

VW *safer* *motoring*

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT VOLKSWAGEN-AUDI MAGAZINE

Diesel Duo: Golf and Jetta

Beetle-based replica racer



Road Test: Jetta GLX

VW caravans lead comeback at NEC

CHRIS BURLACE reporting

Motor caravan exhibitors were once regular supporters of the Motor Show, but their numbers dwindled after the move to Birmingham's NEC in 1978. By 1982 only three 'vans' were to be found, and those were tucked away among the commercial vehicles. This year saw a small comeback, however, with Holdsworths and Diamond RV on parade, a Devon and an Auto-Sleeper displayed by Toyota and Freight Rover respectively, and VW-based models stealing the limelight.

Diamond had an all-Volkswagen line-up, with two Transporter conversions and a version of their up-market Autobahn model on the VW LT31. In the hightop Autobahn the extra length afforded by the lwb version of Volkswagen's big van allows the forward, L-shaped seating unit to convert to a 6ft 6in by 4ft longitudinal bed.

Volkswagen's cab seats, with arms and head restraints, are upholstered to match the caravan seating and the passenger seat swivels to complete a comfortable and spacious lounge area. For dining a big tabletop is



Diamond Transporter with add-on GRP mouldings.

added, supported on a pair of 'island' legs. At the rear there's an L-plan kitchen comprehensively fitted with vitreous enamelled Optimus sink, drainer and cooker, an Electrolux T22 fridge, cooker and constant-flow water heater.

On the nearside is a compact toilet cubicle with foldaway basin, vanity unit, shower fittings and a Porta Potti 65 toilet. Although primarily a 2-berth, the Autobahn can be transformed into a family 'van' by fitting a high level double bed in lieu of roof lockers. The price will be £15,595, based on the petrol engined LT31, giving the new model a slim £70 advantage over the alternative Autobahn model on the Mercedes 210.

Diamond's other two NEC offerings were the hightop versions of the Autostrada (a fairly conventional side-kitchen layout on the Transporter) and the Autocruiser with its novel rear kitchen and adjacent tiny toilet cubicle and individual rear seats which join with cab seats to provide a pair of single



Holdsworth's VW Variety flanked by a VW Villa and a new Transit conversion.

beds (or make to a double with an extra-cost conversion kit).

A detail change in the Autocruiser is the provision of 'dished' seat cushions for improved lateral support and greater security when the seats are formed into a bed. The Autostrada shown was dressed up in the 'Elite' kit, £800 worth of add-on GRP mouldings providing front and rear spoilers, 'ground effect' skirts and a 4-headlight conversion, which makes Diamond's Elite models the most eye-catching Transporters on the British market.

On the Holdsworth stand it was the VW Variety, joint winner of the Motor Caravan of the Year award at the 1984 Motor Caravan Fair, which had pride of place. In a novel and practical layout, kitchen facilities and most of the storage are grouped at the rear. The U-shaped kitchen provides sink, cooker and separate drainer and more workspace than any other Transporter conversion.

Swivel cab seats bring the cab into the living area, and beneath the standard VW hightop the forward section of the Variety feels particularly spacious. Rounded corner detail to the cabinetwork, a 'first' for Holdsworths among British constructors, and an attractive light greys and blue colour theme complete an interior which has grace and space. Built, deservedly, on the 78bhp version of the Transporter, the Variety is not cheap, however, at just over £11,100.

Like the Diamond range, Holdsworths too have a 'conventional' side kitchen layout model on the VW. The Villa, recently given a



New Diamond Autobahn on the VW LT31.

face-lift with new upholstery, rear head restraints and a mains/battery charger package, has been given a 'Mk II' designation and is available in elevating roof or hightop versions.

With the lower output 60bhp engine, the Villa shows a saving of about £1,200 over its newer stablemate. For still less, however, just topping £9,000, the Reading factory has a new Ford Transit based model. Holdsworth's concertina-sided elevating roof is fitted, while down below is a 4-place dinette



New Japanese-style Bedford Midi

converting to two forward facing seats; at the rear, kitchen on the nearside with wardrobe, fridge and cupboard opposite. A neatly executed package at a keen price, for those who can do without a VW!

Completing the Holdsworth line-up was the Renault Romance HTL, on the Traffic lwb hightop. Up front Holdsworth's 'Flexi-Seats' complete face-forwards seating for four, flatten and face inwards for dining, and team with the cab seats in the bed arrangements. The rear nearside corner accommodates a small toilet/shower cubicle, the wardrobe is opposite and the well planned and fitted kitchen is divided between the two sides of the 'van'.

Careful exploration of the NEC's halls revealed just two more motor caravans. Devon's Tour-Ace on the Toyota Hi-Ace has been considerably revised from earlier conversions on that marque and looked an all together better layout — and it was cheaper than Devon's current VW Moonraker.

The Leisure Executive, by Auto-Sleepers, on a 2-litre Sherpa 285, makes good use of space. Cab seats



swivel to complete a 4-place group up front, there's a good L-plan kitchen and a reasonable sized toilet cubicle.

New and revised base vehicles at the NEC pointed to continuing challenges to Volkswagen's supremacy in the world of motor caravans. Bedford's long-running CF has become the CF2, with a 'heart transplant' of the 2-litre Opel engine to replace the rugged 2.3 unit. The more refined engine, drive-line changes and further attention to insulation provide a quieter, smoother, more pleasant outfit to drive.

New at the Show was Bedford's 'Midi' van, a slim, obviously Oriental, competitor with its origins in General Motors' Isuzu factory in Japan. Inboard engines are 1.8 litre petrol (76bhp) or 2 litre diesel (57bhp) matched to a 5-speed gearbox.

An eye-catcher on the Bedford stand was a customised CF2, the Cruise-o-van, with sumptuous interior and seating. More interesting was the underbonnet story. There lurked a 3.3 litre power unit.

Other developments to keep the competition hot on the heels of VW for motor caravan business here and in Europe were seen from Mercedes and from the Peugeot/Citroen/Fiat group, whose newest commercial, sold here as Talbot Express or Fiat Ducato, has made big inroads in the two years since its introduction.

Mercedes showed their 210/310 commercials (that's the petrol, not diesel-powered versions) with optional 4-speed automatic transmission. Detail changes to the Italian-built vans for 1985 are minor, but will help them on the upward path which has seen the Talbot Express alone corner some 22% of the UK motor caravan market. Look out, VW!



Cruise-o-Van conversion of Bedford's CF2.