

Source NZ Motorhomes Caravans and Destinations
Date Issue 61, October 2009



RoadCraft Base Jumper L4 review

RoadCraft's existing Base Jumper motorhomes – its S2 and M2 – are firmly established as get-in-and-go platforms for thrill-seeking couples. They're designed for independence, allowing you to spend days at a time "going bush" rather than overnighting at the nearest campsite.

The L4 takes this concept a little further: going bush as a family.

Launched in August, the L4 is designed around a couple with two children, and it sleeps four in comfort. At nearly 7m long it's quite an imposing proposition, but it's sleek and

aerodynamically sculpted. Weighing in at around 3880kg, it's also well within standard driver's licence parameters. It's also a pleasure to drive – more about this in a minute.

The model we drove is the prototype, but the vehicle was a hit before it was even built, with three being ordered from the plans. Due to this demand, the company has quickly ratcheted up production, aiming to deliver 20 L4s to its rental arm (Wilderness) over the next year. The first of these became available at the beginning of this month.

German Engineering

Volkswagen's Crafter 35 van, one of Europe's most popular commercial vehicles, is the starting point for the L4, and it's characterised by solid precision bodywork, refreshingly free of rattles. A 2.5-litre, five-cylinder common rail Turbo Diesel Injected (TDI) engine nestles under the hood. As always with RoadCraft, there are plenty of options and extras – even with the engine.

This model was fitted with an 85kW engine. The company says future L4s will probably be equipped with a 100kW alternative, and there is also a 120kW version for those who enjoy larger reserves of power. All are mated to a six-speed manual gearbox, though an automatic version is also available.

For my part, I wouldn't be too fussed about up-scaling. The vehicle performs perfectly well with the 85kW unit, although admittedly I didn't take it up any remote tracks, and we didn't have a full load on board. Still, there's plenty of torque, and cruising at 100km/h in sixth gear, the engine's turning over at sedate 2500rpm. Very quiet it is too – and fuel consumption equates to around 12.5 km/litre. All engines meet the Euro 4 emission standard.

Cab

The original VW Crafter was a joint design project between VW and Mercedes Benz – the latter being responsible for driver ergonomics and cab layout. Let's just say you won't be pressed for space. All controls fall easily to hand, and the visibility is excellent.

I liked the large "split" side mirrors – they eliminate blind spots and provide uncompromised rear views. Just as well – the vista from the cab's rear view mirror is a little tight (you have to peer past the bathroom structure). The standard vehicle isn't equipped with a GPS unit, but it would be easy to fit one, and while you're about it, to couple it to a rear view camera.

Features include cruise control (very useful, as you'll find the L4 galloping to

120km/h without realising it), a fully-adjustable driver's seat, adjustable steering column, air conditioning and stereo/radio player. There's also a DVD player mounted on the ceiling – perfectly positioned for the children seated in the bench seat immediately behind the driver. There are also two line-out jacks at the bench seat – so the adults will not have to suffer through repeated Bambi soundtracks.

Both the cab seats swivel 180°, so in relax mode the L4's interior becomes a very friendly, intimate space.

Safety

Despite its size, driving the L4 is easy. Power steering and the muted engine belie the apparent bulk, and in case you're lulled into inattentiveness, the Crafter's equipped with a high-tech braking package.

It comprises 300mm discs up front (298mm at the rear) with two callipers per wheel. Even better, the Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) teams up with Electronic Brake-Pressure Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist, Electronic Stabilisation Program (ESP) and traction control to ensure optimal driving safety. EBD, for the uninitiated, disperses the braking force to where it's most required – between the front and rear axles. A great help when negotiating awkward, rough-terrain country.

Bed time

RoadCraft has used the Crafter's roomy interior to maximum benefit – and it's particularly evident in the sleeping arrangement. The rear wrap-around couch (the parents' area) becomes an expansive double bed (1770 x 1900mm), and if things between you and the wife are a little frosty, it can also be configured as two singles (800 x 1900mm). The best part of the bed, however, is that it's deployed with a flick of a switch – using an electrical release mechanism.



