



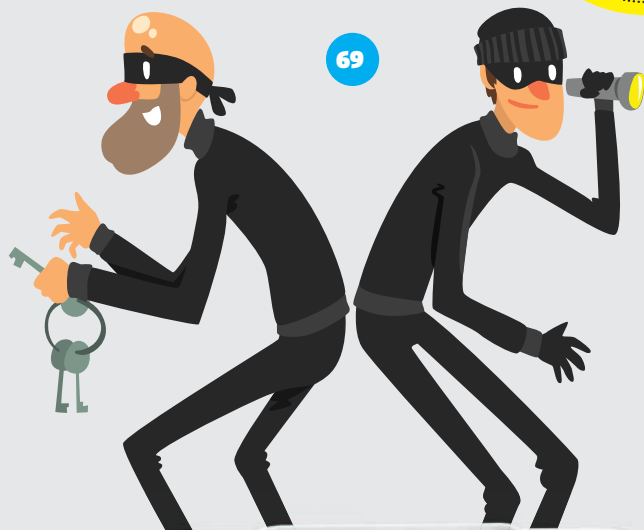
YOUR GUIDE TO

MOTORHOME SECURITY

Keep your vehicle safe, on the road or pitched up



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advice

KEEPING YOUR 'VAN SECURE

Follow Peter Rosenthal's tips for outfoxing the thieves and you can rest assured that your vehicle will be as safe as possible

As you probably already know, professional motorhome thieves are no fools.

Their set-up starts with spotters, who are paid to find a specific vehicle (most 'vans are stolen to order). Once found, they follow it home to see whether the keys might be easy to steal, or they'll pass on the details to the gang. A duplicate key is made, the vehicle is taken and trackers and alarms are disabled. Then it's into a shipping container and onto a boat, or being taken off to be chopped up for parts.

Only one thing can fully protect you against these determined criminals – insurance. Make sure you have excellent cover and follow your provider's advice to the letter – for example, if they require a tracking device, fit one that they officially approve.

That said, there are still plenty of steps you can take to make your motorhome less attractive to thieves, including locks, alarms, trackers and more.

Keys and keyless entry

Professional thieves just love people who leave vehicle keys near their front door, because it saves them the bother of having to make duplicate keys or break into the house. If your key is visible from a letterbox, cat flap or window, you're an easy target.

Armed with a telescopic rod or a hooked stick, they can easily grab your keys. Hide them from view, preferably in a key safe.



Carjacking and violent theft involving keys are rare in the UK, but always be on your guard when returning to your parked vehicle, and lock the doors as soon as you get in.

According to Tracker, around 92% of the vehicles they recovered in 2019 had keyless entry. This is the system most vulnerable to theft; the problem is that keyless entry fobs broadcast a signal, which can be grabbed electronically by thieves.

Most manufacturers have now changed how their keyless entry works, but for older systems, the fobs are vulnerable. So what can you do?

One option is a Faraday pouch, designed to stop the signal being broadcast. Some people simply leave their fob in the fridge! Or you could use a tin (1). Keeping it hidden and far away from your vehicle is essential.

Selling your vehicle

Most people will trade in their motorhome to a dealer (2), but if you are selling privately, you need to be aware of a few things.

First, never give the potential buyer your key and never let it out of your sight. This obviously prevents buyers getting into the vehicle and driving away, but that isn't the problem we're dealing with here.

There have been a number of cases, usually involving two thieves, where one 'buyer' will keep you talking and



distracted while the other 'buyer' clones your key. They then make their excuses and return at their leisure to steal your vehicle. Never give buyers your keys or reveal anything about your security systems until you have cash in your hand or cleared funds in your account.

Preventing theft from your 'van

Having things stolen from your motorhome is horrible: they're breaking into your home.

To help prevent this, it's worth taking stock of how you leave it.

Do this before you start →



spending any money on security devices. For example, you'll often see motorhomes parked up with phones on the dashboard, laptops in the rear and bags on show.

This is asking for trouble. Even if you're just filling up at the petrol station, don't leave anything obvious on show and lock the 'van while you pay.

Ideally, you want to hide all valuables (3) and make the vehicle look as uninviting as possible. Packing as much kit as you can into lockers is best. If that isn't feasible,



cover up your valuables with a blanket or throw, or simply pull down the blinds.

Try to think like the thieves: walk around your vehicle and peer in. If you can see any high-value items from a window, they are vulnerable. Anything that can be carried and hidden away – laptop, phone, wallet, purse, passport, watch, jewellery and so on – should never be left on show.

Stopping the opportunists

Although it's extremely difficult to stop professional thieves, you can deter them, and add some devices that can help halt the opportunists in their tracks.

