



JOHN HUNT TESTS **HOLDSWORTH 'VIGO'** **FAMILY FIVE** **CONVERSION OF** **VW 1600 TRANSPORTER**



Holdsworth 'Vigo' Family Five VW. Super Two has same external appearance, is same price. The roof may not be the most beautiful when raised, is one of the easiest to operate.

This Volks must be one of the best looking compact light vans, with the Holdsworth treatment of the exterior enhancing rather than detracting from its appearance. The low-line roof increases height only a little — in fact, without the optional roof vent, the van would go into a 7ft garage with a couple of inches to spare. The moulded roof rack aids airflow over the front and, being fixed, does not have to be unloaded before the roof is raised. On this prototype, there were no fasteners for luggage straps; we're assured there will be on production models. Not that raising this roof is any chore; it goes up with a mere touch in seconds after the four exterior toggle catches have been released. Lowering is equally easy on the biceps and, because the sidewalls are pleated, there's no tucking-in of canvas. If the Holdsworth roof is not the most beautiful or space-making when up, it's one of the easiest to operate.

On the road

The new Volks is a delight to drive, light on controls without being directionally unstable. There is very little wind noise at 60 mph and only a faint hum from the engine, far away behind you. We found the adjustable backrests of the cab seats gave good support and the free-running sliding bases could be positioned to suit driver and passenger, tall or short. The few simple instruments were easily visible through the large steering wheel and the hand fell naturally to the pull-up handbrake. The gearchange mechanism on the test vehicle was particularly notchy in the low ratios — a fault which can soon be eliminated by any VW mechanic who knows his job.

Holdsworth's cab retains the original VW rubber matting and there is no mention of carpet being available as an option. This is the area where there's most wear and rubber is certainly easier to wash or brush. Carpet is unnecessary from the noise angle and we discovered last winter that the new VW heater can keep your feet warm — which marks a distinct improvement over the old 1600cc type 2s. There's plenty of control over the airflow. Once you've mastered the levers, it's possible to direct hot or cool air where it's wanted.

All minor controls were within easy reach of the driver wearing the inertia reel seatbelt. There's no way of telling whether headlamps will be on beam or dip until you've switched them on. They're controlled by a spring return stalk on the steering column. The horn button is easily found; it's in the centre of the steering wheel. Doors can be locked from inside or outside but there's now no means of accidentally locking yourself out with the key ring dangling enticingly from the ignition switch.

After the 2000cc engine, the 1600 feels a little less than lively. It can be wound up to 60–65 mph with no stress — just takes its time getting there. Motoring is relaxed rather than invigorating and it's necessary to use the gears fairly frequently.

The Volks is the only light van for which DIN fuel consumption figures are quoted: 24.5 urban cycle, 23.7 at 56 mph, for the 1600 on 2-star fuel. (The 2000 is reputed to be almost as good, with more sparkling performance, justifying the radial tyres fitted.)



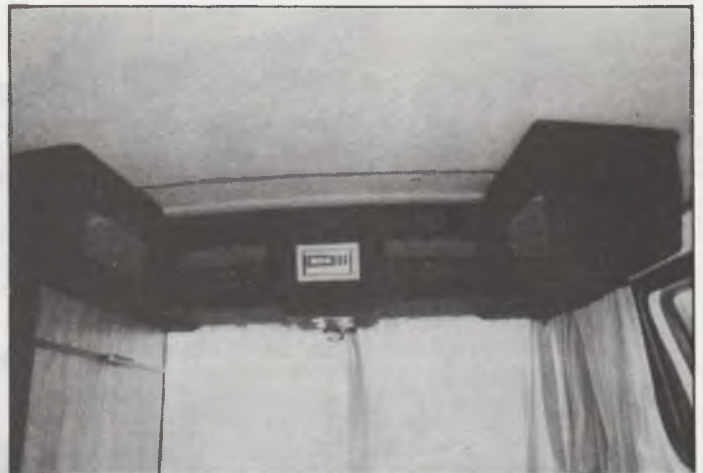
Fairly conventional layout, with kitchen on offside wall, face-forward settee and face-rearward occasional bench.



