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## The Don, 80 years on

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In print and online

AUSTRALIA'S NEW FAVOURITE CARAVAN AND CAMPING MAGAZINE



# The great escape vehicle

Since the advent of the original VW Kombi, having a camper van as a second vehicle has been the dream of many Aussie families. And why not? You get the luxury of a reserve set of wheels in the garage and a great escape vehicle for holidays and weekends away.

**Tried and Tested Frontline Adventurer** Review and photos by Paddy McCann

**Of course, the downside in the past has been the bulk of the van. Fine for leisure trips, but not very zippy or much fun for a quick dash across town.**

But times have changed. The Powerful 132kw diesel engine in the latest VW T5 drives so well, you have to pinch yourself to remember you're actually getting around town in holiday garb.

Frontline Camper Conversion's Peter Farrugia and Jeffery Verhagen have been designing and building camper conversions in Sydney since 1987.

Today they focus on three base vehicles the Toyota Hiace, Landcruiser and VW.

The VW T5 is more "car like" due to the out front engine and this translates to a vehicle that is just a little bit nicer on the road. It also has a walk through cab which is brilliant and the front passenger seat also swivels to face the rear, adding to the usable space in the vehicle when camping.

Frontline offer four different layouts in the VW T5, the Freedom, the Adventurer, the Vacationer and the Avalon.

## Family Friendly

The Adventurer is one of their best sellers due to the addition of a rear bench seat and the fact that the vehicle is fitted with four seat belts, making it popular with families.

Frontline Camper Conversions point of difference begins in the back of the vehicle and their approach to fitting the vans pop-top roof. From their very first pop-top campers back in the 1980s through to the current 2014 iteration, not a lot has changed in Frontline's approach which is to create a robust, highly usable, value packed camper that is as affordable as possible without sacrificing quality.

For example, Frontline still opt for the full pop-top rather than the tilt style of many European vans and in the T5, the top is completely seamless with the look of the van underpinnings right down to an exact match on the paint. (not sure what underpinnings are?)

Frontline even takes the trouble to disassemble and colour match paint the Fiamma awning that they optionally offer with all Frontline campers. This attention to detail is typical of Peter and his teams commitment to quality and there is no denying that the final finish reflects the extra effort.

Our test vehicle took the custom camper look a step further with a black and orange colour scheme, extending to the custom



wheels and chunky all terrain tyres.

Around the vehicle, the air ventilation grills, 240v power plug and even the water inlet have been painted a gloss black. The overall look is very striking and it makes you realise how sophisticated Frontline production technology has become in recent years. This vehicle looks like it came in one piece straight from the VW factory.

In the back, the general layout to around the van's midway point is consistent throughout the Frontline T5 range. There is a sink plus bench space directly behind the driving seat with a compressor driven two-way (12v / 240v) fridge below.

## Out the back

Behind the passenger seat, there is a swing out cupboard which houses an ever-reliable mentholated spirits cooker. Peter says they moved away from LPG cookers and gas lit refrigerators several years ago with the gain of more space, reliability and safety.

"The fridge, lighting and pump will run for around two days with the included camping battery but it can be extended to 7-8 days



**"For travellers who like to travel a little fast or people who want to take weekend getaways at every opportunity, this camper van has great appeal."**

> continued on page 36

## tried + tested | motorhome review

with an optional solar booster or four days running simply by adding an extra battery”.

From the midpoint back, the Frontline VW T5 design varies slightly depending on your chosen layout. In the T5 Adventurer, it has row of perfectly fitted cupboards extending down the drivers side ending with a cabinet containing a retractable shower that can be accessed by opening the rear door of the camper. The shower is pump fed and the flow is excellent. The 55 litre water storage is more than enough for a few quick showers and it's also perfect for washing off sandy feet or hosing down a mucky dog.

When the shower is fully retracted, there is no sink or catch tray to protect the cabinetry from drips, although the internal construction of all cupboards is a lightweight plywood covered in a high pressure laminate similar to a kitchen work-top. This makes for a very tough interior and a couple of drips of water will not hurt it.

Next to the row of cupboards and rear shower is one half of the double bed with the bench seat in front. During the day, the bench seat is comfortable seating for two. At night, the rear bench seat is folded flat to join up with the cushioned area directly behind it forming a large double bed. There are even convenient cubby drawers under the bench seat, one of which provides storage for the optional Porta-Potti which was fitted to our test vehicle.

On our road test, the cab was remarkably quiet with very few rattles and creaks. Invariably, campervans and motorhomes do get noisier as they start to cover more kilometres but it's hard to imagine the quality of the Frontline fit out giving much slack over time. Every cabinet is precision milled using Frontline's computerised routing machine and then screwed together by talented craftsmen. Peter himself is a cabinet builder by trade so quality cabinetry is part of the company culture.



### In summary

The Frontline Adventurer is a practical and well put together vehicle which also offers good value for money.

When you consider the price of a base model VW Transporter van is around \$50,000 and the price of a baseline Frontline T5 Campervan is around \$64,800 (or \$76,740 as tested which included 120w solar amongst other premium goodies),

there is not really that much in it.

For travellers who like to travel a little fast or people who want to take weekend getaways at every opportunity, this camper van has great appeal. Not only can you get an adventure vehicle that will take you almost anywhere under your own steam (Frontline even offer an all wheel drive model), you also get incredibly low depreciation – enough even to keen an accountant happy. 🐾

### Pros

- Seamless finish
- Superb handling vehicle
- Good value for money

### Cons

- Bluetooth not standard
- No drip tray for the shower

## YOU MIGHT ALSO CONSIDER

### Trakka Trakkadu

Also based on the VW T5, Trakka's 21st Century answer to the original VW camper is a sophisticated package, with upmarket specs including a titanium awning and external shower. Well kitted for a bush escape and equally smart on the road around town.

↑ PRICE IS HIGHER AT \$130,000

