



**ncc** | leisure vehicles  
holiday & park homes  
holiday & residential parks

leading & promoting the industry

## **THE MOTORHOME AND CAMPERVAN GUIDE**

Learn more about buying, driving, maintaining –  
and enjoying your motorhome



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## ABOUT US

The NCC (National Caravan Council) is a not-for-profit trade association that champions the leisure vehicle and parks industry. It was founded in 1939 and is now the leading organisation representing a wide range of members including holiday and residential parks, manufacturers, dealerships, service providers and suppliers in an industry that contributes billions of pounds to the UK economy every year.

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## OUR THANKS

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## WELCOME ABOARD!

Congratulations – it looks like you're ready for an exciting first step into a world of travel and adventure! Owning a motorhome or campervan means having the freedom to go where you want, when you want – whether that's a lengthy trek across the country or a short break to recharge the batteries – and is a wonderful way to explore and enjoy the great outdoors.

Better still, motorhome trips and holidays are a great – and great value – way to take a family away, escape as a couple, reconnect with friends, or enjoy some peace and quiet on your own. And you can even bring your pets along too!

This guide has been put together by experts and contains all the information you need whether you are new to the pastime or an experienced motorhomer. We consider how to choose a motorhome or campervan (they are different) that's right for you, and offer tips and advice on everything from buying to pitching – in fact all you need to make the most of this fabulous way to have a holiday. You'll be ready for the road when you first start the

ignition to enjoy the many adventures ahead of you.

## WHY A MOTORHOME?

Whether you want to travel alone, as a couple, a family with children or grandchildren – and not forgetting the pets – a motorhome is the perfect companion.

Motorhomes, which may also be called by their legal term of motorcaravans, come in an increasingly wide variety of sizes and layout options, whether you want extra sleeping or living space, fixed beds, toilets (or not), full shower facilities or high-spec kitchens, and there's a multitude of styles and specifications too.



## BENEFITS OF A MOTORHOME OR CAMPERVAN

- ✔ There's room for all the family (or the grandkids)
- ✔ You can take all your home comforts
- ✔ It's great value for money compared to a hotel
- ✔ You're self-contained with your own kitchen, or kitchenette, and washroom depending on the size and specification of your vehicle
- ✔ You can tour and explore without having to pitch up on a holiday park first

# DEFINITIONS

## TYPES OF MOTORHOME



Low-profile

### Low-profile coachbuilt motorhome

These use a cab and chassis from a major van manufacturer and a motorhome body is then built on to complete the vehicle. They can sleep two or more and generally have a washroom with a shower and cassette toilet. Some will have a fixed double bed.



Coachbuilt

### Conventional coachbuilt motorhome with over-cab bed

These slightly bigger motorhomes have extra space for an over-cab bed or additional storage area.

### 'A' class motorhomes

These large motorhomes have no separate cab - the body, including the driving compartment, is entirely coachbuilt by the motorhome company using a bare chassis unit from one of the large commercial vehicle manufacturers. Most 'A' class motorhomes are imported from Europe or further afield.



A Class

### Micro motorhomes

These tiny motorhomes are often based on small van versions of popular cars or even small people carriers. Most offer sleeping for two - although some have just a single berth - as well as simple cooking facilities and a cupboard to store the smallest portable toilet.



Campervan

### Campervans

Campervans such as Volkswagen campers have been popular for more than half a century. They offer comfortable accommodation for two or more in a vehicle small enough to be used as the only family car. High-top and raising (or pop-top, as shown above) roofs are both available to extend the space, and many of these campers even have dedicated fan clubs! They are compact on space and do not tend to have washroom facilities you'd expect to find in a larger motorhome.

## Larger van conversions

Often known as 'panel van' conversions, these larger vans offer more room so it's easier to fit in a good-sized washroom and a bigger kitchen. They are big enough to offer standing headroom and many contain a fitted double bed.

