


# MOTOR CARAVAN MAGAZINE

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1991  
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 A LINK HOUSE MAGAZINE

Makes the  
going great



**FIRST  
TEST**

**HOLDSWORTH'S**

**NEW  
VW  
VILLA**



**WIN  
ELECTROLUX  
PORTABLE  
FRIDGES**  
**ALSO TESTED  
MACHZONE  
SILVER MINT**







Holdsworth Villa based on the new Transporter. Turn to page 34



Win an Electrolux RC1600 fridge on page 45



Auto-Trail unveil their model range for 1992 on page 62

## COMPETITIONS

**SPOT THE STICKER** \_\_\_\_\_ 24

Six more winners in our number plate search

**STAY COOL** \_\_\_\_\_ 45

Your chance to win a super Electrolux RC1600 fridge

## TEST REPORTS

**HOLDSWORTH VILLA** \_\_\_\_\_ 34

First test on Holdsworth's new VW Transporter-based high-top

**MACHZONE MINT** \_\_\_\_\_ 81

Focus on one of Britain's largest coachbuilts

## NEW MODEL NEWS

**AUTO-TRAIL 92** \_\_\_\_\_ 62

The line-up from Auto-Trail for the forthcoming year

**THREE CHEERS** \_\_\_\_\_ 68

Holdsworth, Autohomes and Auto-Sleeper conversions on the new VW unveiled. Paul Carter reports

## BUYING SECONDHAND

**PICK OF THE YEAR** \_\_\_\_\_ 48

This month we concentrate on models made between 1981-90

**20 YEARS ON THE ROAD** \_\_\_\_\_ 60

A list of all our road tests from 1971 to 1990

## TOURING

**MEMBERS ONLY** \_\_\_\_\_ 65

Maurice Tew signs up with the National Trust and English Heritage

**DAFFODIL WAY** \_\_\_\_\_ 88

Elizabeth Bradbeer explores Cardiff, the capital of Wales

## PRACTICAL MATTERS

**KEEP RIGHT ON** \_\_\_\_\_ 26

Continental driving for beginners. Paul Carter takes to the wheel

## EVERY MONTH

**COMMENT** \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Show time, plus a new dealer

**NEWS** \_\_\_\_\_ 7

Latest happenings in the motor caravan industry

**READERS' LETTERS** \_\_\_\_\_ 15

We sit back and let you have your say

**WHAT'S NEW** \_\_\_\_\_ 30

New products and accessories for motor caravanners

**MOTOR CARAVAN MIKE** \_\_\_\_\_ 30

Catch up with our cartoon character's latest adventures

**ARMCHAIR TOURING** \_\_\_\_\_ 43

Reading matter to help you find your way about

**WHAT'S ON** \_\_\_\_\_ 46

Details of forthcoming events up and down the country

**CLUB CORNER** \_\_\_\_\_ 72

Round-up of news from the owners' clubs

**SITES** \_\_\_\_\_ 76

First-hand reports from touring sites at home and abroad

**BUYERS' GUIDE** \_\_\_\_\_ 92

Prices and data of new models, updated every month

**NEXT MONTH** \_\_\_\_\_ 106

What to expect in the December issue





Transporter Kombi's cab seats, including headrests, are upholstered to match soft furnishings; dashboard and facia are finished in grey/black vinyl to reduce glare; all major and minor controls fall easily to hand

# Holdsworth VW Villa

Volkswagen's all-new front-engine, front-wheel drive Transporter is an exciting prospect for motor caravanning in the 90s and, presumably, on into the next century. Here are our impressions of the latest Villa

**V**olkswagen is a name associated with the best in motor caravans for as long as we can remember. True, the Transporter had its critics, not least those who pointed out the problems caused by its rear engine, said to limit the Type 2's flexibility as a motor caravan conversion.

Well, after years of development and an investment of some £700 million, VW addicts and critics alike now

have a completely new Transporter – with its engine at the front, driving the front wheels.

Volkswagen are now 'over the hump' and motor caravanners can look forward not only to a vehicle which is aerodynamically superior to its predecessor, but which offers more space, greater cab comfort and sheer 'driveability'.

We are grateful to Richard Holdsworth Conversions for giving us an early opportunity

to borrow his latest version of the Villa high-top, on which we have based this assessment.

