



HOLDSWORTH VILLA

*John Hunt finds several unique features
in a conventional conversion of the new VW*

This base vehicle has the same specification as those in the previous two test reports. Regular readers may therefore wish to skip the first part but, for the sake of new readers (and those who may be ordering copies ten or twenty years hence) we have made this a full account of both the vehicle and caravan components.

Although my first impressions of the T4 Volkswagen have been very favourable, a continued acquaintance with the model serves to reinforce our joint opinion (yes, Audrey loves it too) that there is just nothing to touch it in its class. Often, when riding in someone's modern car, we have remarked, "It IS smooth, after a motorcaravan." Now we have a vehicle which is every bit as good, and this is not surprising because the new Transporter was built to a standard, taking Volkswagen's popular Passat as the yard stick — or metre rule, perhaps.

On the road

So we set off on a 120-mile drive, over the same route as in previous tests for comparison, had some lunch and returned, wishing that the trip had been longer. More miles were put on the clock on subsequent days; we were unable to resist the temptation to use the demonstrator, kindly loaned by Bowers Motor Caravans, to the full during our temporary possession.

This particular sample had been thoroughly run in over a few thousand miles. The wind was gusting but, even on the exposed roads of Salisbury Plain, there was no tendency to wander from the straight line. On fast dual carriageway stretches it was difficult to keep the speed down to the regulation 70mph and, when it was unintentionally allowed to creep nearer to 80, there was still none of that rather frightening lightening of the steering often experienced with lesser vehicles. Directional stability remained perfectly under control at all times.

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The smooth line of the hightop looks good and helps to reduce wind noise. Highest point is central vent.

A special word of praise must go to Richard Holdsworth here for the design of the hightop roof. Subjectively, this seemed to be the smoothest of them all; the wind made practically no noise as it rushed past; it was possible to chat in normal tones or listen to the radio without excessive volume. Again subjectively, I think this is one of the better looking hightops, seeming to match admirably the lines of the vehicle. One might almost say that, combined with the bold side graphics, the rather uninspiring appearance of the basic van is enhanced, to an extent that it looks like something rather special.

The performance came up to all expectations. This Volks really can be driven like a car. Accelerating out of a roundabout on to a dual carriageway, a Range Rover nudging behind immediately pulled into the passing lane to overtake. It was a mile or more before I decided not to break the limit as he flashed by. So the performance is there when needed, plus superb stopping power to go with it — and anti-lock brakes as an option.

The delightful aspect is that this vehicle is equally happy pottering on country lanes when, thanks to the forgiving nature of the transmission, frequent gear changing is not necessary. It's not a thing to make a habit of but this Volks will pull away smoothly in fifth gear from as low as 20mph, yet will whiz up steep hills in third at 50mph with very little increase in cab noise. Fifth gear, now in the conventional location out on the right, is a true motoring ratio. If you are not in a hurry, fifth can be held on inclines. If you want to get a move on, then the gearbox is one of the best, with every ratio readily to hand.

There is a little roll on corners if they are taken fast but the wheels stick to the ground and the passengers remain in their places — which is more than can be said for the chemical closet in its cupboard. On fast right-handers the single catch on the cupboard door was not man enough for its job and the thing came skidding out across the carpet. This matter needs a little attention, although all the other doors remained closed and there were absolutely no rattles or groans from the furniture even on some of Wiltshire's appalling road surfaces. So, all in all, this Villa was one of the quietest motorcaravans we have ever driven.

After several hours on the road, we were as fresh as when we began. We both think that the original Volkswagen cab seats (covered to match the rest of the upholstery) are the very best. Audrey, suffering from a bit of back trouble at the time, pronounced



Bold side graphics are repeated in part on the roof, where the side windows slide to open.



Roof rack, which is easily reached from the ladder on the tailgate, offers extra storage capacity.

them more comfortable than anything we had in the house. The rear settee, fitted with lap belts, provides passengers with a view all round. The ride there is as good as it is in the cab and production models will have two positions of rake on the backrest.

This rear seat is unique to Holdsworth. Built on a metal frame, it has undergone crash tests with a deceleration force of 20G. (The same tests showed the usual wooden box collapsing into matchwood, we are told.) Visitors to the Caravan Show may have seen the video of the 12-stone dummies on the test track.