Generally speaking, coachbuilts are less secure than panel van conversions: they tend to have more habitation windows and non-steel doors. So they benefit most from adding locks to windows (4) and doors.

Given the choice of a cab or a habitation door, thieves will always choose the latter



because they rarely have double locks and they are usually fitted to aluminium frames, with plastic catches.

Firms such as Milenco sell additional locks for habitation doors; these are easily fitted and help beef up known weak points.

You can also have extra security locks added to the doors of most campervans, and these are essential. Firms such as Vanguard sell anti-pick reinforced door-locking systems, as well as deadlocks for every door. In addition, you can get reinforced security plates that attach to places on the bodywork that are prone to screwdriver attack.

Thatcham-approved devices

In the late eighties and early nineties, vehicle crime had reached epidemic levels. Clearly, something had to be done.

Two things happened: manufacturers started to improve security systems with standard-fit alarms and immobilisers, and Thatcham Research (www.thatcham.org) was set up. This is the body that oversees the testing of security devices, funded by the insurance industry.

Alarms and trackers are the devices most requested by insurers, but if your vehicle doesn't already have a Thatcham-approved system, it might not be worth fitting a £500 set-up just to save £50 on your premium.

It depends on your insurer – some will insist on a certain level of kit being fitted, especially with 'vans valued at more than £50,000. Thatcham-approved security devices are classified into several groups:

- **Category 1** Combined alarm/immobiliser
- **Category 2** Electronic immobiliser
- **Category 2/1** Alarm upgrade (that is, adding an alarm to a Category 2 system)
- **Category 3** Mechanical immobilisation (steering wheel, pedal and gear lever devices)
- **Category 4** Wheel locking devices
- **Category 5S** Trackers and recovery systems
- **Category 5T** Stolen vehicle location
- **Q Class systems** These are non-categorised systems, including aftermarket alarms, immobilisers and data signalling systems not meeting Thatcham approval criteria

Approval is indicated by Thatcham Security Certification, which does mean Thatcham has tested the products, but does not mean your insurance provider will automatically recognise them and offer you a discount on your policy.

Device suppliers have to negotiate directly with the insurers, so always check with your provider before you buy any additional security devices.

‘Thatcham Security Certification means it has tested the products, but doesn't mean your insurer will automatically recognise them and offer you a discount’

Alarms and immobilisers

Most 'vans have a factory-fitted immobiliser that is extremely difficult to get around without the code from the key. These are integrated into the ECU and wiring loom, so the days of hot-wiring by cracking the ignition barrel are long gone.

However, professional thieves can copy keys, so it is worth adding another alarm or immobiliser, often referred to as a ghost, because they won't know it's there. These can be programmed, so they won't unlock the ignition without a sequence of button presses on the steering wheel, or via a code pad, additional key fob or card.

The downside to any alarm system is that it's only for your attention. If you're out of earshot, or not near your phone to receive an alert, it's unlikely that passers-by are going to do anything to help.

Understandably, nobody would be keen to risk contact with criminals to protect somebody else's property from harm. Alarm manufacturers know this, and many specialise in making their systems as unpleasant as possible for the thieves.

If you do want to have an additional alarm installed in your vehicle, make sure that it is fitted by a motorhome specialist, because they are far more aware of how 'van thieves actually operate. VanBitz, for example, offers its Thatcham-approved Growler, which features hidden wiring and multiple alarm placements that will emit such an ear-piercing racket, no thief could bear to stick around them for long. This can also be paired up with its app-controlled Non-Starter immobilisation system.



5



Tracking devices

Trackers use a combination of satellite GPS and the mobile phone network to transmit data (5). Their key benefit is to alert the owner or control centre of vehicle movement very rapidly, so immediate action can be taken. It's this speed of response that is essential for fast recovery of the vehicle.

The most basic type of tracker is a black box that can be connected to a 12V battery via two leads. Some are made to look like USBs and can be plugged into a 12V socket, while others are disguised as relays or other automotive accessories.

More sophisticated systems tend to use small black boxes buried somewhere in your vehicle and hardwired in place – these can be positioned in multiple locations and have several aerials.

Thatcham rates trackers as S5 or S7 models. An S7 tracker must use GPS and is deemed an asset recovery system by insurance providers.

An S5 adds a driver ID tag (Automatic Driver Recognition or ADR) and might also include an immobilisation system, often referred to as S5 plus. S5 and S7 systems monitor your vehicle via a control centre 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Some manufacturers suggest you'll get 10–25% discount on your premium by fitting an approved tracker. In practice, if your 'van is over a certain value – typically ranging from £50,000 to £60,000 – many insurers will simply not quote unless you have a

tracker fitted. Insurance-approved trackers usually cost in excess of £400, with annual subscription fees often topping £150.

