

Motorcaravanabout

Surprises at Bowers

We've seen some innovative motorcaravans over the last couple of years, inspired largely by the advent of new vehicles compelling new thinking. But it has taken a couple of brilliant boys in Bedfordshire, John Bright and Martin Johnson, to do something entirely original with the familiar VW Transporter, working under the aegis of Diamond RV in Wolverhampton, and mentioned last month in MMM. The result had its first showing at the Bowers 'at home' at the end of February. We arrived on the morning of the first day – the Diamond Autocruiser was already sold!

They've gone for a full luxury package specifically for two people, to satisfy a market that has long been proclaimed in MMM but only recently considered worth attention by the manufacturers. The photographs show most of the unusual features and we've been promised one for road test as soon as the production line is rolling.

The model on show was priced at £9895, with very full equipment (double-glazing is an extra).



Among the trees at Bowers' attractive showground at Green Lawns Garage, between Harpenden and Luton – masses of motorcaravans of all shapes and sizes. This is just a small selection, mainly Fiats.



Diamond's original thinking on a familiar Volks, with free-flowing high top likely to offer little obstruction to airflow. This model, first off the line, has optional-extra acrylic double glazing.



At the rear of the Diamond's nicely sculptured roof is a cut-out incorporating a simple, folding roof rack which, we estimate, would accommodate a couple of camping chairs OR a small annexe.

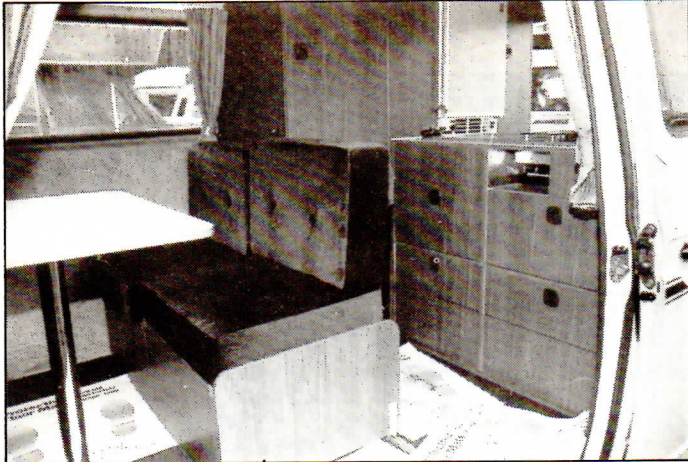


Usual storage space for bulky clobber over the rear engine deck, beneath the high-lift tailgate. There's also a range of cupboards for smaller items. Access to the lift-up engine cover is completely unobstructed.



The toilet/shower compartment at the rear. When not in use, the chemical closet is stored in a recess which is above the engine. The large shower tray is then unobstructed. A shower curtain will be provided.

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Inside the Diamond, the real difference becomes apparent. Rear passenger seats are located fairly well forward, to allow room for a comprehensively equipped rear kitchen, which sits over the engine.



Dining room at front end. Reversible cab seats allow four to sit at table. Front and rear seats recline fully to make twin single beds extending into the cab — left hand passenger seat slides across to nearside.



Something else at Bowers that took our fancy — a camping car based on the little Fiat Fiorino.



Fiat Fiorino, seen from rear, has two beds but little else. W-registered, it was on sale at £4650.

Twenty-two thoughtful touches

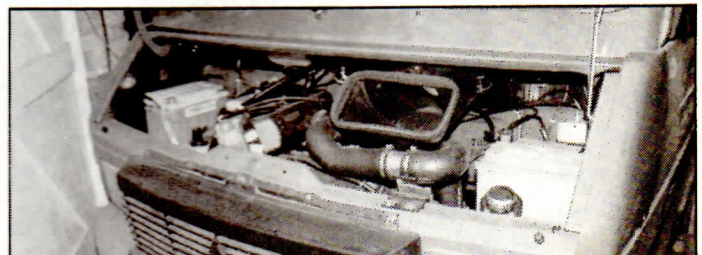
We thought we'd seen just about every possible layout on the long wheelbase Renault Trafic high top but Carefree Caravans of Wycliffe Road, Winton, Bournemouth, had a few pleasant surprises.

Carefree have been hiring motorcaravans for years, so they know what it's all about. MMM was invited to see the first prototype 'Cameo' as it was nearing completion, specifically so that our brains could be picked. We were almost stumped, but managed to suggest a couple of

alterations which we thought might improve matters for the users. The pictures tell the story. We've concentrated on the multiplicity of thoughtful touches, will report later on how it works out in practice after the promised road test of an early production model.

