



# Zenith Heaven

Revolution Motorhomes' Zenith reaches new heights in the van conversion market...

Story by Richard Robertson  
Images by Malcolm Street



VW's new Crafter is a good looking machine and brings real choice and difference to the motorhome scene. You'd be hard pressed to pick the Zenith's slide-out at a casual glance as it's a very neat installation.

Following the mid-2018 release of the Envoy – a 'revolutionary' Toyota HiAce van conversion with slide-out bed – Revolution Motorhomes has raised the bar with the Zenith, a VW Crafter conversion with full-length kitchen/bedroom/bathroom slide-out.

Not only is this the first conversion we've seen on the all-new Volkswagen Crafter, to our knowledge it's the first van conversion anywhere to feature a full-length slide-out. Interestingly, Revolution plans to install the same thing on its 'little' Envoy, which will transform the Hi-Ace into something more closely resembling the Tardis!

Conventional wisdom dictates slide-outs to be the province of coachbuilt motorhomes. Van conversions are often seen as stepping

stones between campervans and 'proper' motorhomes; their more compact dimensions suit those who value manoeuvrability, ease of parking and economy over ultimate living space. Conversely, coachbuilts – be they A, B or C-class – are often seen as the ultimate motorhome, with slide-outs as the 'ultimate ultimate' in providing mobile real estate. So, does the marriage of a slide-out with a van conversion make it the 'ultimate ultimate ultimate' by providing the best of both worlds?

## Crafting the Base

In the motorhome world the Fiat Ducato and Mercedes-Benz Sprinter reign supreme. Volkswagen's Crafter has only ever been a bit player, gaining most success Down Under in the rental business.



In case you're unaware, the Crafter and Sprinter were near-identical twins that started life on the same Mercedes-Benz production line. Towards the end of production the Crafter was moved to Volkswagen's own assembly line, where its unique engine, transmission, trim and body fittings were added. However, that arrangement ended last year because Mercedes-Benz needed all the production space for its booming Sprinter business. This forced Volkswagen to reinvent its own wheel, this time drawing on the expertise of its MAN truck division. The result was the MAN TGE and VW Crafter. If the Sprinter and Crafter were near-identical twins these two are identical, they just wear slightly different clothes.

The all-new Crafter has been in Australia for a little while now, but only in front wheel

drive form. Rear and all-wheel drive models are just arriving and you can expect to see them become a more visible part of the local motorhome scene as RV manufacturers look for something new and different. Whereas the previous Crafter was a bit of an ugly duckling, it's now right up there in looks as well as specifications. Visually, it echoes current VW passenger car design language, with that influence extending into the cab.

### Advantage VW

**N**ew Crafter actually has one up on the Sprinter in that it now offers an eight-speed ZF automatic transmission. This is a 'proper' automatic, not the lumbering automated manual previously offered, and it's a beauty. By comparison, Mercedes-Benz is

sticking with its seven-speed auto in the all-new Sprinter.

New Crafter's other big attraction will be its affordable all-wheel drive option. Called 4Motion, it's about a quarter the price of the new Sprinter's admittedly 'proper' four-wheel-drive option, but for most people just having all-wheel drive ability will be more than enough. Power now comes from a twin-turbo 2.0-litre diesel producing 130 kW and 410 Nm, both much more competitive than before.

Naturally, new Crafter comes with a full suite of safety equipment including front, side and curtain airbags for both cab occupants and all the expected electronic aids: Front assist with city emergency braking and multi-collision brakes, anti-lock brakes, electronic

Rectangles Snip

stability control, traction control, hill-hold, crosswind assist and more. Along with properly engineered crumple zones it's good to see light commercial vehicles finally achieving passenger-car safety standards, both passive and active.

I only took the Zenith for a 10 km run 'around the block', but found the new Crafter to be comfortable, quiet and, as expected, very easy to drive. The small, sporty, flat-bottomed steering wheel is a delight to use, although in a vehicle at this price point it would be good to have it leather-wrapped. I found the gearbox quite a departure from standard automatics and at first thought it to be a DSG because up-shifts were made in a fraction of a second, accompanied by a flick of the tachometer



Two lockers in the slide-out house the gas cylinders and provide good room for hoses, power leads and the like. There's a third locker on the kerb-side for storage or optional generator.



