

Caravan Talk

The Oldest Caravan in Australia?



The origins of touring caravans can be traced back to the Gypsies and showmen who spent most of their time touring in horse drawn caravans. The world's first touring caravan was built in 1880 by the Bristol Carriage company (UK). However it wasn't until 1929 when the first Australian caravan was reportedly built by R J Rankin in the Sydney suburb of Newtown. Caravan builders were scarce around this time and during the 1930's when caravanning really started to take off in Australia a lot of people took to building their own! For this reason it's very hard to trace the exact origins and what is the oldest van in Australia.

Caravans started off being pretty basic inside with beds in one half and the kitchen in the other. You'll soon be able to see just how much vans have developed over the years with our very own 1947 handbuilt caravan on display at Hardings. The Hardings team will be tweaking it up to our standards but it still has the charm of a genuine bondwood van. You can even grab a coffee while you take in its charm as it's going to double up as our customer waiting room.

We've known for some time that our premises don't have anywhere you can comfortably wait if we're attending to another customer when you arrive. So Dave came up with the

idea of restoring an old van that customers could use as a waiting room. We didn't want just any 'ole van', it needed to be something classic. Our search took us to Adelaide initially where a real vintage van was for sale on ebay. We bought it for a steal at \$128! Now we just needed to work out how to get it back from Adelaide, and towing wasn't an option! While we were still pondering this problem, Jim Hall presented us with a more attractive alternative down in Rosebud. Jim and Jan Hall, long time caravanners, staffers from Hardings and RACV Caravan Club members recently moved to a new home which came complete with a 'Duz Us', a tear drop caravan built by the original owner of the home. So rather than 9 hours away, we just needed to pop down to Rosebud, and as they say, the rest is history! Needless to say So next time you're in at Hardings



In this Edition

- The Oldest Caravan in Australia?
- Televisions in Caravans
- Rock on with a Better Tandem
- Trends for the Future
- Insurance Claims
- Raising the Bar
- Tom is on the Road Again
- Smoother Braking
- Hardings new Scheduling System
- Our Popular Bike Racks
- Staff Profile – Ian and Brian
- Steps to Consider when Upgrading your Caravan or Car
- New Retail Shop Hours
- Some Travelling Notes from a Good Customer
- On the Road

Diary Dates

- Caulfield Caravan Show
23rd to 28th April 2008
- Get to Know Your Caravan Seminars
12th February and 5th March 2008
- Christmas Shutdown – Our last day for 2007 is Saturday 22nd and re-opening 2nd January, 2008

having an Electric Brake Controller fitted in your vehicle, have a look at how far we've come, and have a coffee on us! And if you have any more information on the oldest caravan in Australia we'd love to hear from you. You can write to us at info@hardingscaravans.com.au and we will present any interesting facts in our next newsletter.

For more information on vintage caravans you can also check out www.vintagecaravans.com

Workshop News & Information

Televisions in Caravans

Whilst it's sometimes nice to escape the television when you're away on holiday, it doesn't hurt to have some extra entertainment, just in case.

This year has seen a quantum leap in technology for televisions in caravans. We can now source Flat Screen Televisions with built in DVD players and Set Top Boxes. Only as recently as last year we had to fit these as three separate units, however these new units make installation a lot more straightforward. This is good news for you as it makes the job much more affordable. Whereas we used to allow a day and half for installations, most can now be done in just a few hours!

When installing televisions we generally recommend fitting the Wineguard Amplified Aerial as they are well regarded for their reception and ease of use. It's an amplified aerial that can be operated from within the van. They can then be directionalised for reception as you tune the television in new locations.

- Installation of the new Flat Screen Televisions is around \$400. This includes fitting the wall bracket, supplying a 12V source for the television, plus the aerial connection if required. We also ensure straps are fitted to secure the television whilst travelling. Most customers would source their own TV (The Conia has been reasonably popular at around \$600 for a medium sized screen, c/w built in DVD and Set Top Box).
- Supply and installation of the Wineguard Aerial is around \$700.



