



There's real life for you, embodied in that little cart.
The open road, the dusty highway, the heath,
the common, villages, towns, cities! Here today,
up and off to somewhere else tomorrow! travel,
change, interest, excitement! the whole world before you,
and a horizon that's always changing!

Mr Toad in *Wind in the Willows*, Kenneth Grahame













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WALWAGEN 740



Calum Creasey & Lauren Smith

Vanlife

Culture, Vehicles, People, Places

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Introduction

16 A Girl, a Boy & a Van

Chapter one - THE CULTURE

40 What Is a Nomad?

46 When There Is Nowhere to Hide

56 The Economy of Small-Scale

Chapter two - THE VEHICLES

62 If a Vehicle Could Choose...

68 Compact Interior Design

78 Mercedes Vario 4X4

86 Volkswagen LT

94 Delica Dreaming

108 How to Build a Rolling Home

Contents





Chapter three - **THE PEOPLE**

- 132 Meet the Van Dwellers
- 144 Slow 'n Steady Livin'
- 154 Digital Life
- 158 Music in the Streets of Europe
- 160 The Wandering Bears
- 168 Good Vibes Only
- 172 Ode to the Solo Traveller

Chapter four - **THE PLACES**

- 176 Where Do We Go?
- 178 Vanhalla
- 180 The Checklist
- 184 Taffie and the Land of the Long
- 190 Van-ee-moon
- 198 All the Mechanics in South America
- 212 Holiday from Where?
- 224 Documenting Vanlife in British Columbia

Chapter five - **THE FUTURE**

- 238 The Future of Travel
- 242 After Vanlife



Introduction

A girl, a boy & a van

by Calum Creasey and Lauren Smith

16

I have a lot of conversations about camper vans. It is true that they fill my day in many ways. Vehicles that usually consist of a bed, a place to cook or prepare food and a spot to sit comfortably out of the rain. I see a converted van drive past me on the street and sometimes name the make and model. I pass a van similar to ours here in Cornwall and can't help but wave. Parked on clifftops, by beaches or in supermarket car parks. We all come across camper vans in our daily lives – the types of vehicles that have been adapted for human beings to live in. Altered so that we can feel comfort far from home. Sometimes built to be our only home. These are the vehicles that fill my conversations and this book.

Our van is a 1996 Volkswagen Transporter and it has a lot to answer for. In many ways it has dictated the passage of our life to this point. I am certain that this was not its purpose when it rolled out of the factory in Germany, a short-wheelbase, relatively underpowered panel van. A large steel box with a four-cylinder diesel engine. Its first trip was to the UK when it was registered by an engineering firm. Following 14 years of hard graft, our van got its first real break. In 2010 I purchased it to replace my earlier, self-built Nissan Vanette. In the act of adding simple pine furniture, carpeted walls, a gas burner and a porthole window, we created what we now call 'the Rolling Home'. Like most of the self-converted camper vans we see, ours was not initially designed to be lived in. Yet we changed that and in doing so changed our lives for the better. It is a modest story and one that has played out for many people across Europe and the world. We take these often old and beat-up vehicles and turn them into something else – catalysts for happiness.



HOME
SWEET

ROLLING

HOME



The van in question might be huge and have seats for all the family, or it might be small with only space for two. A blow-up mattress and a camping stove might suffice. Trips that may be dictated by the span of the weekend, or else that ferry ticket may be for a one-way voyage. What all of our van stories share is in essence the act of searching and often finding that which is elusive in our lives. Since we have owned our van, we too have searched.

As teenagers we built it. As young adults we packed it for trips outside our parents' houses. As a couple, our van became the vessel that housed our love of life and of each other. Open the sliding door and that love would pour out. Onto beaches and clifftops. It would wrap around us and our friends and mingle with bonfire smoke and laughter. You can see it in the photos and on the faces of all of us. Etched in happiness. When it was time to move on, those feelings would fly with us back to the van and fill all of the gaps between ourselves and the vehicle.

When we returned and tried other ways of living, renting a chocolate-box English cottage not far from where we grew up, trying out office jobs and careers we may have been destined for, nothing ever felt as real as that van. It always represented something that we could so easily reach out to and embrace. Like the empty suitcase at the back of the wardrobe, only far more alluring. When you are faced with bills and rent, it still sits there. Even driving it as a daily vehicle can be a torturous affair, always feeling the pull towards the sea or the ferry port.

Until again you find yourself fully seduced. With the turn of a key, normal life gives way to nervousness, fear, trepidation and, ultimately, happiness. We wanted all of those things to come in torrents, we wanted them to surround us and envelop our very being, we wanted to feel truly alive. When all that you own surrounds you in a small camper van, this happens without you even knowing.