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*Far away the hills are all aflame;
the blossom golden fair*

*Streams up the gladdened
ranges, and its scent is
everywhere,*

*And the kiddies of the settlers on
the creek are red and sweet,*

*Whilst my youngsters have the
sallowiness and savour of the
street.*

*To escape these endless vaults of
brick, and pitch a tent out back,*

*If I get the chance I'll graft until
my very sinews crack.*

*Meanwhile all the angels up in
Paradise look down*

*On a man of sin who died not, but
was damned and sent to town*

*Excerpt from the poem 'In Town'
by Edward Dyson*



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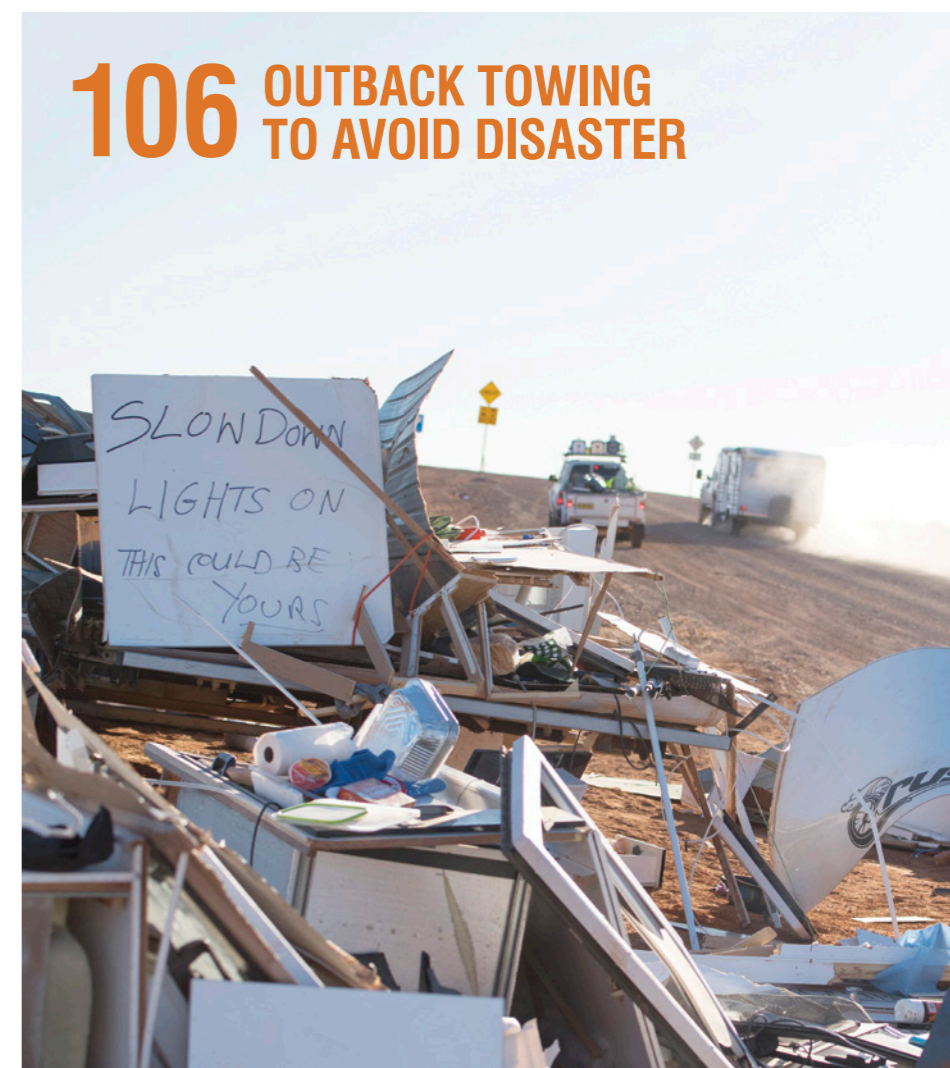
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#34 Far to the madding crowd

As I write this, Busby Maroo is strumming away on his guitar in front of a crowd that's about 6000 strong, another 3000 or so people are still in camp, but no less part of the concert. Hopefully I'll get through this last little bit of writing soon, finish this issue of ROAM and enjoy the rest of the Big Red Bash.

As a concept, it seems utterly absurd. Big Red, the famous sand dune 38 kilometres past Birdsville is at least 32 hour's drive from the east-coast population centres. It's dusty, dry, there's no phone reception (despite the best efforts of Telstra, it seems), yet 9000 caravanners, motorhomers and campers have swamped in from all over the country to sit around in the dust and listen to music. It's exactly the opposite of our camping ideals, where peace, quiet and solitude are often the dream. From under my awning I can see a Wendy's Ice Cream Parlour, a pizza truck and even a Redarc tent, from which I could buy a solar panel. In town, 40 dusty minutes away, one servo is out of fuel, and another one perilously low, both awaiting a delivery. We waited over an hour in line for diesel this morning, while others lined up for nearly similar times to get a pie from the bakery (or some of us sent our wives). One of the service station owners complained to us that too many people 'get invited to this event', a weird complaint from a bloke who'd just sold every litre of fuel in his tanks at over \$1.70 a litre. But the Big Red Bash isn't the only event like it. We also visited the Pitch Fork Festival in Cowra, this issue, another



camping and bush cooking festival that invites people who usually prefer solitude to congregate far from the madding crowd, only to become exactly that in the process. I don't know what this says about our ideals of travel and escape, all I know is that the week we spent getting here was bloody awesome, and three days of listening to good music, emptying the fridge of beers and otherwise enjoying a few days without anyone being able to phone me sound's bloody awesome. You can read about it inside, along with heaps of other incredible stories. I hope you enjoy it as much as I'm going to enjoy the next three days. Until next time, see you under the stars

Brendan Batty
Owner, editor
editor@timetoroam.com.au

Who won the Blue Tongue Camper?

We're really happy to announce that the \$22,490 Bluetongue Overland XFS Series 2 forward fold camper trailer has been won by Colleen Ponchard of Killmore, Victoria, who told us she's never owned a camper trailer before, but is really excited to take hers on some great adventures. Colleen tells us that they use to have an on-site caravan but she always wanted something they could tow so they could get to more places. The Bluetongue Overland XFS Series 2 is the company's top-of-the-line camper trailer. It's got full independent trailing arm suspension, a two-pack coated steel body and is easy to set up by just one person. With an extensive kitchen and indoor living area, it doesn't get much more comfortable in the bush. Find out more at bluetonguecampers.com.au



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A few of the many faces behind this issue of ROAM



Ian Gill

Retired following a working life in Air Traffic Services and airlines, Ian and his wife Janet hitched a NOVA Bravo to their Ford Everest and set off to see what this caravanning caper is all about. An avid writer and photographer for many years Ian's lived and worked in most states and territories of Australia and is keen to revisit some of those places and explore a whole lot of new ones.

His recent trips along the Murray River, to Broken Hill, western Victoria and SA's Limestone Coast all served to whet his appetite for more adventures further afield, enjoying the relaxed caravan lifestyle, people they meet and the odd 'happy hour'.

Emma Ryan

Emma's one of the most experienced writers in Australia on topics that include camper trailers, Aussie travel or how to pretend to have a job, but instead just roam through the Kimberley or northern Australia.

A former editor of magazines like Camper Trailer Australia and key contributor to Caravan World, she knows her way around a recreational vehicle about as well as she knows how to leave Sydney and end up in Kakadu. In her spare time Emma works for the Centre for Media Transitions, researching ways to protect real and objective journalism in an age where comment can so easily be bought.

Liss Connell

The woman is single handedly responsible for the incredible modern popularity of vintage Sunliner caravans (according to me, anyway), Liss grew up in the Kimberley before travelling Australia extensively in her own vintage Sunliner. Although she's moved on from her Sunny, a vintage Olympic sits in her driveway, a patient project and promise of future travels.

Now residing between Lennox Head and Kunnunurra, Liss' put her keen wanderlust and local knowledge to task, as she shows us through one of her favourite haunts on the northern New South Wales coast.



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WHO

ROAM is Australia's only caravan magazine dedicated to telling the stories of caravanning's history, as well as bringing Aussie nomads all the latest travel information and product reviews. It's distributed nationally to subscribers, newsagents and through retail partners.

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We greatly value the support of our contributors.

In this issue they are, David Bristow, Liss Connell, Jonny Dustow, Ian Gill, Catherine Lawson, Emma Ryan, Bob Taylor and Michael Wilkins.

We welcome story ideas. Get in touch via editor@timetoroam.com.au

WHY

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VISCOUNT TO RESURRECT

We don't want to sound too much like a tabloid, but anonymous sources close to ROAM have revealed that the Viscount name is to be resurrected and new caravans will once again appear on the road bearing the regal V.

Viscount was, until the mid-1980s, the largest caravan manufacturer in the country, accounting for around seven out of 10 caravans rolling off production lines at its peak.

Viscount isn't the only name to be resurrected during caravanning's more recent boom. Concept Caravans

manufactures caravans under the Franklin and Newlands name, while the Olympic and Sunliner names are both used by modern caravan manufacturers separate from the original companies. The Millard name, another of the large manufacturers of the 1960s, '70s and '80s is also used by a Sydney manufacturer building a range of hardy off-road caravans.

There's no word on exactly when the Viscount caravans will be officially unveiled, although we expect it to be before the end of the year.

AL-KO AND G&S CHASSIS NOW SIBLINGS

Caravan and motorhome parts and accessories giant DexKO, which is the parent company of AL-KO, has purchased the Australian owned G&S Chassis, which also consists of Austral Chassis and Hume Caravan and Camping Accessories. In an email sent to caravan manufacturers who use G&S Chassis products, former company director Robert Inturrisi has said he hopes it will be a smooth transition process with the same management team on board.

The email said, "I would like to take this opportunity to personally let you know that G&S Chassis/Austral and Hume has made a decision to grow the business

through its acquisition by AL-KO International."

In a statement, DexKO has said, "We are excited to welcome the G&S Chassis and Hume teams to the DexKo organization. These acquisitions allow us to expand into chassis manufacturing and supplying an even more diverse range of products in Australia"

Rob Inturrisi has said, "Becoming part of the DexKo family will allow the business to continue to grow with the backing of the industry leader,"

AL-KO already manufactures a range of motorhome chassis which are used on many locally made motorhomes.



AUSSIE TRAVELLER CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

Aussie Traveller, the family owned Brisbane manufacturer of awnings, caravan windows, doors and, now, fridges and air conditioners celebrated 30 years of business while displaying its complete range at the Brisbane Caravan and Camping Supershow. Owner Mike Freney says he could never have imagined where his company now is, back in the late '80s, when I caught up with him on his stand.

When Aussie Traveller first entered the market, caravans were fitted with very little in the way of external accessories from the factory. Mike said, "Back then, family holidays were spent at beachside caravan parks every May, August and December. Caravanning was affordable and offered a chance to reconnect with nature and each other."

What started as a retail business had to swiftly change course when caravan and RV manufacturers started installing awnings, air conditioners and other products before handing over to the customer. "Realising that our market was declining around the early 2000s, we had to change tact with our business model and start working with manufacturers and dealers to sell our products," Mike said.

The company has grown from a small 200 square metre factory to a 9000 square metre space spread over two warehouses. Mike says, "It's with great pride that our little brand plays a part in the industry's growth"

LEGO CARAVAN HIGHLIGHT OF QLD SHOW

Lego is timeless and so are caravans, so it makes sense that the two should come together. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the Queensland Caravan Camping & Touring Supershow organisers got together with professional Lego builder, Ben Craig, who's estimated the caravan will use around 25,000 pieces when it's finally finished.

Caravanning Queensland CEO Ron Chapman says that once completed, the caravan will hold the world record for the largest caravan constructed from Lego. It's actually modelled from a 1973 Viscount Royal, which was stripped back to the floor and built from there up with the interlocking toy bricks. Chapman has said the project has cost in excess of \$100,000. By comparison, a 1973 Viscount Royal 15-footer would have cost around \$2000 brand new.

On day one of the Supershow, the caravan still had some work to go, but the interior was almost complete with an L-shaped dinette, two-burner stove, Lego fridge with hinged door and a bed base able to support a proper mattress. Still to finish was the roof and some of the detail, but when it's done it'll have working lights, a mattress and presumably cushions for the dinette.



EXPLORER MOTORHOMES SHOWS OFF 6WD MOTORHOME



With power to all six wheels, diff lockers fitted to two of the three diffs and an extended chassis that'll support a 23 foot motorhome body, the extended, 6WD HiLux from Explorer motorhomes was one of the wildest vehicles on display at the Brisbane Caravan and Camping Supershow in June.

Explorer Motorhomes is a small tray back camper and motorhome builder based near the Sunshine Coast which puts out a range of small motorhomes with bodies built from a complete and single-piece fibreglass moulded body, harking back to its owner's days as a luxury boat builder. While it's carved a niche building motorhomes for the backs of Toyota HiLux and Ford Ranger single cab utes, it's impressed critics recently (including this humble one) with its extended wheelbase, six wheel, four-wheel drive Explorer Discovery.

The six-wheeler, four-wheel drive features a full load sharing suspension system which allows far more articulation of the two axles, so the rear lazy axle is much less likely to lift the driven one off the ground in undulating terrain. It also means there's no risk to over-stressing either axle if there is some articulation, as the load is shared between them.



COROMAL AND WINDSOR SOLD FOR PEANUTS

Coromal and Windsor, two of Australia's most recognised caravan brands, have been sold to Apollo Tourism & Leisure in a move that wasn't entirely unexpected considering Fleetwood had been losing money hand-over-fist on the two nameplates for years now, and Apollo is buying up assets in the caravan industry in what seems like an effort to take over the world.

Apollo paid just a million bucks for the two brands, less than the price of 20 caravans, but since 2017 it's also bought 25 per cent of Camplify, all of Sydney RV Group, Kratzman's Caravans and George Day Caravans, each of them the largest dealerships in their respective states (NSW, Qld and WA). It's also bought large motorhome rental companies in the UK and Canada, and moved into the second-largest caravan factory in Australia which pumps out Apollo's rental fleet and Talvor and Winnebago caravans and motorhomes. Apollo is also responsible for importing Adria caravans and motorhomes into Australia.

Apollo's marketing manager Jess Adams told ROAM that over the next six months Apollo will work to move production of the caravans to its 12-acre factory in Brisbane and continue to produce the Coromal and Windsor products along with a line of Fleetwood RV motorhomes.

In a statement, Apollo managing director Luke Trouchet has said "Acquiring segment leading caravan brands in Coromal and Windsor is the logical strategic response to current industry dynamics and will be a catalyst for improved margins. The acquisition provides significant potential for manufacturing synergies due to economies of scale. We are proud to add these established and well-recognised brands to our portfolio and will continue to build on their heritage in the Australian market."

Fleetwood has been contacted for comment but managing director Brad Denison said in a statement, "Fleetwood's operational management have done a tremendous job of reinvigorating the Coromal and Windsor product range over the last three years, and that has resulted in significant gains in market share. Ultimately though, the board sees the future of the business as being better served by being part of Apollo's wider tourism and leisure platform."

NSW REGO COSTS TO BE SLASHED BY UP TO \$471

New South Wales caravan owners have been burdened for a long time with the second highest caravan registration costs in the country, although this is all about to change. From a caravan dealership in Lismore, Melinda Pavey, NSW Minister for Roads, announced that there will be a 40 per cent reduction in the motor vehicle tax on privately owned caravans from November 1 this year.

In a post on social media, Ms Pavey said, "I'm thrilled with this announcement today which will see the motor vehicle tax for private caravan owners reduced by 40 per cent from November 1 this year. Our region's grey nomads, families and adventurers will benefit from this reduction and allow people to spend their money on the things they love – including camping and caravanning around NSW. The change will apply to towed caravans and purpose-built camper trailers weighing up to 4.5 tonnes, putting a saving of up to \$471 back into the pockets of hard working families."

Under the plan, caravan owners will still have to pay the caravan registration cost, which is \$65, but it's the motor vehicle tax which has been cut on caravans or trailers weighing up to 4.5 tonnes. Currently a 4.5 tonne trailer costs \$1177 + \$65 to register, while a 3500kg caravan costs \$898 + the \$65 registration fee. Under the new scheme the three-and-a-half tonne trailer would cost \$603.80. Still not quite as good as Victoria, which charges just \$54, but a saving's a saving. Below are the current and proposed Motor Vehicle Tax changes.

Tare Weight (kg)	Current Cost	New Cost
Up to 975	\$211	\$126.60
976 to 1154	\$245	\$147
1155 to 1504	\$299	\$179.40
1505 to 2504	\$457	\$274.20
2505 to 2794	\$663	\$397.80
2795 to 3054	\$754	\$452.40
3055 to 3304	\$826	\$495.60
3305 to 3564	\$898	\$538.80

How to make your caravan or RV tax deductible



As the idea of a sharing economy swiftly embeds itself in our everyday lives, it's no surprise that the humble pursuit of caravanning and camping is swept up in it. For example, the peer to peer sharing service Camplify is growing so large that not only does it manage the largest fleet of rentable RVs in the country, but it's captured the eye of the Australian Tax Office, which has set in place specific rules about how owners report their income and claim tax deductions on their RVs.

In the recently released Fact Pack – Renting or hiring your Recreational Vehicle – the ATO says, "The payments you receive from renting or hiring out your recreational vehicle (RV) through a website (such as Camplify) are assessable income." This means, that like the income from your job, you need to tell the ATO about it. And on the other hand, some or all of the costs of your RV ownership are deductible.

We spoke to Steph Hinds of Growthwise, an accountancy firm in Newcastle, who's spent some time looking into the peer-to-peer caravan hire model (and in fact, hires one out herself on Camplify). When we asked what can be a tax deduction she told us, "Literally everything to do with the van. So of course, the van cost itself, if you've financed the van, then the interest you are paying on that van, your insurance, your premium membership

with Camplify, if you're storing the van when it's not actually hired out or you're not using it. All those storage fees maintenance for the van. If you're buying things to put in the van, so if you are buying cutlery sets and sheets to put in when it goes out for hire, then all of that becomes tax deductible."

There are limits, though, and these are represented in what Steph describes as the apportionment rule. If you use the caravan 10% of the time for personal use, then you can only claim 90% of the cost of things like depreciation, insurance or maintenance. Other things, though, like any Camplify fees or accessories specifically for use by the hirers, can be fully tax deductible, according to Steph.

That apportionment is most easily divided by how long it is listed on the hire service in a financial year, not just how long it is hired out. Steph says, "The definition is 'available for hire.' So, if it is actively available for hire and ready to take bookings on Camplify, then one hundred percent, that time is tax deductible, verses the time you are using it, where you block it out as not available for hire on the Camplify platform."

The good news is, it doesn't matter how much the van is worth, or even how old it is, from a tax point of view, and likewise it doesn't matter whether you bought the van new or second hand, or

already own it.

For pensioners, Steph says that income from Camplify could affect how much you receive, and that it's important to speak with an accountant about it. "You do need to seek advice, but it then depends on how much income and whether it takes you over your threshold. You might also find you are earning more income from actually renting out your caravan than what the pension is paying you in the first place. It's defiantly not an easy question to answer in general terms."

Importantly, though, Steph says that no one should be scared of paying tax on peer to peer caravan rental income. "No one should ever be scared of paying tax because it means that you've made money. The thing I always say to people is, if you have \$100, then in round figures you'll pay somewhere around \$30 worth of tax. Having that \$70 is actually better than having nothing, because if you aren't paying tax, then you have nothing. We only pay tax on profit, after all."

If you want more information on all this, we've put a video on our website at timetoroam.com.au/camplify-and-tax or you can get more information directly from Camplify's tax information pack at camplify.com.au/taxpack.



WIN SOME WINTER COMFORT

There's almost nothing more important than a comfortable chair at camp, and Oztent is an expert at that. The company's new range of chairs, featuring Hotspot technology, have reusable hot and cold packs that help keep you cool in summer or warm in winter. The pouches are made from a non-toxic sodium acetate which lasts for up to an hour, and they can be reused more than 500 times. Find out more at oztent.com.au or call 1800 OZTENT (698 368)



This issue's letter of the month winner, Graham and Deb have scored two Oztent King Goanna HotSpot chairs valued at \$149.95 each, for his thoughts on caravan park value. If you've got something you'd like us to find out, or something we need to know, send your own letter to editor@timetoroam.com.au or mail us at PO Box CP445, Condell Park, NSW 2200.

A COSTLY CONVERSATION

Do any other caravanners notice how expensive overnight stays are becoming? The increase in rates does not equate to better amenities or larger sites. It seems that with the continual growth in caravan sales to the grey nomads, the parks are taking advantage of this group of people. We are being told daily wages are not increasing so why the rise in rates?

I have noticed that a lot of parks are setting themselves up as child play centres that the grey nomads are paying for.



Nomads are not using large amounts of electricity, as they tend to go to bed early, nor are they excessive water users. No wonder we look for free camp sites or the new farm stays offering reasonable rates. How do other ROAM readers feel about this?

Keith Gillespie, via email



Just read your shitty article on the history of dunnies in caravans! I loved some of the lines in the article. I have installed in my Eco Tourer an SOG system (a ventilation system for the cassette which promotes natural, odour free decomposition of the waste, rather than the addition of chemicals to do the job), which is extraordinarily successful. The biggest development of the caravan toilet since the cassette, in my opinion. Mine is home-made using Bunnings bits and pieces worth \$36. Jeff Corbett, via email

ID CONFIRMED

I've had a good look at the photo of Russell Watson's van from last issues letters, and discussed it with another person who is very good at identifying vans from the 1960's onwards (he was involved in the caravan industry for many decades.)

At this stage we've ruled out that it is a Roma, and are thinking that it may very possibly be an Escort, built in Sydney. We haven't seen one exactly like this before (the design of the back is different to other Escorts), but it does have a number of other Escort-like features.

Russell might like to have a look at the Escort thread in the 'Down History Lane' section of the Vintage Caravans forum and tell us if his interior is similar to the ones shown there (vintagecaravans.proboards.com/thread/4323)

There weren't too many brands



building vans with the sloping ledge below the front window, and the sharp edge to the ledge, so that reduces the number of possibilities. It definitely isn't a Valiant or a 'St Leonards' Gypsy, and I'm almost certain it isn't a 'Homebush' Gypsy, however a serial number or some inside pics may help.

Richard Dickins, vintagecaravans.proboards.com



My wife and I are now into our fifth month of our fourth trip around Oz and are absolutely loving it. Living in WA, and wanting to see other states, we will have to travel further than those who live on the east coast. We have met eastern states who have been travelling in their caravans or motorhomes for years, but have never made the trip across the Nullarbor or into the west along the top. We realise how easy it is to travel interstate and how, within a few days, one can visit four or more states and not have a need to see other places.

However, for us, doing longer journeys is a must, but something we never get sick of. Checking out maps and gaining information of different areas can be exciting and it enhances our expectations of our forthcoming destinations. But how do we decide on which way to go and why?

A lot of the time we haven't got a clue as to where we'll go next, so obviously the visitor information centres and the Camps 9 book or WikiCamps app on the internet are terrific starting points. Also, recommendations from other well-travelled fellow caravanners and like-minded people are always considered, and nine times out of ten we find their favourite places well worth the visit. We have also learned that 'the road less travelled' is often the better choice.

When here on the east coast we have found that travelling along a coastal highway conjures up images of idyllic spots with surf, sand and sun. There's also the thought of bright lights and special spots that cater especially for tourists, such as the Great Ocean Road, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. Further north we have the welcoming lights of Townsville and Cairns, and then there's the magnificent Daintree. It's not hard to see why such top places can easily make travellers go that way. In fact, the whole of the coastal road is beautiful, so why would we consider the inland route?

Well, for one we're not keen on the coastal road congestion. Everyone seems to know where they're going and wants to get there yesterday. One has to be super vigilant with rear-view mirrors and constantly ready to brake, because there are the sudden lane changes and stopping in front of you without warning. If you have towed through capital cities at peak hour, then you'll know what I mean.

We've found that the country life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know (as Clancy also well knew) and there's



always plenty of flora and fauna to see. I've got to confess that driving beside flocks of green native budgies or watching majestic wedge-tailed eagles riding the thermals are sights I can never get enough of.

So, at the time of writing this, we are well away from the hustle and bustle of city life or suburbia and instead are camped on the banks of the mighty Murray River, just east of a small country town called Robinvale - between Swan Hill and Mildura. It's an idyllic location and there's hardly anyone around us. One van is upstream from us, some 300 metres away, and another couple, Graham and Dot, who turned up yesterday, have set up some 200 metres further downstream. The river looks magnificent and the solitude and peace and quiet here is just beautiful, so it was a no-brainer for us to decide to stay here for a week or maybe even longer.

Then, on top of that, with being in the country you get the country-style hospitality. It's another big attraction for us, as friendliness and warm welcomes are always on tap. In South Australia, whilst set up along a river, a neighbouring camper brought us a nice sized freshly caught bream. It was the only one he'd caught, but he explained he had plenty in his freezer.

Yet another example of this generosity was when we arrived here two days ago. After we'd just settled in, a bloke wearing a singlet and stubby shorts turned up on his quad bike and asked if we'd tasted the local grapes yet? He offered to bring us some grapes from his large property down the road and added we'd arrived just in time - "We're just about to start harvesting".

Three hours later he returned with the biggest bag filled to the brim with three different varieties of table grapes and just said, "Enjoy them guys, they're fresh off the vines and you're the first ones to taste them."

Both of us love travelling, enjoying just about everywhere we visit and with wonderful locations and experiences like this, we remain enthusiastic and keep looking forward to the next place.

Judy and Ben Grothues
ROAMing, somewhere.

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

We built and opened our caravan park seven years ago. It's located two kilometres out of town on 30 acres. We increased the size to 32 powered sites the following year. It was all going really well, but then I realised that a whole lot of caravanners weren't coming to our town because there wasn't a cheaper option for them to stay at.

