

Following last month's test report-AN OWNER ASSESSMENT
Another dream come true-or how we came to buy the
DIAMOND RV AUTOCRUISER *by Janet and Paul Chaplin*



This is an account of how we found our ideal motorcaravan at last.

In 1976 we became hooked on motorcaravanning when we bought a five-year-old Bedford CF Dormobile Deauville. This was a rising roof conversion with seven forward-facing seats, double bed and side loading door. The intention was to keep her for two to three years and then buy something newer. In the event, four trips to Switzerland, one to Scotland, two to the Lake District, many other journeys and seven years later we still had not found a replacement which came up to our specification.

John Hunt has been saying for some time that there is a demand for a well equipped motorcaravan for two and we heartily agree with him.

We particularly wanted a compact van, with forward-facing rear seats for occasional passengers, a side door and above all a toilet compartment. We had played around with endless bits of paper out to scale to see if we could come up with something ourselves. We soon realised it is a difficult job, best left to the professionals who have the expertise and opportunity to prototype.

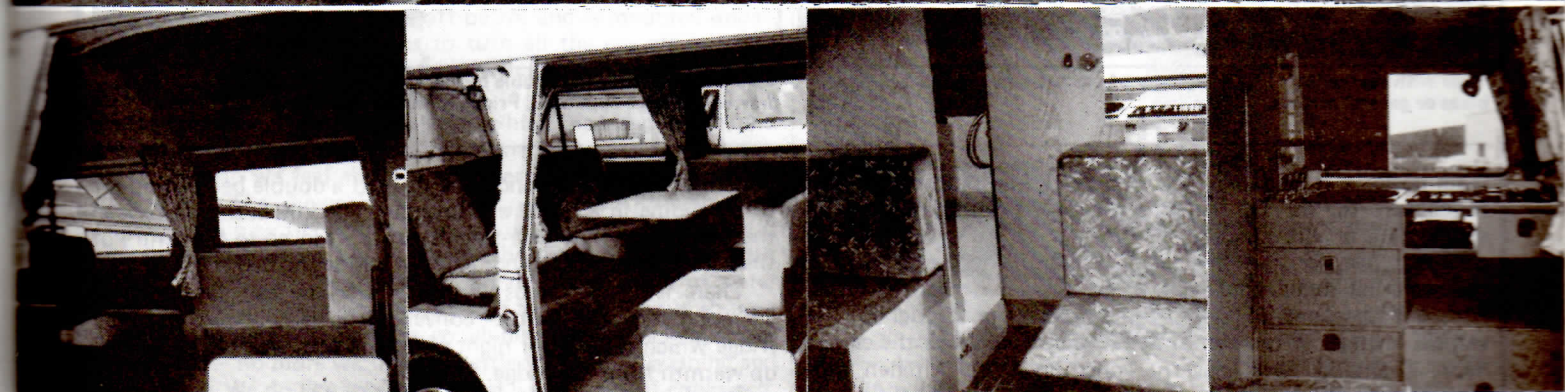
There can't be many production models we haven't seen at some time or other, either at the Motorcaravan Show at Brands

Hatch, the Caravan Camping Holiday Show at Earls Court, visiting showrooms or even prowling round car parks but nothing really excited us.

In the spring of this year, feeling that the time had really come to replace the Bedford, we almost succumbed to the unthinkable — buying a bigger car and a towing caravan! As it happened, in the nick of time I prevailed upon my wife to go to one more show — The Thames Valley Caravan & Camping Show at Windsor, the temptation being that there would be lots of touring caravans there. We had had quite a good look round, plodding through the mud when someone suggested we should visit the Travelworld Display. Amongst the bigger models stood the Diamond Autocruiser on the VW Transporter. It was causing considerable interest and we found ourselves agreeing with many fellow motorcaravanners that here at last was something we had been looking for. Personally we had always dismissed the new VW Transporter on the grounds that the engine deck dictated the layout, that a toilet compartment was not possible and that the roof bow interfered with head room. Diamond had changed all that!

