



St Nicholas Church, Stamford on Avon, Northants

1994 AUTO-SLEEPER CLUBMAN GL

on VW 2.4-litre diesel

Jonathan Lloyd spends a few days away with a compact coachbuilt from the Willersey works, and assesses whether reality measures up to expectation



Smooth GRP body sits easily on swb T4 Transporter chassis. See continuation of bumper colour along caravan skirt.

What they say

The Clubman GL brochure for 1994 opens with the following: "The Clubman Grande Luxe epitomises the luxury and craftsmanship for which Auto-Sleepers are justly renowned. Stylish, compact and elegant, this coachbuilt is a rare combination of good looks and design." Quite a claim, but does the reality live up to the hype?

What I say

In short, "Yes, it does!" Overall, I thought the manufacturer's claims to be valid - although nothing in life is perfect, the Clubman certainly gets close. Following are my findings in more detail.

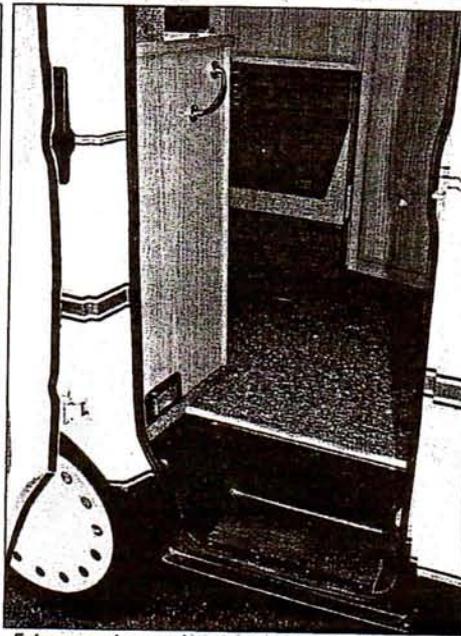
Exterior

My first glimpse of this 'van was of the nose. The profile is easily identifiable as of VW origin and one doesn't need to look any further to realise that this smooth GRP body is mounted on the first generation of T4 chassis cabs. Short and sweet at only 5.29m (17ft 4 1/4in) long, the Auto-Sleeper coachbuilt shape rests easily on the short wheelbase chassis.

1994 AUTO-SLEEPER CLUBMAN GL



VW Transporter's nose is readily recognised, even without sight of the famous roundel.



Entrance and egress is safe and easy – thanks to inset step, grab handle and courtesy light.

The white and light-blue duo-tone body is thoughtfully complemented by a dark high-level body stripe, a coach line just below the windows, and by a lighter coloured combination stripe at (low) waist level. The dark skirt echoes the line and colour of the front bumper and successfully integrates the body with the cab, illustrating the importance of sequential continuity to design.

Residential

The Clubman is shorter and narrower than many coachbuilts (hooray!) but the interior still manages to feel reasonably spacious. This is, no doubt, due to the large sliding double-glazed window on each side.

Entry is via a one-piece half-glazed door towards the rear of the nearside. That door got the test off to a good start, as it felt reassuringly solid and the lock looked more

burglar-resistant than most. The internal step, courtesy light and adjacent grab handle made entry and egress both comfortable and safe.

Clubman places two twin-seater inward-facing settees behind the cab. Between the nearside settee and the caravan entrance door is a unit containing the fridge, above which is a worktop and high-level cocktail cabinet. Behind the offside settee is the wardrobe, and in the rear corner the shower room.

The lounge area has two island-leg tables. The table tops have dedicated storage hollows behind the nearside settee backrest.