So, on our other block of land we built a bush camp. We opened this four years ago and charge people \$5 per night to stay there. We provide a dump point, water, camp fire, camp hosts and security while they visit town. Often we can get up to 30 vans per night. At our caravan park, which has a separate entrance, we fill up often, offer activities like Finska comps, pizza nights and camp oven meals.

We know the bush camp and caravan park complement each other. Some come and stay at the caravan park then go to the bush camp for a few days. We have proved that the two can coexist and they're not in competition with each other. I think more caravan parks should look at doing what we have done and not try to stop the 'free campers'. Caravanners are looking for options, but we still have many more staying at our caravan park than our bush camp.

Graham & Deb Reid – charlevillecaravanpark.com.au

You mirror my own thoughts on the free camping issue, actually. I believe that people will usually camp in the best place, regardless of cost. If the only difference between two places (in one's mind) is that there's a \$40 a night difference in where they lay their head, it's understandable they'll lay it at the one where they keep \$40 under their mattress. I don't think the problem is the cost of caravan parks, but the perceived value. Brendan.



LETTER OF THE MONTH

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The oddity of the half-safe

How one down-on-his-luck Aussie took an amphibious RV around the world.

Words *Brendan Batty*

Could you imagine crossing an ocean in a small motorhome or campervan? What about surviving a hurricane 1000 nautical miles from land in a floating Jeep, or driving your RV through the wilds of south-east Asian rainforests riddled with rogue groups of bandits? In the 1940s and '50s, one Australian war veteran did just that, and lived to tell the tale. Despite that, many people have never heard the story of Ben Carlin and Half-Safe, the World War II amphibious Ford GPA which, over a period spanning nearly 10 years, against all odds, he drove, sailed and drank his way around the world in history's most bizarre and unsuitable RV ever conceived.

We've all heard the success story that the Willys Jeep and Ford GPW were in the West's war efforts. The light-weight, rugged and utilitarian four-wheel drive could withstand almost anything, was reliable and played a big part in the success of the Allied forces war campaign, and even began the world's love affair with the modern SUV. But alongside that, an amphibious version of the four-wheel drive was made, the Ford GPA (A for Amphibious). Hoped to be able to ferry soldiers



and supplies across the most inhospitable of terrains, it could do neither and was very quickly considered just as useless on water as it was clumsy on land. In fact, although around 15000 of the units were made, thousands upon thousands were scrapped almost as soon as they came off the production line.

Still, plenty did make it into the field, and it's towards the end of the war that Major Ben Carlin, an Australian enrolled with the Royal Indian Engineers, spotted one of the vehicles and said to another officer "You know, with a bit of titivation you could go around the world in one of these things."

To set the scene for Carlin's ambitious statement, the GPA is a 1600kg Jeep with a 15-foot boat hull stuck to the bottom of it. Even without a load, it had a freeboard of only half-a-foot or so, and was easily engulfed by water, even in reasonably benign situations. Many sank even in rivers or across dams. The boat hull also sacrificed significant ground clearance and it was often bogged on shallow river crossings that other regular vehicles could ford with ease. Understandably, no one believed Ben could do it.

Last year, the full story of Ben's life was told by Gordon Bass, an American writer and author whose father was a

personal friend of Ben. His book, *The Last Great Australian Adventurer*, is an incredible insight into Carlin's life and adventure and I caught up with him to find out what it must have been like to travel around the world in such a cumbersome vehicle.

Bass tells me, "I've been in Half-Safe and there is no concession to creature comforts. It's only five feet wide, so you have to imagine, that when you are not driving it, you are sleeping on a back bench that is the width of the jeep, so you are always curled up. It's hard because it's basically just a bit of foam on a piece of plywood. The front seats are metal frames which had some foam cushions on them, but very basic. When the jeep was on the water, remember this is the 1940s and '50s so there was very little ventilation and no air conditioning, it was humid and it was salty and there were always fumes that were leaking into it and there was oily water sloshing around in the bottom of it, so it was really, really uncomfortable."

In making it suitable for a trip around the world, Ben spent years modifying the GPA he bought in America at the end of the war. He fitted a cabin-top roof too it, extended the hull, added fuel capacity, coated it in neoprene, strapped a life-raft to the roof and even fitted a radio that never worked as two of the few concessions to safety. This is actually where Gordon's father met Ben. He, as a fourteen-year-old boy, would help Ben modify the Jeep after school each day.

Although the journey of the Half-Safe is generally considered Ben's adventure, he shared more than half of it with his second wife, Elinore, who he'd originally met while serving in India, and to a certain extent, this was as much her journey as it was Ben's. Bass tells me, "Absolutely Ben couldn't have done it without out her. I think the commonly held belief would have been that Elinore was dragged along kicking and screaming on this journey and that she was the stereotypical housewife of the '40s and '50s who would have done his bidding. But the fact was, she was adventurous in her own right. She grew up in an immigrant family of Italians in





Half-Safe looking decidedly un-seaworthy before it enters the sea.



Has an RV ever looked so uncomfortable?

the Boston area and as soon as she could she volunteered to go to India with Red Cross, so she had an adventurous spirit of her own. And I think that, while they fought like cats and dogs and had a really sad relationship, I think she pushed him as much as he pushed her. I see that in some of the letters back and forth in the late '40s where she's pushing him along and they are talking about this thing which they've planned together. She wrote long and beautiful letters that were full of the excitement and the exoticness of her adventures, especially when they were crossing the Atlantic and landing in Madeira and France and England, and it was really exciting for her and she felt like she was seeing the world."

Originally Ben had thought the trip would only take six months to a year, but it took him three years just to get the little amphibious motorhome ready, which included breaking down in the Atlantic Ocean and having to be rescued by a cruise ship. In fact, it wasn't until the third attempt at the Atlantic Ocean crossing that Ben and Elinore finally got away. It took them six months just to reach Africa, island hopping as they went and miraculously surviving a hurricane.

In Africa, Half-Safe took up its roll of more traditional campervan and the couple cruised up the west-coast with relative ease, although probably not in relative comfort. Half-safe was fitted with the small bench that acted as bed and had a chamber pot in a cavity under the front passenger seat, although it was rarely used. If both Ben and Elinore slept at the same time, they either did so outside (on land) or Ben would stuff clothes into the cavity between the two front seats and sleep there (at sea). At this point of the journey there was no cooker, although the couple often heated cans of food on the exhaust, or ate it cold.

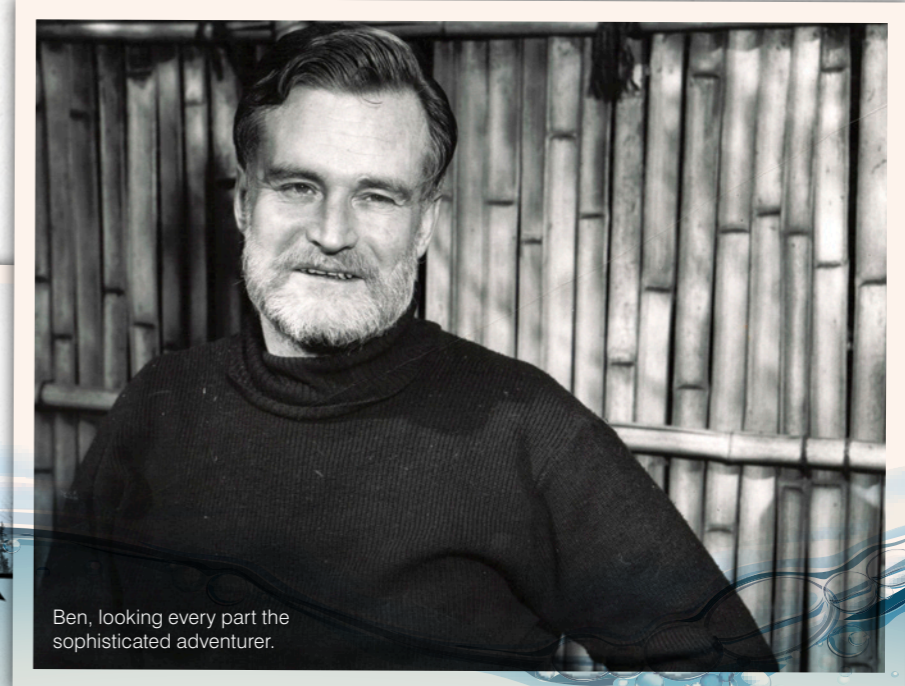
When Half-Safe finally reached England, the pair were broke, Half-Safe was in serious need of reconditioning and Ben and Elinore's relationship was starting to show signs of trouble. They actually ended up spending three years in England, Ben refitting and further modifying the jeep and

writing a book about the first half of the journey, and Elinore working as a secretary and paying all the bills.

The journey continued across Europe and into the Middle East where it was hot enough to melt plastic inside the awkward camper. It was here that Ben's violent tendencies started to take their toll on Elinore and she was often the recipient of verbal and physical abuse. In his book, Bass says she only stayed as long as she did to fulfil media commitments for Ben's book, Half-Safe – Across the Atlantic by Jeep. When I spoke with him he said of their relationship, "I talked to one of Elinore's nieces who said in her later years she really didn't want to talk about Ben or the adventure. She thought it had been a folly and that she'd been taken advantage of by Ben. I think they went into it together, but she felt embarrassed that she stuck around so long with someone who was so violently and physically abusive. She never remarried, but she did have several relationships afterwards and so she wanted to keep it very much in her past. Unlike Ben who wanted to hold onto it as the big adventure of his life."

Part of the book publicity meant shipping Half-Safe to Australia for book signings and meetings with Australian

He always had something to prove. He was also a completely driven person, and when he put his mind to something he did it and nothing would stop him."



Ben, looking every part the sophisticated adventurer.

Safe were joined by journalist Boyé De Mente, who'd agreed to cross the Pacific Ocean to Alaska with him, that last great hurdle of this incredibly journey. By now we're in 1957, nine years after Carlin and Elinore first set off and through all the hardships Half-Safe has so far encountered, it crosses the ocean in relative ease landing in Alaska about three months later, leaving only the benign highway run through Canada as the final hurdle to the journey's end. When Ben did finally get back to New York, no one remembered him, no one was there to celebrate the journey and Bass says even Ben was somewhat dejected.

I ask Bass why Ben even thought this journey was a good idea, which gives some insight into why he didn't seem happy to finish it. He says, "I think it was a lack of options. Here was a guy that was 35 years old. He thought he was a little smarter than everyone else and he thought that he was more ambitious than everyone else, but he was in the middle of his life and felt he hadn't accomplished anything. He had dropped out of college, he had been mining in the gold fields of Western Australia without any success, he'd got into fights, gotten hurt, but hadn't found any fortune. He was in the army during World War II and thought he would prove himself in battle, but he was never actually in a battle, so to hit 35 he was just out of options. He had come out of an alcoholic haze, didn't have a wife, didn't have kids and didn't have a job or prospects, so he was looking for something or some way to prove himself. And I think part of it stemmed from an insecurity. More than one person said that when he grew up in Western Australia, he felt like he was in the middle of nowhere, and even when he was travelling around the world he felt a little insecure about that. He always had something to prove. He was also a completely driven person, and when he put his mind to something he did it and nothing would stop him."

But the world had forgotten about Ben and Half-Safe, while other adventurers of the time, like Edmund Hillary (first to summit Everest in 1953) and Thor Heyerdahl (crossed the Pacific on a hand-built raft in 1947) were household names.

press, but little is known about whether Half-Safe became a temporary part of Australia's burgeoning caravan population of the time. What is known is that Elinore stayed in Australia when Ben and Half-Safe left. Bass says, "She actually went on to become really successful in the corporate world in New York and belonged to the set of people that went out and played tennis on Long Island and things like that."

Down a crew member, Ben picked up a young Aussie guy in India, Barry Hanley, who travelled with Ben and Half-Safe as far as Japan. Bass tells me of the trip across south-east Asia. "It was totally insane, for a number of reasons. There was a lot of political strife, so there was a lot of bandits and conflict going on, and part of it was the roads weren't suitable for any kind of vehicle, much less one that was really clumsy." Some days they would only make a few miles progress and camp beside the jeep on the side of the road. Another time they spent two days bogged on a river bank, only to get bogged on an island in the middle and then again on the other side. Through it all Hanley was on the receiving end of Ben's temper and so left without saying a personal goodbye once he got to Tokyo.

After spending some time on more repairs, Ben and Half-



Ben and Elinore packing Half-Safe before leaving London.



Half-Safe in Western Australia after a group of enthusiasts got it running.

Ben had wanted to prove himself, but there was no one watching to see if he did.

Ben received some acknowledgement of his feat. He holds the Guinness World Record for first person to circumnavigate the globe in a single vehicle. A short, two-part documentary was aired in America some years later (Odyssey of the Half-Safe), but his first book had been a flop, he couldn't sell the concept for a second and Hollywood certainly wasn't interested, either.

Ben eventually remarried, but the marriage was just as disastrous as his first two. He had one daughter, although he only met her a few times as a baby or toddler and died in his 60s back in his home town of Cottesloe, Western Australia, almost alone and abandoned by his extended family that had had enough of his temper.

Half-Safe, which he'd left a half-share of to his high-school, Guildford Grammar, a prestigious private boarding school in Western Australia, is now on permanent display on the school grounds, a well-kept, if obscure tribute to one of the school's most outgoing former pupils. Bass tells me, "I think they have Half-Safe on display because they wanted to honour Ben who had given a lot of money to the school and funded a scholarship. But I think also, because Ben, if you don't dig too deep, is a great personification of what the school stands for. Their motto is Go Forward, and it's about being strong and successful, so it seemed like an embodiment of what this very British-based school stands for."

Happily, the school welcomes visitors to come and see Half-Safe. It's inside a protective glass building. You'll have to make an appointment, but they're happy to show people through so they can boggle at the audacity that would cause a man and his wife to sail this ridiculous RV across an ocean. 📍

The Last Great Australian Adventurer by Gordon Bass

Although Ben finished his trip over 60 years ago, his story was all but forgotten until recently. The Last Great Australian Adventurer by Gordon Bass recreates it stunningly, though. From Ben's early childhood, his time in school and then as a miner in WA and engineer in World War II right through to his later life, Ben's story is one as tragic as it is triumphant, and Bass has managed to fill it with as much emotion as adventure. There is no doubt, after reading the book, that Ben was brilliant. But he was also deeply troubled. It's as enthralling a story as A.B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life* or Tom Cole's *Hell West and Crooked*. I highly recommend it. The book is available from most good bookstores or on Kindle. Find out more about it at gordonbass.com.

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Take a load off

Dolly wheels, the obscure accessory of Australian caravanning history.

Words Bob Taylor pics Ray Bartlett and Brendan Batty



Just 12 days before he passed away, Bob Taylor, also known as the Olympic Caravan Guru, sent us a letter with the following story. He and I had spoken about it a number of times, so I was excited to get it from him. In his letter he said, "As promised, I have found some time to put 'The Jones Dolly Wheel History' together for you. It would be nice to see this published in one of your future editions for all to read. Feel free to use all or part as you see necessary." Little did either of us know, Bob would never get to see it in print. We've used all of it, though, because it's such an interesting story about a very intriguing piece of caravanning history. Learn and enjoy. Brendan, editor.

Jones Springs Pty Ltd was started by Herbert David Jones from a factory located on Ivy Street, Chippendale, near Sydney, soon after the conclusion of the Second World War. The phone number was MX 1941. As well as producing automotive springs, the company manufactured trailer chassis and tow bars, so had a lot to do with the early caravan industry, especially in Sydney.

Herb had observed how the castor-type tail wheel on some aircraft operated, and being in the industry he was, decided he would develop a similar mechanism to fit to caravans and trailers to reduce the load on the rear of the tow vehicle.

Of course, the idea of a dolly wheel for the front of a caravan wasn't new. At least two notable manufacturers had been building their own version since at least 1949. The first

225029
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
PATENT SPECIFICATION 31,801/57.
 Complete Specification Lodged 1st October, 1958.
 Application Lodged (No. 31,801/57) 2nd October, 1957.
 Applicant..... Jones Springs Pty. Limited.
 Actual Inventor..... Herbert David Jones.
 Complete Specification Published 9th April, 1959.
 Complete Specification Accepted 14th October, 1959.
 Classification 95.5; 95.7; 96.5.
 International Classification B 62 d.
 Drawing attached.
COMPLETE SPECIFICATION.

"IMPROVED FRONT SUPPORT MEANS FOR TRAILER CARAVANS."

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method of performing it known to us :-

This invention relates to those trailer caravans which are adapted to be coupled to a tow vehicle and to be supported at the front end by the tow vehicle. In many cases this type of trailer caravan places such a heavy load on the tow vehicle that additional supporting springs have to be incorporated. These supporting springs adversely affect the riding qualities of the tow vehicle when travelling light. Another disadvantage in this type of trailer caravan is the difficulty of negotiating "V" gutters, punt ramps and the like.

Endeavours have been made to overcome these several objections by providing front support wheels for the trailer caravan. As constructed hitherto these front support wheels have not been completely satisfactory because they have adversely affected the manoeuvrability of the trailer caravan when the tow vehicle is moved in reverse.

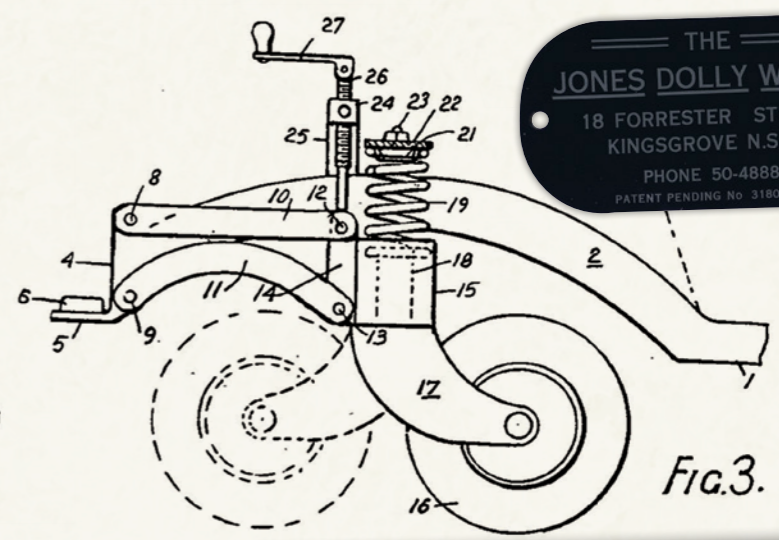
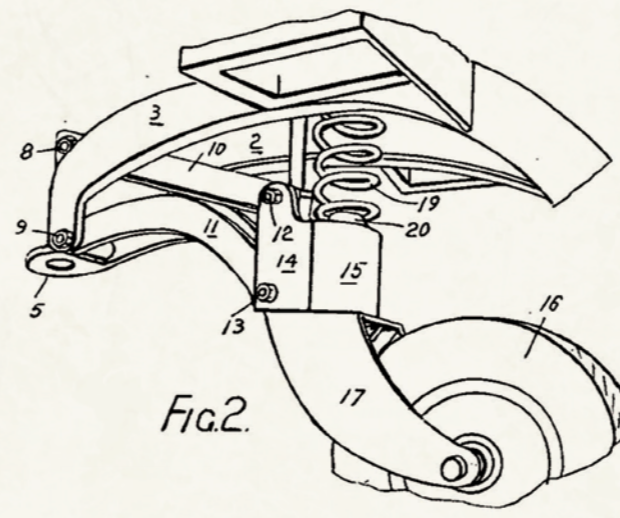
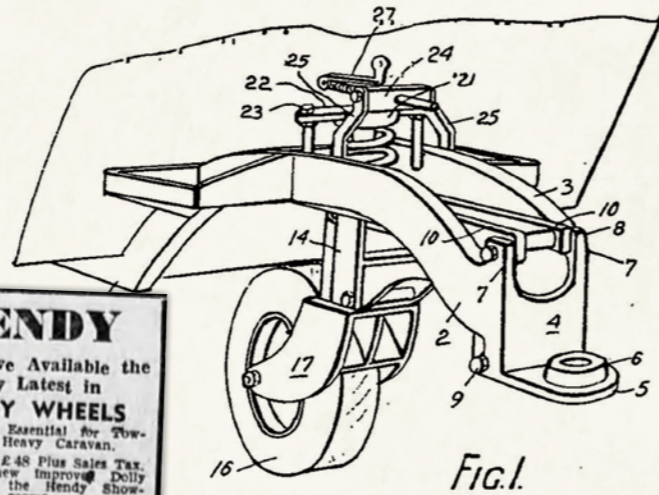
This invention has been devised to provide a front wheel support for a trailer caravan which overcomes the several disadvantages outlined above.

According to this invention a caravan chassis has at

7.-26/11/59.-130. 1.

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Towing dolly
 AN adaptation of the towing dolly used for moving cars with damaged wheels has been applied to caravans. It is called the Hutchinson towing dolly.
 When a caravan is hitched in the normal way to a car, any pitching action which develops and any departure from perfectly balanced loading must be borne by the rear suspension, axle, and wheels of the car.
 The Hutchinson dolly substitutes a pair of small road wheels carried on an axle as a forward load carrier, and completely relieves the rear end of the car of any added downward thrust.
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 PATENT PENDING No. 31801/57



TOWING WITH A JONES DOLLY WHEEL
 Chris and Jenny Broadbent, who own a 1961 Jenson Pathfinder fitted with a Jones Dolly wheel have travelled reasonably extensively with it, so we asked them how it compared to towing their modern Jayco caravan.
 "Because the Jones Dolly Wheel has its own independent suspension which works in conjunction with the car, so even when the car hits a pothole, the caravan will follow through and you won't get that telling whip you normally get with a normal caravan.
 With the Jayco we put load equaliser bars on to stop the bouncing of the rear end of the car, but with this we didn't have that problem - it's almost like you wouldn't know the caravan was there. The only thing you've got to remember is that you've got a third wheel in the middle of the car so you can't try and straddle a lump of wood or something on the road. You will hit them with the wheel, and as I did, blow the tyre.
 It puts very little weight on the back of our vehicle, so when our FJ Holden is restored I won't have to beef up the back suspension to put the caravan on the back."
 If you want to see a video of the dolly wheel in action check out timetoroam.com.au/1961-jenson-pathfinder-restoration-video

patent for a castor wheel type dolly came from Americans Joseph Tiburtus Conley and Oscar David True, although the Hutchinson Dolly (1954) and Hendy Caravan Dolly (1957) were far more common (if, that is, you can call dolly wheels common).

Both the Hutchinson and Hendy versions were contraptions that the caravan hitched too before it was then hitched to the vehicle. In the patent application for the Hendy dolly wheel the inventor says, "the principle objective of the invention is to provide an effective suspension and coupling means for a trailer vehicle of the type specified whereby the vehicle is effectively restrained against abnormal or continuous swaying when coupled to the automobile so as to track uniformly with the latter under reasonable or normal road conditions." In layman's terms, it took the weight off the tow hitch and reduced the effective ball weight without unbalancing the caravan.

However, they were genuinely woeful to use if you ever had to reverse the caravan, as not only did the wide set of wheels affect how far you could jack-knife a trailer, the second point of articulation added its own set of complications. In Herb Jones patent application for his own dolly wheel, he

said of others, "Endeavours have been made to overcome these several objections [being high ball weight, overloaded vehicle springs or poor ride quality as a result of heavy duty springs] by providing front support wheels for the trailer caravan. As constructed hitherto these front support wheels have not been completely satisfactory because they have adversely affected the manoeuvrability of the caravan when the tow vehicle is moved in reverse." Ray Bartlett, who worked for Herb, also said, "They were actually illegal in New South Wales because of the two hitches on them, and a lot of caravan parks would make you take them off and re hitch before you parked as they'd tear up the grass."

Around about the same time Herb started looking at the concept of a caravan dolly, Ray Bartlett, who was just 11 years old at the time, began working in Herb's factory during his school holidays and did so until he was about fourteen. At this time he was struck by a motor vehicle whilst he was in his billy cart and spent the next three-and-a-half months in hospital recovering. Incredibly, when Ray was ready for release from hospital, Herb picked Ray up and took him, still in crutches and before he'd been home to see his mother, straight to the spring factory so Ted Elvey, the local butcher, couldn't steal

him away to work in his shop. On arrival at the factory, Herb screwed Ray's lunchbox to his crutches and said, "This is where you are going to work."

It wasn't until 1956 that Herb started manufacture of the early dolly wheels and on the second of October 1957, Patent Specification 31,801/57 was lodged citing the 'improved front support for trailer / caravan.' Not long prior to this, Herb had remarked to Ray, "I think we can make a business out of this development," and so with this in mind they built a new factory in Kingsgrove that could accommodate both Jones Springs and the Jones Dolly Wheel development. The first dolly wheels cost £85, fitted. As well as springs and dolly wheels, the new factory produced tow bars, gas fittings and manufactured chassis, which included modifying caravan draw bars so that the dolly wheels could be fitted in place.

This conversion of the A-frame generally took about two days to complete and the caravan owners would generally stay in their vans while work was carried out. At its peak, Jones Dolly Wheels had 11 caravans lined up for conversion, but mostly it was organised for two vans at a time.

