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EXCLUSIVE

# Home on the Randger



*Peter Vaughan*

The latest exclusive-to-Marquis brand, Randger, launches its pop-top campervans from France onto the UK market

## RANDGER R499

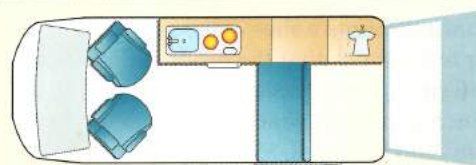
**Price from:** £41,995 (estimated)

**Berths:** 4 **Travel seats:** 4

**Base vehicle:** Fiat Talento

**Length:** 4.99m

**Gross weight:** 2,960kg







It's a typical campervan side kitchen layout; the furniture is well finished and the sliding door is on the UK side (although it's built in France)

**T**he market for compact campervans – ones with a pop-up roof and, usually, a side kitchen layout – is growing faster than any other sector. It is led by the VW California (sales up over 50% in 2017), with Ford, Mercedes, Renault and Toyota all now able to offer campers through selected car dealerships, and a huge variety of specialist converters building campervans on new VW T6s and used T5s. Some pundits expect van-based leisure vehicles to hit 40% of the whole UK motorhome market.

So, it's hardly surprising that the UK's largest motorhome retailer, Marquis, (with 12 branches and counting) wants a slice of the action. Nor is it a shock that the product that it is sending into battle comes from its French parent, Trigano. A comment from Alan Buckwell, Marquis' Sales Director, when we collected the

Randger for road test says it all, "We've taken three California Beach campers in part-exchange in the last month and they've all been sold within a week."

So, who is Randger? A wholly new marque, launched in 2017, it builds only campervans and larger van conversions at its base in the Dordogne (at picturesque Brantôme), where it benefits from years of experience from other Trigano brands (including sister marque, Font Vendôme). Only two models are destined for the British market: this R499 and a long-wheelbase, rear toilet layout in the R535, both based on the Fiat Talento and both fully UK-handed with access on the nearside (unlike the California and Mercedes Marco Polo). The model you see here is the very first prototype, so production models may differ slightly.

### DUCATO'S LITTLE BRUV

We all know that Fiat's Ducato dominates in coachbuilt motorhome sales. Its little brother, the Scudo, however, was never more of a threat than a mosquito to the king of the jungle, the lion of campervans being the VW Transporter (T6).

The Scudo was (like the Ducato) a joint venture with PSA (Peugeot-Citroën), which has now gone its own way, with its small van partnered with Toyota (and soon Vauxhall). The Scudo's replacement is the new Talento, which is a derivative of the Renault Trafic (also seen as a Nissan, and a Vauxhall until that agreement expires). Confused? Well, such sharing of development is the way of the modern motor industry.

Suffice to say, here, that the Trafic impressed when it was launched in 2014 and it still offers as many





There's good storage in the galley and a small, front-loading compressor fridge



There's a useful tall, shelved locker alongside the rear seat



The cab seats get a single armrest and loose covers. The rear seat slides forward so little passengers are nearer to mum and dad

## SECOND OPINION

*"The campervan market seems to be exploding with new products. It's the value that stands out here"*

DANIEL ATTWOOD EDITOR

smiles-per-mile as any rival. And the Talento, built on the same line at Sandouville in France using the same engines, is just as worthy a rival for the ubiquitous T6.

Bold Fiat grille aside – I'll leave you to debate whether it's prettier than the Renault – the Talento is, of course, the same van. And here you'll get the same kit in every Randger, in the usual one-spec-fits-all policy from Marquis. That means plenty of kit – 17in alloy wheels, air-con, cruise control, ESC with Traction Plus and Hill Assist, and a DAB radio with 7in touchscreen, Bluetooth and sat-nav (which oddly doesn't do postcodes). Parking sensors are the only obvious omission.

There are three exterior paint colours to choose from but all Randgers come with the 1.6-litre twin-turbo 125bhp diesel motor and a six-speed manual gearbox. Don't

let the small capacity put you off, it's just another sign of the times, and the benefit is fuel economy – we're getting close to an indicated 40mpg from this brand-new camper.

