

SAFER *VOLKSWAGEN* MOTORING

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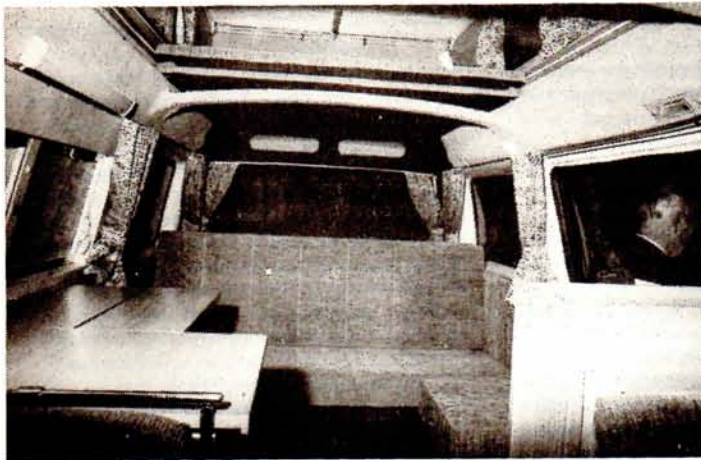
The **INDEPENDENT** pro-British magazine
that concentrates on the VW/Audi Family

Two new air-cooled VWs and luxury LTs at the Caravan Show

Chris Burlace reporting



A Motorhomes International VW Motorsleeper with rear-mounted motor-cycle. With its 50/50 weight distribution the new VW can take such a load with little effect on handling.



Inside the latest conversion of the air-cooled VW, the Autosleeper features a U-shaped seat layout, light oak cabinetwork and a rigid-sided roof.



Interior of the Cavalier custom van conversion of the Volkswagen LT.

Volkswagen motor caravans were in the limelight again at the Caravan Camping and Holiday Show at Earls Court. There were two brand-new conversions of the ever popular air-cooled van, a range of luxury conversions on the LT made their London debut and the first pictures were shown of a luxurious American motorhome body fitted to a Volkswagen LT chassis. The most awaited model was the new **Autosleeper Camping Car**, the first ever conversion by the Worcestershire company on a small VW.

Like all Autosleepers the Camping Car is furnished with cabinetwork in light oak plywood, beautifully finished. Light coloured carpet trims the lower part of the 'van and around the roof opening, while toning vinyl material clads the area around windows. The decor combined with a novel U-shaped rear seat arrangement gives an air of spaciousness.

Part of the worktop covering the kitchen fittings hinges over the back of the driver's seat to give extra working area, while the adjacent window is a louvre unit with flyscreen. Behind the cab passenger seat is a tall wardrobe rather too shallow to provide much storage, but extra depth could be found without obstructing the handle of the sliding side door.

The rear seats can accommodate four around the table, mounted on an island leg so that it swivels for access, but leg space with two people facing forwards and two inwards would be rather restricted. Autosleeper stress that the new model is a prototype; among the modifications for production 'vans could be improved seating arrangements for dining. There is plenty of under-seat storage and one of the space-takers in a small 'van, the water tank, is located under the vehicle. However, I felt that 14 gallons is a rather over-generous allowance for a VW — a

140 lb load with consequences for performance and economy.

Sleeping space in the Camping Car is generous, with the rear seat and engine deck area combining to give a main bed the full width of the 'van. Above, in the solid-sided Autosleeper elevating roof, panelled to match the furniture below and fitted with a pair of double glazed windows, there is the firm based bed, now common in the VW and some other elevating roof conversions, with the two sections stacking by day to give headroom in the forward part of the caravan area.

Bedding in the VW is traditionally stored in the well behind the rear seat, where it benefits from heat diffusing up from the engine, and a neat touch in the Autosleeper is the provision of a carpet-clad light lid to conceal the contents of the well.

This newcomer combines eye appeal with a basically sound layout and with a price tag at the Show of £7,750 should carve itself a

niche in the market. Like its new rival, the CI Kamper, displayed at the Motor Show and making its second appearance in London, the Autosleeper is arranged to offer a load deck in the rear after removing the bed cushions.

Attracting even more attention than the VW was Autosleepers new coachbuilt model on the recently improved **Bedford CF** chassis. The fibreglass body has been styled by **William Towns** and achieves elegance with low drag for good fuel economy. The kitchen unit and toilet compartment take up the rear of the 'van, there is a U-shaped seating unit on the offside forming a 4-seater dinette and converting to a double bed, and on the nearside is a long worktop and a capacious wardrobe immediately to the rear of the cab. An overcab bed provides two more berths but a penalty of the aerodynamic styling is a shortage of headroom in the Luton.

This new Bedford conversion

gets my vote as the smartest coach-built motor caravan around, and with a price advantage of some £1,400 over Autosleeper's award winning Volkswagen LT, which will now leave you with no change from £12,000, it will be a serious rival to the LT conversions. The comprehensive specification leaves little scope for spending on extras.

Richard Holdsworth was drawing VW fans to his stand with a new high top model, the VW *Hi-Flyer*. The fibre glass top incorporates an overcab roofrack and gives 6' 3" of headroom. The most novel feature of the new model, however, is the provision of a toilet compartment, the first time this feature has been offered on the small VW. A 'Pompe' unit housed in the base of the compartment provides the twin comforts of hot water, piped to the sink, and warm air heating. Remaining offside space is taken up by the sink with fridge below a deep locker (you need arms like a gorilla to reach

Another new option on all three VW models is swivelling cab seats, turning inwards to face a small pedestal table, for which the price is £155.