Continuing their line-up of models on the earlier Transporter, Holdsworth also has a new elevating-roof version of the Villa, plus a 'top-range' Vision, in which the layout offers walk-through from front to back.

The new Transporter variant supplied *exclusively* to VW-recognised converters is a Kombi, with something

amounting to £1500-worth of additions specially chosen for the motor caravanner: bonded-in windows aft of the cab, of which the two leading windows slide open; rear wash-wipe system; centre dashboard vents for the heating system; and storage bins on both cab doors.

Holdsworth's Villa conversion requires that the rear off-side window be replaced by a GRP moulding to provide privacy for the wardrobe.

The model we tested was the 84bhp two-litre petrol version; 1.9 and 2.5-litre diesel power units are optional.

Cab specification is, if anything, more car-like than the old Transporter, with a slightly more angled steering wheel and the sort of minor controls and switchgear expected in a saloon or estate car.

Chunky stalks on each side of the steering column control indicators, main and dipped headlamp beams, and the wash/wipe system. Separate left and right turn arrow warning lights are provided on the instrument panel, while the wipers are two-speed and intermittent. Also standard is a tailgate wash/wipe, plus a







# STAR TEST



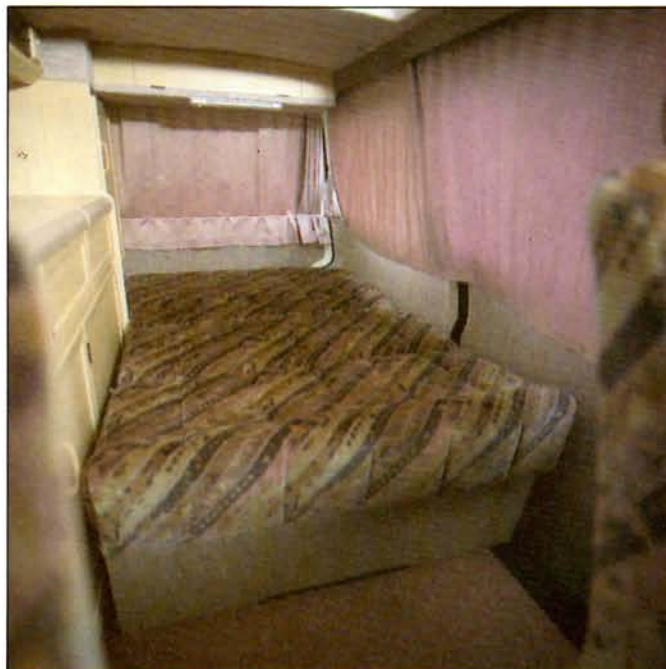
Interior layout looks similar to earlier Villas; Electrolux fridge has been replaced by a top-loading 12v/240v/gas unit, allowing more storage in kitchen cupboards



Transverse settee is fitted with lap belts and is now built on a metal-framed base; anchorage points and frame have been crash-tested



Stainless steel appliances are beneath kitchen worktops; left-hand cupboard takes a portable toilet; Propex heater in right-hand cupboard will be properly boxed in – one of Villa's optional extras



Settee converts easily to a comfortable double bed, leaving free access to cab etc

heated rear window in which the elements extend over the full glass area, including the 'park' position for the rear wiper blade.

Instruments are deeply recessed against reflections, but in direct line of sight of the driver. Clearly laid out are temperature and fuel level gauges, plus a large speedometer which includes total mileage and trip recorders. The speedo, however, lacks numbered intervals for 30mph, 50mph and 70mph.

## ‘Cab specification is, if anything, more car-like than the old Transporter’

Motor caravanners interested in the time of day will be pleased to see a clock incorporated into the panel.

Equally car-like are the new Transporter's driving characteristics. Gearchange/clutch combination is both light and positive, and we were pleased to see that VW have opted for a more conventional five-speed gearbox.

It was also pleasing to find that the new Transporter has lost none of the all-round visibility of its predecessor. If anything it's even better now, thanks to the combination of horizontal nearside and vertical offside door mirrors. Add excellent lateral vision and unimpeded view through to the rear from the dipping cab mirror and we don't think there

will be any complaints on this score.

Facing the front passenger is a narrow, lockable glove compartment with a deep, scalloped tray above. The latter is not level enough for drinks, although a flat area extending across the dashtop may well prove more convenient.

