

VANIFESTO

A MEDITATION ON VAN LUST



by Hadassah D'Luxe

This zine has several parts: the Vanifesto mini-opus of course, plus an instructional guide and info on types of van customizations for your van searching and purchasing needs; Hard Fact\$ about buying and maintaining your van; a catalog of all the vans I looked at; Van History; a dreamy

Travelogue from trips all over the US and Canada; and even a touch of sexy Vantasy fixxxtion to keep you driving.



Special van-search morale thank-you's go to Ely, Finch, Kassidy, Heather, Ray & Susie, Sophie, Aimee, Bevin & Heather, all of who made major time and magic contributions to my search! I needed you and you came through. Love to my platonic life partner [PLP] Sarah Jenny who supports me in all my eccentricities. To the pup who knocked out over 9000 miles in the passenger seat with me; to my sweetheart who makes van adventures for the futures; to drivers past and to come; thanks to all the people who have shared adventures and road blues with me! Long drive Craylene Dream!

xo, Hadassah Damien

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the **VANIFESTO**

When you put “van” as a prefix in front of many adjectives*, it improves the word: Vantasy. Vantastic. Vandura. Vanarchy. Vanzine. Vansion. Vandate. **Evangelist**. Vankind. Vaniversarry...

When you put a van in front of **me**, I get much happier and really excited – especially if it’s got a highly-detailed interior conversion, a sweet paint job and some slight dents and scratches that show it’s been around a few time zones. Thus, vans are an improvement to both an epistemological and the lexicographical worlds.

When I get **in** a van**, then me and a **lot** of my friends/about-to-be friends can go somewhere fun -- and super far away if we want. You can’t put more than six or seven people in a sedan, no matter how hard you try. It starts getting body-size-negative and is only good for a few blocks anyway***. No, if you want to get a lot of people and have the freedom and space you need to go ANYWHERE, you need a van. And not the horrible tragedy of the minivan - no I’m talking about full-size, gas-guzzling, slow-ass, three-quarter-ton-and-up tricked-out conversion vans. Extended cab if you can -- because then you have space for luggage **and** opening the bed up.

Bands know this.
Grandpas know this.
And now I’m telling you.

Driving is a sweet and gorgeous act that the next generation of travelers will not have access to in the way we know it now. Driving, the act of holding onto the wheel and steering away from danger; every choice an affirmation that you are choosing not-

** It’s like the word “femme” that way – e.g., femmetastic.*

***The phrase “Get In The Van” is etymologically the major contribution that Henry Rollins has made to society.*

****The most people I ever had in my van so far was 11, in Philly July 2009, on our way to the Fattest Day of Summer, a short neighborhood jaunt really. The most I took far was 8 to Oka Beach, an hour outside of Montreal, and then there was the time seven of us took the long 14-hour-route from SF to PDX, and that other time seven of us took 18 hours to get home from IDA...*



death. Looking out from the drivers seat, you have to turn, break, calculate. The automatic motions of arms and legs acts we don't have to remind our limbs to do; we become part of the machines we operate and so we better choose those machines wisely. This is not personal or metaphorical: it is the nature of technology to connect physicality in new and unusual routes. Driving a van insists that you stay calm in your giant vehicle and take the long road sometimes – you can speed, but you can't race.

Van drivers of the world, we are doing important not-work. Van travel is part of resistance because you are not commuting to work in any traditional sense of the word, if you're working at all. Even if it fits into a moneymaking scheme, something illicit -- or at least untaxable – is going on. At least -- that's how I make it work. Van travel is a cure for the anxiety borne of the urban condition, the slow enclosure of the head that pushes good ideas out our guts instead of through our brains. This is travel that takes friends on adventures. You can go on tour, you can move, you can go en masse to the beach, you can tailgate, you can set up the back to be a mini-puppet theatre, you can stop anywhere and live in the fucker if you want, you can get on top and look at the stars.

I keep telling myself that my van is my back-up plan, that if this mediocre world of employment and systemically oppressive systems and cliques gets me too far down – or if the rev comes, or the apocalypse or some such – I can go away to where most of

THE MOST VAN- POSITIVE PLACE IN AMERICA!

Red Hook, Brooklyn

Van Brunt street runs into
Dikeman, just past Delavan
street. Honey, I'm home!

*[Someone please give me
a half a mil and I could be
home there....sigh.]*



my friends are and where there's hopefully still water and live in my van. With only slightly worse hygiene than I exhibit now.

Comrades: if we want to bring down this monolithic gasoline-dependent, barrel-commerce-driven world by surpassing peak oil, making petrol obsolete and eradicating one major base of the current money system, all we need to do is keep filling that 25-gallon tank with our evil dollars. And if you really want to do right by yourself [and the four-to-nine other people in your vehicle], you will be filling the tank of the most awesomely painted, comfortably decked-out, giant-ass beast of a conversion van you can. Because if you are going to fuck up the world by driving [beats flying!], you might as well do it in style.

You might have questions, like "Why a van?" or "What are you thinking?" Van drivers need big vehicles because then we can dream about being outside more. We are irrationally and beautifully following a vehicle lust, adventuring, people-finding and art-touring dreams, and such desires won't be confined to the realm of the reasonable.

Let me be Cartesian for a moment and break my reasoning down: at 28 my too-vague resistance ideologies crystallized into this realization: I'm supposed to be working as much as possible and maximizing my profit margin, using my white privilege to get ahead and never notice or care when I do; I'm supposed to be singing hymns for existing gods who want my heart to crumble obediently in their favor; I'm supposed to eat toxic chemicals to eat well. I'm supposed to have a husband who knows more than I do and whom I live to respect: his history, his dick, his head above mine in the family portrait we mail out at Christmas. I'm supposed to have a family who loves me when I impress them with my Jesus Babies and wholesome goodness. I'm supposed to buy new things and put dirty, old things in landfills, out of sight; I'm supposed to need things packaged in plastic: my clothes, my food, my cunt. I'm supposed to be so quiet and complaisant about all of this.

Instead, and in direct contrast to what it is I am supposed to be doing, I am singing rock songs at the top of my lungs and laughing after I've declined an extension at yet another underpaid job and am getting the fuck out of town. Like my foremothers I am



stepping away from patrilineal history by using new surnames, taking feminist art and community-building exercises around the continent, not making money, definitely making friends. I am rolling out queer with too many people in my life to be anything but messy-beautiful and vibrant, swapping stories and making eyes at each other. I am being fed somatically, getting off, healing myself and people around me from the violence we've come from and inventing ways to be with each other that create virally exciting better systems; I am not being quiet. In short – I have made it. I am getting in the fucking van. Come with me?