You can buy non-approved trackers for less, but bear in mind that the police might not want to be involved in recovering a 'van with an unapproved tracker if its location system isn't pinpoint accurate.

However, they can be useful for remote monitoring – I use a £40 Rewire Security DB2 tracker in my car (with £60 annual subscription), and I find its app a bit more intuitive than the Thatcham-approved unit that has been fitted to my campervan.

If you store your vehicle remotely, then a tracker is a must – it will not only alert you to vehicle movement or the ignition being activated, but will also tell you the battery voltage, so you can take appropriate action if the battery is going flat.

Some thieves will steal a 'van and park it in a quiet spot with the battery disconnected. Their aim is for the battery-powered tracker to go flat and stop sending signals. So if you ever see a motorhome parked up in an odd place, with damage to the locks, windows or steering wheel, report it to the police.

Steering wheel locks

If you have one of those bar-style steering wheel locks with hooked ends, you might want to consider upgrading it. Thieves seem to be able to remove certain examples fairly quickly, and they can assist in breaking the steering lock by providing extra leverage.



Bear in mind that any device attached to the rim is only as strong as the rim itself. The best locks will cover the whole steering wheel, so are harder to remove. They also help to prevent airbag theft (another favourite part for thieves).

You should look for a lock that's tested and approved to Thatcham Category 3. They also have a good deterrent value. Disklok is one of the more popular brands (6), together with Autolok. ➔



CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE

Wheel clamps

Another good visual deterrent is a wheel clamp. These are available in all shapes and sizes, with the best ones being Sold Secure Gold rated and police recommended.

Companies such as Autolok, Bulldog and Milenco offer an excellent range. As well as Sold Secure Gold rating, look for wheel clamps that are easy to use.

Security posts

Security posts are worth considering, but their value really depends on their location. For example, a post will have little effect in front of a 'van if the rear is only protected by a flimsy fence. Thieves don't care what they destroy to remove a vehicle.

Equally, security posts will need to be professionally fitted securely in the ground – this can involve costly groundworks, and not everybody is going to enjoy the aesthetic of a luminous yellow metal structure poking out of their carefully designed drive.

Bear in mind, too, that security posts rely on you always remembering to remove them before setting off, and not reversing into them on your driveway!

Pedal locks

An effective method for preventing vehicle theft is to use a pedal lock system. These stop all three pedals (two pedals in an auto) being operated, and because they are buried in the footwell, they are also very difficult to remove. In addition, chopping the pedals off makes life hard for the criminal.

Their downside is that they rely on their warning labels to act as a deterrent.

Again, you should ideally buy models that are approved to Thatcham Category 3.

Devices with umbrella-style handles that hook around the steering wheel and pedals are likely to be less secure, because cutting the wheel rim could render them useless.

7



Locking wheel bolts

If your motorhome doesn't have locking wheel bolts, fit a Thatcham-approved set. Don't leave the key with the factory toolkit – everyone does that and thieves know it!

Some people add an extra locking wheel bolt, but this isn't really necessary, as they only offer limited protection and locking wheel nut defeat kits are widely available.

Alloys are less of a target these days, largely because most vehicles have them and prices have tumbled. Scrap prices are typically £5–£10 per wheel, so they're not such a high-value item for the work involved in removing them. They're also bulky for the thieves to carry away and store, so most will target something smaller and easier to sell.

Catalytic converter theft

One item that is a particular target for 'van thieves is the catalytic converter (7). These are fitted to both petrol and diesel models. So what can you do to prevent them from being removed by criminals?

Several firms produce protection devices, generally consisting of steel rope and clamps bolted around the unit. They help, but can be

'One item that is a particular target for thieves is the catalytic converter, and these are fitted to both petrol and diesel models'



expensive, reduce your payload, and add labour costs to your servicing bills should a section of exhaust or an oxygen sensor need to be renewed.

Another idea is applying some engraving or anti-thief paint to the catalytic converter. This presupposes that scrapyards will refuse to take them, but most of the gangs stealing cats will have links to scrap dealers who really won't care. And even if they do, no engraving or paint can withstand a grinder.

Your best defence is probably to park your 'van off the street, box it in with other vehicles, a wall or a fence, consider using CCTV, set your vehicle alarm, and most crucial of all, check that your insurance covers catalytic converters.

Like alloy wheel theft, catalytic converter theft is closely linked with current scrap metal prices. Precious metals are always going to be high value, so cats are much more of a target than alloys.

