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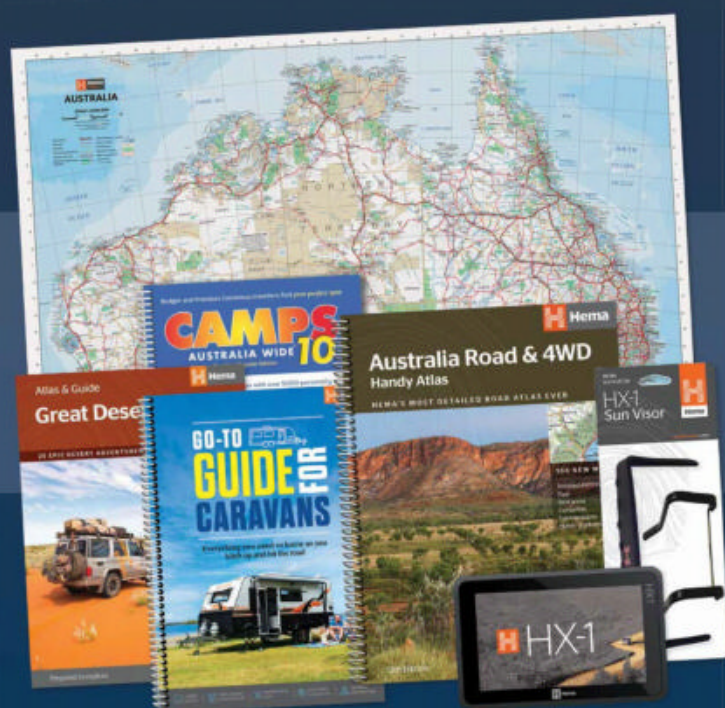
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ADVERTISING TERMS & CONDITIONS

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Caravan World is printed in Australia.

We are proudly Australian-owned and members of a number of industry bodies which are working to grow the caravan and RV market in Australia

Total printed copies: 16,400

powered by



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Caravan World is published by Adventures Group Holdings.

ACN: 155 672 192 ABN: 29 155 672 192

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*Recommended maximum retail price.

Distributed by Gordon & Gotch. Printed by IVE, 83 Derby Street, Silverwater, NSW. ISSN 2205-0620

FIRST WORDS

JOHN FORD



Welcome to our Great Migration North Issue, and for those lucky ones hitting the road soon there is plenty here for you. For the rest of us, perhaps there is inspiration from our travel writers to pack the van and follow suit, especially as there are fire ravaged areas across the country crying out for visitors.

Huge donations to the cause show how Australians and people around the world have been touched by the plight of those affected, particularly those who have lost everything. But many businesses that survived are also in trouble. It's the same from the east coast and across the great divide, through South Australia and over in the west. Not all these towns are ready for an influx of visitors, but plenty are.

As Brett from Captain Sponges Magical Oyster Tours in Pambula, NSW said recently, he's seen more people standing around a dead snake. The road from Melbourne was closed to the south coast of NSW for weeks, so businesses along the highway are struggling too. Let's get out there. Check out Tyler Jefferson's story starting on page 28 for tips about how we can help.

As well as supporting these economies directly, there are many opportunities for volunteering in a variety of roles through organisations such as Blaze Aid. Established

in 2009 following the Black Saturday fires in Victoria to help farming communities restore fences, there are currently 19 Blaze Aid camps in NSW, five in Victoria's high country and four across South Australia, including one on Kangaroo Island.

Repairing rural infrastructure will take a long time. When I spoke to Andy at the Cobargo, NSW, camp he anticipated the work there would continue for up to a year while the one in Adelong will continue for at least six months. Currently the camp in Cobargo is being fed by the American based charity World Central Kitchen from the Westwood cooking school in Bermagui. Some 70 volunteers are making upwards of 500 meals a day for workers on the ground and families who have lost everything.

Volunteers can sign up to Blaze Aid for a few days or as long as they like. Those with the time, and especially their own van, are welcome, and work can range from helping around camp through to the more physical. Blazeaid.com.au will take you to links for each camp and you can call the coordinators for more information.

Because the task of rebuilding is time consuming, there will be a need for workers for most of 2020, so it might be possible to put in a week as part of your travel after the Great Migration North later in the year.

— John

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Titan Blackhawk 480H

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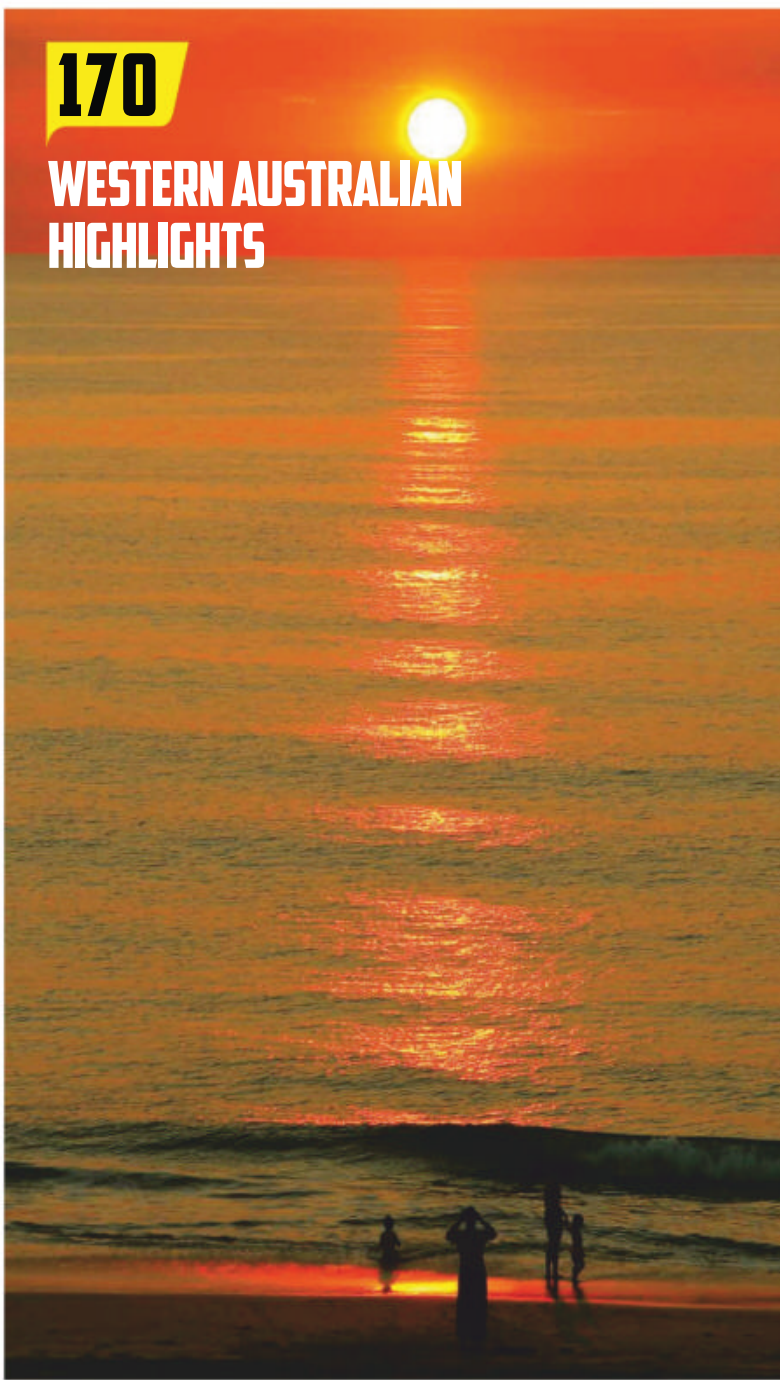
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TRACKING BUSHFIRE RECOVERY



Researchers are encouraging citizen scientists to use their mobile phone for a good cause – to track the recovery of bushfire-ravaged area to help inform future research.

Created by University of New South Wales (UNSW) PhD candidate, Casey Kirchhoff, the Environment Recovery Project aims to use a mobile phone app so anyone can take photos of bushfire-affected areas to allow scientists to analyse how areas recover, why some areas recover better than others and which plants and animals return first.

“I realised that I was probably among a handful of scientists collecting this information. So, I thought, why not ask citizen scientists to share their photos? The bushfires burnt such a large area, it’s impossible to survey it with our current resources,” Kirchhoff said.

“This is another way people can contribute to post-bushfire efforts.”

The app is available via the global citizen science iNaturalist website, and Professor Richard Kingsford, Director of the UNSW Centre for Ecosystem Science, believes this initiative and its aims will have an important role in managing and understanding the

long-term recovery after bushfires.

“Understanding recovery from this unprecedented fire season is scientifically critical and the opportunity to harness the community’s resources through the Environment Recovery Project is a practical way of doing this,” he said.

“The key aims of this initiative are to understand which plant species are resprouting and growing seedlings, to calculate when and how animals return to burnt areas, and to highlight which species are struggling to recover and might need our help.”

Mrs Kirchhoff stressed that people should only walk through areas that are safe, and that people don’t need scientific knowledge or camera skills to be part of this project.

“If you can identify the species do so, but even if you can’t, the photos are still valuable because other people will be able to help. The app will read the image location and allow scientists to identify the particular animal or plant,” she said.

“It would be amazing if thousands of citizens uploaded their images – we look forward to watching the bush recover together.”



GIVE IT A REST

Transport for NSW is trialling a change in parking at two rest areas on the Pacific Highway and Northern NSW, with the aim to reduce fatigue-related crashes by developing a network of rest areas across NSW.

Changes during this trial will include the enforcement of fines for light vehicles parked in heavy vehicle spaces and four-hour time limits for light vehicle drivers, and will apply in the Yelgun and Arrawarra rest areas.

Acting Director Northern, Vicky Sisson, said rest areas are provided to reduce the risk of fatigue in all drivers and therefore improve road safety.

“Heavy vehicle drivers are required by law to take mandatory rest breaks, and because of their size are limited to where they can

travel. It is important that heavy vehicle drivers are able to access dedicated parking spaces to manage their fatigue,” she said.

Both rest areas chosen for the trial have been increasingly used by travellers for overnight and longer-term stays, reducing the available space for others. Heavy vehicles in particular have been affected as recreational vehicles have begun parking in spaces allocated for heavy vehicles, impacting their ability to take mandatory rest breaks. This trial aims to accommodate the needs of all road users and help everyone manage fatigue.

Ms Sisson also emphasised the fact a wide range of accommodation in the local area is available for those needing a break longer



than four hours and encouraged travellers to plan ahead.

“We encourage drivers to plan their journey and make sure they’re well-rested before they head off. For longer trips share the driving if possible and plan regular breaks. If you need to pull over and rest, a short 15 to 20 minute nap works best,” she said.

The trial will run for six months and will be monitored as part of any future roll out.

CSIRO HELPING SUGARCANE FARMERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In a world first, a new app from the CSIRO will help sugarcane farmers in far north Queensland monitor fertiliser use and reduce nitrogen runoff into the Great Barrier Reef.

The app, named 1622WQ, shows water quality information and the nitrogen concentration in local waterways in real time, allowing farmers to tell whether fertiliser has run off their farm and adjust their management practices accordingly.

Rainfall washes fertiliser into waterways, wasting both the farmer’s time and money and becoming a major threat to the health of Great Barrier Reef ecosystems.

According to CSIRO agricultural scientist and 1622WQ project leader Dr Peter Thorburn, the app was co-designed with farmers to meet their needs.

“Sugarcane growers told us they wanted quick and easy access to water quality information, so they could find out what’s going on with their crops and make better decisions,” he explained.

The app shows data on nitrate concentrations and rainfall so farmers can see how the weather is affecting water quality through CSIRO’s advanced data analytics and state-of-the-art learning.

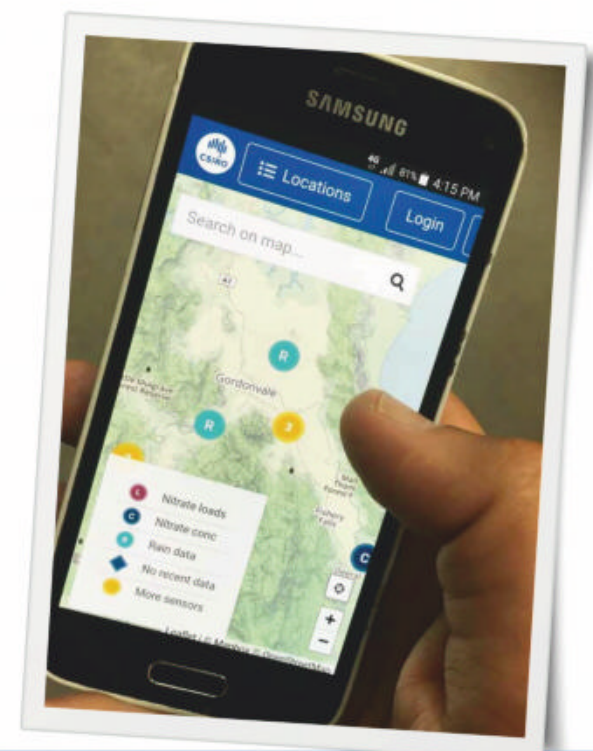
Stephen Calcagno, a sugarcane grower and Chairman in the Cairns region of CANEGROWERS, has already started using the app.

“This will be a great tool for farmers to see the impact of their farm management and help them improve their practices and the environment,” he said.

“I look forward to seeing what happens over the coming wet season.”

CSIRO is already fine-tuning other aspects of importance for the app, such as which part of the crops need more or less fertiliser, comparing different fertiliser application rates and environmental impact before crops are even planted.

The app can be used by visiting 1622.farm.





MAKING A MEDITERRANEAN DIET WORK DOWN UNDER

A study conducted by researchers from the University of South Australia (UniSA) found adding 2-3 serves of pork (250g) per week to the Mediterranean diet makes it more palatable for Aussies while still allowing them to reap the benefits.

Statistics show that most Australians suffer from a poor diet, and there have been calls for moves towards the adoption of a Mediterranean diet. However, the red meat restrictions of the diet are problematic as Australians are among the top meat consumers worldwide – on average 100kg per person per year is eaten.

“The Mediterranean diet is widely

accepted as the world’s healthiest diet and is renowned for improved cardiovascular and cognitive health, but in Western cultures, the red meat restrictions of the diet could make it harder to stick to. By adding pork to the Mediterranean diet, we’re broadening the appeal of the diet, while also delivering improved cognitive function,” said Dr Alexandra Wade, a researcher at the University of South Australia.

The study compared the cognitive effects of people aged 45-80 and at risk of cardiovascular disease following either the Med-Pork diet or a low-fat diet, which is commonly prescribed to negate risks of

cardiovascular disease. It found that those on the Med-Pork diet had higher cognitive processing speeds, emotional functioning (both signs of good mental health) and improved cardiovascular health.

Improved cognitive function in particular bodes well for Australia, where dementia is a leading cause of death and disability.

“We’re hoping that people will find this dietary pattern to be more in line with their accustomed eating patterns and therefore more adoptable. Making a Mediterranean diet work ‘Down Under’ is just one step in a bigger picture for better health,” sums up Dr Wade.

KEEP ON CAMPING

Caravan Industry Association of Australia’s (CIAA) new initiative ‘Keep on Camping’ is urging travellers to consider visiting an affected area on their next caravan or camping trip.

According to Tourism Research Australia, caravan parks in the South Coast of NSW and Gippsland, Vic, account for 38% and 42% of the market share of all commercial accommodation in the regions respectively, while caravan and camping trips make up 30% of all trips in regional Australia.

With this in mind, the Keep on Camping website launched by CIAA helps travellers

make informed decisions so that when it is safe, they can get back to those areas to spend money and help communities reliant on tourism.

Stuart Lamont, CIAA CEO, reinforced the prevailing message that long-term sustainability in these regions will be reliant on tourism.

“Many of the affected areas should be in absolute peak season brimming with tourists, and yet whole regions remain closed with some caravan parks suggesting they may be weeks before re-opening,” he said.

“Once these affected areas re-open, the need for tourist visitation will be vital to assisting these communities and businesses to start the long process of getting back on their feet.”

The website has everything needed to research and plan a trip, with sections on finding a park, booking a trip and state emergency contact details. There are also sections with local stories and photos and ideas for inspiration.

Visit the website: www.keeponcamping.com.au.

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With
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AN ANTI-THEFT DEVICE

This month Mal discusses keeping up with technology, local hoons; and what you can find when hunting for a good photography location

I know that people like automatic gearboxes these days, but I am one of those funny people that prefers to drive a vehicle, so my current around town vehicle, a diesel Subaru Forester, has an anti-theft device fitted, aka a six-speed manual gearbox with three pedals on the floor.

Unfortunately the time has come to upgrade, which has presented a slight problem. For the most part manual gearboxes are no longer available. Indeed, when I asked the 20-something salesperson about a vehicle with a manual gearbox, she looked at me with a somewhat quizzical look like, "What are you talking about?" It turned out there was a manual model available for a test drive – 1000km away in Queensland. It looks like us old fashioned types are going to have to move with the times.

Most motorhomes and tow vehicles these days have either fully automatic torque converter type gearboxes or what are known as Automated Manual Transmissions (AMT). The latter are often a bit hesitant in the lower ranges, not always a handy feature, and those familiar with the AMT gearbox in the Fiat Ducato will know what I am talking about.

I often think a manual gearbox might be better for more precise gear changes – many of the European manufacturers still supply motorhomes with a manual gearbox, as they are still popular in Europe, something that has given a Tauranga (New Zealand) dealer I happen to know a problem. Because of long lead ordering times, there's an oversupply of sharply priced, British built motorhomes with manual gearboxes, if anyone is interested.

NOT IMPRESSED

Around the greater Sydney region, I have quite a few locations that are decent photography locations. For a variety of reasons (mostly local council closures) those spots are declining and in recent times, serious bushfires have temporarily reduced that number even more. In the north-west of Sydney, there's a small picnic area I use occasionally. Imagine my disappointment when I turned up because of bushfire related closures elsewhere, only to discover the local hoons had decided that the picnic area made a good mud patch and rubbish dumping ground instead. Not impressed I have to say.

DEVONSHIRE TEA ANYONE?

In the same area as my vandalised picnic spot is the Ebenezer Presbyterian Church which lays claim to being the oldest church in Australia and has plenty of history in its graveyard. Nearby was an open grass area which I decided would make an excellent location for a photo or two.

While there I was approached by a gent mowing a nearby area, who was wondering what I was up to. Undoubtedly the tripod gave him the clue that I was merely taking photos rather than setting up camp. It turned out that I was on church land, but it wasn't a problem, and did I know that the little cafe in the church served an excellent Devonshire Tea? I can take a hint and it was indeed quite

delicious! Made a change from usual photo locations where there is nothing around!

SURPRISE FINDS

Still on photographic spots, in desperation recently, I used a roadside area for some photos. It wasn't the greatest but while I was parked I did a little bit of exploration in the adjacent bush area, mostly because I had noticed a bit of old timber that wasn't a tree. What I discovered was the remains of an old cattle or sheep loader being taken over by nature. Given its location I wondered about its history.

Some years ago I was in the Windsor, NSW area looking along the Hawkesbury area for yet another photo location. At one point I accidentally drove through an old cemetery. When I investigated, I discovered that several of the graves dated back to those who arrived with the First Fleet in 1788. An interesting piece of history if ever I saw one and a reminder that you never know what you might find in the oddest places! 🇺🇸



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Manual drivers may be a dying breed, but there are still a few around; you never know what you'll find just off the beaten track; a nice surprise during a recent photo shoot

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With
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KIMBERLEY DREAMING

The dreams of the Kimberley are becoming increasingly vivid as our wild west itinerary takes shape!

You may remember back in Issue 595 when we shared our plans to return to the Kimberley later this year. Well, our plans are progressing well, research is in full swing and the itinerary is looking full.

With trip planning, we like to map out our itinerary on an Excel spreadsheet with additional tabs for accommodation, permits, budget and fuel range. As we research and find good references, we download them and put them in our computer trip folder, and save the links to key information, such as the online booking sites.

Some of the information on the itinerary includes overnight stops, refuelling locations, distances and fuel prices, plus any other relevant notes. All our research is downloaded onto a laptop so we don't need the internet for access and only the key documents are printed. Like rules, itineraries are destined to change as you discover new places along the way, but it's all good research and really bumps up the excitement in the planning phase.

We're using the Hema Kimberley Touring Guide and the bigger paper map to help plan our trip. The touring guide includes information contributed by intrepid explorers Ron and Viv Moon, so we know we're onto a good thing, particularly as we enjoy a similar style of offroad travel.

We're planning some more remote adventures this time around. Coming off the northern end of the Tanami Road, we'll explore around Lake Gregory at the top of the Canning Stock Route. As an interesting side journey, we want to get a sniff of the Canning as a teaser for a future trip. Permits apply but seem easy to source.

While we're factoring in some extra adventure, we're not planning on wandering too far. Anita is starting her medical treatment for Multiple Sclerosis (MS) this month, so we'll be monitoring how that goes. That's really our only speed bump at this



ABOVE The planning stage always helps build excitement for the trip, even if half your plans will fly out the window once you're out there!

stage, but even then, we're ploughing ahead with the planning, assuming that'll sort itself out. We will also be closing our shop for that duration.

From the Tanami Road junction just south of Halls Creek, we'll head north to the Bungles (Purnululu National Park) and then on to Kunnunurra and surrounds – Lake Argyle, the Ivanhoe Crossing and the nearby nature reserve. Then it's onto the Gibb River Road.

Key destinations include Mitchell Falls, Mount Elizabeth Station, King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park, Mornington Wilderness Sanctuary and bush camping on the Fitzroy River. Add a trip to the Horizontal Falls and we have an action-packed escape planned.

We're not sure if we'll meet up with our other friends just yet. They're leaving in mid-April which is at least a few weeks before we want to travel – but we'll see what happens – plus the area around Mitchell Falls sees the largest rainfall of the area and requires a bit

more time to recover after the wet season. The same goes for the Munja Track beyond Mount Elizabeth Station, particularly as this is largely unmaintained.

Our overnight stays will be a combination of station stays, free bush camps, national parks and the odd caravan park.

We'll continue our goal to Clean up Australia, one campsite at a time. If you missed our column from last month's magazine, we were ranting about the littering problem across our country, particularly at bush camps. Campers seem to confuse fire pits for rubbish bins, the ground surface for a toilet and the wider landscape for an ashtray. We're encouraging all Australians to think about how they dispose of their rubbish. We hope you can join us with this initiative by collecting rubbish at campsites you visit. It's not something we should have to do, but at least we can enjoy ourselves in clean and hygienic surroundings.

See you on the trails. 

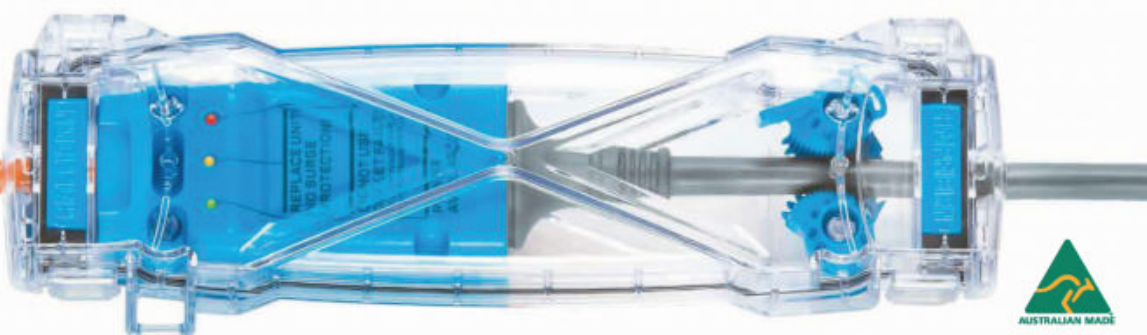
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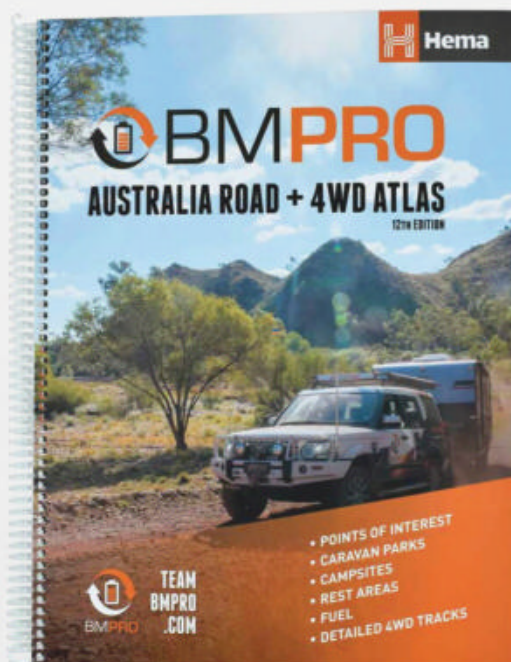
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or email:
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Please include your full address (not for publication). Letters chosen will be edited for publication, may be shortened, and may appear online.

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We are giving away a copy of the **BMPRO Hema Road + 4WD Atlas** valued at **\$39.95!** This handy spiral bound atlas features points of interest, caravan parks, campsites, rest areas, fuel and detailed 4WD tracks for your next trip. Just email your question to **David Bayliss** at **submissions@emprisegroup.com.au** with '12V Guru' in the subject line to be in the running to win.



IS LITHIUM REALLY NEEDED?

Q Hi Dave,

Hi 12V Guru! I hear all this hype for Lithium batteries these days, but do we really need such technology for camping and when trying to get away from everything? Surely this just encourages us to charge more distractions or carry more unnecessary gear? Typically, fridges in the vehicle and van are the main power users. Appreciate your advice.

Callum Smith, Phillip Island, VIC

A Thanks Callum, this is a very pertinent question when considering new caravans coming onto the market. It seems that many RV manufacturers are trying to add the latest functionality just for the sake of it or to outdo their competitor — is it really adding value to our camping experience? Do we all really need the same modern conveniences as what we have at home? For different people that answer, obviously, will be different depending on circumstances and what we are trying to achieve on our holiday.

Many of these extra features requires power, and this has a snowball effect adding to the requirements that need to be fitted to a caravan — especially on the electrical side.

I have met many people who are either grey nomads, enjoying their time exploring Australia and don't wish to be without the modern conveniences of their day to day life, or are travelling with children and a multitude of devices or toys in constant need of charging. For these two groups of travellers it certainly makes sense to invest in Lithium batteries. This newer technology offers some substantial benefits over older traditional lead acid batteries:

- Less than half the weight of the environmentally unfriendly lead acid batteries, which obviously make it a better choice
- Available energy in the same space mean that if you discharge a Lithium battery to 20 per cent depth of discharge (DOD) and a Lead Acid to 50 per cent DOD you receive 60 per cent more energy
- Lithium batteries have superior lifetime — you would have replaced the lead acid battery 5x before replacing the Lithium
- Faster charge and discharge times mean you can recharge batteries faster with

available sources such as AC/DC/Solar and they are perfect for those using inverters to power that coffee machine

So, for all travellers that fit into these categories and appreciate the investment, then my answer would be a resounding yes. Lithium batteries can make life easier, more reliable and actually cheaper in the longer term. I guess a similar analogy would be the investment you place in your tyres on your caravan. Quality costs more but you should be able to get more value from it. The tyres will last longer, provide better traction in wet conditions and overall be a safer option when towing.

Lithium batteries are already well known in uses across a range of products in today's world of technology, in everything from mobile phones to toys and more. So, Lithium is all around us already.

Do you really need it when camping — of course not! We could all deal with a lot less in our lives, but I don't see any seismic shift or reverse trend in society consuming less. But let's be practical! If you have a favourite campsite at your favourite powered park site every year and really enjoy time with family and friends relaxing around the fire over a few drinks while the kids are loving the jumping castle and tearing around on their bikes, then spend your money elsewhere.

Callum, like most things in life you need to choose what suits your needs. Lithium offers some great advantages and will become more widely used in caravans and camping as it gets cheaper. Personally, with getting away to the bush with kids onboard when we grab a break and my thirst for a great coffee in the morning, it is on my list.

Hope that gives you some insight. **G**

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Q&A

THE VEHICLE OR THE VAN?

Q Hello Tech Talk,

My wife and I have a dilemma. We are looking to travel around Australia in the next two years so

we have commenced researching our caravan. The dilemma is, do we stick with our five-year-old 4x4 (Prado) with 2500kg towing or do we upgrade to 3500kg towing?

The changeover to a 3500kg towing vehicle seems a lot (\$35 - 60k+), but I have been trying to calculate the payload of our Prado with the maximum 2500kg caravan as I am concerned about the GCM, and I have been told that I can't exceed the maximum braked towing capacity of the tow vehicle. I believe the answer is almost nothing.

The calculation I have at present is GCM 5370kg - Max caravan 2500kg = 2870kg - Est Tow Ball 250kg = 2620kg. I went to a weigh bridge over the weekend, the weight with quarter tank of petrol and two people was 2600kg.

Does the calculation look correct? If so, I think I am looking at a caravan with an ATM closer to the 2000kg mark.

We are not hardcore offroaders or after huge luxury, our few requirements would be: offroad or semi-offroad (though we do want to travel the Kimberleys), queen bed that you can walk down the side of and inside toilet/shower/cooking/fridge. We would like to do some free camping and visit National Parks so presumably some essentials are solar panels, water tanks, grey water tank. Do you have any recommendations for a maximum 2000kg ATM caravan that would fit the criteria?

Or, do we bite the bullet and upgrade to 3500kg towing vehicle?

Regards,
Phil & Kathy Tenison

**LETTER
OF THE
MONTH**

A Hi Kathy and Phil

Gotta love the Prado. I can see why you would want to keep it as I have had a couple and they are fine touring vehicles. I reckon with a higher towing ability they would have trounced Landcruiser sales. But the specs are the problem.

I think you have been too conservative in estimating your loaded vehicle weight of 2600kg. With a full load of fuel and associated camping gear for a long trip, I'd be surprised if it didn't go closer to 2800kg or more and you can't simply put everything in the van. The ball weight will probably tip you over that 2870 GVM (although it's more likely to be 2990kg, depending on the model, but still over your limit.)

Stepping over to a 3500kg towing ability gives you many more options with the van, but I'd still err on the conservative side when making your choice, leaving plenty of room with the GVM to keep it safe and manageable.

John Ford

SHOULD I WAIT?

I am due to fit a tow hitch and 12 pin plug and Anderson plug to my new car, but as I don't have my caravan yet (I'm planning the big lap late next year), should I wait until I know the exact requirement for the caravan or just go for a standard layout? I also have a trailer which I need to use in the interim.

Thanks,
Clark Flint

A Clint,

Without knowing your car or your van it's only possible to give some general advice. Let's presume your vehicle is capable of towing a van of the weight you have in mind and you are going to fit the heaviest rated tow bar that your vehicle manufacturer recommends. In most cases this will be the only tow bar available. You should take note of the maximum rating of the bar and it should match your vehicle's maximum braked towing capacity and the ATM weight of the proposed van. On a different score, you should also check before buying the van that it suits the GVM of the vehicle and van combined.

As you will be towing a trailer it makes sense to get the bar fitted now.

John Ford

WHAT TO DO WITH THE BRAKE AWAY CABLE?

Q Hi CW,

We have just brought a van that weighs over 2 tonnes. With the brake away cable, do you hook the cable onto the car, onto the tow bar or onto the D shackle? We have a Ford Ranger and I can't see anywhere to hook it onto on the car or on the tow bar, which only leaves the D shackle. Could you please let me know what the rules are as this is the first van with the brake away we have had.

Regards,
Phil Barrand

A Thanks Phil, this is a question I have pondered myself and finding legislation around this eludes me. However, it makes sense to connect the cable to somewhere on the vehicle other than the towbar in case the bar detaches from the vehicle. Not likely I know, but better safe than sorry. In my case I have a tow point on the chassis that the cable clip hooks onto, but on my previous vehicle I drilled a hole for the cable in the trailer plug mounting base and that seemed secure. It's worth pointing out the NSW legislation requires a monitor for the breakaway battery inside the tow vehicle in the event of battery failure.

John Ford

DETECTING FLAMES

Q I believe there are new regulations requiring BBQs fitted to all caravans requiring fitting of flame failure detection.

A significant number of caravan owners have BBQs such as the Weber Baby Q fitted in slide-out systems connected to LPG via bayonet fittings. Is there a flame detection device available to retrofit in such situations please?

Ferg le Juge de Segrais

A Hello Ferg

I'm pretty sure these regulations have been around for a while and the legislation groups devices fitted via a bayonet and those permanently connected to the van. They do require flame detection to be legal. Some of the new Camec BBQ's are equipped with this safety device and while there are retro-fit options available, the ones I have seen have been quite expensive. I'd be keen to hear from any suppliers who might have an easy answer to retro-fitting older cookers.

John Ford



How to win

If you're stumped by a technical or towing problem, send your question to submissions@emprisegroup.com.au with 'Tech Talk' in the subject line or send a letter to Caravan World Tech Talk, 125 Hawthorn Road, Caulfield North, Vic 3161. All entries must include your full address (not for publication).

**WIN!
THIS**

DO35 V3-R ALL-TERRAIN
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The DO35 Drop-On Coupling is designed, tested and manufactured by Cruisemaster™, home to Australia's leader in all-terrain towing technology. With full 360-degree articulation to reduce the risk of roll-over, smooth ADR compliant locking mechanism and patented 'Check Lock' system the DO35 means added safety whether on the highway or going offroad. Valued at \$405, the DO35 V3 is easy to install and compatible with all major WDH systems out of the box. (Note: this model does not include handbrake, sold separately for \$70.)

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*5 Year Unlimited Km Warranty from date of registration on new and demo vehicles registered on or after 1 July 2018.



LETTER OF THE MONTH



ABOVE How do warranties work on second-hand vans?

CUSTOMER CARE

Hi there,

My hubby and I have been regular readers for many years and look forward to the next edition.

The 'Taking More Care' about ACL, warranties on new vans in the February edition was great but didn't mention second-hand vans. When purchasing a second-hand van from a dealer, do these laws and warranties get transferred to the new owner? This is mainly aimed at vans that are under two years old and still come under original warranty time frames. I have been advised that the warranty is not transferred to the new owner. If so, I believe this warrants further discussion.

Keep up the great work and it's great to see the reviews on all sorts of budgets.

Kind regards,

Michelle Stoei

A Michelle,

Thanks for your letter and I am glad to hear you enjoy Caravan World.

Your question about guarantees on second-hand vans raises some interesting points. Australian Consumer Law applies to used vans but only from a licensed dealer and not to private sales. The warranty is through the dealer only and the original manufacturer's warrant usually expires on the transfer of ownership.

According to the legislation the seller must guarantee the second-hand goods are of an acceptable quality. This means that the goods

are safe and free from defects, an acceptable quality and adequately perform the job that the user would expect from the product.

It must be recognised that the van's age, price and condition determines its quality.

In the case of a van only two years old you would expect the quality is high, but if it has been knocked around on a lap around the country over rough roads and is sold at a reduced price, then you can't expect redress on any damage that was obvious at the time of purchase.

An independent check on the van, a weigh bridge certificate to confirm weight and carrying capacity and proof of service history is recommended. This should uncover any poor repairs that might lead to water ingress and consequent damage.

Good luck with your search.

John

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ABOVE On trips around Australia, you'll see sights like the Burrungkuy region in Kakadu, NT

MAPPING AUSTRALIA

📧 Firstly, can I congratulate you all on a fantastic magazine, there is heaps of great information in there.

My wife and I are looking to travel around Australia in the next two years and are planning where to go. Are you able to advise whether a map of Australia exists that indicates the optimum months to visit various locations, e.g. Kimberleys, Darwin, Kakadu, Cairns, Nullarbor, etc.? This would assist greatly in our trip planning.

Also we presume anti-clockwise is the best direction so that you go across the Nullarbor with the wind behind you, is this the case?

Regards,

Phil and Kathy Tennison

A Hi Kathy and Phil,

Thanks for your kind words. I'm glad you like the magazine.

I'm not sure if there is a map of this kind that covers all of Australia, but I can recommend several Hema publications that might help. Hema

has a number of guides that not only present very informative maps and information but also the best times of year to travel along specific routes.

Have a look at both 4WD Adventures and Great Desert Tracks books, and the Atlas and Guidebooks, such as Cape York, discuss the ups and downs of travelling through given regions different times of year. These guides can be found online at shop.hemamaps.com

Have a great trip,

John Ford 🇺🇸

Congratulations to Michelle Stoel whose submission has been selected as this month's CW Postbag 'Letter of the Month'.

Michelle Stoel has won an RV Inline Water Filter from B.E.S.T. Water Filters, valued at \$119.

With a B.E.S.T. (Bacteria Elimination Silver

Treatment) water filter, you can ensure you have clean, safe water – wherever the road may take you. The filter means you can safely draw water from town, tank, creek or bore water sources to fill your caravan's

tanks, while the chemicals and sediment will be removed and the bacteria destroyed. The filter is multi-directional, can be used after long periods of non-use and involves a simple, DIY installation.



For more information, visit 🌐 bestwaterfilters.com.au **or** 📞 **call 1800 240 822**



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 **WONDERLAND RV**

TRAVEL HAPPY

We shine the spotlight on caravanners, their rigs and their travel tales

**MORE
PICS
PLEASE**



→ Rob and Cathy Goudswaard know the benefits of modifying a tow vehicle. Theirs is seen here on a recent trip.

"On our recent trip from Brisbane to Melbourne we took a picture of the rig at Quota Park. Overall GVM is 6.8 tonne, Landcruiser has had improvement to the ECU, injectors and a 4-inch exhaust. All giving extra power to go up and down the Great Dividing Range!"



→ Long weekends are great for getting away, and that's exactly what Ray Blick did on the Australia Day long weekend.

"Australia Day in Leeman WA set up in the caravan park with family and friends. We had three wonderful days of relaxation."



→ This photo of Chris and Michelle Stool's rig, a 2017 Jayco Journey OB 17.55 and 2011 Mitsubishi Pajero, was taken at Stansbury on their way home from the Yorke Peninsula over Christmas and New Year break.

"Our trusty touring setup works very well when looking around this great country," they wrote. "We toured the Yorke Peninsula over the Christmas & New Year holidays and saw the impact of the December 2019 fires in the Edithburgh area, where we stayed and explored the Yorke Peninsula from, photo was taken at Stansbury on our way home."

WIN!

🔑 This month's winner will receive a Purple Line Saracen Ultra Hitch Lock, valued at \$189. Saracen Ultra is a highly visible, simple to use, compact, high security lock which works both hitched and unhitched to keep would-be caravan thieves at bay. It fits to most standard 50mm ball hitches on caravans, camper trailers, boat and car trailers, and even work trailers. **For more information about this and a host of other vanning accessories, visit purpleline.com.au**



→ Technology is now a staple in most caravans, but this picture from reader Geoff Salm reminds us that sometimes old school simple is best.

“The attached photo of our van was taken in Kalbarri, WA, in the late afternoon on a return trip from Coral Bay, adjacent to our 2004 Nissan Patrol purchased the same year as the caravan,” he wrote. “This caravan has been across Australia and back as far north as Rainbow Beach, QLD with our three children and done a run to Coral Bay twice, along with a trip to Esperance and few treks to Albany in WA. It has been used on long weekends whenever possible with trips to Jurien Bay, Cervantes, Dwellingup etc. It truly is a testimony to 1970s engineering as it has held up well in all our travels. I think this classic van will last for many more decades to come. It has been a great family can and an absolute pleasure to own.”



HOW TO WIN

Just email your most travel-inspiring picture (2-3Mb) of yourself, family and friends, with your rig along with a brief description to: submissions@emprisegroup.com.au with 'Readers' Rigs' in the subject line, or send a print to Caravan World Readers' Rigs, 125 Hawthorn Road, Caulfield North, Vic 3161. All entries must include your full postal address (not for publication). Photo submissions may also appear on caravanworld.com.au.

AFTER *the* FIRES

Words Tyler Jefferson
Pics Supplied

When the bushfires have gone and the long road to recovery begins, many of Australia's tourism-dependent communities will be relying on us to return. But how soon is too soon?



We have all been moved by the recent devastating bushfires and weather events that have destroyed homes, forests, farms, townships and infrastructure, and taken the lives of people and animals across Australia.

We have been especially moved by the extraordinary efforts of our firefighters and emergency services personnel to keep us safe and protect property, as well as the efforts of volunteers and the defence force to provide victims and firefighters with sustenance and sanctuary in the face of these threats.

The scale of this disaster is immense – more than 8 million hectares, an area bigger than Texas, has been burnt. These are destinations where Australians holiday and adventure, particularly over the summer period. And of course, these regions are home to some of us too. For many of these areas, tourism is the backbone of their economy and the very things that attract us to holiday in these places may have been severely impacted by the bushfires.

The economic impact of the fires, coming as they did at peak tourism season, has been significant for so many regional areas, both those directly affected, and also those in similar regions where many have become nervous about travelling remotely.

Look, for example, to Gippsland. This is a beautiful and varied region in Victoria that offers everything from pristine beaches to mist-shrouded alpine mountains, rolling wine country and challenging 4WD tracks. Much of East Gippsland, including the incredible Alpine National Park, has suffered from the terrible bushfires. However, central and western Gippsland have been safe from bushfires this year, pristine and ready to welcome travellers looking for anything from fishing and watersports, camping, art and culture or a relaxed drink and delicious

local food. As a result, these parts of Gippsland have seen a devastating loss in the tourism dollars they rely on to survive.