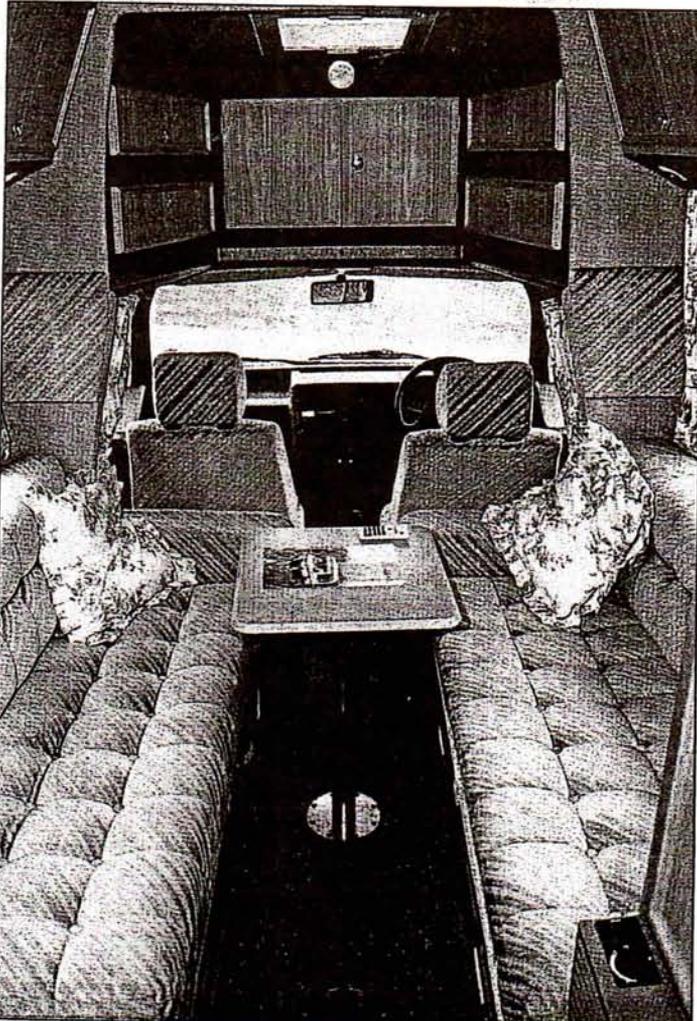
The kitchen is across the rear of the 'van. I propose to report on this area first.

Catering

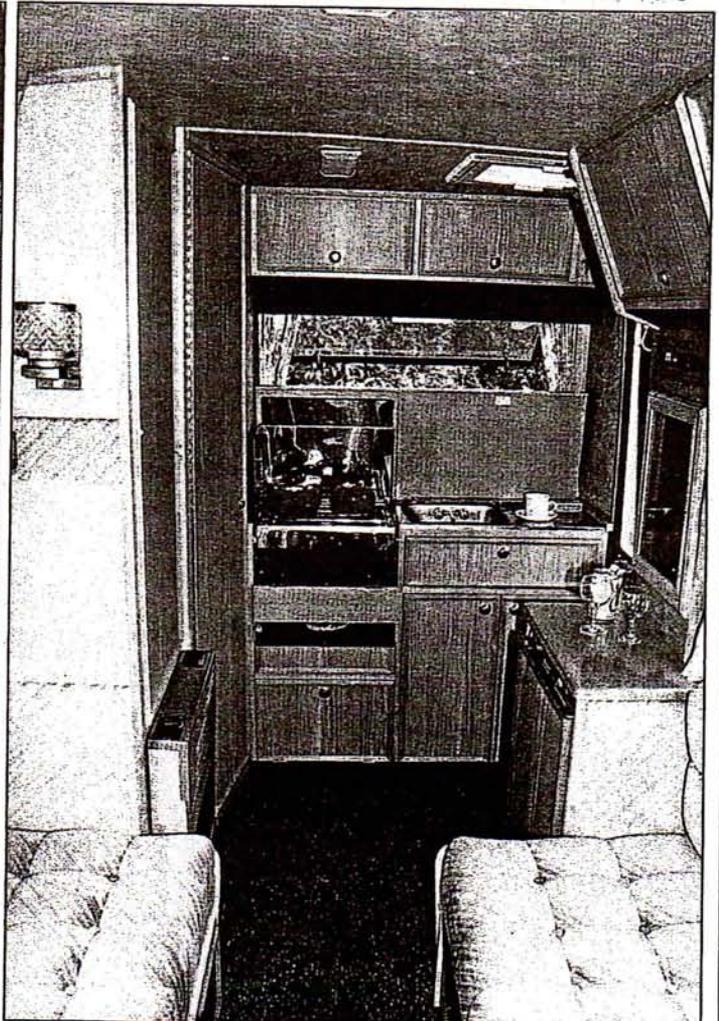
Most cooks would judge the kitchen to be well-enough equipped, though falling a little behind the leaders in this area. Standard equipment includes a two-burner hob and grill, oven, and stainless steel sink and drainer. Eagle-eyed readers may have spotted four knobs on the 'two-burner and grill' and wondered what the fourth knob is for – it is the oven control.

