

MOTOR CARAVAN GUIDE

A motor home of your own?

*Could you and your family live in a VW camper?
Eoin Young and his were not all that sure they could.
How they came to terms with their Devon Eurovette . . .*



THE REGISTRATION number bothered me. To most people the prefix ROW suggests row as in boat, but it struck an ominous warning that it could mean row as in fight as the Young family scaled themselves down to life in a Volkswagen camper. I was right. We almost didn't make it to the front gate after packing for our inaugural trip. Why did we have to have so much stuff? Where did we put it anyway? Whose idea was it to buy the thing in the first place? I have to confess that the journey from East Horsley to the M4 motorway was notable for a lack of conversation, a stony silence in fact, but as the camper gathered pace and settled at a comfortable 70, family peace re-established itself and it has been

a funwagen ever since.

The regimentation of life in a camper is all-important, even down to who sits where when you do the washing up. If you can accept the pattern of procedure, it's all downhill; fight it and you might as well forget it.

The choice of a camper is the first and most important step. The Young family numbers Mr., Mrs., daughter (5) and dog, a combination that seems optimum on a wet week in Wales. Using the twin bunks up top and the optional cab bunk for littlies, the camper would sleep five but I don't wish to be around when that happens.

The first thing about our decision to buy a VW was that we didn't plan to do it. We were all set to buy

the super-luxury CI Travelhome on the long wheelbase Ford Transit with its central heating, double-glazing, instant hot water, refrigerator, and all those little items which you find you really can't be without. That was before a road tester with no eye for heights took the top off it on a service station roof and the vehicle became unavailable. With the Travelhome we would have been a 4-car family (Porsche, Granada wagon, Fiat 126 and motorhome) which in these days of our Chancellor didn't seem to make a lot of sense, so we revised the family plan and decided to replace the Granada with a VW camper which could conceivably double as a station wagon. Next problem: find a VW camper.

With the cost of just about everything, including holidays and travel, climbing out of sight Volkswagen campers have suddenly appeared as The Answer for a lot of families and the result is that good ones are extremely difficult to find. New ones are £3,000 to £4,000 and reasonable used models are between £2,000 and £3,000. As we visited various dealers we discovered that a mushrooming industry has grown up, fanned by the demand, where used Volkswagen delivery vans are bought in regardless of mileage, fitted with a new camper conversion, repainted, and then offered on the market at prices competing with carefully used, low-mileage camper units. I don't suggest that the practice is wrong

motor home your own

...hat I don't wish to buy one. I discovered that you tend to pay what you pay for, that cheap vans are close to £3,000, which is more than we wanted to spend. There was also the choice of layout to consider. The Moonraker came highly recommended for the quality of its build but the model was phased out some three years ago. The Phyllis Continental, the "official" German version of the VW Eurovan, is a well built device but for family purposes the layout was cramped. We settled on the Eurovanette as our ideal, and continued the search. It's not easy to sell a Ford Granada estate these days. It didn't take me long to discover that. If we found a Eurovanette we liked, the dealer wouldn't like the Granada — or at least didn't like it sufficiently to accept any form of negotiation... When someone suggested that Alan Jones knew a lot about Volkswagen campers and I decided to contact with another Australian racer, Brian McGuire at Mill Motor Caravans in Bedford. Buying anything from an Australian car dealer tends to be something of an experience and our was no exception. By the time we had settled on ROW219M and a published agreement on the Granada, we had to start on the Eurovan. There was a fair amount of fiddling on note pads and best prices and looking at the ceiling and cups of coffee from that lady built to take your mind off the price, and finally it was £2,300. Any sort of guarantee, I decided, without seriously thinking about it would be, "Thirty-Thirty," McGuire. Thirty-thirty? Thirty yards or thirty seconds... The mileage was 17,000 and there had been two previous owners, one of whom must have been a works product tester for John Player. The interior was tinged an delicate shade of nicotine gold which necessitated a massive clean-off programme. With the rains washed most of the cigarette-smoke smell had departed. Mill Motor Garages at Ripley charged £1,000 for a going-over that included a new exhaust system, new brake pads, an engine service, a complete overhaul of the running gear, and the installation of a Javelin radio. An extra touch was the fitting of a Pye reverse stereo cassette player and the speakers built in to the roof cupboard. So now we can sit outside in the summer and listen to our van... New Zealand photographer Euan Macdonald and his wife are sea-faring campaigners with their De-Moonraker and we decided to make a joint assault on Wales by way of coming to terms with life in a motorhome.



The Devon Eurovanette. This one is M-reg with two previous owners and 17,000 miles behind it. It cost £2,300 plus £130 for a thorough check-up

side by side in a farmer's field miles from anywhere, we were agreed that we had already had more enjoyment from the camper than from the Granada in twelve months of ownership. The Granada had been superb as far as it went, but it simply wasn't able to go as far as turning into a cosy lounge, a busy kitchen, or a sight-seeing bus within minutes.

Caravanners are a divided lot. Motor caravanners have little in common with those who tow their 'vans' and little motor caravanners tend to have little in common with big motor caravanners. Each group fiercely defends its choice. Until ROW218M came along, I was under the impression I was a big motor caravanner. Now I'm converted to a small one. When I first showed a glimmer of interest in motor caravanning a few years ago I was told that big units were great to live in but hell to drive and that little units were great to drive and hell to live in. The living-in you can adjust to, the major advantage of the VW is in its car-like versatility. It handles well (on radials, not so well on cross-plies) and we found that it would motor along mountain trails in Wales that would have been nerve-shredders in anything larger and less agile. Ours is a 1974 model with the 1600 engine although later versions have

1700, 1800 or even 2-litre motors. Third gear is ideal for the meandering motoring you tend to do along little lanes, pulling healthily from 20mph up to the cut-out at 50mph. Fuel mileage is between 23 and 25 miles to the gallon and we alternate between two-star and three-star, tank for tank. The engine doesn't seem to mind.

