

**MOTOR CARAVAN TEST**  
**VW INVINCIBLE CAVALIER**

Reprinted from Camping, December 1976.



The Cavalier Hi-Top, designed by practising motor caravanners, is a well-constructed conversion that looks good in its VW wrapping

## MOTOR CARAVAN TEST VW INVINCIBLE CAVALIER

The Volkswagen is one of the most popular motor caravan base vehicles in the country—but it has one major shortcoming. Catford Motor Caravan Centre is a relatively unknown motor caravan converter in south-east London with an answer to that shortcoming. The two don't appear to have much in common, but put them together and the result is one of the best VW conversions we've seen for a long time.

Ever since the Volkswagen Transporter series first came to these shores back in the '50s it has enjoyed immense popularity among the motor caravan fraternity. It is economical, being hardly more expensive than a family saloon to run, and its compact size makes it just as easy to drive and park. Anyone who wanted a multi-role vehicle, i.e. saloon/mini-bus/delivery van/holiday home, turned to the VW for a versatility that few base units, even today, could satisfactorily match.

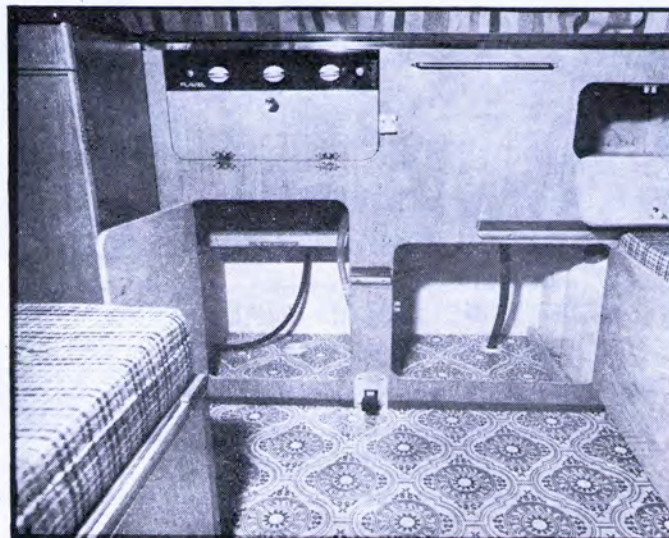
However, despite all these plus points, there was one major shortcoming — insufficient storage space. The rear-mounted engine is of course the main reason for this, but even so there is a very large number of people happily making do with what space they have in their VWs.

But what about those lovers of the VW (the VW is surely one of the few mechanical objects that has an aura about it that makes it lovable) who can't buy one because they

really must have that space? Well, they need fret no more, for here we have a VW conversion that fills the bill—the Invincible Cavalier Hi-top. Made by Catford Motor Caravan Centre in south London, the Cavalier in fact first

**Cupboard space in the kitchen unit is quite extensive. The cupboard on the left houses the gas supply, but there is still room to store tinned foods. Note water carriers**

appeared a few years ago but was dropped soon after its introduction in favour of the small Fiat conversions that were enjoying a spate of popularity at the time. Its brief exposure to the public did show there was a market for the



Cavalier, and with more and more people clamouring for its reintroduction the manufacturer has decided that the time is now ripe.

Most of Catford's conversions are carried out on used vans that the owners take along to the works. Very few are all-new conversions, and in fact the one we tested was a brand new conversion on a two-year-old chassis. Its coachwork was finished in bright orange, apart from the glass-fibre roof—imported from a northern competitor—which was white. Inside it was tastefully decorated throughout. All woodwork is finished in a light oak laminate, seat cushions are covered in a check oatmeal fabric, curtains are striped in matching colours of cream and brown and the vinyl floor covering comes in a design, also colour-matched, that wouldn't look out of place in a Roman villa. All work surfaces are covered in ochre melamine, and all exposed walls and the roof are lined with white vinyl-covered board.

### Useful aid

Access to the vehicle is good. Apart from being able to enter the living area from the cab, there is the usual VW sliding door in the nearside which is a useful aid when you are tightly parked. Its great width also means that loading the van can be carried out unhindered. Finally there is the rear hatch which, though not meant for personnel entry, makes loading even easier.

