



AUTOHOMES KONCORD

*First full road test report on a prototype new VW
from Britain's largest builder of motorcaravans*

by John Hunt

Problem: how do I criticise a motor that's virtually perfect? The new VW with front wheel drive is the best thing of its kind on four wheels that has come our way.

MMM has already given readers impressions of the vehicle in passenger carrying Caravelle form (in Germany) and diesel van (in Britain). Now we have had the petrol version of a motorcaravan in our hands for several days — and are highly enthusiastic, can think of no similar vehicle that comes near it for performance and comfort.

The cab seats, original Volkswagen, are high backed, supportive and comfortable on long journeys. Adjustable armrests make them into what many would refer to as captain's chairs. Not only have Autohomes covered them to match the rest of the upholstery, they have also found the lowest of swivels to go beneath them, thus preserving the ideal driving position worked out by the VW ergonomists.

The cab itself is well equipped with storage space, including a lockable glove compartment, two big door troughs, some flat surfaces to the fascia and space beneath the seats. All controls fall easily to hand and there are enough instruments — including the welcome dashboard clock — and warning lights to keep the driver well informed.

The heater is powerful, with a four speed blower fan and selection of fresh air or recirculation. To our surprise, VW seem

to have listened to our past complaints (or perhaps other more powerful voices were heard); cool fresh air is available through two directable central vents, whatever the heater itself is doing. At last, we could drive with cool heads and warm feet!

The base vehicle is well equipped in other respects, too, most important perhaps being the wiper to the large, heated rear window in the tailgate, through which there is an excellent view rearwards via the central mirror with night dimmer. Door mirrors are of different shapes (see photographs) for maximum useful views; their glasses are adjustable and they are available with heaters. Many other options, such as a catalytic converter and two diesel engines, can be ordered (see specification table) but, strangely, automatic transmission is not yet listed.

The option I'd go for would be power steering, having tried it on the new Volkswagen diesels and finding that no directional stability is lost at speed. Although the test model was not unduly heavy when parking, PAS makes manoeuvres in confined spaces a lot easier.

One small aspect that was appreciated was the fact that the ignition key operates all the vehicle's locks, including the fuel filler cap and the glove box. The only other key was for the caravan's water tank filler. Would that manufacturers of motorcaravans, especially coachbuilds, could follow the same simple system!

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Autohomes have been adventurous with the roof line which gives maximum interior height where most needed.



Plenty of floor space with the settee in its rearmost position. Interior step aids easy access.

On the road

Regular readers will know that the new Volks is a delight to travel in for both passengers and driver. Particularly appreciated by passengers was the rear seat system thought up by Autohomes, where the usual settee (rather unusual in this case, as will be described) can be positioned forward so that those in the rear are not half a mile away from the front seat occupants. The restraint belts come forward with the seat and, for use in this position, one three point harness is available as an extra.

There are certain vehicles which the driver just steps into and drives, without the need for a lengthy cockpit drill. The VW is one of them. If you have never met one before, everything falls readily to hand (or foot) and the automatic choke ensures a first-time start and smooth getaway with a cold engine. All the gears were easy to find at the first attempt, the clutch was smooth and not too heavy and the throttle pedal just right. The brakes are superb, although ABS is available as an extra.

What was surprising, in view of the automatic choke, was that the petrol consumption was so good. We did the usual tankful-to-tankful test and achieved a remarkable 25.5mpg on unleaded petrol with an engine that had only 82 miles on the clock when collected. So enjoyable was the motoring that we soon increased that figure by a healthy amount. Of course, for a truly accurate consumption figure, the measurements need to be taken over several fillings — but you don't fill the large tank very often when the range is around 400 miles or more.

As speed built up, there was a little wind noise but not enough to spoil the music or speech on the radio (which, oddly, is an extra). The excellent flexibility of the engine and transmission was a pleasant surprise. Even in this new model, it was possible to be very lazy with the gear changes. The thing to watch was the speedometer. It was too easy to break the limit of 60 or 70mph!