Rock on with a Better Tandem!

In recent times at Hardings we have noticed an increase in van size. Once the norm was a 16' pop-top whereas now it's almost the 18' tandem!

The tandem suspension we see frequently through our workshops is the 'Rocker Suspension' system which spreads the load of the caravan over 4 wheels evenly. This is a good suspension system, however the downside we see is the high degree of wear they experience.

As a van travels along an undulating road surface, the 6-7 bushes and shackle pins on each side of the suspension continually move. This seems to create a high degree of wear in several bushes as they don't appear to be of sufficient quality to support this ongoing movement. We generally find that somewhere between 20 and 30,000 kms the bushes may need replacing.

We have been looking closely at how we can improve this and feel we can now provide two options that will provide greater longevity for tandems with load sharing suspensions. Each have their own benefits and could be worth considering if you have been experiencing this kind of wear.

Option 1 – The 'Rocker Roller' system

The 'Rocker Roller' system has a fixed pivot which instantly reduces 2 of the working joints around the middle swivel elbow on each side. Additionally the rollers in the loop allow for smaller ongoing movements from each axle. This allows smaller road undulations to work within the spring loop rather than passing through the complete



suspension, as occurs in the rocker system. We feel that due to these loops there is less chance of spring breakage and bush wear is reduced. Conversion costs are around \$1400 which includes labour to remove the existing rocker system and weld on a new Rocker-Roller suspension. This includes the cost of the suspension.

- Great for caravans getting onto unmade corrugated roads as it significantly reduces bush wear and chance of a spring breakage.

Option 2 – New 'Low Wear' Bushes

We have been working with a local plastic manufacturer on a new bush material which we believe can sustain about 4-5 times the amount of wear the current nylon bushes available to the industry offer. Whilst greaser bolts can be installed into a standard 'Rocker' system, these new bushes are virtually self lubricating.

These new bushes are made of a high grade nylon which can be fitted with conventional non-greasing shackle bolts. They are designed to take the weight and wear load of a rocker suspension. The cost of converting your current rocker suspension to these new bushes is around \$550 inclusive of new bushes and labour.

- Great for caravans that do solid touring every year and have experienced bush wear issues. This could be the last time they need to be done, and the best value upgrade!

If we have fitted greaser bolts to your suspension recently this is still a great option, and one that extends the life of normal bushes. However we have been doing a lot of research in the past few months to provide this self lubricating bush which saves the use of a grease gun.

Trends for the Future

It's always hard to predict how caravans will evolve and what new trends the future may bring. The US and Europe are good places to start looking at what may be coming our way. Europe certainly leads the way with bodywork innovations. Just take a look at some of the groovy caravans produced in Germany. Google it!

The US have really led the way with the introduction of electric brakes and revolutionised towing equipment. We have the US to thank for that fantastic 250kg hitch kit that always keeps your car level!

The other major development in the US, whilst not directly related to caravans is that vehicles are now being sold complete with brake controller plugs fitted, so the unit just needs plugging in!

So that's some of the recent changes we've seen overseas, but what's happening in Australia? Caravan manufacturers are looking to be more innovative and some of the areas we believe may change in the near future are:

- The highly profiled aluminium will eventually be replaced with flat aluminium
- 12V will be the power source of future caravans - 240V will fade away!
- Caravans with built in heaters will be the norm in 2015
- Solar systems will be more prevalent, plus be more efficient
- Cars will come delivered with plugs to fit brake controllers directly in to
- Caravans will come with coffee machines (yeah, yeah).

Insurance Claims



You hope it never happens to you, but sometimes that rotten pole in the caravan park wasn't quite as far away as you thought! Luckily caravan insurance excesses are very low (\$50-200) so your out of pocket costs are very small. Our Body Workshop has done hundreds of insurance repairs over our 30 years in business.

