

Volkswagen T2 Split

Buyer's Guide

Iconic looks, charm by the barrel full and arguably the most beloved generation of VW Camper. Here's how to buy a first-generation VW Transporter



Why buy a VW Split Screen Type 2?

Split Buses are cool. That pretty much covers it. And, if you're reading this then you already think the same. The first-generation VW Transporter has an appeal that extends far beyond the VW scene and explains why some examples are fetching huge money at auctions these days. The fact is that those 'big money' Buses tend to be bought by people who simply want them in their collection, and that explains the appeal.

Splits look great. They hark back to a simpler time, when the world was a friendlier place and people had time to trundle up and down B-roads at their leisure. So, it's odd that buying a Split Screen Bus can be a complete and utter nightmare today. Actually, that should be buying a 'good' Split Screen Bus can be a complete and utter nightmare, because it's ridiculously easy to go out and buy a bad one, as a lot of people discover. There are countless examples out there waiting to ensnare the unwary and merrily drain your bank account, so you really do need to know what you're looking at when buying a Split Screen Bus.

VW Split Screen model history

We've already produced an excellent guide to Split Screen model history that can be found [here](#) so have a good read of that and then meet us back here when you're fully clued up.

As you (now) know, Splits were the first Type 2s built. VW sold offered them from 1950 until 1967. The important detail here is that 1950 to 1967 is the German production run of the Split Screen Type 2. For the 1968 model year, the Hanover factory switched to producing Bay Windows, but Splits continued to be built in various factories around the world. Anything that wasn't made in Germany tends

to be frowned upon by the Split illuminati and the term 'Fleetline' is almost a dirty word. For those who don't know, a Fleetline is a Split Screen Bus built in 1975 in South Africa, using 'Knock Down Kits' from Brazil. They're all 15-window, Panel Van or Wide Bed Single Cabs and have an enhanced reputation for rust. There's a stigma attached to them that has a negative effect on their popularity and values, but it does mean you can snap up a 15-window Split for less if you don't mind where it came from.



53' - 55' Early Barndoor - No indicators



55' to 61 Bullet Indicator (US Spec)



62' - 67' Fisheye Indicators



Rear - Barndoor Split



Rear - Small Window Split



Rear - Large Window Split

How many windows does a VW T2 Split have?

You'll hear a lot about windows when talking about Splits. That's because VW offered a number of different models with a different amount of windows. Simply put, the more windows there are the more you'll pay for a Split Screen Bus. The lowest spec Split is the work-a-day Panel Van, the next step up the ladder was the Kombi, essentially a Panel Van with six windows in the back and bench seat. Kombis have 11-windows, as do all other standard model Splits, like Standard Microbuses and Campers. Then we come to the Deluxe models. These are identified by their extra bling, in the form of belt-line trim, dash clocks (honestly!) and extra windows. We're talking 13-windows (an extra window either side towards the rear), then 15-windows (the extra ones are on the rear corners), 23-windows and 21-windows.

21-window and 23-window Deluxes are known as Sambas. The higher window count is the result of having skylights and a folding fabric sunroof, known as a Golde sunroof. They were the flagship models in the Transporter line up back in the day. They were the most expensive models you could buy then and that remains the case today. You'll pay a hefty premium for the privilege of parking a Samba in your garage.



Split Panel Van



Split Kombi



Split Westy Camper



Split Samba

Why do Sambas come with 21- or 23-windows?

Simple. VW changed the size of the rear tailgate for the 1964 model year. The larger opening meant the lovely corner windows of the 23-window Samba bit the dust. It also brought an end to 15-window production in Germany. If you see a 15-window built after 1963 it didn't come from Hanover and is therefore seen as being of lesser value (by some). A German 15-window is identical to a 23-window Samba in terms of trim and spec, it just doesn't have the eight roof windows and sunroof. Many enthusiasts say they're rarer than full-blown Sambas now, which is why they get all huffy about Fleetlines.

What VW Split Screen should I buy?

