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WELLHOUSE LEISURE



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GRANVIA

FULL TEST DETAILS INSIDE!

PLUS SPAIN - SIERRA GUARA

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POLICEMAN CONSPIRING TO RUIN YOUR PEACE

ITALIAN SUNSHINE

IT'S THE END OF THE LINE AS OUR
INTREPID COUPLE REACH THE BOOT

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WELLHOUSE TOYOTA GRANVIA

**IS IT A CAMPER OR A CAR?
NEITHER - IT'S BOTH**

Words & photos by John Page



W

hy would you pay £17,000 for a second hand camper that first saw the light of day in 1997? The answer is that it represents very good value for money. How come? Consider first the specification: The power unit is a three-litre turbo diesel developing 289Nm of torque at 2,000rpm – fed via a smooth four speed automatic transmission to the rear wheels. At just 4.71m long it will park almost anywhere and take up less space than your BMW. Air conditioning, plus heating for the rear of the vehicle comes as standard, as well as driver and passenger airbags, ABS, electric mirrors and central locking. And as for the appearance, take a

look at the two-tone Ivory and Opal paint scheme on the Granvia we had on test, one from a fabulous choice of coloured campers from the land where plain white is almost unknown. As for the drive, read on.

Construction

To the all-steel body Wellhouse add a Reimo low line elevating roof hinging from the front to give maximum headroom over the living quarters and space for all manner of gear above the cab when you're on site. Four forward facing seats are all fitted with lap and diagonal safety belts and the addition of an optional double bed in the roof completes the four-berth designation. With storage units along the offside and a double rear seat floor space is generous and entry via the sliding door is completely unobstructed. Plenty of

room also to carry home the occasional bulky bargain picked up at auction or a boot sale. Laminate surfaced plywood units for the furniture is of lightweight German Vohringer boards with a choice of four different grain effect surfaces. Add twelve fabric choices or a full leather interior and there's plenty of opportunity for a highly individual looking Camper.

On the Road

The big advantage of importing vehicles from Japan, due to their utterly sensible way of driving on the left as we Brits do, is that not only is the steering wheel where it should be but so is the internal layout and of course the sliding door giving access to it. However there is the small anomaly of the windscreen wipers on the left and direction indicator stalk on the right of the steering column (opposite to



European practice) amusing my navigator but inclined to confuse other drivers. Technically Granvia is a sophisticated package; boasting double wishbones for the front wheel suspension and trailing link for the rear wheels. Add the anti-roll bars and you have a first class recipe to cope with good or bad road surfaces. Three litres of turbo diesel power is almost overkill in such a compact camper but there are times when you need to shift briskly out of trouble and here you have it instantly. At other times the engine hums away quietly to return something like 25mpg or perhaps more if you discipline that right foot.

For the controls a hefty gear lever couldn't possibly be confused with anything else and its position is easy to check with the illuminated signal among the dials. An old-fashioned temperature gauge is always preferable to a warning light that will usually be too late and the heat/ventilator control needs only a light tap to have the systems working including that for passengers in the rear. Passenger and driver airbag is nothing but logical and the radio too is of the simple, obvious non-distracting variety. Dark tinted windows for the rear section of the vehicle may be unusual but we thought they were great because our tackle was invisible to anyone of a light-fingered proclivity.

At Rest

Versatile is what Granvia is all about – you can go shopping in it because it will park anywhere, picnic in quiet or very public places unobtrusively or tackle the serious

business of camping for which the addition of an awning makes sense. Wellhouse have all sorts available, from the fitted to the clip on type, to double the amount of living space available. Raising the roof involves only the release of the two securing straps and pushing it upwards helped by the gas struts. The canvas sides unzip for lots of extra sunlight and when two are sleeping upstairs plenty of ventilation.

Not huge by motorhome standards, nevertheless there is a great deal more elbow room in this Camper to spread out and relax than in the most luxurious of saloon

cars. Reversing the passenger seat increases the space and the opened sliding door becomes a window on the world. Totally portable, the free standing table stands on a tripod base and is just about ample for a meal for two. In fact Wellhouse will make you a table of whatever height and size you need, typical of this manufacturer's approach. Interior lighting has twin spotlights on either side of the lounge.

Sleeping

Well fitted curtains slide easily into place, although press studs to hold the hems



Driver's workplace – airbags for pilot and navigator, large gear lever for the automatic transmission and touch buttons for temperature control.



With passenger seat rotated, ample space to take life easy. Note roof switches and vents to adjust temperature control for rear passengers when travelling.



Neat stainless steel sink and two-burner hob with cutlery drawer and fridge under. Generous locker space all round.



Alison gets to grips with the bird watching paraphernalia. The table was a touch too high but the supporting table leg heights can be varied to order



One part of the extensive total storage capacity.

At 1.82m long and a 1.21m width this is a good size Camper double bed, made ready in seconds. An upstairs double bed is an option.

against the sides would improve their coverage of the windows. Cab and living quarters are separated by a curtain partition and to further prevent heat loss a set of stick-on screens for the windscreen and cab side windows are an option. Transforming the rear seat into a double bed is simplicity itself by raising the seat squab and sliding it forward, at which point the four cushions slide flat to form a generous dimension 1.82m long and 1.21m wide double sleeper. The large locker beneath the front of the seat is roomy enough to stash all the bed linen. When the upper bed is fitted it is held in place against the headlining of the roof, then pulled down for sleeping complete with its mattress and whatever sleeping tackle you have stored there.

