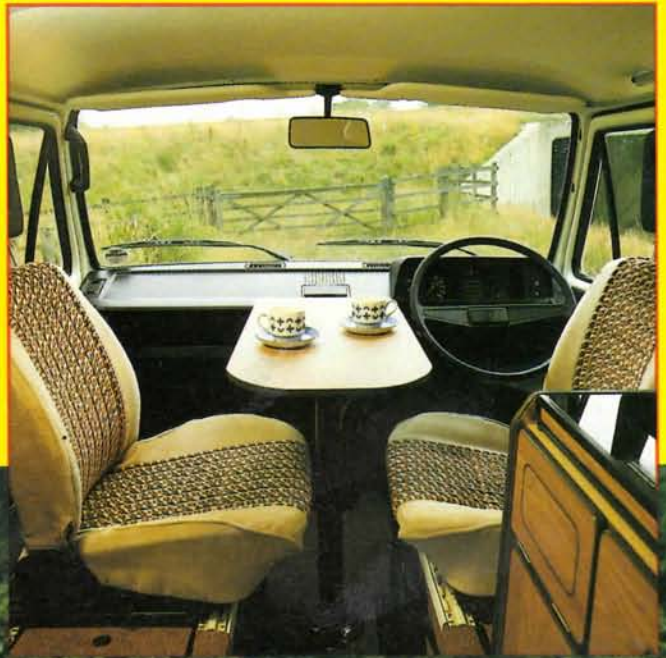


AUTOHOMES

KOMET

Latest high-top in the Autohomes "K" series offers four berths inside VW's Transporter base vehicle



STAR TEST



With the introduction of the Komet which we test this month, leading manufacturer Autohomes has filled the gap in their Volkswagen-based K range. Until now the range has comprised the four-berth elevating roof Kamper conversion backed up by Kameo and Karisma, two-berth high-top models differing only in trim and equipment specification. The Komet is a full four-berth layout in a high-top shell and features many of the furniture units from the Kameo.

Price-wise the Komet slots neatly in between Kameo and Karisma at a total including car tax and VAT of £11,769. Our test model was fitted with the optional extra 78bhp engine, which adds a further £276.52 over the standard 60bhp water-cooled unit. Both the 112bhp engine and a turbo-diesel option are available, together with a five-speed gearbox or automatic transmission, and the revolutionary syncro four-wheel drive, presenting the buyer with a wide choice of options.

To accommodate the four-berth layout, the Komet has an entirely new moulded GRP high-top roof, styled by designer Roger Tucker. Front profile is similar to the two-berth roof but the height is continued right through to the rear to provide the length for the high-level double bed. A roof rack is incorporated into the moulding and because this is somewhat higher from the ground than on the two-berth models a stainless steel rear ladder is a standard fitting.

In construction at the Autohomes factory, the basic VW Transporter has its central roof section removed, leaving in place the roof stiffening rib, and the high-top moulding is bonded into place. All wall cavities are filled with glass fibre mat for insulation and the inter-

ior is then trimmed with a biscuit coloured carpet lining which is attractive and warm to the touch. The whole interior floor, including the cab, is covered with a good quality rubber-backed carpet in a red and brown fleck.

Noise level on the road is commendably low except when the engine is working really hard. The flat-four 78bhp engine provides a lively performance, accelerating from 0-30mph in 6.1sec and to 40mph in 9.7sec. Volkswagen devotees will be familiar with the way engine revolutions are governed, power just ceasing abruptly when the limit is reached. This can be embarrassing in the middle of an overtaking manoeuvre, but the driver soon learns to anticipate the limit and change up. Mid-range acceleration is fair, with 30-50mph in third gear taking 9.7 sec.

Easy to drive

All the controls are light and the brakes are powerful. The floor-mounted gearshift is reasonably positive bearing in mind the length of the linkage to the rear-mounted transmission. Access to the engine involves removal of part of the bed base and some storage drawers, which could be inconvenient in the event of a roadside breakdown, but access to the oil filler and dipstick is provided through a flap behind the rear number plate.

The petrol engines are designed to run on two-star fuel as an aid to their already legendary economy. Our test model, which was little more than run-in, achieved a consumption of 28.4mpg over a typical test route, including normal single-carriageway main roads and motorways on which we cruised at speeds in the upper 60s. It

would not be unreasonable to expect around 30mpg if some restraint was used.

Interior layout is basically simple, but features some novel ideas. Like the other Autohomes VW conversions, all the fixed units are on the offside behind the driving seat, with a transverse seat just behind the nearside side loading door. This arrangement leaves generous floor space mostly with a full 6ft 7in headroom, but necessitates the use of two tables to provide adequate dining space for four people.

