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VW HOLDSWORTH HI-FLYER TESTED LIVING WITH AN AMERICAN

JOHN HUNT TRIES THE VW HOLDSWORTH HI-FLYER PROTOTYPE



Yes — yet another Volkswagen for test! My wife and I couldn't resist the opportunity to try this one. It's different, being the only conversion of a VW Transporter with ALL life-support systems. It's a complete motorcaravan.

(And just what is a 'complete motorcaravan' you may ask? I think it's one in which two or more people could live for two or three days without putting a foot outside. In a large American motorhome, you would be able to live comfortably. In the small Holdsworth, you'd feel like pushing the walls out, but you could exist.)

Unique on a Volks, the Holdsworth has a toilet compartment — a step-in rather than a walk-in — but it's usable with the door closed. There's also a good double bed, room for a bed in the roof space for a couple of youngsters, the usual caravan fittings and a generous amount of storage space.

Putting all this into the compact Volkswagen Transporter calls for more than a little ingenuity and, of course, there are penalties. My wife remarked on the absence of clear floor area, the feature she likes second-best in conventional Volks conversions. (Her favourite is the car-like ride and absence of engine noise.) It's not so much that the Hi-Flyer is cramped but that putting the toilet room in the only place where it could go — behind the driver's seat — robs the conversion of a bit of floor and window area.

The kitchen is split. The cooker is positioned behind the passenger seat just inside the sliding door. The sink is on the off-side wall, to the rear of the toilet room. To the rear of the sink is a commodious locker; the lid, when closed, provides work surface. The locker has a maximum depth of 32 inches — too deep to reach into comfortably. The bottom of this would be the logical place to put the fitted water tank, rather than in its present position beneath the rear seat, where more accessible storage space is lost. No waste water tank is supplied. There's not much room for one beneath the Volks but the enterprising DIY owner could fit a small one in the bottom of that locker.



I think at this stage it is fair to remind readers that the Hi-Flyer we tried was a prototype. Production models could be slightly different. I'd hope, for instance, that at least one opening window would be fitted in the caravan part. The loo certainly should have a ventilator or extractor fan.

The smallest room is otherwise perfectly functional. We tried our small Porta-Potti in it to make sure. The closet stands on a plinth, beneath which will be fitted the gas operated water and space heater, both of which help to make this a complete motorcaravan.

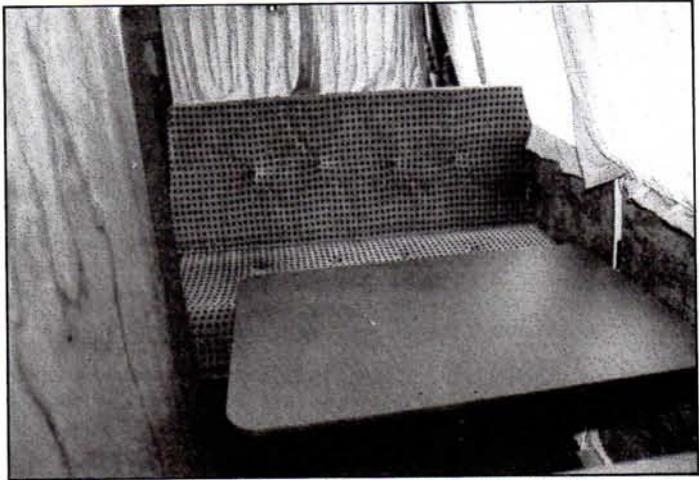
(Here, I must interject on a personal note. The loo compartment would have been easier to use with a flat floor area. I'd be content to go without the water heater, which supplies the only tap which is at the sink, and put the space heater in a recess at the foot of the cooker cabinet. This is purely personal preference. Others may like the arrangement as it is.)

Volkswagenwerke's intrusive roof bow, across the centre of the caravan, which converters must leave in place, makes its presence felt again. At the sink, there's enough headroom — just. It would have been nice to have had a bit more. No way, on this

