

SCENE IN GERMANY

First off the mark with conversions of the new VW Transporter are Westfalia and Karrosseriewerke Weinsberg. D Ian Hodges photographed some examples at the Frankfurt Motor Show.

The new Volks has independent coil suspension all round and two engine sizes — 1600 and 2000. Both have transistorized ignition and computer control of idling mixture and ignition advance/retard. The 2000 has twin carbs.

The tailgate is wider and deeper, with a lower engine deck. Main access to the engine is via a large lift-off lid — which means that no furniture can be per-

manently installed across the rear.

Among improvements are: centrally heated fuel tank, pull-up handbrake, spare wheel storage beneath cab floor, looks to rival that handsome oriental. Retained is the sliding door, guaranteed to wake the campsite at night.

Appeals to VW/GB for info have gone unanswered and we're extremely grateful to Howard-Lange of Brixton who arranged a test drive for MMM in a van they're converting for export. Even old VWs are easy to drive; this 1600 was a piece of cake, with perfect behaviour and no apparent vices. The unlined, empty panel van was

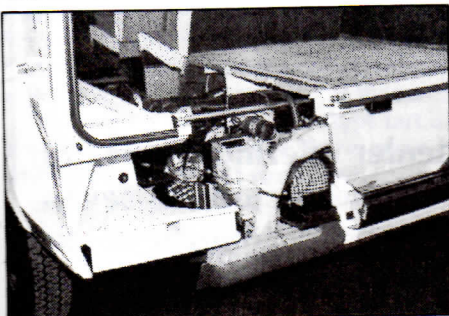
quieter than many of the old type 2s we've tried. We look forward to a full road test one day — but, as we go to press, there are no indications of imports reaching this country yet. Vital dimensions for converters: Flat floor area 5ft 2in x 5ft 2in (1575 x 1575 mm); engine deck height above floor 1ft 2½in (368 mm); max internal width 5ft 6in (1676 mm); max length behind cab 9ft 1in (2769 mm); max interior height 4ft 9in (1448 mm). Split bulkhead behind front seats has vanished, offering possibility of extending bed(s) into cab.

R-J Thurn, European Correspondent, describes

The first conversions of the new Volkswagen-bus

In 1978, the German motorcaravan industry sold about 18 000 motorcaravans, here and abroad. During the same time in Western Germany, 4000 new motorcaravans (imports included) were registered. Ninety per cent of the newly registered vehicles were in the range of 2 to 3 tons overall weight. That means these motorcaravans were conversions of the Volkswagen bus and LT, the Daimler Benz 207D and so on.

The Volkswagen bus (type 2) is the most popular base vehicle for conversions — by the industry or by DIY men. Therefore I would like to tell you about the latest models. That is, the first ones on the new bus which I saw at the Caravan Fair in Essen in October last.



Sectioned rear end, seen at Frankfurt, shows how power unit has been 'squashed down' (Photo: D Ian Hodges)

When I saw my first new Volkswagen bus, at once I tried to work out how I would alter my own (old) conversion so as to make use of the possibilities (lower engine compartment, bigger tailgate) the new bus offers. The result was not overwhelming — the alterations would be minor ones.

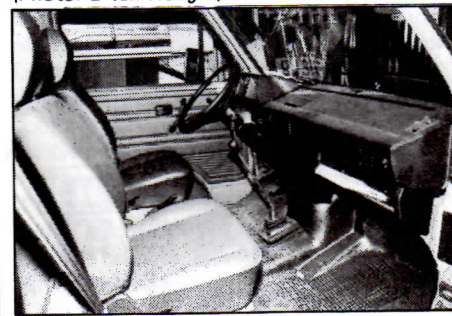
The same process of thinking led Westfalia — the largest motorcaravan converter — to the same result: the new models "Joker 1" and "Joker 2" are but a further development of the former model, "Berlin". All the furniture is situated along one side of the van in a

straight line; therefore there is a lot of room for the passengers.

In both models you will find the kitchen unit (consisting of sink, cooker and frig and a small cupboard for cutlery) at the rear of the driver's seat. When cooking, you open the lid of this unit, which doubles as a protection shield for the window.



Westfalia 'Joker' conversion, at Frankfurt. Tailgate is virtually full width. (Photo: D Ian Hodges)



Cab end still more functional than pretty, but seats comfortable with greater rake adjustment. Bulge in centre appears to confirm that this WAS to have been a front-engined diesel. (Photo: John Hunt)

In the Joker 1, which seats four people, at the left side of the kitchen is a small cupboard, about three inches lower than the kitchen. You reach the rest of the storage space in this cupboard (that which is not occupied by the 55 l — 12 gallon — fresh water tank) through two lids in the top and a small door in the front. When driving (and at night) the rear table is stowed above this cupboard. Therefore, the size of the table is restricted; it measures 80 cm x 40 cm (32in x 16in).