The larger of the tables measures 32 x 20in and uses a single tubular metal leg. On the test prototype it was very unstable, but subsequent investigation showed this to be due to temporary fixings. Models off the line will have screws going right through to the metal floor. Even so, we would have preferred a hook-on table with a rail on the front of the storage unit and a single folding leg. We felt this would give equal dining space and easier access, as well as the possibility of it being used with a duplicate rail outside under an awning.

The smaller table measures 31½ x 16in and fits between the cab seats, both of which swivel on special mountings. This table also has a single tubular leg but it is offset towards one end and the other rests on the dashboard above the radio housing. This table is thoroughly secure in use. The seat swivels are easy to operate, although the driver's seat base fouls the handbrake lever unless the latter is released, not perhaps the ideal arrangement if one is on a sloping site. The cab seats are standard VW units trimmed by Autohomes to match the dinette upholstery.

The kitchen is a minor masterpiece in the restricted confines of a VW Transporter base vehicle and offers more than many conversions in larger

vehicles. A two-ring and grill Spinflo hob is set under a hinged glass lid alongside a large matching sink bowl. A swivelling spout supplies cold water to the sink, controlled by a conveniently located foot switch. The 12-gallon tank is located below the dinette seat and a Zig water level gauge is positioned above the kitchen where it is easily seen.

Alongside the main sink is a 16 x 9in shallow drainer sink with a linked-in waste outlet. The two sinks have separate hinged lids with durable melamine work surfaces. A cutlery drawer is centrally positioned in the kitchen unit above the electronic ignition, three-way operation Electrolux 212 fridge, and a large shelved cupboard. Storage for five cups, saucers and plates is provided in a pull-out rack which slides unobtrusively away into the luton roof over the driver's head. Matching it on the other side is a cocktail cabinet with clips for three bottles and space for a good supply of glasses.

Cupboard space

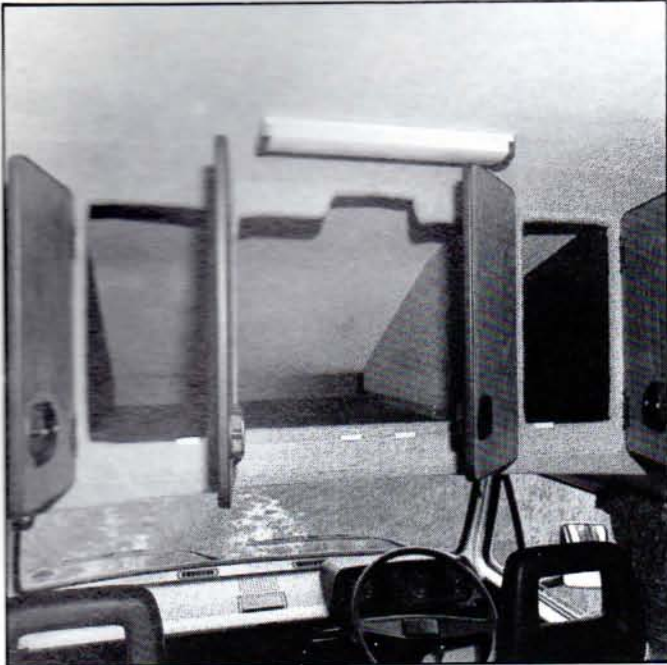
Between these racks are three separate cupboards, two small and one large. They offer plenty of storage space, the large one measuring 30 x 16in in area and with a height ranging from 15in to 3in. The combination adds up to a really imaginative use of the luton roof space, which in some other high-top models tends to be squandered.

The storage unit beside the dinette seats has two sliding doors with inset handles that are also ventilators. We found the spring catches on the doors a little strong, especially since only fingertips can be used to open them. The lockers measure 17 x 13in and are 15in deep. Below them is a locker specially designed to accept a Porta Potti 235 (an optional



Fixed ladder gives access to rear roof rack

STAR TEST



Lots of storage in the high-top roof over the cab



Kitchen is a masterpiece of design and space utilisation

extra) with the service gas bottle, a Camping Gaz 907, located behind it. The toilet must be used either in the centre of the floor space or in a separate toilet tent, but this is the price you pay for compact size on the road.

In the top of the storage unit, hinged lids reveal a vanity box with a mirror and a recess containing a plastic-covered wire basket that could retain a rubbish bag. Lifting the wire basket out of the recess exposes yet a deeper well which can hold a spare 907 gas cylinder.

