

Choosing a New Van or Light Commercial

When choosing a new van you need to start by considering your business needs. Take on board each vans practicality and also how affordable it will be to buy and run. Consider what you intend to carry (payload) and what capacity (loadspace volume) you will need. We've teamed up with Vansdirect.co.uk, one of the UK's leading new van suppliers, to give you the low down.



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Choosing the Right Van

Different Types of Van

Different vans are suited to different types of job but we can put vans into general categories which have certain advantages and disadvantages. The van you need will be found in one of these categories.

Microvans

Ideal for tight streets, busy city centres and multi-drop deliveries where parking is limited. Although payloads are very reasonable given the smaller size, taller drivers can find microvans cramped. Fuel economy is not great and long journeys can be wearing. Examples include the Daihatsu Hijet, Piaggio Porter and Suzuki Carry. Of these we recommend the Suzuki Carry as the best in type.

Car-derived Vans

Car-derived vans (CDVs) or small vans are normally standard passenger cars with a load area instead of rear seats and solid panels instead of rear side windows. Being based on cars they are comparatively refined to drive, deliver good fuel economy and good in motorway, town and country use. The major limitation of this type of van is an inability to carry heavy or bulky loads. Examples include the Fiat Punto and Vauxhall Astravan.

Light Vans (Hi-cubes)

Light vans or hi-cubes offer a similar wheelbase to CDVs but can carry more load in terms of volume and weight. The original hi-cubes were based on the front of a three-door hatchback with a high cubic load space behind. More recent models have been designed with a single space which offers a more generous cab. This type of van is generally fuel efficient, easy to manoeuvre and easier to drive than a panel van and most suited to carrying small to medium loads. Examples include the Ford Transit Connect, Renault Kangoo and Vauxhall Combo.

Small Panel Vans

Small panel vans fall between light vans and large panel vans. The latest models are quite refined and fuel efficient and offer a good balance between load carrying ability and ease of driving at reasonable operating costs. It may be worth considering whether you only occasionally need the larger load areas of a large panel van – if so then it may be that you should run a small panel van and hire the larger van when you require.

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The ideal choice for new vans

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Large Panel Vans

The large panel van category covers a wide range of shapes and sizes. Generally there are three roof heights – low roof (LR) or standard roof (SR), medium roof (MR) and high roof (HR) and three lengths – short wheelbase (SWB), medium wheelbase (MWB) and long wheelbase (LWB). However, the way different manufacturers classify these shapes and sizes varies and what is a MWB from one manufacturer may be a LWB from another manufacturer so you need to check the dimensions. Large panel vans are high-volume, heavy-duty workhorses offering decent fuel economy. Examples include the Citroen Relay, Renault Master, Ford Transit and Mercedes Sprinter.

Pick-ups

All pick-ups have an open load area behind the cab but can be subdivided by the type of cab. Single cabs have two doors and two seats, super cabs have two doors with two front seats plus a rear bench seat or two individual seats and double cabs typically have four doors and four seats. Most pick-ups are four-wheel-drive and although this can be good for rugged terrain they can be a bit unrefined on the road. Double cabs prove particularly popular with drivers who need a large open load area (although solid covers are usually an option) and still want a luxurious cab. There may also be a case for driving a pick-up instead of a company car to reduce the tax bill – but be warned that your local taxman increasingly frowns on this. Examples of pick-ups include the Ford Ranger, Mitsubishi L200 and Nissan Pick-up. Smaller pick-ups from Proton (the Jumbuck) and Suzuki (the Carry pick-up) are also available.

Chassis Cabs

Chassis cabs are cabs on a bare chassis base which may then be customised with the body you want. Common variants include tippers, flatbeds, dropsides and Lutons (Box vans) but if you have a specific use in mind and none of these is a good fit then there is probably a way of bespokeing a chassis cab for the job. Examples include the Renault Master, Ford Transit, Iveco Daily and Mercedes Sprinter.

Minibuses

Minibuses are normally panel vans which have been converted and fitted with seats. The number of seats varies with the wheelbase of the original platform but is typically 12, 13 or 17. It's important to note that under most circumstances a PCV licence is needed for minibuses with nine or more seats. (contact the DVLA for more information www.dvla.gov.uk). Further conversions such as wheel chair lifts or ramps are possible. Examples include the Fiat Ducato, Renault Master, Ford Transit and Mercedes Sprinter.

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Questions to ask yourself in order to buy the most suitable van

- How much can you afford?
- How long do you expect to keep it?
- What is the best way of paying for it?
- When do you need delivery?
- Can you afford the general running costs (insurance, servicing, parts, fuel, etc.)?
- What sort of engine size and fuel do you need for the job?
- What payload and load area will be adequate?
- How long will the driver spend in the cab each day?
- Does the specification provide the driver with an adequate level of comfort and convenience?
- Are the vehicle's external dimensions small enough for where it needs to go e.g. loading areas and multi-storeys?
- What sort of roads will the van need to deal with most - city centre, A roads, B roads, motorways, off-road?
- Does any special equipment need to be fitted or carried and if so is the van suitable?
- Can the supplier provide all the accessories you need and fit them before delivery?
- How many people does the van need to carry?
- Will the van be used for towing?
- Does the load area offer enough accessibility for the driver and can any loading equipment access the cargo area?
- Is the standard security equipment sufficient?
- Does the vehicle's driving licence requirement fit the drivers?

Remember that the friendly staff at Vansdirect.co.uk can help you to work through the entire purchase process and their prices are hard to beat. Click the logo to visit their website or you can contact them on t. 0845 021 1111

Vansdirect.co.uk

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