



Chris Burlace looks back at the history of Europe's largest and most successful manufacturer of motorhomes and caravans

Hymer's history as motorhome makers stretches back forty years, although the company owes its existence to events at least another two score years earlier in the last century. Herr Alfons Hymer (1897-1973) gained his diploma as a 'Meister' in the craft of coachbuilding in 1921 in Ravensburg. He began to work independently within his parent's business, initially specialising in farm carts, but then in 1924 he built a workshop and house in Bad Waldsee. After marrying in 1925, Alfons expanded his activities into car repairs and started to sell Aral petrol. His son, Erwin Hymer, was born in July 1930.

Erwin Hymer studied mechanical engineering and then joined the Dornier aircraft company in Spain, where he was one of the team responsible for the very successful DO27 short take-off and landing aeroplane. Later, still with Dornier, he moved to Munich where he developed the Dornier Delta bubblecar. One of a crop of micro-cars created in the 1950s to bring cheap motoring to the masses, this unusual four-seater design (two occupants faced forwards and two rearwards) was taken up and built by motorcycle manufacturers Zundapp as the 'Janus'.

In 1956 Erwin Hymer made a timely move to join his father's firm in Bad Waldsee. Alfons Hymer had just bought land from his neighbour Erich Bachem to extend his works. Bachem not only was another man with an aircraft industry background - in 1944/45 he had headed the 'Natter' rocket-assisted interceptor aircraft project - but had together with Wolf Hirth built a small caravan, the Aero-Sport, in 1938. Now he had new ideas for a caravan for his own use and had asked Hymer senior to build it. Alfons put his son in charge of the project and the result brought together Erich's and Erwin's thoughts on caravan design and influenced in no small measure by their aircraft industry experience.

Caravanning only started to take off in Germany in the mid-1930s. After the war there were more pressing priorities and caravan construction was slow to revive but by the mid-fifties an upturn had started. The Hymer/Bachem team were quick to appreciate the possibilities stemming from their first design exercise and prototype caravans were ready in 1957 in time for the Hymer and Bachem families to be able to check out their practicality on their summer holidays. Now the Hymer family business was to take a new direction. It would build the caravans and Erich Bachem would market them. You may have deduced by now how the name for the new



1. Borgward Caravano 1961
2. Hymermobil 462 of 1973 on Mercedes L206/L306
3. 660, the first fully integrated model, still had Mercedes grille and windscreen.
4. 1974 660 with luggage rack and wholly Hymer face.

marque was derived - ERich BAchem = ERIBA.

Series production of the caravans began in February 1958. In fact the Hymer workshops built the 'Puck Luxus', 'Faun Standard' and 'Faun Familia' models, whilst the 'Troll Luxus' top-of-the-range model and based on the outfit created for Bachem's personal use was at first put out for manufacture by the glider makers Schempp-Hirth. By the second half of the year one Eriba 'van was being built per day; the annual total was 167. In 1959 output rose to 455 units and it wasn't too long before the magic 1000-per-year was achieved. Sadly, however, Erich Bachem did not live to enjoy the meteoric rise of his partnership with the Hymers; he died in 1960 after a severe illness. His friend Armand F. Protzen took over as head of the Eriba marketing organisation.

From touring caravans the next logical step for Hymer was a motor caravan. Although Westfalia had paved the way for the postwar motor caravan industry in Europe with their 'Camping Box' conversion of the Volkswagen Transporter, and had moved on to refine their concept there was a decade later still no other volume producer in Germany. Erwin Hymer picked a vehicle with rather more conversion potential than the VW with its layout-constraining rear engine. His choice was the Borgward B611, a forward-control 3.5-tonne van nearly 17 feet long and over six-and-a-half wide. It offered over 11 feet of flat floor length, lack of adequate headroom could be overcome by using a pop-up roof of the kind already fitted to most Eriba caravans. The engine options, 42PS diesel or 60PS petrol, provided performance considered adequate and more in 1961.