Single seat behind cab will take Porta-Potti in base. Fourth seat, based on hinged flap, spans gangway.



Sink and cooker, left of photo, frig beneath. Lower of two drawers comes right out to reveal hidden locker.



Three-sided roof console moulding at rear is covered with carpet-type material, supports digital clock in centre.



Most of rear bench locker taken up by large water tank. Lid does not stay up of its own accord.



Double bed, looking towards rear, quickly converted with rock and roll settee. Drop-down wardrobe door open.

The cab is roomy, with easy access between front seats to the caravan accommodation. The VW option of swivelling seats is, of course, available and it would not be difficult to rig up a small, island-leg table in the gangway between them.

There is a large glove hopper in front of the passenger and a reasonable amount of storage space beneath the passenger's seat. The meagre tool set (jack, wheelbrace and hub cap remover) lives there in a plastic bag. The battery is beneath the driver's seat.

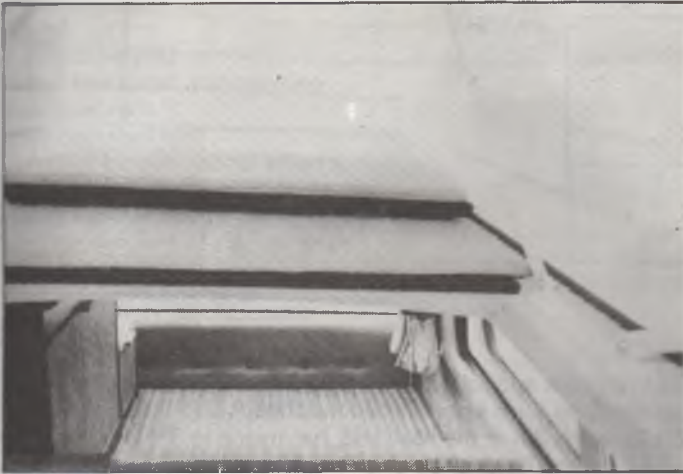
The spare wheel is housed under the floor, right at the front. The pan which supports it is hinged, released with the wheelbrace; there's a safety catch to ensure that it doesn't drop down on your hands unexpectedly. The fuel tank has been moved to a safer position amidships, where it's better protected from front and rear end shunts. Engine accessibility is now very good via

the large panel beneath the floor at the rear. Oil check and top-up is behind the hinged rear number plate. The only water used by this vehicle goes into the battery, very occasionally.

There's a really wide top to the fascia beneath the wind-screen, with enough slope to it to deposit maps placed there on the floor when motoring. (Wonder how long it will be before someone brings out a fiddle rail? The people who satisfied the demand for spare wheel mountings on the old Volks are going to have to exploit some new need.)

Colours

The exterior of the test vehicle was all white with a double dark brown stripe at waist level. Interior colours were restful in the latest idiom: café-au-lait ribbed Dralon velvet upholstery covers (buttoned but removable for cleaning), toning plain curtains of generous cut, mottled brown carpet on the floor, light or dark



Base for upstairs double bed can be pushed right back, as here, to give maximum area of standing room below.



Simple, uncluttered cab. Comfortable VW seats have optional Holdsworth covers.



Louvred windows, above kitchen, are a worthwhile optional extra. Flyscreens are available.



Engine access is quickly gained by removing rear mattress and engine cover. Oil check is behind hinged number plate.



Side curtains have wire restrainers to hold them against windows. Wall beneath is cork-effect hardboard.



