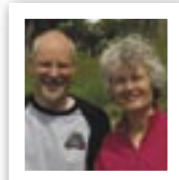


HILLSIDE THULSTON



VANTAGE ZEN



BRIGHT PROSPECTS

A first viewing of two lightweight-and-different high-top conversions from innovative British designers - both offering washroom facilities in small spaces

Words & pictures by Andrew & Rona Bromley



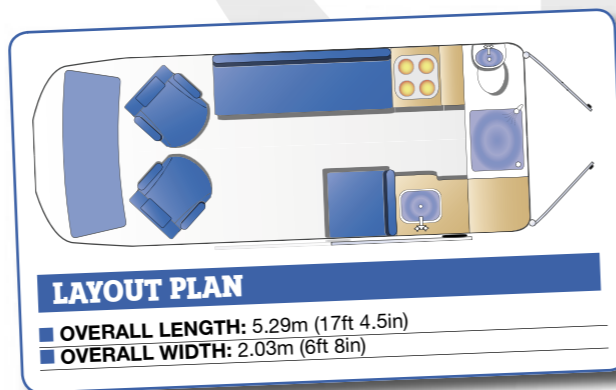
It is always inspiring to visit the new generation of converters - you find the owners of these small companies brimming with enthusiasm, ideas and skills brought from other industries and backgrounds. Many have been lifelong campers and, knowing what they wanted but unable to find it in established brands, built their own.

Hillside Leisure, based in Derby, is the

brainchild of brothers Mark, Adrian and David Cross who, some five years ago, started converting imported Mazda Bongos, then Toyota Hiaces and late-registered Volkswagen T5s. With business snowballing, Hillside Leisure has appointed a northern dealer (ES Hartley of Ings, near Kendal) and increased its model line-up with two new long wheelbase T5s - Cromford and Thulston - all Hillside's models are named after Derbyshire villages. We tested the Thulston prototype, a smart high-top - featuring rear washroom and front lounge - priced just above the strategic £40,000 mark.

Here, its competitor is Vantage's latest baby, the Zen. Unusually, this is based on Vauxhall's Vivaro, a Luton-built clone of Renault's Traffic and a patriotic choice of base vehicle. Zen prices start at just under £40K. Company founder Scot Naylor's background

is in the furniture business, but in the last five years, Vantage Motorhomes of Leeds, has been converting Sevel-based panel vans of varying lengths and configurations, all with uniformly high standards of finish and innovation. Last year, Scot and his wife, Jane, spent three weeks touring abroad in the prototype Zen, proving to their satisfaction that longer duration travelling in this small



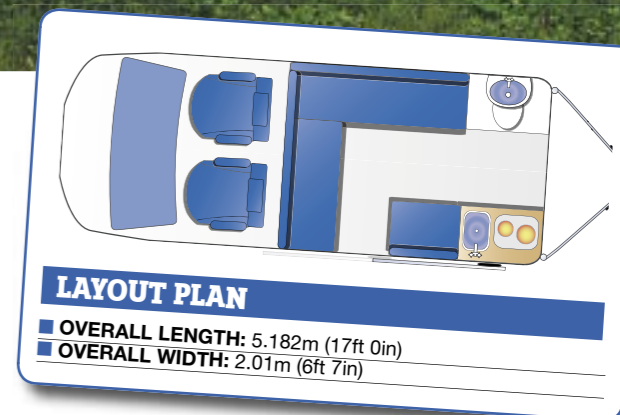
was white, but production Zens will be in metallic silver.

