

Caravan Talk

Power to the People

12V power is the way of the future for our caravans, and improvement to the efficiency of low voltage systems make this possible. We hope these notes help you understand what you've got, how it works or what could be added to your system.

The Tow Vehicle (Car)

When using 12V power for our caravans and campers, the tow vehicle serves two purposes. The first is to run the fridge through what we've traditionally called a 'hotwire' for many years, or auxiliary wire. In the early years of caravanning this hotwire ran the fridge whilst driving and also doubled as the power source on un-powered sites for lights. However most people that now use un-powered sites, would probably have a battery on-board the caravan/camper, therefore the hotwire is now used just to run the fridge. There are various automatic switches available for the car or the van to ensure the fridge stops running when the car stops. This is very important as it prevents the car battery flattening when you stop for lunch! It's also important to ensure the auxiliary wire is appropriately rated and exposed wiring is adequately protected and the complete system is protected with fuses or circuit breakers.

The second purpose of the tow vehicle is to supplement charge to the caravan battery. This is done via heavy duty wires which are setup on both caravan and car. These are becoming quite popular and we generally run medium duty charge wires through a 12-Pin plug or heavy duty charge wires through an Anderson Plug.

In summary the tow car runs the caravan fridge plus tops up the charge to the onboard caravan battery.

Caravan Battery

Caravan and camper batteries either sit within the front boot or inside the van under a seat box. The most common type of caravan battery is a deep cycle, which means it has thicker plates compared with a normal car battery. These plates are designed to give long periods of low current power, compared with a car battery that provides high peak demands (e.g. when starting the vehicle) but for shorter periods.

The new trend towards gel or sealed lead acid batteries can also be viewed positively as it significantly reduces the need for venting (ie. Can often be installed under seat boxes without vents), plus they seem to last longer when used in RV situations.

Whatever type of deep cycle battery used, it's essential to ensure the battery is kept on charge for a majority of the time with an appropriate smart charger or solar system to ensure the battery doesn't discharge. Most lead acid batteries left uncharged for a long period can sulfate causing irreparable damage.

How we Charge Caravan Batteries?

We deal with 2 primary sources of charge for caravan batteries

1. Battery Charger
2. Caravan Solar

...plus the tow vehicle as we've just discussed. Whilst generators are popular we find most people connect these to the 240V inlet, thus they do not serve as a common part of the 12V charge circuit.

1. Caravan Battery Charger

'Smart Chargers' are in most cases the only appropriate charger for a caravan. They are designed to be left ON for a majority of the time. They

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monitor the battery and provide charge as required without overcharging. Good battery chargers are very much the key to an effective 12V system. Its important you have a 'smart charger' (a type of charger not brand) which is designed to be left on almost continuously. A basic battery charger used for your car battery is not suitable

First you need to ensure the amperage rating of the charger is appropriate for the battery being charged. The general rule is the battery should have a charger rated at

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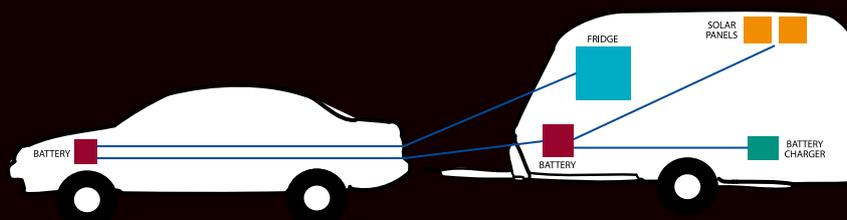
News & Information

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2. Caravan Solar

12V Transformers

Caravan Fridge



Harding's move to handle more complex cars

In our next staff profile we will talk about some of the staff we now have on-board to handle the growing complexity of tow cars. Car electrical systems keep getting more complex, however we are now fitting more Reverse Camera's, Brake Controllers, Anderson plug circuits than ever before.

Hotwiring your ignition!

We are now installing ignition operated switches on tow vehicle hotwires. This means the power to the caravan fridge is turned off when the keys are removed from the car ignition which stops you flattening the car battery (can occur in less than 1 hour). For a while there we were not offering this option however we have introduced the technology to our workshops to allow us to install these switches on late model vehicles.

The 'fridge switch' is still very popular and will provide the same automatic switching of the caravan fridge. The fridge switch must be fitted to the caravan and the ignition switch to the car so sometimes the decision on which switch is made easier based on the vehicle you're bringing in to us first (i.e. when we are installing a brake controller to the car ignition switches are usually more convenient for the customer).

