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HOLDSWORTH VW VILLA MK3

John Hunt spends a few days with a Volkswagen motorcaravan that's conventional in layout but with some original touches.

The brochure says: *The Villa Mk 2 had more than its fair share of praise — in fact it was voted Best Elevating Roof Motorcaravan at the '85 Earls Court Caravan Show by a panel of judges including . . . John Hunt. How then have the Richard Holdsworth designers improved on this winning motorcaravan?*

In several ways, in fact, for the current range. Most noticeable is the quality of finish. Richard Holdsworth introduced no startling changes for the last Caravan Show but among the improvements most noticeable was the attention paid to detail and the sheer quality of finish. The old brown look has given place to lighter coloured carpet and upholstery and, as a one time woodworker, I admired the light oak finish to the furniture and particularly the hand finished hardwood edgings — so easy to touch up after prolonged use.

I have been studying some of the old colour photographs. The lighter colours certainly give a feeling of spaciousness inside a van that is the same size as its predecessors. Whilst the winning vehicle in 1985 was the Villa's rising roof version, we had the hightop for test. And that roof, thought I, was the least attractive part of the package — from the outside only. I'm amazed that Volkswagen's team could not come up with something a little more graceful.

The high roof is all down to VW. Other converters design their own more streamlined hightops — and are stuck with the roof bows that Volkswagen say it's not safe to remove. So their standing room is limited to about three feet square in the centre of

the caravan. Holdsworth's Villa has full headroom over the entire floor area, because the roof has been engineered by Volkswagen themselves. Once inside, you'll appreciate the air of spaciousness and the ability to walk upright to the cab seats.

Layout

There are the two cab seats at the front and a forward facing settee towards the rear. Between them is a large uncluttered carpeted floor. (An extra seat may be ordered to go there if it's needed.) The kitchen/storage unit runs the entire length of the offside from behind the driver's seat. A flat, cushioned platform behind the rear settee and over the engine allows this motorcaravan to double as an estate car, for lifting the tailgate gives access to a generous luggage area.

Seats/beds

The rear settee makes a pleasant place to travel for there is a good view of the road ahead and through the side windows. (The desirable safety restraint belts are an optional extra.) The two Volkswagen seats in the cab are covered to match the rest of the upholstery. The cab passenger seat is easily swivelled on site to face the rear of the vehicle.

At night, the rear settee 'rocks and rolls' in one movement to become, with the big cushion over the engine deck, a double bed. I liked the simplicity of the German designed mechanism — much better than fiddly bolts or catches found on some other VWs.

HOLDSWORTH VW VILLA MK 3



The bluff front end of the roof is clear in this photograph but, if you don't lift your eyes too high, it's a sleek good looking and no longer nor wider than many a car.



The driving cab has full headroom above the windscreen. The glove locker is open to reveal accessibility of the vehicle fuses. The sloping fascia top is clearly visible.



View from the open side door, showing the comfortable rear settee which can be fitted with restraint belts. The floor of both cab and caravan are carpeted.



The table stands on an island leg (which rocked a bit on its mountings) and is a comfortable dining place for a couple. Fridge is accessible with table erected.



View forwards from above the settee's backrest, showing the neat furniture unit with heat resisting top, carpeted floor and reversed passenger cab seat.



The bed is so easily made by pulling the settee base forward, when the back flattens to line up with the cushion over the engine. Curtains fit well without gaping.

Come morning, it's again a single action to change the bed back to a settee. There are twin adjustable reading lamps at the head of the bed.

The three cushions matched perfectly to provide an absolutely level bed and I found the foam density was just right for a good night's sleep. At breakfast, there is plenty of room for the cook to work and the chauvinist to sit at table awaiting the result of the labours. There is ample space, however, for two to do the washing up, once the table has been stowed in its slot behind the driver's seat.

The test vehicle was uncompromisingly a two berth model. A further double bed is available for the roof space. If that were ordered, it might be as well to specify the second dinette package,

whereby both front seats may be turned inwards to face another and smaller table. The children will enjoy having their own dining room.