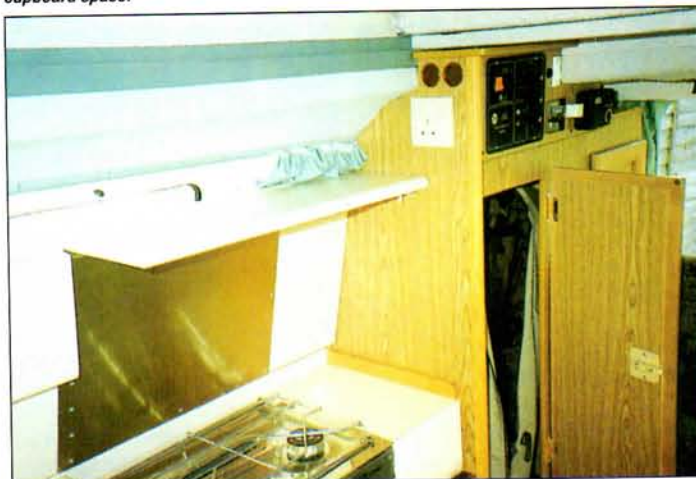
On winding country roads (when our things slipped around on the plastic dash top) fourth gear was the most useful, with no need



VW have certainly improved the cab for the new Transporter. Armrests are wide and adjustable.



Kitchen worktops become splashbacks when raised. Fridge is beneath drainer. Good cupboard space.



Hinged front of cooker cover becomes a useful shelf when raised.

to change down for every bend. There was a little body roll on bends but not enough to worry about and certainly no more than experienced on other high roof motorcaravans. On main roads very little throttle seemed to be needed to maintain a steady speed in fifth gear, with a change to fourth on steeper gradients. Dual carriageways and motorways were taken almost all the time in fifth gear. I, for one, was delighted with the configuration of the gearbox, for Volkswagen have abandoned the awkward layout of the old Transporter and now made theirs similar to most others, with first and second, third and fourth in the same planes and fifth stuck out on the right. (Reverse is 'way over to the left and cannot be engaged accidentally, for it is necessary to press the lever down.)

The steering remained positive at all speeds; even on a windy motorway there was no hint of loss of directional stability at the permissible maximum, when there was plenty of power in reserve.



Settee in forward travel position. Nearside seat harness can be a lap/diagonal. Good storage beneath.



Front seats reversed, settee forward, therefore places for four at free-standing table.



Settee lowered to bed position to show wardrobe and adjacent shelved cupboard. Control panel is extra.



Above cab, where roof is partly cut away, crockery in its cupboard. Other two cupboards are for storage.



Above settee, fall front keeps things in place. Upper bed sections are just visible behind.

On a dual carriageway a Ford Transit Executive bus flashed past us at well over the legal limit. We easily passed him at the next gradient!

We took our usual test hill at 48mph in third without pushing too hard in deference to the new engine. (The best we have achieved was 50 with a turbo diesel, the worst was touching 30 with our own coachbuilt!) 30 to 50mph acceleration was the best achieved with any motorcaravan so far, taking 8 seconds in third and 12 seconds in fourth — but we haven't been doing that for long and must try a lightweight turbo diesel sometime for comparison. So far the 2-litre petrol Volks comes top. Although its engine capacity is around the same as most of the others, the VW engineers seem to have tweaked the motor a little more and got 84bhp from the horses against the usual 77 or 78.

Altogether, it is a delightful motor, vice free and a pleasure to drive.

The caravan

The new Transporter has set our converters something of a problem for, although the engine is no longer in the way at the rear, the body is somewhat shorter. There is just room for a six-foot bed extending from the extreme rear and a refrigerator; then you reach the cab.

So Autohomes have followed the 'conventional' layout, with the usual settee which becomes a bed and the kitchen unit and furniture cabinet extending all the way along the offside.

Seats and beds

'Conventional' it may appear at first glance; in truth, there are very many innovations, the most important being that very seat. In its rearmost position, it sits beside the wardrobe, leaving the whole of the kitchen area free, with clear access to all the cupboards, sink and cooker.