The folding cupboard fronts that hide the oven are thought by many to be a good idea, but I had mixed feelings about this – cleaning the front of the oven looked a mite challenging to me.

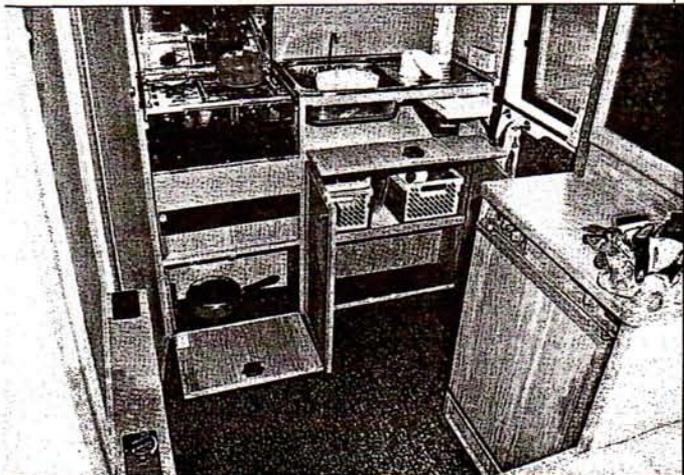
My only real complaint about the kitchen was that the burner control knobs didn't 'pop out' when in the off position. I think having a positive 'off' position for any gas



General view forwards showing inward-facing settees, generous overcab storage, and one of the two island-leg tables.

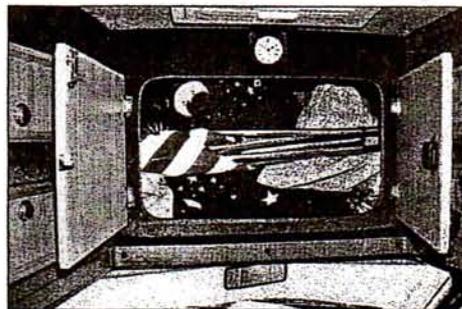
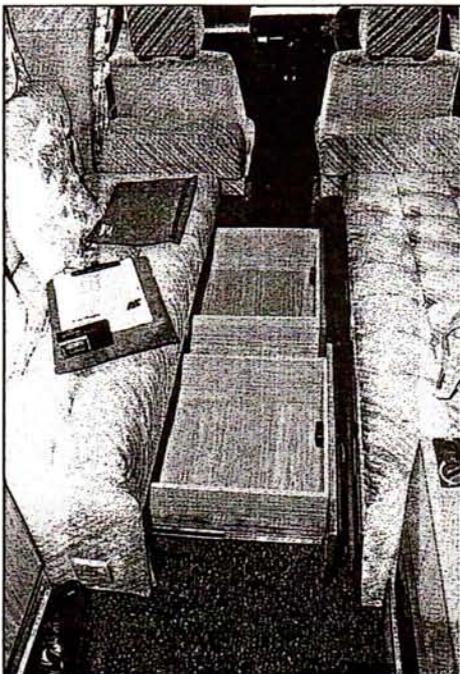
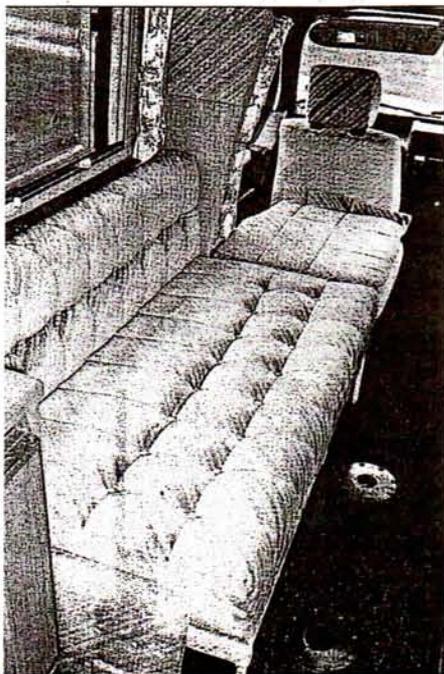


View to the rear: wardrobe, Carver space heater, and shower compartment on left, kitchen across rear.