Both vans have nearside sliding doors and living areas can be accessed through the rear. Entering the Thulston (an electric step is an optional extra, as on the Zen) you discover a beige interior - sandy-coloured lined curtains, creamy-beige abstractly-patterned upholstery (including cab-seats) and a very serviceable mottled-beige floor in the living area. American Cherry-coloured furniture is neatly made and finished. Layout is pretty standard for a front lounge panel van conversion: swivelling cab seats, offside settee, single forward-facing nearside travel seat behind the sliding door. And aft, a split kitchen with sink, work-surface and fridge in an offside unit, and cooker opposite. Across the rear, behind a concertina door, lies a washroom. VW conversions always feel slightly narrow - unavoidable, given the van's dimensions and the narrowing of the roof - an impression increased here by dark-tinted windows.

high-top is perfectly possible and comfortable to boot. Now it's our turn to try this little camper, and see whether that claim rings true.

Exterior beauty is, of course, subjective, but I'm sure most people will agree that the Thulston's VW T5 base is one of the prettiest out there - sand-beige metallic paint enhances this. In long wheelbase guise, with high-roof balancing the extra length, it looks very elegant. Slightly odd - to our eyes - are the tall rear doors, but that's nit-picking. More importantly, at 5.29m long and just 2.03m wide, it's small enough to be practical as a couple's sole vehicle.

The Zen is shorter still and the nearly vertical sides make it more boxy than its rival - a considerable practical advantage, as the inward curves of the T5's flanks are a bugbear for converters. The Zen's steeply raked nose integrates smoothly with its metal high roof - though from the rear, the low bumper height and high roof makes the Vivaro look very tall and narrow, but so what? The test example



the aisle to afford some privacy. Walls are covered in grey carpeting, highlighted with tweedy fabric panels and the floor in tough creamy vinyl. Woodwork is pale-coloured and excellent - unsurprising, given the proprietor's background in furniture manufacture. Do you need this high quality woodwork in a camper van? Arguably not, but a craftsman's finish certainly enhances appeal.

The Thulston's beds are made by removing headrests and flattening the cab seats. The rear travel seat slides forward, joining to form the nearside bed, the settee helping to make the offside. The settee also pulls into the centre to make a partial double, though leaving a gap between the cab seats. Shaped cushions are supplied to level the cab seats. The Zen's beds are simply made utilising the backrest cushions, with a couple of infill

The Zen is different and unusual. Though shorter, it feels more roomy. Plenteous seating - upholstered in light-brown tweed with darker leather panels traverses behind the cab and down the offside, with another seat behind the sliding door, there's seating for four or more. But travelling is strictly for two, only the cab seats have belts. Kitchen facilities are to the nearside rear, with washroom opposite and behind a door which folds out across

1 The latest T5 base is a superb vehicle, but seats proved too low
 2 A comfortable cockpit, but a shame the steering wheel doesn't adjust for rake

HILLSIDE THULSTON



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- 3 Thulston's dark-tinted windows make the interior feel gloomy
- 4 The front lounge stands ahead of a divided kitchen with washroom area at the rear
- 5 Everything here for the enthusiastic cook - apart from a drainer

boards across the aisle if a double is desired. Both 'vans are relatively narrow, so you sleep longitudinally.

MOTIVE POWER

Both base vehicles have been around for a while, each recently benefitting from a midlife revamp. With Vivaro, externally, there's little new - it's mainly a case of uprated engines to accord with the latest Euro V emissions regulations. Vauxhall offers Tom Tom satnav and excellent Tecshift automated gearbox as options. With base vehicles scarce, Vantage converted a recent, but high-mileage example, powered by the 2.0-litre (115bhp) turbo-diesel motor, with six-speed gearbox. A more powerful 146bhp engine is available.

VW's face-lifted T5 is distinguished by a sharper-looking nose, but more importantly, features a series of new 2.0-litre engines (84, 102, 140 and 180bhp), all Euro V compliant, with six-speed gearboxes. Hillside fits 102 horsepower motors as standard, but the test 'van had the 140bhp variant. Highly desirable DSG automated gearboxes are optional.

Both vehicles have cab air-conditioning (standard on the Zen, optional on the Thulston), with ABS and twin airbags (though the tested Zen, being built on an older example, had driver's only). Spare wheels are supplied with each.

