



△ RV50. Short wheelbase version of front wheel drive Renault Traffic is car-like in size, parkability and ease of driving. Spare wheel mounted on rear door is accessible and clean but length is increased marginally.

▽ RV50. Steeply sloping front end aids fuel economy and performance at speed. Typical Auto-Sleepers' rising roof was quick and easy to erect. This demonstrator was fitted with an A & E roller blind awning.



# AUTO-SLEEPERS JOHN HUNT SUBMITS TRAFIC RV50 & V

## 1. Renault Traffic

"The Renault Traffic might have been built with motorcaravans in mind," says Auto-Sleepers' brochure. How right! With sloping front end for less drag, side and rear doors for versatility and a low floor for stepless entry, it approaches the ideal base vehicle for economical conversion.

"Approaches" — certainly but, with all its plus points, it's not quite perfect. If Regie Renault had thought seriously about leisure use, they'd have made the thing a little wider to take a 6ft transverse bed. The current 5ft 5in maximum interior width is sufficient to allow a spacious interior, provided beds are placed longitudinally.

Such considerations don't bother Auto-Sleepers, with their standard layout of four face-forward seats which convert quickly and easily to two beds (or to a king-sized double with infill cushions), so it's fair to claim that the Traffic might have been built with Auto-Sleepers in mind; the pair have made a happy marriage.

### On the road

All Traffics I have driven up to now have been new models with

'works' mileage only on their clocks. Auto-Sleepers' demonstrator has been all over the country and topped 22 000 during our trial. It felt properly 'run-in'. Bearings had bedded down and performance from the 1400cc motor was surprisingly lively, creeping easily to 60 mph-plus, on level roads. At this speed, noise in the cab was by no means intrusive and conversation was still possible without raising the voice. At low speeds, the motor was delightfully flexible, with no backlash from the transmission and light steering making parking in tight spots child's play, thanks to good all-round visibility. A recent modification by the converters allows the driver's seat to be pushed back a little further on its runners. My absolutely average male height found the seat position about right. Abnormally large males should perhaps insist upon a trial run to ensure that there's enough leg room.

The new Auto-Sleepers front seats with rolled edges provided adequate sideways location and yet, when flattened to form part of the bed, fulfilled their dual role admirably. Rear seat passengers said the ride comfort was beyond criticism, with excellent location and commanding all-round visibility.





△ VT20. Auto-Sleepers' low-line rising roof keeps overall height just below 7ft. Like Renault, VW has small roof rack over cab and prominent side striping bearing A-S motif. But note the Volks's superior wheel trims.

▽ VT20. The rising roof was effortless to raise but upper bed had to be shunted to and fro when fastening side panels and it was necessary to stand on seat to reach rear bolts. Centre locking desirable here.

# DOUBLE FEATURE

## BRIEF REPORTS ON THE

# VW TRANSPORTER

# VT20

Controls on the Renault were all pleasantly light and drive and ride were more like those of a car than a commercial van. It's essentially a relaxing vehicle to travel in and I, for one, would be perfectly happy with the small 1400cc engine which, though it may not hang on to hills as tenaciously as bigger brutes, provides adequate main road performance coupled with the undoubted benefit of fuel economy. If pushed really hard, consumption can increase to around 26 mpg but, with a lighter right foot, readers have found that 30–33 mpg is possible without dawdling. The hinged side door allows the Renault to double as a four seater car but rear seat passengers must wait for the door to be opened for them from outside – a safety feature to protect children, say Auto-Sleepers.

### The caravan

The height of the front seats (or the lowness of the van's floor) means that a false floor must be built into the caravan's seating area if occupants are not to find their feet dangling in the air. The penalty is a 4 inch step-up when walking from rear kitchen to dining area. The bonus is additional storage space for large



flat objects. I moved around the caravan a lot during photography, did not find the step any kind of a hazard.