Kitchen

Fridge, dinner plate size sink and two-burner hob – it's all here along with adequate storage space for the tools and the foodstuffs. In fact there is more locker space for the kitchen in Granvia than in many Campers twice the size. Fair work space too if you include the glass tops of the sink and hob burners. Waeco make the efficient 40-litre compressor fridge operated from the 12 volt supply or a mains supply when connected up on site. Compressor fridges reach their operating temperature more quickly than absorption fridges. Beneath the floor 38-litre fresh and waste water tanks both of which can be drained easily, have sufficient quantity for several days when used sparingly. Electrics include 12 volt and 240 volt outlets, an 85Ah battery, 12v intelligent battery charger and split charging system from the engine battery. A 20m main hook up lead is also standard equipment.

Washroom

Patently, there's no space for a washroom but a portable flush toilet stows neatly in one of the compartments under the rear seat – an awning could act as wash room and toilet and, on full facility campsites of course the lack of a washroom is less important.

Stowage

In general the overall stowage is something of a minor miracle – our photo with



TECHNICAL DATA

Vehicle specification: Wellhouse Toyota Granvia, two-berth, elevating roof Camper
Price of vehicle tested: £17,000 on the road
Vehicle kindly loaned for testing by: Wellhouse Leisure, Unit B, Sovereign Business Park, Barnsley Road, Shepley, Huddersfield, HD8 8BL. Tel: 01484 600416

CONVERSION

Overall length:	4.71m
Overall width:	1.80m
Overall height:	2.10m
MTPLM:	2380kg
Payload:	440kg
Construction:	Steel body, GRP elevating roof, furniture of light weight Vohringer board with laminate surfaces.
Fresh water capacity:	38-litres
Waste water capacity:	38-litres
Gas storage:	one 6lb Gaz cylinder
Auxiliary battery:	85Ah leisure battery
Refrigerator:	Waeco 40-litre compressor fridge operating from 12v, fitted with energy accumulator.
Water heating:	optional
Space Heating:	optional
Lighting:	spotlights in lounge, automotive lights in cab
Upholstery:	abstract pattern tapestry fabric
Other equipment fitted:	VHF/AM radio, central locking, electric mirrors, air conditioning, automatic transmission, passenger and driver airbags.

BASE VEHICLE

Type:	Toyota Granvia short wheelbase passenger vehicle
Power unit:	2982cc, four cylinder, turbo diesel with electronic fuel injection
Maximum power:	130bhp @ 3600rpm
Maximum torque:	289.30 Nm @ 2,000rpm
Transmission:	four-speed automatic
Steering:	power assisted rack and pinion
Braking system:	servo assisted with ABS to front discs and rear drums

PERFORMANCE

Fuel consumption:	25mpg estimated
Maximum speed:	85mph estimated
Comfortable cruising speed:	60-65mph

the tailgate open shows some of it. There is also the wardrobe with adjoining lockers, the gas locker that houses the vehicle jack and tools, plus the space over the cab when the roof is up to take all the clobber and clothing that can be tucked away until needed for the outdoor activities.

Summary

How would our test Granvia measure up against a used UK built Camper of similar age? The first problem would be to find one with anything like a comparable specification mechanically and in such good overall condition, hand in hand with a twelve month warranty on the chassis and the conversion. Wellhouse tell us spare parts are not a problem, most being available in the UK and a fast service from Japan to compare with a parts service for European vehicles. The road performance and noise levels with the Granvia were a revelation, topped though by an even quieter short trial in a 2001 registered Toyota Regius powered by 2.7-litre petrol motor that was astonishingly quiet by any standards. It had 52,500 miles registered and was in superb condition priced at £21,000. So, to return to the question of how these unusual vehicles measure up; I'll repeat the words of David Elliott when talking to potential customers: "Come to us after you have looked at the competition." He is that confident in the basic Japanese product and the conversions that Wellhouse meld to them.

BRASS TACKS

Why Japanese? Reasons include the unique compact size allied to a superior mechanical specification and the reputation for reliability that vehicles from Japan have established over the past decades, adding up to a camper that makes no claim about being the cheapest on offer but does claim value for money.

The premises at the junction of the A629 and A635 at Shepley near Huddersfield are purpose built with a manufacturing section, administration and showroom. Whilst Toyota is now the mainspring of the product range, Mazda and Ford have also been imported from Japan. Micro campers built on the Toyota Sparky and Daihatsu Extol are another highly ingenious part of the Wellhouse line-up. With a length of just 3.76m they are highly manoeuvrable and economical to run. Power is by 1.3-litre, 16valve, twin cam 82bhp engine and the option of automatic transmission or five-speed manual gearbox. Prices range from £11,500 to £13,500. The latest develop-



ment, UK supplied new Toyota Hiace Powervans, are high-top campers with 2.5-litre turbo diesel motors retailing at £23,000 ready to roll.

A short tour of the company buildings was enough to discover a real enthusiasm for the job whether it was building the machines, organising the infrastructure or in discussion with the customers. On such enthusiasm anything is possible. At the manufacturing stage there was a palpable spark from anyone I spoke to - ready to explain what they were at and the direction of future plans. In the near future the operation will include mechanical servicing in a separate department. A really attractive showroom complete with explanatory illustrations and customer facilities is far from common in moderate size manufacturing operations but it is typical of the professional approach of this West Yorkshire builder of Campers with flair.