



The VHT's high-top roof provides an ideal anchoring point for a simple-to-erect and practical sun canopy

# VHT mods

Christopher Moore runs through some personal touches he's added to his Auto-Sleeper high-top

All motor caravan design is a compromise between all the comforts of home – sleeping, sitting, dining, cooking and hygiene – and the confines of road-going vehicles. Many motor caravans are conversions of small commercial vehicles so the space available for these activities would be very limited indeed, were it not for the expertise of the converters.

The evolution of design over the last 30 years or so in the motor caravan industry

has enabled a remarkable range of facilities to be provided in most models, including fridges in just about all, pumped water (hot in some), central heating two-burner cooker and grill, plenty of storage, sleeping for four and tiny closets in growing numbers.

Every motor caravanner has personal needs. No one conversion can possibly meet them all, so, having picked the best compromise for one's own needs, there is still scope for adding a feature here or an improvement there.

Being 6ft 4½in tall, my own major requirement is headroom. So I was delighted at the prospect of standing upright in a high-top without the contortions and head-bashing involved in raising the blessed roof every time we stopped.

Not wishing to cart a closet around with us, we were happy to settle for a Volkswagen-based Auto-Sleeper VHT to provide practically all that we needed. However we soon found that, with the improvements already made, further ones were indicated.

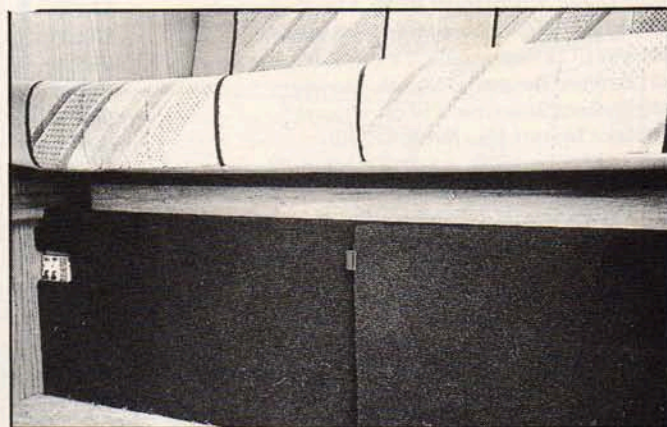
## Second carpet

The first involved the carpet. As standard it's a very short pile, man-made fibre job which, in our previous van, had proved a bit vulnerable to the harsh wear and tear inflicted on the square yard-and-a-half. So, having made

the necessary cut-outs for the two table mountings, we put on top of it a good quality, tufted wool and nylon pile carpet, matching the furnishings in colour, to provide 'bedroom' comfort as well as 'downstairs' heavy traffic resistance to wear.

## Seat rail

Secondly, we turned our attention to the rear seat. We had switched from a VT20 in which the full-width seat was very comfortable for two sitting in the corners. The narrower VHT seat has a flat base and a tendency to slide forward under braking. The Velcro strips don't really hold it in place. Fixing a two-inch deep rail in front of the existing rail beneath the base board cants the seat backwards, greatly improving both comfort and stability.



Seat rail improves comfort and stability for passengers

# PRACTICAL MATTERS

## Sun canopy

The prospect of a holiday under the Spanish sun prompted thoughts of awnings or canopies, in order to enjoy the heat without the glare and burn. We have had framed awnings before, when the children were with us: the business of putting up clanking iron frames and tying billowing masses of canvas was worthwhile when there were five of us to accommodate; but it seemed an awful lot of bother for the two of us, since we needed little more than a sun canopy anyway.

The high-top roof extension provided the scope for fixing an old-fashioned but simple awning channel, of the same type we fitted to our first fixed-roof VW in 1964, to take a 10ft x 7ft canopy. We screwed the channel through the glass fibre to a quarter-round moulding which in turn was anchored to the top of the service boxing above the side door. Our Isabella awning has only three poles to be pegged out, taking just five minutes up or down.

Such awning rails are stan-

dard fittings on towed caravans and it's very surprising to me that they have not become so on panel vans, even more

so on coachbuilts. In my opinion there is no comparison in value between a channelled sun canopy and the alumi-