ROAD MANNERS

Driving this Zen, you'd never guess the base van's mileage - the engine spins sweetly and the 'van handles in a civilised, rather French fashion, with some controlled roll around bends. The drive-train is smoothness personified, with flawless throttle response at low speeds. Sixth gear is very high - only really usable above 60mph - but economy should be good by van standards (Scot claimed mid-thirties for his European sojourn). The driving position is comfortable, though the steering wheel only adjusts for reach. And you must set the driver's seat height before setting off, as downwards relocation can be very sudden! I didn't find the instruments particularly enlightening, nor did I like the large, unswept-by-the-wipers nearside area of the windscreen. However, I could certainly live with this cockpit for long journeys.

The Thulston has the advantage of VW's peerless cockpit. Beautifully made, this new Transporter boasts the clearest instrument display I've seen: white-on-black, easy to read, practicality exemplified. The gearchange is sweet and snappy and the small steering

HILLSIDE THULSTON

WE LIKED

- Superb and beautiful base vehicle
- Excellent toilet with dedicated flush-water tank
- Comfortable lounge
- Well-equipped kitchen for size of 'van
- Spare wheel
- Good payload

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Less heavily-tinted windows
- Draining board

WE DISLIKED

- Non height-adjustable cab seats
- Second, small table

VANTAGE ZEN

WE LIKED

- Superbly finished interior
- Big, flat, comfortable bed
- Versatile lounge
- Good facilities in a very small package
- Spare wheel

WE WOULD HAVE LIKED

- Some form of wardrobe
- Larger drop-down work-surface alongside sink
- Loo with own flush-water tank

WE DISLIKED

- Lack of curtain/interior blinds for cab
- Space unnecessarily taken up by two fitted electric fan-heaters

wheel adjusts for reach and rake. However, the driver's seat (raise-able in most T5s) is fixed - moreover, fixed in a low position - doubtless to facilitate bed making. I sat too close to the floor, out of kilter with the remainder of the driving position, though the ability to drop the steering wheel did help. Thankfully, Hillside is looking to specify alternative, adjustable seats. Certainly, the engine was powerful, though raucous under throttle, and the handling was all you'd expect from the sophisticated independent suspension: safe, assured and compliant. Economy should also match Vivaro's - excellent reasons for considering these two small, efficient base vehicles. In my opinion, neither needed the pricier, more powerful engines on offer. Indeed, if buying the Thulston's VW, I'd save £1,400, opting for the 102bhp engine.

LOUNGE AND DINE

There's a distinct difference in style here. The Thulston's cab seats swivel (with difficulty in the narrow confines of the VW's cockpit, and much easier with cab doors open). They face into a lounge with two tables, the smaller - on a curved, ribbed pole support - lives behind the passenger seat, its main purpose, seemingly to be obstructive. The larger table's top stows on the interior of the offside rear door. Its pole-type leg fits in a floor socket and stows in big clips on the drop-down front of the settee-base. Here, it interferes with access to the storage within. This table will serve two or three people satisfactorily.

Lounge upholstery is good - the settee has reasonable depth and slight knee-rolls, while the travel seat proved comfortable. This prototype lacked reading lights, but production vehicles will have two LED-powered lamps on stalks. The tinted lower side windows are single-glazed and have slightly inset slide-open panels. There are no blinds, but curtains on rails, top and bottom within the window reveals, and so close to the glass we feared wetting from condensation. We found the level of tinting oppressive, even on a sunny day. High-level windows are clear, opening, double-glazed acrylic and with blinds, admitting welcome light, as did the Mini Heki rooflight.