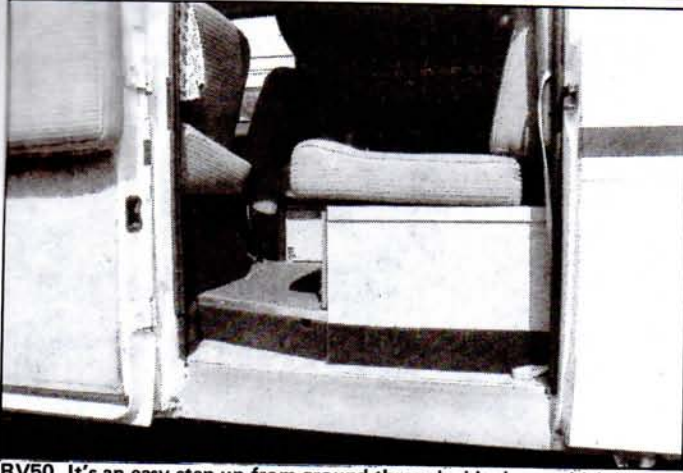
There can be two face forward passenger seats for travel or two face-inward settees which accommodate four people at the centrally positioned dining table. With both settees in place, the side door is out of action, but there are still accessible doors at the rear or in the cab (all openable from inside). Whether or not the table is in position, front seat backrests may be wound down to provide a couple of long couches for daytime relaxation.

The lower floor at the rear gives a respectable 32 inches of working height at the kitchen. Thanks to a fairly wide gangway, contents of the cupboards beneath were easy to reach. The refrigerator is placed well above the floor, making contents very accessible and there is a useful clobber cupboard beneath, which is partly, like the wardrobe, obstructed by the big wheel arch – inevitable penalty of a low floor line. The refrigerator, and the wardrobe next to it, has a flat top where yet more impedimenta can be placed when on site.

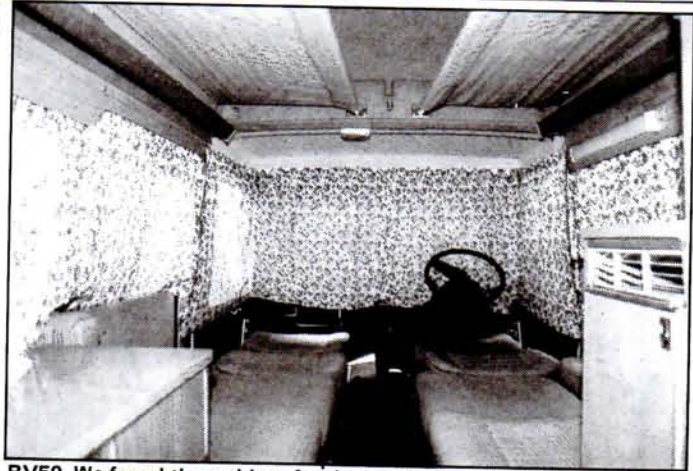
The wardrobe is big and incorporates a shelf unit which provides yet more clothes storage space. Below its twin doors is



# TRAFIC RV50



RV50. It's an easy step-up from ground through side door, which hinges right back out of the way. Removable plinth to false floor hides useful extra storage accommodation.



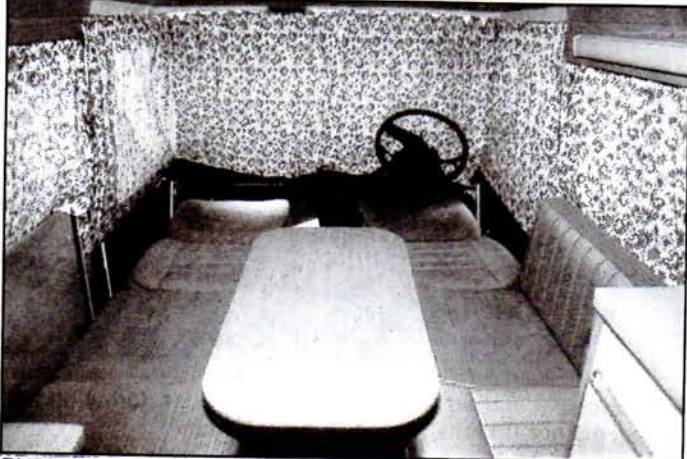
RV50. We found the cushions for the longitudinal single beds matched up very evenly and there were no uncomfortable bulges. Tapering of upper bunks preserves a bit of headroom at rear end.