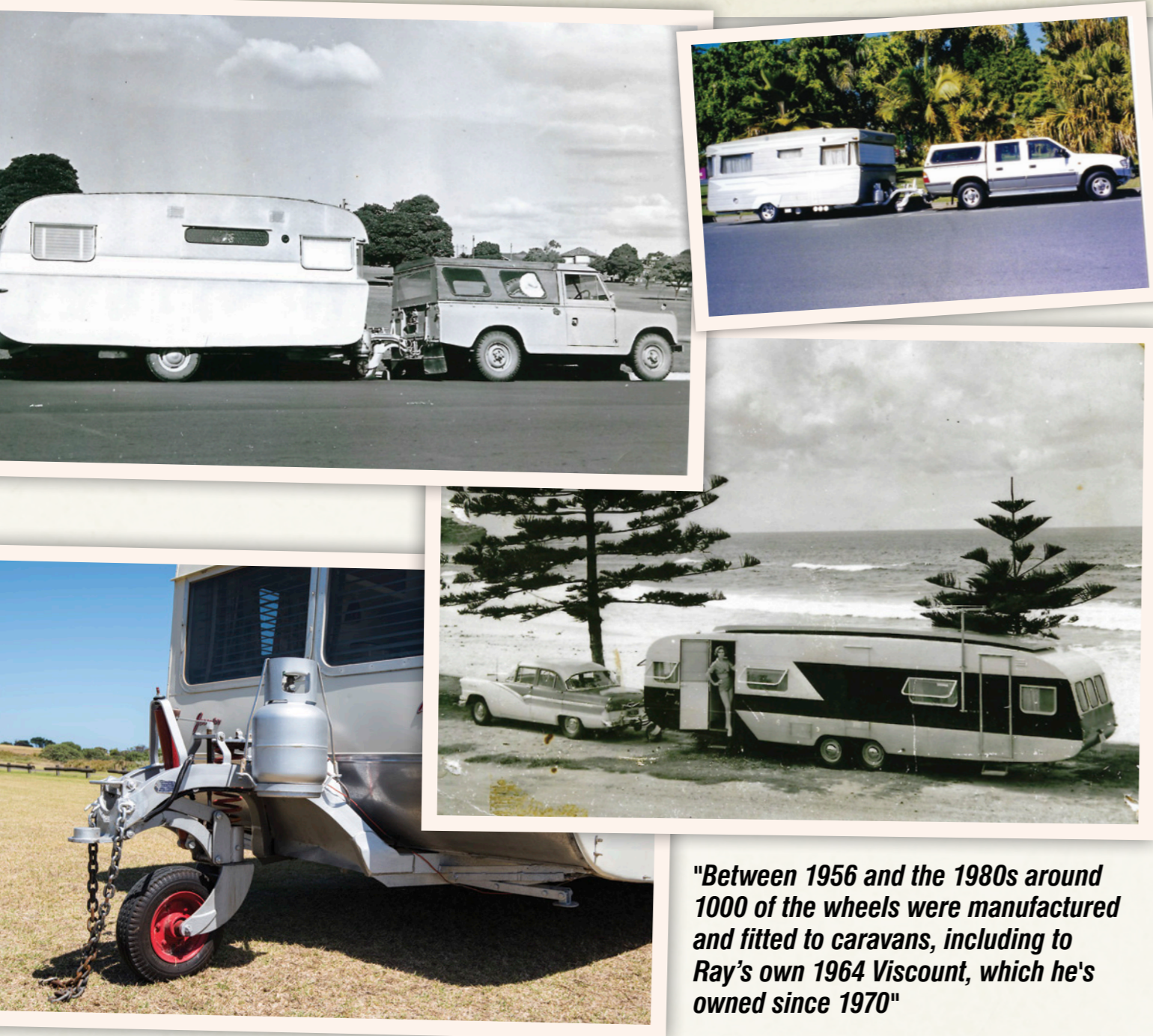
In 1964 Herb Jones passed away. This required a change of direction for the company, and as a result Ray, who'd been

working there since he was 11 years old, decided to carry on the manufacture of the dollies, while Eileen Beeching, who had been working for the company as office administrator before Herb had offered her a share in the business, continued to run the spring shop side of the operation.

This arrangement continued until 1980, when the factory was sold to a nearby business owner. The new owner allowed Ray to stay on at the factory and continue manufacturing, but the springs business was wound down and ceased trading. Ray renamed the business to Jones Trailers – in memory of Herb Jones, and the factory now concentrated on the manufacture of the Jones Dolly Wheel and boat trailers. Ray predominantly made surf boat trailers for surf clubs across Australia.

Production of the Jones Dolly Wheel ceased in the mid-1980s, although Ray continued to build trailers until the early

1990s at the Kingsgrove factory. Ray said, "The dolly wheels got too expensive to manufacture because there was a lot of work in fitting them to the A-frame and without good electric brakes available at the time, we had to fit hydraulic ones and that also put up the price. It was just easier to fit load bars or pneumatic suspension or heavy-duty springs." This combined with the increasing ability of modern vehicles to tow heavier loads made a product like the dolly wheel largely redundant. Between 1956 and the 1980s around 1000 of the wheels were manufactured and fitted to caravans, including to Ray's own 1964 Viscount, which he's owned since 1970, which is still in active use by he and his wife to this day, towed behind their Holden Rodeo. Ray and his wife Mearle spend three months of every year in the old Viscount, usually at Yamba, and have done three laps of Australia in it, dolly wheel and all. 📍



"Between 1956 and the 1980s around 1000 of the wheels were manufactured and fitted to caravans, including to Ray's own 1964 Viscount, which he's owned since 1970"

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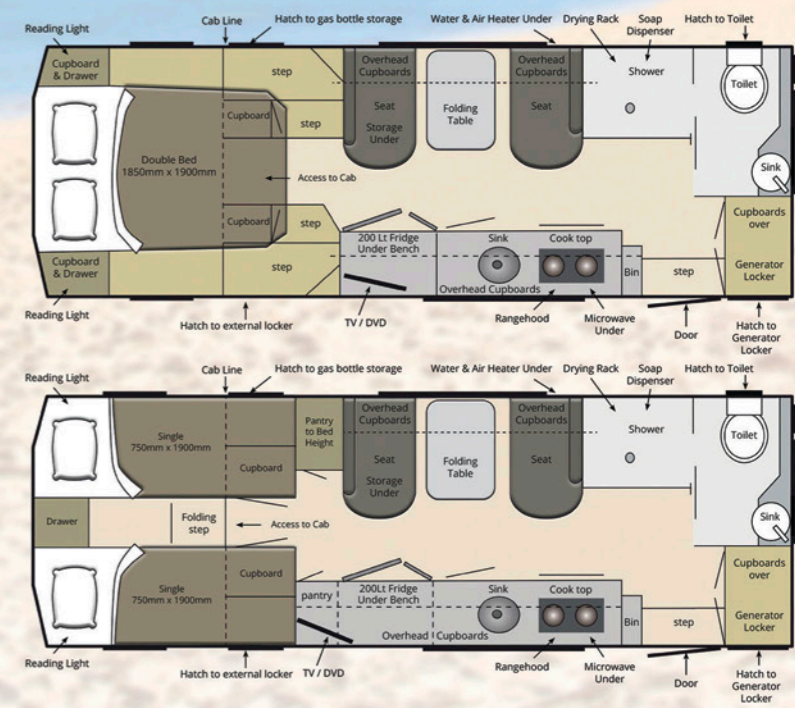
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QUEENSLAND BORDER
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DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

09



Model citizen

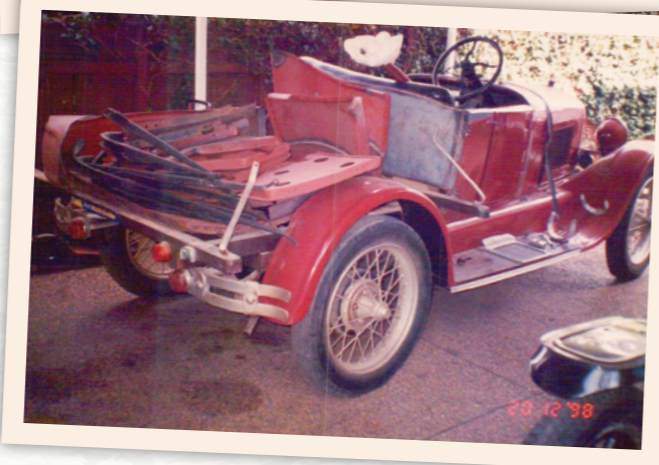
How one Sydney couple turned the world's first mass manufactured car into a camper van unlike any other.

Words Emma Ryan pics Gary Amesbury

When Gary Amesbury picked up a wrecked 1927 Model-T Ford from a fellow enthusiast in Sydney in 2005, he had no plans to reconfigure it into one of the coolest camper vans cruising Australian roads today. That would come later. A member of the Model-T Ford club for some 30 years, Gary had planned to restore the vehicle to its original five-seat configuration. You see, it had received the farm treatment along the way somewhere and been converted to a working ute, and hadn't been running at all for many years. The vehicle was an example of the last of the Model-Ts, with Ford introducing the Model-A the following year, in 1928. So Gary reckoned this piece of automotive history was worthy of a loving touch to bring her back to her former glory.

Gary's profession as a vehicle builder helped on that front and in no time he had the thing in tiptop shape. He'd managed to revive the original motor with the addition of a somatic fan so it could be turned on and off as needed. Shortly after, he and his wife Marilyn partook in a charity run from Sydney to the Gold Coast with the Model-T club, to raise money for Camp Quality. The trip was such a hoot that the club members got to thinking they should do something similar to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Model-T, which was coming up in 2008. When some ambitious soul threw out the idea of doing a lap of Australia as a convoy of Model-T Fords, it seemed just nutty enough to be suitable.

Back at Gary and Marilyn's south Sydney home, plans were underway to get ready for this trip of a lifetime. But bugger



paying for accommodation the whole way; the pair decided they'd instead convert their newly restored Model-T into a camper van so it could double as their home away from home during the trip.

With no real concept of how he was going to do this – short of extending the chassis by 300mm – inspiration struck Gary when he drove past an old sofa bed in a pile of hard rubbish. The bed mechanism of the trashed sofa was unceremoniously on display like the innards of roadkill, which gave Gary an idea; perhaps he could use the folding bed of a sofa to create a bed in the camper. He bought an old sofa online and it worked a treat. The bed folds out one side of the camper into a 9x9ft annex room, created by Aussie Traveller. This room serves as the bedroom of an evening, and during the day the bed can be easily packed up to create more undercover living space.

On the other side, a matching Aussie Traveller awning (although no annex) protects the kitchen area, which houses a three burner stove, an Engel fridge/freezer and storage space. On this side there is also a 40-litre water tank. Gary installed two 38-litre fuel tanks; one gravity fed and the other under the seat and pumped into the first tank by an electric pump when needed. With all of these modifications in place, Gary had effectively turned a classic car into a home on wheels that would be very liveable for he and his wife for six months of travel.

So how did the trip go? Incredible, as you can imagine. The convoy of Model-Ts turned heads everywhere it went, so much so that the group managed to raise \$11,000 for the



But bugger paying for accommodation the whole way; the pair decided they'd instead convert their newly restored Model-T into a camper van so it could double as their home away from home during the trip.



Royal Flying Doctors Service simply by asking people to donate a dollar when they wanted to take a photograph. "In outback areas, people were putting in \$20 and \$50 notes, many of them with stories about the RFDS and how they'd saved their family. Country people are so generous," Gary said.

And it turns out, that spirit of generosity extended to assisting foolhardy classic Ford enthusiasts when they'd broken down in the middle of nowhere. Gary recounted a story of one such breakdown, when community spirit got them going again.

"We broke the diff on the Friday afternoon of a long weekend in the town of Gin Gin in Queensland. We got towed into town by the RACQ, which left us at a property next to a stockyard. We borrowed a jack, removed the diff and rested the vehicle on tree stumps so we could sleep in it overnight," Gary said.

"The next day we went looking for locals who had or knew someone with Model-Ts. The locals helped us out and within a few hours we'd located a new diff in Bundaberg. The owners gave it to us for no cost and we were back on the road Sunday morning."

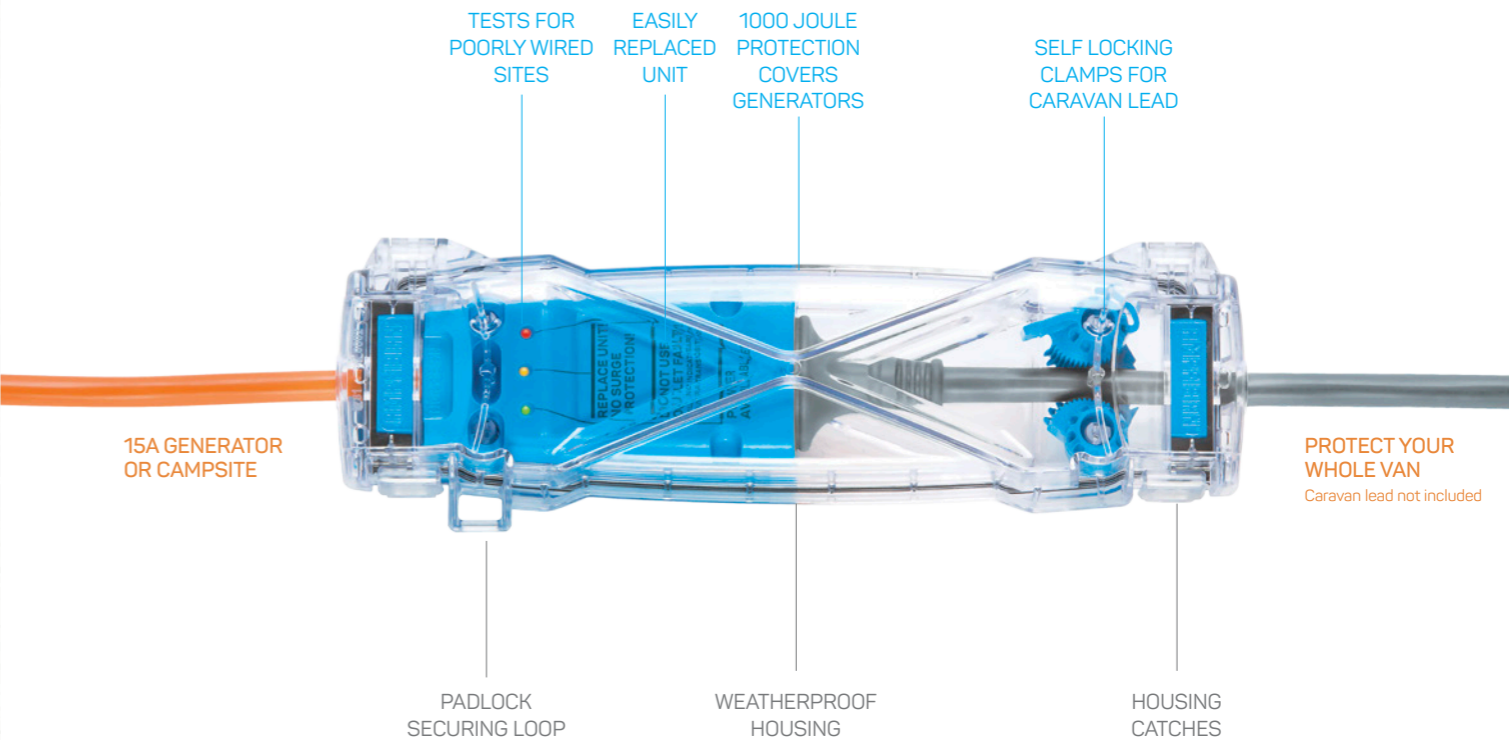




And Gary's stories of the kindness of strangers doesn't stop there.
 "It happened everywhere. Everywhere we had a breakdown, people would give us parts or lend us workshops. One guy in Port Germein in South Australia let me use his workshop to fix a broken axle. When he had to leave to go to Alice Springs we weren't finished, so he left us there alone with instructions to lock up and leave the keys under a brick out the back."
 Gary talks of these encounters with great affection, and it's clear the perceived 'risk' of driving the Big Lap in a classic car is balanced out by the moments of friendship and camaraderie shared with locals thanks to the odd breakdown. Gary reckons it's all part of the adventure, and wouldn't have it any other way.
 During our conversation on the phone, Gary and Marilyn were on the road camping out of the Model-T with other

members of the club. They'd been to the NSW Corner Country, a remote stretch of spectacular outback north of Broken Hill where NSW, SA and Qld intersect.
 "So you made it to Tibooburra but surely not Cameron Corner?" I asked. I've driven that road myself and know of its, at times, treacherous corrugations.
 "No, we went all the way to Cameron Corner," Gary said proudly. "It's 400km there and back and took us all day, but we did it."
 Never say never, I guess.
 Sadly, this most recent trip has shown Gary and Marilyn it is time to sell the Model-T camper. They're 10 years older than they were during the trip around Australia and setting up camp every night is beginning to take its toll. But while the pair's Model-T camping days are coming to an end, Gary plans to keep the Model-T dream alive and hopes to find an earlier model to continue partaking in club trips. 📍

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¹ Independent study commissioned by Ampfibian in October 2017. ² Most insurance policies and equipment warranties explicitly exclude surge damage or put the onus on you to prove it. An ounce of prevention is still worth a pound of cure. Image is for illustrative purposes only, actual goods may differ.

DON & GEORGE

We reunite one of Don Caravans' builders with one of the finest vans to come off the Don production line.

Words and pictures Brendan Batty

“As a kid, I would wander round to the shop there and stand at the front door and watch what was going on in the factory, because I was so interested in the caravans and so interested in how they were built that I just wanted to work there – that was basically it. I was probably about nine or 10, around about that age, I just couldn't wait to get there. And then when I did get the opportunity to start there, I was fortunate that Don did accept me. He took me on as an apprentice.” And so, from January 14, 1957 until 1965 when Don shut its doors, George A. Brown was a proud employee of one of Australia's most significant caravan builders.

“It was a big deal in those days because everything was done very properly. You were introduced. I still have at home my letter of introduction from Don Robby to my family stating that ‘your son George has been accepted as an apprentice in our workshops.’ In those days, everything was formal. You didn't just walk in and say ‘I want a job here mate,’ you know. You were accepted. Everybody was Mr. and Mrs. You didn't refer to anyone by their Christian name – it was all ‘Mr. Robinson’ in those days. You had respect for everyone.”

Although Don made some of the finest caravans of the times, it was a victim of its own adherence to quality. When the company could no longer compete on price against newer businesses with modern production lines and more efficient labour costs, Don Robinson decided he'd had enough, and closed down the business to retire. “Working for Don, they were some of the greatest days of my life. Had he not closed, I would have been with him for ever, I suppose. I really enjoyed my job. They were good tradesman in those days, and everything was built by hand. They were the best times of my life.” But after George walked out on his last day in 1965 he never saw another Don caravan again. Until he read issue 33 of ROAM.

Hi there. In your edition number 33 is an article on a Don caravan. What a fantastic surprise after all these years we have a survivor. The reason for my interest is the fact that I was apprenticed to Don Caravans, Neerim Road Oakleigh and worked for them building caravans from 1957 until they closed. I would really like to talk to the couple who own this van now, as there is a very real chance that it was I who built this caravan.

yours truly
George A. Brown



Dear Mr Brown,
We are pleased to inform you that your son George has been selected as an Apprentice to cabinet-making for our caravan factory.

The term of Apprenticeship will be Five years from January 1956, the first three months being on probation. If found satisfactory, his first year will be a Provisional Apprenticeship as directed by the Apprenticeship Commission, being subject to him obtaining a pass in the required subjects for a Junior Technical Certificate.

The present rates of pay are as follows:

1st year	£4-15-6	2nd "	£6-2-6
3rd "	£7-3-6	4th "	£10-18-0
4th "	£13-7-0		



13th December, 1956.

Mr. A. Brown,
234 Neerim Road,
CARNEGIE.

Dear Mr. Brown,

We are pleased to inform you that your son George has been selected as an Apprentice to Cabinet-making for our caravan factory.

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3rd "	£7-3-6
4th "	£10-18-0
5th "	£13-7-0

Our factory re-opens on Monday 14th January 1957 after the Christmas break, and George will be required to attend at 8 a.m. with overalls and whatever he has in tools.

Yours faithfully,
"DON" CARAVAN COMPANY PTY. LTD.
R. Donald Robinson
MANAGING DIRECTOR.

Our factory re-opens on Monday 14th January 1957 after the Christmas break, and George will be required to attend at 8 a.m. with overalls and whatever he has in tools.

yours faithfully,
DON CARAVAN COMPANY PTY LTD
R. Donald Robinson
Managing Director

Apprenticeship Acts

APPRENTICESHIP COMMISSION OF VICTORIA

Form of Indenture prescribed for the Apprenticeship Trades of- Cabinet Making Polishing (Furniture) Wood Carving Upholstering Wood Turning Machining (Furniture) Chair and Couch Making

This Indenture made the 10th day of 6/12 November

between "Don" Caravan Company Pty. Ltd. of 607-615 Neerim Road, OAKLEIGH

in the State of Victoria (hereinafter called "the employer") of the first part and

George Alexander Brown of 234 Neerim Road, CARNEGIE in the

said State (hereinafter called "the parent or guardian") of the second part and

George Andrew Brown, of 234 Neerim Road, CARNEGIE

in the said State (hereinafter called "the apprentice") who was born on the twenty-third day of

June, 1940, of the third part, witnesseth as follows (that is to say):-

Whereas the Apprenticeship Commission of Victoria is satisfied that the apprentice has sufficient knowledge to be deemed to have completed two years and seven months of the full term of apprenticeship of five years prescribed for the undermentioned trade.

The employer for himself his heirs executors administrators and assigns doth hereby covenant with the apprentice and the parent or guardian and with each of them severally that he will-

(a) Take receive and accept the apprentice as his apprentice for the balance now remaining of a period of two years and five months from the fourteenth

day of August, 1959 being the date since which the apprentice has served as an applicant for apprenticeship on probation.

(b) By the best means in his power cause the apprentice to be taught and instructed in the trade of

CABINET MAKING

including such processes therein as may from time to time be prescribed by Regulations under the provisions of the

It was easy to get George and the van's current owners, Stuart and Elvie Barnes to talk, but we wondered if we might be able to get them to meet and show him through the van that he very well may have crafted. As it turned out, just a week later, George would be passing by the town the Barnes' have called home for 25 years, so amazingly, we got to reunite him with one of the finest Don's to ever come off the production line.

"I've been waiting for so many years to see one, but now I reside in Queensland, and I've been there a very long time, I haven't found any at all. It's quite exciting really, to see that they are still around and this one is absolutely impeccable. This is brilliant to see, this van. I'd like to see more." He told me a few days later, "The excitement I felt was a bit overwhelming because I did not believe that I would ever see one again in my life time, especially in this condition."

As happy as this moment was, this is a van with a really sad history, and one that we've only been able to uncover because George inadvertently came across a picture of it in the last issue of ROAM. "The history of this van goes back to one of our painters who was known as Syd Gates. Syd bought tickets in a raffle for a new car and caravan. The car was a Citroen Goddess, the caravan I don't remember, but I remember Syd didn't want it, he wanted a Don caravan irrespective. So, he put the caravan that he won into our showroom and Syd Robby (Don Caravans' Sales Manager) sold that van for him and we built this one.





“Unfortunately, though, Syd didn’t get to use the van, he passed away before he got the opportunity to use it. We don’t know whether it was just too much excitement, with everything happening. Because he was just an old gentleman, you know, a painter. After that, it would have been sold out of the showroom, but to who, I don’t know.”

It’s from here that Stuart and Elvie Barnes pick up the story – they’re the current owners, who picked it up a few years ago and have been slowly restoring it. They told me it was sold to Chris Howlett, who in 1963 was the president of the RACV Caravan Club. Little is known of what sort of travel he did in it, although eventually it was sold to an American family who spent a lot of time in Australia. Stuart says, “The children of that family actually ended up as school teachers who taught Elvie as a child. They travelled around Australia in it as kids and used it as a residence when they were in the country. They were the second owners.”

Elvie continues, “Stuart saw the caravan on Gumtree one night, and it sparked his interest because it was a local caravan. We rang the owner the next morning and found out they were my teachers from school and because of the connection we went around the next day for a look. We didn’t really know much about Don Caravans, but the thing that appealed to me when I saw it was that it was a 1963, the same colour and year as my mother’s AP5 Valiant, which we still have. Then when we walked around the back I saw the number plate on the caravan had the same letters and numbers as Mum’s car! After that it didn’t matter what condition it was in – it was the same year, the same colour and had a similar number plate, so it was meant to be. We bought it then and there.”

For a 50-year old bondwood caravan that had gone around Australia at least twice, Stuart says it was in really good condition. There was a little bit of weather damage, but it hasn’t been re-sheeted or anything like that. All the windows came out, it was repainted and had new seals fitted, plus a new axle with electric brakes installed. Inside, the original beds were restored, as it’d been converted from singles to a double at some point. Inside, most of the interior is actually still covered with the original paint (George says the interior painting was done by a bloke called Jim Carney, who was obviously a master tradesman).

Before he leaves to finish his own caravan trip (George now travels with his dog Zoe in their Jayco Westport), he tells us, “I’m just so glad that I got the opportunity to find this, and it’s through ROAM magazine, that I started this journey. You would never know just what this has been for me, because I didn’t think I would ever see another one again.”



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Cozy comforts



How comfortable can a small camper be for cool winter touring?

Words and pics David Thorndike

Amongst the established camper trailer manufacturers Frontline has always built a comfortable but modest unit, tending to steer clear of the lavishness others trade on. But Frontline's latest releases have been slowly upping the ante, adding features like ducted diesel heating. It's been freezing on the east coast, so we wanted to see how comfortable a little van can be in all that. Set-up for the single traveller or couple, the economical VW Transporter is renowned as a reliable vehicle and is

an ideal base for Frontline's camper conversion. With a three-year unlimited kilometre warranty and a choice of three engine configurations available, we tested the top of the line 132kW 4Motion all wheel drive model with the seven speed DSG transmission.