No need to unload roofrack before raising roof. Production models will have cleats for luggage straps.

brown carpet covering most surfaces inside (underneath bunks, edge of roof etc), brown simulated leather lining inside tailgate and an attractive and expensive-looking French walnut veneer on the all-plywood furniture units. (Holdsworth's boast is that he uses no chipboard, no printed finishes which can be permanently damaged by scuff marks. In that respect, I thought the embossed hardboard panelling, looking like imitation cork on the lefthand side and inside the door, was below the standard of the rest of the cabinet work.)

Amidst all those subdued interior colours, we admired the embroidered bands of ribbon which held the curtains in place — a very nice touch.

Inside

What can you do with a Volks inside? Limitations are imposed by the compulsory side entrance, the raised platform over the

engine at the rear and, most of all perhaps, that central roof bow which, say VW/GB, must not be removed. So, you've got standing space of 3ft 3in x 3ft 8in in the centre of the vehicle. The van roof may be removed to the rear of the bow but there's not much call for headroom above the raised engine deck and most converters opt for a bed or storage accommodation up there. (Devon use it as a hatchway to the 6ft upstairs double bed.)

So, it's not surprising that Holdsworth has come up with an interior layout which is similar to that of other volume producers — and entirely different from the early Holdsworth VWs, where there were no such restrictions on roof removal. If you're only allowed a little, squarish, standing-space inside the side door, the kitchen unit must be located there. If you put it on the nearside, you obstruct the doorway, so perforce it goes on the



Nicely counterbalanced, high lift tailgate could support an annexe such as offered by TVC.

offside. And although Volkswagenwerke appear to have ignored the needs of motorcaravanners when designing the roof, happily they put the windowsills high enough to allow a refrigerator, topped by a kitchen unit, to be located beneath them.

You open the side door, therefore, and facing you is the kitchen unit. Reading from left to right (front to back of vehicle) you have: sink unit integral with cooker, followed by a bit of working top, succeeded by a large storage locker, then 2ft width of wardrobe (with 2ft 10in hanging height) rounded off with a neat little locker with a flat top on which to put your alarm clock, false teeth or nightcap.

Beneath the sink is a ventilated cupboard, which will hold Calor or Camping Gaz bottles. There's a shut-off cock for the gas but no means of locating it firmly. Not that many practising motorcaravanners will need to strap it in; inevitably, this cupboard and all others will be filled with clobber.

To the rear side of the gas bottle cupboard is another one, normally occupied by the Electrolux 120 frig — an optional extra. Holdsworth put the frig here so that the external vent would not be too close to the petrol filler, which is immediately behind the cab door on the offside. The frig is properly ventilated to the exterior. Its door is panelled to match the rest of the furniture.

The location of the frig shows good thinking. The same cannot be said of the little door on the floor next to it. The doorway measures a minute 8¼ x 9½ in, gives access to a storage area 2ft 10in long, 1ft 3in wide and 1ft 1in high. If you kneel on the floor, your arm can't reach the extremities. Perhaps it's designed as an oubliette, somewhere to hide things you don't want to know about.

Above this is another hidden space — but extremely useful. The lower of two commodious drawers is removed completely, to reveal a compartment in which to hide valuables. My wife said I shouldn't give the game away but I don't think sneak thieves read MMM!

The main bench crosses the van at this point — and makes a very comfortable seat for a couple of passengers, who have a good view of the road ahead and of the scenery to each side. Beneath the bench is a large locker mostly taken up by the water tank. This has the usual Holdsworth giant-sized filler into which you can reach your arm, if ever cleaning becomes necessary. (It shouldn't for, although it's not made of black polythene, it's in the dark and algae will not thrive.) This tank supplies water to the sink, fed by the quietest electric pump I've not heard!

Behind the carpeted backrest of the bench seat is a cushion filling the floor above the engine deck right up to the padded tailgate. That's the top half of the bed. The bottom half is very simply formed by lifting the base of the bench, when seat and

backrest rock and roll into position. The three cushions matched up nicely to form a double bed mattress, 4½ in thick, measuring 6ft 2in x 4ft 2in at the head end, narrowing to 3ft 8in.