Three layouts were planned for the Borgward 'Caravano'. Up front were two couches facing a central table and converting to a double bed; for youngsters a bed could be rigged in the cab and a sideboard unit at the rear opened up to form the fourth berth. At the rear were sink/drain and hob, a 60-litre fridge, wardrobe and storage for two gas bottles. One layout provided a toilet cubicle with foldaway basin, chemical toilet and a folding door to increase the enclosed space, while there was also a gas-fired heater. The floorplans were similar to those of the period built in Britain and not miles away from some models still in the showrooms today.

However, just three Caravanos rolled out of the Hymer factory in 1961. No doubt the choice of base vehicle, the right one on technical grounds, was made a year or more earlier. But by early 1961 Borgward were in trouble ('The Motor' in February '61 reported debts of £16M) and the company ceased trading in 1962. Hymer dropped their motor caravan, put the episode down to experience and concentrated their efforts in the now lively caravan market. Not for another ten years would they return to the motorhome game.

Through the 1960s they took 'Troll' production in-house, introduced a new 'Nova' range of tourers and numerous design advances, set up Hymer Leichtmetallbau making



5. Flagship model 720 of 1974 had a layout still popular today.

6. 500/501 was based on the Mercedes L206D/L207.

7. The 'English' Hymermobil 521, on the Bedford Blitz was very popular - hundreds sold in a matter of weeks.

aluminium ladders and other caravan components. Output rose to 1500 per year and in 1966 the 10,000th caravan left the production hall. In March 1968 a massive fire swept through the now much enlarged works and leaving only the cabinet making shop and the office building standing. Amazingly, some production re-started after only two weeks and by June was in full swing again in new buildings which provided 2000 sq.m. of additional production space.

Hymer France SA was set up in 1970 at Thann in Alsace and moved two years later to a newly-build factory in nearby Cernay, where it remains today. With a large part of the caravan manufacture transferred across the border, it was time to expand once again into the motorhome business.

The first of the second generation Hymer motorhomes was unveiled at the Essen Caravan Salon in 1971. 'A dream on wheels' the brochure called it. In reality the 'Hymermobil 550' comprised a caravan body mounted on the Mercedes L 508 D, the big Transporter known as the 'Düsseldorfer', and stretching a point might be called semi-integrated in current terminology. Eriba chief Armand Proteen expressed his doubts that any significant numbers would be sold. However, 22 were built in 1972, the first full production year, and over a hundred in total. A cheaper model, still caravan-on-chassis style, was introduced in 1973 on the fwd and forward-control Mercedes L206/306 - itself based on the Hanomag F20 inherited when Mercedes took over that company.

In 1973, also, Erwin Hymer became head of Hymer KG following the death of his father. Five years later he was in the driving seat at Eriba, this time after the tragic death of Herr Protzen in a road accident, and then two more years passed before he brought the two companies together as Eriba-Hymer GmbH.

From the beginning Hymer built the motorhomes separately from the caravans and then as production increased the company changed from individual construction to a proper production line in the 1974/75 season. Fully integrated styling arrived with the first 660 model, although it still retained the original one-piece Mercedes windscreen and front grille. In 1974 the Hymer gained a distinctive face all of its own, now sporting a split windscreen and a stepped front roofline with luggage rack in the style of contemporary 'camping bus' conversions. The 600 was joined by a flagship 720 - the latter's layout of kitchen opposite side dinette, a high-mounted fridge alongside the wardrobe and opposite the washroom and a rear lounge/diner familiar in many motorhomes since - and by smaller 620 and 520 models. Now there was a range from 5 metres to 7.25 metres, variety in floor plans and in the top models cabinetwork in real teak veneers - the fashion of the moment. Output in 1975 totalled 237 units and by 1977/78 had topped the thousand. In Germany Hymermobil was becoming synonymous with luxury motorhome just as Dormobile was applied here to any van



8. Destined for the desert, this fifth-wheeler built for a sheik was 3 metres wide.

9. The 900, 8.8 metres long, boasted every luxury and showed influences

conversion and to not a few coachbuilt models as well.

Hymer had picked the right time to branch out into motorhome production. In Germany in 1971 just 701 new motor caravans were registered. That figure had doubled by 1973, after which the market was hit by an oil crisis, and then by 79 new registration had soared to 4750. And although Hymer had started with top-bracket models they were quick to add more affordable van conversions and then a 'budget' A-Class to their range.



from the US RV.