The Zen provides a large and luxurious L-shaped lounge, in a rather restrained fashion, achieving this without use of the cab seats - they remain fixed in the forward-facing position. Seating traverses the interior behind

VANTAGE ZEN



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- 6 Zen's art places kitchen and washroom aft, L-shaped lounge up front
- 7 A luxurious lounge, and plenty of room for dining
- 8 Compact kitchen has a place for everything - small, but efficient

HILLSIDE THULSTON



VANTAGE ZEN

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

HILLSIDE THULSTON

PRICE

- From: £40,995 OTR
- As tested: £45,225 OTR

BASICS

- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 3 (incl driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion 3 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Steel bodied window van with OEM GRP high roof
- Length: 5.29m (17ft 4.5in)
- Width: 2.03m (6ft 8in)
- Height: 2.47m (8ft 1.5in)
- Wheelbase: 3.40m (11ft 2in)
- Rear overhang: 996mm (3ft 3in)
- Gross vehicle weight: 3,000kg
- Payload: 570kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, gas)
- Insulation: 20mm all round
- Interior height: 1.89m (6ft 2.5in) max

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Volkswagen T5 long wheelbase van
- Engine: 2.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 140bhp
- Transmission: Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Front: independent on MacPherson struts, Rear: independent on mini-block springs
- Features: ABS, ESP, driver and passenger airbags, remote central locking, immobiliser, trip computer, heated/electrically operated door mirrors, electric windows, radio/CD player, spare wheel

KITCHEN

- Sink: Stainless steel bowl with glass lid and mixer tap. No drainer
- Cooker: Smev stove with 4-burner hob, separate oven and grill
- Fridge: Waeco 12V compressor type with freezer compartment. Capacity 50 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford 402C bench-type, wheeled cassette, flush-water tank
- Basin: Plastic drop-down type with mixer tap
- Shower: Uses basin's extendable tap, wall bracket, shower tray floor with single drain, flexible shower curtain

BEDS

- Longitudinal singles
- Length: 1.91m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 650mm (2ft 1.5in)
- Alternative partial double
- Length: 1.91m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 1.67m (5ft 6in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water tank: Underslung, 60 litres (13.2 gallons)
- Waste water tank: Underslung, 30 litres (6.6 gallons)
- Water heater: 10-litre boiler, gas-mains powered
- Space heater: Eberspächer diesel-fired with blown-air
- Leisure battery: 100 amp hr
- Gas: 1 x 4.5kg cylinder
- Lighting: All LED. 4 ceiling lights in main lounge, 1 ceiling light behind cab seats, strips over sink and cooker, 1 strip over washbasin, 1 ceiling light
- Sockets: 230V: 2, 12V: 1

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- Fitted to test vehicle: 140bhp engine upgrade (£1,400), metallic paint (£520), colour-coded bumpers (£350), cab air-con (£820), cruise control (£195), electric/heated mirrors and electric windows (£350), alloy wheels (£595)
- Other options available: DSG 7-speed automated gearbox with 140bhp engine (£2,500), 180bhp engine with 4-motion four-wheel drive and DSG (£5,500), chassis upgrade to 3,200kg (£400), reversing camera (£350), awning (£455), electric step (£295), bike rack from (£95)

the cab - a central piece removes easily, facilitating access to the cab - then forms a settee down the offside. There's another seat aft of the sliding door. The layout allows many options for lounging positions, simply by moving cushions, backrests and boards. The cushions are flat (no knee-rolls to complicate bed making) and made of excellent quality foam. The windows are clear acrylic, opening, double-glazed units (with concertina blinds), supported by a Remis rooflight, three ceiling LED clusters in the lounge, another in the cab and three more under the overhead lockers. The Zen's lounging gets full marks.

For dining, the Zen has two different sized table tops, both living in the overcab, their bosses locating in shaped depressions in its base. The pole-type leg stows behind the washroom, while there's a leg socket in the lounge floor. A tripod base is supplied for dining outside.

