

Motorcaravan Motorhome

Monthly
June 1982



The Danbury Diamond
Road Test this issue

DANBURY'S VOLKSWAGEN TRIO
DETHLEFF MERC GLOBETROTTER

DANBURY'S VOLKSWAGEN TRIO... DIAMOND, SERIES 2 & TRAVELETTE



Danbury's smart two-tone paint treatment on the one we tested, the 1600 Series 2. Although by no means a lively package, we enjoyed

motoring in this extremely civilised vehicle and achieved a consumption figure of around 24 mpg on 2-star petrol.

Davis & Stone are having a special batch of Danbury Diamonds converted to their own specification, based on the 2 litre petrol VW but with manual roof rather than Danbury's own electrically-operated Autoroof. So we decided to make this limited edition the subject of our test report. In the event, when we arrived, the first of the batch was still covered in factory wax and, for the road test, we selected the less expensive Danbury Series 2 on the 1600cc Volks — and also took a look at the even cheaper Travelette, which is *just* a motorcaravan.

On the road

We've been taken to task by some readers for not dwelling on what they regard as the 'pathetic' top gear performance of the 1600 VW. So we did mention it — and were immediately assailed by others who were perfectly content. So, for the record, let's state that the smaller motor will keep going all day (and all night, if you're that way inclined) but you will have to resort to third gear on long inclines and to second on real hills. First would take you up the side of a house, if the tyre grip was equal to such a task.

For rather easier long distance cruising — at speeds above our legal maximum if you wish — the 2000 VW takes a lot of beating. You don't have to resort to third gear nearly so often, and very seldom to second. I'll stick my neck out and state that, if a trailer is to be towed, the larger motor is highly desirable

(it comes with servo brakes) though old 1600s can be seen coping with fairly large caravans in the summer months, sometimes heedless of the queue of cars behind.

Is the 2000 worth the extra £400 or so? Would you do better to increase the addition and go for the economical diesel version? Depends what you're looking for. The 1600 scores on lowest first cost, the diesel (also 1600) will be cheapest in the long run. The 2000 gives the most enjoyable motoring and need not be more thirsty provided it is driven with restraint. (DIN figures are almost identical at 56 mph for the two petrol versions — at around 24 mpg. Many readers do better.)

Whichever Volks is chosen, the owner can expect car-like comfort and ease of driving, with scarcely a murmur from the well-silenced engine at the back — and these observations apply equally to the diesel version. Stepping straight from our British motorcaravan, which we consider acceptable as far as noise level goes, we were again impressed by the Volks's smoothness and lack of engine chatter at all speeds.

If you must have a personal opinion, I'd go for the petrol 2000, because my wife prefers it (probably because it spends least time on the wrong side of the road when overtaking). But spares and servicing can be horribly expensive.

And if you've read all that already in MMM, be patient please and remember that each month brings another few hundred new readers who don't know it all.

DANBURY TRIO



The good-looking Diamond 2 litre with its brown and stone exterior paintwork, nicely complemented by the yellow, white and brown striped roof apron. This particular model, the first of the batch, was still in its dull factory-applied protective wax coat.



Just as well the table is mounted on a Desmo island leg, so that it can be swivelled to allow the cook to get to the sink and under-sink cupboards. The front of the seat locker is carpeted and the floor is covered with 'cork tile' vinyl.



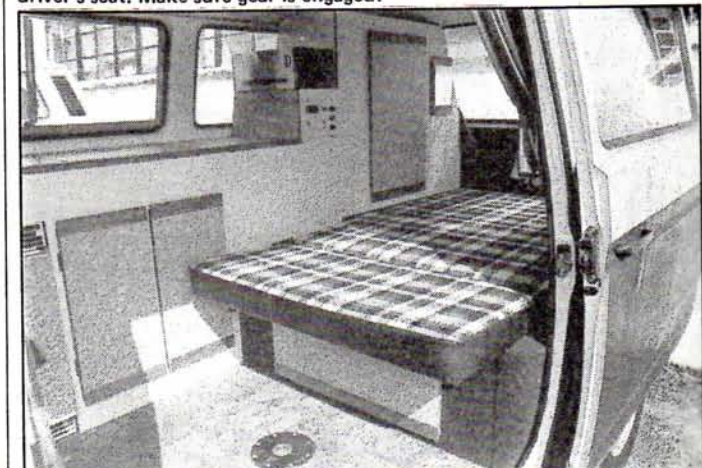
Spacious interior of Davis & Stone's special Diamond. Access to the underseat locker is via the hinged flap on the front. We thought putting the hinge at the top was a mistake. It would be so much easier if the flap fell to rest on the floor.



