

VW *safer* **motoring**

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT VOLKSWAGEN-AUDI MAGAZINE

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15 VW-based models on offer

Chris Burlace at the 1984 Caravan Show

More exhibitors, more models, more choice, and a price span from under £5,000 to over £26,500 — that was the encouraging picture presented by the 1984 Caravan Show. And for the Volkswagen enthusiast at Earls Court no less than 15 basic models were on parade — more, if the permutations of engine, gearbox, roof and major extras are taken into account.

Hightop models are very much in vogue, and there were two such new VW conversions vying for attention. Auto-Sleepers had an all-new conversion (although with a conventional side kitchen layout) boasting a sleek, William Towns-designed roof and with the usual immaculate light oak cabinetwork and superb trim which are the hallmark of the company. At £10,699 it was just over £400 more expensive than the competing model from Devon Conversions, although that retains the old Moonraker interior.

Roofs were news on the Devon stand with the big AeroSpace straight-lift roof now available in three versions — with plain plasticised fabric sides, insulated flexible sides or clip-in plywood panels inside the conventional roofskirt to give the benefits of a solid-sided roof.

Insulated, solid-panel roofs are gaining in popularity and Richard Holdsworth was another exhibitor launching a new design. Shown alongside his VW Variety model, itself a Motor Caravan of the Year award winner earlier in '84, his VW Villa Mk 2 carried off the Caravan Industry award for best elevating roof model at the Show.

Autohomes had a three-model line-up: Kamper, Karisma and Kameo. The Kamper, with solid-type elevating roof, has been a best seller and currently starts at £10,587. The hightop Karisma, a luxuriously equipped 2-berth, costs from £10,587. The hightop Karisma, a luxuriously equipped 2-berth, costs from £10,862, but, stripped of its 'goodies' such as water heater and built-in TV, the model becomes the Kameo, and at £9,995 with the 60bhp engine, the cheapest hightop Transporter-based model.

Offering the widest range of VW motor caravans were Diamond R.V. with five models. The Popular, in fixed-roof form, is the cheapest VW around, but nevertheless adequately fitted and equipped, and costs just £9,153. At the other extreme the Autocruiser, with VW's engine and gearbox extra options, Diamond's Elite package of add-on GRP mouldings to enhance its looks, and every extra on the list, would set you back around £15,000. For a few hundred

more you could buy the Autobahn on the LT31 lwb, a very comprehensively kitted-out luxury 'van and a refined performer with the 2.4-litre, 6-cylinder engine which now powers the LT range.

Completing the VW offerings was the long-running Xplorer model by Spacemaker with the gigantic side-lifting roof. Interest on this stand, however, centred on the range of Colt L300 conversions, now improved by the availability of a lwb version of the base vehicle and offered with the choice of the big Spacemaker roof or a new solid-sided roof.

Competition for the VW-based models at Earls Court this year came mainly from conversions of the Renault Traffic, Ford's Transit, which is being made available to motor caravan manufacturers with the 2-litre engine and an 'extras package' at a very keen price, and the Talbot Express. Holdsworth's Renault Romance, with the new, solid-sided roof was priced from £9,780 and a new hightop version, with L-plan seating layout and a rear kitchen/toilet area which can be closed off by a folding partition, had a £10,500 price tag. Auto-Sleepers' Renault models, elevating roof and two hightop versions, ranged from £9,453 up to £10,499 for a model with shower compartment and a very full spec.

Holdsworth's Ford easily had the edge on price at under £9,000. Devon's new 'Dawn' model (claimed to be their first 'British van-based model, but have they forgotten the Transit model 'launched' on their stand at the '78 Motor Show?) had an unusual rear dinette layout, is intended just as a 2-berth and will cost £9,508. The Ford model re-introduced to the Auto-Sleepers line-up costs £9,725.



Bird's eye view of Holdsworth stand with the VW Variety, joint Motor Caravan of the Year, hiding the Villa model with new elevating roof.



Holdsworths Villa Mk II, with new solid-sided elevating roof, won the Caravan Industry award for best elevating model at the Show.

Among the several Express/Ducato offerings, the Autohomes Camelot deserves first mention, this very cleverly laid out and well equipped model adding the Caravan Industry award for best hightop to its (shared) Motor Caravan of the Year title won earlier in 1984. It sneaks in at just £7 short of the £11,000 mark. Competing models from Auto-Sleepers and Holdsworth run from around £9,700 to nearly £12,000, with a wide choice of specifications.

New models from GT Motorised of Beverley added to the choice at the Show. The Sarasota hightop, nicely furnished and well equipped, was priced at just on £10,600, while the Bonita, a small coachbuilt model, was remarkably cheap at £9,995, though not surprisingly very simply styled and fitted at that price.

Most notable among new coachbuilt 'vans were Autohomes' Merlin and the Auto-Sleepers Talisman, both on Talbot Express. The Merlin,

with a sandwich construction body similar to that of the Company's top selling Excalibur model, has a versatile front dinette seating arrangement, superb centre kitchen, corner toilet room and a dressing table at the rear.

Innovation, a stylish interior and a keen price of £12,995 won for the Merlin the coachbuilt award of the Caravan Industry. The new Auto-Sleeper, using an enlarged version of the sleek GRP body designed by William Towns (best known as designer of the Aston Martin Lagonda) was, in my view, the best looking motor caravan at the Show and just under the £14,000 mark.

For those short of cash the cheapest 'vans in the Show were the little coachbuilt demountables on the Polish FSO pick-up, with 1481 cc 80 bhp engines and a 5-speed gearbox option. At £4,995 under-standably basic, they nevertheless had all the motor caravanning essentials and are a sensible initiative by Madisons Motor Caravans at a time of out-of-reach prices for so many would-be buyers.

At the other end of the price range the 'money's no object' stars of the Show were Auto-Trail's new giant Chieftain on a Mercedes 307D with extended chassis, a 25-footer with every conceivable luxury; and a new range of A-class motorhomes (built with integral cab and caravan body) from Italy, the Arca Europas, from around £20,000 and imported by Hayes Leisure of Darlestone.



Left: Kitchen unit and tiny shower/toilet cubicle in Diamond's VW Autocruiser. Right: Diamond's Popular, introduced in the summer as a basic, under £9000, VW. As shown with elevating roof and extras such as rear head restraints and seatbelts now £9703.