I suppose, if I had been content not to use the performance of the Volks to the full, the petrol consumption might have reached the magic 30mpg figure. I was tempted, however (in the interests of research, mark you) to put my foot down more often than would be the case during normal touring. As a result, we covered 28 miles to each gallon of unleaded petrol.

I guess the diesel engines would do a lot better and, although I have driven them, have no idea of their fuel consumptions, for this was during a Volkswagen sponsored briefing and, although the press had a choice of vans for two days, they magically filled themselves overnight! So now the only one left to sample is the newly introduced (to this country) 112bhp petrol model with catalytic converter. Any offers of a test sample?

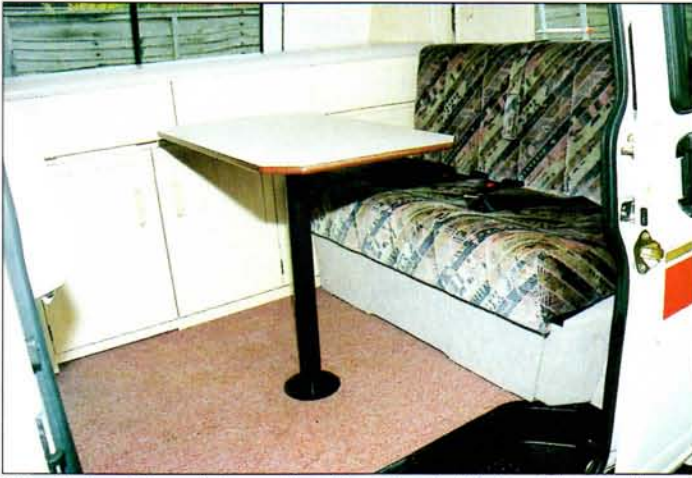
Practicalities

I have rambled on too long about the delights of travelling in the new Transporter, so now let's have a glance at some of the essentials.

The cab is well planned, with controls within easy reach and plenty of storage space in the deep door troughs and a generous, lockable compartment in front of the passenger. This is opened with the ignition key, which also operates the fuel filler cap. A road atlas can stand on the dash top beneath the windscreen (or even be tucked into a door trough). There is a flat depression for smaller items, where they slide about on bends unless anchored or wedged in some way.

The windscreen wipers have a large sweep and leave little of the screen obscured. Intermittent wipe is available. The stalk which operates them also works the wash and rear wiper. There was not enough rain during our test to see whether the guttering would carry drips clear of the opened windows or doors.

The headlamps are good and instrument lights can be dimmed.



Wide side door slides easily to reveal the settee with restraint belts and the central floor area.



Cab passenger seat reversed. Behind driver's seat is optional Propex heater and our suggested table storage.



The settee is transformed to a double bed in one operation. Rear cupboard door will be replaced by drawers.



Hinged central section simplifies bed making and will be softer on production models.

A wide rear view is available through the interior mirror and the single piece glass in the tailgate which, incidentally, is heated. The door mirrors do their job excellently, the offside being vertically mounted and the nearside horizontally for maximum view. They are adjusted by moving the glasses within the frames. Among the Volkswagen options are heated glasses for the exterior mirrors. Whilst there is plenty of choice as regards power units, automatic transmission is not yet available.

It was lovely to be able to get the heater just as we wanted it, with cool air to our faces through two individually adjustable front vents. Twin vents at the sides are useful for demisting front windows or, turned, warming heads or bodies. The main heat output comes from below we found the ram effect adequate when moving, needed the boost from the fan when crawling. The lever that controls the heat output is not linear in its operation. Only the last half-inch of its four-inch travel seems to have any effect on the heat output — but the important thing is that there is ample warmth when and where it is wanted.

The base vehicle used for the Holdsworth conversion is a special from Volkswagen. A conversion of an ordinary Transporter van might lack some of the features mentioned.

The fuel gauge also is not linear in its reading. We have found on all samples tested that it will indicate 'full' for over a hundred miles and will then drop quite rapidly. The fuel tank is large and will provide 400 miles or more on one filling of petrol — more with diesel of course.

Outside, the profile is smooth, thanks to the fitting of Volkswagen's own bonded windows behind the cab, two of which slide to open — and can be locked about half an inch open. The Holdsworth roof windows are also sliders and can therefore be opened when travelling. The side door has a childproof locking device.

