

Caravan Talk

Name Change on the Horizon

Back in 1976 Tom Harding purchased a Caravan and Auto Electrical business from Ray Kelly which became known as Hardings. Since that time the business has grown and seen many changes. From acquiring a new arm down in Murumbeena – Classic Caravans, run by Tom's son Greg, to Greg taking over from his father at Bayswater and Murumbeena.

In 2007 I bought the business from Greg and continued to build on the legacy established by the Hardings. Last year we made some significant changes - moving into our new home on Colchester Road and establishing our Caravan Storage site alongside so we feel a name change is appropriate at this time. Over the next couple of years we will be phasing out Hardings and becoming known as Swift Caravan Services. Why Swift?

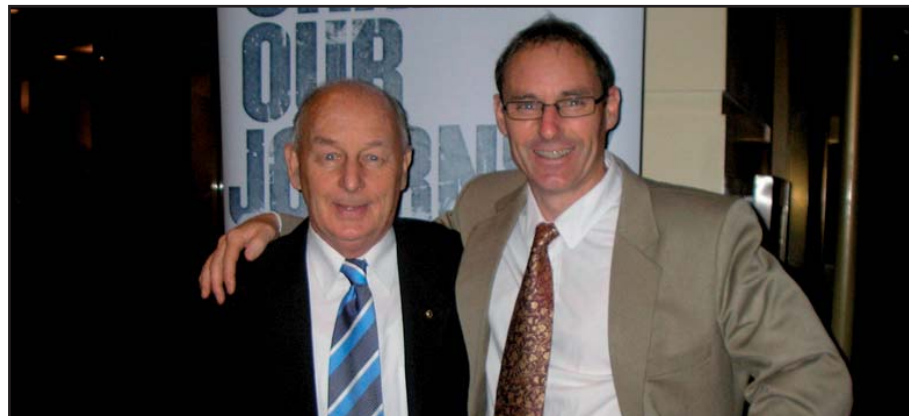
Well back in 1995 when I was studying Engineering at Swinburne, I worked for Hardings part-time. As part of my course criteria I needed to gain some work experience. Tom had some contacts in the UK and before too long I was working for Swift Caravans in England. For me it

was a memorable 8 months living in Hull where they were based and working as an Engineer at Swift. At that particular time Swift were a caravan manufacturer employing about 500 people and pushing out around 30 caravans per day. Now I believe they are almost the largest manufacturer of caravans in the world and a leader in the industry. I found some accommodation within the university halls of residence at Hull and met Claire whom I am now married to and have two children with. So the name Swift has a lot of meaning!

Coincidentally I had the original owner Ray Kelly come in earlier this year. After running passionfruit farms and bike shops in Queensland I was surprised how much Ray remembered about tow-bars and electric brakes from 1976!

For the next few years we will run with a hyphenated name Hardings-Swift Caravan Services and then we will revert to Swift in time. Same place, same people, same service.

Thanks
Andrew



In this Edition

- Name Change on the Horizon
- Tour the New Pad
- Grabby Brakes
- Hail Damage Repairs Ongoing
- Q & A
- Renovate an Oldie
- Caravan and Car Combination
- Tandems Becoming the Norm
- Caravan Heaters
- Book in Times
- Odd Spot
- Staff Profile

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this newsletter are opinion only and may vary for each person. It is your responsibility to verify any claims made.



View our newsletter online at:
<http://www.hardingscaravans.com.au/newsletter.htm>

Receive our newsletter via email;
click the **SUBSCRIBE** button under
the same link

OUR NEW ADDRESS: 114-142 Colchester Road, Kilsyth

News & Information

Tour the New Pad



For those who haven't visited us at Colchester Road yet, we thought we would take you on our virtual newsletter tour. We hope that when you arrive with your van you will feel very comfortable with the 'landing strip' compared to The Nook which was like landing on an aircraft carrier. I think we all did it hard at The Nook for many years, staff and customers included and we appreciate the patience from customers and staff for working in these tight confines. It is really quite amazing to look back and see how many vans we would move through that site in a week! So yes, this site has an abundance of room in comparison and there is a feeling of calmness which surrounds your arrival without the nervousness of The Nook.

Let's show you around the whole site:

The Electrical Shop

Managed by Andy, a qualified Auto Electrician this workshop has 3 caravan bays, plus 2 vehicle hoists. 12V is a growing area within the Caravan Industry whether it be the tow vehicle or the caravan, both have a lot more 12V equipment to be fitted than in the past.

