

CAMPING in a car?

One of the smallest four-berth campervans around, Lunar hope to carve a new niche for themselves with their 'Camping Car' Vacanza. Could it really replace the family car though?

WORDS PETER ROSENTHAL
PHOTOS MIKE BAILIE



With the optional towbar and a bike rack, the Vacanza is ideal for bike-mad families. Unlike an MPV, you can brew up after a ride, too!

At just 4.4 metres long the Lunar Vacanza is half a metre shorter than a VW T5. In campervan terms it's tiny and little wonder that Lunar refer to it as a Camping Car. Based on the Nissan NV200 Combi - commonly used as taxis - and powered by a Renault 1.5dCi engine, it should give car-like frugality, too.

Lunar reckon it will average around 50mpg, while Nissan quote 50-65mpg - so you shouldn't be visiting the diesel pump very often.

It's a clean and modern looking vehicle with Lunar's pop-up roof blending neatly with the stubby Nissan bodywork. The graphics are subtle and it looks more like a posh people carrier than a campervan. We'd delete the chromed sill rails fitted to the test vehicle, though - they're purely decorative and serve little purpose other than to reduce ground clearance. It's low enough to step straight into, so they're not needed as a step.

On the road

The cabin is fuss-free and spacious, although the swathes of black plastic are crying out for some aluminium or wood

detailing to add some contrast. Taller drivers may find the swivel seats of the Vacanza a little tall - the mechanism lifts the seats up - and the steering wheel only adjusts for rake and not reach.

Instruments consist of a central clear speedo, with a neat full-colour display to the right of this showing the trip-meter and flashing up a gear-lever symbol when it's time to change up for the best economy. Slot it in reverse and the display changes to reveal the view from a small camera tucked next to the rear numberplate light. This is great for parking and would be perfect for reversing up to a trailer if you tick the towbar option.

Despite only having 90bhp, the 1.5-litre turbo-diesel is a willing and refined engine, with a progressive clutch and smooth-to-select gears.

The ride quality gets a bit bouncy over potholed roads, but overall it's an easy vehicle to live with.

The travel seats in the rear are fully crash-tested items and even come with Isofix mountings. They're ideal for kids and the twin sliding doors make loading simple and safe - the children will always

- PROS**
- ✓ As practical as a family car
 - ✓ Great rear travel seats
 - ✓ Twin sliding doors
 - ✓ Reversing camera
 - ✓ Well-equipped kitchen

- CONS**
- ✗ Inflatable bed is fiddly and only 6ft long
 - ✗ Dining area is a squeeze for four adults

get in on the kerbside.

The test vehicle came with optional grey leather and Alcantara trim, which smelt great and looked superb, with the central suede-like section adding grip to the seats and being more suited to child seats. On full leather interiors, child seats tend to slide about. So another tick for family-friendliness.

Lounging & dining

It's unusual for a vehicle of this size to have swivel seats, let alone ones that are any good. Pull the orange latches between the seats and even the driver's seat swivels around with very little fuss. The resulting lounge area isn't massive but feels bigger thanks to the clear central aisle. Two people could put their feet up and admire the view, but it's a bit cosy for four adults. Two adults and a couple of kids would be fine.

The dining table is clipped to the rear edge of the kitchen cabinets and accessed by opening the tailgate. An L-shaped tubular leg then fits into a hole in one of the seat bases and allows the table to be positioned in a variety of different ways. Its size is limited by the

width of the kitchen cabinets - it would block kitchen access if it were any wider - and is a bit on the small side for four. You'd probably feed the kids first, then dine as a couple.

Kitchen galley

The tailgate forms a handy canopy in sunny / rainy conditions and Lunar have provided a fold-out shelf to give you somewhere to put your drinks while you natter to friends. Just remember to fold it back up before slamming the tailgate!

The kitchen features a Smev grill inset into the passenger side bank of cabinets, together with a wardrobe and storage lockers, while the three-burner hob and sink unit is on the driver's side and fed by a 12-litre water tank.

