



 **Devon**
Motor caravans
that live up to their promises.

**Chris Burlace reports on his
road test of Devon Conversions
Eurovette Motor Caravan**

GERRY HILL (CAR SALES) LTD.

33, VICTORIA SQUARE,

ABERDARE M.D.-GLAM.

CF44 7LB

Telex number: Aberdare 2564

Reproduced by kind permission of 'Safer Motoring'

EXTRA 20 BHP MAKES DEVON'S EUROVETTE FASTER AND SAFER



Chris Burlace testing

A friend who owns an elderly VW motor caravan and is also a great sailing enthusiast puts it nicely when he says: 'These Caravettes don't accelerate, they gather way!' Lack of performance is something one accepts in a motor caravan in exchange for its many other merits, but there are many times when I long for something more than the 50 bhp churned out by the 1600 unit in my own 'van to propel its one-and-a-half tons. Needless to say, therefore, I did not have to be asked twice when offered the loan of one of Devon's Eurovettes with the latest 2-litre engine option.

Originally a 1967 Devon Microbus conversion, bought in 1971 with 50,000 on the clock, provided our introduction to motor caravanning and soon had us 'hooked'. It was a wonderful vehicle, combining the solid reliability of the VW with tough craftsman-made furniture which could take all the knocks of camping and quickly come up like new after a quick sand and a coat of varnish.

However, design-wise those earlier conversions were not our cup of tea. The bed arrangement was not the most comfortable for larger mortals, the pocket handkerchief floor space remaining when the bed was in use cause endless contortions when dressing or undressing, and the lack of a walk-through to the cab necessitated an inelegant scramble between cab and living area.

We solved those problems, saved money and beat the imposition of tax on motor caravans by building our own conversion on a new 'van early in 1973 (described in detail in the May, June, July and August 1974 issues of *Safer Motoring*).

More recent Devons have undergone a transformation in interior layout, yet have retained the excellence of materials and workmanship which brought the company its reputation.

Examining the new generation Devons, Devonettes and Eurovettes, on camp sites and at the various shows, I have been



convinced that they had found a practical layout. How would it turn out in a prolonged test?

We journeyed down from Hertfordshire to pick up the Eurovette from Devon's factory at Sidmouth. Well into autumn, and hardly the height of the holiday season. Heavy rain accompanied us for much of the way but by the time we reached Devon the sun had been brought out to greet us. One of Devon's staff cheerfully came out on a Saturday afternoon to hand over the vehicle and make sure that we were familiar with it.

We wondered how the Eurovette would cope with swallowing all the paraphernalia which, from long practice, we manage to cram into our own 'van. We need not have worried. It all went in and looked no more and no less untidy than usual!

The Eurovette has the usual locker under the rear bench seat, another spacious locker under the single rear-facing seat behind the driving seat, and a capacious wardrobe sited between those two seats with access through a door opening on to the walkthrough.

There is additional storage in a roof locker at the rear, while food is stored in an evaporative cooler unit located beneath the sink on the nearside. A refrigerator can be fitted as an alternative to the cooler at extra cost.

To the rear of the stainless steel sink and drainer unit, which is conveniently sited beside the rear seat, is a special crockery storage basket and below it the five-gallon water tank. This feeds the folding faucet in the sink via a Whale electric pump.

Bedding and other items for which no other home can be found can be stowed in the large wall behind the rear seat. Smaller items, however, had an unfortunate knack of disappearing down the slot into the underseat locker.

Tidiness is a virtue in motor caravanners, and its presence or absence in Eurovette owners can soon be gauged by a glance through the rear window of their 'van!

The extra power of the two-litre engine was immediately apparent on driving the Super Eurovette. The clutch action is heavier than on the 1600 versions; presum-

ably the clutch has been beefed-up to handle the extra power.

Take off is smooth with acceleration which amazes those accustomed to 'ordinary' Type 2 vehicles, with less fuss from the engine; the final drive ratio has been reduced from 5.43:1 to 4.57:1, so reducing revs in all the gears.

Power is, in fact, increased from 50 to 70 DIN bhp and torque from 74.5 to 98.6 lb ft without a significant increase in engine rpm.

The extra bhp in the tail makes the 2-litre Type 2 VW a safer vehicle to drive. Overtaking is markedly improved with usable maxima of 400 and 60 mph available in second and third gears respectively.

Surprisingly top gear performance appears to be only marginally better than with the 1600 engine and the vehicle still only 'gathers way'.

Providing that a good speed is built up, however, it is possible to hold on to top far longer on gradients. In the lower gears hill climbing performance shows a startling improvement and nobody could label the big-engined Eurovette a 'snail'.

At 70 mph the 2-litre Eurovette cruised quietly and seemed to have plenty in hand. The quoted top speed is 79 mph but I would not be surprised if a far better figure could be attained.