The other dining room, at the front — a smaller table, also island leg mounted. Volkswagen's comfortable, back-hugging seats swivelled easily but, on this model, it was necessary to release the handbrake to turn the driver's seat. Make sure gear is engaged!



The big lid of the worktop hinges upwards and keeps curtains away from cooking and washing up operations. The commodious top-access locker has its lid partly open. Behind it is the Optimus eye-level grill and, below that, the Zig unit.



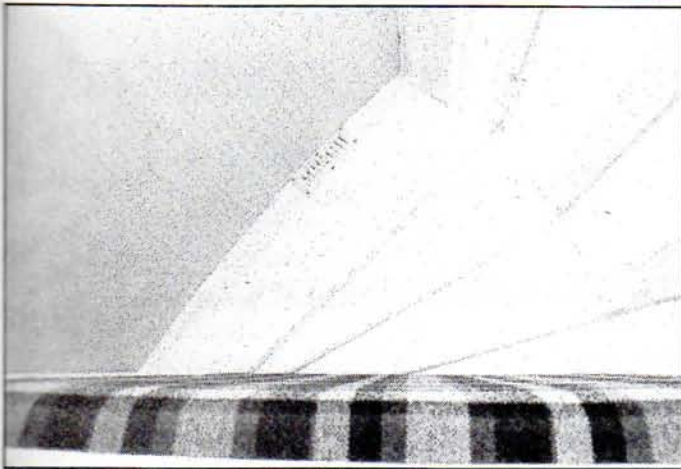
Bed making was a simple operation, thanks to Danbury's rock and roll mechanism. A fluorescent lamp is provided above the bed and there's still plenty of unoccupied floor space. Kitchen, 'fridge and one cupboard door accessible (compare with Series 2).

The Diamond

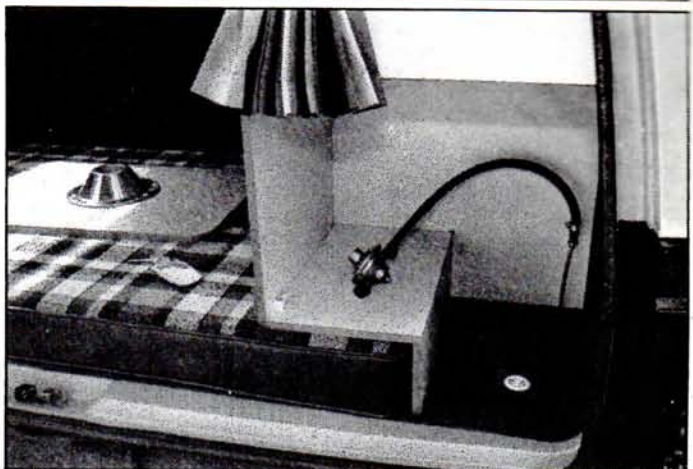
This is the top of the range model. The standard specification includes two-tone exterior paintwork and the 2 litre engine and the price is £7495 ex works — not bad for a luxury model.

The interior breaks with convention in appearance rather than layout. The latter is that almost universally adopted on the new Volks: long worktop and kitchen unit along the offside. The kitchen unit has an off-white Formica front and doors are surface-mounted, panelled with Formica in a delicate small floral pattern. The door of the refrigerator (an optional extra at £160) is treated in the same way.