New Crafter's interior is a big step forward and in line with current VW passenger car design language. Sporty flat-bottomed steering wheel is a beauty, but should be leather wrapped at this price point.



## 36 | Tested

needle. Engine response is good and the vehicle gets up to speed nicely and is very quiet.

While the dashboard is contemporary with VW's passenger cars, I have to say it's not as 'swish' as the all-new Sprinter. However, that certainly wouldn't put me off and it was good to see connectivity like Apple Car Play as standard. Volkswagen backs the new Crafter with a five year unlimited kilometre warranty and three years roadside assistance, while servicing is only required annually.

I should point out that the test vehicle is built on a long wheelbase (LWB) Crafter with front-wheel drive and a 3550 kg gross vehicle mass



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Rectangular Ship



**Top:** When retracted the slide-out sits over the cassette toilet. Production models will have a full rear wall to ensure bathroom privacy. **Above:** The 3.9 m slide-out seems very well engineered and is rock solid when extended. Built-in storage lockers are a nice touch and the Zenith has more external storage than is usual in a van conversion.

The slide-out is smooth and 'lipless', meaning any water or debris on top is simply pushed off when retracted.

(GVM). That's because this is the prototype; production vehicles will come standard on the LWB Crafter with 4Motion – yes, all-wheel drive as standard – and a 4495 kg GVM. Revolution reports that the test Zenith, filled with freshwater, diesel and 256 kg of people, tips the scales at 3226 kg. That leaves a respectable payload of 324 kg payload for food, clothing, camping equipment and whatever, and means the full production vehicle will literally have a ton of load carrying capacity.

### Body Beautiful

**A**nyway, that's enough now about the new Crafter, I know it's the body you really want to hear about.

The slide out runs the full length of the driver's side, between the cab and rear barn doors. It appears to be well thought out and engineered, and incorporates a high tensile alloy frame to ensure structural integrity. As with the slide-out on the HiAce-based Envy, this one is also sealed by an air-operated system to ensure







Individual tables are an interesting feature that generally work well, but aren't really conducive to intimate dinners for two. The passenger-side table can be left in place when travelling, if desired, too. Production Zeniths will have a proper motorhome side entry door rather than the dreaded 'whizz-bang'.

watertightness and is 'lipless', so any water or debris is simply pushed over the rounded edges on retraction. At 850 mm this is a deep unit, yet when fully extended it feels rock solid and there's no apparent movement. The slide-out houses the kitchen just aft of the cab, the bed in the middle and the bathroom vanity unit at the rear end.

Production Zenith's will not only feature 4Motion all-wheel drive and a 4495 kg GVM, they will also have a proper motorhome door in place of the test vehicle's 'whizz-bang' side door. The floor plan, however, will remain the same and features swivelled cab seats for after hours relaxation and dining, the mid kitchen opposite the entry door, the bed (with its



head in the slide-out) aft of that and a full-width rear bathroom. Most slide-outs stop short of incorporating a bathroom section, but Revolution has made the most of the available space and it works wonders in this small van.

An interesting side effect of this big slide-out is its reported benefit to vehicle stability. That's because some of the heaviest items – the kitchen unit and bed – move into the centre of the vehicle when the slide-out is retracted.

As is usual with van-conversion motorhomes, external storage is at a premium, but better than most. There are two lockers built into the forward section of the slide-out, the front one for storage (it would be the place for hoses, power leads and tools), while the other contains a pair of four kilogram gas cylinders, although twin nine kg cylinders are optional. On the kerb side a single storage locker houses the optional sine wave generator, which on production vehicles will be externally vented to allow for operation with its door closed.

### Inside Story

**B**ecause the slide-out is so deep, when retracted there's not a lot of room inside. Having said that, you can still (just) move from the cab into the kitchen and bedroom area, although if you want to get to the bathroom you need to extend the slide-out. The lack of bathroom access isn't unique to this vehicle and in this instance is a small price to pay. Also, you can't use the bed until the slide-out is extended because the bottom half of it automatically folds up against the wardrobe as the slide-out is brought back in.