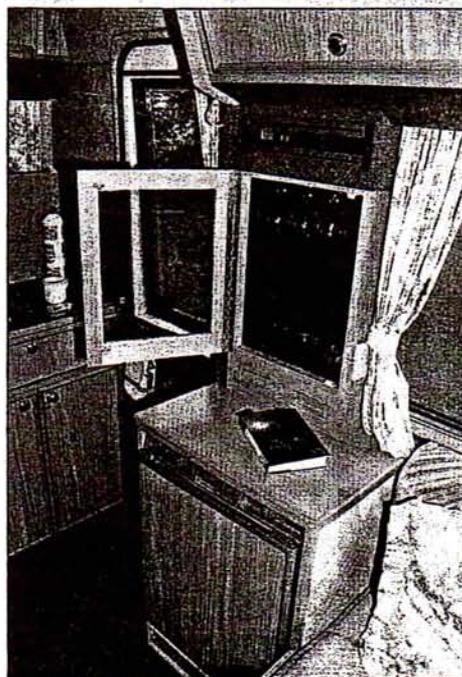


Then is a light and airy place to create in. Oven is 'hiding' below grill aperture:

Transverse double is also effortlessly achieved. There are plenty of well-positioned lights for reading in bed.



Overcab locker held lots of lightweight clobber. It is important to keep a check on the weight of stored items.



The cocktail cabinet came equipped with glasses, but no juice of the grape or grain.

Single beds are simple to make and do not use cabinets. Blinds and lined curtains will keep you snug during winter nights.

Under the nearside settee are two large drawers. The offside has slide-out wire baskets - accessed via drop-down flaps.

Control is a good safety feature.

The double is made by extending both settee bases to fill the centre aisle.

Kitchen cupboard space is varied, generous and useful, including a sliding utility drawer under the drainer.

The caravan windows have both lined curtains and blinds - cab curtains are also lined. Auto-Sleepers usually fit plenty of reading lights, and the Clubman is no exception.

I enjoyed using this kitchen; it is light, airy (thanks to a clever divided rear window allowing effective ventilation even with the sink and hob covers raised), and the fridge top can be used for food preparation. I know some testers have had problems with the 'Noddy'-sized taps, but I found them fine. I usually can't find anywhere to hang a (normally slightly damp) tea towel, but this time the interior door-pull on the caravan door fitted the bill nicely.

Storage

There is plenty of easily-accessible storage distributed throughout the 'van. Under the nearside settee are two large drawers and, under the offside, drop-down flaps with slide-out wire baskets. Both underseat areas can also be accessed from the top.

Sleeping

The Clubman is a dedicated two-berth, so there is no overcab bed, but the somnolent can choose between two longitudinal single beds and a transverse double. Either option has been well thought out. I found the resulting beds to be comfortable and of generous size.

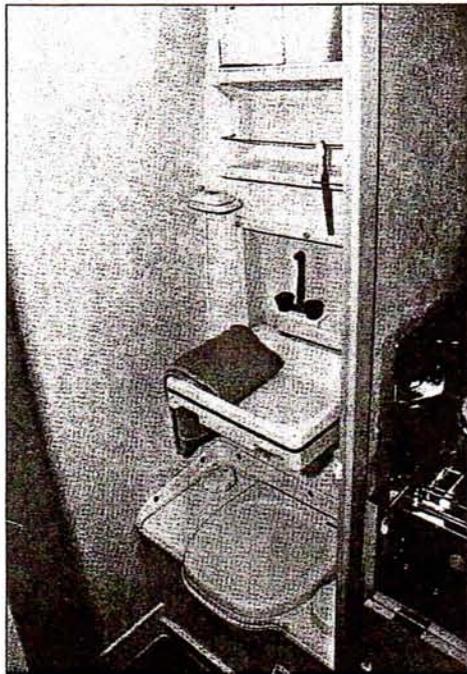
There is a bewildering array of high-level cupboards, but I found the double-door overcab locker to be the most useful. It was already home to the single bed cushion in-fills, but had oodles of space left for my sleeping bag, pillow, and Gadabout chair. As you can see from the photograph, I am sometimes an ardent supporter of the 'chuck-it-all-in-and-slam-the-door' method of packing. (See weighty matters section.)