Every inch of available storage space is used and there are two shallow roof lockers and a handy cubby hole for odds and ends. There is also what amounts to a secret locker almost entirely hidden under the passenger seat and only accessible with the seat reversed. This could be particularly useful for cameras or other valuables which can attract thieves if left visible.

Accessible from outside the vehicle when the tailgate is

raised are two very large drawers over the engine compartment. These measure 24 x 22in with a depth of 3in. Although they are close to the engine, they are in no way subject to dirt or fumes. Access is also possible from inside the vehicle by lifting the rear mattress and the bed baseboards.

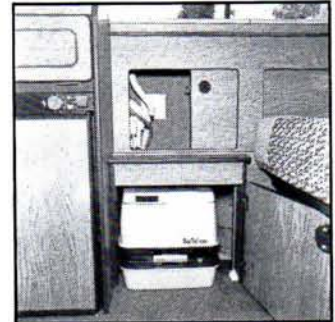
Completing the storage space is a hanging wardrobe in the offside rear corner. Measuring 25 x 11in with a hanging depth of 35in, this is reasonable for a family's needs on holiday. Most of the interior of the wardrobe is lined and the small area of window where condensation might form and mark the clothes is covered by a curtain.

Practical storage

If we have dealt at some length with the storage capabilities of the Komet it is because they are so versatile and offer far more than one might reasonably expect. What is more, it is convenient storage, mostly easily accessible and practical in use.

When bedtime comes around the conversion of the dinette to a double bed measuring 6ft 1in x 4ft is simple. The seat mattress pulls upwards and forwards and a spring clip releases the backrest, which hinges flat to line up with the third section of mattress resting over the engine cover. The forward extension of the seat is well supported on a ledge on the storage unit and a folding leg. The bed is very secure and the two joins in the mattress are hardly noticeable to a sleeper. An important point to some, now that duvets seem to be gaining in popularity over sleeping bags, is that a convention bottom sheet can be tucked in round most of the bed.

The upper bed is formed by pulling forward a sliding platform which then almost completely covers the standing headroom section, leaving a gap of just 15in. Bolts prevent the platform from sliding forward when on the road and also locate it when the bed is in use. Again the bed comprises three



Special locker will house a Porta Potti 235



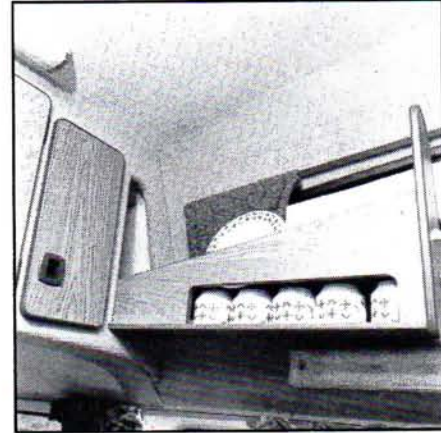
Mains and 12v sockets, plus water level gauge



Double bed 'downstairs' makes up easily



Two large drawers provide extra storage



Clever crockery storage in a pull-out rack

www.vwT25camper.info - a useful website for owners and enthusiasts of VW T25 / T3 / Vanagon Campervans

STAR TEST

mattress sections and measures 6ft x 4ft.

Access at the forward end is well-nigh impossible. The technique is to push the sliding section right to the forward end against the luton section. This leaves the gap in the centre of the bed where the ledge over the toilet cupboard, and the worktops, are designed with sufficient strength to act as steps. Once the occupants are in place, the sliding platform can be closed up to the rest of the bed and bolted in place.

The bed is comfortable enough, but is not for claustrophobes: clearance between the ceiling and the mattress is a maximum of 17in, with just 11in from the knees downwards. However, it is not dark or airless. Apart from the gap at the front,

there are two small opening side windows (with curtains) and a roof-light for ventilation. Children will probably find the roof area great fun, but we are doubtful about the feasibility of four adults using the Komet.

Privacy

Curtains are generously cut and extend right round the cab windows. Pads of Velcro are located at strategic points to keep the curtains close to the vehicle sides and ensure privacy. In the lower area, only the cab windows and one sliding window on the offside open and it is possible that the caravan, shut up for the night, could be a little oppressive in a really hot climate.

Lighting is quite well taken

Worktop 'steps' enable occupants to climb 'upstairs'

care of. In addition to the standard vehicle courtesy lights in the cab and by the side door, Autohomes have provided a fluorescent light in the high-top, and another over the kitchen. A 10Watt tungsten reading lamp is perfectly placed above the dinette, where it can also be reached comfortably from the bed.