It is slightly down on torque compared with 148bhp VW and 128bhp Ford rivals (both 2-litre engines), but a few extra gearchanges are no hardship when the shift is this easy. With a ride quality that copes admirably even with the worst of Britain's roads, the Talento manages to feel more like an MPV than a van and you'd happily drive this camper every day – to the office, to the supermarket, on the school run...

With its contrasting black pop-top lid and black alloys, but colour-coded white mirrors and front bumper, the Randger also makes a statement wherever you go. Pity, then, that the slightly baggy loose covers on the

front seats and the overwhelmingly black plastic cab interior don't match this style. But we've yet to mention what could be the R499's trump card – a projected on-the-road price of circa just £41,995.

## LIFTING THE LID

While its sister model goes all unconventional in terms of layout, the R499 is as predictable as cheese and pickle living in the same sandwich.

Firstly, there's a rear-hinged, manually raised roof, designed and made in-house by Randger. It offers massive headroom of almost 2.40m at the front, comes with a roof bed as standard and is unclipped with a simple, central catch (no horrid, fiddly straps here). Half-moon-shaped, flyscreened vents are fitted on either side but there's no window in the >





Table is a good size but works best in conjunction with the rear bench. Note magazine pockets and moulded trim panel in rear

front. With dark privacy glass in the body of the camper that means you'll have the LED strip lights on more than you might expect.

The floorplan – with side kitchen and rear bench seat – is exactly as you'd anticipate, though. Like many other campervan makers, Randger turns to RIB for the seat/bed unit, so this is a well-tested design. It comes with height-adjustable headrests and twin three-point seatbelts but not Isofix (for child seats) and its proportions (quite high off the floor) best suit those with longer legs. It isn't mounted on tracking in the floor but its seat runners underneath (as you'd find on cab seats) give over 200mm of fore/aft movement. With the seat in its forward position, rear passengers will feel much less remote from the cab and boot space is increased, too. Pity that headroom is tight with the

roof down – six-footers will have their heads against the ceiling.

Up front, you'll find that both cab seats swivel without opening the doors, though you will need to release the handbrake to turn the driver's chair. Then, for dining, the good-sized table is retrieved from the boot (it slides under the rear section of mattress) and clipped to a rail on the front of the galley. With the rear seat slid forward (blocking the fridge) four people can all (just) reach, but the table works better for two in conjunction with the rear bench only.

Unfortunately, there's no provision to dine al fresco but it wouldn't take much redesigning to allow the table to clip to the back of the galley, through the open offside sliding door. Yes, this Talento comes with twin sliders, though here the second door doesn't really serve any purpose.

## TAMBOUR TIME

Side kitchen campers may all look much the same but it's the details that make all the difference when you've got such a small space to play with.

Here, the minutiae start with the very automotive trim panel in the rear nearside (there are sliding windows in each sliding door but what appears, at first, to be glazing beyond this is just a graphic on each side) and plenty of artificial lighting – three LED strips and two spotlights over the back seat (which may get USBs in production as the only existing port is in the dash).

More importantly, the galley seems well thought out, with practical storage and very solidly constructed furniture. The use of tambour doors also makes for easy access whichever position the seat is in. Starting from the front, under the sink, there's a tall cupboard with shelf and cutlery ►



## LIKED



- Easy-to-use elevating roof with simple central catch
- High-spec, great-driving base vehicle

## DISLIKED



- Very thin upper bed mattress on a solid base
- Stick-on insulated screens for every window (no blinds/curtains)

## WANTED

- Automatic gearbox option
- Practical benefit of second sliding door (maybe for the table?)

There's a reasonable worktop beside the hob, with 12V and 230V sockets on the wall



The RIB seat converts easily into a good, flat double bed. Silver Screen-style covers are used for all windows

drawer, then, below the cooker, there's a shallow locker above the 41-litre compressor fridge (which has a *very* positive latch). Alongside the back seat, another tambour door opens onto a deeper cupboard than you might expect (maybe for pots and pans), followed by a full-height shelved space that's perfect for folded clothes (and has the inboard water tank in its base). Finally, in the back corner is a small wardrobe with shirt-length hanging depth.

The Can hob has two unequal-sized burners and push-button ignition, while a small but useful worktop sits adjacent with accompanying 12V and 230V sockets (the only ones fitted).