Inner door panel mouldings incorporate a comfortable 'elbow rest' for the driver, while deep, sectioned storage

► p.39



# STAR TEST



*Villa's wardrobe is in the traditional VW position behind the settee; visible are the mains RCD unit and isolator taps for gas appliances*



*Open lockers provide additional storage over the cab, where the roof-cut-out tapers inwards*

bins are provided on both cab doors.

Additional storage is available in cubby holes set in the lower dashboard on each side of the steering wheel.

Heating and ventilation controls are fitted centre dash and easily reached by the driver. As well as grille outlets for fresh air at each end of the dash, there are two additional vents in the centre. A four-speed fan boosts airflow.

Volkswagen do not fit a radio as standard, although a retractable aerial is installed in production. A 12v cigarette lighter is, however, part of the standard specification.

Performance from the two-litre/five-speed gearbox combination left us in no doubt that the new Transporter is destined to enjoy continued popularity with motor caravanners who like to use their vehicles every day. Around town it blends in with other traffic, keeping up with the general flow. Motorway cruising at 70mph is effortless and quiet, and we detected no undue signs of sensitivity to cross-winds or overtaking heavy vehicles.

Whether in town or out on the open road, occupants get a comfortable ride from all-round independent suspension. Initial design engineering between the converter and the base vehicle manufacturers has paid off in that the conversion feels taut on the road and remains stable

even at high speeds.

VW claim around 29mpg for the two-litre Kombi at a steady 56mph. On a new vehicle with less than 50 miles on the

**“The new Transporter is destined to enjoy continued popularity with motor caravanners who like to use their vehicles every day”**



*Rear storage shelf and 'boot' area, where items can be kept out of sight. Tailgate now extends down to rear bumper height*



# STAR TEST

clock, we recorded 20.4mpg for a mixture of driving. We had no doubt that this figure would improve with mileage, but reckon that somewhere around the mid-20s would be reasonable for a laden Villa high-top on tour.

One of the main considerations with the new Transporter has been how to cut the roof without impairing the vehicle's inherent on-road safety. Villa's cut-out leaves much of the cab roof intact, but without impeding movement from the cab to the rear. To comply with VW's stringent safety requirements, considerable supplementary strengthening has been rebuilt into the vehicle surrounding the cut-out.

The actual opening is at full width over a length roughly equivalent to the VW's side entry door, tapering towards the front. The original roof is retained from the rear seat to the back of the vehicle.

This design had to be crash-tested in Germany to satisfy VW that the conversion came up to passenger safety levels. In addition, Holdsworth have undertaken their own crash-test programme for such components as the rear bench seat, which is now built on a metal frame. Also crash-tested were the lap belts, fitted as standard, and their anchor points.

As you might expect from a company with Holdsworth's experience their roof design is well matched to the new base vehicle to maximise aerodynamics and retain its crisp lines. The roof continues the angle of the VW's sloping front and is rounded nicely at the back, again to match the slight radius of the Kombi's rear wall. Here, also, Holdsworth have further extended the Villa's carrying capacity by fitting a roof rack – the ladder was still to be fitted to our early prototype.

Well-designed graphics enhance the new Transporter's clean lines and add colour to the otherwise all-white base vehicle.

Access to Villa's living quarters is either direct from the cab or through the nearside sliding door, where an inset step is set at a convenient 15½in above ground level. The sliding door works easily and is held in the fully open position by a positive lock.

At first glance the new Villa



*Top-loading fridge has wire baskets and bottle storage; access is easy and the unit fits neatly into the line of kitchen units on the offside*

## Relocation of the fridge has doubled the available cupboard space in the kitchen base unit



*Zig SP4 12v electrical control panel and fresh water level gauge; adjacent mains socket is positioned over worktop area*

interior differs little from that of its predecessor: kitchen and storage units along the offside, rear transverse bench seat, and a rear wardrobe and storage shelf/double bed extension. However, there are some quite noticeable differences.

Gone is the Electrolux 2cu.ft. fridge, to be replaced by a top-loading Camping Gaz model with a capacity of 1.25cu.ft. A slight loss of cold storage is surely compensated for by the greater convenience of this 240v/12v/gas top-loader, which has wire baskets and bottle storage.