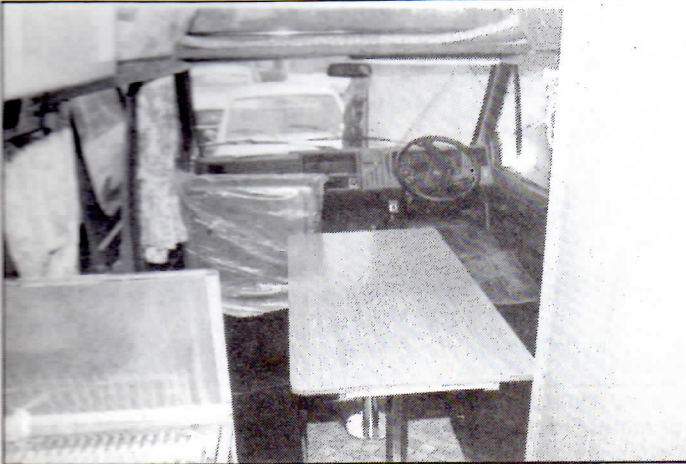


Carefree's Cameo on high top, long wheelbase, front wheel drive, diesel Renault Trafic. Cost of this model is likely to be in the £11 000 region but hopes are high of producing a petrol model at less than five figures. "No above-cab windows" we were told. "They weaken the structure."

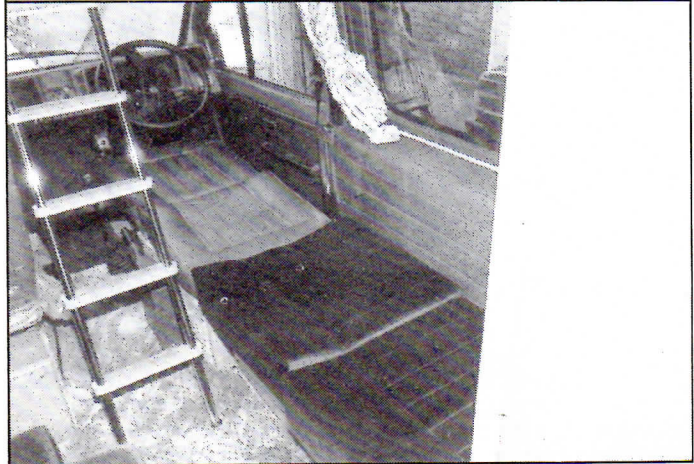


Thoughtful touch number 1: twin battery system with Lucas isolator: thoughtful touch number 2: water filler for 15 gallon domestic tank beneath bonnet, where splashes won't matter. Thoughtful touch number 3 (not seen): 14 gallon waste water tank. Thoughtful touch number 4 (not shown): skirts to hide both underfloor tanks from view.

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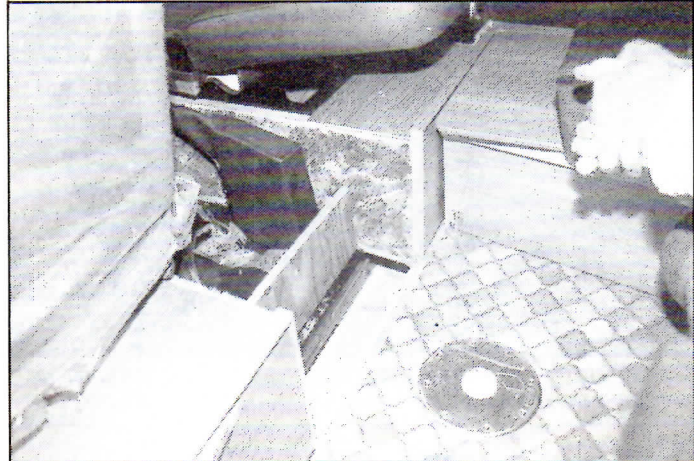
Conventional layout here, at the front ends with twin settees facing the table – but TT number 5: table is rock steady on two island legs and (6) can be slid to and fro for unobstructed access. We suggested reversing front seats and providing twin single dinettes for more space.



Cab seats recline and mate with face-forward rear passenger seats to make twin single beds, 7ft (max) length and 2ft 1in (max) width. Cushion supplied to make 5ft 4in wide double. TT number 7: ladder to upper bunks has non-slip carpeted treads.



