Why I . . . own a vintage campervan

GP Paul Reynolds talks to Kathy Oxtoby about the sense of freedom he gets from life on the road

Kathy Oxtoby

As the storm raged on, the military tanks rolled by, and the shells continued to fire past him, GP Paul Reynolds reflected that this was not the relaxing getaway he’d hoped for.

But by then he had learnt that life on the road with Clementine meant expecting the unexpected.

Clementine the campervan—so-called because she’s bright orange—is a constant source of adventure for Reynolds, a GP partner at Elthorne Park Surgery, in west London. This escapade two years ago was at a remote campsite in Pembrokeshire, Wales, situated next to an army training camp.

“I arrived at the campsite in beautiful weather. But that night a huge storm blew in. Then the army training camp decided, as the weather was so terrible, that they would carry out tank manoeuvres and began firing shells. And there I was in my little campervan, trying to get through the night,” says Reynolds.

Aside from the occasional disaster, he loves life on the road—“I enjoy the sense of freedom it gives.” Since purchasing Clementine in 2011, he has spent many memorable days driving the length and breadth of the UK, “from the Lake District to Cornwall.” He makes local trips every two weeks, and longer journeys three times a year, with places along the “beautiful Welsh coastline,” among his favourite destinations.

One of his most enjoyable journeys was this June. “My experience of campervan holidays depends largely on the quality of the campsite and the weather. Recently, I was at a tiny campsite on an organic farm. The owners were fantastic. The weather was amazing. Everything came together.”

Reynold’s love of camping began as a boy scout. “When I’d go camping in a tent I was always jealous of people who turned up at campsites in beautiful campervans. I thought, ‘One day I’d like to own one’.”

His first step towards realising this ambition was to hire a campervan and take a two week trip around the Scottish Highlands in 2010. “One blustery day, while driving along an exposed remote road, the wind nearly blew the roof off the campervan. I had to hold on to it until I was able to flag down a local driver who helped me. It was terrifying, but it didn’t put me off buying one,” he says.

He didn’t have to travel far to find his dream purchase. “Five minutes from my home is a garage whose owner restores and sells campervans. In 2011, I spotted an orange and cream 1970s campervan that had spent its life in California, with one previous owner. It had come to the UK, presumably for scrap. But it was well maintained and restored, so I took the plunge and bought Clementine.”

How to make a change

• Buy the best quality campervan you can afford. A cheap purchase is likely to break down frequently and need lots of repairs
• Be prepared to maintain your campervan
• Make friends with your breakdown insurance cover contact because you’re likely to need them
• Enjoy being part of the campervan community. Campervan owners are always really friendly