Also, relocation of the fridge has doubled the available cupboard space in the kitchen base unit. Floor area in the forward cupboard is given over to housing the van's portable toilet, included as standard, while a pull-out

moulding in the other cupboard is designed to take a four-person crockery set, also standard.

Two hinged tops cover Villa's combined sink/drainer and three-burner hob/grill. Stainless steel supports locate in slots on the underside of the worktops to hold them in the upright position. A small drawer beneath the sink is sectioned for cutlery.

As in earlier Villas, cold water only is pumped to the kitchen sink from an under-floor tank, for which a level gauge is fitted. The van's 12v electric pump is operated by a conveniently located foot switch. Waste water is fed to a separate external container.

Electrics are a combination of 12v from the vehicle battery and mains, the latter wired from the external three-pin hook-up to a safety RCD unit,

and from there to a single 13-amp switched socket. Holdsworth pre-wire the Villa for a second battery, which is one of the optional extras.

Gas supplies are housed in a compartment in the wardrobe base. Although sealed to the interior of the vehicle, the area is vented to the outside – just one of the requirements of the SMMT Code of Construction to which all Holdsworth conversions comply.

In addition to the storage available in the kitchen base unit, Villa offers a variety of cupboard and locker space, including the area beneath the settee. Villa's wardrobe is in the 'traditional' position behind the settee backrest and, so far as we could determine, offers about the same amount of space as earlier models.

There's also a large floor area beneath the fridge housing, although access via the rear-most cupboard door may prove difficult.

High-level storage is available over the cab and in a compartment over the rear settee, supplemented by the 'boot', to which access is available via the tailgate. The latter now extends down to bumper height and is a weighty piece of equipment, even though mounted on gas struts to assist opening. Sensibly, Holdsworth have fitted a leather strap to enable it to be lowered with ease.

Villa seating includes a swivelling cab passenger seat plus the rear settee, which is fitted with two lap belts. Located just in front of the settee is the plinth for an island-leg table which, when not required, stores behind the settee backrest. The metal leg clips on to the inside of the wardrobe.

Converting the settee into a double bed has to be the easiest operation we have come across in a Volkswagen conversion – even easier than the 'rock 'n' roll' device which Holdsworth fitted to earlier models. Simply raise the leading edge of the settee and pull; the backrest drops to align with the rear cushion, creating a comfortable sleeping area measuring 6ft 3½in x 3ft 7½in. A loop pull is provided to revert the bed to daytime seating.

As with the previous model, Villa is a two-berth as standard, but with the option of a



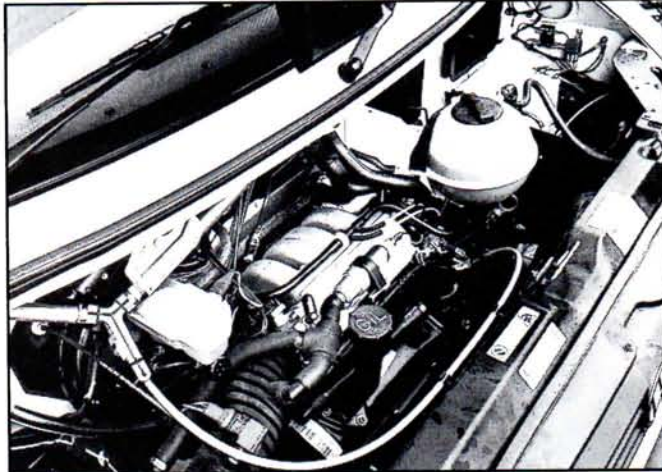
second bed in the high-top roof space.

Fluorescent fittings are well placed to give a good level of interior lighting at night. Curtains, though unlined, are substantial enough and generously cut to provide complete privacy.

Villa's fully trimmed interior combines cord carpet material in pale lilac with mid-brown insets with an attractive and modern floral-pattern velour upholstery. The whole interior is colour co-ordinated, including the worktops and practical, short-pile fitted carpet which extends into the cab.