Somehow we always seem to end up doing things a little differently, and in this case we managed to purchase through a

The All New AUTOCRUISER



LOUNGE AREA

DINETTE

SHOWER/TOILET

REAR GALLEY

- ★ TWO SINGLE BEDS WITH WALK THROUGH ★ Split Charging ★ Mains input
- ★ 3-way Fridge ★ Hot Water System ★ Shower ★ Toilet ★ Roof rack ★ Full insulation
- ★ Fully lined ★ Waste Tanks ★ Interior Decor choice ★ Options

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DIAMOND RV

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The first radical rethink of a VW Design for 15 years. That is what is being said about the Autocruiser. We think you will like it.

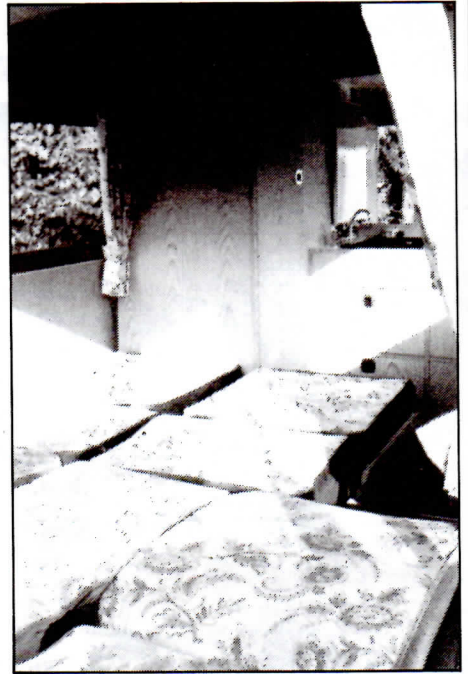
DIAMOND VW AUTOCRUISER



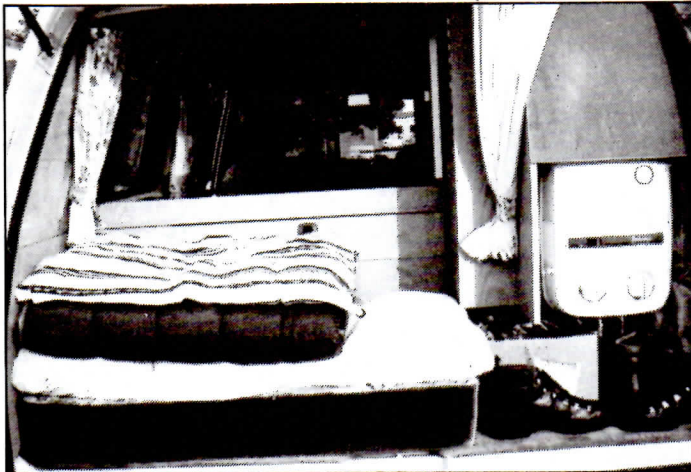
Details of toilet compartment. Note alcove for storing toilet when taking a shower.



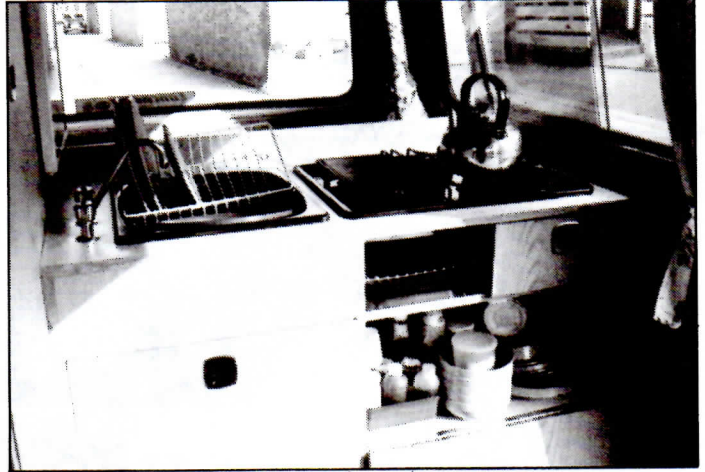
View from nearside door to rear. Upright backs of passenger seats only complaint. Note water filler to side of door.