The first thing that struck us as we entered the living area was the way everything had so obviously been well thought out so that the utmost use has been made of what limited space there is. The management and staff at Catford are all practising motor caravanners and all their ideas on how a motor caravan should look have been incorporated in this vehicle in a first-rate design. The kitchen is located opposite the side entrance along the off-side. Covering the unit is a working surface 1.20m x 39cm (3ft 11½in x 1ft 3½in), all of which lifts to expose the all-in-one cooker and sink/drain unit. The manufacturer decided to have just one large top rather than two smaller tops, one over each appliance,

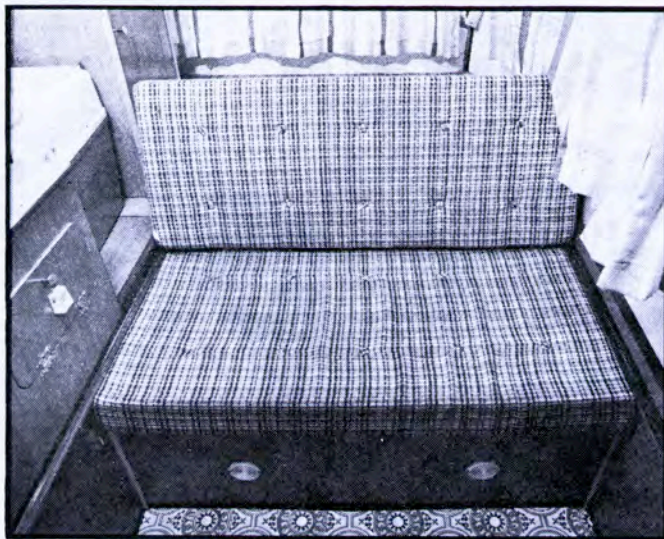
because it was found that food being prepared would get trapped in the cracks between—not the most hygienic way to prepare meals. A small stay keeps the top open while the cook is slaving at the stove or sink.

## Kitchen storage

The two burner and grill cooker is a product of Sidney Flavel & Co of Leamington Spa, also maker of the stainless steel sink and drainer. The sink spout folds down when not in use. There is no shortage of cupboard space in this unit for tinned food, pots and pans and other tools of the cooking trade. Immediately below the drainer is a smallish (38 x 33 x 30cm or 15 x 13 x 8in) cupboard, probably best suited for cutlery. Under the cooker is a much larger, shelved cupboard measuring 46 x 53 x 43cm (1ft 6in x 1ft 9in x 1ft 5in), where the gas is stored. There is a vent in the floor to dispel any gas that might leak.

Next to this cupboard and below the sink is an even larger cupboard, half of which is given over to the storage of two 22-litre (five-gallon) water containers. The maker was going to fit a larger underfloor tank but, because of the problems involved in cleaning it out, it was decided instead to fit two ordinary carriers. Space effectively left after the containers are in position measures 58 x 48 x 43cm (1ft 11in x 1ft 7in x 1ft 5in). Protruding from the foot of the kitchen unit, between the two larger cupboards, is a foot-operated pump to take water up to the sink.

At the rear end of the unit,



The rear bench folds flat when the bed is being made up. Underneath is ample storage for bedding. At the left is the coolbox—a standard fitting

next to the drainer, is a coolbox—standard equipment on the Cavalier. You can, if you prefer, opt for a chest-type refrigerator—at extra cost, naturally—which slots into the same position as the standard fitting. A final, small touch is a towel rail screwed to the kitchen unit's face.

The seating arrangement in the living area allows for three passengers when on the road. Behind the cab passenger's seat and next to the side door is a single seat facing aft. The other two passengers have a two-seater bench facing forward and a little farther towards the rear. When it's time for meals only the single seat is moved. A small bolt holds it in position, and to move it to the appropriate eating position you slip the bolt, slide the seat on its rack as far to the rear as it will go, and drop the bolt into another hole. Then you

lift off the cushion, and underneath you will find a hinged wooden board which lifts over to rest flush with the seat base on ledges fitted to the front of the kitchen unit. Replace the cushion and put what was the single seat's backrest on the bridging board and hey-presto!—another double bench seat.

## A blemish

A 79 x 56cm (2ft 7in x 1ft 10in) melamine-topped table with a single folding leg, which hooks to the front of the kitchen unit, completes the dining arrangement. The only (minor) blemish in the design comes to light at this moment if you have a towel hanging on the rail—it will get in the way of the table being hooked in place.

Transforming the seating into a sizeable double bed takes only a matter of seconds. Only

the rear seat is used—the table is put away and the single seat is left in its normal travelling position. Remove the base cushion and backrest squab from the bench seat, then lower the hinged wooden backrest. Under the large cushion that lays over the engine cover is an equally large plywood board (92cm x 1.05m or 3ft 0½in x 3ft 5½in). This you pull forward until it drops on to the supporting ledges along each side and lies flush with the engine cover, then you place the two seat cushions on top to make a 1.88 x 1.14m (6ft 2in x 3ft 9in) bed. The 10cm (4in) thick foam cushions ensure that dreams will be sweet. It's a very simple layout and it leaves plenty of floor space for changing or getting to the cooker for that reviving morning cuppa.