## American Recreation Vehicles (RV)

A number of American RVs are imported to Britain and these can range from vehicles not much bigger than a typical British coachbuilt to giant vehicles worthy of rock stars. All offer lots of room and luxury, but you won't get many miles to the gallon so they can be expensive to run – and to park!

## WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A MOTORHOME OR CAMPERVAN

- ✔ Check your driving licence to see what size vehicle you are legally entitled to drive.
- ✔ How many people will typically be travelling?
- ✔ How much space do you need? Bear in mind you can expand the space with an awning or pup tent.
- ✔ Do you prefer a fixed bed or one that folds away?
- ✔ What facilities do you need onboard? Remember, you might be staying at campsites with full facilities or rural locations offering minimal facilities.



# GETTING STARTED

## WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A MOTORHOME OR CAMPERVAN

- ✔ Compare prices from reliable sources and set a price range.
- ✔ Buy from a reputable dealer - look out for dealerships that are NCC members, which follow best practice guidance.
- ✔ If you are considering buying a vehicle, make sure it has the EN 1646 badge of approval for motorhomes. The NCC Approved badge is the sign that when a vehicle was built, it complied with all relevant European and UK health and safety standards, industry codes of practice and UK regulations. Some of these are not required in countries outside the UK, so you need to be sure that your vehicle is safe - look for the badge.
- ✔ Look out for consumer shows, which are held around the UK and offer the chance to compare different models and layouts in one place. NCC Events runs two national shows at the NEC Birmingham - the Caravan, Camping and Motorhome Show in February ([www.ccmsshow.co.uk](http://www.ccmsshow.co.uk)) and the Motorhome and Caravan Show in October ([www.mcshow.co.uk](http://www.mcshow.co.uk)). They are also great places to pick up show deals and buy accessories. Visit their websites for dates and details.
- ✔ Visit [www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk](http://www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk) which is powered by the NCC for an extensive directory of



motorhomes and campervans. The advanced filter allows you to compare vehicles with the features that are most suited to you.

## TOP TIPS WHEN GETTING STARTED

- ✔ Make sure you know the weight limit and payload of your unit and don't overload it.
  - ✔ Be aware of the differing speed limits that apply on some roads to vehicles of a certain size or classification.
  - ✔ Don't go too far on your first trip - make it a trial run to familiarise yourself... and you can easily pop home if you forget anything!
- See page 8 where our technical section starts to ensure you have all the information you need to be safe, legal and ready for the road when setting off.

## MAINTENANCE BASICS

We'll discuss the more technical aspects of owning and using your motorhome later in this guide, but it's crucial to:

- ✓ Make sure to get your unit serviced annually, by a reputable dealer from the Approved Workshop Scheme ([www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk))
- ✓ Prepare your unit for winter when it's less likely to be in use
- ✓ Choose recommended products for cleaning
- ✓ Make sure you store your unit in a safe place, and take appropriate security measures



## OTHER TOP TIPS

It's a great idea to join a touring or camping organisation as you'll be in the company of fellow motorhomers. There are a number of organisations such as the Caravan and Motorhome Club or the Camping and Caravanning Club. Both offer high-quality campsites across the UK, as well as access to smaller member-only sites, and a range of benefits such as technical help, access to social events, and product discounts plus inspiration for your camping trips through their magazines and websites.

There's some good support available in the form of confidence-building training days, where you can get to grips with manoeuvring a motorhome in a controlled environment.

Once pitched up, you'll find a good number of their campsites are well served by public transport and within easy reach of local amenities. Sometimes they'll also offer basic supplies in an on-site shop or are visited by mobile food merchants. Many are set up to cater to bike owners, being on or near cycle routes, or for walkers who want to explore on two feet.



## WHAT'S COVERED BY OUR GUIDE

As ownership and the use of motorhomes and campervans is increasing, this guide has been produced to help users in both loading and driving their vehicles correctly and to legally ensure the safety of both the vehicle and its occupants.