Access is still possible to galley and toilet compartment with bed down.



View with rear tailgate lifted — plenty of storage space for bedding, bikes or general clobber.



View of galley showing double burner hob with hotplate and grill, cutlery drawer and large cupboard. Fridge is on left above sink.

main dealer a second-hand VW minibus which Diamond agreed to convert for us. This gave us the added bonus of having a sliding door on either side of the van.

The conversion is a two-berth, high top, four seater, with a shower/toilet compartment. The roof bow has been modified with VW components giving ample head room throughout the vehicle. Instead of the conventional double bed over the engine deck, Diamond have cleverly constructed the kitchen unit including a three-way fridge over the engine deck, with a toilet/shower compartment complete with extractor fan behind the rear passenger seat. This still leaves an enormous storage space over the engine behind the kitchen unit. We put our bedding here; at the show Diamond stowed a folding bicycle. Rearwards of the fridge is a wardrobe accessible either by leaning over the sink or from the rear of the van. The gas water heater is fixed to the rear side of the wardrobe and is lit from the back of the vehicle. Ventilation is by means of a skylight.

There are storage lockers beneath the rear passenger seats. The right hand one is ventilated and houses the Camping Gaz bottles with plenty of room for tools, spares and chemical toilet fluid. The other seat is fixed to runners across the van where it can be secured either in the middle or against the door.

The single beds are made up by using the backs of the passengers' seats and fully reclining the driver's and front passenger's seats. In response to our request the ever-helpful and

patient chaps at Diamond have devised a double bed option for us by sliding in a board and dropping an extra cushion between the front seats. The near-side rear seat is moved to the centre of the van. There is still standing room beside the bed.

There is an enormous cupboard over the cab, in the novel Diamond roof and another convenient little cupboard over the fridge which is ideal for night clothes in cool weather as it picks up warmth from the fridge.

The table is stored under a useful shelf over the rear of the vehicle, which makes extra surface space when cooking or washing.

The caravan electrics are taken care of by a Zig CF8 unit, which allows a second battery to be charged from the van's alternator. The interior lights, water pump and extractor fan are fused through the unit. Alternatively, these systems can be operated from the mains — a luxury we have yet to try out. I reconnected the van's own interior lamp and a cigarette lighter/socket (for a 12v vacuum cleaner) to the second battery. When this lamp started to go dim I realised there must be a fault. This turned out to be a failure of a connector to the fuse holder which connects the second battery to the Zig unit. If I had read the instructions to the Zig unit properly this fault would have been discovered much earlier!

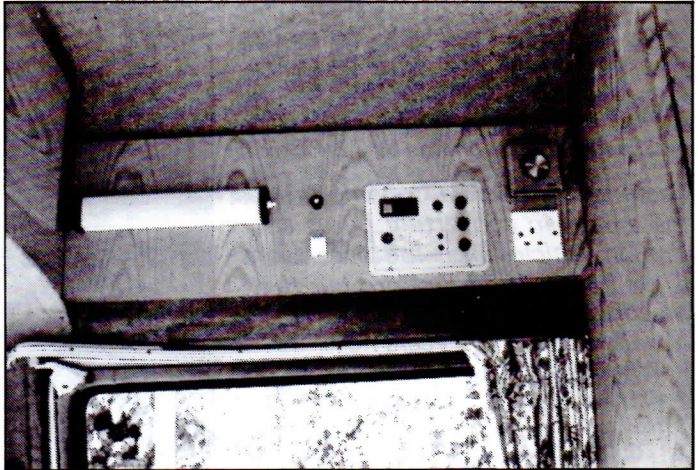
We still can't help marvelling at the sheer ingenuity of the layout and fittings (remembering all our own attempts at

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View towards front of van, showing space to stand beside the bed. Unlike the editor, we prefer the idea of using space in the cab.



