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SAFER VOLKSWAGEN MOTORING

The INDEPENDENT British magazine that concentrates on the VW/Audi Family

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VWs in a minority

Caravan Camping Holiday Show

Report by Chris Burlace

The Excalibur by CI Autohomes on the new Talbot Express.

The VW Diamond shown by Travelworld and Diamond RV.

A fast-rising rival to the VW is the Renault Trafic; this is Richard Holdsworth's Renault Romance HT.

Interior of the luxurious and well equipped Pioneer 1204 on the Mercedes 207D.

The Horizon Colt L300. Another threat to the VW, this little coachbuilt costs under £9,000.

With far fewer VW motor caravans than usual among the exhibits at the 1982 **Caravan Camping Holiday Show**, it was left to the new VW Santana GX5 to steal the limelight for the Wolfsburg marque.

As reported in our last *News Round-up*, the 5-cylinder, 1.9 litre Santana with its 4+E gearbox emerged a clear winner in the 'Towcar of the Year 1983' competition sponsored by **CI Caravans**. The struggle for runner-up, however, was keen with the **Opel** *Manta GT/J Hatchback* squeezing into second place just two points ahead of the **Peugeot** *505 Estate*.

The decline in the number of VW models on show at Earls Court this year owed much to the absence of the 'Three Ds' — **Devon, Danbury** and **Dormobile** — names which for so long have been synonymous with the Volkswagen motor caravan.

Dormobile, although still active in the commercial vehicle field, stopped motor caravan production in 1981. Danbury, after bringing out some models which showed considerable innovation, sadly went into liquidation a few months ago, while Devon Conversions (reportedly still in good health) chose to break their long run of appearances at the Caravan Show.

The absence of these famous names of the VW world, however, did not leave customers without a choice. VW Transporter-based models from five different manufacturers were on view, but this year there was not a single conversion or coachbuilt based on the Volkswagen LT.

Another potential disappointment (but not for the air-cooled fanatics!) was that all the conversions, even that of the sole VW-approved company **CI Autohomes**, were on the 'old' air-cooled models. We'll have to wait a little while to see motor caravans built on the Transporter with the new, flat-four, water-cooled 1.9 litre engine.

Available in two versions putting out 60 bhp and 78 bhp, the new engine will be most appreciated for its good torque characteristics with both versions producing over 100 lbf ft. VW-based motor caravans will soon be able to keep up with the competition!

CI's *Kamper*, although a late arrival on the VW scene, has been quick to make its mark. For 1983 there is a Mk II version with several significant improvements. Lighter-coloured furniture gives an impression of greater interior space and there are also new, luxurious interior soft furnishings.

Storage space has been increased and there's a new vanitory unit with mirror and a new, neat cutlery tray beneath one of the lift-up sections of the long offside worktop. The rear seat system has been altered, simplifying the conversion to a bed, but I found the seat squab too long, and only the very long-legged will get good lumbar support from the nicely raked seatback.

Up aloft, CI's solid-sided, double-skinned elevating roof has improved panel-to-panel sealing, new adjustable security catches and a redesigned curtain location. The solid-based bed in the roof has a thicker mattress in recognition that its 6' by 4' dimensions could just as well accommodate two adults as two children.

From the outside you'll be able to spot the Kamper Mk II by its new coachlining and graphics. With the VW 2-litre engine package the Show price of the Kamper was £9,014, a few pounds less than CI's equivalent **Ford** Transit conversion, the *Trailblazer*, and only £288 more than the equivalent **Bedford**, so the VW is not uncompetitive. However, the arrival of the new water-cooled models will lift VW prices by over £500.

Another relatively new conversion of the VW is the *VT20* model by **Auto-Sleepers**, whose trademark is their high quality, light oak cabinetwork. In the VW there's the usual rear bench seat converting to a double bed, a shallow wardrobe adjacent to the side door

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VWs in a minority

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and a kitchen/storage unit opposite with two-burner-and-grill cooker and a neat, rectangular sink with drainer.