10. S-Class c. 1980 hid the swing-down cab bed under its curved roof.

11. 1980 B-Class began on the Bedford Blitz.

12. 1983 and the B-Class moves to a Ford foundation, this is the 522/532.

13. Hymercamp II on the Mitsubishi 1.300 proved a popular entry level model.

14. King of the 'Camp' in '83 was the Mercedes based 'IV' model.

15. 'Day Van' style windows for the Hymercar.

16. Hymermobil 750 became the flagship in '83.

17. New front Camay in 1982/83, the Eriba-Car on Renault Trafic. Headroom courtesy of an elevating roof as on Eriba caravans.

18. They only made one! The Caravan Salon sensation of 1988 the 880

19. Erwin Hymer

The van version of the Hanomag-derived Mercedes L206 served as basis for the conversions. For the cheaper integrated model, the 521 launched in 1976, the foundation was the Bedford Blitz (the German market version of the Bedford CF which found much favour for motor caravans here) and this model was also the first to have a swing-down cab bed. The 521 broke new ground to provide comfortable beds for a two-plus-two complement within a 5-metre motorhome and was the fore-runner of what Hymer later called their 'B-Class'. In the period 1976-1982 2000 of the 521s and larger 581s were built.

For their mushrooming motorhome production Hymer needed more space and in 1976 the No. 3 works was built, still the firm's headquarters and main production unit in Germany. Now with three halls each of 2000 sq.m. the model range could be added to again. The new Mercedes 'Bremen' transporter (307/308/310) had arrived and was the basis for the Hymer 650. This was a landmark model, the first to employ Hymer's 'PUAL' construction. The name derives from PolyUrethane/ALuminium; a sandwich of aluminium outer, plywood inner over a steel frame and with PU foam filling. And with the new body structure came a new

construction procedure - now the interior fittings were built up on the floor section and then walls and roof added.

The Hymer policy from day one with caravans and then with motorhomes had been practicality and value-for-money before sheer showiness. With the new works, however, they had the opportunity to exploit a new niche market. In the ten years from 1976 they built around a hundred supervans for the super-rich namely the oil-rich sheiks of the Gulf states. Mostly these were fifth-wheeler style with a commercial tractor unit hauling a trailer which would have been over-dimensioned to travel legally on European roads. No matter for there's plenty of room in the desert!

Experience with the super-luxury 'sheik-mobils' was no doubt the trigger to Hymer building a supermodel for European, and American, buyers in the millionaire bracket. The 900, actually 8.8 metres long, was based on the Mercedes LP 813 7.5-tonne chassis, showed obvious influences from the American RV world and with air-conditioning and on-board generator boasted every luxury. The floorplans offered two forward layouts, five alternatives for the rear and a common central arrangement, thus allowing buyers considerable individuality. Just a small number of the 900 were sold after its launch in 1978 but the model laid the groundwork for both the new S-Class which followed in 1979 and the present 2001 S-Class models.

The new S-Class brought rounded frontal styling and a smoothly curved, double skinned and insulated GRP roof. Technical advances included crumple zones, crash-tested seatbelt mountings in the cab and a double dinette with flip-over front seat so that all four occupants could face forwards for travel. Cosmetically the interior took clues from the 900 but, carried on the Mercedes 'Bremen' chassis, one could buy a new 660 S-Class for half the price of a 900.

In 1980 the 660 S-Class was joined by smaller 550 and 590 models as the Hymer concern continued with a decade of vigorous growth and a proliferation of new ranges and models. The older integrated models meanwhile were upgraded and became the new B-Class with the Bedford Blitz giving way to the Ford Transit and then the new generation of so-called 'Sevel' chassis - Fiat Ducato, Peugeot J5 and Citroen C25 - as their foundations. 1980 also saw the arrival of a van conversion with elevating roof, named the 'Tramp', and 1981 the first cabover motorhomes. Initially badged as Eriba-Camps, these latter were built by the Hymer associate company FFB in Blankenheim and were based on the Transit.