When extended, the slide-out transforms this vehicle and it feels like a 'proper' motorhome – and a decent sized one at that. It's quite a revelation (revolution?). I'll go so far as to say this is the first van conversion that made me think I could live in it long-term.



**Top to bottom:** When travelling, the bed automatically lifts as the slide-out is retracted. It blocks bathroom access, but the toilet is covered by the vanity anyway, so it's not really an issue. However, the kitchen can be accessed and it's a great size.



## 40 | Tested

Upfront, the cab seats swivel to become your dining and after-hours seating. Individual, pole-mounted tables are provided for each seat and the passenger's table can be left in place when driving as there's still just enough room to squeeze past it to get to the kitchen. The kitchen itself is well equipped and has a very deep benchtop, courtesy of the depth of the slide-out unit. All cabinet doors and drawers lock automatically when you drive off and there is plenty of storage; indeed the size of this kitchen puts many larger motorhomes to shame

The east-west bed is a double and it comes with a small table on each side, but if you want more sleeping room you can lose one of them and choose the optional queen size bed, which would be my choice. The same actuators that lift the bottom half of the bed as the slide-out comes in can also be used to lift it when fully extended, to access storage space below. This is really the only bulky-item storage space suitable for outdoor chairs, table and the like.

Opposite the bed is a good size mirrored wardrobe unit with a very sturdy, swivel TV mount on top that allows easy viewing from the bed or cab seats. Forward of the wardrobe and protruding partially across the side door opening (opposite the kitchen) is slightly curious bench seat; the base of which swivels up to become a small desk! You'd need a stool or chair to use it, but it's a novel solution to providing extra workspace.

Across the back, the bathroom has the shower in the kerb-side rear corner, cassette toilet in the middle and vanity on the drivers side. There's a mirrored sliding door to provide privacy which, cleverly, automatically locks in the open position when travelling. The shower cubicle is generous and there's good room between it and the vanity for drying off and getting dressed. In production vehicles the bathroom will have a full back wall with a small



**Top to bottom:** A small inwards-facing lounge sits inside the side door and is interesting, but the base sits as a slight awkward angle. However, it swings up to become a handy work station (you just need a stool or small chair). The kitchen is huge by van standards and has plenty of storage. Drawers lock when travelling, for added safety.

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There's a ham in every shower.



## 42 | Tested

amount of storage shelving on the outside, accessed through the barn doors.

### Standard Features

The difficulty writing about complex motorhomes is getting all the details in and doing it justice. The Zenith certainly falls into this category and its standard equipment list is impressive. Highlights include, but aren't limited to:

- 120 Ah lithium house battery
- 2 x 100 W solar panels
- 140 L fresh water (59 L grey water)
- Reverse cycle air conditioning
- Instant hot water system
- Electric entry step with LED light
- 24 inch LED smart TV with Wi-Fi, Bluetooth built-in DVD
- RV-specific Wi-Fi with 4G modem
- 6 x double and one single USB charging ports
- 2 x thermostatic, variable speed and multi direction roof hatches
- Filtered drinking water
- 1 x set of steak knives (well, room for them at least)!

### What I Think

We had just a few hours to go over Revolution Motorhomes' new Zenith and it certainly impressed. So much so we're trying to organise few days to take it away once properly finished – this was the working prototype – to see just how liveable it really is.

As anyone experienced in motorhomes can tell you, there is no such thing as perfection.



**Top to bottom:** The compartment for the optional generator will be ventilated to allow closed-door operation; Roof-top aircon can be swapped for a diesel heater and the generator for off-grid travellers; Electric entry step has an LED strip light built in above. Nice...



Everything is a compromise and personal preferences rule, but the Zenith raises the bar for innovation and features in this market segment and both Mrs iM and I can't wait to properly try it out, so watch for our report.

Price is projected to be around the \$182,000 mark on the road for the full production version, which includes 4Motion all-wheel drive and the upgraded GVM. Meanwhile, Revolution is offering to pay the GST on the first two orders, so if interested you need to get in quick.