The Eurovanette conversion features a simple pull-out bed that makes up from the rear bench seat, simple when compared with some conversions that require the use of table-tops, extra legs, and patience to build a bed for the night. You tend to be jealous about space in a VW and the removal of the spare wheel from its inside mounting to a Holdsworth bracket on the front (£19.50 including fitting at Richard Holdsworth Conversions, Reading) was worth the cost in gained storage even though Volkswagen officially frown on the modification. We have also fitted a hose connector to the sink outlet pipe and carry a length of hose in the engine compartment so that we can drain the dishwasher somewhere other than directly under the side door.

Another feature of the Eurovanette is the hanging wardrobe at the rear of the driver's seat with further clothes storage in the top rear cupboard and storage for sleeping



Cooker is mounted in box unit behind passenger's seat (on right of picture) and hinges out for outdoor cooking in good weather

bags and pillows under the rear seat. The two-burner stove and grille is mounted on a box unit behind the passenger's seat, with the gas bottle and room for pots and pans in the cupboard below. This unit hinges out and locks so that the chef can cook outdoors when weather permits. In Wales the weather ranged between snow flurries and sunshine and we were soon aware that the cooker doubled as central heating. By the time the kettle had boiled for breakfast, the van was snug and warm despite whatever the Welsh weather was doing outside.

Our second trip was to Silverstone for the Graham Hill International Trophy race and we took up our place in the 'corral' at Becketts made up of the Sarginson and Young VWs and the borrowed Mercedes of Autocar editor Ray Hutton. Modern motor racing tends to have lost a lot of glamour once involved with after-race jollities; the rush to beat the crowds away after the race becomes almost as important as the race itself. With a camper the urgency of departure disappears and you can discuss dinner over drinks while the queue edges imperceptibly over the track bridge and people who left in haste an hour before abandon the idea of getting away and return to cool their mounting irritation with a glass of something soothing.

Routine is the major requirement of camper living. Always stow the bedding when you make the seats and table up for breakfast, always wash and stow the dishes after every meal, work out a seating plan that leaves the cook beside the cooker and the infant away from it, arrange family ablutions to coincide with the boiled kettle. It all sounds simple until the first time you try it. After that it is simple.

The Eurovanette has a 5-gallon lift-out plastic water tank with a one-gallon water carrier, the tank supplying an electric pump controlled by a button behind the sink. This can be hand-operated as well. Under the sink there is a cool storage box, a sort of poor man's fridge, which we may replace with a gas fridge if the advantages of ice in your gin and tonic stack up favourably enough against the chances of waking up dead in the morning because you can't vent the fridge to the outside for some reason that has so far escaped me.

Running out of water is a problem faced by all forms of campers, motorised or otherwise, but we have insured against drought with a plastic water carrier that holds 10 litres and has an on-off tap. When empty it rolls up for easy storage.

So the Young family is heading into summer with what appears to be the best investment father ever made, a Volkswagen camper that has cost under £2,500 and is already paying dividends in the sheer pleasure derived from the versatility of the vehicle. It's a second car for your wife, a station wagon, a family bus for the school run, a picnic on wheels, a motor caravan... but mainly, it's fun. **EY**

the occasional weekend, and | ture round with you when you | driving the rear wheels. It's quite | and the imported westphalia.

Who Makes What?

Main motor caravan manufacturers and their offering on the chief vehicles used for conversion. Special models — the luxury Winnebago Superior Land-Rovers, are excluded

C = Coachbuilt, V = Van conversion

| Caravan Manufacturer | Bedford | Commer | Fiat | Ford Escort | Ford Transit | Mercedes Benz | Leyland Marina | Leyland Sherpa | Toyota | Volkswagen |
|----------------------|---------|--------|------|-------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------|------------|
| Auto Sleeper | V | V | — | — | V | — | — | V | — | — |
| Bristolan | C | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| CI Autohomes | V+C | V+C | — | — | V+C | — | — | C | V | — |
| Clevercars | — | V | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cotswold | — | — | — | — | C | C | — | — | — | — |
| Danbury | — | — | V | — | V | — | — | — | V | V |

| Caravan Manufacturer | Bedford | Commer | Fiat | Ford Escort | Ford Transit | Mercedes Benz | Leyland Marina | Leyland Sherpa | Toyota | Volkswagen |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|------|-------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------|------------|
| Dormobile | V+C | — | — | — | V | — | — | — | — | — |
| Devon | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | V |
| Invincible | — | V | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Holdsworth | V | V | — | — | V | — | — | — | — | V |
| Motorhomes International | V | V | V | — | V | — | — | V | — | — |
| Newlander | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | C | — |
| Nimbus | — | — | — | V | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Suntrekker | C | — | — | — | C | — | C | C | C | C |
| Ultra | — | — | — | — | — | C | — | — | — | — |
| Viking | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | V |
| Westphalia | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | V |

Note: Suntrekker's demountable caravan is available for other vans including Datsun and Mazda

