

NEW MODEL NEWS



Penny Smith travels to Sussex and finds three new panel van conversions from Devon

Devon Motor Caravans have been busy since our last report (in July 1994, giving a brief impression of their Ford-based Moonraker). Although the move to Cold Heseldon in County Durham has been a great success on the manufacturing side, they've been aware of a lack of representation in the south. Now they've teamed up with Johns Cross Campers, not far from Hastings in Sussex, where I was recently invited to take a look at three new models fresh from the factory.

First in the line-up was Discovery – another Devon name from many years ago, although now bearing no other resemblance to its former self. (Our last report, in 1982, looked at a Mercedes-based Discovery. The 1995 version, as the photographs show, is built on a swb Transit.)

Devon's basic idea for the new Discovery was to provide a shower cubicle and Thetford loo in as short a 'van as possible. Overall length is a fraction over 15ft; Discovery comes as standard without a rear step but I think most users will require one as an optional extra, for it's quite a climb up through those rear doors. Looking

towards the front, the basic layout consists of shower and wardrobe on the left, kitchen opposite, and a 4-seater lounge arranged on either side of the aisle, made from the two forward-facing rear seats and the swivelled cab seats. There's the usual versatility of this layout in that it's also possible to set up the offside seat as an inward-facing settee, if required.

I was glad to see a degree of rake on the backrests of the two rear seats – a good point for comfort – and the expected 3-point inertia reel harnesses, although there are no rear head restraints, which isn't so commendable from a safety point of view. Bedmaking – which incorporated the cab seats (in my view a sensible step in a van conversion) – seemed fairly painless. Devon say a double bed can be provided if required, although the standard arrangement is two singles. First, slide open the drawer in the seat box, then remove the cushions and swing the seat base over on its front hinge until it's supported by the drawer. Drop the backrest forward onto the seat box; replace the cushions. Push the cab seat fully forwards and recline the backrest.

Bed dimensions are a claimed 6ft x 2ft. At upper level, a roof bed is standard, although a storage cupboard can be fitted in its place.

On the nearside, behind the lounge, are the small wardrobe and the shower cubicle. The cubicle too is necessarily small but – as long as you're not of very generous height or girth – quite feasible for showering. Features are uncomplicated: just a shower tray, shower spray and Thetford cassette loo, with electric flush. All the walls, including the door, are attractively lined but I was concerned about the lack of any additional protection for the door frame. Far better not to have a clingy curtain if it really is unnecessary, but this not being a proper test, I wasn't able to judge.

To save having to close all the front curtains when stepping out from the shower or washing at the kitchen sink, a loose curtain is provided to hang from the ceiling, behind the lounge area. It may not look much, but it could well come in handy! Hot water for the shower and basin is provided courtesy of the Atwood gas/mains heater, with the general water supply coming from a 10-gallon underfloor tank. A waste tank is



Both cab seats swivel to make most of sitting area. Only a single table is provided (stored on back of shower compartment). Note comfortable rake on backrests of rear seats.



Flexibility of layout in lounge area permits an offside settee. (Additional cushions are kept in overcab area.) Under-seat drawers provide both storage and bed support.

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Single beds (standard) are not difficult to make. Ventilation is provided by roof vents, plus sliding windows (with flyscreens) both 'downstairs' and in roof. No heating is fitted.



Toilet compartment does not include basin but should offer sufficient room for taking a shower. Water system is pressurised; shower head itself has separate on/off control.



Kitchen is far from claustrophobic in spite of compact dimensions. No head restraints are provided for rear passengers but there is a sensible barrier between hob and seat/bed.



Ford-based Discovery has attractive lines and tasteful graphics. A step can be provided to ease the climb at the rear. Overall height is 8ft 5in.

also standard. The gas locker takes two Camping Gaz 907 bottles – nothing larger, I'm sorry to report.

In addition to the sink, the kitchen is fitted with a 2-burner cooker and grill, a 3-way Electrolux fridge and a variety of cupboards (but no draining board). Other standard features on the Discovery include the second battery, mains hookup, Zig unit plus charger, clock, reading light, and tinted glass and flyscreens to windows.

Model number two was the Aurora, built on the swb Volkswagen. Virtually identical in concept to Discovery at the front, Aurora is entirely different behind the lounge area, due to the narrower width and pronounced



Aurora's front layout is very similar to Discovery's. With no rear shower room, a disguised portable loo can make a handy occasional table or stool in the living area.

tumblehome of the T4. There's no shower compartment, of course, which allows the kitchen to be split between nearside and offside, offering the convenience of a raised fridge and greater cupboard space. The loo need not be forgotten, however: disguised with a cover and an upholstered top, a portable model acts as a handy stool or an extra table in the lounge area.

Without a shower compartment, Devon have chosen to make Aurora of lower specification than Discovery – with consequent savings in price. Missing are the water heater, waste water tank and front/rear dividing curtain, but swivelling cab seats, mains hookup and an auxiliary battery are



Devon have chosen to supply workspace rather than a drainer. No water heater fitted. Cooker has two burners and a grill; hob cover will be redesigned on future models.



Aurora's gas compartment (capacity 2 x 907s) is beneath fridge. Front of roof contains storage area, with a pull-out child's bed provided as standard at the back.