Where do we start? The vast majority of owners today want them for camping or as wedding/prom hire vehicles. Hence, Campers are the most sought after and most numerous variants you'll come across. This explains why so many Microbuses have lost their rear seats and been converted into Campervans. That's no bad thing, as most people want to sleep in their Split and two rows of seats don't exactly encourage that. Tracking down original components, like the missing seats is neither cheap or easy, so have a think about what you plan to use a vehicle for and how important originality is. As we say, the vast majority of Splits you'll see will have been modified in some way, be it cosmetically, mechanically or with a different interior. Don't pay for something you don't want and will end up changing.

Panel Vans and Pick-Ups, which come in either Single Cab or Double Cab formats are very popular, but you can't camp in them. Well, you can pop a tent on the back of a Single Cab, and you can put an interior in the back of a Panel Van, but you can't enjoy the view if you're sat on a rainy campsite.



Split Single Cab Pick-Up



Split Double Crew Cab Pick-Up

What do I need to check when buying a VW Split Screen Van?

In a word. Rust. Whichever model you go for, they all rot in the same places and you should buy the best example you can find. Rust repair and bodywork will be the most expensive outlays, especially if you have to pay someone else to do it, so try to find the most rot-free example you can. The truth of the matter is you're not likely to find anything these days that hasn't already been on the hot end of a welding torch. If something hasn't had a full-blown resto it will at the very least have received or be in need of a patch or two.

Where to start? Well, be wary of anything shiny. A coat of paint can hide all manner of ills and you'll find a lot of

wagged up old dogs out there. It's not necessarily the seller trying to pull the wool over your eyes either. A lot of work carried out can be substandard and problems occur a year or so down the line. Hence, cracks and splits in paintwork often point to poor repairs and copious amounts of filler. Check that all of the body lines are there, not filled over and that all of the doors line up and open and close properly.

You're often better off buying an original, unrestored Bus, even a tatty and rusty one as at least that way, you're not dealing with other people's hooky repairs.



T2 Split Resto in full swing



Rusty, unrestored and honest

Where do VW Split Screens rust?

You'll often hear that a VW Camper has had 'the bottom six inches' replaced. That's pretty much the size of it but is by no means the end of it either. Splits also rust around the windows and roof, especially the gutters but the good news is you can buy every panel you need. In fact, it's possible to build a Split entirely from scratch and good starting point would be to look [here](#) and browse our selection of replacement body panels.

Start at the front and take a walk around a prospective purchase. Replacement [front panels](#) are commonplace but as a minimum you should expect to find a rusting or replacement [lower valance](#). The first sign of trouble is bubbling paint as they tend to rot from the inside out.

Look a little higher and see if there is any bubbling around the windscreens. Rust streaks down the front panel point to rot in these areas but [repair sections](#) are readily available.



This leads nicely on to the chassis. These are the main offenders on a Split and can be very expensive to restore. Not so much in parts, which can be found [here](#) but in time and labour to repair them. Chassis rails, outriggers, jacking points, cross members and heater tubes all rot and you're likely to find previous repairs in all these areas.

Some Splits will have belly pans fitted, which can be good or bad. They may have protected the chassis, or they could be hiding all manner of horrors. If you can look at the underside of the [cargo floors](#) as these tell a tale in themselves. Water leaking in from dried-out window rubbers will result in rotten floors. If there's a camping interior fitted this can be hard to spot from above, so have a nose underneath.

Check the condition of the [side panels](#). Waves and ripples point to previous repair work but the good news here is you can buy complete side panels, which also fixes rusted out [rear arches](#).

Split owners love opening Safari windscreens, but they always leak and water seeping in here causes rot in the window channels, front panel and cab floors, so be warned.

You might as well look under the floor mat whilst you're here and check the condition of the [cab floors](#). These often rust out entirely or become thin, with pin-holes. Replacement floor halves or complete floors are the fix.

Before closing the door, look at the [cab steps and front wheel arches](#) which are also known as doglegs on Splits. Replacements vary in quality and the cheaper ones will require more time and money to fit.

Split Screen sills always require work, especially the side with the [cargo doors](#) and if the outer sills look iffy then you can bank on the inner sills needing work too.



[Rear corners](#) are another common rot spot. Check for dents and bubbling caused by corrosion. There's usually a line of bubbles that means the [battery tray](#) has rotted out. A leaky battery can hole destroy a battery tray on even the cleanest of Buses.

Closing panels rot along the bottoms, window surrounds and hinges but replacement cab doors, cargo doors, tailgates and engine lids can all be found [here](#).