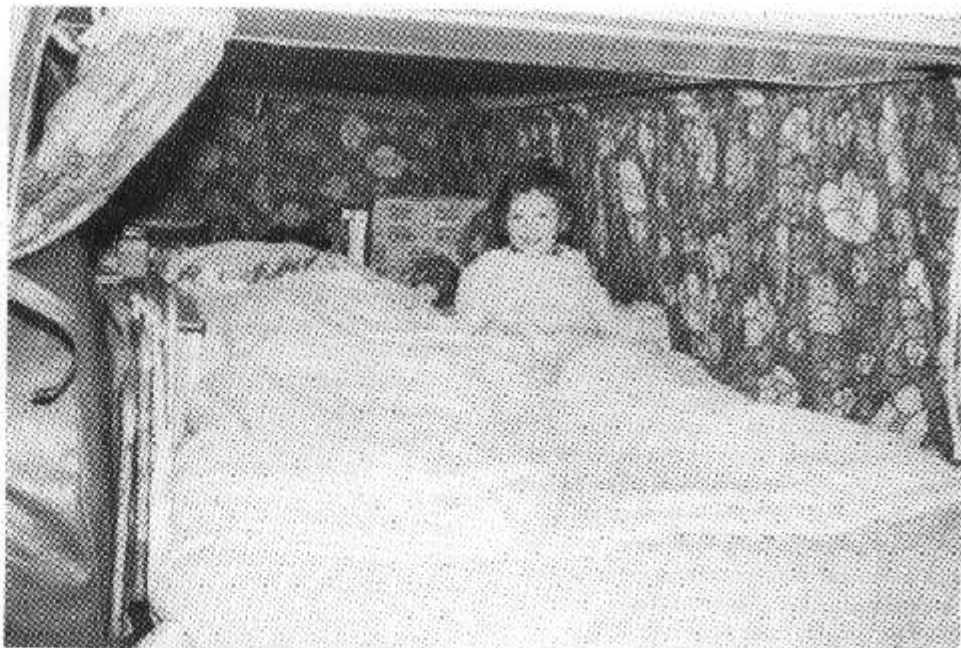
However, the extra performance has to be paid for. Our mix of driving conditions was far from ideal – plenty of hills, stops and starts, third gear work on twisting lanes and a couple of long runs on the A38 at the legal limit, and a resulting consumption of around only 17-18 mpg.

An additional benefit which comes when one pays £336 for the 2-litre package is servo brakes. These bring about a very marked reduction in the pedal pressures needed to stop the ton-and-a-half plus of vehicle and passengers, while being progressive and with plenty of feel.

I vote this the best of the, admittedly few, servo-braked vehicles I have driven.

Radial tyres are also included in the 'package price' and bring improvements in roadholding which, once experienced, no Type 2 owner will wish to be without.

The delights of the big-engined Eurovette as a vehicle on the road were very quickly appreciated, but how would it measure up as a caravan? We drove on from Sidmouth through Exeter and regained the coast again at Dawlish where we found a camp site. The first job was to put up the raising roof.



Spacious bed with ample room for two adults, or one adult and one little girl.



Devon's cooker unit – sensibly sited and efficient.

Our own 'van is not fitted with an elevating roof because another inch in height would prevent it squeezing into our garage! The extra headroom of the Devon roof was an unaccustomed luxury. Raising the roof required quite a strong push but was relatively easy and straightforward. The roof has a glass fibre top and fabric sides and the top is well insulated with hardboard and a sandwich of polystyrene.

Our first night in the 'van brought wind and rain to give the roof a thorough test. We had been worried about drumming on the roof top and flapping of the fabric sides in the wind, but our fears were soon allayed for everything was commendably quiet.



Breakfast for two – and plenty of elbow space.

The sides of the roof are a particularly good feature, being made of a very strong and heavy reinforced plastic which looks as if it could last for ever.

A constant problem with late or early season camping is interior condensation. We were pleased to find that the Eurovette, in addition to the double louvred window fitted to the front offside, had two roof ventilators. We still suffered condensation troubles but I'm sure they would have been worse but for the excellent ventilation.

However, the top-of-the-range Eurovette is based on the VW Kombi and thus has no insulating trim around the metal surrounds of the windows, and this leads to water streaming from the metal as well as the glass surfaces.

EUROVETTE

Continued from Page 11

Ideally an all-seasons motor caravan should have complete interior trim and double glazing — but such a feature is a rarity in Britain and only to be found in vehicles in the £6,500 plus bracket.

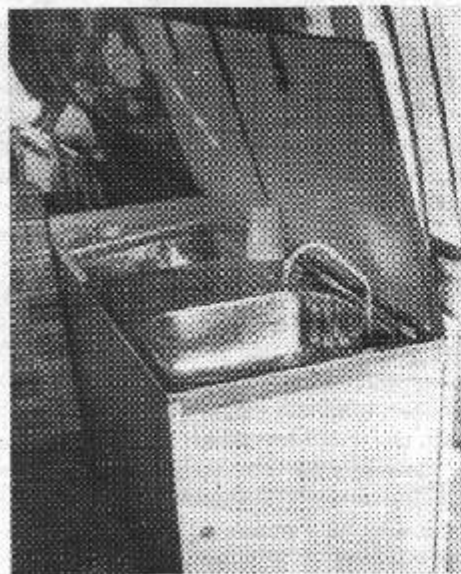
Essentially a motor caravan is a vehicle for sleeping in, so no vehicle can gain a good rating unless the main bed is comfortable and easy to erect. The Devon bed system gains very high marks. A lift and a pull of the front of the bench seat causes it to extend and form a continuous platform level with the engine deck.

