

A CHEAP TWO BERTH? IMPOSSIBLE! - SO I DID IT MYSELF

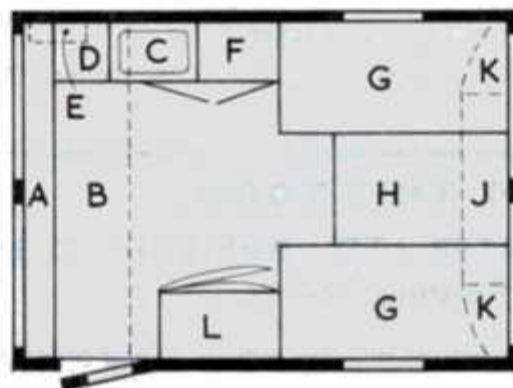
An article by Eric Haslam May 1964

Why is it that when manufacturers design a two-berth caravan, nine out of every ten of them seem to imagine their potential customers are middle-aged millionaires, who will tolerate nothing more spartan than central heating, tapestried mattresses, rich veneer and acres of deep-pile carpet? Have they never heard of the vast market of lower middle-class couples who either have no family or whose family has grown up and left them? Believe me, one needs a great deal of audacity to go along to a caravan depot and ask to see a cheap lightweight two-berth.

Well, I wanted a cheap lightweight two-berth, with a toilet and acres of deep pile carpet, and which could be towed by a very small car. In fact, it positively had to be no heavier than 9 cwt. And, of course, it didn't take me long to discover that there was then no such article made; for the life of me I could not understand why. So, undaunted, I decided I would make one for myself, although not being one of those jacks of all trades who can build a caravan from a few sheets of aluminium and plywood, I had to content myself by modifying a pro-prietary van.

The van I chose was an 8ft. 6in. Eccles Nipper, weighing 8½ cwt., and now long out of production, although second-hand ones can be found. It is a three-berth, comprising a 4ft. double dinette at the rear and a folding single at the front. It is superbly made for the price, with a finish, both inside and out, which encourages an amateur like me to try to maintain a high standard of workmanship. So, having obtained my van. I set to work designing my ideal lightweight two-berth.

LAYOUT OF THE ECCLES NIPPER BEFORE CONVERSION



A Foldaway bunk extending to B
C Sink
D Foldover drainer lid
E Crockery rack
F Hotplate

G Dinette double bed
H Hook-on table
J Roof locker, shoe locker at floor level
K Roof shelf
L Wardrobe, cupboard over

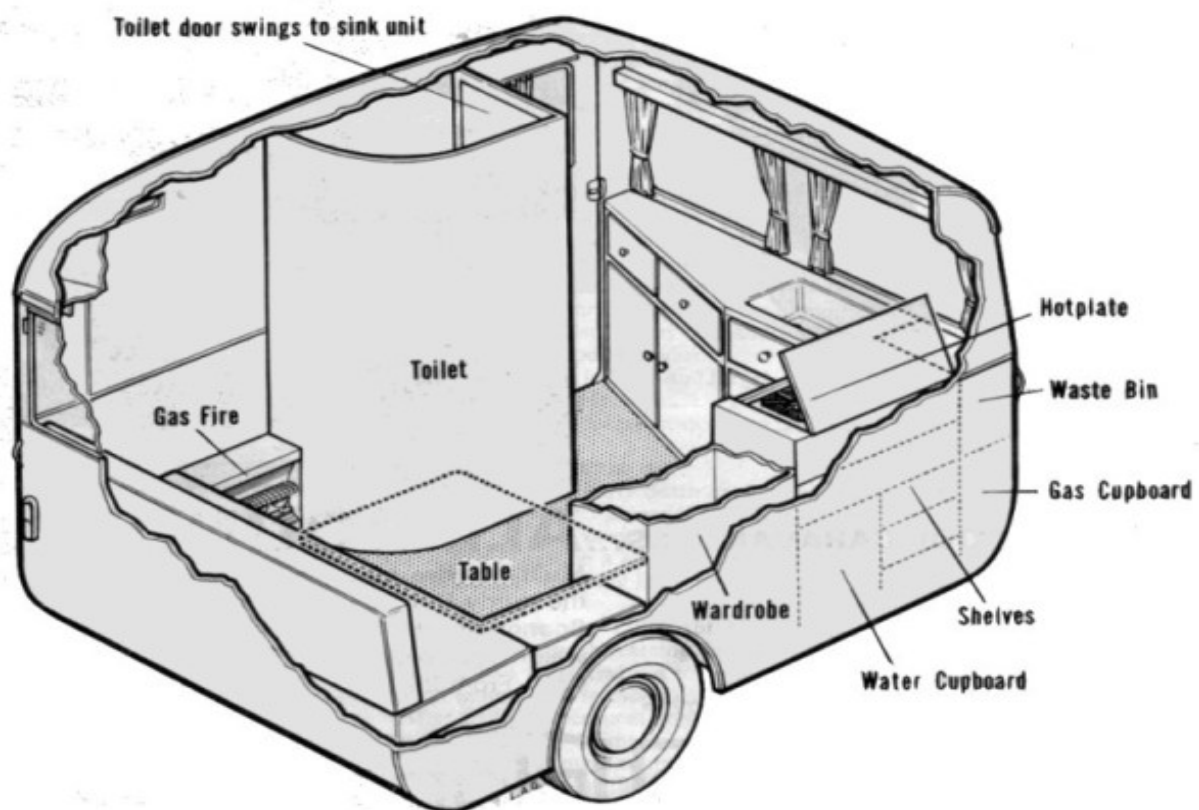
I have never been keen on the double bed dinette. It seems to have been designed solely for people who enjoy spending their time eating, playing cards and writing letters, and wallowing amid piles of bedclothes and mattresses at bed making time. I like to lounge on a deep, wide and nicely raked settee and stretch out my legs without creating two pairs of bruised ankles, and eventually get into a bed which I have prepared without too much loss of dignity and temper. So out went the dinette, and in its place I put my settee with its raked seat and raked backrest. I thoroughly enjoyed myself cutting up two of the 4ft. foam mattresses into twin 3ft. lengths with a pair garden shears; these and the spare 6ft. mattress made up my settee, and I still had two 4ft. pieces left over for cushions and bolsters. And believe it or not, bed making is now almost effortless. A refinement I really ought to incorporate is a mattress cover which encloses the readymade bed, such as the Dressaway bed which Fairholme once used, and perhaps one day I will do so.