Kitchen

The cabinet behind the driver's seat houses combined sink and hob with grill, both concealed by work surfaces which, when hinged up, protect the curtains from flames and splashes. The large Electrolux refrigerator is beneath them, with a door clad to match the rest of the woodwork. This is, of course, the three-way model with electronic ignition which not only ignites the gas for you but immediately supplies reignition if the wind should extinguish the invisible flame. The 'fridge's flue vent is on the outside, just



Kitchen unit with all doors open. Camping Gaz in its slider is bottom left. Raised worktop, upper right, conceals the deep locker with sliding box and cutlery tray.



Close-up of 'fridge and gas compartment. Electronic ignition is the red switch on 'fridge front. Ice box has two-star rating for frozen food. Red gas cocks are above shelf in gas locker.



Close-up of the deep locker at the rear of the kitchen unit. Hinged lid has spring loaded stays. Small cupboard to right (closed) has many potential uses.



View forwards and upwards from the settee, showing curtained and opening roof windows and cupboards above windscreen. Cab seats have head restraints and mirror gives good rearward view.



Wardrobe is behind settee backrest. Control panels are above it and small cupboard is to the side. Two of the four upper rear cupboards are shown.



Lockers beneath the rear settee, showing top of water pump (it's not often troublesome nowadays but as well to have it accessible). Lift front on right gives access to chemical closet.

26 inches from the petrol filler cap. This is enough for safe operation but it would be a foolish driver who pulled into a petrol station with the 'fridge operating on gas — an illegal practice anyway.

Forward of the refrigerator is the ventilated cupboard holding two Camping Gaz bottles. They are mounted on a slider which eases servicing. The drawer and shelf above may be removed if the larger Calor Gas cylinders are preferred. Gas isolation cocks are situated near the top of the cupboard.

On the other side of the refrigerator is another shelved cupboard, the bottom half of which extends some distance towards the rear. The long work surface above hinges upwards to reveal a deep locker fitted with a shallower sliding compartment

and a removable cutlery tray. This arrangement allows accessible storage for tall drinks bottles and much smaller tins.

Storage

In addition to the storage provision in the kitchen unit, there is a wardrobe at the rear offside corner which, although not tall enough for evening dresses (who needs them when camping?) will take four or five shorter garments on hangers. At the extreme rear, and accessible only from the opened tailgate, are two further deeply lipped shelves, suitable perhaps for outdoor shoes or tools. At the front of the wardrobe is another small cupboard which we found ideal for washing up implements and liquid.

Two further lockers are to be found beneath the rear settee. The

HOLDSWORTH VW VILLA MK 3



The long cupboard which extends rearwards from the refrigerator alongside the settee base. I'd find cardboard boxes to fit, so that small items did not roll to the back.



Opening the tailgate reveals the estate car qualities of this vehicle. (Some owners store their bedding here, ready for instant use.) The shelf unit is useful for 'nasties'.



The engine on Holdsworth VW conversions is easier to get at than some, with only a cushion and cover to lift. You don't need to do it often, for oil and water points are behind the number plate.



Distinctive lettering and discreet striping identify the Villa 3. VW supply two good door mirrors to supplement the one inside. The quarterlight is fixed.

larger is for general storage; the smaller has a flap front and will accommodate a small chemical closet.

That's by no means the end of the storage provision in this two berth hightop. At eye level, above the wardrobe, is a cupboard with lipped shelf, ideal for storage of soft items. There's another opposite, with crockery fret. Running across the van at the rear are two further high level cupboards which we allocated as his 'n' hers.

The uncompromisingly near-upright forward end of the Volkswagen hightop at least has one advantage. It permits Richard Holdsworth to provide two further spacious cupboards which are above the windscreen and yet well clear of the heads of those walking through to the cab seats.

It would be an extremely overloaded or disorganised couple who were unable to find a place for everything in this well planned Holdsworth conversion.

Other equipment

The 12 gallon water tank is now slung beneath the vehicle, which helps in the provision of interior storage space. (Earlier Holdsworth VWs put it beneath the settee.) The filler is located at the base of the nearside cab door pillar and the fuel filler is in a similar position on the opposite side. Although one is labelled 'Water' and is lockable, some mechanics and forecourt attendants are obtuse and the owner might be well advised to keep its key apart from the others.

Two batteries are fitted, accessible by sliding the front seats forward on their runners. Charging of the caravan's battery (from mains or vehicle generator) is controlled by the Zig panel above the wardrobe. Next to it is the mains control with safety trip switches. The control panel sports a fresh water gauge, four cartridge fuses, switches and a battery indicator. The 13 amp mains socket is on the base of the settee. The electric water pump is beneath the settee and is switched by a foot control near the sink unit.