If that's all too sappy, let's just be real: I was stuck in New York City on the goddamn subway one too many late nights. I was lonely in my apartment too often. I was ready to see the country that birthed and demented and inspired me. We could even skip the metaphysical so I can just slip the little golden key in the door's lock, step up the 18 inches to the seat platform, set myself in the cerulean blue luxury plush velour interior, turn the ignition over to hear the familiar rumble that sets my blood aflame and say, "That's just how I ride."

THE VAN DYKES

A special Heroines of Herstory callout to Lamar, Brooke, Judith, Sky, Thorne, Ange, Birch, and the other lesbian separatists who traveled with the increasingly kinkedout and nonmonogamous caravan of women who took on the surname Van Dyke in the late 1970's. Travelling via van from Womankind's Land to Wymyn's Land all over North America, Lamar says of the experience, "We didn't wait for a screen to give us a signal to do something. We were doing whatever we wanted." See the whole article by Ariel Levy at newyorker.com.



VAN HISTORY

While lesser-evolved economies like the turn-of-the-century US were only beginning to churn out mere cars on dirty factory assembly lines, magical places like the one where we live had developed the basics of caravan technology hundreds of years earlier. It was with the advent of the FM radio and interior

carpeting, however, that the true rise to excellence of vans began.

The first series of vans had wings and could fly out of flames like the majestic Phoenix but these scared Normals too little and got horrible gas mileage. The

second-generation of vans found their way through the radical politics of the 1970's, driving under the radar of the FBI because there was no Web 2.0 oversharing. The travelers caused havoc, worshipped an archaic witchy nature cult called "Three on the Tree" and generally were as well-behaved as bikers and pirates.

The most recent wave of van ownership is best described by personal narratives of the maniacs and wild ponies behind the wheel. Read some of my own later in the zine – and send me your own van stories for inclusions in later incarnations of this zine!

Futuristic Dream Van worlds include the one I love to think about, where I live in a Vansion – a building whose structure is of less importance than the fact that it is surrounded by a MOAT OF VANS. And all your friends can live in them or you can have an awesome museum or Media/Listening Rooms. And when, if you ever have a showdown -- like Pat Califia describes in the Best Biker Dyke Dystopia Novel Ever Doc & Fluff – the moat will protect you.



VANITY SEX

“Hey, wanna see my van?” is, in fact, a pickup line. I love bringing a lowlife femme, a promising tiny, a curious faggot or some rough trade cocky butch motherfucker up into my van. Even if we never kiss, it’s a space that brings on the ST [sexual tension]: a traveling, low-lit living room that looks like a VIP lounge. And yes, it’s right outside the venue. And yes, the track lights work. What do *you* think we should do? I love to ask, seeing the dirty thoughts written clearly on the faces of my guests.

And if/when we do make out, well, first I’ll pull the blinds down because nothing says privacy like fucking on the side of the street while people walk by and live their duller, non-van lives.

Maybe you were loitering near my van looking for trouble, sent out on a dare or a whim, trying to break in not realizing that my vehicle is protected by some serious magic. If I saunter up just while you’re not paying enough attention trying to open the door, I’ll take you inside and make you answer to your crime in a manner that befits your dirty hands and filthy mouth.

Maybe I offered you a ride to the bus station and just never stopped, taking you down some long dusty roads faster and funner than greyhound in exchange for your entertainment and quick hands.

Maybe you got in the van unawares, not knowing that a femme top was going to be sitting in there, too, and you’re taken aback by her presence in the back seat, and you’re now smarting from the hands that run down your throat like water, hard as amber, moving like lava. Your pants feel too tight, now they’re at your knees. Did you know there’s all kinds of hiding places in this van for ropes, knives, gloves? You must have thought of it...and you’re definitely thinking about it now.





VAN RULES

I love this fucking thing. Look how happy I am on the back! Do you really want to take any of that away from me if you don't really have to? Listen up...

1. Don't fuck up the interior. Seriously. If you do: TELL ME.
2. All pets must be approved by and not piss off the Lady of the Van
3. Track lights are a visual treat that should be consumed daily.
4. The following foods are ideal:
 - a. Trail mix
 - b. Tiny burritos that include greens and cheese, hand-crafted by fellow rider/ passengers
 - c. Water with emergen-C
5. The following foods are NOT ideal:
 - a. Bags of crumbly chips
 - b. Bananas [smell!]
 - c. Meat [you will leave remnants and they will go bad]
6. It's ok to stop and pee anytime. It's ok to stop and fuck anytime. The only exception is that that it's not ok to stop and fuck if everyone else in the car just thought we were stopping to pee. And no peeing in the van.
7. The back bench seat is a lover's lane, has the best lighting, and is also impossible to hear from the front. Just saying.
8. Sign the guest book and leave a compliment -- but don't tell all.
9. Like a pristine National Forest Reserve: if you bring it in, take it out. Yes that includes your coffee cup.
10. Driving OR navigating: everyone's gotta take their turn at one or the other.



13 Vans, 13 Different Levels of WhatTheFuckAreYouTryingToSellMe?!

I actively van shopped from April 2009 – June 2009, going as far as Austin, TX in my search. I finally discovered The Dream on May 29 – the day Mercury went out of retrograde that spring. But before I found her, I tested and looked at a dozen other vehicles – and perused several hundred online listings. It is my hope that some of this information can aid you in your van search, or at least amuse you in regards to mine.

Van 1: Chevy G10, Mark III Conversion.

Location: Mansville, TX.

Just take the “Pickle Parkway” there, and exit on Daddy School Road and we’ll be on the right. No, really. And when you get pulled over on the parkway for speeding in your truck with half a windshield and outdated paperwork, the magic of your mission will get you out of it with no ticket!

Stats: \$1500. Ran decently but was a boring/ugly shade of green and taupe inside. Also the G10 rear bench seat is close as shit to the Captains’ chairs in the middle. Not comfy at all. No magic feelings, no purchase.

Van 2: Chevy G20, ? Conversion, Navy Blue.

Location: S Austin, some dealership on Lamar.

