

Wolfe Garage, Kentish VW motor caravan specialists, had a stand right next to the famous racing circuit.



Just a part of the biggest collection of motor caravans ever seen in Britain.



# Air-cooled models outnumber water-cooled at biggest ever parade of VW caravans

Chris Burlace reporting



Rain did nothing to deter the crowds.



The Autosleeper LT drew a ceaseless stream of admirers.

**T**he (Third) National Motor Caravan Fair at Brands Hatch brought together the largest display of Volkswagen motor caravans ever seen. Ten conversions on the new VW air-cooled van were on offer and seven different models on the water-cooled LT. If the still-to-be-sold new conversions of the superseded Type 2 were added the choice of models for the VW enthusiast soared to well over 20, while the selection was broadened still more by plentiful stocks of secondhand VWs on the exhibitors' stands.

## WOLFSBURG BAN

A wet weekend, with the sun only getting the upper hand late on the Sunday, did nothing to keep the crowds away. On the camping fields and in the car parks Volkswagens of all kinds were the largest single species, their owners had come to see — gathered together for the first time — the

offerings on the new, brilliantly designed VW air-cooled commercial.

The edict from Wolfsburg that the two bows extending across the roof of the new VW van forward and to the rear of the side door should not be cut has limited the scope for variety in layouts. Kitchen facilities are invariably grouped along the offside of the conversion and the main bed is formed over the engine deck at the rear.

Side-lifting elevating roofs have gained in popularity and were seen on **Devon, Danbury, Invincible** and **Motorhomes International** conversions. All have firm based upper berths instead of roll-out bunks and the Danbury has a unique electrically powered roof elevating mechanism.

**Holdsworth** and **Howard-Lange** VW conversions retain straight pop-up roofs, not quite as spacious as the side-lifter but offering

less target for the wind in bad weather.

If the new small VW has not permitted the converters to depart too far from established layouts it has brought a great emphasis on interior decor. Carpet is much in favour for trim. Devon and Motorhomes International have opted for smooth plastic laminate finishes, Danbury choose pine woodwork, while natural wood veneers grace the furniture in Holdsworth 'vans (rosewood), and the Howard-Lange model which offers a choice of teak or oak.

Despite the sameness of layouts from the various converters there has been plenty of ingenuity exercised to improve camping comfort in the VW. Seating in the caravan area is generally improved and the pivoting table using a **Desmo** island leg is common to improve accessibility and flexibility of the layouts.

## SWIVELLING SEATS

The prize for innovation must go to the Motorhomes International models, although when it comes to finish and workmanship I feel that they are behind several of their rivals. Their *Xplorer* and *Hustler* conversions feature swivelling cab seats which permit a second, two-seater dinette in the cab area, while the *Super Spacemaker* roof gives unrivalled upper bed accommodation and head-room. The *Hustler* even has a hot water system, the first time ever on a series production small VW conversion.

A brand-new model unveiled at the Fair was a high top version of the *Xplorer*, a 2-berth permitting the rear portion of the high top to be given over to an enormous storage locker while the over-cab roof section is provided with a roof rack. Inside I liked the carpet trim neatly continued around the windows and the provision of an enclosed, balanced flue heater.

Prices of the new air-cooled VW motor caravans range from just under £6,300, for the just-introduced Danbury *Travalette*, simple but versatile like the early Danburys, to over £8,100.

For the larger LT conversion prices now start around £11,000 and it is not difficult to part with over £13,000! However, at the Fair there was plenty of choice for those with that sort of money burning a hole in their pockets and perhaps more variety than was offered on the smaller VW.

## LT TOP AWARD

An LT this year took the top award at Brands Hatch, the magnificent silver trophy awarded to the Motor Caravan of the Year. I was not surprised to see this coveted prize go to the Autosleeper conversion of the LT28, a 'van which much impressed me when first shown last winter.

The immaculate light oak furniture and superb trim of the Autosleeper must have won it high marks but credit for the design raised its score to a winning total. The spacious and comfortable rear dinette seating converts to a large double bed, while above it upholstered sections stored beneath the roof level lockers can be unfolded to make single beds or another giant double. There is a well equipped toilet compartment, hot water system, large fridge, louvred windows, and flyscreen protected ventilators.

Competition was hot from the other big Volkswagens on show, however. The Devon *Royalty*, with its neat and practical kitchen layout and high eye appeal, scores high marks with the ladies. This year the number of its rivals had grown.

New from Derby came the high top **Pampas Laredo**, a stable mate for the *Nevada* elevating roof model of the LT which has been on the market for about a year. Pampas Motor Caravans offer a variety of floor plans in their LT conversions and I found the standard of materials and workmanship to be first-class. They look set to fill the gap left by **Bariban**, producers of the excellent VW conversions from Newton Abbot.

Motorhomes International also produced a couple of LT models for the Fair. Their *Mirage* model on the LT35 fitted with a gigantic *Spacemaker* elevating roof caters for the larger family, and has been produced previously in lefthand drive form for export. I noted a rear dinette layout, plenty of storage and double glazed side windows and a *Carver Trumatic* heater to extend the camping season to the chillier months.



From Motorhomes International the 'Trans Europa' LT with roof rack equipped high top.



The spacious interior of the *Mirage LT* elevating roof model from Motorhomes International.



Inside the 'Trans Europa' LT a spacious rear kitchen and toilet compartment.



A brand-new model for the Fair, the 2-berth *Xplorer* high top.



The new *Nevada LT* model from Pampas Motor Caravans.



The beautifully fitted interior of an *RGA* high top on the old Type 2 VW.

Brand new and completed only hours before the Fair opened, was the LT *Trans Europa* high top. A 4-berth, this features a rear kitchen and toilet compartment, both well equipped, while the 4-seater dinette is located opposite the side door. Double glazing and a heater plus the good insulation of the high top could make this 'van a good prospect for year-round use.

## £12,500 'VAN

For Fair-goers with around £12,500 to spend who wanted something different **Cavalier Caravans** from Felixstowe were showing a custom van cum motor caravan on an LT 31 base vehicle. Typically customised with deep, tinted windows, eye-catching external paintwork and a much-carpeted interior it nevertheless included all the necessities of a

motor caravan and more. A good shower compartment, adequate kitchen facilities and plenty of locker space were backed up by the necessary water heater and fridge and the luxury of warm air central heating and a stereo system.

VW enthusiasts more than ever before got value for their money (and it only cost £3.45 for a weekend's camping plus two days unrestricted access to the exhibition) with all the new air-cooled models on show as well as the greatly enlarged range of LT conversions. Even so I can think of a few models that were not at Brands this year. Perhaps next year there could be as many as 30 different Volkswagen motor caravan models at the Fair, making it even more of a draw for the fans of the Wolfsburg built 'vans.