The spare wheel is beneath the floor at the back, where two bolts (operated by the wheel brace) hold its cradle against the floor. It is not difficult to reach in the van conversion, being just forward of the rear bumper. Jack and wheelbrace are clipped into the bottom of the wardrobe.

The engine compartment has no baffling catches. As soon as the internal lever beneath the dash is pulled the lid springs up a little to reveal a small red catch. Normal service points are easily identified but you have to undo two screws and remove a cover to find the battery

compartment. The power house looks pretty crowded and I have no idea what it would be like to work on (couldn't be worse than the original Transporter — and that didn't put people off!) A few more screws release the front grille, which may then be completely removed, so perhaps it's not too bad.

The caravan

We have already praised the exterior design of Holdsworth's hightop with its practical roof rack and ladder, so how does the inside measure up? My investigations were assisted by the comprehensive owner's manual which includes wiring diagrams.

Well, the layout at first sight is entirely 'conventional Volks' with a settee at the back and work/storage unit along the entire offside. But looks can be deceiving. There are several unusual features, the chief, I think, being . . .

. . . the kitchen

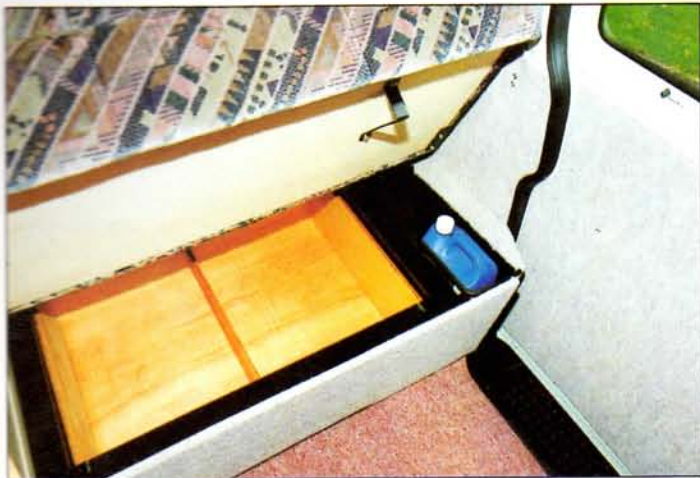
We are so used to seeing a Volkswagen with the fridge at the forward end of the cabinet, behind the driver's seat, that casual observers will be deceived into thinking that Holdsworth has forgotten it, especially when the door where it ought to be is opened to reveal a chemical closet in its own compartment. Putting the potty there shows good thinking. It's the only sensible place to locate it so that it is readily available when the bed is down. The compartment also allows the use of a full size unit, rather than the tiddly potties found in many other motorcaravans of similar size.

The location of the fridge itself demonstrates that Richard Holdsworth has lost none of his ability to dream up something a little different. He has chosen a top opener, at the rear of the work surface.

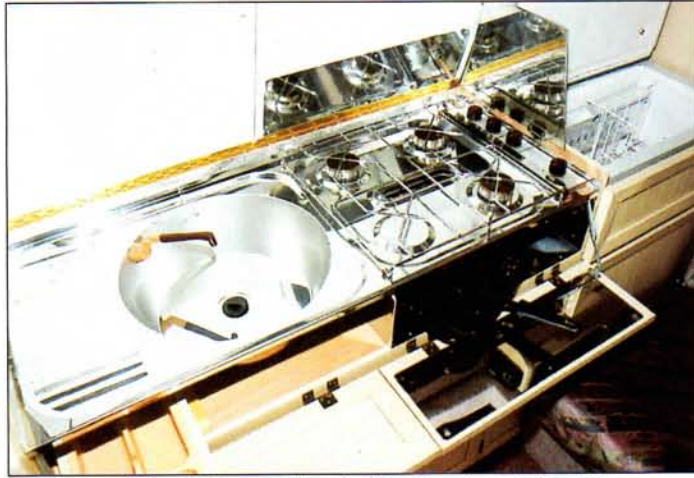
Unusual though this is in a motorcaravan, I liked it, firstly because it is efficient. When a front loader's door is opened, you can feel all that lovely cold air spilling out on to the floor, to be replaced by warm air from inside the motorcaravan; this in turn has to be cooled, soon leading to a demand for defrosting and the loss of all your precious cooith.