Manufacture of the overcab models was transferred to Bad Waldsee in '82, when they were allowed to take 'Hymer' into their name, and for '83 there was a trio of new 'Hymercamps', I, II and III based respectively on the Transit, Mitsubishi's L 300 and the Mercedes 'Bremen'. The next year Hymercamp IV appeared on the Fiat/Peugeot/Citroen base chassis, by now commonly called the 'Eurotransporter'. The III and the IV versions featured a layout with double dinette and couch forward, rear kitchen and corner washroom - since established as the most popular floorplan in European motorhomes.

More variation came with the change from Bedford to Ford for the van conversions. Out with the 'Tramp' name, later to be recycled for semi-integrated models, in with 'Hymercar'. For the Ford there was a full-length front-lifting elevating roof and deep 'picture' side windows, as favoured in what the Americans call 'Day Vans'. However, Hymer's 1980s affair with the Ford was to be short-lived as the Eurotransporter took over across the company's range for all but the top S-Class, built only on the chassis with the prestige of the three-pointed star.

With PUAL construction adopted for all coach-built models during the '80s and the technology well proven as regards reliability, Hymer offered a 6-year guarantee against water penetration for the 1984/85 model year. In the meantime, 1983 had seen the addition of a new flagship to the S-Class and the new 750 marked another first for the basis was a Mercedes chassis with twin rear axles (still rear wheel drive). And new from the French factory for '82/'83 had been the Eribacar and Eribajet on Renault Trafic chassis; the former was a semi-integrated model with standing height completed by an elevating roof after the style of Eriba caravans and the latter a fully integrated creation.

Hymer's sensation for the 1986 Caravan Salon was another super-luxurious giant model, the 880. Styling changes from the S-Class saw the word 'Hymer' now as a cut-out and air intake in the front panel, a new GRP rear panel and rounded GRP skirt sections. External embellishment was more than matched by interior luxury and the model attracted unlimited

admiration but no buyers, it had been just too expensive to produce. Erwin Hymer used the 880 as his personal motorhome for a time. The name cut-out was adopted in the external restyling in 1987 - and remains an enduring feature even now - when Hymer's shed their cream-and-brown livery and took on the 'Playa Metallic' white/grey/silver. The 880 was a model ahead of its day but now the time has come for some of its ideas, which can be distinguished in certain features of the current S-Class.

A gap in Hymer's range was filled in 1987 with the first true semi-integrated 'Tramp' models on the Fiat Ducato. The 'Hymer Quartet' is complete, proclaimed the company's advertising - van conversions, cabovers, semi-integrated and A-Class. In the same year a new flagship model was launched, the S-Class 700 7.2-metre on the Mercedes 410 D and with a fixed, transverse rear bed. Customers, tired of the routine of bedtime cushion shuffling, were demanding dedicated sleeping quarters. Hymer went further giving them also an en-suite bathroom - the new layout of the B-654 and the S-670 providing a lengthwise double bed with shower, WC and washbasin alongside became an enduring favourite on the Continent and more recently has found its way into British designs.

The eighties had been a very successful period for Hymer with sales of over 25,000 motorhomes and around 85,000 caravans and in the 1989/90 accounting period motorhome production had for the first time topped 5000. The Bad Waldsee manufacturer reinforced the bottom end of its range with the compact (4.62m) and very competitively priced Hymercamp 46 on the Fiat Talento, a miniaturised version of the Ducato, with 3 berth or two-plus-two-tinies accommodation and still all the essentials for all-year touring. Better still was to come, the German motorhome market peaked in 1991 with 21,688 new registrations and that year Hymer built 5882 in Bad Waldsee and a further 500 motorhomes in their Cernay factory.

1990 was a year of honours for the Hymer company and for Erwin Hymer personally, also the year in which the Company's status was to be changed. Firstly, Germany's leading motorhome magazine, 'promobil', had instituted a system of 'Motor Caravan of the year' awards based on reader's votes. Hymer's B-Class models scored convincing wins in their categories - and have continued to do so up to the present. At the Essen Caravan Salon Erwin Hymer, who had given over 12 years of service as President of the Verband Deutscher Wohnwagen Hersteller (Association of German Caravan Constructors), was named as the association's first Honorary President as, at the age of 60, he announced that he was going to be less active in the day-to-day business of his companies.