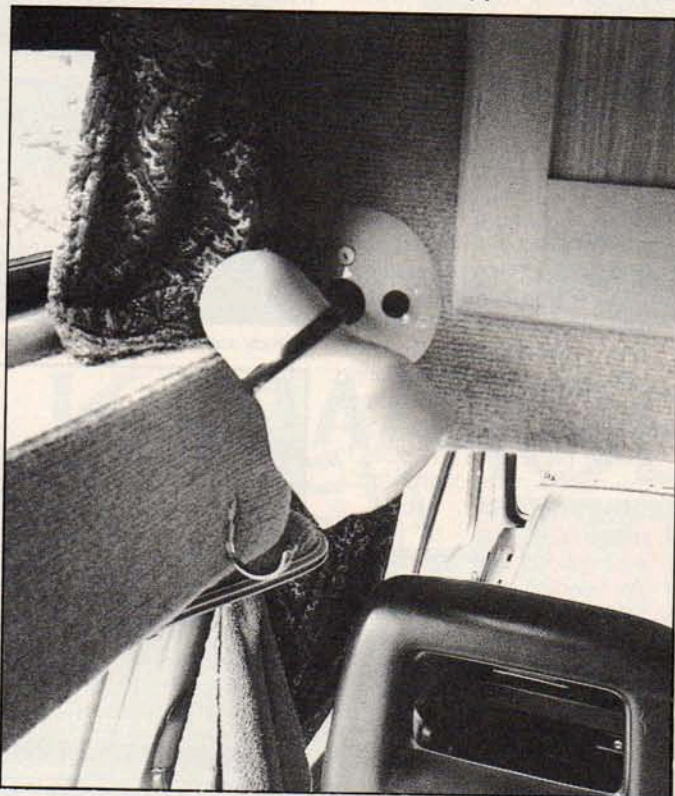
nium-boxed, wind-out variety currently fashionable—convenient, certainly, but very expensive.

## Extra lights

The biggest improvement of the VHT over the VT20, after the height advantage, is the way that floor space for sitting and eating is maximised by the provision of a swivelling passenger seat and the removal of the storage cupboard.

But when dusk falls it is not feasible to use the swivelled seat for reading; the 12v spotlight provided doesn't 'reach' that far, and all the other lights serve other spaces.

So, while we were fitting the awning channel, we used the space afforded by the flat on the inside of the quarter-round moulding to accommodate wiring from just inside the overcab cupboard to the corner of the upstairs bed, taking it round the back and other side of the bed and feeding it back to a bank of sockets installed alongside the single mains socket. We found a 60-Watt swivelling spotlight colour-matched to the fur-



Reading lamp positioned over cab passenger seat

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# PRACTICAL MATTERS

ishings, which not only illuminates the printed page, but adds greatly to the overall brightness on a dark evening.

The socket bank enabled us to fit a second mains light opposite the standard 12v strip light, so that we now have all the light we need when 'hooked-up', as well as being able to use an electric kettle, shaver etc in the van.

## Coffee table

The popular single-leg table system is one of the best features of motor caravan design, giving the convenience in the VHT of two tables, with different leg lengths, for complete flexibility within the van. However, we were keen to be able to use either table outside at coffee table height alongside camping chairs. We bought a tripod at the Motor Show, but none of the retailers we tried could supply a short leg. They simply did not seem to know about the 14in leg which Desmo readily supplied when we contacted them directly.

## Brass hook

We use the round coat 'hook' fitted by VW to the door

pillars for towels, but find a large traditional brass hook fitted to the front of the service boxing just behind the passenger seat extremely useful for wet clothing – so familiar when motor caravanning in England.

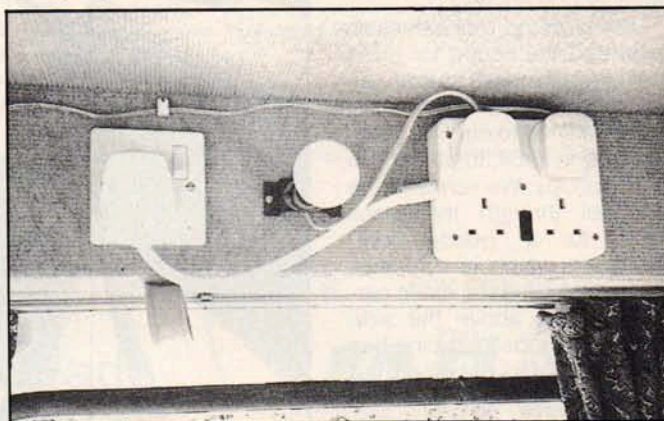
## Map box

A persistent irritation of the VW cab has been its sloping fascia which is quite useless for resting maps etc on. The one facility a navigating passenger/co-driver needs is somewhere to keep maps and guides. So I made a simple 'box' – really a front and two sides of oak with slats joining the sides and a matt black painted lid; double-sided Sellotape pads stick the slats to the raised parts of the fascia. Two-inch depth allows a reasonable array of atlases and guides that are likely to be needed on any one day, and the open end enables them to be lifted out easily.

So far so good. I daresay we'll think of something else during our travels, but that'll do to be going on with. Come to think of it, what about a microwave oven? □



Handy map box mounted on top of the VW's sloping dashboard



Additional electrics for power and lighting



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