The Shoalhaven region of NSW has similarly seen a huge drop in tourism numbers during their peak season due to access road closures and fires nearby, despite the fact that the region's beautiful coastal towns and villages have themselves been untouched by fire. Tourism to Shoalhaven's incredible beaches and seaside towns is a huge part of their economy.

This provides a challenge for many communities, as some are desperate for tourism business today – such as the aforementioned Gippsland and Shoalhaven – while some are not ready (or safe) for visitation.

The first question for many around Australia has been, “How can we help?” It's been inspiring to see Australians from every walk of life, in every part of the country, pulling together to help however they can. The hard work of volunteers, charities and other not-for-profit groups has been essential for dealing with the devastation. Now, as caravaners, we have the unique opportunity to help these communities by doing what we do best – journeying to them.

This provides a challenge for many



LEFT TO RIGHT The Blue Mountains, NSW, were badly affected; watching the devastation unfold



ABOVE Kangaroo Island is ready to welcome tourists back to places like this

"Some communities will need time to clean up, rebuild *and to process the emotional impacts of their tragic losses before they will be able to host visitors again.*"

communities, as some are desperate for tourism business today – such as the aforementioned parts of Gippsland – while some are not ready for visitation. In some cases, towns were physically razed, and the infrastructure will take a while to be up and running, but in other cases, the effect of the fires are still very raw. In ringing around to check on the readiness of some places to receive visitors, the pain is still apparent. Some places have had unprecedented media attention and dealing with curious outsiders wanting to see the damage is taking a toll. When I asked one caravan park owner if it was okay to talk about tourism for her area, she burst into tears. It shows the level of pain out there and reinforces the need for us to cut the service providers some slack.

Every dollar we inject into a community helps, and even those on a limited income can play a role. We applaud the #gowithemptyeskies campaign, an effort to encourage Australian travellers to carry less with them and buy more locally.

If you're experienced caravaners, you're probably used to meticulously planning your journeys to get the best value on fuel, food and other supplies. That's great as it's details like that which enable us to travel more often and farther than we otherwise would. But this year, consider planning a little less and spending a little more at your destination filling up the petrol tank and stocking up on supplies. You may be surprised by how much of an impact this can have.

RETURNING WHEN THEY'RE READY

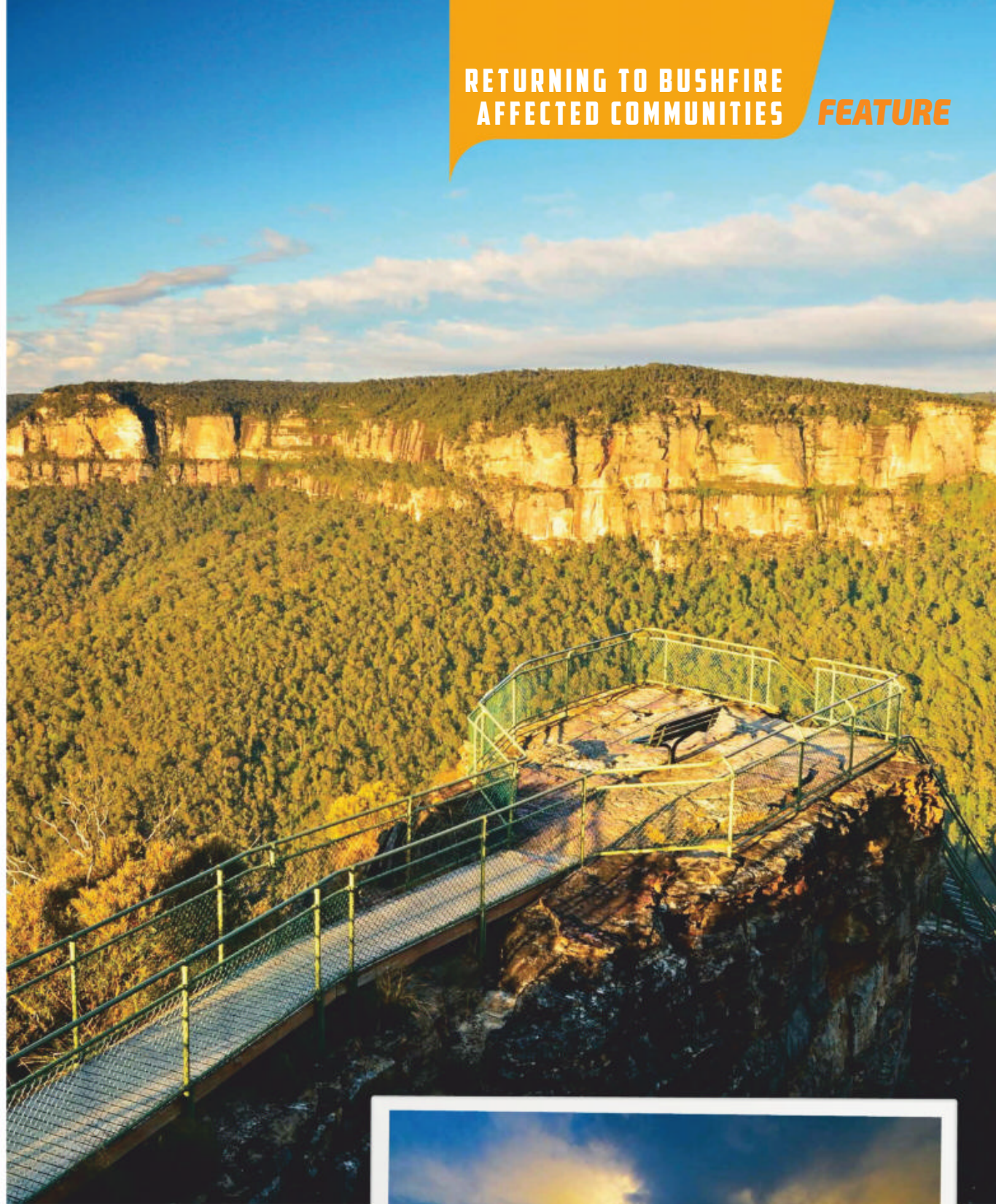
On top of the fires, the recent rains have in fact presented a different set of dangers to emergency personnel and communities already dealing with so much. We are most certainly a land of "droughts and flooding rains", and it seems to be one disaster after another at present. So, we have to accept that not all facilities will be fully operational in some places as communities need time to clean up, rebuild, and to process the emotional impacts of their tragic losses before they can host visitors again.

KANGAROO ISLAND.

Kangaroo Island in South Australia is an ideal example. There was a lot of ink spilled in the days and weeks after the island was hit by the fires debating whether it was right for tourists to flock to the area or stay away. Today the island is open, but in January the University of South Australia's sustainable tourism expert, Dr Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, explained that the situation was far more complicated than a simple need to boost tourism numbers.



ABOVE AND BELOW Kangaroo Island's population will be slow to recover from the fires, but tourist income will be vital for local shelters; Tarra-Bulga National Park has seen a drop in tourism despite being a long way from the Gippsland bushfires



UP TO THE MINUTE INFO

Here is a list of relevant national and state resources, which provide you with up to date warnings and conditions on where and what is safe.

NATIONAL

Tourism Australia Travel Alerts <https://www.australia.com/en/travel-alerts.html>

NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW Fires Near Me website and app <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fires-near-me>
Traffic Updates via Live Traffic NSW <https://www.livetraffic.com/desktop.html>

QUEENSLAND

Visit the Queensland Government Rural Fire Service website <https://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/map/Pages/default.aspx>
Traffic Updates via the QldTraffic website <https://qldtraffic.qld.gov.au/>

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Check the South Australian Country Fire Service <https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/home.jsp>

Traffic Updates at the Traffic SA website <https://traffic.sa.gov.au/#mapo>

TASMANIA

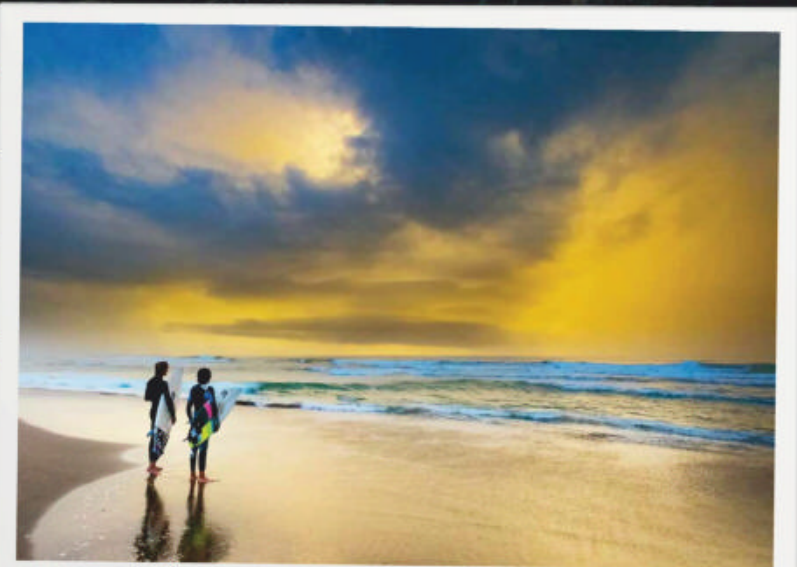
Visit the Tasmanian Fire Service website <http://www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pagelD=colGMapBushfires>
Traffic Updates via TasAlert website <http://www.alert.tas.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx>

VICTORIA

Visit the Country Fire Authority website <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/home> and download the VicEmergency App: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/vicemergency-app>
Traffic Updates via the VicTraffic app available <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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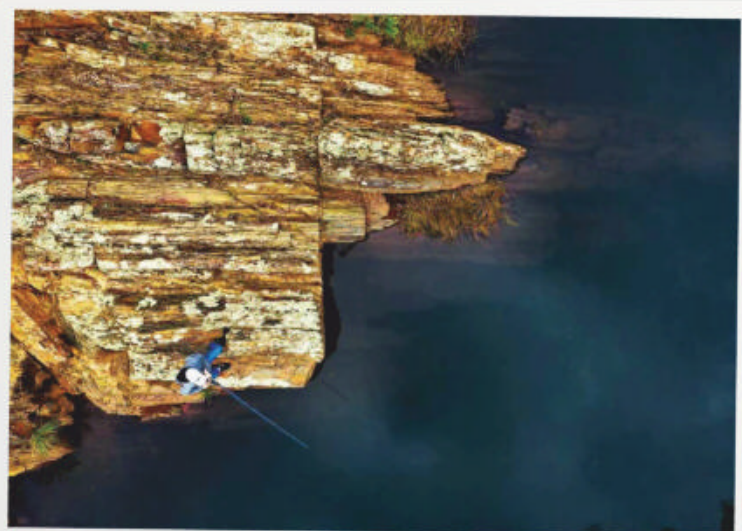


TOP TO BOTTOM Lookouts at the Blue Mountains have reopened; Shoalhaven NSW's beautiful beaches are untouched by the fires, and the region very much needs travellers to return; tourism dollars will be needed to help all of Kangaroo island's populations recover



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE New South Wales' South Coast; the Three Sisters are no longer shrouded in smoke; Mitchies Jetty in Merimbula, NSW; some of Victoria's best fishing spots are along the Great Alpine Road

"In the months to come, expect to see local spotlights feature more *than ever as we partner with councils around Australia to highlight beautiful locations*"



"The bushfire crisis on Kangaroo Island is heart-breaking, and for a holiday destination that relies on tourism, the summer holiday fires could not have come at a worse time," Dr Higgins-Desbiolles said. In January, the fires were not yet out, CFS volunteers and defence personal are still being deployed, and infrastructure like the water treatment facilities was damaged.

Today, weeks later, the people of Kangaroo Island say they are ready for tourists to return, and authorities are encouraging us to do so. Some parts of the western side of Kangaroo Island are still undergoing cleanup, but the danger has passed, and most of Kangaroo Island is open and ready for much-needed business.

MALLACOOTA

The fires smashed the eastern Victorian village of Mallacoota, and 120 houses were lost, and many more were damaged. Since then storms have wreaked even more devastation on the area, and it's only recently that roads have opened to the outside world after nearly eight weeks of being cut off. The navy evacuated holidaymakers, and even in late February many caravans and tents that had to be left behind are still unclaimed. With the main caravan park due to open in early March, things are looking up.

When I spoke with Peter York from Buckland's Jetty Boat Hire in late February, he hadn't had a boat out rented since 30th December, meaning he had lost nearly all his summer trade and 75% of his annual income. Mallacoota in winter is pretty quiet. Peter believed the community is ready for visitors and that businesses are looking forward to a bumper Easter season.

NSW SOUTH COAST

In the days following the New Years Eve fires on the south coast, thousands of holidaymakers were directed to leave the area. As well as the tragic loss of





ABOVE View of the Victorian Alps from the summit of Mt Feathertop

life, hundreds of houses went up in flames and business all took a hit to the main part of their annual income. As Peter from Longstocking Brewery in Pambua told me, business was running at 10% of the previous January, and his story is repeated across the area.

Further north, 79% of the Eurobodalla Shire was burned and Batemans Bay lost many residences. The road to Canberra was cut for a month and tourism collapsed.

Rain in mid-February finally extinguished all fires and the south coast is open for business. Tourist oriented villages like Cobargo and Mogo will take years to recover, but surviving shops are open amid the cleanup. Mogo Wildlife Park was expected to reopen on March and 10 demountable buildings have been erected in Mogo to help store owners until permanent shops are rebuilt.

Right across the south coast, from Eden to Nowra, are a variety of caravan parks open and ready to receive guests. Almost all National Parks have been closed since Christmas, but most are expected to reopen in early March.

STANTHORPE QLD

The food bowl area around Stanthorpe in South East Queensland may have a cautionary tale to tell. According to Barry Murphy from the Stanthorpe Tourist Information Centre, when the fires ran through the area in September 2019, tourism stopped. Despite the loss of several houses, the effect of the fires was limited, but the publicity saw an immediate drop of 80% of travellers and things haven't really improved. According to Barry the fires only added to the bad news about the drought, which continues in mid-February despite big falls elsewhere. He added that the town hadn't been affected by the fires, but the tourists are still staying away.

GOOD ADVICE

Tourism Australia has created an easy to use tool to help track what regions are safe, partially impacted or currently unsafe. You can view that online at <https://www.australia.com/en/travel-alerts.html>. You can also see more national and state-based resources with all the latest updates on precisely what regions are safe or not in the sidebar titled 'Up to the Minute Info'.

australia.com/en/travel-alerts.html. You can also see more national and state-based resources with all the latest updates on precisely what regions are safe or not in the sidebar titled 'Up to the Minute Info'.

In the months to come, expect to see local spotlight features more than ever, as we partner with councils around Australia to highlight the beautiful locations, exciting activities and welcoming communities that could host your next Aussie adventure. We'll be working closely with local councils to ensure you know the best spots to return to, and the right times to do so –remember, first check to see if the region is safe and open for business. Second, if possible don't cancel existing reservations, reschedule them. Third, donate to support the emergency services; the victims of the bushfires; the re-building programs or the wildlife support organisations.

This is not the first or the last, natural disaster Australia will face. As many commentators have suggested, we will see the true grit and resilience of these communities show through as they rebuild their towns and their economies, but they will need our collective help. 🇦🇺

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SMOOTH



Words
**JOHN
FORD**

OPERATOR

Pics Marcus Cozzolino

Innovative design shows this enduring brand still has plenty to offer in a streamlined touring van with loads of layouts and options to customise to your style of travel





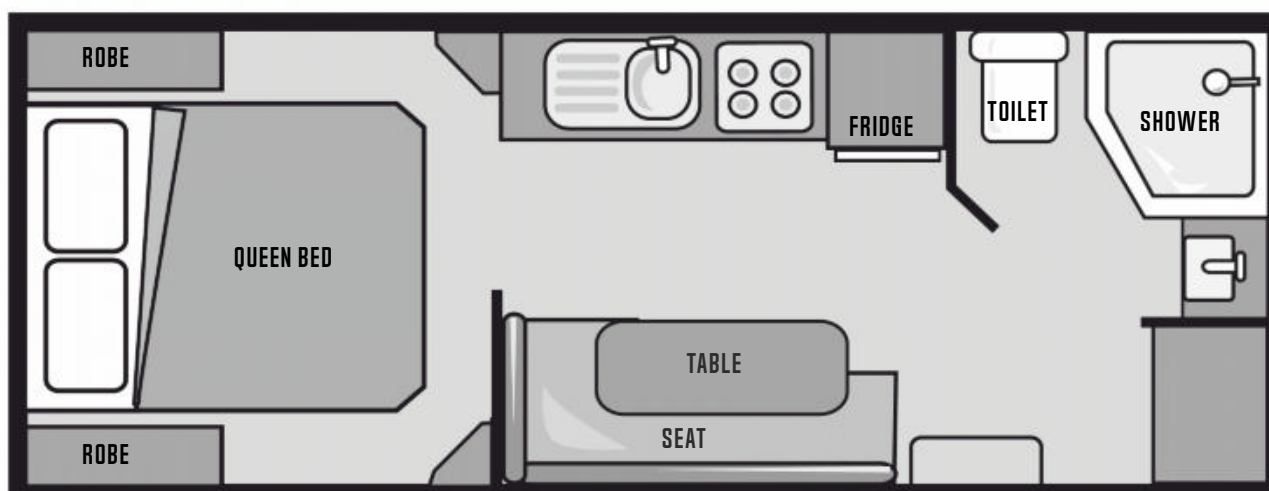
Innovation is a key criteria when *Caravan World* reviewers rate vans at the end of the test, and also features strongly in the Best Aussie Vans event every year. We consider it because it's an important element for prospective buyers looking at a van. After all, we all like fresh ideas and better ways of doing things if they make sense and make our lives more enjoyable.

Because things are so competitive locally, the Australian caravan industry strives for new ideas on a daily basis. But in reality, change is limited by size and layouts in a moving structure somewhere around six metres long.

The latest design from Coronet RV delivers an aerodynamic bullnose shape at the front, which adds extra internal space. The van on review is the first model in the new CL-series and is soon to hit the show circuit following a run into the wine country north of Melbourne.



LEFT TO RIGHT The Swift 500 cooktop/grill; Coronet is one of Australia's longest-running caravan builders, but the CL-6000 shows that they're still very capable of innovation





MEASURING **UP**



PROS

- ⊕ Well-finished van with quality equipment
- ⊕ Light weight makes it easy to tow behind mid-size vehicles
- ⊕ A boutique builder that can customise to your likes



CONS

- ⊖ Limited off-grid ability as tested

CORONET *CL-6000*

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 6.3m (20ft 8in)
Overall length 7.8m (25ft 7in)
Width (incl. awning) 2.4m (7ft 10in)
Height (incl. hatches) 2.77m (9ft 1in)
Tare 1798kg
ATM 2298kg
Payload kg (calculated) 500kg
Ball weight 174kg at Tare, 300kg maximum loaded

EXTERNAL

Frame Composite foam
Cladding Aluminum cladding
Chassis G & S chassis/100mm main rails
Suspension AL-KO Torflex (independent rubber)

Coupling AL-KO 50mm Ball coupling
Brakes AL-KO 10" electric
Wheels 15" Primal black alloy including 1 x spare
Water 1 X 95 L Fresh water tank (can option additional tank)
Battery 1 x 100A AGM Century
Solar 1 x 150W lightweight flex solar panel
Air conditioner Option (Roof mount or ducted available)
Gas 2 x 4.5kg
Sway control AL-KO Electronic Stability Control

INTERNAL

Cooking Swift 3 x gas/1 x 240V Element with grill

Fridge Thetford N3141
Bathroom Thetford 12v flush toilet/Jayco shower screen/Kings shower recess/Phoenix tapware.
Hot water Camec Lp Gas instantaneous hot water service

OPTIONS FITTED

nil

PRICE AS SHOWN

\$61,500 Inc on-road (Vic)

MORE INFORMATION

Coronet RV Bayswater Vic Ph 03 97615286 www.coronetrv.com.au



ABOVE The comfortable kitchen and lounge area includes a microwave at an accessible height, avoiding one of this reviewer's most-hated bugbears

THE COMPANY

Coronet is one of our longest-running caravan builders, and the new shape of the CL-series isn't the only innovative aspect of the build. When things started back in the late 50s under the original owner, production was the standard timber frame and aluminium sheet style familiar to many builders even today.

These days, Coronet vans have more robust engineering with Worthington Industry composite side and rear walls bolted to a ladder-structure timber roof with an aluminium cover. The floor is also a Worthington one-piece composite that is extremely strong and weather resistant. Side walls are clad with raised aluminium panels fixed to timber supports incorporated into the wall.

THE BUILD

Under the body is a 100 x 50mm G&S SuperGal chassis with a similar size A-frame supported by neat looking braces each side. SuperGal, rather than a hot-dipped galvanised metal, keeps weight down but is strong enough for the mainly smooth road

travel for which the van is designed. AL-KO Electronic Stability Control is a standard safety feature, the coupling is a 3500kg ball fitting, and two 4.5kg gas bottles rest on the A-frame to take care of cooking, hot water and the fridge when free camping.

Suspension is another aspect where Coronet steps outside the mainstream. Their AL-KO rubber suspension may be unusual, but it has proven to be a reliable and efficient for many years on vans like the American Airstream.

The system uses rubber blocks twisting inside metal tubes to allow independent travel to each wheel for a stable and well-mannered ride. Also under the van, I noticed neat plumbing and electrics, and 10" drums on all 15" sporty looking black alloy wheels.

THE EXTERIOR

The composite front wall features black and blue highlights and a protective glossy black aluminium panel down low. Rather than a front boot, which may be prone to water leakage, a full tunnel version will take care of a good lot of camping essentials. The tunnel boot looked neat and well-finished

but I would have liked to see lights at each end to help find things at night.

The black and blue colour scheme extends along the white side walls, and while I understand the intention to keep weight down with the lightweight raised aluminium profile covering, it gives an old-fashioned impression that not everyone will love. At the lower edge of the van, a composite panel mitigates stone damage and ties the look together nicely.

A Carefree awning covers most of the exterior, and there are power points for TV and 12V for outside entertainment.

Down at the rear end, the van has a square profile and a minimalist low bumper bar with a single spare wheel, set at a sensible height for easy access. Meanwhile, cool-looking, clear LED corner lights add to the modern theme.

Keen observers may note in our photos the unusual vent at the passenger side rear corner. It's for a Camec instantaneous gas hot water system for plenty of long showers – keep in mind there's only 95L of freshwater. A second tank and a greywater version are options.

COMPANY PROFILE

Coronet RV is a boutique builder in Melbourne's east that has been owned by Andrew Phillips since 1991, making it one of our most enduring brands and one of the longest for a builder under one ownership. Additionally, Andrew is also the director of the RV Repair Centre located within the same Bayswater, Victoria complex.

Both the company's and Andrew's history with caravans go back even further. Coronet began making vans in 1959 in Ballarat and Andrew built his first caravan from plans he drew himself at 15 as an addition to his family's caravan hire fleet — CJ Phillips Caravan Hire.

That initial build was a timber framed aluminium clad thirteen-footer, most likely towed by a VH Commodore of the day and headed to a campground on the Mornington Peninsula. Hire caravans need to be durable and practical, so experience from those early

days shows in his attitude to build-quality over the years.

When his mother and father sold their business in 1984, Andrew found himself working with two local caravan dealers for a while, before setting up ADP Caravan Services as a repair and hire company.

In 1990 he established a caravan repair shop at Caravan City in Croydon, Vic, selling his own Hacienda caravans and a year later took over Coronet RV. Initially building in the traditional timber 'stick' frame style, the construction method evolved to composite veneer and foam walls manufactured by Worthington's Industries, which Andrew rates highly for their strength and light weight.

As a small builder he turns out around 60 caravans a year — Andrew likes that he can still be hands-on in the business to exceed customer expectations, many of whom are

repeat buyers. About half the caravans are offroaders for customers who appreciate the attention to detail and the thoughtful engineering that keeps weight to a minimum.

In recent years Andrew sold the retail side of his operation to concentrate on Coronet RV and the service operation. The service side does all manner of repairs for all brands and the manufacturing arm turns out custom designed vans that are sold through their dealers Caravan Country Pty Ltd and Accessavan Pty Ltd for disability customers with special needs such as wheelchair access.

While that first humble van was drawn up on the kitchen table with Laverne and Shirley blaring on the TV in the background, today's floor plans and elevations are consummated on Auto CAD computer programs in the factory with an eye on recycling and as much green manufacture as possible.



CORONET RV IS A BOUTIQUE MELBOURNE BUILDER WITH A RICH HERITAGE OF VAN BUILDING.

THE CL-6000 WILL FIND A PLACE WITH COUPLES LOOKING FOR SOMETHING OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM THAT MEETS THE OFTEN-OPPOSING CRITERIA OF A SPACIOUS INTERIOR AND AN EASILY TOWED VAN.



LIVEABILITY

The entry is towards the rear with a fold-down step and one of the new, robust Hume Industry security doors. Once inside, the van has a roomy feeling courtesy of smart thinking and a sensible layout. The rounded front end gives a concave shape inside, adding interior volume, but the compact ensuite in the driver side rear corner also helps. Instead of the bathroom taking all the rear, the corner unit leaves a space to the right of the entry that can be set up as an office or storage area.

Big picture windows around the van support the open feeling, and if you can take in the view when lounging inside it always adds to the enjoyment of camping. Layout places the bedroom at the front, the dinette at the central passenger side with the kitchen opposite.

The shower and toilet design bucks the prevailing trend for big ensuites but makes sense to those like me who think the less time in the ensuite the better. A big bathroom detracts from the liveability of the rest of the van where you spend 99 per cent of your time.

A corner shower has a large clear door and a triangular shape that makes it feel larger. There's a small vanity with mirror and a corner cassette toilet, so overall you miss nothing and gain more living space.

Fitout is well finished with precise angles and corners, enhanced by edges meeting without the small plastic moulding seen in

many vans. Coronet RV uses a pocket hole jig and secret screws to achieve fine tolerances at their cabinetry joins, and the outcome is beautifully finished.

The kitchen runs in one line to include a 141L Thetford Slimline gas/electric fridge at the back and a central bench with stainless steel sink and Swift 500 cooktop/grill. An NCE microwave is over the counter and set at a sensible height for easy and safe access. The Slimline fridge allows extra bench space and has a large drawer at the base for wine bottle storage.

Most of the electronics are found in a small cupboard above the microwave. A Fusion sound system sits alongside two 12V/USB outlets, and there's enough shelf space for phones to rest when charging. Also here is the main breaker and various fuses as well as a BMPRO screen for water tank level, solar input and battery monitoring.

A single 105Ah AGM battery, charged through a 160W Flexi solar panel on the roof would give a degree of off-grid capability as long as the sun was shining. Battery usage would be confined to lights and TV with gas supply handling most of the rest. An extra battery and solar is an option, but they will add to the van's ATM.

The bed has good access and the cupboards include hanging wardrobes with shelves and handy dressing tables on each side. At the dinette, the L-shaped lounge has loads of room for two and could even accommodate a couple of extra guests.





FROM TOP The Yarra Valley wine country was the perfect setting to relax with the CL-6000; the interior feels very open and light thanks to picture windows and bright surfaces

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY



"A roomy touring van for a couple for \$61,500 has to be great value"

TOWABILITY



"Dedication to keeping the weight down and the wind cheating front end pay off here. I'm a fan of the suspension and it works well on the road."

SUITABILITY

FOR INTENDED TOURING



"It doesn't pretend to be anything but a main and formed dirt road cruiser with limited off-grid camping and it will fulfill that task admirably"

BUILD QUALITY



"Composite walls and a finely finished interior look the goods. This is a builder who knows his stuff."

LIVEABILITY



"It's roomy and comfortable with smart use of space"

SELF SUFFICIENCY



"Off grid living is not this van's forte, so we have to mark it down for small power and water capacity. The option is there, but with a cost to weight."

INNOVATION



"How can you not give points for the innovative front end and the lightweight package"

CUSTOMER CARE



"Five-year warranty on the structure is valuable, one year on appliances"

X-FACTOR



"It's more the well-worn and comfortable pair of shoes you love to wear, rather than the red boots that looked good in the shop but sit unused in your cupboard."



TOWABILITY

Almost half of the Coronet RV's output are hefty offroad beasts, but the CL-series is a different species altogether, based around the concept of light weight and ease of towing. The aerodynamic nose is designed to cut down on wind resistance, and the van achieves a 1798kg Tare Weight, which is impressively low for a 6m van.

Load the van to its 500kg payload and it hits the scales at 2298kg, meaning plenty of medium-size tow vehicles are legal and capable. The AL-KO rubber suspension is ideal for blacktop touring but is also up to some dirt road travel as long as speed and tyre pressures are reduced.

Coronet RV sales rep Peter's Jeep Grand Cherokee with a 3L V6 Mercedes turbo diesel is a willing performer under much more arduous going and was having an easy day towing the CL-6000. We found our way through heavy Melbourne traffic out into the wineries to the north for photos.

Neither Peter nor I knew the area very well, but you have to hand it to our young photographer, Marcus, who found a great location on street view on Google maps.

The drive proved the Coronet is well-balanced at tare and tows smoothly without movement at the ball or swaying through turns or at speed. Load it sensibly and there is no reason your travels won't be enjoyable.

THE BOTTOM LINE

I love seeing innovative ideas come to life in a caravan and the CL-6000 fits the bill, not only with the wind-cheating shape but with a roomy couple's van that won't see your medium-sized tow vehicle struggling up hills.

The combination of a bantamweight tourer with all the features most couples will want is smart thinking from this boutique builder. At \$61,500 it's also well priced, and there are several layouts already on offer and a long list of options to make the van your own. 



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE BMPRO battery management keeps it all under control; the bathroom is compact but adequate and the saved space helps elsewhere; the clever design makes this an extremely tow-friendly RV for its features





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Jeep

*3,500kg towing capacity across 3.0L Diesel 4x4 models is achieved when properly equipped with Jeep accessories, which are not standard. Please visit <https://www.jeep.com.au/grand-chokeee/accessories.html> for further information.

⁽¹⁾ 5 years from the date of vehicle registration or 100,000kms (whichever comes first). Visit <https://www.jeep.com.au/there-and-back-learn-more.html> for Warranty and Capped Price Servicing Terms and Conditions.

⁽²⁾ After your warranty period expires, scheduled maintenance services must be conducted through a Jeep Authorized Dealership at manufacturer specified intervals to maintain Lifetime Roadside Assist. Free Roadside Assist is not redeemable for cash or anything else.



HEART OF THE KIMBERLEY

*Mt Elizabeth Station lies in the centre of Wandjina Country
and provides an unmissable opportunity to see ancient art
depicting Dreamtime stories*

Words and Pics **CHRIS WHITELAW**



The Kimberley region of Western Australia is one of the greatest natural galleries of ancient art in the world. Many different styles of rock paintings are found here, but the most intriguing and perplexing are those depicting the mysterious Dreamtime spirits and legends called 'Wandjina'.

Wandjina country is a vast area of some 200,000 square kilometres, embracing the land, sea and islands of its traditional custodians, the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunumbal people, whose occupation dates back more than 40,000 years.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT We listen intently to a lesson about the local rock art; a track leading to adventure in remote parts of the station; Wandjina with distinctive lightning rays emanating from their head





“Attempts to date the rock paintings suggest the Wandjina may be as old as 4,000 years, while the Gwion Gwions date back at least 18,000 years, deepening the mystery that enshrouds them both”

WANDJINA

The Wandjina were powerful ancestor beings who came down from the heavens to create the land and all its inhabitants. After completing their creation journeys, the Wandjina returned to the spirit world, leaving behind their ‘shadows’ imprinted on the rock in places where they descended into the earth or ascended to the sky.

Wherever they now reside, the Wandjina continue to influence the land and people, bringing rains, controlling the elements and maintaining the fertility of all living things. As well as benevolent seasonal regeneration, they can also deliver floods, lightning and cyclones to punish those who break their laws. As their images are believed to possess these powers, they are treated with great respect and reverence.

Wandjina images are not regarded by Aboriginals as ‘art’ as it is believed they were not originally made by humans. They are, however, conserved by human

hand. Each Wandjina has a custodian family or clan responsible for protecting and maintaining the image. This involves periodic repainting to restore their brightness and preserve the ancestor’s spiritual essence within. Not only does this ensure good relations between Wandjina and the people, it also perpetuates the regeneration of all life. Only senior men of the clan have authority to do this.

Frequently associated with the Wandjina are other images portraying mythological beings and a wide variety of plants, animals and items of material culture. These motifs are often linked to events that occurred in the Wandjina’s creative journey and may include Gwion Gwion figures, also called ‘Bradshaws’ after the first European to record them in 1891. Attempts to date the rock paintings suggest the Wandjina may be as old as 4,000 years, while the Gwion Gwions date back at least 18,000 years, deepening the mystery that enshrouds

them both.

The spirits may be depicted alone or in groups, upright or horizontal depending on the dimensions of the rock. They are often imposing in scale, sometimes extending up to 6 metres in length. If a Wandjina is shown as a full body, it is said to be walking the Earth; if depicted as a torso with head and shoulders, the spirit is said to be moving across the sky in a cloud or storm.

They are generally drawn front-on on a white background, which is created by blowing pigment from the mouth. The outline is often black or red and the decorative infill is applied in red, yellow, orange or black pigment. The body lacks anatomical detail but is decorated with dots or stripes representing rain. Sometimes an oval shape placed centrally on the chest represents the Wandjina’s heart and may be painted as a pearl-shell pendant, signifying the spirit’s life-giving powers.





FROM LEFT These Wandjina images have recently been repainted to refresh their spiritual essence; Mt Elizabeth Station is a real working cattle station, not a tourist trap, but amenities at the station campground include a well-appointed camp kitchen

Heads are surrounded by a semicircular band of solid colour or radiating lines that give the impression that they are wearing a helmet or headdress. Radiating lines represent the lightning that heralds the wet season rains. Ceremonial dances paying homage to the Wandjina Rain Spirit can include headdresses symbolizing this element.

But perhaps the most striking aspects of a Wandjina image, which make them instantly recognisable, are the facial characteristics – large black eyes gazing out from a luminous white face that is always devoid of a mouth. Two explanations have been given for this: they are so powerful that they do not need speech or that if they had mouths, the rain would never cease. A feature between the eyes resembles a nose but is actually a power line or conduit through which energy is transmitted.

The overall effect is mesmerising and has been the subject of many interpretations. One of these is that Wandjina are stylized representations of extraterrestrial beings who visited Earth tens of thousands of years ago and played a direct role in creation – a theory shared by myths and legends in ancient civilizations around the world. Yet, despite exhaustive study and voluminous writings, the origin and meaning of the Wandjina images remain a mystery, lost forever in the mist of time.

MT ELIZABETH STATION

Paintings of these ‘sky beings’ occur at many sites throughout northern and central Kimberley and one of the best places to see them is Mt Elizabeth Station (MES). The Station lies in the heart of Wandjina Country, about halfway between Derby and Kununurra. On a trek through this iconic region, we made a point of stopping at MES for some much-needed R&R and a guided tour of these fascinating paintings.

After topping up with fuel and supplies at the Mt Barnett Roadhouse, we continued 39km further east along the Gibb River Road (GRR) and turned onto the 30km access road to the homestead – an oasis of lush gardens, soft green lawn, pandanus palms and gum trees. All roads in this part of the world are unsealed, some rougher than others, and we found these ones to be in reasonable condition and traversable in our high-clearance vehicles and vans (4WD is recommended but not obligatory).

The area has a long history of human occupation. Abundant water and food sources enabled the Ngarinyin people to flourish, which explains why there is so much Wandjina artwork among the station’s rocky outcrops. Gold prospector and explorer Frank Hann visited the area in 1898 and named Mount Elizabeth after his mother and in 1945, pioneer Frank Lacy

established the station on the Kimberley's oldest pastoral lease. Both Lacy and his wife, Teresa, are buried near the homestead. The Lacy family operated the enterprise until 2016 when the lease was sold to Western Australia's biggest landholder, Shanghai Zenith.

Although MES welcomes and is able to accommodate tourists, it is not a touristy dude ranch. It is a fair dinkum working cattle station and reputedly one of the best places to experience true station life.

The 2000 sq km station stocks about 6500 head of cattle on its pastures. The cattle, predominantly Brahman-crosses and some shorthorn, are bound for export markets in Indonesia and the Middle East. Mustering was happening at the time of our visit and we got to see some of these beasts – at a respectful distance – in some of the bush collection yards. Back in the 1950s and '60s, the Lacy's employed Aboriginal stockmen (many from the nearby Dodnun community) on horseback to round up the animals. Today, the operation mostly uses quad bikes and helicopters. Stockmen cull and manage the critters at close quarters through the homestead yards, which is a risky exercise as the long-horned bulls have been the undoing of many a slow ranch hand.



fast

FACTS

➔ Mt Elizabeth Station is 340km east of Derby and 365km west of Kununurra along the Gibb River Road. The Station turn-off is 39km east of Mt Barnett Roadhouse and the homestead is at the end of an unsealed 30km road.

➔ 4WD and/or high clearance vehicles are recommended.

➔ MES is open seven days a week during the dry season (April to October) but is inaccessible and closed during the wet season (November to March).

➔ A gorge pass (\$20) is required for access to Wunnamurra and Warla, and a fee of \$150 per vehicle, plus a \$50 key deposit (refundable on return) is charged for travel on the Munja Track.

➔ Unpowered camping is available with a camp kitchen, BBQ (wood supplied) and amenities that include drinking water, hot showers, flush toilets and a laundry. Bookings are not required for the campground but fees apply (not available at the time of publication).

➔ Single, twin share/double and king rooms are available in the homestead complex, with a mix of shared and ensuite amenities. Room only \$137/person/night; bed and breakfast \$167/person/night; full board \$229/person/night. Linen, towels provided. Bookings essential.



➔ Mt Barnett Roadhouse is the nearest place for fuel and offers meals and a limited range of supplies.

➔ There is no mobile coverage but MES and the Roadhouse have Telstra payphones available 24 hours.

CONTACT:

Mount Elizabeth Station

P: (08) 9191 4644

E: bookings@mtelizabethstationstay.com.au

W: www.mountelizabethstation.com



Although the primary focus has been the production of beef cattle, some years ago the Lacy's opened MES to eco-tourism, with accommodation in the homestead complex (with or without full board) or in the adjacent camping area, serviced by showers, toilets and laundry. With magnificent gorges and waterfalls on the Barnett and Hann Rivers, scenic bush-walks, a huge variety of native flora and fauna and extreme terrain for enthusiastic 4WDers, MES has much to offer visitors. The main attraction for us was joining a guided tour of the station's several Aboriginal rock art sites. This proved to be a very popular choice by many of the visitors at the time and we had to extend our stay by an extra day to secure a berth on a tour.



FROM LEFT Entrance to the station reception through the homestead garden; wallabies are common companions in the homestead campground

“But perhaps the most striking aspects of a Wandjina image, which make them instantly recognisable, are the facial characteristics – large black eyes gazing out from a luminous white face that is always devoid of a mouth”



TAKING A TOUR

After a sub-zero night under a million stars, the day of our tour was balmy and clear – typical Kimberley weather in the dry season. We piled into the back of a station troopie, driven by Phil (a Kimberley veteran who hailed from WA's southern wheat belt), and settled back to enjoy the ride accompanied by his laconic commentary and wry bush humour. Other members of the tour opted to drive in a tag-along convoy that provided some interesting fourwheel driving.

Our route took us along some

rudimentary tracks that have to be re-graded or pioneered afresh after each wet season, and the further from the homestead, the rougher they became. We followed these red dirt tracks through undulating prairies and savannah woodland, crossing creeks at stony fords and skirting rocky outcrops that rose from diverse, ever-changing vegetation.

Phil told us about the station's environment and the abundant wildlife that thrives despite the harsh conditions. A host of native grasses, shrubs and trees are endemic to the region, many of which have

been used by Indigenous people as bush tucker or medicines for thousands of years. The most common native animals on the station are wallabies (which frequent the campground and home paddocks in large numbers) and reptiles such as goannas, water monitors and pythons. Dozens of bird species also inhabit the region's woodlands and watercourses including brolgas, jabirus and egrets, flycatchers, warblers and orioles.

At the Hann River, Phil announced smoko and we dismounted to stretch our legs and admire the pristine waters of one of the many watercourses that traverse the station. Pandanus lined the banks and silky grevillea with golden, nectar-laden combs grew beside the track. Kingfishers darted here and there among the trees, their iridescent plumage flashing under a cloudless Kimberley sky. The rough track beckoned us deeper into the savannah beyond the ford and, smoko done, the convoy pressed on.

During the course of the day we stopped at five art sites, to which the station owners have permission from the Traditional Owners to conduct tours (there are many other sites on the station that are still out of bounds to all but the initiated). At each one Phil regaled us with Indigenous folklore entrusted to him by an elder from the Dodnun community. The paintings comprised an interesting mix of Wandjina and Gwion Gwion figures of varying size, colour and complexity, as well as ochre murals immortalising the exploits of corporeal ancestors. Many had been painted in the sandstone caverns and overhangs so long ago that they were faded and barely discernible, which seemed to accentuate their antiquity and the mystical aura surrounding them.

We stopped for lunch at a beautiful billabong, fed at one end by a stream that cascaded gently over a modest waterfall, enclosed on one side by a low sandstone cliff and, on the other, by a stand of paperbarks that cast cooling shadows across the pool. This grotto seemed to be imbued with a tranquility not entirely natural. While the billy boiled for lunch, Phil pointed to the rocky overhang at the far end of the pool, adorned with several Wandjina that had been recently repainted – a narrow ledge cradled the earthly remains of an Aboriginal elder, whose skull gazed sightlessly across the water.