When I got in and closed the drivers’ door, the rearview mirror fell off. Uhm. The fusebox was on the median console and had a section that was melted and burned.

Stats: \$1800. Totally sketched out by salesguy who blew the A/C in my face repeatedly. Upon driving it, the brakes shook and I feared I would not stop in the lot but roll into major traffic.

Van 3: Vandura, green

Location: East Austin, E 7th street.

Note to van purchasers: you have to ask a lot of questions before you go to see a van. Questions like “Does it have all its’ seats?” because the seller did not seem to think it was a problem that they were ALL MISSING except the drivers’ seat.

Stats: \$1500.



Van 4: GMC, Dream = Danger

Location: South Austin

Found in an espresso-fueled burst of genius [check autotrader.com and not just craigslist!] after several days of discouraging phone calls to nowhere. Sold by a grandpa, yes! Black and silver exterior and maroon interior, yes! Extra sound system and CD player, yes!! “D” monogram insignia on the headrests? Yeeesss!! I got REALLY excited and took it to a mechanic, who reported back that the engine mounts were cracked, the ball joints were a disaster, there were no brakes in the rear, it was totally unsafe to drive, and could I please not go over 40 on the way back?

Stats: \$2500 talked down to \$2000 which still felt like too much when the report on making it safe was \$900 + a \$?? amount to make it solvent. Tears. Sadness. Anguish.

Van 5: Chevy G20, ?? customization

Location: central San Antonio dealership

Well the windshield was cracked, which looks more dramatic than it really is in safety terms, but still. Looking in the interior was all I could do because the dealership couldn't find the keys. Really?

Stats: \$1850 but not that exciting.

Van 6: North Austin

Location: phone only.

I'll be real: I called this guy more than once because I was getting desperate. And this ends with another note about asking lots of questions and ultimately not going to see something because of the answers – this van was real cheap: because you had to START IT WITH A SCREWDRIVER. Ask everything, my friends.

Stats: \$900 and DEFINITELY STOLEN

Van 7: Chevy G20, Choo Choo conversion.

Location: Austin suburbs.

Ed was the dudebro selling this van, and he was sad to let it go, but a dudebro can only have so many vehicles, and he has a boat and



a bike, too. I get it, Ed. It gets expensive. The van was navy blue with orange and brown 70's rocker stripes on the sides and wood paneling on the dash it was pretty sweet, for a dudemobile. Specs: \$1800, needed catalytic converter, new windshield and a stereo. It wasn't deluxe enough for me. I hope it found it's Dude out there.

Van 8: Ford E Series.

Location: San Antonio, TX

This woman was selling the van to get bail money for her boyfriend, which is real and I was hoping to get a deal off of her troubles, which was my first mistake. We went to test drive it but the battery was dead and it wouldn't start, which was actually a blessing because as I was fucking around with all the van parts, the steering wheel CAME OFF, and I'm ever so glad I didn't take it into traffic, where I and my van viewing friend surely would have died. Specs: \$1200 and so so dangerous and karmically cursed.

Van 9: GMC in Orange and Yellow: a great almost

Location: Off Utopia St, SATX

As we drove away from the NonSteeringWheel of Death, my friend yelled "J I C" and crossed Utopia Street to careen into a nearby parking lot...towards the coolest van I have seen before or since. GMC Vandura 2500: the exterior was chocolate brown with blue, orange and yellow geometrical lines caressing the panel-windowed sides aerodynamically. It looked like some colorblindBolshevik revolutionary had been taken to Van Land and produced this piece of art.

Specs: Abandoned in a lot in pieces. Sigh.

Van 10: Dodge Ram 250.

Location: Long Island, Somewhere

The red/maroon/brown color scheme, venetian blinds and 90k grandpa-miles made me HOT for this van, even though the cab was not as long as I would have quite wanted [the ½ tons are actually "small"]. It was totally cute and lady-appropriate looking and I would have dropped cash but the seller was... a grandpa at a dr's appt and his son was showing it. Turns out they just wanted a



backup buyer, though because when I called back the next day it'd been taken by "someone from last week". Bastards.

Stats: \$1600. I wanted it but they sold it from under me! Argh! Tragedy!!

Van 11: Ford E Series, World Explorer customization

Location: Long Island

I came across this van by accident and still wonder during the occasional quiet times in my heart if it wasn't secretly the Right One That I Let Go. It was in a lot that Don, a retired trucker, had left it in for a while. White, pop-top, the spare tire was in the back. The customization is one I've seen a few times since, the World Explorer, and the O in World is a globe, as if you could drive the fucker across the oceans. [That would be sweet.]

Specs: \$1000. No rearview mirror and couldn't test drive it so ... lots of questions. Rebuilt engine with 20k miles. Hot dang!

Van 12: Chevy G10 Mark III

Location: A mid-Jersey dealership.

A G10 is the ½ ton, so basically the body is not very long and your knees touch the seats in front of you when you sit on the back bench. It needed speakers and brakes and had a boring green exterior with taupe racing stripes and grey interior.

Specs: \$1500 and depressing to me. Is this all that's out there?

Van 13: THE DREAM!!, Chevy G20, "Designer Vans" conversion

Location: South Jerz

I saw this van listed on CL while I was still in Austin with no return ticket home [I had been planning on driving!]. This van was making me FREAK OUT and need to get back though, because it was all tidy on the inside, had a TV/VCR, was all blue and pretty with golden wooden trim. When I finally got into it with my homegirl, we realized that the headrests also had "D" monogrammed into them, and on the test drive, "Dream On" came on the stereo and I knew she had to be mine.

Specs: asking \$1500 down from \$2500 because there was a big dent in the side and it needed a catalytic converter. I talked the lady down to \$1000 because I think she was on a lot of valium.



Purchasing: The Hard Facts

When you buy a van, there is more to think about than general past-owner engine-maintenance and bourgeois shit like carfax accident report queries. You are about to buy a vehicle that is at least 15 years old -- a living room/bedroom on wheels – so while it's not going to be expensive like a “real” car, it's going to have lived some life, show some use, and there are extra considerations you need to take.

Breaking Down Gasoline Engines

So you know what you're looking at, you'll want to ask questions like: what kind of horsepower the engine has and how big it is. The bigger your numbers, the more power you get -- and more gas you'll use.

Horsepower: In large vehicles, people will throw around quantifiers like V6 and V8.

