

# Bongo Buyers Guide

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## Allans Vehicle Services

Wixenford Depot, Colesdown Hill, Plymouth, PL9 8AA, Devon

T: 01752 403400 ~ M: 07471 002034 ~ W: AllansGarage.co.uk E: hello@allansvehicleservices.co.uk

The fuel consumption of all engines averages at 26mpg. This depends on use; constant stop-start around town can reduce that figure. Steady driving and a light foot on the throttle can increase it to 32mpg.

Most Mazda Bongos have a 4 speed automatic transmission. The 5 speed manual gearbox is rare.

Mazda Bongos are approximately 4.6 metres long and 1.7 metres wide. The elevating roof model is 2.1 metres high; the tin-top is 2.0 metres.

Many Bongos are converted to camper vans. These are either dealer converted or self-conversions. There are many different side and rear conversion layouts and the specification varies. Others are 'weekend' campers with removable kitchen pods that are interchangeable with the rear seats.

Spare parts and accessories, both new and used, are readily available via the internet and from Bongo specialist garages.

If you're buying a Bongo then it's good to get one with a decent Service History. Then you know if it's been properly looked after. If you're looking at one that been previously owned in the UK, it should have service history. Plenty of people do their own servicing and should have receipts for the parts they've bought. If it's been serviced by a garage, there'll be invoices and receipts. If you're looking at a newly imported Bongo, service history is rare. But you can ask to see the 'auction sheet'. This shows the general condition of the Bongo when it was sold at auction in Japan. On our website, there's a link to more information.

(<https://www.allansvehicleservices.co.uk/motoringtips/japanese-imports/>) If you have the registration number, you can check the MOT history online. You can check the mileage recorded at each MOT. Sometimes when a vehicle passes an MOT, there is still work that is 'advised' to be done. These are generally things that are OK for now, but will need doing fairly soon. You can check if there are any 'advisories' and ask if this work has been done. You can search online for the MOT history of a vehicle. (<https://www.gov.uk/check-mot-history>)

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It's sensible to have a good look around the Bongo, inside and out, so prepare to get your grubby! Get down on the ground and look underneath for evidence or leaks or corrosion. Common corrosion areas are the front and rear crossmembers, inside the wheel arches and inner and outer cills. If it is corroded, many can be welded and repaired, so you can factor the cost of repair into the purchase price.

If a Bongo has been undersealed, it will have a black or clear coating over the metal. This can be waxy and slightly sticky or look like thick paint, depending on what the Bongo was undersealed with. A few Bongos are just undersealed on the very edge of the underbody, so look further than the edge. If it's not undersealed, you'll see bare metal.

Sit inside the Bongo and check all the controls work - aircon, front and rear heating (when fitted) or climate control, all wipers, windscreen and rear screen wash etc. If it's not obvious, ask what the switches are for. If the Bongo has rear heating and air conditioning, get in the back and make sure it works via the controls on the side pocket. Bongos need a rear fog light to pass the UK MOT. Check that one has been fitted - it surprises me to still see Bongos with an MOT but no rear fog light.

Check that the AFT roof rises smoothly and fully; there should be no creaking noise from roof struts or bagginess in the sides of the roof tent canvas. It should beep when raising and stop beeping when fully open, unless the beeps have been disabled. Look at the outside of the roof tent to check it's fully raised and not baggy or straining. Look inside the roof tent to check for mildew or damage to the tent, net screens or zips.

Check the spare wheel and tyre. The standard one is a 'space saver', designed to get you to a place of repair. They often still have the aging, original Japanese tyre. You may wish to factor in the cost of replacing this with a standard size wheel and tyre, which will fit in the same storage space.) . The wheel is stored beneath the "boot" of the Bongo. It's lowered with a bar, that's stored in the cubby hole in the side door step. (Sometimes the bar is missing. A replacement can be pricey so factor the cost in, if it's not there.) Lower the spare wheel to check it.

