

VW *motoring*

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT VOLKSWAGEN-AUDI MAGAZINE

Year of
25th
Publication



TESTS: HOLDSWORTH VILLA, PASSAT CL
NEW SERIES: THE VWs OF BRAZIL

The Holdsworth VW Villa Mk. 3 conjures up images of . . .

Comfortable Living

writes Chris Burlace



Side windows in the neat, solid-sided, elevating roof are double glazed but do not open. Fridge vent is well back from fuel filler.

Renault and Volkswagen share the limelight at present in the Holdsworth range. At Earls Court in November there was a new model on the Renault Trafic lwb, the 'HTL Super', with a spacious rear kitchen. There were new and revised VW models, too, although following his successes in 1984 Richard might have expected to rest content with his VWs. The Variety hightop had shared the 'Motor Caravan of the Year' award that year, and the conventional layout Villa Mk. 2 had been voted 'Best Elevating Roof' model at the London show in the November.

For 1986, however, it was once more all change on the VW front. The 'Vision' hightop was an all-new model, with rear kitchen enclosable by means of a folding centre partition to also serve as a toilet area. For the Villa there were practical detail changes and a completely new interior decor. It was the new Villa, designated Mark 3, which first became available for testing.

The Villa name joined the Holdsworth list about six years ago. A clever choice, for 'VW Villa' rolls easily off the tongue and conjures

up images of comfortable living in the sun. The model has followed that most popular of VW layouts with the kitchen fitment filling the offside and the rear seat joining with the over-engine platform to provide a double bed.

Elevating roof

The test vehicle came with the relatively new, solid sided elevating roof (although fixed roof and hightop versions of the Villa are offered as options). When closed, the roof adds just 6½ in. to the height of the VW, taking it to 7 ft. 0½ in. The GRP roof plinth, topped by the shallow cap of the roof itself, blends neatly into the lines of the Transporter. At the front is a tray section providing a roofrack, which (unladen) was invisible and appeared to create no wind noise.

Four over-centre catches have to be released outside before the roof can be raised, so it's a brief trip into the cold or wet on many occasions in our climate! Back inside, a moderate push on the padded section at the centre of the roof will send it skywards. Pairs of gas struts at each end of the roof provide plenty of help.

Conversely, when lowering the roof one must work against the thrust of the struts but then one can hang full weight on the lowering straps attached to the roofside. The side and end panels follow the roofcap automatically, so putting the roof up is essentially a one-step operation.

The three-section end panels

unfold like the ends of a folding packing case. The front section needs a push and a bolt slid home. The rear (out of reach above the uncut rear section of the original roof) is eased into place with a clever sliding rod arrangement – a twist and then it's locked. This rear panel can, alternatively, be left partially open for ventilation.



Solid beech edgings and cappings enhance the cabinet work of the popular side kitchen layout. Electrolux 212 (2 cu.ft.) fridge now has electronic, easy-to-use ignition.

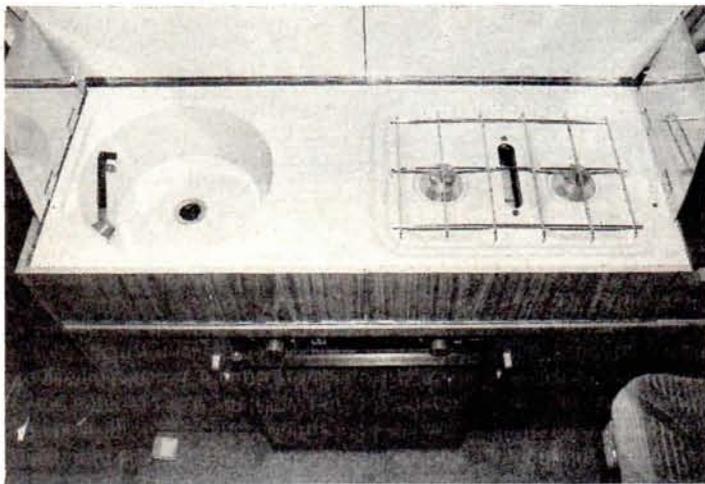
Internally, the Holdsworth roof is 18ft. long and a fraction short of 4ft. wide. It adds 21in. to headroom and gives a spacious air, more in keeping with a hightop than with an elevating roof conversion. The roof sides themselves, smooth and with no chinks to let in draughts, enhance the feeling of solidness and permanence.