We were acutely aware that we were in a special place with the express permission of the Indigenous custodians and felt extremely privileged to be there. Our sojourn among these beguiling ancestor spirits, the legacy of an ancient culture, had been a truly enriching experience in the heart of the Kimberley.



LEFT TO RIGHT Gwion Gwion figures are depicted throughout the area; Silky Grevillea was prolific along the river banks; This Wandjina reclines beneath a sandstone overhang

THINGS TO DO

There are many things to do in Wandjina country including but not limited to:

- Bushwalking
- Swimming
- Photography
- Guided 4WD tours to Aboriginal rock art
- Self-guided 4WD excursions to Wunnamurra Gorge, Warla Gorge and the Munja Track to Walcott Inlet. 



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Words Ged Bulmer *Pics* Cam Inniss and Supplied

TEUTONIC TRUCK

Better known for its luxury SUVs, sedans and sporty coupes, the three-pointed star has made an impressive debut into the dual cab ute class and now has a clear point of difference with this punchy V6 diesel





When news broke in 2015 that Mercedes-Benz was planning to enter the booming dual cab ute market, many an eyebrow was raised. Prevailing wisdom said that the Stuttgart-based car maker is a prestige brand and hence has no business messing about in the muddy wheel tracks of the dual cab 4x4 market.

What this view failed to acknowledge, however, is that Germany's oldest and most famous luxury car maker has a long history of making rugged and reliable commercial vehicles. There's a reason the Australian Defence Force use Benz G-Wagens, and it's not because of their leather.

Of course, the X-Class also generated headlines for other reasons as well; principally because it wasn't an all-new model as such, but a re-engineered version of a Nissan Navara. That really got the purists fuming, but Benz's logic was hard to fault; a ground-up development of an all-new model costs billions of dollars and takes at least five years, where a partnership gets a car to market sooner, and at a lower cost.

Still, with Ford's Ranger and Toyota's HiLux regarded as the benchmarks in the category, many wondered why Mercedes didn't look to partner with one of those, rather than a solid and dependable mid-fielder like the Navara? The real answers are no doubt buried in reams of arcane corporate contracts and locked in a vault in Stuttgart, but suffice to say Mercedes-Benz and Nissan already had existing platform and engine-sharing partnerships in place, so the Navara may simply have represented the path of least resistance.

COLLABORATIVE THINKING

Perhaps just as importantly is the fact the top-tier, dual-cab 4x4 Navara on which the X-Class is based, is differentiated from pretty much all of its rivals by the use of a coil sprung rear end. In this category, leaf springs are still very much the proven configuration for hard-working commercials, but with their traceable links to the horse and cart they're not such a good fit for Mercedes-Benz, with its carefully-crafted image as a safety and technology leader.

As Nissan has found out, though, opting to go with more comfortable and sophisticated coils does have drawbacks when it comes to load lugging. Put simply, beefing coil springs up to give them something approaching the load-lugging ability of a leaf spring setup often negates the ride and handling benefits that promoted their fitment in the first place. Nissan has certainly struggled to get the balance right during several iterations of the current Navara.

Meanwhile over at Mercedes-Benz, it's fair to say that the X-Class hasn't exactly set the ute category on fire, either, managing a total

of 16,700 global sales in 2018 in the limited number of markets where it is sold.

By comparison, the Toyota HiLux, with a much wider global distribution and a nameplate that goes all the way back to 1968, sold close to 500,000 utes in that same period. It's a similar story here in Australia, where the X-Class managed 1500 sales in 2018, versus nearly 51,705 sales of 4x4 and 4x2 HiLux. That said, X-Class sales are up by a healthy 50-odd per cent so far this year, so it's possible Aussie consumers have simply taken a while to wrap their heads around the concept of a Mercedes-Benz ute.

GRUNT AND GROWN

Some of the sales issues may also be attributable to the fact the X-Class launched with the Navara's four-cylinder turbodiesel engine, rather than a 'proper' Benz engine. Mercedes responded to that criticism in December 2018 with the launch of the grunty 3L V6 turbodiesel we're testing here, immediately propelling the X-Class to the top of the league table in terms of power and torque, along with VW's Amarok.





MERCEDES-BENZ X350D TOW TEST

FROM TOP Mercedes Benz have worked with Nissan and re-engineered the popular Navara; an engine upgrade put this at the top of the dual cab market in terms of power and torque

MERCEDES BENZ X350D

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Length 5340mm
Width (excluding mirrors) 1916mm
Height 1839mm
Wheelbase 3150mm
Ground clearance (unladen) 222mm
Kerb mass 2190kg
Gross Vehicle Mass 3250kg
Gross Combined Mass 6180kg
Towing capacity unbraked/braked
750kg/3500kg
Towball (max) 350kg

DRIVETRAIN

Engine 3.0L intercooled turbodiesel V6,
DOHC
Transmission Seven-speed automatic
Power 190kW at 3400rpm
Torque 550Nm at 1400-3200rpm
Gear ratios 1st 4.377, 2nd 2.859, 3rd
1.921, 4th 1.368, 5th 1.000, 6th 0.820,
7th 0.728
Reverse 4.041
Final drive 3.357
High/low 1.000/2.900

GENERAL

Fuel capacity 80L
Suspension Independent, double
wishbones, coil springs (fr); live axle,
coil springs, multi-link (rr)
Brakes Ventilated discs (fr); ventilated
discs drums (rr)
Wheels 19in alloy
Warranty Three years/200,000km
including 24/7 roadside assist.
Roof load 100kg

OPTIONS FITTED

Style Pack including privacy glass on
rear windows, electric sliding rear
window, side-steps, roof rails,
alternative 19-inch multi-spoke
alloys with 255/55R19 tyres and full-
size spare (\$2090); leather seats
(\$1750); metallic paint (\$950)

ACCESSORIES FITTED

Bed-liner (\$899); chrome sports bar
(\$1551); full towing kit (\$2063)

PRICE AS TESTED \$88,718 plus
on-road costs

PRICED FROM \$79,415 plus dealer
and on-road costs

MORE INFORMATION

Please visit www.mercedes-benz.com.au/vans



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP There's a payload of over 1000kg; it has some serious grunt; safety features give the V6 a five-star ANCAP rating; the dash is well-laid out; the new 3L V6 turbo-diesel

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"With production of the model ending, astute buyers should be able to drive a hard bargain"

TOWING PERFORMANCE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Gutsy V6 diesel matched with smooth and responsive automatic gearbox make for an impressive drivetrain package"

HITCHING UP

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Reversing camera and infotainment screen a boon here"

CREATURE COMFORTS

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Luxurious leather-trimmed interior matches the badge on the bonnet"

ACCESSIBILITY OF SPARE PARTS

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Dealers not as widely dispersed as brands like Toyota or Ford"

FUEL ECONOMY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Sips with typical diesel thrift"

SOLO PERFORMANCE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"One of the better riding and handling dual cabs on the market"

ENGINE POWER

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Vies with VW Amarok V6 for title of most powerful dual cab ute"

INNOVATION

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Interior is a stand out in the ute world, with impressive infotainment system"

THE X-FACTOR

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Following the news it will be a one-off model, the X-Class is guaranteed a certain exclusivity"



Importantly, the V6 is a Benz designed and engineered unit, featuring all-alloy construction, DOHC 24-valve cylinder heads, common rail fuel injection, a variable geometry turbo and a single counter rotating balance shaft to iron out some diesel vibration.

The new engine comes fitted in two high-spec X-Class models, the Progressive and the Power, costing \$73,240 and \$79,415 respectively. If you're thinking 'wow, that's expensive for a ute!', then you're right, but then a top-spec Ford Ranger Raptor retails for \$74,990, while a VW Amarok Ultimate 580 V6 costs \$72,790, so it's not that over the top.

You can obviously also spend a whole lot more by shopping the extensive factory options list and our X-Class featured leather seats (\$1750) and metallic paint (\$950), along with a 'Style Pack' (\$2090). The latter includes an electric sliding rear window, rear privacy glass, side-steps, roof rails and alternative 19in alloy wheels. The Style Pack also includes a full-size spare which, along with the standard tyre-pressure warning monitor, came in handy as we copped a puncture during testing.

In addition, the Benz box tickers also added a protective load tub liner (\$899), chrome sports bar (\$1551) and full towing kit (\$2063). Tote that lot up and you'll note we were rolling – extra carefully thanks – in nearly \$90k worth of premium ute. Yowser!

“The driving position is comfortable and everything is well laid out, with an 8.4in multimedia screen at the centre of the dash”



As you might expect from this brand the X-Class is impressively well appointed on the safety front, with four-wheel ventilated discs, and an array of electronic safety aids, including anti-lock brakes, traction control, stability control, brake assist, and trailer stability assist. There's also autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, adaptive cruise control, and airbags seemingly everywhere. The latter includes driver and front passenger front and side airbags, driver knee airbag, driver and front passenger side airbags, and front to rear curtain airbags. Collectively, that lot contributes to the X-Class's excellent five-star ANCAP safety rating.

Out on the open road the X-Class gets along very nicely indeed, its 3L V6 turbodiesel punching out a healthy 190kW and 550Nm, the latter available between 1400 and 3200rpm. For the record, the only engine that comes close in the category is VW's Amarok V6, with figures of 165kW/550Nm. Hitched to a smooth shifting seven-speed automatic gearbox, the V6 fires the unladen X-Class from 0-100km/h in an impressively brisk 7.9 seconds. By way of comparison, Ford's Ranger Raptor covers the distance in a claimed 9.9 seconds, while the Amarok V6 claims an identical split.

There are steering-wheel mounted paddle shifts to enable manual gear selection if desired and the auto offers no less than five different driving modes – Comfort, Eco, Sport, Manual and Off Road – via a switch on the console. In Comfort mode there's some turbo lag evident, which is most noticeable

INTO THE HOT SEAT

Despite their spiraling price tags, rear seat accommodation in most dual cab utes is pretty ordinary, and the X-Class is no exception. Aside from the usual difficulties with ingress and egress into the high cab, the seats are oriented with an upright backrest and a high squab that means you sit in knees-up position with headroom for tall passengers at a premium.

The driving position is comfortable and everything is well laid out, with an 8.4in multimedia screen at the centre of the dash featuring navigation and 3D maps, as well as Around View Monitor.

There's also a rear-view camera and rear parking sensors, both of which come in handy as the 5.3m X-Class isn't exactly nimble, as evidenced by its 12.8m turning circle. Bug bears include the lack of steering reach adjustment, the absence of a driver's footrest, and minimal oddment storage in the centre console.



"Mercedes responded to that criticism in December 2018 with the launch of the grunty 3.0L V6 turbodiesel we're testing here, *immediately propelling the X-Class to the top of the league table*"



when you suddenly want a bit more acceleration at low speeds, such as when turning into traffic out of a side street.

Switching to Sport sharpens throttle and gearbox responses noticeably and largely negates the issue, but we found the mode a little too frenetic for everyday driving, so switched back to Comfort as soon as possible.

Unlike the Navara and most others in the category which feature selectable 4x4 systems and typically run in 2WD, driving the rear wheels up until the point where the front axle is manually engaged, the X-Class features permanent all-wheel drive via a central-differential.

In its normal 4MATIC mode the system varies torque 40:60 front to rear but can send up to 100 per cent of torque to either axle when slip occurs. There's also the option to engage 4H at speeds up to 100km/h for a 30:70 split, or 4L which brings in the low-range gearing and splits torque 50:50. If that lot still hasn't got you out of trouble, there's also an electronic rear differential lock which provides a further level of traction aid.



TOWING TESTED

Of course, the towing fraternity will be thinking that, being an all-wheel drive, there's likely to be a penalty at the bowser, and they'd be right up to a point.

The V6 ticks over at a lazy 1650rpm at 100km/h in top gear with Mercedes claiming a highway cycle figure of 8.1L/100km, while around town the figure is 10.0L/100km, and the combined cycle 8.8L/100km. As always, these ADR figures are somewhat optimistic, and over our 700km tow route from Melbourne to Dargo and back, towing a 2020 Jayco CrossTrak 16.48-1 with a Tare weight of 1500-1549kg, we averaged 14.9L/100 km.

For the record, the Jayco ran with no water or gas but around 100kg of gear inside, so our final tow-weight was circa 1600-1700kg. Hence, with its fuel tank capacity of 80L, the unladen X-Class should have a combined-cycle range of around 900km, while with the Jayco in tow we'd topping up roughly every 500km.

Despite the coil sprung rear end the Jayco's moderate (130kg) ball weight meant the X-Class tray never sagged and the ride remained nicely compliant throughout. The steering errs on the light side and lacks a bit in terms of feedback when laden, and we noticed the steering weighting-up slightly when accelerating on loose surfaces, as the all-wheel drive system shuffled drive to the front end. We didn't get a chance to test the X-Class with a lot of additional weight in the tray, so can't comment on how payload affects the ride but it towed strongly, rode well and was impressively quiet even when under load.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The X-class has permanent all-wheel drive; it towed strongly across different conditions; a seven-speed automatic gearbox has the dual cab getting along nicely

Aside from the aforementioned lag when accelerating off the line, the V6 pulls strongly and smoothly, feeling very under-stressed and managing this load relatively easily. Using the adaptive cruise control system was simple and never felt unsafe, but it was best to leave the radar at full length to allow the ute more time to decelerate evenly.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In summary, Mercedes-Benz may have arrived late to the dual cab ute party and taken a short cut to get there, but the X-Class V6 is an impressive piece of kit that offers class-leading performance, impressive dynamics, a strong safety package, and the ability to get down and dirty with the best of them when the going gets rough.

It has also got the logo of one of the world's most respected and revered car makers mounted proudly and prominently on its grille, which for some buyers will be all they need to know. 



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The X-class managed the van very easily; for some the badge on the front will be all the need to know



X-CLASS SOON TO BE EX-CLASS

Weeks after I had penned this review for *Caravan World*, Mercedes-Benz confirmed the widely circulated rumour that its X-Class mid-size pickup would cease production from the end of May 2020.

After years of building anticipation and bold announcements about the impact the luxury brand could have in this new workhorse segment, in the end the X-Class will be remembered as a short-lived one-trick pony from the world's oldest car maker.

In an official global statement released on January 31, Mercedes-Benz confirmed that the model's demise came as a result of the decision, taken in early 2019, to not proceed with production of the ute in Argentina. The X-Class is manufactured at a Nissan plant in Spain and there were plans to extend manufacturing to Argentina but "the price expectations of the Latin American customers have not been economically viable," the statement said.

Mercedes-Benz Vans Australia confirmed that its last X-Class order was placed in January and it would not order any further stock. A spokesperson said there was enough stock in the system to satisfy current demand, which is running at around 180 units per month. The spokesperson added that ongoing service and warranty coverage will continue to be provided by the approximately 52 Mercedes-Benz Vans Australia dealerships that stock or have previously sold the X-Class.

In the end Benz's flirtation with the dual cab ute market was surprisingly brief, with owners left to ponder what the end of production will do for their residuals. No doubt it won't be positive, but for anyone who has always wanted a ute with the iconic three-pointed star on the bonnet, you now have more dealership bargaining power than ever.

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20 THINGS FOR 2020

With so much to see and do around Australia, here is a list to help you choose and plan a trip you'll remember

Words CATHERINE LAWSON

Pics DAVID BRISTOW



You've set your sights on a far northern Aussie escape, and since no road trip is complete without a list of challenges and thrills to tick off along the way, here it is! From Broome to the Kimberleys and Kakadu to Cape York, whether you're a seasoned escapee or hitting the road for the very first time, these Bucket List ideas will inspire your travels this year to make the journey one you'll remember.



CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN Find Mount Hypipamee's hidden crater; 4WD through the Eastern Kimberley; Anastasia's pool and the 130 million-year-old dinosaur footprints at Gantheaume Point

FIND DINOSAUR FOOTPRINTS, WA

Beneath Gantheaume Point's crumbling amber cliffs, Broome's best end-of-day beach parties heat up on the sand as travellers gather to salute each sunset with drinks in hand. But, at the base of the historical lighthouse, the lowest of low tides reveal a truly remarkable stampede of 130 million-year-old dinosaur footprints, imprinted on the rock shelf.

Check the tides before tackling your search and afterwards, stop for a lofty swim in the waterhole known as Anastasia's pool, staring out over the sea.

When you go: Gantheaume Point is located at the southern end of Cable Beach in Broome. A 4WD track leads onto the sandy beach below, which is hard and safe — just watch the quick incoming tide.

SEE THE STAIRCASE TO THE MOON, WA

When the full moon rises over Broome, mangrove-fringed Town Beach comes to life, hosting a stunning but fleeting phenomenon known as the Staircase to the Moon. Mudflats revealed at low tide provide the perfect al fresco canvas, reflecting a shimmering, golden staircase that rises to meet the moon.

It only happens for a few nights each month between March and October, and because just about everything is celebrated in Broome, a night market materialises with the moon as locals cook up a storm and entertain with acoustic tunes.

When you go: Time your stay in Broome for any full moon rising between March and October, and don't miss the Shinju Matsuri Festival in September (visitbroome.com.au).



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Experience Broome time at Gantheaume Point; a wet walk through Tunnel Creek; a freshwater crocodile in Windjana Gorge; camp on the coast and catch Broome's Staircase to the Moon from March to October; break out the tent and spend time exploring the Mitchell Plateau

WET WALK THROUGH TUNNEL CREEK, WA

Arm yourself with a torch to tackle this thrilling wet walk through the pitch-black pools inside the Kimberley's Tunnel Creek. Wade and wander for 750m, spotlighting stalactites and curtains of flowstones that drip onto your nose, while little red flying-foxes squawk restlessly overhead and freshwater crayfish, known as cherubin, tickle your toes.

High above the tunnel's entrance, eagle-eyed explorers will spot rock art marking the secret hideout of Bunuba tribe freedom fighter Jandamarra, who waged a guerrilla war against police and pastoralists in Windjana Gorge in 1884.

When you go: Tunnel Creek is located 115km northwest of Fitzroy Crossing (open April to November, \$15/vehicle entry). Pack torches and wear waterproof sandals (parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au).



“Utterly bewitching and oh-so-remote, magical Mitchell Falls is the Kimberley’s ultimate, four-tier cascade and there are lots of ways to see it.”





EYEBALL CROCS IN WINDJANA GORGE, WA

Close to Tunnel Creek and rising 100m above the Lennard River, Windjana Gorge guards a string of seasonal waterholes where big freshwater crocodiles laze on sunny, sandy banks. It's easily the best spot in the Kimberley to safely encounter freshies up close, and there's a top riverside hike and strange prehistoric fossils to discover at the rocky entrance to the gorge.

When you go: Windjana's spacious campground has hot showers, drinking water, and generators and fires are permitted. Sites cost \$17/adult, \$12/concession and \$3/child (parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au). Visit over the cool winter months.

FLY OVER MITCHELL FALLS, WA

Utterly bewitching and oh-so-remote, magical Mitchell Falls is the Kimberley's ultimate, four-tier cascade and there are lots of ways to see it. Base yourself at Drysdale River Station for a scenic flight over the falls, or drive to King Edward River, unhitch the caravan and rumble 80km on to Mitchell River campground where you can take a chopper ride over the falls and be back in your van in one, very long, day trip.

Break out the tent if you want to linger longer and enjoy the excellent hike to the falls, stopping en route to discover the rock art and lofty spa pools above Little Mertens Falls (five hours return).

When you go: Mitchell River campground is located 260km off the Gibb River Road across the King Edward River (high clearance 4WDs and rigs only). Visit from May–July and buy a Unguu Visitor Pass online (\$45 per person, kids free, wunambalgaamberra.org.au). Camping costs \$11/adult, \$7/concession or \$3/child (parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au).



TICK OFF PURNULULU'S TOP 5, WA

Deep inside Echidna Chasm, the midday sun appears briefly overhead, igniting this slim, boulder-strewn canyon. Dazzling fingers of light dance across flaring 200m high rock walls, wooing walkers with an unmissable, noon-time phenomenon.

To fully experience the Bungles, add a hike into cavernous Cathedral Gorge to test the water-filled amphitheatre's amazing acoustics (3km, 1.5hrs return), wander beneath towering Livistona palms on the Mini Palms Walk (5km, 2hrs return), and catch at least one sunset over the Bungle's extraordinary beehive domes. Finally, jump aboard a helicopter to dip and dive into Purnululu's endless, otherwise unreachable chasms.

When you go: Purnululu National Park is 300km south of Kununurra (parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au). Access is restricted to single axle caravans so unhitch yours at Bungle Bungle Caravan Park (powered sites from \$50/night) or join a day tour (bunglebunglcaravanpark.com.au).



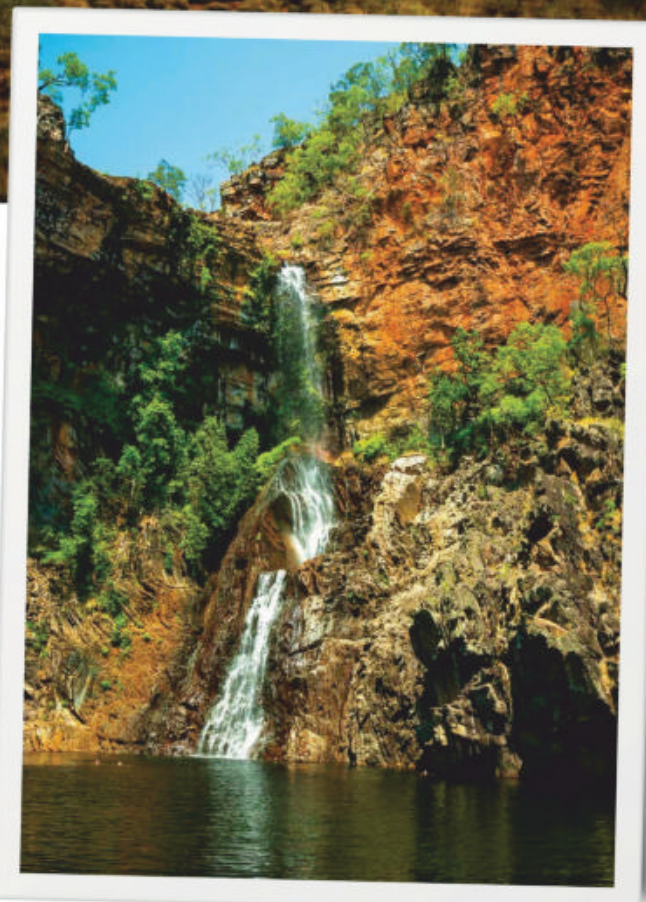
LEFT TO RIGHT Catch Echidna Chasm's midday light show in Purnululu National Park; warm up in hot springs from Darwin to Katherine

4WD TO MARLGU BILLABONG, WA

On this little-travelled back road that links Kununurra to Wyndham, a string of hidden waterholes fill beneath weathered sandstone ranges and travellers settle into free waterfront camps at Valentine Springs, Middle Springs, Black Rock Falls and angler-friendly Mambi Island boat ramp on the Lower Ord River.

Up the track in Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve, migratory birds take flight in hypnotic whirls from the shimmering pools along Marlgu Billabong. Stake out the bird hide, then climb nearby Telegraph Hill for sunset to photograph the purple-hued boabs that stud the golden grasslands.

When you go: 18km west of Kununurra, turn off the Victoria Highway towards Valentine Springs. The unsealed route to Wyndham (125km away) is suitable for offroad caravans during the dry season (May to September). Free camp or overnight at Parry Creek Farm (powered sites, \$37/couple), visitkununurra.com.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Bungle's extraordinary beehive domes; Litchfield's less visited Tjaynera Falls; the NT's Mary River Wetlands

GET HOT AND WET, NT

This string of rejuvenating hot springs will soothe you all the way from Darwin to Katherine. Start your water therapy at Berry Springs Nature Park, a 40-minute drive out of Darwin, and continue south to lounge in Mataranka Thermal Pools and drift dive magnificent Bitter Springs.

Along the way you can overnight by the Tjuwalyin Hot Springs, which bubble to the surface at a 60°C, and after a day exploring Nitmiluk National Park, cool your heels in Katherine's gloriously tranquilizing Monsoon Springs.

When you go: Visit from May to September. Plan an overnight stop at Mataranka's Little Roper Stock Camp (\$30 powered sites, kids stay for free, littleroperstockcamp.com.au).

SWIM AT TJAYNERA FALLS, NT

For a wild slice of Litchfield without the crowds, head 9km off the bitumen to Sandy Creek Campground and Tjaynera Falls. Follow the cycad-fringed walking trail to the falls and plunge off poolside rock ledges, lazing on sunny granite boulders in between icy dips (1.7km, 45mins). Close by, the rustic outdoor museum at Blyth Homestead showcases one family's Top End life in the early 1900s (free entry).

When you go: Unpowered sites at Sandy Creek cost \$6.60/adult, \$3.30/child and \$15.40/family (nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves).

FISH THE MARY RIVER BARRAGE, QLD

Home to the world's highest concentration of estuarine crocodiles (and some of the best barramundi angling you'll ever encounter), Mary River Wetlands is an exceptional, caravan-friendly destination for anglers and wildlife watchers.

Brave the Shady Camp barrage to cast your line into either the saltwater or freshwater side and snare your catch from the mouth of a croc. Afterwards, launch your boat to wrangle barramundi in Corroboree and Rockhole Billabongs, and climb to Couzens Lookout for wild, endless views

When you go: Follow the Kakadu Highway 90mins from Darwin. Campsites cost \$3.30/person.

HIKE COBOURG'S VICTORIA RUINS, NT

When the British Government built the Victoria Settlement back in 1838, they had no idea that isolation, malaria, cyclones and sunken supply ships would bury a quarter of its pioneers on this faraway coastline. The settlement's survivors stoically lasted 11 years before calling it a day, and today Victoria's crumbling brick ruins occupy an idyllic clifftop location shaded by mop-top cabbage palms and paperbarks, overlooking the calmest of bright blue bays. Hiking the ruins takes just a couple of hours but you'll need to tow your tinny 560km to Garig Gunak Barlu (Cobourg) National Park first.

When you go: Don't miss Ranger Robbie Risk's excellent (free) adventures to hunt mud crab and bush tucker on Wuwurdi Billabong. The park is 4WD-only (open May to October) and permits for week-long stays cost \$232.10 per group (nt.gov.au).



LEFT TO RIGHT Take your tinny to faraway Garig Gunak Barlu (Cobourg) National Park and hike the Victoria Ruins; unwind at Nanny's Retreat in Lorella Springs Wilderness Park



GET LOST IN LORELLA SPRINGS, NT

For offroad-ready caravans, Lorella Springs offers a week's worth of soothing hot springs, escarpment caves, waterfalls and billabongs to explore with imaginative names like Scary Thing Swamp, Snapping Handbag Billabong and the Valley of the Mazes. Canoe along Rosie Rapids, slide into the pandanus-fringed Nudie Hot Springs and retreat to the bar after sunset to mingle with adventurers from right across Australia.

When you go: Lorella Springs is located 140km off the bitumen north of Cape Crawford. Visit early in the dry season (April or May). Camping costs \$20/person and kids pay their age (minimum 2-night stay, lorellasprings.com).

CROC-SPOT AT CAHILLS CROSSING, NT

You might have seen a hundred salties, but this turn-of-the-tide spectacle that entices estuarine crocodiles and anglers to spar for barramundi is not to be missed. 4WD vehicles crossing the causeway between Kakadu National Park and Arnhem Land, stir up the turbid water, attracting fish that get trapped by the rapidly retreating water on the wrong side of the causeway. Salties move in to snap them up, and anglers join the fun too.

When you go: Camp close by at Kakadu's Merl Campground (parksaustralia.gov.au/kakadu) and arrive in September to catch Jabiru's Mahbilil Festival.

WAKE UP TO A MORNING GLORY, QLD

Burketown is famous for exactly two things: superb barramundi fishing and the spectacular Morning Glory clouds that sweep across the Gulf of Carpentaria from August to October. When conditions are just right, these 2km long tubular clouds roll in at first light, spanning the sky and attracting gliders who 'ride' the Morning Glory like a surfer catching an ocean wave.

If you make it to the barramundi capital of Australia and don't catch the clouds, fish the Albert River for a catch of barra and mud crabs instead.

When you go: Burketown is located 32km west of Normanton. Arrive over the Easter long weekend to join the World Barramundi Fishing Championship (burke.qld.gov.au).



ENCOUNTER LUMHOLTZ'S TREE-KANGAROOS, QLD

Resembling a cross between a bear and a kangaroo, these rare creatures inhabit the canopy in Mount Hypipamee National Park, also famous for a dramatic, water-filled volcanic explosion crater with sheer granite walls that plunge 140m.

Hit the trails early for your best chance of spotting one and cool off afterwards in the fern-fringed pools beneath Dinner Falls. If you don't get lucky, Malanda's Nerada Tea Plantation is a reliable spot to encounter tree roos and the tea and scones alone are worth the trip.

When you go: Mount Hypipamee National Park is 25km south of Atherton (free entry, no camping). Don't miss Malanda's Tree Roo Awareness Week in May (treeroorecue.org.au).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Discover the NT's last frontier in Limmen National Park and Lorella Springs; stand at The Tip; encounter rare, endangered Lumholtz's tree-kangaroos in Mount Hypipamee National Park

STAND AT THE TIP, QLD

Every dusty Cape York adventure ends at this low-lying slither of rock that touches the sea at the very tip of Australia. To stand atop Mount Bremer is a euphoric bucket list moment, and the island-studded vista of York and Eborac Islands and rainforest-fringed Frangipani Bay curling away behind is simply breathtaking.

When you go: The Tip lies 32km north of Bamaga. Free camp at Frangipani Bay or check into nearby Punsand Bay (capeyorkcamping.com.au).

SPEND A NIGHT ON THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, QLD

Midnight at sea on the Great Barrier Reef is utterly amazing, so save your splurge for a dazzling stay on the largest living organism on the planet. In all, there are 900 reefs, 600 islands and 300 coral cays to discover, so learn to dive (it takes just three days), book a resort stay at Fitzroy, Green or Lizard Islands, or set sail on an overnight reef cruise for thrilling dives, snorkelling and unparalleled quiet.

When you go: Compare reef trips and find your perfect fit at greatbarrierreef.com.au.

4WD THE BLOOMFIELD TRACK, QLD

Adventure through pristine and remote tropical wilderness from Cape Tribulation to Cooktown, stopping at deserted, coconut palm-fringed beaches and secluded rainforested swimming holes. Unhitch your van at a favourite Daintree holiday park and spend a night in a safari tent at the quirky, historical Lions Den Hotel before looping north to Cooktown and retracing your steps.

When you go: Swim at croc-free Woobadda Creek, rockhop to Bloomfield Falls, catch a barra on the Bloomfield and float beneath Home Rule Falls (tourismcapeyork.com).

**TOP TO BOTTOM**

Book a resort stay at reef-fringed Fitzroy Island, just 45 minutes from Cairns; explore Chillagoe's stunning underground wonder-world; midnight at sea is amazing, so spend a night on the Great Barrier Reef; discover a pristine, uncrowded slice of the Daintree on the rugged Bloomfield Track

**CHILLAGOE CAVES, QLD**

Explore, climb and shimmy through Chillagoe's stunning underground wonder-world that sparkles with chandeliers, delicate stalactites and gleaming rimstone pools. Explore Donna, Royal Arch and Trezkinn Caves on exceptional national park ranger-led tours or take your own torch and a pal on daring self-guided roams into Pompeii and Bauhinia Caves.

When you go: Chillagoe Caves are 143km west of Mareeba. Book cave tours on arrival at The Hub, and don't miss sunrise over Chillagoe's Balancing Rock (parks.des.qld.gov.au).

UNDARA EXPERIENCE, QLD

Spotlight your way through Australia's longest volcanic lava tubes and sip champagne on a sunset tour to watch the dazzling mass exodus of thousands of micro bats from Barkers Cave at dusk. At Undara you can plug your van into power or stay in a restored railway carriage, and there are walking trails, antilopine wallaroos to watch, and storytelling around the campfire.

When you go: Head 300km southwest of Cairns to Undara Experience (in Undara Volcanic National Park) over the winter months (April to August). Arrive in October for Opera in the Outback (undara.com.au). 📍



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Words
and Pics

MALCOLM
STREET

EASY CRUIS'N ENTRY LEVEL

Atlantic reckon their E-Series vans are the ultimate entry level caravan and great for first time buyers, but it does seem to have a few features that suggests it might be attractive to other purchasers as well





IN BRIEF

- ⊕ 6.56m (19ft 4in) tandem axle van
- ⊕ Roller rocker leaf spring suspension fitted
- ⊕ Front bed, rear bathroom layout
- ⊕ Tare mass of 2170kg

Atlantic caravans is a manufacturer that has been around for just on 10 years. Based in Campbellfield, aka the caravan manufacturing capital of Australia, Atlantic might get a bit lost among the larger players, but it produces a good range of caravans – road tourers, family vans and those suitable for off-road travel – or in other words, something for everyone.

Among that category comes the E-Series, a range of caravans aimed particularly at entry level buyers. My review van, an ES190-1MD, or E19 for short, came from Parravans Caravan World at Windsor, NSW. It's a mid-door entry van with an external length of 5.9m (19ft 4in).



ON THE ROAD

Towing the E19 is my sort of driving, especially around the Windsor area. Most of the roads are just two lanes and in some places there are tight corners. The E19 is not an overly long van and with a Tare of just 2170kg, it's a fairly light towing prospect. Certainly the Nissan Navara I was using had no difficulty handling the van and it didn't bounce around on the tow hitch. The payload of 630kg is very good for a van this size and I'd suspect that most people won't be loading up to that amount.

AROUND THE OUTSIDE

Aluminium cladding – just metal, not composite – was once used by just about every caravan manufacturer in Australia. That has changed somewhat, but Atlantic still has ribbed alloy cladding in white, which also used to be the default for most vans – nothing wrong with that, I quite like the white with a few decals.

Both the side and front walls have a lower waistline of black alloy checkerplate to give a bit of extra protection and offset the white of the van. I know black checkerplate is very popular, but it does look dirty very quickly, and on a warm day it can be hot to the touch, something I discovered when opening the alloy toolbox on the front drawbar!



CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN The layout is the ever present front bedroom, rear bathroom; alloy wheels and electric brake suit its intended touring; ribbed alloy cladding used to be the default for caravans

MEASURING **UP**



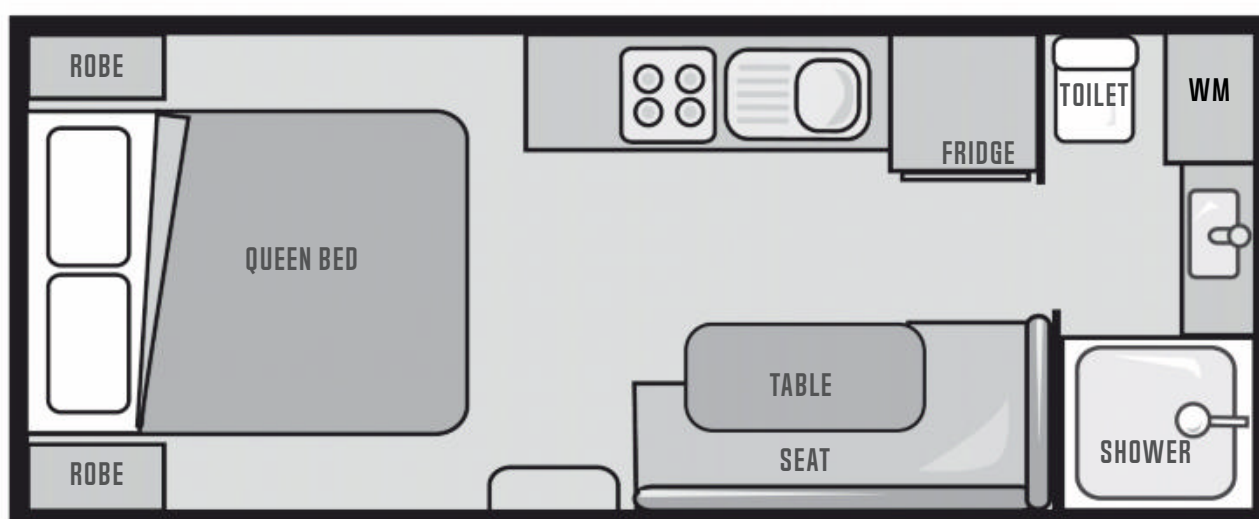
PROS

- ⊕ No real layout compromises
- ⊕ Payload
- ⊕ Interior look and finish
- ⊕ Good towing van



CONS

- ⊕ Bit squeeze around the loo
- ⊕ Bed single power points
- ⊕ Microwave oven height



"Front bedroom, rear bathroom (FBRB) layouts are very much in vogue these days"

Under the cladding is a Meranti timber frame with full insulation. One of the benefits of a mid-door caravan is that the awning covers the entrance with room to spare – no getting wet as you hop in and out.

Below the body line, I reckon that quite a few manufacturers use 150mm x 50mm (6in x 2in) RHS rails for no other reason than it looks good for the customers. Nothing like that here as both the main chassis rails and drawbar are made from 100mm x 50mm (4in x 2in) RHS, which keeps the weight down a bit. This is definitely an on-road van, so comes with the expected ball coupling and roller rocker, leaf spring suspension, alloy wheels with 10in electric brakes and a chassis ground clearance to suit the expected conditions. The water tanks are either side of the suspension mounts, and just in front of the offside wheels is the battery box for the two 100Ah batteries. Next to the battery box is an Anderson plug for connecting up extra solar panels if needed.

LAYOUT CHOICES

Front bedroom, rear bathroom (FBRB) layouts are very much in vogue these days, in part because the two most popular features seem to be an island bed and a full width bathroom with room to move. The compromise is that both take up more space than alternatives, but that doesn't seem to deter interest.

Atlantic's E19 is a typical example of this layout but is made more practical by the mid-door entry, which is something of a space saver in shorter vans. With the bed at the front and bathroom at the rear, the mid area is taken by a nearside dinette and an offside kitchen.

Glossy finishes also seem to be the thing at the moment and that is certainly reflected (pun intended) in the E19's interior colours. Dark grey for most of the cabinetry doors and white for the ceiling and wall. Even in daylight the effectiveness of the ceiling

mounted LED downlights is quite obvious. Simple things like door handles and door mini gas struts can make a difference to the overall finish. The handles are stylish yet practical because it's quite easy to get several fingers under them to open the overhead lockers, the doors or the drawers – it makes all the difference for those whose fingers aren't quite as flexible as they used to be.

ROOM TO MOVE

In a van this length, an L-shaped lounge fits in well with the door entry and the front bed and there's space enough to move around the immediate area without a problem. The lounge itself, upholstered in leatherette, has contoured cushions and is very comfortable. Measuring 1.33 x 0.5m (4ft 4in x 1ft 8in), the table is mounted solidly but can easily be rotated or moved up and down as needed. Above the lounge are four overhead lockers, a couple having shelves and the end one being where the AM/FM radio/CD player is located.



"Glossy finishes seem to be the thing at the moment and that is certainly reflected (pun intended) in the E19's interior colours"

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Awning comes as standard; the kitchen has everything you need; leaf spring suspension is built for on-road conditions; a roomy full-width bathroom, as seen here, is the norm these days



ATLANTIC ES190-1MD

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 6.56m (19ft 4in)
Overall length 8.56m (28ft)
Width (incl awn) 2.44m (8ft)
Height (incl ac) 2.83m (9ft 3in)
Tare 2170kg
ATM 2800kg
Payload 660kg
Ball weight 245kg

EXTERNAL

Frame Meranti timber
Cladding Aluminium high profile, white
Chassis Road Runner 100 x 50mm (4 x 2in) rails and drawbar
Suspension Load sharing leaf spring
Coupling Ball
Brakes 10in electric
Wheels 15in alloys
Water 2 x 95 litre
Battery 2 x 100Ah deep cycle
Solar 2 x 150W
Air-conditioner Dometic Ibis 3
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control No

INTERNAL

Cooking Mobicool 4 burner & grill
Fridge Dometic RM4606 186 litre 3 way
Bathroom Dometic cassette and separate shower cubicle
Hot water Swift 28 litre LPG/electric

OPTIONS FITTED

BMPRO Battery Plus35 HA
Trek battery and water gauge
Recessed cooktop and grill
Reverse camera kit
Drawbar toolbox with jerry can holders

PRICE AS SHOWN

RRP \$67,375.00
Sale \$63,572.00

MORE INFORMATION

To enquire about this caravan,
Parravans Caravan World
38-40 Mileham Street
Windsor NSW 2756
Ph: (02) 4577 5577
www.parravans.com.au

KITCHEN ESSENTIALS

Across the way, the Dometic 186 litre fridge butts up against the bathroom wall, leaving the rest of the kitchen area for the cooker/grill and stainless-steel sink, while the Sphere microwave is fitted into the overhead locker space above the cooktop. The cupboard space isn't quite as good as it looks, with the water heater and sink taking up space, but it still scores quite well and there are shelves built into the cupboards plus five decent sized drawers.

Hiding in one of the overhead lockers is a BatteryPlus35HA battery management system, along with the 240V circuit breakers and hot water/air conditioner switches.

SPACIOUS BEDROOM

Large windows and a marine style roof hatch give an open plan feel to the bedroom area. Indeed the 1.85 x 1.53m (6ft 1in x 5ft) bed looks smaller than it actually is, especially as it is surrounded by an impressive array of wardrobes, cupboards and overhead lockers. Mounted on a posture slate bed base, the innerspring mattress can be lifted up to get to the non-compartmented bed space. There's no problem seeing in the dark here since there are four ceiling lights and a pair of reading lights.