This Territory (right) is being fitted with a **Hayman Reese Towbar** (Hardings have now been a Hayman Reese Distributor and Fitter for over 40 years!) It is having a genuine loom installed so it doesn't void its warranty with Ford or have issues with the reverse sensors. We will then fit a

Prodigy Brake Controller, plus an **Auxiliary Hotwire** with a special ignition relay so the caravan fridge will only run when the car is running. Lastly we will install an **Andersen Plug** system to charge the caravan battery.



We specialise and have installed Brake Controllers in the following European Vehicles; Audi, BMW, Mercedes, VW & Land Rover. We will quite often do installations that car dealers have referred on due to its complexity, plus with our knowledge of caravans we will ensure it matches the various caravan wiring combinations now available. Due to this increased complexity with caravans and their Andersen and 12-Pin Plugs setups, even your more standard cars such as Pajero's and the like are being sent to us by dealers as we intimately understand the caravan wiring setup to get the match right.

The Body Shop

Managed by another Andy (we have lots but it's not an essential criteria for working here!) who has managed this workshop for the past 3 years plus also back in the early 90's. This workshop has 7 dedicated caravan bays. Each bay is wide enough for gantries or side cladding work where space is important.

In this picture the caravan is having the complete roof replaced after hail damage. We have several of these gantry work platforms to allow us to rebuild a roof efficiently and safely. We pride ourselves on having what we believe are the neatest seam joins in the industry. Our staff are very fussy about their workmanship. Check out your roof if we resealed it recently!



This caravan was damaged in a swaying accident. We are replacing the side cladding, some framework plus installing a diesel heater so the owner can endure the winter outback evenings.



News & Information

The Mechanical Shop

Managed by Colin, originally an Aircraft Engineer, this workshop has 6 separate roller doors. Every service or repair is carried out on our specialised caravan hoists. This allows us to see so much more than the old days on jack stands.



This is a typical service in action. This is the core activity for this workshop along with many other things. Bearings, brakes and suspension are the key areas of focus on a service, however many other items get looked at. We find the odd chassis crack, and often find your 'breakaway brake system' isn't functioning. Our staff will remove the wheels, degrease the bearings, make all their inspections and then Ed calls the customer with any work required. We have a strict policy of, trying to contact the customer or leaving a message, running every cost past you prior to proceeding.

This simplicity suspension is being installed under a 5th Wheeler from the USA. Its current suspension is a poorly built rocker which has been cracking springs. This conversion will provide the customer with a suspension that will be maintenance free for the first 100,000km and can be used extensively on unmade roads.

We now have a drive through bay for setting up **Weight Distribution Systems**. We have many years of experience within this specialised area. Resetting these systems is vital after a new car or caravan purchase, as if incorrectly setup from the start it can lead to on-road accidents (due to very little weight on front wheels of the tow vehicle).



Work In Progress Bays



We can hold up to 60 caravans in our Work In Progress Areas. We are currently converting some of our grassed areas to more 'hard-stand', which enables us to cater for our usual work plus damaged vans which may arrive unexpectedly.

Office and Showroom

The office at The Nook was almost claustrophobic and here its got room for growth. Ian has recently done a great job getting the showroom into shape – apologies it's taken so long but when we moved it was during our peak season and we ran out of time. We still stock a lot of caravan spares but our main business currently is repairs, service and storage. Please be aware we don't sell anything from the workshop anymore such as aluminum or ply as we find it takes our staff away from the counter or phones where you need us most.



Technical Information

Caravan Storage



The good news is we're building another 100 sites over the coming year, however the not-so-good news is we are currently full with a growing waiting list. We have over 200 caravans in storage now. With our winters being wet again we have grappled with the lack of drainage in the front corner of our block, plus we are currently repairing and installing new roads, however once this is complete, we will be able to focus on creating more space and hopefully keep up with demand.

