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EDITOR

2016 Renault Traffic 140 Sport LWB**Owned since** June 2016**Engine** 1.6-litre twin-turbo diesel (Euro 5)**Power** 165bhp (remapped by Superchips)**Gearbox** 6-speed manual**Fuel economy** 40mpg**Insurance cost** £486 (Adrian Flux inc business cover)**Best trip so far:**

After all the family duties of Christmas, it was great to get away to Winter Camp with the lads from my village – 19 of us tramped around the Derbyshire Dales on a very hilly pub crawl and had a great time

COSTS SO FAR

Renault LWB van (Bristol St, Derby)	£17,278
Superchips Bluefin remap	£359
Kiravans swivel seat base and fittings	£271
Dometic sink	£115
Tap, water tank and plumbing (Clearcut Conversions)	£70
SCA roof, lighting, Veltrim, rear windows	£7,000
Van X blackout blinds and external cab blind	£175
Focal door speakers and iBus 20 active sub	£325
Reimo Variotech seat, table leg and step	£5,634
NDS battery-to-battery charger, inverter, batteries, wiring	£1,180
Wallas XC Duo	£1,598
Vitrifrigo 75-litre compressor fridge	£791
Rhales Conversions custom cabinets build and fit	£2,000
Nespresso Essenza coffee machine	£90
Tracker system fitted	£249
First year tracker subscription	£168
Total cost of conversion	£37,303

campervan

F R E E D O M T O E X P L O R E

It's finished!

With the sliding seat fitted, the editor's Renault conversion could finally be finished...



“I've worked out that on a full tank of diesel, the Wallas XC Duo will run non-stop for 32 days on the low setting!”

Having had the sliding Reimo Variotech seat fitted, we were finally on the home straight with the Trafic conversion and with this major piece of the puzzle in place, we could finally measure up for the final fit of the cabinets and appliances.

At this point – just before Christmas – the van had the SCA roof and windows fitted, together with all its electrical systems. As I now knew the clearance for the cabinets, I could finally work out how wide the cabinets could be and what appliances could be fitted.

Having seen the superb Wallas XC

Duo at the NEC show and been impressed with its compact size and quietness, I already knew I wanted to go down that route, so all that was left was to work out which sink and fridge to fit.

Big fridges are best!

One thing I really wanted was a large fridge compressor – I've tested many campervans and compressor units always work best. The issue with my van was that the sliding seat had to be able to slide in front of the fridge to maximise the boot space with the seat slid fully forward. Initially, I'd just wanted a similar

1 The campervan makes a great day van to park up and simply make a coffee

fridge to the one I'd had in my previous Chevy campervan – a 50-litre Waeco that had worked fine. The trouble was this fridge was too deep to fit and I didn't want to limit the seat travel by using an L-shaped kitchen layout.

I only had 450mm of depth to play with and after scouring fridge maker brochures, it soon became obvious that only Vitrifrigo made anything of a shallow enough depth to be suitable.

I basically had two options: a 42-litre model which could be fitted without any bodywork alterations, or a 75-litre model with a separate compressor that would

need some panelwork modifications to fit.

After much deliberation and consultation with suppliers, Penguin refrigeration, I opted for a Vitrifigo C75LBLAL model in black paying an additional £52.17 to add a 12V/240V switching unit so that it automatically switches to 240V when you're on a hook-up.

Fitting this involved trimming the side panel of the van (which isn't structural – it just supports the side panel to prevent dents) and making up a new recessed section in thick aluminium. This was then bonded and riveted in place and should prove just as strong as the original steelwork.

Clever cabinetry

With the fridge fitted and wired up, I then headed to Rhales Conversions in Peterborough to have the cabinets fitted. I'd met the boss of the company, Richard Hales, when *Campervan* had featured his personal Crafter conversion van in issue 6. I'd been really impressed by the fit and finish of this and knew he was the man to fit out my own van. He's an ex-yacht fitter and makes cool curved cabinets all with modern edge banding.

Armed with a really bad sketch of mine and a Dometic sink that I reckoned could just about fit, he started work on it just before Christmas, helped by his two Australian Shepherd dogs.

After much deliberation we opted to go for Zebrano Sand cabinets and gloss White Nouveau worktops (which I'd seen fitted to a Devon conversion and loved), which are both made by Superva. Normally you'd go for black or grey worktops, but I wanted something a little different that would also be light coloured and reflect the light. For an extra bit of style we'd also opted to use brushed alloy effect silver edge banding.

With the trim chosen, we left Richard to it and he reckoned it would be done in a week (it was).



That sinking feeling...

The first I knew I'd cocked up on my measuring of the sink was when Richard rang: "The sink won't fit as it sits near the roof pillar and it's too deep. Can you source me another one and I'll cut it into the worktop. CAN do some small ones that will fit".