This guide covers all types of motorhomes including:

- A-class
- Coachbuilt
- Low-profile
- Campervans

We also outline everything you need to consider when preparing a vehicle for a trip, to ensure you get the most out of the adventure. This guide can equally be applied to those vehicles that have been converted to be used as a motorhome, or motorcaravan to use its legal definition, but retain the

description on the V5 as a 'van with windows'.

Motorhomes come in all shapes and sizes, each with specific loading considerations.

In the following pages we will help with simple and easy to understand advice on:

- Maximum loads and the importance of not overloading axles (as indicated on the manufacturer's type approval plate)
- Loading considerations from the storage of heavy items to checking the weight of roof boxes and bike racks
- What you can legally and safely tow, so you can inform your insurance company
- Checking your driving licence entitlement to ensure you are legally entitled to drive your motorhome
- National speed limits for motorhomes
- Security device options



## DEFINITIONS

### 1. Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass (MTPLM)

This is the legal maximum weight of your motorhome when it is fully loaded. It is illegal to exceed this load rating.

### 2. Mass in Running Order (MRO)

This is the mass of your motorhome as delivered by the manufacturer.

This figure includes the mass of the recommended gas cylinders, any fresh water the manufacturer states can be carried while driving, with its fuel tank(s) filled to at least 90% of capacity, and 75kg for the driver.

### 3. Conventional Load (CL)

This is a load for each passenger seat fitted to your motorhome and is set as 75kg per seat by the European Regulation.

### 4. Maximum Axle Load (MAL)

This is the maximum load that can be carried by the specified axle and must not be exceeded. It is illegal to exceed this load rating.

### 5. Train Weight (TW)

This is the maximum allowable combined weight of the towing vehicle and trailer as set by the towing vehicle's manufacturer. It is illegal to exceed this load rating.

### 6. Actual Laden Weight (ALW)

This is the weight of the vehicle when it is on the road and varies dependent upon what is loaded into the motorhome.

*Note: The ALW must never exceed the MTPLM.*

### 7. Unladen weight (ULW)

The weight of the vehicle as delivered from the factory with the fuel tank empty. It does not include any LPG cylinders, water in the water tanks, personal possessions or driver and passengers.

### 8. User payload

Payload relates to the mass of all items carried in a motorhome and is the allowance for additional equipment, including any fitted by the dealer.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Know your limits, ensure you are aware of the maximum width, height, and weight of your motorcaravan to avoid problems when driving towards low bridges, height barriers and weight restricted bridges.

If you are new to the world of motorhomes, it is advisable to stay local on your first trips to enable you to get used to the equipment.

Make sure you know your vehicle's speed limits, as some heavier motorhomes and van conversions may have lower speed limits than the national speed limit.

# MAXIMUM LOADS

## BE CAREFUL NOT TO EXCEED MAXIMUM LOADS OR OVERLOAD ANY OF THE AXLES

While a larger motorhome may enable you to carry more load, it is where this load is placed that is critical to ensuring the vehicle remains stable on the road and safe to drive. All motorhomes will have a maximum loading capacity that must not be exceeded. And it is also important you do not overload each of the axles.

These maximum masses will be stated on the motorcaravan manufacturer's type approval plate usually found in the engine compartment or the cab door pillar.

Where there are differences between the manufacturer's approval plate and the base vehicle and/or chassis manufacturer's approval plate, the motorhome manufacturer's approval plate takes precedence.

The maximum load for each axle will be stated on the motorhome

manufacturer's type approval plate. This will normally have four masses stamped on it.

