



After the intensive introduction of recent months to new conversions based on the Volkswagen T4, Special Correspondent Mike Jago offers readers a report on his own

1982 DEVON MOONRAKER

on air-cooled Volkswagen Transporter

Our VW Devon Moonraker was registered in June 1982 and has the 2-litre air-cooled engine, limited to 5400rpm by a special rotor arm. It will happily keep up to the legal limit on motorways, except on hills, but is at its best on A and B roads, its distinctive sounding engine purring along at 40–60mph.

It has been claimed that the VW drives like a car, but we find it better. The high, forward driving position gives excellent visibility over traffic, whilst large windows all round and good door mirrors make motorway driving easy and safe. The only drawback is parking, when the high rear window causes some difficulty reversing between parked cars, but practice makes perfect, and at only 15 feet long the VW slots into most parking spaces.

After eight years and 38 000 miles the VW shows little sign of ageing. The clutch and 4-speed gearbox are surprisingly smooth, and steering is light yet positive with no sign of wander — a luxury compared to some light commercials we have driven. The handling has been much improved by fitting an Onexe front spoiler and crosswinds are now less of a problem. Braking is smooth and progressive, although adequate rather than impressive, lacking the feel and bite of some other vehicle systems. (The Renault Trafic is our favourite in this league.)

The chassis has been well undersealed and body panels and doors have a wax substance applied. Even on close inspection the dreaded rust is virtually non-existent with just a few bubbles on the wheelarch seams. The MOT tester described the underside of the van as 'surprisingly, very clean' which, in trade terms, is translated as 'no rust'.

The Moonraker conversion is fitted with Devon's 'Double Top' full-length elevating roof. This roof is made of a nylon reinforced fabric which cannot be insulated, making the 'van cold in cooler weather. On the plus side, when the roof is elevated there is an enormous amount of space and air in the vehicle, without the cluttered claustrophobic feeling experienced in some high-top conversions. One of the few signs of age in the vehicle was that the roof clips had become loose, causing rattles and lifting, especially when being passed by large vehicles. The problem was overcome by bending the stainless-steel clips back into shape, a two-person job!

The flue outlet for the fridge has been fitted rather close to the petrol filler-cap. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that the fuel cap makes a good seal on the unvented system. The genuine, costly VW locking cap we purchased didn't; this was overcome by

swapping the rubber washer from old cap to new.

The cab is basic, with no storage space except the glovebox. We have fitted an Onexe dash tray and a pair of door pockets from Q-B Auto Camp. Standard VW seats with head restraints are comfortable, even on long journeys, and we have fitted a swivel base from Cressland Engineering to the passenger seat, thus greatly improving lounge seating.

The heating is typical air-cooled VW but fine on longer journeys. Cab ventilation is good but very noisy when all vents are open. A fire extinguisher and fire blanket have been fitted behind the driver's seat.

The furniture and fittings are all intact and unmarked, with no signs of water ingress, all surfaces being sturdy and easily cleaned. The layout is classic style with furniture built along the offside of the 'van, and storage space is sufficient for most touring trips. Two garden chairs are kept under the rear seat and the overhead locker is ideal for the first-aid kit and toiletry items. Standard equipment includes an Electrolux RM122 gas/12V fridge which is efficient in operation, only being let down by floor level controls. Above the fridge is a stainless steel sink/drainer with tap and 12V water pump switch. Next to the drainer is a grill and double burner surrounded by a

1982 DEVON MOONRAKER

collapsible stainless steel canopy/plate warmer which, when folded away, requires a metre of bubble wrap to stop the rattles.

Two 6-pound Camping Gaz bottles are stored in the lower locker. Only one 45 amp battery is fitted to this vehicle and we have found this to be adequate, running 12V lighting, water pump, TV and fan for several days before requiring a charge.

A Porta-Potti and electric hook-up cable are kept in a box unit seat, which is also ideal for storage of tall bottles.

The weakest point in the fittings has been the fragility of the cupboard catches which break easily and require lubrication, not to mention gentle use. Another slight irritation is that two of the curtains are permanently fixed to the body of the 'van and cannot be removed for washing.

