



HOLDSWORTH VILLA 3

ON VW TRANSPORTER
1.9 LITRE 78 BHP PETROL

by John Hunt

A conventional conversion of the popular Volks with some original touches.

"The new Volkswagen seems a lot smoother than some of its predecessors," said Richard Holdsworth when we spoke to him about his new Villa conversion. Agreed! This one was a beauty, being silky-smooth all round.

The engine purred away behind, virtually noiseless at all times. The four speed gearbox was easy to use, with never any doubt about which ratio was selected. (Admittedly, the lever has a long travel but motorcaravanners will be used to that.) Steering was light enough at parking speeds yet rock steady at 70mph. Foot controls were well within the capabilities of the daintiest feet, with a progressive clutch which never grabbed and a footbrake which was gentle in normal motoring yet produced reassuring stopping power without undue effort when asked to do so.

There has been some correspondence over the years about the suspension of the new-shape VW. A few have found it too soft. For Audrey and myself it has always proved about right, providing a reasonable compromise between smooth main road and motorway stability and yet not objecting unduly to the cambers and inevitable potholes found on most minor roads these days. It is, we think, the best possible compromise for all types of motoring. You can hurry all day without unduly straining yourself or the vehicle.

Roof down — clean lines, low overall height, little wind noise.



Roof rises on four gas struts. Sliding side door was effortless.

Alternatively, it is a beautiful potterer, content to amble around country lanes and it is never too particular about being in exactly the right gear for every eventuality. If you are too lazy to change from third to second, for instance, for maximum acceleration, the Volks will not object — will just take a little longer over the operation.

Weather was not too kind during the test, being cold with a share of wind and rain. Side winds were not troublesome and the smooth contours of Holdsworth's new roof meant that headwinds were hardly felt. Wind noise was never obtrusive.

If it all seems too good to be true, read on. As with all basic Transporters, we thought the cab was bare in appearance compared with most of the competition. There was nowhere to put

Holdsworth Villa 3



After releasing four external catches, padded centre of roof is given a push, when it rises, taking side and end walls to position shown. Sides are then pushed out to click in place. 'Cummer straps' are for pulling to lower roof.



This photograph shows the high standard of Holdsworth's 1986 finish, with light oak effect smooth panels and doors contrasting with pinky-brown leather-look table and worktop. White dot below table is mains socket on seat front.



Beige enamel integrated 'Spinflo' sink, drainer and cooker with two burners and grill. Sliding tray in cupboard beneath sink holds two Camping Gas 907 cylinders. Shelf above is removable.



Cooker and sink have folding splashguards. Beyond is deep chest with cutlery box and removable tray. Big Electrolux refrigerator has electronic ignition. Lower part of cupboard beyond extends to engine deck.



Close-up of top of rear wardrobe shows pleated curtain tops, earth leakage trip, low water warning lamp and Warner Electric monitor panel clearly labelled with caravan functions.



Wardrobe as seen from rear tailgate. It extends downwards out of sight to give 3ft of hanging height. Door opens just above rear cushion, so any bedding stored there must be moved.

a map or road atlas; the navigator just had to hold it all the time. (The sloping top to the fascia has been the subject of correspondence in our DIY pages. As readers say, it is easy enough to screw or glue a retaining lip in place. We shouldn't have to do so.) There was no dashboard clock, no trip recorder for the mileage, no intermittent or flick wipe. But the cab heater, with three speed blower, was efficient, produced a comforting draught of warm air in less than a mile after a cold start. And this was one in which we could indulge in the luxury of warm feet and cool faces, whilst the adjustable vents in the cab doors kept the air flowing gently and the windows clear.

Starting after a cold night was always instantaneous and one could move into the traffic stream without hesitation, thanks to that automatic choke which some owners claim is a petrol guzzler. I like it, find it preferable to trying to find exactly the right position on a manual choke — and fuel consumption was an overall 24mpg, which cannot be bad, especially as we had lots of cold starts. Better than that could be expected on long holiday runs if too much advantage is not taken of the willing performance of the lively 78bhp optional engine.

In short, we love the Volks as a car — but what about the conversion?