COOK'S QUARTERS

The description, 'small motorcaravan' generally equates to paucity of cooking facilities - not so with the Thulston. Offside, and under a glass lid, there's a full-sized cooker with four hob burners, separate grill and oven, plus pan store at floor level. However, this leaves no room for work surface. Above, there's a locker and cubby. Opposite is a shaped surface with inset stainless steel sink with glass lid, but no drainer and underneath, a small (50-litre) Waeco compressor-type fridge. Alongside is a drawer with cutlery drawer within, and below, a further slim drawer. Two mains and two 12V sockets are handily placed above the rear of the work surface and two shelved overhead lockers and a cubby. Rona felt their carpeted interiors inappropriate in the kitchen, and nicked her fingers on sharp clips holding one of the slim LED strip-lights under an overhead cupboard, when lifting the cooker lid. One might suggest a smaller, combi-oven to release further space, but overall this is an excellent kitchen, especially considering the size of 'van. The Vantage, with its relatively large

lounge, is challenged to fit a usable kitchen in the remaining available space, and so its galley is more limited in scope than that of its rival. There's a two-burner, manually-lit hob (with glass lid) and forwards, a deep rectangular stainless steel sink. A lift-up flap on the forward end of the unit (over a seat), provides work-surface which, in production models, will be a dark grey formica to match the splash-back fitted. To assist with washing-up, the Vantage supplies a food-grade, solid plastic tray and stainless steel draining rack to sit thereon - either fitted in the sink, or on the flap. No oven or grill? True, but Vantage supplies a novel doughnut-shaped pan, which - sat on a hob burner - acts as an oven. A toaster is also supplied, and this has already proved a 'van sale winner - seems Scot Naylor has a solution to every problem!

There's another bijou compressor fridge - this time a 45-litre unit - situated under the hob. A pull-up 'power-tower' rises from the rear, between the hob and sink - it contains three mains sockets and is a signature feature of Vantage motorhomes. Overhead are two un-shelved cupboards, with two LED cluster lamps in the bases, while low-level storage comprises a pull-out drawer for cutlery - its partitions substantial, so it's a little too small. Three shelves are below, and all is behind a cupboard door. The seat base forward of the kitchen contains two useful drawers - one, opening into the aisle, contains a waste bin,

9 The washroom is spacious and fully-equipped for abluting

10 The single beds - despite appearances - proved quite comfortable

11 The double bed leaves a gap between the cab seats. Cab curtains could do with some more hooks and poppers

12 The washroom provides plenty of room to primp and preen, but no shower

13 Beds can be made as singles/partial double

14 A big, flat, comfy double bed

HEAD-TO-HEAD DATA

VANTAGE ZEN

PRICE

- From: £39,950 OTR
- As tested: £39,950 OTR

BASICS

- Berths: 2
- Three-point belted seats: 2 (incl driver)
- Warranty: Base vehicle and conversion 2 years, water ingress 5 years
- Badged as NCC EN1646 compliant: No
- Construction: Steel bodied high-roof panel van
- Length: 5.182m (17ft 0in)
- Width: 2.01m (6ft 7in)
- Height: 2.57m (8ft 5in)
- Wheelbase: 3.49m (11ft 5.5in)
- Rear overhang: 850mm (2ft 9.5in)
- Gross vehicle weight: 2,900kg
- Payload: 450kg (after allowance for driver @ 75kg, 90 per cent fuel, fresh water, gas)
- Insulation: Floor 12mm, walls/roof 15mm
- Interior height: 1.87m (6ft 1.5in) max

THE VEHICLE

- Chassis: Vauxhall Vivaro long wheelbase panel van
- Engine: 2.0-litre turbo-diesel producing 115bhp
- Transmission: 6-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive
- Brakes: Servo-assisted discs all round
- Suspension: Front: independent, wishbones with MacPherson struts. Rear: semi-independent with trailing links
- Features: ABS, driver and passenger airbags (production models), remote central locking, immobiliser, trip computer, heated/electrically operated door mirrors, electric windows, mudflaps, radio/CD/MP3 player, spare wheel