Useful contacts

- **Autolok** autolok.co.uk
- **Autowatch** autowatch.co.uk
- **Back2You** back2you.com
- **CanTrack** cantrack.com
- **Disklok** disklokuk.co.uk
- **HAL Locate** hal-locate.co.uk
- **Meta Trak** metatrak.co.uk
- **Milenco** milenco.com
- **Phantom** phantom.uk.net
- **Rewire Security** rewiresecurity.co.uk
- **ScorpionTrack** scorpiontrack.com
- **SmarTrack** smartrack.uk.net
- **Tracker** tracker.co.uk
- **Trackstar** trackstar.co.uk
- **VanBitz** vanbitz.com
- **Vanguard** vanguard-conversions.co.uk

how to...

FIT A SAFE

Installing a small safe in your motorhome is a sensible precaution and here, Tony Brown shows you how easily it can be done

Do you sometimes wonder where to put passports, credit cards and cash when you decide to visit the campsite pool to enjoy a swim or a few hours of sunbathing?

Take your valuables along with you and you risk some opportunist stealing your bag, but leave them behind and equally, you risk losing them in a burglary.

Motorcaravanners who enjoy wild camping will also have read of break-ins during the night, when wallets and bags have been stolen while the owners are asleep.

I must admit that I used to think there was little point providing a secure place inside a vehicle, because it seemed relatively easy to steal the motorhome itself, but the advent of much better security devices, such as wheel locks, immobilisers and tracking systems, has changed my mind – I now think it has become a sensible precaution.

Choosing your safe

I am not going to prescribe where to install a safe – every motorhome and every owner is different, and you will want to find your own preferred place – but I will run through aspects to consider before you buy one.

Starting with the basics, it would be pretty pointless to choose something of a cash box standard, which could be opened by anyone using items from your cutlery drawer. So it's best to begin by searching online to find the smallest, lightest domestic safe fitted with a reasonably robust lock.



ABOVE Fitting the safe in an overhead locker would be convenient, but difficult to hide and fix to something secure **RIGHT** Extension bolts can be fitted under the floor and bolted inside the safe to prevent its easy removal



Tony's six-litre, key-locking Cathedral safe is strong, lightweight and compact

Digital safes avoid the need for a key, but have sometimes been criticised for having poor-quality override locks. The highest quality is not necessary, though, because in the unlikely event that you are faced with a very determined thief armed with an angle grinder, nothing will be secure.

My choice was a Cathedral key-locking safe from Ryman, costing just £27.99. Weighing in at under 3kg, it is strong and light (so won't eat up too much payload). Measuring only 150 x 200 x 200mm, it is

also small enough to be hidden away quite easily and securely in the motorhome.

There is little doubt that skill in finding a well-hidden location for your safe is your best protection. It might take a long time, sitting in your vehicle thinking about it and searching around, before you find a place.

You might need to consider removing some trim to fit the safe, then adding extra trim to conceal it afterwards.

Find a secure fixing

Although not always compatible with a good hiding place, it is also vital to find something secure to anchor your safe to.

The floor offers the most secure fixing, with through bolts and a plate below, but some lengths of hidden steel studding or good-quality bicycle cable, fastened under the floor and fixed in the safe, will provide flexibility in placing it near, not on, the floor.

Accessibility

The best hidden, most securely fixed safe is no use if you can't get to it. Installation is a compromise between a well-hidden place offering secure fixing, and somewhere that's going to be straightforward to access.



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protection

DETECTING THIEVES

Gentleman Jack discusses why keeping your motorhome secure is important, and how he upgraded the defences on his Bailey Advance



After changing motorhomes, we always make it a priority to take our new vehicle to a reliable fitter of motorcaravan security systems, so that we can have 'it', 'us' and 'ours' properly protected.

Motorhomes are worth a lot of dosh in their own right – although actually, ours is worth far more to us than it would be to some earwig of a thief, because it's absolutely integral to our lifestyle.

Transport, adventures, exploring, walking, foreign holidays, family weekends away, even romantic meals for two watching the sun go down on a jaw-droppingly beautiful view – our motorcaravan is essential for most of our leisure activities, so to have it stolen would be life-changing.

Personal experience has shown us the impact this can have. Some 33 years ago, someone broke into our coachbuilt 'van,

and it was painfully obvious to us that the 'car alarm' fitted needed replacing with something designed and purpose-built to protect our motorcaravan and accessories, such as bikes on a rack.

Special protection

Back then, only one firm had alarms made to their own specification, and were keen motorcaravanners themselves – meaning that they understood the requirements differed from those of car owners. They were also approved by insurers.

I reckon that company has stayed ahead of the game ever since then, which is why for well over three decades, I've remained a Van Bitz customer.