Good insulation

The construction is a sandwich, polystyrene between aluminium and the whole encased in a vinyl skin which, at the joints between the triangular end panels and at the corners, also serves as hinges. The structure provides good insulation, and on chilly winter days the interior kept much warmer than in comparable vehicles fitted with the (now old-fashioned) fabric-skirted type of elevating roof.

Sink, drainer and hob are all formed in a common steel pressing, which has a vitreous enamel finish. Aluminium splash guards at either end hinge up and double as supports for the worktop sections. For ventilation in the kitchen area, the forward window opening on the offside of the VW is furnished with a double louvre unit – a practical style of window which can be opened in all weathers. The window is standard, but a fly-screen is extra; £30 to keep unwelcome visitors out.

Standard now on the Villa is the 2cu.ft. Electrolux fridge, the 212 model, and Holdsworth fit the pricier version with the benefit of electronic ignition. Lighting the fridge now is a flick-of-a-switch job, not a tedious task on hands and knees peering into the far corner of the fridge to be certain that the gas flame has lit. On the



One piece, enamelled top provides sink, drainer and two-burner-plus-grill hob. Splash guards at sides support worktop sections.

Practical touches

Down below the layout differs little from the superseded Villa model, or from the conventional VW conversions from other stables. There are, however, a number of changes from the Mark 2 Villa and some practical touches unique to the marque. Most of all the Villa sets itself apart from its competitors by its distinctive good looks.

The offside kitchen unit presents a work surface 68in. long by 18in. wide. The favourable proportions of the Transporter permit it to be 33½in. high, a comfortable working height, without obscuring the windows. The smart, brown, leather-effect Formica top is split into three sections. The first lifts to reveal a round, flat-bottom sink, with a foldaway faucet, and a diminutive drainer. The second lifts to show a two-burner-and-grill cooker.

road, of course, the fridge operates from the 12V vehicle supply; on campsites where there are hook-ups it can be used on 240V from the standard mains connection.

Sliding trays

The fridge fills the centre position in the kitchen module and is flanked by a pair of capacious cupboards. In the forward cupboard I found the gas bottle storage, and thoughtful provision for bottle changing. The two Gaz 907 size bottles, one in use the other the spare, are mounted on a slide-out tray.

There's a sliding tray again in the big, deep locker, which is found under the rearmost section of the worktop. It splits the space, making it easy to lift out the goods at the top to get to items in the bottom section. Here also I found a cutlery tray – a small fitting, not costly to install, but a very worth-



The usual rock-and-roll mechanism makes for a quick seat-to-bed transformation. Length is 6ft.2in., width 44½in. at forward end widening to 50in. at rear.

while feature for camping convenience.

The wardrobe, with the jacket-length hanging space which is all one finds in most VW Transporter conversions, and a cubbyhole locker under the slope of the tailgate, complete the line of cabinetwork on the offside of the 'van. Above the wardrobe I noted the electric control panel, with switches for 12V and mains services, fuses and a battery condition indicator.

Around the corner, on the front

face of the wardrobe, were a low level warning light for the under-van water tank and an earth leakage trip for the mains input, a good safety feature. The 240V supply is used for the fridge and for a single, standard 13A type, socket fitted on the face of the rear seat box. A second battery (useful where there is no mains supply and essential if you want to have the optional blown-air heating unit or run a TV) and the necessary charging circuitry costs an extra £97.



The slide-out gas bottle tray is a new, and very convenient, feature.

Extra storage

Richard Holdsworth has departed from his established practice of fitting the water tank under the rear seat in his VWs, and on the 1986 Villa there is a 12 gallon tank under the vehicle. That releases underseat storage space but does make the water system more vulnerable to freezing.