From the illustration it will be seen that I have now the luxury of an end kitchen with 5 sq. ft. of Formica working space (8 with the hotplate cover down). There is ample storage space in the sliding door cupboards beneath. For me to

say my toilet compartment is a masterpiece of practical research and precision design makes it sound like a surgical instrument and a darned uncomfortable one too; but it can be seen that although it takes up very little floor space, it is very roomy when opened up for use, and unless one is too modest to leave open the venetian blind, very well situated for a superb view of the countryside.

To avoid the built-up appearance of two ceiling-high units in a small space, I cut down the wardrobe to 4ft. 6in. by taking away the top cupboard which Eccles provided. I did, incidentally, find it necessary to move the wardrobe to the offside so that my toilet could take in the porch. The resulting wardrobe is an attractive piece of furniture which, topped by a wall mirror, does very well as a dressing table. The bowed door of the cupboard unit was used to front one of the wheel arches and, after vainly trying to buy a suitable gas fire, I built one myself in front of the other arch. This fire was made very simply (it had to be if I was doing it!) for about 15s. by inserting three fantail gas burners in a perforated steel tube which was sealed at one end, and fixing over the top, Emmett-wise, one of those grills that make the flame glow a seductive, cosy red. But I must issue a word of warning here, three fantails on full blast will shrivel two human beings to a couple of barbecued chickens in five minutes.

Well, there it is. And believe it or not once again, the van still tows as steady as a rock, sorry, like a bird at fifty. Now I have my (almost) ideal two-berth caravan, with every mod. con. and (almost) enough room to swing a cat round. With the generous double windows at each end and the splendid little louvre windows near the roof which Eccles so wisely provided in their 1959-61 vans, there is a phenom-enal sensation of light and airiness. Believe me, with my 4 by 5ft. luxurious deep pile fitted carpet, my lush lazy settee, my ox-roasting fire, my Ideal Homes kitchen and my superb, so handy toilet room, I can even kid myself that I am a middle-aged millionaire, or even just a millionaire!



It is remarkable that, with all the different tourers on the market, some requirements remain unsatisfied. This is particularly so in two-berths, a field neglected by the trade except in luxury models. Eric Haslam found this problem and tells how he solved it. The model he used as a basis has been out of production for some time, although a few second-hand versions can be found. Although few are likely to want to copy Mr. Haslam's ideas slavishly, his approach is likely to inspire attempts using different lightweights as a basis for conversion.

By Eric Haslam first published in the May 1964 edition of *The Caravan*

Reproduced by Graham P Thompson

Copyright © 2010 www.thomson-caravans.co.uk