Anderson Plug Circuits becoming popular



Anderson Plug



12-Pin Plug

I noticed at the Caulfield Show that nearly 50% of new vans have battery systems, many with Anderson Plugs. And we've noticed the increase in demand in our workshops for Anderson Plug Installations. What does all this mean? Additional to the 7-pin plug on the front of the caravan is a separate grey coloured plug with heavy leads attached. These run directly to the caravan battery. They need a corresponding plug and lead on the car to allow charging to take place.

The other scenario we also see is a 12-Pin plug where both the 7-core loom and the charge wires run through the one 12-pin plug. An Anderson plug has heavier pins allowing more charge through than the 12-Pin plug.

To make a tow vehicle compatible we need to do the following:

- Run medium or heavy duty cables to the rear of car
- Connect both to the battery with special soldered connections
- Solder an Anderson Plug on the rear
- Solder a Anderson Fuse holder under the bonnet.

This then allows the caravan battery to be charged whilst the car is driving. We can also go one step further and fit an automatic switch so power can only transfer if the tow vehicle is running. In saying that it's probably not as much of a 'power drain' as the caravan fridge!

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How do I know whether my van's leaking?

At Harding's we have recently introduced an 'Upper Body Service' where we check moisture levels in the timber framework with a moisture meter. However a visual check can also tell a good story. Peel back the curtains around the bottom of your windows. If you can see a water mark (e.g. faint stain with an irregular line) below the window it means water is coming through. Additionally in the interior corners of the van behind corner moulds the same checks can be made.

If this water damage is left for 2-3 years it can result in a series of costly issues:

- Badly water stained interior ply which could cost thousands of dollars to repair, or;
- Rotting frameworks which can creep along the bottom edge of the wall.

A framework repair can involve removing all the aluminium cladding and replacing the entire framework! A job that can cost thousands of dollars. So put simply, the cost to reseal a few windows far outweighs a frame re-build.

Our advice - if they're leaking don't let them continue for too long!

Our long term solution:

- Remove the window/corner mould and all the foam tape
- Run a bead of silicone around the window frame
- Screw the window back in.

Now the tricky part starts and where experienced staff are required! The cleanup of the silicone once the window/moulding has been

screwed back in is a fine art. Our staff get an experienced hand for creating a nice clean edge of silicone that will look clean against the window frame and aluminium cladding. All that silicone oozes into every screw hole and aluminium profile and joint behind the window. This allows for a very thorough seal and the new silicones we use have been designed for caravans and will probably last in excess of 20 years.

Older caravans that were sealed with caulking also need resealing as the caulking starts losing its flexibility and cracks or loses its shape in the summer.

Priority Sealing:

Our recommendation is to identify the areas for leaks in priority order. Some areas could be left until next year while some may require immediate attention. This can also help smooth out the costs of this exercise.

Resealing Foam Tape

Spare Wheel Covers

Checking the pressure of your spare tyre is fundamental before heading away on a trip. However when the cover tears apart in your hand because it's become brittle in the sun the whole exercise can become a 'I wish I'd just left that!' Colin's come up with the idea of having a Velcro patch over the valve to save the cover – nice one Colin.

Water Tank Gauges

Most vans these days come with a water tank gauge. They're very handy in times when water has become a scarcity and are a very straightforward job for us to install. Concealing the cable from the tank to the gauge inside generally proves to be the most challenging aspect of the job. We can supply a variety of gauge faces and these are supplied and installed for around \$300.



Our new Kubota Tractor

I hope in your visits to Harding's you never felt the old Fergie reflected our level of equipment or expertise! It has served us well and has been with the business for over 10 years. So we're now moving with the times, from a '47 Fergie to a '93 Kubota. The Kubota came from an orchard up north and has come to be a great asset for the business. It's a lot more flexible than the Fergie, handles a whopping 22' tandem with ease and makes the Fergie look a bit tired. We've also changed our yard layout so all vans are backed-down the middle and parked in a herringbone fashion. Previously the yard was double stacked so vans needed to be moved to get others from behind. This is much more efficient for storage of caravans prior to their work.