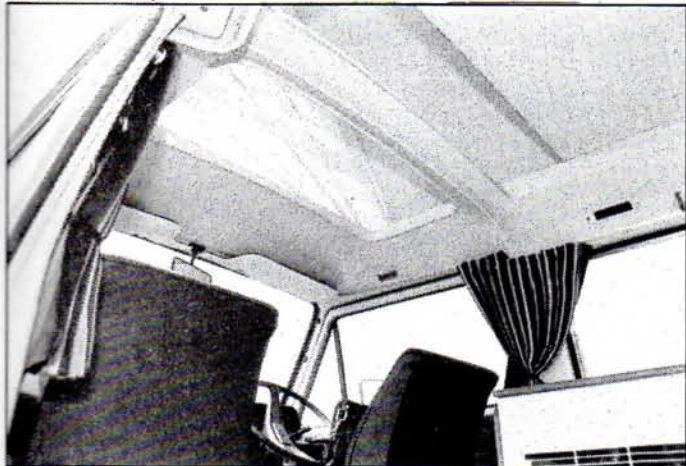
The work surface is 59 inches long when tops to sink, cooker and chest are closed and, at the rear end, is the Zig mains control unit and a separate Optimus eye-level grill. The Italian 2-burner hob, integral with the sink, is finished in brown enamel. Storage space is excellent. In addition to the cupboards beneath the kitchen, there's a large locker with top access and a big wardrobe, plus the usual space beneath the bench seat and a gas bottle compartment accessible when the rear tailgate is opened. There is no specific storage compartment for a chemical closet but, with the uncluttered floor area, motorcaravanners wanting one could carry it disguised as a seat.



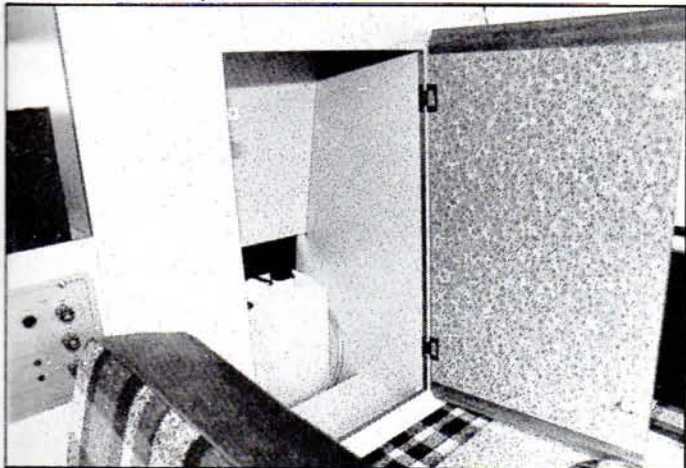
The roof was very easy to raise and lower and the bed up there was fully upholstered. As the photograph shows, the apron lets in a lot of light and is uninsulated. There are small hit-and-miss ventilators each end and one fluorescent lamp.



Behind the wardrobe is a gas locker (ventilated), big enough for a couple of Camping Gaz or Calor bottles. The step in the floor allows the lid to the engine compartment to be raised, once the mattress has been removed.



The small gap between cab roof bow and end of bed can be seen but, on the Diamond, there's an aperture in the cab roof which I found fairly easy to clamber through from one of the front seats. Note the smart brown and cream striped curtains.



For a Volkswagen, the wardrobe at the rear is commendably spacious, giving room for something like four or five jacket-length garments. Danbury's standard water containers rest in the bottom. Water is supplied to sink by a submersible pump.

The spacious feel of the interior is achieved partly by the light tones of the furniture and interior cladding but mainly by leaving out any additional passenger seating at the rear. There is just the bench seat.

Dining, therefore, is at separate tables: two at the rear, two in the cab, where seats swivel to face a small table.

Danbury have their own rock-and-roll mechanism for converting the rear seat to a bed. We found it easy to operate but, after lowering the bench, it was necessary to pull the big rear cushion (over the engine compartment) forward to close a gap. The upper bed is a full width upholstered double, extending

from the rear of the van. The bed is in two sections and the front half lives over the cab when not in use, to allow full standing height around the kitchen area. When this bed is made up, occupants can enter through an aperture cut in the cab roof — the first time we've seen such an arrangement in a VW. Danbury are, by the way, one of the three "officially approved" Volkswagen converters.

My wife and I have no hesitation in declaring the Diamond to be the most attractive motorcaravan to have emerged from the near-Chelmsford factory. To be honest, we've always looked upon their conversions as utilitarian, practical but unexciting. The Diamond is different. What about the others?



