

# Four wheels only

They say it takes a tragedy to get people off a motorbike, and for Alex Greig a moment of clarity prompted the best decision he's ever made

Words Gordie Woollacott Photos Andy Saunders





▲ 18in Calibre Exile-Rs finished in gloss black look right at home against the blackberry paintwork

**W**hen Alex Greig broke his back in his early 20s, little did he know the trauma he suffered then would prove vital later in life.

Fast forward 20-something years to a routine back scan, something that had become a necessary part of his life ever since. During this particular scan, the doctors noticed a lump on Alex's kidney that, after further investigation, turned out to be cancerous and had to be removed immediately.

Alex: "I never felt ill, or had any idea what was going on. In fact, the worst part of it all was the recovery after the operation."

Thankfully, the surgery was a success and Alex was free to get back to life as normal.

"Having gone through that kind of experience, it really does make you stop and take stock of things," he says.

Prior to that, as keen motorbike riders, Alex and wife, Heidi, had travelled throughout Europe, and beyond, on their Harley Davidson tourer.

### Alternative thinking

"I guess having witnessed first hand the fragility of life, I didn't really fancy getting back on the bike. And so I spent a large part of my recovery in the summer of 2016 looking for an alternative."

In that time of contemplation, Alex fondly remembered outings in the family Leyland Sherpa campervan (perhaps the first time such a thing has ever been mentioned in these pages!), and had daily reminders due to the part of the country he calls home.

"We live in Cornwall," he continues, "and you really can't move for Campervans around



▲ Black badge and grille suit the stealthy theme



▲ Alex Greig has had more than his fair share of hardship but is now making the most of his neat T6



**"I have to admit, they do look a lot better with some subtle custom touches"**

here, especially in the summer."

And so in a defiant, 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' move, it was a Campervan that became Alex's focus in those testing months.

His research led him through magazines, websites and forums, until eventually the field narrowed to a couple of local converters.

"It's amazing what you can find out these days without moving much!

"As soon as I was able to get out and about, I went to visit both of them, one of which was Ecowagon in Redruth."

### Deciding factors

Kenny and John's enthusiasm, and openness to ideas, is what Alex recalls as deciding factors in choosing Ecowagon to build his



▲ Kayaking is one of Alex's hobbies hence he's had the Camper kitted out to suit

ideal Camper.

"I would have been more than happy to travel further afield for the right converter but, as luck would have it, Ecowagon is based about 10 miles from where I live, which made it all the more convenient."

First things first, the subject matter needed to be chosen, and again Alex didn't have to go far to achieve that part, as he explains:

"At the time they had two Vans in stock ready to be converted. One was a silver T6, the other was this 2016 in Blackberry that I believe was destined to be Kenny's own Van. Until I showed up!"

Fully loaded from the factory, the Highline model with 140bhp Euro 5 engine was a great starting point, and the wheels were put in motion.

To put some context to all this. Alex had his operation in May, in July he was talking with Ecowagon, and by October had taken delivery of his Camper.

### Right direction

"I'd had plenty of time to plan out exactly how I wanted it to be. Kenny was great taking my ideas onboard, but also with helping point me in the right direction in certain areas that may not have worked so well.

"He was definitely a huge help in narrowing down the vast choice of upholstery. I love the final choice we made of tan leather, with the cream furniture detailed with green edges."

The interior layout and design they came up with went on to become known as the Expo+, which is now a regular offering from

Ecowagon, as Alex concurs: "Yes, I believe this was the first one they did like this.

"The option of the original VW bed from a California, and using the factory sliding rail system, is brilliant. It creates the perfect space and, with the bed pushed all the way back, you have almost as much room as you would in a LWB Van," he enthuses.

Originally, everything underneath was kept stock, right down to the standard wheels, and Alex explains why: "I'm not one for Vans being slammed to the ground with 20in wheels. Scraping around campsites is not my idea of fun. "The idea was just for it to be a useable Camper."

### Subtle custom

However, as you have probably noticed from the pictures, it didn't stay that way.

"I have to admit, they do look a lot better with some subtle custom touches," says Alex with a grin.

The choice of wheels was left to Ecowagon, which is a great show of faith in Kenny's judgment. The 18in Calibre Exile-Rs finished in gloss black prove Alex's judgement was correct.

Throw in a set of Bilstein shocks and -40mm lowering springs and the subtle custom box has been well and truly ticked.

Okay, it's time to talk about it.

You cannot fail to have noticed the kayak in the room. As well as a keen mountain biker, Alex loves to spend his free time rolling down the rivers between Falmouth and



▲ Electrical sockets (240- / 12-volt) are essentials

## "The interior layout and design they came up with went on to become known as the Expo+"



▲ No Camper is complete without a dual burner hob and a sink – this kit being from the Dometic range



▲ The colour combination works really well and the modern theme adds a real touch of class



▲ Keeping things toasty with some central heating



▲ Speakers are located in the overhead storage unit

Truro. He's always careful never to get into any situation that might require assistance though, as when he's not doing that he's to be found working out of the lifeguard control tower in Falmouth, so he'd never live it down!

The kayak is carried on the Van by the ingenious Thule Hullavator, whose gas-assist strut mechanism allows Alex to load and unload it on his own. Clever stuff.

### All-weather Camper

"The Van has provided everything I wanted, and it gets used all year round, even if it's just taking the dog to the beach.

"And there's nothing better than parking up and brewing your own coffee, dodging the tourist prices at the cafés!"

Ecowagon contacted Alex recently to check in with him on how things were working out, with a view to some ongoing product development.

"They asked if there is anything I would change, and the simple, short answer is no.

"My two boys are grown up now, and are away with the navy, so I'm currently working



▲ Gas assisted struts on the Thule Hullavator kit makes loading the kayak a one-person job



▲ UK tour map was an eBay purchase and is slowly being coloured in as Alex and Heidi tour the UK

out our holiday plans to coincide with them coming ashore.

“Nothing’s finalised yet, but we definitely have France and Spain in our sights.”

In the meantime, Alex and Heidi can plan other adventures from the comfort of the Van, thanks to the very cool UK map hanging in the back.

“I spotted it on a Campervan YouTube channel, and managed to track one down via eBay. It comes with stickers of each county

so you can fill them in as you go.”

By way of explanation, if you can see it in the pictures: “We only mark places we’ve been when we sleep at least one night – the Van didn’t magically appear up in Scotland!”

Having heard Alex’s story, I think the time may have come to retire the saying, ‘everything happens for a reason’ as I don’t think we’re going to top this reason to buy a Campervan any time soon.

Good luck guys, and enjoy the journey. 🍀



▲ Ecowagen sure put together a top quality conversion – check out [www.ecowagon.co.uk](http://www.ecowagon.co.uk) for more info

**“We only mark places we’ve been when we sleep at least one night”**