New exhibitors at Earls Court were **Pampas Motor Caravans**, of Derby, with a choice of six versions of the Volkswagen LT; three layouts each available as either an elevating roof *Nevada* model or a *Laredo* high top. Options for seating and dining are an inward facing settee on the offside, with fixed and folding seats by the side door and a long table set on the axis of the 'van; a double dinette or a double plus a single dinette.

The former plan (model A) is popular if the conversion is to be used primarily just by a couple; models B and C appeal for family camping, with model C able to sleep up to six.

In all models kitchen units occupy the offside rear, wardrobe and toilet facilities are on the nearside. The sections forming the upper

the *Altus*, by **Cavalier Coachman**, an offshoot of the Cavalier company better known for its trailer caravans. The *Altus* is one of a range of custom van style conversions by the company (the others are on Bedfords) which combine the unique appeal of the custom van with practical camping features.

The LT model features a forward dinette with versatile seating arrangements, a kitchen at the rear and a good-sized toilet compartment and a wardrobe on the nearside. Externally the *Altus* is in the custom van idiom with shaded metallic paintwork highlighting the white background of the bodywork and big, tinted 'picture windows' gracing the offside.

Inside there is lavish use of carpet, buttoned cushions and a very comprehensive lighting system. The amenities are what one expects in a 'van of this class, warm air heating, hot water system, oven cooker, fridge and a smartly fitted

and fitted toilet compartment. The 500 costs £5,232 including VAT for the demountable unit alone.

Rivals to the expensive Volkswagen LT-based motor caravans are the top coachbuilt models in the ranges of companies such as **CI Motorhomes**, **Advantura**, **Dormobile**, and **Glendale**. The larger body units from the Advantura and Glendale ranges have been fitted to LT31 and LT35 chassis.

On the whole there are few changes to the popular large British coachbuilts, but CI had saved one new model for the Show. The new Bedford-based *Bedouin* has a large body of sandwich type construction (panels constructed by bonding aluminium and plywood to a polystyrene core) similar to that of the company's Mark II *Sherpa Highwayman*. The spacious newcomer may tempt a buyer with a budget of £12,000 looking for more space than is available in the LT panel van conversions.



Sleek lines of Autosleeper's new fibre-glass coachbuilt conversion of the Bedford CF 250.



Smart interior of the Pampas Laredo model A conversion of the VW LT.

New at the Show, the Laredo high top and Nevada elevating roof models on the Volkswagen LT from Pampas Motor Caravans.



New VW Kamper by Caravans International. Note height of elevating roof.

Holdsworth's new VW Hi-Flyer, the only small VW to feature a toilet compartment.

the bottom!) and a wardrobe.

The cooker is adjacent to the side door of the 'van, and further storage is provided in the rear well, by lockers in the front of the high top and by cubbyholes in the rear below the original van roof. A 7-gallon water tank takes up much of the space below the rear bench seat.

In the 'van at the Show the rear platform in the high top was fitted as a child-sized double bed, but I can foresee a high demand for this new Holdsworth to be supplied as a luxury two-berth with the roof space fitted for storage.

The *Hi-Flyer* is competitively priced at £8,041. The other two Holdsworth VWs, the *Super Two* and the *Family Five*, cost £7,356 and £7,543 respectively, and are now available with the high top instead of the straight-lifting, concertina-sided elevating roof as a no-extra-cost option.

double berth fold away to the front of the roofspace, leaving virtually full headroom over the whole living area by day.

I was impressed by the workmanship and materials in the Pampas 'vans. Furniture is faced with rosewood patterned melamine laminate, and rich Dralon boldly patterned in browns, golds and yellows is used for upholstery with toning generously cut Dralon curtains.

Pampas Volkswagens start at around £11,300, refrigerators are standard but items like a water heater, a balanced flue heater or blown air central heating and auxiliary electric systems are extras. It would not be difficult to end up with a bill of £14,000 or more for one of these superb 'vans equipped to complement the style and quality of the basic conversion.

Another distinctive LT conversion shown at Earls Court was

toilet compartment. The dinette converts to a double bed and there is a cleverly designed swing-up double bed for children which tucks away into the roof of the cab.

The *Altus* is more likely to appeal as a luxury 2-berth, however, to couples whose children have flown the nest.

A practical form of motor caravan for the small businessman who can utilise a small truck is the demountable. **Walkers Suntrekker** range has always catered for the Volkswagen LT with the 500 model. At the 1980 Show I found the interior of the Suntrekkers much improved. Furniture is in a restrained 'Colonial' style; I liked the neat doors on the units and the tapestry upholstery.

Standard fittings in the larger, 400 and 500 series models include **Saunier Duval** water heater, **Electrolux 212A** fridge, 2-burner and oven cooker and an extractor hood

Prices of the LT motor caravans now overlap those of many of the American imports, although the latter have the penalty of lefthand drive and thirsty V8 engines. A new exhibitor at Earls Court was **Bill Hayes** from Darlaston with 'vans from **Fleetwood Enterprises**, one of the big US producers. For £12,795 he was offering a 23' *Tioga Arrow* model with all the equipment and luxury of the top British conversions and more. Pictured on the Fleetwood stand, incidentally, was a *Tioga* body wedded to a Volkswagen LT chassis. The 6-berth conversion offers facilities such as a 7 cu. ft fridge, central heating, 2½-gallon hot water storage heater, and even a bathroom with bathtub! Unfortunately the price had not then been fixed, but it will undoubtedly be the most fully equipped VW motor caravan ever offered in Britain.