With the top loader, the cold air remains where it belongs and, although you may have to remove one item to get at another, the interior stays cold. It can also be crammed full; try that with a front loader and you're likely to end up with something on the floor. As far as

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Metal framed box base slides forward with the seat. There is a separate compartment for oddments.



Stainless steel sink and drainer are integral with the three-burner hob and grill.



The top opening fridge makes ice quickly and accommodates tall bottles. Lid lifts with worktop.



Below kitchen top. Right hand cupboard will be changed to two drawers (openable when bed is made).



There's a lot of space to the rear of the bottom cupboard, beneath the fridge.



Storage space for bedding and soft items in the overhead compartment. Below: control panel and spot lamp.

we could tell in November's weather, the Camping Gaz model used by Holdsworth is very efficient. It has two long ice trays and the water they were filled with soon became ice when operating on gas.

Getting the fridge going was simple enough. There is a flame failure override to hold down and a button to press for the piezo spark. You hear the 'plop' as the gas ignites and, as long as it stays on, a little needle on an indicator moves to a green segment. There appeared to be no temperature control in this mode (or on 12 volts when motoring — but this is normal). 240 volt operation via the fitted mains hook-up does provide control over internal temperature. One failing: if the gas blows out there is no automatic reignition.

The fridge, like other gas appliances is fed from Camping Gaz bottles stored in a sealed compartment at the bottom of the wardrobe. Master cocks are situated on the forward wall inside the wardrobe and can be reached by leaning over the back of the seat. Unless you want to go round the back to operate them, it would be advisable to make a

mental note of their relative positions — and particularly that for the fridge, which can only be turned on or off from its appropriate cock.

Although the weather was close to freezing during the period of our test, the butane Camping Gaz continued to function. I don't know what winter campers would do, for the compartment is not big enough to take the essential red Calor Gas propane bottles (I tried mine to make sure).

The cold weather provided an excellent test for the optional Propex Compact blown air heater, which is also situated in the kitchen cabinetwork. It was necessary to have the doors open during our photographic session, but each time I retired inside to make notes the doors were closed and the interior became warm again within a very few minutes. The Propex is thermostatically controlled and adjustable and — a feature very much appreciated — its switch could be reached from the bed. A water heater is not listed among the options; we'd have liked one.

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Holdsworth arrangement keeps the fridge flue well away from the offside opening window.



The engine compartment is well filled but essential service points are accessible.



Spare wheel, in cradle forward of rear bumper, is released by turning two bolts with wheelbrace.

socks or partaking of a nightcap. The settee itself forms the basis of the bed and for this Holdsworth has thought up his own system. The base is simply lifted slightly and pulled forward, when the backrest reclines to match up with the extreme rear cushion to form a sensible double.

I found a hard section in the middle of the bed on this prototype which bothered me only when lying head to the rear; otherwise the bed was most comfortable. Resulting from some discussion with Richard Holdsworth, the design will be changed. The hinged centre section will be retained but will be a lot thicker on production models and should present no problem. Thus is demonstrated the power of the press—and Holdsworth's determination to get everything right for his customers.

Whichever way round you sleep, it is possible to reach the closed kitchen worktop to dump things. For Audrey and me, two reading lights in place of the one provided would have been appreciated. It's not everyone who wants to get up when reading is finished to switch off the main lights.

Even with the bed down in this small vehicle, there is enough free floor space for undressing and dressing and, of course, with Holdsworth's unique design, the chemical closet remains at all times accessible.

An upper bed, about five feet long, is available as an option for children. In our case, that extensive compartment above the settee was used for storage of all the soft items such as blankets and pillows. This seems to project into the living area almost as much as it did in the old Transporter (where it was essential not to remove the roof bows during construction) and we both banged our heads on it — once! We would have preferred it to have been a little shorter for more headroom in the living area.

Storage

When not used as a bed, that capacious upper area at the rear swallows a whole lot of clobber. As there is nothing but a small lip to keep it all in place, it is essential not to put anything heavy there which could come flying forward in a crash stop.

So we decided that the best place for our personal items was in the big compartment beneath the settee, especially as it was not necessary to remember to extract them before making up the bed, for the whole lot slides forward with the bed base.

