



27 JUL, 2024

Schlafenwagen

Weekend Herald, Auckland

INSIDE: ROLLS-ROYCE SPECTRE | HYUNDAI SANTA FE HYBRID

SATURDAY JULY 27 | 2024

DRIVEN

CAR GUIDE DRIVEN CARGUIDE.CO.NZ

CALIFORNIA VACATION

Taking a mid-winter trip to experience Volkswagen's California Ocean campervan, offering the classic Kiwi getaway for any time of the year

EV ISSUE INSIDE



27 JUL, 2024

Schlafwagen

Weekend Herald, Auckland

Page 2 of 6



COVERSTORY

BREAK IT DOWN

2024 VOLKSWAGEN CALIFORNIA 61 OCEAN

ENGINE: 2.0-litre turbo diesel

four-cylinder

POWER: 146kW/450Nm

GEARBOX: 7-speed DSG all-wheel-drive

ECONOMY: 7.8l/100km

PRICE: \$171,500

- Super-versatile and efficient, so many surprises hidden within, even has a kitchen sink

- Access to roof is challenging, big tailgate is heavy to close, pivoting front seat is a juggle

DRIVENGUIDE.CO.NZ

Schlafwagen

We spend a winter night lakeside with Volkswagen's California Ocean camper



Dean
EVANS

It may not be California, USA and it might not be the Pacific Ocean, but waking to a view of Taupō Lake sure does have its share of beauty, and a dose of mid-winter nature.

The VW California Ocean is Volkswagen's campervan, a Kombi for modern times if we can stretch realities a bit.

Packed to the gunnels with gear, it's a superb tourer or family getaway car, for a night or for a month, able to sleep four, and all within the dimensions of the standard VW van, such as the Caravelle nine-seater or Multivan seven-seater people-movers; all without fear of underground garages or tight parking spaces.

The electrohydraulic pop-up roof

has its own mattress and sprung pads, and is even a little longer than a standard double-sized bed.

Actually, to be fair, we did drive and make a video about the California Ocean back in March 2021, but we didn't get to take it away due to a thing called Covid lockdown.

So for the past three years, the kids have been asking (and asking!) for the big van with a bed up top, so VW's updated-for-2024 California was as much a relief as well-timed for a mini-adventure, this time in Reflex Silver and Starlight Blue.

Four invitations were sent to the family for a night away in a California: wife wasn't interested,



27 JUL, 2024

Schlafenwagen

Weekend Herald, Auckland

Page 3 of 6

eldest 12yo daughter is attached to wife's hip, so it was down to just Dad, Oscar (5) and Ella (8), the main proponent for getting the van back.

With on-board power, dual batteries and low-power cut-off, the California provides plenty of reassurance, along with a kitchen, consisting of a 30-litre freshwater tank (and 30-litre wastewater), that feeds both a mini spray/washer nozzle and a kitchen sink. Alongside is a two-burner gas stovetop, and a 42-litre fridge.

The only things lacking from it being a fully self-supported vehicle is a toilet and a shower, but that's the job of the Grand California.

The California Ocean offers four seats, and a slide-and-pop-up table, made even more practical by the pivoting two front seats that can face the rear bench seat.

We booked a powered (redundant, but simply for the sake of it) berth on the shores of Lake Taupō, to drink in the serenity, a sunset and sunrise, surrounded by nature. Oh, and a few other campers, and nearby Highway 1. Still . . .

As is often the case with life, Ella was hit with a 48-hour flu, keeping her at home in bed. And then there were two.

So, with Oscar proudly riding shotgun in his booster seat, we set off to arrive mid-afternoon, the California proving remarkably thrifty. With a 70-litre fuel tank, and an economy claim of 7.8-9.0l/100km depending on where you read it.

We saw around 8.0l/100km on the highway, which offers a range around 850km.

Arriving and setting up, the California is a breeze, once you're familiar with where everything is and stored. The side awning quickly winds out, with its own integrated

and height-adjustable legs, once you've found the handle in the under-rear-seat storage drawer.

The table unfolds in seconds, once you've found it neatly semi-hidden on the inside of the power sliding side door, and the fold-out chairs offer a quick rest, once they've been slid from their pockets in the end of the rear hatch.

Truth be told, we set it up for pics only, this time, thanks to the 9-degree temperatures. With just the two of us, there's plenty of space within anyway.

The pop-up party piece roof is like having an automotive attic that kids love. Operated by a console above the driver, the roof raises in about 20 seconds, interspersed with pause reminders to check for room overhead, or if everything's removed and shut when closing.

With side zippers for both insect screens and open air, the whole front end opens up in the same way, with magnets to hold the flaps, offering the shelter of a tent, with the views better than most hotels: because they're your own choice.

With a large mattress and under-springs, it's quite comfortable, and Oscar set up for the night with his thick winter duvet, pillows and iPad, hooked up to local Wi-Fi.

The only challenge is entry and egress to/from the roof, as it requires a little athleticism, climbing on to the seat's base, and/or the seat back/shoulder, to allow you to climb up and in. The roof is angled, of course, so it's a good idea to sleep with head facing to the front — unless you're 5, and it doesn't matter.

Access is made a little easier by the swivelling front seats, they make roof access a fraction easier, but allow four+ occupants to use the

dining table for meals, games or conversation. Though there is a trick to pivoting the driver's seat, with a special movement combination of armrests, seat base, backrest, steering wheel and handbrake. Get one wrong, and it turns to custard. Once the code is cracked, and remembered, it's quick and easy.

We used the plug-in power, not because we needed to, not even just in case, but simply to try it out, the on-board cable hooking up to a power box and the plug on the rear-quarter.

Easy, done, and no drain, given we'll likely be running an on-board heater all night.

Three-zone climate control, dual up-front and another control panel in the rear, ensures everyone's happy, and the rear speakers keep the music easily heard down below, though there isn't a way to adjust the volume without climbing back up front.

The lower bed offers a bit more room for adults, and with the rear seat sliding forward on rails, and the backrest dropping flat, it merges with the boot floor and a fold-out mattress to become another double bed, with a convenient light switch operating the many LEDs dotted around the cabin.

And to finish off the privacy side, there's a full suite of blinds to close: from A-pillar blinds that cover the windscreen, the pull down and up for the side and rear blinds, and even the magnetic-lined cloth covers for the front windows, and they all do a good job of keeping the heat in.

Other little extras are neat and very useful, like a small 12v socket torch, dashtop cupholders, pockets that act as rubbish bins in the lower door pockets and a good dose of



27 JUL, 2024

Schlafenwagen

Weekend Herald, Auckland

2024 technology, such as adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning with emergency braking, cross-wind assist, rear cross-traffic alert, Lane Keep and Park Assist. Parking sensors and rear-view camera also come in very handy, as does the tight-ish (for its size) 11.9m turning circle.

Up front is a modern 9.2-inch touchscreen with smartphone/wireless app connection and USB-C ports.

It all adds up to make the VW California not just a super campervan, but one that drives and rides and performs like a van, which lately, drive like SUVs.

Add in the economy and range of the 2.0-litre turbo diesel engine, grip from the 4Motion all-wheel drive, and the range, and the California starts to show why it's such a capable campervan and a fantastic way to get away, for a few months, or just one night in Taupō.



Photos / Dean Evans





27 JUL, 2024

Schlafenwagen

Weekend Herald, Auckland





27 JUL, 2024

Schlafenwagen

Weekend Herald, Auckland