Our Bailey Advance has been fitted with a Growler system, which uses the same basic Strikeback alarm as we've had before, but

includes some useful extra accessories and features. The Growler's key advantages are:

- Three (yes, three) exterior sirens, which can create a wall of sound
- Two (switchable) internal sirens



One of the pair of discreet, two-button radio keys that is included in the Growler

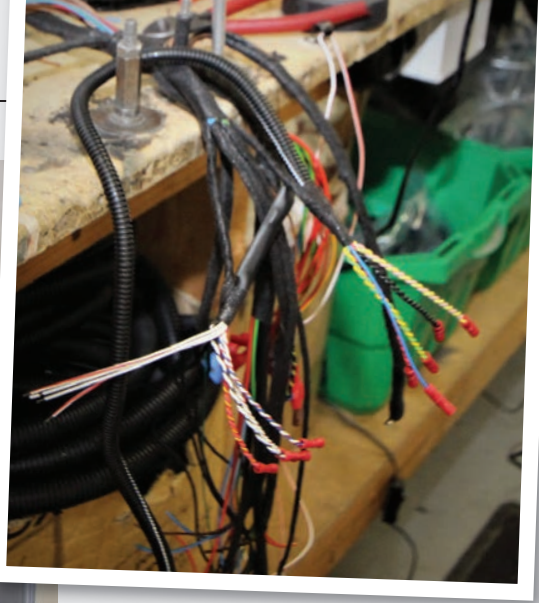


The Van Bitz premises are well-equipped and can accommodate the largest RV or Euro-Liner. It's important to make sure that you choose a manufacturer/fitter with a good reputation – the cheapest definitely isn't always the best

- Blue LED variable-intensity warning lights at both front and rear, and next to the entrance door
- Bonnet protected by a tilt switch, rather than a pin switch
- Interior protected by high-frequency sensor. Better coverage and more reliable than PIR detectors, plus air conditioning or blown-air heating won't trigger the alarm
- Diagnostic facility for alarm triggers
- Perimeter-only protection can also be selected, so Fido or Top Cat can pad around inside when their owners are out and about and the motorhome is alarmed
- Bikes, genny and so on are protected by an accessory loop
- Panic button on key fob triggers the alarm, whether it is 'armed' or not
- Approved by Thatcham and all leading motorcaravan insurers. Some providers give a discount on the premium
- Hard-wired gas detector is standard. I'm more concerned about LPG leaks than (supposed) narcotic gas attacks, but to have something that detects both can't be a bad thing, in my opinion
- High-quality multilingual warning stickers are provided
- Two anti-grab and anti-scan radio keys are supplied as standard
- System is upgradeable to include Europe-wide GPS tracking
- Lifetime warranty



Fitting these four auxiliary control switches so neatly required some serious dismantling and reassembly. (L to R) Blue LED: brightness of LEDs; red LED: Devil's Wail; green LED: LPG alarm; no LED: accessory loop (bike rack)



Key to its enviable record of customer satisfaction is the preparation Van Bitz puts in before a single screw is undone. Here, a bespoke wiring loom is being constructed for Jack's Bailey Advance



Visual deterrents work! Growler has three high-intensity blue LEDs. This one is in bright sun; red LED on a nearby 'van wasn't visible

Jack's hacks

- Always remember, even the best alarm in the world will not prevent the theft of a vehicle or its contents if you don't set it!
- People who are after stealing your 'van might attempt to take your keys, rather than try to break in and bypass the vehicle immobiliser and steering lock. Keep those keys safely out of sight at all times.
- Visual deterrents do work – on three occasions, people looking for stuff to steal from our 'van have been put off by the LEDs and stickers, and moved on to try their luck at our site neighbours' 'vans, which weren't so well protected.
- If you have an older panel van conversion, you might want to put in an isolator switch for the central locking on the side sliding door. Then you can lock the other doors, but leave that one unlocked when you are sitting beside it.
- If you think the cost of a security system is high, consider that the basic Strikeback alarm equates to five tanks of Derv.



The hardwired gas detector is just part of the Growler package's comprehensive armoury of protection for your motorhome

Of course, there are plenty of other great alternatives to both manufacturer and alarm systems to choose from – but remember, you want the best value, not the cheapest.

You can also download some helpful free booklets from the Van Bitz website, to guide you through the maze of security products that are currently available.

