

# WHICH MOTORCARAVAN



TESTED



- ELDDIS AUTOCIRRUS MERCEDES COACHBUILT
- GLENDALE GOLF FORD TRANSIT COACHBUILT
- SUNRISE GENESIS II LWB TRANSIT HIGH-TOP
- AUTO-SLEEPER VW VX50 USED MODEL TEST
- ACCESSORIES AT EARLS COURT
- BORDER JOURNEYS ● SITE PROFILE

# RETURN JOURNEY

Several years on from his last motorcaravan Peter Lumley is outfitted by Cleveland Motorhomes. Test vehicle is an Auto-Sleepers VW Transporter.

Report and pictures by Peter Lumley



The VW Auto-Sleeper attracted attention and proved a very convenient hobby horse for our leisure activities.

A bit of enthusiasm enhances enjoyment, for I guess there isn't much point in doing anything if it is a drag. So it's fair to say I approached this particular assignment with spring in my heels and all on a day when the weather kept step, too. Unusually mild with spring springing, yet still only mid January.

It wasn't just the weather that gave me the enthusiasm for today, either. Here was my first motorcaravan drive for several years, an opportunity to find out how far things have progressed in this field of outdoor activity, as they have in lightweight camping, in caravanning and on the bike-riding scene.

I don't have to exert a lot of energy to become enthusiastic

about the outdoors scene. I find it quite natural to amble towards the horizon with a daypack or just ride my bike. Driving a motor vehicle is no less a happy experience; after all, I do so much of it year upon year that I'd be daft to even *think* for one moment that driving wasn't enjoyable for much of the time.

Not everyone feels the same, of course, so it is always rewarding to meet like-minded souls — which is where the Jackson family come in. Ken and his family own and run the Cleveland Motorhomes operation and they were about to loan me a VW Auto-Sleeper to further my experience and help research some answers to the sort of questions friends come up with.

People who haven't expe-

rienced the motorcaravan scene may wonder what they will make of the change from family saloon to driving what is usually a broad, high, long and seemingly cumbersome vehicle. They'll admit trepidations about road-holding, about reversing, about parking. In reality they'll be nervous for no reason at all.

When the tent has been your touring home so far you'll now have more solid comforts to experience, a new routine to adopt. Things are no longer at ground level, seats are for lounging in! You'll soon take motorcaravan life for granted.

For those who are considering the swap from towing a caravan then, in my view, you will ONLY need to review what you used your car for when you were not

towing. You'll soon remember that once the kettle is on you don't drive to the shops! But that's about the only negative point that comes to mind.

In a very short time I re-discovered that the motorcaravan has some pretty unique advantages, though, and especially for country lovers who live in town but want out!

People who move on regularly will know the knack of keeping a daypack stuffed, their boots handy and wet weather wear ready. That's the regular content of my car boot, anyway. But with a car — or when biking — the flask for a hot drink has to be filled before leaving home. That is something you can't forget when your transport is a motorcaravan! The kettle can be



Durham moorland and a sunny day make this scene — but best of all the VW makes a good family base.

'on' in a trice, stop where you will, unless it is on a motorway forecourt or parking lot where local by-laws make sense by saying no.

In the VW I quickly realised that there was more room for work-things, like my cameras, a table for the laptop computer and the other paraphernalia of a travelling scribe. The real beauty is the extra room readily available to work in, with the benefits of home right there at my elbow.

When a car driver first climbs into the cab of a motorcaravan like the Volkswagen Transporter, the first thing that strikes is the view from the driving seat. It is like sitting on an eagle's eyrie.

You can see over the car in front, over the car following you and even over the hedges beside the road. On long, boring motorway stretches that I've travelled more times than I can count, the view was across embankments that confine the saloon car driver to a straight-ahead view. And for those who may say you should keep your eyes only on the road, monotony brings on boredom, something we can all do without!

The VW cab layout gives an easy, upright driving position,

with a steering wheel that is before you in a flattish plane. The clutch is car-like, the gear box not so indecisive when you consider the length of the lever. You get used to it quickly.

My only hesitations came when changing down, third to second, and that was probably because my technique was inadequate as I faltered only occasionally.