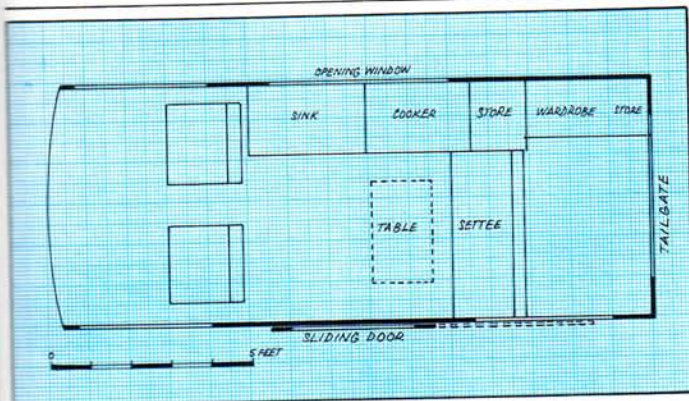
An opening, sliding window is provided above the kitchen and there are two more in the sides of the roof. Lighting is by a double fluorescent above the kitchen (which illuminates the dining table adequately) and two eyeballs at the head of the bed (fine for reading when sitting on the settee). There are festoons over the side door and in the cab. Neatly pleated curtains obscure all windows and run easily on their tracks. The contrasting curtain ties are a feature of all Holdsworth conversions.

Shelves above the windows on each side of the vehicle would support the upper double bed when fitted. On this two berth model they made useful dumping places when on site. Holdsworth window surrounds, of shaped GRP with leather effect finish, are easily wiped clean and add an air of distinction to the attractive interior.

On the road

The Volks is a lovely vehicle to drive in spite of a cab that is beginning to appear utilitarian and a little dated. Audrey and I found the adjustable seats comfortable and supportive and all controls were within easy reach. The VW's steering and foot pedals are reasonably light, although both power assistance and automatic transmission are available if needed. The gearstick is long and calls for pronounced movement when changing but on this four speed model I found the correct ratio every time — which I have not always been able to do with the close ratio five speed box.

The rear engine, well insulated by VW and further quietened by the Holdsworth bedding and furniture, was so unobtrusive that I made my usual mistake of forgetting to change to top gear more than once. The interior was remarkably free of the usual rattles — once one cupboard door had been adjusted. Directional stability at speed on the motorway was fairly good but sidewinds called for a degree of concentration. With a headwind, the bluff front caused the normally easy 70mph cruising speed to be unattainable.



I usually obtain around 25mpg with the 78bhp 1.9 litre Volks. This time my tankfull-to-tankfull test gave the inexplicable figure of 30mpg. Although some readers of MMM have claimed over 25mpg when touring, I cannot believe that my heavy right foot broke all records. Either the petrol pump was wrong (unlikely) or my record.

I have two complaints about the current Volkswagen cab: Firstly, there is nowhere to put a map on that sloping fascia. (Others don't like it, to judge by the success of the Onex fascia top.) Secondly, VW have now robbed us of the ability to obtain warm air to the feet and cool to the face. I consider this a ridiculous economy but, apart from that, the cab heater was as efficient as anyone could wish.

This is, indeed, a pleasant and relaxing vehicle to drive or travel in, front or back. Because of the quietness of the engine and the lack of rattles from the Holdsworth conversion, you can cover great distances without fatigue.

The Holdsworth Volks is small enough to be used for daily transport. With the opening tailgate revealing a flat platform, it is ideal for shopping trips and that wide side door and unobstructed floor area allow it to double as a small removals van. On top of this, it's also a well designed motorcaravan.

I liked:

Quality of finish
Colour scheme
Four seater car
Quiet engine
Compact overall dimensions
Swivelling cab seat
Kitchen working space
Storage space
Separate caravan battery

Headroom full length of van
Large load area
Estate car type tailgate
Easy driving
Head restraints on cab seats
Easily made comfortable bed
Gas bottle slider
Safe mains electricity
Stowage for Porta-Potti

I would have liked:

More flowing roof line
Interior heater (available)
Waste water tank

Warm feet, cool head in cab
Rear restraint belts (available)
Flat fascia top

SPECIFICATION

THE VEHICLE

Base vehicle & engine type: Volkswagen Transporter with rear mounted watercooled boxer engine.

