



WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLE BUYERS GUIDE

Choosing your WAV isn't as straight-forward as choosing a standard car. You need to consider the needs of the wheelchair passenger which will have an effect on the type of vehicle you choose. Find out more in our WAV Buyers Guide

ABOUT GM COACHWORK



Since 1988 GM Coachwork have been providing adapted vehicles to people with medical conditions, disabilities and mobility issues. GM offer the biggest range of wheelchair access vehicles on the market giving you the widest choice, backed up by the best customer service. We hope this guide provides you with some valuable information to help you choose the right vehicle for your needs.

What is a WAV?	3
What's different about a WAV?	4
Different sizes of WAV	7
Different types of WAV	10
Getting in and out of a WAV	12

WHAT IS A WAV?



Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) are vehicles that are specially converted so a wheelchair user can travel either as a passenger or a driver.

How WAVs are constructed

Every WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles) starts as a standard vehicle which is subject to a number of fairly significant alterations to allow a wheelchair user to access the vehicle and remain in their wheelchair when the vehicle is moving. The size, shape, and design of the WAV will vary depending on the original vehicle used for the conversion.

Is a WAV right for you?

If you are no longer able to transfer from your wheelchair to a standard car seat, or if your carer is no longer able to lift you, a WAV could be the answer.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT A WAV?



WAVs are very different from standard cars and each of these differences can impact whether a WAV will suit your needs. Here's an overview of some of the key differences to consider.

Travelling experience

Travelling in a WAV will feel different from sitting in a standard car. You will be seated in your wheelchair which, although safely restrained, is not fixed to the floor in the same way as a car seat. You will therefore experience slight movements when seated in your wheelchair – most people get used to this in time.

Headroom

When choosing a WAV one of the main considerations will be headroom. How much headroom does the wheelchair passenger need when seated in their wheelchair? How much entrance headroom does the vehicle have? Your height when seated in the wheelchair may give you a different eyeline out of the windows. When choosing a WAV bear in mind these factors.

TOP TIP:

If the wheelchair user is sensitive to temperature check both the air conditioning and the heater during a demonstration, especially if you are considering a larger WAV.

Seating arrangements

Typically there are three options for where the wheelchair passenger sits in the vehicle. The first option is to sit behind the rear passengers. The second option is to sit in the second row alongside the rear passengers. This is the most popular as it gives a more inclusive passenger experience. The third option is where you can sit alongside the driver in the up-front position. We have vehicles in our range where passengers can sit in any of these positions.



TOP TIPS:

Think about the size of your family. The size of the WAV you need will depend on how many passengers you regularly travel with. Do you regularly travel with just the driver? Would sitting behind the driver be a problem for you? Will a partner or carer need to assist the wheelchair user during journeys – does the layout safely allow for this?

Parking

WAVs can be bigger than the type of car that you're used to, so it's important to think about how this will affect your travel from day to day. All WAVs are fitted with either a ramp or lift, and access will either be from the back or side of the vehicle depending on the conversion. Think about where you normally park and if there is enough space for a ramp or lift

and room for wheelchair user to manoeuvre. If you opt for a larger vehicle, make sure the height of the vehicle will be able to clear any height restrictions that you regularly pass through, for example multi-storey car parks.

TOP TIPS:

Where do you normally park? Will there be enough room behind or to the side of the WAV to access the vehicle by a ramp or a lift? Will there be enough room for the ramp to fully extend? Are there height restrictions?

Ground clearance

Most WAVs will have had their floor specially lowered to allow enough headroom for the wheelchair user. As the floor has been lowered, you will need to make sure the WAV allows for enough ground clearance in the places you usually drive, and the driver will need to be more careful over speed bumps.

TOP TIPS:

Where will you regularly travel to in your WAV? Are there lots of speed bumps or areas with height restrictions?

Driving experience

Some WAVs are larger than regular cars, and as a result will offer a very different driving experience and may require some adjustments in driving style to make sure everyone is safe and secure. It is extremely important to ensure that your driver feels comfortable and confident operating the vehicle.

TOP TIPS:

Think about what would make driving the WAV easier. For example, does your driver need automatic transmission to make motoring easier? A WAV demonstration could help your driver in understanding what could help.

Fuel gauge

When we lower the floor of a WAV occasionally the fuel tank may need to be modified or replaced, reducing its size or changing its shape. This can mean your WAV will need to be refuelled more regularly than a standard car and the fuel gauge may be less accurate. Ask us if this applies to the WAV you're looking at.

TOP TIP:

Do you mainly make local journeys, or will you be taking your WAV on longer trips?

DIFFERENT SIZES OF WAV



WAV's come in four size categories – small, medium-small, medium-large and large. The majority are rear access via a ramp or an electric lift. The wheelchair passenger will have the option of sitting in the front next to the driver or in the rear cabin alongside the rear passengers.