You probably know that a Bongo engine is under the driver and passenger seats. There are more components under the bonnet. While the engine is cold, lift the bonnet to inspect the header (overflow, expansion) tank. It's usually discoloured so you won't see much from outside. Remove the cap and look in; it's useful to have a torch for this, even in daylight. Ensure there are no copper coloured particles or gloopy sediment. If you see any, it can suggest a 'leak stopping' additive has been used, so ask the seller for reassurance. Leak stopper or K-Seal is sometimes used to conceal a cylinder head problem. Check the brake fluid and windscreen wash while you're there.

Ask what antifreeze the owner uses, as you'll need to use the same type. Most now use standard UK blue or red antifreeze. Just don't mix the two types. Once bought, you may like to flush the system, as sediment can build up in the radiator and lead to overheating. Ask when the thermostat was last changed. If it hasn't been done recently, you should change it. A sticky thermostat can cause the cooling system to overheat.

Take it on a long road test, incorporating hills. Check the temperature gauge when driving uphill. The standard gauge should never rise above the '11 o'clock' position. It's 'dumbed down' by Mazda and will only rise above that when it has a cooling problem. If another temperature gauge is fitted, the Bongo runs at about 82\* as standard and a bit more on hills.

Pull away on a slope; The Bongo should pull away smoothly without wheel hop or juddering. When driving, the engine should accelerate well and gear changes should be smooth. The steering should be light, not heavy or notchy. Braking should also be smooth, with no judder from discs or vibration from the pedal. Also drive it in

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reverse to ensure there are no problems. Check the tyres are wearing evenly across the tread and there are no cracks in the side walls.

While test driving, listen for knock or clunk noise when going over bumps. This can suggest steering or suspension problems.

Lift the seats to check the condition of the cooling system hoses and pipes. These are rarely changed until they fail; many have been on the Bongo for 10+ years. If they fail, the system can rapidly lose coolant and overheat. If a hose (or metal pipe) has a slow leak, coolant loss can go un-noticed, until the system overheats. Look for swelling or cracking on the hoses. Check for rust stains on pipes, hoses the engine block, cylinder head - anywhere where water could squirt or drip from a leak. If you notice any, ask what caused it and see proof that it's been fixed. There should be an invoice for work done by a garage, or a receipt for parts if it's a DIY repair.

There are a couple of common oil leaks on the Bongo. You may see a very small oil leak behind the diesel pump and an oil weep around the rocker cover gasket. They leak slightly for years and aren't an immediate problem unless the leaks are bad. Wipe them away; it'll be obvious when the leak is bad because you'll need to wipe more often, the engine oil level will drop more quickly and you may notice an oil fume smell. On the V6 petrol Bongo, the rocker cover oil leak can eventually seep into the sparkplug holes; if this happens, the engine will misfire. On the 2 litre Bongo, the oil leak from the rocker cover eventually finds its way onto the gearbox and manifold; you may notice the smell of oil fumes if this has happened.

There should be no diesel leak from the diesel pump.

Check the engine oil and gearbox fluid (ATF) levels and conditions. A check of these might reveal either emulsified (creamy) engine oil or brown ATF (gearbox fluid). Emulsified oil suggests an engine problem. Brown ATF that smells burnt suggests a transmission problem.

I've mentioned 'overheating'. This is said to be a common problem with Bongos. It's not. But it is a common problem with Bongos that haven't been properly maintained! Old parts, pipes, hoses, oils and fluids don't last forever. So double check the service history! If things have been omitted, factor in the cost of getting this rectified.

In 2008 I set up a Facebook group for owners, where you'll find more advice and news about Bongo owner meetings. My group is simply called 'Mazda Bongo' and is on: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/7571714956/>

**I can carry out an inspection of your Bongo, if you bring it to me in Plymouth. See my website for more information on Bongo inspections and tips on maintaining your Bongo or Freda.**