Output: 78bhp at 4600 rpm

Max torque: 141Nm at 2600 rpm (104 lb/ft)

Compression ratio: 8.6:1

Greabox & drive: 4 speed, rear wheel drive.

Brakes: Front disc, rear drum, dual circuit with pressure regulator.

Steering: Rack and pinion.

Suspension: Independent all round with coil springs.

Fuel tank capacity: 13 gal (60 l).

Fuel consumption during test: (see text) 30 mpg.

Instruments: Fuel, coolant temp, speedo with trip, clock*.

Warning lamps: Ignition, main beam, oil pressure, indicators, hazard.

Windscreens wiper controls: Column mounted stalks, 2 speeds + intermittent.

Heater controls: 3 levers for heat selection & distribution, 3 speed heater/ventilator fan but no warm feet/cool face.

THE CARAVAN

Body type & construction: Panel van.

Windows and doors: Side sliding door, rear tailgate. Sliding window over kitchen.

Additional ventilation: 2 sliding roof windows.

Blinds/curtains: Pleated unlined curtains all round with fasteners at bottoms.

Mains electricity/electrical sockets: Mains control panel with earth leakage and fuse trips. 13 amp socket.

Batteries & control panel: Zig panel with 4 cartridge fuses, switches and battery indicator. Second battery standard.

Lighting: Double fluo over kitchen, 2 eyeballs over bed, 2 courtesy.

Cooking facilities: Spinflo 2-burner hob + grill.

Refrigerator: Electrolux 212E, 3-way, electronic.

Sink & drainer: Enamel, integral with hob.

Water pump: Electric, under seat; foot switch near sink.

Fresh water tank: Underfloor, nearside; filler at base of door pillar.

Fresh water level gauge: On control panel.

Waste water tank(s): None supplied.

Heating system: None supplied (optional extra).

Gas locker: Below sink; slider for two Camping Gaz 907.

Seating/dining/sleeping: Bench seat/double bed.

Tables: One, island leg, stowed behind driver's seat.

Wardrobe: At offside rear.

Flooring: Carpet throughout.

Additional features: Moulded window surrounds; big locker beneath worktop.

DIMENSIONS (Imperial and metric)

Overall length: 15ft 0in (4.57m).

Overall width, excl mirrors: 6ft 1in (1.84m).

Overall width, incl mirrors: 6ft 10in (2.08m).

Overall height: 8ft 0in (2.44m).

Driver's max leg length: 41in (1040mm).

Step up height to caravan: 17.5in (445mm).

Interior length from dash: 12ft 5in (3.78m).

Interior length behind cab: 9ft 2in (2.79m).

Interior width at waist level: 5ft 2in (1.57m).

Interior height: 6ft 1in (1.85m).

Work surface height: 33.5in (850mm).

Table dimensions: 30 x 19in (760 x 485mm).

Bed dimensions:

(1) Double bed **Mattress length:** 75in (1905mm).
width: 49/44in (1145/1120mm).
depth: 4in (100mm).

available headroom: 37in (940mm) at rear.

Wardrobe: 32in H, 24in W, 12in D (av) (815 x 610 x 305mm).

Other principal cupboards: Locker beneath worktop 24 x 16 x 17in D (610 x 405 x 430mm).

Cupboard beside settee: 26.5 x 17.5 x 15.5in H (675 x 445 x 395mm).

Cupboard access: 10 x 12in (250 x 305mm).

Gross vehicle weight: 47.24cwt (2400kg).

Unladen weight: 32.67cwt (1660kg).

Load capacity: 14.57cwt (740kg).

Price for standard model at test date: £14 862 inc car tax & VAT.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS AVAILABLE

Base vehicle options:

1.7 litre diesel or turbo diesel engine, 2.1 litre fuel injection petrol engine, auto transmission, power assisted steering, synchro four wheel drive.

Caravan options:

Solid roof bed £138-86. Blown air heating (Propex) £356-21. Flyscreens (1 lower window, 2 in hightop) £72-44.

* included in test model
E&OE

VW Villa 3 supplied for test by the converters:

Richard Holdsworth Conversions Ltd, Headley Road East,
Woodley, Reading, Berks RG5 4NE. (Tel: 0734 692900/693731) □