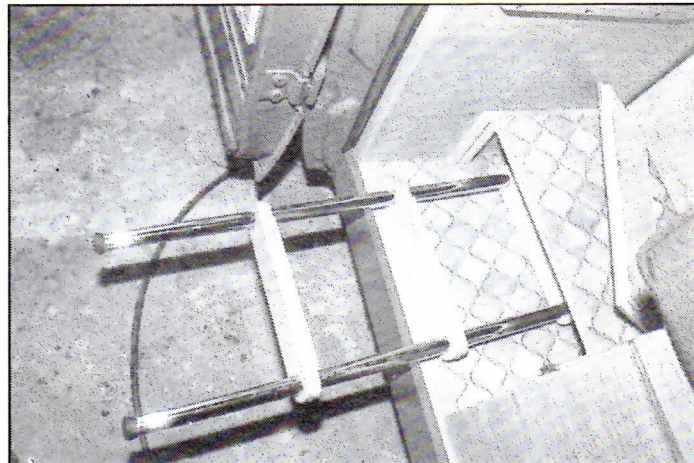
Upstairs, at front. TT number 8: warm walls and ceiling. TT number 9: bunk mattresses are wedge-shaped to hold occupants in place. TT number 10: separate fluorescent lights for upper and lower bedrooms. Two-berth version will have cupboards in place of bunks.



TT number 11: carpet easily removed to reveal warm vinyl floor. TT number 12: ugly Renault handbrake is covered. TT number 13: useful storage space in boxes beneath front seats and between them (cover removed here to show it).

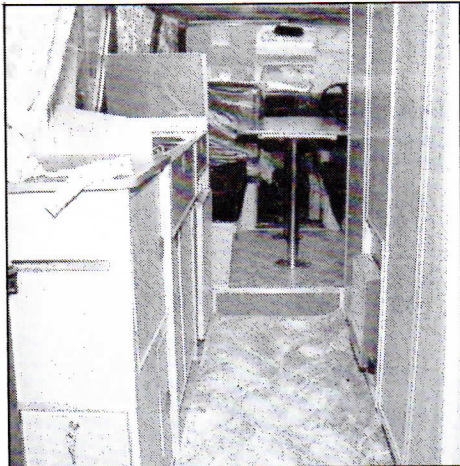


TT number 14: twin table legs are stored in rattleproof housings by side of driver's seat (here reclined to make single bed). Back-rest of this seat is firmly supported when lowered and may therefore be used to provide extra sitting accommodation on site.

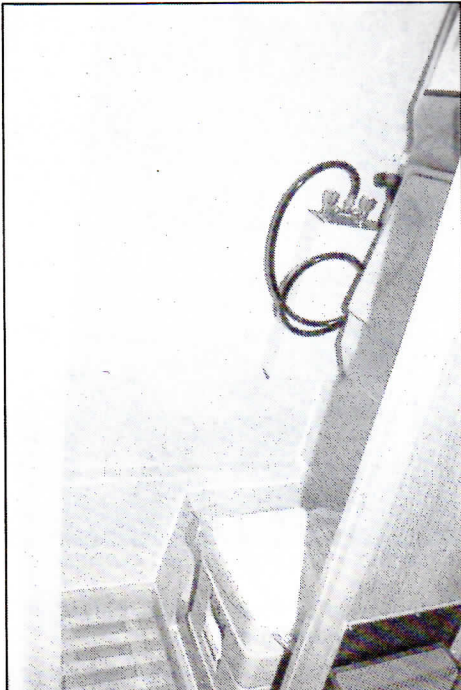


Floor at front is raised about 4 inches to provide a comfortable sitting height, though underseat lockers go right down to base floor and are enormous. TT number 15: storage for ladder beneath false floor. TT number 16: false floor cut away to provide step by side door.

