

One of the last rear-engined Transporters has become perhaps the ultimate camper, reckons **ROBIN WAGER.**

# MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Thirty-three years spent as a flight engineer with BOAC and British Airways, working with the highest quality products of the aviation world, probably account for Robin Taylor's enthusiasm for Volkswagens.

A couple of years ago Robin, who lives in Devizes, started thinking about retirement and, having hired motor caravans while in America and New Zealand, decided one of these might be the ideal leisure vehicle. Speaking to people who owned campers, though, he gained the impression that these were very much a compromise.

'I had been flying 747s for the past 20 years,' says Robin. 'and the very word 'compromise' didn't come easy to me. I realise now that I've been spoilt and that Boeing, Rolls-Royce and BA fitters have given me very high standards.'

...a credit to British workmanship and to Holdsworth!



Pat and Robin with their 'Li'l Red Jitney'.

Aircrew are never late for a flight - hence his main vehicle for travelling to work over the past 15 years has been a VW - a 412 LS Variant that Robin describes as 'a fantastically reliable car which never let me down in over 130,000 miles.'

Robin extended his high standards to his wife, who just happens to hail from Seattle, the home of Boeing! Pat drives a 1980 Cadillac Seville - 'the ultimate electronic comfort vehicle,' says Robin. 'The car itself is fine, but the electrics and electronics are a bit over the top; fortunately my 747 electronics training allows me to keep it serviceable.'

Standing between the two cars in the garage one day, the basic specification for his retirement vehicle came to him. It should combine the comfort of the Caddy with the reliability of the Volkswagen. It must fit in the garage (max. headroom under door 86 ins), and it must be able to tow his trailer to the dump, since Robin anticipated that an inevitable result of retirement would be more time in which to collect rubbish!

It would be nice, he decided, to be able to make tea in it, to have a Porta-Potti to cope with all the tea-drinking, and to sleep in it (no, not the P-P!) should they so desire. Doesn't sound too

difficult so far...

Giving his imagination free rein. Robin prepared a complete spec which he showed to a few owners, who all agreed - *impossible!*

That was just the challenge he needed. As he went around the world he looked at what other countries had done with the good old Type 2 and, with 'a bit of arm-twisting', convinced Pat that they stood a better chance of getting what they wanted right here in England.

Now they looked around at lots of secondhand vans, especially ex-hire ones, to see how the various conversions had stood up to hard wear and tear. Pick of the

bunch proved to be Holdsworth, and they finally settled on the Villa 3 model with elevating roof.

Next on the schedule was a visit to Holdsworth's Reading factory to talk to 'Mr Fixit', works manager Tony Stream. Tony, together with Rita Long, listened to the Taylors' proposals, and smiled.

'They never said no', says Robin, 'they just smiled! Then they suggested we contact Volkswagen's Commercial Vehicles Division at Swindon to see whether such a vehicle had ever been produced.'

Over at Swindon, Caroline Taylor (no relation) quickly entered into the spirit of the game



for most people appeared to think Robin was joking) and produced lots of 'M' numbers for all the options they knew about. Robin took these with him to America, Germany and South Africa and managed to find a few more that even Swindon hadn't heard of!

A few more trips round the world, chatting to all the experts, produced the general opinion that, having built over six million examples of the Type 2, VW must have got it fairly right.

Robin was about a year from retirement when they announced the end of the rear-engined Transporter and its replacement by the T4 'Eurovan'.

'Imagine my dilemma', he says. 'Here I was, intending to pay for my van out of the lump sum I would receive on retirement, and that was still a year away!' Had he known how long it was all to take, he needn't have worried...

Enter at this stage Caroline Taylor's boss at Swindon, Richard Noy, another man who enjoys a challenge, and without whom it would all have been impossible.

Robin produced his spec and Richard faxed it to Germany. The factory replied, 'Which of these options does the customer want?' 'All of them', responded Richard. At this point, Robin swears there was a small puff of smoke from the fax machine.

'Impossible!' said Germany, eventually. 'No such word as far as this customer is concerned!' retorted Richard Noy.