Neat control panel over offside door: Zig unit, thermostat, mains socket, 12v socket, water pump switch and one of the two fluorescent lights.

design!). Everything is easily accessible either with the table up or the beds down. There is plenty of room for everything we want to take such as folding chairs, sun bed, and bedding. Lack of storage space was what was putting us off some other recent designs.

There are two twelve gallon underfloor tanks, one for fresh water the other for grey water. We found filling and emptying the respective tanks proved easy using hoses and connectors. The fresh water hose, after it has been drained, is coiled up and slid over the engine deck from inside the kitchen cupboard. The grey water hose lives in the pan of the spare wheel.

The finish of the interior is excellent. Soft carpeting is laid to the cab and the bases of the cab seats and living area. The sides of the van are trimmed in beige velour to match the carpet and furnishings whilst the door panels and roof are lined with a matching foam-backed material. The van is lined with insulating material and late summer proved the worth of such treatment as the van was bearable to enter after being in the sun all day.

The curtains and upholstery are in beautiful fabrics untypical for a motorcaravan although you can choose more conventional designs. The curtains slide easily and are a generous cut, especially round the windscreen.

Whilst specifying our requirements we decided to invest in an Eberspächer heater. This runs off petrol and is mounted underneath the van. This allows us to turn all the gas off at night. It proved very useful in Yorkshire in June, but fortunately has been redundant since. We expect it to allow us to extend the season, together with the insulation which Diamond install, and the curtain linings which my wife has made.

So how do we feel about the conversion since we have been using her? The shower/toilet is a big success. Although some large people may find it too cramped, we and our visitors find it totally adequate. Initially I thought the shower would be a bit of a gimmick, but I was proved wrong. The quantity of water used is about 2 gallons. It is marvellous to have a shower straight after a long walk. In fact we concluded the water heater was wonderful — no more waiting for kettles to boil for washing and washing up. We do like the feeling that we can be self-contained. We asked Diamond to hinge the toilet door on the left and when hooked open it makes a 'washbasin corner' of the sink — nice not to have to draw all the curtains for a wash.

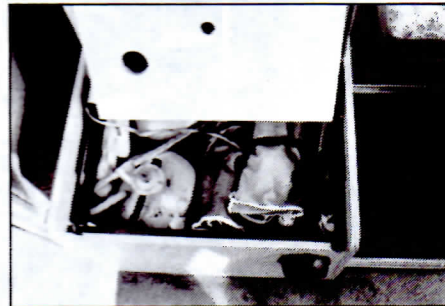
The kitchen is easy to use and the lighting adequate with fluorescent lights in the living area, over the sink, and in the toilet with a spot light at the back.

In fact, the only thing we can find to grumble about is that the rear passenger seats have upright backs. They would be a lot more comfortable with raked backs. We still feel we can modify the cushions to solve this problem.

There is little I need say about the VW Transporter as there has been much said about it in the past. However, as newcomers to the VW we did like the finish and the detailing of the interior. The quiet ride and easy handling are definite virtues of the vehicle. The high top caused no discernible extra noise by comparison to the basic van although she is a little more prone



Original single bed arrangement. See socket for island table leg. Leg is stored above side door.



Vented and fixed locker with ample room for two gas cylinders, tools and general clobber. Note also air intake for Eberspächer (on front panel).

to side winds. A testimony to the vehicle is the fact that my wife is happy to drive it. Those remarks often read in MMM about it handling like a car are quite true.

There are one or two subtle points which we have noticed about the VW, which we hadn't appreciated previously, such as the fact that the brake lights come on even when the ignition is switched off, and that there are expansion chambers to the fuel tank which eliminate overflow when filling or in hot weather.

All in all, considering our lengthy interest, our long search, our attempts at designing-it-ourselves and our near despair earlier in the year, we still can't believe it — but it's true, we have found the motorcaravan of our dreams, and we are well pleased with it.

VW Diamond Autocruiser converted by Diamond RV, Unit 26, Youngs Industrial Estate, Stanbridge Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire.

Prices of new Diamond Autocruisers start at £9895.