

weekend away | leisuredrive crusader

# royal crusade

## A VW T5 Leisuredrive conversion in Salsa Red livens up Her Majesty's Sandringham country estate, but is it fit for the Queen?

**T**HIS attractive two-berth with impressive standard specification, from Bolton-based converter Leisuredrive, seems great value for money... on paper. As it turns out, this translates into real life too, as proved by this weekend in and around Norfolk's regal countryside, based at Sandringham, with the Crusader for company.

The trailer for this Leisuredrive trip is an excellent DVD tutorial, comprehensive instruction sheets and knowledgeable staff at the end of the phone, hammering home the simplicity of this camper - it's a common sense approach to motorhome conversions that leaves off the bells and whistles in favour of solid build and practical design.

Built on a panel van base, this is not a 'motorhome spec' T5 - a key difference being that such vans have the seatbelt mountings for rear travel seats fitted at the factory; on the Crusader, Leisuredrive have mounted the metal fixings for the belted rear seats, covered them with wooden panels, added padded headrests and velcroed on some rather smart hessian-style covered cushions with a practical and stylish burgundy leather-effect panels. These seats are comfier as travel seats than as a settee - the backrest is bolt upright and non-adjustable, so laid-back lounging is out of the question. For a more comfortable seat, fight over the passenger seat, which swivels by aligning the two handles and swinging round towards the passenger door.

On the road, the Crusader is powered by VW's lowest output van engine and, although it'd be useful at times to have a little more oomph, the ride is smooth and totally rattle-free (even the grill pan) - a credit to the fixtures fitted here. Welcome cab toys include air-conditioning and electric windows, but in backing directly onto the kitchen unit, the driver's seat has limited scope to slide backwards, so longer-legged captains might struggle to get comfortable. On the outside, graphics are

Words & Pictures | Marie Marsh



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modern and understated, and with so much shiny chrome to catch the eye (in the form of running strips and alloy wheels) around the Salsa Red 'van, they were never going to be the centre of attention.

A 'van such as this is the cheapest way into new VW camper ownership - it's an exclusive club, and a friendly one: numerous comments from passing cyclists, campsite neighbours and other motorhomers included how taken they were with the colour, chrome fittings, size of the floorspace and the general VW camper appeal.

Like only a handful of converters, Leisuredrive use their own elevating roof design - to raise the roof, unfasten a clip at the front and clip at the back, give the middle handle a firm shove, and (with the help of gas-assisted struts) you suddenly have up to 2.22m of colour-coded headroom in a 'van that'll ordinarily fit under a height-restricted car park entrance barrier. To close, push in an orange button located on one of the gas struts at the same time as tugging down on the central handle; as the roof folds down, tuck and tidy away the excess fabric so that none gets trapped in the roof as it lowers, then fasten the two straps to keep it in place. For the more petite camper, an arm-span extension is necessary to allow simultaneous pushing of the orange button whilst pulling down on the middle handle - nothing that a multi-functional awning wind-out pole couldn't fix. As raising roof

designs go, it's one that Leisuredrive can be proud of. All that's missing is a flashing neon sign to remind you that your 'van will only ever be as soundproof as a tent when the roof's raised. The choice of a high-top comes at no extra cost.

It's no surprise that doors open to reveal a side kitchen layout - most VW campers have these so there's nothing new here - but this is Leisuredrive's own roof design, and bed construction, and it's pretty good. Making (and unmaking) the bed is one minute's work - remove the padded headrests, settee squab and backrest and put them out of the way in the cab; lift the front of the 'seat' frame and pull forwards, stretching the frame out flat; then reposition the two rear-most cushions slightly so that they make the front end of the mattress, and replace the two 'travel seat' cushions to make the foot end; then throw the bedding on and it's a long (if not massively wide) and firm double bed without ridges.

