

Dawsons Danbury Renegade

This is a very different design for a Volkswagen-based camper. The interior layout is the same style as the original Renegade which is built on the Bedford Rascal. The Rascal Renegade has proved such a success that Dawsons Danbury have slotted the same concept into other base vehicles such as the Nissan Vanette which made its debut at last year's Earls Court Show, and now the Volkswagen Transporter.

We've already tested the others in the Renegade range.

Our testers go fun camping in Big Red, the latest in the Renegade range

The Nissan version came under our scrutiny in the February 1988 issue and the original Rascal-based model (which incidentally was in a similar red colour) featured back in April 1987. We christened that particular model Little Red, so that must make this one Big Red.

Despite a similar conversion going into the comparatively

roomier surroundings of the VW, this is still very much an occasional camper rather than

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a fully-fledged motor caravan. It's the type of vehicle to be used not just for touring but as a car and a load carrier during the week. And the dimensions of the VW mean that this vehicle is not much longer or wider than an estate car. Particularly one which can carry up to six adults in comfort, if indeed there is such a thing.

Big Red's distinctive colour – Volkswagen call it Marsala red – has the Danbury logo in black on the doors and elevating roof section in white. Additional side windows have been



Plenty of seating is the plus point of the interior



Storage at each side of the van – cupboards and deep lockers



You don't have to go to the fair to enjoy this fun camper



Good-sized double bed is as easy to make as it is comfortable

fitted by the converters – the one on the offside slides open for welcome ventilation for the rear seat passengers. A final, stylish touch to the exterior was the addition of an Elite front spoiler in matching red.

Our test vehicle had the standard VW running gear – a 78bhp petrol engine coupled to a four-speed gearbox. We can't help feeling that in the case of this Volkswagen engine four gears are better than, or at least as good as, the (optional) five. With the

‘four gears are better than five’

four-speed you get a conventional shift pattern and the final ratio is not that much lower than the five-speed.

Our feelings are borne out by the miles-per-gallon figures. Volkswagen reckon on 24.1mpg at half payload and $\frac{3}{4}$ maximum speed for four gears compared to 24.8mpg for the five-speed. That's for a pre-conversion Transporter. Official data for the Transpor-

TEST EXTRA

ter-derived Caravelle, which is probably closer to a motor caravan, are: at constant 56mph, 29.7mpg (four-speed) and 30.1mpg (five-speed); only the urban cycle figures show any appreciable difference – 20.3mpg compared to the five-speed's superior 25.9mpg.

What these figures fail to take into account are differences in individual driver's methods of driving – it is probably safe to assume that a motor caravanner will take more care in the driving of his vehicle than, say, someone using it as a commercial van. Four gears or five? Motor caravans are more economical? Perhaps readers would like to offer us their opinions.

We can only go by our own fuel consumption records for test vehicles. This Renegade had just 30 miles on its clock at the start of the test yet the engine felt already well loosened. Over our 584 miles of test driving we recorded an overall 23mpg; this rose to 27mpg on a cross-country run along fast A-roads of some 150 miles.

Big Red did seem to be a particularly lively performer. This could be put down to a number of factors: the elevating roof design is obviously more aerodynamic than a high-top; inside it's a fairly simple conversion which means a lighter kerbweight; or quite simply the engine was in especially fine tune. Or could it be that the Renegade felt faster due to the sunny spell dur-



Dinette arrangement just copes with four at meal times

ing which we were testing the vehicle?

Even with a weekend's luggage on board, Big Red cruised comfortably at 70mph with power in reserve. We felt little effect from side winds despite some very gusty weather – the Elite spoiler played its part here. Around town it was the usual story for VW-based conversions – no problems.

If there's little to criticise about the VW's driveability, unfortunately the same cannot be said about the cab. It's definitely feeling its age in here – equipment is kept to a bare minimum with a clock the only item you could consider a luxury. It's good news to hear that

all new VWs will have a cigarette lighter – it provides a

Despite its billing as a budget-priced camper the Renegade is finished to a good standard as well as having features many other costlier motor caravans would like to boast

handy 12v socket in the cab which, especially in the case of the Renegade, would be useful for a coolbox (a refrigerator is not part of Big Red's specification).

It's also good to hear that all new Volkswagen Transporters will have intermittent wiper, driver's door tray and dipping rear view mirror. That VW have only just got round to fitting these items justifies our comments about the base vehicle.

Cab accommodation is more acceptable. Seats are firm and supportive, being adjustable for reach and rake, with the added safety of adjustable head restraints. Standard trim here is a flecked grey tweed which is both attractive and hard-wearing. Danbury have left the cab floor trim at Volkswagen's rubber matting too – this often proves more practical than carpet.

Passenger seating is just as comfortable. In the back there are separate rear facing seats and a forward facing bench seat. Upholstery, plus side wall panelling, is a natty grey woven material with red checks which contrasts well with the exterior colouring. A grey heavy-ribbed floor carpet and cord carpet roof lining complete the interior colour scheme which has a 1980s look and feel to it. Considering the Renegade is designed with people carrying very much in mind, we would have expected to see rear lap restraints fitted as standard.

A single leg table slots in



Storage at the sides continues to the rear with wardrobe on offside...



...and extra cubby hole on the nearside.

TEST EXTRA

between the two rows of seats to provide dinette seating for four. When not in use, the leg stores in the wardrobe and the top can be put over the engine deck behind the rear seat. An alternative location we found for the table when it was not required was beside the seat against the offside wall.

All furniture is ply with a light oak finish and dark wood beading for the edgings. Despite its billing as a budget-priced camper the Renegade is finished to a good standard as well as having features many other costlier motor caravans would like to boast, for example 'brass' handles and piano hinges for the cupboard doors. Likewise the bright red velvet-style material for the curtains which extend all round the van at night time.