FULL WIDTH BATHROOM

There was a time when a caravan bathroom contained a shower cubicle and cassette toilet but not much else. Vanity cabinets have gone from being just a simple wash basin to what we have here – a large wall mirror, pedestal wash basin, two door cupboard and a second cabinet that contains a top loading washing machine. The toilet was rather close to the washing machine cabinet, though. Additional bathroom features include two ventilation hatches and a couple of towel rails on the sliding door.

POWERING ON

Mains power points seem to be something of a lottery between manufacturers but the E19 has them in all the right locations – by the bed, kitchen bench, dinette and in the bathroom, though doubles by the bed might have been nice and there is but one 12V/USB hub located in the corner by the dinette. For the TV viewers, the mounting and connection point is at the end of the kitchen bench overhead lockers.

For the 12V load, two 100Ah deep cycles batteries are supplied and are charged by both the BMPRO 20A mains charger and the two roof mounted 150W solar panels.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Atlantic reckon this is an entry level van but I think it's a bit above that"

TOWABILITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Easy towing van that does not require a large tow vehicle"

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"For a couple who don't want an oversize van, not bad at all"

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Few minor issues but otherwise everything opened and shut properly"

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Quite good. Mid-door entry means less issues with bed walk around space"

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Water tank, battery and solar panel capacity means this van can be used for quite a few days living remotely"

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"3-year structural warranty, 12-month warranty on plumbing and electrical"

INNOVATION

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Nicely built van but there's nothing particularly innovative"

X-FACTOR

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Van looks good but apart from the interior nothing really stands out"



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP There's room to move; it doesn't require a large tow rig; the cooker/grill and stainless-steel sink, the bed is surrounded by an impressive amount of storage; a mid-door entry is perfect for this van; BMPRO battery management





THE BOTTOM LINE

A close look inside and outside the E19 reveals it to be a well-appointed on-road van. It's not particularly flashy but does have all the essentials plus several extras like two house batteries and a generous amount of power points and lights. Its other asset is that being a relatively light, the van is an easy towing prospect. I reckon it's a very classy entry level van that might well suit a few old hands as well. 



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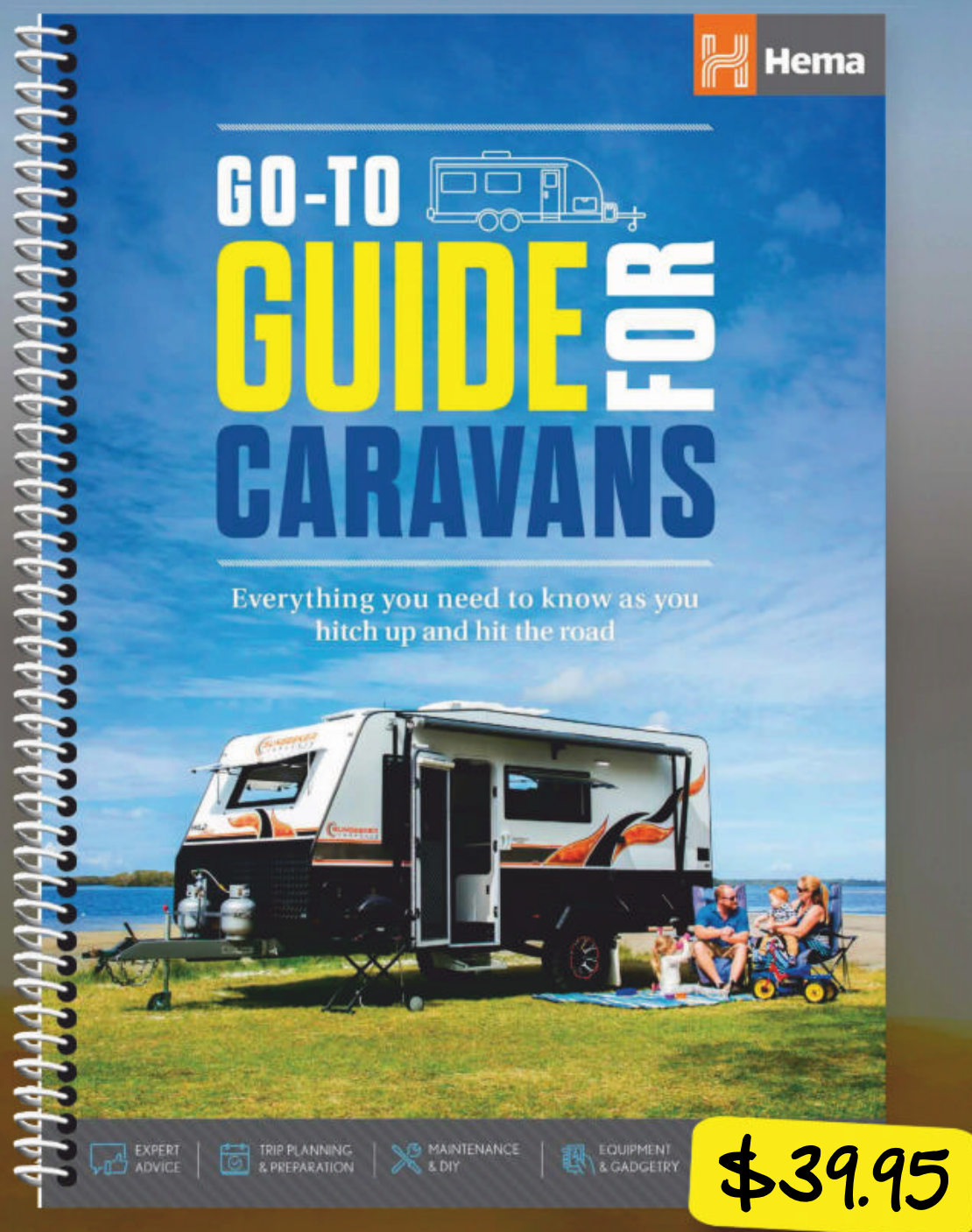
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IN BRIEF

- ⊕ 6.56m (21ft 6in) tandem axle van
- ⊕ Fitted with offside slide-out
- ⊕ Front bed, rear bathroom layout
- ⊕ 2800kg Tare



Words
and pics
**MALCOLM
STREET**

SLIDE-OUT DREAMING

Slide-outs are certainly not new in the world of caravans, but neither are they common. When they are used it is often in larger RVs, so how effective are they in vans under 7m (23ft) like the River Dreamliner?

It was with a little bit of surprise that I noticed a 6.56m (21ft 6in) River Dreamliner van complete with a slide-out fitted to the mid-offside wall when wandering the dealership of Parravans Caravan World, based in Windsor, NSW. There were a number of River caravans on display, both single and tandem axle in on-road and offroad configurations with many layouts, but the Dreamliner was the lone slide-out model, making it the flagship in the Dreamliner range.

It's often underestimated just how much difference a slide-out, even a small one, can make in a relatively confined interior space. In this case, the slide-out has a length of 2.26m (7ft 5in) so it's larger than most.

EXTRA SPACE

The layout of the Dreamliner is the familiar front island bed, full-width rear bathroom, nearside kitchen and offside dinette – the popular Front Bedroom Rear Bathroom (FBRB) layout. It's difference, of course, is that the club lounge dinette is fitted into the slide-out.

When fully opened, there is a considerable amount of floor area in the middle of the van, enough for a small dance floor – well at least for one happy couple, anyway. Apart from anything else, it's great for anyone not so keen on confined spaces.

I've seen a few slide-outs with a clunky operation when opening or closing but the Dreamliner's was smooth and relatively quiet. The operating switch is quick to access in a handy location above the fridge, out of harm's way and preventing it from being accidentally opened.

Apart from a height-adjustable table, the slide-out includes two extra windows in the side walls. Something to keep in mind is it might be easy to forget open windows when closing the slide-out, which could result in expensive repairs. It might be a good idea to put a removeable warning label on the switch when the windows are open.

These side windows aren't something every manufacturer offers, yet they make a considerable difference when seated at the club lounge. That, of course, can be done in comfort given the seat cushion space available and the footrests at the end of both seats. Something to be careful of though is the step up the to the slide-out, which can be awkward – the butt first, swing legs around approach is recommended for taller persons.

Where we did this review didn't have 240V mains power and I don't have a generator to power the air conditioner, the 12V Sirocco fans (one is in the lounge, the other is in the bedroom) was a welcome relief. While on 12V

MEASURING UP



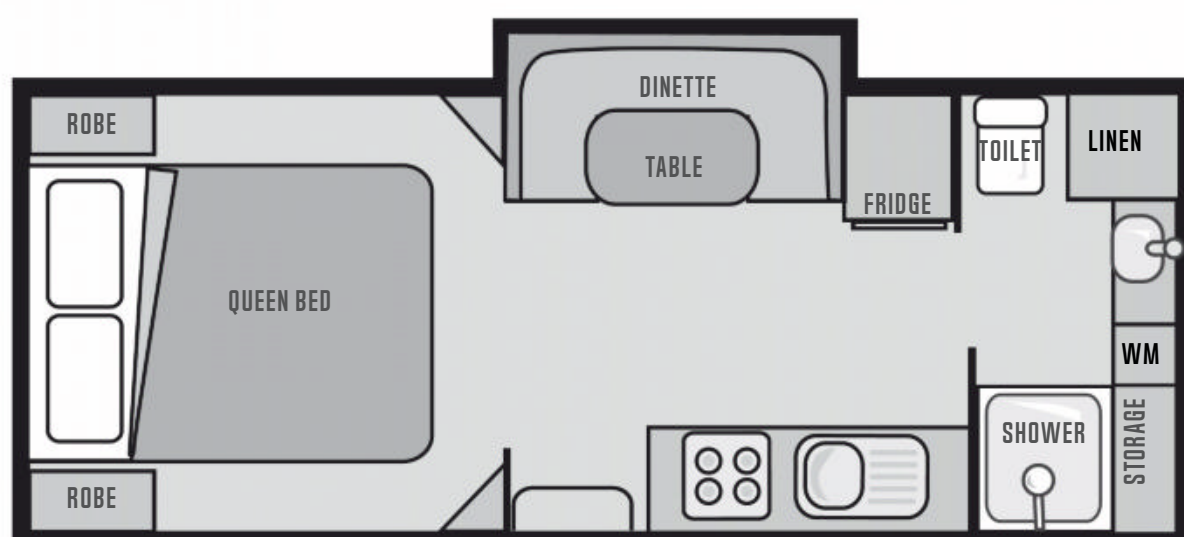
PROS

- ⊕ Slide-out creates considerable interior space
- ⊕ External storage bin capacity
- ⊕ Large roof hatches
- ⊕ USB charger hubs in various places
- ⊕ Well set up electrics



CONS

- ⊖ Requires large tow vehicle
- ⊖ Remember to close windows before closing slide-out
- ⊖ No 12V fuse labels
- ⊖ Post build, several cupboards needed a vacuum cleaner





power, the lighting in the slide-out is quite good with a single ceiling LED light and two wall lights. Tucked into the rear corner is a USB charger hub with two outlets. What there isn't is a 240V socket, so you'll have to plug the laptop in someplace else.

One final point on the slide-out is that unlike some RVs I have seen, the Dreamliner bathroom facilities can be used with the slide-out closed, there's just a little less room to move around.

MORE SPACE ELSEWHERE

Moving the dinette away from the kitchen gives much more space around the kitchen bench area – handy if there is a cook or two or it's washing up time. The kitchen is still rather compact but has a surprising amount of storage that includes two overhead lockers, four drawers of various sizes and



LEFT TO RIGHT The slide-out adds heaps of room to the interior; two additional storage bins are to the rear

RIVER DREAMLINER 21FT 6IN

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 6.56m (21ft 6in)
Overall length 8.83m (29ft)
Width (incl awn) 2.49m (8ft 2in)
Height (incl ac) 2.93 (9ft 7in)
Tare 2800kg
ATM 3500kg
Payload 700kg
Ball weight 300kg

EXTERNAL

Frame Meranti timber
Cladding Aluminium composite
Chassis C & R SupaGal box section

Suspension Roller rocker leaf spring

Coupling Ball

Brakes 10in elec

Wheels 16in alloy

Water 2 x 95 litre

Grey water 1 x 95 litre

Battery 2 x 120Ah AGM

Solar 2 x 150W

Air-conditioner Dometic Ibis 4

Gas 2 x 9kg

Sway control Dexter

INTERNAL

Cooking Swift 500 4 burner, grill & oven

Fridge Dometic RU8408X 216 litre

Microwave oven dLuxx

Bathroom Thetford cassette & separate shower cubicle

Hot water Swift 28 litre gas/elec

OPTIONS FITTED

Fusion stereo system
2 x Sirocco fans
Geni slide toolbox
Oven

PRICE AS SHOWN

RRP \$94,380
Sale price \$89,900

MORE INFORMATION

To enquire about this caravan,
Parravans Caravan World
38 – 40 Mileham Street
Windsor NSW 2756
Ph: (02) 4577 5577
www.parravans.com.au



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Drawbar rail runs to the axles, making the link extremely strong; it's sea-grey colour stands out; the bathroom can be used even when the slide-out is closed; three windows and a roof hatch gives the bed plenty of air flow

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Quite a pricey van but for those who desire a more spacious living space, then the Dreamliner has much to offer"

TOWABILITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"For a large van it towed quite well on most road conditions"

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"For a road touring van, the Dreamliner is well appointed — it has the storage capacity for extended travel, as well as a comfortable living space"

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Apart from a few easy to fix post build issues (like sawdust and shavings), the van was fairly well built."

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Generally speaking a well-proportioned layout with a decent sized kitchen and bathroom"

SELF SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Has good battery and solar panel capacity"

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Two years from factory, appliances covered by individual warranties"

INNOVATION

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Slide-outs aren't exactly innovative, but it does add a different dimension to an otherwise fairly standard layout"

THE X-FACTOR

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"No prizes for guessing here, the slide-out is the main one but there are other smaller items like the cupboard locations and the USB hubs"





four wire basket pantries. There is certainly adequate capacity for a couple of weeks worth of food supplies.

Bench top space is reasonable and can be increased with the flush top lid for the cooktop and the bench extension that sits under the stainless-steel sink. All the cooking is handled by the Swift four-burner cooker/grill/oven and the dLuxx microwave fitted into the overhead locker area. 240V mains power points are fitted at both ends of the kitchen bench and the middle overhead locker is where the BMPRO battery management touch pad is found, along with the 240V circuit breaker. In keeping with the dry food storage, the fridge, located on the opposite side of the van between the slide-out and the rear bathroom, is a three-way with a capacity of 216 litres.

PARTITIONED BEDROOM

A benefit of this layout is there are partitions on both sides of the bedroom area and by using the concertina style curtain, the bedroom can be closed off from the rest of the caravan. On the downside, it results in a slightly confined feel around the 1.85m x 1.52m (6ft 1in x 5ft) bed, even if three large windows and a marine style roof hatch to give a good air flow on a warm night.

Fitted into both corners of the bed base are a couple of diagonal cupboards which might not sound like much except that they are in addition to the usual array of wardrobes and storage around the bedhead. Novel features are magazine pouches on either side at pillow height and, as usual, the bed base can be lifted to use the storage space underneath.



There's no shortage of power points in the bedroom area with one in each corner. Additionally, bed occupants get a USB hub above their bedside cabinet. These, being almost flush with the wall, are classier than fittings found in other vans that can almost look like an afterthought.

The airspace above the nearside bed base cabinet houses the TV mounting bracket and there's both TV antenna connection and power point in the appropriate location.

A WASHING MACHINE TOO!

Almost de rigueur these days is a washing machine in any full-width bathroom and there's certainly one here.

The ensuite is quite spacious I have to say, with the necessary separate shower cubicle and Thetford cassette toilet. Cupboard space is generous with one under the pedestal wash basin, adjacent to the front-loading washing machine and a multi-shelf cabinet in the offside rear corner air space. A window above the loo and two fan hatches take care of the air circulation without too much trouble

POWER PLANT

In the 12V department the Dreamliner is well equipped with two 120Ah AGM batteries box mounted on the rear offside chassis and two 150W solar panels on the roof. All power charging is handled by the BMPRO Battery Plus 35 management system in the front tunnel storage. Also here are the non-labelled 12V fuses and the breakaway unit, making them fairly easy to get at.

BODY STYLE

There's nothing like being a little distinctive, and the sea grey colour of the Dreamliner body stands out. The aluminium bodywork isn't all a grey though because the lower waistline is the more familiar black alloy checkerplate. Adding to the look are the black and white decals on each side of the van.

Wheels are 16in alloy and are fitted as standard, as is the alloy checkerplate storage box on the drawbar. It comes complete with slide-out trays on both sides, handy for generators, fridge or toolboxes. In addition to the front tunnel, there are two additional storage bins at the rear nearside one on top of the other, which does make the top one a bit awkward to get at.

Under the van the C & R SupaGal chassis is built using RHS components in box section style. Both main and drawbar rails are 100 x 50mm (4 x 2in) but a slight difference from the norm is that the drawbar rail runs under the chassis rail to the axles, making the link extremely strong. Suspension is a load-sharing leaf spring setup with beam axles and the brakes are 10in electrics. The two 95-litre water tanks are fitted on either side of the axles, while the 95-litre grey water tank is at the rear, the readily accessible drain point being behind the offside rear wheel. On the drawbar, the usual suspects are there – two 9kg gas cylinders, handbrake, jockey wheel, mains pressure tap and ball coupling. The latter item is of note as it is made by Ark and has a handle that folds over when not being used.





"In the 12V department the Dreamliner is well equipped with **two 120Ah AGM batteries box mounted on the rear offside chassis and two 150W solar panels located on the roof**"



LEFT TO RIGHT Spare wheel is mounted on the rear; the kitchen has storage space for a couple of weeks worth of food; it features a mid-door entry; the ensuite includes a separate shower

ON THE ROAD

With a Tare of 2800kg and an ATM of 3500kg, the Dreamliner is at the top of most tow vehicle capacities. So, when fully loaded, a reasonably heavy-duty vehicle will be needed to move it around, but unladen on our review with the Nissan Navara I was using, it was fine. The van was well behaved and tracked along smoothly, with little signs of pitching and yawing.



THE BOTTOM LINE

To slide or not to slide, that is the question. As I noted in my intro, slide-outs are not all that common in caravans but it's easy to see the advantages in the Dreamliner. In a van this length, a slide-out adds a considerable amount of very welcome space. That's not only good for a couple when camped but will also be great if you like to have a few guests over for afternoon tea on an inclement weather afternoon. The slide-out does move very smoothly, creates a nice bay area for the relaxing club lounge and the van can still be used easily with the slide-out closed up – a well-rounded package. 🇺🇸

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT There's plenty of space when the slide-out is open; it has the usual suspects up front; it's a well-rounded package



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DANCING IN THE STREETS

Cobar is already a vibrant mining town in central New South Wales, but for a few days in early April it comes alive with the sounds and colours of the 1950s, 60s and 70s

Words Tyler Jefferson Pics Supplied



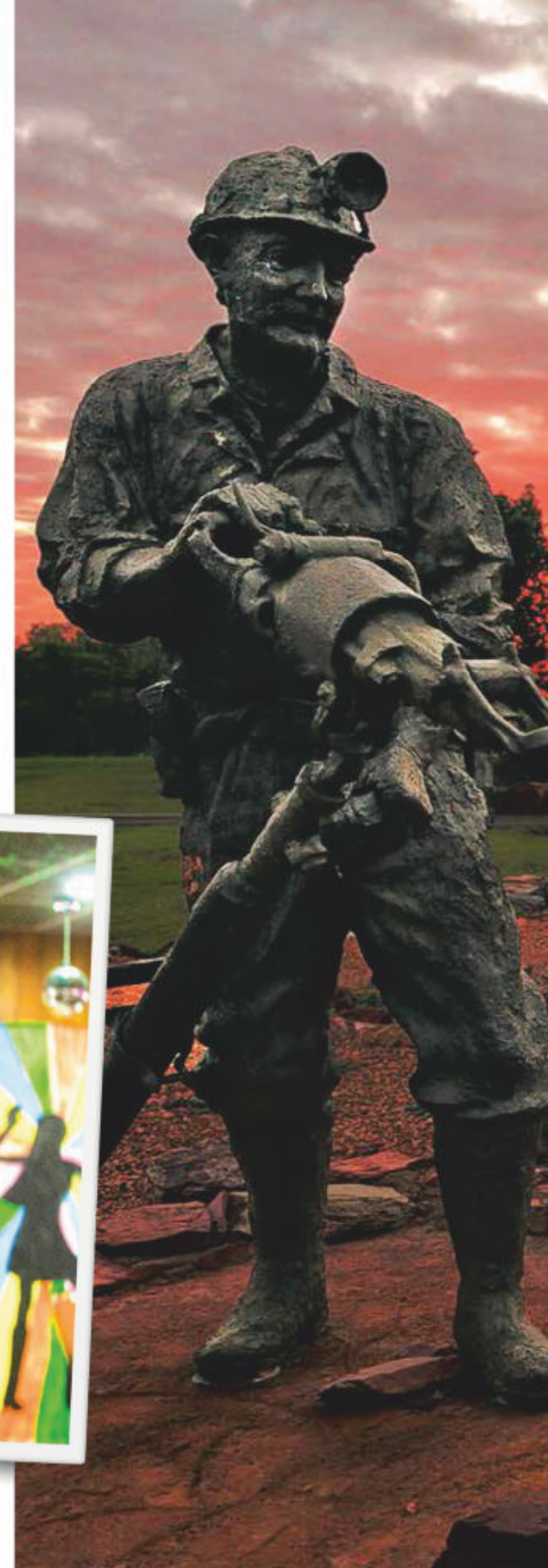
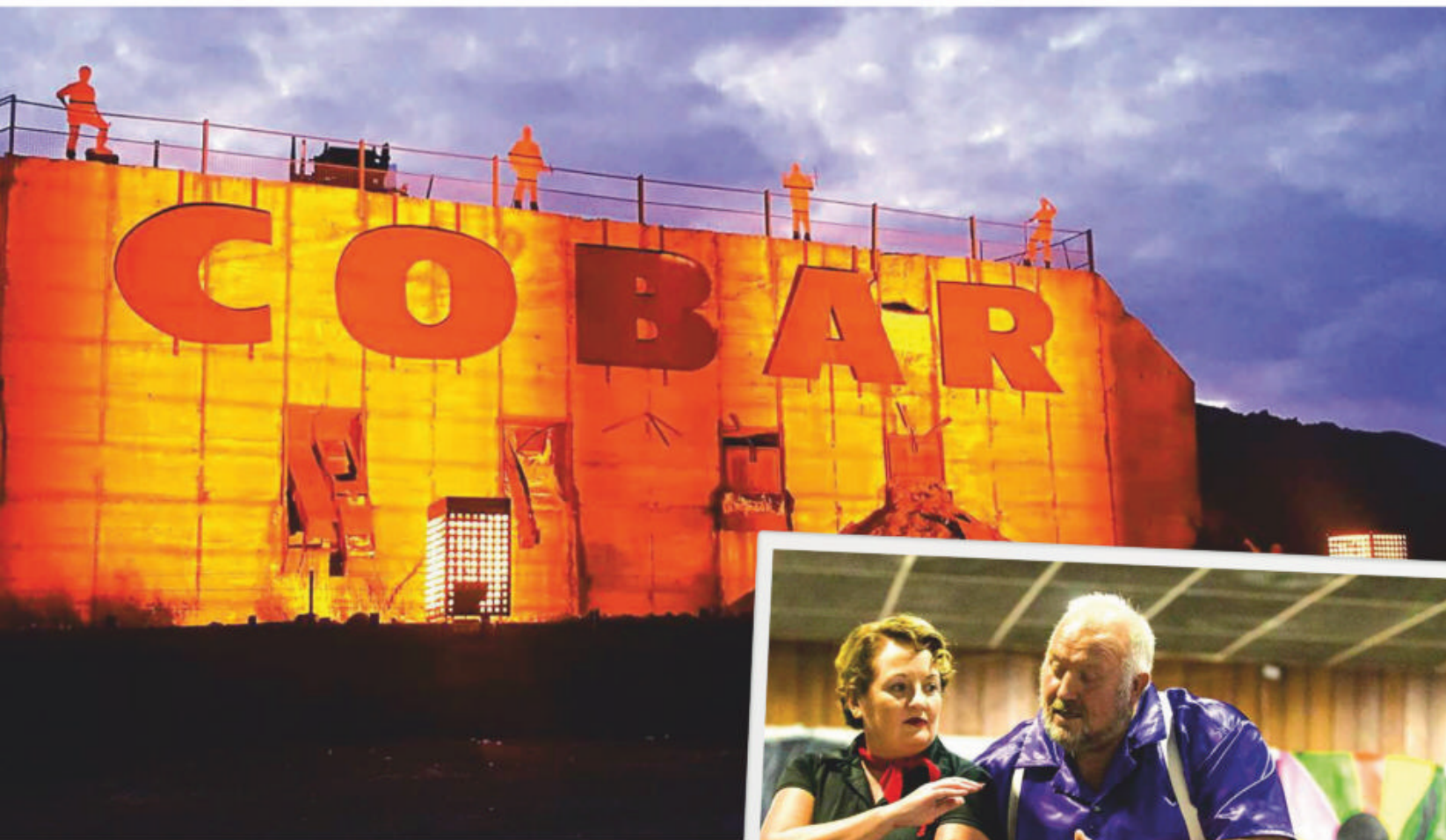
FROM LEFT An Elvis impersonator takes the stage at Gig on the Grass; get your costumes ready

The town of Cobar in central New South Wales will be hosting the Grey Mardi Gras for the second year running in April. Don't let the 'grey' in the name deceive you, this is a very colourful festival, with a 'dancing in the streets' vibe!

Cobar named the event as a bit of a cheeky reference to the Grey Nomads they hope to attract to their town, and last year it certainly worked. More than 900 visitors streamed through the gates for the 'Gig on the Grass' main event, the climax of the whole Mardi Gras. Caravanners from all over Australia made Cobar a stopover, or the main destination of their trips, in order to catch the festival, and this year the people of Cobar hope to see even larger crowds. And no wonder, as Cobar is a town that has made an active effort to be caravan friendly, with a well-equipped caravan park, free dump point and plenty to see and do even outside festival season.

The Grey Mardi Gras celebrates the best of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, bringing back the music, fashion and food of iconic periods in many of our lives.

This year's Grey Mardi Gras will run from 3-6 April. Festivities will kick off on Friday with rockabilly dance lessons at the Cobar Bowling and Golf Club. Pick up some new skills or polish some old ones there, and then head to the "Stomp, Jive and Bump" dance and buffet dinner at Cobar Memorial Services and Bowling Club. There will be live entertainment throughout the night, photobooths and fashion prizes – so start planning your best retro outfit – a dance competition and a two-course meal included in your cost of entry.



On Saturday a street parade will bring the sleepy town's main drag to life. There will be vintage cars on display, retro themed floats, street walkers and dancers, as well as buskers, live music, markets and a Show & Shine car expo. Anyone nurturing a bit of nostalgia for the music, styles and culture of the 50s-70s will be delighted.

Later that day the festival's main event, the Gig on the Grass, will kick off at the Tom Knight Memorial Oval. Tickets are \$20 per person, with discounts for seniors, pensioners or family groups. There will be six hours of live music from the 50s, 60s and 70s, with everything from Johnny Cash and Elvis impersonators to local band Ballz and All and all girl trio band Amitie. There will be activities and entertainment for the little ones, and bar facilities for the big ones.

On Sunday the dancing will continue, in the streets and elsewhere. There will be yet more live music, as well as retro-themed trivia, Bingo, golf and bowls.

Finally, on Monday there will be a free entry day at the Great Cobar Heritage Centre and a 60s themed Cobar bus tour

Once the Grey Mardi Gras is over, there's still plenty to see and do in and around Cobar. This old mining town is soaked in history, from thousands of years of Aboriginal heritage, to its period as a booming colonial-era mining town through to the modern day. You can take it all in at the Great Cobar Heritage Centre. Cobar was Australia's leading producer of copper in 1911, as well as producing gold and silver. You can see the wealth that flowed through the town in the beautiful rambling building the Heritage Centre is set in, which began life as the admin centre

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE There's plenty of time for dancing; Cobar has a rich mining history; Cobar Miners Heritage Park; vintage cars take part in the action; live entertainment is a big part of the event





for the mines. Today it's the perfect place to take in the history of colonial and turn of the century New South Wales, as well as social, Indigenous and farming history of the region.

Across from the centre is the Cobar Miners Heritage Park. This park was opened in 2002 as a tribute to miners who have lost their lives throughout the town's history. You can view sculptures and restored historical equipment, including a 15-metre tall poppet-head from the New Cobar Mine, a restored stamper batter from the Count Boppy Mine, a loader from the CSA Mine and the headframe and winder from the Old Chesney Mine.

If you're looking for a glass of wine or a frosty cold beer, we can recommend Cobar's Great Western Hotel, home of Australia's longest verandah. Built in 1898, this heritage-listed pub boasts a hearty menu of classic Aussie pub meals. Where better to watch the Grey Mardi Gras parades and street performances from than from the shade of their iron lace verandah, reputed to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere?

While you're checking out the town's

“This old mining town is soaked in history, from thousands of years of Aboriginal heritage, to its period as a booming colonial-era gold town through to the modern day.”

fast FACTS

GETTING THERE

➡ Cobar sits at the crossroads of the Barrier Highway and Kidman Way, in central NSW. Whether you're headed there specifically for the Grey Mardi Gras or stopping over as part of a trip into or out of the outback, these major roads make the town easy to reach from the north, south, east or west.

WHERE TO STAY

➡ Local RV facilities include Cobar Caravan Park, which has powered slab and grass sites from \$38 a night, as well as plus-size sites for larger motorhomes. Contact Cobar Caravan Park on (02) 6836 2425 or at cobarcaravanpark.com.au for more details. During the festival sites will also be available for RVs on the Ward Oval, Cobar, for \$60 for three

nights, \$80 for four nights or \$100 for five nights, unpowered. Power is available for \$30 extra per outlet. Camping spots can be paid for through the same ticketing site where entry to the Gig on the Grass and Dinner Dance are bought: <https://www.123tix.com.au/events/7403/cobar-grey-mardi-gras-2020>

MORE INFO

➡ To buy tickets for the two major events at the Grey Mardi Gras, the Friday night Stomp, Jive and Bump Dinner Dance and the Saturday night Gig on the Grass, go here: <https://www.123tix.com.au/events/7403/cobar-grey-mardi-gras-2020>. For the rest of the long weekend's events, simply turn up!





hotels, you should also drop in at the Grand Hotel. Take a moment to get your picture taken with 'the Big Beer Can' above the entrance. As part of Australia's ongoing love of 'big things', the Big Beer Can was built in 1990. At five metres tall and two-and-a-half across, it immediately took out the Guinness world record for the largest beer can in the world. If you like to make a point to get a happy snap with our big brown land's

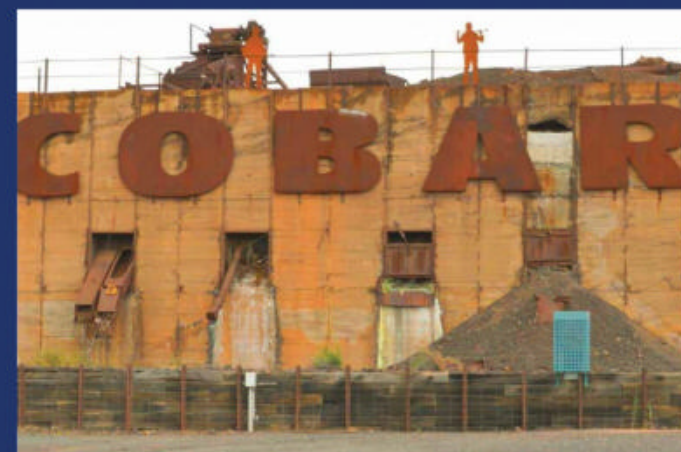


CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Great Cobar Heritage Centre; Cobar is dotted with mining sites and history; floats during the parade are 50s—70s themed; Cobar's open cut gold mine

oversized monuments to Australiana as you motorhome across the country, this one is not to be missed!

Out of town, you can take the sealed road to Fort Bourke lookout, 300m above sea level. From there you can see all of Cobar and its surrounding landscape of red earth scattered with greenery. The rich Cobar mineral belt is clearly visible, and you can gaze down into the dizzyingly large open cut gold mine. The view from the Fort Bourke Lookout is particularly stunning at sunset. Just check in with Cobar Heritage Centre on (02) 6836 2448, or face to face while visiting the museum, before heading up as access to the lookout can occasionally be restricted.

Whether you're heading into Australia's red centre on a pilgrimage to the sun-beaten outback or heading north as part of your annual great migration, Cobar is a beautiful town to stop for a night or three. With upwards of a thousand RV travellers expected for this year's Grey Mardi Gras, and so much to see and do, April this year is the perfect time to stop in and sample the sights, sounds, history and colour. 📍



Celebrating 150 Years of Cobar

COME CELEBRATE AT "BACK TO COBAR WEEKEND"

Oct 30 – Nov 1, 2020

SOME EVENTS INCLUDE:

Bands in the Bush, Lost Miners Memorial, Mini Mining Exhibition, Open Cut Fire Works Spectacular, Town and Mine Site Tours, Markets, kids amusement activities and lots more.



GREAT COBAR HERITAGE CENTRE: Barrier Highway, Cobar NSW 2835

W: www.cobar.nsw.gov.au | **E:** cobarmus@bigpond.com | **P:** 02 6836 2448



If you were to define 'The Big Lap' in the dictionary, you'd do alright to say 'Australian for a bloody long drive best undertaken over 12 months or more'. Why? Well, you'll cover over 15,000km if you travel National Highway 1 – throw in a ferry trip and you can circumnavigate Tassie for another 800km or so.



LEFT TO RIGHT Scooters and bikes for kids are a must; take the time for side trips

This distance could be covered in around 25 days with fuel stops, but that assumes you'd drive an average of 80km/h eight hours a day – you'd be mad as a cut snake to try. Firstly, you wouldn't see much more than the roadside and your campsite. Secondly, and most importantly, you'd be operating in the Red Zone for driver fatigue management, putting us all at risk.

Besides, who sticks to the highways all the time? Whether you're heading along byways to explore the 40 ecological regions in eight different terrestrial biomes that showcase our biodiversity and endemic wildlife or simply turning up to a Friday night raffle at a local pub, there are plenty of reasons to take your time.

Give yourself three months and you'll experience the climatic differences from north to south and have time to poke around a bit. Take six months and you'll be able to stop, stare and stay when you find a hidden gem that takes your breath away. Take 12 months and you'll start to live and breathe the magnitude of this great continent – plus, you'll see enough places to realise you'll need to do the Lap again to find other bits of the country you know you missed.

If you accept this, then you may be facing a significant packing dilemma because you'll probably want to pack your rig for every season and occasion. That will be your first mistake.



10 TIPS



Words & Pics
**SCOTT
HEIMAN**

FOR PACKING FOR

Packing for the 'Big Lap' can be intimidating. Here Scott Heiman offers up his top tips on what to include.

THE BIG LAP





BUSHRANGER COUNTRY

While packing requirements will inevitably differ, some things are more important than others. So, when it comes to planning the Big Lap, consider these 'Top Ten Tips' as a guide for your personal packing pixie.

1. TIME

There's a saying in the Army that 'time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted', so have a broad plan for your Big Lap before you start shoving goodies in the rig. For example, will you travel clockwise or anti-clockwise and why? Will you end up somewhere suffering seasonal inclement weather like cyclones? Will you spend time with Nanna or Uncle Bertie on the way round? Will they be home? Is there something of family significance you should take with you that would put a massive smile on their dial?

Remain realistic. Don't plan to do in three months what should realistically take six, and don't completely fill your travel schedule. Spare time will be your greatest commodity, so leave gaps to fill in with hidden locations you currently don't even know exist.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Find the time to unhitch and explore; a grab bag for 'just in case' is a must; money makes the world go round; one for the car, van and each person; stop in at the local; having a PLB is a real safety investment

2. PLB

By the time you've decided to do the Big Lap, you should have an appreciation of just how big Australia is, so you may start to realise how far away help may be if you get into difficulty. Mobile phone coverage covers 90 per cent of the population not 90 per cent of the country, and when this 90 per cent of the population lives within 100km of the eastern seaboard, there's a lot of area for your throat to go dry screaming for help.

Carrying a PLB ensures someone will hear when you need them. Unlike S.E.N.D devices (like SPOT or InReach), a PLB won't help maintain social connectivity with your family, but a PLB doesn't require a contract to be effectively activated, doesn't need its batteries changed or recharged and is the only satellite communication device guaranteed to work – someone in the Australian Maritime Safety Authority is always listening.

3. CHANGE

We're not talking here about loose change here. Your need for a cash float will become evident the moment you find a coin operated washing machine or shower. Also, many campsites still have cash drop-boxes and donation tins, and farmgate produce and roadside stalls will be out of bounds unless you have some cold hard cash. Further, for whatever reason some businesses may not have the capacity to deal with electronic transactions, so you'll be sorry your wallet's empty when it's 40 degrees and you're begging for an ice-cream.



4. GRAB BAG

Some call it a 'Bug Out Bag' or a 'Get out of Dodge' bag. It's one little piece of insurance for when Murphy's Law trumps all. You fill it with things to get you out of trouble when, for example, your engine bay catches fire or when spinifex gets wound around your driveshaft and muffler and spontaneously catches light. When there's not a moment to lose, your Grab Bag needs to be accessible and ready to sustain you with 72 hours' worth of emergency rations, shelter and survival gear. Channel your inner Bear Grylls and add a dash of Lord Baden-Powell and do some research to understand how to effectively pack your Grab Bag. We also recommend generating an 'Every Day Carry' (EDC) bag of essential items to consistently carry day-to-day. There's heaps of 'how-to' advice online and via professional training.



5. FIRST AID KIT

Yes, yes, we can hear you. You already have a First Aid Kit and it's as big as a whale. But when was the last time you refurbished it? Have the Band-Aids been depleted from previous trips? What happened to the tweezers and scissors? Are your prescription medications still relevant and in-date? Do you need to carry a spare asthma puffer or Epipens? Have you considered carrying a Defibrillator? If in doubt, talk to your local GP or St John's Ambulance rep (who can help refurbish your Kit) and consider taking a First Aid course so you know how to use it.

Now, where to store this gigantic First Aid Kit? In the caravan? In the car? During your Big Lap you'll periodically leave the caravan at camp, and you'll leave your entire rig behind when you go for a walk along a pristine bushtrack, so you'll need a smaller personal First Aid Kit in your backpack for stings, bites, sprains or burns.



6. HAND-HELD CB RADIOS

Otherwise known as marriage savers! If you've only ever camped in large commercial caravan parks, you may not appreciate the value of CBs for reversing into tight spots and they're also handy if a member of your travel party goes off by themselves – after all, everyone separates from the group now and again, whether to deal with 'calls of Nature', collect kindling, for some time-out or to pursue an independent interest. Whatever the reason, it's important to carry a hand-held CB so members of the travel party can be notified in the event of injury.

If you plan to use a CB, learn how to use it properly. Radio-chatter is an art-form and you need to understand what channels to use and why.

7. TWO WHEELS

Too many times we've seen kids without bikes or scooters lounging around camp complaining of boredom. A mountain bike or scooter, with tyres suitable for rugged terrain, will help expend pent-up energy generated while sitting in the car – the same goes for adults too. If you're tight for space, there are compact, collapsible scooters available with pneumatic tyres that will carry up to 100kg. Either way, be prepared to deal with punctures.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Sometimes you just want or need to cook outside; bikes or scooters for the kids are a great investment, but be ready for punctures; if everyone onboard knows how to use a CB you're halfway there; you'll appreciate the CB when reversing onto the Kangaroo Island ferry; car fridges keep you fed and hydrated on day trips; a toolbox has more than just tools in it

8. BENCH TOP CONVECTION OVEN

Let's face it, sometimes you don't want to cook inside, don't want a mixed grill or you simply run out of LPG gas. A small bench top convection oven provides masses of versatility around meal-time. They operate at around 1400W so any inverter above 1500W should be able to handle the power draw. Set-up the oven outdoors to keep the smell and cooking heat out of your caravan. While travelling with a portable oven may be a little indulgent, as Napoleon said 'an army marches on its stomach' – you're going to be on the road for a while and good food is a real morale booster.

9. CAR FRIDGE

A car fridge comes in handy when you leave the caravan at camp to go exploring, for beachside BBQs, cold drinks or simply for food resupplies from centres that are far enough away for your milk to go rancid on the drive back to camp. While you may use the car fridge predominantly as a drinks cabinet, when you head into remote Australia, use it as an over-flow freezer. Alternatively, it's a great place to store your day's catch.

“While travelling with a portable oven may be a little indulgent, as Napoleon said ‘*an army marches on its stomach*’ — you’re going to be on the road for a while and good food is a real morale booster”



10. TOOLBOX

Everyone has a toolbox, but some are better than others. When you're considering a Big Lap, think about the day-to-day mechanical issues you may need to deal with. This includes simple vehicle maintenance to keep your rig in tip-top shape. If you're travelling remote, you'll also need the knowledge, capacity and tenacity to fix things 'on the go' or risk a costly recovery. While some issues will require on-site professional mechanical attention, in other cases, if you're carrying the right spares, you may be able to 'limp' your rig to the next population centre for assistance.