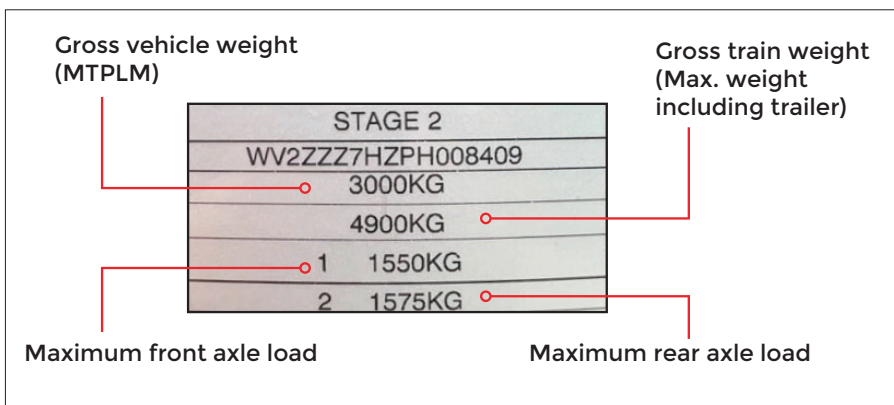
**Note:** *Where only three masses are stated, the vehicle cannot tow a trailer.*

- Where four masses are quoted, the highest figure will be the train weight.
- Where only three masses are quoted, the highest figure will be the vehicle's MTPLM, which would be the second highest figure on a plate containing four masses. This is the legal maximum weight your motorhome can be when it is fully loaded.

These weight limits must not be exceeded. To do so is illegal and will invalidate your insurance.

The next two loads will be the front and rear maximum axle loads normally shown with a 1 before the front axle and a 2 before the rear axle (motorhomes with three axles will have the maximum third axle load shown with a 3 before the load).

## SAMPLE OF A VEHICLE TYPE APPROVAL PLATE



## FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOADING AND DRIVING

### 1. Storage of heavy items

Always consider where to store heavy items in your motorhome. The heavier the item is, the lower it should be stored within the vehicle. High-level lockers should be kept for light items and, when travelling, it is essential to ensure the doors on these lockers are correctly closed and secured.

Wherever possible, heavy items should be placed on the floor near to an axle as this will aid the handling of your vehicle.

Heavy items should be secured for travelling so they cannot move while in transit.

### 2. Water

Motorhome manufacturers will specify the amount of water that can be carried while travelling. Whenever possible, travel with your vehicle's water tanks empty and fill them when you arrive at your destination. This will save 1kg in weight for each litre of water that you do not put in your tank while on the road. Large amounts of water moving around in the tanks while travelling may affect the handling, and even the braking of your motorhome.

### 3. Passengers

Passengers should only travel in designated passenger seats and should always wear a seat belt.

*Note: The manufacturer has only taken account of 75kg per passenger when advising you of your payload, so you will need to take account of any passengers over this weight as it will reduce your payload for other items.*

*Line 8.1 of your V5 registration document 'Number of seats including driver' will state the number of people who may be carried in the vehicle. To exceed this is illegal and may invalidate your insurance.*

### 4. Pets

If you travel with pets on board your motorhome, their weight must be considered as part of your user payload.



### 5. Bike racks and roof boxes

If racks or boxes were not fitted by the manufacturer, then the weight of these and any items inside needs to be considered as part of your payload. If the manufacturer has fitted these items, then they should have made an allowance for the weight of items placed on the rack, or in the box. You should check the manufacturer's allowance before loading these items.

When a carrier is fitted to the rear of a vehicle, it is important to consider that this weight, being so far behind the rear axle, could induce a rear axle overload (see item 7 garage advice, page 12).

## 6. Towing

If you wish to tow with any motorhome you should:

- First check you have a driving licence that allows you to tow with it (also see below).
- Confirm with the manufacturer the motorhome has been approved for towing and, if so, any towing limit for the vehicle. Some vehicles have a reduced towing limit when they are converted to a motorhome. It is essential you check the converter's type approval plate for their published towing limit.
- Only fit an approved tow bar. By law it must be marked with the UNECE R55 approval number, which will carry an approval marking that includes the Type Approval and the loading limits.
- Research what's required when towing with an A-frame. Although use is permitted by the Department of Transport while in the UK, such use is considered unlawful in many countries across Europe. Ensure you confirm it is legal to use in the countries you plan to tour because failing to meet their rules may lead to your equipment being confiscated.