The locker with a drop door above the rear end of the bed we found ideal for smaller things and shoes tucked comfortably beneath the front seats, leaving the floor clear at all times. Other clobber that was not too bulky went in the pigeonholes above the windscreen, leaving

the whole kitchen storage for appropriate things.

On the model we tried, it was necessary to think ahead about the morning cup of tea and remember to extract the fitted plastic crockery from its storage below the worktop before the bed was made but I believe this will be altered on production models by providing two drawers in place of the crockery slider within a cupboard (see photograph).

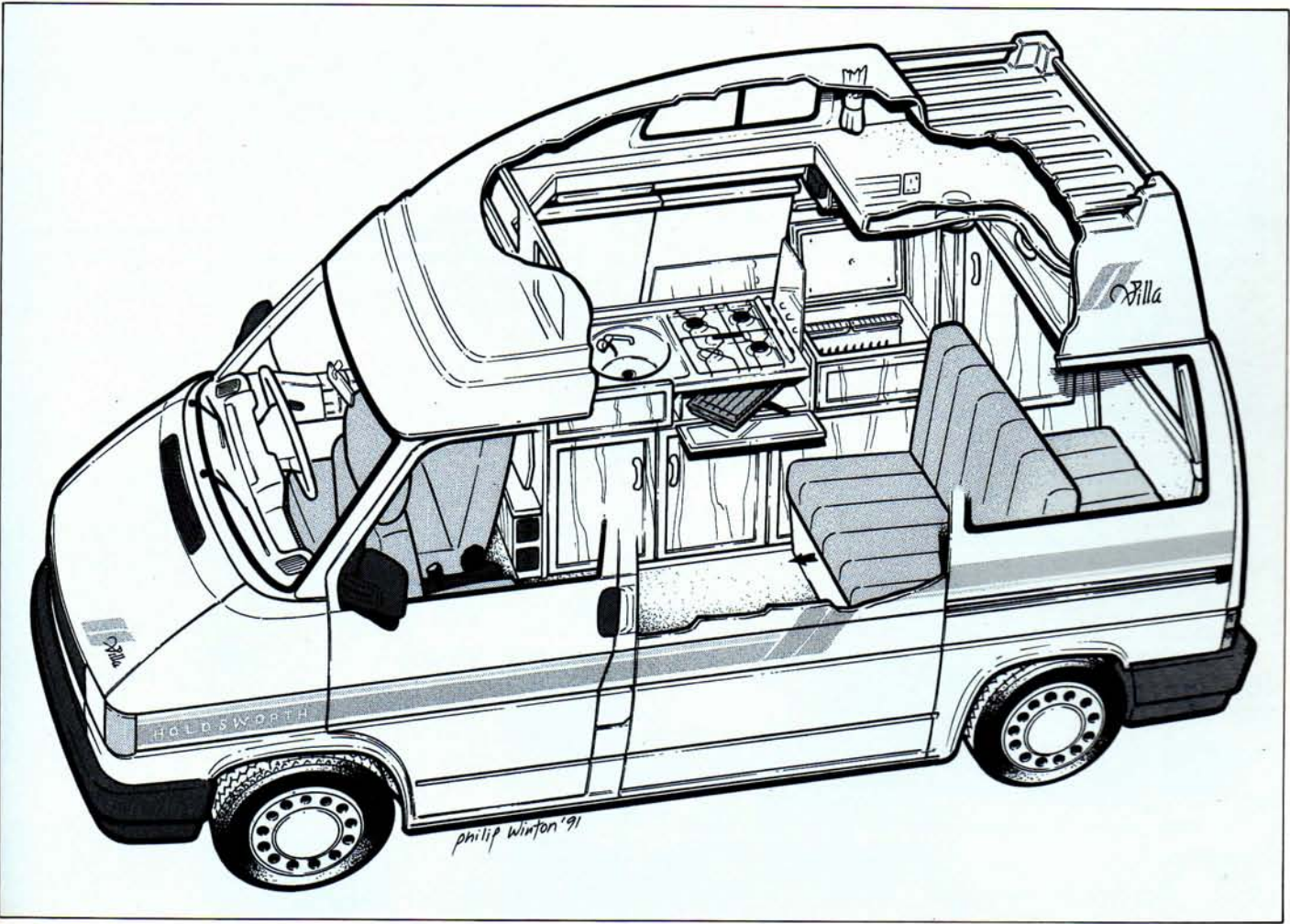
The advantage of this conventional Volks layout is that there is a tremendous amount of storage space at the rear, both above and below bed level. This will swallow a whole lot more and becomes most useful when using the Volks as an estate car, for shopping can be hidden beneath the bed behind the tailgate. Bulky loads can be accommodated by removing the rear bed section completely.