The Series 2, seen here in Davis & Stone's Saltdean salesroom, has the same easy-lift roof with the same striped apron. Externally, the 1600cc VW base vehicle is indistinguishable from the 2000cc model — or the 1600 diesel. On all of them, the side sliding door wakes the campsite at night.

Danbury Series 2

This is more conventional. It has the same side-hinged rising roof which, incidentally, we found quite easy to raise and lower on all three samples. There is the same upper bed arrangement but this time there is no cutout in the cab roof. When the bed is made, there is a tiny gap between its end and the cab roof — nicely padded but too narrow for my bulk. I chose to clamber up on to the rear half of the bed and then pull the front half backwards, finally arranging the sleeping bag.

The exterior was also a two-tone job, in brown and stone. Price was virtually the same as that of the Diamond for, although the model we tried was £300 cheaper, it had the smaller 1600 engine, although the Electrolux 122 was included in the price.

The Series 2 didn't seem as spacious as the Diamond — and it wasn't, for there was a wide, rear-facing, bench seat behind the cab passenger's seat. This gave a lot of extra storage space (enough for a chemical closet and then some) and the unit bore traces of its original function of a forward or backward seat — now abandoned.

DANBURY TRIO



Compare this view from the side door with that of the Diamond — and observe the comparatively restricted floor space on the Series 2. Note also the position of the refrigerator, which will be referred to in a later photograph. In this model, two-plus-two can sit facing the table.



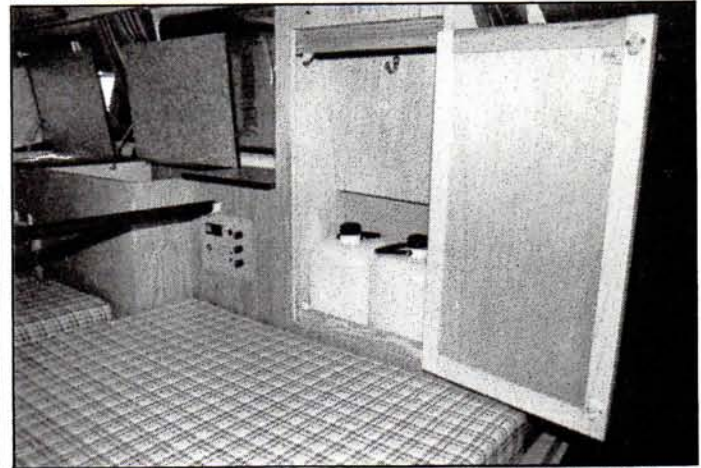
Separate lids here for sink and cooker in place of the one-piece in the Diamond. The two-burner cooker has its grill beneath, and the hob is shielded by hinged metal side flaps which also hold up the lid. The lid to the deep storage chest is shown opened. When closed, it's a useful worktop.



These timber framed, hessian-covered hinged flaps on the front panel of the bench seat look like doors giving access to the locker beneath but 'opening' them reveals a blank wall. They are supports for the bed base. The socket for the island leg table can be seen in the vinyl covered floor.



The bed is made from the flattened bench seat matching up with the big cushion which lives permanently over the engine deck. It is also based on a rock-and-roll mechanism but the backrest is supported by an iron tube (here removed). Refrigerator cannot be opened when bed is down.



Here is the vergh shallow wardrobe at the rear, with a single peg rather than a rail for garments. Keeping the wardrobe so small does allow a bed that's wider at the head, although it narrows where the kitchen unit intrudes. The Zig unit and part of the iron tube can be seen forward of the wardrobe.



The rear-facing passenger seat is simply swung on its hinges to reveal the big storage compartment beneath, measuring 20 x 28 x 12 inches deep. Twin end panels with a gap between presumably indicate that at one time this seat was reversible, though now it's fixed.

Again, the kitchen unit runs along the offside wall and provides virtually identical accommodation. I thought the treatment of the three narrow doors rather fussy but no doubt others will like the wood frames and dark hessian inserts — a motif repeated on the three false doors on the front of the locker beneath the bench seat. Two of these hinge outwards to make bed supports; the centre one is fixed.