## ON THE SILVER SCREEN

When it's time to turn in, there are no curtains or blinds to pull in the

Randger. Every window (six of them) instead has a Silver Screen-style pad attached to the inside of the glass with suckers. That creates a more car-like feel inside but you do end up with a big bag of screens and putting them in place takes longer than drawing curtains. However, they do a good job of keeping out the light (keeping in the dark?) and they offer a bit of insulation, so I got used to the idea.

I also thought I might spend my first night in the Randger in the roof bed. It's the wider berth, with a one-piece mattress and it's available instantly. There's even a folding ladder provided to ease access, though I found it just as easy to clamber up without it and the fact that it is stored at the back of the boot perhaps suggests that Randger doesn't really expect you to use it. Despite its near-6ft length, the brochure describes

this as a child's bed and the thinness of the mattress (only about 35mm), and its solid base, put me off. It's also worth noting that while twin reading lights are fitted (rare in a pop-top), these are at the rear of the roof where headroom is negligible.

The lower bed unfolds in the usual RIB fashion, with the squab rotating through 180 degrees first and the backrest then flipping down into the space created to make a flat double that's 1.86m by 1.11m. That's the mattress size but gaps at the sides (next to the nearside wall and offside furniture) mean usable width is actually 1.22m. There's also, oddly, a void of around 130mm between the head of the bed and the tailgate, down which pillows might be tempted to try to escape. But in the morning you'll be keen to raise the rear section of mattress to create a sort of giant >





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Boot space is generous and makes the Randger more practical than some rivals

chaise longue. Only snag now is that, if you want a cuppa, it'll have to be black (as the foot of the bed obstructs the fridge door).

### BOOT CAMP

Rear boot space is vitally important in a camper like this and it quickly turns some rivals from hero to zero. Here, thankfully, it's more supervan than *nul points*. The low-level section is big enough for compact outdoor chairs, wellies, mains lead, etc, while there's plenty of room for bedding (and more) on top of the rear mattress. Or you can fold this section of bed flat against the rear seat backrest to create full-height storage that's 1.11m across and at least 650mm deep.

Also found in the boot is the locker for a single Campingaz 2.75kg cylinder (it only serves the hob), while under the back bench is a very large (685mm long!) drawer and a cupboard that wasn't filled by our camera bag. If you want to carry a Porta Potti, though, it'll have to be stored in the boot.

Completing the Randger's spec is Webasto diesel-powered blown-air heating, which easily took the chill of a spring night. [www](http://www)

### THE VERDICT

*With its high spec – and great driving – new Fiat base vehicle boasting everything from alloy wheels to sat-nav and a well-made conversion that includes a roof bed and diesel heating as standard, this Randger has a lot going for it. With the backing of Marquis' 12 dealerships and a £42k price tag, we would expect it to sell like freshly baked patisserie.*





### THE ALTERNATIVES

CMC Reimo Trio Camper	£42,500
Hillside Ellastone	£36,595

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Quote details can be found on page 196



### FACTS AND FIGURES



#### PRICE

From: £41,995 (estimated)  
 As tested: £41,995 (estimated)



#### BASICS

Berths: 4  
 Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion two years, water ingress five years  
 Type approval: European Whole Vehicle



#### DIMENSIONS

Length: 4.99m (16ft 4½in)  
 Width: 1.96m (6ft 5in)  
 Height: 2.03m (6ft 8in)  
 Gross vehicle weight: 2,960kg  
 Payload: 531kg



#### BASE VEHICLE

Type: Fiat Talento SWB panel van

Engine: 1.6-litre, Euro VI, 125bhp, front-wheel drive, six-speed manual gearbox



#### KITCHEN

Cooker: Two-burner hob with spark ignition

Fridge: 41-litre compressor type



#### BEDS

Lower double: 1.86m x 1.11m (6ft 1in x 3ft 7½in)

Roof bed: 1.81m x 1.35m (5ft 11in x 4ft 5in)



#### ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 55 litres (inboard)  
 Waste water: 43 litres

(underfloor)

Space/water heating: Webasto Air Top 2000 diesel-fired blown-air

Leisure battery: 75Ah

Gas: 1 x 2.75kg (Campingaz)

#### OPTIONS

Fitted to test vehicle: None

Options available: Fendoz upholstery, Aluminium Grey or beige exterior paint colours

### SEARCH

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