

Shopping for an Accessible Van

January 25, 2023

Suggestions collected from the local ALS community

When buying, my top considerations are:

Is the PALS tall? How much head room do they need? Where do they want the PALS to ride? Front or middle or on a side?

What does the driver comfortable/feel safe driving?

What style of ramp do they want? (Side or back entry, in floor, folded inside, manual or power?)

Will family or others be with PALS?

We were fortunate to have the VA grant to help and are now on our second toyota. The Braun conversion looked nicest to us. The in floor ramp is great and side entry felt easier and safer for us. The ramp controls are on the key fob. D rides in the passenger place in his chair as it is just the two of us most often. It is super easy to drive and is great in the snow with winter traction tires. We did not get a sunroof as it took away 2" of head room. D is 5'8" and in his permobile chair his head just barely grazes the door gasket. (Although we could recline him slightly if need be or for a taller person.) But when seated inside he has plenty of room. Also, I would definitely look for a rubber floor and not carpet for ease of cleaning.

My experience with the wheelchair van is fairly limited, but I can share a few things. I would recommend a rear-entry vs a side entry. It can be challenging to turn the wheel chair once in the van. The rear entry is easier to load and unload. With a side ramp, it is helpful to have a kneeling option, which lowers the side the ramp is on to make it easier to lower the ramp. It's been 10 years since we had our van. I'm sure there have been improvements to the vans.

From the [Your ALS Guide website](#):

Handicap-Accessible Vans

For greater freedom of movement, you may decide that it is worth making the longer-term investment of purchasing a van. New handicap-accessible vans can be expensive, but there are options for purchasing used vans at a more affordable price—and you can often resell them at a slightly lower price, as they tend to retain their value.



Start by asking your local ALS organization for suggestions or leads. [Craigslist](#) is a popular and free website that lists many things for sale, including handicap-accessible vans. Click on your city and enter “handicap vans” in the search box.

Here are some important things to know before purchasing a van or lift:

- Medical insurance never pays for a wheelchair lift or special vehicle to transport wheelchairs.
- Make sure you know which power wheelchair you will be using before you purchase a van.
- The easiest logistical option is a van where you can drive the wheelchair directly inside and lock it down.
- Some families decide to purchase a lift for the back of their current vehicle. This option is less expensive, but the logistics with this option can be cumbersome. You will still need to transfer from the wheelchair to the passenger seat

and then the caregiver will need to lock down the wheelchair to the lift on the back of the vehicle.

- Always check with your local ALS organization for practical advice on van models and to ask if they know of any families selling a van.
- Reasonably priced handicap-accessible vans are in high demand. If you find one you like, be ready to move quickly.
- When purchasing any used vehicle, have your mechanic inspect it first.

Veterans: Ask at the VA about automobile grants.



Are you getting a custom power wheelchair?

If so, visit our [Transporting Your Power Wheelchair](#) page to explore your transportation options—including vans, lifts, and ramps.

Check out this forum – tips shared here for purchasing a van:

<https://alsnewstoday.com/forums/forums/topic/requesting-tips-for-purchasing-a-mobility-accessible-vehicle/>

We are in the process of finding a wheelchair accessible vehicle. They do conversions for trucks and SUV's too. Not just limited to the minivans. We are hunting for a truck right now and a wheelchair accessible travel trailer. Our son is helping us too. And he said, no matter what, do not buy a vehicle with a 'rebuilt title'. They are salvaged and then converted and sold. We have spoken with Alex at Goldenwest Mobility in Spokane. They have rentals there, as well as new and used vehicles. Very nice place to work with.

One thing I learned in purchasing the van is making sure you have all the tie downs and know how they work. We also agree about making sure you consider head room and side vs rear entry. We have side entrie since we have two kiddos who also need a place to sit