

ALL THE FUN OF THE FESTIVAL

TV presenter and adventurer **Monty Halls** continues his campervan travels with a trip to the family-friendly Camp Bestival event in the grounds of Lulworth Castle in Dorset



This summer was festival season, in more ways than one. Obviously, there were flags fluttering and portaloos springing up in fields the length and breadth of Britain, but there's also been the hint of freedom in the air. We had a renewed appreciation of being out and about - we were

giddy at the sight of the open road, and we embraced gatherings and groups as though they were some delicate new trend. With that in mind, the Halls clan set off in late July for a fun-packed, family-friendly festival adventure in Dorset.

With my wife Tam by my side and our two daughters on board, I tentatively fired up Ashley - our splendid Ventura campervan - and headed to our first festival for two years. Lockdown had at least given me a chance to create systems for packing - previous features in this very magazine having railed at my inability to keep anything vaguely tidy in the van - and I packed boxes neatly atop one another with considerable pride prior to departure.

What I hadn't taken into account over those weeks and months of planning is that much as nature abhors a vacuum, Molly and Isla (my two maniacal offspring) abhor systems. Systems are for losers, particularly when those systems mean that Woof - Molly's beloved flop-eared rabbit toy - are buried within them. As such, the only way to rescue Woof from the constraints of formality was to hurl the boxes aside and release him from within. This led to, shall we say, a certain level of tension in the van upon departure.



Monty Halls and daughter Isla enjoying the sights and sounds of Camp Bestival







SETTLING INTO THE CAMPSITE

Camp Bestival was our destination, and it was taking place in the grounds of Lulworth Castle in Dorset. When we arrived, it was an odd sensation to drive onto the site. Obviously, there was nothing inherently weird about what we were doing - after all, we were only turning up in a campervan to enjoy a festival. It was just that this was to be our first exposure to lots and lots of people for a year and half and, judging by everyone's expressions as they also drove into the large field set aside for vans, they felt the same way. It was a strange mixture of trepidation and joy, a mass commitment to freedom from the pandemic. I must confess to a moment of anxiety, but it's worth pointing out that the Camp Bestival organisers had very much towed the Covid line, with double jabs a prerequisite, an abundance of sanitising stations, and the bulk of the activities outdoors.

▲ Clockwise from top: Monty's new packing skills came in handy on the trip; the girls enjoying breakfast in the van; Isla and the Mossy Crow area; Ashley the campervan was the ideal festival home

Camp Bestival was established in 2008 and, as such, it has pretty much nailed the logistics and routine for running a large-scale event. Oddly enough though, the organisers had allocated the campervan area to a huge (good), green (splendid), extremely sloping (not so great) field on the far side of the hill from the main festival. There was a flat bit, but that was taken up, rather disconcertingly, by the entirely empty cars of people camping.

But I worried not. Feedback from the good folk who read this magazine has been hugely valuable to me as a newbie to campervans, and I had levelling ramps and chocks with me to raise Ashley to a smug horizontal. Sadly, the feedback from the memory part of my brain to the packing part of my brain was less reliable and, as we drove along the slope - canted at 45 degrees, with my backside sliding entertainingly off the driver's seat and onto the handbrake - I recalled in a moment of absolute clarity that the chocks were still in the garage.

We did finally find a bit of ground that was flattish, albeit quite close to a fence. In fact, the space was perfect for a Ventura Peugeot Boxer campervan, which was handy indeed, even if it did require some nifty manoeuvring.

GETTING INTO THE FESTIVAL SPIRIT

But we were here, and we were staying. I hauled on the handbrake, lifted our roof, and threw open the back doors. The Halls immediately marked our territory in traditional style, by flinging everything out of the back doors, and creating an eclectic pile of kit on the floor to be rummaged through. Once this was completed, we 'repacked', and headed off to the festival.

Camp Bestival is terrific campervan venue, as it shares many of the same characteristics as your average van fan. It has a certain style, a certain nomadic swagger, it is friendly, and - most importantly - it has that whiff of eccentricity. Walking through the vast site, the kids suddenly found themselves in an eclectic world of performers, jugglers, singers, trapeze artists and families kitted out in the most amazing fancy dress.