Moved forward one notch (it slides easily after releasing a catch and locks again in the secure position), it provides a sensible position for travel, so that the rear passengers are able to communicate with those in front without shouting. In this position, the fridge is still accessible, as are the sink and cooker, the latter with a bit of reaching over the backrest — but you'd have the seat pushed back when cooking.

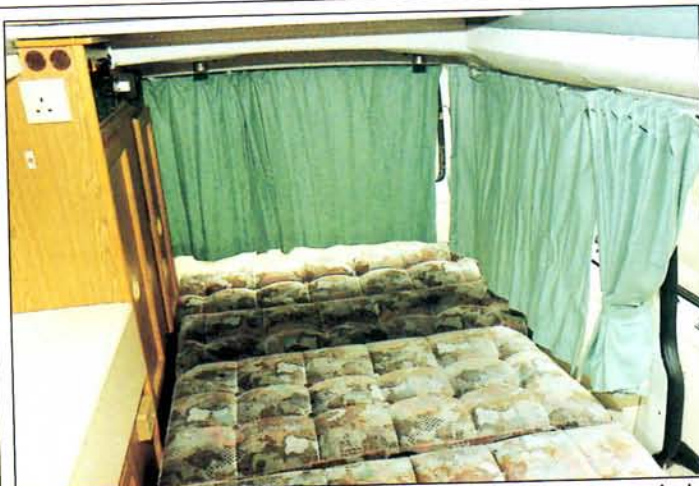
Both cab seats may be reversed, the passenger's fully and the driver's three parts of the way. With the settee in its middle position, a free-standing table is placed to provide dining places for four. I found that the passenger seat could be reversed without any adjustment; the driver's required a little alteration to the backrest rake — but both went easily.

When the seat is moved right forward (for this it is necessary to open the fridge door), it does not lock in position but may be removed completely. This is a job for two people but Penny and I found it simple enough the first time we tried — and that was without an instruction book (which was still in course of

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The lower bed viewed from the rear. It's really comfortable and joins between cushions are not felt.



Lower bed viewed from the front. Fasteners to hold curtains against walls are promised.



Rear storage: lockers and drawers. Whole unit is removable if not wanted. Gas locker is on right.



Side lift jack clips beneath sills for use, is stored with wheelbrace in locker shown.

preparation). As the storage unit at the extreme rear can also be removed, this VW will soon change to a load carrier able to cope with bulky items (for dimensions see the specification). We reckon this is going to be a real asset for those who want a true multi-purpose vehicle.

As the seat is moved, the storage locker beneath comes with it. It is here that the chemical closet and a large empty box are found. So, whatever its position, the load beneath is accessible.

In its central position the settee is ready to become a bed with enough room to stand at the foot (and somewhere to sit if the cab seats are reversed). Another catch beneath is pulled to release the backrest, which drops to the horizontal. The two spare, full width cushions at the back are placed in position — and that's it.

With its five-inch, flame retardant foam, that bed was truly comfortable and of a reasonable width. Autohomes obviously expect people to sleep with heads to the rear, where there is enough height to sit up in bed and a couple of little adjustable lights are provided for reading. Although there are no opening windows at the extreme rear, I found that opening the roof vent provided sufficient ventilation in late summer. As to what it would be like in the heat of the Mediterranean, we'll leave others to discover — but there are also two top-opening windows in the sides of the roof which will give a cross current of air.

The upper double bed is fractionally larger than the lower but headroom is restricted and the upholstery is not as generous. Retracted, the sections make a commodious locker for the storage of all the bedding, leaving the lower cupboards, lockers and space behind the settee for other luggage. The high level bed is reasonably easy to climb into via the reversed front seat and the closed lid of the sink.

Kitchen

The long kitchen unit extends all the way along the offside behind the driver's seat. At the front is the stainless steel sink unit and



Two long bolts hold the spare wheel cradle and are operated with the wheelbrace as shown.

drainer, in the middle the hob and grill and at the rear a wardrobe and shelved cupboard, taller than the other units. Sink and cooker are covered by hinged lids. Unusually, their fronts are hinged to the tops and rise with them as they are opened. This is most useful in that the rearmost one, over the cooker, is supported by a shoot bolt to provide a little extra dumping space. The undersides of the back and shelf top are lined to prevent heat damage.

