

Going Deutsch

Coasting along the autobahn at 90mph listening to Pavarotti (the editor's choice) may not be everyone's idea of motor caravanning but you might as well enjoy your work.

The 'work' was reporting on this year's Caravan Salon at Essen. There's far too much to see in one day here, so we decided what we needed was a vehicle which would not only get us to Essen and back as quickly as possible but would also provide comfortable accommodation for a two night stopover.

Volkswagen supplied us with an Auto-Sleeper VHT from their press fleet, which could explain why it was no ordinary version. Power, for instance, came from the 2.1-litre petrol injection engine which we knew from past experience to be a 'flier'. A three-speed automatic gearbox made a pleasant change from the usual manual versions which come our way for testing. The combination makes for a very relaxing and fast motor caravan – just what was needed for our 800 miles round trip, especially as we wanted to spend as little time as possible travelling.

However, these two factory-fitted options alone add an extra £1335.50 to the price.

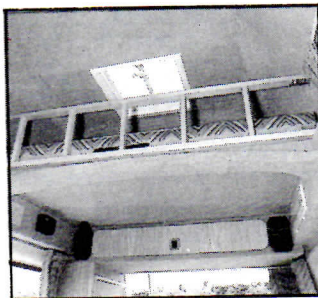
This was also the first time we had come across the anti-lock braking option on a Transporter-based motor caravan – VW is still the only base vehicle supplier to offer ABS. In normal use the foot pedal felt, if anything, more spongy than standard, and we're ashamed (or should that be proud?) to say we did not get as far as testing the efficiency of the anti-lock system. The price alone is enough to stop you in your tracks – £1569.75.

The VW carried a number of other options which accounted for the £19,391 price tag on this VHT, some £4,800 over the price of the standard model. The base vehicle was liter-

ally an example of the wide range of options which can be ordered from VW. Apart from those already mentioned, this van had power steering (£845.92), electrically heated and powered door mirrors (£191.85), heated rear window (£65.55), rear wash/wipe (£179.40), Blaupunkt Vancouver radio cassette (£271.95), and speakers, aerial and fitting kit (£46.14).



Waiting at the docks – the VHT at Dover



Upstairs bed is ideal for children, not quite so for adults



At home among the crowd in the car park site at Essen

Suffice to say the vehicle went well, really well. A very quiet engine allowed us to take full advantage of the vehicle's excellent music system. In fact the only time the engine made its presence felt was in the way the fuel gauge needle moved to the left as quickly as the speedometer indicator was going in the opposite direction – at one point we estimated we were doing just 18mpg. Overall we got 20mpg which isn't to be sneezed at in view of our considerable haste.

Inside, it was a straightforward VHT four-berth with the addition of thermostatically controlled blown air heating (£326) and opening roof windows (£29). It was definitely one of the smaller motor caravans in the overnight car park at Essen where the assortment included virtually everything right up to coach conversions, although we found that by Saturday two more VW-based campers had parked near us. Who said like doesn't attract like? Even so, we felt definitely oversaturated.

Did we say four-berth? The unfortunate person who had to sleep two nights in the VHT's roof bed would argue the suitability for accommodating one adult up there, let alone two. Downstairs, there was no such complaint from the comfortable double, derived as usual from the settee.

Despite our moaning, this VHT really was a pleasure to use. The VW base vehicle offers more options than its rivals, and this was an excellent opportunity to sample them all on one van. The power steering and automatic gearchange made driving a simple act of pointing the VHT in the right direction. Performance was right up there in the fastest motor caravan class and we arrived in Germany relaxed and ready to spend a long day and a half on our feet at the Caravan Salon before an equally swift return across the Continent. □