That's something that had somehow passed us by, the fact that Camp Bestival is a chance to let rip on the fancy dress, to work together as a family to



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come up with some truly terrific outfits. There were Ghostbusters, entire clans of Jurassic Park dinosaurs, the Incredibles, and pirates galore. And - in the midst of it all - the Halls, who had come dressed as a middle-class family from Devon, a get-up we pulled off with some style. Some panic-buying of bright sunglasses, flower garlands and two massive fluffy tails turned the kids into some sort of weird endemic Hawaiian squirrels, and only cost me £300,000. But it did seem to satisfy everyone, and even drew an approving glance or two from passers-by.

LETTING OUR IMAGINATIONS RUN WILD

The highlight of our festival was unexpected to say the least. There really is something for everyone - bands, performers, booze and barbecues - with a particularly memorable moment for me being watching agog as a chap on huge unicycle juggled, talked and removed all his clothing simultaneously. It might not sound that spectacular, but it was a combination of Cirque de Soleil and some CCTV footage from Crimewatch and will stay with me forever. But the unquestioned pinnacle of the entire thing - certainly for the kids - was to be found in a yurt in the Wild Zone, an area set aside for bushcraft, forest skills and, as it turned out, witchcraft.

Mossy Crow is - well, to be honest, I'm not entirely sure what it is. But what I do know for sure is that it's described as an immersive family show and it seized the kids' imaginations like nothing we'd ever encountered before.

Walking across the threshold of the yurt, Isla was immediately confronted with a gigantic squirrel/badger/outlandish character who demanded to know what potion she had brought with her before she could come in. Backing away, she bumped into a walking rockpool, who peered at her and then scuttled off to get her some lichen, pine cones, clay and nuts so they could make an imaginary animal together.

All around the tent were skulls, stuffed birds and bizarre composite animals made of bark, feathers, fur and a colossal dose of imagination. Inside that yurt was akin to the interior of your skull when you're having a fever dream, with images and memories colliding into a gigantic collage of mixed-up beasts and long-forgotten sensations.

I loved it, and so did the kids. The culmination of our visit was the Mossy Crow parade through the festival, where the entire crew joined in a wonderful, scuttling, chanting cacophony that made people stare, then start, then - without fail - smile. Isla and Molly by this stage were in their midst, dressed as a kind of chipmunk/rabid hyena combo, a picture of feral contentment.

COMING HOME TO OUR CAMPERVAN

Late in the evening, weary, entirely broken, overstimulated and undernourished, we stumbled back to Ashley. Make no bones about it, this is when a campervan really kicks in as the accommodation of



CAMP FESTIVAL

Next year's Camp Festival is planned for 28-31 July 2022, with tickets on sale now. Find out more at campfestival.net

choice at an event like this. There's a glorious moment of coming home, of swinging the sliding door shut with a percussive "whump" and shutting out the bedlam on the other side. The lights went on, the stove was lit, and we drank late night hot chocolate with the girls. Raise the roof, brush the teeth, climb the ladder, crawl into the womb of duvets and sleeping bags, and sleep comes instantly. The kids were serenaded initially by the heartbeat of distant music, and then by the stentorian snores of their father on the double bed below, akin to a diesel locomotive in the Klondike pulling a colossal load. How very romantic for Tam.

We woke the next morning fully refreshed and set out into the beating heart of the festival once again, for a final day before departure. I must say that the whole thing felt less like a planned event, and more like an army mobilising after a period under siege. It was glorious to be out again, amongst so many likeminded folk, and to see kids running round in fields under big skies. The banners and flags of Camp Festival fluttered in the breeze, announcing a revival and a re-emergence for us all. Fingers crossed that it's permanent, and our travels in Ashley have only just begun.

The finale of the entire thing was not the big-name rock stars, or the parades, or the acrobats and tumblers. It was actually me packing the van ready to leave. I was so chuffed with how organised I'd become - not a natural state for me by any stretch of the imagination - that I sat on the tailgate and spent several minutes admiring my handiwork. Isla spotted that her dad was very, very pleased about something, and like a golden retriever that knows the mood is buoyant (but isn't quite sure why), jumped onto my lap and gave me a kiss. Overall, not a bad old ending to the great campervan festival adventure. 🐾

▼ Imaginative fancy dress is all part of the Festival experience