Small WAVs

Vehicles include: Citroën Berlingo Blaze, Ford Connect Flame

- All small WAVs will be fitted with a ramp for entry
- Usually have a lowered floor to give more headroom inside the vehicle and reduce the angle of the ramp
- At least one passenger seat in the rear, but usually seat no

more than five people including the driver and wheelchair passenger

- These WAVs tend to feel the most similar to driving a standard car.



Medium-Small WAVs

Vehicles include: Volkswagen Caddy Canto; Ford Grand Connect Flame+.

- These have more space than a small WAV which either means extra passenger seats, more room for equipment or a more flexible seating position.
- Like the Small WAVs, these vehicles will have more of a car-like feel in terms of size
- The wheelchair user can be positioned behind the second row of seats in the rear-most part of the car, but some of our vehicles have options to sit further up in between the second row of rear seats.



Medium-Large WAVs

Vehicles include: Ford Custom Quantum; Volkswagen Shuttle Vermont

- These are based on larger vehicles and are the most common WAV for users with larger wheelchairs as their

size allows more flexible seating arrangements

- They can carry up to nine passengers including the wheelchair user and driver
- Some conversions allow two wheelchair users
- The majority of medium-large WAVs are still fitted with a ramp, however if you need a lift these can sometimes be fitted, but you should be aware that there will be reduced head height in these cases.



Large WAVs

Vehicles include: Peugeot Boxer Utah.

- These are great for larger families or those travelling in the largest or heaviest wheelchair
- All are fitted with a lift
- Most can be converted to allow for two wheelchair passengers, as well as space for other passengers in standard seats.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF WAV



Different types of WAVs have different seating arrangements. Choosing one that meets your requirements and helps you to enjoy safe and comfortable travel is important.

Passenger WAV



This is the most common type of WAV where the wheelchair user travels as a passenger in the rear of the car either behind the rear passengers (third row) or alongside them (second row). These types of WAV come in all shapes and sizes. If you're going to be sitting in the back, there are a few more things to consider. Will you be able to speak to the driver? Will you be able to see out of the window?

Up-Front Passenger WAV



These are passenger WAVs where the wheelchair user sits in the front next to the driver. Many wheelchair users prefer this type of WAV, because they can talk to the driver.

Drive-From Wheelchair Vehicle



This could be the option for you if you want to drive the vehicle yourself. These WAVs are adapted so that you can operate the driving controls – usually by replacing the pedals with hand controls. It's important to remember you'll need to be able to get in and out of the vehicle yourself. This could involve using a ramp or lift. GM are leaders in drive-from vehicles offering the biggest range of any convertor in the UK. Visit the website for our free Drive-From Wheelchair Buyers Guide.



Internal Transfer WAV

If you want to drive, but feel like it would be uncomfortable or impractical while sat in your wheelchair, this could be the

right choice for you. Some internal transfer WAVs allow you to get in and secure your wheelchair, before switching over to the driver's seat. These seats can be made to move, either rotating or moving backwards into the rear of the vehicle, allowing you to easily transfer from your wheelchair.

GETTING IN AND OUT OF A WAV



Many WAVs will have had their floor specially lowered to allow enough headroom for the wheelchair user. It also helps make access easier by allowing the ramp to be as short as possible and the angle to be less steep.

Ramps

Ramps are the most common way to access a WAV. The ramp is usually manually operated with the carer physically unfolding the ramp from the back of the vehicle. They can be automatic, where the ramp folds and unfolds at the touch of a button – however this will cost extra. Some manual ramps are single piece or bi-fold while others can be gas-assisted to make raising and lowering easier.



TOP TIP:

Think about the angle and length of the ramp as not all WAVs will be the same and some options might make it easier than others to push a wheelchair user into the WAV.

Lifts

If you opt for a larger WAV, it might have a lift instead of a ramp. This can be a help if your carer has trouble pushing you up a ramp. A lift may cost more than a ramp so your Advance Payment could be higher.

TOP TIP:

Consider whether your carer will physically be able to operate a ramp and then push you up it. Will they be able to do it now and for the duration of your lease? Inside a WAV



Safety

Our WAVs have a restraint system that has been tested as part of the conversion type approval. Most WAVs have four restraint belts that attach to the front and rear of the wheelchair to keep it in position inside the vehicle. The front restraints are adjustable and are usually self-locking, similar to a seatbelt. They are easily be attached to the wheelchair to lock it in place, minimising movement when you are travelling.

There are different mechanisms for attaching the restraints to the wheelchair, some of which a carer might find easier to operate than others. An automatic tie-down system is available at additional cost. Additionally, the wheelchair user

will have an appropriate seatbelt fitted to keep the user safe when travelling.

All WAV conversions are tested for safety of the wheelchair user; however some WAVs will be tested with a heavier wheelchair than others. It is important that we know which wheelchair you are currently using and if this is likely to change during the course of your lease so that we can recommend an appropriate WAV and restraint system.

Ready to get started?

To explore our range of used WAVs, visit gmselect.co.uk or speak to one of our team on 01626 855057



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