Grabby Brakes

How often do we still see people with grabby brake issues? 40% of customers would be our guess. Electric brakes are straightforward for us as we've been working on them now for 40 years. Really though there are a few key ingredients to good brakes

1. A Prodigy Controller (a great brake controller that provides exceptionally smooth braking)
2. If brakes are excessively grabby and your prodigy is on a low setting (ie. 3-4) there is probably an issue with overheated linings (we can resolve this problem)
3. There are several other isolated issues which are too complex for this newsletter so please talk to us if both scenarios above don't apply to you

Our in-house drainage team



Insurance & Hail Repairs @ Hardings

Believe it or not we are still finishing off Hail Damage repairs from March 2010. It was important in a period of major demand last year that we didn't just desert our usual customers with bodywork repairs. As the hail damage in most cases didn't have any structural consequences other than an eye-saw this allowed us to plan out these repairs in amongst our other repairs

Ed who has been with the business now for over 20 years now handles all our insurance repairs. Ed is well known to all the insurance companies and has a good relationship with their assessors. Whilst our insurance repair shop has 5 permanent staff we still do get booked ahead so talk to Ed if the need arises.

Renovate an Oldie

After some recent renovations on older vans (see the old Holden Motorhome under 'Work in Progress' on our website) Ed came up with some package deals to renovate the old van that may have some interest to someone with a family heirloom.

(see www.hardingscaravans.com.au/work-in-progress)

Q&A

Q: Why is my pop-top roof not aligned with the hold down catches anymore?

If it's a pop-top from the mid 90's onwards it will use gas struts to raise the roof. Often what's happened is two of these struts have become stronger than the other two and essentially all four need re-gassing.

Q: Why doesn't my handbrake work?

Not great is it! The mechanism within the wheels isn't like a car handbrake and cannot exert a great deal of force (even if you pull it super hard). We often say it's best to use wheelchocks. Also, remember especially with leaf spring suspensions you should have plenty of slack in the handbrake cable when the brake is off to allow for on-road movement without applying the brakes.

Q: When I release my level rides why isn't there as much pressure on the bars like there used to be?

There's a lot of pressure on these bars and what can happen over time is the trunnions where these bars meet the head may have worn and need resetting. Remember they are like wheel barrow handles leveraging the ballweight back onto the front car wheels. (Note; these bars should have good pressure to lift up, however always be very careful with their release).

Technical Information

Q & A *(continued)*

Q: Why is my caravan very low? I'm always damaging the rear stabiliser jacks.

This can be resolved by installing raiser rails on the chassis. This will raise the caravan and make it much easier for all those Queensland driveways with large drainways.

Q: Why is my roll-out awning so stiff when putting up?

Keep it well lubed. Silicone spray works well as it doesn't leave oil stains, but will need constant applications as it washes away easily.

Q: Can I put a jerry can holder, bike rack or generator on the bumper bar?

We wouldn't recommend it. If the caravan hasn't been built with this on the bumper, then it's best to avoid it. Bike racks tend to fatigue or damage the bikes due to excessive vibration, plus jerry cans or heavy objects will often make the van very susceptible to swaying. Low ballweights can lead to swaying, which is incredibly dangerous.

Q: Can you install a battery system in a caravan?

Yes very easily, and something we do all the time. We install a circuit like all the modern vans come equipped with which has a C-Tek Smart Charger and Sealed Battery, and we remove the existing transformer. Most caravans in the past 10 years have most lights and appliances powered by 12V so everything converts across. Older vans still convert well but sometimes they have a mix of 12 and 240V lighting.

Q: How often should caravans be serviced?

It's the brakes, bearings and suspension that need the monitoring and maintenance. Every 10,000km is our recommendation whether someone professionally does it or you do it yourself.

Q: When should the 12V pump be turned off in my caravan?

Whenever you leave the caravan. If a hose burst on the outlet side of the pump, the pump would empty the water tank onto the caravan floor until the tanks were empty!

Q: How often should I charge my caravan battery?

ALL DAY EVERY DAY AND ALL YEAR. The only way to maintain a battery and have it last many years is to keep it on charge constantly. We change so many batteries that have experienced irregular charging and this always leads to Sulphation, and then the battery gets very hot and cannot be charged. However the only charger we have learned to trust is the C-Tek Unit which have almost been faultless in our experience and can be left on all the time.

Q: Should I use weight distribution with my new tow vehicle with air bags?

Some vehicle manufacturers clearly state that weight distribution 'must not' be used. Others 'recommend not to be used'. We always refer customers to the manufacturers instructions, and if it states 'must not', it is very clearly not recommended. The air bags do visually make the car appear like its level and supporting the load well, however with large vans with heavy ballweights some customers (with air-bag tow vehicles) complain of poor stability. Weight Distribution leverages that ballweight through the complete car and this locks the front wheels down to the road which in some cases makes the complete towing rig more comfortable to tow with.