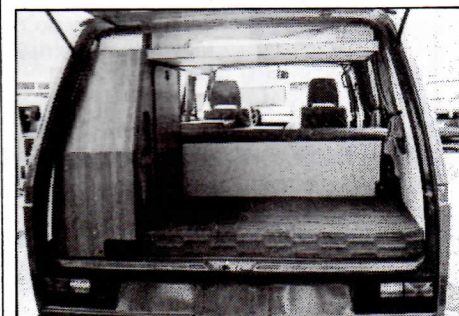
Further back, on top of the engine compartment, is a wardrobe with front

door and a cupboard for clothes. Two of the four passengers sit on the transverse bench in front of the engine compartment (there are even seat belts), the other two in the cab. For dinner, you can swing the table from its travelling position to the front of the bench and fit another table between the two cab-seats, which themselves can be swung round in 180 degrees.

The beds are made in the usual way: you lift the bench and pull it forward to get a double bed for two adults, 1 88 m x 1 20 m (6ft 3in x 4ft). Another bed of the same size is in the big elevating roof, which is standard equipment of the Joker models.

The Joker 2 seats five people. The layout is slightly modified. The kitchen is some inches shorter. Instead of the side cupboard, there is a small bench. The transverse bench runs over the whole width of the van.

There are two possible positions for



Westfalia from rear, showing cut-out at base of storage unit to allow engine access. (Photo: D Ian Hodges)

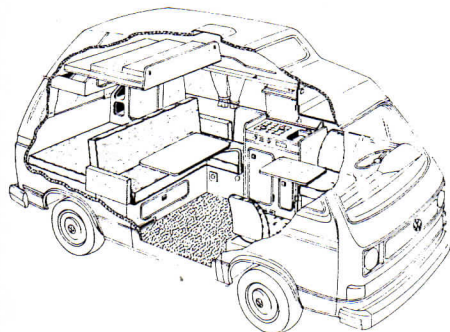
the wardrobe. For a bed over the whole rear part of the van (1 88 m x 1 60 m — 6ft 3in x 5ft 4in), you will need the whole engine compartment. Therefore, the wardrobe will be fitted behind the passenger seat of the cab, reaching up to the height of the backrest of this seat. If you think a bed will suit you which is smaller at one end, you can keep the wardrobe on top of the engine compartment.

In all three versions you find a lot of electronic equipment in the kitchen unit, namely for the control of the fresh water level, the operating of the frig and the

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Westfalia Joker with high top.
(Photo: R-J Thurn)



High top Joker showing cab seats turned inwards to face small table.

charging state of the second battery. This second battery is standard, for Westfalia offers a new heating system. It is operated by a small fan and burns petrol. Why? Is heating with petrol cheaper than heating with gas? No, says Westfalia, but it would be wise to save your gas supply for cooking and operating the frig. Why? They fit a gas tank which holds 10 kg. That is a lot of gas, why then? It is not too easy to get the tank refilled. In Western Germany there are only 50 filling stations. (For old-fashioned people like me, they fit instead of the gas tank a 5 kg gas bottle in a separate compartment, which is vented to the exterior of the van.)

The frig is of an absorption type but is a new development which works even when the van does not stand level.

Some people do not like elevating roofs. They think there is no logic in them. To do a superb insulation of the van body (like Westfalia) and then add an elevating roof with textile sides. For these people Westfalia offers a purpose-made high top. Inside, there is a bed consisting of three massive boards with foam mattresses. The boards run in rails in the sides of the roof. The same mechanism is used by Westfalia in the high tops of the Sven Hedin and James Cook, their conversions of the VW LT and Daimler Benz 207D.

The finish of the conversion is one of the best, maybe the best I saw at Essen. The plywood they use for the furniture is crash tested. All corners (eg the side of the kitchen unit or the front of drawers) are rounded off and protected by a flexible rubber band to minimise the risk of getting hurt. All door handles are let into the doors, and so on.

Prices for these fine conversions (you have to add the price of the van) lie in the range from DM 8400 to DM 8845 (£2100 to £2211) all included — that means together with elevating roof, furniture, second battery, frig, cooker, heater, gas tank and so on. For the high top, you will have to add another DM 1000 (£250).

The Karosseriewerke Weinsberg (KW)

Newcomers, not in the motorcaravan market, but in Volkswagen conversions.