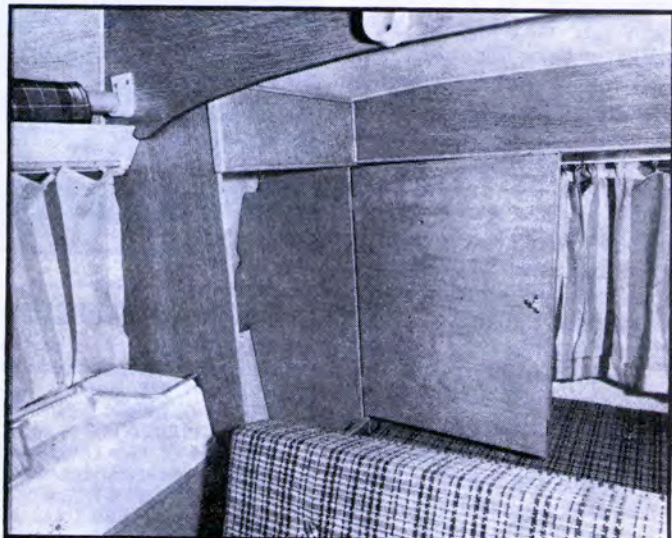
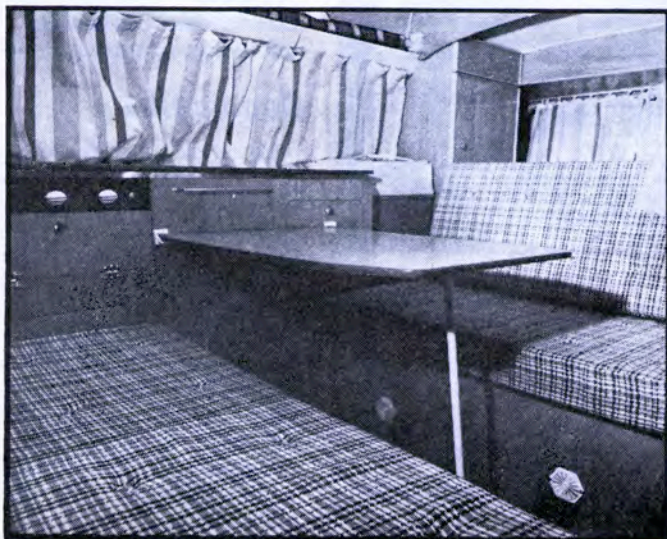
In the roof there is additional accommodation for two children in the form of two rollaway bunks. These are made up of a red checked fabric, with heavy-duty tubes which slot into U-shaped cradles to take the weight of the occupants. Overall size of each bunk is 1.65m x 53cm (5ft 5in x 1ft 9in), and when both bunks are opened out there is only a very narrow gap between them. You might just be able to squeeze a couple of tiny children through but if you have bigger offspring it might call for a little planning in getting them up. Also available as an extra is a child's bunk for the cab.

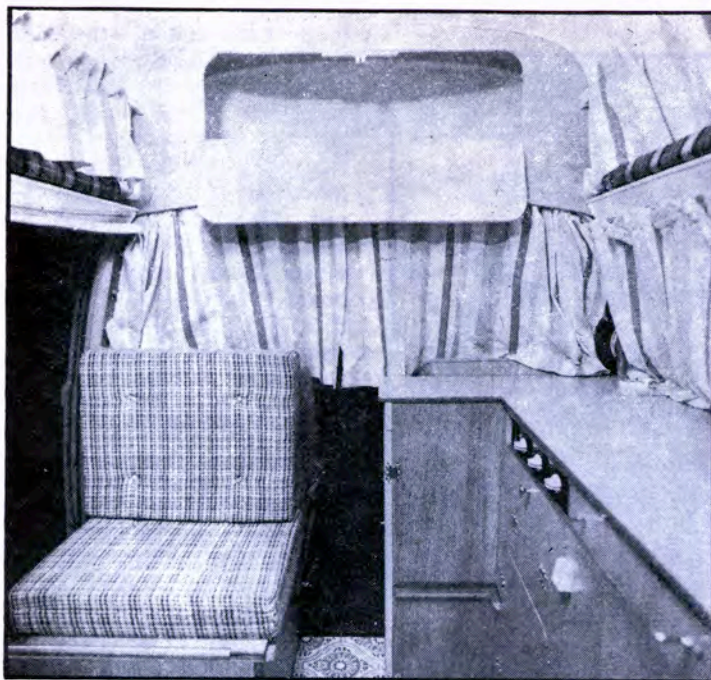
## Spacious cupboards

Apart from the cupboards already mentioned there are still plenty more storage areas around the vehicle. Under the bench seat there is 1.07m x