KITCHEN

- Sink: Stainless steel bowl with mixer tap. Plastic drainer tray and stainless steel draining rack
- Cooker: Cramer 2 burner gas hob (manual ignition)

- Fridge: 12V compressor type with freezer compartment. Capacity 45 litres

WASHROOM

- Toilet: Thetford 400 bench-type with wheeled cassette
- Basin: Plastic drop-down bowl with mixer tap
- Shower: Shower hose and head from basin tap for use outside only

BEDS

- Longitudinal singles
- Length: 1.91m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 600mm (1ft 11.5in)
- Alternative double
- Length: 1.91m (6ft 3in)
- Width: 1.54m (5ft 0.5in)

EQUIPMENT

- Fresh water tank: Underslung, insulated 65 litres (14.3 gallons)
- Waste water tank: Underslung, 25 litres (5.5 gallons)
- Water heater: Truma Therm 6-litre boiler, mains-only operation
- Space heater: Webasto Airtop 2000 diesel-fired with blown-air, 2 x 500W mains fan heaters
- Leisure battery: 2 x 100 amp hr
- Gas: 2 x 4.5kg cylinders
- Lighting: All LED. 1 in cab ceiling, 3 in main ceiling, 3 under cupboards over settee, 2 under kitchen overhead cupboard, 1 over washbasin
- Sockets: 230V: 4 (1 in front of settee base, 3 in pull-up tower in kitchen), 12V: 2 (aft of sliding door, above fridge)

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- Fitted to test vehicle: None
- Other options available: 146bhp engine (£1,600), Tecshift automated gearbox (£1,000), alloy wheels (£600), reversing sensors (£300), cruise control (£200), tracker (£450), electric step (£350), awning (£600), 70W solar panel (£750), Avtex TV/DVD player, bracket and aerial (£500)

HILLSIDE THULSTON



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15 Under-settee storage access is obstructed by stowed table leg
16 The wardrobe provides good clothes storage for a small 'van

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the other, opening forward, can house the draining rack. Within the limitations imposed by available space, this is an imaginative kitchen, beautifully executed. Whether it suits, depends on culinary style: if a full cooker is essential, Thulston will win your vote.

BATHING SPACE

The Zen's washroom is in the rear offside corner, also utilising aisle space, when the bi-fold wooden door is extended. The interior is finished in smooth, hygienic, wipe-able white. The drop-down basin and Thetford 400 bench-type toilet are set on the offside wall, so the toilet cassette is removed conveniently through the rear doors. Flush water comes from the main tank, but production versions may have their own dedicated supply. The basin tap pulls out as a shower-head, though there's no shower tray - it's for washing sandy feet outside. A round mirror, toilet-roll holder, toothbrush mug and two hooks are fitted, but no cabinet. We feel there's room - just - for a slimline version above the basin. For a campervan, it's a good, well-equipped 'necessarium'.

If you want more facilities, look no further than the Thulston. The rear-end washroom design is not unique, but here is refined by Hillside Leisure. There's a central, step-through shower tray and, entering from the rear, the full-height doors mean no stooping. Thetford's bench-type toilet (with its own flush tank) and another drop-down basin occupy the offside, with cupboards opposite, protected from water damage by a pale-blue shower curtain. Interestingly, washroom ceiling and walls are covered by a patterned blue material (called Intervene) that, we're told, is fully washable, waterproof, anti-bacterial and used in hospitals. The current velour finish on the internal surfaces of the rear doors, will become Intervene in production. The curtains to those big rear door windows will need to be pulled fully whenever facilities are being used. Finally, the toilet-roll holder is definitely wrongly placed - just where you'll knock it off the wall when arising!