Two supports then fold down to brace the extended section on the front of the under-seat locker. The bed is over six feet long and nearly four foot wide.

Three cushions, one permanently in place on the engine deck and the others from the bench seat, form the sleeping surface. The foam is thick and firm and covered in a warm attractive material which blends well with the rosewood finish of the furniture.

The joints between the cushions were spaced ideally with respect to my anatomy and I slept even better than in our own van. Sandra, my wife, however, being six inches shorter found the joints at critical positions and was less comfortable.

This is one of those compromise situations which would be solved by one-piece cushions for the bed, and is impossible to arrange in any reasonable VW layout. On a more practical note Sandra was critical of the decorative buttoning on the cushions, which would make the covers difficult to remove for cleaning.



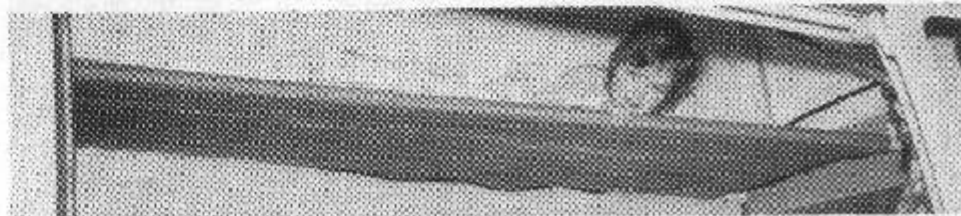
Stainless steel sink unit, with food storage underneath.

Sleeping accommodation for two children or small adults (slim but not necessarily short) is provided by two roof bunks in the Eurovette. They disappear remarkably behind press stud fastened covers when not in use but are easily folded out.

Being tapered towards the foot ends they leave space for clambering in, without the precarious two-on-a-bunk situation necessary on some conversions I have seen to permit the second occupant to unfold his bunk and then scramble across to it.

Our daughter, Susan, at two-and-a-half, was too young to trust in a roof bunk, so we fitted up the cab bunk which Devon can supply as an optional extra. This is slung between two spring-loaded poles which fit into holes in the screen pillars and door pillars.

Fitting the rear pole was a bit of a struggle and had to be done with both



Upper berth — just right for a child of any age, and a bit of an adventure.

doors open, but the bunk once erected provides a safe and spacious area for the younger child.

Kitchen facilities in the Eurovette are adequate for a vehicle of its size. The two burner and grill cooker is located on top of a cabinet, behind the passenger seat, in which is stored the gas bottle, leaving room for a few pots and pans.

The cooker is fitted with a fold-away splash guard with a plate rack incorporated, and in fine weather can be swung out for use outside the 'van.

The rear facing seat, which is fitted with a folding section to form a fourth seat for dining, provides a suitable place for the cook to sit.

Melamine work surfaces form lids over both the sink unit and the crockery storage basket and together with the table and the removable top over the cooker provides plenty of working area. As is usual with Devons, a variety of screw-in legs are supplied to enable the dining table to be used outside the vehicle if required and to permit the cooker top to serve as a work surface even when the cooker is used in the out-of-van position.

Inside the 'van the table slots into a *Vitesse* strip on the wall, making for quick

and easy fitting, and is supported at the outer end by a single folding leg. Unfortunately the table on the loan 'van easily slid out of the *Vitesse* fitting at inconvenient moments — no doubt a result of straining the strip by overloading.

Basically we approved of the layout and choice of fittings in the Eurovette, although it did not fit our needs like our own 'van, tailor-made to our particular requirements and fitting us after four years like a well-loved pair of old shoes!

But the commercial converter has to produce something which appeals to a wide range of buyers. That I think Devon have undoubtedly achieved.

To those who have been motor caravanners before, and to the novice who has done his homework and asked the right people the right questions before making a purchase, there are some little points which are important.

Devon have paid attention to these.

Protective plastic edging to protect the vulnerable corners of furniture. Vinyl cushion floor, non-slip and easy to wipe clean from campsite mud.

Cupboard catches, either concealed with access through neat sleeved holes or impulse operated, which will not yield at a critical moment to spill out the contents of lockers, nor catch in ones clothes.

Flame retardant curtains (but please arrange a separate one for the back window, the tailgate hinges intrude and make an all-round-the-van system impractical).

A really good fluorescent light. These little features set the seal on a well thought out product.

If you have £4,000 plus to spend look at the Eurovette range; a fixed roof conversion on the Type 2 van is £4,029, recommended retail price, and top of the range is the Kombi-based 'van with elevating roof at £4,475.

To really enjoy your driving as well as your camping opt for the 2-litre engine package — if you haven't driven a Type 2 with 70 horses in the back you haven't lived! You might have to give up a few little luxuries to pay for the extra petrol, but that's just exchanging one luxury for another.