A 42-litre compressor fridge nestles under a cutlery drawer. There's a little storage under the sink and even a chemical toilet squeezed under the cabinet. We'd probably delete the Smev grill in favour of extra storage space, but it's amazing how much is crammed into this small space. With the roof up and the roof bed section folded back, there's plenty of headroom, too.



▲ Lounge and dining area are a bit tight for four adults but would work well for families with younger kids

◀ Kitchen boasts 42-litre fridge and three-burner hob and sink unit, plus some worktop space

Bedtime

Pop the roof and you'll find an ABS moulding housing the ladder, together with a fold-down bed and mattress sections. With three windows covered by roll-up screens (one of which unzips and has flyscreen mesh) together with safety netting it's ideal for kids. My son Sam very much enjoyed being in his own high-level viewing area. The clip-on latches are another good idea with the pop-up roof and are much easier to use than the more common webbing straps.

To erect the downstairs inflatable bed, the trick is to angle the front swivel seats to face the gearstick and then flip the rear seats flat. Behind the backrest is a bag holding the inflatable mattress. A powerful electric pump of the type used to inflate boats is then clipped to a socket on the mattress and the pump switched on. A preset dial stops pumping when the correct pressure is reached (between about 5 and 9 psi - allowing you to minutely adjust the firmness). The pump takes minutes to inflate / deflate the bed and results in a 6ft 1in long bed that tapers towards the cab end and curves around the gearlever.

“Lunar reckon it will average around 50mpg, while Nissan quote 50-65mpg - so you shouldn't be visiting the diesel pump very often”

SPECIFICATION

Base vehicle	Nissan NV200 Combi
Drive	front-wheel drive
Engine	1.5 dCi diesel (Euro 6)
Power	90bhp
Economy	50mpg
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Number of travel seats	4
Berths	4 (two adults, plus two kids)
Leisure battery capacity	80Ah
Payload	322kg
Length x width x height	4.4m x 2.01m (inc mirrors) x 1.96m
Standard equipment	Three-burner hob and sink, loo, elevating roof, LED lighting, compressor fridge, grill, inflatable bed and electric pump, swivel front seats, Bluetooth
Optional equipment	Sport Pack (comfort upholstery, Porta Potti, TV/Sat 12V, external mains socket, carpets) £999, Luxury Pack (leather upholstery, Porta Potti, TV/Sat 12V, external mains socket, carpets, Nissan side rails) £1,499, Nissan side rails £410, Nissan towbar £387, metallic paint £420, space heater (dealer fit, POA), water heater (dealer fit, POA), Vango AirBeam awning £599
Warranty	3 years for base vehicle and conversion
Price	From £31,995 on-the-road
Price of test vehicle	£32,909
Contact	www.lunarcaravans.com/vacanza

VERDICT

For such a compact campervan, the Vacanza really does cram a lot of kit in and it must be one of the smallest four berths around - it's over half a metre shorter than even a VW T5 short-wheelbase. But it can't really be compared with other campervans and people carriers are probably more closely related to it.

It's clearly been targeted at families as well as couples, with the crash-tested rear travel seats being ideal for kids. Yet it still manages to squeeze in a decent kitchen galley and a well thought-out roof bed for the kids.

Lunar have done incredibly well to slot all this kit into a 4.4m long vehicle and it's sure to carve out a new niche for those families who were considering an MPV but actually want something more versatile that they can holiday in. Could it really replace the family car though? Without a doubt.



Mains hook-up is mounted on the rear bumper, while the pop-up roof boasts three windows



Yes there's even a wardrobe back here. Just remember to flip up the rear shelf before slamming the tailgate!



Kids' roof bed is well thought out and even includes ladder storage. Makes a good viewing area, too



Marine-style air compressor inflates the downstairs bed in minutes



A drive away Vango AirBeam awning can also be offered with the Vacanza to boost the on-site space



Adults definitely fit in the travel seats! Access to all seats is excellent