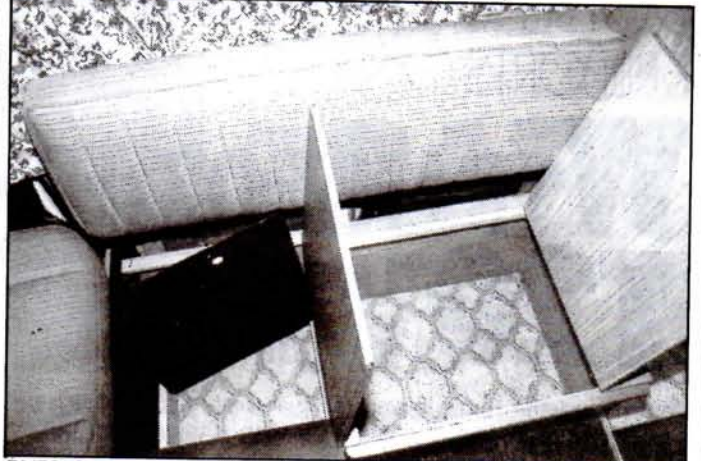
RV50. Four forward-facing seats for travelling. Settee backrests on side walls make arm-rests, offside one hides table stowage. Carpet is flecked and doesn't show marks. Note 'modesty skirts' on backs of front seats.



RV50. Using backrests and extra cushions to make up the 5ft 5in wide king size bed. Front centre cushions may appear to stick up a bit — but that's where feet go and it's not uncomfortable.



RV50. Forward-facing passenger seats flattened to form inwards-facing settees. Table is island leg mounted in centre snagway. Cab seats can be reclined (but not reversed) for extra seating.



RV50. Some of the generous under-seat storage with locker lids lifted to show interior. Front locker has false floor (here standing on edge) which provides a 'secret' compartment.

a solid panel on which a balanced flue gas heater can be mounted as an optional extra. This is vented to the exterior and so is the refrigerator, though the latter has air circulation grilles above and below from which a bit of heat escapes (not fumes). Some owners have found this bothering in hot weather and have said they'd prefer those grilles to be on an outside wall. (A bonus in cooler weather, however. See foot note.)

The roof was simplicity itself to raise and lower, giving a generous 6ft 9in of headroom above the kitchen (6ft 4in over the sitting area), yet folding to provide overall vehicle height of just 7ft. There are two tapered stretcher bunks in the roof, concealed when not in use in neat, long lockers. There is no ventilator as such, in the top of the roof but the long side panels

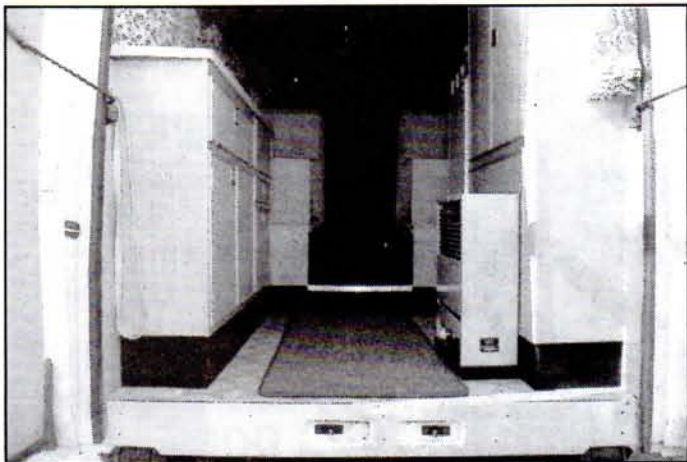
can be opened fractionally or fully to provide ventilation, if the three sliding side windows (plus two in the cab which wind down) are found to be inadequate.