Finally, give the roof a thorough inspection. Repairing rusty gutters is an unpleasant task and something best avoided. Blocked drain holes are the main culprits and roof racks and pop-tops certainly help. Replacement sections are available, as are [complete roof skins](#) and pop-tops. If your roof is completely shot you can always take the opportunity to add a Samba roof should you wish.

Bumpers and trim

You may think nothing of missing components, but anything you have to replace or restore is going to add to the cost of ownership. Especially if you're looking at a Deluxe. The cost of replacing belt-line trim, [window surrounds](#), [bumpers](#), [lights](#) and rubbers can make a huge dent in your wallet.

Are VW Split Screen Campers reliable?

Yes and no. Regular maintenance and oil changes are the key to reliability. Most examples will have a 1500cc or 1600cc engine, which were the stock offerings on later models. That's not a lot of power to lug a fully laden Camper up and down hills and motorways. The bad news is tired out engines are commonplace, as are oil leaks, end float and missing components. The good news is replacement parts are plentiful and you can buy complete new engines that are simply plug-in and play. Look here for [engine components](#).

What are Split Screen Type 2s like to drive?

In a word. Horrid. In stock format and when compared to a modern vehicle anyway. Driving an old Split is an experience that is not for everyone. You can give them more powerful engines, better brakes and sharper steering, but all of that takes money and you're still driving old technology that requires lots of regular maintenance.

If you've never driven anything as old as Split that first drive can be a shock to the system. Stock suspension will soak up bumps and poor road conditions with ease, but old Splits have an alarming tendency to meander down the road.

Steering boxes wear and you can turn the wheel a surprising amount before that translates into anything seen at the road wheels. Add in motorway speeds and crosswinds and you're in for a white-knuckle ride. They're not fast either, which is why you'll see most in the slow lane or crawling past lorries in the middle lane.

VW Split Screen Transporter engine issues

What you don't want to find is end float. This is the amount of movement there is between the crankshaft and crankcase. You check this by pulling on the bottom pulley. If you notice any movement in and out whilst tugging on it you're looking at a big bill as the crank/engine case will be worn.

Oil leaks are common and the worst one will be coming from the crankshaft oil seal. This is also known as the flywheel oil seal and is the main seal behind the clutch and flywheel. These can dry out and split over time and play in the crank can also destroy them. A bad flywheel oil seal will dump oil at an alarming rate. If it goes unchecked your engine can lose all of its oil and seize solid. Signs of this are loads of oil wherever you park and a slipping clutch.

You can buy replacement oil seals and gaskets [here](#) and clutch components [here](#). Missing bits of tinware are pretty common but can lead to an engine overheating. [Exhausts and heat exchangers](#) also rot out or go AWOL but are easily replaced or upgraded.

The spindles on [carburettors](#) can wear and when that happens fuel can leak onto the engine. Definitely not something you want.

Are Type 3 gearboxes any good?

These are pretty sturdy items and usually stay the course but if you have one that jumps out of gear it's time for a replacement. All Splits left the factory with reduction boxes. These were a gearing system to help haul heavy loads. They're often leaky and temperamental so are ditched when a Bus has been converted with a straight-axle or IRS gearbox from a Beetle. Both are common mods on Splits as they help with gearing, handling and lower the rear end of a Split when fitted.

Worn linkages can make finding gears a pain and replacing all of them is a pretty involved job when they get close to the rear of the vehicle.

Can you make a Split Screen Bus nice to drive?

Yes. If you have the time, money and inclination. First thing we'd recommend is you check everything that is there is in perfect working condition.

Play can be dialled out of steering boxes (within reason) and worn suspension components should be replaced. Check all rubber boots for splits as these will allow water in that destroys components. Fresh grease needs to be applied regularly to things like the grease nipples in the front beam and link pins. Poor brakes or a vehicle that pulls to one side can often be traced to incorrectly adjusted drums. Also be on the lookout for leaking brake cylinders, weeping master cylinders and perished brake lines. Regular maintenance is key to longevity although things like larger engines and disc brake conversions can improve the driving experience dramatically. From the factory all Splits came with drum brakes front and back in the 5 x 205 bolt pattern and when in tip-top condition they're plenty good enough for a stock Bus with a 1600cc engine. If you need [braking components](#) we have you covered.