In the Series 2, there's also a Zig unit and a big locker with top access in the working surface, but the wardrobe is much smaller, with a hook rather than a rail for clothes. There's also

a metal bar across the full width of the vehicle, which acts as a support for the backrest of the bench seat. That bar was a bit of a nuisance when bed making.

Both Diamond and Series 2 had provision for carrying 6 gallons of water in three containers, which could be stored in the big locker in the kitchen or in the bottom of the wardrobe. Both pumped water to the sink electrically, neither had a waste tank. In addition to their Zig units, both provided three 8 watt fluorescent lamps, plus cab courtesy lamp and 12 volt socket outlets.



In the same showroom, next to the Series 2, was the much simpler Danbury Travellette, in one-colour exterior paintwork — white in this case. Although a simpler (and cheaper) package than the others, it has the same easy-lift rising roof with double bed.



Apart from lockers beneath seats, the only other storage space in the Travellette is in the narrow, full length fitment along the offside wall, where there are pigeon-holes and lids. The enormous bed is made from seat cushions, measures 8ft 2 inches x 4ft 10 inches — but there's a gap at the foot, as shown.



On the Travellette, seven passengers can face forwards for travelling: two in the cab, two on the seats/lockers situated midway and three on the rear bench seat, which is almost five feet wide. There is a narrow gap between the two midway seats.



The Travellette's bed in the roof is the same as that on the Series 2, so again it's easier to clamber through the gap shown and then pull the front portion backwards. Travellette is leg generous with interior lighting. There's the one fluorescent shown here, plus two festoons.



In this model, the two single seats are reversible (though not instantly removable) so that they face the table. Cooker and gas are carried in one of the ventilated underseat lockers. Reversing the seats is simply a matter of pulling out backrests and slotting them in t'other way round.

At virtually identical prices (allowing for variations in equipment of models reviewed) the choice is yours. We thought the Diamond had definite flair, while the Series 2 was merely competent.

Travellette

And now for something completely different. The Travellette is essentially a personnel carrier with motorcaravan additions. There was the same bed in the roof seen on the other models but, down below, the long kitchen/storage unit along the offside has been reduced to a few inches in width and has become merely

a narrow locker. There is no wardrobe, no kitchen sink — no kitchen, in fact, although a simple gas cooker is provided in one of the underseat lockers. Washing is relegated to a plastic bowl.

The lack of domestic equipment allows a much wider bench seat (nearly five feet) which can be converted to an enormous bed over eight feet long. The twin seats in the middle position are reversible by a simple alteration of their backrests, so four or five people can be seated facing the small table which clips to the offside wall, supported by a single pole leg.

It's a rudimentary motorcaravan but a very practical passenger carrier with forward-facing seating for seven. Davis and Stone and Danbury have, between them, managed to keep the price below £7000. The Travellette could appeal to buyers who want a super new VW at a modest price. It offers tremendous scope for DIY modifications and additions.

VOLKSWAGEN

I liked:

- Smoothness
- Light controls
- Easy steering
- Good lock
- Fair directional stability
- Well silenced engine
- Absence of body rattles
- Comfortable cab seats
- Fair fuel economy
- Automatic choke
- Accessible spare wheel

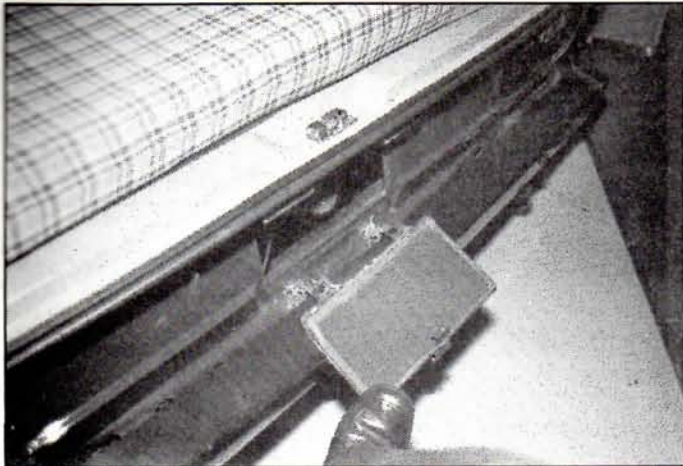
I would have liked:

- More urge from the 1600 engine
- Seat belts for rear seat passengers
- (Danbury can supply mounting points on some of their conversions)

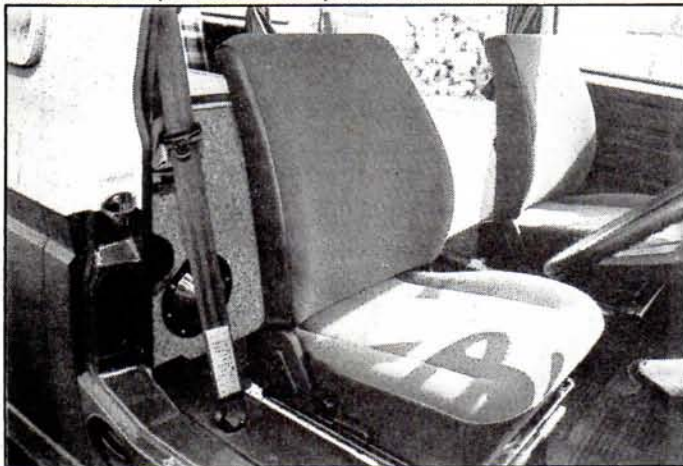
I disliked:

- Releasing handbrake to swivel driver's seat.
- Noisy sliding door.

DANBURY TRIO



On all Volkswagens of this type, the engine is accessible only by removing the big cushion which forms the rear end of the bed, but oil can be checked and topped up via this small orifice, revealed when number plate is lowered. The spare wheel is in a pan beneath the front floor.



On all models, the same figure-hugging Volkswagen cab seats, cloth covered, were fitted. I've driven long distances in them and like them. They are adjustable for reach and backrest rake — although the amount of adjustment on driver's seats is limited by the furniture unit behind. Only Diamond's swivel.



The cab can't be considered luxurious, but it is neat and functional. Car drivers might call the gear lever notchy, with long travel, but motorcaravanners will be used to that. All minor controls are within easy reach of the driver; instruments are recessed to avoid reflections. Controls are light.



Diesel differences: here is a view of the cab on the 1600 diesel. Instantly recognisable as VW but observant readers may be able to spot a few differences. We'll be running a full report on this interesting new addition to the VW range in an early edition of MMM.

DIAMOND

I liked:

- Uncluttered floor space
- Attractive décor
- Eye level grill
- Enamelled sink and hob
- Good storage space
- Deep, top-access chest
- Big gas bottle compartment
- Swivel front seats
- Easy seat-bed mechanism
- Two-tone exterior paintwork
- Good roof bed with cab access
- Easy-lift roof
- Zig unit for mains electricity
- Good interior lighting
- 12 volt socket outlet

I would have liked:

- Water tank to supplement porters
- Waste water tank

I disliked:

- Top-hinged door to underseat locker.

- Two-tone paintwork
- Generous work surface
- Zig unit for mains electricity
- Deep storage chest
- Good interior lighting
- 12 volt socket outlet

I would have liked:

- Reversible middle seat
- Larger wardrobe
- Water tank to supplement porters
- Waste water tank

I disliked:

- Metal bar which supports seat
- Bed obstructing refrigerator

TRAVELETTE

I liked:

- Simple interior, allowing scope for DIY
- Good roof bed
- Easy-lift roof
- Wide rear bench seat and bed
- Reversible seats
- All seats face forward

I would have liked:

- Removable mid-seats

Volkswagen options (approx prices):

- 2 litre engine package £424
- Auto transmission with 2 litre engine £400
- 1600cc diesel engine £600.

Danbury Diamond 'Special'

Colour scheme:

Brown/stone exterior paintwork. White GRP roof cap with yellow/white/brown striped apron. Brown ribbed cord linings on doors and seat bases. Brown enamel sink and hob. Off-white Formica front to kitchen unit with flower-patterned doors. Light, wipe-clean roof lining. Cork tile effect vinyl flooring. Green/brown/beige check tweed upholstery. Brown/cream regency striped curtains.