Holdsworth Villa 3



Rear settee base is covered in dark brown carpet. Compartment on right of photo will take a Porta-Potti. Storage for table leg on left. Conversion from seat to bed is simple and rapid.



The double bed is made up of three large cushions and the joins between them could not be detected in use. There are two adjustable reading lamps above bedhead. Cupboard above runs full width but access is restricted by centre panel.



Big shelf (or base for second, optional bed) above bed. Cranked bolt for closing rear wall of roof shows at top centre. Twin doors giving on to single overbed cupboard shown opened.



At the front end there is a similar but narrower carpeted shelf revealed when the roof is raised. End wall has been left partly open here to increase ventilation. Roof windows are fixed double-glazed acrylic.



Cab end with passenger seat reversed. Driver's seat swivel is optional extra, when second table goes in gangway. Both cab seats have head restraints. Pale curtains have colourful, contrasting ties.



Passenger's cab seat pushed forward to reveal storage compartment beneath, wired ready for optional second battery. Water filler on left supplies underfloor tank. Caravan carpet extends to front of cab.

The caravan

All but the newest reader will know about that hump at the back over the rear engine. It imposes severe limitations upon the designer and it says a lot for the Volks's character that, in spite of this obvious drawback, this has remained over 20 years or more just about the most popular vehicle for motorcaravan conversion. Traditionally, designers have used the hump to support part of a double bed, although recently there have been other layouts where the kitchen and even a toilet room have found their way there. Holdsworth offers one such, called the Vision but, as the heading explains, the test vehicle is of 'conventional' design. So there is a

rear settee which, when pulled forward and flattened, makes the usual double bed. It is an operation which takes only a few seconds, thanks to the unique rock-and-roll mechanism. There are no fiddly bits: just lift the seat base a little, pull forward — and the two cushions of the settee mate with the big one over the engine deck to form a very respectable bed. It was comfortable and free of ridges at the joins. There were no complaints during our brief ownership but we did remark that, in summer, it might get a bit stuffy there. There is a big shelf just above it, high enough not to bang heads on (and to carry a pair of reading lights).

One of the things to check on a VW conversion is accessibility

Holdsworth Villa 3



Dining table is stored securely behind driver's seat. Covered compartment hides vehicle battery. Foot switch for water pump on floor. The quality carpet did show footmarks but was easily brushed.



Close-up of that sloping fascia, with MMM about to slip off! Glove box in front of passenger seat is not big enough for most road atlases. Instrument panel is clear, switches and controls easily reached.



Rear storage, viewed through open tailgate. Most VW owners carry bedding on that rear cushion. Wardrobe unit incorporates a useful, rear-access cubbyhole and there is also room for objects beneath it.



Remove the rear cushion and the carpeted and insulated engine cover is accessible. With that out of the way, the power unit becomes visible. Oil and water checks are simply made by hinging down sprung number plate.



Close-up of pan beneath front floor where the spare wheel is stored. The pan is wound down on a screw operated by the wheelbrace but does not drop until ring at top left is pulled.



At last! A sensible luggage rack with substantial cleats to take securing straps (often forgotten by many converters). It can be reached by standing on front door sill, as photographer did.



Before roof can be raised (and after it is lowered) there are four external clips to be attended to. Each has a locking pin which should perhaps be retained by a cord — for one was already missing!

to the engine, which is reached by opening the rear tailgate and lifting the cover within, which lies above the engine. With motorcaravan furniture fitted, some can be a bit tricky. This was one of the easiest. All that had to be shifted (apart from any clobber which the owners might store there) was one big cushion. (Day to day inspection of water and oil levels is done by hinging the number plate; it is only necessary to gain access to the engine bay itself for servicing — perhaps twice a year with reasonable luck.)

That rear settee is a good place to travel, with an excellent view sideways and forwards for a couple of passengers. My adult passenger found the height about right and the ride excellent. She even felt some benefit from the powerful cab heater when the fan was put on to 'blow'. There was no safety belt on the test vehicle, although a pair can be fitted to order (lap or lap/diagonal).