Furniture units are built to a high standard and attention to detail is everywhere to be seen - in the lack of edge banding, the accurate mitring of cupboard fronts, and the

**Converting the settee into a double bed is one of the easiest operations we have come across in a Volkswagen conversion**

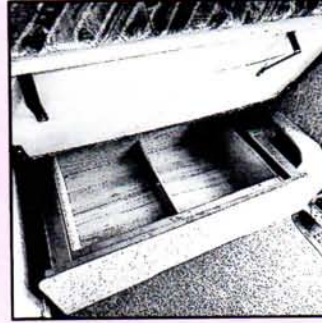


Access to the new Transporter's engine compartment looks tight, but most of the service items are within convenient reach

smart piano-lid forming of leading worktop edges.

Wipe-clean veneer finish chosen by Holdsworth is an attractive light ash. It's easy on the eye and adds further to the sense of spaciousness which is a feature of all Holdsworth conversions, created by good standing headroom of 6ft 3in and large areas of glass, including sliding windows in the body of the vehicle and the high-top.

Practicality combined with a sensible equipment level, an attractively modern interior coupled to a smart and well-presented exterior all look set to propel Holdsworth's Villa on into the 90s. The emergence of the new, front-engine, front-wheel drive Transporter can only further enhance the appeal of this popular conversion. □



## HOLDSWORTH VILLA HIGH-TOP

£19,196.68

### Converter

Richard Holdsworth Conversions Ltd, Headley Road East, Woodley, Reading, Berkshire RG5 4NE.

☎ 0734 692900.

### BODY

**Type:** high-top

**Berths:** two, optional four

**Construction:** VW Kombi with roof cut-out and fitted GRP high-top.

**Insulation:** inner cord carpet material, air space between walls.

**Windows:** laminated windscreen, toughened glass; sliding windows in body and high-top.

**Roof-lights:** one.

**Doors:** two in cab, nearside sliding door, rear tailgate.

**Dimensions:** overall length, 15ft 3in; width, 6ft 1/2in; overall height, 8ft 3/4in.

### INTERIOR

**Toilet room:** no, but portable toilet housed in floor cupboard.

**Gas system:** sealed compartment (vented to exterior) in wardrobe base;

supply piped to isolator taps for individual appliances.

**Electrical system:** 12v DC from vehicle battery to lights, water pump and Zig SP4 control unit; 240v input to RCD and single 13-amp socket.

**Lighting:** three fluorescent fittings, all 12v DC, plus cab and tailgate courtesy lights.

**Standard equipment includes:** upholstered cab seats/headrests with swivel to passenger seat; cab carpet; stainless steel one-piece sink/drain and three-burner hob/grill; top-loading 1.25cu.ft fridge operates on gas/12v/240v; portable toilet; four-person crockery set plus cutlery storage; steel-frame settee seatbase with two crash-tested lap belts; island-leg table; colour co-ordinated interior trim and soft furnishings; rear roof rack

and ladder.

**Factory-fitted options:** second battery with charger and split relay, £185.06; Propex blown-air heater, £363.93; upholstered panels for roof bed, £80.19.

### BASE VEHICLE

**Model:** Volkswagen Transporter Kombi.

**Engine:** 1968cc water-cooled four-cylinder ohc. Max power 84bhp at 4300rpm, max torque 117.2 lb ft at 2200rpm. Compression ratio, 8.5:1.

**Transmission:** five-speed manual, front-wheel drive.

**Steering:** variable-ratio rack and pinion.

**Turning circle:** 38ft 4 1/2in.

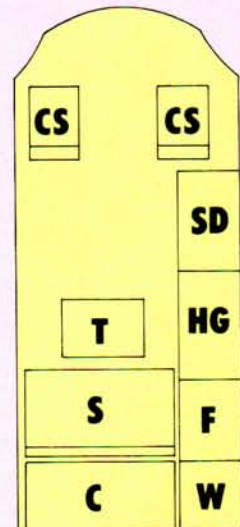
**Suspension:** front independent double wishbones with longitudinal torsion bars and additional progressive springs, hydraulic telescopic shock absorbers; rear diagonal trailing arm axle with coil springs and hydraulic telescopic shock absorbers.

**Brakes:** front discs, rear drums.

**Tyres:** 185 R 14.

**Factory-fitted options:** 1.9 and 2.4-litre diesel engines.

**Importer:** VAG (UK) Ltd, Yeoman's Drive, Blakelands, Milton Keynes MK14 5AN. ☎ 0908 601187.



**Key:** CS cab seat, SD sink/drain, HG hob/grill, F fridge, W wardrobe, C cushion (combines with S to make double bed), S settee, T table.