For us, insurance repairs come in peaks and troughs. In our peak periods we have to schedule carefully. As some of these repairs may take 3-4 days each, they aren't quick jobs. So when you call us and we want to schedule you some weeks away, it's because we are scheduling your job into our system. However, as a customer the insurance process is very straightforward:

1. Contact your insurance company and they will provide you with a CLAIM NO
2. Call Hardings and we will provide you a scheduled time to bring the caravan in
3. When you deliver your caravan we will document all the damage
4. Hardings will quote for repairs and deal with your insurance company directly
5. We repair your caravan and you simply pay your excess on pickup!

You can also call us any time during this process for a progress report.

Reversing Cameras

Hardings now install the SVS Reverse Cameras on cars and caravans. Fantastic for viewing traffic behind you as you're travelling or for backing onto site. Its amazing how suddenly those mirrors don't seem as important!

Raising the Bar

In recent times caravans have been built fairly low to the ground, however with the ever growing number of 4WD's being used for tow vehicles, this has become an issue for many owners. Constant scraping of the van on driveways combined with the van travelling at an angle to the tow vehicle are just some of the issues faced today.

Why raise a caravan?

- Improved clearance under rear jacks to stop them scraping on driveways
- Increased chassis strength
- Much easier to change a tyre
- No more grinding on the level ride bars
- Ride height more like the tow vehicle (Particularly for 4WD's).

How we raise the van?

We cut the suspension away from the chassis rail. A steel box section is then welded in and then the suspension is welded back on to this new rail. We can raise the caravan by 50mm, 75mm or 100mm. The rail we install not only provides a lift but a good deal of extra strength to the chassis.

Conversion costs are:

Single Axle	\$600
Tandem Axle	\$900



Tom is on the Road Again

2007 saw Tom and Joan Harding 'grounded' with orthopaedic surgery. Recovery is in sight, and so are the plans for another outback excursion in 2008. In May Tom intends to "tramp" some of his special inland areas – the Oodnadatta track and the Painted Desert. As always, he invites a small group of Hardings customers with no necessary outback experience but who aspire to travel inland Australia to tagalong. Duration is 12-14 days. Four Wheel Drive tow vehicles are essential. Standard caravans will be fine subject to appropriate inspection and a special pre-trip service.

Expressions of interest to Tom Harding at PO Box 482, Torquay, 3228 or email hardingtomb@bigpond.com

Smoother Braking

Constantly re-adjusting your brakes?

That's right. It's not uncommon they feel perfectly adjusted and then suddenly they're too aggressive again. The technology in the Tekonsha Prodigy has brought the 'pendulum' based brake units forward along way. The benefits we find from talking with customers and daily test drives are:

- The pendulum is very consistent and smooth in its power adjustment to the brakes
- It's hard to get the adjustment wrong on a prodigy!
- Once it's set, it never seems to need fine tuning
- The Prodigy seems to mask brakes that differ in strength with temperature.
- Its digital which makes setting very easy to check settings

The Prodigy is without doubt a huge success with extremely smooth braking and ease of operation. Not convinced? Then talk with a Prodigy owner who can back us up.

It's a fairly common job for us to replace an existing brake unit with a Prodigy. In this case the job costs \$345 for unit and labour. However until the end of January 2008 we're offering to:

- Replace your existing unit with a Prodigy for \$300 We install -Bookings essential
- Supply a Prodigy only for \$245 - You install.

Simple Tips for Brake Adjustment on a Prodigy

- Slide the manual control hard left. Typically we find a setting somewhere between 5.5 to 8 suits the majority of vans. Try settings in 0.5 increments until you feel smooth braking in harmony with the car. Remember the Prodigy has the new self levelling pendulum making it a lot smoother than the older units you may be used to.



Hardings New Scheduling System

It's always been a vibrant environment at Hardings however that can be intimidating if you are coming down 'The Nook' with your 20' tandem and you can't find anywhere to park!! We agree, and have made some significant changes to our scheduling system to make this a less stressful time.

You may have already experienced this in recent times when booking in. We now run a book-in system that controls the number of cars, caravans and pickups per day. This has proven a huge success as it ensures we have room to park your van on arrival. It also enables us to give your van the attention it needs on bookings and you the attention on pick-ups when we often take you for a test drive. As always though we appreciate your feedback, so if you still feel things aren't working well please let us know.