Van Bitz

Cornish Farm, Shoreditch,
Taunton, Somerset TA3 7BS
Tel 01823 321 992/01823 353 235
www.vanbitz.com

- Strikeback alarm: from £599 fitted
- Growler security package, including Strikeback: from £999 fitted
- One night's camping on Cornish Farm's full-facility campsite (adjacent to Van Bitz) is included in the price

storage

STORING YOUR MOTORHOME SECURELY

When you're not touring, peace of mind means knowing your 'van is safely stored. Here, John Sootheran outlines the options and essential questions to consider

Motorhome owners are in a constant battle to outwit thieves who want to steal their 'van. Here are some tactics to turn the odds in your favour and keep your treasure as safe as houses, whether you're planning to store it at a dedicated site, or on your driveway.

High-value items

Motorhomes are extremely valuable. To you, that value lies in the freedom they bring and the life-long memories they help you create. To a minority of others, it is measured simply in terms of pounds and pence – however much they can get for your vehicle once they have relieved you of it.

The average motorhome spends a good deal of its life in storage, with just a few weeks or months each year on the road, so it's really important to choose your method of storage with the utmost care.

This guide explores the various storage options open to you, and provides some details on the things that you should think about and look for when you're choosing.

Storing at home

Many motorhome owners will store their leisure vehicle at home, on the driveway or in a space created in their garden.

The benefits of this arrangement are manifold: you save money, and your 'van is right there when you want to load it up for a trip or carry out maintenance and cleaning. You can also keep an eye on it yourself.

But there are downsides to storing it at home. Your vehicle is at far more risk there than it would be in formal secure storage. Each year, many 'vans are stolen from the owner's property, while just a handful go from specialist facilities.

Storing your motorhome outside your house is also likely to increase the cost of your insurance, and when you do go away in the 'van, it's going to be very clear to passing thieves that you're not at home.

So if you can store at home, and it is your preferred option, it's advisable to apply some additional security measures.

For a start, consider protecting your home storage space with a passive infrared (PIR) light, which triggers if anyone gets close to your motorhome. CCTV is also relatively cheap these days. This links to your home Wi-Fi, and images are then stored on a hard drive and/or in the cloud.

PIR lights and CCTV cameras should be mounted high on a wall or post, well out of reach. Some PIR lights also provide a warning-chime option inside the home, if your motorhome is approached.



Wherever you store your vehicle, a steering wheel lock is essential



Bear in mind that you will need regular access to your vehicle for maintenance and cleaning, so take a look around any potential storage site to make sure getting to your 'van is straightforward

‘The safest place to lay up your motorhome is in a dedicated storage facility’



CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE

As well as all of the essential vehicle security devices, including wheel locks, a security post will add an additional hassle factor for any would-be thief. For more about security devices, see p80.

Remote storage

Lower-priced leisure vehicle storage is often available on farms and smallholdings whose property owners are seeking to diversify.

These locations might not have formal security systems, and their remoteness is both a pro and a con. Yes, such places can be safe, especially on busy farms that are always occupied, but if the farm is ever left empty, your 'van will be at greater risk.

Thieves can use online satellite imaging to scan for potential targets parked on drives or in remote locations, so 'out of sight' won't always be 'out of mind'.

If you do decide to store your motorhome remotely, you should aim to put in place the same precautions that you would if you were keeping it outside your house.

Bear in mind, too, that if you store your 'van remotely, it is unlikely to be easily accessible on a regular basis, so you will need to keep an eye on battery charging, general maintenance and so on.

Secure storage

The safest place to lay up your 'van is in a dedicated storage facility. The very best of these come with a whole suite of security measures to deter thieves and keep stored vehicles as safe as possible.

It's also worth looking out for a CaSSOA member site. CaSSOA (cassoa.co.uk) has around 500 member firms at independent locations around the UK, graded Bronze, Silver, Gold and now Platinum, depending on the level of security they offer.

Expanding the ratings became necessary as new and innovative security systems are developed, and the 'best of the best' vehicle storage sites embrace them.

Other than checking its CaSSOA member credentials, there are a few things to bear in mind when choosing your site.

■ Inside or outdoors?

Good-quality indoor storage has to be the ultimate option (both for security and for maintaining your motorhome's condition), but it is likely to be costly and in demand.

If you opt instead for storage at a working farm or warehouse, ensure your 'van is away from moving vehicles, such as forklifts and tractors, and think about fire safety, too.

■ What's the fencing like?

Anti-climb, 2.4m-high palisade steel fencing is considered one of the very best options for securing a storage facility.

This type of fencing is strong and when properly constructed, is also very resistant to being rammed or ripped out.

Ideally, there should be no climbable trees overhanging either the fencing or the site.

■ What are the gates like?

Any storage facility should have strong and secure gates, and preferably, only one point of entry and exit.

The best of these operate like an airlock system, where each gate will only open when the other has been closed.