Now Hymer GmbH was to become Hymer AG, floated as a joint stock company embracing the Hymer, Eriba and Hymer France marques. Herr Hymer retained a majority shareholding in the company and kept his hands firmly on the reins as chairman of the board. Hans-Jürgen Burkert was appointed managing director. Already in Erwin Hymer's own hands were caravan and motorhome companies Dethleffs and TEC and shortly he acquired LMC. Since 1990 Bürstner and Niesmann + Bischoff have been brought into the Hymer fold, whilst last year the company took a controlling shareholding in Laika of Italy.

For 1991 Hymer replaced their traditional teak-finish cabinetwork in a couple of Hymermobils. The new 'Time-Line' furniture featured elegantly framed locker doors, more rounded lines and a light colour finish with rather a mother-of-pearl effect, it did not find favour with the marque's conformist buyers but the following year the combination of Time-Line styling with its features such as roller-shutter doors and a new cherry finish was received with acclaim. Meanwhile in France the range of Eribacar models was increased by offering the 'Eurotransporter' chassis as an alternative to the Renault and soon to further extend motorhome production at Cernay was the overcab Hymercamp 49 on the Transit. This model enjoyed a successful run in both the French and Scandinavian markets and was rare at that time in offering a bathroom with separate shower cubicle.

After the euphoria of the 1991 motor caravan figures '92 brought a sharp downturn. Hymer, however, pressed on with new Hymercars on the Ducato van. Bright and modern with red plastic edgings to their cabinetwork, 'Fantasy' catered for those wanting storage space and 'Magic' for buyers demanding a toilet cubicle. In '93 Hymer van on the compact 13 1/2 ft long Fiat Talento created a just-for-two but complete package. Such 'starter' models were perhaps a wise move as new registrations and production continued their decline until 1995/96.



1. The first Hymertramps appeared in 1987



2. Hymermobil S-Class 700 took its styling from the giant 880, including the 'Hymer' grille cut-out



3. 1991, time to test a change of interior 'Time-Line'



4. 1992 Hymercar pair Magic (left) and Fantasy

1993 was the year in which the ADAC conducted their famous crash tests with a small coachbuilt motorhome. Dummies protected only by lap belts, or not provided with adequate head-restraints, suffered severe 'injuries'. Hymer, who earlier had offered an optional 'safety pack' including a 3-point belt for the outboard dinette seat position, responded at the Caravan Salon by showing a cutaway Hymermobil with two 3-point belts and four head-restraints as standard. And no crap of new models this year. Instead the company launched the 'Hymercard' to bring to their customers a range of services and privileges.

Quiet times in the motorhome market didn't mean inactivity behind the scenes. Hymer's designers and constructors were busy preparing for the arrival at the beginning of 1994 of a new 'Eurotransporter', which was going to necessitate the biggest ever model changes in the company's history. Alterations in the dimensions of the new base vehicles meant that bodies and furniture must change. The opportunity was seized to provide more spacious seating, more storage and better equipped kitchens, on the overcabs larger Lutons. Exterior changes saw the new generation Hymers with smooth white exteriors and new graphics. For the B-Class there was a new face, and without the Hymer cut-out in the grille, but for the first time three 'wipers were fitted to sweep the expanse of the big windscreen.

On the van front only the 'Magic' remained in the programme, still with the same floorplan but now more spacious thanks to the increased size of the base vehicle. In summer '94 Bad Waldsee sprang a surprise with a new model range between the B- and S-Classes. E-Class paired a Fiat driving-head with a low-line Al-Ko chassis. The front was more rounded and swept back to its union with the sides, the Hymer cut-out was restored and the slightly upswept pairings of the four headlights introduced the first Hymer with a 'smiley' look. E-

Class came with a GRP roof and glued to the sidewalls; the new model's bonded construction was a development of technology first used in the too-expensive-to-sell 880. Incorporated in the stylish GRP rear panel was a foldaway bike rack.