- V is the shape of the cylinders and 6 or 8 is the number of pistons.
 - Really simply:
 - Pistons move within cylinders, compressing a mixture of air and gasoline until it sparks, forcing the piston up out of the cylinder
 - As the pistons go up and down, they turn the engine crank, which makes the wheels go round.
 - Engine oil keeps this whole process moving smoothly, which is why it's SO important
 - V6 – has 6 pistons, and so less power/torque than engines with more pistons [but still definitely more power than a sedan]; also it uses less gas than a larger engine, and is damn hard to find in a conversion van engine.
 - V8 – has 8 pistons, so has more power and uses more gas. Do you need to move or drive the mountains with a buncha shit or a hitch? V8 [using your gears!] is a safer bet for engine longevity.

Engine Size

- Describes the volume of the engine, how much gas it can move through it, relates to speed and performance. In the case of a giant van, it matters more if you can afford the gas. Bigger engine size = more power to move you and your shit around = more gas usage.
- Engine size examples are: 4L, 4.3L, 5L, 5.7L



This section describes what is out there in makes and models; what to look at in engines; and what typical costs to purchase and maintain a van are. For more detailed car buying advice, please consult your diesel femme / old-school butch / overachieving houseboy friends, relatives, and other people who “know cars”, and always trust your gut. All I know is CHECKIN OUT HOT VANS and that at least some magic that got me mine.

Makes and Models: American – Made



Chevy G-Series: my love! also, lots of these beasts roam free



Ford E-Series: boxier, UHaul and wheel-trans standard-issue



GMC Vandura: tough-guy kissin cousins to Chevy



Dodge Ram: sometimes I can't even tell the difference between Dodge and GMC but there you have it

Plus/Minus of American Made

- + cheapish to buy as there are a gazillion of them around the country and were mostly made when cars were still made to last
- + cheaper to fix/easy to find parts for
- + steel beasts= safe. You win on the road.
- automatic transmission = gas guzzler like whoa; slightly lower engine lifespan, though many of these vans easily get 200k+ miles because people treat them so dearly. Mine has 176k and is still kicking!



Makes and Models: Foreign



VW: lets be real, there's a lot of Volkswagon Westfalias out there, and you either like it or think it's ugly.



Toyota "Van": It's a van called "Van," people. Utilitarian and the social property of tradespeople.

Plus/Minus of the Toyota Van and VW Westfalia

- + 4-or-5-speed/standard transmission, takes less gas, some can be converted to biodiesel, not everyone can drive stick though [heh, heh]
- generally more expensive to buy
- /+ rear-wheel drive is the standard make [there are 4WD around]
- + "Van" only manufactured from '82-'89, and only sold in N America from 84/85-89 – so not common...
- but therefore, not lots of cheap parts or sweet customizations
- parts are also perhaps more expensive/harder to find when you break down in fucknowhere Montana
- /+ the Westfalia customization, is sweet if you want a stove and a camping pop-top, not a ton of [legal] seating.

A Note On Pop-Tops...

A pop-top is when the top of a van is not flat, but raised in some fiberglass-and-window-pane homage to the RV. They add anywhere from 8 – 24 inches of height to the top of your vehicle, and while they give amazing benefits like cupboard space for your drugs, VCR tapes, and sex toys -- and sometimes, rarely, sleeper-space – they also make it impossible to pull into certain parking garages in large cities [see Boston, L.A., et al]

Conversions/Customizations:

This is of course, the most EXCITING and COOLEST part of van shopping and ownership: the tricked out interior that comes with the van! These can be standardized or highly customized. At the zenith of conversion van production in the late 1980's, there were over a THOUSAND individual customization companies in the US – mostly based in the Midwest. So many possibilities!



Attributes that could be customized:

- carpet & seat fabric and color,
- blinds/curtains,
- type of seating,
- seat plushness
- inclusion of a TV/VCR/Stereo

system in the front and/or rear and speakers,

- number of cigarette lighters and ashtrays,
- track lighting, overhead lighting,
- wood paneling for all kinds of storage and decoration,
- captains chairs with reclining and swivel potential
- Tables! Storage! Cupboards!

In theory, every van you ever will see could have been tricked out by a different agency in a different way, though in reality there are a few customizations I came across more than once, leading me to judge them as less than totally unique, though sometimes still totally sweet. Customization companies usually put their name/logo on the rear side of the van and/or on the spare tire cover in the back.



Common Customizations

Mark III – the most commonly-seen customization, I can only assume that this was the Cheap Dad's Interior, a basic comfy captains-chair and bed situation. Usually some version of taupe or grey and not fierce but is, well, a van you can decorate.

ChooChoo – a wood-paneling-focused dudebro conversion, the two vans I saw with this were pretty sweet, but not fancy enough for me. There was a sense of bong hits and ZZ top and rifle cases that I do not fetishize enough to want to live in, but ya know I get it.

Astro – Astro was actually a company who did some pretty rad customizations – generally pop-topped and ALWAYS finished off with a star-trek/boomerang-looking topper. Not to be confused with Chevy's Astro Minivan, extremely different and 100x more awesome.

Explorer – the "O" in the name is a globe, suggesting that you could drive across the ocean if you wanted to. That would be cool. The vans I've seen with this customization are usually tricked the fuck out with tons of cigarette lighters, tiny compartments, holders for beer coolers, etc. Think interior wood paneling. Think retirement chic.



The Dream, Interior c. 1995. [Note: track lighting in ceiling centre.]

My Customization

Designer Vans – My baby is a DV. She's got custom headrests [with my initial!], a TV/VCR, track lighting, an ez-pull-out bed/back bench seat, that's so very comfy for one or two, and exxxtra plush seating. She is a lady's van. A vehicle someone let the love of their life customize. Cerulean blue and deep gold wood interior -- trust, I put down plastic on the carpets and bed. I've met my friends.



Driving Your Dream Costs Money

Purchase Costs \$1000 - \$4000:

You can't get an awesome van in good/great condition for \$1000. I don't want to be the person who destroys the grandpa-selling-a-perfect-car-for-way-under-market-value dream for you, but it definitely got destroyed for me and you'll appreciate my harsh realism more than my sweet lies. I mean, drive the back roads and go on wild trips to underpaid zip codes to try to find a cheap fantasy van, but have a craigslist back-up plan too.