You pull past the first open gate, which then closes behind you, before the gate in front of you can be opened.

This is a major deterrent to 'van thieves, because they remain vulnerable while they are 'locked in' between the two gates.

■ What's the lighting like?

Lighting at your storage location will be another important feature to consider. PIR-activated lights are better than fixed floodlights, because they will alert staff ➔

‘You should check that your chosen storage facility has wide, clear roadways to make entry and exit easier’



Take a careful look around the site before you make your choice

to intrusions when they come on, and can give thieves an unwelcome surprise when they are suddenly illuminated.

■ Are there CCTV cameras?

The perimeter and the inner section of the storage site should have CCTV coverage. The latest cameras have night-vision capability and high-resolution imagery, which can, for example, capture facial details or vehicle numberplates.

■ How do the alarms work?

The very best of the secure storage sites should have monitored alarm systems, which are designed to alert both the staff and the local police as soon as anything untoward might be happening.

■ What is the access like?

At which times of day can you access your vehicle, if, say, you need an early start to catch the ferry? The better sites will offer



customers excellent flexibility, even if this is only available by prior arrangement.

In addition, does the storage facility have wide, clear roadways, to make entry and exit easier when you are collecting or dropping off your motorhome?

■ On what surface are 'vans stored?

Will your vehicle be kept in a grassy field or on hardstanding? Will you be able to retrieve it easily following heavy rainfall?

■ Are other services available?

Does the site that you're considering also offer extra services, such as leisure vehicle cleaning and servicing?

The best will have arrangements with trusted, AWS-approved mobile vehicle technicians, who can visit the facility to service your motorhome. They can also arrange for replacement tyres and repairs to minor body damage, dings and scuffs.

Likewise, many storage sites can provide a vehicle cleaning service, and some also stock gas bottles, so you'll never be caught short. Together, these motorhome storage services help to ensure maximum security and convenience, at all times.

■ How much will it cost?

The price of high-quality secure motorhome storage depends very much on where you are in the country, your vehicle and the level of security on offer. You can expect to pay £200 to £700 a year in the north, and £350 to £1000-plus in the south-east.

Summary

Anyone who's ever had a motorhome stolen, damaged or burgled will be painfully aware of what a huge hassle it can be to sort everything out afterwards.

For example, I know one couple with a much-loved older 'van, who had all of the sofa bases and backrests stolen while it was in remote storage.

These proved to be a huge problem to replace, and they lost an entire season of touring while it was resolved. Owners with this kind of experience know the value of quality secure storage.

Budget might be the deciding factor in how and where you store your motorhome, but there's no doubt, well-run, bespoke secure facilities are the safest option.

If that's not viable, however, follow our advice on making your 'van as secure as possible in other storage locations.



Robust fencing and electronic gates all contribute to the level of security available at a site

advice

PERSONAL SECURITY ON TOUR

It's important to protect your motorhome, but ensuring your personal safety while out and about is also crucial. Tony Brown passes on a few tips

On holiday, you want to focus on rest and relaxation – not worrying about your cash and your kit. And what a disaster it could be, if you were to lose some or all of your portable valuables.

It is, of course, best to leave jewellery at home, but there are some things you can't do without while you're away.

Lose your passports and you'll need to seek out a British embassy and pay £100 each for an emergency travel document. This is valid for one trip home; there will be extra costs replacing your passports.

If your cash is stolen, it is unlikely to be covered by your travel insurance, while lost cards are a hassle to cancel and renew.

Loss of keys does not bear thinking about. Replacing your motorhome's locks can cost hundreds, never mind dealing with house locks. Safe carriage of handbags and mobiles also needs careful consideration.

Passports, cash, cards

It is best if at least one of you has a large belt pouch, worn underneath the clothes, to keep passports, cash, Travellers Cheques and credit cards safe, with small amounts of ready money kept in your pocket.

This takes some thinking ahead, but you can usually find a quiet place where you can pull out your pouch and replenish cash and so on, as and when necessary.

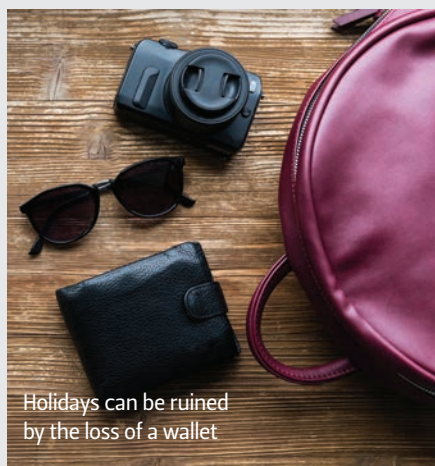
Handy belt pouch

An excellent pouch for these items can be made from a 330 x 170mm piece of chamois leather. You'll also need some strong, 10mm, synthetic tape for the belt loops.

