD-protected mains hook-up. They all incorporate the electric rising roof, where bedding can be stored during the day and children safely tucked away at night. After you've finished admiring the sunset, the electric blinds will at a touch transform the interior into a cosy bedroom. The original factory-fitted Mazda rear seats and three point seat belts offer safety for your passengers during the day and are readily reformatted at night to furnish a comfortable bed for adults.

Imperial's range of five Bongo conversions are true multi-purpose vehicles, just right for shopping and commuting from Monday to Friday, while hitting the spot for spontaneous weekends in the wilds.

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## Thinking differently

Inquiries to Romahome have shot up – in the last quarter the company received more than in any previous three month period in the history of the company, and that spans 27 years, said Brian Bailey, managing director of the Cowes-based motorhome maker.

“We are also starting a re-education process for both customers and ourselves,” said Brian. “Many want to downsize because they want a smaller vehicle that can be used as a car, so the R30, which comes in at under five metres, is ideal for that. But the larger coachbuilt R40 is also attracting a great deal of attention as it has six seats with belts.

“One of the problems is that people moving down in motorhome size still want all the lockers, storage, and other features they get in their previous bigger vehicles.

“We are now educating them to think differently about the amount of stuff they take with them and prioritise what they need rather than want. The bigger the vehicle, the more they carry and much of it is clothing, equipment, and other things they rarely use.

“They just like to know it’s there – it’s a bit like Range Rover syndrome, where drivers have a 4x4 that will scale mountains and ford rivers even though they only drive it to work or school so don’t really need it.

“Owners of large motorhomes have to learn to plan that bit better like the rest of us have been doing for ages and it can be a revelation when life is de-cluttered.

“Even so, I am looking at ways of designing more storage into our vehicles so we are learning fast at Romahome and coming up with some ingenious ideas. It’s a case of literally watch this space!

“Meanwhile, I have had to step up production and have put another ten R30s into the build programme already. We are very flexible in what we can cope with and things like our ten-year warranty on our fibreglass panels reassure people about our quality. Some people joke about our vehicles being like upturned boats, but often it’s rivals who can’t quite reach our standards with their mouldings.

“This durability issue is another selling point. People will buy a smaller vehicle and want to keep it for longer to save on their outlay so they need to know it will last.

“I can assure them it will. We have just taken back a 25 year old demountable that had been traded in after being fitted to its third base vehicle and are keeping it to show people how our bodies last and how much progress has been made in the intervening years with regard to layout and equipment.

“Used Romahomes are also creating huge demand and Neville Peachey at Romahome Centre in Southampton is running hard to keep up with the pace.”

**“One of the problems is that people moving down in motorhome size still want all the lockers, storage, and other features they get in their previous bigger vehicles.”**



Romahome at the NEC. (Picture Fen Leisure Services)

## Highland Campervan Hire

Try before you buy!

Whether you're thinking about downsizing or are still deciding what type of vehicle to buy, hiring a campervan from us is the **perfect introduction to the campervan lifestyle** and is an ideal way to explore the remote and beautiful Scottish Highlands.

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