## 2. VW Transporter

It's not so long since I drove and reported on the new breed of water-cooled VW with powerful 1.9 litre 78 bhp rear engine. It's superb, capable of cruising quietly at 80 mph, positively purring along at Britain's legal maximum of 70. Driven hard, taking full advantage of its sparkling performance, fuel consumption will be little better than 21 mpg. With more considerate progress (yet still fast by motorcaravan standards) 25 or so can reasonably be expected. Motorists in search of economy will



## TRAFIC RV50



RV50. Worm's eye view through wide rear doors. Floor is 16 inches from ground, so no extra step is needed. On left, kitchen cupboards. On right, wardrobe (optional heater at base) and refrigerator.



RV50. All systems go in the spacious kitchen, with worktops at sensible height. Plenty of storage accommodation beneath sink and cutlery drawer beneath cooker. Fitted real crockery doesn't rattle.

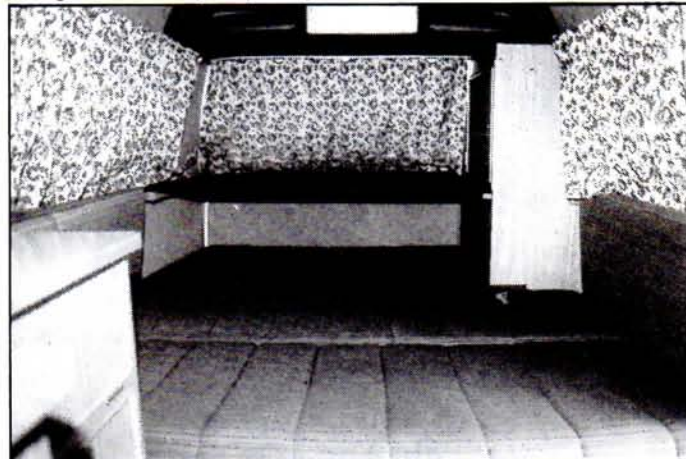


RV50. Opposite kitchen is wardrobe with incorporated lipped shelf unit and flat top, also with lip. Forward of that is 'frig and another flat top. Above is fuse panel, water level gauge and 12 volt socket.

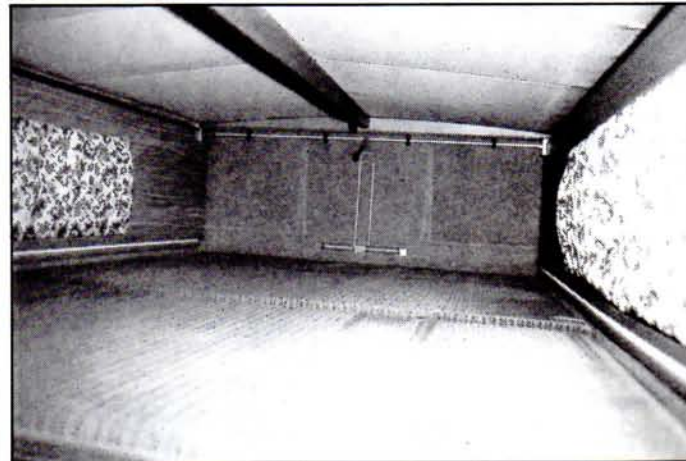
## VW VT20



VT20. View from above of U-shaped rear seat with island leg table in position. Ride here was most comfortable according to my researcher, with good view and plenty of leg room.



VT20. Rear bed is quick and easy to arrange and extends, for most of its length, the full width of the vehicle. Roof locker above end of bed has pigeon hole access with double-fluo lamp in centre.



VT20. Upper bed, 5ft 2 inches long, is in two sections, stored one above the other to preserve headroom. Single-glazed fixed side windows. Ventilation is by opening one of side panels a little or a lot.

probably select the 60 bhp version, where performance falls not far short of last year's air-cooled 2 litre, with rather better fuel consumption anticipated.