One aspect the owner will have to instruct the family about is to take care when lowering the lids. It's easy to catch the fingers between the hinged fronts and lids as they come down. You'll only do it once! I'm not sure whether I'd want this system altered; that shelf over the cooker is so useful! It's fair to remember that this vehicle was the first prototype and various alterations are still being considered. Autohomes were keen to get our reactions as its very first users.

www.vwT4camper.info - a useful website for owners and enthusiasts of VW T4 Transporter Campervans

Motorcaravan + Motorhome Monthly



Offside: Cascade water heater flue, electrical hook-up, fridge vents and fridge flue.



Lots of space for bulky loads when settee and rear storage unit are removed — not difficult.



Rear storage unit, complete settee and spare cushions can all be dumped in the garage!



Beneath the bonnet. Twin batteries (right) have removable cover. Note fresh air scoop (central).



A small mirror is mounted on the hinged flap at the front of the upper bed unit. We found it rather high but it is to be changed to an acrylic, unbreakable one on production models.

I know the designers would have liked to have fitted a three-burner hob. There just isn't room in the width available. Whilst the VW T4 is a delightful vehicle, it's quite a job to fit everything in and I believe Autohomes have done a pretty good job.

When the lids are raised, the opening kitchen window is three parts obscured but there is still some airflow over the tops. The fridge's flue vent is close to the open window but the gas hob inside would produce far greater amounts of the products of combustion and nobody ever seems to worry about that. On checking, I was assured that the recommended distance of 500mm from any opening window applies to such things as water and space heaters with their larger outputs.

The fridge is the Electrolux 2cu ft three-way model with a freezer compartment and electronic ignition, accessible whatever the position of the bed. The other cupboards in the kitchen unit are largely obstructed when the settee is in its forward position or arranged as a bed.

Among the optional extras fitted to the test vehicle were the Propex blown air gas heater and the Carver Cascade water heater. The latter is deservedly becoming popular with both manufacturers and users. It is stored out of the way, low down. It doesn't rattle, is well insulated so that, once the water is hot, it stays that way for a considerable time.

The Carver is automatic in operation. Throwing a switch causes a green light to come on. If all is quiet, you can hear the gas ignite with a 'plop'. If the gas fails to light first time (as I have found usually to be the case), a red light shows, when all you do is switch off and on again. I was usually successful at the third attempt.

The makers say that water will be hot in 40 minutes. I reckon that's conservative. Konkord's was warm in ten minutes, hot in 20 and scalding in 30. Autohomes supply one tap for switching on the water and a second knob for adjusting the temperature; so you set it at what you like and leave it there. The capacity of the Cascade is about 2 gallons which, when diluted with the necessary amount of cold, is ample for all domestic purposes in this motorcaravan. A mains electric element will be fitted to production models. It could save on gas if the user regularly camps on sites with hook-ups.

Storage

The provision of cupboards etc below the kitchen will be obvious from the photographs, as will the big locker beneath the settee which moved with it and holds the chemical closet and a large bin for what-you-will. There will be room for a lot of the bedding in the area above the settee which, when pulled out, becomes the upper bed. Certainly, a good proportion of the available space is taken up

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by full width cushions, needed when using the high level bed, but couples who don't need the bed can remove the cushions completely.

Those who need the four berths will find that there is a reasonable amount of storage accommodation in the full width locker above the cab. More bedding or other clobber could be placed there. This long cupboard is flanked at an angle by two smaller ones, one of which is empty, the other holding the set of quality plastic crockery for four. This includes egg cups, salt and pepper pots. I was glad to see that Autohomes have now adopted spring stays that hold the doors up when opened and do not project into the interiors as they are closed.

There is a lot of further storage provision at the rear. The wardrobe is accessible from the interior. Behind it is another shelved cupboard, accessible from interior or exterior. At its bottom is the gas compartment which will hold one Calor Gas and one Camping Gaz — or two Camping Gaz of course, the latter being smaller. The door to that is accessible from the exterior but there is a removable floor which would allow the gas to be turned off from the interior — if it has not been filled with the owner's clobber!