Up front, the children sleep in two bunk beds configured sideways, across the width of the vehicle (750 x 1770mm each). The lower bunk is formed from the bench seat, while the upper folds down – on pneumatic rams – from the ceiling; a particularly clever piece of design technology.

Galley

Plenty of goodies here to test your culinary skills – with lots of lockers and bench top space. Solid macrocarpa is used for the bench top, and while it looks great, I hope its warm tones aren't too easily spoiled by careless chefs.

Most of the action takes place on a four-burner Spinflo gas stove with grill (fed by two 4.5kg gas bottles) under a Dometic rangehood, with wash-up in a generous stainless steel sink. Hot water's (14-litre capacity) supplied by either the Truma diesel heater or mains power.

A 110-litre Waeco fridge (with separate freezer compartment) is on the opposite side, conveniently mounted at chest height. It's a fridge that perfectly complements the L4's adventure ethos – it doesn't have to be level to perform. The compressor will run even when you're on a 30° angle, or testing your dentures over corrugated tracks.

For me, though, the galley's pièce de résistance is its tools – top-quality pots and pans, and surgical-grade knives.

Bathroom

Again – it's spacious by motorhome standards, and features a Dometic cassette toilet (nine-litres), shower and basin. The swivel seat toilet swings out of the way when not in use, and if your day's adventures have resulted in wet clothing, the bathroom doubles as a drying room.

That Truma heater, incidentally, is a Combi model – providing heating for the vehicle and the drying room, as well as the hot water for

the galley and bathroom. Grey water collects in a 135-litre tank and all RoadCraft vehicles have self containment certification.

Designed as an all-country, all-weather adventurer, staying toasty in icy climates is easily achieved thanks to the L4's insulation and heater. Insulation uses SL2 grade polystyrene in the roof, and polyester "Green Stuff" batts in the sides and behind the cabinet walls. Coupled with carpeting on the floors, thermoflex on the walls and vinyl headlining on the ceiling, you won't be chilly, especially once the heater kicks in.

Entertainment

While the children's "are-we-there-yet" boredom will be tempered by the cab-mounted DVD player, at night the family can switch to the main 15" Majestic LCD screen mounted in the lounge. You can also use it to view the day's photos. If you prefer to listen to music (four-channel surround sound), you have a choice of CD, MP3, MP4 or the radio. If none of these is ideal, hook your iPod into the auxiliary input.

Electronic equipment, of course, demands decent power, and the L4 is fitted with twin batteries – one for the engine, and the other for the house. The latter (220 amp-hours) comprises two six-volt, deep-cycle batteries connected in series. If you're desperate to hook up with far-flung family and friends by email, the vehicle's also fitted with a 600-watt inverter – providing 240 volts AC for your laptop.

As might be expected with its engineering heritage, the Crafter comes with a four-year or 200,000km (whichever comes first) full-vehicle warranty. That's complemented by Volkswagens's Roadside Assistance programme (24-hour help for three years), plus a 12-year anti-corrosion warranty and three-year paint defect guarantee.

Accessories

A good selection of outdoor accessories are supplied with the vehicle. It includes Oztent fold-up table and chairs, and a gas-fired barbeque and an outside shower.

Optional extras range from a customised awning (over the main entrance), to a satellite dish, solar panels and a roof rack.

In fact, buyers have plenty of scope to customise the L4, tweaking interior layout and fittings to their preferences. That also extends to the signature “contour” graphics that adorn each of RoadCraft’s motorhomes. Fancy a bit of Coromandel on your home? Bay of Islands? Tongariro?

All up, the Base Jumper L4 is a solid addition to the RoadCraft stable – easy to use, easy to drive, comfortable, and well-finished. It might not find favour with dedicated couples, but for those keen on adventuring as a family, it’s a perfect fit.

ENDS

www.motorhomesandcaravans.co.nz