

# Forging ahead

Dawson's Danbury are now operating from a new base in Suffolk. **MOTOR CARAVAN MAGAZINE** went to see if it was a move in the right direction



Above: Chief executive Danny McCarthy, Joy Dawson's right hand man, at the entrance to the new premises. On the left is the vehicle bay where the final conversion work is completed, while the building behind him houses the reception, offices and board room.

Busy person, messy desk (below left). This is the boss. Joy Dawson may not have the tidiest desk in the business but she's more interested in the full order board on her right. The 'phone rang right after this shot was taken, and another Renegade was sold.

Behind the offices is where the conversion work begins (below right). First along the line is the assembly room for all the furniture units. The old forge buildings seem well suited to this type of light industry.

**YOU can't keep a good motor caravan manufacturer down.** These words are more than appropriate when talking about Joy Dawson, owner of Dawson's Danbury Conversions. Fortunes have fluctuated over the years for this company, from when Danbury were one of the top three converters, the days of the 'Big 3 D's' – Danbury, Devon and Dormobile. With the imminent sale of Devon and Dormobile's departure from

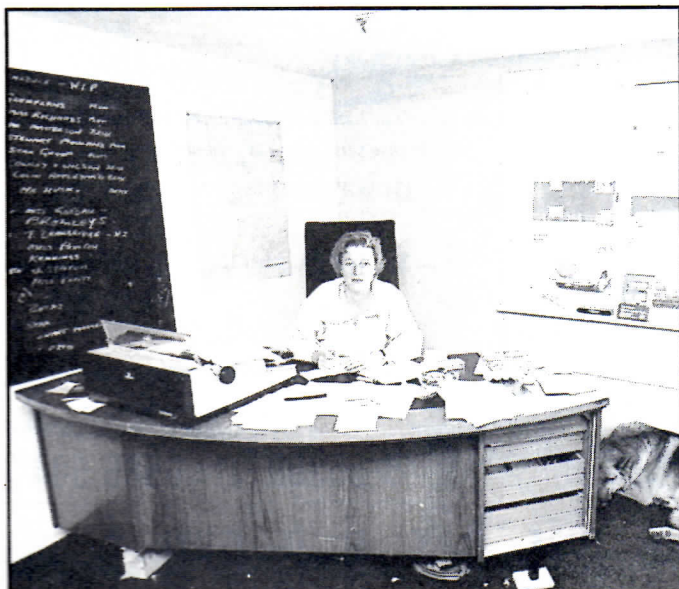
the motor caravan scene, Danbury could claim to be the sole survivors among the 'old brigade'.

Fortunes took a downward turn in the 1970s with the fuel crisis and the imposition of car tax on motor caravans. Danbury weren't the only company to struggle. Without doubt the corner has been turned, to quote Joy in a recent letter to us, although there have been a number of ups and downs along the way. These have included a number of changes of premises.

Today Dawson's Danbury are still based in Suffolk, but the new headquarters are the buildings of what used to be an old ironworks, a site with much potential for growth, especially as Danbury are hoping to purchase the extra strip of land nearby.

Joy Dawson is in fact one of the motor caravan industry's innovators, witness the Renegade and indeed her whole range of fun campers. The success of the Bedford Rascal-based Renegade (tested by us back in our April issue) has been the major contribution to her recent rise in fortune, and the company look set to re-establish themselves at the top.

Not that the new ideas have stopped there. A bold step was taken with a limited edition run of Bedford CFs; and Volkswagens are still being converted, newest addition here being the Transporter version of the Renegade. There has been talk of taking on other base vehicles, including schemes which would make most



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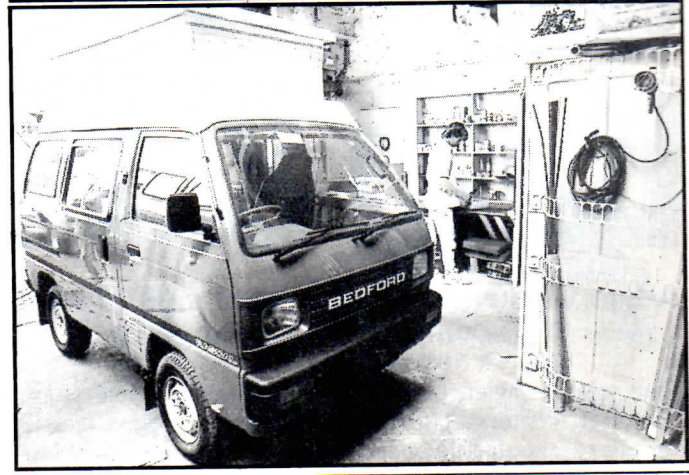
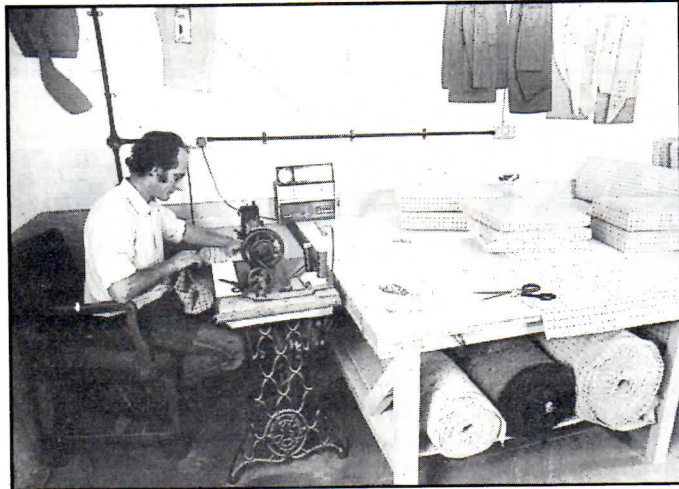
converters (if not their accountants) cringe with disbelief. But then conventionality never was Joy Dawson's strong point. Who else would consider using an old forge for a motor caravan production line?

When we went up to Kin Royal Forge production was still split between Bedfords (here) and Volkswagens at the old factory nearby, so the full 'move in' had not taken place. But already the production line was in operation. □

Next door to the furniture preparation room is the upholstery area (below). The sewing machine may not be quite the most up to date but it's reliable!

Downstairs now for the finishing to the furnishings (right). All the wood units are made of ply which is then sanded and heavily varnished before being ready for installation in the vans.

Fitting out the vans themselves is done in a separate building downstairs. Future plans involve building a complete new factory unit on land nearby. Here's a Rascal (below right) getting the Renegade treatment.



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