



One of the most famous names in VW campers makes a welcome return to the UK thanks to Deepcar Motorhomes, as **Peter Rosenthal** reports.

The name Westfalia should need no introduction to motorcaravan enthusiasts, being synonymous with high-quality Volkswagen conversions. In fact, its 'Campmobile', which was introduced to the world in 1951 and based on the Split-screen Transporter, is thought by some to have been the first proper motorcaravan (although it wasn't until 1959 that Westfalia's conversion really took off).

UK motorcaravanners can be forgiven for not realising that Westfalia is still in existence, because it stopped being officially imported here with the replacement of the 'Bay-window' Type 2 camper in 1979. Since then, though, Westfalia has gone from strength to strength in Germany, producing conversions on the T3 and, more recently on the T4. It has close links with Volkswagen and is still one of the few officially approved VW converters. To get backing from VW, the quality has to be flawless. We're not talking about screwing in a crude MDF wardrobe here...

The good news for UK buyers is that Westfalia conversions is now available in this country from importers Deepcar Motorhomes International, who are based in Sheffield. Founded in August 1999, by directors Dave Elliot and Dirk Oppermann, the company specialises in the sale of pre-owned Hymers. The firm's latest venture is the supply of brand-new Westfalia conversions, which it imports direct from Germany.



*The only potential snag is the left-hand drive, but you do get the latest T4 dashboard with twin airbags.*

Two models are available, the T4 SWB California Coach and the T4 LWB California Exclusive. Three different roof options are offered for the Coach, two fixed high-tops and one elevating roof, with the Exclusive only being offered with a high-top. Prices are highly competitive and start from just £21,423 for the basic 68bhp 1.9-litre turbo-diesel rising roof California Coach. The range-topping 102bhp 2.5TDI Exclusive high-top model is priced from £27,795. But don't for a moment think that these 'basic' prices are simply for a pared down, no frills model. Far from it. In fact all models come with power-steering, anti-locking brakes (with EDS - an electronic diff lock that's ideal for pulling out of slippery campsites), electric windows, engine immobiliser, remote-control central locking, electric heated door mirrors and twin airbags.



*Designed for practicality, the California uses the standard VW camper floorplan with an automotive approach to decor.*



*Rock 'n' roll system equates to quick bed make-up - an essential in any camper.*

Standard fit camping equipment includes front swivel seats, a 40-litre Electrolux fridge, waste and fresh water tanks, a two-burner hob, kitchen sink, folding detachable table and a very slick central electronic control unit. The latter unit includes an LCD display and controls the interior temperature, battery level, compressor fridge, as well as monitoring the fresh and waste water tank levels.

So what's the catch? Well, they're only available in left-hand drive. For a vehicle such as this though, with an elevated driving position, it's hardly a problem. And for those who do a lot of Continental touring the LHD could actually be a benefit.

To see how the new Westfalia's stack up on British soil, I borrowed one of the brand-new California Coach models, smartly finished in Elegance Green Metallic paintwork. This particular motorcaravan was positively dripping with extras, including air-conditioning (£1,041), colour-coded mirrors and bumpers (£196), an upgraded 'Gamma' stereo (£418), cruise control and computer (£261), heated seats and 3.2kW diesel-powered heater (£1,336), detachable towbar (£348) and metallic paint (£491). Even with all these items fitted, the Van is almost a steal at £27,500.



*Dining table stores under the sliding rear seat.*

Opening the sliding door doesn't disappoint either, with the interior being finished to a very high standard - the whole thing could have been built by VW, the fit and finish is that good. Although, at first glance, it seems a little Spartan thanks to the factory seat fabric and the plain grey cupboards, you get an awful lot for your money.

Both front seats swivel and, as Westfalia has completely re-engineered the seat bases, they're mounted at an identical height to the standard seats (so the usual headroom problems are avoided). The rear bench seat contains a storage unit that also houses the table and the whole seat slides along rails set into the floor for maximum versatility. The table itself is easy to erect and slots into the floor rail to give an impressively stable and sturdy surface.

Behind the rear seat unit is a simple flat foam squab under which luggage can be stored. With the rear seat 'rock and rolled' flat a 1.94m x 1.17m (6ft 4in x 3ft 10in) bed can be formed. There are an extra two berths located in the roof area, which houses an impressively spacious 1.94m x 1.06m (6ft 4in x 3ft 5in) bed. The roof space also has a useful flexi-lamp unit at the cab end.

Located just beneath this lamp, in the roof above the cab, is an LCD display flanked by an interesting array of push buttons - this is the main control for all the van's electrical functions.



*Roof console in the cab includes controls for heating and fridge.*

The cupboards are finished in grey laminate with beech edgings, which gives a slightly Scandinavian look to the interior. These cabinets house a stainless steel twin-burner and sink unit, with a fold-down stainless draining board covering the hob when it's not in use. There's also a top-opening compressor fridge that is said to be more efficient than a front-opening version by virtue of reduced heat losses (as it's right next to the rear seat, you don't have far to reach to grab the next beer).

Everything about the interior exudes quality and, whether you're actuating a cupboard latch or the bed mechanism, it all operates with millimetric precision. There are no rough edges, flappy bits of fabric or exposed screw heads on this Van.

The driving position is excellent and the controls for the electric windows and mirrors fall easily to hand. The only annoying thing I found was that the large centre console (which has a useful slot to house a two-litre bottle of pop) was too close to the accelerator and my size 10s kept fouling on it. Narrower shoes would solve this minor irritation.

On the road, the T4 is easy to drive with an absence of any squeaks or rattles - further evidence of how well screwed together this Westfalia conversion is. The left-hand driving position takes 10 minutes to get used to, and then you forget about it, while the 102 bhp engine pulled the 'van along with gusto.

All things considered, there's a great deal to praise in the Westfalia. The conversion is of peerless quality, the base vehicle is pleasant to drive and very well equipped. For the price, this is an awful lot of motorcaravan for the money. It's worth pointing out that because Deepcar has negotiated a special price with its German suppliers that the price you pay over here is identical to the retail price you'd pay in Germany (provided the exchange rate remains relatively constant). So going through the hassle of a personal import yourself will be a fruitless exercise.

Westfalia's return to the UK should be welcomed with open arms and is great news. Even if you're not interested in this particular conversion it's sure to set a new benchmark in terms of quality for other manufacturers converting T4s.

#### Fact file

**Make/model:** Westfalia California Coach

**Base vehicle:** VW T4 SWB LHD

**Engine:** 102 bhp 2.5TDI

**Price:** £27,500 (as tested)

**Overall length:** 4.79m (15ft 8in)

**Overall width:** 1.84m (6ft 0 1/2in)

**Overall height:** 1.99m (6ft 6in)

**Standard equipment includes:** Power steering, ABS, electric windows and mirrors, remote central locking, front swivel seats, sliding rear seat/bed unit, 2.7-litre waste water tank, 25-litre fresh water tank, 40-litre Electrolux fridge, two-burner hob and kitchen sink unit, folding detachable table, electronic control unit.

**Importer:** Deepcar Motorhomes International, 10a Vaughton Hill, Deepcar, Sheffield S36 2SW. Tel: 0114 288 7557

**Website:** [www.dmiuk.de](http://www.dmiuk.de)

#### Plus points

Price, quality, lavish standard equipment level, safety features, versatile interior, looks

#### Minus points

Left hand drive and... that's it!

Which Motorcaravan

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