Up to now, KW offered conversions of, and coachbuilt bodies for, all vans which are available in Germany, even for rare ones like the Fiat 900T and 242, the Peugeot J7 and for the popular ones like the Fiat 238, the Ford Transit, Bedford, VW LT, Daimler Benz 207D, everything, in fact, except the Volkswagen bus.

Therefore, their "Terra" which is available in versions 'A' and 'B' is a completely new development. Version A has a small cooker/sink combination behind the driver's seat. Under the cooker is a gas-operated heater with electrically driven fan, a Trumatic E 2300. In this position the heater doubles as additional heater for the cab. Under the sink is the frig which holds 45 l, also of the newly developed absorption type.

At the back of the passenger seat, reaching up to the height of the backrest, is a cupboard with two drawers. This cupboard houses two containers for fresh water with combined capacity of 40 l (9 gall). The water is pumped to the sink by an electric pump.

Behind the kitchen unit is a small bench, then comes the usual transverse bench which does not occupy the whole width of the van because of the wardrobe on the right side, behind the sliding door. On top of the engine compartment behind this wardrobe is another cupboard for cooking utensils and so on. Inside is room for two 5 kg gas bottles.

The table measures 80 cm x 53 cm (2ft 8in x 1ft 9in). On its L-leg it can be swung to the front of the benches. By pulling forward the transverse bench, you get a bed of 1 94 m x 1 33 m (6ft 4in x 4ft 4in).

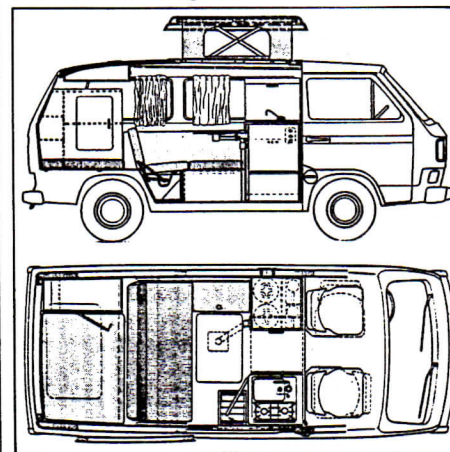
In addition to the usual curtains on the windows are, for complete darkness, roller-shutters with aluminium outsides. These shutters are an excellent protection against sunshine too.

Standing height is achieved by an elevating roof, 1 10 m x 1 10 m (3ft 8in x 3ft 8in) small by British standards. It is extremely low when closed — an advantage when your garage is not very high.

For 1980, KW announce a bigger elevating roof with two beds. The KW version B has the sink/cooker combination not behind the driver's but the passenger's seat. I personally would prefer this version for I like to cook when the sliding door is open — to reduce condensation in the van.



Karosseriewerke Weinsberg at Frankfurt, showing lowered engine deck.
(Photo: D Ian Hodges)



Syro 1 DIY kit.

Weinsberg, the seat of KW, lies in Swabia in Southern Germany. The Swabians are known for their handcraft. You would agree if you could see the Terra. But quality cannot be cheap. Together with a second battery, charger, elevating roof, frig, heater and so on, conversions cost about DM8300 (£2750). You will have to add the price of the base vehicle to this sum.

Both converters, Westfalia and KW, have tried to maximise the room for passengers to move around, maybe at the expense of storage space. Both put the wardrobe at the back of the living room. If you prefer a wardrobe with full hanging height behind the cab, you will have to think about one of the conversion kits which are offered by some firms. I show you the plan of one of them — Syro 1. To buy a kit is the cheapest way to get a motorcaravan.

The kit comes with all necessary parts and pieces, elevating roof, frig, cooker, heater and so on. For building the furniture, you get the wood in the right dimensions. You have to put all together and fit the parts in the van (even the elevating roof). The conversion as shown in the plans will cost about DM4370 (£1100). If you would like to reduce the work to be done to the fitting of the pre-fabricated parts of the furniture, then you pay about DM5070, or £1260. The easiest way is to have the conversion done by Syro. This would cost about DM6380, or £1600.

Now it is up to you!

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R-J Thurn also spotted at Essen . . . **Laverda's 'Paguro' — a real motorcaravan on a small Citroen van**

On your holidays in France, you certainly saw a lot of small Citroen 2 CV delivery vans. Maybe you even saw some of them with curtains at the rear windows and a kind of rudimentary conversion. But did you ever believe it would be possible to convert such a van to a real motorcaravan?

Laverda, an Italian converter, did it. The result is the Paguro, which I saw at the Essen Caravan Fair.

The base vehicle is the Citroen Dyane. This is the younger sister of the old and well known Citroen 2CV. It has the same mechanics but a slightly modified body.