The new E-Class, with five models from 5.7 to 7.7 metres, was aimed firmly at the two-berth market. There was the 'bar' seating group with its cantilevered table, all featured a fully separate shower cubicle or shower section within the washroom, kitchens had a new elegance and the three largest models boasted a fixed rear bed layout.



5. The B-Class 544, always a favourite, in its 1993 livery



6. 1994 the year of the new 'Eurotransporter' aid a new look for the Hymercamps



7. Between B- and S-Classes in '94 came the E-Class with new construction technology.



8. Compact but complete, the 494 gave birth to the new Swing series.



9. Kitchen of an S-Class 1995 and roundness rules



10. 1995 and a special 544 cabover model celebrates the 50,000th Hymer motorhome



11. Classic B-Class body and Mercedes chassis join the launch of the Star-Line in 1996



12. New lines for the B-Class in '97 and that clever concertina blind to close off the windscreen



13. S-660 is top model for 1998/99 programme



14. Hymercamp Swing 524 is typical of many late nineties models in having raised rear bed over a 'garage' for bikes etc

Mercedes forced more changes on the motorhome makers at the beginning of 1995 with the launch of their new 'Sprinter', which replaced and extended the range of the now rather dated 'Bremen' commercial. Hymer's homework for the new chassis with the three-pointed star had

already been done in creating the E-Class and the S-Class newcomers which appeared at the Caravan Salon that year differed only in the fine detail of their style. Inside, customers with S-Class spending power found specification upgrades and extra luxury. Notable was the S-520 with its round-table dining/seating group.

The Tramp models introduced in the late eighties were close clones of the Hymercamps but without the Luton. For '95 the semi-integrated Hymer was reborn as the Hymertramp sibling of the new E- and S-Class, sharing their body construction technology and with a less prominent, sleeker low profile front moulding and sharing also the Fiat/Al-Ko foundation of the 'E'. But if Hymer were moving upmarket with their integrated and semi-integrated models there was concern about their competitive position at the budget end of the price scale.

In addition to the fall in sales, cheap Italian imports had been making significant inroads in the German and other European markets. Hymer responded with the Hymercamp Swing 494, a whisker short of five metres and on the 1.9 turbo-diesel Fiat Ducato 10. It followed in the wheeltracks of the earlier Camp 46 on the Talento and both the 'Swing' name and the cabinetwork were derived from the Nova Swing caravan from Cernay, where the 494 was also initially built.

Compared with the existing Hymercamps, the new model was simplified in style and specification but still with all the essentials -space and water heating, cassette toilet, second battery etc. - and very keenly priced.

1995 saw the 50,000th Hymer motor caravan produced and this was celebrated by launching a 'Jubilee' version of the Hymercamp 544, similarly with a pared down spec like the 494 and selling at around 12.000DM less than the regular model. Already in Swing-style livery, this 544 was soon adopted into a quickly growing Swing series to run in parallel with the established Hymercamps.

Hard work at Bad Waldsee in 1994/95 upgrading existing models and introducing new brought its reward in the 1995 'Reisemobile des Jahres', when Hymers occupied two first places and three seconds in the results tables published in 'promobil'. Recognition of excellence came also that year with the granting to Hymer of their ISO 9001 certificate they were the first in the German motorhome and caravan industry to qualify for the award.

In 1996 Hymer acquired Niesmann + Bischoff, that prestigious constructor having a few years earlier fallen to Fleetwood of America. Heavy investment in a new green-field factory and the new 'Flair' range had rewarded the Americans only with a large deficit. Hymer took on a programme of upper middle class and super luxury models and before long increased sales, something the Bad Waldsee professionals seemed to manage with all their takeovers.

Back at base, meanwhile, things were not standing still. B-Class was reclad in a new, smooth outer aluminium skin in place of the previous hammer-finish and given an all-round package of improvements. Two new series were started. The integrated 'Star-Line' set B-Class style bodies onto the Mercedes Sprinter chassis, two models initially later increasing to four, and the Sprinter also carried a new cabover model, the 'Hymercamp Star-Line 640'. Now the Hymer programme had a model to suit 99 out of every 100 buyers of a coachbuilt motorhome.