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Staff Profile



Colin

Colin has been a great asset to Harding's. Colin manages the front mechanical workshop. When he first joined us we were concerned he would be a touch overqualified having worked his way through the British RAF and Aerospace. His mechanical detail is a great bonus plus his easy-going style rubs off well on staff and customers. Proud of his Scottish heritage he's now settled in Australia with his family and able to hit the golf and fishing a bit harder now the kids are older.

Aldo

Aldo has been around Harding's for a few years however you'll miss him some days as he only works part of the week. A qualified motor mechanic Aldo brings us a great deal of experience and is always up for a 12V challenge. Aldo ran his own mechanical business for many years so understands how important customers are. Aldo and his family have houseboats, fishing boats, been 4WD enthusiasts for years so we enjoy having Aldo around as he relates well to customers and intimately knows the product.

Ed

Ed hardly needs an introduction, however his role changed within Harding's last year. Many of you know Ed for his expert knowledge of parts and whilst that still exists, Ed moved across last year to manage many areas of the service department. When our mechanics or body-workers find a problem Ed is the liaison person who will call to discuss how we go forward. Ed has excellent product knowledge and has fitted in extremely well in this role. Ed quotes all our insurance work so always feel free to drop him a line if you need an update on your claim. Ed is a caravan owner but his stays permanently down at his Gippsland hideaway.

Ewan

Probably the reason Harding's is now run by the Gallops is down to Ewan. Ewan, my father, arranged my first part time job with Tom over 21 years ago and now he returns as part of the management. Ewan is an important part of the front-house team plus is an experienced caravanner of some 30 years. If you're in on Mondays you'll miss him as he's off walking with the Bush Nomads. Having spent his working life in the education department as a teacher followed by Principal and Regional Positions. A keen bike rider and regular participant in Round The Bay.

Introducing Australia's First Upper Body Service

I am fortunate to have connections with the European caravan industry. This allows me to keep abreast of other approaches to caravanning in the world. In the UK and Europe servicing of the 'upper body' of caravans is common place.

Caravans are becoming a more complex unit with many more components. They often come fitted with a full working kitchen, awning, shower and toilet. This all needs maintenance. We do a lot of one-off repairs on awnings and How Water Services and have decided to introduce a service that will make this cost effective for customers, rather than being a series of one-off repairs. This will also provide the opportunity for other issues to be identified before they become a hassle on your holiday.

Basic Upper Body Service

Some of the items we service are:

- Awnings (lubrication and Cloth Roller Tension)
- Internal Body (lubrication and adjustment of window, main door and cupboard catches)
- Pop-top (tension and pressure of scissor lifters and gas struts, lubrication of lifters and zips)
- Appliances (operation of all 240V, Gas and 12V appliances)
- Plumbing (Change hand pump washers and check mains pressure system)
- Electrical (Safety test 240V and 12V System)
- Moisture Testing (Provide a report on any water entry points and their moisture readings)
-plus other items. Check out our service sheet when you're next in.

Premium Body Service

Basic Body Service plus the following extra items:

- Change anode in HWS (recommend every 2 years) and run to test
- Load Test Caravan batteries
- Check operation of 2-3 modes on battery charger
- Tighten Wineguard Aerial mounts
- Check water pump connections and pressure
- Cleanout water tanks
- Detailed checking of fuses and 12V circuitry
- Solar Operation
- Air-conditioner Operation

Caravan Servicing Options

Our latest list of servicing options for your RV vehicle

- **Undercarriage Service** – Servicing all running gear on your chassis. Recommended 2 yearly or every 10,000km.
- **Windup Service** – Servicing of the cabling system on a camper. A 3-4 yearly service
- **1000km Service** – We are an approved provider of your first 1000km service
- **Upper Body Service** – We have done these repairs for many years however we have recently converged many of these tasks into a routine service

Working Notes

Cracked brake linings

Many caravanners may already know what we mean by 'cracked linings'. We change linings on a weekly basis on caravans that have done various distances. The removal of asbestos from brake linings in the 90's seems to make many linings more susceptible to cracking when they get hot. When we discover cracked linings our mechanics change them over for Australian re-bonded linings. We generally don't seem to have issues with cracking on these locally supplied linings as they are made from a slightly different material.