HOLDSWORTH HI-FLYER



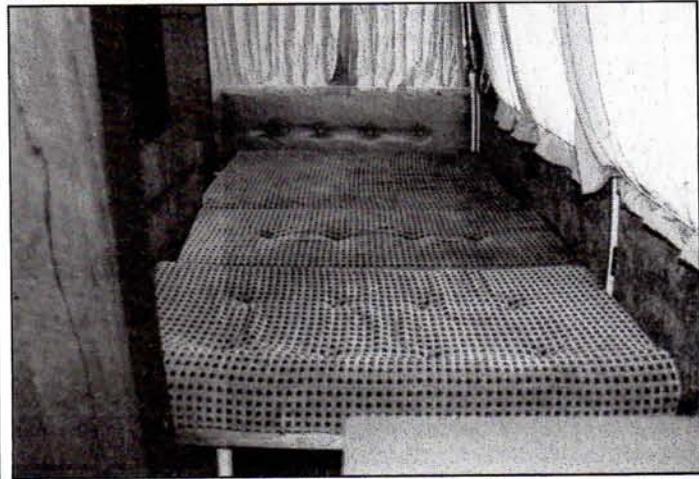
From any angle, it's an attractive GRP high top. The front cutaway allows the installation of a roof rack, yet there's still room inside for two overcab storage compartments.



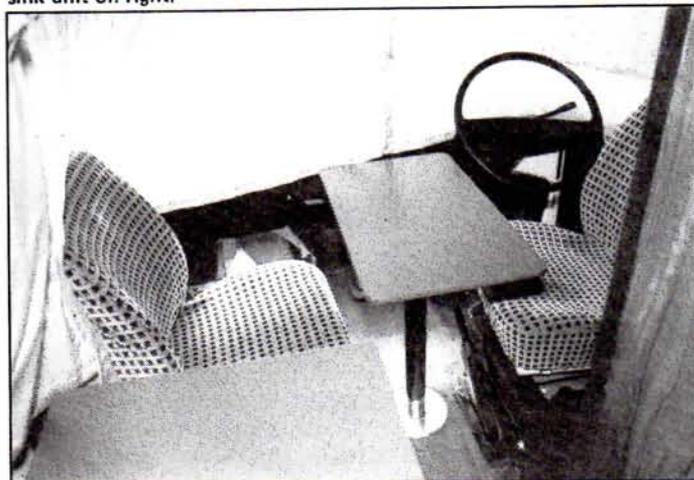
The other — or main — dining position, with island leg table in front of the rear bench seat. With table in place, we found it possible to use sink, cooker and adjacent side door.



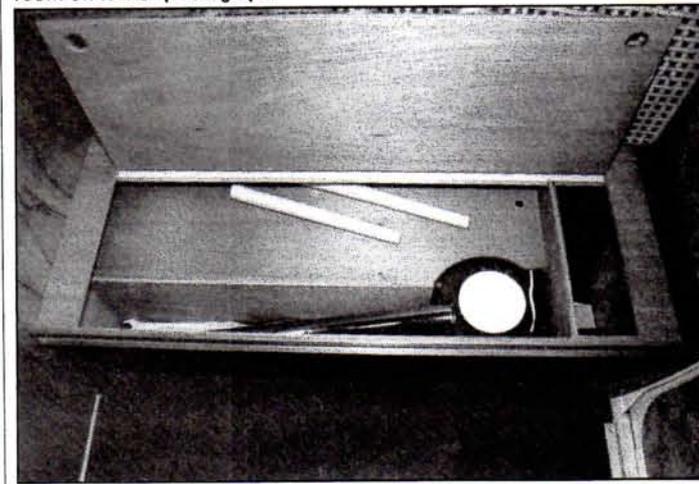
View through the side doorway. Cooker on left, behind passenger seat. Toilet compartment (door open) straight ahead. Refrigerator beneath sink unit on right.



The generous double bed is easily made up and we found it comfortable. There's space at the foot of the bed to stand, use cooker or enter toilet room on left of photograph.



The cab, with driver's and passenger's seats turned to face inwards, island leg table between. Seats are covered in same checked material as rear bench.



The big fresh water tank beneath the rear bench seat has a wide neck. There's still a little bit of storage space for odds and ends. We put the table legs and bed legs here.

base vehicle. At least Holdsworth has padded the thing and covered it with carpet-type material so that it's not really a hazard to heads.

From above the roof bow to the rear there's a large compartment, 52 inches wide, 48 deep and 17½ high. It could serve as a bed for children (when an optional extra ventilator would be advisable) or as a clobber-swallowing storage area — but only for soft items such as clothes and bedding. The temptation to store folding chairs or suitcases up there must be firmly resisted for sharp braking could transform them into projectiles.