On the other side is a small locker which houses the jack (clamped to prevent rattles) and wheelbrace. The spare wheel is located beneath the floor at the back. The wheelbrace operates the two bolts which must be released so that the wheel's cradle can be wound down. The jack is a side lifter, clamps on to reinforced places on the skirt.

The floor space at the back is occupied by a wooden unit with removable lids which can also be reached from the inside. Below that are two drawers, accessible only from the outside. If you'd rather have just the space, the whole box merely lifts out. One of the very few rattles we heard on bumpy roads came from the loose lids. Autohomes are going to subdue that on production models.

We thought the people at Poole had done a pretty good job on a base that is not the easiest to convert into a motorcaravan. They have made a vehicle that is car sized — and applicable to so many purposes — into a practical little home on wheels. Their insulation is thorough and, with the optional heater, the new Konkord would be a suitable motorcaravan for those who want to use it the whole year round. It's not the cheapest but, with that versatile seating and wonderful motoring, what more would you want in a vehicle of its size?

I liked

- Almost perfect motoring
- Supportive cab seats
- Adjustable armrests
- Lowline swivels to both seats
- Cab storage space
- Powerful cab heater
- Warm feet, cool heads
- Dashboard clock
- Rear wash/wipe
- Sensible door mirrors
- Options of diesel engines
- Option of catalytic converter
- Option of power steering
- Option of three point rear harness

Option of ABS

- Accepts leaded or unleaded petrol
- Fuel economy
- Power
- Low wind noise
- Flexible engine and transmission
- Directional stability
- Easy gear change
- Hill climbing
- Acceleration
- One key for all functions
- Lockable fuel cap
- Lockable glove locker
- Adjustable rear seat provision
- Removable furniture

Chemical closet storage

- Roof rack and ladder
- Easily made lower bed
- Comfortable lower bed
- Storage provision
- Sliding side windows
- Openable roof windows
- Adjustable reading lights
- Good general illumination
- Optional blown air heating
- Optional water heater
- Optional second battery
- Optional control panel
- Optional waste tank
- Standard safe mains electricity
- Fitted full crockery set