Like the CI Kamper, the Auto-Sleeper features a solid-sided elevating roof and the layout, combined with the light-coloured cabinetwork and interior carpet trim, gives a feeling of space and warmth.

New in the 1983 model is a wardrobe/storage unit on the nearside over the engine deck, stealing something from the previous generously wide bed but adding greatly to the clothes storage space in the 'van. At £8,724 with 2-litre engine the Auto-Sleeper seems very competitively priced.

Another company which can be counted on to provide competitively priced VW motor caravans is **Richard Holdsworth**. There were few changes in their VW model range this year (Richard has concentrated his innovative energies on the competing **Renault** range) but the popular *VW Villa* is now available in both elevating roof and hightop versions, and the single seat adjacent to the side door is now reversible.

Immaculate, all-plywood furniture, luxurious upholstery and practical, well-trimmed layouts characterise the Villa range which starts from about £8,250.

The *Hi-Flyer*, the only Transporter conversion to provide a toilet compartment, comes with a fridge as standard as well as a hot water system and warm air heating. Naturally you'll want to complement that specification with a 2-litre engine package, so the price tag will read £9,038!

The fourth exhibitor of VW 'vans at Earls Court this year was **Travelworld** of Wolverhampton, a company relatively new in motor caravanning but with a lively approach. An associate company are shareholders in an American RV (recreation vehicle) manufacturing business which produces the **Travel Cruiser** motorhomes; alongside these American 'vans the company also handle **Coachman**, another US marque.

At the other end of the scale from these American giants, Travelworld also offer the famous *Westfalia Continental* in Britain. Shown beside the Westfalia at Earls Court was a reborn Danbury, the *Diamond VW*, now built by **Diamond RV**, the company of John Bright, formerly with Danbury and before that with **Motorhomes International**.

American-style space and specification with European quality and economy, the Miami on the Fiat Daily.

The Westfalia, reintroduced early last year and shown at the 1982 Motor Caravan Fair has several unique features on which I reported in some detail in the Aug/Sept 1982 issue.

I was pleased to see a very thorough standard of trim in this latest model, in contrast to that which I criticised in the earlier show 'van, and the well equipped Westfalia seems remarkable value starting at £8,237 with the 1.6 litre engine.

The Diamond, successor to the model produced briefly by Danbury before their demise, is of conventional layout with kitchen and storage facilities grouped in a unit extending the length of the offside. However, it has 'extra' features in its standard specification such as swivel cab seats with a second table, fridge and eye-level grill.

Furniture is attractive, with a mosaic patterned laminate on doors and worktops and (an improvement over the original Danbury) there is now soft vinyl trim adding the final touch to the conversion around windows in the caravan area. The biggest surprise with this 'van from Diamond RV, however, is the price — at £8,452 with 1600 engine, it is over £500 cheaper than the last advertised Danbury price!

Showing that the Travelworld/Diamond RV combine really mean business, the new partnership already have the prototype of an up-market panel van conversion of the **Mercedes**. Making much use of fibreglass mouldings for the interior, giving curves instead of corners and considerable weight savings, the new Merc model, with eye-catching leather effect finishes and soft, luxurious fabrics

Auto-Trail's Cheyenne on the Peugeot Pick-up.

for trim and upholstery looks like being a winner.

There are all the features one expects in a luxury motor caravan and the price shows why Mercedes is now winning hands down over the VW LT in the luxury 'van stakes. With diesel power, the Mercedes Diamond costs £14,936; or for more performance but less economy you can have the petrol-engined version for £13,886.

Not long ago the Volkswagen LT was enjoying great popularity in the motor caravan world. This time only one exhibitor, Auto-Sleepers, listed an LT-based 'van, the *VX10* at £13,400, but had no example on show.

Mercedes, though, are available in profusion. On show were the **Pioneer 1204** on the *207D* at £14,236, the **Auto-Trail Cherokee** on the same base chassis at £13,535, and the **Compass** *Clipper SE* at £15,099.