Make no mistake, this is a groundbreaking vehicle and it should have great appeal. Revolution is living up to its name and Zenith seems apt, although doubtless the company will continue to push the boundaries. Watch this space...



The bathroom is difficult to photograph but runs full width across the back and is generously proportioned. Shower size is good, hot water is instant (continuous) and there's even the option of a small washing machine!



## SPECS

GENERAL	
Make	Revolution
Model	Zenith
Type	Van conversion
Berths	2
Approved Seating	2
Licence	Car
VEHICLE	
Make/Model	VW Crafter 35 LWB FWD (Crafter 35 4Motion AWD std on production)
Engine	2.0 litre 4-cylinder twin-turbo diesel
Power	130 kW @ 3600rpm
Torque	410 Nm @ 2000 rpm
Gearbox	8-speed automatic
Safety	6 Airbags and a full suite of electronic safety aids
Fuel	75 L
WEIGHTS	
Tare Weight	3226 kg with fuel, fresh water and 2 passengers
Gross Vehicle Mass	3550 kg on test vehicle
Max Payload	324 kg on test vehicle
Braked Towing Capacity	2500 kg
DIMENSIONS	
Overall Length	6.84 m (22' 5")
Overall Width	2.43 m (8' 0")
Overall Height with a/c	2.79 m (9' 2")
Internal Height	1.95 m (6' 5")
Main Bed	1.88 m x 1.38 m (6' 2" x 4' 6") Est. Queen optional.

2018 VW Crafter LWB High Roof Van



Interior Mockups Provided. Photo ©2019/2018  
 External Equipment Design ©2018/17/16

## SPECS

EQUIPMENT	
Slide-Out	Yes (3.9 m)
Awning	Dometic PerfectRoof 3.75 m
Entry Steps	Electric with automatic LED light
Cooker	3-burner Dometic stainless steel sink combi
Rangehood	Dometic
Sink	Stainless steel
Fridge	140 L Dometic CoolMatic 12 V compressor
Microwave	25 L LG
Lighting	12 V LED
12 V Sockets/USB Outlets	6 double and 1 single USB
Air Conditioner	Dometic Air Command w reverse cycle
Space Heater	Opt
Hot Water System	Instant LPG
Toilet	Cassette - swivel
Shower	Separate cubicle
CAPACITIES	
Batteries	1 x 120 Ah Lithium
Solar	2 x 100 Ah
LPG	2 x 4.0 kg (2 x 9 kg opt)
Fresh Water	140 L
Grey Water	59 L
Hot Water	Continuous
Toilet	19 L
PRICE ON ROAD QLD	
From (2019 Crafter 35 4Motion LWB)	A\$182,270
iMotorhome reader offer - First 2 orders only	A\$165,700
Warranty - VW	3 yrs/unlimited km
Warranty - Conversion	3 yrs/100,000 km
Warranty - Appliances	As per manufacturer

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## PROS...

- New VW Crafter
- Standard all-wheel drive
- Standard 8-speed auto
- Long warranty
- Space efficiency
- Standard equipment
- Large kitchen
- Large bathroom
- Total storage space
- Value

## CONS...

- New manufacturer
- Individual tables not 'cosy'
- No 'driving' bathroom access
- No 'driving' bed use

## CONTACT

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### Zenith Update:

We strive to bring you correct information, but are at the mercy of details supplied by manufacturers and vehicle suppliers. Between previewing the prototype and going to press, specifications and information relating to the Revolution Zenith have changed/been updated as follows:

1. Production Zeniths will be on the 2019 Crafter 35 LWB with 4Motion, which has a GVM of 3550 kg (not 4495 kg).
2. A rear-wheel drive Crafter with 4495 kg is optionally available at additional cost.
3. Zenith says the tare and payload weights quoted for the prototype already incorporate the 127 kg weight increase of the production 4Motion Crafter.
4. Buyers looking for off-grid living can opt to swap the rooftop aircon for a diesel heater and sine-wave generator at no cost.
5. Note: Revolution says the Crafter's warranty is 3 yrs/Unlimited km, although Volkswagens' website says 5 years/Unlimited km on 2019 models.



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