- **CHEAP:** For \$1500 you can find a decent one that needs definite [\$500 - \$1000] important work or has some major flaw in the exterior or interior. Sure.
- **CHEAPish:** For \$2500 you can find one that needs minor [\$250-\$500] work or has a minor flaw.
- **MIDRANGE:** For about \$3500-\$5000 you can probably get a conversion van in pretty pristine condition – if you have that much to blow. Go get it!
- **YOU ARE RICH:** For \$10,000+ you can get one very new very “nice” and probably really boring and ugly van from the last decade. But ... why would you?

Repair & Maintenance Costs

The beauty of a van is that it will get you home safe. It might scare you along the way, though – and certain maintenances can make the whole experience more calming. One thing I learned when at Pep Boys et al is: always ask for a discount, if there is a coupon or new-customer rate, or bat your eyelashes if you have pretty ones. The worst thing someone can say is “No” and I've gotten 10% off service more than once that way. Also, see if your parts are available used. And be nice to the mechanic – you might get a second estimate that is more than the person you are talking to just gave you and wish you could go back.

Before Purchase:

Mechanic to check it out before you buy: \$50-ish. Don't pay more than \$75 unless the mechanic is also giving you a neck massage to mediate the stress of a vehicle purchase. That said, the \$\$ spent is REALLY LIFESAINGLY WORTH IT. One of the vans I loved had cracked engine mounts and had I not learned that, the engine could have FALLEN OUT if I went over a major bump. Not cute. Please have the mounts looked at! Have them crack that bitch open, put



it up, look around and tell you everything that's wrong with it. Don't be afraid of there being things wrong with the van, any vehicle will need something – its whether it is fixable and how much that will cost; and what the state of everything else in there is like.

Maintenance: Normal Moneysucking Bullshit

Tune-up: V6: \$200 -250ish, V8 [gasguzzlin realness]: \$300-350. Unless the seller can show you records of the last tune up your van had, go get one, or else your van could start emitting burning smells and having engine shakes during a tornado-fueled downpour on an underlit expressway in Pennsylvania like mine did. The coils, spark plugs, wires all only last about 50,000 miles, maybe 100k if grandpa was careful on every other front and never sped. They have to be replaced, its what keeps your engine from melting down.

Oil Changes: \$20-\$35. **Do Not Skip.** If you do nothing else, get oil changes every 3000 miles. EVERY 3000 miles like a RELIGION.

Tires: New are like \$80-\$110, Used are \$25-\$50 but you might need that tread a new tire gets ya.

Extra Occasional Moneysucking Bullshit

Ballbearings have to be replaced on the front wheels every 100k miles and it's common for vans to need them replaced. It that or your wheels can bend inward or outward and maybe even snap off. An uncool way to go out.

Windshield Wiper Motors conk out and while you can get the motor used, the service to disassemble the front end of your dashboard to get in there to fix it gets costly.

Paying the \$state

Don't forget that you still have to register, get inspected, and get plates. You'll need another \$200-300. Custom plates -- in NYS, at least -- are \$100, renew every two years, and have eight characters, just like knuckle tattoos. You have to get "real" plates first so that the custom plates are associated with a real plate number. You don't actually get a ticket to "F YA PIG" or "FEMMETOP" or whatever it is you've picked.

And last – car insurance!!

Whatever you do, do not EVER register or try to insure a car in New York City. Insurance for me, a lady driver over 25 with no driving infractions, on The Dream in NYC for 6 months: \$2200 [yes, over two thousand bucks]. In Upsate NY for 6 months: \$260. You know what to do, friends.



DLUXE VAN LUST

DAYS & NIGHTS IN A CONVERSION VAN

NYC TO Idyll Dandy Acres, TN: 2010 twice, 2009 once

I've made this 900-mile-each-way trip three times with anywhere from 5-7 people in the van, and I will tell you this: you will become friends. You will be snuggled in the back bench seat together, you will be entertaining each other, you will be holding the drivers' coffee as you corner hard onto the expressway onramp, you'll take turns looking out for TN small-town cops and you will tell stories. It's a 16 hour drive, kids.

Approximate cost of gas is \$200 each way. Having six people is really a good idea, cost wise. This is the trip that developed my driver-discount cost-sharing rule. Everyone throws in \$20 towards maintenance [and trust me -- you will spend it on maintenance] and then the gas cost is divided up and adjusted so drivers spend about \$20 less than non-drivers to ride. This is so drivers can have unlimited coffee paid for collectively, and their many hours of hard work keeping us all alive is acknowledged. Plus the tire you blow on a one-lane dirt road heading up to Short Mountain trying to turn the van around on an incline, or the tune up you discover you need in a hurricane on the unlit highways of rural PA when the van engine won't stop shaking, or oil change you can't wait on gets paid for collectively, too.

One the trip through PA, I had three friends with me – two homegirls and one trandom-now-friend who visited my grandma, aunt and cousin at my aunt & uncle's house on a hill, just above the Baptist church where he preaches and the little graveyard that's been in the community for 150 years. As we pulled down the steep holler incline to get back out onto the highway was when the engine first started shaking. Freaked I turned it off then on and it was fine – but when it started again in the hurricane we pulled off into a small town that was having a blackout, and had one gas station, a macdonalds, and a day's inn. We got a room [snuck in half of us], and I never thought I'd be happy to see the lights turn on in a fast food chain, but I was.



Adventure Dates

You can have a really fun date in a van. Just go somewhere almost abandoned, yet engaging like an amusement park in a forest or Detroit, and make absolutely no plans about where you will stay beyond “in the van.” In Detroit this resulted in parking my van in a civic parking lot -- which became a farmer’s market the next day. We awoke to crates of flowers and plants magically scenting and less than magically surrounding the vehicle. In the forest, this means sneaking into an RV park because hey – you don’t have to hook up to anything [tho vans with hookups are pretty sweet] and thus you don’t have to pay a cent. Walking around an RV park is going to bring to you back to your childhood if you ever camped with family or friends’ families or went away. There were definitely people who lived in the RV camp perhaps year-round and peering into their summer lives was fun.

NYC to Austin on Tour

As if you didn’t know: touring involves not only artists and merchpups, but TONS OF SHIT, so by the time the fifth person with their amps got in the van, it was as full as it could be and I was so glad we hadn’t invited anyone else. As it was, napping in the back meant resting your head on a pillow made of crackers and dried fruit in festive paper Trader Joe’s bags, and we all had to take turns refolding the merch because we kept kicking it over the in the middle aisle of the van.