Last of all, there is the roof rack, a sensible design in this case and admirable for those who might want to carry an awning or annexe tent for extra living space — or perhaps a couple of folding bikes. Although I have lost my first youthful agility, I found it reasonably easy to reach via the fitted ladder.

In conclusion

This is a pretty little conversion with an attractive finish of high quality and a number of unusual features. It is designed and built by the Holdsworth team with full Volkswagen approval. The simulated crash testing in Britain and the thorough examination in Germany has ensured that the well known structural integrity of the Volks has been maintained.

<p>I liked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Car-like motoring Stability in wind Smooth fast cruising Absence of wind roar Brakes Flexible transmission Gear change Cab seats Fuel consumption Cab storage places One key 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rear wiper Reat heated window Cool heads, warm feet Rear vision Bonded sliding windows Childproof door lock Rheostat on instrument lights Jack stowage Roof rack and ladder Absence of rattles Masses of storage space Easily made bed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swivelling cab seat Large wardrobe Three-burner hob Safe mains electricity Optional space heater Accessible chemical closet Top opening fridge Metal framed seat base Rear lap restraint belts Owner's manual Quality of finish 	<p>I would have liked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option of auto transmission Firmer catch for loo cupboard Space for propane bottle Stowage for table top Two reading lights Shorter over-settee compartment Vanity mirror Waste water tank (available) Option of water heater
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SPECIFICATION (standard model)

The Vehicle

Base vehicle & engine type: Volkswagen Transporter 1000kg window van to motorcaravan specification with 1968 petrol engine, 4 cyl, petrol injected, transverse in-line engine.

Output: 84bhp/62kw at 4300rpm.

Max torque: 117 lbf ft/159Nm at 2200rpm.

30-50mph acceleration time: 3rd gear 8 sec av, 4th 12 sec av.

Compression ratio: 8.5:1

Gearbox & drive: 5 speed manual change with front wheel drive.

Mph per 1000rpm (top gear): 19.3mph/31.1kph.

Brakes: Dual circuit disc/drum, servo assisted, load sensing valve, asbestos-free linings, load sensitive pressure regulator.

Steering: Rack & pinion.

Suspension: Independent all round, front torsion bars, rear trailing arms.

Tyres fitted: Continental 185R14.

Spare wheel position: Beneath floor at rear.

Fuel tank capacity: 17.6gal/80 l, locking cap.

Fuel consumption during test: 28mpg/10.091 per 100km.

Type of fuel: 98RON leaded or 91RON unleaded.

Instruments: Speedo with trip, fuel and water temp gauges, dashboard clock

Warning lamps: Coolant temp, oil pressure, main beam, battery charge, handbrake/brake wear, turn indicators, hazard flash, parking lights, rear fog, rear window heater.

Windscreen wiper controls: Stalk, 2 speeds + intermittent, wash/wipe, - also for rear window.

Heater controls: 3 levers on dash: hot/cold, fresh/recirculation, distribution, 4 speed blower. Separate cool air to face.

Other features: Heated rear window with wiper, lockable glove box, troughs on both front doors, flat top dashboard, stainless steel ladder to roof. VW wheel trims, optional radio cassette, childproof lock to sliding door.

The Caravan

Body type & construction: Window van with bonded VW windows and insulated hightop.

Insulation: Foam backed panels; full glass fibre available.

Windows and doors: 2 sliding VW bonded side windows, 1 fixed, 2 sliding roof windows. Sliding side door and tailgate.

Additional ventilation: Five-way roof vent with insect screen.

Binds/curtains: Unlined curtains all round with retainers where necessary.

Mains electricity/electrical sockets: Earth leakage trip with two circuit breakers, 13 amp socket.

Batteries & control panel: 45 a/h vehicle battery; Zig SP4 control panel. Second battery optional.

Lighting: Single fluos over kitchen and nearside roof window; spot over settee; 2 door operated courtesy lamps.