Our trip put 300km on the clock, with the fuel gauge showing just over a quarter of tank used. With reported fuel economy figures of 7.6L/100km, this would give the 80L fuel tank a range of approximately 1050km per tank, which on our trip was close to spot on. Being

a standard size van, the VW Transporter was easy to navigate around the city and upon reaching the highway to head up the coast I found the 132kW engine responsive, powering up the hills and easily sitting at 110km/h.

From a driver's perspective, it offers a pleasurable experience behind the wheel, especially for those who like to sit up a little higher than they normally would in a sedan. There are numerous touch controls for your favourite accessories, including phone and stereo controls from the steering wheel,

a rear vision camera and park assist from the media screen, plus easy to reach cup holders in the dashboard.

Inside the campervan, Frontline has done a great job with the conversion, with plenty of room to stand once the pop top roof has been raised, and the dining configuration able to be mixed up by repositioning the table to work with either the bench seat or the front passenger swivel seat. The sink is small, yet functional and it allows for adequate bench space for food preparation without the table being

set-up, which could get in the way when using either the sink or accessing the fridge. The bench seat has two seat belts available in case you are taking a couple of extra passengers out on a day trip or looking to fit the optional roof-bed.

The 80L fridge is as large as you would want in a vehicle this size and is positioned for easy access from both the side door and from the front passenger seat (when it has been swivelled around for dining). The sink is fed from a 55-litre water tank, which

also feeds the shower hose at the back of the van. A hot water system was available as an optional extra and would be something I'd recommend for those looking at longer trips.

Next to the fridge are the 12V power switches that control the LED interior lights, the fridge, the diesel heater and the 12V power points for recharging phones, camera batteries and other devices. To the right of the fridge there is a microwave oven (must be connected to 240V mains power to use) and above this a fan that can be rotated

to face the bed or the dining area as needed. The two-burner stove is fuelled by methylated spirits and resides in a pull-out drawer just above the fridge. It is easily removed so that you can cook outside or inside depending on the weather or the meal.

Frontline has done well with the available drawer and cupboard space in such a small motorhome, providing a pantry cupboard next to the fridge with three slide-out racks, a cutlery drawer above the microwave, and two sliding door cupboards next to the bed area, one of which is set up as a clothes wardrobe with hanging space, and the other with shelving for folded clothes

Being the middle of winter when we did the test, I took full advantage of running the diesel heater overnight, setting the thermostat at 22 degrees. Installed under the driver's seat, the heater is unobtrusive and very quiet. With the outside temperature dropping down to just a couple of degrees overnight, it kept the camper so warm, no blanket was needed, and I made do with just a sheet. In summer, while no heater would be needed, the zippered flyscreens' on both the side and rear doors will ensure no annoying buzzing visitors are around to bother you inside the van.

The bed itself is created by folding down the bench seat (which is a simple 10 second operation) and combining it with the rear cushion bench. When set-up, it is a bit smaller than a double, however there is room for two people to sleep but it is a cosy fit. The cushioned seats fold completely flat and make for quite a comfortable rest; I had no trouble falling straight to sleep. Curtains are provided for every window for privacy and they also block out any external lights to make sleeping easier. You can access the bed internally via the dining area or via the rear door. The bench seat can also be folded to face the rear door, making for a comfortable day bed or lounge area from which you can enjoy the view of the campground or wherever you may have stopped.

There are several LED lights within the camper, including the main lights over the bed and dining areas, a light over the sink area, and personal lights both at the head of the bed for reading, and also behind the front seats for the driver and passenger.

Underneath the bed area there is ample storage for all your gear next to



Far Left: With a metho stove, there's no need to carry gas, and the stove can be moved outside to cook.
Left: The 80-litre fridge is just the right size.
Right: The bed end can lift from the front to create a cool day-bed or lounge.



THE BASICS

FRONTLINE VW T6 TRANSPORTER



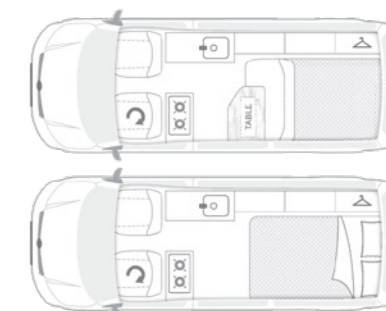
CHASSIS

Vehicle – VW T6 Transporter
 Engine – 132kW bi-turbo 2.0L diesel
 Transmission – 7 speed DSG Auto
 Torque – 400Nm
 Fuel Economy – 7.6l/100km



DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHTS

Length – 5290mm
 Width – 1904mm
 Height – 2060mm – with roof racks – 2135mm
 Internal height – 2020mm
 Tare Weight converted – 2200kg
 GVM – 3000kg



CAPACITIES

Water – 55L
 Grey Water – N/A
 Black Water – N/A
 Gas – N/A
 Fridge – 80L
 Battery – 2 x 100ah
 Fuel – 80L



WARRANTY

3 years Unlimited km



PRICE

From \$74,000 plus on roads. As tested, \$85,000 plus on roads



CONTACT

Frontline Camper Conversions
frontlinecamper.com.au

the twin 100a/h deep cycle batteries. Also provided is a compact folding solar blanket that can be connected via an Anderson plug to recharge the batteries when free-camping. To the right of the storage area is the shower head and tap. There is also the option to purchase the canvas rear door tent, which I would highly recommend, as both a good size change room, and also as a shower and toilet area. As with most vans this size, there is not a built-in toilet, however you can purchase a porta potti and have a door installed under the rear seat.

Outside, the passenger side has a 3-metre wide Fiamma awning which provides a fantastic shaded area when fully set-up, with more than enough room for a table, two chairs and a cooker. The wind-out mechanism is operated by a handle stored just inside the rear door, and there is an additional spreader bar for extra support and strength when the awning is wound out. The driver's side of the van has the external power connection as well as water and fuel tank access points.

Frontline offers three vehicle choices and four layouts to choose from, as well as a range of optional extras including



If you like quick set-ups, nothing beats a walk-through camper.

a bike rack, a flyscreen room for the Fiamma awning, a roof bed if travelling with kids, and a TV antenna, to name just a few. Prices start at \$74,000 for the 103kW 2WD version in manual, while the 132kW all wheel drive that we tested comes in at \$85,000.

Overall, the Frontline camper is

a great fit for a single tourer looking to explore Australia, even on some unsealed roads, and who likes to be able to set-up or pack-up within a few minutes. If you don't mind the compact environment, then this is one of the most economical set-ups available for a brand-new motorhome. ♦



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MADE BETTER BY

FRANCE?

Toast, kissing and fries are all better when French. What about caravans?

Words and pics Brendan Batty



?

Caravans have changed a significant amount, following trends and adapting to how the market uses them. These days, the predominant caravan is for two people, is built to be towed behind the larger SUVs that are popular with Aussie travellers, and to some extent, weigh as much as they do, not just because of the desire for strength or features, but because a dual cab ute can tow at least 3-tonne, so a caravan can weigh that much if it needs too.

But that will not always be the case (and is not). For starters, caravanning and camping, if it isn't already, is becoming a mainstream holiday option. More and more people, especially families, might choose between a caravanning trip or one to Bali. And caravans like the new French built Caravelair Antares range are making that significantly more accessible.

For starters, these caravans are incredibly light. Light enough to be towed by some small or medium SUVs or wagons (the kind of cars you'd find in France, for instance). And because they use a mechanical override



braking system, there's no need for the added hassle of an electronic brake controller. Essentially, if your car's got a tow-bar, there's probably a caravan in the Antares range that you can tow. Alternatively, as the popularity of peer-to-peer caravan hire grows, something like this makes reasonable sense – more people can tow it easily.

The other thing this has going for it, in the changing caravanning climate, is six berths. This is a family ready caravan in a modern package that's ideal for that stereotypical 'east-coast' touring where caravan parks are as much the destination as the place to park up. And there's more than a few reasons for that.

For a bit of background, Caravelair is owned by Trigano VDL, France's largest builder of caravans under six different banners and at around 10,000 units a year, it's very significant in the wider European market. In Australia, we see caravans from a number of Euro builders, although this is the first from the French. Trigano also builds its own absorption fridges rather than buying from larger firms like Thetford or Dometic.

Typical of Euro design, though, the chassis is light-weight and minimalist, taking most of its strength from the two pressed main rails and their integration with the boxed caravan body, which has its own inherent integrity, and the AL-KO independent rubber suspension's main tube. It's not how we build caravans in Australia, but used within its reasonable limits, this design has certainly proved itself over the last decade in Oz. Stick to the bitumen and you'll be fine.

In fact, on the bitumen, the Antares 496 is quite good. At just 1230kg empty, and just 1500kg with a load, it's barely a burden. In fact, it's lighter than most of the camper trailers on the market these days. Even as a 20-foot caravan, it barely feels like it, being altogether lighter, narrower and with a lower centre of gravity. As there's a reasonably light ball weight, it doesn't cause the vehicle to unbalance much at all, and I found this is in no way a daunting caravan to tow and really well suited to the Subaru Outback we paired it with.

At camp, the caravan's layout is interesting, especially in the Australian market which is very used to a full-time master bed. To be fair, there are two full-time beds in this van, but they are two of kids' bunks. The front of the van



is dominated by the large dinette. This is a really comfortable area with plenty of space and big windows all around to let in both light and breeze. A folding table, which during travel is stored in the rear cupboard, fits the space nicely, and as it's not fixed to the floor in any way, leaves plenty of space for lounging when it's not needed.

This lounge transforms into the master bed thanks to the rearrangement of some cushions and the pulling out of the extending bed base. There's no getting around the fact this is less

convenient than a normal bed, but in a family van, it does at least leave the largest, most comfortable seating area available after the kids have all gone to sleep. It's an inconvenience, for sure, but a van this light and comfortable, able to be towed by the cars it can, and with as many beds as it does, wouldn't be possible in a van this length any other way.

There's a second, smaller dinette in the van, which also converts into beds – this time a set of bunks. It's a pretty clever mechanism to convert them,



THE BASICS

CARAVELAIR ANTARES 496



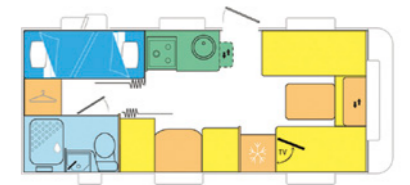
CHASSIS

Style – Touring caravan
Chassis – AL-KO hot dipped gal chassis
Suspension – AL-KO Independent Rubber Suspension
Coupling – AL-KO anti sway coupling



DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHTS

Length – 6910mm
Width – 2300mm
Towing Height – 2580mm
Tare Weight – 1220kg
ATM – 1500kg
Tow Ball weight – 80kg



CAPACITIES

Water – Mains water only
Grey Water – 30 litres, portable
Gas – 2 x 8.5kg
Fridge – 87-litre, three-way
Battery – 100ah



WARRANTY

2 year water ingress



PRICE

From \$48,990 tow away



CONTACT

Caravelair Australia
caravelair.com.au

Overleaf top: The two bunks are great for teenage sized humans offering a little bit of private living space for each.

Overleaf bottom left: The ensuite is cozy but convenient.

Overleaf bottom right: The smaller dinette cleverly converts into a second bunk like so.

Above right: The kitchen isn't the largest on the market, but it's got everything a family needs.

Above left and left: The main dinette becomes the main bed really easily.



Above: The AL-KO anti-sway hitch and mechanical override brakes mean nearly any car with a tow-ball can tow this caravan easily.

and looks daunting to do, but with the right movements is very simple. A set of cushions, which store under the full-time bunks, fill in the blanks offering two beds suitable for young kids or older contortionists.

The kitchen in the Antares is simple but effective. There's a small counter which has a three-burner stove and oven, a small, circular sink and a simple folding bench extension. The fridge is opposite, about 90-litres in capacity and runs off gas or electricity. I don't want to cast dispersions on it too early, but the fridge is a proprietary product of the French caravan maker – finding a replacement in Australia might be difficult in the unlikely event you'd need to. Around 10,000 are made a year, though, so the company knows its way around a chilly-bin. Storage around the kitchen is somewhat limited thanks to the proclivity to beds, but this isn't the sort of van where provisioning for long periods is likely a consideration, so it shouldn't be an issue.

The rear of the van is divided by the bunks and ensuite, which run up each side. It's a cosy but convenient little space with a separate shower cubicle, small stainless-steel basin and basic storage shelves for a few pieces of linen. It's convenience, plain and simple, without any embellishment, and it does the job.

Similarly, both bunks are long enough for a teenager to sleep in, although probably too narrow for an adult to enjoy. The bottom's base lifts up to reveal a large storage area, which is also accessible from the outside via a large boot door. Both bunks have reading lights, and the top is accessed via a removable ladder.

Overall, this is a very practical caravan with a reasonable level of comfort built in. It's got a clever floor plan and its light-weight opens it up to a lot of families or travellers who might otherwise be shut out of the market due to their vehicle preference. But this is undoubtedly a black-top-only caravan

that's intended for caravan parks.

There's no fixed water tanks, for starters, which probably makes this range one of the only in Australia to so audaciously omit them, expecting the van to have mains water availability wherever it goes. As that is the case I'd love to see a suitable hose included as a standard accessory. In fairness, there is a 30-litre wheeled jerry can in the front boot, but that's technically for grey water. I'm not even sure there's a water pump. There is a 100amp-hour battery, thankfully, so with some preparation, a nights free camping is possible.

In conclusion, this isn't the sort of van we're used to in Australia and certainly doesn't live up to the ideals magazines like this and others portray. I expect that over the next few years, features will be 'Australianised', as many of the other Euro vans have been, but I'd fall very short of saying this isn't a good van – because it's great if you want to holiday up the coast, or even look to hire it out for other families to enjoy as well. ↗



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A foundation built on Rock



It's a long way, to the camp if you want to rock and roll. And we definately want to.

Words Michael Wilkins pics Brendan Batty

Avida, still a family run company after more than 50 years (although formerly known as Freeway Campers and then Winnebago) has long been one of Australia's foremost builders of caravans, campers, slide-ons and motorhomes. However, in all that time its focus has been more road-based than anything else, and even its recent forays into off-road vehicles have been conservative.

But, with the market trending towards family adventure travel, Avida has looked to its fifty-or-so years of experience and developed a line of dedicated off-roaders, beginning with a family bunk van. The term "off road", is often misused and abused, so what does the Rock (all Avida's caravans are named after stones) have that qualifies it to wear the tag? I spent hours running the magnifying glass over the Rock to find out just that, starting below the floor line.

The chassis and drawbar (150x50mm and 127x50mm hollow section steel) are fully welded and hot dip galvanised. The welding is neat and clean and would pass any inspection. The galvanising is

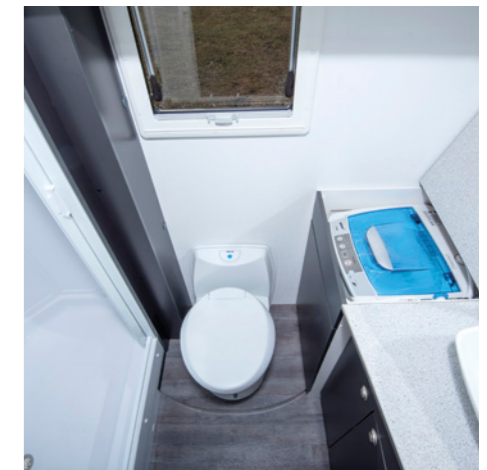




Well maintained gravel roads are eaten up by the Avida Rock.



Above: There's a real sophistication to the caravan's design that's not common in the industry.
Left: The Cruisemaster XT suspension is about as good as it gets without going to air-bags.
Above right: It's hard to appreciate just how classy the new Dometic slide-out fridge is without seeing it in person, but it still looks good in pictures.
Right: You can do a load of washing while reading the latest edition of ROAM.
Below right: Orientating the bed east-west saves about three feet of overall length from the caravan.



flawless. The drawbar is plated for extra strength at maximum stress points. The cross beams are 110x40mm pressed channels, which is light but strong. The design ensures rigidity, durability and I would say, long, long life expectancy.

The Cruisemaster XT independent suspension is a swing arm and coil spring design with dual shock absorbers manufactured by Cruisemaster (formerly known as Vehicle Components), a company that has been in the game for over forty years. If I was asked to describe it using only one word, the word I would choose is solid. One look at the tandem set-up under the Rock gives me the impression that it would take you wherever you wanted to go. The coupling is a DO-35 V3 3.5 tonne all terrain coupling with an integrated handbrake. It is also solid.

The solid theme continues to the attractive black and silver alloy 16-inch wheels (with two matching spares mounted on the rear) fitted with all

terrain light truck 265/75 R16 tyres. The combination of these features contributes to a generous road clearance and emphatically identifies the Rock as having genuine off-road capabilities.

The extended drawbar supports a full width lockable boot with slide out trays both sides to accommodate an optional portable fridge (or two). Forward of that, two 9kg gas bottles, a lockable jerry can rack and a full width mesh stone guard are mounted. The jockey wheel is centrally mounted, and looks a little fragile when viewed against the robust build of the Rock (even though the labelled capacity suggests it's suitable).

A full width tunnel boot, with lighting and accessed from both sides, is built into the body, next to another full width boot which houses the optional Dometic outdoor kitchen (gas burners, sink and a serving bench). Also on the near side, a drop-down table and access to the toilet cassette are provided.

More external storage is available

on the far side (under the bunks). It is 700mm deep and contains the jack and wheel spanner. All exterior storage is lockable, although not all of it is keyed alike. The six-metre Dometic awning and ample exterior lighting completes the caravan courtyard and BBQ area.

Stepping up the folding entry steps and into the caravan, the first impression is of light and space. A skylight and plenty of windows, all with fly screens, allow plenty of natural light inside. Night lighting is more than adequate, with two overhead LEDs supplemented by downlights over the table and beds.

The queen bed is oriented east-west at the front of the cabin, full width to cater for taller tourers. It rails against the general assumption that island beds are the only way to go, but this design saves a full three feet of overall caravan length (and associated weight) according to Avida. The base lifts up offering internal access to the second

of the two forward tunnel boots, and is also where the batteries are stored.

The kitchen is built along the far wall, and includes a four-burner cooktop and grill (with externally vented exhaust fan), a nice deep sink with mixer (with a separate tap and water filter), and a generously sized fridge freezer. An oven is offered as an option and if not fitted, a set of drawers is substituted. A three door (but narrow) pantry and plenty of food storage cupboards are provided, including a deep pot drawer. A microwave oven is built into overhead cupboards with concealed flush handles.

Opposite is the dinette, with a comfortable café style seating arrangement. The test van was fitted with an L-shaped lounge and adjustable table (a no cost option), seating four diners easily and maximising the kitchen space.

Double bunks, built along the far wall, are a cosy size for a child or young teenager, but would be too small for

an adult. Opposite the bunks is the bathroom, with a 900x700mm shower recess, a Thetford toilet, corner wash basin and a 3kg washing machine. Adjacent to the bunks, a full height shelved cupboard provides clothes storage, supplemented by a space under the lounge and two small overhead lockers at the bed head. There is no hanging space.

A 55cm television is wall mounted and can be swivelled to be seen from the dinette, or for private viewing from the queen bed. Three double 240-volt power points are fitted, and a stereo system with Bluetooth and USB, plus external speakers and USB. A reversing camera is standard.

A Dometic reverse cycle air conditioner is roof mounted and controlled from a central control panel over the entry door. The same panel also controls the management of water and batteries. Two 125Ah batteries are stored under the queen bed, accessed



The Avida Rock is built to carry Mum, Dad and a couple of kids wherever they want to go across Australia

by a gas strut assisted hinged cover.

A 300-watt solar panel installation and two 125-litre fresh water tanks (protected by heavy duty stone guards) will ensure an extended stay away from town services is possible. Grey water storage capacity is also 125 litres.

On the road, the Rock is a big unit. Travel length is 8.6-metres, width 2.5. The ground clearance demanded for off road work results in a travel height of 3.15-metres. But at freeway speeds, or through the traffic, the towing behaviour is faultless. For a tall rig, there is no sway, not a hint of fishtail and minimum bounce through the towbar.

The performance for the test was anxiety free, even given that my 2.5 litre Navara dual cab was barely adequate for the task. At 2675kg, the van as tested was perilously close to the 2800kg towing capacity of the Navara, and hill starts were... perhaps not entirely anxiety free.

With the van loaded to its Gross Vehicle Mass of 3300kg, you will need a towing vehicle a bit beefier than the D22 Navara, and a bit more grunt would not go astray, either.

I mentioned at the start that I couldn't fault the Rock, but since then I've had a little grizzle about the jockey wheel. The only other improvement suggestion I would venture is to move the coupling a bit further forward to allow a smaller turning circle and relocate the electrical plug to prevent damage if contact is made in a tight turn.

The Avida Rock is built to carry Mum, Dad and a couple of kids wherever they want to go across Australia. It is built to be tough but is not built rough. The standards of finish of all aspects of the build – steelwork, cabinetry, comfort, appearance, and most importantly, towability are of high quality.

With a price nudging into the high \$80K range, depending on options chosen, it is not a cheap caravan. But it is a genuine off road capable van and on a value for money basis, the Avida Rock is an attractive proposition. And given that it is wholly Australian made and wholly Australian owned by the same family since 1965, you may well consider that that adds a bit of value, too. 📍

THE BASICS

AVIDA ROCK



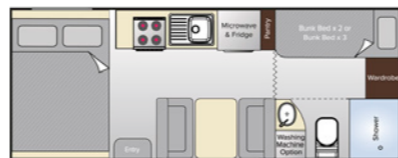
CHASSIS

Style – Off-road family caravan
Chassis – Hot dipped gal chassis
Suspension – Cruisemaster XT independent coil ppring
Coupling – Cruisemaster DO-35



DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHTS

Length – 8600mm
Width – 6375mm
Towing Height – 3150mm
Tare Weight – 2585kg
ATM – 3300kg
Tow Ball weight – 195kg



CAPACITIES

Water – 2 x 125 litres
Grey Water – 1 x 125 litres
Gas – 2 x 9kg
Fridge – Dometic 188-litre, compressor
Battery – 2 x 125ah
Solar – 300 watt



WARRANTY

3 year factory warranty, 5 year structural warranty, 2 year roadside assist



PRICE

From \$88,490 tow away



CONTACT

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K LEVER CAMPING



After a rough twelve months, has Kimberley Kampers found its feet?

Words and pics Brendan Batty

Ten years ago there were three names in camper trailers that people aspired to – three campers that really set themselves apart from the pack. The Ultimate Camper, Track Tvan and the Kimberley Kamper. And each three stuck to their own idea of awesome. Ultimate makes a lightweight, fibreglass pod (or upturned rowboat – depending on your perspective), that's the inspiration for many a forward fold camper of today. Track built a space-age, rugged and functional teardrop with military spec suspension that captured the imaginations of many a desert traveller, while Kimberley set about perfecting the rear-fold camper, constantly looking to the latest technologies and engineering prowess to make camping easier.

All are great products, all are excellent in the outback, and all, at one stage or another, have had dramas. Kimberley's well documented voluntary administration is the latest of them, but it hasn't dampened the company's commitment to building off-road RVs. In fact, Todd Cannock, the company's newish director, and the guy who's wrestled the company out of its financial despair, is as passionate about building the best





Left: The quick set up, with awning still over the roof for perfect arvo sunsets
Above: Plenty of room in the kitchen
Below right: 66mm monotube shocks are standard fare on the Kimberley



Top: The main bed is comfortable and easy to climb into and the tent end has an alcove to create a bed-end table
Above: The optional kids room sleeps three little bodies very comfortably.
Below: The diesel heater keeps the winter chills away, while the slide-out underbed storage keeps things organised and is accessibly when the camper is closed.



Windorah and it ate it up the whole time. You can make of it what you will, but our eggs never smashed and the bottle of Gin I left poorly packed in the main storage drawer at the back of the camper was still in-tact when I finally found it half way into the trip, thank goodness. An added bonus of the air suspension is that it can be used to level the Kamper at camp, with far more range and ease than ramps ever can.

One of the most distinct features of the modern Kimberley Kamper are the gullwing storage boxes forward of the camper body. At once they offer pretty significant comfort (in the form of the extensive kitchen) and weight on the draw bar (which is one of the few KK weak points). On the passenger side, the gullwing reveals two sliding sections – one with the pantry, a barbeque and a two-burner stove (although a few different cooking options are available) and another for the fridge (although an upright fridge is now offered). The cooker section of the camper is telescopic – from under the barbeque slides the two-burner stove. Neither of these are plumbed full time, so quick-fit bayonet connectors plug into a gas bottle each. The pantry is also two-tiered, and the top section slides back off the bottom so both can be accessed at the same time.

From the main body of the camper, the third part of the kitchen emerges – a large stainless steel unit which is

THE BASICS

KIMBERLEY KAMPERS PLATINUM



CHASSIS

Style – Off-road rear-fold
 Chassis – Galvanised steel
 Suspension – Independent, air-bag trailing arm, 66mm monotube shock absorbers
 Hitch – Tregg



DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHTS

Length – 4515mm
 Width – 1910mm
 Height – 1455mm
 Tare Weight – 1090kg
 ATM – 2000kg
 Tow Ball Weight – 140 to 240kg



CAPACITIES

Water – 190 litres
 Grey Water – NA
 Gas – 2 x 4.5kg
 Fridge – 85 litres
 Battery – 1 x 200ah lithium
 Solar – 70-watt



WARRANTY

5 years chassis and canvas, 2 years body



PRICE

From \$63,650 plus on roads



CONTACT

Kimberley Kampers
kimberleykampers.com

off-road product as any of the company's previous, but is doing it as much with tech savvy as actual trips into the outback to prove his products' mettle. As an interesting side note, he and his wife own a fashion label, Wish, so come Christmas time, Mrs ROAM reader and Mr ROAM reader can both buy from him and both will be happy campers, as it were. Anyway, back to the Kamper.