## 7. Garage areas

For motorhomes with a large 'garage' area at the rear, it's important to consider how this area is used. As this storage (garage) is to the rear of the vehicle, it could be easy to induce an overload of the rear axle.

**Note:** *Loads placed behind the rear axle, for example points 4, 5 and 6 above, will transfer weight from the*

*front axle to the rear axle, and therefore the load imposed on the rear axle will be greater than the load placed in these positions. Great care must be taken not to overload the rear axle.*

## 8. Food

It is recommended you buy food once you have arrived on the holiday park or campsite rather than travel with food on board to ensure you keep your vehicle's loaded mass within its MTPLM.

## 9. Using the motorhome's refrigerator when driving

If you wish to travel with food in the fridge, you must ensure the refrigerator has been brought down to its operating temperature using either the gas supply or main electrical supply before you depart. The 12V supply provided for use when driving will maintain the fridge at the operating temperature but will not cool it down from an ambient temperature to its operating temperature. If you are driving with a vehicle that has a start/stop feature, this feature should be turned off during driving to ensure the refrigerator receives a constant voltage.

## 10. Driving licences

- If your motorhome has a MTPLM above 3,500kg, you need a C1 driving licence, otherwise you are not legally entitled to drive the motorhome.
- If you passed your driving test after 1 January 1997, you will not have been given the Category C1 automatically and would need to pass a C1 driving test.

- When you reach 70 years of age, your driving licence entitlement will expire. If you have a motorhome over 3,500kg you should make a request to the DVLA to retain your C1 category. In order to meet the requirements, you will need to take both a medical and an ophthalmic test every two years.
- Towing with a motorhome will require a B+E licence if the combined MTPLM of the motorcaravan and the towed vehicle exceeds 3,500kg. This may not be shown on your licence but since December 2021 this has been granted to B licence holders. However, if you wish to travel to Europe and then tow, you will need to have your licence updated to show the B+E category.
- If your motorhome has a MTPLM above 3,500kg and your trailer's maximum weight exceeds 750kg, then a C1+E licence is required.

## 11. Motorhome speed limits

- The maximum speed limit at which you can drive your motorhome will be determined by the body type as shown in section D5 of your V5 registration document.
- A vehicle with a body type in section D5 specified as "motorcaravan" can travel at the national speed limits.
- If your motorhome has a body type "van" or "van with windows" specified in section D5, the limit is up to 30mph in built up areas, 50mph on single carriageways, 60mph on dual carriageways and 70mph on motorways.
- If you are towing with your motorhome, then your speed limit is limited to 60mph.
- You cannot travel in the third (or outside) lane of a motorway when towing.

## NATIONAL SPEED LIMITS

Vehicle type	Built up areas MPH (km/H)	Single carriageways MPH (km/H)	Dual carriageways MPH (km/H)	Motorways MPH (km/H)
Motorcaravans with an unladen weight of 3,050kg or less	30* (48)	60 (96)	70 (112)	70 (112)
Motorcaravans with an unladen weight greater than 3,050kg	30* (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	70 (112)
All motorcaravans when towing a trailer	30* (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	60 (96)

The speed limits given are national speed limits for motorcaravans being used for their intended purpose. Be aware that if the motorcaravan is being used to carry goods for exhibition and sale, or used as a workshop or for storage, then it is classed as a goods vehicle and goods vehicle speed limits will apply, irrespective of the unladen weight.

\*Unless a 20mph speed limit is in place.