Storage for other items is a strong point of the Hi-Flyer. In addition to the kitchen chest already described, there's a locker

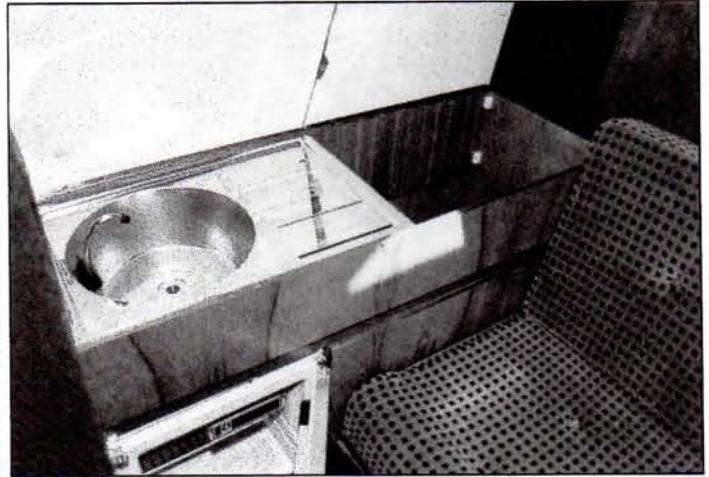
with a flap door above the cab and another, similar but smaller and without a door, in the loo compartment, suitable for sponge bags and the like. Then there's a compartment for pots and pans beneath the cooker and, below that, the ventilated gas locker big enough for a couple of Camping Gaz 907 bottles and some odds and ends as well.

The wardrobe, at the extreme offside rear, is big enough to take a few jackets on hangers, though not deep enough for dresses unless they're hung, folded, over hangers (but the big upper compartment could take all your precious clothes stretched out in plastic 'wardrobes' if it weren't being used as a bed).

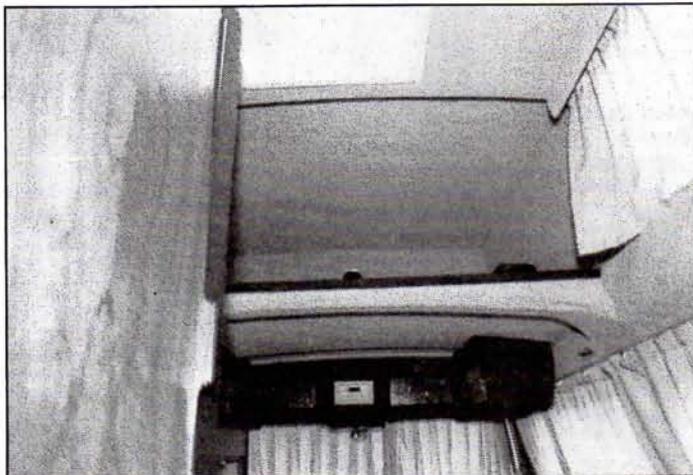
HOLDSWORTH HI-FLYER



The small wardrobe, at offside rear, will take a few jackets on hangers. It's easier to reach it through rear tailgate or when bed is made up.



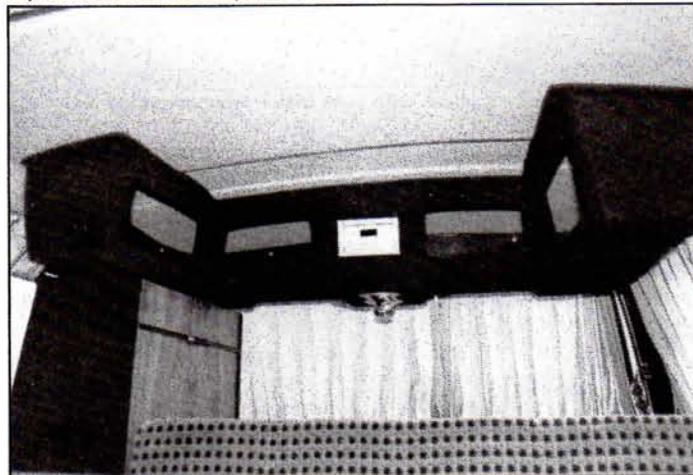
Stainless steel sink with draining board on offside, to rear of toilet room, refrigerator beneath. Lid of the big storage chest (right) can be lowered to provide more work top.