The dining table, which travels securely behind the driver's seat, can be mounted on an island leg in front of the settee to make a dinette for two — sufficient, as this was a two-berth caravan. If

more dining accommodation is needed, an optional package puts another, smaller table between the cab seats, which can then be turned to face inwards. In standard trim, only the cab passenger seat swivels to face the caravan's interior.

The Villa is available with four sleeping places. Another double bed is then located above the main bed, using that wide shelf already mentioned, with an upholstered pull-out extension.

The kitchen unit runs along the offside, from behind the driver's seat, ending with a fairly commodious wardrobe (for a Volks) at the back, over the engine deck. So there is generous working space for the cook (more than is found in some larger motorcaravans) and a fair amount of storage beneath it. Most of the latter remains accessible whether the caravan is in sitting, dining or sleeping mode. A louvred window over the kitchen is now standard.

One of the delights of this 'conventional' Volkswagen layout is the large storage chest at the rear end of the kitchen unit, just ahead of the wardrobe. Lifting its hinged top reveals a deep recess

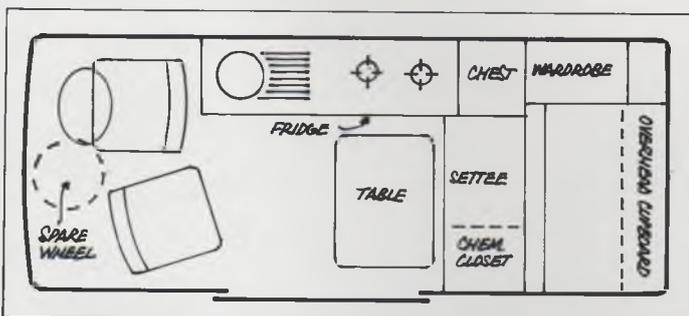
fitted with a lined cutlery tray and a movable and removable box. The latter will retain small items which might get lost in the cavernous depths, whilst the chest itself will accommodate the tallest wine bottle — and several of them, or what you will.

There are one or two thoughtful touches. We liked the slide-out gas bottle drawer beneath the kitchen; it is big enough for a couple of Camping Gaz 907 containers. Lifting the rear seat reveals a compartment large enough to carry a Porta-Potti. It was a bit dark in the kitchen at night but Richard Holdsworth had already decided the same and is fitting another fluorescent lamp over the side door. He is also raising the existing lamp over the kitchen so that less shadow is thrown on sink and cooker by the uplifted lids.

If you have not yet seen the new Holdsworth finish, it is certainly worth searching out. Furniture has been 'cleaned up', with smooth, dust-free surfaces, very easy to wipe clean. Gone are last year's framed doors with linen type inserts. The new doors are smoother and apparently stronger, for there was no tendency to warp when I grabbed top and bottom of an open door and tried to 'bend' it. Furniture is capped with hardwood edgings.

But to my mind, the greatest single improvement is in the rising roof, already reviewed in MMM but well worth a repeat here. It may not be quite as effort-free as the old 'concertina' type but the added comfort and insulation is well worth a little extra effort. And only a little is called for by the operator. Once the catches are released, a gentle push upwards has the cap rising half way, taking sides and ends with it. Then another shove on the sides and they lock into place. At this stage, there are small gaps between the end walls and the roof cap. They may be left thus, fairly rainproof unless a horizontal gale is blowing, to provide ventilation. For complete insulation, the end walls are locked into place. The front one is easy to reach and, to save you having to climb on the rear seat, an extension crank is fitted which can be operated from the centre of the caravan. Excellent. The only improvement now looked for is the elimination of those four outside catches. I'm sure the inventive Holdsworth brain is already turning over possible solutions.

If you want a Volks with all life support systems, look at Holdsworth's hightop 'Vision'. But for the hundreds who seek a no-nonsense conversion with rising roof on the ever popular Transporter, this is the answer. It is what very many people are looking for in their motorcaravan: nice to drive, easy to park, comfortable for overnighting — and very good looking.