Few rattles

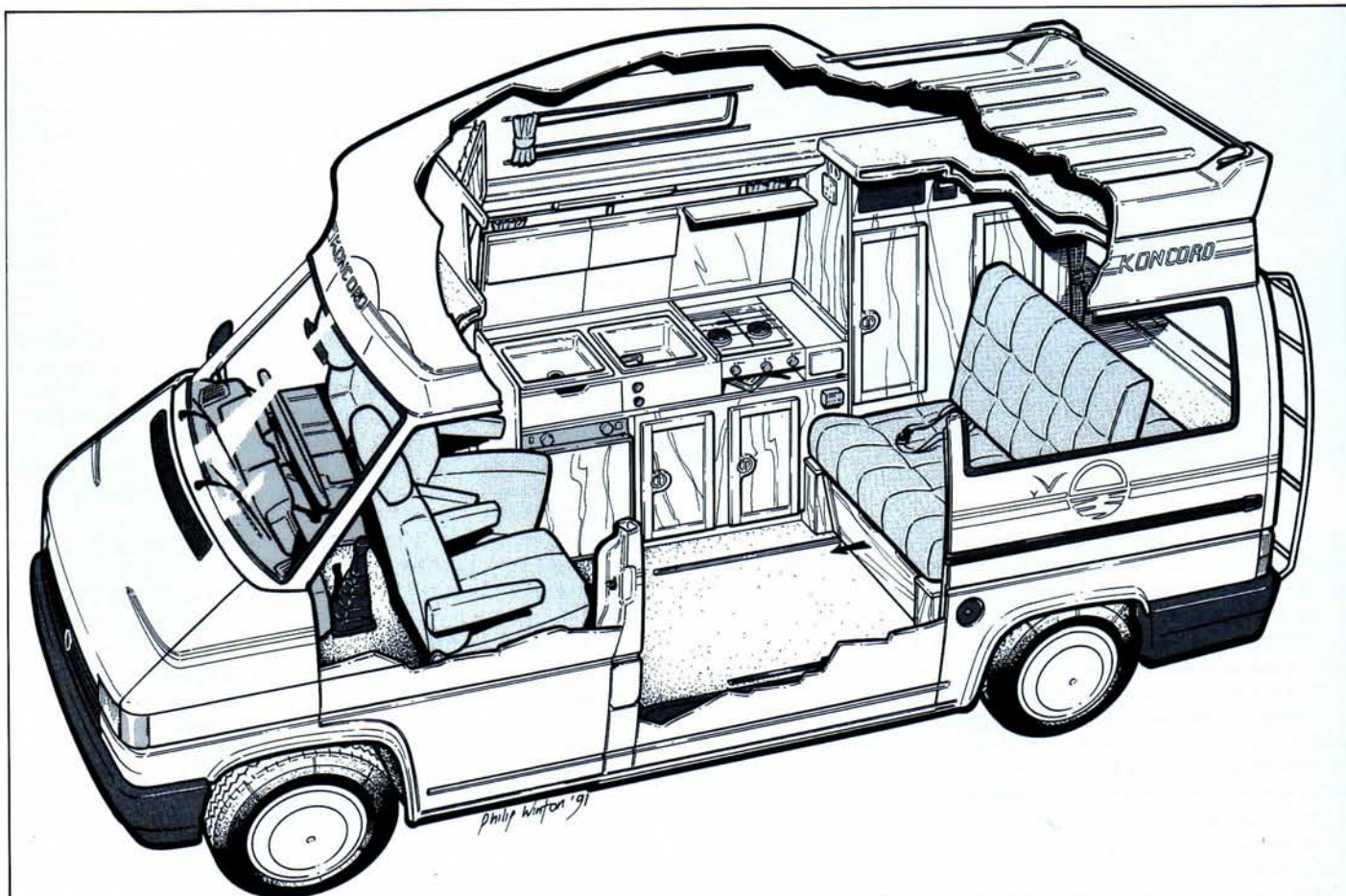
- Jack storage provision
- Insulation all round
- Places for four at table
- Versatility

I would have liked

- Option of auto transmission
- More rake to settee backrest
- Standard cab radio
- Insect screens for windows
- Owner's manual (coming)

I disliked

- Nothing except the price — but if you want the best ...



SPECIFICATION (standard model)

The Vehicle

Base vehicle & engine type: Volkswagen T4 1000kg window van with 1968 petrol engine, 4 cyl, petrol injected, transverse in-line engine.

Output: 84bhp/62kw at 4300rpm.

Max torque: 117 lbf ft/159Nm at 2200rpm.

30–50mph acceleration time: 3rd gear 8 sec, 4th gear 12 sec.

Compression ratio: 8.5:1.

Gearbox & drive: 5 speed manual change with front wheel drive.

Mph per 1000rpm (top gear): 19.3mph/31.1kph.

Brakes: Dual circuit disc/drum, servo assisted, load sensing valve, asbestos-free linings, load sensitive pressure regulator.

Steering: Rack & pinion.

Suspension: Independent all round, front torsion bars, rear trailing arms.

Tyres fitted: Continental 185R14C.

Spare wheel position: Beneath floor at rear.

Fuel tank capacity: 17.6gal/80 l, locking cap.

Fuel consumption during test: 25.5mpg/11.08 l per 100km.

Type of fuel: 98RON leaded or 91RON unleaded.

Instruments: Speedo with trip, fuel and water temp gauges, dashboard clock.

Warning lamps: Coolant temp, oil pressure, main beam, battery charge, handbrake/brake wear, turn indicators, hazard flash, parking lights, rear fog, rear window heater.

Windscreen wiper controls: Stalk, 2 speeds + intermittent, wash/wipe, also for rear window.

Heater controls: 3 levers on dash, hot/cold, fresh/recirculation, distribution, 4 speed blower. Separate cool air to face.

Other features: Heated rear window with wiper, lockable glove box, troughs on both front doors, flat top dashboard, roof rack and ladder, adjustable armrests to cab seats.