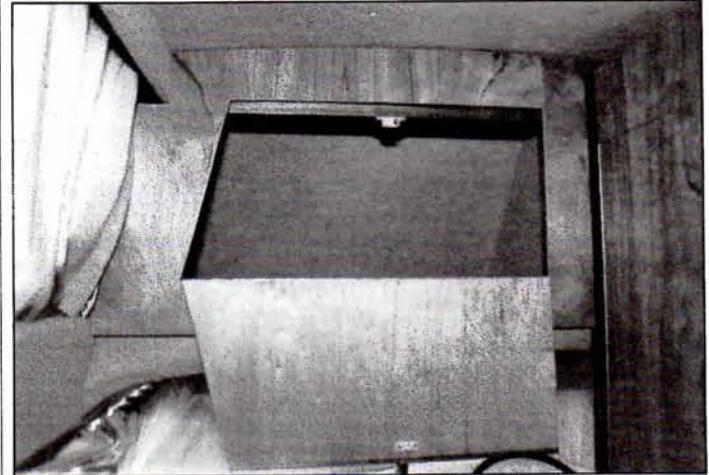
Above the rear double bed is this enormous compartment, which can be used for storage or as a children's bed. Volkswagen's intrusive roof bow is padded and covered by the converters.



Cooker unit, behind cab passenger seat and just inside sliding door. Cupboard for pots and pans beneath cooker; gas compartment is below removable shelf. Note gas shut-off cock, left.



Useful pigeonholes, covered with dark carpet-type material, at rear end (I bumped my head on the one on the right of the photograph) with twin adjustable bullet lights beneath.



Overcab storage locker has flap-down door, is fairly commodious but narrows considerably towards the top. Note attractive grain on real wood veneered plywood.

We've never yet found a Holdsworth motorcaravan with purpose-made and rattle-free stowage for the table leg, but we found that in this model the legs for the two tables would travel without chattering in the narrow locker beneath the rear seat.

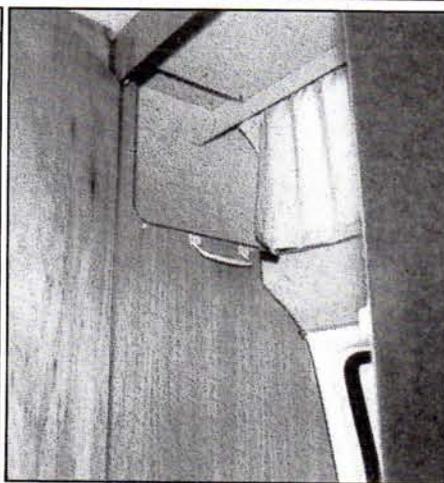
Seats and beds

No mattress was supplied for the upper bed in this vehicle. That would come as an extra if needed. The lower bed was easy to make up. Seat and backrest cushions are removed, the wooden backrest hinged forward and the extension swung over, after two screw-in supporting legs have been inserted. The big cushion which lives permanently over the engine, then matches up

perfectly with the two seat cushions to make a very satisfactory double bed, 6ft 4 inches long. One sleeps (or, rather, two sleep) with heads towards the padded tailgate, where there are two adjustable bullet lamps in the roof for night readers. There's still room to undress/dress on the unobstructed floor for'ard and the sliding side door can still be used (though if you open or close it at night you'll wake the campsite). The toilet room remains accessible when the bed is down but you have to lift the foot to open the refrigerator to get at the milk to make the morning tea.

My wife and I just loved those front seats. They were fairly firm, gave excellent location when motoring and had rake-adjustable backrests. Best of all was the easy-to-operate swivelling