The double bed is on a rock and roll mechanism and can be described as just comfortable. A further two berths are available in the roof, but in our case the space soon fills with junk when on site.

Insulation is limited. Carpet lining has not been used on all metal areas, but the 'van is not suitable for cold climates anyway, due to the nature of the elevating roof. In fact, for spring and autumn camping we would recommend the use of an electric hook-up and a small heater.

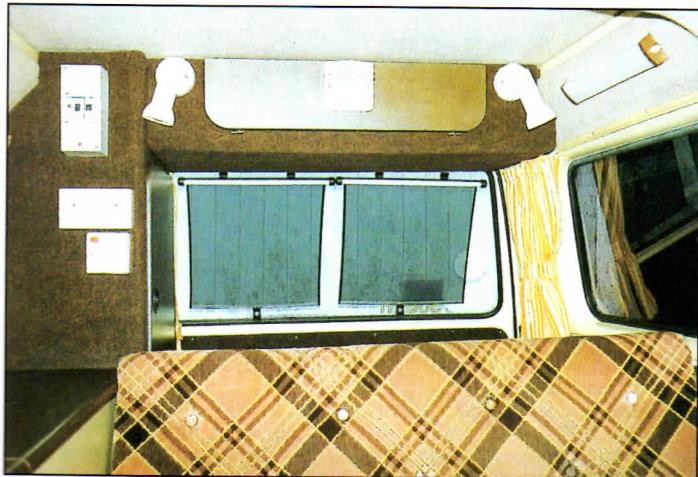
Ventilation is also something of a minus point, being confined to cab windows and a single roof vent. The four side windows have been fitted with a tinting film and rear blinds are used to provide a cooler interior. We have also made full sized flyscreens for the cab windows.



Durable work units have worn well (apart from cupboard catches). Fire extinguisher installed behind driver's seat.

The water tank with submersible pump is situated in the rear of the 'van and is difficult to lift when full. This, together with the rear storage tray, has to be removed to gain access to the engine compartment, although the oil level can be checked and topped-up from outside, by tilting the rear number plate. Electronic ignition and hydraulic tappets make for easy servicing. Regular oil and filter changes are essential. We use top quality oil and change more frequently than the service schedule requires. We change the air and fuel

filters at 20 000 miles and clean out the oilstrainer. The spark plugs can be difficult to reach. I use a long, thin spanner with a rubber insert, and re-gap at oil change intervals. Don't forget to check the hidden clutch/brake fluid reservoir and the fan belt regularly. Properly cared for Michelin tyres will last for 50 000 miles, although we have replaced the front tyres purely due to their age. All brakes are self-adjusting. We check the front pads every 5000 miles and remove the rear drums every 10 000 miles.



Rear end shows DIY-fitted ELCB, twin socket, mains spotlamps, infra-red alarm and two sunblinds in tailgate window.



Dining space is available for four at island leg table.



The lower bed we consider adequate. Water tank is difficult to lift into place when full. Flue from gas fridge is very near petrol filler. Note also waste water outlet below.





Original paintwork is showing very few stone chips.

Since the demise of 2-star fuel we now use a mixture of unleaded and 4-star, taking note of Dave Farmer's comments. 30mpg can be achieved driving at 50mph on a long motorway journey, but a more realistic average of 23mpg is obtained on touring trips. In the winter when the automatic choke is in constant use on short trips, the consumption leaps to 17mpg. Insurance need be no more expensive than for a small family saloon, but a lot more 'shopping around' is required to obtain good rates.

We are very happy with our Devon Moonraker. It is used as daily transport, takes our four dogs to shows in comfort, and is the ideal holiday home when used in conjunction with a Raleigh MotoVilla awning.

Facts and figures

1982 Volkswagen Transporter with 2-litre air-cooled 70bhp petrol engine, 4-speed gearbox, rear wheel drive.

Devon Moonraker 4-berth conversion, with full-length rising roof.