BED TIME

As explained, the Thulston forms two longitudinal beds, or a semi-double (with a gap between cab seats), which is 1.67m (5ft 6in) wide. Both beds are a good length (1.91m - 6ft 3in) - foot tucking under the dashboard; there's surely a knack in achieving this elegantly - I got hot, flustered and irritable! Whoever has the offside billet may need (if tall), to tuck tootsies under the steering wheel. Despite levelling cushions on the cab seats, these beds proved to be somewhat uneven. However, they seemed reasonably comfortable. Cab curtains weren't (on this prototype) popped to the fascia, so light came in around them.

The Zen's beds are easily and intuitively made, utilising backrests, seat cushions and bed boards. The results are very flat, comfortable and long enough - at 1.96m - and even extendable to 2.04m (6ft 8.5in), by pushing cab seats forward and inserting another cushion. The singles are narrow, at 580mm (1ft 11in), but we'd use the double, which is 1.54m (5ft 0.5in) wide. The only downside is the lack of cab blackout facility. Exterior quilted screens are provided, but they're a faff to store when damp. A curtain across the rear of the cab might work well.

Though Hillside Leisure has made a good

fist of the Thulston's beds - achieving a far more useful bed length than some rivals, the Zen wins this section.

STORE ROOM

Two light 'vans with more than adequate payloads: 450kg claimed by the Vantage, 570kg by Hillside. The Thulston's overcab locker is divided in two, with separate doors. Two narrow, lipped shelves run along above the lounge, and the travel seat base offers capacious storage, accessed from above. The settee base looks promising, but is inaccessible from above, and the drop-down front is obstructed by the stowed table leg. Production modifications may solve this. The kitchen is well provided for and the washroom has plenty of cupboard space. The wardrobe, aft of the cooker on the offside, has shelves and central hanging area with a 710mm (2ft 4in) drop. The Thulston's occupants are well-catered for.

The Zen has lots of standard equipment, so low-level storage is at a premium. The front section of the settee-base houses sundry batteries, heaters and chargers, so the best storage locker is the rear settee section, which is large and unobstructed, accessed from above, and without needing to move the backrest. Here, gas struts would assist. The seat beside the sliding door is partially occupied by the gas locker - fortunately, the cab is available for storing rucksacks, coats and suchlike, particularly as the Zen lacks a wardrobe. However, we're pretty sure a slim clothes-carrier would fit on the back of the rear offside door panel. Despite the presence of the table tops and bed-board, there's adequate room in the overcab for bedding. There are four overhead lockers in the lounge and two more in the kitchen - all un-shelved. Finally, three fabric wall-pockets are fitted on lounge walls.

LIFE SUPPORT

Though small, there's no reason why these motorhomes shouldn't have all mod cons. The Thulston has an Eberspächer diesel-fired space heater underneath (fed by the vehicle's fuel tank), plus a gas/mains-powered water heater under the cupboard floor in the washroom. The gas locker, under that same cupboard, and accessed via a rear door, houses a 4.5kg cylinder. Water tanks of 60 litres (fresh) and 30 litres (waste) are both underslung, and the 100 amp hr leisure battery is cunningly hidden below the wardrobe.

The Vantage crams in a Webasto Airtop 2000 diesel space heater, Truma Therm 6-litre water heater, two 100 amp hr leisure batteries, two 4.5kg gas cylinders and two built-in electric fan heaters. Insulated fresh and waste water tanks, holding 65 litres and 25 litres respectively, are underslung.

Both campervans list plenty of optional extras, such as awnings, solar panels, bike racks, etc, and we noted that the Vantage also offers the excellent Outsmart tracker and alarm system.

CONCLUSION

Both contestants offer a refreshing vision of motorcaravanning, in nimble, lightweight packages. They're not cheap, but offer a great deal, appealing to different clienteles - the Thulston to those wanting VW cachet and driving experience, combined with a fully-usable washroom/shower and kitchen. The Zen is smaller but is still a highly-specified camper with toilet facilities that majors on bed and lounge. ■

VANTAGE ZEN



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17 Good storage in the rear settee base - it would be nice if the lid was self-supporting

18 Much of the settee base is occupied by life-support equipment