Austin to Philly to New York So I Could Start A Day Job

The return road trip from tour made a small finger outlining the south and back up to the east coast. I spent small nights in smaller cities and THIS time I had a secret weapon, something I really should have been doing all along – plugging my Hitachi Magic Wand into the cigarette lighter converter and relaxing instead of stressing out for 1900 miles. This was a definite yes success do it don’t not do it strategy for being a solo driver. A veteran sweetheart travel mate/navigator was with me so we developed Hitachi games and it was like BOOM, we’re in Pennsylvania already?

Then again road trips are about at least wanting to arrive, because otherwise you realize that PA is so wide to drive across [though nothing compares to Texas] and you’re still pretty far when you get to the southwestern border, and then even the Hitachi can’t help. My



final destination was a desk job in midtown Manhattan, which is the OPPOSITE of an **adventure**, so its lucky that I am smart and believe in rewarding myself for Doing The Right Thing, and I had a very exciting date awaiting me in Philly. This was probably the only thing that was going to get me up to the east coast on time [and even then I was a day late]. Moral of the story: be nice to yourself, driving is hard work, but working is the hardest work.

NYC to Upstate New York in the Winter

The thing about driving in the snow is, you need snow tires. Especially if it is actively snowing. Double especially if you have a pregnant friend in the car who you are invested in not murdering or making involuntarily abort. If you, for example, are on an expressway in active snowfall and want to get off because that shit is dangerous, I recommend NOT making any last-minute decisions about offramps when the road is whited-out. This is because you could have to slam on the brakes and swerve to avoid hitting a divider you couldn't see til the last second, thus spinning out the van in the snow. And let me tell you, spinning out on an expressway offramp is the BEST way to practice your multitasking skills: you can see your life flash before your eyes and handle the steering wheel and brakes of a one-ton vehicle that's whipping around in uncontrolled circles at the same time. Excitement! Because you are in a van, you may crush and dent the exterior, but you, like me, may very well drive away from such an encounter. And then, you will get snow tires. And you will still not start smoking again. [*note: the baby is now 8 months old! Darling Anna!*]

A Note On GPS:

I drove full-circle of the continent and got home fine without it, with the use of a quaint device called a Road Atlas. You can, too – though, I wil admit that GPS helps when you have a deadline.



ROAD TRIP ACROSS AMERICA 2009!

I drove the nicest conversion van I could find [that is, afford with my pre-recession 2008 tax return] around the perimeter of the United States of America – with serious quality time spent in Canada -- in the summer of 2009. 11,867 miles, 32 States, three Provinces, several tattoos, a hundred new friends, three oil changes and half a folk album later, I returned home to Crown Heights, Brooklyn with no more tread on my tires and a huge wonderful fulfilled dream in my heart.

Good things about van travel include: driving my house without having to deal with RV realness like cleaning up pee leaks, and gaining the awesome skill of being able to parallel park a twelve-foot-long vehicle absolutely anywhere, including on an incline with only six inches to spare. Not as good things include purchasing gasoline using money, and getting asked to move along at 10am by police in Nashville when I'd parked in an exhausted fit behind a Jaguar in the fancy neighborhood for the night.

Having so much space to spare, I networked out and traveled with amazing people most of the way, and by myself for a few little special stretches. But the van was always there: my plush blue best friend that doubled as a giant purse, roaming bedroom and tailgate space.

For more detailed stories and illustrations about the return trip where I got a sweetheart in the van and we put “Just Married” on the exterior spare tire cover, you can see the companion zine Love Island. Here are some remaining travelogue notes.

The trip is describes as such: Day-on-the-road – Real World Date – Driving Destinations – Routes, if I can remember

JUNE 6, 2009

I buy a conversion van that has no exhaust system for \$1000, and chugs along great after she sees \$1300 of mechanic. My femme community dedicates her to our collective liberation by collecting all my best girlfriends to come over, tailgate with cold drinks and faux flowers, pass around a pair of busted gold lace high heels and place all our safe magical travel wishes into them. The heels sit in the front corners of my windshield to this day, and I have been in trouble but not yet hurt.



DAY 1 | AUG 4 | BROOKLYN TO VIRGINIA

We get a late start somehow, even though I pick up the van at noon sharp from the mechanic where it got its windshield wiper motor replaced. We miss the Tiny America Museum and head straight for the VA border, clocking about 9 hours of driving that day, being nice to ourselves and each other. The first night of this trip is the first night I ever sleep in the van with other people. I park in between the truckers and their long hauls because the van feels really big to me, and take a turn in a reclined captain's chair. All night I dream of the van bouncing and rolling madly down a twisting hill and the light toggle pulling out, and I realize later it was the trucks rolling out in the early morning.

DAY 2 | AUG 5 | VIRGINIA TO NASHVILLE

We drive all day and stop frequently, no need to hurt ourselves! We get into Nashville around 9pm and use the magic of Internet Phones to find the lesbian bar: the Lipstick Lounge. We are a little confused, we drink.

We only find one motel, and the existence of a sign that reads “No Prostitutes” in the hallway makes my travelmate pissed off, “Well, they don’t want us!” I drive on exhausted, just enough alcohol in me to bring on the cranky, and park semi-randomly on a side street.

DAY 3 | AUG 6 | NASHVILLE TO NEW ORLEANS

We wake up at 10am and within 10 minutes of waking up, we realize I parked in the Rich People Neighborhood. We are behind a Jaguar and the people on the porch we are next to look freaked out as we bounce the van about, waking ourselves up. A police officer pulls up and knocks on the window, so I, the least freaked by cops, emerge.



No we don’t live here and yes, actually, we are leaving right now. Where **is** the expressway, anyway? We find a random café in one of those Artisanal Center City Revitalization Plazas, look at signage for the annual Tomato Festival next weekend as we caffeinate and wake up.