For the last week-and-a-half I've been travelling, wife and kids in tow, with Todd and a party of Kimberley people with one of every product in the current line-up, (which includes an impressive

Unimog Expedition Vehicle which my wife has fallen in love with). We've seen the entire Kimberley product pushed to the limits and been welcomed in to see, warts and all, what it's got to offer. My Kamper is the company's Platinum model, albeit a few trips old and missing three of the latest improvements – lithium batteries, a super thin 70-watt solar panel and an upright fridge instead of the slide-out chest version.

This is a trailer that tips the scales at just over 1000kg when it's empty, which is pretty impressive amongst a sea of imported campers that generally

carry 500kg more weight before they carry any weight at all. It's built in Ballina using Australian canvas and it's that local know-how, and reliable consistency which enables Kimberley to keep so much weight down.

It tows great, too, and not just because it's not unnecessarily hefty. Kimberley's own independent, air-bag suspension and 66mm monotube shock absorbers keep everything in line. We towed (as you can read about on page 74) on dirt, corrugations and through gibber deserts all the way from Cobar to Birdsville then back to



It's been some years since Kimberley, along with Track and Ultimate, sat well and truly ahead of the competition, but after nearly two weeks living from the Kamper, it's very clear the KK is still at the top, an exceptionally well-thought and functional camper.

mostly bench-top and storage, but with a decent-sized sink and plumbed hot and cold water. There are four drawers in it, none large, but all big enough. Two other lift-up lids give access to bin-like storage in the bench-top so not much space is wasted. From underneath this, a breakfast bar slides out to the back of the camper, a great place for kids to eat, we found. Overall, it's a really comprehensive kitchen, especially for a camper trailer.

The kitchen's function is supplemented by the two water tanks under the body, one each forward and back of the axle. The two aren't joined, and each are plumbed to different points. This is so that drinking water can't be contaminated, but gives us the option of filling up the utility tank with bore water a few times on our trip. When that ran out, it was a simple, if labour intensive job of pumping our excess drinking water into the utility tank so we could have a shower. The other taps, at the sink and another for a shower, are plumbed to the electric pump and diesel hot-water system.

This last feature was actually quite handy, and far faster at simple tasks, like filling a sink with hot water, than warming a kettle is. Mostly we could get

hot water within a couple of minutes, even on the morning when all our sponges were frozen in the sink.

Setting up the Kimberley for camp is very simple. After the cantilever rack is flipped over the top, it helps pull the rest of the lid over, the tent coming with it. Small adjustable legs on the lid-come-floor help keep it firm on the ground so it can be climbed in to set two extra poles that push out the back wall. Done. The awning, which can remain attached to the roof and just folded over the tropical roof if it's not needed, can be set up with just four poles which attach to the camper's body. A more comprehensive set-up adds an extra few uprights for stability and allows a bit more canvas to be unfolded.

Inside, the rear-fold camper is comfortable. The bed is large and on a lift-up base, although that's rarely needed as the main storage area underneath is a large drawer that can be pulled out whether the camper is open or closed. Behind the drawer is the camper's battery – a 200amp-hour lithium, which is about 70kg lighter than the bank of AGMs Kimberley used until recently.

The tent's design is quite clever, really. At the bed head, an alcove of

canvas creates an area that works great as a bed-end table. There's also a small extraction fan in the top peak, to help move hot air from the camper efficiently and the back wall slopes outwards from the floor to help increase the standing room inside. There's also plenty of window around the bed, all with midge-proof screens. If it could be improved in any way, it would be to seal up the gaps in the bottom of the canvas doors which let in drafts (although not bugs – the screens Velcro to the floor). However, with a diesel room heater, the camper's rarely cold inside if you don't want it to be.

Pack-up is simple, if you follow the process, but can be difficult if you skip a step or try to rush it too much. While the awning is still attached, it's a tight fit to get all the canvas under the lid, and it's the last of the process I found hardest, making sure all the canvas fits behind the seals, as some muscle is needed if you're tackling this by yourself.

It's been some years since Kimberley, along with Track and Ultimate, sat well and truly ahead of the competition, but after nearly two weeks living from the Kamper, it's very clear the KK is still at the top, an exceptionally well-thought and functional camper.

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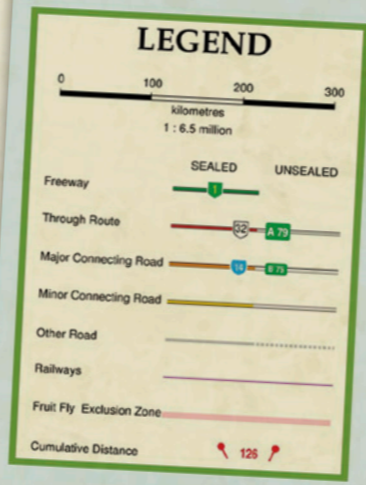
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ANCIENT MARINE STROMATOLITES AT HAMELIN POOL, SHARK BAY



THERE ARE ENDLESS SALTPAN VIEWS FROM THE BUSH CAMP AT LAKE JOHNSON

From Cottesloe to the Kimberley, when it comes to budget touring the west is best with no end of free places to park your rig and surprising ways to fill your days that will well and truly have you accused of wallet neglect.

Catherine Lawson photography David Bristow

THE GREAT SOUTHERN



EXPLORING MARRINUP POW CAMP 16, A FAVOURITE SOUTHWEST CAMP



BALINGUP'S GRIMWADE TOWN CAMP IS A TOP FOREST FREEBIE



THREE SOUTHWEST FIRE LOOKOUT TREES PROVIDE HIGH ALTITUDE THRILLS.



Marrinup POW Camp

My current favourite freebie is a rare, historical find located 5km out of Dwellingup at Marrinup POW Camp 16. There's free, unrestricted camping, easy mountain biking and waterfall walk trails, and unique WWII ruins to tour full of elaborate stone relics. From 1943-46, Marrinup POW Camp 16 housed 1200 prisoners of war, shipped from Libya and India to farm and mill the southwest's rich karri and marri forests.

Today the site is an intriguing place to camp where pets are welcome and fires are permitted. Head to Dwellingup on Pinjarra-Williams Road and take the signposted turn onto Grey Road (BYO firewood and drinking water).

Grimwade's Marron Feast

Further south, on the shores of a sapphire-hued dam where marron spend most of the year getting fat and juicy, travellers repopulate the old Grimwade Town Camp, a top forest freebie near Balingup. There are no facilities and no hassles either at this former timber mill settlement that now caters for self-sufficient travellers and, for 23 days from early January, marron anglers. The camp is located just off Grimwade Road, 11km northeast of Balingup and campsites are caravan and pet-friendly but BYO water.

Getting High

In high winds, the canopy cabin atop the Dave Evans Bicentennial Tree sways 1.5 metres in either direction, shaking those daring enough to take on this 75-metre forest giant which rates as the world's highest fire lookout tree. The tree's adrenalin-spiked views are sublime, but the climb itself via 165 steel pegs that spiral up the tree (no safety net supplied), is not for the faint hearted.

Located 11km southwest of Pemberton, The Dave Evans Bicentennial Tree is the tallest of a trio of fire lookout trees,

and the others – Pemberton's Gloucester Tree (72 metres) and Manjimup's Diamond Tree (51 metres) provide an equally thrilling good time.

Inland Salt pans

Paving the way between Perth and the Nullarbor, an impossibly scenic travel route lures travellers to the edge of crumbling painted cliffs and up gently sloping granite outcrops for views over the endless bluebush plains.

Think free camping on bright pink salt lakes and waking in breezy groves of rare ribbon gums. An easy stroll up Disappointment Rock is anything but, and at Lake Johnson where a row of tall salmon gums mysteriously fringes the salt pan, the camping is free and the vistas, endless. The route, marketed as the Granite and Woodlands Discovery Trail, is suitable for all vehicles and free bush camps at Lake Johnson, McDermid Rock, the Breakaways and Forrestania Plots provide picnic tables, toilets, fire pits and walking trails.

Gorge Rock

Around 235km southeast of Perth near the wheatbelt town of Corrigin, Gorge Rock Pool is a lovely find with a free campground nestled beneath an enormous granite outcrop. The pioneer-era pool on top was dammed generations ago, fed by rainwater flowing off the soaring granite flanks of Gorge Rock to create a swimming and picnicking place.

The enormous rock is easy to climb and you can push on up some immense slabs of gently rising granite to reach the obvious, distant summit for expansive rural scenes. Free-camping is permitted at the rock's base, and you can visit Corrigin's unique Dog Cemetery and tackle a scenic wildflower walk trail.

Lake Ballard

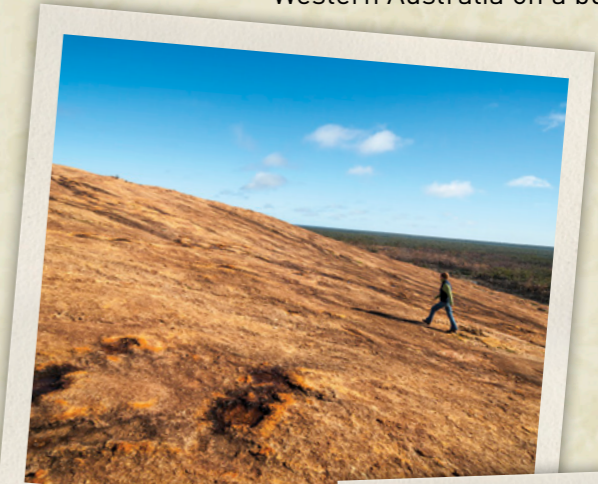
Not only is Lake Ballard home to the most unique outdoor art installation in the country, it's also an incredibly beautiful free camp. Artist Antony Gormley chose well when he installed 51 solitary, spirit-like sculptures across Lake Ballard's shimmering white salt flats, and watching the sunset from



LAKE BALLARD'S UNIQUE OUTDOOR ART INSTALLATION



ALBANY HAS A STELLAR REPUTATION FOR PROVIDING FIVE FREE WATERFRONT CAMPS



THE GENTLE GRANITE CLIMB UP DISAPPOINTMENT ROCK IS ANYTHING BUT



HIDDEN HIGH ABOVE CORRIGIN IS GORGE ROCK POOL

these mulga-fringed dunes is nothing short of magical. There's toilets, drinking water, picnic tables, firepits, a dump point and bins, and you'll find it signposted off Goldfields Highway, 57km from Menzies.

Close by, 10km east of Leonora, the spacious waterfront camp at Malcolm Dam is a top spot to watch waterbirds and cast a line.

Albany Beach Fun

Nestled on neighbouring turquoise bays, the white sand beaches that fringe the free camps at Bettys Beach and Normans Inlet are quite simply, exquisite.

Ideal for compact campers, Normans Inlet attracts paddlers who can glide across a deep, tannin-hued pool graced by elegant black swans.

Close by, the grassy campsites at Betty's Beach overlook one of the region's prettiest bays, bookcased by giant granite boulders that glow golden with orange lichen at sunset. Pods of dolphins fish the bay and with a 4WD you can access the beach to launch a tinny or reach rock-fishing spots at low tide. Located a 30 minute drive east of Albany, both camps permit seven-day stays and provide public toilets (no fires or mobile reception, though).

Closer to Albany, free camps at Torbay West and East Bay permit similar stays, and caravanners favour pet-friendly Cosy Corner East for its spacious camping bays, beach access and RV dump point.



CRUNCHING ACROSS LAKE INDOON, A FREE CAMP 18KM OFF THE INDIAN OCEAN DRIVE



HIT THE WATER AND SPEND UP TO FIVE, FREE NIGHTS CAMPED ON THE DAMPIER ARCHIPELAGO

Back on the coast, the grassy camps strung out beneath towering limestone at Cliff Head have long provided coastal sanctuary to beach-lovers. Still free despite facility upgrades, the camp provides toilets and the three-night limit is ample time to rest and explore. To the south there are similar free camps at Freshwater and Knobby Head, and a free camping area for self-contained rigs 30km away on Dongara's Town Oval lets you tap into free public Wi-Fi too!

Peninsula Petroglyphs

More than a million petroglyphs await intrepid travellers to the Pilbara's remote Burrup Peninsula and the 42 reef-fringed islands and islets that stud the turquoise seas offshore on the stunning Dampier Archipelago.

Chiselled into the region's fractured ironstone hills, the petroglyphs record the 30,000-year history of WA's Jaburara people and include what is thought to be the oldest depiction of a human face ever found.

Here boaties and paddlers can take to the sea and spend up to five, free nights camped on the Dampier Archipelago's islands, snorkelling in protected lagoons, spotting dolphins and dugongs, and discovering little-seen petroglyphs that lie over the dunes. To get there, head to Dampier, 25km west of Karratha via Burrup Peninsula Road.

CRUISING NORTH

Camp the Indian Ocean Drive

When it fills after winter rains, the vast salt lake at Lake Indoon becomes a waterskiers' paradise, a drought refuge for wildlife and a staging post for birds on their north-south migratory route. For the rest of the year you can crunch across the salt pan from camps shaded by rare, towering flooded gums. Great facilities include a boat ramp, coldwater showers, toilets, rubbish bins and a picnic shelter with free gas barbecues, and you'll find it signposted 18km off the Indian Ocean Road along the Coolimba-Eneabba Road.

Tackle the Coral Coast's Top 6

If wild dolphin-feeding, dune-sliding, thar-she-blows holes and top snorkelling and angling are the kings of things that keep your holiday humming, then this strip of World Heritage-listed paradise is bound to thrill. Here's our pick of things-to-do as you hug the coast north.

- 1 Take a torchlit tour through 300 metres of ancient limestone in Stockyard Gully National Park, signposted off the Indian Ocean Drive directly east of Green Head.
- 2 Crunch across the pink salt lakes en route to Kalbarri, then peer through Nature's Window, an easy 500m stroll in Kalbarri National Park.
- 3 Ogle weird, wonderful ancient marine stromatolites at Hamelin Pool in Shark Bay, then float in Hamelin Bay's warm, ultra saline sea.

- 4 Afterwards, attempt to build a cockle shell castle at 60km-long Shell Beach.
- 4 Climb the mighty red dunes above Gregories Beach in Francois Peron National Park to spot eagle rays and shovel-nosed sharks in the gin-clear waters below, then brave a scorching soak in Peron Homestead's artesian hot tub.
- 5 Paddle Yardie Creek to spot rock wallabies

- 6 at dawn, then drift dive across Turquoise Bay, a favourite coral garden on Ningaloo Reef in Cape Range National Park.
- 6 Brave the Spider Walk to Kermit's Pool deep within Hancock Gorge in Karijini National Park where a free camp at Hamersley Gorge provides an elaborate picnic shelter, toilet, and unbelievably, free, solar-powered Wi-Fi.

THE KIMBERLEY



LAUNCH A BOAT IN BROOME



Broome's Beachfront Freebies

Secluded barramundi fishing holes and blissfully remote beaches await, 60km from Broome on the Dampier Peninsula. Wild camps at Willies Creek, Barred Creek, Quondong and James Price Point offer nothing but sandy, clifftop camping, swimming, fishing and snorkelling (and the perfect way to bolster the budget after pricey Broome splurges).

Push north to Coulomb Point for 4WD beach access and to explore the lagoon that appears at low tide, teeming with fish, and colourful coral bombies. To get there, turn off the Broome-Cape Leveque Road onto Manari Road.

Back in Broome, don't miss the laidback, end-of-day beach parties that take place beneath Gantheaume Point's crumbling amber cliffs: kids swimming in the shallows, sandcastles and beach cricket and you, kicking back in a camp chair with the esky within reach. At low tide, head for Gantheaume Point's historical lighthouse to spot the stampede of 130 million-year-old dinosaur footprints (free!), or to swim in Anastasia's pool.

Gorge Out

For Gibb River Road explorers, Bell Gorge is one of the best places to get wet: a dazzling five-tier waterfall with a hidden pool below and sunny rock slabs alongside to bake on between icy dips.

Just up the track, bomb diving into the thundering falls at Galvans Gorge is a top way to wake up, and there's hidden rock art to discover and plenty of wildlife at the crack of dawn: water monitors, sleepy tree snakes, wallabies and birds by the hundreds. You'll find it 14km south of Mount Barnett Roadhouse.

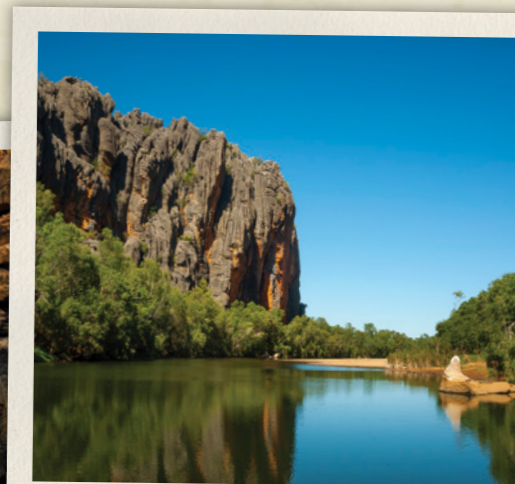
Wet Walking & Windjana Gorge

You'll need a torch and waterproof shoes to tackle this thrilling wet walk through the Kimberley's Tunnel Creek, 115km northwest of Fitzroy Crossing. Wade through 750 metres of knee-deep pools spotlighting stalactites and curtains of flowstones and the little red flying-foxes that squawk restlessly overhead.

Rock art at the tunnel's entrance marks the secret hideout of legendary freedom fighter Jandamarra who in 1884, waged a guerrilla war against police and pastoralists in nearby Windjana Gorge. Rising 100 metres above the Lennard River, Windjana Gorge today guards a string of seasonal waterholes where big, docile freshwater crocodiles laze on sunny, sandy banks – close enough to ogle!



GORGE OUT IN THE KIMBERLEY WITH A SWIM BENEATH BELL GORGE



RISING 100 METRES, WINDJANA GORGE GUARDS A STRING OF SEASONAL, CROC-FILLED WATERHOLES

BIG RED BASH

**Play as loud as you want.
The neighbours can't hear you.**

*Words Brendan Batty photography
Brendan, Angela and River Batty*

If you talked to your accountant about business opportunities, there's a good chance they'd say a concert in the outback, 30-hours drive from the nearest large population centre, on a dusty, grassless paddock that's as much dried cow poo as it is sand, is a bad investment. Even worse if it's technically a celebration of the completion of five days ultra-marathon running through unforgiving desert (an ultra-marathon is a running race longer than 42-kilometres). Who would come to something like that?

9000 people would apparently, and from all over Australia (just as long as you don't make us do any actual running, I'm sure). Welcome to the Big Red Bash, Australia's hardest-to-get-to music festival under the shadow of Australia's tallest sand dune. It's an event so big that the line for fuel in Birdsville the day before, is two hours long and it empties at least one service station of all its fuel and the bakery of all its bread and pies (although the pub is well prepared and doesn't run out of beer, thank goodness).

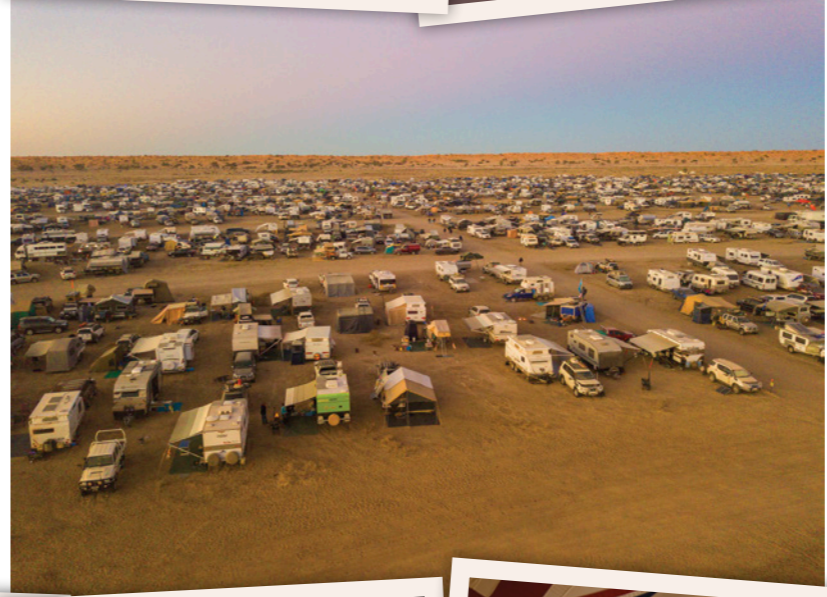
Like so many people, we make a trip of the event and spend six days travelling through outback New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia on our way out. We pass through Cobar, White Cliffs, Tibooburra, Cameron Corner, Innaminka and past the Dig Tree, free camping the entire time, before we finally descend on Birdsville with 2500 other camping vehicles.

This is the sixth year the Bash has run. It was originally a small event to mark the end of the Big Red Run, a five-day, 250km trail running race through the Simpson Desert raising money for Type 1 Diabetes Research. The concert was held on top of Big Red itself, as the dusty paddock, actually a dry lake-bed, was less dry than most years. From the few hundred that attended the first event, the Bash has grown into one of the biggest outback events anywhere in Australia.

There's a good reason for it, too. For three days you get to sit around a campfire with a bunch of mates and listen to some of the best Australian artists play music live on stage. This year it was headlined by John Farnham and Daryl Braithwaite, but Jimmy Barnes has played it twice and so has John Williamson. James Reyne has headlined and so has Paul Kelly.

From the Birdsville Commons, where we camp the night before we roll into the Bash it's a 40-kilometre drive to Bashville, the concert site. It takes us over four hours to get there, though, once we wait in line for fuel (weirdly, the Roadhouse closed at 5pm the day before, the local police





Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Jeljendi people, traditional custodians of this part of the Simpson Desert, and so pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Best Time to Visit

The Big Red Bash runs in July each year usually opening its gates a few days early to help reduce the strain on Birdsville in the days leading up to the event. In July, the days are warm but the nights can be freezing.

Where

Birdsville is 30 hours drive from both Sydney and Brisbane, with around 400km of dirt road from Windorah. It's on the edge of the Simpson Desert and often the start or finish point for four-wheel drive crossings.

Camping

Camping is included in the ticket price of the event, but campers must be self-contained and collect all grey and black water. Grey water can be emptied into points onsite, although black water and silage must be taken off site. There are no showers onsite, apart from what you bring, but toilets are provided. There is no power, but generators and campfires are allowed.

Don't Miss

Any of it. But spend some time in Birdsville, it's a quaint, but friendly outback town.

Best Freebie

Sitting atop Big Red as the sun sets over the Simpson Desert.

More Information

bigredbash.com.au



turning people away who hadn't already lined up, and the other servo had run out), empty cassettes, fill up with water and get stuck in the long queue outside the event.

The campsite sprawls over a massive area. Even from where we are camped, in the front row and somewhere in the middle, it takes nearly 10 minutes to walk back to the day-parking area where I leave the Prado so I can venture into town if need be. Those who are camped further back from the stage (and who have obviously been before), tow big-wheeled carts with camp chairs and ice-boxes down to the concert each afternoon. For some right at the corners, it's probably a 15-minute walk.

Already, the top of Big Red is lined with revellers – the adults with camera and a couple of tinnies in hand, the kids sporting body-boards to zoom down the dune and fill their hair with red sand. From the top you can look west into the endless expanse of the Simpson Desert, or east onto the sprawling mass of caravans, camper trailers and motorhomes that have rolled in over the last few days.

After we set up camp, the kids are desperate to 'walk' to the

top. If you thought driving up was hard, consider doing it with shoes full of sand, a three-year old in one arm and a can of lager in your other. I'm puffing by the time we've 'conquered' Big Red, but repay the kids by telling them that it's like the beach and they'll find water if they dig just a little bit further.

Up here's the only place anyone can get a slither of mobile phone reception. Even though Telstra has set up a mobile tower on site, it's obviously overloaded as no one can make a call unless they climb up here, switch to flight mode then switch back to try and ping Birdsville's tower, 35km away on the plain. It's lucky this is the tallest dune, as there's a few others between here and town.

I'm not even sure who plays on the first day. We've got a campfire lit out the front of our camping area and although it's a pleasant bit of background entertainment, most of our focus is on stories from the last six days travel out here or getting to know those around us. More than a few in our group wake up a little dusty the next morning, and not because we're camped on a dried lakebed of dirt, cow poo and kicked up dust.

Day two we've got a full day on site and not much to do,

which is perfect. From early on, half our campsite is up, watching brightly dressed blokes in tutus, dress frocks and sequined garments trickle into the main square in preparation for the drag race. When they're all gathered, the starters gun sounds and they frolic from the top of Big Red, around the stage and over the finish line in a mad scramble of colour and clumsiness. The music begins at around lunch, so like day one, we enjoy it mostly from around the campfire, occasionally venturing to front-of stage to enjoy some of our favourite songs. My eight-year old daughter spends nearly the entire performance of the Angels on my shoulders rocking out as hard as any of the blokes who actually grew up listening to the band.