Dimensions:

- Main bed 72 x 45 inches (1830 x 1145 mm)
- Upper bed 70 x 42 inches (1780 x 1065 mm)
- OR 42 x 42 plus 42 x 28 inches (1065 x 1065 + 1065 x 710 mm)
- Headroom above upper bed 35 inches max (890 mm)
- Full standing height 98 inches max (2490 mm)
- Work surface 56 x 19 inches (1420 x 485 mm)
- Tables 31 x 18 inches (785 x 455 mm), 22½ x 16 inches (570 x 405 mm)
- Storage chest 17 x 22 x 31 inches deep (430 x 560 mm)
- Wardrobe 24 inches wide (610 mm), 15 inches deep (max) (380 mm), 30 inches drop from rail (760 mm)
- Gas locker 15 x 17 x 18 (max) 13 min ht (380 x 430 x 455/330 mm)

Price: £7495 (ex works) with 2000cc engine, plus £160 for refrigerator.

SERIES 2

I liked:

- Good roof bed
- Easy-lift roof

DANBURY TRIO

Danbury Series 2

Colour scheme:

Brown/stone exterior paintwork. White GRP roof cap with yellow/white/brown striped apron. Brown ribbed cord linings on seat bases. Stainless steel sink and hob. Pine edging to cupboard doors and brown hessian panels. Flecked stone vinyl flooring tones with kitchen worktop. Brown/cream regency striped curtains. Blue/tan/cream small checked tweed upholstery.

Dimensions:

Main bed 74 x 53 narrowing to 46 inches (1880 x 1345/1170 mm)

Upper bed 70 x 42 inches (1780 x 1065 mm)

OR 42 x 42 plus 42 x 28 inches (1065 x 1065 + 1065 x 710 mm)

Headroom above upper bed 35 in (max) 890 mm)

Full standing height 98 inches max (2490 mm)

Work surface 62 x 19 inches (1575 x 485 mm)

Table 26 x 31 inches (660 x 785 mm)

Storage and gas chest 21 x 16½ x 31 inches deep (535 x 420 x 785 mm)

Wardrobe 19 inches wide at top (485 mm), 17½ inches deep

(max) (445 mm), 29 inches drop from hook (735 mm)

Box beneath middle seat 20 x 28 x 12 inches deep (508 x 710 x 305 mm)

Price: £7195 with 1600cc engine (refrigerator included)

Danbury Travelette

Colour scheme:

White exterior paintwork. White GRP roof cap with yellow/white/brown striped apron. Blue/cream/tan small check tweed upholstery. Brown/tan regency striped curtains. Brown carpet.

Dimensions:

Main bed 98 x 58 inches (2490 x 1475 mm)

Upper bed 70 x 42 inches (1780 x 1065 mm)

OR 42 x 42 plus 42 x 28 inches (1065 x 1065 + 1065 x 710 mm)

Headroom above upper bed 35 inches (max) (890 mm)

Full standing height 98 inches (max) (2490 mm)

Table 26 x 31 inches (660 x 785 mm)

Vehicles converted by Danbury Conversions Ltd, Main Road, Danbury, Chelmsford, Essex and supplied for evaluation by Davis & Stone Ltd, Longridge Avenue, Saltdean, Brighton, Sussex.

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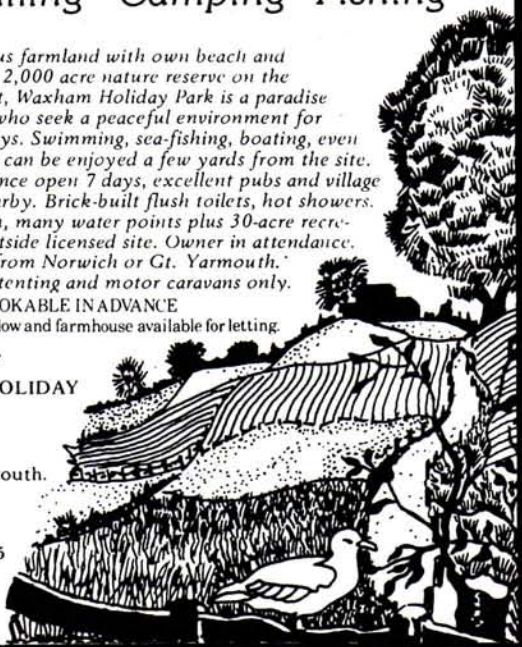
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