Your choice of spares will depend on your level of knowledge and experience, so consider some 4WD training and/or maintenance training to extend your abilities. At the very least, ensure you carry simple items like a windscreen repair kit, silicone rescue tape, hose clamps, tyre inflator cans and tyre repair kits, then talk to people around camp as you travel. What mishaps have they dealt with on the road and what did they do? You may be surprised how much you learn leaning over a bonnet, with a cold drink in hand, at a bush campsite 200km from nowhere. 📍



TOP



Words
and Pics

MATT
WILLIAMS

TITAN

Ideal for couples who want to experience the outdoors, this hybrid still has the comforts of a caravan





With a beautiful Queensland summer day upon us, it was time to head to one of my favourite places. Making it even better was the fact I was going to be putting the brand new Titan Caravans Blackhawk Hybrid through its paces.

Along with me for the ride was James Creswick, the owner of Titan Caravans. Before we set off, James took me on a tour of the Titan facility at Eagle Farm, Brisbane. This facility looks after the final plumbing and electrical fit outs, as well as suspension installation on the imported vans, hybrids and camper trailers. The Titan Caravan crew will even service other manufacturer's vans as well.



With formalities taken care of, it was time to reverse the Colorado up to the Blackhawk 480H, lower the DO35 hitch into place, attach the safety chains, connect the Anderson plug and trailer socket, check the tail lights and point our chariot north towards the beautiful Glasshouse Mountains.

For testing and reviewing caravans, the Glasshouse Mountains really offer up a lot in a short period of time – while it would be great to have all of our test vans for a couple of days, the harsh reality is that we generally can't.

With the Glasshouse Mountains being on Brisbane's doorstep, it's the ideal location to test for handling and towability on blacktop at highway speeds, on slower secondary bitumen roads or fast, loose gravel roads. Add to that some steep and rutted tracks, and – if we weren't in the middle of a drought – some mud, and you've got the ideal test location.

There's plenty of spots to park the trailer and set everything up, so you can crawl under and over all that the van has to offer. It's also easy on the eye, which always makes the pics look better too. Best yet is that you can do it all in a day!

MEASURING UP



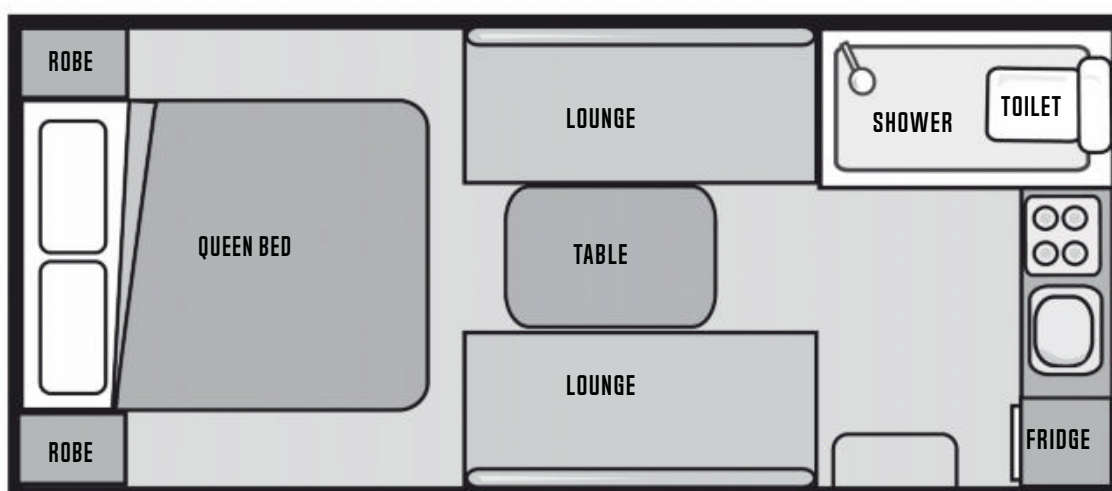
PROS

- ⊕ Nothing more to add as standard features tick a lot of the boxes
- ⊕ Grey water tank as standard
- ⊕ Super quick set up
- ⊕ The shower curtain in the ensuite



CONS

- ⊖ Location of battery box
- ⊖ No struts to hold up lids on under seat storage areas





“When we hit the dirt, ruts and washouts, the suspension matched with the DO35 offroad coupling to make pulling the 480H a breeze — *soaking up bumps is what the twin shock independent coil spring suspension was born to do.*”

FROM LEFT Suspension is made for offroad touring; the interior is bright and spacious

TITAN BLACKHAWK 480 HYBRID

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Length 4.8m (15ft 9in)
Length (Overall) 6.9m (22ft 8in)
Width 2.16m (7ft 1in)
Travel Height 2.93m (9ft 7in)
Internal Height 1.9m (6ft 3in)
Tare 2180kg
ATM 2680kg
Payload 500kg
Ball Weight 220kg
Bed Size 1.95m x 1.5m (6ft 5in x 4ft 11in)

EXTERNAL

Wall construction Heat laminated fibreglass composite panel with structural foam core and aluminium subframe
Chassis 150 x 50 x 3.5mm Galvanised Steel (hot dipped galvanised)
Suspension Cruisemaster XT (coils) fully independent suspension system with twin hocks on each wheel.
Coupling DO35 Off road hitch
Brakes 12" electric brakes
Wheels 265/75R16 Mud Terrains on 16" black alloy rims with 1 x spare
Water 2 x 100L general/65L grey
Battery 2 x 120Ah AGM
Solar 2 x 160W panel
Air-conditioner 2.5kW IBIS 4 A/C system
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control optional upgrade
Kitchen external
Cooking Thetford stove (3 x gas burner, 1 x electric hotplate) and grill with automatic ignition
Fridge Waeco CFX 95DZW
BBQ Ziggy by Ziegler + Brown, Dometic DRS (Dust Reduction System)

INTERNAL

Fridge 152L Thetford T1152 (tropical rated) compressor upright fridge/freezer
Microwave 25L CAMEC Microwave
Bathroom Ensuite with combined shower/toilet
Washing machine N/A
Hot water 14L Truma Ultrarapid Gas/Electric hot water system

OPTIONS FITTED

Electric Step

PRICE AS SHOWN

\$59,990

MORE INFORMATION

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Burpengary QLD 4505**
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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Titancaravans>
Web: <https://titancaravans.com.au/>

UNDER TOW

After leaving Titan HQ, we headed for tracks that go through the pine forests and bushland that surround the volcanic peaks. Although our van wasn't loaded to the gunwales with fresh water and supplies, it tracked well behind the dual cab, thanks in no small part to the Cruisemaster XT suspension that is fitted as standard (if you felt the need, an upgrade to the full Cruisemaster air package is available).

When we hit the dirt, ruts and washouts, the suspension matched with the DO35 offroad coupling to make pulling the 480H a breeze – soaking up bumps is what the twin shock independent coil spring suspension was born to do.

OUTSIDE

On first glance, the Blackhawk 480H Hybrid does a very good impersonation of a caravan. With an overall length of 6.9m (22'8") and a travelling height of 2.93m (9'7") the 480H is by no means diminutive.

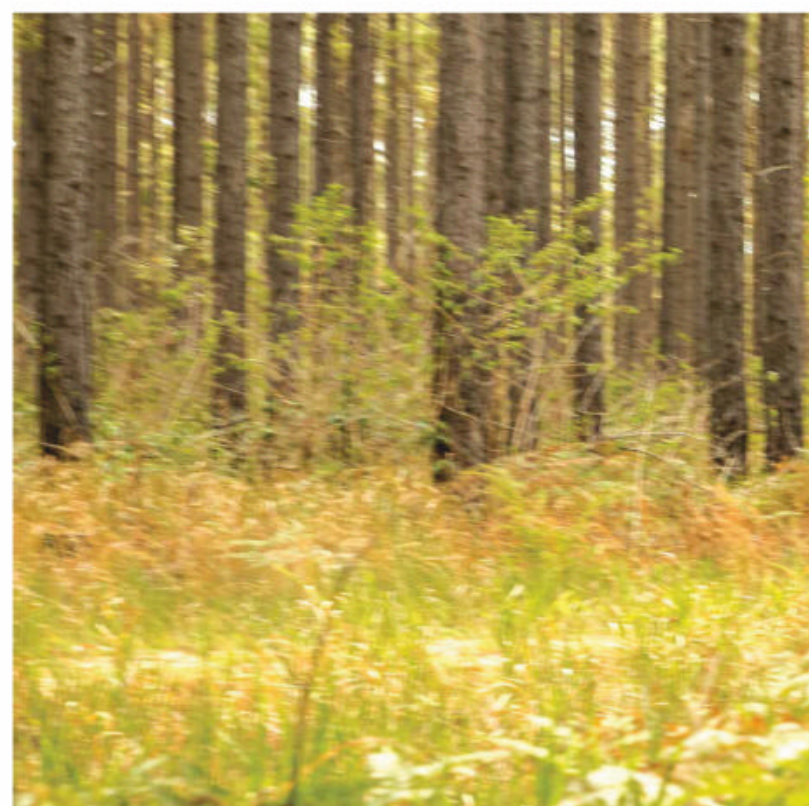
The sleek 'Desert Sand' composite panels give a modern look, while the high waisted, black powder coated aluminium checkerplate screams 'offroad van'.

There is no pop-top on this hybrid. All you have to do is open the back door, roll out the Dometic awning for a bit of shade and drop the stabiliser legs if you feel the need and you are done.

Being a hybrid, the majority of the cooking is going to be done outdoors, but luckily



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE It soaked up the bumps without breaking a sweat; set up is a breeze, so you'll be relaxing in no time; it tracked along great





the 480H comes equipped with the best of both worlds. Not only do you have a pull-out Dometic cooktop (3 x gas, 1 x electric) with grill, but hiding on the other side of the 95L Waeco is a little Ziggy. That's right, this hybrid comes with its own gas BBQ on a custom slide, housed in a custom storage locker on the drawbar.

The kitchen includes plumbed hot and cold water, a drawer for all your herbs and spices, as well as drawers for cutlery and cooking utensils. A fold down picnic table also forms part of the outdoor kitchen area.

On the offside, large storage areas suitable for outdoor furniture and other bulky items can be found forward of the wheels. Filler points for the two potable water tanks are located above the wheel arch, as is the external shower and mains electricity hook up point.

INSIDE

Stepping up inside the 480H by way of the optional double electric step (manually operated single step is the standard fit and provides much better offroad clearance), you are greeted with a bright and spacious interior – there's more LED lights in here than what you're likely to find at the local arcade.

Slimline dome LED's are mounted to the ceiling and underneath the overhead storage cupboards. There are individual LED reading lights at the bedhead, while funky purple LED strip lights above and below the cabinetry give the interior a modern feel.

Up front, the nearly queen size bed sits up high, making getting in and out a breeze. Overhead cupboards along with hanging space on either side provide more than enough storage for clothes. More storage is provided under the bed and is accessed by a drop-down hatch at the foot. Taking the 'everything's included' mantra to the next level, Titan even provide storage tubs for this



space. I'm also told that this is a great spot to store golf clubs when on the road.

Ranger double glazed windows (with insect screens and block out blinds) provide a cross-breeze and ventilation, while a pair of Sirocco 12V fans can take over when the breeze drops off. A Dometic IBIS 4 air-conditioner unit is fitted as standard for when things get a little too hot.

Taking pride of place in the middle of the van is the spacious four berth dinette. While the 480H only sleeps two, it doesn't mean you can't invite a couple of friends around for happy hour. A simple pivoting table is provided and simple to install.

One thing the 480H does not want for is storage – your only problem may be not utilising it all if you want to stay below the 2680kg ATM. Apart from the storage already mentioned, there are more overhead cupboards above the dinette, as well as space beneath the seats.

It is here, underneath the seats, where you will also find the Truma HWS and battery charger. The lift up lids could do with a gas strut or the like as them falling down when you're trying to fix something would get annoying. Titan informed us after this review that gas struts would be added as standard, which is good to know.

Up the back of the van is the kitchenette and slimline 152L Thetford compressor fridge/freezer. The kitchenette has even more storage, with seven soft close drawers and an overhead cupboard. A 25L microwave is housed in this overhead cupboard, while a hot and cold water plumbed sink resides in the bench top. If the weather turns particularly nasty, twin power points would allow you to plug in an induction cooktop to sizzle up a few snags for dinner.

Hiding in the rear offside corner of the van, behind an opaque glass door is the combined shower/toilet. Inside you'll find

the usual suspects: a Thetford toilet, a wall mounted cupboard with mirror, an adjustable height shower and a soap tray. But it was the unusual suspect that caught my eye – a shower rail and curtain.

I have had many a shower in the confined spaces of a combined shower/toilet and the one thing that you cannot avoid is getting water everywhere, no matter how hard you try. After your shower you've got five minutes of wiping everything down so the next person won't drown when they step inside. Well, the humble shower curtain here saves you the hassle of wiping down the mirror and toilet, leaving the excess water to drain down the plughole.

With our heavy reliance on electricity, it's good to know that the 480H is well-equipped. I counted six double power points inside to go with the four double USB points. Even when charging up all of my camera gear, I would have trouble filling all of them!

A 24" LCD TV/DVD combo matched to a roof mounted digital booster antenna will let you keep up to date with your latest TV series or the nightly news. If music is more your thing, a bluetooth stereo will get the campground pumping when you blast your playlists through the internal and external speakers!

UNDERNEATH

I've already mentioned the suspension used on the 480H, but what else is lurking beneath? Is it out of sight, out of mind? Or, do the team from Titan pay as much attention to what can't easily be seen as what can?

Beneath the 50mm thick composite floor, the 150 x 50 x 3.5mm galvanised chassis rolls along on 265/75R16 Mud Terrain tyres wrapped around 16" black alloy rims. A three-bar rear bumper houses the single spare tyre as well as a pair of 20L jerry cans.

The three poly water tanks (2 x 100L potable and 1 x 65L grey water) are protected by a zincalume shroud. Plumbing and hoses are run high and protected where possible, with John Guest fittings being used throughout the build. Electrical cabling is run through tubing and inside chassis rails where possible and tied up high and tight where not.

Mounted to the chassis and sitting in front of the wheels on the driver's side is the checkerplate battery box, which houses the two 120Ah AGM batteries. Sitting forward of the wheel and hanging well below the chassis rail puts them at serious risk of being damaged in an offroad situation. Personally, I'd prefer to see them housed elsewhere, and Titan did inform us before we went to print with this review that customers can request internal battery storage at no extra charge.

For a mild amount of protection, 50mm rock rails/sliders run beneath the bottom of the walls.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Most of the cooking will be done here; rear of the van has a kitchenette and bathroom; the Titan is a rugged off-roader; the pivoting table is easy to install; outside storage areas are perfect for outdoor furniture





RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"For sub \$60k you get a lot for your money with nothing more to add "

TOWABILITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Performed well on a mixture of road surfaces"

SUITABILITY FOR
INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"An offroad hybrid that will have you tackling some of the best touring locations this country has to offer"

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Well presented hybrid with all plumbing + electrical done in-house in Australia"

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Comfortable and roomy inside with large lounge/dinette area"

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"24hr contact number, warranted as full offroad, a roadside assistance package coming and they look after own warranties/problems"

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"240Ah/320W solar/200L fresh /65L grey make this a hybrid that you could easily stay off grid with for an extended stay"

INNOVATION

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"An imported van mixing new materials and construction methods with the old"

X-FACTOR

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Turns heads with striking external colour scheme and aggressive styling"

AFTER SALES SERVICE

When you're spending \$60k on a van, you're putting a lot of faith in the manufacturer to not only provide you with a quality product, but to back it up if something does go wrong.

After speaking with James, I got the impression that he likes to deal with any problems as quickly as possible. He knows that problems do occur from time to time, but it is how they are dealt with that makes the difference. His mindset is, "Just get it fixed and get them back on the road."

Apart from each of his vans coming with comprehensive electrical, gas and plumbing diagrams for side of the road troubleshooting, every new owner of a Titan Caravan has access to a 1800 phone number that is manned 24/7 to provide additional roadside assistance.

On top of that, all new buyers can partake

in an RACQ accredited '1st Time Towing' course, which is included in the purchase price.

The cherry on the top for me is that the warranty is a true offroad warranty, with surfaces such as corrugated dirt roads and beaches all covered and stipulated in the warranty document.

THE LAST WORD

For the couple who want the convenience and comfort of a caravan, but still want to spend more time outdoors cooking and entertaining, then the Blackhawk 480H from Titan Caravans could be the ideal choice. At under \$60K, this is a well-built van with a list of standard features as long as your arm. To be honest, there's not a lot more you would want to add to this van – except maybe your food and clothes for a couple of weeks away from the daily grind. 🇺🇦



FROM TOP The Blackhawk has more storage than you will use; heading off on a offroad adventure

Altech UEC's SELF-POINTING SATELLITE SYSTEM

Easy To Use



Integrated Solutions
with Altech UEC STB



After Sale Support
NAS Australia Backing



Optimised for
VAST™ and Foxtel



Built-in Indoor Unit

DSD4921RV *Satellite Receiver*



- Smallest VAST™ Certified Set Top Box on the market, ideal for Caravan and RV enthusiasts.
- Market leading Technology and Software packed with features to make the setup, viewing and operation as easy and intuitive as possible.
- Ruggedised design and construction to suit the harsh Australian environment with several built-in features.

HALO *Auto Satellite Dish*

- Single cable connection between indoor and outdoor unit.
- Built in GPS and Auto Skew Adjustment
- Quad LNB to support VAST and foxtel
- Choice of 2 indoor unit configurations
- Metal Gear Box

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call **07 3015 8788** or visit **vastsat.com.au**
to locate your nearest stocklist.





CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE



Words
**CATHY
ANDERSON**
Pics Supplied

Selecting the right caravan, camper or motorhome for your needs can be a tricky business. In part one of a two-part series, we ask an expert for their tips to figuring out your needs, where to inspect RVs and which one you can afford



FROM LEFT Living the life in a motorhome might be your jam if you don't want to tow a caravan or camper; camper trailers come in a wide variety of sizes and layouts; ahh, the open road

Buying a recreational vehicle, whether that's a camper trailer, pop-top, caravan or luxury motorhome, is a thrilling experience. Soon you'll be living your best life out on the road, exploring new places and having adventure after adventure.

But it can also be a confusing process. With so many Australian and overseas manufacturers vying for your attention – and your hard-earned cash – it's easy to be seduced by a unit that may look slick, but also be completely impractical for the type of travel you want to do.

Wayne Park is a relationship manager

with finance broker Credit One and works with customers every day who are considering buying their first RV, or trading up to a different model. His job is to give owners confidence in the decision they have made, the product they are purchasing and that the unit will suit their needs. From there he helps them to work out how they can afford to buy it and ensure it fits within their lifestyle means.

Here, Park shares his top tips for choosing an RV, whether it be new or secondhand, and ensuring it will be the perfect fit for your intended lifestyle.

MAKE THE COMMITMENT

It may sound obvious, but Park says the initial step is to get off the fence about buying a van.

“The first thing you have to do is make sure you commit to the decision to purchase,” he tells *Caravan World*.

“It takes a long time. The average timeframe it takes for someone to purchase from the time they say ‘yes we are going to move ahead and buy something’ to then purchasing something is generally around 18 months.”

Making that commitment means you are taking the search seriously, and you can begin to dedicate time to researching and kicking a few tyres before you find the right one. It also means that when you begin to have conversations with dealerships, manufacturers or private sellers, you can make genuine enquiries about the price, and then similarly genuine offers (more on the negotiation process of buying a van in part two of this series, in our May issue).

NEEDS VERSUS WANTS

The trickiest part of deciding on what kind of RV you should buy is considering how you will use it – particularly if you have not experienced the caravan lifestyle firsthand. But Park says it’s really important to get this right to avoid disappointment and hassle.

“A lot of people purchase a smaller-end van or potentially even something that is more cost-effective,” he says. “But like most things, the first van they purchase generally isn’t the last one they will end up with because you don’t really know how you want to use it and where you want to go.”

“Choosing the right van upfront the first time is definitely more cost-effective because if you go to re-trade it back in to get another, you need to consider there will be a level of depreciation and you are likely take a loss on it.”

Depending on the type of travel you will do, there will be non-negotiable features (those that you ‘need’), and others that might look pretty but may only be used sporadically or not at all (those that you might ‘want’). Park says there are several basic questions you should ask yourself.

“The main points are where do you want to go, how do you want to use it, how many people will be travelling – is it a family van or for a couple – and things like whether you need an ensuite or if you will spend more time in caravan parks or free camping,” he says.

The number of beds in the caravan is the first step – you need to find somewhere for everyone to sleep comfortably. If towing is not your jam, then a campervan or motorhome might be best. If you think that you might spend more time in caravan

or holiday parks, you’re unlikely to need a rugged, off-road van with high-tech suspension, beefed-up solar panels and batteries and additional water storage. If the seldom-beaten track sounds more appealing, you’ll need to consider adding all those items to your wish list – whether it’s a smaller camper trailer or a full caravan. And then of course if you want to go off the beaten track you will need to purchase an appropriate unit to ensure you not only get to where you want to go, but get home safely.

Do you want an internal toilet and shower in your RV? That counts out most camper trailers but most these days have external options available and can be tricked up with some big van options but with a more outdoor feel. If wanting to be more environmentally conscious then you may also need to look at a unit that has grey water storage for waste and water tanks for flushing. Park says the new breed of hybrid camper is becoming an attractive option, too.

“These are a cross between a camper trailer and a caravan, so they are generally a small caravan but used more for offroad purposes,” he says.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Some vans offer a cosy space for couples; make sure you buy from a manufacturer or dealer which offers a great warranty so you know you can get out of trouble if you need to; smaller campervans can make excellent getaway vehicles for couples; interior layouts can vary across different models such as this Coromal RTV; caravan shows can be a great place to see your options firsthand





YOUR TOW VEHICLE

Another huge consideration is the tow vehicle, unless you are buying a campervan or motorhome. Park says buyers can get this bit back to front – and can cause a headache.

“People do things the wrong way around – they buy the car first and then look for the caravan,” he says. “You need to find the caravan you want, understand how heavy it is, what its towing limits are, and then make sure you have the car to suit it.”

Towing limits are extremely important, especially considering the current trend is for caravans to be more laden with creature comforts and thus heavier to tow around. Park says this is where your wants may be outweighed by your towing capacity as well as your wallet.

“All these common extras that people are after these days – higher-spec suspension, batteries, solar panels, satellite dishes on the roof, checkerplate boxes on the A-frame and a whole lot more will add more weight because you will fill them with something – all of a sudden your van can become very heavy and that could change the type of towing vehicle that you could need.”

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

One way to get acquainted with the RV lifestyle before you buy is to hire a camper, caravan or motorhome and trial it out.

There are various ways to do this. You can hire through a commercial company such as THL which rents Britz, Maui and Mighty motorhomes (www.britz.com.au). Some of these even offer a refund of the rental price if you then purchase a vehicle.

Peer-to-peer platforms, where owners lease their RVs to others when not in use, have become extraordinarily popular now and can offer an affordable way to trial different brands, layouts and styles over short or long trips to see if they appeal. Some of the sites that offer this service include Camplify (www.camplify.com.au), My Caravan (www.mycaravan.com.au) and Share A Camper (www.shareacamper.com.au).

DO YOUR RESEARCH

It sounds like such a hackneyed phrase, but doing your research is imperative to making an informed decision. From reading caravan reviews in magazines such as *Caravan World*

to joining RV forums and Facebook groups online to checking out different models at shows, Park says research can come in a variety of options.

Nothing quite beats attending caravan and camping shows to check out a range of options in one place. But spend time on the internet looking at the range offered by manufacturers and dealers before you go.

“At shows you can get a better feel for what you feel comfortable in, what kind of setup you want and require based on how you want to use it, and you will see perhaps the latest technology rather than driving around over a number of weekends looking at a whole lot of different dealerships,” says Park. Dealers spend a lot of time and resources to attend caravan shows so they are always keen to chat about what they have to offer.

“But when you are at the shows, try and narrow yourself down to a handful of brands so that you don’t spend the whole day getting confused looking at a lot of different brands.”

Consider the features of each RV – the weight, internal layout options, standard features versus accessories, suitability of different styles of touring as well as construction. There are myriad construction methods from traditional meranti timber frames right through to fully-carbon designs. Check out the warranty for different vans as well, advises Park.

“You need to know that if something goes wrong, you will be able to get it fixed reasonably quickly, that they have spare parts available,” he says.



Park also recommends checking to see if the manufacturer or dealership is accredited with the Caravan Industry Association of Australia's (CIAA) RVMAP program. By complying with the RVMAP process, a business is committing to consistently supply products that adhere to relevant Australian Design Rules and Federal Compliance Regulations. You can find out more on the CIAA's website (www.caravanindustry.com.au).

THINK ABOUT RESALE

Finding the right van for your needs right now is, of course, the primary objective, but Park says having one eye on future resale value is a smart play.

Although RVs depreciate, you don't want to overspend on a model now that won't deliver some return. Consider the kinds of bells and whistles you build into your van – are they worth it? Some items, such as an ensuite, most likely will, but others may not appeal to future buyers.

“One way to get acquainted with the RV lifestyle before you buy is to *hire a camper, caravan or motorhome and trial it out*”



“The bulk of them are being **built with** ensuites, and when you go to re-sell a non-ensuite van you will certainly get less for that than a model that has a full ensuite,” Park says.

“A lot of vans are coming out not just with full electronics, but remote-controlled lighting and heating and security too – they are becoming far more high-tech than we have seen before. It’s a nice-to-have feature but does it really add a lot of value?”

SET YOUR BUDGETS

Every buyer has to set a budget for what they can afford and fits within their budget, even if they are lucky enough to have the cash up front to buy a caravan outright. Buying a new RV with finance, that is taking out a loan for the full purchase price or perhaps even partially funding, may be a better choice. It makes a lot of sense if you don’t want to put off living the lifestyle until you have saved the whole amount.

Park says a conversation with a professional finance broker can be a great first step to working out what you can afford, and what loan repayments would look like. Having pre-approval for a loan is definitely food for thought.

“If you are committed to purchasing, getting pre-approval does take that finance pressure off,” he says.

“It is really easy to go to the likes of Credit One Finance and obtain a pre-approval at creditone.com.au, so you know what you can buy up to. If you are a bit unsure, you can go to the caravan shows, pick out roughly the kind of RV you want, look at the price range and then make some decisions. The next step is to contact Credit One to have a genuine conversation and make the dream become a reality. But it is no good looking at a \$120,000 van when you can only spend \$50,000 based on repayments.”

In the May issue of *Caravan World*, we’ll dive deep into the fun world of negotiation, and offer some more of Park’s advice to make sure you pay the right price for your dream RV, Caravan or Camper Trailer – it’s all about timing. 



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Living the lifestyle with a purpose-built family van; be sure to narrow down your choices before heading to a caravan show, to avoid being overwhelmed by choice; you’ll need a rugged unit if you want to make this your holiday touring style; an ensuite will definitely help future resale value



Far north Queensland can rightly lay claim to some of the country's most spectacular rainforests, picturesque coastlines, beautiful coral reefs and romantic holiday islands. But almost swept under the carpet and appearing in few of the hundreds of tourist brochures is one of its more dubious attractions – and one of the nation's most mysterious and notorious landmarks – Black Mountain.



FROM ABOVE The eerie Black Mountain; view from the lookout

AN EERIE HISTORY

Located around 25km south of Cooktown on Queensland's Cape York Peninsula, local Indigenous people believe this huge pile of black granite rocks is haunted by an unfriendly phantom.

It's rumoured to be alive with devils and ghosts, snakes, poisonous plants, dangerous boulders and foul gaseous smells. Some people have lost their lives here over the years, and even some search parties have been reluctant to go there.

Police records show that at least four people have mysteriously disappeared on Black Mountain. Some say the correct figure is nine, but there are many who claim the number is much higher.

Its first recorded victim was farmer Charles Graynor, who vanished with his horse while searching for stray bullocks. Ten years later – on the exact anniversary of Graynor's disappearance – bushmen Jacob Owens and Thomas Hawkins went missing on the mountain while searching for runaway horses. Another ten years on, a gold prospector, Jim Wren, also vanished on the mountain. Despite massive searches by police and Indigenous trackers, no trace of the men was ever found.

Dating back over 100 years, there are reports of a string of explorers, prospectors, cattlemen and even Indigenous trackers

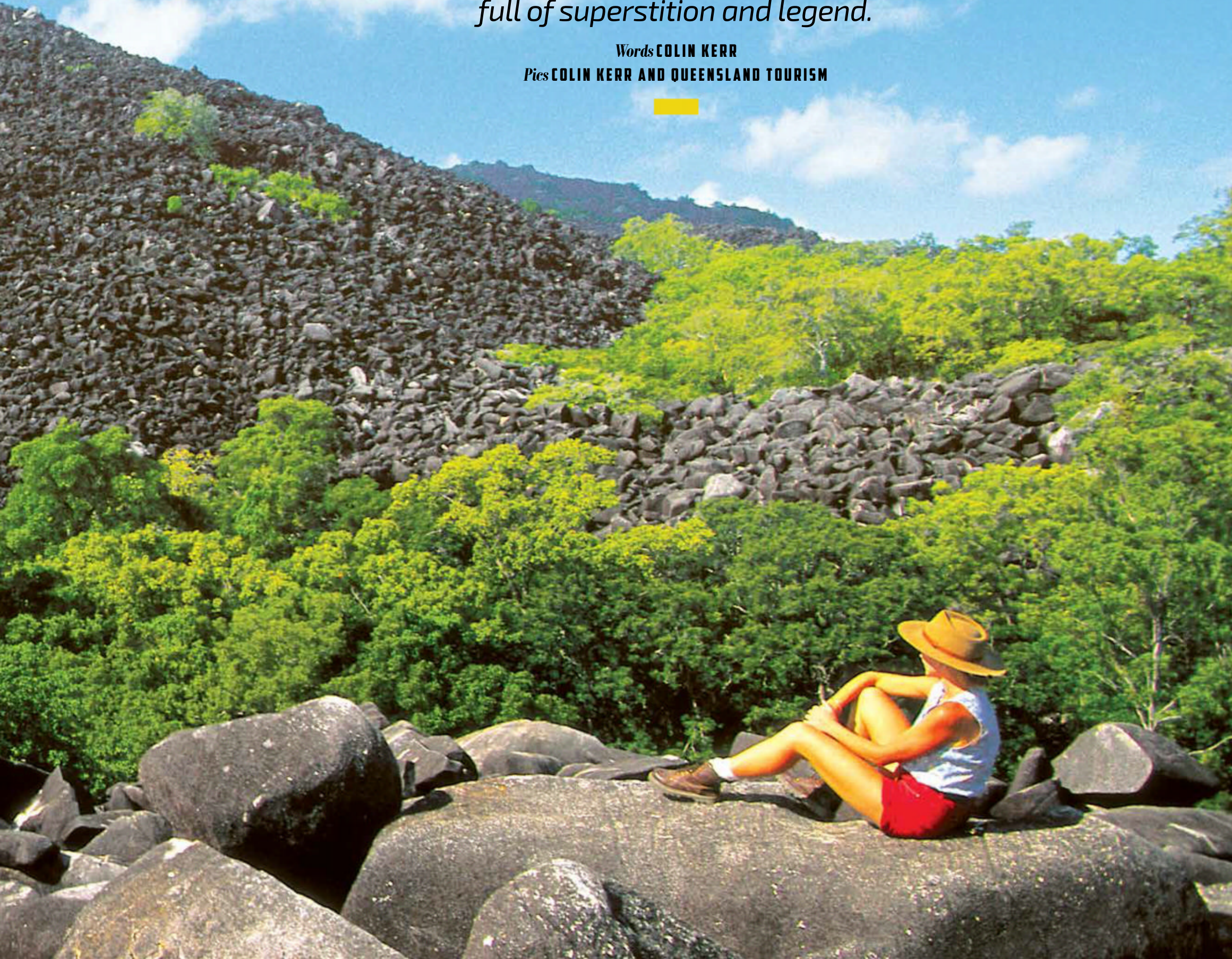


A CAPE YORK MYSTERY

Black Mountain, also known as the Mountain of Death, is a little known spot on the Cape York Peninsula full of superstition and legend.

Words COLIN KERR

Pics COLIN KERR AND QUEENSLAND TOURISM



going missing. Presumably all became hopelessly lost in the inky maze of caverns and deep holes within this honeycombed boulder mountain. There is even a story of a whole Aboriginal tribe and a mob of cattle disappearing into the labyrinth of rocks, while there are reports of several search parties going into the mountain, never to be seen again. But, their fate is no real mystery to Kuku Yalanji elders, who warn visitors to stay clear of this 'evil place' if they value their lives. They say it is the lair of an evil spirit out for no good.

Climbers who have returned to tell the tale explain that within the mountain it is totally black, with tunnels and shafts leading off in all directions. It has been compared to climbing around in a giant bowl of rice in pitch blackness.

Inside, foul smells and gasses fill the air, and throughout the outer rock forms there are a huge number of ghost bats, lizards and rock pythons – some measuring over 20 feet long – and there have been numerous reported sightings of the 'Queensland tiger', described as a large striped cat (closely resembling the extinct marsupial lion), which has been blamed for killing and mauling cattle in the Cooktown area – all of which do nothing to improve the appeal of this eerie place.

To add to this mystique, the area around the mountain is home to a poisonous fig tree and the frightening stinging tree (*Dendrocnide moroides*), where just one brush against it can inflict excruciating pain which can still be felt months later. The leaves, stems and fruit of this plant are covered with tiny silica hairs that inject neurotoxins.



“Whatever the background, it is certain that the mystique and legends of this weird mountain will live long into the future.”

KALKAJAKA NATIONAL PARK

This mysterious 465m mountain is set within the Kalkajaka National Park, which comprises some 780 hectares and includes several other huge piles of black rocks in the surrounding area.

On a wider scale, it is all part of the Black Trevethan Range which is made up of huge heaps of loose granite boulders that look like pieces of black coal. Some of the precariously balancing rocks across the range are as big as houses and the gaps formed between them go deep into the mountain and lead to thousands of chasms, tunnels and caves throughout this massive structure.

These holes in the mountain, as well as being home to snakes, bats and the like, also provide shelter for the timid Godman's rock wallaby.

Travellers through this part of the world are intrigued with these weird, forbidding formations as they suddenly appear before them on the skyline. One could imagine a giant from the past having emptied his bags of coal in piles on the ground.

There are also stories from locals of explosive noises coming from the mountain. Apparently in summer when the rocks are extremely hot, a sudden downpour can cause the boulders to suddenly contract and, on occasion, literally explode. Airline pilots report turbulence (thermal currents) over Black Mountain and closer up, mournful wailing cries and deep hissing can be heard – this is thought to be wind and water moving deep underground.

It may not be surprising that Black Mountain is reported to have a good amount of UFO activity and reports of strange lights – all good reasons for visitors to be wary in and around this quite unusual place.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The black rocks of Black Mountain; yellow Kapok flowers stand out against the black rocks; visitors reading the information signs

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FACTS

- ➔ Living within Black Mountain are a number of rare and endangered animals including the Black Mountain skink and amethystine pythons which are big enough to devour one of the Godman's rock wallaby that also call Black Mountain home. The Black Mountain boulder frog and Black Mountain gecko are found nowhere else in the world.
- ➔ At the Black Mountain car park (accessible to all vehicles via a sealed road from Cooktown) there are a number of information signs giving visitors an insight into this eerie place.
- ➔ 'Kalkajaka', the Aboriginal name for the mountain, means 'place of the spear', or more loosely 'mountains of death'.
- ➔ Ghost bats (*Macroderma gigas*) roosting in the dark interior of the mountain are the only truly carnivorous bat species in Australia, feeding on frogs, lizards, birds, small mammals (including other bats) and large insects.
- ➔ For safety reasons, access to visitors beyond the car park and viewing area is not permitted without National Park and traditional owners' authority. There are no walking tracks or facilities for picnics here and camping is not permitted.
- ➔ Around the mountain there are a number of



religious and mythological sites of significance to the local traditional Aboriginal owners where access is also not permitted.

- ➔ For additional information/enquiries contact Queensland parks and Wildlife Service, phone 137 468 (13 QGOV)

THE MOUNTAIN OF DEATH

Aboriginal legends about this mountain abound, include one about its origins:

A LEGEND OF KALKAJAKA

In the time when this land was young and when Dreamtime was only hundreds of moons ago and not, as now, when the Dreamtime is only something which lurks in the farthest corners of the minds of the old men, there were two brothers, Ka-Iruji and Taja-Iruji. Their mother was a woman of the Kuku tribe and their father a chief of the Iruji. They were of the Wallaby Totem, the small rock-hopping wallabies of the boulders.

When they had come to manhood, bearing proudly the scars and cicatrices of initiation, they were mighty hunters and inseparable companions. The country in their hunting grounds was flat, covered with shiny black boulders like some giant's discarded marbles. One day when hunting on the farthest edges of their land, they saw a girl at her yams, digging.

It was plain to see that she was of the Rock Python Totem and a fit mate for either of the brothers. The Rock Python Totem is, as everyone knows, the most suitable totem for the men of the Rock Wallaby Totem. In that instant the brothers were friendly no longer, for each wanted her as their wife.

They fell into dispute as to how they would fight the matter out, for they knew full well that the laws of the Iruji say that their hunting weapons must not be used in anger, one against the other. All around were the black boulders, huge and shining in the sun. Ka-Iruji and Taja-Iruji strained each to the boulders piling them high until one was higher than the other so that he could cast a mighty boulder down upon his rival.

Day by day the brothers toiled while the piles rose higher. First one and then the other would be just a little taller, but not enough to cast the final smashing boulder. The toiling two were so busy that they did not see the first wisps of clouds that Kahahinka, the cyclone, flew as a warning to all that he was near. Even the woman, who was watching the brothers, did not hear the whinings of the Kahahinka's winds. Then the cyclone fell upon them, tearing, rending, shrieking and then pulping and drowning, and so they died, the brothers each on their heaps of stone and the girl in the roaring torrents between the masses.

Now, even to this day when the Dreamtime is so long ago, the heaps still remain, and if you listen carefully in the deep caves you can hear the crying of the girl of the Rock Python totem while, forever waiting, are the hopping Rock Wallabies.

Adding to the ongoing mystique of the

“If you listen carefully in the deep caves you can hear the crying of the girl of the Rock Python totem while, forever waiting, are the hopping Rock Wallabies.”



mountain is the wide range of scientifically based theories on the formation of this huge black mass. These range from the view that around 260 million years ago, these boulders were in a hot molten state (magma) several kilometres underground. They were then exposed when the softer land surfaces above the solidified magma eroded away to be left as we see this eerie sight today. Other theories revolve around the mountain having volcanic origins and the boulders are the outcome of a colossal explosion, while yet another version says the mountain developed as the result of glacial action. Other assessments virtually combine all of these to say the original grey granite boulders were blackened by a film of microscopic algae growing on exposed surfaces, giving the boulders a sinister, forbidding appearance. Whatever the background, it is certain that the mystique and legends of this weird mountain will live long into the future.





VISITING

Black Mountain is on the Cooktown Development Road approximately 25km south of Cooktown. There are no facilities, camping or otherwise, here. For obvious reasons, unless you are a serious rock climber or brave and well prepared caver with all the necessary gear (special authorisation required) this is not an ideal spot to spend much time, but do stop awhile and 'take in' a little of this Black Mountain mystique, before calling in to the nearby Lions Den Hotel where you can settle any nerves that may still be on edge! 📍

FROM ABOVE Black Mountain is 465m tall and there a numerous theories about its existence; a youngster rock hopping near the mountain

15 TIPS

FOR EVERY

TRAVELLER

Travelling can be a little overwhelming at times, so Catherine Lawson offers her top 15 tips



Words
**CATHERINE
LAWSON**

Pics David Bristow



Whether you're just getting started or want to declutter your rig after long years on the road, this list could change the way you travel. Pack better, shop smarter and keep your travel kit full with these top travel tips for 2020.



1. RIP YOUR RIG APART

If you've owned a caravan for more than a few seasons, you've probably got it all set up, ready to go at a whim. Add food and clothes, hitch it up and hit the road, right? But consider this: how much stuff are you regularly hauling that you won't touch on every trip?

Unless you are setting off on a Big Lap (or continuing on one), each trip is different, from wintertime escapes to summer beach flings, offroad adventures to town-to-town road tripping. And because every trip is different, you're never going to need all the gear, all the time. So stocktake what's weighing your rig down, take out the stuff you don't need, and tailor what goes back on board to suit the adventure you're on.

2. BECOME A MINIMALIST

I love to have exactly what I need on every trip – the right toys, repairs and spares, and enough water, food and fuel to get me off the beaten track. But in order to stay small rig savvy, I make sure that everything I pack is absolutely essential, versatile enough to perform more than one task, and is as lightweight and compact as possible.

This includes kitchen gear, clothing and electronics, and I'm happy to pay more for durable, Aussie-engineered gear that won't fail me off the beaten track and won't end up in landfill any time soon.



FROM TOP You won't see the sheer, powerful beauty of Queensland's roaring waterfalls in peak season; you're all set for adventure, but consider what else you are hauling that's not worth its weight; travel off-season and experience must-see spots, minus the crowds

3. TRAVEL OFF-SEASON

There's a best time to visit every place in the country, but when that is depends very much on your vision of perfection. North for winter and south for summer used to be the rule to make the most of mild temperatures and dry skies, but in my experience, it takes more than good weather to make a journey memorable.

Timing your travels to catch every part of Australia in the 'right' season is near impossible, and when everyone has the same idea, the peak season crush and crowds can be too much for solitude-seekers to bear. The best way I know to escape the crowds, encounter more wildlife, see roaring, wet season waterfalls or crunch across a snowy, Tasmanian trail is to travel off-season.

By going against the flow, or simply timing your trip for the months just before or after the main rush, you can expect more elbow room in camp, lower holiday park fees and your pick of sites. There's less traffic on the road and you'll rarely have to book ahead, which leaves you free to change your itinerary at a whim.