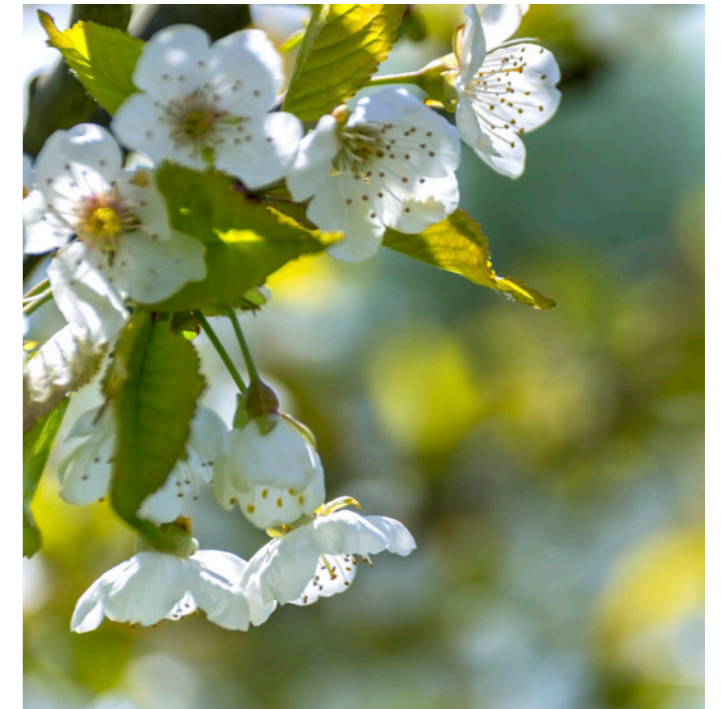
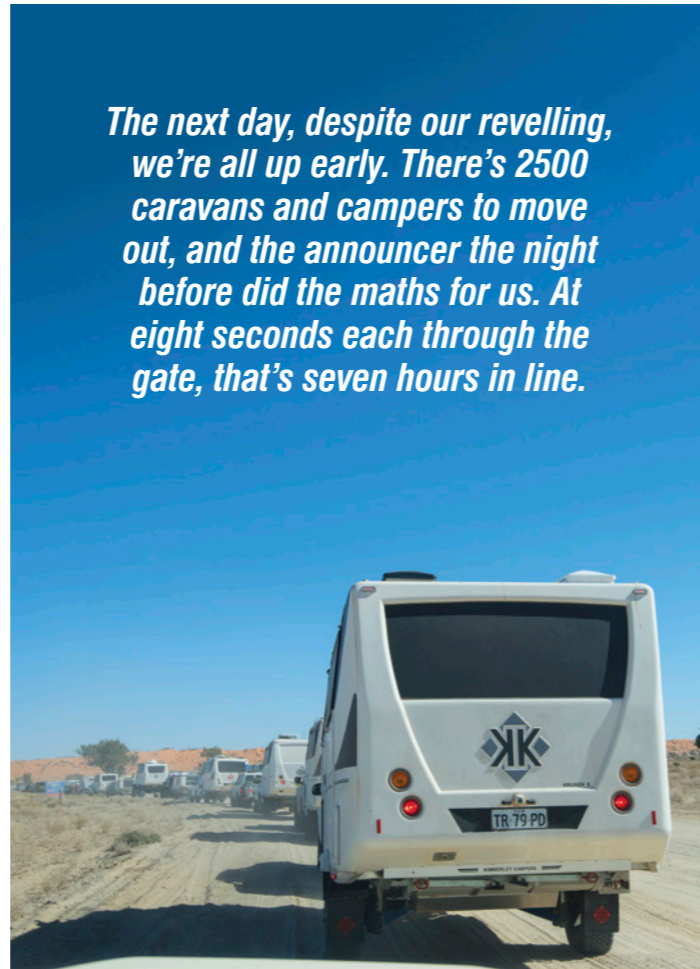
Each night the concert finishes reasonably early. It's cold in the outback nights, and most wander back to camp and campfire for dinner and a few drinks. State of Origin is on, though, so instead of settling down we project game three onto the side of the Kimberley Kamper Unimog and offer one of the best advertisements for the Sat King Promax, fitted to another of the caravans, money could buy. I swear, the

crowd around the Unimog was as thick as the one around the Hoodoo Gurus that night, as Queensland did its best to prevent the Blues taking a clean sweep of the competition.

It's day three we're all looking forward to, though. There's a full day of music to be topped off, presumably, by Daryl Braithwaite singing Horses and Whispering Jack singing the Voice. Anticipation is running high. In fact, John Farnham's bagpiper had actually stood atop Big Red at sunrise and played in the day.

The crowd is massive for both and spills well past the fences of the concert area. Braithwaite's The Horses is massive – I don't think he needed to sing a word of it himself – we the crowd sang it all for him as he held the mic out to us – a useless gesture, we were loud enough without it. John was kind enough to sing along with us all as we belted out the Voice into the cold desert air. If they couldn't hear us in Birdsville, or maybe even Windorah, I'd be a little surprised.

The next day, despite our revelling, we're all up early. There's 2500 caravans and campers to move out, and the announcer the night before did the maths for us. At eight seconds each through the gate, that's seven hours in line. We pack up quickly and make sure we're at the front of it, but I still end up handing out two boxes of magazines to the cars around us so they've got something to read while we wait. It takes us two hours to get to the other side of Birdsville, and we don't hit Windorah until sunset, so much traffic is on the road. And although we're rushing to get home after two weeks in the outback, there's still some great camps to set up in as we do, and time to talk about which route we'll take to get back there next year. 📍



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RA3960

Griffith Region

Plan a trip to Griffith during Spring and experience the charm and hospitality of this cosmopolitan regional city. The days are perfect for exploring, and the Spring Fest program is loaded with fabulous lively events, enticing you outdoors. From delicious long lunches under shady trees - in celebration of our rich Italian heritage, to relaxing in rambling open gardens and attending how to sessions with gardening guru Jason Hodges, there is plenty on offer. Be sure to admire the amazing citrus sculpture display - there's a reclining chook, talking robot and grand piano, and don't miss the festivities and fun at the paella launch party. The 70 plus sculptures, created using 100,000 oranges, line the main street for two weeks making an impressive sight. Visit Griffith Region during Spring Fest 7-20 October 2018.

GriffithSpringFest.com.au

Kingy in bloom!



After Kingscliff's massive foreshore redevelopment we ask a local exactly what's best in Kingy.

Words Liss Connell pics Liss Connell and Jonny Dustow

With the Gold Coast to the north and Byron Bay to the south, the beachside village of Kingscliff can sometimes be outshone by its famous neighbours. But a \$21m facelift to the foreshore has brought a whole new vibe to this coastal village. With endless golden beaches and glorious hinterland, Kingy is the ultimate spot to explore both the Tweed and Byron. Or set up in the holiday park, get on your bike and check out the local sights. In Kingy you can do as much or as little as you like, and best of all, you're never far from the action.

It's a sunny winter's weekend and I'm exploring Kingscliff with my buddy Jonny Dustow. The Dustow family has lived in Kingy for 20 years, originally opposite the beach and now in rural Cudgen. "It was a pretty quiet little beach village when we first moved here," says Jonny. "The population has grown a lot, but Kingscliff has still kept a lovely coastal village atmosphere. It's got a lot more coffee shops and places to eat out. The live music and community markets have grown a lot, providing a fun outing for visitors and locals".

This is one of Kingy's most endearing qualities, its close-knit community and a lively village atmosphere that visitors can really be absorbed into. With many scenic attractions and a caravan park that's conveniently wedged between the CBD and the sea, Kingy is an easy getaway for families, couples and well, pretty much everyone. The \$21m foreshore revitalisation has seen the Tweed Coast Holiday Parks Kingscliff Beach reduce in size by a third, with an increase to seaside convivial spaces. From the caravan park you can walk along the new boardwalk atop the new 500m seawall, which was built in response to severe erosion that has occurred in recent years.



Who doesn't?



Caravan parks don't get more beachfront than this. What a view!



Cudgen Creek is the place to go if you love the water.

LOCALS KNOW BEST

Jonny's top tips:

- 1 Best coffee: Mockingbird
- 2 Best time to visit: Any time of year is good because of the moderate climate. I like spring the best.
- 3 Best day trip from Kingy: Mount Warning for a hike and amazing views. The coastal drive from Kingscliff to Byron Bay is also a beautiful day trip.
- 4 Best spots to grab lunch: Choux Box or Earth Pantry
- 5 Best live music: Kingscliff Beach Hotel or Brothers Bar/Cafe have regular high quality live music. (To see when Jonny's playing check out facebook.com/dustybootsmusic or [instagram/dustybootsmusic](https://instagram.com/dustybootsmusic))
- 6 Best local natural attractions: The beaches; Cudgen Creek for a swim, paddle board or walk; dropping into Farm & Co. to walk around a running fruit and vegetable property.

The boardwalk flows through the new Rowan Robinson Park, which has BBQs, a community stage and big concrete steps down to the beach. There's even a ping-pong table. The park was named in honour of former Cudgen Surf Life Saver, Rowan Robinson, who lost his life while serving in Afghanistan. Community spirit is strong in Kingscliff.

I ask Jonny what his family think of Kingy's facelift and he replies, "We love the new foreshore development as it provides a place for the community and families to spend time together, so close to the ocean here. We would like to see more parking options close to the beach, though, as the town gets busier when more people come to visit". Not a problem if you're camped in the caravan park, though and thankfully, part of the revitalisation project was moving the caravan park's entrance to the northern end of the park to aid in traffic flow through town.

Despite visiting during the low season the holiday park is pretty full, with most of the caravan sites occupied. There are a few accommodation options at Kingscliff Beach Holiday Park, and these can be pre-booked via the park's new online booking system. The beachfront cabins look directly out across the boardwalk, which offers great views of the sea. Going for a surf is as easy as grabbing your board and running across the boardwalk then straight down into the surf.

I spy some big rigs parked up in the southern end of the caravan park and also, further back from the beach, a few tents pitched on the evergreen synthetic grass hemmed in by a lovely wall of native flora. There's a modern camp kitchen and BBQ areas, or if you want to eat out there are many great spots just across the road. If you'd prefer to escape the CBD, Tweed Coast Holiday Parks have another park in Kingscliff North, just 2km from town.

One of the best things about Kingy is that once you're in the CBD or inside the caravan park, you can park up and walk or cycle about. Walking along the boardwalk you'll see plenty of spots where you can jump in for a surf and others that are great fishing spots, including at the river inlet. Continue further and you'll find the gorgeous Cudgen Creek. The water here is crystal clear, perfect for snorkelling or kayaking. On a sunny day, the turquoise coloured water is irresistible and the adjacent Faults Park is the perfect spot for a picnic. Unsurprisingly, this is a family favourite. When the tide's low, the exposed sandbanks are great for the kiddies.

Experiencing Kingscliff with a local means seeing spots that aren't on the tourist radar. Jonny takes me to Farm and Co, a humble farm-come-tourism venture on rural Cudgen Road. After operating as an avocado farm for 30 years, Michele Stevens and Ian Kettle purchased the land in 2002 with a vision to offer wholesome and reasonably priced food to the public. "We grow food without harmful chemicals and we are committed to teaching how to grow, nourish and build healthy communities," says Michele. Even on a winter's weekend and being relatively unknown to folks outside of Kingscliff, cars line up along the fence and people are wandering all around the farm. We walk through rows of vegetables, people lying in hammocks strung up between macadamia trees and children giggling at the pigs and chooks. Walking to the back left-hand paddock, we find ourselves wandering through a labyrinth of golden sunflowers.

At the farm store you can fill a box with veggies, eggs and sourdough. For seasonal fruit, continue on to Tropical



The beaches on the Tweed Coast are stunning year round.

Fruit World. Keep your eyes peeled for honesty boxes along Cudgen Road selling a variety of goodies. The rich volcanic soil of the Tweed Valley is a great place for growers and the region is establishing a reputation as a gourmet food destination. Kingscliff's main street, Marine Parade, offers a smorgasbord of gastronomic delights that are fit for a King. A few favourites include Taverna, serving mouth-watering Greek cuisine; Zanzibar for burgers; and Mockingbird who use ingredients from its own veggie patch and honey from its native beehive. Cudgen Headland Surf Club is great for sunset drinks with a sweet view. For live music, swing by Kingscliff Beach Hotel or Brothers Cafe. You may even see Jonny playing a tune on his sax under the persona of Dusty Boots.

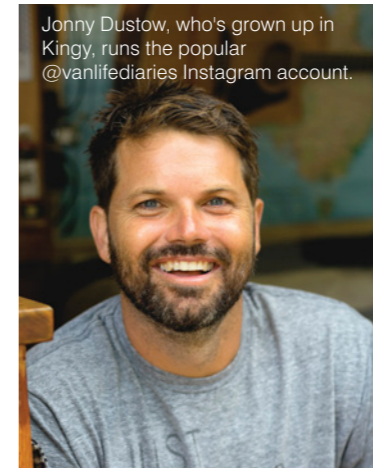
If live music, good food, surfing and fishing aren't keeping you busy enough, there's plenty more to explore around Kingy. The omnipresent silhouette of Wollumbin (Mount Warning) captivates with its unusual shape and towering height of 3,793ft. Many hikers come and do the 4.4km climb to watch sunrise from the summit. For part of the year, it's the first place on the Australian mainland to see the sunrise (during the Autumn and Spring equinoxes). Of course, Wollumbin is alluring at any time. The relic core of an ancient volcano, Wollumbin is a sacred place for the Bundjalung

People, who request that visitors do not climb it. A lovely alternative walk is the Lyrebird Track, taking you through some gorgeous parts of the Gondwana Rainforest that cover the mountain. For sunrise, try the Pinnacle and Blackbutts lookouts in the Border Ranges National Park.

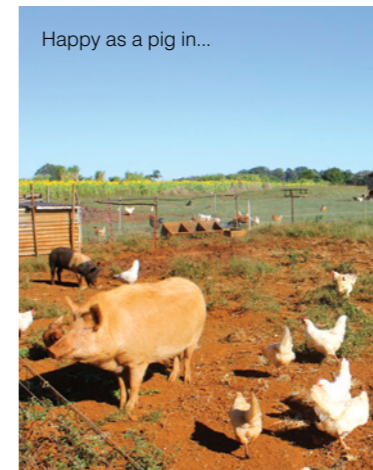
Continuing explorations of Gondwana Rainforest, head north to Springbrook National Park for waterfalls, scenic lookouts and glow-worms. Yep, glow-worms! A great spot to see them is the Natural Bridge, a basalt cave that houses a gorgeous waterfall and also a colony of tiny bent-wing bats. Springbrook National Park encompasses a quarter of the World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforest and is often described as 'the Noah's Ark of rainforests' as it is a sanctuary for many different kinds of wildlife that are endemic to this region, including the rare Albert's Lyrebird.

For some wild encounters of the marine variety, head back toward the coast and grab a boat out to Cook Island off Fingal Head. This relatively unknown spot has amazing snorkelling and diving with an abundance of marine life. The aquatic reserve provides a permanent home for green and loggerhead turtles. You may also see rays, sharks and species of reef and pelagic fish. Jonny reckons the Watersport Guru is the guy to call for watersports rentals and trips to the island (watersportsguru.com). If you still have some energy left, you can cycle the coastal paths from Fingal to Pottsville with many great stop-offs enroute, including historic Fingal Head Lighthouse.

Top off your day with a BBQ and some ping-pong in Rowan Robinson park. And if you hear the smooth sounds of a sax floating out of the Kingy Beach Hotel, be sure to drop in and say g'day to Jonny. While Kingy is no longer the small village that it once was, it certainly remains to be one of the great Aussie surf towns. Come as a stranger, leave as a friend. Community spirit is strong in Kingscliff!



Jonny Dustow, who's grown up in Kingy, runs the popular @vanlifediaries Instagram account.



Happy as a pig in...

Roamin' Facts

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Bundjalung peoples, the traditional custodians of Kingscliff and so pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Best Time to Visit

Any time of year is good because of the moderate climate, although Jonny says Spring is the best.

Where

Kingscliff is less than an hour south of the Gold Coast and about 40 minutes north of Ballina.

Camping

The **Tweed Coast Holiday Parks Kingscliff Beach** is right on the foreshore and has just received a major redevelopment. Its sites are all powered, flat and astro-turfed, but there are few better locations on the east coast. For a quieter experience, **Tweed Coast Holiday Parks Kingscliff North** is just up the road. tchp.com.au or call 1800 234 121

Don't Miss

The stunning beaches, the great foreshore dining, adventures up or down Cudgen Creek and seeing Dusty Boots live on stage.

Best Freebie

The new development of the Kingscliff Beach Foreshore is spectacular, offering a really relaxing place to enjoy by the beach, take relaxing walks and just enjoy the seaside.

More Information

Farm&Co
farmandco.com.au

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Down in Victoria's far southwest you'll find a little piece of paradise. A stretch of shoreline where the Shipwreck Coast meets South Australia's Limestone Coast and the Southern Ocean laps the shores of Discovery Bay Coastal Park. Inland, the Lower Glenelg National Park roughly follows the Glenelg River from its estuary at Nelson up to the South Australian Border and then east, back into Victoria and covering a total distance of about 400 kilometers from its headwaters in the Grampians.

As parks go, the two combined are relatively small, just 55 kilometers of coastline and a total area of only 377 square kilometers, but a real haven for campers, bushwalkers, canoeists and fishermen.

Extending from Portland in the east to the South Australian border in the west, the region is an eclectic assortment of rolling hills, rich farmland, pine plantations, scenic bushland, magnificent beaches and coastal vistas.

For me, the outstanding natural attractions here are the Glenelg River and two of its major features, both created by the river and the abundance of limestone found here. One, the Glenelg River Gorge stretches over 15 kilometers along the lower reaches with imposing limestone cliffs rising as high as 50 meters in places. The other, the magnificent Princess Margaret Rose Cave – the result of river and rainwater seeping through cracks and fault lines in the rock, dissolving it and carving out a subterranean wonderland.

The river was named by Major Thomas Mitchell in 1836 and was described by him as "the finest body of fresh water I had seen in Australia".

The majority of the region is comprised of eucalypt bushland, home to an estimated 700 species of native plants and something of an environmental melting pot – the most westerly point in Australia that tree ferns are found and the most easterly habitat for a variety of plant species most commonly found in Western Australia.

There's an abundance of wildlife – koala's, wombats, brush-tailed possums and yellow-bellied gliders along with red-necked wallabies and the inevitable eastern grey kangaroo.

For bird watchers, the Glenelg estuary is a haven for waders and terns and inland you'll find everything from azure kingfishers, gang gang cockatoos and brush bronzewings to emus and the blue winged parrott.

Then there's the fishing. The Glenelg River provides an exceptional mixed bag of bream, perch, salmon, mullet and mulloway. In fact you'll often hear it referred to as 'mulloway heaven', returning fish averaging about 4kg on a variety of lures, pilchards and live baits. The Discovery Bay Marine Park is a protected area where all methods of fishing are prohibited up to three nautical miles offshore.

Nelson, located on the banks of the Glenelg River, just a couple of kilometers from its mouth, is the unofficial capital of the Discovery Bay/Lower Glenelg region. The first Europeans settled here in 1848 and a punt provided river crossings



on the Portland to Mount Gambier road until a bridge was constructed in 1893.

The town comprises the Nelson Hotel, a general store and kiosk, a BP service station and roadhouse, and a small caravan park. It's also home to a boat and canoe hire business and Glenelg River Cruises who offer a variety of river trips.

No tour of this part of Victoria would be complete without a visit to the Princess Margaret Rose Cave. Reputed to be the most decorated cave per square meter of any in Australia, it features some of Mother Nature's finest work, including stalactites, stalagmites, helictites, cave coral and many rimstone pools.

The cave, some 20 meters underground and about 150 meters long, was formed an estimated 800,000 years ago when river water seeped into a 500 metre long fault line dissolving the limestone and creating calcium carbonate which crystallised when exposed to the air. The spectacular formations within the cave are formed by those crystals and coloured by tannins and minerals from the surface soil carried in by water seepage.

The cave was discovered by a local farmer, Keith McEachern, in 1936. With the help of three friends he lowered himself more than 17 metres down a vertical shaft to discover one of nature's great treasures.

Over the next five years McEachern and his friends dug a stairwell through the limestone and opened the site to the public as a tourist attraction in January 1941.

Walking through the cave you can't help but be amazed by the spectacularly coloured formations and mind-blowing timeframe of their creation, but I must admit to being pre-occupied, wondering whatever possessed a man, having stumbled across a hole in the ground, to tie a rope around his waist and be lowered all that way into a pitch black abyss.

Today, the cave complex includes an information centre and kiosk, landscaped surrounds and camping facilities including on-site cabins and caravan sites. A River View Nature Walk leads down to views of the Glenelg River Gorge and a nearby jetty.

Just a 15-minute drive from Nelson or 30 minutes from Mount Gambier the Princess Margaret Rose Cave is open to the public daily with frequent guided tours lasting about 45-minutes. Glenelg River Cruises run a three-and-a-half-hour return trip between Nelson and the cave site.

When God created the Glenelg River he must have had flatwater canoeists in mind with 75 kilometres of pristine river beckoning between Dartmoor on the Princes Highway and the river mouth near Nelson,

While there are no fast-flowing rapids to contend with, the stretch from Dartmoor to Pines Landing is seasonally



Left: Portland's old Customs House is the oldest continuously used customs house in Australia, in operation for almost 170 years.

Above: The Glenelg River at Nelson. Once described by Major Thomas Mitchell as "the finest body of freshwater I had seen in Australia" and home to boat hire and river cruise operators.

Right & below: Led by Park Rangers visitors to the Princess Margaret Rose Cave descend 20 metres below the surface to inspect the magnificent formations dating back some 800,000 years.



Roamin' Facts

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Gunditjmara and Buanidig people, traditional custodians of the region, and so pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Best Time to Visit

There are attractions here year round. The pick of the weather is in autumn, wildflowers abound in spring and during late winter and early spring migrating whales can be seen from the clifftops at Cape Nelson and Cape Bridgewater. Canoeists and boaties are attracted to the lakes and river during summer but need to be aware of the forest surrounds and ever-present fire danger.

Where

Discovery Bay and the Lower Glenelg region are located in south-west Victoria, between Portland and the South Australian border. Nelson is 427 kilometres west of Melbourne and 470 kilometres south-east of Adelaide.

Camping

There are 50 vehicle accessible camp sites at nine locations within the **Lower Glenelg National Park**, 28 south of the river and 22 to the north. There are also nine canoe dedicated campsites between **Dartmoor** and **Nelson**. All sites must be pre-booked and fees apply. Check the website parkstay.vic.gov.au for details.

Toilets are provided and water is available but must be treated before use. Fires are permitted in fireplaces provided except on days of total fire ban or high fire danger. No pets permitted.

Don't Miss

The incredible Princess Margaret Rose Cave.

Best Freebie

A coastal walk at Cape Bridgewater and whale watching in season.

More Information

parkweb.vic.gov.au
visitvictoria.com

affected by low water and snags. At Nelson the wind off Discovery Bay and incoming tides can often make for very difficult paddling.

Seven of nine dedicated canoe camping areas are within the National Park. Stays are limited to one night, must be pre-booked and cost \$10.80 per person per night. Except on total fire ban or high fire danger days, camp fires are permitted in designated fireplaces. Toilets are provided and water is available but needs to be treated before use.

Vehicle access is available at two of the sites, Pines Landing and Moleside, but other non-dedicated canoe campgrounds and picnic areas along the river are accessible.

This part of Victoria is also very popular with walkers of all levels of ability and fitness, here to engage in short scenic walks or to test their mettle against the Great South West Walk.

This challenging 250-kilometre walking trail begins and ends at Portland's Maritime Discovery and Visitor Information Centre. Easily accessible at a number of points, it includes a series of short looped walks, some taking as little as a couple of hours to complete, with other more advanced treks made up of one, two and three day options.

If you decide to go the whole hog, there are 14 campsites along the full length of the Great South West Walk, the longest distance between camps being 22 kilometres. The trail transits three national parks, parallels the Southern Ocean along rugged cliffs, through sand dunes, bays and beaches past Bridgewater Bay and the Cape Nelson Lighthouse. It follows the Glenelg River for a distance and passes through hardwood forests, Nelson and a number of aboriginal heritage sites. Along the way, and depending on the season, you might be lucky enough to see blue and southern right whales, fur seals and the only Australian mainland rookery for the Australasian gannet.

Not surprisingly the annual GSWW Friends Long Walk over the entire track takes 14-days to complete.

This very scenic part of Australia comes with a long list of activities and attractions that beckon to a broad spectrum of outdoor lovers, primarily remote campers, walkers, fishermen and canoeists. But, if you're more a 'glamper' than a camper the nearby cities of Portland and Mount Gambier offer the perfect, comfortable, some might say indulgent, base camp for a visit to the Discovery Bay and Lower Glenelg region.



The site of the first European settlement in Victoria, Portland today is a major regional city and an important shipping port.

Freedom Of Choice Camping

The location of all 59 campsites plus full details, terms and conditions, fee schedules and on-line bookings for sites within the Lower Glenelg National Park are available through Parks Victoria at www.parkstay.vic.gov.au

River Vu Park, Nelson

River-Vu is a small park located in the centre of Nelson and comprised of just 23 sites (powered/non-powered and en-suite). Just 50 metres from the river and even closer to the pub it offers a private landing for fishing, swimming and boat mooring.

A powered site costs \$29 per night twin share and \$5 per night for each additional person. Site fees remain unchanged year round.

rivervupark.com.au
(08) 8738 4123

NRMA Portland Bay Holiday Park

Portland boasts five caravan parks, three of them in very close proximity to the town centre.

My pick of these was the NRMA Portland Bay Holiday Park located on a cliff-top overlooking the bay and with views to Whalers Bluff Lighthouse.

Accommodation options comprise un-powered, powered and ensuite sites as well as ensuite and waterview cabins.

Un-powered fare from \$29 per night and powered sites from \$35 per night. It is a large, well maintained park in a prime location.

nrmaparksandresorts.com.au
(03) 5523 1487

Blue Lake Holiday Park, Mount Gambier

There are six caravan parks in Mount Gambier and on this occasion we chose to stay at Blue Lake Holiday Park, and what a great choice it was.

Sitting high above Mount Gambier's iconic Blue Lake, the park provided every amenity in relaxed and secluded surrounds.

Accommodation on offer includes un-powered, powered and en-suite sites and a variety of cabins. Un-powered sites from \$35 per night, powered sites from \$39 per night.

bluelake.com.au
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IMAGE COURTESY OF DAVE & FIONA HARVEY - SCAMANDER FOREST RESERVE

Have fork, will travel



A winter long weekend with camp oven cooking, country music and a campfire into the wee small hours. Now that's a winning recipe.