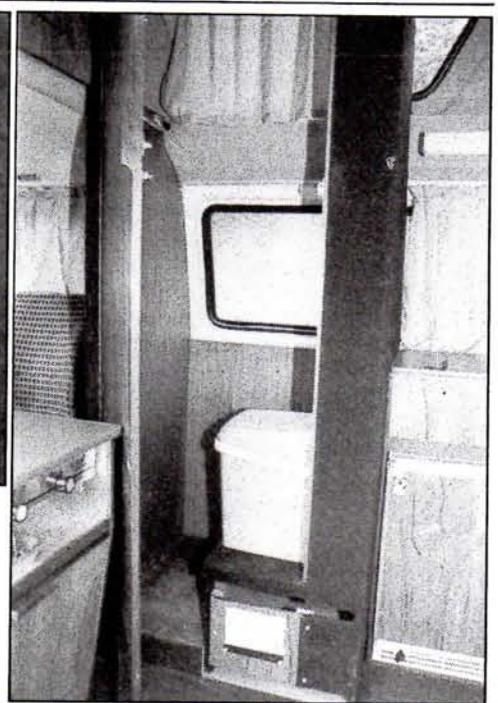
HOLDSWORTH HI-FLYER



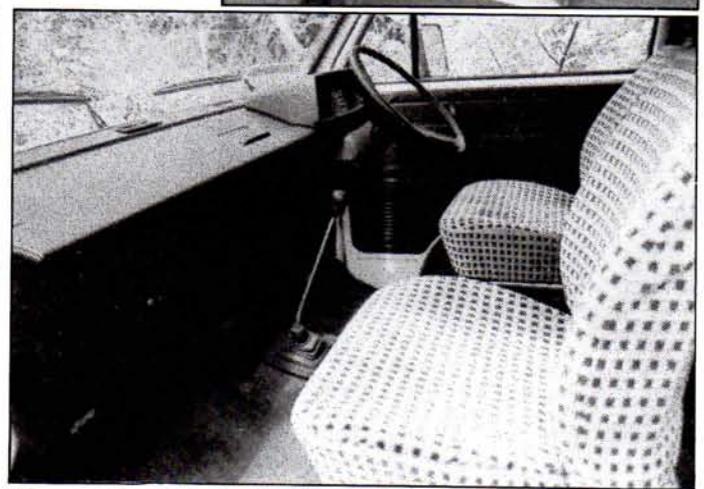
Thoughtful touch: a stout grab handle makes it easier to rise from the loo in the smallest room.

◀ And this is what makes the Holdsworth VW Hi-Flyer unique, the well-lit toilet compartment.

Another view of the toilet room, as seen ▶ from the opened side door.



It takes less time to reach the engine than on some other VWs — only a cushion and the engine cover to be removed.



Clean, neat, uncluttered cab with seats that are ergonomically and anatomically right.

mechanism, allowing both seats to be turned inwards and an island leg table palced between.

A second, larger, island leg table serves the rear bench seat. Even with only two people using the caravan, it's so convenient having alternative seating and dining arrangements. If there's not much space to spare in the Hi-Flyer, at least you can have a change of scenery.

On the road

The rear seat cushion was comfortable, with a roll on the front edge which gave an impression of some rake, provided good location when motoring. I thought the rear backrest rather upright but my wife travelled there and liked it. Surprisingly, in spite of the toilet compartment behind the driver's seat, she said that the rear passenger's view of the road ahead was acceptable and one could see as much of the scenery to the offside as in a train or coach.

When motoring, the only intrusive rattles came from the cooker behind the front passenger seat. They always seem to need padding, don't they? The motor itself was extremely quiet and there were no body squeaks or groans. Holdsworth's liberal use of carpet and carpet-type material nearly all round must take some credit for quietening still further what is already a very smooth vehicle.

I love driving the Volks. It's all so easy. Easy to climb into, easy to start, easy to motor straight away, thanks to the automatic choke, easy to steer, easy to stop and easy to park in tight slots. No doubt a car driver would not relish that long gear

lever. As a motorcaravanner, I think it's perfectly acceptable.

We drove along the clifftops outside Brighton when there was a healthy breeze from the sea. The high top did, admittedly, catch the wind — but not to any alarming extent. There was very little wind noise and fuel consumption at around 24 mpg was not affected. It might be, though, if you were tempted to pile the front roofrack high with slipstream-defeating luggage.

That roofrack, simple in the extreme, would hold a large tent annexe or small cabin trunk. There's no provision, though, for strapping down smaller items that would come below the horizontal bars.

This Volks had the 1600cc engine, lacked the urge of the 2000 which, in spite of a £300-plus price differential, seems now to be the more popular. With the 1600, greater use has to be made of the gears and anything steeper than a slight main road rise calls for a change to third. Acceleration was relaxed rather than sparkling but that's something we grew to like. All our driving was, in fact, relaxed. Once wound up, the thing will motor happily between 60 and 70 mph, provided you have a clear run. At speed, you don't have to shout to carry on a conversation.

If you buy a 1600 instead of a 2000 to save on initial cost and the price of spares, that's understandable. But don't buy it to save on fuel costs — unless all your motoring is to be urban. At 56 mph, the 2000 is marginally less thirsty than the 1600 although, if you use its full performance, you'll pay a little more to cover each mile.

HOLDSWORTH HI-FLYER

Colours

Upholstery was in a brown and fawn velvet type material. Walls and roof were lined with brown and pale beige carpet material, with a touch of cork-finish vinyl in places. The plain brown carpet was in line with modern caravan decor but a flecked one would have been more tolerant of the bits of dust and fluff that inevitably accumulate. The tailgate door was lined with thickly padded and buttoned vinyl. Furniture was well made, all of plywood, with a genuine French walnut finish (no imitation photo veneer in Holdsworth conversions). Work tops were of brown laminate. The generous, unlined curtains, in soft yellow, ran easily on tracks but the spring wire restrainers (put there to stop them falling away from the sides of the van when drawn) were positioned too low and the bottoms of the curtains kept popping out — particularly annoying on the tailgate where heads went when sleeping. When drawn back, the curtains were held neatly bunched by attractive patterned wide restrainer bands.