The B-Class was the main centre of attention in 1997, an external reworking leaping it arguably ahead of its E- and S-Class stablemates in the style stakes. The rounded front with twin headlights and the curved slash of the air intake in the bumper/spoiler accentuated the 'smiley' look first seen with the E-Class. Similar upswept styling to the rear bumper, and the sweep of the skirt moulding over the wheelarches, continued the curvy theme. And gone was the flat roof dipping downward over the cab, in its place a rounded roofcap (surprisingly an aluminium sandwich composite, not GRP).

Nine layout options are offered with the new B-series, furniture now in a light pearwood decor, new windows and concertina-fold blinds (two of them cleverly fitted to close around the curved windscreen). Internally, however the pièce de resistance is the new washroom with the panel carrying handbasin and mirror arranged to hinge across to the toilet leaving a dedicated and uncluttered showering area. This 'Vario' system was to spread into other Hymer models which could otherwise find no space for a separate shower cubicle. One 'old' B-Class model, however, was allowed to remain in the company's programme, that eternal

favourite the 544 Styled the 'B-Class Classic', and since joined by the B-584, it provides affordable entry to the world of the integrated Hymermobil.

In 1998 the new B-Class bonded construction was applied to the Hymercamps which, in the process, gained a new half-round style overcab providing exceptional sleeping space and also establishing a wide visual differential between them and their budget priced Swing brothers. A similar realignment of the Hymertramps with the B-Class instead of the E-/S-models brought those semi-integrated models into more affordable territory.

After the recent flood of new and revised models, 1999 appeared to be a relatively quiet year, although under the seemingly still waters at Bad Waldsee there was much activity developing models for the new Millennium. The Swing series, now eight in number, had their hammer finish replaced by a smooth exterior plus improvements to specifications with little change in prices. The Hymercar was discontinued and the E-Class merged into the B-Class. A year later the Tramp was also terminated, a logical move as the acquisition of Bürstner in 1998 had brought into the Hymer fold a leading maker of semi-integrated motorhomes. At the '99 Caravan Salon 'Hymer-rent' was unveiled, from the outset making Hymer a major force in motorhome rental with hundreds of vehicles at around fifty dealerships.

First among the moves towards the Millennium was 'Project Mozart', top secret with designers and constructors beaver away for more than two years to create a new S-Class range. Paraded first at the Düsseldorf Salon 2000, the new trio rode on the Mercedes Sprinter 416/419 (4.6/4.9 tonnes) with 6-speed 'Sprintshift' automatic transmission. The S-650, S-740 and S-820 were respectively 6.6, 7.5 and 8.2 metres long and catered for complements from two to four according to layout.

The new S-Class is based on a four-space concept: driving area, lounge/dining area, functions area and sleeping accommodation. All models share a common cab with seats swivelling to become an integral part of the lounge, for which there are six optional layouts. A common functions module provides kitchen, washroom and wardrobe facilities. Beds in the S-650 have to be provided by conversions of dinette/couch seating and/or a swing-down cab bed. S-740 and S-820 also have, respectively, a fixed single and a fixed double bed over a rear 'garage' which can house outdoor gear, bikes etc. Among a cornucopia of innovations and new ideas in Hymer's latest flagship range are double floors and a three-way heating system. The former adds just 20cm to height on the Mercedes chassis, accommodates tanks, pipe and cable runs plus the spare wheel and provides much useful storage space accessed via external hatches. The 'Hymer Combi' heating comprises underfloor warm-water heating, a blown-air system for fast warm-up and a separate blown-air heater for the cab area when driving.