Dark red velour-look curtains surround every window, including the cab, at night and have a smooth action on rails. Although blinds are now considered to be more modern, at least curtains don't rattle and chatter on the roads. For ventilation there's a vent and two windows in the rising roof, and two slide-opening windows, one on each side of the 'van. Lighting comprises three LED striplights (on the roof, beside the sliding door and above sink), one

#### FACT FILE

**PRICE FROM** £27,990

**PRICE AS TESTED**  
£32,900

**BERTHS** 2

**TRAVEL SEATS (INC DRIVER)** 4

**DIMENSIONS** 4.89m L,  
2.04m W, 1.95m H

**INTERIOR HEIGHT**  
1.49m-2.22m

**MAXIMUM WEIGHT**  
2800kg

**PAYLOAD** 480kg

**BEDS** Double bed 1.80m  
x 1.14m

**FRESH WATER** 25 litres  
(inboard)

**WASTE WATER** 20 litres  
(portable)

**LEISURE BATTERY**  
70Ah

**MAINS SOCKETS** 2

#### BASE VEHICLE

**VW T5 SWB**

**PANEL VAN**

**ENGINE** 2.0 TDI (84bhp)

**MPG** 28.6

#### COOKING/HEATING

**COOKING** Smev two-  
burner hob, grill/oven

**FRIDGE** Dometic 60-litre  
three-way

**GAS** 2 x 2.72kg  
Campingaz

**HEATING** Webasto  
diesel-fired blown-air

**BOILER** Not fitted



## take time to visit sandringham



Set in 243 hectares of Country Park, the Sandringham Estate is a haven for dog walking, rambling and relaxation.

The Park itself is open for all to wander around at no charge and with free parking. Catch the tractor and trailer tours at the visitors' centre, giftshop and restaurant, that run every day when the House is open, and for a small fee you can see the Park without the exercise.

Sandringham House has been passed down as a private home through four generations of British monarchs, and is now the country retreat of Her Majesty The Queen.

Admission prices cover the gardens and museum, with an extra charge for a ticket to tour the main ground floor rooms of the house, regularly used by the royal family. There are knowledgeable guides in every room, including the room where the Queen records her annual Christmas message – it's smaller than it looks on the telly!

The house is set in 24 hectares of impeccably groomed gardens, and the museum holds a unique collection of history – ranging from a 1939 Merryweather fire engine to the clock used in the Royal Pigeon Lofts at Sandringham to time the Queen's racing pigeons.



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adjustable spotlight (next to the passenger seat) and two reading lights (above heads when the bed is made-up). When they're all lit, there isn't a dark corner, but keep a torch handy for peering into cupboards after dark – a light in the wardrobe would be most useful.

Kitchen kit is comprehensive, comprising fridge, oven/grill, plus two-burner hob and sink – both with glass lids. Inevitably, worktop space is limited and requires a tidy cook, but the table stored down the side of the settee can be clipped onto its rail in the kitchen area if there's a desperate need for more surface area. This same table is a good height for dining, with diners limited to sitting side-by-side on the settee. The table's rail runs the entire length of the kitchen unit, so it can be positioned in front of the swivelled front passenger seat as an option.

Storage starts in the cab, with deep recesses in both driver and passenger doors. Moving rearwards, kitchen storage comprises the fridge, flap above the fridge with space for one bottle on its side or equivalent next to the base of the sink, one drawer above the oven/grill which is large but can't be stuffed full as the workings of the hob sit at the top of it, one large cupboard below the oven/grill housing the gas taps but otherwise free space ideal for pots, pans, food, drink (on our test neatly contained in a box) and one locker next to the hob in the side wall of the wardrobe with two lipped shelves – shallow,

<b>FOR</b>	
VALUE FOR MONEY	
SOLID BUILD	
LOOKS GREAT	
<b>AGAINST</b>	
LOW OUTPUT ENGINE	
DRIVING POSITION FOR TALL DRIVERS	
LIMITED LOUNGING SPACE - NO SWIVEL DRIVER'S SEAT	
<b>RIVALS</b>	
BILBO'S CELEX SE	
DEVON MOONRAKER	
HILLSIDE BIRCHOVER	

holds jars, small tins etc. When the bed is made-up, the fridge, wardrobe and rear side cupboard remain accessible; the underseat storage, oven/grill and cupboard below are not – so liberate the Porta-Potti and any kit you might need at night-time prior to bed-making. Of the two underseat storage lockers, one stretches right to the back of the 'van and is also accessible via the rear tailgate; it's big enough for fold-up camping chairs and other accessories. The other (with the Porta-Potti) stretches back to the back wall of the gas locker.