The Caravan

Body type & construction: Window van with insulated GRP hightop.

Insulation: Glass fibre.

Windows and doors: 2 sliding windows, 2 fixed, 2 hinged roof window.

Additional ventilation: Wind-up insect screened roof vent.

Blinds/curtains: Lined curtains all round.

Mains electricity/electrical sockets: Earth leakage trip with two circuit breakers, 13 amp socket, 13 amp socket for fridge.

Batteries & control panel: 45 a/h vehicle battery; control panel and 2nd 45 a/h battery optional.

Lighting: 2-tube fluo over kitchen, 2-tube fluo high level, 2 reading lights over settee/bed, cab courtesy.

Cooking facilities: 2-burner hob and grill.

Extractor fan/cooker hood: None.

Refrigerator: Electrolux 212 2cu ft 3-way with freezer compartment and electronic ignition.

Sink & drainer: Stainless steel sink and separate drainer.

Hot water system: Optional Carver Cascade storage, gas plus 240V.

Water pump: Shurflo electric.

Fresh water tank: Underfloor, 17gal/78 l.

Fresh water level gauge: Zig, with adjustment knob.

Waste water tank(s): 6.2gal/28 l.

Waste water level gauge(s): None.

Heating system: Optional Propex Compact blown air.

Gas locker: Base of rear cupboard, takes 1 Calor + 1 Camping Gaz.

Seating/dining/sleeping: 3 position removable settee converts to double bed, double bed in roof area, reversible cab seats.

Table: Free standing, clips to back of settee.

Wardrobe: Rear offside, accessible from interior.

Flooring: Carpet throughout.

Additional features: Cutlery drawer, chemical closet in locker, removable settee and rear furniture.

Dimensions (Imperial and metric)

Overall length: 15ft 8in/4775mm.

Overall width, excl mirrors: 6ft 0.5in/1840mm.

Overall width, incl mirrors: 7ft 1in/2160mm.

Overall height: 8ft 7in/2660mm.

Turning circle, wall to wall: 38ft 5in/11.7m.

Driver's max leg length: 40in/1015mm.

Step up height to caravan: 16+5in/405+125mm.

Interior length from dash: 11ft 2in/3405mm.

Interior length behind cab: 8ft 2in/2490mm.

Interior width at waist level: 5ft 3in/1600mm.

Interior height: 6ft 6in/1980mm.

Work surface height: 33in/840mm.

Table dimensions: 30x20in/915x510mm.

Bed dimensions:

(1) Lower **Mattress length:** 6ft 0in/1830mm.

Mattress width: 3ft 11in/1195mm.

Mattress depth: 5in/125mm.

Available headroom: 38in/965mm.

(2) Upper **Mattress length:** 6ft 0in/1830mm.

Mattress width: 4ft 0in/1220mm.

Mattress depth: 2.5in/60mm. (1.5in/40mm end section)

Available headroom: 18in/455mm.

Wardrobe (height from rail): 36inH, 17.5inW, 14inD av/915,445,355mm.

Gas locker: 16.5inH, 18.5inW, 13.5inD/420,470,345mm — all max.

Other principal cupboards: Load area at rear with seat forward:

36in/915mm long, 34in/865mm wide; with seat removed: 98in/2490mm long; doorway 51in/1295mm high.

Gross vehicle weight: 2.48 tons/2515kg

Unladen weight: 1.90 tons/1934kg.

Load capacity: 0.58 tons/581kg.

Price for standard model at test date: £19 246 inc car tax & VAT plus delivery charges.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS AVAILABLE

Base vehicle options:

1.9 l four cylinder direct injection diesel engine with power steering, power steering on petrol model, 15in wheels, ABS, electric cab windows, heated and adjustable door mirrors, tachometer, tachograph, fog lights, larger battery, 90amp alternator, tow bar, catalytic converter on petrol engine.

Caravan options:

Zig control panel with battery charger and second battery*. Propex blown air heating*. Carver Cascade storage water heater*. 3 point rear seat belt, waste water tank*, radio cassette player*.

* Included in test model.