Above the head of the bed is a pair of adjustable spotlights, each separately switched and separately dimmable. So, if one wants to sleep and the other wants to read — lovely. If one has to get out in the small hours, he/she can do so, with the lamp on 'dim', without disturbing him/her — until he/she comes to open/close the side door when, in true VW tradition, half the campsite will be made aware of the nocturnal excursion. Is it really beyond the considerable ingenuity of Volkswagenwerke's boffins to dream up a silent door?

Whilst I liked the bedside lights, I thought the rest of the interior illumination was a bit mean: a small courtesy lamp inside the doorway and an 8 watt fluorescent over the kitchen — suitable for romantic dining, definitely a strain on the eyes for reading.

In the roof area, on carpeted bases, are cushions just over an inch thick, which form the kiddy beds. The centre part can be slid to and fro to form (a) one bed, 5ft 4in x 3ft 4in or (b) two small beds, 3ft 4in x 3ft 4in and 2ft 9in x 3ft 4in. (I'd want to tie down any youngster on that smaller bed.) When the larger bed is made up, over the main double below, there's still adequate standing space by the kitchen and a shelf about 6 inches wide running the width of the roof at the front. The centre baseboard can be removed completely to increase standing space to the VW maximum of 3ft 3in x 3ft 8in.

The cushions in the roof can be taken out and used for other purposes, e.g. sun loungers. A fifth sleeping space is available, as an extra, across the cab.

Just inside the side door is a rearward-facing single seat with a locker beneath large enough to take a small chemical closet (the opening is 1ft 5in x 1ft 3in and it's 1ft 1½ in deep). The backrest is another cushion which has a pocket which slips over the table which forms the backrest. A fourth seat is made available by lifting a flap across the gangway and placing the backrest cushion on it. The table (2ft 6in x 1ft 8½ in) can then be positioned on its island leg to make dining places for four. It's still possible — just — to work at the kitchen when the table is in use, but difficult to get at the frig unless the table is swung around on its leg — which it can be. There was no storage provision for the table leg.

Ventilation on this Volks was adequate, with a superior quality flyscreened roof vent, operated by a winder, and a pair of louvred windows over the kitchen — with flyscreens available as an extra.

The Family Five we tested offers comfortable and practicable living accommodation for two adults plus two or three small children, yet it's compact enough to be used as an everyday runabout.

For the couple without children, there is the Super Two at the same price. This has the bed — king sized — extending across the whole width of the vehicle, with a useful little storage console down the middle if you want it. The wardrobe is then repositioned behind the cab passenger seat, has a flap seat on its front for a third person at table.

"It's quite plain," says Richard Holdsworth, "that the selective couple is not going to be satisfied with a layout built for a large family."

Well said, Richard. It's a lesson that some of our largest motorcaravan manufacturers have yet to learn.

I liked:

- Driving the Volks
- Ease of low speed manoeuvring
- Fixed roof rack
- Easily operated roof
- Attractive interior colour scheme
- Buttoned, removable cushion covers
- Quality cabinet work
- Generous amount of storage space
- Hidden space for valuables
- Large inboard water tank
- Integral sink/cooker
- Silent electric water pump
- Adjustable reading lamps
- Louved windows with optional flyscreens
- Quality roof vent
- Digital clock in smart roof console
- Storage space for chemical closet
- Option of purpose-designed two-berth layout

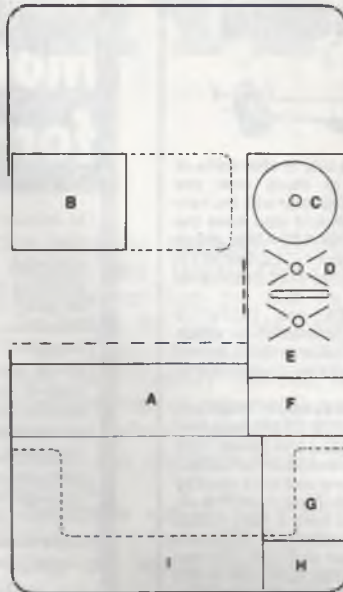
I would have liked:

- Seat belts for rear passengers
- Waste water tank
- Positive location for gas bottles
- More interior lighting
- Storage for table leg

I disliked:

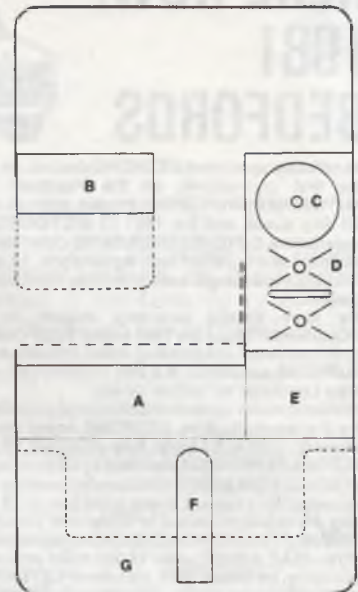
- Noisy side door
- Tiny door to large storage compartment below kitchen
- Headlamp dip/beam switch

FAMILY FIVE



- A Rear bench seat folds out to form rear double bed.
- B Rear facing seat (space for toilet beneath) with fold-out flap for fourth seat around table.
- C Sink.
- D Two burner and grill cooker – room for refrigerator beneath.
- E Drawer unit – storage beneath.
- F 3cu ft cooler box.
- G Wardrobe.
- H Storage box.
- I Three sided roof locker beneath roof.

SUPER TWO



- A Rear bench seat folds out to form (with E) two single beds.
- B Wardrobe with fold-out flap for third seat around table.
- C Sink.
- D Two burner and grill cooker – room for refrigerator beneath.
- E Cushion for single bed – storage beneath.
- F Storage console.
- G Three sided roof locker beneath roof.

Prices at press date

Elevating roof model £7282 (a fixed roof, 2-berth model, costs £6752).

Extras available (many of which were fitted to test vehicle)

- Fold-out roof bed £62-29
- RM122 Electrolux 2-way refrigerator £143-27
- RM122 Electrolux 3-way refrigerator £161-95
- 220 volt plug and socket £18-68
- Cab bunk £31-14
- Louved side window £49-83
- Flyscreen for louvred window £18-69
- Matching front seat covers £37-38
- Swivel cab seats £247-94

Vehicle extras

- 2000cc engine 'package' with servo brakes and radial tyres, £446-00
- Servo brakes £87-20
- Automatic transmission (2 litre) £448-50

Dimensions:

Overall length 14ft 11in (4.57 m), width 6ft 1in (1.85 m), height 6ft 10in (2.08 m), 7ft 2in (2.18 m) with option roof vent.

Beds:

Main double: 6ft 2in x 4ft 2in (1880 mm x 1270 mm), narrowing to 3ft 8in (1120 mm).

Roof bed: 5ft 4in x 3ft 4in (1625 mm x 1015 mm) OR 2ft 9in x 3ft 4in (840 mm x 1015 mm) and 3ft 4in x 3ft 4in (1015 mm x 1015 mm).

Wardrobe: 2ft wide (610 mm), 2ft 10in (865 mm) drop from rail.

Single seat locker: 1ft 5in (430 mm) x 1ft 3in (380 mm) x 1ft 1½ in (345 mm) high.

Kitchen storage chest: 1ft 4in (405 mm) x 1ft 4in (405 mm) x 1ft 6in (455 mm) deep.

Table: 2ft 6in x 1ft 8½ in (760 mm x 520 mm).

Vehicle supplied for test by Davis & Stone, Longridge Avenue, Saltdean, Nr Brighton. Tel: (0273) 37571.

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