

The Hi-life

The imported Toyota Grand Hiace is a reliable and robust short wheelbase vehicle, ideal for a campervan conversion **WORDS AND PICTURES** Rob Hawkins

THE TOYOTA Hiace is a familiar sight on most UK and European roads and was one of the first generation MPVs or people carriers. In Japan, they're just as popular. Wellhouse Leisure, of West Yorkshire, is importing a variety of Japanese vehicles, including the Hiace and Regius. Most of the Hiace imports range from 1997 to 2003 vehicles, usually with between 25,000 and 60,000 miles on the clock. These are sold at £15,000 to £22,000 fully converted.

Buying an ageing used vehicle as the base for a new camper conversion can be a little worrying. Wellhouse, however, has not had any major problems with the imported Hiace.

An imported Hiace arrives as an eight-seater people carrier. Wellhouse strips the interior to a bare shell to begin the conversion. The rear seats are replaced by an in-house rock-and-roll bed that seats two people and uses the standard seatbelt mounts. The roof is cut away and a GRP replacement from Reimo is fitted. Alternatively, an elevated roof can be used.

Our test van was made in 2000, had completed 60,000 Japanese miles and had one previous owner with a full service history. It's a Grand Hiace model, which was a special edition of the Toyota Granvia. Wellhouse sells all its converted imports with a full one-year warranty, 12 months MoT, six months tax, RAC report, 12 months' RAC

breakdown cover, thermal screens, an owner's manual and mains lead. The engine receives a full service, including timing belt replacement, and all import conversion work (speedo changed to mph, rear fog light and UK stereo).

Cost of this particular conversion, above standard spec, is £21,865. Luxury additions are leather upholstery at £400, Webasto diesel heating, £850, upgraded stereo, £150, iPod connection, £65, and colour-coded awning, £400.

Driving the converted Hiace is very straightforward. Its MPV-sized proportions, power steering and large door mirrors make it easy to manoeuvre. This particular model is fitted with Toyota's three-litre 138bhp turbo diesel. Most models have rear-wheel drive, although there are also some with four-wheel drive. All of these imported models use a four-speed automatic

gearbox, in which top gear acts as an overdrive. Consequently, Wellhouse says fuel consumption is modest at between 25 and 30mpg.

The converted Hiace will seat four people on the move, but only three inside the main living area. The captain's chair-style passenger seat swivels round for the third person. Any size of table (free-standing or with column leg) can be made and fitted by Wellhouse. Due to the layout, the table serves only the two rear seated occupants and is a stretch for the front seat

PRACTICALITY

Toyota Grand Hiace 8/10

This Hiace conversion, by Wellhouse Leisure, offers lots of storage space, a rock-and-roll style bed for two and a good-sized kitchen and dining area. There's no toilet or washroom though so you'll need sites with facilities. The compact length and width of the base vehicle makes it easy to store on most driveways, but don't expect to get it into a garage with its high roofline.



The Grand Hiace is a used van converted to a camper



Headroom in the Wellhouse conversion is impressive



A spacious double bed is the only berth in the Reimo GRP roof version

BUILD QUALITY

Toyota Grand Hiace 9/10

Wellhouse has achieved a high level of finish with this conversion so build quality is good. It has invested in brand names such as the Reimo roof, Waeco fridge and Webasto heater, but has also developed its own fittings.

passenger. Such a dilemma is offset by the fact there's generous floor space in the dining-living area. Maybe a separate pull-out table for the front seat passenger is the solution here.

The compact kitchen makes the most of the space provided. Cooking is on a two-hob stove, which sits over a 40-litre fridge. A sink is to the right of the stove. Cupboard space is impressive. The only disappointment is in the overhead cupboards, which don't have any internal lips to stop items falling out when the doors are opened.

Tanks for fresh and waste water are provided. A single gas cylinder is stored in a rear sealed compartment.

Rear facing seating is used to form part of a double bed, with space underneath for luggage. Additional luggage space can be found in the front and rear of the GRP roof. There's a large panelled compartment over the front

seats and a similar one at the rear. This space is very useful, but lots of heavy items may make the vehicle top heavy. Another bed conversion, available in the roof, can accommodate two small children.

Internal lighting includes a stalk-mounted reading light for the rear seat and several spotlights and LEDs. There are sockets to the right of the sink. Any control panels for optional extra diesel heating or music systems are also mounted here.

Wellhouse's camper conversion of the Hiace is a compact design that makes the most of the space available. □

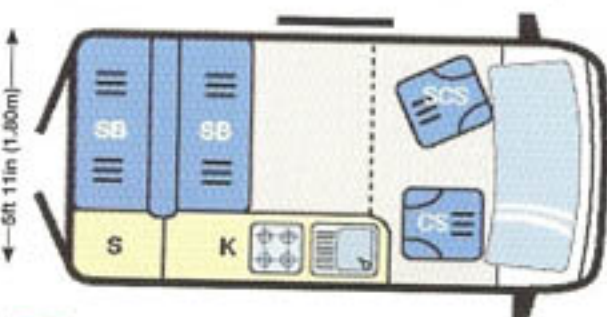
Scores

Exterior features	8/10
On the road	8/10
Lounging	7/10
Dining	6/10
Storage	8/10
Night-time	7/10
Kitchen	7/10
Washroom	N/A
Practicality	8/10
Build quality	9/10

TOTAL 68/90

Toyota Grand Hiace

£21,865 (fully converted models £15,000 to £22,000)



KEY

SCS swivel cab seat CS cab seat K kitchen SB settee/bed S storage

BASE VEHICLE	Toyota Hiace (1999-2003)
BERTHS	2 (GRP roof) or 4 (elevating roof)
MTPLM	2600kg
PAYLOAD	600kg
GAS	1 x Campingaz 907 5kg
BATTERY	110Ah
FRESH WATER	35 litres
WASTE WATER	35 litres

BASE VEHICLE

3.0-litre turbo-diesel (optional 3.4-litre V6 petrol)

CONSTRUCTION

MPV conversion, Reimo fixed GRP or elevating roof

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

40-litre Indel B or Waeco fridge, Cramer two-burner hob, sink, 240v and 12v power outlets, 25-metre hook-up lead, Porta-Potti 335

CONVERTER

Wellhouse Leisure, Sovereign Business Park, Unit B, Barnsley Road, Shepley, Huddersfield HD8 8BL

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FOR

Compact campervan that sleeps two comfortably, sufficient space for dining and cooking

AGAINST

New conversion components fitted to a used imported vehicle, compact enough to store on a driveway but not in a garage due to the high fixed roof