Words and images by David Thorndike

Camping in the middle of winter doesn't happen for a lot of people from the city. It's just too much trouble to head off into the cold when you've got a nice warm home to relax in. For the rest of us though, we know that it doesn't have to be cold and uncomfortable, you just need to plan properly and dress in the right gear, and once you have that sorted, the only thing needed is a great reason to head out. This year, we found several great reasons to head off on the June long weekend to the central west region of NSW and the towns of Cowra and Grenfell.

Pitchfork Festival

The Pitchfork festival was the drawcard for bringing us to Cowra on the long weekend. Promoted as a fun family event centred around a camp oven cooking competition, there is plenty to see and do over the two days including street stalls, a sheep shearing demonstration, kids' activities and live country music performances.

This was the second year of the festival with local motel owner, Nicole Robinson taking over the reins from Garth Collins who came up with the idea in 2017. With over 300 attendees in the first year, a good crowd was expected again this time around, right up 'til the Friday of the long weekend, when the heavens opened and rain came bucketing down for a day and a half. While disappointing to the show organisers and campers, the rain was much needed in this area of the state and was a welcome relief to local farmers.

Still, there were around a hundred hardy people that turned out for the event, including many of us that set-up camp in our caravans, camper trailers and tents at the showground. And what began as a rather damp event, soon did a complete U-turn as the sun came out on Saturday afternoon and the rest of the long weekend was clear and dry. The campfire in the main cooking area was lit and being a good 200 square feet in area (with the logs so big they had to be moved around



SHEEP SHEARING DEMONSTRATION AT THE PITCHFORK FESTIVAL



THE LIVE ENTERTAINMENT WAS GREAT AT WYANGALA FIREWORKS

with a small bulldozer), there was plenty of warmth for anyone looking to relax, have a chat and sample the camp oven roasts that were on offer from the competitors that had set up around the fire's edge.

A few hours, several beers and a dozen new mates later, campers started to head back to their vans and trailers for the night, so they would be ready to get out and explore the local sights the next day.

Henry Lawson Festival

Sunday morning had us up, breakfasted and on the road by mid-morning, heading west to Grenfell, where for the last 61 years on the June long weekend, the town holds a festival to celebrate its most famous resident, Australian poet and short story writer, Henry Lawson.

There is a different theme each year the festival is held, and in 2018 it was 'Poetry in Motion'. This theme is put to use in many of the festival's activities, including the street parades, art exhibitions and school theatre productions.

The Festival begins on the Thursday evening and continues through to the Monday. We hit town before lunch and spent the first hour admiring the hundred or more classic cars on display in the main street, before stopping and supporting one of the local charities with a sausage sizzle lunch.

Other festival events on the Sunday included market stalls, poetry readings, a local art exhibition, and a drama performance by the local Henry Lawson High School.

We opted to take the traditional tourist route after lunch and head over to visit the birthplace of Henry Lawson, marked by an obelisk and with a plated information walk that takes you through his life story, before taking the trip back to Cowra via a stop off at landra Castle.



THE CLASSIC CAR SHOW AT THE HENRY LAWSON FESTIVAL CREATED SOME ENVIDIOUS FEELINGS

Japanese Gardens

The Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre is the 'must-see' attraction in Cowra. Officially opened in 1979, the gardens were built to promote peace and reconciliation between Japan and Australia following the deaths of over 200 Japanese prisoners from the POW camp in Cowra during World War II.

Situated adjacent to the Bellevue Hill Lookout, the gardens are built into five hectares of rocky hillside, and the Japanese designer, Ken Nakajima, has used the natural environment to include stream and waterfalls feeding into two lakes, surrounded by manicured lawns and an amazing variety of Australian and Japanese native trees and plants. There is also an open air tea-house, a traditional Japanese Edo Cottage, and the main cultural centre building that houses a café and an art gallery.

The gardens are open seven days a week from 8.30am to 5.00pm and there is an entry cost of \$15 per person. After visiting the gardens, be sure and drive or walk the 100 metres up to the adjacent lookout and enjoy the views over the whole town.



THE JAPANESE GARDENS ARE INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL



FREE COUNTRY DRIVING TIP: COWS ALWAYS HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY



GUARD TOWER AT THE POW CAMP

landra Castle

Located about 25 minutes south east of Grenfell, landra Castle is only open a few times a year, and is a great opportunity to see how one of Australia's early settlers built himself a magnificent country estate.

Purchased by Mr. George Greene in 1878, the original landra property consisted of 32,000 acres, and at its peak ran 19,000 sheep, 700 horses, produced 10,000 tonnes of wheat, and employed over 350 men. He commenced building the first house on the property on 1880, continually adding and improving until 1908 when the current two-storey, reinforced concrete castle was completed.

The castle is the main attraction and it's a magnificent experience exploring the century old building and its grounds, including the period furniture inside the original rooms, as well as the early machinery and farm implements scattered around the stables and outbuildings. Tours are run by the current owners and are well worth joining for an in-depth history lesson into the origins of the property and what life was like on the land back in the 1800s.

There is a small cost (\$15) to visit the property, and be sure to take cash folding money, as there are no eftpos or credit card facilities on site. We spent a good two hours exploring the castle and outbuildings, and it wouldn't have been difficult to spend a couple more if we had the foresight, like many of the other visitors, to pack a picnic blanket and some afternoon tea and to enjoy the sunshine on the lawn in front of the main house.



LANDRA CASTLE IS A MUST-VISIT DESTINATION FOR HISTORY BUFFS



POW Camp

The Cowra breakout is probably the most famous war event that occurred on Australian soil, together with the Japanese bombing of Darwin. The fact that over 1000 Japanese soldiers orchestrated a mass break out with over 230 being killed, also makes it one of the saddest. The site of the POW camp has been heritage listed, and even though the original buildings and fences have long since been removed, it is still well worth a visit to read through the history described in detail on the signs that have been erected to remember the event.

The site of the POW camp is just a few minutes' drive north of the Japanese Gardens and is best experienced following a stop at the Visitors Centre on Grenfell Road, where you can get a firsthand explanation of the events that occurred from one of the town locals via an informative 'hologram' show. The show lasts for around 10 minutes and is well worth the time. Both the hologram show, and the POW campsite are free to visit.

Bonfire & Fireworks Spectacular

For those of us old enough to remember 'cracker night', the June long weekend was always something to look forward to, so it was a blast from the past to find out the locals at Cowra still liked to celebrate Her Majesty's birthday with a bonfire and fireworks display.

Sponsored by the Wyangala Country Club, the Sunday night event was held at Wyangala Dam, around 30-minute's drive south east of Cowra. With a huge bonfire (under the watchful eyes of the Rural Fire Brigade), live entertainment, a jumping castle for the kids and plenty of food and drink around, it was fantastic end to the long weekend, with festivities kicking off at 4pm and the fireworks going off at 6:30pm. Best of all, it was free entry and still finished early enough that we got back to our campsite at Cowra before 8:30pm to enjoy the last night around our own campfire with a few cold beers.

Monday was a late start, but there was no rush to pack up as we had access to the showground for the whole day (no 10am exit like a normal caravan park), so we had a sleep-in followed by a relaxing breakfast, before heading out the gate at noon to drive back home. Our fellow campers' feedback was unanimous, too. We would all be back again next year.



BONFIRE AND FIREWORKS NIGHT BRINGS BACK CHILDHOOD MEMORIES



Roamin' Facts

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Wiradjuri people, traditional custodians of Cowra, and so pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Best time to visit

An all year-round destination as we had a fantastic time in winter over the June long weekend.

Where

Cowra is located just over 300km west of Sydney with the most direct route being the Great Western Highway over the Blue Mountains to Bathurst and then the Mid-Western Highway to Cowra. Estimated time for this trip would be between four and five hours.

With the rain bucketing down on departure and not looking forward to the possible long weekend traffic through the Blue Mountains, I opted for the longer 400km Hume Highway route from Sydney through to Yass, and then took the Lachlan Valley Way from Yass through to Cowra. This took me four and half hours and I didn't sight a traffic delay at any stage of the trip! Grenfell is a further 55km west of Cowra. A short trip of approximately 40 minutes.

Camping

We stayed at the local showground where the festival was being held, located on Grenfell Road opposite the Visitor Centre. This had been booked out exclusively for the Pitchfork Festival and had both powered and unpowered sites, and access to toilets. A full amenities block was available in the adjacent caravan park which the owner had kindly allowed access for the festival goers. Sites were also available here for those that didn't want to stay at the showground.

Alternative camping arrangements are available at the Cowra Van Park on Lachlan Street. This is right in the centre of the shopping district and backs onto the Lachlan River.

Don't Miss

Cowra Japanese Gardens
cowragarden.com.au
 landra Castle
iandracastle.com.au

Best Freebie

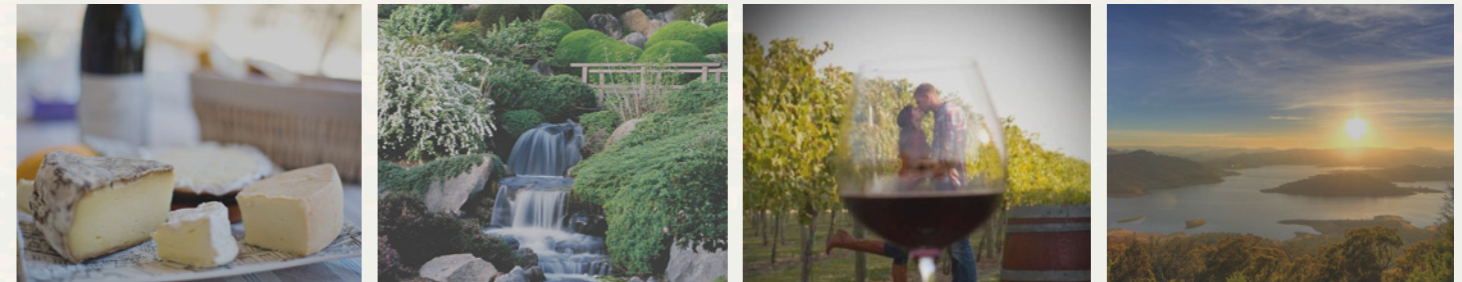
The hologram show at the Cowra Visitor Centre is fantastic. Give yourself a good half hour to see the show and have a look around.

More Information

Cowra Tourism visitcowra.com.au
 Grenfell Tourism grenfell.org.au



head to www.visitcowra.com.au to plan your stay



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www.grenfell.org.au



Towing with an autonomous vehicle

Are we on our way to a world where cars tow caravans while we read magazines?

Words and Photography Brendan Batty



THE BASICS SUBARU OUTBACK 3.6R



MECHANICALS

Engine – 3.6-litre six-cylinder boxer
Power – 191kW @ 6000rpm
Torque – 350Nm @ 4400rpm
Transmission – Lineartronic CVT
Drive – AWD with X-Mode
Fuel economy – 9.9L/100km unladen combined



WEIGHTS

Tare weight – 1673kg
GVM – 2130kg
Max towing – 1800kg
Towball load – 180kg
Payload – 493kg



Price – From \$49,140



Back in issue 31 I took a look at the Subaru Forester and concluded that “You probably wouldn’t consider it for a lap of Australia, but if you head down the coast in summer and to the snow in winter – this is a good option.” I’m still getting emails from people who are doing laps of Australia in their Foresters, but I stand by my supposition, anyway. If I was going to do a lap of Australia in a Subaru, it would be in the 3.6-litre Outback, but that’s not entirely why I’ve been testing it.

There’s been a lot of talk in the media and at board room tables lately about the future of mobility. For those of us who don’t care to speak in corporate jargons, people are trying to work out how we’ll get around in the future. Vehicle developments like those from Tesla or self-driving cars from Google and ride-share company Uber are some of the most significant voices. The momentum, as it seems, is towards a world where environmentally friendly cars drive themselves and vehicles are shared, rather than owned. To hear some

companies talk, we’ll be giving up steering wheels for a good book by 2021.

But what is often left out of the conversation (apart from realistic time-frames) is what autonomous or self-driving cars will look like for recreational road-users. According to the narrative of those heading the development, driving is a chore and people can’t be trusted to drive safely anyway. While both those things are often true, that’s not always the case, obviously. People like you and I that actually like driving, don’t mind the monotony of it, or even the thrill of it, can’t dream of a time when we wouldn’t take the wheel and head off into the great unknown (or the caravan park we migrate to each winter – whatever).

The Subaru Outback is not an autonomous vehicle, but it does have some autonomous features. Subaru’s EyeSight technology is a set of cameras monitoring the road ahead and feeding information back to various systems in the vehicle. As well as the reasonably common ability of adaptive cruise

control (a function that slows the car down if the car in front slows down), EyeSight also monitors the vehicle’s position on the road and tells the car if it’s leaving its lane. Further than that, the car will actually offer a steering input and actively keep the car on the road, without driver intervention. Essentially, on some stretches of road it can maintain a safe distance behind the vehicle in front and keep its own lane, even through bends and some corners, without the person behind the wheel doing a thing. (Note – of course I know that it’s irresponsible to let a car drive for you)

In real life, this technology is really interesting, even if it’s a little spooky the first time you encounter it. Driving down a road with well-defined lines marking the edges of each lane, the Outback recognises them and will offer steering input as you turn through bends or give a slight nudge of the wheel if you get too close to the edge. It’s possible to (if you’ll excuse this crude example) have the car drive down the road like it’s in a bumper bowling lane at the local 10-pin alley.

Of course, the car’s not happy if you let it do that – it’ll beep incessantly at you until you offer a steering input of your own to reassure it that you actually are still driving and in control. There’s also a limit to what it can do. It can’t take you around anything more than a slight curve in the road, so if you’re stupid enough to trust it and come across a significant bend, you will definitely crash spectacularly.

If you’re concerned that a car offering its own steering inputs puts you at risk of the car causing a crash, let me allay your concerns. It can always be overpowered, and the inputs are always slight. If you want to cross a lane marker, the car will let you do it. If you want to drive off the road, it’s easy, just steer off it, and even if the car doesn’t think it’s a good idea, the wheel’s yours and so are the consequences.

The system also works reasonably proficiently with a caravan on the back. The adaptive cruise control’s ability to slow down both car and van is not hindered just because a computer does it. Just like when you press the brake pedal, the caravan’s weight affects braking performance and so more caution is needed – so a more cautious cruise control setting can be selected which will maintain a larger distance between two vehicles.

Similarly, as a caravan’s weight affects steering performance, so it does when the lane keeping technology is the one doing the steering. Mind you, as the Subaru’s towing capacities are so modest, the effect is minimal. The car, as a result, holds its corrections a little longer, and seemed more likely to hit the ripple strip. Still, it never caused the caravan to sway or spear off the road – the corrections it makes are too gentle for that.

Which is interesting, because here is a car, within reasonable reach of many Australians’ aspirations and finances, that has some ability to autonomously tow a caravan. It’s not the only one, either. The latest Ford Rangers have similar abilities, as do a suite of small to medium SUVs. Combine that with the fact that some Volkswagens and Range Rovers have the ability to reverse park a trailer and we’ve covered off some of the significant challenges of Australian road travel – travelling long distances safely and not embarrassing ourselves when it comes time to reverse the van into a campsite.

Is it too much to imagine, that combined with some of the modern caravan safety systems, like AL-KO’s Electronic Stability Control or Bosch’s yet-to-be-released Trailer Safety Control (which adds an ABS function to caravan braking), cars and caravans could talk to each other while trundling themselves down the road to camp? It doesn’t seem so far-fetched to me.

Of-course there are limitations. A significant portion of Australia’s road network doesn’t have marked lanes, hard edges or even bitumen. Plenty of it isn’t even well mapped by the GPS systems in most modern vehicles’ navigation systems. And for many of us, they are exactly the roads we’d like to be driving on. And although Elon Musk has tweeted that he’d like the Tesla pick-up truck to have 300,000lb towing capacity and a 400-500-mile range, battery technology has a long way to go.

Still, what we have got in vehicles like the Subaru Outback is great technology, even with its limitations. It’ll quietly and calmly make driving and towing safer, less fatiguing and ultimately more enjoyable. And if you don’t like it, well, you can always just turn it off.

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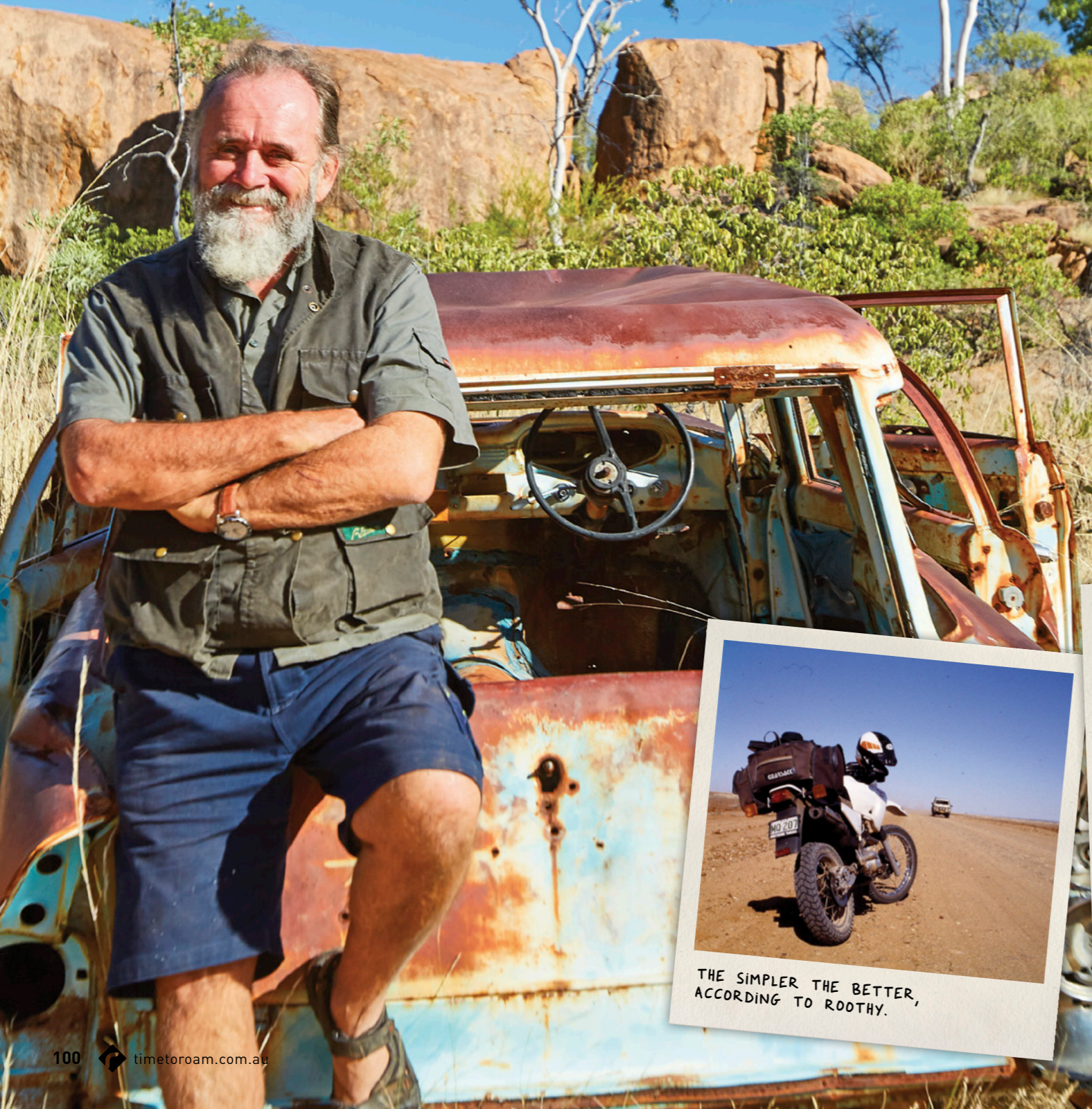
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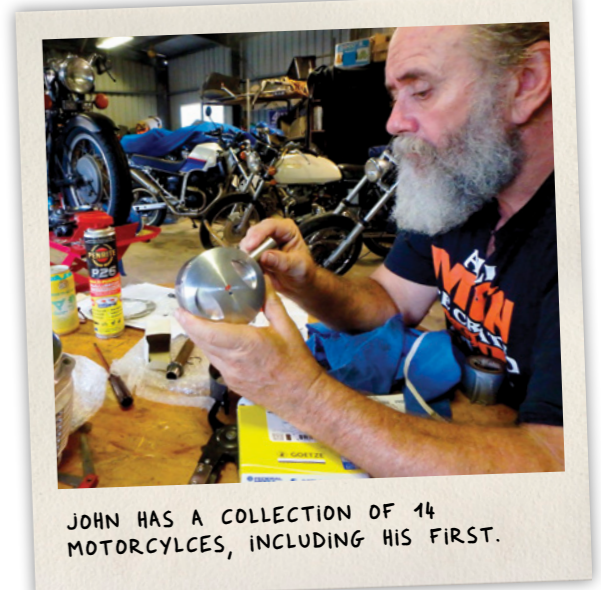
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John Rooth



Roothy needs little introduction for most people interested in caravanning and camping in Australia. As one of the most prominent four-wheel driving and camping journalists and entertainers, John's career as what seems to be a professional camper is enviable. Recently I got the chance to catch up with John while he was tinkering in his shed and find out what life and camping have been like off the camera.



JOHN HAS A COLLECTION OF 14 MOTORCYCLES, INCLUDING HIS FIRST.

Brendan: I still remember reading your articles about four-wheel driving and camping in Australia when I was a teenager, which is part of why I bought a four-wheel drive and started to go camping. Did you ever think, when you were writing about this stuff, that you'd be so influential?

John: Only recently, actually, and because so many people like you have mentioned that in passing and I suppose the last five or ten years I've been hearing it and it makes me feel really proud. If a bloke ever had a legacy, what a wonderful legacy to have.

It was never meant to be like that – it was just me doing what I liked doing and what I've always done and somehow out of that, this other growth happened and it's just wonderful.

I think there's an awful lot of people, 20 years younger than me who don't know what a dirt road is. When I was a kid, all roads were dirt until you got just outside of Adelaide, and then probably for the next 20 years most of the highways still had big components of dirt. You'd leave Brisbane and it was dirt after 15 miles when I was 17 going north, and now we've got a motorway. It's a different world. But it's still all there because it's such a big country.

Brendan: Were there any people that influenced your love for the Aussie bush and camping?

John: The Leyland Brothers would be the best-known influence, and I think they influenced a lot of people. I remember them, in their early 20s, coming through our property in the northern Flinders Ranges and that was pretty amazing. We had a big barbeque for them and they filmed some of it. And I guess the Aboriginals I grew up with, because as a young kid you are very influenced. The way they'd just meld into the country and feel right at home, that was a big thing for me.

Brendan: What sort of camping did you do as a kid?

John: We used to go out mustering, and we didn't even think of it as camping. That was basically just sleeping next to a fire and drinking black tea with sugar and eating damper and tins and a fair bit of horse riding. Most of my camping after that came about when I was old enough to get a licence, which was 16 in my case, and the only way I could afford to do the big mileages I wanted to do was to camp out in the bush.

Brendan: So much of your public camping life has been on trips for magazines or DVDs or with sponsors – do you do much travel with your family, and what are those trips like?

John: When the kids were little we used to go tenting and then we bought a camper trailer and a lot of our family camping trips have been to nice places – beaches and things like that. The funniest thing, really, is the fact I'd come home from a trip (where I've been away for a month sleeping in a wet canvas bag) and I would always plan the trips so I'd be home for school holidays. I'd come home, they'd have the camper trailer ready and we'd turn around and be straight out the gate.

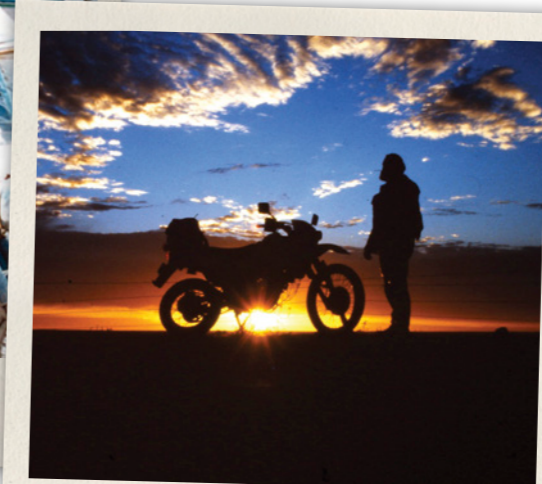
We've done a lot of camping, although it's evolved, like most family camping. All my kids have got licences, except for the youngest, he's on his way, and so now they're all sleeping in swags, so we'll be selling the camper fairly soon, because we sleep in swags too, Karen and I.



THE SIMPLER THE BETTER, ACCORDING TO ROTHY.



A YOUNG JOHN ROTH TOURING INDONESIA.



JOHN SAYS HE'S MOST ALIVE WHEN MOTO-TOURING.



JOHN AND THE GREEN TOYOTA THAT HELPED MAKE HIM FAMOUS.



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JOHN SAYS THAT TRAVELLING WITH HIS WIFE KAREN IS A DISTINCT PLEASURE.



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MILO IN ITS ELEMENT AND GETTING A HARSH WASH DOWN.

You sort of evolve through the camper stage and come out the other end. But I'll never buy a caravan.

Brendan: You've had a couple of caravans in your time, haven't you?

John: I built them as projects for Caravan and Motorhome magazine. Yeah, I like caravans, it's just not what I would choose to do in my own... dotage. Karen doesn't need it, and I would rather spend my money on a pub in town – I love staying in little country pubs, and I love staying out in the bush. So the combination of that makes for a pretty relaxing trip.