At the beginning of its life, 40 years ago, the 2CV was one of the few cars which were designed and developed according to precise specifications, namely (1) to transport four people (2) with baggage (3) at a moderate speed (4) at the lowest possible cost and (5) protected from wind and weather. These specifications are still valid, maybe number 5 only partly, owing to the textile roof and so on. I know, for I have my third small Citroen now, after a 2CV with 16 hp and an Ami 6 with 23 hp, now a Dyane with 423cc engine and 23 hp. For the van and the motorcaravan they use the bigger engine with 602cc and 31 hp, which drives — with its air cooled two cylinders — the front wheels.

Laverda fits a body of styrofoam sandwich panels which is higher, longer but

only a fraction wider than the original van body. Overall, the Paguro is 4.62m (15ft 4in) long, 2.48m (8ft 3in) high and 1.7m (5ft 8in) broad. The body is not very heavy. The Paguro weighs (without passengers) 890 kg (my Dyane being 610 kg).

As soon as you enter the body through a door on the righthand side behind the rear wheels you will forget that you are (only) in a small Citroen. Even taller persons can stand upright inside the body with its height of 1.80m (6ft), length of 3.0m (10ft) and width of 1.5m (5ft).

To the left of the door is a long wardrobe. Opposite the door, the cooker and sink are fastened to the wall; they don't reach to the floor — we will see why, later on. Water flows through an electric pump from a freshwater tank in stainless steel which holds 38 l (8+ gallons) and can be filled from the outside. In a separate compartment stand two 5 kg gas bottles. Under the roof, above the kitchen, is a small open shelf.

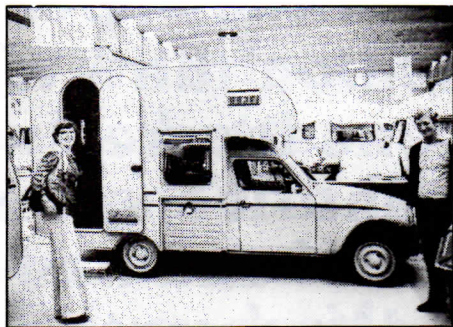
Under the window on the left side is a bench. At the other side, a table is hinged to the wall of the caravan. Three persons can travel in the Paguro, one on the bench in the rear, two in the cab. Therefore, there must be three beds too.

One bed is made by taking off the backrest of the bench and fitting it flat at the end of the bench. It reaches under the cooker-sink-combination. That is the reason why the kitchen unit does not stand on the floor. At the sidewalls,

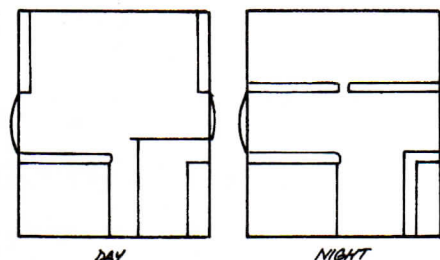
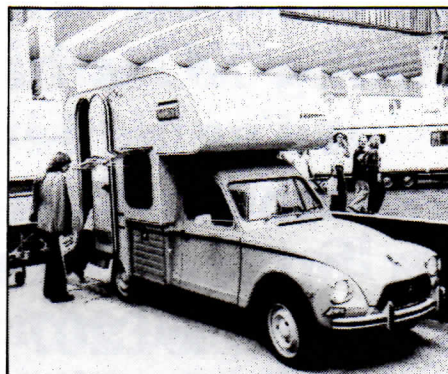
above the windows, two boards with mattresses are hinged. Pulled down, they meet in the middle and form an extension of the alcove, now offering sleeping room for two persons (1.90m x 1.50m — 6ft 4in x 5ft).

As always when I see an Italian motorcaravan, I am delighted by the ingenuity, the unusual but ingenious solutions the Italians find for the usual questions — namely, how to make the best use of the restricted space in a small motorcaravan. Partly this is the colours they use. No mock-up wood, no copying of domestic furniture, but clear design and colours, mostly blue in the Paguro.

Although, in my opinion, the Paguro is worth its price of DM22 800 (£5700), I do not expect it to sell well in Germany. Compared with a Volkswagen-bus, it is too expensive. The difference in insurance premiums (depending on hp) and annual tax (depending upon capacity of the engine) would be about £65—£90 in the year. I don't think there would be a great difference in petrol consumption, if you keep to the same top speed with both vehicles, owing to the great overall height of the Paguro. The Citroen van with its small engine will need a body with a big elevating roof, a body where the whole roof can be elevated, as the Americans use on their smaller pick-ups (where engines have about ten times the power of the Citroen Dyane).



Hors de France, via Italy nach Germany:
Laverda Paguro on Citroen Dyane.
(Photo: R-J Thurn)



Schematic elevations — day and night —
Laverda Paguro.

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