The Pioneer, as always, is unbeatable on specification with safety glass double glazing, three-burner cooker with eye-level grill and oven, fridge, excellent toilet compartment and much, much more. The Compass, too, is an excellent 'van much improved in detail since its first appearance a year ago, and with the edge over the Pioneer on quality of cabinetwork.

Another newcomer to the luxury market is **GT Motorised** of Hull with their *Miami* coachbuilt on the **Fiat** *Daily* chassis. This 'van borrows much from American design but offers superb European

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quality and an excellent specification, with considerable individual choice; and even at £17,000 and upwards, the beauty exhibited on Bill Hayes' stand drew a stream of customers, chequebooks at the ready!

For those with less spending power the Show still had plenty of new models to choose from. In the **GT** *Florida* range Bedford-based coachbuilt start at just under £10,000 and go on to just over £13,000. The smaller *Orlando* model is also offered on the Renault *Trafic* at £10,447. The Compass *Drifter* on Bedford has many of the merits of its bigger brothers at £10,272, while there is an exciting new model from CI, the *Excalibur* on the new **Talbot** *Express* with 2-litre engine, 5-speed gearbox and front-wheel drive.

The Excalibur will be very much a family 'van with accommodation for up to six. There's a forward dinette, central kitchen and toilet cubicle and a second dinette at the rear. The Talbot chassis permits extra body length but enables height and width to be kept down, which is good for fuel consumption. The price should be in the £11—12,000 range, very attractive in view of the accommodation and specification.

Also in this price bracket is the Auto-Sleeper *SV100* with its sleek, fibreglass body designed by William Towns. Winner of the 'Motor Caravan of the Year' title in 1981 and 1982, the SV100 is a standard setter in its class and continued to draw a stream of admirers at the Show.

Moving back to the panel van class at under £10,000, the VW this year had to face competition from the fast rising Renault Trafic and from the brand new Talbot Express, an 'International' vehicle from the Peugeot/Citroen/Fiat stables, also sold in the UK as the Fiat *Ducato*.

Both base vehicles offer interesting permutations. The Renault comes in front-wheel drive form with a 1397cc petrol unit or a 2069cc diesel; or as a rear-wheel drive model with 1647cc petrol engine. The Express/Ducato offers 1796cc and 1971cc petrol engines or a 2498cc diesel, with power outputs of 68, 77 and 74 bhp respectively, and a 5-speed gearbox is standard with the larger engines. All versions of this newcomer are fwd.

Auto-Sleepers produce an elevating-roof version of the Trafic, an attractive conversion but no different in layout from their other models. With the smaller petrol engine the Auto-Sleeper Trafic is priced at £8,372.

When it comes to innovation on the Trafic, however, Richard Holdsworth leads the way. His Renault *Romance* fitted with the Holdsworth 'Giant Riser' roof won the panel van class in the 1982 'Motor Caravan of the Year' contest. For 1983 there are improvements including rearrangements in the 'all-round' rear kitchen (itself a leap forward in panel van kitchen layout), fitting of the famous Holdsworth aircraft-style seats, lighter materials for a greater sense of spaciousness, and neat fibreglass window surrounds.

The elevating-roof, 1397cc Romance is now £8,593, while the hightop, 1397cc.version is £8,998. Also shown at Earls Court was the top-of-the-range HTL (high top, long-wheelbase) with toilet compartment and water heater as standard, and greatly increased storage space. Price was £10,133, but that was with the smaller petrol engine which delivers only 47½ bhp.

Auto-Sleepers have been given Talbot approval as convertors of the Express. The standard Auto-Sleeper layout is employed with forward dinette; however, the extra length of the Express makes room for a minute toilet cubicle in both the elevating-roof *SL* and the hightop *CX1000*, while there is also more cupboard space than in the equivalent conversions on Ford Transit or Bedford.

Prices are £8,676 and £8,827, not much over those for the Auto-Sleeper VW considering the extra space and performance of the Talbot conversions.