Suspension

The majority of Buses you go to view will be running lowered suspension. We're not talking slammed, although that's pretty much the norm but even just a tad to level things out. Split rear ends sags with age. It's just how torsion bars wear. Many owners add an adjuster to the front beam to level things out. You also need to do this if you do away with the original reduction box rear end and fit an IRS or Beetle swing-axle rear.

Dropping the ride height a touch can help with handling as a slight drop can reduce body roll and the effect of crosswinds on a vehicle.

Inspect the quality of any welding (like adjusters or chassis notches in extreme cases) carefully. Really low Splits will smash their steering boxes on the ground unless they've had the section it attaches to raised with a chassis notch.

Split Screen Camper interiors

What you'll find inside a VW Camper is anyone's guess. The original (and best) camping interior would be something from Westfalia. Other old-school offerings could be from Danbury, Dormobile, Devon, Canterbury Pitt etc but you're just as likely to find a home-built or modern conversion from any of the specialists on the scene these days. If you're looking at a period conversion you need to check that everything is there and not damaged in anyway. Wooden units can rot and fall apart if they've been damaged by water leaking in through perished window seals. The glue holding the wood veneer can dry out and the veneer flakes off. Replacement veneer can be added, new units built or you can pay for an entirely new interior, but it will all add to the cost. As will upholstery, curtains and headlinings. We should also stress that any plumbing for gas hobs and fridges needs to be properly installed by someone who knows what they're doing. You can browse our range of Split Screen interior equipment [here](#).



Where is the VIN number on a Split Screen Bus?

Always check a Bus's logbook tallies up with its Vehicle Identification Number plate. You'll find the vehicle's ID plate riveted to the body in a number of places, depending on the age of the vehicle. From October 1958 it was fixed to the bulkhead behind the right-hand front seat. Chassis plates can either be found on the right-hand side of the engine bay, or from November 1963, fixed to the right-hand side of the overhead fresh-air vent in the cab.

You should also find a VIN number stamped on the body. It will either be in the metalwork above the transmission cradle, underneath the VIN tag in the engine compartment or stamped in the metal beside the battery tray. Check everything adds up and if it doesn't start asking questions or just walk away.

Buyer beware

You really do need to go into buying a Split with both eyes open. Do your research, speak to people on forums and speak to as many owners as you can about their experiences. You may also stumble across the perfect Bus that way. A lot of people get sucked in by Internet ads. Remember, if something looks too good to be true, it usually is. Never buy on photos alone. Always ask questions and to see as many photos as you can. In fact, ask for some random photos of specific areas, that way if the seller obliges with them, you at least know they have the Bus in front of them. There are way too many people waiting to scam the would-be Split owner out of their money.

[Shop All T2 Split Parts & Accessories >](#)

[View T2 Splits For Sale On JK Marketplace >](#)

[Learn More About T2 Splits & Their History >](#)

VW T2 Split check list

- Paperwork:** V5C tallies up with VIN. Any old bills/invoices/MoTs?
- Bodywork:** Check the front panel, lower valance, window surrounds, roof, gutters, rear corners, sills, arches, long and short side panels, doors, tailgate, engine lid, wheel arches, cab floors and cargo floor. Entire chassis.
- Paintwork:** Any scratches / dents / faded or poor paint? Any signs of accident damage, poor repair or filler work?
- Bumpers and trim:** Is everything there and in good condition?
- Engine:** Check for end float, oil leaks, missing tinware/other components. Does it start and idle ok? Any smoke or strange noises?
- Gearbox:** Any oil leaks? Does it go into gear and stay in gear?
- Clutch:** Does it slip or is the biting point excessively high?
- Brakes:** Do they stop the car? Does it pull to one side? Any leaks coming from the drums? Hand brake efficiency?
- Suspension:** Does the vehicle bump, rub or scrape anywhere? Does it have good suspension travel? Do the wheels foul the arches? Any strange clunks or noises when driving?
- Check wheels and tyres for damage and tread
- Interior:** Is anything missing? What are the carpets, seat covers, door panels and headlining like?
- Electrics:** Does everything work? Lights, wipers, horn, radio and camping equipment.