Meal times seating arrangement. The nearer bench seat is made from a single seat that slides into position on rails. When not being used, the table is kept in a cupboard

This wardrobe is at the rear of the vehicle, over the engine. There are plans in hand to make the door hinge downwards instead of the way shown here





The living quarters looking forward. The cupboard in the roof over the cab is much larger than it appears here. Note the gap below the curtains (see text)

51cm x 33cm (3ft 6in x 1ft 8in x 1ft 1in) of luggage space, and under the single seat there is 53 x 43 x 28cm (1ft 9in x 1ft 5in x 11in) of space. Being a hi-top enables the Cavalier to have more cupboards built into the roof and the maker has certainly made the most of the opportunity. Cupboards of cavernous dimensions have been built into each end of the roof, the forward one over the cab measuring 1.27m x 94cm x 30cm (4ft 8in x 3ft 1in x 1ft) and the one at the rear 1.27m x 66cm x 33cm (4ft 8in x 2ft 2in x 1ft 1in).

### Spare wheel housing

Down below this, on the offside and to the rear of the coolbox, is a wardrobe, complete with hanging rail, which measures 86 x 36 x 41cm (2ft 10in x 1ft 2in x 1ft 4in). Finally at the other end of the kitchen unit, immediately behind the driver's seat, is a cupboard 81cm (2ft 8in) high x 26cm (10½in) wide x 74cm (2ft 5in) deep which has been designed to take the spare wheel. Usually the spare is kept at the rear over the engine compartment, but in this design it has been moved to allow more room for the bed. If you so desired you could bolt the wheel to the front of the vehicle—a not uncommon practice, though, because it affects the vehicle's deformable structure, one that doesn't go down very well with VW—but it means you are left with a second wardrobe. And if you still can't find a space for all that luggage (which you ought to) there is a level 1.17m

x 91cm (3ft 10in x 3ft) area behind the rear seat.

As with all VWs, the Cavalier has plenty of glass area and there is even more in the high roof. The roof gives a headroom of 1.74m (5ft 8½in) over a length of 1.96m (6ft 5in), which isn't as high as you would expect from an elevating roof model, but nevertheless it is still reasonably comfortable for most people. Each side of the roof are windows 1.40m (4ft 7in) long with louvred centre sections. All other windows are fixed apart from a large louvred window behind



The large double bed is very comfortable, and its position means that there is also plenty of room for changing or making the morning cup of tea

the kitchen unit, seemingly ideally placed for the dispersal of cooking smells—until you lift the worktop. All louvred windows are aluminium-framed, while fixed windows are rubber-framed.

### Skimpy

When you need artificial light there is a large Lab-Craft fluorescent light fixed to the wall above the kitchen, but ours didn't work so we can't comment on its effectiveness. Judging by its size, though, it ought to give ample light for

most purposes. Curtains on the most part were sufficient to deter prying eyes, though those covering the roof windows were a little on the skimpy side. We weren't too happy with the curtain that cuts off the cab from the living space, either. It is only half length and anyone passing close to the front of the van would be able to see into the living area between the cab seats. Curtains to go around the cab windows might be better, or maybe something to fill the gap between the seats.

On the road the Cavalier is just like any other VW. It's easy to drive, it handles well, and though we were expecting the high roof to have a detrimental affect on its performance, we noticed no marked drop in speed nor any increase in fuel consumption. Ours was fitted with the smaller VW engine, the 1600, but even so it coped admirably under all conditions. Coupled with the ultra-reliable gearbox the VW unit will go on almost for ever.

### Good value

Cost of the conversion? £1060 if you take your VW along to the works, or about £4030 for a brand new model. And if you're not too fussed about the roof space you can have an elevating-roof version for £925. It's money well spent, too. It is extremely well constructed, which is what you would expect of a motor caravan built by enthusiasts for enthusiasts, and it looks good on the road too. We wish it every success.

This side view of the Cavalier shows that access is good via the sliding door, in spite of the seat. Older purchasers of this conversion might find that a small portable step would make entry a little easier



### VW INVINCIBLE CAVALIER HI-TOP

**PRICE** £4030 (approx) or £1060 for conversion only  
**ENGINE** 1600cc, optional 1800cc  
**DIMENSIONS** overall length 4.49m (14ft 9in), width 1.76m (5ft 9½in), height 2.41m (7ft 11in)  
**ACCOMMODATION** seating for five, dining for four, beds for two adults, two children; transverse cab bunk optional  
**EXTRAS** chest refrigerator £70.20, cab bunk £17  
**CONVERSION BY** Catford Motor Caravan Centre, 9-13 Catford Hill, London SE6 4NU