## Security

- Fit a secure device to your motorhome when leaving it unattended. If you use a steering wheel lock, ensure it is one with a long arm. The NCC recommends the use of Sold Secure security products.
- When parked, the steering wheel should be left turned full lock, either left or right, this is to prevent 'dragging' away.
- Other products to consider are OBD locks (relevant to chassis manufacturer), clutch claws (locks pedals together) and wheel clamps (check wheel size).



- Many leisure vehicles lack clear identity markings, making theft recovery difficult. VIN CHIP enhances security with tamper-evident labels and advanced RFID technology, helping law enforcement verify vehicle identities, even if altered. This added layer of protection helps deter theft and increases recovery rates. Easy to use and highly effective, it's a smart way to safeguard your leisure vehicle. Learn more at [www.vinchip.co.uk](http://www.vinchip.co.uk).
- If considering an after-theft recovery device, check if your insurer has a preferred product - that may lead to an insurance benefit.
- Systems should at least be multi technology - GPS/GPRS.
- You must ensure the subscription is

paid up for monitoring.

- If your motorhome is left in storage, it is still the owner's responsibility to check it.

## Optional extras

If you have optional extras fitted, either by the manufacturer or by a dealer, then the mass of these options must be considered when loading your motorhome.

The additional mass added by the optional extra must be considered as part of your user payload, as it is not included in the manufacturer's stated MRO.

Below is a list of the typical masses for these extras, but you should check the masses when the option is fitted to ensure you do not overload your motorhome.

Optional extra	Mass in Kg
Bike rack	8
Electric step	5
Solar panel (flexible)	7
Solar panel (rigid)	11
Tow bar	35
Oven and grill	13
LPG tank (empty)	14
Sidebars	14
Roof bed	60

- ✔ Read the motorhome manual to familiarise yourself with the features.
- ✔ Be careful never to put fuel in the freshwater tank - the water connection to the freshwater tank will be identified by a blue label.
- ✔ Always plan your route taking into account the size and weight of your vehicle.
- ✔ Check your driving licence entitlement to ensure you are legally entitled to drive your motorcaravan, especially if its MTPLM is greater than 3,500kg.
- ✔ Advise your insurance company if you wish to tow with your motorcaravan.
- ✔ If possible, weigh your motorhome (including driver and passengers) in 'holiday mode' to ensure you have not exceeded any maximum weights.
- ✔ Load the motorhome with care ensuring heavy items are low down in the vehicle and secured safely.
- ✔ Don't travel with water in the water tanks whenever possible. If you do, remember the mass of the water you carry may reduce your available user payload.
- ✔ If your motorhome is not designed to have gas appliances working - such as a space heater - when the vehicle is in motion, you must turn off the gas supply when travelling.
- ✔ Always check all your road lights are operational before setting off on your journey.
- ✔ Always check tyre condition and pressure before travelling. Remember to check your tyres for age and wear regularly and replace them if the tyres have been in use for more than five years or are over seven years old.
- ✔ Dispose of litter in bins, recycling where possible, and/or take rubbish home with you.
- ✔ Dispose of the contents of the toilet cassette in the correct manner at the appropriate chemical disposal point.
- ✔ Ensure all locker doors, windows and rooflights are closed and secured before travelling.
- ✔ Do not overload any individual axle.
- ✔ If your motorhome has a MTPLM above 3,500kg check you have a C1 driving licence because if you do not you are not legally entitled to drive the vehicle and would not be insured to do so.
- ✔ Have your motorhome engine and running gear serviced annually (or potentially twice a year if you do high mileage).
- ✔ Have the habitation area serviced annually by a member of the Approved Workshop Scheme (AWS). [www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk).

Acknowledgements

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VIN CHIP®

[www.vinchip.co.uk](http://www.vinchip.co.uk)



The Approved Workshop Scheme

[www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk)



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While every effort has been made to ensure the advice is correct at the time of going to press (February 2025) none of the above accepts any responsibility for the accuracy of the contents of this publication.



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