The new system runs a daily planner that details every half hour in the day (when caravans arrive and leave). For you it's important to:

- Arrive as close to your scheduled time as possible. This time has been allocated to spend with you
- Drive in our second drive and pull your van alongside the other drop-offs
- Please call us if you are running late so we can modify our schedule.

Please note:

- Drop off's are scheduled between 8.30am and Midday (some flexibility)
- Pickups are between 2 and 4pm (some flexibility)
- For jobs such as Brake Controllers and Hitch Kits we will have dedicated service times of 8.15, 10.30 and 1.15

When leaving your van for an Undercarriage Service, we usually ask you to leave it for at least 3 – 4 days. Some customers ask why we need it for this time. Often during a caravan service when the wheels are off and the brakes dismantled, we may find any number of items that were not apparent when the van was brought in. It could be worn brake linings, a cracked spring or welds coming adrift. This all involves extra time especially if the brake drums need machining in which case we outsource to a local supplier. Hence

an undercarriage service can very easily be extended.

There are situations where country customers or people who live in the caravan need a service done within the day. Booked well ahead we do provide this service however if additional work is required it can be difficult to have it back on the road by 4.30pm and we appreciate some flexibility. This ensures we have the right amount of time to finish the job without it being rushed.

Our Popular Bike Rack Mount

The single stem bike rack mount off the A-frame has become very popular in 2007. It keeps the bikes in view, enables the caravan boot still to be used and allows access to the rear of the car. Having them mounted higher and clear of the level rides makes hook-ups less hassle for you, than other rack mount options. Talk to us about whether we could fit this to your van.

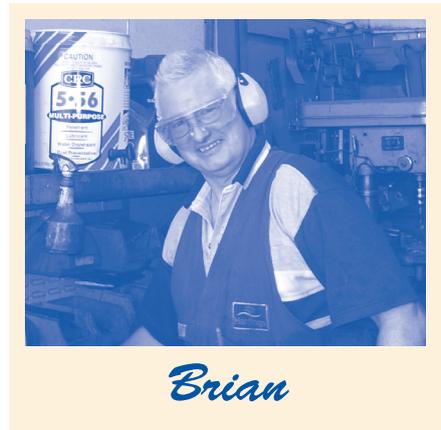


Staff Profile



Ian

Ian is one of our key Resealing and Insurance Repairers. Ian has a background in administration with Melbourne Water but has taken well to being on the tools in recent years. Ians photo demonstrates his passion for football. Ian keeps fit chasing his 2 kids and playing regular squash!



Brian

Brian is our main Undercarriage Service Mechanic and we appreciate his keen eye for detail. This probably stems from his background as a qualified Fitter and Turner followed by Draftsmen for the Department of Defence. Brian still owns his first car an EK Holden and on the weekends enjoys renovating his home.

Steps to Consider when Upgrading your Caravan or Car

It is important to check in with us when either changing your caravan or car to ensure the towball weight and towing weight of the caravan is still appropriate for the car. Insurance and warranties can all be affected if the towball capacity of the car is exceeded. For example if you currently tow a light camper trailer that fully laden has a towball weight of 160kg then a Toyota Camry may well be an appropriate vehicle because it is rated to take 160kg. But if you upgrade to a 16' pop-top caravan which with water, gas, clothes and food will have a towball weight of around 190kg, the Camry would no longer be appropriate. We would suggest you now need a tow vehicle such as a Commodore, Falcon or Prado which can take 210kg, 230kg and 250kg respectively. We have charts detailing every vehicles towball weight, or alternatively you can visit the Hayman Reese website and check out your vehicles capacity. **Simply go to www.haymanreese.com.au select 'Catalogue' and enter the vehicle details.**

We've been improving and adding to our Undercarriage Service for 30+ years as caravans become more complex. Our 2 hoist provide us with facilities to service a caravan of any size. Just some of the items we look at in our 40-point service:

- Clean, inspect and repack wheel bearings
- Clean, inspect and lubricate brake systems.
- Check suspension and bushes, and lubricate
- Check axle fittings, u-bolts and axle condition
- Check tyres and adjust pressures
- Chassis condition, A-frame condition and general chassis welds
- Lights, plug and loom and breakaway systems
- Lubrication of J-Wheels, jacks and other moving parts

New Retail Shop Hours

From January 2008 our front retail shop will be closing at 3.30pm, whilst still opening at 8am. This is to allow us to spend more time with customers collecting their caravan plus preparing for collections the following day. Our sales data shows most people already come between these hours so we don't believe this should be an inconvenience.

Destination Diary

Some Travelling Notes from a Good Customer

Constantly re-adjusting your brakes?

So you want to see Australia. To get the most out of any endeavour you must do your homework. You know in any worthwhile travelling adventure you should desire at least 3 thrills.

1. The first is in your preparation. By reading and studying for your proposed itinerary and by asking those who have been before you, you build up your expectations.
2. The second is the actual trip. To stand where some great event occurred and see some marvellous scene before your eyes or just to cover this great brown land with all its nooks and crannies is really living life.
3. The third is your memories. When your travelling days are over you can look back at the wonderful things you have seen, events that have happened to you on your travels and of course some of the people you have met.

Lastly it is delightful to relate your experiences and share them with others and maybe pass on some of the knowledge you've gained to others who are embarking on an adventure of their own.

Some tips for West of Alice Spring

There are numerous interesting places to visit west of Alice Springs. Most are easy to reach in a conventional vehicle. Simpsons Gap and Stanley Chasm are the first two which highlight the colours of the rockfaces in the centre of our continent. Next is Ellery Creek Big Hole, a large waterhole which is rather a surprise to find in the dry heart. The bitumen road follows the West MacDonnell Ranges and the rock formations and rock strata all add to the enjoyment of the drive.

Serpentine Gorge is a pretty spot and the short walk to the lookout gives another vantage point to see the rugged cliffs around the gorge. There are plenty of rock wallabies in the area but you need to be sharp to pick up these animals in their surrounds.

Then comes Ormiston Gorge. It's a beautiful area with lots of walks both short and long with numerous ghost gums dotted around. The last gorge is Glen Helen Gorge, a nice spot just a short walk from Glen Helen Homestead.

If you wish to travel any further you leave the bitumen. Redbank Gorge, Gosse's Bluff, Hermannsburg an old Lutheran Mission are also great places to visit.

On the Road

Oh, it's fun to go a-caravanning
If you've got the strength to cope.

Well, it's go to bed early

Get up early,

It's time to hit the road.

It's time to hitch the van up

Time to lift the chocks.

Time to unplug power and water,

Time to test the lights.

Oh, it's fun to go a-caravanning
If you've got the strength to cope.

You can shower often

If you want,

But it can be with a frog.

And you can sit out in peace and quiet,

If it weren't for the neighbourhood dogs.

Oh, it's fun the go a-caravanning
If you've got the strength to cope.

Now you mustn't dress up too much,

"Daggy" is the go,

washing, ironing? drying

You're always on the go.

It's hard to fit in sightseeing,

But we always manage too,

It's hard to do the shopping,

Even if it's only for two,

But the sights and sounds are amazing,

And the people you meet too.

Oh, it's fun to go a-caravanning
If you've got the strength to cope.

We thank Gael and Rob O'Brien for this great poem

Hardings provides you with all the necessary products and services for your caravan.

- Accessories and spare parts
- Towbars, level rides and sway controls
- Electric brake controls
- Caravan repairs
- Trailer parts
- Camper trailer windup service and repairs
- Resealing
- Lift up beds
- Caravanners education programs
- Brakes and undercarriage servicing
- Chassis upgrades and repairs
- Aerolite chassis strengthening
- Sway problems corrected
- Improved lighting
- Bumper bars
- Outback preparation
- Caravanners advice
- Insurance repairs
- Solar equipment & installations
- Jacking systems
- Raise your van
- New pop top vinyls



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