Brendan: For almost as long as I've been reading your articles or watching you on videos, Karen's been referred to as the Handbrake, but I imagine she's anything but, given your lifestyle. How much of what you do is possible because of the support she gives you?

John: All of it, in our married life. We've just clocked up 25 years and we were together for a year before we got married and I'm really lucky because she's quite a bit younger than me. She's from a family where her father was a ship's engineer so he was away six weeks, home six weeks, so she's always been used to the man of the house being away and that has made my life possible, to be honest.

She's always happy to see me come home, but six weeks later my bags are packed and she's wondering where I'm going to be going next.

Brendan: Is she just as happy to see you leave, by any chance?

John: Yes, of course! She gets the place in order and cleans up. She's brought the kids up, really. I've always planned the rest of my life so I can pick them up from school when I'm home, that kind of thing, but it's all possible because of her.

The funny thing is, I came up with the Handbrake concept

early in the piece, but we used to lie there in bed and all those funny columns where I'd heap shit on her, basically she'd come up with half the ideas for those. She's got a great sense of humour. So, it's been very much a shared life.

Brendan: Karen pops up in a couple of your more recent videos. Is it nice to be able to travel with her for 'work'?

John: Yes, it is, it's great. Because of the nature of what we're doing now – we're basically YouTube, social media eyeball grabbers and all that, and she does all the editing. She's a graphic artist by trade so to come along on the trip if you're the editor is obviously of paramount importance – she's essentially the producer for what we do now.

All those years, and you probably know this from your own travels, if you are somewhere on a work trip and it's somewhere really nice, normally the first thought is that 'I wish the kids and the wife could see this.' It's one thing to see something with your colleagues and mates on a work trip, it's another to share it with those closest to you. And that's what we're trying to do now.

Brendan: You've had a couple of famous four-wheel drives, in particular Milo and now Milo 2, what else is in your shed at the moment?

John: Pretty much everything I've got is pre-1984. I've got the yellow Troop Carrier, which is our family vehicle. A 1984 mustard truck. And I've got a 1950 Mark V Jag I built about 15 years ago. It took me about 10 years to do it. That's just a car I've always wanted to own. There's a World War II Jeep which I restored with a locking rear diff and better suspension and a couple of mods just to make it useable. I haven't used it yet, really off-road, but I will be. And there's 14 motorcycles. I love bikes, they're all old.

There's a bike here, a Matchless 500 which I rode to school when I was 16. I've still got it. There's a BMW here that I bought when I was 18, I've still got that, and my number one bike is a 1994 Harley I bought when we made some money mining opals, and I still ride it. I love my old bikes.

Brendan: It's no real secret that you do a lot of motorbike touring. What is it that you like about it so much?

John: Bikes are just fun They give you a real sense of freedom and a real connection with the environment. I don't have air-conditioning in any of my vehicles anyway, but just the freedom of a motorcycle is really quite an awesome thing when you're touring. Our tour groups would go from Cairns to the Tip in two days on Yamaha TTR250s. And we could do that in three days in the wet season. You can't do that with a four-wheel drive – you can't even get through in the wet season. But there are places you can go rapidly on a trail bike that take a long time in a truck – even a really well-equipped truck.

It's just the freedom, the fact that it doesn't cost very much, so you can go a long way for not very much. For me, the best sort of touring is the simplest. I don't like it to be complicated. I don't like to take a tonne of stuff and I guess that's where bikes come into their own too, because you're a bit limited in what you could take.

Brendan: If you had to choose between a trip in Milo or a trip on the bike, which would it be?

John: Oh, that's an impossible question, Brendan. I love my four-wheel drives, and I love Milo particularly, but Milo's got over a million kays on her now, so that's why we built Milo 2. I'm actually still in two minds as to what to do with Milo. Its next trip could possibly be to the transport museum. But back to the question, it would depend entirely on who was going and what the trip was about.

Brendan: What are you up to now? What are your own projects?

John: We are working on our YouTube subscribers. We've built that up to nearly 25,000. I work for Channel 7, doing Creek to Coast up here and I do a radio program every week and those sorts of things create the eyeballs, which brings in enough sponsorship to make it all pay. It's basically what I've always done, but I don't need the company structure. There's a lot of places I want to fill in on that map, too.

Brendan: From the outside, your life looks incredible and amazing. Is it always easy, is it always incredible?

John: No, it's been a lot of hard work. You only ever show people the good parts and it's been a helluva lot of 24/7 work, which I love because it keeps me doing what I love doing, but it's not a life for everyone and the life away from home, specifically, you'd need exactly the right sort of home to get away with that. I wouldn't change any of it, though.

Brendan: If you retired, what would retirement look like for you?

John: We're going to drive my old 84 Toyota to remote places in the bush and spend a bit longer camping than I got to while I was working. So, I'm not really going to change anything other than I'll be paying for it myself!

I probably couldn't see myself hooking up a caravan and doing a lap as a grey nomad. Because I don't really need a caravan to do what I do and go to the places I like to go. Caravans are fantastic, they're especially good for people who aren't as comfortable sleeping out, but I'm not sure. I think if I was going to do that it would be in something like a Hiace or a HiLux with a little camper on the back. In fact, I've been contemplating that lately. But a good roof-top tent, or a swag is more sort of my end of it. I'm one of those people who sees \$80,000 for a caravan and thinks I could go around Australia for three years on \$80,000.

If you want to see more of what Roothy (and the Handbrake) is up to these days, check out his YouTube channel and social media account. There's hours of great content, and best of all, it's all free. Find out all the details at roothy.com.au

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Melbourne dealer making its mark



Joe is the avid camper among the three and for that reason is usually the first person that new customers speak to when arriving at the showroom or walking in to the stand at one of the many caravan shows they exhibit at.

Do you remember when you bought your first new car? Like many people, you probably knew that you wanted something reliable and comfortable that would get you where you needed to go and back again without a hitch. You also would have had a clear idea of what features were important to you such as air conditioning, maybe a Bluetooth stereo, possibly seven seats if you had a large family, or perhaps even the ability to tow over two tonnes if you are a caravanner. Those were the easy decisions to make.

What a lot of people are less sure of is the actual quality of the brands, such as whether a Toyota is more reliable than a Nissan, is Holden more popular than Ford for a reason? Are the newer car companies making in-roads in Australia, such as Kia and Skoda, just as good as the well-established brands? These are the more difficult questions to find a straight answer on, and for many people, their final decision may come down to how comfortable they feel with the dealer at the sales yard, and if they trust what they are being told.

When choosing a new caravan you will come up against the same challenges. After having a good look around, you will find that there are many small manufacturers in Australia that are all producing very similar caravans on paper. The brochures will show you similar layouts and features, similar tare weights for

similar length vans, and a similar list of added extras that they can add to the van to up the level of comfort and convenience almost to what you experience at home.

So again it can come down to the people at the dealership and how comfortable you feel with them, and if you have shopped around a bit, you will have noticed that just because a company tells you they are selling a high-quality product, that doesn't mean you're not being led around the garden path. So how do you know who you can trust when it comes to one of your life's major purchases, such as a new caravan?

Well, this is where Fabio, Joe and Cettina from Melbourne City Caravans have decided to stamp their mark. They have set out to become above all else, a team that people can turn to and get a straight answer on, for anything they need in relation to their caravan purchase.

Started as a family business in April 2016, they did an exhaustive search on many of the caravan manufacturers in Melbourne before settling on the Grand Salute range for their dealership. According to Fabio, what first sold them about these vans was the passion and attention to detail of the four brothers that hand built each and every one of them. Unlike many of the larger companies, each of the

builders of Grand Salute have a specialised role in the manufacturing process and are hands-on with the tools on a daily basis. As Fabio said, "This, together with the comprehensive quality control process that they had put in place, ensured to us that each van that rolled off the line was guaranteed to be built to the highest quality, and if we were going to put our name and reputation behind something, we wanted that level of hands-on involvement from the manufacturers." Also, being entirely Australian made in Melbourne, meant they were backed by a comprehensive warranty and if a problem did occur, it could be fixed locally or in some instances, nationally and without a fuss.

Cettina was particularly impressed with the level of appointment within the vans, stating that most of the inclusions in a Grand Salute are usually only available as optional extras with many other brands. With a 20 year background in bookkeeping, having a focus on the bottom line comes as second nature to Cettina, and she immediately saw the value over similarly equipped caravans on the market.

Joe is the avid camper among the three and for that reason is usually the first person that new customers speak to when arriving at the showroom or walking in to the stand at one of the many caravan shows they exhibit

at. With a background in car sales, Joe is very hands on in making sure that potential new owners are made fully aware of what they are capable of towing with their current tow vehicle, as well as being able to share his knowledge of anything camping and caravanning that first timers may want to know about. As Joe says, "There are no silly questions when you are learning about caravans for the first time, and he is happy to spend whatever time is needed with customers to understand their individual needs and requirements."

Fabio is the more technically-minded of the three – having come from a building and construction background, he has a great deal of insight into the manufacturing processes and is happy to discuss anything from the internal construction of the vans, chassis design, the difference in tow hitch set-ups, electric brake controllers, sway bars, appliances and add-ons, power and heating options and anything else that people are curious about.

With a showroom in Somerton, Victoria, call in and meet the Melbourne City Caravans team anytime Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm or Saturday from 10am to 4pm, or see the Grand Salute range first on their website melbournecitycaravans.com.au

OUTBACK TOWING

How to tow any caravan or drive any motorhome into the outback and back out again.

Words and pics Brendan Batty

To avoid disaster

Although Australia is constantly being opened up by improving highways and better infrastructure, the truth is, there's still plenty of it only accessibly by driving on really terrible roads. And those places that are only accessible after a day's corrugations are also giving us reason to come more often. Birdsville, for example, which was only popular once a year for the Races, now has a few events where nearly 10,000 people descend on its service stations, pub and bakery to camp nearby.

If you are to walk through the campground at the most recent Big Red Bash, you'd notice that it's not just the domain of off-road caravans, 4WDs and camper trailers. Camped alongside modified SUVs are station wagons towing Adrias, an old Kingswood with what looks like 250kg of gear on the roof, and

a veritable swag of Jayco Conquests and Fiat Ducato based motorhomes which are just not designed for 'off-road use'. On the other hand, 40-kilometres east of Birdsville is the wreck of a semi-off-road caravan – the type specifically designed to be towed to outback towns like this. It is sprawled all over the road, the prognosis, from gossip in town, that the driver had just been going too fast and couldn't react to an obstacle in time. They were lucky the caravan sheared the tow hitch off and didn't take the car with it.

So how is it that decidedly on-road caravans and motorhomes can make it over 400km of terrible outback road, but an outback caravan did not? Really, it's just a few simple precautions that don't cost a cent.



PRECAUTION 1



Outback roads are dusty, and dust is hard to see through. Headlights will not improve your vision through the dust in front of you, but they'll help other vehicles see you much earlier. On some dusty roads, especially when travelling in convoy, visibility can be less than a vehicle length in front of you, but another vehicle's two bright headlight dots will be visible far earlier. Helping others not crash into you makes sure you both get to camp safely.

PRECAUTION 2



Going slower is safer, but that's not only why you should do it in the outback. Going slower puts less strain on your caravan or motorhome because it has more time to deal with the corrugations and stones that make the track so rough. Your shock absorbers and tyres will have more time to dissipate heat (heat is mainly what kills them both), and you'll have more time to pick out the less rough parts of the road.

For all vehicles, there's a point where the speed and roughness sort of even out – where the wheels skip over the corrugations, rather than drive in and out of them. Once you hit this point (which varies, but is often around 70km/h), it can be tempting to keep going faster as this'll continue to make the road seem smoother. Remember, though, that if you are skipping over the road, rather than driving on it, you're steering and braking abilities will be hindered severely. Expect to need more than double the stopping distance, as compared to a bitumen road.

PRECAUTION 3



In the outback where traffic is light and roads are often just suggestions rather than well-defined highways, it can be tempting to stray all over it finding the best surface. Often, that's just what you'll need to do and when visibility is good, there's no problem. When there's dust or trees or corners or crests, though, stick to the left because this is Australia, and that's where we drive. If everyone does it, no one will ever hit anyone else head on.

When it comes to overtaking, though, often it's not safe to do so on the right because of where the dust is being blown. If you do need to overtake, contact the driver ahead on the UHF and let them know that you'd like to. They can then tell you when it's safe to do so, and also which side would be best.

PRECAUTION 4



LET YOUR TYRES DOWN OR THEY'LL BE LET DOWN FOR YOU

There is simply no more cost-effective modification you can make to your caravan or motorhome than to let some air out of the tyres when the road gets rough or soft. Not only will it improve the comfort of the drive, it will reduce the likelihood of you getting a flat tyre or breaking your wine glasses. Tyres with less pressure in them, like a balloon, are softer and more malleable, so they'll bend around rocks and sharp objects rather than bouncing off them harshly (best case scenario) or being punctured by them (worst-case scenario). Lower tyre pressures will also increase traction on rough roads.

On outback roads, I'd normally drop my tyre pressures by 10 to 15psi from what I was running on the road. If you have a motorhome with dual rear wheels, make sure you don't deflate so far that the two tyres can touch, as this will likely cause them to puncture.

PRECAUTION 5



ADD STONE PROTECTION BECAUSE IF A STONE CAN HIT IT, IT WILL

Given the damage tally on the nine vehicles I recently travelled to Birdsville with, flying stones certainly caused the most – damaged tailgates, a broken caravan window, chipped windscreens, a hole in an alloy rim, plus plumbing, Anderson plugs and pressurised air lines all suffered under a constant barrage of gibber stones.

Stones will find their way everywhere, although stones hitting the front of the camper or caravan and rebounding into the rear windscreen or tailgate is a common issue that can lead to insurance worthy damage. Taping corflute or cardboard to the rear windscreen is a common and satisfactory solution, although there are a number of mesh or mud-flap type aftermarket solutions that are worth looking into.

PRECAUTION 6



LEARN BASIC FIXES LIKE HOW TO RATCHET STRAP STUFF

In the outback, things break. Whether that's from a stone hitting an air-line or a bolt rattling itself loose or just a tyre getting a puncture, if you are able to make simple, or at least temporary repairs, the cost of the damage will be far less. It's an extreme example, but the recovery cost of a vehicle on the Canning Stock Route can be well into the tens of thousands of dollars, but if you can limp into a town, it might just cost you a few nights in a cabin as you wait for a part to show up. If you are going to travel outback dirt roads, make sure you know how to change a tyre, fix basic electrical faults (like broken plugs), bolt things back on and have some basic gear on hand to strap things back together temporarily. And if you do break down, pull off the road onto the side away from the dust. Not only will it help people see you, fixing things in a cloud of dust is just plain lousy.

PRECAUTION 7



KEEP DUST OUT AS BEST YOU CAN, ANYWAY

As a general rule, caravans are not dust proof. Not even close. With gas vents and air vents and that roof hatch you accidentally left open, dust will find its way in. I've even seen a compartment fill with dust because a pop-rievet had a pin-prick hole through the middle of it which caused dust to be sucked in due to the venturi effect. If your caravan or motorhome has any plumbed gas appliances in it, then the easiest thing to do is cover all the vents by taping cardboard over them. Tape around each of the windows will also help keep dust out. Just remember to take them all off at camp, as those vents are designed to prevent you dying from carbon-monoxide poisoning while you sleep.

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hmbe.com.au From \$305



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thetford-europe.com/au



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offroadsystems.com.au



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CARAVAN SHOWS

Queensland Outdoor Adventure & Motoring Expo

Toowoomba Showgrounds
August 3-45. Entry is \$12 for adults and \$10 for concession card holders.
adventureexpo.com.au

Mid North Coast Caravan, Camping, 4WD, Fish & Boat Show

Wauchope Showground
August 10-12. Entry is \$15 for adults, \$11 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
ruralscene.com.au/mid-north-coast

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Fraser Coast Expo

Maryborough Showgrounds
August 17-19. Entry is \$12 for adults, \$10 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
frasercoastexpo.com.au

National 4x4 & Outdoor Show

Melbourne Showgrounds, Ascot Vale
August 17-19. Entry is \$19 for adults and \$14 for concession card holders.
4x4show.com.au/melbourne

Rockhampton Expo

Rockhampton Showgrounds
August 24-26. Entry is \$12 for adults, \$10 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
rockhamptonexpo.com.au

Border Caravan & Camping Expo

Wodonga Racecourse
August 24-26. Entry is \$13 for adults and \$11 for concession card holders.
borderexpo.com.au

Townsville Expo

Reid Park, Townsville
August 31- September 2. Entry is \$12 for adults, \$10 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
townsvilleexpo.com.au

Hawkesbury Caravan, Camping, 4WD, Fish & Boat Show

Racecourse Rd, Richmond NSW
September 7-9. Entry is \$15 for adults, \$11 for concession. Kids \$0
ruralscene.com.au/hawkesbury

AND HERE!



Sunliner 60th Anniversary Rally

Tuncurry Beach Holiday Park, Tuncurry NSW
August 31- September 2
Join with the vintage community and celebrate this milestone event, Sunliner's 60th Anniversary. Bring your own van and stay for the weekend to compare notes or drop in for the day and enjoy the celebrations and stories.
northcoastholidayparks.com.au

VINTAGE CARAVAN MEETS

Tas Outdoor, Boat & Caravan Show

Launceston Silverdome
September 7-9. Entry is \$15 for adults and \$12 for concession card holders. Children under 17 are free.
tasoutdoorshow.org.au

Orana Caravan, Camping, 4WD & Fish Show

Dubbo Showgrounds
September 14-16. Entry is \$15 for adults, \$11 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
ruralscene.com.au/orana

AND ALSO HERE!

Cleveland Caravan, Camping and 4WD Expo

Redland Showgrounds, Cleveland
September 21-23. Entry is \$12 for adults, \$10 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
clevelandexpo.com.au

Central Coast 4WD, Caravan, Camping & Boat Show

Mingara Recreation Club, Mingara Dr, Tumbi Umbi
September 28-30. Entry is \$10-\$12 for adults, \$8-\$10 for concession card holders and \$5-\$6 for children aged 5-16.
grimmopromotions.com.au

Melbourne Leisurefest

Sandown Racecourse
October 4-7. Entry is \$16 for adults and \$13 for concession card holders.
melbourneleisurefest.com.au

Sunshine Coast Home Show & Caravan, Camping & Boating Expo

Sunshine Coast Stadium, Bokarina
October 12-14. Entry is \$12 for adults, \$10 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
sunshinecoastexpo.com.au

Sydney 4WD and Adventure Show

Western Sydney International Dragway, Eastern Creek
October 12-14. Entry is \$18 for adults, \$14 for concession card holders and \$9 for children.
sydney.4wdshow.com.au

Toowoomba Expo

Toowoomba Showground
October 19-21. Entry is \$12 for adults, \$10 for concession card holders and children under 16 are free.
toowoombaexpo.com.au

MUST VISIT EVENTS!

VICTORIA

August 2-19

Melbourne International Film Festival

Take part in one of the film industry's most prestigious events and enjoy feature films, documentaries, short stories and more from makers all across Australia and the world. Prices and locations vary.
miff.com.au

August 24- September 2

Melbourne Writers Festival

Let the world of literature come to life before your eyes at the iconic Melbourne writer's festival. With talks and workshops by some of your favourite authors and artists including the ever-popular Dr Karl Kruszelnicki and a fantastic program put together just for children, there is sure to be something for everyone. Passes are available online from \$79.
mwf.com.au



September 1-30

Spring Racing Carnival

Experience the colour and excitement of Spring with good food, great fashion and loads of entertainment at the Spring Racing Carnival. Whether you come to pick a winner or just want to show off your

best hat, a good time is almost certainly guaranteed at any one of the scheduled events spanning across the entire month of September.

Prices and locations may vary.
springracingcarnival.com.au

October 3-21

Melbourne International Art Festival

Immerse yourself in the colour and sound of Melbourne at this year's art festival celebrating everything from painting to dance and all forms of self-expression in between.

Festival.melbourne

NEW SOUTH WALES

August 10 - 27

Australian Surf Festival

The annual surfing event taking place on the Tweed Coast will see over 500 competitors from across all disciplines including short board, longboard, loggers and body board. Pick a favourite and watch as they take a shot at becoming Australian champion.
australiansurfestival.com.au

September 7-9

Broken Heel Festival

Get ready to party darlings with plenty of comedy, cabaret, live music and social activities at this year's Broken Heel Festival. Bring you boa and join in the drag or sit back and watch the hilarity from the sidelines. With headlining act Christine Anu this year is sure to be a big one.
bhfestival.com

September 22

Flavours of Mudgee

This free community street festival celebrates the local growers and producers from around the area and showcases the wonderful food and

wine offerings they have to bring to the community.

flavoursofmudgee.com.au

September 29

Woolgoolga Curry Fest

Celebrating the town's Punjabi heritage, enjoy a day filled with Indian dress, music and dancing as well as over 180 food and market stall including curries from all over the world.

curryfest.com.au



October 7 - 20

Griffith Spring Fest

Come be part of this festival celebrating the annual orange harvest in Griffith. With a focus on gardening, art (check out the citrus sculptures) and starting off with a huge Main Street launch party, there is plenty to see and do at this two week event.

GriffithSpringFest.com.au

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

September 15 to October 15

Floriade

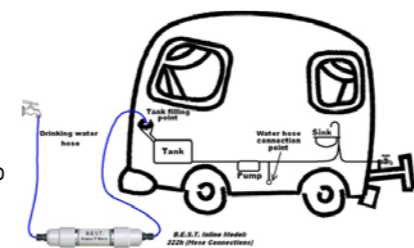
Over a million bulbs planted over 8000 square meters of Canberra will bloom spectacularly come September, for the 31st edition of Australia's largest flower festival. Come for the flowers, stay for the music, food stalls and entertainment.
floriadeaustralia.com

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September 21 to 23

Canberra Moon Festival

The capital's most anticipated multicultural festival, Canberra will be transformed over three days showcasing the best of multi-Asian culture, entertainment, and of course, food. facebook.com/canberramoonfestival

QUEENSLAND

August 8 and 9

Isa Street Festival and Mount Isa Mines Rotary Rodeo

Over two feature packed days, Isa transforms into a bustling outback hub celebrating all the best of the Queensland outback. Join in the fun of the Street Festival then back up the following day for the Rodeo. mountisa.qld.gov.au

August 24 to 26

Cunnamulla Fella Festival

Join thousands of other travellers as they honour the bush spirit of Slim Dusty's Cunnamulla Fella with a weekend of bull-riding, country music, live entertainment and great camping. cunnamullafellafestival.com.au



August 31 to September 1

Birdsville Races

Australia's biggest and most prestigious outback racing meet, the Birdsville Races is a bucket-list event. Join 6000 other travellers for the 'Melbourne Cup of the Outback'. birdsvillerraces.com

September 28 to 29

Karumba Anglers Classic

After it was postponed due to flooding earlier in the year, the Karumba Anglers Classic returns over the Queens Birthday Long Weekend bigger and better than ever. karumba.qld.au/events

NORTHERN TERRITORY

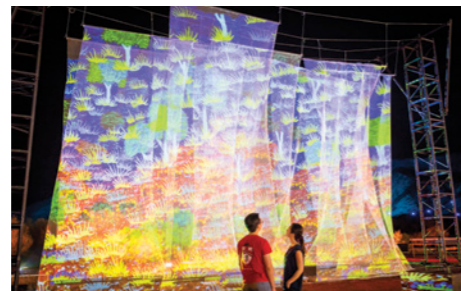
August 9 to 26

In a melting pot of cultures like Darwin, its festivals are something to be remembered. Ascend on the Top End in August for balmy combination of great food, excellent entertainment and culture everywhere. darwinfestival.org.au

September 28 to October 7

Parrtjima Festival

Late in September, the brilliant outback skies are matched for beauty by the stunning light displays through Alice Springs and the MacDonnell Ranges, bringing to life traditional Indigenous stories and artwork. parrtjimaaustralia.com.au



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

August 10 to 12

Derby Rodeo, Gymkhana and Campdraft

Over one wild weekend in August, Derby transforms into a wild western frontier celebrating the horsemanship and bushmanship that established the town in such a remote part of the world. derbytourism.com.au

August 24 to 27

Mullewa Wildflower Show

Spring is wildflower season in the west and there's few better ways to experience it than as part of the many wildflower festivals across the state. Held in the town hall, a display of over 200 native flowers engages and educates. wildflowersocietywa.org.au

August 25 to September 2

Shinju Matsuri (Festival of the Pearl)

Nearly 50 years old, Broome's pearl festival is one of the North West's highlight weeks. Relax in the tropical wonder of Broome, enjoying the mix of cultures shinjumatsuri.com.au

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

August 8 and 9

Coober Pedy Races and Gymkhana

Beginning in 1969 to bring together town and station people "to make new friendships and renew old ones" it has evolved into an annual horse and motorbike event held on the second weekend in August cooberpedy.sa.gov.au

September 28 to 30

Ceduna Oysterfest

Nowhere does oysters better than the Eyre Peninsula, so get on down late in September and indulge in the best shellfish the world has to offer. Free seafood tastings, entertainment and roving performances. cedunatourism.com.au

September 30

Bay to Birdwood Run (vintage vehicles)

Late in September Adelaide plays host to the largest vintage and classic vehicle event held anywhere in the world. Come see old cars, motorbikes and caravans in convoy and on display between West Beach and the National Motoring Museum. baytobirdwood.com.au



TASMANIA

August 13 to 19

Tasmanian Whiskey Week

Across the state, boutique distillers will open their doors to offer tours and tastings. Need we say more? taswhiskyweek.com

September 8

The Tasmanian Micro Brew Fest

Many of the Apple Isle's best micro brewers of beer and cider will display their wares in Hobart for all to taste and enjoy. facebook.com/tasmicrobrewfest

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