



Access Granted

Today's wheelchair accessible vehicles are cheaper and better quality than ever, and with help from Motability you should be able to find the perfect option...

To many people the words **wheelchair accessible vehicle (or WAVs as they are known)** will conjure up visions of the **community minibus – a big lumbering vehicle with a professional driver and an industrial tail-lift. Or (if your memory goes back that far) you might remember the 1970s Mini-vans and Mini Metros with raised roofs.** Often hand-built by specialist coachbuilders, they quickly earned the nick-name 'Pope mobiles'. Although these conversions gave many people a new freedom, they were not without their problems. Their unusual looks certainly made them distinctive and that extra height could be a problem with some car parks. But the biggest difficulty was that, being hand-built, they were beyond the financial reach of many wheelchair users and having shelled out, some were not as waterproof as owners might have hoped!

But that was 30 years ago and things have changed a lot since then. A quarter of a

century of development later and there are more WAVs on Britain's roads than ever before. The Motability Scheme alone currently has nearly 8,000 WAV customers. Today's wheelchair access conversion is a very different animal and there is a thriving industry of specialist converters offering a tremendous choice of conversions on a wide range of popular cars and multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs).

Many adaptation companies have close links to the original car manufacturers and use the same materials (upholstery, carpets, soundproofing etc), so today's conversions are often indistinguishable from the car they started out as, both inside and out.

The choice is huge. With most WAVs the wheelchair user travels as a passenger and enters from the rear using a ramp attached to the back of the vehicle. On smaller cars the floor is often lowered to give the wheelchair user more headroom and bring them down to

the same eye-level as the other occupants of the car. However, the length and angle of the ramp, and the size and depth of the lowered section can vary between cars and between converters. This means you and your wheelchair may fit comfortably into one converter's vehicle but you may struggle to get into another company's conversion of the same car.

Future proof

As with any car purchase, it is important to consider carefully what you need both now and in the future. How big is your family? What do you need to carry with you? Who is going to drive the car and what length of journey will you typically make? Before looking at WAVs in detail, it is essential to seek professional advice from your local Mobility Centre. There are 17 Centres located throughout the UK, which offer a range of services and advice and can provide a personal assessment. For example,

they can arrange to assess you whilst you are seated comfortably in your wheelchair, on a flat surface, to measure how high your eyes are (you want to be able to see out of the windows) and how high the top of your head is (you don't

regulations and will also have been tested to meet Motability's own WAV vehicle specifications. The scheme is open to anyone who receives one of the following benefits and has at least 12 months' award length remaining

A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN THE ARRIVAL OF CONVERSIONS THAT ALLOW WHEELCHAIR USERS TO DRIVE FROM THEIR WHEELCHAIR

want to bang your head on the roof every time you go over a bump). The Forum of Mobility Centres will be able to tell you where your nearest Centre is. They can be contacted on freephone 0800 559 3636, emailed at enquiries@motability-centres.org.uk or you can visit www.motability-centres.org.uk. Charges for assessments may vary from centre to centre.

The smallest WAVs are often based on MPVs such as the Renault Kangoo, Fiat Doblo, Peugeot Partner and Citroen Berlingo. As well as being easy to drive and to park they are very affordable, and many are available on the Motability Scheme with no advanced payment. If you need slightly more room you may want to consider larger cars such as the Kia Sedona, Vauxhall Zafira, Citroen C8, Peugeot Expert or Fiat Scudo. There are even conversions available on luxury MPVs such as the Chrysler Voyager and Toyota Previa.

If you have a larger family or need to carry a lot of equipment, many converters offer models based on vans from manufacturers such as Volkswagen, Renault, Mercedes and Toyota. These larger vehicles are usually fully trimmed inside and often come with the option of a powered lift in place of an entry ramp.

Testing times

Whatever size of WAV you need it is essential you have a thorough demonstration and test drive before making a commitment. If possible have your main driver with you and make sure the demo includes getting in and out of the vehicle (without any help from the salesman), securing the wheelchair and fitting your seatbelt. Your driver should then take you on a route around your local area to make sure they are comfortable driving the car and you feel safe and happy travelling in it.

