

BUYERS GUIDE

Autohomes (UK) Open Weekend, Poole, Dorset — a report

by Peter Vaughan



Autohomes' Open Weekend 1985 at Poole.



Striking in silver, with matching roof, the new Midihome.



Bedford Midihome is a 1.8 litre 5 speed, 2 berth high top.



Midi cab shows Japanese design origins.



Plush seating — Midihome side dinette, viewed through sliding side door.



View forwards through rear tailgate, showing the kitchen in Midihome.

The 'Silver Dream Machine' banner heralded the arrival of Autohomes' latest, as Britain's reputedly biggest motorhome manufacturer opened its doors to the public. This was the company's second Open Weekend with the complete Autohomes' range on display, as well as secondhand models from their leading dealers.

The Silver Dream Machine, however, seemed to be the centre of attraction — not surprisingly, as the new model follows Autohomes' recent success stories in the form of Excalibur, Camelot and Merlin and also marks the introduction of the first Bedford Midi motorcaravan.

No motorcaravan demonstrator was available for the Midi but I did take the opportunity to try an example of the panel van. Although only a brief trial, my impression of the Midi was quite favourable, and the quiet smoothness — in an unlined van! — at 60 mph — seemed particularly good. The Midi feels very much like a Japanese commercial, with its column change, fly-off handbrake and fully-forward control layout, but this is hardly surprising remembering that the design is based on an Isuzu. The steering, too, reminded one of Toyota, Mazda, et-al, being light (usefully so when parking) but a touch lacking in 'feel' and sensitivity when travelling at main road speeds. The cab is quite pleasantly equipped and the seating comfortable but the cab does feel rather cramped in comparison with that popular German chassis.

As a motorcaravan, Midihome (after names like Camelot and Excalibur, perhaps we might have expected something more inspiring) is one that sets a good impression. Immediately, glancing into the interior, it seems plushly appointed. Behind the cab which, unusually, remains as only a driving room, there is a side dinette with side door opposite. To the rear of the dinette is an 'L' shaped kitchen unit with a

small cupboard and wardrobe opposite. With the aid of wardrobe door and a roller blind, the rear can be shut off for changing or use as a loo area. The quality of materials used looks high and the interior comfortable, but space is not a strong point, particularly when considering the Renault and Talbot based opposition. Midihome can, perhaps, look to the Volks as its main opposition and its compact dimensions, good looks (especially in the optional extra silver paintwork of the prototype) and smart furnishings will undoubtedly win it friends. Price of Autohomes' 2 berth high top Midi is £11 299.

Autohomes' team have not forgotten their existing range in the meantime, however, and their VW models have gained valuable improvements. The rising roof Kamper now has a built-in deflector in front of the roof rack to cut out wind noise, while the Kameo and Karisma gain a neater shape roof (just a little tidier at the rear). Other improvements include a larger 'fridge and high-level opening windows in high top models, and all gain lighter coloured furniture, new wheel trims and new upholstery. The changes are not drastic but show the Dorset's firm commitment to an ever-better product.

The Open Weekend was, apparently, an even greater success than last year, thanks to Autohomes' efforts and those of the participating dealers — Bromley Motor Caravans, Avon Motor Caravans, Hampshire and Dorset Motor Caravans, Southern Cross Campers, Berkshire Motor Caravan and Leisure Centre, G Wells & Sons, Bowers and Three Counties — and the supporting chassis manufacturers: VW/Audi, Peugeot/Talbot and Bedford.

Certainly, it was a very good weekend for those who visited to eye Autohomes' products, and how and where they are made.

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VW Audi supported the Open Weekend and brought this Quattro rally car.



Kamper's revised roof with small 'spoiler' in front of roof rack.



Interior of latest Karisma with bigger refrigerator and new colourings.



Only Autohomes insulate a panel van this thoroughly (or so they claim) — Talbot Camelot under construction.