Heating controls are positioned on the sidewall of the kitchen, with two 230V power sockets mounted onto the side of a deep shelf that gives useful storage and has the wind-out pole for the Fiamma awning attached to the side of it. The wardrobe sits in this unit – the door (with mirror inside) isn't full length, but the storage space behind it is usefully deep – running all the way to the floor and along to the back of the 'van so it's accessible through the tailgate. In this spec, the battery charger is tucked in the corner, next to the fuses and trip switch for the electrics. The easy-to-use Zig control panel is behind the wardrobe, with a 12V socket below it. There's no fancy digital display – just a simple battery gauge and three switches with fuses – for the pump (for water), lights and auxiliaries (like the spark ignition for the fridge and oven/grill). It's easily switchable from vehicle to leisure



for such a small space, there's still storage capacity for all manner of gear

battery or mains with a clear indication of how each battery is faring. At the rear of this same unit, is another split-level cupboard accessible from the side and rear. The gas locker, with its two mini cylinders, is next-door. One 25-litre water tank sits in the rearmost corner locker with the water pump, bringing fresh cold water to the sink's tap. A portable waste container catches the other end of the equation from a waste pipe under the 'van.

For such a small space, there's still capacity for all manner of gear. Anything bulky will have to be rear-loaded under the seats as the only limit to what you can fit in these lockers is likely to be what's passable through the doors. Bulky bedding has a home during the day behind the rear travel seats. The only thing missing seemed to be somewhere to hang wet towels or coats - a hook, anywhere.

Webasto heating sprang into life at the turn of a dial to keep off the chill of an unseasonal four-degree night. If, like the Queen, you want to spend Christmas at Sandringham, but in a Crusader, speak to Leisuredrive about extra winterisation.

You'll have noticed that there's been no talk of a washroom - this 'van doesn't have one. There's a Porta-Potti included if need's must. If it's not needed, leave it at home to free up more storage. And on the subject of thrones, this motorhome looks good enough to get the Royal seal of approval.

**QUALITY COUNTS**



Solid, stylish and simple is a fitting mantra for this Leisuredrive masterpiece; the Crusader didn't have a screw, trim or handle out of place.

Reassuringly, this is not some demonstrator model farmed out to the press and dressed to impress - it's a model that's on sale now, available to all, and if it's indicative of this Bolton-based manufacturer's attention to detail and quality of work then it's certainly a good ambassador.



**WHICH motorhome says** ★★★★★

A solid build and a specification list to be proud of helps to set this vibrant red UUW apart from the crowd.

**sandringham camping and caravanning club site**



This site sits at the heart of the Sandringham Country Park, a leisurely 20-minute amble or shorter bike ride from the visitors' centre, house and gardens.

It's a large woodland site - the 275 pitches (with no hardstandings) are scattered around between tall trees, and although it is often busy, it doesn't feel overcrowded.

There's a shop selling food and supplies on-site and the popular fish and chip van visits on Thursday and Friday nights. The facilities are modern and clean, and there's a small play area for children.

There's no shortage of places to day-trip to from here - the beaches and lavender of Heacham and seaside resort of Hunstanton are 20 minutes away, and Snettisham's nature reserve and farm park are only 10 minutes' drive.

The site is open from February to November. Telephone 01485 542555 (no calls after 8pm), visit the Club's website at [www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk](http://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk) and head for their Site Seeker pages, or find independent site reviews at *Which Motorhome's* [www.outandaboutlive.co.uk](http://www.outandaboutlive.co.uk) website.