For many people the easiest route to a WAV is via Motability. Through the scheme customers can lease a brand new converted vehicle for a five year period. The lease includes road tax, insurance, servicing, maintenance and breakdown cover.

Anyone choosing the Motability Scheme as their route to a WAV has the added security of knowing that any vehicle supplied will be properly tested to meet UK approval

when they apply:

Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance.

War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement.

Through Motability, you simply exchange your mobility allowance for the car of your choice. Whilst larger and more expensive conversions may require an additional advanced payment, there are an increasing number available at no additional cost.

A major development in recent years has been the arrival of conversions that allow wheelchair users to drive from their wheelchair. Wheelchair driver conversions are more complex (and therefore more expensive) than passenger conversions, but here too recent innovations mean that they are now smaller, more useable and more affordable than ever before. Once again, Motability can help here, as recent improvements to the Scheme mean that many simple driving adaptations, such as hand controls for accelerating and braking, now come as part of the contract hire package.

Motability may be able to offer financial help towards the cost the advance payment for



a car, more complex adaptations, conversions and even driving lessons. Grants are provided from Motability's Charitable Fund or from the Specialised Vehicles Fund, which is administered on behalf of the Government.

The Motability Price Guide contains details of conversions companies that currently supply vehicles through the Scheme with examples of the cars they offer. This can be obtained by calling Motability's Customer Helpline on 0845 456 4566 or it can be viewed online at www.motability.co.uk.

Whatever your personal situation, the chances are one of the specialist converters makes a wheelchair accessible vehicle that is right for you. The Motability Price Guide could be a good place to start looking for it and the friendly Customer Helpline staff will always be pleased to provide advice and guidance.



MOTORING

Innovation Motor Caravans

A pioneering series of wheelchair accessible motor caravans based on the Ford Transit and Mercedes Sprinter are being produced by Horizons Unlimited. Both models are furnished with a toilet, three burner hob, sink, fridge and rear garage in which to store powered wheelchairs or scooters.

The motor caravans allow for all round easy access, thanks to a specially commissioned front passenger seat which docks onto a manual or powered wheelchair chassis, and side door entry via an underfloor lift. You can also choose to remove a seat in the habitation area to create space for a wheelchair.

Owners benefit from an extensive choice of optional extras, such as hoists and ramps, which they can mix 'n' match with other equipment from the rest of the product range. The Company can also custom fit caravans if desired.

Contact: Roy Wood Transits
www.roywoodtransits.co.uk 0118 978 5079



Aspect Conversions

Since its introduction, the Kangoo has been one of the most successful wheelchair accessible conversions in the UK. Aspect's version has a roomy interior for one wheelchair user, a driver and two additional passengers, and includes a counterbalanced ramp that requires minimal effort to operate and eliminates irritating rattles.

Prices are at their lowest since the vehicle was first introduced some eight years ago, with the 1.2 petrol version available for no advance payment and the 1.6 automatic for just £500 on the Motability contract hire scheme. With the driving characteristics of a small car and its compact size, the Kangoo makes an affordable and practical family motor.

Contact: Aspect Conversions www.aspectconversions.co.uk 01704 546600



Carchair

Riding up front is a breeze with Constables' Carchair. Backing a specially designed wheelchair onto an electric lift, both chair and user are raised smoothly into the vehicle and safely secured for the journey.

Fully automated, it's easy to operate and saves on space as the wheelchair no longer needs to be stored separately in the vehicle.

Contact: Constables Mobility
www.constablesmobility.com 01323 76 75 74

The Carony

No lifting is involved during transfers with the Carony: a wheelchair that doubles up as a passenger seat. A swivel base is fitted into the vehicle and the wheelchair seat simply slides directly onto this.

The compact wheel unit is easily stored in the boot when not in use and the Carony can be fitted to a large number of vehicles without the need for major modifications. An electric version of the Carony is also available called the Carony Go.

