



INSIDE THE CALIFORNIA FACTORY

Text and Photography: David

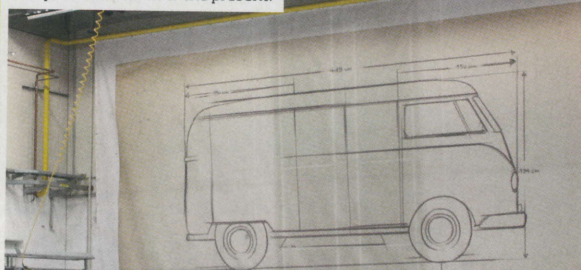
Recently I was privileged to be taken round VW's California and Beach assembly plant at Limmer in Hannover. The factory is not open to the public, so this is a rare insight into what goes on! Special thanks to VW Press, Christian Schleuter, and Toni Schorrardt for arranging the visit and taking us around the factory

The Limmer plant is a self-contained unit, separate from the main T5 factory, with its own team of 110 technicians (plus 15 admin staff) who work in two shifts, producing around 35 fully-finished vehicles per day. It operates like an assembly line that has dedicated areas for each stage of assembly and fitting out, with nearly every task being done by hand. Interestingly, all Californias and Beaches, LHD or RHD, are built to individual order, mainly for a specific customer, but also for dealerships as stock to sell, with factory fitted options and paint finish specified by each customer. Each vehicle carries the

customer order number and info about seating configuration options (Beach) or special options such as fitting the side awning or additional seat. One of the reasons why lead in time between order and delivery of a vehicle is quite so long is because each is built to order, – no surplus stock to sell is carried.

Road ready, complete T5 units are delivered to the Limmer plant direct from the Hannover production line, with everything done except the fitting of the roof and kitting out of the rear area – swivel cab seats, parking sensors, wheel choices, upholstery, seat runners in the floor, etc., are already done at the main plant for each individual bus. The whole roof

The past watches over the present!



Finished kitchen/ wardrobe units ready to be taken to the assembly line.



A line of nearly completed Californias.



The assembly line has five stages, with five buses being worked on at a time.



The kitchen/ wardrobe unit is delivered as a carcass ready for fitting with cooker, etc.



Vehicles come from the Hannover factory fitted with a temporary rigid plastic roof cover.



The roof has already been cut out during the build on the main factory assembly line.



The complete kitchen/ wardrobe unit is inserted into position by a robotic arm.



One stage involves the fitting of the cladding and electrics.



Pre-painted roofs are delivered from suppliers ready for assembly.

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section has already been cut out, and vehicles fitted with a temporary white, rigid plastic roof prior to delivery to Limmer. The aluminium roof sections, pre-painted and moulded, are delivered in batches from an external supplier and sit on pallets arranged in paint colours awaiting assembly prior to fitting - one of the last big assembly line jobs. Roofs are collected from the palette and fitted with lining, awning sides and scissor arms, before being sent on to the roof fitting area.

Items such as the hydraulic roof mechanism and gear also come directly from sub-contacted suppliers, as does much of the interior equipment and fittings, either as a base unit ready for assembly (as in the kitchen/ wardrobe cabinet), or as a complete unit ready to fit (as in the roof storage cupboard, which comes with speakers already installed). Another dedicated area assembles by hand

the kitchen unit, fitting the cooker, sink, waste tank, fridge, electrics, etc., onto the supplied carcass, before the completed units are sent to await fitting into the vehicle. To keep weight down, the cabinets are made from double skinned, faced aluminium.

Once a vehicle has had a full delivery inspection and check, the plastic roof is removed and the vehicle driven to the assembly line. This interior fitting line is a rolling process, with about five units on at any one time and with five key stages. Each stage here has its own jobs, like adding the interior cladding, or wiring up stuff. The only mechanised bit is the stage where an amazing robot arm picks up the entire kitchen/ wardrobe unit and inserts it through side door into position for workers to then bolt in! Approximately 30-35 vehicles per day go through this area.

Fitting of the assembled roof and

the front frame part with hydraulic mechanisms is one of the last major jobs, done in a separate, dedicated area that deals with one vehicle at a time.

The last jobs carried out are the fitting of the rear seat, carpets and the small items like the tool and first aid kits before the finished vehicle is sent for quality control. Finally, the gas is connected and tested along with the electrics. The gold sticker is added to the tailgate and the vehicle is sent out for road testing. The finished units are now ready for delivery to customers!

Since production started in 2004 approximately 30,000 Californias and Beaches have been built, which is set to rise to 40,000 by the end of 2012. In 2011, 6,600 units were built, with just over half that amount being the California. For 2012 the target is 7,000 units, while the Beach is now available at last in RHD, so expect to see more of them on our roads! ☺