The rear bench seat is flanked by small armrest-cum-work surfaces which offer cupboard space accessible by stylish rounded doors at the front and hinged lids on top. The unit on the nearside houses a 6lb Camping Gaz



Flip up the seat squabs for two-ring cooker and sink

cylinder on the floor and has a shelf.

These cupboard units extend along each side of the van to offer a storage bin on the nearside and wardrobe,

with a hanging depth of 35in, on the offside. The latter is the only item of furniture extending above the vehicle's waistline which means you get excellent vision all round.

There's further storage space in the base of the bench seat and a single overhead locker behind the seat. It adds up to easily enough space for two peoples' camping. If more are going on holiday you will need to specify the option of roof beds or buy an annexe for extra sleeping berths.

Cooking and washing facilities are kept out of sight when not in use in the bases of the rear facing seats. When it's time to do the cooking the nearside seat cushion tips back and you pull up the cooker - two rings and a grill - to rest on the seat base. It's a tried and trusted Renegade method. A similar operation with the offside seat also reveals a stainless steel sink with cold water supply pumped from the 10-litre container adjacent.

These facilities, albeit basic, are efficient enough. That's no criticism, many people feel they do not need full cooking and washing facilities - for instance, many Continental models we test do not have a



Side windows slide open, extra windows in elevating section



Rounded edges add distinctive look to interior



Base vehicle looks and handling are enhanced by spoiler



Overall length 15ft, overall width 6ft 1in, overall height including roof vents 7ft.

DANBURY VW RENEGADE

£13,750

Converter

Dawsons Danbury Ltd, Kin Royal Forge, Mellis Common, Mellis, Suffolk IP23 8EB. ☎ 037983 8282.

BODY

Type: elevating roof.

Berths: two.

Construction: Volkswagen Transporter with additional windows in body and GRP elevating roof plinth.

Insulation: air space between outer walls and inner panels. Carpet material roof lining. Carpet floor.

Doors: two in cab, nearside sliding door, tailgate.

INTERIOR

Toilet room: no.

Gas system: on-board capacity for single 6lb Camping Gaz cylinder.

Electrical system: 12v DC supply from vehicle battery.

Lighting: single-tube fluorescent strip light, cab courtesy light, rear courtesy light.

Standard equipment includes: Spinflo Mk X two-ring hob and grill, stainless steel sink with 2½-gal fresh water supply, single leg table, wardrobe.

Factory-fitted options: rear lap restraints, bunk beds, mains hook-up package.

BASE VEHICLE

Model: Volkswagen Transporter.

Engine: 1913cc, 4cyl horizontally opposed. Max power 78bhp at 4600rpm, max torque 104lb.ft at 2600rpm.

Transmission: four-speed manual, rear-wheel drive.

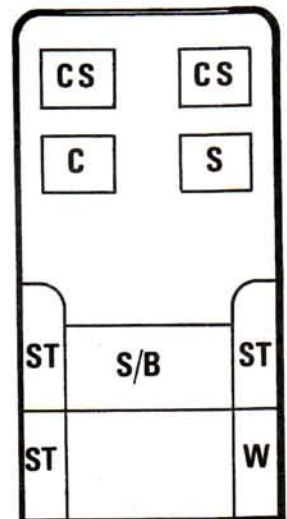
Suspension: front independent double wishbones, progressive coil springs with telescopic shock absorbers, anti-roll bar; rear independent trailing arms, miniblock springs with telescopic shock absorbers.

Steering: rack and pinion.

Brakes: front discs, rear drums, dual circuit, servo-assisted.

Factory-fitted options: full range of diesel, turbo-diesel and fuel-injected engines; five-speed manual or three-speed automatic transmissions, power-assisted steering, anti-lock brakes, syncro four-wheel drive.

Importer: VAG (UK) Ltd, Commercial Vehicle Division, Frankland Drive, Blagrove, Swindon SN5 8YU. ☎ 0793 40231.



Key: CS cab seats, C cooker, S sink, SB seat (converts to double bed), W wardrobe, St Storage.

grill - and it's likely that some motor caravanners will need the extra seating anyway. And the budget price for a Volkswagen-based conversion just about clinches the argument in favour of Big Red.

One problem we did find with this layout was that the cooker and sink could not be left up with the table in position. This means a quick transformation from kitchen (cooker and sink up) to dinette (table up).

At night time a large double bed 6ft 3in x 3ft 7in is easily made by pulling forward the squab of the rear bench seat and allowing the cushions to drop in to position. A large loop pull in the middle of the mattress makes converting the bed back to a seat an equally easy operation.

The elevating roof is just as convenient. Four interior clips hold it down. When these are undone the elevating section just pushes up and metal stays at the front and back keep it up. The purpose of the roof in the two-berth is to give more headroom, 6ft of it, when the vehicle is parked up,



Elevating roof is a simple design which is surprisingly sturdy

although small 'windows' in the striped vinyl sides do let in slightly more light. Twin roof vents with flyscreens provide the ventilation.

Any doubts about the stability of the roof were soon dispelled when the elevating section was put up during a really windy day on the coast. The conditions were enough to rock the van, but the roof stayed steady.

This is a very versatile conversion, as was proved by us in our week of testing, where Big Red performed a number of roles apart from just that of camper. We also used it as a six-seater (four adults and a child were comfortably accommodated), and as a load carrier (a large bed and a bike were swallowed up with ease).

The Renegade is also the type of camper which people

might like to consider as an introduction to motor caravanning - there's enough in the way of life support equipment to give a taste of what it's all about. Or if you want a vehicle which is easy to drive, copes with unusual loads and enables you to stop at the roadside for a cup of tea, it's ideal. At £13,750 it's about the cheapest all-new VW-based conversion you can buy □



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