Contact: Des Gosling Mobility
www.desgoslingmobility.co.uk
01332 863742



Chris Elliott Adaptions

If you want to make sure you get the best solution available, then Chris Elliott Adaptions can be a great help as they supply equipment from most of the leading manufacturers, providing a wide choice of options. As a Motability accredited agent, you can also be sure the quality of the company's workmanship will be of a high standard and the service reliable.

It's a small and friendly business owned by Chris Elliott, with Paul Bailey and Kelvin Hull carrying out the workshop fittings and Fran Elliott dealing with customer enquiries on the phone. The wide variety of adaptations on offer range from a simple steering ball to hydraulic lifts, including hand controls from well-known names like He-Man, Jeff Gosling and Brig-Ayd and hoists from KC Mobility, Autochair and Techmobility.

A nationwide network of trained agents are in place to carry out all of the adaptations available, and the company are happy to answer any questions you might have.
Contact: Chris Elliott Adaptions
www.chriselliottadaptions.co.uk 01733 333023



MOTORING

Springer Access Ramp

If you need safe and speedy vehicle access for wheelchairs or scooters, the lightweight Springer Access Ramp by KC Mobility could be just what you're looking for.

Easy to operate thanks to its one-handed action, the Springer folds and unfolds by itself, taking all the effort out of deploying the ramp. It fits into most vans, either by the rear or side door, and is available in a range of sizes with various accessories, including electric and remote control operation and a powered winch or strap for heavier users.

Contact: KC Mobility Solutions Ltd www.kcmobility.co.uk 01924 442386



Conver-tech

Comprising of a small but dedicated team in Alf Richards and Paul Keegan, Conver-tech has built quite a reputation for converting models as diverse as six-wheel drive Hum Vees to Toyotas.

The company welcome all requests for conversions, having previously adapted the VW T5 Semi high roof. They made this model more accessible by extending the rear door height and increasing the internal height to create extra clearance. As they manufacture practically everything they use in house, Conver-tech are able to design and install exactly what you need on almost every type of vehicle.

Offering various hoists and lift options too, as well as supplying adaptations such as seats, winches, grab handles and more, Conver-tech should be able to cater for all your vehicle requirements.

Contact: Conver-tech www.conver-tech.co.uk 01628 636303

AMF Bruns

Good examples of AMF Bruns' ever-developing range of conversions include the new inboard and underfloor mounted passenger lifts, fold-out and telescopic ramps and electric steps.

One of the company's most successful products is the SmartFloor, regarded by some as one of the most flexible M1-tested bonded floor system in the industry. The company is also well known for their 4-point retractor restraint system known as the Protektor, and they recently carried out the impressive feat of testing the upper fixing point for wheelchair restraint shoulder belts to M1 standards.

Contact: AMF-Brunns UK Ltd. www.amf-bruns.co.uk 0161 8727951



Basil Person Hoist

This multi-purpose wheelchair and person lift from Brig-Ayd can be fitted to both the passenger and luggage areas. With its 120kg (246lb) capacity it can transfer the majority of people and electric wheelchairs in and out of the vehicle.

Weighing only 9.5kg (21 lb) and incorporating a very compact single point mounting, the lift arm is extremely easy to move from door to tailgate and, once removed, the door aperture and glove compartment are clear from any obstruction.

Contact: Brig-Ayd Controls www.brig-aydcontrols.co.uk 01707 322322



Lewis Reed

Currently offering a new and improved VW range for 2007, including the previously unavailable VW Caddy Life and an enhanced access system for the VW T5 range, Lewis Reed should have a conversion to suit everyone.

Some of the exciting new developments with the T5 include a lowering floor with suspension, as well as various comfort and functional improvements. There is also a new luxury VW Cruiser MKIII available to replace the MKII. For more details on the extensive choices available with the VW range of WAVs, call Lewis Reed who'll be happy to answer all your questions.

Contact: Lewis Reed www.lewisreedgroup.co.uk 0845 345 0127