15. Half-Round styling for Hymercamps in '98 enlarged that upstairs bedroom

16. New S-Class with style fit for a new Millennium - and it's striking from the rear, too.

17 Kitchen in the 'functions area' common to all new S-Class

18. New S-Class with 'Studio' lounge option of dinette and sideboard

The S-models leave space in their kitchens not only for an oven or microwave but also for a compact dishwasher and, of course, they boast the Electrolux 135-litre fridge/freezer with automatic energy selection. The washroom, with separate shower, has a designer basin in Corian-and-glass, whilst 'column' lights are a designer feature of the motorhome's sophisticated lighting arrangements. Such details move these Hymers into new territory, challenging the built-to-order models from specialist constructors. And Hymer customers, too, can enjoy considerable choice in their new S-Class. The six lounge options offer combinations of conventional double dinettes, couches and single swivel seats; round or oval tables on versatile mountings and with extension pieces and even a sideboard/desk with hideaway freestanding chair. Three models, six lounge layouts and six choices of upholstery add up to a large measure of individuality in this Hymer trio which, both technically and stylistically, are way ahead of any previous model with a Hymer badge.

Prioritising 'Project Mozart' did not mean neglecting other sections of the Hymer range. Both Hymercamps and B-Class entered 2001 with double floors, although with no change in external appearance, gain in height or weight, or loss of ground clearance. The miracle is achieved by the use of a low-line Al-Ko chassis, specially developed for Hymer, together with the new plastic, double-skinned and insulated 'Duofloor', patent applied for, which also provides excellent underside protection. Meanwhile the B-Star-Line, previously based on the old B-Classic style body and an older design of cabinetwork, gained the rounded body of the full B-Class and also its latest furniture. That lifted the now four-strong series on the Sprinter into a new slot, price-wise, between the B-Class and the new S-Class. For 2001 the Bad Waldsee factory lists thirty basic models but with all the various floorplan options that stretches to sixty-nine. Cernay builds four Eriba-Cars, two Tramp Swings and a couple of integrated models based on the Renault Master. The choice grows with chassis options, different engines and alternative upholsteries... there's something to satisfy ninety-nine in every hundred would-be buyers.

Since entering the leisure vehicle business, the combined caravan and motorhome production of Hymer's German and French factories is in excess of 200,000, of which around 75,000 have been motorised outfits. What's the reason for that success, for climbing to No. 1 in Europe? It has much to do with Erwin Hymer's business philosophy. Working for success today as the sure foundation for tomorrow. Bringing the right product to the market at the right time and the right price. Treating his enterprise and its employees like family. And a key factor in creating that 'right product' to win the customers is surely that Herr Hymer is not just a maker of motorhomes but also a keen user.

Hymer in Britain

Madisons of Preston were pioneers in the importation of German motorhomes but before Hymer came Tabbert. Dave Allen, a director of Madisons and until recently still a key player in the team at Preston, took the initiative by bringing in a Tabbert A-class on a Peugeot chassis as a personal import. The vehicle readily found a buyer and induced Madisons to sign up as official importers of the German marque. The Continental newcomers quickly found a following but then, as a consequence of major changes at Tabbert, the German company decided to cease motorhome production and to concentrate on their principal, and long established, touring caravan business.

Tabbert actually suggested that Hymer might step into their wheeltracks in the UK market and recommended their rivals to Madisons. John Lunt, the principal of the always progressive Preston dealership, carried out a thorough assessment of the competition at the 1983 Essen Caravan Salon and concluded that Hymer were far and away the front-runners. A Mercedes based 590 A-class was brought across a few weeks later for the Earls Court Caravan Show and sold by Dave Allen at that London event. From there the marque has gone from strength to strength in Britain. Well over 2000 Hymers have been sold and Hymer motorhomes have scored numerous successes in the 'Motor Caravan of the Year' competition held every June at the Motor Caravan Fair, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Two years ago Madisons Hymermobil Centre was bought by the Brownhills Group and now trades as 'The Hymer Centre' of Hymer UK Ltd. It continues to be the sole authorised importer of Hymer motorhomes and centred on the original Preston premises.

Seeing Hymer History

Herr Hymer is setting up a caravan museum at the factory at Bad Waldsee. This will include not only Hymer products but also much other material from Herr Hymer's existing collection. The project is being led by Bernhard Jehne, a longtime associate and friend of Erwin Hymer who first joined his company in 1957, has held many leading positions in both development and marketing and is now the company archivist. The museum is expected to open by 2003.

Motorhome Monthly
March & April 2002