The Volks was always ahead of its competitors for effortless long distance motoring. It has managed to remain so. I cannot think of anything to touch it for the sheer joy of motorcaravan travel. My wife, as passenger agrees. "If only we could have a Volks with the accommodation of an ordinary van or coach-built . . .," she says.

And there's the rub. There's no doubt that, for a motorcaravan, the engine is best placed up front, driving the front wheels, leaving the rear end uncluttered and less restrictive on layout.

Auto-Sleepers have cunningly adapted what could be called conventional VW layout to their own ideas, taking advantage of the two restrictive features of the base vehicle: a central roof bow which must not be removed and the hump over the engine.

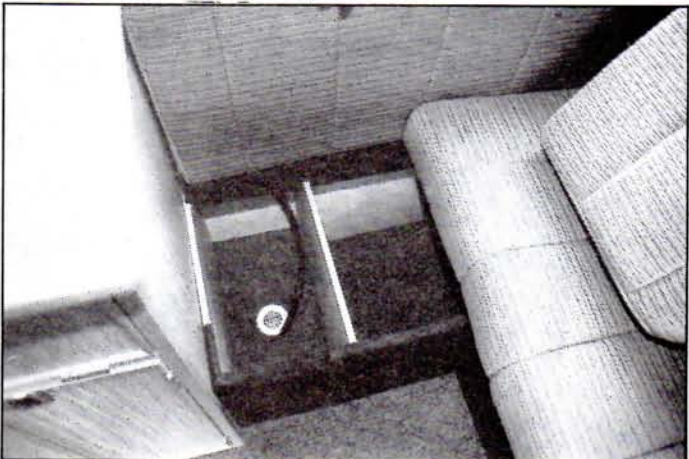
The engine deck supports the usual bed but this one, at 4ft 9in, is wider than those found in most contemporaries, although it narrows to 4ft 1in at the rearward end. A nice touch is the provision of a wide, removable shelf which hides luggage or shopping placed behind the back seat. This vehicle has been called an 'estate caravan' because, in the provision of this shelf and (with cushions removed) it can beat any production estate car in terms of sheer cubic capacity.



# VW VT20



VT20. Storage beneath rear seats. Note carpet lining throughout. Square locker on right of photograph will hold small chemical closet or walls will concertina away for extra floor space.



VT20. The offside wing of the U-settee hides the ventilated gas storage locker, with room for a spare Camping Gaz bottle or more clobber. Close-up of upholstery shows quality of the job.



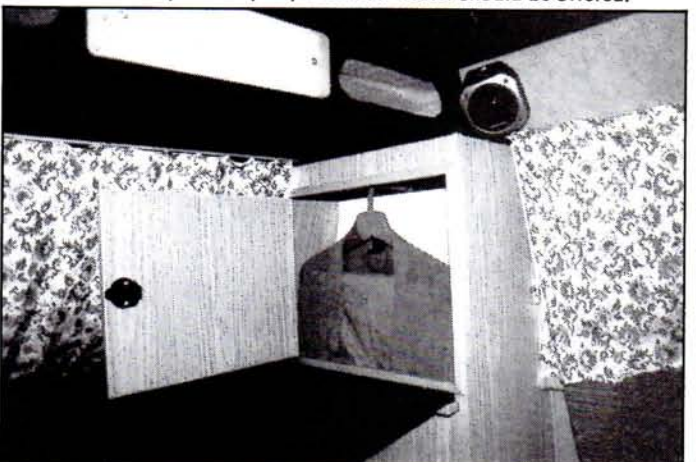
VT20. Kitchen, behind driver's seat. Cooker has splash guards on three sides, with big cupboard beneath. Room under sink for washing-up mops etc. Notice sink lid over back of cab seat.