Overall length: 15ft (4.57m)

Overall width, excl mirrors: 6ft 1in (1.85m)

Overall height: 7ft 3in (2.21m)

Interior height — roof closed: 5ft 3in (1.60m)

— roof open: 8ft 1in (2.47m)

Bed dimensions-

Lower double: L 6ft 1in x W 3ft 10in x

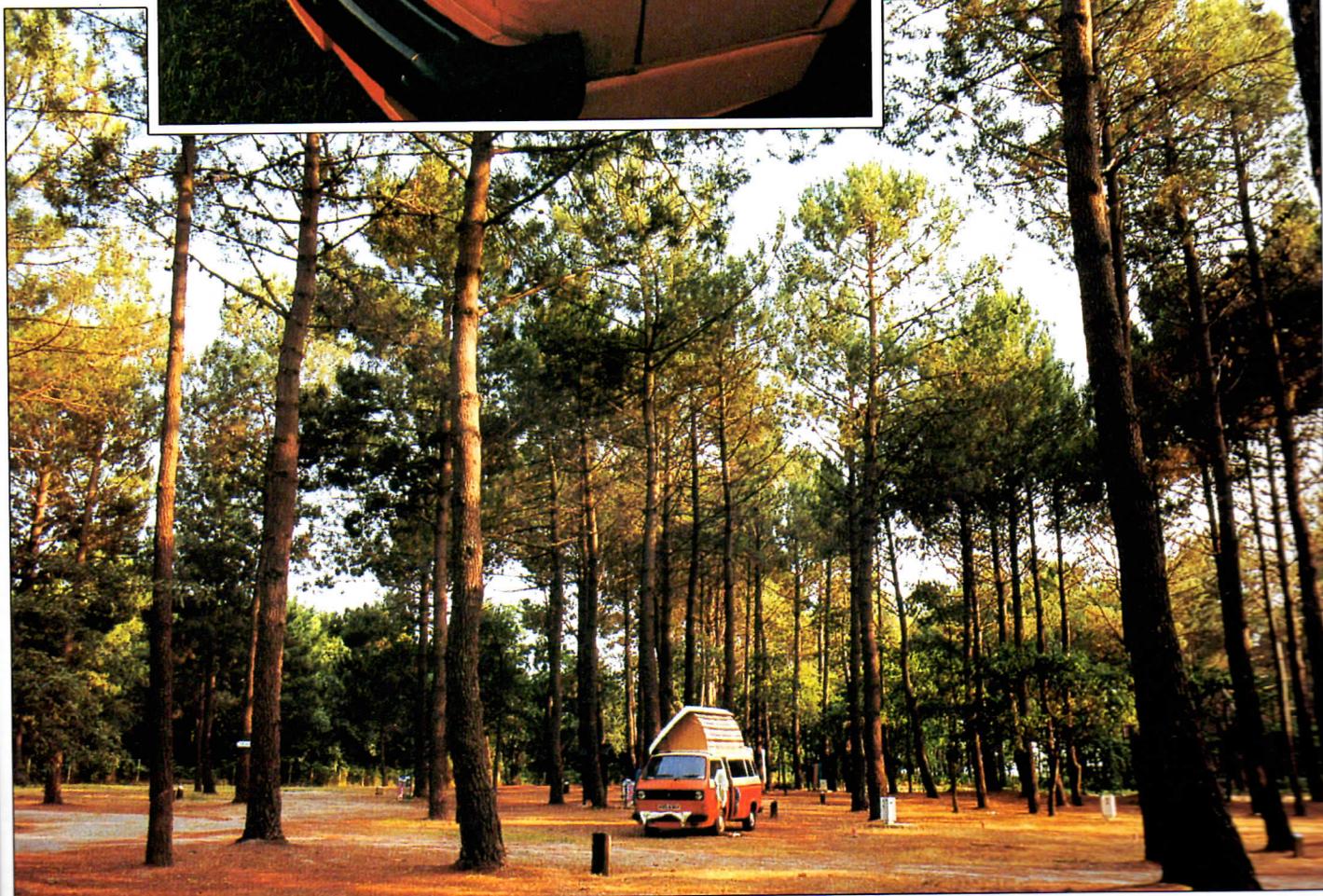
cushion depth 4in (1860 x 1180 x 100mm)

Upper double: L 6ft 2in x W 3ft 10in x

cushion depth 2in x headroom 34in (1880

x 1180 x 50 x 870mm)

Estimated current value: £6000 — £6500



Moonraker 'at home' in the pine forests of France.