4. DITCH DISPOSABLES

2020 is THE year to let go of our addiction to single-use, disposable items and upgrade to non-plastic replacements that can be used time and again. Refuse plastic shopping bags (even the ones you pay for), get your daily news online, carry a refillable water bottle and your own bamboo straw and reusable coffee mug for cafe stops (or order coffee in a ceramic mug and score a discount for your efforts too!).

But don't stop there. Upgrade to camp gear and electronic items that are USB-rechargeable and don't require disposable batteries, including torches and camp lighting, cameras, GPS units, water purifiers, kids' toys and more. Batteries might seem benign, but once they become landfill, they leech toxic metals into the earth – lead, mercury, cadmium and nickel – and Aussies collectively throw away around 230 million of them every year.



5. SLEEP CHEAP

We are so spoilt with top free camps in Australia that I rarely pull into a holiday park unless I find myself city-bound or in desperate need of power and a shower. It's not only that I love to save a few dollars (I do!), but also because I love good scenery and you can't beat kicking back at a sandy camp on the Eyre Peninsula with pelicans at the doorstep or stoking a campfire in the Red Centre beneath the stars.

National park stays are always a good deal, especially in the NT where bush sites cost just \$3.30 per adult and come with hot showers for just a few dollars more. Tasmania is head and shoulders above the rest when it comes to long, free stays at conservation reserves and national parks (don't miss the free, van-friendly nooks at the Friendly Beaches in Freycinet National Park).

But when you do need a caravan park, be sure to ask about deals and discounts ahead of time or upon check-in. Most parks will give you 10 per cent off when you flash a motoring club or seniors card, while others let kids stay for free or offer 'one free night' deals for longer stays. All you have to do is ask.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Pick up reusable supplies like bamboo straws; use apps to find the best spots to free camp; become a minimalist and enjoy a slice of the simple life again

"North for winter and south for summer used to be the rule to make the most of mild temperatures and dry skies, *but in my experience, it takes more than good weather to make a journey memorable*"



6. GET APPY

If camping on the cheap drives your travels, get an app that guides you to the best free spots every night. Affordable and popular because lots of users constantly update the camping information is Wikicamps (\$7.99), which can be used offline and across all platforms (IOS and android). Aircamp is free to download and lets you to book campsites through the app, but doesn't seem to provide the faraway coverage that other apps do (aircamp.com.au). Others worth a look are Australia Free (\$5.99, australiafree.com.au) and Offroad Escape.



7. EXPLORE ON THE CHEAP

At the risk of appearing like a complete travelling scrooge, you can save quite a few dollars by using discount coupons from traveller magazines or online sites to score discounts and 2-for-1 deals on tours, campsites, attractions, meals and fuel.

Tourist operators are used to paying booking agents upwards of 10 per cent commission, so when you book a tour directly, they may be happy to pass the saving on to you. Ask about discounts for any category that describes you: senior, family, local, off-season traveller or early-bird diner. I've scored up to 30 per cent off advertised prices, just for asking.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Use coupons or seniors discounts to save on tours and attractions; use Camplify to road-test a rig or rent your own out; take local advice to find the very best spots; set up your rig to survive off the grid; some of the best spots are the most remote, so be ready

8. DREAM BIG

Do you dream of offroading the Gibb, riding a camel through the Red Centre or spending time in Tassie? Regardless of how far from home you long to travel, all top trips begin with a big map of Australia and a long list of the destinations, events and natural phenomenon (think nesting turtles, morning glory clouds or whale watching) you yearn to experience.

Grab a map of wherever you long to be, circle 10 places you must see, circle some secret camps and off-track travel routes, and the best places to do whatever it is you love, be it bushwalking, fishing, festivals, or historical sightseeing. Next, work out a good way to take it all in by joining the dots and adding a few worthy detours too. You might not be able to hit all your targets, but now you know where you want to go.



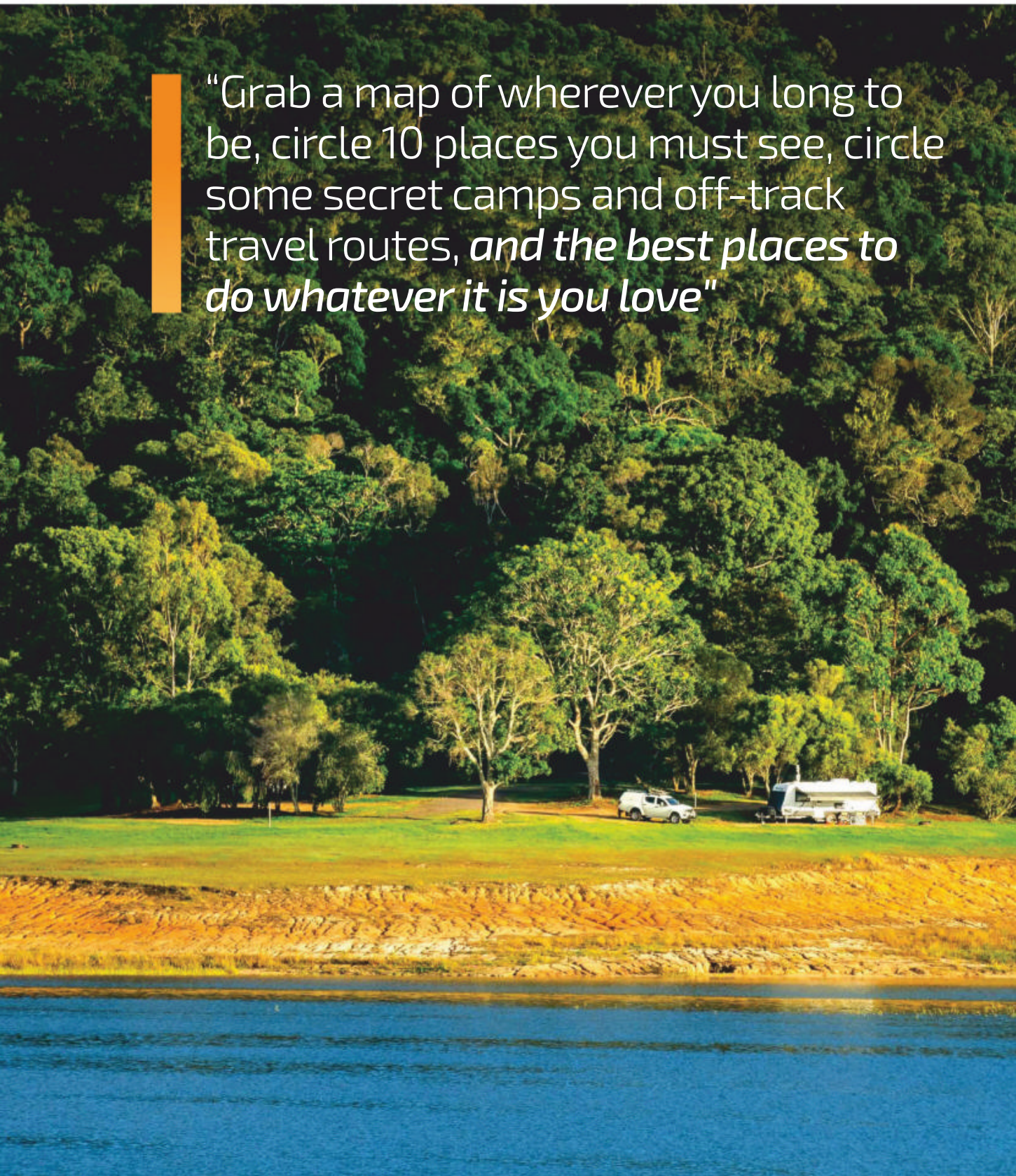


9. GET REAL

To really see the best of Australia, you're going to have to drive beyond where comfy holiday parks are found. But as long as your rig is well set up and you cultivate a self-sufficient mindset that conserves power and water, there is no limit to how far you can go and how long you can spend off the grid.

Before the next trip, make sure your power supply matches your usage and check the health of your deep cycle batteries. Reconsider your need for energy-draining appliances and make a pact to keep them switched off when you are staying off grid. Stretch your precious water supply with low-flow taps and showerheads (or simply shower less), and save your laundry until there is water aplenty, or rig up your awning to catch rainwater when it falls.

"Grab a map of wherever you long to be, circle 10 places you must see, circle some secret camps and off-track travel routes, *and the best places to do whatever it is you love*"



10. MAP YOUR FUEL STOPS

Never get caught short and be forced to buy overpriced fuel again by using online apps to map out where to get fuel at the best price on every chosen route. Free to download, Fuel Map and Petrol Spy use crowd-sourced information and live updates in WA, NSW and Qld to update the location and prices of fuel sold right across Australia, and Fuel Map goes further by allowing you to log your fuel purchases and analyse your fuel economy too.



11. PUT YOUR RIG TO WORK

If you're in the market for a new rig and have shortlisted a few options, Camplify lets you road-test someone else's caravan before you hand over your hard-earned cash. This Aussie initiative connects RV owners with those who'd like to hire out their rigs, and handles the fine print (insurance, bonds, and roadside assist), so you can get on with your holiday.

The flipside is that caravan owners can put their rigs to work to and make anywhere up to \$2100 a week for a caravan that might otherwise be gathering dust in your driveway. Listing your rig is free and you decide who to rent to, when, where and for how much, and any conditions you insist on. When the deal is done, collect your cash and pay Camplify their 11 per cent commission (camplify.com.au).

12. TAKE LOCAL ADVICE

As travellers, we have an excess of information at our fingertips, so what might you get out of a stop at a tourist information centre these days? Directions to some top free camp perhaps? What about an update on local road conditions, or a mud map to the best place to cast a line, or any number of tips on what's happening around town, plus a local's opinion about the best places to sleep, shop and swim too.

13. DON'T OVER-PLAN

This goes against pretty much everything we tend to do as travellers, but just occasionally, it's worth winging it. Turn down that unmarked track, stop short of your destination in a town that's off your radar, and if you see a lovely riverside spot perfect to spend a night, take your eyes off the horizon – you just might discover your own slice of secret Australia.

**14. TREAT EVERY TRAVELLER LIKE AN EXPERT**

Most travellers like to share what they know so grab a cold drink, open your ears to every yarn and you'll come away with secret directions to top camps, little-known tracks and reliable fishing holes that no one else knows about.

**15. SAVE THE DESTINATION YOU LOVE**

Everyone has a favourite destination where our best camping memories were made. It might be a regular haunt close to home, a cherished holiday spot, or some place you've simply always wanted to see. National parks, remote bush reserves, wild coastal camps and historical Outback tracks – they all deserve a hand to help keep them pristine and just as magical as you remember them.

When you next visit the destination you love, volunteer as a camp host or sign up to help revegetate trampled zones. Rally fellow campers for an impromptu clean-up day, filling bags with rubbish and making the effort to recycle it afterwards. Even from afar you can donate to support wildlife conservation in your favourite camping destination, fund specific research and conservation programs, and support others making a difference to protect wildlife and wild places. 🐾

FROM LEFT Volunteer as a national park camp host and become part of the team protecting wild zones; protect the wild places you love, and all that you love them for



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Words
**JOHN
FORD**

BRONZED

AUSSIE

Pics Marcus Cozzolino

A road trip along the Great Ocean Road in the pouring rain didn't dampen our enthusiasm for this family friendly, tough offroader from Wonderland RV





IN BRIEF

- ⊗ Industry leading tech
- ⊗ Outstanding comfort
- ⊗ Huge payload



The metallic bronze exterior is a Dibond composite that Wonderland RV wrangled as an exclusive from the German manufacturer so it adds a level of difference to the already impressive looks.

If you wait in Melbourne for a nice day to take photos, you could be in for a long wait. This was my thinking when wind and rain were forecast for our review of the new Wonderland Hornet, a day after it wowed show-goers at the Geelong Camping and Caravan Show.

The big brash bronze behemoth stood out in a sea of white vans at the show, and while we would have loved some sunny skies to show it at its best, time was short so we hit the road hoping for better conditions.

The weather wasn't the only thing not on our side. When we pulled over in a quiet street near Lorne to reconnoitre with our photographer, Marcus, who was travelling behind, an irate resident accosted us with a demand that we move on. "You're blocking my view," he exclaimed, not appreciating that the drop-dead gorgeous Hornet was a better sight than the grey ocean half hidden by a misty sea fog. Welcome to Lorne.

As it turned out, the photos of the van were amazing and worth the drenching Marcus copped when we drove past. There was even a long enough break in the deluge to complete detailed photography and for a good look around the van.

MEASURING UP



PROS

- ⊕ Well-engineered and quality fitout
- ⊕ Long off grid capability
- ⊕ Innovative technology



CONS

- ⊖ Needs a big tow vehicle



FROM TOP LEFT TO RIGHT A roof full of equipment; picture perfect; a busy front end





**WONDERLAND
HORNET 2100** *TESTED*

THE COMPANY

Wonderland RV began building vans when friends Kevin Dani and Robert Uzelec joined forces after individual careers with Retreat Caravans and Meridian Caravans. Their experience led them to create innovative, high spec, offroad vans.

Their choice of a plywood frame was based on the material's strength, lightness and flexibility. All furniture is double-laminated and precision cut from lightweight ply for a perfect fit and maximum strength, while quality control at all stages ensures a well-built van that will last.

In the over 40 designs, there are 20 family layouts in models that span 4.7m (15'6") to 7.3m (24'), and with a long list of options, it's unlikely that any of the over 400 vans produced so far are exactly the same.

THE BUILD

Coming from a custom builder that will go the extra mile and specialising in offroad family vans, the Hornet sits under Wonderland RV's top of range XTR as a backcountry traveller. With a long list of standard and optional features, it's designed to get to remote places so you can enjoy them in comfort for as long as your food and water hold out – camp near a supply of fresh water and fish and that could be a while.

WONDERLAND *HORNET 2100*

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Length 6.45m (21ft 2in)
Length overall 8.8m (28ft 10in)
External width 2.4m (8ft)
Internal height 1.98 m (6ft 6in)
Travel height 3.05m–3.13m
 (height adjustable air bags)
Tare 2900 kg
ATM 3500 kg (can be rated to
 4000kg with coupling upgrade)
Payload 600kg
Ball weight 200kg

EXTERNAL

Frame Structural ply interlocking
Cladding Dibond /Alcuabond
 (German made)
Chassis Roadking AllGall

Suspension Tandem
Cruisemaster Level 3 wireless
Airbag
Brakes 12" drum
Wheels 18" Allied alloy
Water 2 x 100L plus 1 x 50L
 filtered drinking water
Grey Water 1 x 100L
Battery 200Ah Lithium
Solar 3 x 160w
Air-conditioner Ibis 4
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control Dexter ESC

INTERNAL

Cooking Swift Minigrill cooktop
Fridge Dometic 188L
 Compressor

Microwave Yes
Toilet Yes, composting
Shower Yes, no external
Lighting LED
Hot water Swift 28L gas electric

OPTIONS FITTED

Airbag Susp Level 3
 18" Lc 200s + Bgf Tyres
 4 Sirocco Fans
 Twin Side Bedroom Windows
 Concertina Door@Bunks
 Dexter Esc
 Dometic DRS
 Thule 3b Rack
 2nd Bayonet
 Bug Lights X 7
 White Sink & Hardware

Composting Toilet
 K4 Kitchen
 Custom Doors llo Thetford Door
 4'S X 4

PRICED FROM
 \$108,000

PRICE AS SHOWN
 \$128,000

ENQUIRIES
www.wonderlandrv.com.au



Along the side is a slide-out Sovereign BBQ with storage to the rear and a second tunnel boot further back.

Wonderland RV has settled on a construction method of computer designed CNC cut structural grade ply walls and an outer skin of composite DiBond. Wall panels are joined in a jigsaw pattern to create a strong structure with voids meticulously cut to incorporate high density foam insulation. A single-piece ply floor and fibreglass roof are screwed and bolted to the sidewalls and ends for a sturdy and durable body mounted to a heavy-duty, galvanised Roadking chassis.

Under the van are four water tanks, including two 100L for general purpose, a 100L grey water tank and a 50L tank connected to a filter and dedicated to drinking water. Built from 5mm food-grade plastic that is highly resistant to damage from flying stones, the tanks don't need protective covers.

THE EXTERIOR

The metallic bronze exterior is a marine grade Dibond composite exclusively from the German manufacturer, adding a level of difference to the already impressive look.

Up front is enough storage for extended travel, plus big alloy toolboxes alongside two 9kg gas bottles and high mount bike racks. Dexter Electronic Stability Control and a breakaway system help with safety, and high black checkerplate skirts will keep the cladding looking new. An overhead work light lets you find things at night, while the orange glow of exterior LEDs along the side set a laid-back mood and reduce insect attack.

Also along the side is a slide-out Sovereign BBQ and sink, with storage to the rear and a second tunnel boot further back. This second boot includes access from inside



FROM TOP LEFT The frame is a work of art; the outside kitchen includes a sink and sovereign BBQ



and significantly increases storage for larger items like kayaks. Other features here include an entertainment hatch with 240V, 12V and TV connectors, a large foldout picnic table and a hatch for the Cruisemaster Air Panel that adjusts the airbags independently to level the van when parked. A Dometic awning covers the passenger side and a set of Fusion outdoor speakers with lights built into the central dome add to the contemporary look.

Digital, zigzag graphics at the back and along the rear quarter break up the expanse of bronze and if you would like a different colour there are plenty of hues on offer. A hefty bar across the back has twin jerry can holders and can carry two spares, although the test van had only one on show. There's also a Safety Dave rear view camera with light – helpful when backing into a tight spot.

What's up top is also worth mentioning. As well as a new Ibis 4 air-conditioner, there's a Dometic DRS285 Dust Reduction System to reduce dust and pollen ingress. The system raises cabin pressure by forcing air inside as the van is moving, thus stopping dusty air sneaking inside. Filters can be removed for cleaning and interestingly, given recent events, the system is easily blocked off when travelling through smoke.

LIVEABILITY

Our review van was a family friendly van, but you can choose from 40 or so layouts or let this custom builder make a van to suit your needs. They have a full time designer on hand and encourage customisation from clients. An advantage of the ply wall construction is it allows almost unlimited arrangement of furniture within the van



FROM TOP Impressive suspension rides on airbags; the bedroom has double windows and storage bins on each side

and by ducting the electrical supply, power points and appliances are also easily moved.

The layout of the Hornet on test had the main bed at the front and a set of bunks along the rear driver-side wall, with the ensuite opposite. The central section is devoted to a dining setting and kitchen.

The main bed area is a new feature that might catch on with young families in particular. Instead of open spaces either side of the bed, this area is an infill of upholstered storage nooks that create a full-width bed with enough room for everyone to spread out to watch TV or hang out together. The extra storage and the big king bed space are beneficial, but access and bed making are compromised, so it will be interesting to see if the idea catches on.

At the side are over-and-under windows for

better airflow and security, while overhead is a large hatch for even more light and ventilation. There is the usual collection of side and overhead cupboards and each side has two 240V and USB fast chargers.

A family van needs a good-sized dining area and the Hornet's will handle two adults and three smaller children but might need an extra chair in the aisle for teenagers, or they could always sit on the bed. The upmarket Nuova Mapa table has a sturdy base and a top that slides to various positions for easy entry, and it drops to make an extra bed if needed. Microfibre upholstery looks classy and the lounges proved comfortable.

Furniture throughout is beautifully crafted from 16mm lightweight ply with fine joins and superior catches and hinges.

On the passenger-side kitchen, the white ceramic sink and white designer mixing tap look terrific set in a natural ash timber benchtop. There's enough food storage space for family travel, including a slide-out pantry and overhead cupboards on both sides of the van. The 188L compressor fridge should also be enough, but if more cool storage is needed the front toolboxes have slide outs big enough for an 80L fridge.

Preparation area is limited to a small section near the sink and the lid of the Swift 500 cooktop when its closed, but in a family van with an ensuite its only natural that compromises need to be made somewhere. Given most of the cooking will be done on the outside BBQ, I'm sure most families will cope quite well.

There's an overhead microwave, which brings me to an interesting point about the van's electronics. In most vans a generator is needed to run a microwave when free camping. But this Hornet has enough power to run one from the battery. Three 160W solar panels charge a 200Ah LifePO4 lithium iron phosphate battery and a 2600W Enerdrive inverter powers the 240V appliances. Redarc's Manager 30S3 keeps things humming along nicely and tells you the state of charge and expected battery life.

The rear of the van, with two bunk beds and ensuite, can be separated from the living space by a concertina door. At 19m and .78m wide with a 120kg capacity the bunks are extremely roomy – large enough for teenagers – and sturdy. Each bunk has its own window, while USB, fan and triple bunks are optional. The cupboard on the back wall adds a huge amount of extra storage for clothing and bedding for everyone.

The ensuite includes a full-size shower, elegant vanity with mirror and, surprisingly, a composting toilet. This Nature's Head system is a sensible alternative to a cassette toilet with the associated problems of regular maintenance and odour. I'm told with part-time use it can last for months without emptying. It looks similar to a conventional cassette system and, as an added benefit when free camping, it uses no water.

The upmarket Nuovo Mapa table has a very sturdy base and a top that slides to various positions for easy entry.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The white sink and tap look great; plenty of overhead cupboards; double windows improve security and ventilation; the table slides and converts to an extra bed





HIGH RIDING HORNET

Riding high on 18" alloy wheels, offroad tyres and Bluetooth enabled airbag suspension, the big Hornet cut a fine if incongruous figure behind Wonderland MD, Kevin Dani's black VW Tourag, as we headed into the pelting rain

At 6.45m (21'2") the Hornet pushes the practical size for an offroader while the 2900kg tare and 600kg payload means it needs a competent and heavy rated tow vehicle. Consider the gross vehicle mass of a prospective tug because these weights can push a lot of twin cabs into illegal territory. The Hornet is easily upgraded to a 4000kg by changing the hitch from the standard Cruisemaster DO35 to a DO45-4T – at this rating it will probably be most happy behind a Dodge Ram or similar.

Airbag suspension adjusts for rough road travel, and softens the ride for differing roads. At the standard ride height the van travelled smoothly on the main roads without any sway or roll through bends. Later, on dirt tracks, the same applied, with the airbags and twin shock absorbers working faultlessly across bumps and corrugations. When we parked for the photos the airbags took care of a sideways lean, which is pretty cool.

Warranty does not cover 4WD-only tracks, and careful driving with lower tyre pressures is recommended in the owner's manual on unsealed roads to avoid hard impacts. Service intervals are at three months then every six months or 10,000km.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

A big, capable offroader with superior suspension, lots of standard features and many worthwhile options

TOWABILITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

The van sat steady over twisting roads in strong winds and on dirt tracks it travelled smoothly. You need a big tow vehicle to tow it at its full payload potential though.

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★★★★☆☆

It's intended for long distance adventures and is well set up to cope with most contingencies. Van is not suitable for 4WD-only tracks.

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

CNC furniture and structural ply walls married to a robust chassis and arguably the best suspension available.

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

Any van this size will struggle for space with a family, and a roomy kitchen but the best use has been made of the space available.

SELF SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

480W of solar, 200Ah Lithium battery, lots of water and a composting toilet – what else could you need apart from a desal plant?

INNOVATION

★★★★★★★★☆☆

It's right on target with all the latest electronics, a composting toilet and new bed layout worthy of a high score.

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★★★★☆☆

Three-year warranty on structural items and various components covered under manufacturer's warranty, but Wonderland has its own staff to assist. Clear warranty document, and active, independent owners' group.

X-FACTOR

★★★★★★★★☆☆

Killer looks, offroad cred and the Bluetooth suspension are a win with me.



TESTED

**WONDERLAND
HORNET 2100**

FROM TOP Impressive layout in this, one of 40 designs; the bathroom includes a composting toilet



THE BOTTOM LINE

Aimed squarely at a younger market, the Hornet family van is sure to attract a good following from this growing sector. Let's face it, the demand for vans from the boomers has to end sometime, so it makes sense to appeal to more than my 'adventure before dementia' crowd – mind you, there will be lots of grey nomads who would love this van for the extra room to take the grandkids along on part of their travels. Wonderland's technology and attention to the customer needs flows across all their models and plenty of folk across all demographics will appreciate the thoughtful inclusion of contemporary design and electronics.

Considering the Hornet's offroad ability and the number of quality options fitted, the \$128,000 as tested price looks like extremely good value. A standard Hornet is \$108,000, and lower spec offroaders in the Wonderland range are even less.

The Hornet is a capable long-distance adventure rig that will need a well set up and powerful tow vehicle to keep out of trouble in the bush and clear of the law on the road. For those seeking out of the way places to camp for extended stays, the comfort and top class off-grid ability are there to enjoy. 



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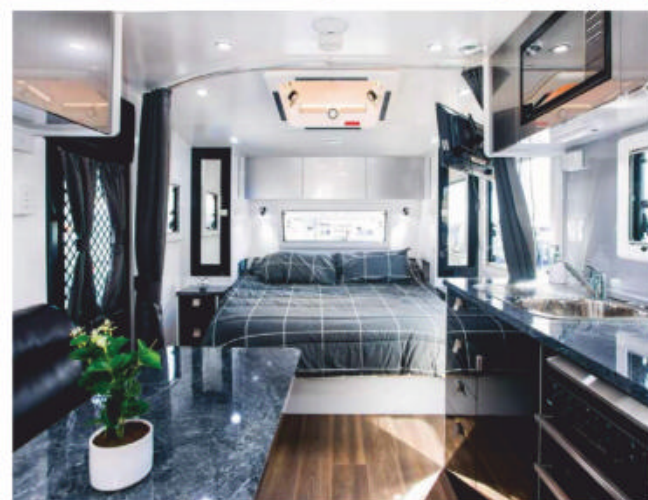


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IN BRIEF

- ⊕ Can sleep four
- ⊕ 5.55m in length
- ⊕ Handy reversing camera
- ⊕ Toyota HiAce as base vehicle



Words
**ANJI
BIGNELL**

QUADRUPLE *Pics Phil Cerbu* **THE FUN**

Straight from the fleet of Britz and Maui motorhomes, this family touring van is built on the super strong Toyota HiAce Super Long Wheelbase, with extra space and comfort to boot



MEASURING **UP**



PROS

- ⊕ Comfortably sleeps 4
- ⊕ Spacious dining area
- ⊕ Ample kitchen prepping space



CONS

- ⊖ Fairly pricey for an ex-rental
- ⊖ Awkward placement of foot step
- ⊖ Lacks aesthetic



Driving the KEA Navigator T555 around the north-west region of Victoria for a review made for an easy transition from my usual towing caravans into driving a motorhome, especially since the Navigator is set up for touring and ease of driving – it was pretty much a matter of get in and go. As much as it's top heavy, it's still got a solid grip on the road, and I felt like if I'd put the pedal to the medal, it may have a bit of grunt too. However, the purpose of this review was to see just how comfortably it would fit a family of four (or a couple) and how well it would drive with this in mind.

FIT FOR FOUR

The KEA Navigator T555 sleeps four people in double beds, which is an impressive feat given its length of 5.55m (18ft 21in). The mini Luton peak over the cab includes a double bed at 2m x 1.2m (6ft 5in x 4ft) which can also be used



"The purpose of this review was to see just how *comfortably it would fit a family of four (or a couple)*"



KEA NAVIGATOR T555 4 BERTH **TESTED**

TOP TO BOTTOM

The overhang at the top may look odd but the extra space is welcome; the T555 is a comfortable and easy drive

KEA NAVIGATOR T555 4 BERTH

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

External length 5.55m (18ft 2in)
External width 1.93m (6ft 4in)
Internal height 1.98m (6ft 5in)
Travel height 3m (9ft 8in)
Tare 2440kg
GVM 3200kg

ENGINE

Base vehicle Toyota HiAce Super Long
Wheelbase
Engine 3L unleaded petrol or diesel
Gearbox Automatic
Max power 111kW
Max torque 241Nm

EXTERNAL

Fresh water 39L
Grey water 44L
Batteries 240V
Solar No
Air-conditioner Cab only
Gas Yes

INTERNAL

Cooking Dometic 2-burner
Fridge Engel 85L
Microwave Nero
Bathroom No
Lighting Vehicle only
Hot water No

OPTIONS FITTED

N/A

PRICE AS SHOWN

From \$59,990

MORE INFORMATION

KEA Motorhomes
1300 720 020
www.keamotorhomes.com



"Especially since they are built locally on *the reputably tough Toyota HiAce Super Long Wheelbase*"



FROM LEFT Despite being a little top heavy, it's got a solid grip on the road; ample kitchen space allows for easy meal prep; Dometic 2-burner and sink

for extra storage space (it has extra ventilation in its roof). The other double bed is 1.85m x 1.24m (6ft x 4ft) and drops down towards the rear of the vehicle, which can then be stored away and converted into a comfy dinette for four at breakfast time. For extra comfort and privacy, there are flyscreens and roll down blinds for each window and a handy partition between the cab and the rear of the van.

There isn't anything out of the ordinary when it comes to the electronics, with the usual CD player with AM/FM Radio with aux input and bluetooth, a couple of front and rear USB points and 12V outlets to the rear of the vehicle, but it has all the basics in easy reach. Unfortunately, the air conditioning

and heating is only available in the front cab section of the vehicle but it shouldn't take long to cool or heat the length of the van.

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

All the KEA models are ex-rentals and are refurbished once they come off the rental fleet and onto the market, which means you know you're getting something that has been well-maintained/serviced and is built to last – especially since they are built locally on the reputedly tough Toyota HiAce Super Long Wheelbase. It comes with a 3.0L unleaded petrol- or diesel-powered engine with automatic transmission that runs smoothly through the gears, albeit with a slow

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"At just under \$60k for an ex-rental (albeit refurbished), it's a tad on the pricey side"

DRIVEABILITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"It drives and handles very well for an automatic, top heavy vehicle"

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"It's got the basics for a few days camping"

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"It's strong, has been refurbished and is built to last"

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Apart from an awkwardly placed step in the kitchen, it's comfortable and spacious"

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Three-year mechanical warranty"

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"It's limited, but then it's not designed for long stints on the road"

INNOVATION

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"Comes with the standard of its kind"

X-FACTOR

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

"The lover's nook is a nice touch"



ABOVE Flyscreens and roll down blinds give occupants some privacy

“The comfort and space hopefully means you’ll be spending more time entertaining and relaxing *indoors without the need for extra-curricular activities*”

pickup, and the reversing camera built into the rearview mirror is handy when reverse parking a vehicle of this size.

It comes with a payload of just over 700kg, which doesn’t amount to much when you include four people, supplies and the extra toys that come with a camping trip, but then, the comfort and space hopefully means you’ll be spending more time entertaining and relaxing indoors without the need for extra-curricular activities to fill your time. In saying this, there is still ample storage internally and externally for the necessary items.

MY KITCHEN RULES

This KEA Navigator (normally known as the Voyager in the Britz and Maui rental fleet) has basic fittings and a simple layout but with a couple of minor scratches, which made me think that it could have done with a small kitchen makeover even after its refurbishment. However, generally speaking it was in good condition.

There’s ample kitchen space and storage,





TOP TO BOTTOM Two seats are available when the dinette and bed are raised; the dinette will comfortably seat four



with a large prepping area that includes a two-burner Dometic stove top, sink (no hot water) and integrated Nero microwave. However, there is a rather awkwardly placed footstep fitted into the kitchen table-top for stepping up and onto the double bed above the cab – not ideal for when someone is prepping food, but great for anyone who has a weird foot fetish!

A decent sized 85L Engel fridge should fit enough supplies for a family of four on the road. I like that there's plenty of storage space for cutlery and dry goods as well.

There's a drop down dinette table which comfortably seats four without the elbow squeeze, and with the house stereo in reach with USB charging point, this could be the main point of attraction over the summer

months – playing some ambient dinner tunes, sharing a meal and avoiding the mosquitos and flies outside.

WHISPERING SWEET NOTHINGS

A little lover's nook or bench space is created in the boot of the vehicle once the bed has been dropped down, so that when the boot is up, two people can swing their legs over the back and sit and appreciate their natural surroundings – well, that's what it's supposed to do, but I'd rather put an esky there for easy access of the wine bottle while seated in chairs al fresco-style.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The basic design and layout of the Navigator gives the feeling of freedom and open space

when all the business is up front and the party is at the back. I'll admit, it's not the sexiest of designs for a motorhome, with the mini Luton peak hanging over the cab like some sort of alien growth. However, that doesn't seem to affect the overall driveability and aerodynamics of the vehicle (because I'm a NASA scientist and know all about that! Disclaimer: I am not).

On the plus side, it provides extra room for sleeping arrangements and/or storage space while freeing up space for foot traffic within the motorhome. I envisage the KEA Navigator as a great space for cooking and general entertaining for family and friends, or even a great option for the couple who require extra room and comfort on the road. 

“It provides extra room for sleeping arrangements and/or *storage space while freeing up space for foot traffic within the motorhome*”



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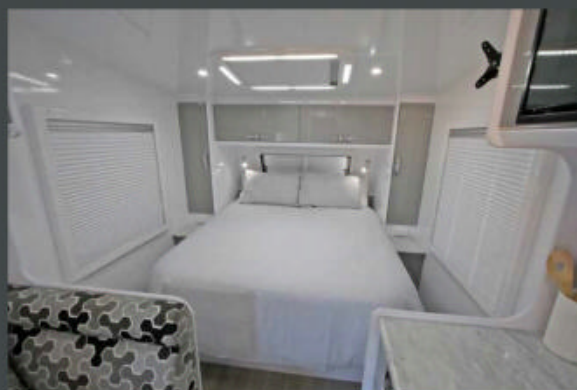


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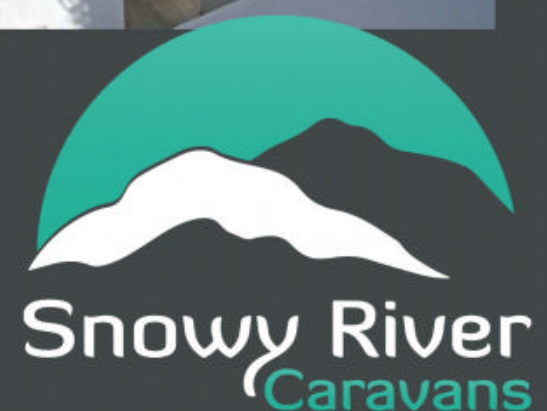
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As a young girl, my mother and I spent a few years living in the regional NSW towns of Cootamundra and Ardlethan. They were halcyon times characterised by long, hot summer days, kicking around in the bush with mates and a true sense of small-town community, punctuated by trips to the Big Smoke to visit my grandparents.

Back in the late 1970s, the Hume Highway was bumpy, narrow and slow – not the long stretch of grey multi-laned efficiency it is today. Travelling with an annoying “are we there yet” kid in the back seat meant taking breaks in towns en route, many of which are now bypassed by the freeway.

One of my favourite stops was Goulburn because of the Big Merino. To an adult it may be a cheesy, outlandish attempt to showcase the region’s fine wool pedigree, but to a kid it was awesome. Standing tall on the main road next to the servo, the Big Merino was a behemoth, a gaudy fascination, but also a playground. I could barely contain my excitement running up the staircase inside to stare out at the town and hills beyond through the ram’s eyes.

The Big Merino is just one engorged statue in a much-loved Aussie tradition of building big stuff as a tourist magnet to showcase our agricultural or artistic prowess. Impressive? Mostly. Corny? For sure.

Here we list the ‘classic’ big things across Australia that were major draw cards in their day, and a few underrated and quirky ones you just might want to add to your next road trip.

LEFT TO RIGHT Check out the Big Pineapple; Larry the spiny lobster standing tall



GO BIG *or go* HOME

*Australia is bursting with natural beauty,
but some of our oversized man-made
tourist attractions deserve a rather,
large round of applause too*

Words CATHY ANDERSON

Pics SUPPLIED, DESTINATION NSW, SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN TOURISM COMMISSION, VISIT VICTORIA



THE CLASSICS

These attractions are those that you automatically associate with Australia's big history – the ones that arguably set the stage for Australians' fascination with showy tourist stops.



THE BIG BANANA COFFS HARBOUR, NSW

Established as a quirky structure to draw a crowd to a roadside stall, the modern Big Banana Fun Park has so many attractions for travellers it'll be hard to bend your brain around them all.

John Landi had the idea to bump up banana sales way back in 1964, which makes the Big Banana Australia's first big attraction and Landi perhaps the father of the movement. It stopped traffic alright, with 2000 visitors per day walking through the huge piece of fruit when it opened, soon inspiring the creation of an on-site milk bar and souvenir store. The banana plantation grew in the late 1960s and received a \$30 million redevelopment in the late 1980s.

It was bought in the 1990s by Kevin Ruby who added a toboggan ride and an ice-skating rink, both of which are still operational. Current owner Village Building Co has boosted The Big Banana Fun Park's 'ap-peel' by adding nine attractions over the last seven years including Laser Tag, a Water Park, a 4D ride simulator and what they claim is Australia's biggest giant slide.

When it was built: 1964

Entry cost: Free to enter, attractions incur a fee (packages available)

Address: 351 Pacific Highway, Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450

Contact: Ph: (02) 6652 4355, web: www.bigbanana.com

Nearby campgrounds: BIG4 Park Beach Holiday Park, 1 Ocean Parade, Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450. Ph: 1800 200 555, web: www.big4.com.au

Woolgoolga Beach Holiday Park, 12 Wharf St, Woolgoolga NSW. Ph: (02) 6648 4711, www.coffscoastholidayparks.com.au/parks/woolgoolga-beach/



THE BIG PINEAPPLE NAMBOUR, QLD

Built in 1971 by pineapple farmers Bill and Lin Taylor on the gloriously sunny Sunshine Coast, the 16m-tall fibreglass pineapple attracted 700,000 visitors annually in its 1980s heyday.

A small train took visitors through the plantation, and in 1978 the 'Nutmobile' tour was launched – complete with macadamia nut-shaped carriages.

Prince Charles and Lady Diana stopped for a visit while on an Australian tour in 1983, and in 2009 the pineapple was added to the Queensland Heritage Register.

But it has had its fair share of drama as tourist numbers dropped and it changed ownership and closed for several years. Since 2013 the owners have hosted the Big Pineapple Music Festival attracting the likes of Midnight Oil, Regurgitator and Birds of Tokyo which offers onsite camping for attendees. There is still a train ride plus a zoo and a treetops walk.

When it was built: 1971

Entry cost: Free but costs apply to the train ride, zoo and music festival

Address: 76 Nambour Connection Rd, Woombye, Qld, 4559

Contact: Ph: (07) 5442 3102, web: www.bigpineapple.com.au

Nearby campgrounds: Rainforest Holiday Village, 557 Nambour Connection Road, Woombye, Qld. Ph: (07) 5442 1153, web: www.rainforestholidayvillage.com.au
Marshall Ski Lakes Campground, 1 Leafy Lane, Sunshine Coast, Qld. Ph: 0408 711 469



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The Big Banana started it all; the Big Banana Waterpark; take a ride on the steam train; a high wire act on the treetops walk; spend time with cuddly koalas; the Big Pineapple in its heyday; jumping for joy



THE BIG MERINO GOULBURN, NSW

The Big Merino has a name: Rambo. Inspired by a real-life stud ram of the same name from a nearby property, Rambo stands 15m tall, 18m long and weighed 97 tonnes when constructed in 1985 from a steel frame and concrete.

Designed to showcase the region's reputation for fine wool production, Rambo was a fixture of the town's main street, but when the Hume Highway was built and tourist numbers slid, Rambo was relocated 800m down the road closer to the highway exit. A heavy-duty, customised rig with 96 tyres was needed to move him and the big guy now has a home with a snazzy gift shop and an exhibition of the industry's 200-year history.

When it was built: 1985

Entry cost: None, but a store is next door if you need new ugg boots

Address: Corner of Hume and Sowerby streets, Goulburn NSW

Contact: Phone: (02) 4822 8013; www.bigmerino.com.au

Nearby campgrounds: Goulburn South Caravan Park, 149 Hume St, Goulburn, NSW 2580. Ph: (02) 4821 3233, web: <https://topparks.com.au/>

“Rambo stands 15m tall, 18m long and weighed 97 tonnes when constructed in 1985 from a steel frame and concrete”



THE BIG MERINO

GOULBURN NEW SOUTH WALES AUSTRALIA

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Rambo on the move; Rambo's eyes have a lookout over Goulburn; Ned Kelly is unmissable; Larry has had a makeover



THE BIG LOBSTER KINGSTON, SA

Affectionately known as Larry, the 17m-tall spiny lobster stands in all its shiny orange glory in the fishing town of Kingston Southeast on South Australia's Limestone Coast. Unveiled by then South Australian Premier David Tonkin on 15 December 1979, Larry is magnificent and, like many others in the big attractions club, was borne from an idea to showcase the town's rich pedigree, in this case seafood.

Made of steel and fibreglass, Larry took six months to construct and served as the face of the town ever since, heralding visitors to a restaurant behind its tail. That business faded as fascination with all big things waned, but the town decided Larry should not only stay, but be restored to his former glory.

Radio presenters Hamish Blake and Andy Lee spearheaded the #PinchAMate crowdfunding campaign to give Larry a dazzling makeover, and you can grab a bite at the new cafe called Janet's Takeaway.