We become of two camps. Day three has us a touch cranky and one of us wants us to take a three-hour detour to see her bestie and swim in his pool in Alabama. Others of us want to get to New Orleans in time for our alcoholism and curiosity. We vote and head direct to the Third Coast though Alabama, seeing the biggest bugs of our lives in the gas stations en route, the only places I have ever been creeped out in America. Getting into New Orleans around 11pm we head over to a nfused to the location, until we get our heads out of our phones and into the world and see that there is a giant lavender-painted building ahead of us. Lesson: the physical world will tell you where to go if you let it. friends house in the Mariny to clean the road dirt off our faces prep for going out for the Thursday night. We forgo vantravel for cabs!! and drinking; get to some famousish clubs in the French Quarter, and dance til far too late, which is never late enough.

DAY 4 | AUG 7 | NOLA TO ATX

This is a schlep, but it is a straight-shot and we drive route 10 towards Austin with our eyes dead ahead. We learn the hard way that heading west is forever going into the blinding sunlight that angles cruelly at our eyes from 4pm til 7pm. Sunlight burns, remember? At 5:30 I limp up into a Sonic to get icecream treats for everyone and to close my eyes and look at the popping lights on my eyelids.

We get to Austin around midnight, so very overheated and exhausted. One friend has prepared a pool party for us, and we arrange a meeting of the peoples in the cool water where we are getting our braincells back. We sleep in houses and feel more normal.

DAY 5-6 | AUG 8-9DAY | AUSTIN

My travelmates began threatening mutiny, it was so hot in the fucking van. August + south/desert = terrible. No, we can't fix the air conditioning – what if something real needs to be fixed and I need that \$600 for something else? We compromise and drive all night, thus getting an extra day Out Of The Van in the process. We spend the extra day in Austin visiting Barton Springs -- where



I had my first orgasm of the trip when I got into the 65-degree-water in my 100-degree-body -- and the Cathedral of Junk, a three-story composite structure of steel bits, broken ceramics, mechanical detritus and concrete. I decide to write a book here when I can return.

DAY 7 | AUG 9 EVE/10 | AUSTIN TO TUSCON

Driving through the desert all night, with nothing to look at but the giant West Texas sky, is a great way to believe that you have been Abducted By Aliens. When I wake up from my nap, the rearview mirror is at an angle that prohibits one from seeing all the way out the back of the van, and it has never been fixable. No one remembers the hours from 3-6am. WHAT DID THEY DO?!

DAY 8 | AUG 11 | TUSCON TO LA

Extreme misery and adventure push us through. We leave Tuscon at midnight wanting so badly to stay in town and rest, I get us lost for an hour trying to find The Expressway. The ONLY expressway, the one that snakes ten miles from the US/Mexico border which I want to cross so badly and will not because the artificial borders that delineate our countries also try to delineate our bodies and the transgressive bodies I am traveling with don't take borders well at all. The Expressway that goes from New Orleans to Los Angeles, which I have travelled every mile of, the one with random roadblocks run by Immigration & Customs Enforcement, and we got rid of our delicious pot cookies before we went too far along. Sad about the pot cookies, abominable about the border guards.

We arrive at the Cali state line around 6am and find ourselves on the edge of the Joshua Tree National Park at 7am. Inside is an alien land where the animals reign and we in our boots and engines should not be. We see herds of wild goats!

DAY 8 | AUG 12 | LA TO SF

The middle of Cali is exciting because we know that our final destination is a very few hours away. Leaving the baller ass hotel where I'd pushed myself to extremes of exhaustion to stay up late out front



smoking cigarettes in a \$2 texas thrift store tight polyester dress effort to Be Discovered, dreaming of my lover, my other lover, my unknown future, and my unknown adventures. I play pretend that things will go terribly for me later so I don't forget to love the magic of the present.

DAY 13 | AUG 17 | SF TO OAKLAND

By this point in the journey, I am just semi-randomly getting on freeways while holding coffees and trusting my driving instincts, which is completely ridiculous, considering how large my vehicle is and how much even bigger America's freeway systems are. Yet I am arriving where I need to get to just fine. Moral of the story: you can learn to speak any language if you practice enough.

PORTLAND BREAK!

I spend seven days in Portland using my van as a pickup line and my bicycle as a vehicle; writing at the café every morning and going out large every night. PDX = I must return sometime.

DAY 23 | PORTLAND TO SEATTLE | RT 5

Hung over as shit I awake late smelling like delicious cologne, satisfaction and last night's karaoke bar party. I slowly get ready to drive, getting home in the sun on the bus. I wait for my van to be returned by my friends who borrowed it, so I can grab the girl craigslist found for me to ride with -- who turned out to be en route to a queer primitive skill share in bellingham, wa. I get to Seattle in time to have dinner with my one friend who tells me to meet him at the restauraunt my other friend is already at. Perfect synchronicity in place, I arrive in heels, hungry, ready. "When are you going to vancouver?" "Uhm tonight?" "What? No!" My friends say, "You're coming over then you're coming out with us!" My drive to meet new people and to enjoy the company around me for a few too brief hours convinces me. I have to tell my travelmate that I won't make it to her in Vancouver til the next day which breaks my heart a bit but I know it's right. I go out for



whiskey on my bike that's a piece of shit, drink at a bar that has a hot Ford parked outside, and when the cowboys who drive it stagger out and ask me to ride with them I convince them to let me pose on the hood instead and get a glamor shot. New York Femme on the road.

DAY 24 | FRI AUG 28 | SEATTLE --> VANCOUVER | RT 5, 15

I wasn't even supposed to be in Seattle but waking up to sweetly calm sun and breakfast being cooked for me in a small neighborhood full of flowers and cute houses was exactly where I should have been, regardless the fact that I was nervous about a crush and forgot that I had real blankets and froze in my van all night. I was anxious to get to Vancouver, knowing that my lover the Puppy was waiting for me there, having adventured and trainhopped all the way there from Montreal. I wanted to hear her stories and touch her face and see my Vancouver friends and get ready for my show there that night.

DAY 25 | SUN AUG 30 | VANCOUVER --> MONTANA | RT: 99, 5, 12, 90

Of course the US side searched the van. This took almost two hours because there was a VANLOAD of femme detritus in the back: seven suitcases/duffels and an evil-looking doctors bag full of dicks and sharps. Pull over for the night at a rest stop in the Lolo National Forest, and good thing because the roads curve so severely in the cuts and gorges of the woods that driving would be a waste of beautiful scenery. The rest stop is full of trucks and truckers and I wonder if the men's room is full of cruising. The car next to us is running all night though it's not cold. The air smells like clean, strange trees. There is a sign to watch out for snakes. Eew.