Bugger! Time to hit sink makers websites and pour over dimensions. In the end I'd narrowed it down to two models – a tiny CAN unit with a rather clunky-looking lid and built-in tap and

2 Rhales Conversions Zebrano Sand cabinets and white sparkle worktops contrast well with the Reimo dark wood-effect floor. The rear seat can actually go back further than this!

3 Mug cupboard works well and tap had to be inset into the sink by carefully drilling a large hole in it. It was the best compromise and works well

4 I've added five metres of LEDs to light up all the cabinets when the doors are opened

5 Large 75-litre fridge is brilliant and the cutlery drawer is of a decent size

a much smarter-looking Dometic item with a flush-fitting lid.

The downside to the Dometic sink was that it didn't have a tap built into it, so I'd either have to fit one into the worktop or get creative. I went with the Dometic SNG 4133 and suppliers Leisure Lines (the webstore of CAK Tanks) managed to get one overnighted to Richard. I'd worry about the tap later...

A week later we went to collect the freshly finished van and I couldn't believe how good a job Richard had made of it. As well as adding a smart panel for the electrics (the heater control, the main control panel and mains and 12V sockets), he'd also managed to build in a small mug cupboard above the sink. I really like these and together with a cutlery drawer they're on my 'must have' list of essentials.

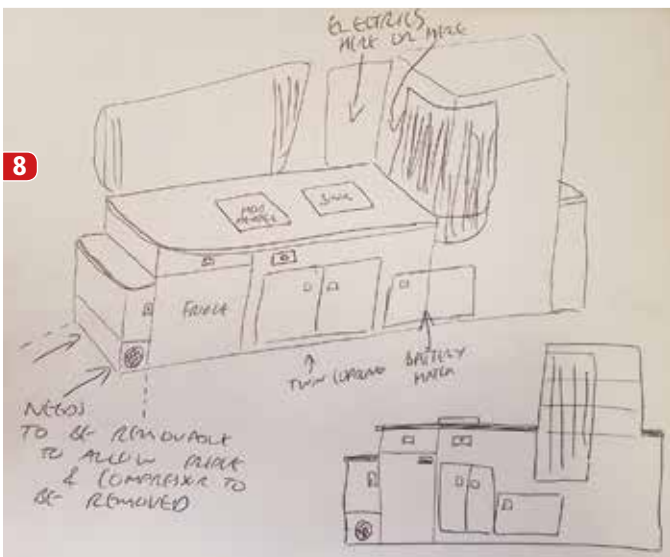
He'd also managed to squeeze in a cabinet for the twin 100Ah leisure batteries and built a bespoke cabinet for the water tank. Once I'd got the van home, I experimented with various tap ideas including having a hidden tap head from under the mug cupboard (too splashy) and a worktop-mounted tap (too ugly and risk of flooding worktops if knocked on), before settling on drilling a hole into the side of the sink. It looks





REREGISTERING INFO

gov.uk/government/publications/registering-a-diy-caravan/converting-a-vehicle-into-a-motorhome



neat and works fine, but we'll need to buy a washing-up bowl to avoid submerging it!

Diesel hob and heater

As well as the sink, Richard had also fitted the hob in the worktop. I'd toyed with the idea of using a gas hob, but by the time you've spent £350 on a combination hob and sink, plus £100 on a space-robbing steel gas locker box and £1000 on blown-air heating, you might as well go the whole hog and spend another £150 on a combined diesel hob and heater unit.

I'd seen diesel hobs in the past and thought that while they were a good idea, they didn't make much sense as they cost over £1000 and you still needed to buy some other form of heating unit. This all changed when Finnish makers, Wallas, brought out their XC Duo model, which combines a diesel hob with a space heating unit. With the lid up it's a two-burner hob (basically boil and simmer), while with the lid down a fan system blows warm air out of the front of it effectively creating a diesel-powered fan heater.

The cherry on the cake is that it also uses far less 12V electricity than conventional blown-air diesel heating

and as it uses fuel from your derv tank, there's no need to carry any extra fuel inside the vehicle.

The downsides are that it's slightly deeper than a gas hob (but not massively so) and the lid doesn't sit flush with the worktop and has rather ugly visible screw heads.

I fitted the Wallas myself and had to drop the fuel tank to install a fuel feed in the top of the fuel tank sender (which was the hardest part of the whole fit) as well as drill some holes through the floor to run the exhaust and intake pipes. Wiring it is dead easy – two wires simply connect to the leisure battery.

The unit uses a balanced flue and all the diesel burning takes place in a sealed box so there are no diesel fumes inside the van (and even when you're near the exhaust, it barely smells).