Our observations are the Tekonsha Prodigy control unit seems to lessen the wear and tear on brake linings as its pendulum motion is very well proportioned to stopping distance, which means the brakes won't run as hot. Some of the non-pendulum type brake units can crack linings more rapidly as they run brakes excessively hot due to the fact they aren't governing the power output to the brakes. You may ask why do they run brakes so hot? It's because without a pendulum the electric brakes always receive the same power, even if the van is moving through slow traffic. A pendulum unit will provide the brakes power relative to the deceleration of the car (i.e. Quick stops will deliver more power to the brakes, whereas slow stops often provide the brakes very little power).



Is the Breakaway Battery flat?

We check your breakaway battery and switch when carrying out an Undercarriage service. We often find two issues:

- A flat battery so if the caravan did breakaway the battery wouldn't have enough power to apply the brakes; and
- The pin in the breakaway switch breaks when we pull it out to test.

Tips to prevent these situations occurring:

- keep the battery periodically charged; and
- keep the pin well lubricated.

Insurance Repairs

You hope never to have an accident however insurance companies have made the whole repair process a lot easier. All you need to do is obtain a claim number and then bring the caravan into us. As happens in most cases you're halfway into your trip when sometimes that 'fence post didn't seem that close'!

Most claims we see don't stop you travelling and finishing your holiday. Either notify the insurance company when it happens or as soon as you return then follow these easy steps:

1. Obtain Claim No
2. Book in at Hardings to deliver van
3. Deliver van
4. Collect a repaired caravan



Low Couplings

Has your new van got a coupling mounted off the bottom section of the A-frame? We find these are becoming more common as the Australian Design Rules (ADR's) govern maximum coupling heights. It's often on vans with largish wheels. These vans need Weight Distribution Kits just as much as others but there's a few modifications required to make a kit fit these couplings. Come and see us and we'll discuss the options.



Sway Control

If you feel you've been given the hard-sell at our premises on a sway control you haven't. Our company policy is any caravan of 16' length and over should have a sway control, and we'll always make you aware of this. With a van this size, there is enough wall area to cause swaying, that could make the van very hard to control. We feel it's our responsibility to at least make people aware of what we believe will make the rig as safe as possible on the road.

Did you know that virtually every caravan in Europe now has a sway control as a permanent fixture? It's not considered an after market accessory, but an essential piece of towing equipment. Whilst their ballweights are less than ours they recognise the importance of such a device.



News & Information

Fuel Prices in Perspective – One Person's Opinion

We would all prefer fuel costs to be lower than is currently the case. Yet arguably a caravan holiday is still the least expensive option.

One of our customers recently presented us with his figures for a Queensland holiday and we suspect he and his partner are there right now!

Fuel Cost – Caravan Holiday

Tow Vehicle	Holden Commodore
Caravan	16 Foot Pop-Top
Tow Vehicle Fuel Consumption when towing	20litres/100km
Expected price of fuel	\$1.75/litre
Cost of fuel per 100km	\$35 (20 x \$1.75)
Cost of fuel for 5,000km	\$1750 (50 x \$35)

As a result of encountering some parks which were fully booked on the same trip last year they have fully booked their accommodation for this years trip. Whilst quoted prices were sometimes right and sometimes lower they determined an average figure.

Accommodation Costs – Caravan Holiday

Average Cost per night	\$26.50
Number of nights	63
Total Accommodation Costs	\$1669

Total Costs – CARAVAN HOLIDAY

Total fuel	\$1750
Total Accommodation	\$1669
Overall TOTAL	\$3419
Cost per day	\$54/day

With fuel at \$1.40 like we had last year this holiday would have cost \$49/day so not a massive difference in the scheme of things!

They considered other costs such as food remaining constant and did not factor them in as these should vary little from being home.

What we did discuss was the inevitable comparison that is often made when discussing this topic – would it be cheaper to have a fly-drive and apartment holiday? We came up with this scenario:

Fly/Drive/Apartment

Cost reasonably priced apartment per week	\$650
Price per day	\$92.85
Cost for 62 days	\$5756
Cost of extremely cheap air fares	\$200
Car hire with good discounts	\$40/day
Car hire for 20 days (1/3 of stay)	\$800

TOTAL COSTS FOR FLY/DRIVE/APARTMENT

Apartment for 9 weeks	\$5756
Air fares	\$200
Car hire for 20 days	\$800
Overall Total	\$6756
Cost per day	\$107

The conclusion one could draw from these figures is that a caravan holiday is around half the price of a fly-drive-apartment holiday.