For those seeking great versatility in a motor caravan, the 'Murvi' (Multi-use Recreational Vehicle) is now also available on a Ducato. Fixed-roof conversions, the Murvis are based around the 'Incredible Shrinking Kitchen' — a wall cabinet from which unfold sink, cooker, table and storage units — and a versatile sliding rear seat design.

In the Fiat Ducato version of the *Executive* model the extra length makes space for a fridge and storage type water heater and the comprehensive specification also includes blown air heating. The price with 1971cc engine and 5-speed gearbox is £9,985.

Last but not least among the contenders pitted against the VW at Earls Court were two versions of the little Japanese **Mitsubishi Colt** *L300*. The compact chassis cab, with ample power from a 1.6 litre ohc engine, permits a coach-built body to be added while keeping overall length just under 14½' and width at about 6'4". Road dimensions are comparable with those of a VW Transporter.

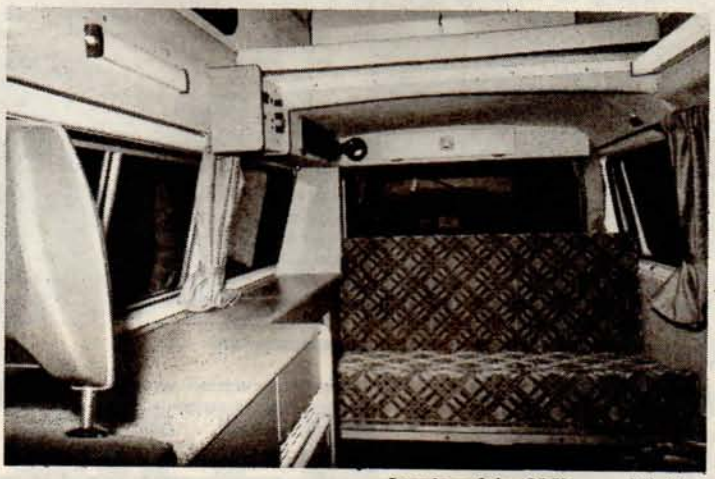
Two versions of the Colt were on show. Both offered four-berth accommodation, a rear dinette bed and a Luton bed, toilet cubicle and kitchen unit, and both had well insulated bodies with double glazed windows.

The comprehensively equipped Colt Pioneer (water heater, fridge, oven, three-burner cooker, shower fittings, waste tank etc) was priced at £9,996. The Colt *Horizon*, built by **Foster and Day** and sold by **Madison's Motor Caravan Centre** of Preston, fitted with only the absolute necessities, is normally £1,000 cheaper.

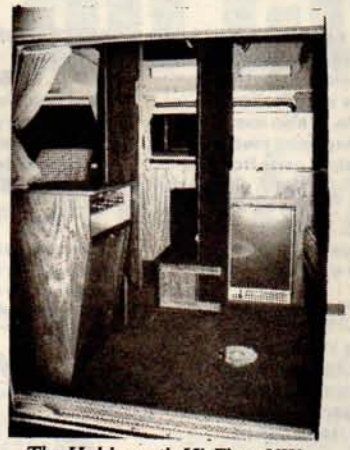
At the Show it was on offer for a remarkable £8,000 — a bargain not to be refused, for the D-I-Y enthusiast could use the fistfulls of notes saved to bring the Horizon up to his own personal specification requirements.

A recent test of a Colt Pioneer showed me just what a handy little vehicle this is. It can out-perform a 1600 VW and is virtually the equal of the 2-litre, yet it will return around 25 mpg in touring conditions. This is just one of the contenders which must be kept in view when new VW conversions are designed to complement the new water-cooled Transporters...

For economy with true car-like driving, the Suntor Marina now built by Brownhills.



Interior of the CI Kamper Mk II.



The Holdsworth Hi-Flyer VW hightop motor caravan, the only VW Transporter conversion to offer a toilet compartment.

The ingeniously designed cabinet which houses the 'life support' equipment in the Murvi, here seen in the new Fiat Ducato-based model.

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