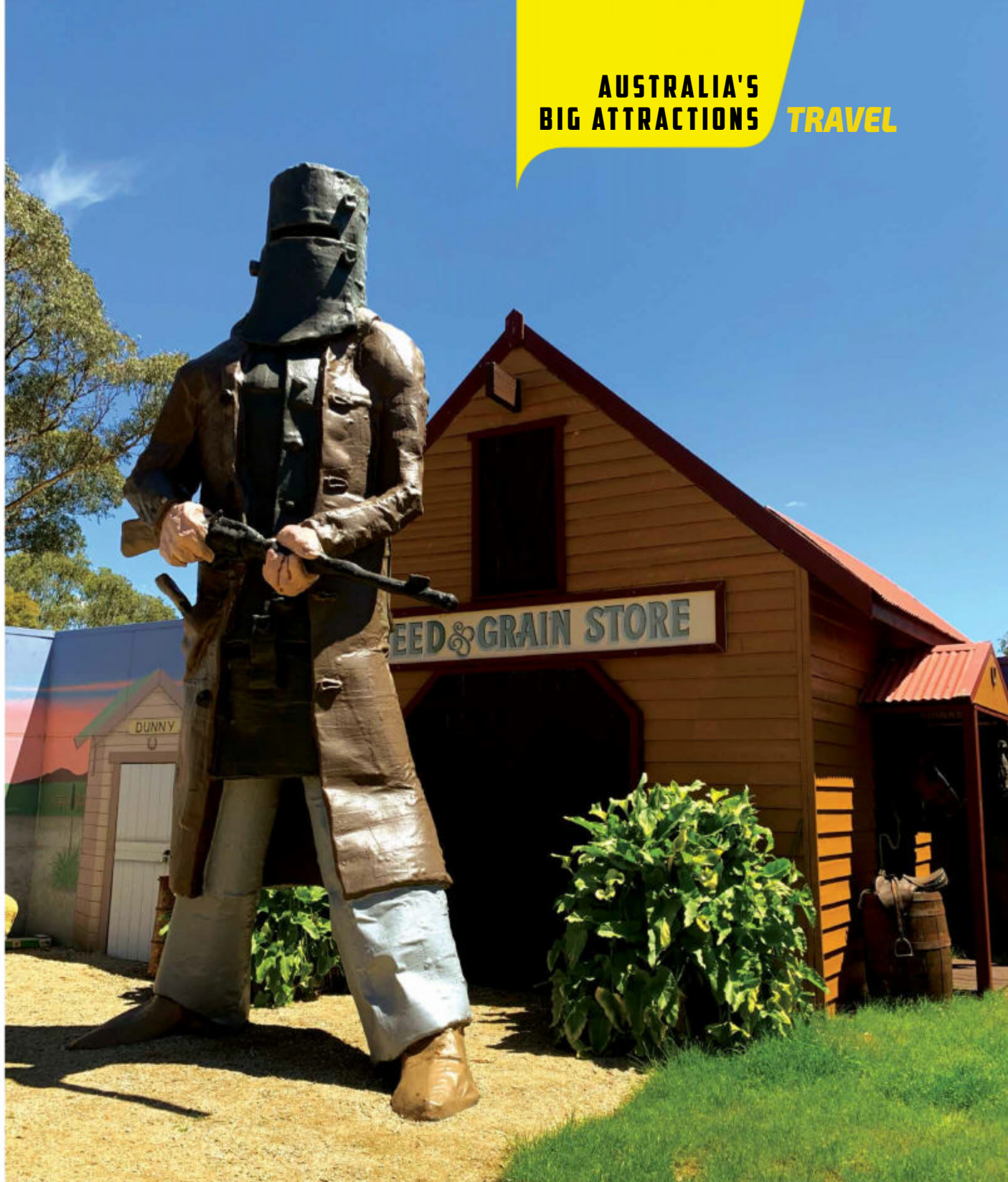
When it was built: 1979

Entry cost: Free

Address: Princes Hwy, Kingston SE, SA 5275

Contact: Ph: (08) 8767 2019

Nearby campgrounds: Kingston Foreshore Caravan Park, 34a Marine Parade, Kingston SE SA 5275. Ph: (08) 8767 2050, <http://kingstonforeshorecaravanpark.com.au/>



BIG NED KELLY GLENROWAN, VIC

Australians love to celebrate an underdog – even a murderous, thieving one – which is why the Victorian town of Glenrowan has thrived as the last stand of notorious bushranger Ned Kelly and his gang in 1880.

The main 6m-high statue of Ned stands in the main thoroughfare (Gladstone St) adorned by his trademark tin mask and armour and wielding an equally oversized shotgun. There's also a fantastic museum here in the Glenrowan Tourist Centre explaining bushranger history along with a fabulous interactive animatronic show of the gang's last stand.

When it was built: 1992

Entry cost: Free to see the statue, fees apply for the show

Address: 41 Gladstone St, Glenrowan, Vic 3675

Contact: Ph: (03) 5766 2367, web: www.glenrowantouristcentre.com.au

Nearby campgrounds: Glenrowan Tourist Park, 2 Old Hume Highway, Glenrowan, Vic 3675. Ph: (03) 5766 2288, www.glenrowanpark.com.au



UNDERATED AND UNAPPRECIATED

You may not have heard of these big things, but that doesn't mean they're not worth a stop to take a snap and stretch the legs.

THE BIG TROUT ADAMINABY, NSW

Trout fishing is a beloved pastime in Adaminaby, 50km north-west of the Snowy Mountain town of Cooma. The Big Trout is a 10m tribute to this and has stood for more than 40 years in Adaminaby Lions Club Picnic Park.

Local artist and trout fishing enthusiast Andy Lomnici created the sculpture after another angler, Leigh Stewart, suggested the idea. Lomnici reportedly froze an actual fish to get the right shape, sketched it and then created the steel frame and fibreglass body. The whole process took four years, and in 2010 it was given a much-needed makeover by The Friends of the Fish Committee. Time your visit for November and take part in the annual Snowy Mountains Trout Festival.

When it was built: 1973

Entry cost: Free

Address: Adaminaby's Picnic Park, Denison St, Adaminaby NSW

Contact: www.visitadaminaby.com.au

Nearby campgrounds: Providence Holiday Park, 46 Providence Rd, Adaminaby NSW. Ph: (02) 6454 2357, web: www.providenceholidaypark.com.au

GIANT KOALA DADSWELLS BRIDGE, VIC

Lazy marsupial or ticked off drop bear – you be the judge at the Big Koala on the Western Highway between Stawell and Horsham in Victoria's Grampians region.

Beryl Cowling, owner of the Koala Country Kitchen and Koala Country Motor Inn, asked her brother-in-law John McEwan to create the steel skeleton structure (out of seven tonnes of steel), upon which Dutch sculptor Ben Van Zetten made the 6m-tall koala from cold cast bronze and a mixture of fibreglass and plaster. Take a look inside to check out the gift shop, snack bar and tavern, all within the belly of the beast, so to speak.

When it was built: 1988

Entry cost: Free

Address: 5829 Western Highway Dadswells Bridge, Vic

Contact: Ph: (03) 53595230, web: www.thegiantkoala.com.au

Nearby campgrounds: Grampians Edge Caravan Park, 20 Krause Rd, Western Highway, Dadswells Bridge, Vic, 3385. Ph: (03) 5359 5241, www.grampiansedgecaravanpark.com.au



FROM TOP How much can a koala bear?; adaminaby loves its trout fishing





ANMATJERE MAN AILERON, NT

About 135km north of Alice Springs on the iconic Stuart Highway sits the Aileron Roadhouse and Caravan Park, home to two very impressive statues celebrating Indigenous heritage.

Anmatjere Man arrived first in 2005, a 17m-tall Aboriginal hunter inspired by the local Anmatjere community which stands behind the Roadhouse but clearly visible to the road. He spent a few years as the sole attraction until a second 17m statue, Anmatjere Woman and Child, joined the property. Both are built by local artist Mark Egan.

It's a 30-minute walk up and around both statues before or after lunch at the Roadhouse and a wander through the art gallery. There's a caravan park onsite for an overnight rest while en route north from Alice or south-bound towards Uluru or Adelaide.

When it was built: 2005

Entry cost: Free

Address: Stuart Highway, 135km north of Alice Springs

Contact: Ph: (08) 8956 9703

Nearby campgrounds: Aileron Hotel & Roadhouse on site offers powered sites, pool, barbecue areas, fuel and a bar.

FROM TOP The Anmatjere Man with the Hollywood style sign; all dressed up in Tassie

THE BIG PENGUIN PENGUIN, TAS

Constructed in 1975 to commemorate the centenary of the seaside town of Penguin, the Big Penguin is a local favourite. Constructed of ferro cement and fibreglass, he stands 3.15m high as a permanent tribute to the fairy penguin, after which the town was named.

He's even more adorable because of the outfits he is fitted with to mark various occasions throughout the year. In December it's not unusual to see him wearing a Santa suit, a bow tie and bowler hat made from tiny flags for Australia Day and, as we went to press, the Big Penguin has a huge heart for Valentine's Day. Nawww.

When it was built: 1975

Entry cost: Free

Address: Scenic Drive, Penguin

Contact: www.centralcoast.tas.gov.au

Nearby campgrounds: Penguin Caravan Park, 6 Johnson's Beach Road, Penguin, Tas 7316.

Ph (03) 6437 2785, www.penguin caravan park.com.au



WHAT THE QUIRK?

Some of Australia's more random big things have a rather, er, eclectic flavour. There were so many to choose from – a big Van Gogh easel at Emerald, Qld; the Big Beer Can outside the Kulgera Pub, NT; and the Big Captain Cook in Cairns, Qld upon which some lark wrote 'Made in China' – but here are two crackers.

THE BIG BOGAN BOGAN SHIRE, NSW

Despite rumours the steel statue of the Big Bogan is modelled on a particular resident of the Bogan Shire in NSW we're told it's more reflective of our national bogan identity. Controversial and divisive in a community where some embrace the ocker connotation of their region's namesake and those who think the statue of a bloke in thongs holding a fishing rod and packing an esky is embarrassing, nevertheless the statue has increased tourism in the town of Nyngan since its erection in 2015.

You can find it at the Teamsters Rest Parking Area near Nyngan (along with

an antique Cobb & Co coach) with a great parking area to accommodate RVs. There's also a suite of Big Bogan merch at the visitor centre in town if you're in need of a mug, flanny shirt, stubby shorts or a sticker for your bumper.

When it was built: 2015

Entry cost: Free

Address: Teamsters Rest Parking Area

Contact: www.bogan.nsw.gov.au/tourism/attractions/the-big-bogan

Nearby campgrounds: Nyngan Riverside Tourist Park, Barrier Hwy and Mitchell Hwy, Nyngan NSW 2825. Ph: (02) 6832 1729, web: www.nynganriverside.com.au/tourist-park



FROM TOP Where's the bin?; the Big Bogan in Bogan Shire

WORLD'S TALLEST BIN KALGOORLIE, WA

Well, it's not really a proper bin but it is certainly a talking point. In 1980 Kalgoorlie entered the state-wide Tidy Towns competition. In an effort to encourage townsfolk to stop littering, the Keep Kalgoorlie Clean Committee decided to repurpose an 8m water pipe into the World's Tallest Bin.

Schoolkids painted the moniker on its side, and we are reliably informed that mischievous local young 'uns have been attempting to lob their rubbish in as an after-school lark ever since. In case you were wondering, the town came equal fourth in the contest.

Just down the street is another little known 'big' attraction – a 59m-long Indigenous mural called Karkurla Dreaming. Created by local artist Jason Dimer, a Wongutha, Ngadju and Mirning man, it tells the story of the spiritual connections between the people, the waterholes, the flora and the fauna of the Karkurla area. It's also hailed as the longest dot painting in the world.

When it was built: 1980 (bin), 2017 (painting)

Entry cost: Free

Address: Hannan St, Kalgoorlie

Contact: www.goldenquesttrail.com

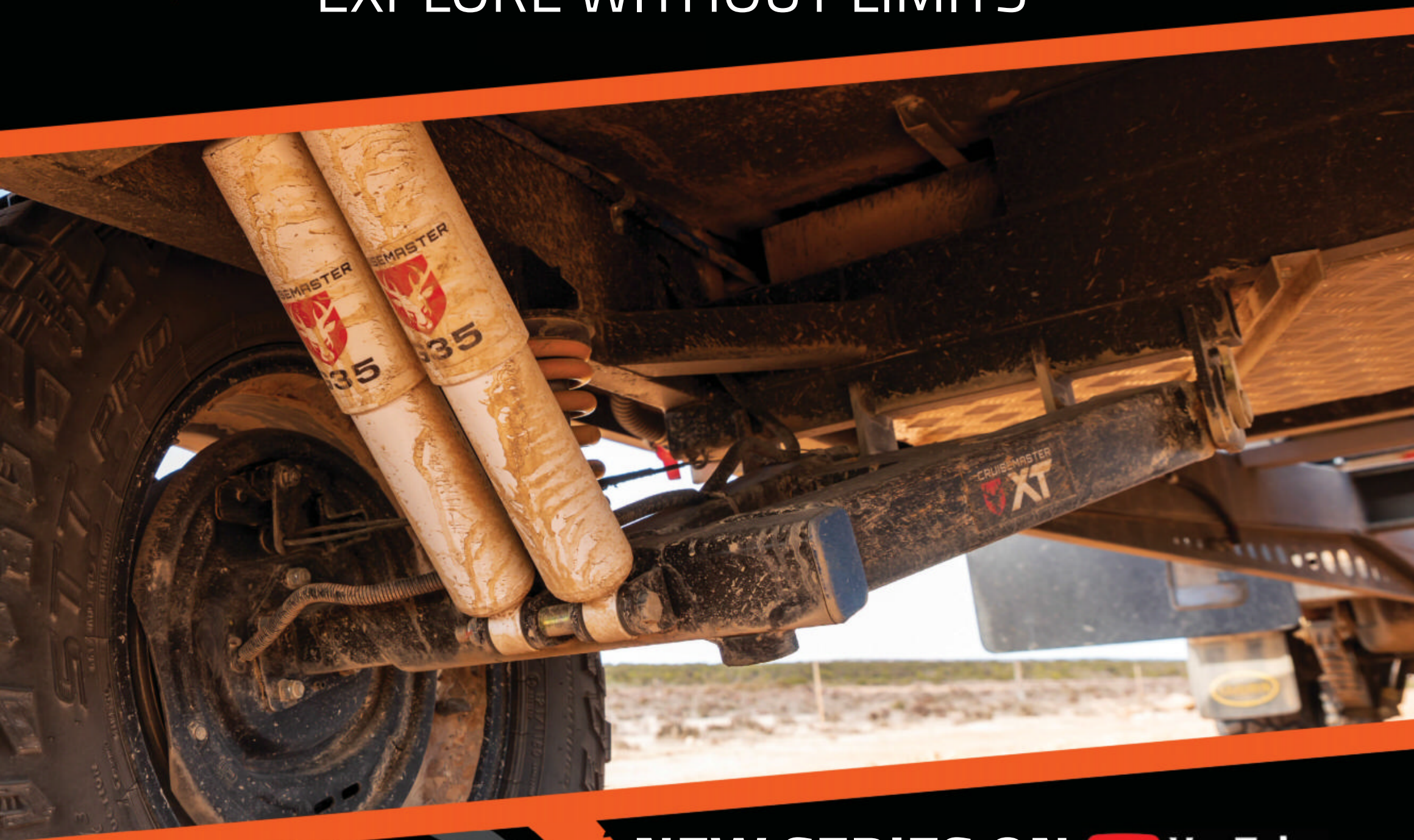
Nearby campgrounds: Kalgoorlie Goldfields Discovery Park, 286 Burt St, Boulder, WA 6432.

Ph: (08) 9039 4800, web: www.discoveryholidayparks.com.au. Kalgoorlie Caravan Park, 8 Great Eastern Hwy, Somerville, WA 6430. Ph: (08) 9021 4855.



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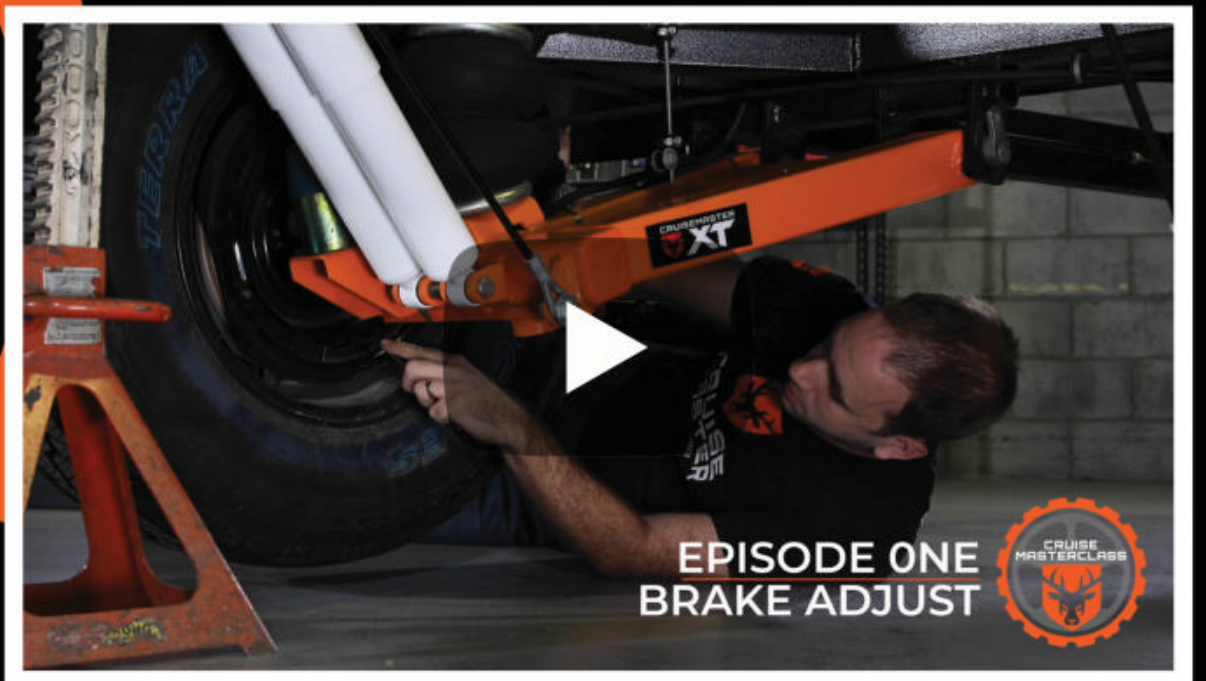
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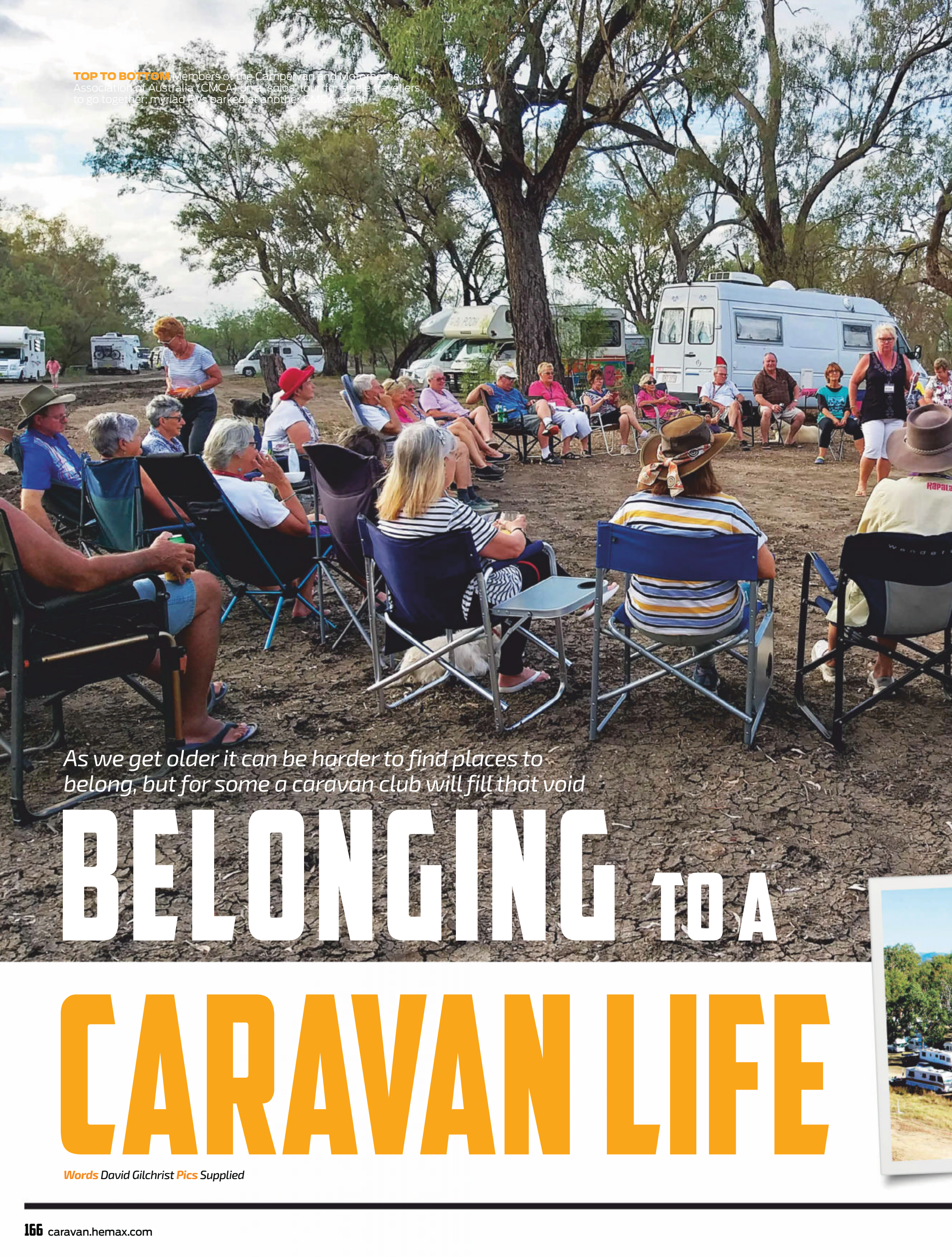


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TOP TO BOTTOM Members of the Campbell and McFarlane Association of Australia (CMCA) on a 'solos' tour for single travellers to go together; myriad R/Vs parked at another CMCA event



As we get older it can be harder to find places to belong, but for some a caravan club will fill that void

BELONGING TO A

CARAVAN LIFE

Words David Gilchrist Pics Supplied





Belonging. It's a simple word with a mountain of meaning. You know how it goes, you work hard and belong to a certain industry or profession, you have kids and belong to a parents and citizens organisation. Then you retire, work connections disappear, the kids move out to live their lives and chase adventures, and you're left with time on your hands.

It's long been argued caravanning and travelling is a way to find purpose in life

when all you've got is time, and as it turns out, staying connected and belonging to something when on the road is essential to staying healthy. The trouble is knowing if joining a club, especially a caravan club, is the right way to fill those empty hours and meet these needs.

WE NEED TO BELONG

Professor Evonne Miller is an expert in Population Ageing and Social Sustainability from the Queensland University of Technology, and says that the need to belong is something we carry all our lives.

"We all have a need to belong, be connected and take part in a community," Professor Miller says.

"If you are children, then you belong to school, then you have your work community and then when you retire, all those things disappear. Our world becomes smaller until people find those hobbies, activities or clubs that they belong to."

However, Professor Miller warns that joining a club or doing an activity is not all you need to do to stave off poor mental health. She said it's very important to find an activity or club in which you and your skills are valued so you feel, "you are making a contribution."

Then, in a word of advice for both potential caravanners and those running caravan clubs, Professor Miller claims that it's important your personality and outlook on the world is also appreciated.

"It's all about belonging with purpose," she said.

INTROVERT OR EXTROVERT

Professor Miller believes that finding a club that suits you, your values, personality, outlook and skills doesn't mean you should just roll up the sleeves and dive into every outing, activity and social event.

"Each of us is either an introvert or an extrovert," she says.

By nature, introverts can be self-contained and reticent, whereas extroverts tend to be the live-wire gregarious types that love to give everything a go.

Those differences mean for some of us being part of a club or community online is enough to meet our need to belong. That online presence might be a caravan club, a dog or even cat club. "Everyone has different social needs, different needs to being part of a community," she says.

What's more, Professor Miller believes how much you get out of any club also depends on whether you are travelling solo or with a partner.

DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS

However, she says a 'place based' organisation is a different proposition be it a caravan club or a group in a community you are visiting. The benefit of joining a local organisation in a town you are visiting depends on how long you're staying, and a long tour might allow the opportunity to benefit from joining a local organisation. So, for those on long tours with a hobby like gardening, floral art class or even watchmaking, or if you are a Lions or Rotary member, remember there are benefits in terms of your well-being to becoming involved in the local club in the town you're visiting.

"That," she said, "gives you an additional reason to interact with others."

She says a trick to finding a group in the community in which you are visiting is to make use of online sources and recommends using them whenever you arrive in a new community to do research or an audit to discover what groups are around. You can also find local groups advertised at the local library.

"It means that you have opportunities to engage with like-minded people," she says.

This approach means you might plan your trip according to the opportunities that exist in any town to meet up with people with similar interests.

Alternatively, Professor Miller suggests looking for opportunities to help within the community. For example, "you might help build a bus shelter or a garden or whatever your skills might be."

"...the Professor reckons, *"It's important for us at a younger age to have some bloody hobbies."*"



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A CMCA national rally; caravan clubs can take you on all sorts of activities; the dance floor at yet another CMCA event is a great place to make new friends; a few good friends make happy hour better; a second set of eyes helps with planning; remote free camping as a group is safer as well as more fun



BACKGROUND MATTERS

Professor Miller also points out that your background might determine how much you may want to interact with others. She remembers her father was a watchmaker and that, often solitary, occupation made him perfectly happy enjoying his own company. Her father was interested in drawing and art and all he needed was access to that opportunity. “Your personality and what you need does differ,” she reassures. “Everybody is different.”

POST-RETIREMENT SLUMP

Even when acknowledging that we all have different needs, Professor Miller said newly retired caravanners might well experience the post-retirement slump.

She says it happens because, “for most people work is a major part of their identity.”

On retirement an individual might carry that with them, introducing themselves as a former doctor, former lawyer, former plumber and so on. She says the trick to separate identity and sense of belonging from work is to not talk about work. Instead, talk about other



things, like a holiday.

Doing that will encourage you to get out and mix with others, not be lonely and avoid identifying yourself with a former work-life.

That means, the Professor reckons, “It’s important for us at a younger age to have some bloody hobbies.”

LIFE EXPERIENCE

Recently, Combined Caravan Club of Queensland members gathered at a rally in the Sunshine Coast town Nambour. Veteran travellers but new caravan club members Ross and Jan Munro reflected on what the club has meant to them.

“Our travelling has mostly focused on travelling to music festivals,” Ross recalled. “This means you meet people all over the place. So, that meant that sort of thing must be happening all over the country.”

Sitting with them were club members Kevin and Carol Day. Kevin and Ross have been friends since their schooldays, but Carol said that belonging to a club was extremely important because, “At our age you need to extend your group of friends. You need to meet new people, have new ideas and do new things.”

By the same token, she said that belonging to a caravan club wasn’t enough. “It is important to have other interests outside of the club,” she says.

Ross agreed saying when you retire your friendship group shrinks as people

move on or pass away but joining a club extends that group again. He reckoned joining a caravan club meant more than just getting hints on possible destinations. He described that something extra as “shared wisdom.”

That shared wisdom included gaining knowledge about technical aspects associated with caravanning like weights, braking, correct weight distribution and more.

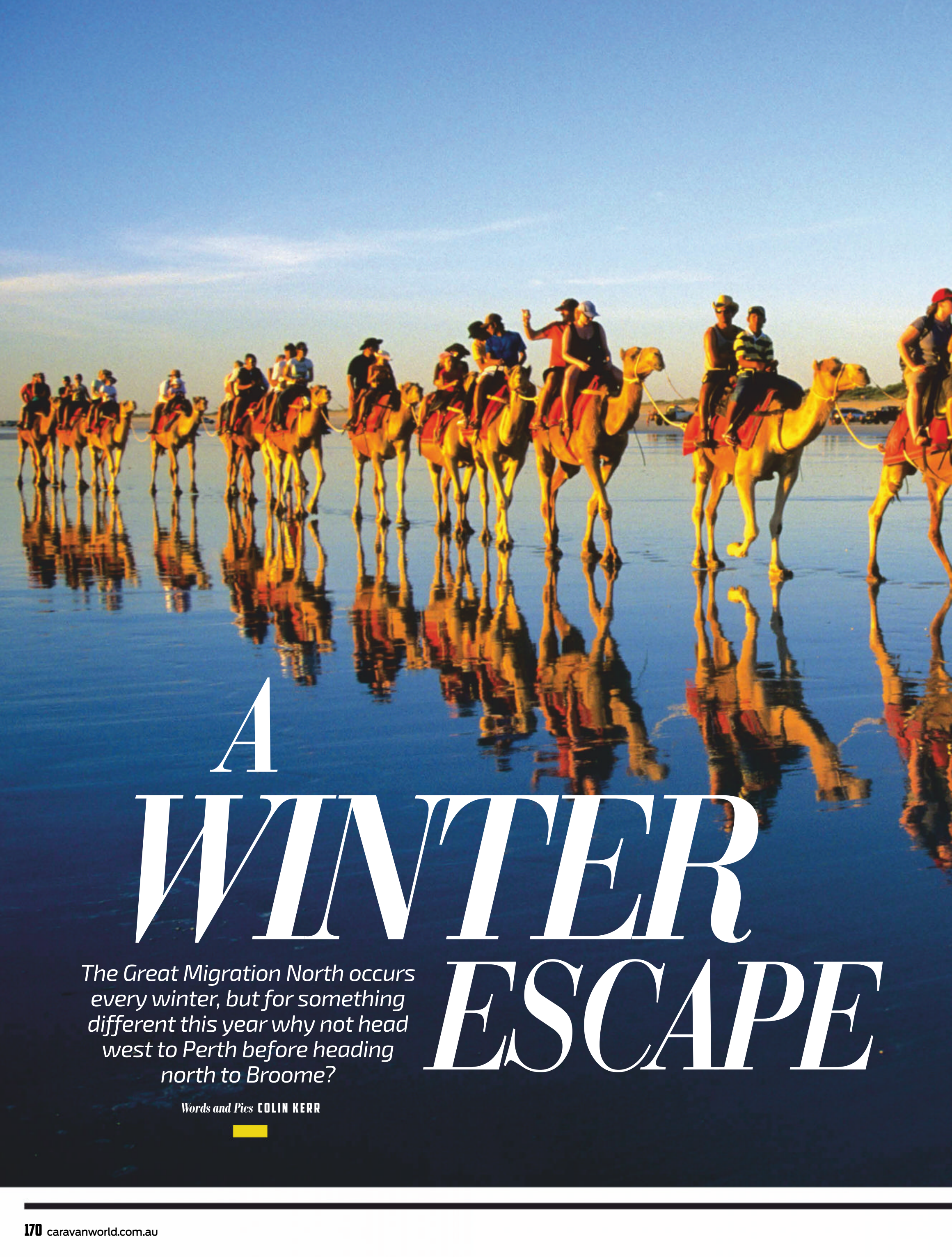
Carol Day was eager to tell *Caravan World* that she likes, “the extra programmes that are put on, day and night, like programmes on technology like iPads and it’s interesting.”

LIVING LIFE

While watching a robust disc bowls tournament solo traveller Yvonne Robins emphasised the human element associated with clubs. Widowed, Yvonne’s adventures are solo usually with only her dog Chanel by her side. She said that membership of the club helped her through her grief by keeping her busy, which encouraged her to get out and about amongst people.

Moreover, she said that when she is finding life is getting a little difficult and she finds herself lacking confidence, “They are always there to support me.”

What’s more, she finds the club give her a sense of identity, purpose and wellbeing, and that the sense of belonging made her feel as though she has been accepted into a caravan family. 



A WINTER ESCAPE

The Great Migration North occurs every winter, but for something different this year why not head west to Perth before heading north to Broome?

Words and Pics COLIN KERR





LEFT TO RIGHT Camel ride at Cable Beach in Broome; the tour boat on Yardie Creek, Cape Range National Park

It won't be long before nights will be getting cooler and the first of the winter cold fronts will be sweeping across the country, with plenty more to come!

A great winter plan for those living in Western Australia, and of course wandering nomads from the Eastern states, is to head north and take in some of the beautiful places spread along the extensive Western Australian coastline.

HEADING NORTH

The newly opened Indian Ocean Drive from Lancelin is the first of many great experiences to be had. This sealed coastal drive is a much more scenic option than simply heading north on the inland Brand Highway towards Geraldton.

With splendid coastal views, there are numerous stops along the way, such as Wedge Island and Grey, but the first main spot to check out is the famous Pinnacles in Nambung National Park. The tall limestone spires and shapes seemingly frozen in time are a wonderful sight. Allow around two hours to look through the Visitor Centre and follow the driving trail through these fascinating formations.

The coastal run from here takes in delightful fishing villages including Cervantes (explore the ancient stromatolites), Jurien Bay (sea lion boat tours), Green Head and Leeman. All of these towns have facilities, including fuel, a place to get a cuppa or buy a snack, plus caravan park accommodation when it's time to put your feet up.

To the North there are several free camping areas on the waterfront at Cliff Head, just before the Indian Ocean Drive joins the Brand Highway. Further on, the twin towns of Dongara and Port Denison have plenty to interest, including historic buildings along an enjoyable heritage trail and a great local bakery. Down by the water is a picturesque boat and fishing harbour, swimming beach, children's playground and a caravan park right on the beachfront.

Next is the historic village of Greenough. Rich early history of the area oozes through with its beautiful old homes, churches and Hampton Arms Hotel.

The city of Geraldton just up the road is a rapidly growing area. With an active port servicing the mining and grain industries, a large commercial fishing fleet including a cray fishing operation, a new boating harbour/marina and plenty of services and facilities, Geraldton is a good spot to stop and replenish supplies before heading further north. While here don't miss the Museum of Geraldton and the splendid *HMAS Sydney* Memorial to the 645 sailors who lost their lives during WWII.

The next main port of call heading north is the coastal town of Kalbarri. It is best to turn off Highway 1 at Northampton and swing towards the coast to take in the fishing village of Port Gregory, marvel at the fascinating pink salt lake and to have a look around the convict ruins at Lynton before heading to Kalbarri.

Another approach to the town, from the south, takes a look at the dramatic coastal



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The boardwalk at the stromatolites in Hemelin Pool, Shark Bay; on the beach at Wedge Island; Charles Knife Canyon and Exmouth Gulf, Cape Range National Park; Quobba Blowholes are just 20km out of Carnarvon



gorges, including Eagle Rock, Natural Bridge, Pot Ally Gorge and Mushroom Rock – all quite spectacular and best seen in the afternoon light.

In Kalbarri itself, Rainbow Jungle (an award winning parrot breeding centre) is well worth a visit. You can also paddle up the Murchison River, go horse riding, take a scenic flight at sunset to see the coastal cliffs, fishing charters and, not to be missed, have a seafood meal at Finlay's (a rustic local restaurant).

In the National Park just out of town, walk and drive trails lead to the spectacular gorge country of the Murchison River. Don't miss places like Nature's Window, Z Bend and Hawks Head, and if you're here in spring, the wildflowers in the area are quite amazing.

North from Kalbarri, near the Galena Bridge, there is a nice free 24 hour rest area right on the riverbank which is always a popular spot for travellers. There are toilets here but no other facilities.

KEEP GOING

Further northwards, Overlander Roadhouse marks the entry to the region of Shark Bay. With the coastal town of Denham as a base, this World Heritage listed area includes diverse attractions such as the Monkey Mia dolphins, dugongs, turtles and other aquatic life; ancient stromatolites; a pearl farm; local star gazing tours; Shell Beach; the beautiful Francois Peron National Park, with its red sand dune cliffs meeting the sea; and the lovely artesian water 'hot tub' at Peron Homestead.

Back on the North West Coastal highway, it's another 200km north to Carnarvon, the main service centre for the Gascoyne Region. The area here is



***“An awesome sight when it is in flood,
in dry periods it continues to flow
underneath the riverbed.”***



a large fruit and vegetable growing region with water supplied by the mighty Gascoyne River. An awesome sight when it is in flood, in dry periods it continues to flow underneath the riverbed.

Carnarvon, with tropical, tree-lined streets, is a busy commercial fishing port. Lying just north of the 26th parallel its warm winter climate is helping to make it an increasingly popular tourist destination.

While in Carnarvon check out the Heritage precinct, including the famous One Mile Jetty (1897) where you can take a ride in the quaint ‘Coffee Pot’ train to the end of this famous icon. Make sure you stock up on local fruits and veggies here before heading further north.

Around 20km out of Carnarvon, a turn-off leads to the Blowholes at Point Quobba. Here you can check out the spectacular blowholes, the tall coastal cliffs, try some balloon fishing, get a view of the huge Cape Cuvier salt export facility and, a little further north, see the beautiful waves that roll in at Red Bluff – a mecca for keen surfers from around the country. There are shire campsites and station stay accommodation along this coastline.

Further north lies the beautiful Ningaloo Reef which stretches some 260km along the coastline, with coral in many places seen just a few metres off the beach. There are wonderful diving and snorkelling areas, glass bottom boat tours, plenty of good fishing and within Cape Range National Park there are beachfront campsites, spectacular

gorge country, a turtle centre, bushwalking options and a delightful cruise (run by National Parks) up Yardie Creek. Both Coral Bay and Exmouth are popular centres for travellers to stop off.

Between March and June here, there is the opportunity to swim with the huge whale sharks that inhabit these waters at that time of the year, or swim with giant manta rays year round.

The next coastal detour is the small town of Onslow. On the way into town you can't help but notice hundreds of termite mounds, some standing up to two metres tall, on the undulating countryside. This quiet township has caravan park facilities, good fishing spots and the nearby ruins of the old Onslow townsite are worth a visit.

Continuing northwards, the Pilbara Region is next, with plenty of colourful rocky outcrops, spinifex covered hillsides, creek beds and large river systems, including Fortescue and Robe Rivers. In late winter colourful Sturt Desert Peas and Mulla Mullas can be seen along the way.

At Robe River there is a free riverside camping area with shade and pleasant water views that's popular for overnight stays. A little further on there is another a popular camping and fishing spot at Forty Mile Beach overlooking the water – it's usually busy here in winter.

AND GOING

The modern town of Karratha has a wide variety of services and accommodation options available. Nearby Dampier has an attractive palm-lined coastal foreshore and tours are available to look over the

huge Dampier Salt operation, iron ore port facilities and, on the nearby Burrup Peninsula, Woodside natural gas operation has a Visitor Centre with tours available.

While you're here don't miss the beach at Hearson's Cove. A popular swimming spot, it's a good place to watch 'staircase to the moon' when a low tide coincides with the rising full moon. The Burrup is also the site of many ancient Aboriginal rock art engravings (petroglyphs).

Further up the highway in Roebourne, look for Aboriginal murals on town buildings, pavements, poles and rubbish bins. This is a historic centre with plenty of old buildings, and the old prison is now the rustic and charming home of the town's tourist centre. A visit to the nearby old pearling town of Cossack (the northwest's first port) and Point Samson (try the fish and chips from Moby's Kitchen) is also recommended.

Whim Creek, once a thriving copper and gold mining township, has a beautiful old pink pub – a real icon of the Pilbara. Don't miss having a look around the bird aviary as you enjoy a drink in the beer garden.

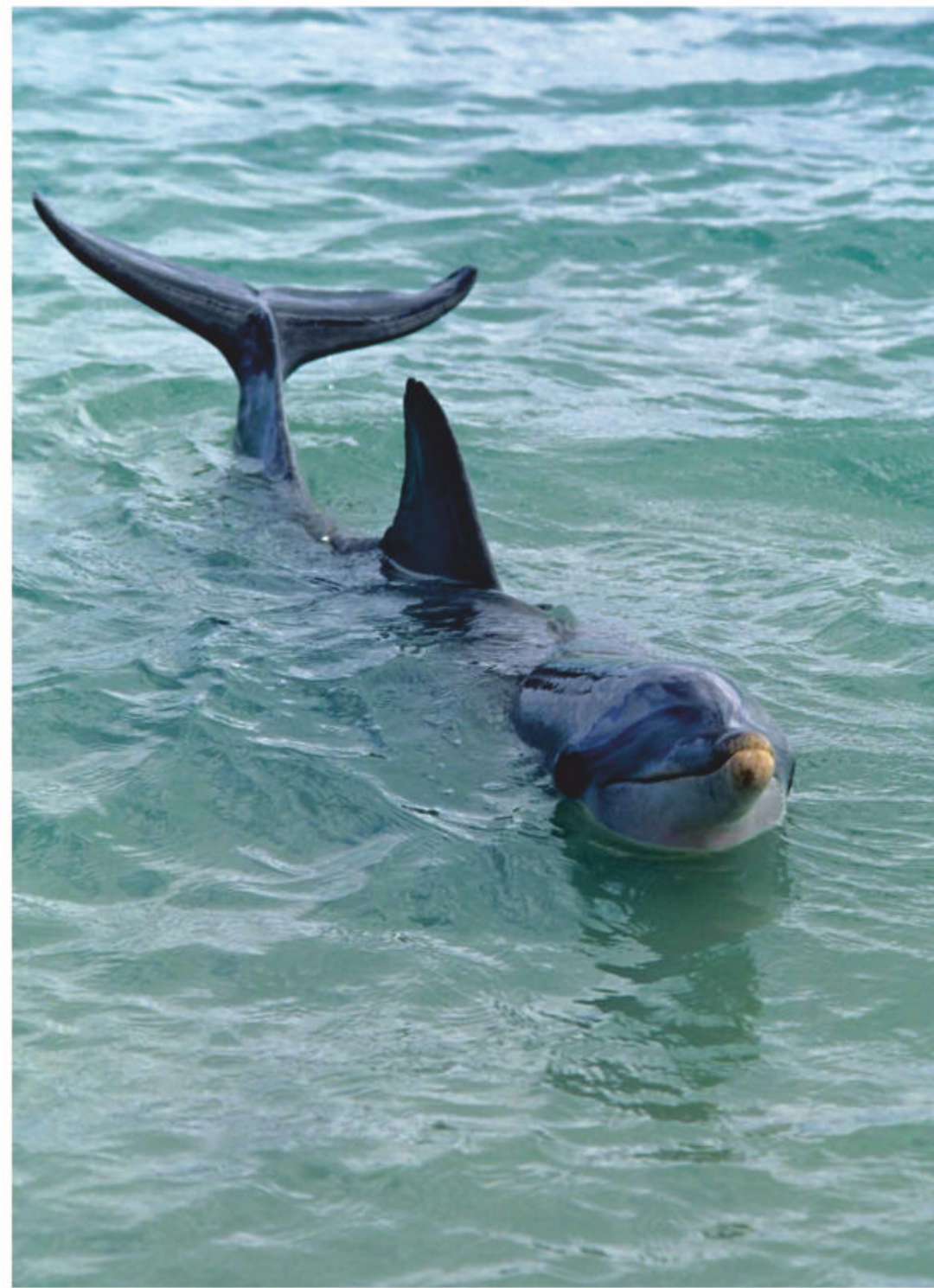
Northwards the countryside becomes mostly flat, open cattle grazing country. The picturesque Yule River, 61km from Port Hedland, has a free 24 hour rest area with plenty of shade right beside the water.