The truth that emerges when one does these comparisons is that with fuel prices as they are we always need to look at the big picture. We always find that accommodation is the biggest cost on a holiday and caravanning is by far the cheapest option. Further remember that if you maintain your van in good condition you should retain its purchase price on resale.

Our new Low-wear Bushes

You may recall in our last newsletter we discussed our new low wear bushes. Tom was trialing these bushes for us on his recent trip of which he did around 10,000km off the bitumen kilometers. In a rocker system standard industry bushes would have possibly worn out completely with this distance on unmade roads, and maybe the same wear after double that distance on bitumen. We are having trouble detecting any wear at all so are very pleased with the outcome. It has given us more confidence to encourage the use of these bushes, particularly in the high wearing rocker suspension systems.

Many of you with rocker systems will know of the work we have done in the past replacing bushes. This is what motivated us to design a better bush for what is a great suspension, but has till now being recognized as high maintenance. We estimate against standard bushes these may last up to 5 times longer. Its worth considering the conversion cost of \$550-\$600 particularly if a few are already worn, as it's probably then the last time you do any maintenance on the suspension.

Destination Diary

Toms Harding's 2008 Oodnadatta Track Caravan Tag Along Tour Adventure

Late last year Tom decided that he would again arrange a tag along tour along the Oodnadatta Track and having made it known, was inundated with interested people wanting to join. Tom had the unenviable task of having to disappoint many people but subsequently a group of 10 lucky couples met at Tom and Joan's home and enjoyed their hospitality whilst meeting each other and being given an insight as to what to expect on this adventure, and what expectations were required of them.

In early May, everyone met at Burra S.A. and upon renewing acquaintances in the caravan park there was a more formal meet and greet at dinner (great meal at the pub).

The following day a conducted tour of Burra was enjoyed by all, with the history explained, a mine tour, museum tour, a visit to where Breaker Morant was filmed and a tour of the original Brewery (amongst other things).

Driving commenced, with Tom leading the pack with his CB call sign of Car 1, with the rest of us (numbered 2 – 11) dutifully following behind towards the Flinders Ranges. The cavalcade consisted of a variety of 4WDs and caravans, Patrols (3) being the most popular vehicle and Evernew (3) being the most popular van. The CB was a great for communication and Tom was able to keep us informed of what was happening and tell us interesting stories and the history of the Ghan Railway and explorer John McDouall Stuart's exploits.

We headed north through Terowie where General Douglas McArthur made his famous I Will Return speech before spending 2 very wet nights at Rawnsley Park which gave us the opportunity to explore Wilpena Pound (and to contemplate what might be in store once we got off bitumen roads and onto the track proper).

The trip through the very picturesque Flinders Ranges provided an insight of what was to be experienced towing a van through a variety of terrains including loose gravel, creek beds and (at the time what was thought to be) rough dusty roads.

On to Blinman via Parachilna Gorge, then to Beltana which is where John Flynn (from the Royal Flying Doctor Service) started his career in a hospital that was designed to work in a similar manner to a coolgardie safe to keep it at a reasonable temperature. Heading towards Leigh Creek and Copley we had our first encounter with the old Ghan railway line. It was this line that the Oodnadatta Track followed, and during the course of our trip the places visited all had a history pertaining to the building and maintenance of the line, as well as the history of the trek of explorer Stuart.

One such very interesting stop over was at Farina which was a very busy "end of the line" town in its day, but when Hergott Springs (now known as Maree) became the end of the line, Farina died and is now a ruin. The owner of the nearby Farina cattle station has created a camping area for use by anyone (\$3.50 per night – not a misprint). He is endeavouring to restore some of the buildings and was enthusiastic on describing Farina's history to our group. He is keen to promote the restoration and would welcome anyone who also may be interested in assisting him.

It is there where we had a camp roast, cooked on open fires, with everyone pitching in and having a great communal feed. This was done on two other occasions, also very successfully.

We drove through Maree where the Oodnadatta and Birdsville tracks actually start and it was planned that the next night would be spent at Curdimurka but on driving past Lake Eyre South Tom turned right and drove onto (the empty dry) lake and we followed like sheep. Everyone agreed that we camp there the night. This was an experience that that cannot be described. Camping in the middle of the lake with only the horizon for scenery, a sunset to beat all, and stars that you could nearly reach out and touch.