In use the Wallas has been brilliant – it takes a few minutes to get up to temperature, but once fully warmed it creates plenty of heat and we've found that setting number one is all you need (we actually had to switch it off overnight in sub-zero winter temperatures as we were getting too hot). Some forums have mentioned that you get cold feet as the warm air is blown out at countertop height, but this



6 You can just see the chequerplate panels that cover the hot exhaust pipe coming from under the Wallas heater

7 Wallas XC Duo hob doubles as a space heater and works brilliantly

8 The original sketch I sent to Rhales Conversions. Art was never my strong point!

9 The metalwork under the window had to be trimmed and a recessed aluminium panel built to fit in the 75-litre fridge

10 The compact Nespresso Essenza coffee machine is powered by a 1500W NDS pure sine wave inverter that's activated via a wall switch

is nonsense as warm air circulates. At night it's great having the fan blow warm air over your feet and it's great being warm while you're partially dressed and making a drink in the morning.

I've also worked out that on a full tank of diesel, the Wallas will run non-stop for 32 days on the low setting! Or 16 days at maximum heat! You'll run out of 12V battery power long before you run out of diesel.

It also sidesteps the whole issue of getting gas refills when you're touring in Europe. Having now experienced how it works in practice, I'd not go back to lugging around gas bottles and messing about with spanners.

Reregistration

With the van finally finished, it needed to be reregistered as a 'motor caravan'. This isn't optional, it's a legal requirement and involved downloading a sample letter from gov.uk filling in the relevant sections on the V5C log book (Body Type and number of seats – 6) and sending it all off to the DVLA with some receipts and photos. It was a simple paper exercise and two weeks later the log book returned with 'Motor Caravan' written in the Body Type section.



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THANKS TO

- CMC Reimo** (Reimo Variotech seat and rails)
conceptmulti-car.co.uk
- Hillside Leisure** (roof, lining, windows, lights)
hillsideleisure.co.uk
- Kiravans** (swivel double seat base)
kiravans.co.uk
- Kuranda** (Wallas diesel hob/heater)
campervanheating.co.uk
- Leisure Lines** (Dometic sink)
leisurelines.net
- Penguin Refridgeration** (75-litre fridge)
penguinfrigo.co.uk
- Rhales Conversions** (all interior cabinets)
rhalesconversions.co.uk
- RoadPro** (NDS charger and inverter, Banner batteries)
roadpro.co.uk
- Superchips** (Bluefin remapping device)
superchips.co.uk
- Van-X** (black-out curtains)
van-x.co.uk

Unique insurance headaches

Getting the log book amended proved far easier than sorting out the insurance. While the van had been in the process of being converted, it had to be insured as a modified van which was far costlier than insuring it as a campervan.

The problem I had was that I wanted it insured for business use (essential as an editor) and it was also my daily driver and had a value of £40,000. Shield Insurance, who I'd been insured with were very polite but could only insure self builds up to £25,000.

My friend, Stuart Craig, who's the

Sales and Marketing Manager for Vantage Insurance pointed out that: "We can insure you for two of these things, but not daily driver, high-value self-build and business!"

Worryingly, even the meerkat refused to produce any quotes for me.

In the end I found that Adrian Flux were prepared to insure me and for a reasonable price (£486) but only if I had a vehicle tracker system fitted. I decided that a vehicle tracker was probably worth doing and a good investment for future cheaper premiums so had Car Electronics in Nottingham fit a 24-hour monitored system. At £249 it's not that

11 Richard Hales is the man responsible for building all the cabinets and he did a fantastic job...

12 ...helped by Jasper and Flame

13 Sliding seat system was expensive but has proved invaluable

14 Our annual 'Winter Camp' with mates saw me wear my smug face as I came back to a warm campervan!

expensive, but then you have to pay for a year's subscription, which added another £168 to the bill.

To sort out the insurance issues, I plan to get a small car to use as a daily driver which should also help keep the mileage down on the Renault.

So does it all work?

In total the 'van has cost just over £37,000 to build and had it been professionally built to this spec with a brand-name on it there wouldn't have been much change from £50,000 so it's been well worth rolling up my sleeves and driving around the UK to visit various specialists. With this much investment, I'd have serious egg on my face if the family didn't like it and it didn't work on a campsite.

Just days after it was finished, Sam and Helen chucked some clothes in it, filled the fridge and we headed to a pub campsite for a pre-Christmas break.

It was brilliant. We had a really relaxing chilled-out break and went and had tea in a local pub. It was freezing cold so we left the Wallas heater on setting number one and returned to find the van was red hot (even though the roof was up). Having a toasty warm 'van to come back to in winter makes such a difference – my old Chevy only had a mains fan heater!

Overall I couldn't be happier with the van and it all works much better than expected. Yes the insurance costs more (mainly because of my job, you won't have this issue) but having my perfect campervan is pretty priceless. I look forward to sharing my future adventures in the 'van with you!



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