To make a single bed, first move the cabinet fully forward, then pull the settee base out slightly to allow the backrest to drop. Finally, an extension is pulled out from behind the cab seat and the gap filled with a cushion (stored in the luton cupboard).

The cocktail cabinet came ready-equipped with four wine glasses (one odd) but no juice of the grape or grain, so I couldn't test their efficacy as 'serious'

drinking vessels. The wood just below the cabinet door looked as though it had been cleaned with something abrasive, or with too much water - but Chris Cole assures me it is just 'dry' and merely needs a drop of wood oil or similar reviver. I took this 'van on test immediately after it had been brought in, so Motorland hadn't had time to service it ready for sale.

In fact there was hardly anything wrong with it; some cupboard catches needed re-aligning and there was a small problem with the water heater. Rest assured, after it has been prepared for sale it will be indistinguishable from new.



Shower room has a cassette toilet, tip-up basin, small cupboard, and shower. I would have liked a window.

Showering etc

First of all let me admit to a bit of bias here. I am not a great fan of tip-up wash basins; they always seem to creak alarmingly when I use them. That said, they do allow more elbow room when showering, an important consideration in such a compact 'van. As a whole, the smallest room worked well; I would have liked an opening window though. The large mirror was a bit frightening first thing in the morning.

Auto-Sleepers have managed to produce a useful shower room without stealing too much floor space from the living area.

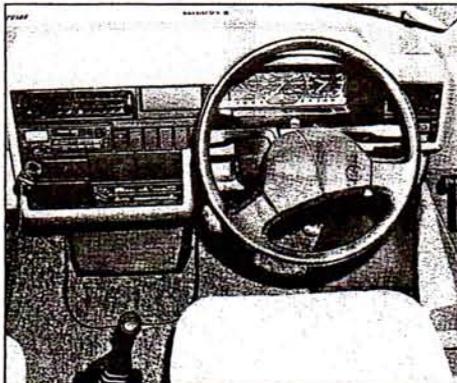
Weighty matters

As I reported earlier, there is plenty of available storage, but you will have to be aware of the weight of stored items, as the 354kg payload of this particular 1994 example is not generous. (The quoted payload for the 5-cylinder 2.4-litre diesel-powered Clubman was 379kg, but this figure did not take into account the wind-out awning.) I believe current models have an increased payload (456kg - 2-litre petrol) as a result of a weight saving exercise by Auto-Sleepers.

On the road/under the bonnet

It has been my good fortune to have two VW T4s on test recently. I find them so civilised to drive. This naturally-aspirated 5-cylinder 2.4-litre diesel example potted around the lanes without the need for constant gear changes, and cruised quite happily along the motorway between 60 and 70mph. It's no ball of fire though; my own naturally-aspirated Talbot 2.5-litre diesel coachbuilt is much quicker, and it's better on hills too. "Speed is always the hallmark of the amateur," my Father used to say, so I had better not dwell on the subject.

Instead I will compliment VW on their supportive seats, good flexible ventilation system, faultless gearchange, appropriately-weighted power steering and smooth ride. The last is achieved despite the short wheelbase chassis (these can give a 'choppy' ride than their long wheelbase cousins) but the downside of this quite soft springing is a fair amount of body roll on



I always find the T4 so civilised to drive. Gearchange, power steering and seats were all excellent.

corners, and a tendency for the front to dive under moderate braking. Neither is anything to concern yourself over; normal driving gave an almost regal ride, and road holding was very predictable.

The narrower-than-many body meant worry-free exploration of country lanes.

The Philips RDS stereo radio/cassette was wired independently of the ignition switch and supplied high-quality sound. The large analogue clock was much appreciated; it is only when there isn't a dashboard clock that you realise just how often you want to glance at it.

Myths and legends

There are plenty of myths and legends surrounding Auto-Sleepers. Let us explode a few . . .