VT20. Above kitchen unit is flyscreened louvred window; above that new control panel incorporating fuses, 12 volt socket, water level gauge and master switches for interior lights and water pump.



VT20. Just inside the side doorway is this shelved cupboard. A gas heater, flued through the floor, can be fitted here, when storage space will be lost. Perhaps a compact, blown-air heater should be offered.



VT20. Rear left corner showing wardrobe big enough for jackets, fluorescent lamp and pigeon holes above rear seat — and tight fit of drawn curtains. Radio speaker is non-standard.

## The caravan

Whilst that intrusive roof bow has, perforce, been left in place, the van's roof has been cut away fore and aft of it and the bow itself supports the base of a movable (and removable) bed for children. (The only solid-based roof bed in any Auto-Sleepers rising roof model.)

Raising the parallelogramming roof is as simple as on all the other Auto-Sleepers but locking the side panels into position takes a little longer, for the bed base must be slid forwards to reach the rear catches, back again for headroom over the kitchen area. Couples without children might decide to leave the upper bed at home. Roof ventilation is the same as on other models from the stable: hinged side panels which may be opened fractionally or completely (but, for stability, both should not be

fully opened at the same time).

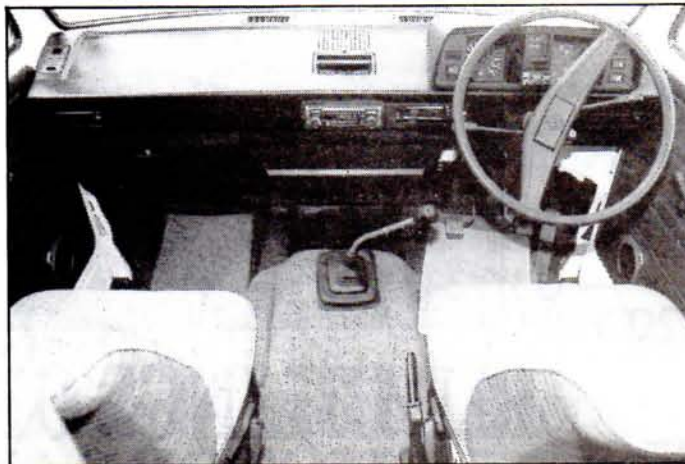
It's below where the differences show. The kitchen is confined to the front half of the van, with a storage cupboard behind the cab passenger seat, which allows the wider-than-usual bed over the engine. The rear bench seat is, unusually, U-shaped, providing accommodation at a rather small table for four diners (two-plus-two, anyway). This has the effect of leaving the cook a clear working area, with unobstructed access to cupboards and refrigerator. The sink's hinged lid opens through 180 degrees, over the cab seat, to provide extra working space.

As in all officially approved VW conversions, front seats remain intact and do not form part of any beds — a reassuring aspect for nervous wild campers.





The 'boot' at the rear end. Shelf hides shopping from the inquisitive. Shelf and cushion can be quickly removed for access to engine below. Oil and water points are behind number plate.



Cab is neat and uncluttered with easily read instruments, powerful heater with 3-speed fan and controllable fresh air ventilation. Maps slide off that sloping fascia shelf; it needs a lip.

### Which one?

Both models, as one has learned to expect from Auto-Sleepers, were beautifully constructed and finished, with thoughtful touches like full curtaining, held taut when drawn, by press studs. Both have full approval from the vehicle makers. Both have large water tanks and water level gauges, though only the Renault had the standard set of fitted crockery.

The final choice will be a very personal matter and the remarks that follow are subjective.

Whilst the Renault is pleasant to drive, the Volks is superb, and we preferred its cab seats, which don't have to double as beds. When carrying passengers, we'd rather have them placed, car-like, just behind the front seats, as in the Renault. VW retains its noisy sliding door. Renault's is hinged and easier to close quietly — but cannot be opened from the inside. Renault provides twin single beds but VW's double is very quickly made up with the minimum of cushion-shuffling. In spite of the hard

hase (about one inch of foam), I'd think children would be happier in the VW's solid roof bed — and certainly less likely to roll out. There's room for a small chemical closet in one of VW's under-seat lockers but Auto-Sleepers' approach is that it's better to have the thing free-standing, disguised as a stool. They'll provide the cover in matching upholstery for either model.