THE FINAL LEG

The busy mining town of Port Hedland also offers interesting tours of their operations, another opportunity to see a 'staircase to the moon' at Cooke Point, plenty of services and several shopping centres – your last place to top up on supplies before heading onto



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Pinnacles at Nambung National Park; Aboriginal rock engravings, Indee Station; diving with whale sharks in Ningaloo Reef; rock formations along the beach at Barn Hill; dolphin at Monkey Mia



THE INLAND ROUTE

Another option from Perth is to take the inland route to enjoy some quite different experiences. Stops along the way can include:

- ⊕ New Norcia, where you can tour a monastery founded in 1846 and still run by the Benedictine Monks;
- ⊕ Dalwallinu and Wubin, where you pass through an extensive grain producing region;
- ⊕ Paynes Find and Yalgoo which mark the beginning of the Murchison Goldfields region;
- ⊕ Mount Magnet where there is an area known as 'The Granites' and 'Amphitheatre';
- ⊕ Cue and Meekatharra with historic ruins, old time architecture, Walga Rock with its old Aboriginal paintings, the ghost town of Big Bell, as well as huge modern open cut mines operating 24 hours a day;
- ⊕ Newman, with an open cut mine tour available, a 4WD gorge, waterhole and Aboriginal rock art trail;
- ⊕ Munjina East Gorge, one of the most scenic sections to be found along this entire route;
- ⊕ And Indee Station, which provides a great station stay experience, with beautiful sites around their property, including some ancient Aboriginal rock engravings.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Prue Kerr at Shell Beach, Shark Bay; colourful sunset from the lookout at Barn Hill; the Amphitheatre near Mt Magnet



MORE INFORMATION

- ☉ Travel distance from Perth to Broome: approximately 2,200km all fully sealed roads, suitable for all vehicles
- ☉ Best time to travel: May to September — usually hot and humid in summer wet season
- ☉ Fuel prices at most north-west centres and roadhouses are 20c to 30c dearer than city prices
- ☉ Staircase to the Moon dates and times are available at local visitor centres
- ☉ As you pass through townships along the way contact local visitor centres for details of nearby attractions
- ☉ Visit: www.australiannorthwest.org.au or www.pilbara.com or www.australiascoralcoast.com

Broome 613km away – and there is a new free rest area close to the town centre.

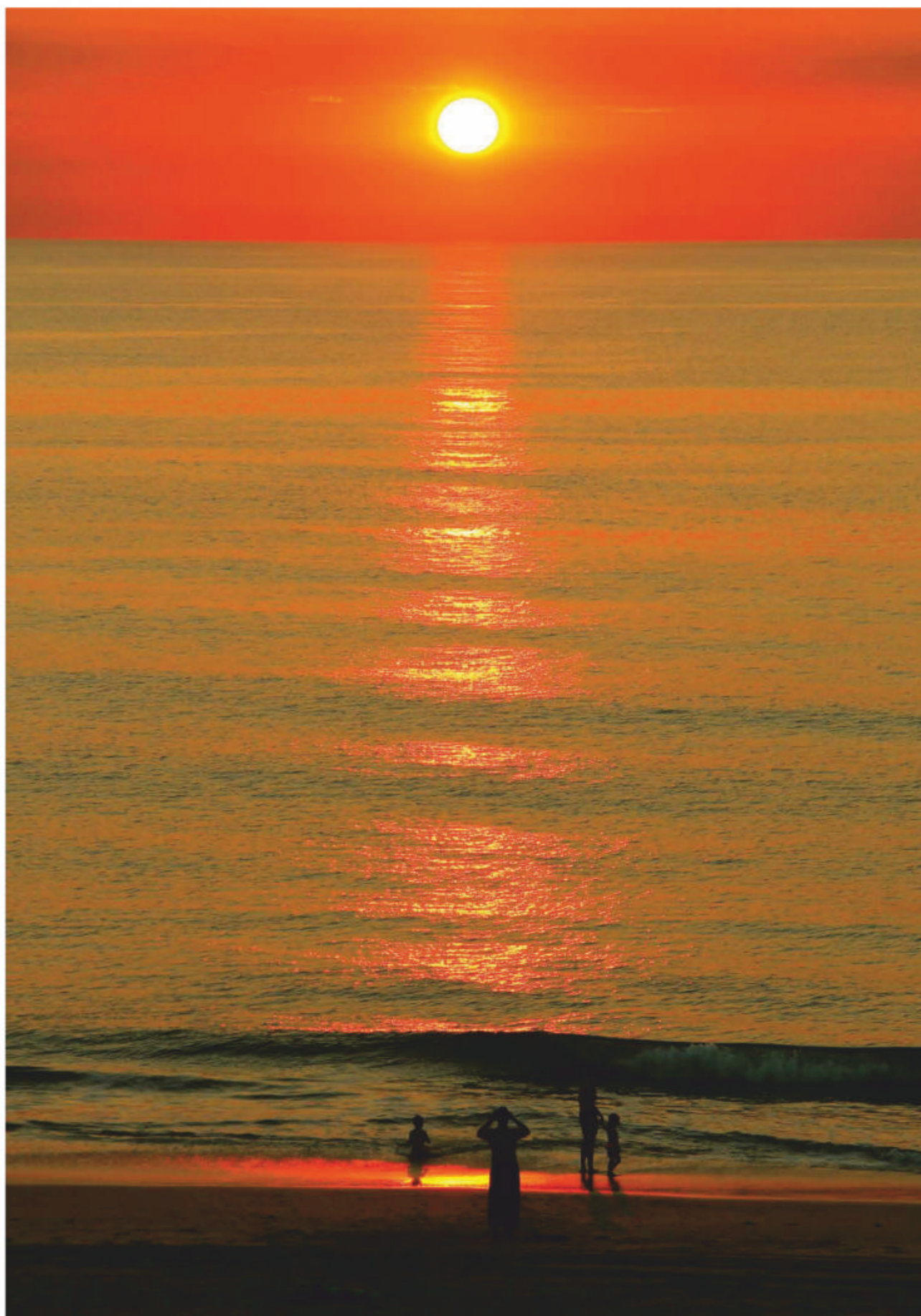
As the highway swings east and then north-east towards Broome, there is another free overnight campsite beside the DeGrey River (81km from Port Hedland) and onwards from there, for those keen on fishing, Pardoo Station and Cape Keraudren are popular getaways right on the coast.

The well-appointed Eighty Mile Beach Caravan Park, 10km off the highway and 245km from Port Hedland, is a popular spot for an overnight break or for a longer stay.

Further on, Port Smith and Barn Hill are both popular spots. Access to Barn Hill, a station stay experience, is by a sandy track but suitable to all vehicles and is one of our favourite places. There is a rustic caravan

park with powered and unpowered sites, a beautiful beach, colourful scenic cliffs and beachfront outcrops, good fishing, a lovely swimming beach and a small shop with basic supplies, ice creams and pizza. There is even a lawn bowling rink and regular special happy hour get-togethers.

From here Broome, ‘the port of pearls’, is just 130km away and as you drive into this appealing multi-cultural town it is like entering another world. The beautiful blue waters of Roebuck Bay, camel rides on Cable Beach, the tropical laid-back feel of the place and the many tourist attractions available here will keep most visitors busy for days, weeks or even months before either heading back south or further into WA’s scenic Kimberley region. 📍



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Words Anji Bignell Pics Supplied

BUSH TUCKER

Add a bit of flair to your standard Aussie fare with some native and sustainable bush ingredients

(Native ingredients can be sourced while on the road or buy online at the <http://www.bushfoodshop.com.au/>)

KANGAROO MEATLOAF

TOTAL TIME: 1.5 hours
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 500g kangaroo mince
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 tbsp Kutjera (tomato) sauce
- 1 tspn native thyme
- 1 tspn saltbush
- 2 eggs
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 3 tbsp breadcrumbs

METHOD

Mix all of the ingredients together and then make into a loaf shape. Roll in extra breadcrumbs until coated.

Wrap in aluminium foil and cook in the camp oven for 50 minutes, then roll back the aluminium foil to brown for a further 30 minutes.

Serve with tomato sauce, mashed potato and roast veggies.





BUSH DAMPER

TOTAL TIME: 1 hour
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups self-raising flour
- 1 tbsp ground wattleseed
- 1 tbsp ground lemon myrtle
- 250ml buttermilk
- 1 tbsp macadamia nut oil
- Milk for brushing

METHOD

Sift the flour and seasonings into a large bowl and make a well in the centre.

Combine the buttermilk and oil and pour into the well. Mix quickly and lightly to form a soft dough.

Turn onto a floured board and knead until smooth.

Shape into a round ball, brush with milk, wrap in aluminium foil and place in the hot

coals or camp oven for 40-50 minutes (it will sound hollow when tapped).

Wrap the foil around it and then place in the embers of a campfire until heated through.



LEMON MYRTLE BAKED CHEESECAKE

TOTAL TIME: 7 hours

SERVES: 8

INGREDIENTS

Base

- 250g plain sweet biscuits, crushed (Granita biscuits)
- ¼ cup raw sugar
- 90g unsalted melted butter

Filling

- 250g cream cheese
- 600g ricotta cheese
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 tbsp cornflour

- 4 eggs
- 2 tspn ground lemon myrtle or grated lemon rind
- 1½ tsp vanilla extract

METHOD

Preheat oven to 180C (160C fan forced). Grease a springform pan and wrap the outside of it with two layers of aluminium foil.

Combine crushed biscuits with sugar and butter. Press biscuit crumbs into the base of the springform pan and refrigerate.

Beat the cream cheese. Add ricotta and sugar and beat for 2 minutes until smooth.

Add cornflour, then add eggs one at a time, beating well each time. Stir in lemon myrtle and vanilla.

Place springform pan in a baking dish. Pour mix into springform pan. Then pour enough hot water into the baking dish so that it comes halfway up the sides of the springform pan.

Bake for 10 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 140C (120C fan forced) and bake for a further 30 minutes until almost set.

Remove pan from the water. Let it cool. Cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours. [📖](#)

RED PINDAN SAND CLIFFS

BARN HILL, BROOME, WA

Photographer
COLIN KERR

Gear
CANON EOS 50D
1/200 SEC
F/4.5
ISO 200



PIC PERFECT

REGULARS





CHAINSAW MAINTENANCE

Words and Pics
by Scott Heiman

There are a number of gadgets we turn to on the road and all require maintenance. Here Scott Heiman goes through maintaining a chainsaw.

If we plan to spend trouble-free time on the road, we need to service our tow-tugs regularly, both to ensure longevity and to avoid being stranded on a remote back road. It's the same story with our caravans. Whether we're tinkering with them in the shed, or having them dealt with by a registered mechanic, a little bit of preventative maintenance goes a long way.

The same goes for many other bits of kit that we rely on when we're away. Consider for a moment the sheer volume of mechanical, electrical and other gear we reach for when we're travelling. While some may be 'set-and-forget', others require routine maintenance.

One of these campsite staples is 'The Little Engine that Could' that many of us keep tucked away in the storage box on our A-frame; I'm talking here about chainsaws. We carry these to clear fallen trees off back roads or to cut firewood for camp oven coals where local regulations permit. Several reputable chainsaw manufacturers market smaller models that are ideal for relatively light jobs around camp and don't take up too much packing space.

Whatever model you choose to carry, if you don't maintain your chainsaw regularly, you'll reduce its serviceable life and make your own life more difficult, and potentially more dangerous. After all, how many of us have

witnessed someone struggling with a chainsaw around camp? Frustrated by a mechanical malfunction, the user risks being distracted from their usual safety precautions. And there's really no scope for error when you're dealing with a device that has a chain of razor sharp teeth rotating at around 100km/h.

Fortunately, chainsaw maintenance is easy to achieve with a few tools and a bit of attention to detail. So follow these simple steps to keep your little engine happy.



STEP 1: FUEL

We've all heard the old adage 'you are what you eat', right? Well, your chainsaw has a similar relationship with its fuel.

Old fuel goes off, be it petrol for your Genny or a two-stroke mix. You can generally store fuel for up to one year in a sealed container, but once the seal is broken, lighter components of the fuel evaporate and the fuel's storage life reduces accordingly. So, expect a useful shelf life of six months with a 20 C ambient temperature or just three months if the ambient temperature is 30 C or more.

Once the fuel is in the chainsaw, its lifespan will reduce further because it's exposed to oxygen and moisture via the breather — it's also inevitably affected by the hot engine operating alongside.

There are some chainsaw fuel products specifically designed for increased longevity. Specifically, Stihl has created a fully synthetic and biodegradable long-life fuel called Moto-Mix. The manufacturer promises a two-year shelf life once opened, with some suggestions saying the sealed product will remain good-to-go for five years. What's more, Moto-Mix is better for your engine than manually mixed two-stroke, which is why Stihl will double the engine warranty if you buy Moto-Mix at the same time that you buy a new chainsaw from them.

STEP 2: STORAGE

If you leave your chainsaw lying around on the ground, or on a cement floor, moisture will inevitably wick through. The consequence can be as simple as surface rust on the bar and chain or may be as bad as engine seizure. So get it off the ground and store it on a shelf.

Consider too the period of time between uses:

- If you are regularly using your chainsaw, store it with both the fuel cell and bar oil reservoirs full to reduce evaporation and oxidation.
- If you're not using your chainsaw every month or so, then it's good practice to change the fuel every two months to avoid the collection of gummy deposits as the fuel evaporates.
- If the period between uses starts approaching three months or more, then it's best to empty the fuel tank and store it dry. To do this start the chainsaw to warm up the engine, then stop it, drain the fuel (keep it in a container to one side, you'll need it later) and then start the saw until it stalls (this stops the spark plug from becoming 'wet fouled').



STEP 3: CLEANING

Just as humans remain healthier if we maintain suitable levels of cleanliness, we'll extend the life expectancy of our chainsaws if we clean them after every use. All that's needed is a rag, a paint brush, air supply (no, not the music band) and some old fuel.

Simply wipe down all external surfaces with the clean rag and use your air compressor (or even a can of 'Spraybuster' from your tool shed or home office) to clean out the engine cooling fins etc. Then remove the Bar to reveal the chain sprocket and brush out all of the crud with rag. Blow-out any excess deposits with air (and don't forget the chain/bar oil holes on the bar). Finally, wipe down everything with the paint brush and the old fuel that you saved when emptying the tank. Put it all back together again or continue with the next steps for a full service.

I'd recommend going the Full Monty at least once every few months for heavier use to at least once a year for light use.



STEP 4: BREATHE EASY

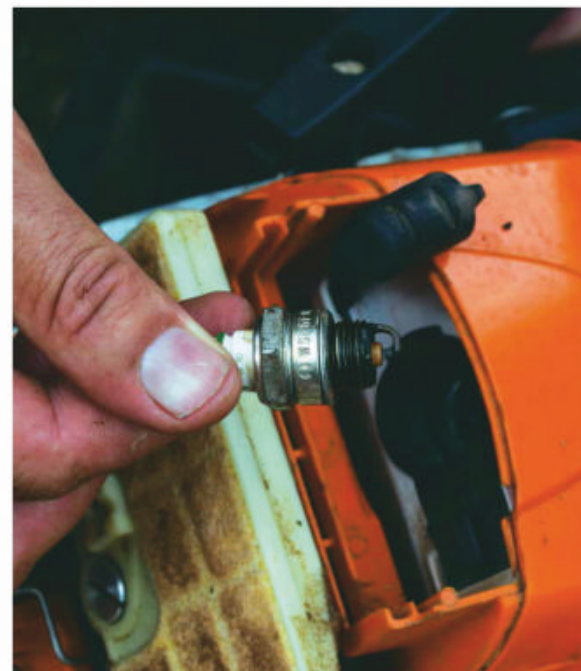
Fire needs three things to burn: fuel, heat and oxygen. Fire is the chemical reaction that occurs when these three things are present and the conditions are right, and fire is what occurs in the small combustion engine in your chainsaw. It's therefore logical that restricted air flow through your chainsaw's engine will result in incomplete combustion which can result in carbon or 'dry' fouling your spark plug.

It's important to clean or replace the air filter regularly. Simply remove the engine cover and clean the underside and components with your paint brush. Next, remove the filter (trying not to dislodge dust and muck that could fall into the intake manifold) and place some absorbent cloth (Chux or equivalent) into the intake recess. Then clean the detached air filter, again with your brush while blowing gently. If it's really dirty, lightly wash the air filter with warm soapy water (or a purpose made cleaner) before rinsing it with clean water. Allow it to fully dry before re-installing.



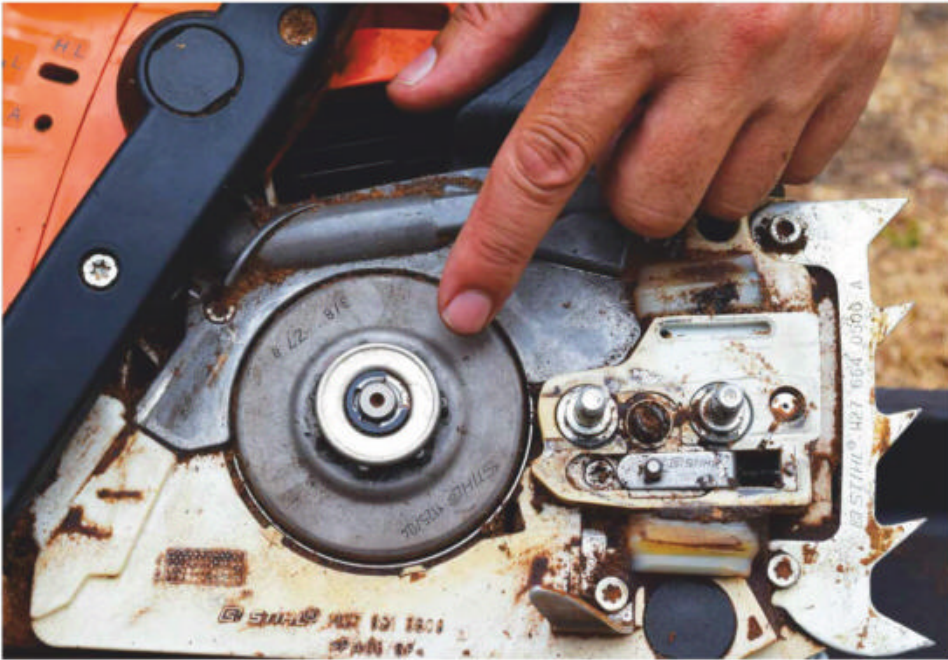
STEP 5: THE OTHER FILTER

Yes, chainsaws have a fuel filter, and this filter is cheap insurance against the Number One cause of problems in chainsaws. A dirty fuel filter restricts fuel flow, which also damages your engine and makes it hard to start. If you've left your chainsaw on the shelf for a year or have been feeding it the spare left-over fuel from yesteryear, it will need replacing.



STEP 6: MORE SPARK

Spark plugs should be replaced annually. Dirty and worn spark plugs can reduce your chainsaw's starting and engine performance. If the plug is dirty, use a carburettor cleaner and fine sandpaper to clean it. If the plug is worn, replace it (you should always carry a spare).



STEP 7: DRIVE SPROCKET

With heavy use, you may also need to change the drive sprocket annually. Check its teeth for damage or uneven wear and replace if necessary. It's handy to keep a spare on hand — after all, it's only held-in by a 'C' clip so changing it is relatively simple.

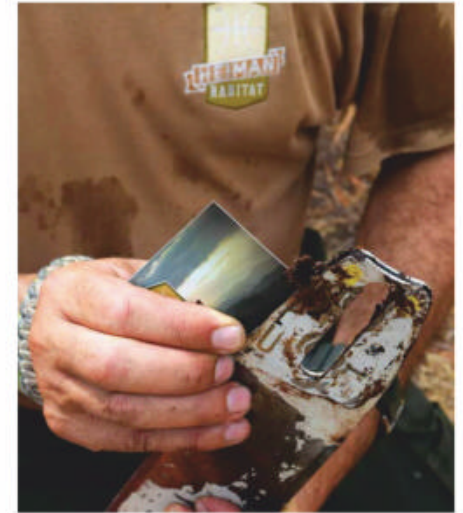


STEP 9: SHARP AS A TACK

Keeping your chain sharp is a key element of maintaining your chainsaw. A blunt chain, caused by contact with soil, rocks and general use, will simply rotate and burn the wood rather than cutting it. You'll know your chain is blunt when you need to apply heavy force to push the chainsaw when cutting.

Chains can be professionally sharpened. Alternatively, you can easily do it yourself using a correct sized sharpening file. Push it horizontally forward through each cleat, then lift, and repeat twice more. To help the process, consider utilising a vice to clamp the bar and lock the chain by pushing the hand guard forward.

There are all sorts of gadgets and do-dahs out there to help make the job a little easier.



STEP 8: INSPECTOR GADGET

While your chainsaw is pulled apart, inspect the chain for damage. You may need to replace it. The same applies to the bar. Inspect it and clean-out the groove of foreign bodies (a business card works well for this). If you find burrs on the guide bar, remove them with a file.

While you're looking at the guide bar, also check the nose for pinches. Pinches are the kiss of death to a bar tip.

To check for wear of the sprocket, measure how far the tip sprocket holds the chain above the rails on the bar's tip. It should measure at least 1/32 of an inch. If it's any less, the tip should be replaced, even if it still spins. Either of these faults can result in your bar seizing up which, needless to say, is not a good thing.

You can get replacement sprocket noses depending on your make and model. How to change them is a story for another day. In the meantime, visit an authorised service centre for help.



STEP 10: LUBE UP

If your chain appears to run slower over the bar than normal, or you're using more fuel than usual, it might be time to lube up. The bar and the chain are in constant contact with one another, so if the oil hole is blocked or you've run out of oil, things are going to get hot. There's a lot of friction between your bar and chain, which means a lot of heat is being produced that could do major damage to your engine, bar or chain if inadequately lubricated.

Once your chainsaw is re-assembled, refuelled and lubed, find a clean surface or a piece of newspaper and accelerate the saw a few times while pointing it in the general direction of the surface. Oil should spray onto it. If it doesn't, check that the oil reservoir is full. Also check that the oil passages and holes on the guide bar are clean. If the oiling system still doesn't work, take it to an authorised service centre.

When choosing an oil, remember there are synthetic and/or biodegradable plant-based oils available that will reduce your impact on the environment. To help you make a decision, picture all of the petroleum-based oil that has spewed out of every chainsaw ever made. 

OTHER TIPS

- Routinely reverse the chain bar, top to bottom, to avoid wear on one side
- Don't operate the chainsaw with the air intake on the ground as this will draw foreign particles into the motor area and damage the motor
- If you notice that you've inadvertently knocked dirt or other crud into the oil reservoir while re-fuelling, drain the contaminated oil into an approved container and let the oil drain by gravity overnight, then rinse the reservoir with fuel, let it air dry, before blowing-out with air.

MAXTRAX

Words Tim Moorton
Pics Anna Shepherd

INDEFLATE



So, what exactly is it?

The Indeflate system is based on a simple solution to a common issue. It's designed to decrease the time and effort needed to deflate and inflate tyres in an offroad situation.

The construction of the Indeflate doesn't disappoint either. The device is manufactured from precision engineered aluminium for the main housing and highly flexible abrasion and ozone resistant air hoses. It also comes with its own zip-sealed strong and durable carry case.

Enough with the marketing I hear you say, does it actually work?

In a word, yes.

We had the privilege of getting a pre-production device to test on our recent mapping trip to Tasmania, and there's no other way to say it — I want one!

The device consists of a central dump valve assembly with a pressure gauge and a pair of 3m hoses with clip on chucks that attach to the tyres. Once the chucks are attached you simply slide the barrel of the dump valve up and both tyres start to deflate. Slide the barrel back down and deflation stops.

The process of inflating the tyres is even easier. Clip on the chucks, make sure the barrel is in the down position and attach an air hose to the threaded valve on the bottom of the device. Any compressor with an attachment for a tyre valve stem will work, even service station compressors. You can of course attach a compressor specific adaptor, but it isn't required or necessary.

One of the best features of this device is the length of the air hoses. Even on a 79 Series Dual Cab with a chassis extension, there is enough hose to not have to bend over while deflating and inflating. My back thanks to you for that, MAXTRAX. We used the device in the field for over a month and it performed flawlessly, cutting a lot of the unavoidable down time that would have been lost in deflating and inflating, as we could leave the device and complete other tasks while the unit was in operation.

The Indeflate is the kind of device that, after you have used it, you will wonder how you ever got by without it. Everyone from the weekend warrior to the professional offroad user will see a benefit in this device and I have no doubt this will see the end of a lot of quick tyre deflators, especially given the price point.

☺ What if I told you that you could air down without removing the valve stem? And that you could do two tires at once? But that's not all, you could also re-inflate those same two tires again with the same device? I hear the cogs in your head turning. Not possible you say, but what if it was?

It is not often I get excited about a new product before I get to play with it, but the new MAXTRAX Indeflate had me intrigued from the moment I heard about it.

MAXTRAX has partnered with a well-established but little-known South African company, Indeflate, signing on as their Australian distributor, and the result is a game changer pure and simple.



MAXTRAX INDEFLATE

RRP \$215

More info <https://www.maxtrax.com.au/maxtrax-indeflate>



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'Cool in Summer, Warm in Winter'

THE ARKPAK 730

Words and Pics Adam Jane

⌚ When I first laid eyes on the ArkPak 730, portable battery boxes weren't something I'd thought about. I've always had a vehicle-based dual battery system and never found it lacking, but as I inspected the black box, my imagination sprang to life with scenes that would be perfect for such a device. I envisaged a picturesque campsite, somewhere by the water, my laptop glowing as I unloaded my camera's SD card after a hard day's work, a cold one close at hand as the fridge hummed nearby.

However, there was one more thing I needed before I rode off into the sunset like a bona fide digital nomad — the ArkPak needs a battery. In order to experience the wonders of the battery box to the fullest, it's necessary to invest in a good quality deep-cycle battery. One of the key features of the ArkPak is its multi-chemistry battery selection, which allows users to install a lead acid, gel, calcium, AGM or lithium battery, and utilises a variety of settings and charging cycles to ensure the battery performs at its best.

The merits of this multi-chemistry compatibility were evident on my trip to the local Battery World store. I had no idea there were so many choices. Anyone looking to set up a battery box needs to remember that after dropping roughly \$500 on the ArkPak 730, it's necessary to spend close to that amount again for a decent battery, or as much as \$2,000 for a top-of-the-line lithium ion version. Keen to avoid a lecture from the accounts department, I settled on a 120 amp-hour absorbed glass mat (AGM) battery for about \$400. While it would have been far cheaper to opt for a lead acid battery, one key consideration was that lead acid batteries are liable to leak or spill, meaning they're not ideal for portability.

Installing the battery was a breeze thanks to the ArkPak's easy to read screen and intuitive system. Then came the moment of truth, the thing I'd really been curious about; how easy was the ArkPak 730 to move with a battery inside? The quick answer, it's not. On its own, the ArkPak weighs in at just under five kilograms. Once I'd added 35 kilograms of

battery, wrapped my fingers around the inset handles and loaded it into the back of my Land Rover, I was forced to reconsider the meaning of 'portable'.

THE JOURNEY

I left it in the back of the car for a few days before setting off on a drive from Brisbane to Melbourne. The plan was to utilise the ArkPak for any task that would usually require my vehicle-based battery system. I arrived at camp after dark on the first night and ran a cable from the Anderson plug of the ArkPak to the Anderson that supplies power to my rooftop tent. I left the box where it sat in the back of the car — nice and easy. After a spot of reading, I plugged my Kindle and iPad into the USB outlets in the tent, switched off the reading light and was out.

In the morning, the display on the ArkPak assured me that my usage the previous evening was negligible. It is, however, easy to recharge the battery after a big trip using 240-volt mains power and the clever staged charger built into the box. You can plug into a solar panel while you're set up at camp for extended periods or you can charge through your vehicle's 12-volt accessory sockets or an Anderson plug as you drive.

Later that afternoon I arrived at my second camp with plenty of daylight to spare. I popped the ArkPak under the awning, took a few glamour shots, pulled out my laptop and flipped on the 300-watt inverter to provide juice to the 240-volt outlet and five-volt USB socket. As I unpacked my web of charging cables, it struck me as odd that there's only one USB outlet on the ArkPak, since almost everything I use these days charges via USB — even my awning lights. But this is quickly remedied by popping an adaptor into one of the 12-volt sockets.

On this short trip, I didn't come close to drawing significant quantities of power from the ArkPak, or having it run anything for extended periods of time. Ark claim that a 130 amp-hour battery will be able to power a 37-litre 12-volt fridge for seven days, which

seems perfectly reasonable after my experience so far.

THE WRAP

After my brief shake-down, I'm keen to take the ArkPak on a longer trip. Ultimately, it seems best suited to the kind of camper who plans to set up an elaborate site and settle in for a week or more. Having a dedicated power source that allows you to run a fridge and lighting at camp, while still being able to take the car on day-trips is something that could come in handy, though the lack of USB points may be a bit frustrating. It's also possible to permanently mount the ArkPak in a vehicle or camper trailer and have it wired up as a self-contained system.

I like the ArkPak because you don't need to be an expert in batteries and power consumption to set it up and get it going, and it'll be a welcome addition at my next multi-night remote campsite. Even still, I might nip down to Bunnings first and see what I can do about sticking some wheels on it.

THE ARKPAK 730

RRP \$499

More info www.arkcorp.com.au/



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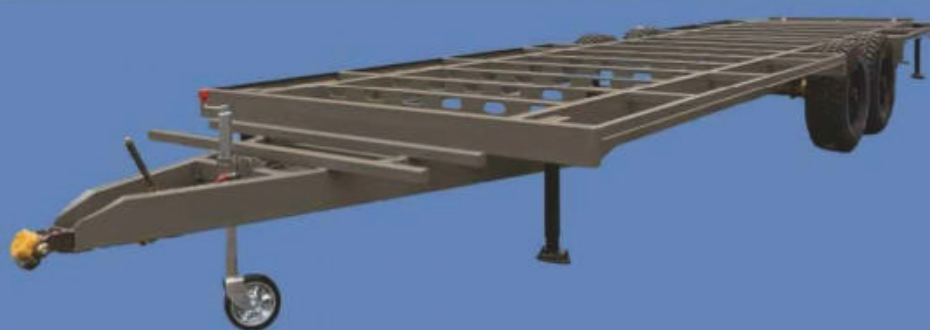
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What's happening around the country in May?



NSW

AUSTRALIAN CELTIC FESTIVAL

April 30-May 3

Since 1992, crowds have descended on Glen Innes in the New England High Country for the Australian Celtic Festival. The four-day Festival attracts clans, cultural groups, dancers and performers from around the world. Entertainment includes a street parade, kirkin' of the tartan, massed pipe bands, jousting, children's entertainment, a fun run, dancing, flag raising ceremonies, poet breakfasts, market stalls and Celtic foods.

<https://www.australiancelticfestival.com/>

HUNTER VALLEY WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

May-June

There's no better time to take in the delights of Australia's premium wine-growing region than Hunter Valley Wine and Food Festival. Spanning May and June, the festival showcases the epicurean pleasures of this iconic food and wine destination, and offers the perfect journey of discovery through the stunning region.

<https://www.winecountry.com.au/events/wine-and-food-festival>



BATLOW CIDERFEST

May 15-17 (to be confirmed due to fires)

Batlow CiderFest is a colourful street party celebrating the end of the apple harvest and the best boutique ciders from around Australia and those brewed locally. Two stages host local talent while market stalls offer boutique ciders, gourmet food, locally grown produce, and tempting homemade treats.

<https://batlowciderfest.com.au/>

NT

BASS IN THE GRASS MUSIC FESTIVAL

May 23

Soak up the sun, sand and good vibes at Darwin's favourite beachside music festival, People's Choice Bass in the Grass. Returning Saturday, 23 May 2020, Bass in the Grass is a licensed, all ages event boasting 10 hours of non-stop music across multiple stages.

<https://www.bassinthegrass.com.au>

QLD

GOLDEN MOUNT FESTIVAL 2020

May 2-4

Beginning 43 years ago, the Golden Mount Festival is Mount Morgan's premier annual event, running over the three days of the May Day long weekend.

It is a spectacular showcase of the beautiful and historical Mount Morgan township and attractions, in the Rockhampton hinterland. Featuring bands, markets, buskers, heritage events, kids entertainment, a relay marathon, 'Running the Cutter', Grand Procession, Children's disco, Alfresco breakfast at the No7 Dam, movies, fireworks, Mount Morgan Rodeo, and Ambrose Golf Day, there's something for everyone and it's a weekend to remember!

<https://www.capricornholidays.com.au/event/golden-mount-festival-2020>

BIRDSVILLE CAMPDRAFT, RODEO AND BRONCO BRANDING

May 8

Experience the fast-moving action and skills of professional Bushmen and women as they demonstrate their skills through these historic arts. Witness teams tough it out to be the quickest to brand cattle using the traditional method of branding in the bush. Food and refreshments are available throughout the weekend and free camping is available.

<https://www.outbackqueensland.com.au/events/birdsville-campdraft-rodeo-and-bronco-branding/>

TASTE OF THE WORLD FESTIVAL 2020

May 9

Come together and enjoy different cultural foods, song, dance, music and fun family activities. Family fun day, with free activities for the kids including rock climbing, face painting petting zoo and much more!

www.capricornholidays.com.au/event/taste-of-the-world-festival-2020

CAPELLA COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL 2020

May 7-10

The 2020 Capella Country Music Festival will be a four-day extravaganza on 7-10 of May. Headline acts include Country Music Awards of Australia Lifetime Achievement Recipient Chad Morgan as well as the cream of Australian Country Music – Keith Jamieson, Jeff Brown, Roger Knox, Terry Gordon, Pixie Jenkins, Tracy Coster and many more.

<https://www.capricornholidays.com.au/event/capella-country-music-festival-2020>

MUSIC IN THE MULGA

May 14-17

Music in the Mulga is a Country Music Festival held on a working sheep and cattle property, Wandilla Station, 16 kilometres south of Eulo.

This unique festival of four days full of great country and country rock music has the atmosphere of a large family gathering and in true outback style everyone is made to feel welcome.
<https://www.musicinthemulga.com.au/>

2020 MACKAY EXPO

May 22-24

The Mackay Showgrounds will be transformed into the region's largest outdoor adventure and home and lifestyle event for three days in May 2020. Get ready for a massive display of caravans, camper trailers, motorhomes, accessories, fishing gear plus great ideas for your home and lifestyle such as pools, spas, sustainable living ideas, bedding, gardening and more.

<https://www.mackayregion.com/events/event/104820-2020-mackay-expo>

OPERA IN THE CAVES

May 29

The Underground Opera Company is pleased to announce their latest concerts at The Capricorn Caves, Rockhampton. The Cathedral is the show-piece of the Capricorn Caves and will provide the most unique, intimate opera and light opera concert you will have ever experienced, with some of the best voices you will have heard, in an environment you may never have seen.

<https://www.capricornholidays.com.au/event/opera-in-the-caves>

SA

BAROSSA HISTORY FAIR

May 2-3

The Angaston and Penrice Historical Society will be hosting the Barossa History Fair in Angaston in 2020. The Angaston Town Hall will feature displays by regional history groups and others who have a passion for history and there will be children's activities, guided heritage walks, fascinating historic displays and paraphernalia, and some very interesting talks given in the Town Hall annexe. The Angaston Blacksmith Shop and Museum will be open, as will Angaston's renowned foodie havens in the main street.

www.barossa.com/events/event-calendar/5d9ac711ec2d9235575090d6/_Barossa-History-Fair

RED POLES AND SPINNING YARNS ABORIGINAL FESTIVAL

May 2-3

Red Poles and Spinning Yarns is an Aboriginal Festival. The event will include many activities and presentations such as welcome to country, smoking ceremony and cultural dance performance. An Indigenous artists market will be held over the two days with stall holder representation from Aboriginal communities throughout South Australia. There will also be demonstrations including weaving, basket making, punu wood burning techniques, painting and jewellery, workshops, short films and cultural talks. The gallery space will have an exhibition titled 'Alaapi Apinha' by Aboriginal artists from the Malka Collective and will explore cultural themes of place and identity in a variety of mediums.

www.redpoles.com.au/

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT Opera in the caves, Qld; Red Poles and Spinning Yarns Aboriginal Festival; Barossa history fair brings the past to life

TAS

FAGUS AUTUMN COLOURS AT MT FIELD NATIONAL PARK

May 7-31

A celebration of the annual autumn display of the Fagus, *Nothofagus Gunni*. This deciduous beech tree is endemic to the highlands in Tasmania. Fagus is a low-lying plant that turns brilliant reds, oranges, yellows and browns, the stunning display of mass colour reflected in the surrounding lakes and tarns. Traditionally changing around ANZAC Day this humble plant entices photographers from around the world to experience, and capture, its wonder.
www.discovertasmania.com.au/event/fagusweekend

VINTAGE TAMAR 2020

May 29-31

Vintage: Tamar is a festival launched by Tamar Valley Wine, a celebration of vintage which showcases the vineyards, cellar doors, wineries and landscapes of the iconic cool climate Tamar wine producing region. There will be events hosted by high profile wine commentators, tastings, ticketed dinners and daytime tours showcase the region. As well as guided tours, cellar doors will offer immersive experiences such as vineyard pruning lessons, vintage flight tastings, master classes and food options.

www.vintagetamar.com.au/

VIC

MURRINDINDI WINE WEEKEND

May 2-3

Discover the hidden vineyards in the picturesque Acheron and Yea Valley and meet the passionate vigneron of these boutique, family-owned wineries. Pair your favourite wines with delicious food ranging from tapas to wood-fired pizza and traditional dishes from German and French wine regions. Many venues will offer live music over the Murrindindi Wine Weekend.

<http://murrindindiwinemakers.com.au/events/>

NULLAMUNJIE HARVEST FESTIVAL

May 24

The Nullamunje Harvest Festival is a fun day for friends and family to join in and celebrate the olive harvest. There will be a spit-roasted

whole pig porchetta for lunch as well as live music and stalls selling beautiful local produce, wines and beers.
<https://www.nullamunje.com.au/the-harvest-festival/>

WA

MULLEWA MUSTER AND RODEO

May 30

On in Mullewa, Western Australia, this event consists of a Full Points Rodeo (including bull riding, bareback, barrel racing and saddle bronc), the Beaut Ute (car) competition, a whip cracking competition and the Australian country music concert. There are interactive workshops, western apparel, and a wide variety of food & refreshments on site.

<https://www.mullewamuster.com.au/>

BURRINGURRAH FESTIVAL OF FIRE

May 16-17

The speculator vastness of the Upper Gascoyne is host to one of the most remote festivals in the world. Come and celebrate this ancient Country by fire light! Roads less travelled lead to the Burringurrah Festival of Fire, a two-day festival set in two locations. Friday night plays host to a twilight concert with Mt Augustus, the largest monocline in the world as a backdrop! While Saturday is set for adventure at the Burringurrah Remote Aboriginal Community and features fire sculptures by the Burringurrah community. Come and feast your eyes, ears and souls next to the fires and enjoy bushtucker while artists perform under the vast and ancient night sky.

<https://www.gdc.wa.gov.au/events/burringurrah-festival-of-fire/>

ORD VALLEY MUSTER

May 15-24

The 20th Argyle Diamonds Ord Valley Muster features an outstanding lineup of over 30 events across 10 exciting days, including two nights of side splitting comedy, a real county rodeo, fringe shows, cultural experiences and performances, a traditional Corroboree, a secret suppers series, Art in the Park, music, early morning bliss with floating yoga boats and a family-friendly closing party that includes a diamond dig.

<https://ordvalleymuster.com.au/>





ON SALE
2 APRIL

Next ISSUE

Caravan World heads to the top end in April with reviews of rough-terrain ready caravans and a plus-size tow rig that's up to the challenge. There will be trips to Wiliga Station and along the Savannah Way in the Northern Territory, and tips on how to make Easter special for the little ones when you're on the road. Plus, John Ford will bring you the latest news and releases from the 2020 Victorian Caravan, Camping & Touring Supershow.



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