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Hijetta has no backrest for dining – but the main bed is permanently ready. Table has its own storage space, but I would like to see a more robust method of edging.



Kitchen comprises 2-burner hob and sink. Crockery is in cupboard above. Nearside rear seat box contains small water tank; offside has more room for storage. No waste tank is fitted.



Second bed in place – slightly lower than main bed. Tilted forwards, cab seats can make backrests for feet-up lounging. Note handy coat hooks on rear panel.



Hijet has twin sliding doors, giving extra ventilation in hot weather and easy access to Porta-Potti and gas bottle store (which, on prototype, needed sealing from interior).

still included. Another difference is the upper bed – a child's bed is located at the rear of the roof, while there's a storage area (where the table must be carried) at the front. It's possible to specify a larger 'upstairs' double – but when in place, so little room remains for scrambling through the gap, that Devon doubt many will opt for it.

With its smart metallic paint and matching rising roof, Hijetta's appearance is very different from that of its two larger stablemates. Devon claim that Daihatsu UK are delighted with the shape of the roof, which mimics the original lines of the vehicle very closely. Even the external hinges at the front aren't too noticeable. It'll be interesting to see how the roof colour wears with time, but if it fades I imagine it can always be resprayed. (White, or other Daihatsu colours, are available if preferred.)

The roof is pretty lightweight to operate and everything can be done from inside, but don't expect the most sophisticated model on the market – there are no solid sides and it's really just a matter of waterproof fabric, supporting tubes and fastening straps beneath the sleek GRP cap. When raised, the height is where it's needed, giving standing room at the kitchen end.

Inside Hijetta, those life support systems include a 2-burner hob (but no grill), a gas compartment large enough for two 907 cylinders, a sink (but no drainer), a 5-gallon inboard water tank (with an electric water pump), and a Porta-Potti. Together with a table (stored at the rear between tailgate and kitchen), plus two cups and four plates housed in a purpose-made cupboard,

there's just about everything that's needed for a well-equipped day out.

The lack of a backrest on the long, offside seat doesn't make for a particularly relaxing meal and, in the prototype, the wobbly island leg table was hardly reassuring. Having an after-dinner snooze is far easier – simply adjust the recline mechanism on the driver's seat and spread out, feet up and towards the rear, either lying flat or leaning against this seat.

For sleeping, Devon are honest in claiming that Hijetta is most suitable for a single occupant, but it is quite possible to accommodate two – provided one has small feet! The main, offside bed is ready as soon as the driver's backrest has been tilted forwards, but the nearside bed needs the table as a bridge and a couple of extra cushions, which are normally stored beneath the sink. Trying out this second bed, I found



Lines of roof mimic original lines of base vehicle, giving a pleasing appearance. Hijetta dimensions are 10ft 10in long, 4ft 7in wide, 6ft 5in high (roof down).

plenty of room for my size 5½s beneath the sink but it would be tricky to turn over without knocking the surface above. Devon's claimed dimensions for each bed are 6ft x 19½ inches.

For those unfamiliar with the Daihatsu Hijet base vehicle, it's of similar size to the Rascal but has a fuel-injected 993cc 3-cylinder petrol engine. There was time only for the very briefest of drives. The seat seemed comfortable with an adequate amount of recline on the backrest, and the controls – including the 5-speed gearbox – were all light and easy to operate. I was surprised to read in the specification that the steering is rack and pinion – in my brief acquaintance it felt just the tiniest bit vague – but I put that down partly to unfamiliarity and partly to a slightly bouncy ride. Lightly loaded, there seemed to be an adequate amount of 'go', although my companion claimed that the engine would respond better if only I would give it higher revs (he wasn't a motorcaravanner!).

And finally, down to the most important information of all. Aware of escalating prices and tremendous competition, particularly in the field of medium-sized panel van conversions, Devon keep their prices attractive by cutting down on luxuries – and often, by building on secondhand vans. Conversion-only prices (excluding VAT) for the above models are £6300 (Discovery), £5350 (Aurora) and £3675 (Hijetta). On new vehicles, prices at Johns Cross at the time of my visit were £18 995 (petrol Discovery), £18 995 (1.9D Aurora), and £10 995 (Hijetta). □

DEVON

Announce two more exciting new models to complement the new Ford Discovery.



First

Devon's new baby the HiJetta. This revolutionary new micro camper is based on the highly acclaimed Daihatsu HiJet.

Special introductory price of £10,995*.



Second

Devon's dazzling new Aurora based on the latest generation Volkswagen Transporter and is available in either Hi-top or elevating roof form.

Special introductory price of £18,995*.

Also not to be forgotten:

the **Devon** Discovery on the SWB Ford Transit complete with proper shower and toilet compartment.

Still available at the incredible price of £18,995*.

For further information on all vehicles available from Devon please contact:

Northern Enquiries
Devon Motorcaravans Ltd
Cold Hesledon
Co. Durham
SR7 8SJ

Southern Enquiries
John's Cross Campers
Battle Road
Robertsbridge
East Sussex
TN32 5JJ

Tel: 0191-513 0658

Tel: 01580 881288

Open Mon-Sat 10am-6pm
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Please feel free to visit or contact whichever site is most convenient to you.

*Prices excluding delivery and number plates.

For a more detailed look see the above vehicles featured in this issue

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