Below the rear seat there is now a space on the nearside to keep a portable toilet, one of the smaller units such as the Porta Potti 235, with access by hinging up the seat front. On the other side of the seat space I found storage room, but with a little space stolen by the Lab-Craft water pump (actuated by a footswitch adjacent to the sink) and provision for storing the tubular legs for the tables.

The Villa, in its basic form, is a 2-berth. The rear seat converts to a double bed and makes room for two, at a squeeze three, at the island leg mounted table (the tabletop stows at the front of the kitchen unit). To increase the complement of the 'van one must add the cab dining kit and the upper bed kit. The cab passenger seat swivels as standard, so for a two-place diner up front one needs a swivelling driver's seat plus

cab table and leg, adding £127 to the price. To sleep two aloft, the upper solid double berth kit costs £72 - bed width is 3ft. 8in. and length 6ft. or 5ft. 4in.

Cabinetwork in the 1986 Holdsworth range, built as always with plywood, has a light woodgrain pattern finish. In place of the brown or dark blue contrast banding used in the Mark 2 Villa, the units are highlighted with solid beech cappings and edgings and with matching beech door handles. The light woodwork enhances the impression of space, and is aided by the choice of toning trim, upholstery and curtains.

The Holdsworth VWs, always attractive, have until now lacked the final finishing touch of trim around the caravan windows. Now that deficiency has been rectified. Above waist level the interior is clad with an oatmeal colour carpet trim, only the thin edge of the tailgate window continuing to display painted metal. The lower trim is in a pinkish brown for contrast. Cab seat plinths and the rear seat front, areas vulnerable to kicks and scuffs and which would soon show the dirt, are covered with a practical dark brown carpet.



Tabletop leaves space to enter and leave rear seat, angled corners help. Mains power point can be seen, left, on seatfront, while bottom right is handgrip for door to toilet stowage space.



Wardrobe over engine deck offers jacket-length accommodation, 36in. hanging height, 23½in. width, and max. depth of 12½in. Angled locker to rear makes use of space under tailgate.

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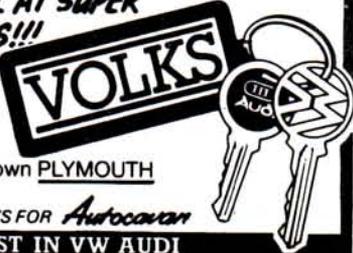
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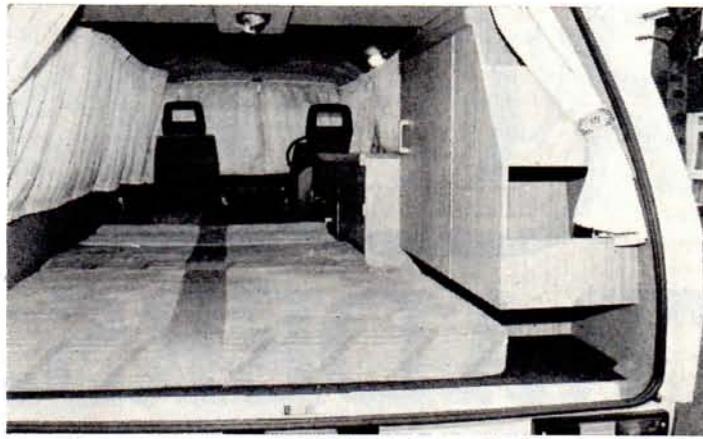
Quality fabrics

In recent years the motor caravans from the Reading factory have been notable for the quality of their fabrics, and there's change but no backsliding for the current models. A rich Dralon velvet replaces wool mixture cloth for the upholstery. The colour is a warm pink beige and interest is added by woven-in ribbing and diagonal banding.