Cut out the leather (*pictured far right*) and prepare two 320mm lengths of tape, which should be temporarily fixed in position.

Next, cut a width of Velcro and stitch it to the front of the pouch, where the flap will close. Use a simple running stitch with strong, synthetic thread to sew around the two open sides, then go back over this to complete the stitches.

Now turn the pouch inside out, ready for use, and add the other Velcro element to the inside of the flap.



Holidays can be ruined by the loss of a wallet

To use it, rest the empty pouch, facing forwards with the tape loops overlapping the trouser belt, just to one side of the centreline. Pass one tape loop through a belt loop, then roll up the pouch and pass it through the end of the tape loop.

Pulling this tight, you form a positive knot to the trouser belt loop, so if you are required to remove your belt for security screening, your pouch remains secure.

Keys and phones

You could use a key chain, but they are short, obtrusive and easily tangled. A better option is a 1.2m length of 3mm nylon cord, in a dark colour. About the thickness of a bootlace, it will be long enough for a small keyring loop at one end and a belt loop at the other.



Phones are more difficult, particularly if you spend a lot of time using them! The risks here are twofold – if your pocket is picked and you don't immediately notice your phone has been stolen, the thief could run up a huge bill on your account.

Or you could have it snatched from your hand. The simple advice is not to carry your phone in a back pocket where it is visible, and to avoid walking around with it in your hand. If you can, stand with your back to a wall while using it, so you can spot anyone approaching you – and that includes thieves riding mopeds or bicycles.

Handbags

If possible, decant the essential items from your handbag into a small, slim bag with a long strap, which you can carry across the body. And if you can, it also helps to wear a jacket or jersey over it.

Keep valuables to a minimum and never put your bag on the back of a chair or on the ground when you sit down – if you do take it off, it is much safer on your knee.



ABOVE This belt pouch is easy to make, but very effective for carrying valuables
LEFT Keeping all of your keys secure is another essential for stress-free touring

accessories


SECURITY EQUIPMENT

There's a wealth of clever gadgets available to help keep you, your 'van and your belongings safe on tour, and give you greater peace of mind



iTrack Mini GPS Tracker


This nifty little device monitors the position of your motorhome and sends Google Map reports via SMS, or tracks it live on the free app. Suitable for your vehicle, bike or any other asset that you might want to keep track of.

Price £45  amazon.co.uk



Smart indoor camera


It's not just your home-from-home that needs protecting while you're away on tour! This clever camera sends you an alert if intruders are detected in your house, as well as providing video footage and a picture of their faces.

Price £179.99
 netatmo.com



Biometric padlock


This robust lock uses your thumbprint for personalised security for up to 10 users – great for bikes and other rear-wall-mounted kit, to help it stay safer when you're pitched up on site.

Price £137.15
 masterlock.eu



Purpleline Nemesis Plus


Keep your insurance provider happy by fitting a strong, high-vis wheel lock. The Nemesis Plus from Purpleline uses a single bespoke wheel bolt to secure the unit to the face of the wheel, while a steel shaft slides between the spokes to stop the wheel rotating.

Price £225
 purpleline.co.uk



Defender plug-in TV

This device is a small but very effective security measure. Plug it into a mains socket in your motorhome. Switch on and its LEDs emit coloured light that makes it look as though you are watching TV in your vehicle, when you are actually out and about.

Price £14.95
 defendersecurityproducts.co.uk



Master Lock 5900 Series Portable Safe

Secure your valuables with the Master Lock 5900 Series Portable Safe, a 'handheld fortress' to take care of precious items. It's small, but the perfect size for storing your passports, credit cards, watches and more.

Price £30.55 www.masterlock.eu



Dometic 361C Safe

This mechanical safe has a capacity of 24 litres and is suitable for storing a 15-inch laptop – ideal security for your vehicle valuables. It weighs 11kg and features a key-operated locking mechanism and two 18mm solid steel bolts.

Price £215

www.cooltechleisure.co.uk



Milenco Security Handrail

This large, robust handrail has a unique twin-locking design for ultimate security. In the open position, it can be used as a sturdy grab handle. High-security locks provide countermeasures against bump keys.

Price £89.06

www.towsure.com



Milenco BC Lock

We think this is a simple, but extremely clever idea from the experts at Milenco – it's a Gold Sold Secure rated, lockable box that fits over your vehicle's pedals to immobilise it. Note that various versions are available, depending on your base vehicle.

Price £89.84

www.leisureshopdirect.com

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