We were impressed with the Komet. In many ways it epitomises what a motor caravan should be, an easy-to-drive vehicle with lively performance coupled to sensible economy, and a living area which demands no unreasonable compromises for use as family holiday accommodation. □



AUTOHOMES VOLKSWAGEN KOMET

£11,769

Converter

Autohomes (UK) Ltd, 59 Old Wareham Road, Poole, Dorset BH17 7NJ

☎ 0202 731711

BODY

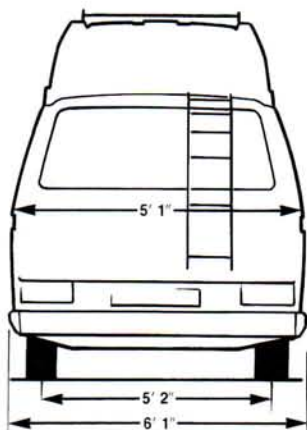
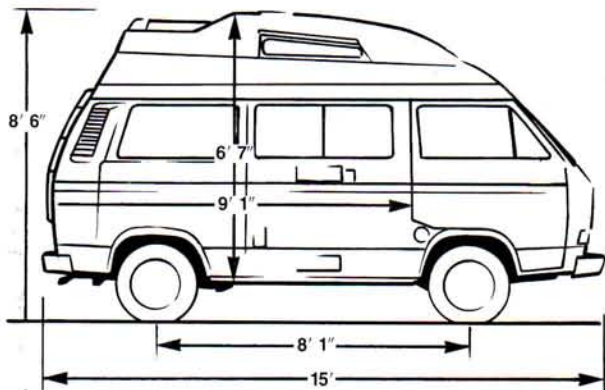
Type: high-top.

Berths: two adults, two children.

Construction: Transporter van with GRP-moulded high-top.

Insulation: glass fibre mat and carpet type interior lining.

Windows: standard toughened glass on body including cab.



Tinted acrylic in roof moulding.

Roof-lights: one, central in moulding.

Doors: sliding side door, rear tailgate.

INTERIOR

Toilet room: no.

Gas system: storage for two Camping Gaz 907 cylinders, one in service one spare. In-line isolator taps for hotplate and fridge.

Electrical system: mains 16amp inlet, residual current circuit breaker, two 13-amp socket outlets; 12v non-reversible socket, water tank gauge.

Lighting: two 13-Watt fluorescent lights, one 10-Watt spotlight, cab and rear compartment courtesy lights.

Standard equipment includes: Electrolux RM212 fridge with electronic ignition (gas/12v/mains operation). Spinflo vitreous enamel two-ring hotplate/grill, twin sinks. 12-gal water tank, Whale submersible electric pump.

Factory-fitted options: built-in tv £120.75, melamine crockery £39.10, 12v electrical control panel with second battery £195.61, blown-air heating system £392.44, water heater £437.11, waste water tank £99.01, Porta Potti toilet £50.60, child's cab bunk £118.34, flyscreen for sliding window £21.73, three-point rear seat belts each £60.37.

BASE VEHICLE

Model: Volkswagen Transporter.

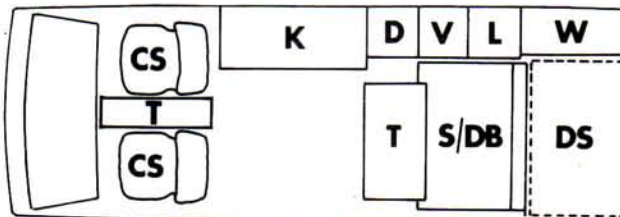
Engine: 1913cc 4cyl horizontally opposed, water cooled. Max power 60bhp at 3700rpm, max torque 102lb.ft at 2200rpm.

Transmission: four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive.

Suspension: front independent, coil springs with upper and lower wishbones, anti-roll bar, telescopic shock absorbers; rear independent trailing arm, coil springs, telescopic shock absorbers.

Factory-fitted options: 1.9 litre 78bhp engine £276.52, 2.1 litre 112bhp engine £845.25, 1.6 litre 50bhp diesel engine £781.25, 1.6 litre turbo diesel 70bhp engine £1324.63, automatic transmission £619.45, five-speed gearbox £231.84, 78bhp engine plus syncro 4x4 drive £4221.42.

Supplier: VAG (UK) Ltd, Yeomans Drive, Blakelands, Milton Keynes MK14 4AN. ☎ 0908 679121.



KEY: CS cab seat, K kitchen, D separate drainer, V vanity unit, L locker storage, W wardrobe, DS drawer storage, S/DB settee seat/double bed, T table