DAY 38 - MON AUG 31 MONTANA --> MONTANA ROUTES: 90, 94

We had to stop to get the oil changed so we picked Butte, MO, where I in my tiny dress and driving heels negotiate the bounds of a "regular" service with the three attendants. There was luckily a tack shop with an extensive Rope Wall across the parking lot from the quick lube to entertain me while I waited.

I also decided while driving that if I ever only had ten grand left in my life and no chance of getting more, I'd buy a tiny Montana plot as close to Washington state as possible and hide out there, singing as loud as I



could: *"Leave me in the cold mountains when I'm decrepit, let my knees give out on the side of a hill ... with my crafty knack, some guns and a shack..."* because secretly I think that when I am decrepit I will only have singing left to love and I will dedicate my warbly voice to the last manifestation of this belief. I make peace with this as I fade to sleep.

DAY 39 - TUES SEPT 1 - MONTANA --> VALLEY CITY, N.

DAKOTA | RT: 84

It was apparent that life is a blessing because we rounded a corner just across the state line into North Dakota, and WHAM - giant smooth rocks with striations of every color grew from the dusty soil, surrounding us. What is not described in the name The Badlands is the absolute gorgeousness of the terrain, and it was the best part of the drive. Shimmering daylight, the brief stay we have on earth, the importance of seeing it and being your best self. So clear. We pulled the van over and climbed the ladder to the roof so we could sit and watch, snacking on a lemon bar from one of Montana's confusingly numerous "Expresso" shacks.

DAY 40 - WEDS SEPT 2 - VALLEY CITY, N DAKOTA -->

MINNEAPOLIS

Got to Minneapolis around 7pm, in time to see the evening sun set on the city while we found the apartment of my friend who had just moved there for an internship at the most Radical Unitarian Church in America. Our beautiful friend had dinner ready for us! After eating road food and sleeping in a van, her apartment was a castle for princesses, and the meal was made with such love and tastiness that I shed a tear while eating. Mexican-sees-homemade everything plus cilantro and lime juice. We toured around town and had coffee and played catch-up and eventually slept soundly under a white chenille comforter.

DAY 41 - THURS SEPT 3 - MINNEAPOLIS -->

MILWAUKEE

Having googled Gay Bars as we rolled into town, we made our way to the southeastern streets and parked on a side road, heading to Walker's Pint, the local lesbian sports bar who's mottoes were "Hide Your Daughters" and "Where Every Night Is Ladies Night". Phone-internet WIN!



**DAY 42 - FRI SEPT 4 - MILWAUKEE, WI --> CHICAGO -->
ANN ARBOR, MI RT: 94, 90**

We left our cozy side street at 10:30am and Driving felt ugly and too early, the streets looked like a combination of Portland's main drag, south Austin, Nashville's east side, and the shopping channels of Greece, NY - everywhere and so nowhere special. I was hung over in the way that not getting quite enough alcohol makes you feel - had I drunk more, I would have been fine. I drive and think about themes in living, how there's always missing parts and they're what we talk about because it feels like "desire for" can define us more easily than trying to describe the existing pieces. I drink water with Emergen-c and sullenly smoke until my traveldear perks me up. Yes to travelmates!

DAY 43 - SAT SEPT 5 - ANN ARBOR, MI --> CHATAQUA NY

We were on the expressway passing the first ruins of Detroit by 7:45. However, we'd lived large with my hilarious friend in Ann Arbor until 3am, and that gave me The Exhaustion. Our hostess slipped me an Adderol and described its uses on our way out the door, but I was totally still afraid of all prescription pills after having taken a Vivarol earlier in the summer that kept me up for 28 hours talking nonstop.

But at 8:45 the sun was behind me and the Reality of Attending A Wedding was in front of me, so I took half the adderol. I didn't want to get actually fucked up, I just wanted to be able to make it through Compulsory Heterosexuality Day, without passing out. I like to forget that I have a supremely delicate and pure system, and that drugs tend to really affect me. I forget this because usually that makes taking drugs fun, unless they are the drugs currently given to children, which are too strong for me.

I drank my coffee, used the cruise control, smoked out the tiny window to keep the noise down and thought quickly about Detroit: how much I wanted to go there instead, the tales of abandoned libraries and streets where there are no people for blocks and houses galore. Maybe it's Detroit and not Montana we're I'll take my last 10k and hide out.

We rolled up to the outskirts of the intensely quaint summertime village of Chataqua just after 12:30 and just in time for my mother to start



calling me, my exhaustion to peak, and the adreol to begin to wear off, leaving me angry and withdrawing. "I smell like shit and I don't have makeup on!" I flipped out and decided to ignore the phone ringing and hastily put on eyeliner and a dress at a gas station. I kicked myself for inviting my mother, having done so in a moment of Daughterly Duty, knowing that this was as close to seeing me in a "real" wedding as she was EVER going to get.

Getting Legal Married [unlike me or my people are allowed to do] was my oldest and dearest friend, to an international lover who looks like GI Joe. I tried to remain calm as I negotiated my mom who was shedding tears over my bridesmaid's dress and snapping photos of me to excess. She loves a wedding, so it's too bad she'd never come to my Legal Wedding to the homo of my choosing. My BF's man pulls me aside to do tequila shots and acknowledges this inequality and I really like him.

DAY 44 - SUN SEPT 8 - CHATAQUA, NY --> NYC

I need to tell you that driving into NYC is a slice of my personal hell: the full picture of hell adds being stuck in traffic, on the wrong bridge, on my way to a heterosexual wedding, without any smokes. Driving without smoking is extremely stressful for me, I want to rage and shake my fist out the tiny front windows but I need to Stay Focused on avoiding potholes and Audis going 95mph. That's why I love having a van – you can smoke if you want and you definitely can not go 90mph so don't worry yourself trying. Here at the end of the trip, both the van and I needed a little break from each other and our peculiarities. We parked in Crown Heights, dragged in a few items, and I put the keys on the rack to gather just a little dust, until next time.

OVERALL

I will say this: I love life more now than I did before, I am also thankful to be alive, unsurprised that my hair is so fiercely gray, amazed at the available adventures that are just out there, and not ready to stop, yet. Now all you have to do is pretend you're climbing into the navigator's seat [called the "passenger's seat" by normals], have maps on your lap and are picking a tape to pop in, and...lets roll.