The near-two-litre motor, rear engine situated, snappily moved the van forward and had sufficient torque to allow a wide ranging speed level to be attained in third. Indicated was a level of between 25 mph and almost to 50 before my own consideration for the engine deemed it time to change to fourth.

Instrumentation is a matter of personal preferences — or makers' gimmickry. The VW dash had nothing of exceptional note about it, nor was it totally bleak and featureless. The radio was not my regular push-button select, perhaps, but I was quite able to get regular programmes — or play my tapes. Not wiring the radio through the ignition meant there was music when parked up.



Driving position gives excellent all-round vision. Passenger seat swivels.

Passenger comfort and convenience enjoyed the privilege of not having to look where we were going — the seat swivels so that it can be used as part of the van layout. As the bunk seat in the van isn't fitted with seat belts — but why should it? — we were pleased to seat our youngster in the rearwards-facing passenger place for on-the-road times, strapped and secure.

I've spent enough time in various styles of travelling homes to appreciate that the designers

have utilised most of the space available for cupboards and storage. The full length of the offside of the van carries everything from kitchen sink to good length wardrobe.

## KITCHEN

Under the double burner and grill is some space which can be used during transit and there is a good area in the space below the sink. Neat thinking had the designer slip a sliding cutlery drawer onto the right side of this

## RETURN JOURNEY



Easy to use, convenient family buggy with plenty of potential. Roomy interior for three, or four. Pillar mounted table is useful.



Kitchen layout against offside of van. Fridge in centre under double burner grill and sink unit. Plenty of cupboards.



Wire baskets fit into lid closed storage cupboard. Sink is stainless steel with powered water supply.

and floor space, to the right two separate cupboards, the one at floor level being used for gas bottle storage — and with the electric water pump beside it make certain you avoid having any gas leaks! Control taps for the gas supply to cooker and fridge are set in the top of these two cupboards.

A top-opening cupboard, which completes the kitchen unit, sits beside the full width bunk seat. Inside the cupboard, with its hinged lid, are two plastic-coated wire baskets which will take groceries and, as they are detachable, can be loaded indoors and used when provisioning the van.

Beneath the baskets are plate and cup spaces, all templated into ply so that things didn't ought to leap around while you are travelling.

Finally, what appears to be a small cupboard right at the rear end of the van turns out to be cavernous inasmuch as it is actually of wardrobe proportions. Well, not *big* perhaps, but certainly it is of a useful enough size to be called a wardrobe!

## ELECTRICS

Over the sink and cooker layout is the fuse box and control panel for the appliances, each marked for recognition with suitable level and electric power indicators for things like the ignition system for the fridge and the water tank — underslung and filled through a lockable filler cap on the outside of the van.

There is a cigar-lighter style electric outlet on the control panel and beside is set a ▶

space so that you don't have to wave knives and forks about after washing and drying up.

Not so neat thinking has seen louvred windows — sealed with anti-midge screens — having the locking handle fouled by the uplifted sink lid or cooker shield.

The refrigerator — gas, mains and 12 volt from the engine — is set square in the middle of the kitchen unit. There is under-floor ventilation to the fridge, which can be quickly changed from whatever power source is necessary. But remember — no naked gas burning when the van is being moved!

The cupboard behind the door to the left has two shelves

## USED VEHICLE TEST

standard 13-amp socket for when the van is mains linked on site. There are fluorescent strip lights, each with a separate switch, so internal illumination is balanced when needed.

## STOP-OVERS

The transition from road-going mode to suitability for over-nighting — or for picnics or day-stops for that matter — is a quick and easy job, managed without strain by one person.

A locking catch aft and a toggle catch on the bulkhead just behind the driving seat secure the roof when moving.



Roof lifts and is locked at this point on both sides, plus front locations.

the VW than when coupled to a caravan! Travel times over some local runs gave no advantage either way and for other obvious comparisons you will already have the answer.

Cleveland Motorhomes could have offered me a coachbuilt model from their wide range of pre-owned vehicles, they may have considered something a little smaller would have been suitable and I wouldn't have argued. There was plenty of choice and a list is available for prospective customers. If I had been a customer they would have asked what I expected to do in a motorcaravan, where



Lower double bed made up with sleeping bags, it is a one-minute job.