I liked

- A smooth all-rounder
- Lively performance
- Sure road holding
- Easy gearchange
- Light controls
- Positive braking
- Low wind noise
- Powerful cab heater
- Warm feet, cool heads
- Instant take-off
- Comfortable settee
- Ridge-free bed
- Secured table and leg
- Cab seat on swivel
- Good working space
- Louvred kitchen window
- Top access chest
- Gas bottle drawer
- Attractive décor

- Good finish
- Easy roof
- Safe mains electricity
- Big fridge — electronic ignition
- Accessible engine
- Clean spare wheel
- Good luggage rack

I would have liked

- Map stowage on fascia
- Dashboard clock
- Trip recorder
- Intermittent wipe
- Rear restraint belts (available)
- Waste tank
- Single door to overbed cupboard

I disliked

- Four external roof catches

Colour scheme

Ivory exterior and roof with contrasting striping, and black bumpers. Light oak coloured woodwork and handles with pinky-brown work and table tops. Sculptured velour fawn upholstery includes cab seats (brown head restraints). Pinky-brown carpet lining at rear and nearside. Pale beige carpet lining to roof and above windows and below upper bedspace. Dark brown carpeting on rear bed bases, rear shelf and cab seat bases. Pale beige curtains with patterned ties. Pinky-fawn floor carpet carried into cab. Beige enamel sink and cooker.

Vehicle specification

VW Transporter with 1.9 litre, 78 bhp watercooled engine. 4 speed gearbox. Independent suspension all round with anti-roll bar. Dual circuit brakes, disc front, drum rear. Rack and pinion steering. Automatic choke. Cab equipment includes seats adjustable for reach and rake, 3 speed heater blower, 2 speed windscreen wipe, usual warning lamps (including handbrake), water temperature and fuel gauges, speedometer, odometer, instrument light dimmer, door-operated courtesy lamp.

Caravan specification

Storage space as described. Spinflo enamel sink/drain integral with cooker with 2 burners and grill. Electric water pump with floor switch. Underfloor 12 gallon water tank. Electrolux 212, 2 cu ft gas/12v/mains refrigerator with electronic ignition. Mains electric hook-up with earth leakage trip. 2 fluorescent lamps. 2 reading lamps. Warner control panel. Low water warning. Louvred opening window.

Dimensions

- Overall length 15ft 0in (4.57m)
- Overall width 6ft 1in (1.84m)
- Overall height 8ft 0in (2.44m)
- Interior length behind cab 109in (2770mm)
- Interior width at waist 61in (1550mm)
- Interior height, roof raised 81in (2055mm)
- Interior height, roof lowered 61in (1550mm)
- Bed 75 x 45in (1905 x 1145mm)
- Wardrobe H 36in, W 23½in, D 12½in max (915 x 595 x 320mm)
- Table 30 x 19in (760 x 485mm)
- Chemical closet stowage 14½ x 17 x 13½in H (370 x 430 x 345mm)
- Rear shelf above bed 47in W x 40in (1195 x 1015mm)
- Chest beneath worktop 24½ x 15½ x 17in H (620 x 395 x 430mm)
- Driver's max leg length 40in (1015mm)
- Optional roof bed 64 x 44 or 72 x 44in (1625 x 1120 or 1830 x 1120mm)
- Optional cab bunk 56 x 26in (1420 x 660mm)

Price — £11 842 with 60 bhp engine (at press date).

Optional alternatives

- 1.9L 78 bhp petrol with 4 speed gearbox £277*
- 1.9L 78 bhp petrol with 5 speed gearbox £508
- 1.6L 50 bhp diesel with 4 speed gearbox £781
- 1.6L 50 bhp diesel with 5 speed gearbox £1013
- Automatic transmission on 78 bhp £896
- 1.6L turbo charged diesel £1325
- Zig unit and second battery £97
- Swivel driver's seat and table £127
- Upper double bed £72
- Fly screens for louvre window £30
- Blown air space heater £356

Also available:

Four wheel drive, rear seat restraints, waste water tank, high top roof (add £85), original van roof (deduct £1352).

*Fitted to test vehicle. Prices are rounded.

Volkswagen Villa 3 supplied for evaluation by the converters, Richard Holdsworth Conversions Ltd, Headley Road East, Woodley, Reading, Berks, RG5 4NE.

HOLDSWORTH VW VILLA 3



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