Altogether, a very pleasant looking little motorcaravan. With its white exterior, dark brown double waistband and nautical style roof, it's a vehicle you'd not be ashamed to take anywhere. Volks and Holdsworth together have, with this one, got right away from the commercial van look.

I liked:

Colour scheme quality of finish
Toilet compartment in a compact motorcaravan
Generous storage space
Comfortable double bed
His and hers lamps over bed
Insect-screened roof vent
Two tables
Generous curtains
Roof rack
Wide neck to water tank
Swivelling front seats
Smooth performance
Quiet motoring
Acceptable directional stability

Easy parking

Accessible engine compartment
Accessible spare wheel at front
Easy-lift tailgate

I would have liked:

Opening window in caravan
More interior lights
Waste water tank
Rear seat belts
Cleats on roofrack for luggage strap

I disliked:

The noisy sliding door
No ventilation in loo

Equipment and dimensions

Electrolux 122 gas/12v refrigerator.
Lytham Adventurer cooker, 2 burners and grill.
Interior gas-operated heater and water heater (not fitted to test vehicle).
1 8 watt fluorescent lamp above sink.
2 adjustable reading lamps above bed.
2 festoon bulb courtesy lamps.
Overall length, 15ft 0in (4.57 m); width, 6ft 0½ in (1.84 m); height, 8ft 1in (2.46 m)
Interior: length behind cab: 9ft 2in (2.79 m); width at waist (maximum): 5ft 2½ in (1.59 m); height: 6ft 3in (1.90 m)
Bed: 76 x 48 in (1930 x 1220 mm)
Overhead storage or bed area: 52in wide (1320 mm); 48in deep (1220 mm); 17½ in high (445 mm).
Wardrobe: 34in (865 mm) hanging height, 21in (535 mm) wide, 11½ in (290 mm) deep (average).
Toilet compartment: 27½ in (700 mm) x 23½ in (595 mm) x 70in (1780 mm) high.
Cupboard beneath cooker: 18½ in (470 mm) x 12in (305 mm) x 12in (305 mm) high.
Gas bottle locker: 18½ in (470 mm) x 12in (305 mm) x 10in (255 mm) high.
Tables: 31½ in x 20in (800 mm x 510 mm) and 24in x 14in (610 mm x 355 mm).
Kitchen chest: 20½ in x 14in (520 mm x 355 mm) x 32in (815 mm) deep.
Overcab locker: 30in (760 mm) wide, 17in (430 mm) deep, narrowing to 6in (150 mm), 16in (405 mm) high.
Shelf in toilet compartment: 19in (485 mm) wide, 17in (430 mm) deep, narrowing to 6in (150 mm), 16in (405 mm) high
Davis & Stone's price, as tested, plus heater, £7950.
Supplied for evaluation by Davis & Stone Ltd, Longridge Avenue, Saltdean, Brighton.

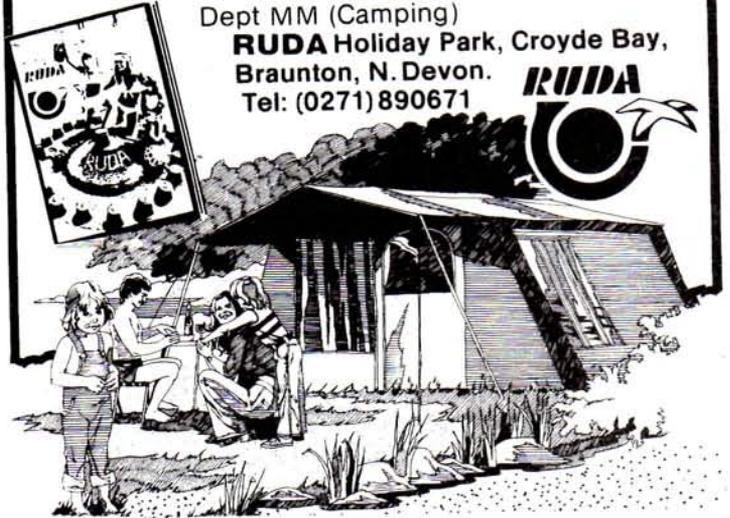
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