Coward Springs was the next stop over for 2 nights. The facilities included mineral springs in which most people took the opportunity to soak their weary bones. We had our second camp roast and members of the group provided various levels of light entertainment around the camp fire. A day trip whilst camping at Coward Springs included visiting Strangeway Springs which was a ruined telephone transfer station which closed in 1896, and Beresford Ruins which was another old Ghan railway station. On our way to William Creek we visited bubbling artesian springs which rose from the vast plains.

William Creek provides the services of a garage (whose owner was ecstatic at the sight of 11 thirsty 4WDs arriving), a pub (where we celebrated the birthday of one of our group) and a couple of small aeroplanes to enjoy scenic flights. The flight over the painted hills (which you cannot get to by road), the Oxiana mine as well as Lake Eyre was a real experience in appreciating the expansiveness of central Australia. Anna Cattle Station for example is the size of Belgium.

Morning tea next day was at Edward Creek where we did some off roading with vans to see the rail bridge and walk along the dry creek bed where we appreciated the first greenery that we had seen for some time. This greenery was followed up with more at a bush camp that night at Algebuckina water hole.

Oodnadatta was welcomed by some in the hope of a cappuccino. With much disappointment this was not to be. The Pink Roadhouse sells most things but doesn't stretch to such luxuries.

To this stage we had driven over plenty of rough and corrugated roads with gibber rock both sides without any mishaps (other than the occasional mirror being vibrated off vehicles). Our luck was about to change. Approximately 40kms from Oodnadatta, Tom blew a tyre which was quickly changed, but shortly thereafter one of the Patrols cracked a head. It was from here on that Tom and Tail End Charley Ken, towed their own vans to the next stop Arckaringa, and then went back and each towed either the Patrol or its van to Arckaringa. This process happened again between Arckaringa and Copper Hill, then between Copper Hill and Cadney Park where our Oodnadatta Track trek finished.

Arckaringa was a 2 night stop, which gave us the opportunity to enjoy a full day walking through the painted desert and taking in scenery that capped off a great experience.

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Destination Diary

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Our last night on the track was spent at a bush camp at Copper Hill where the third camp roast was enjoyed by everyone, and where we all sat around the camp fire for hours enjoying the camaraderie and talking of the experiences and the possibility of undertaking similar trips in the future.

The group experienced a range of minor and major mishaps where everyone pitched in to help. This showed that the value of touring in remote areas with at least one other cannot be understated. The diverse knowledge within the group also came in handy at times. The trek was not just about driving. It taught us that to get true value and enjoy our experience, don't just treat the track as a highway, be prepared to divert onto sidings on the way. Most of the group had read up about the area before the trip, but Tom's knowledge of the area and its history made their experiences all

the richer and meaningful. From a driving perspective, after day 2 we were fortunate that we didn't get any more rain. The track was in good condition (so we were told), but we still learned a lot about driving on soft ground, corrugations, and rough dusty conditions, and as a result we are all more confident having done so.

So the message is, caravanning is not a race, so back off the accelerator and enjoy what is around you. We did thanks to Tom, and it is a lesson that none of us will forget when, in all likelihood given our newly gained knowledge and confidence, we will again get off the bitumen when towing a van.

Toms Next Trip?

Be alert to our website for details on Toms next trip

Perhaps our little caravan isn't even vintage!

Well it turns out our 47 caravan may be struggling to be recognized as 'old'. Its more of a young thing than we thought. We got some very positive responses. One customer has photos of their relatives caravan at Woods Point in 1934, another has an old Don (1940's) and believes the oldest camper in 1910 was used by a hay contractor and towed behind his threshing machine. Another customer is also aware of a 1920's caravan on display at the Warrak Museum in Buangar.

Did we meet your expectations?

It is our intention that you will get value for money. As far as is possible we will advise what the job will cost and we will always call you about necessary variations. It helps in communicating to our staff in doing the job if you can provide a written list of concerns. If there is any doubt we will ring and discuss the job details and cost. If you are disappointed in any way please ring me.

You can always email us on info@hardingscaravans.com.au too!

In response to the often touted, What is Greg up to?

Greg and Fiona Harding love their new venture into the aged care industry. They purchased Alphington Aged Care, an established 45 bed low care facility in Melbourne's inner north. Both are responsible for the management and operation of the business and find providing care to our elderly to be very enjoyable and satisfying. Aged care continues to be a growing industry that plays a very important role in our families and community and Greg and Fiona are delighted to be part of it.

Contact at www.alphingtonagedcare.com.au

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

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