Certainly, if in the habit of rushing along autoroutes to the south of France or north of England, I'd choose the 78 bhp Volks, for I suspect that the 1400 Traffic might run out of steam on some of the long gradients, especially if laden with camping gear, when its power/weight ratio would be affected more adversely than that of the bigger and heavier VW.

So, I'm still cogitating the final — and entirely academic — choice. Perhaps price will be the decisive factor. A difference of £1000 is not to be lightly ignored — even in theory.

## Renault Traffic Auto-Sleeper RV50

### Dimensions

Overall length 14ft 7in (4.44m); Overall width 6ft 0in (1.83m)  
 Width including mirrors 6ft 9½ in (2.07m); Overall height 7ft 0in (2.13m)  
 Interior height, rear 6ft 9¼ in (2075mm); Interior height, front 6ft 4½ in (1945 mm)  
 Single beds 6ft 8in x 2ft 0in (2030 x 610 mm); Double bed 6ft 8in x 5ft 5in (2030 x 1650 mm)  
 Tapered roof bunks 6ft 6in x 1ft 10in/1ft 6in (1980 x 560/455 mm)  
 Table 3ft 0in x 1ft 6in (915 x 455 mm)  
 Mid underfloor locker 2ft 1in x 1ft 6in x 4in (635 x 455 x 100 mm)  
 Side underfloor locker 2ft 10in x 1ft 3in x 4in (865 x 380 x 100 mm)

**Price:** £8483 on Traffic T800.

**Optional extras:** Flyscreens £36, Rear annexe tent £193, Heater, £235, Double bed conversion £36, T100D with 2 litre diesel engine £1154.

### RV50: I liked

Car-like motoring for four  
 Fuel economy  
 Light controls  
 Hinged side door  
 Excellent interior headroom  
 Ample working spaces

Three opening windows  
 Single beds option

### RV50: I would have liked

Catch on inside of side door  
 Restraint belts for rear passengers  
 Reversible front seats

## Volkswagen Transporter Auto-Sleeper VT20

### Dimensions

Overall length 15ft 0in (4.57m)  
 Overall width 6ft 1in (1.84m)  
 Width including mirrors 6ft 10in (2.08m)  
 Overall height 6ft 11in (2.11m)  
 Main bed 6ft 4in x 4ft 9in/4ft 1in (1930 x 1450/1245 mm)  
 Upper bed 5ft 2in x 3ft 11in (1575 x 1194 mm)  
 Table 2ft 3in x 1ft 6in (685 x 455 mm)

**Price:** £9239 with 60 bhp engine.

**Optional extras:** 78 bhp engine (as tested) £233, 1.6 litre diesel engine £642, Heater £235, Auto transmission £506, 5 speed gearbox on 78 bhp only £200.

### VT20: I liked

Sparkling performance  
 Figure-hugging cab seats  
 Wide, comfortable bed  
 Children's solid bed  
 Kitchen unobstructed by furniture  
 Flyscreened louvred window  
 New systems control monitor  
 Rear luggage 'boot'

### VT20: I would have liked

Centre locking for roof side panels  
 Space-saving heater option  
 Restraint belts for rear passengers  
 Swivelling front seats  
 Lip on fascia shelf

### VT20: I disliked

Noisy sliding door  
 Obtrusive roof bow

*Footnote: We asked Auto-Sleepers why their refrigerators were vented internally, were told, "We cannot find an external ventilator guaranteed to exclude water and airborne pollution. Present models are particularly susceptible to car washing hoses."*

*I appreciate their point of view, having seen a burner unit rusted from just such a cause. There would seem to be a need for a ventilator which allows free air flow yet excludes pollution. Editor* □