Cooking facilities: 3-burner hob and grill with flame failure overrides.

Extractor fan/cooker hood: None.

Refrigerator: Camping Gaz CTL 175 three-way top loading with piezo ignition for gas.

Sink & drainer: Stainless steel sink and drainer integral with hob.

Hot water system: Optional.

Water pump: Foot operated electric.

Fresh water tank: Underfloor, drainable, 12 gal/54 l.

Fresh water level gauge: Zig, with adjustment knob.

Waste water tank(s): Optional.

Waste water level gauge(s): None.

Heating system: Optional Propex Compact blown air.

Gas locker: Base of wardrobe; takes 2 Camping Gaz 907.

Seating/dining/sleeping: Settee converts to double bed; reversible cab passenger seat, island leg table. Optional upper bed and second dinette.

Tables: One, island leg.

Wardrobe: Rear offside.

Flooring: Carpet throughout.

Additional features: Two drawers plus cutlery drawer (on production models); chemical closet in locker; overhead rear storage; underbed storage; owner's manual; roof rack and ladder.

Dimensions (Imperial and metric)

Overall length: 15ft 8in/4.75m.

Overall width, excl mirrors: 6ft 5in/1.84m.

Overall width, incl mirrors: 7ft 1in/2.160m.

Overall height: 8ft 3.5in/2.52m.

Turning circle, wall to wall: 38ft 5in/11.7m.

Driver's max leg length: 42in/1065mm.

Step up height to caravan: 16+5in/405+125mm.

Interior length from dash: 11ft 2in/3405mm.

Interior length behind cab: 8ft 2in/2490mm.

Interior width at waist level: 5ft 3in/1600mm.

Interior height: 6ft 3in/1905mm max.

Work surface height: 34in/865mm.

Doorway: Side 40in/1015mmW, 50in/1270mmH.

Table dimensions: 29.5in/750mm x 18.5in/470mm.

Bed dimensions:

(1) Lower **Mattress length:** 6ft 3in/1905mm.

Mattress width: 3ft 6in/1065mm.

Mattress depth: 4in/100mm. (1.5in/38mm small section — see text)

Available headroom: 31in/785mm (to underside of roof bed).

Wardrobe (Height from rail): 46in/1170mmH max, 24in/610mmW, 16in/405mmD av.

Gas locker: 10in/255mmW, 22in/560mmD, 11in/280mmH.

Other principal cupboards: Rear, below mattress 34.5in/875mm x 24in/610mm x 12in/305mmH (with bed base removed 48in, 1220mmH); rear overhead 47in/1195mm x 37in/940mm x 15in/380mmH max.

Gross vehicle weight: 49.6cwt/2515kg.

Unladen weight: 38.6cwt/1959kg.

Load capacity: 11.0cwt/556kg.

Price for standard model at test date: £19 670 inc car tax & VAT plus delivery charges.

Optional extras available

Base vehicle options:

1.9 l 61bhp four cylinder direct injection diesel engine with power steering

£771, 2.4 l 78bhp five cylinder direct injection diesel engine with power

steering £1810, 2.5 l 110bhp catalytic petrol engine with power steering

£2424, power steering on standard model £675, 15in wheels, ABS, electric

cab windows, heated and adjustable door mirrors, tachometer, tachograph,

fog lights, larger battery, 90amp alternator, tow bar, catalytic converter on

petrol engine.

Caravan options:

Propex Compact blown air heater £364*, Firetrace automatic fire

extinguisher system fitted during factory build £179, roof bed for

children £80, swivel driver's seat and cab table £148, flyscreens for roof

windows £53, flyscreens for lower windows POA. Prices apply only when

fitted during production.

* Included in test model

Colour scheme

Burgundy and white flecked carpet, plain pinky-fawn unlined curtains, multi-coloured velour upholstery toning with carpet, grey roof lining, blonde wood effect furniture, worktops in multi-flecked pink tone laminate, stainless steel sink and integral hob. White exterior with burgundy, white and gold striping.



Vehicle supplied for evaluation by Bowers Motor Caravans, Greenlawns, Kinsbourne Green, Harpenden, Herts AL5 3RN (0582 713094/715766) and converted by Richard Holdsworth Conversions Ltd, Headley Road East, Woodley, Reading, Berks RG5 4NE (0734 692900).

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