

We live in the garage

Rather than moving to a larger house, many families are finding extra space closer to home, says **Christine Webb**

LIKE many mums, Janet Grant longed for a roomy farmhouse kitchen to provide a heart for her family home. So she and her husband, Shane, 44, converted their garage into living space and knocked it through to gain a 27ft dining, kitchen and family room.

'I'd have loved a period cottage with a big kitchen, but it would cost £150,000 to move from our modern four-bed detached to a period version here,' says Janet, also 44, a midwife in Bovey Tracey, Devon. 'Still, I've now got a lovely big kitchen and family room for a fraction of the outlay.'

'I found a company on the

internet that specialised in garage conversions,' she recalls. 'It only took two weeks for them to bring it up to habitable standards.'

'First, the door came off, and the wall was built up halfway with bricks that matched the rest of the house. A window in keeping with the house was added and now it is impossible to tell there was a garage there at all.'

The conversion cost about £10,000, and a further £15,000 went on new kitchen cupboards, tiles, floors and furnishings. But Janet says it was worth it: 'There's much more room for us and our children, Oliver and Gabriella, who are 12 and eight.'

A growing number of people are considering their garage as a way of creating extra space, instead of moving to a larger house.

Staying put can make financial

sense. Moving costs an average of £12,500, and four-bedroom house prices are 20 per cent higher than for those with three bedrooms. But does a garage conversion add value to a home?

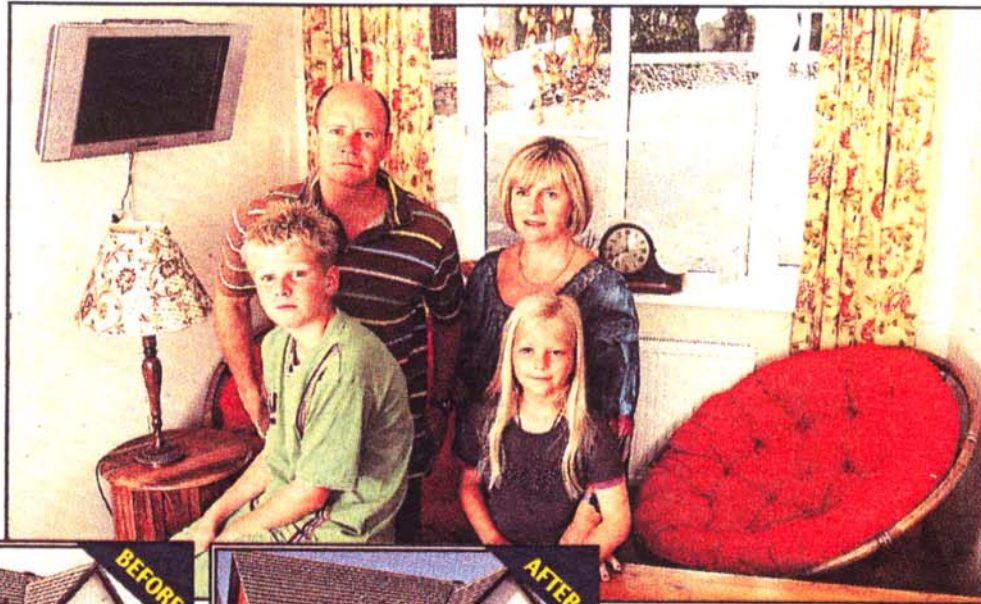
Liam Bailey, of estate agent Knight Frank, says if a property lacks, say, a study, bedroom, living or dining room, creating this in the garage can add 10 per cent to its value. 'There are no clear rules,' he adds, 'except that if you convert a garage, you must have off-street parking.'

One-stop garage conversion companies have sprung up to meet demand. Donna Watts launched More Space, in Crawley,

West Sussex, 18 months ago, and now has 14 conversion teams. Phil Bateman, meanwhile, started The Garage Conversion Company (GCC) in Ampthill, Bedfordshire, four years ago. 'Having spotted a niche in the market, I rapidly reached £1 million turnover in Bedfordshire alone,' he says.

Susan and Barry Hemmings, 57 and 58, used the GCC to convert the integral garage of their former home in Ampthill into a dining room. 'When we moved in March, our buyers said it made a big difference,' says Susan.

But they did not recoup the £10,000 conversion costs: their house sold for £240,000, but an



Inner space: The Grant family and, left, their garage conversion before and after

almost identical house nearby with an unconverted garage sold at the same time for £235,000.

Tina and Barry Cunningham added value to their home after Barry, 35, transformed their garage into a master bedroom as a DIY job, spending about £7,000. Now their house in Mountfield, East Sussex, is on the market at £425,000, and agent Freeman Foreman (01580 881188) says the conversion has added £25,000 to its value.

And what of the Grants? Local agents Bradleys say without the garage improvement their house would be worth £280,000, while now it is worth about £305,000.

But if they get outline consent for another garage in the garden, the house could sell for £325,000 — a healthy gain.

■ **THE Garage Conversion Company, 0800 587 0262; More Space, 0870 286 1657.**