'After all,' says Robin, 'they listed 2.1 fuel-injected engine, automatic gearbox, cruise control, air-conditioning, ABS brakes, central locking, power steering and brakes, tinted glass, electric and heated mirrors, towing package with uprated cooling system, Caravelle style seats etc, so I didn't see why I couldn't have any of them...'

To cut a lot of faxes short, Richard Noy managed to get the factory to agree to incorporate all the options into one van, and the order was placed. 'Ironic, isn't it?' says Robin. 'Practically the last of the old vans off the production line was the first and only one to have all the options fitted!'

Many months later the van, complete with factory options, arrived at Richard Holdsworth's in Reading, where Tony Stream sat down with an economy-sized bottle of aspirin to pore over the customer's 'unusual' spec.

Realising that there would be some problems affecting the



**Above:** Bull bars were Pat's idea, and give the van a 'go-anywhere' look.

**Right:** Caravelle-style seats have genuine VW infill bolsters for head restraints. Upholstery is extremely impressive. Dash top is fitted with a Webb's storage tray. **Below:** Original air-con trunking ran down centre of roof. To allow for elevating roof, Holdsworths diverted the central part of the conduit. Robin has made his own electrical hook-up points in order to get the combinations he wanted.



layout, Tony invited the Taylors over to discuss things. The air-conditioning trunking, for example, ran right down the middle of the roof, where the pop-up version was to go!

Second battery? No problem, put it under the passenger seat.



Ah - ABS control valve already there! In the engine bay as on the Diesel? Air-conditioning compressor in the way! How about behind the wardrobe? Great - easy to get at for maintenance, and even for jump-starting others less fortunate (why didn't they fit it there for the past umpteen years?).

Says Robin: 'Tony Stream never stopped smiling, and never said 'impossible' - he just sorted it all out. We've even ended up with full air-conditioning front and rear - something that well known German converter doesn't offer even for the American market!'

Although Robin had already retired by the time the van was ready for delivery, he and Pat



# MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

reckon it was well worth waiting for. The high standard of workmanship, they say, is summed up by the detail of the upholstery on the two-tone covering of the adjustable armrests(!) and the whole conversion is a great credit both to British workmanship and to the Holdsworths team.

Final touch for the Taylors' van is its personal licence plate J1 TNY. Why 'Jitny'? Well, in America 'jitny' means a small vehicle that transports people and Pat learnt to drive on her father's red jitney that used to deliver goods around the town of Davenport, WA.

When DVLA announced the sale of 'J' registrations from May 1 last year, Robin was on the phone at 8 a.m., plastic in hand, dialling every 30 seconds until he got through. Relief - J1 TNY was still available!

So what did it all cost? Er, well...if pressed, Robin will tell you he got just enough change out of £30,000 to buy a celebratory bottle with which to

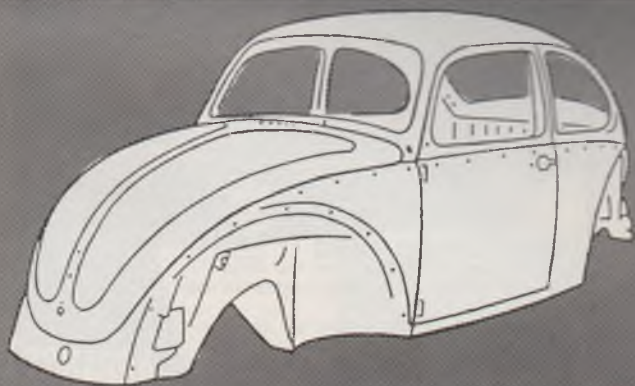
christen the Little Red Jitney. I get the impression he still can't quite believe his good fortune in having a wife who was prepared to see him spend a cool 30 grand on his 'Taylor-made' Volkswagen, without batting an eyelid!

If you see J1 TNY on a camp site or at one of the VW shows, Robin will be glad to show you around. He'll also tell you how it's a continual reminder that nothing in the world is impossible, provided you have the will - and the patience! ■

**Above right: J1 TNY is fitted with the three-speed automatic box - after the Cadillac, nothing else comes close! Also shown in this shot are the facia controls for air-conditioning. American-style dash plaque reads 'Precious Metal by Richard Holdsworth'. Right: Second battery was installed neatly behind the wardrobe.**



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