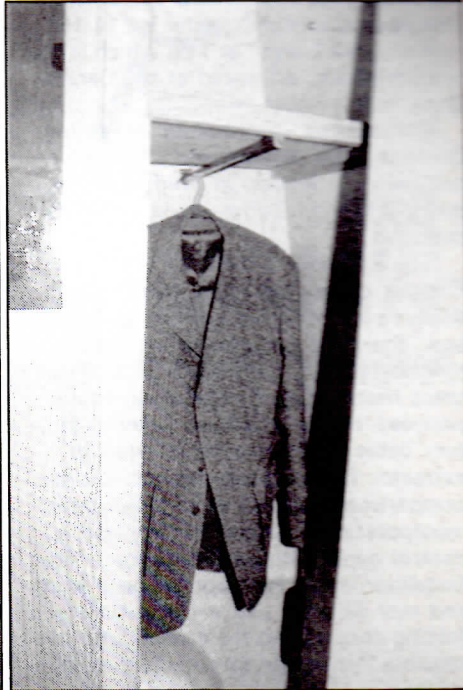
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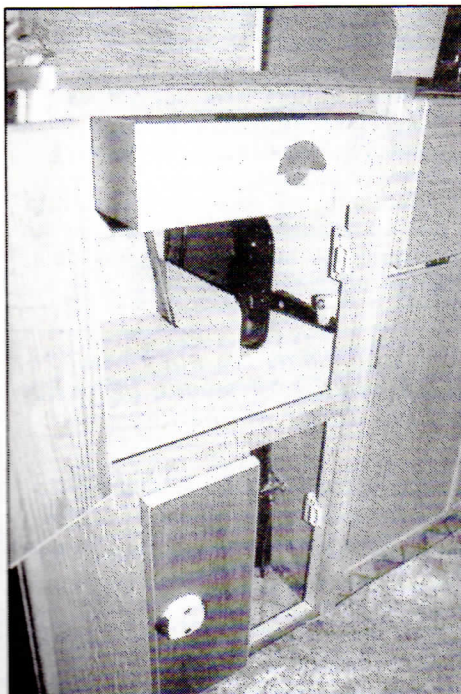
View from rear doors, showing kitchen unit on left, wardrobe and toilet room on right. Space heating is by Petite catalytic (lower right). Gas bottle locker is key-operated (lower left). There are two motorised roof vents.



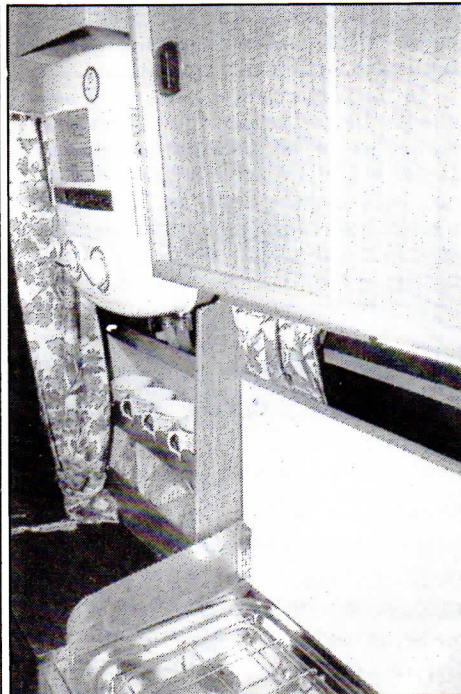
Sensible toilet/shower compartment will have a shower curtain, but walls and floor are fully waterproofed against seepage. There's no daylight here – a regrettable omission, we thought. TT number 17: duckboard for shower tray.



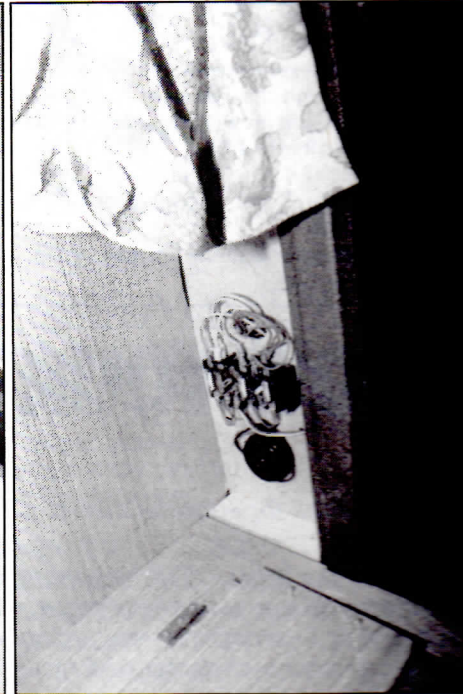
Enormous wardrobe – biggest we've seen in a van conversion. We'd have preferred coat rail running side-to-side but table is stored here and would then be difficult to get at, we were told. Not if they adopted our suggestion of two small tables and single dinettes.



Furniture is nicely finished with real wood cappings to all door edges and the amount of storage room can only be called generous. TT number 18: rattle-free stowage in cupboard for grill pan. TT number 19: fitted cutlery drawer.



Sliding doors to big upper cupboards provide no hazard to heads. Paloma water heater really works well, we were assured. TT number 20: neat rack for china cups and side plates. Dinner plates have their own rack in cupboard.



TT number 21: all caravan systems fuses are grouped behind a panel by the side entrance door. TT number 22: all furniture is plywood, oak-faced and varnished so that it is easily touched-up by the owner.