This is how the lower double bed is made up from the seats and back cushion.

Release these, push the roof canopy upwards — there is a handle — and lift the side panels into place. There are two locking devices, pressure secured, to hold the roof erect. It happens quicker than saying it!

Of the four adult sleeping positions there are two on the lower bunk. This uses the seating and back which hinges flat and is pulled forward to be adequately supported by inbuilt ledges and a flange which hinges into position. Once done you'll remember it for ever.

There is sleeping accommodation overhead on a sliding panel which positions to gravity lock. It is lightly cushioned and you would need to be agile to enjoy the experience — kiddies can be lifted, of course.

## CONCLUSION

As we didn't sleep in this van then purists may want to contend it hasn't been truly evaluated, yet I am confident that our experience supports the contention that here is an adaptable, uncluttered motorcaravan that has to be used to get the best from it. The living quarters and facilities have been built in without hindering the



Upper twin bed, in this case used by a young son who has more than enough room.

versatility of the side-doored VW body. It is easy to drive and has none of the immediate disadvantages you would believe exist in a larger than average vehicle.

What is money? In this article it is a means of comparing one product or one lifestyle with another. A saloon car to carry a family of four needs a 1600cc engine at least and will cost £8500 or possibly more. You'll pay around £5000 for a four-berth caravan. Cleveland Motorhomes have tagged the VW

Auto-Sleeper at £13,500.

Rather than miles per gallon, for years now I have reckoned petrol costs in pence per mile. With a 2-litre saloon I pay just under 6p a mile, then when I tow our caravan that costs another 2p, making the best part of 8p per mile. I don't suppose I could change my driving style if I tried, so at just on 7.6p a mile for the VW we have similar costs for similar accommodation.

On the road the VW isn't as lively as my saloon but on the other hand it is easier to reverse

I would go and how often. The alternatives would have been demonstrated and price for price differences explained.

At their Teesside Airport base I looked over a range that represented motorcaravanning in the broadest terms, and I don't need another look to assure readers that the VW Auto-Sleeper I drove for a few hundred miles fairly represents the merchandise on offer.

Clean like a new pin, and even with over 10,000 miles since new, no signs of roadgoing abuse. The full documents of the vehicle, bought from them and subsequently traded in for a coachbuilt model, in the glove-box to peruse and even the name and address of the previous owner if a check is thought appropriate.

But trading reputations are earned, and as the Jackson family want to keep their customers happy and coming back for more, checking isn't likely to be a consideration. The van gave first time starting, even on frosty mornings, there were no unexplainable rattles, squeaks nor doubts of any sort. I would have been a very satisfied customer.



The Cleveland Motorhomes operations headquarters is right at the entrance to Teesside Airport — signposted on major routes from twenty miles away. The office complex was once the RAF guardhouse, built like the

proverbial and now refurbished *Espanol* style and very smart with it; but the Jacksons are happy, wanting to help with queries, so easy to talk with and working to please their customers. That's enthusiasm for you.

## SPECIFICATION

Auto-Sleepers Ltd conversion on VW Transporter model VX50.  
 Engine size 1997cc  
 Pre-delivery inspection dated June 1987, E registration.  
 First service at 4646 miles in January 1988.  
 Recorded mileage after this session was 11,240.  
 Very clean bodywork and clean furnishings.  
 Petrol consumption average was 7.6p per mile, something near 22 mpg on current pump costs.  
 Standard equipment is double burner/grill; mains wired with safety trips; fluorescent strip lights; 12/240 volt/gas fridge; sleeps four; pillar mounted table; flyscreens on louvred windows; water pump to sink.  
 One previous owner.  
 Made by Auto-Sleepers Ltd, Willersey, Nr Broadway, Worcs.  
**Priced at £12,995.**  
 Auto-Sleepers' Trident now replaces the VX50.  
 Cleveland's on-the-road price for a new Trooper is £15,600.  
**Vehicle supplied for evaluation by:**  
 Cleveland Motorhomes, Teesside Airport, Darlington,  
 Co Durham DL2 1RH.  
 Tel: 0325 332626



Rear door lifts to reveal storage space under rear parcel shelf — this is where your feet go in bed!

## RETURN JOURNEY

## USED VEHICLE TEST