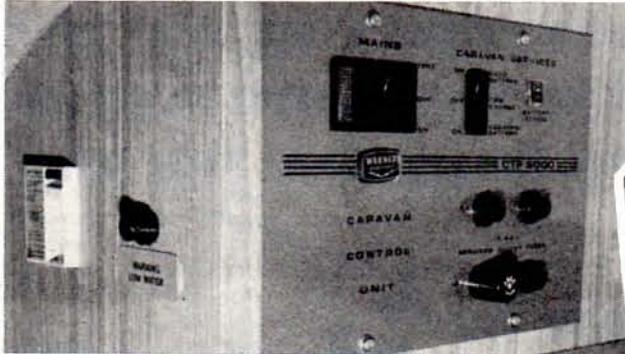
The rear seat/bed cushions are split by a central band of plain fabric, giving an illusion of two separate seats and also serving as a ready marker in any dispute about who has more than their share of the bed! The rear seat is well proportioned, and the back nicely raked, for comfort when travelling and on the campsite. The bed is of generous size for a VW conversion, 6ft. 2in. long and 50in. wide at the rear narrowing to 44½in. at the forward end.

With a clear bonus of width and the aircraft style lights overhead there's no problem about deciding which way round to sleep in this VW. Up front the standard VW cab seats are covered to match the rear and headrests are fitted.

Curtains in the test 'van were in light beige, toning with the rest of the colour scheme, yet their lighter shade not diminishing the feeling of space when they were drawn. The fabric was of good weight, and a dense weave, the cut generous enough but not so much as to provide folds of fabric which has to



View from rear shows a good, flat bed. On offside is wardrobe and cubbyhole behind which is reached from the tailgate.



Electrics panel provides switches, fuses and a low battery charge indicator. To left are water tank low warning light and the earth leakage trip for the mains input.

be carefully arranged for neatness.

A wool twist carpet, quality again, completed a cosy interior and was carried through to the cab, where lift-out sections showed a practical approach to

motor caravanning needs. The Mark 3 Villa departs only in small ways from the conventions of layout in the VW, but it is thoroughly practical and it is undoubtedly a leader on looks.

Refinement

On the road the Villa provided the refinement which has made the VW Transporter-based motor caravans such a success over the years. It is just as much a comfortable passenger carrier as a camper.

The independent-all-round coil spring suspension smoothed our passage over neglected byway surfaces and was as effective as any at damping the incessant thump caused by ill-matched joints in the concrete of more major highways. After the usual teatowel had been packed between the cooker and its worktop to silence the inevitable tinny chatter, there were no more noises from the rear – confirmation that the fit of the furniture was as good as its looks.

With the 78bhp engine (worth its £277, for it would be a shame to spoil such an outfit by opting for the standard 60bhp power unit) the Villa was a lively enough performer, and it allowed itself to be slipped through bends and roundabouts with the surefootedness of a well-balanced saloon.



Swivelling passenger seat is standard. Tabletop, island leg and pivoting driver's seat to complete a front dinette are extra. Note neatly boxed water filler.

There were only a few hundred miles on the clock, so undoubtedly the outfit would improve to better the 15 seconds shown on the watch for acceleration to an indicated 50mph. And economy would no doubt exceed the approx. 23mpg calculated over the test; a reasonable figure nevertheless for mixed driving in the cold winter months.

Latest price for the Villa, based on the 60bhp van with 4-speed gearbox, is £11,842 with elevating roof. The hightop version comes out at £11,926, and for those who can get by without standing upright there is a big saving to be made with the fixed-roof model, priced at just £10,490. The turbo-diesel engine, the 1.6litre in-line unit used in the VW passenger car range, adds £1,325, but is a lively and economical engine, its 70bhp providing a more acceptable performance for leisure use than the 50bhp of the naturally aspirated diesel (that unit costs £781 over the basic price).

These prices reflect the recent revision of VW prices in general, due to the weakening of the pound against the Deutschemark. That, sadly, has been a long and continuing process, but it hasn't yet dampened the enthusiasm of buyers who know a good product.



The Transporter cab provides car-like driving comfort. Headrests are fitted to standard VW seats, which are trimmed to match caravan upholstery. Carpet sections lift out.