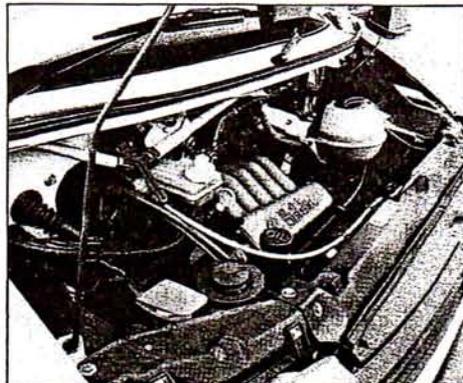
1) "Auto-Sleeper coachbuilt body shapes haven't changed over the years." Wrong, look at the CB22 if you don't believe me. Any changes to the William Towns-designed GRP bodies have been incremental though, rather than revolutionary. This means that your 'van will not 'date' as quickly as some.

2) "Auto-Sleeper interiors are old fashioned." Wrong again, but neither are they avante garde. To me, they are not as instantly appealing as the very best interiors from (say) a company like Mobilvetta Design - but Auto-Sleepers do produce well-finished interiors that are easy on the eye and that you are unlikely to tire of. Perhaps best described as more 'Classic FM' than 'Kiss FM'.

3) "Auto-Sleeper coachbuilts have a low rate of depreciation." Um Umm Ef . . . actually my researches show that this appears to be true. Retailers tell me that secondhand prices (and demand) are particularly buoyant.



Extra, extra! An advantage in buying this low-mileage one-owner vehicle is the 'free' awning, TV aerial, and Hope Safe-T-Bar. Note divided rear window.



Our Clubman had the optional 2.4-litre 5-cylinder diesel engine. It is very quiet and smooth, but 'no ball of fire'.

Extra, extra, read all about it

Included in the price of this 'van are a wind-out awning, Status TV aerial and amplifier, and Hope Safe-T-Bar with towing facility. All of these are useful accessories.

Secondhand but not second best

After Motorland have given it a good service clean and polish, the 'van will look like new and, with just 11 000 miles on the clock, the diesel motor is not even fully run-in yet. The asking price of £24 950 represents a useful saving on new and you are getting all those expensive accessories for no extra. (Total cost of equivalent new vehicle and accessories would be around £33k.)

All Motorland vehicles are sold with a full service, full MOT, And a 3-month parts and labour warranty. The Clubman would be an ideal purchase if you are looking for a compact, well-equipped, easy to drive, two-berth coachbuilt.

I found the Clubman GL to be exactly what Auto-Sleepers claim it to be!

In brief

1994 2-berth Auto-Sleeper Clubman GL on swb Volkswagen Transporter with 2.4-litre 5-cylinder diesel engine. Recorded mileage 11 000 miles. One previous owner.

Standard equipment

Double glazing; roof rack and ladder; 2-burner hob and grill; oven; 60-litre 3-way fridge with electronic ignition; Thetford Cassette toilet; tip-up sink; shower; 230V hook-up; RCD + MCBs; leisure battery; 7 x fluorescent, 4 x reading and 1 x 230V lights; Carver Cascade 2 water heater; Carver 3000S space heater; 12V Truma blown air; storage for 2 x 6/7kg gas cylinders; Auto-Sleeper crockery; fire extinguisher.

Extras included

Wind-out awning, Hope Safe-T-Bar with towing facility, Status TV aerial and amplifier.

Dimensions & weights

Overall length: 5.29m (17ft 4 1/2in)
Overall width: 2.08m (6ft 10in)
Overall height: 2.71m (8ft 10 3/4in)
Max gross weight: 2810kg (55.3cwt)
Available payload: 379kg (7.46cwt) less accessories fitted (see text)

Bed sizes

2 x single: 1905mm x 685mm (6ft 3in x 2ft 3in)
or double: 1905mm x 1320mm (6ft 3in x 4ft 4in)

Price as tested

£24 950 incl full service, full MOT, and 3-month warranty.

Auto-Sleeper Clubman GL kindly supplied for evaluation by: Motorland Leisure Vehicles, Coventry Road, Croft, Nr Leicester LE9 3GP.

Tel: 01455 286600. (Closed Sundays)



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