Q: Are flat panel vans harder to repair?

They probably are but we are fully equipped to carry out these repairs. They do have the advantage of being very well insulated due to the sandwich board effect which means warmer in the winter and cooler in summer!

Q: Why does my caravan fridge struggle in the hot and humid climates?

Unfortunately the '3 Way Type' caravan fridges tend to struggle when you most need them, in the heat! You can improve their efficiency by fitting small fans to help create constant air flow. Essentially these fridges need coolish air drawn in through the lower vent and pushed out the top vent. The following additions make these fridges more efficient; fans, improved baffling around the top vent so air is directed straight out the vent, and shade-cloths so the top vent is protected from the beating sun.

Q: Why does my tandem rocker suspension need constant maintenance?

Good question. See our Rocker Suspension article notes below. Unfortunately the system has so many moving parts that it will always wear these. The system works fine if maintained regularly, but it's worth the investment in a better system if you're purchasing a new van.

Q: Why are my brakes grabbing?

A Prodigy Brake Controller usually resolves 80% of grabby brakes. The other 20% of problems usually relates to linings (within the wheels) that have become very hot (i.e. you may have accidentally left the handbrake on) and since then the brakes have been extremely aggressive. Simple fix we change the linings!

Q: Why does my caravan sway so easily at highway speed?

If it's swaying easily it often means there could be too much weight behind the wheels. A caravan with a ballweight over say 12% will not sway as easily. Make sure the caravan is loaded correctly, and a sway control is always a good investment for any caravan over 16' in length.

Q: Can I change my own gas regulator?

No, even we can't as any gas work carried out on a caravan needs to be done by a licensed Gas Plumber. We provide a Gas Certificate for any gas related job we do now.

Q: Our tyres are 10 years old but have plenty of tread. Keep them?

No, tyres older than 6 years seem to have a habit of blowouts!

Q: Why does my front boot and sometimes the front window leak?

At Hardings we'll never guarantee we can fix it and neither will manufacturers, but we'll give it a good shot! We have several methods for diverting the water that drips off the rails above the windows and boots. A heavily raked front body can be worse. Some manufacturers only fit fixed windows for this reason.

News & Information

Buying The Correct Car and Caravan Combination

At Hardings you can be assured of good honest advice on towing. However in providing this advice we are often the reason customers begrudgingly have to invest in a larger tow vehicle. "With a ballweight of 320kg you can't do it with your Prado, Sorry"

There is no question people are buying bigger caravans these days. However with a larger van the need often arises for a larger tow vehicle. We find ourselves constantly counseling people into new tow vehicles and it's often the ballweight that swings the decision.

Example: A Prado towing a caravan with a ballweight of 320kg.

The Prado is designed for a maximum ballweight of 250kg. Towing this caravan with a Prado could break the towbar and void any insurance if there were an accident.

You also need to be aware of tow vehicles that have sliding scales on their ballweights. For example, they may be able to take a 300kg ballweight providing the weight of the caravan is 1500kg or less, but if they tow 2500kg they can only withstand 150kg ballweight.

So our advice, do your research on car and caravan prior to the purchase. If prior to purchasing your caravan and if you're already near the top end of your cars towable rating invest in a larger tow vehicle.

Tandems are the Norm!

If you are buying a new tandem it's our advice to spend a little more and invest in either the Rocker-Roller Suspension or an Independent System. The traditional Rocker seems to continually cause frustration for customers, whether through the need for ongoing maintenance or issues with cracked springs. The design of this system is very dated and it has so many moving pins and bushes that they all become prone to wear.

However, we are well aware many of you already have this system, and wouldn't want to change the caravan just for the suspension. There are some key things that can be done to make it a lot more reliable along with reducing the chance of cracking springs;

- o Installing Hardings low wear bushes
- o Increasing the suspension rating. As a very crude guide 2 ton tandems are 5 leaf, 2.5 ton is 6 leaf, 3 ton is 7 leaf and so on. However if your 2 ton van often just goes over this weight 6 leaf will handle the load better and in the tow vehicle you will never notice the difference. We find some suspensions are rated too close to the van weight, which is where a lot of the cracked spring issues arise.
- o Having it checked by experienced people every 10,000km.

If people are spending significant time each year in the van and/or do like to travel the unmade roads regularly we recommend the conversion across to the Simplicity System. These are incredibly reliable and robust. The coil independent systems are fantastic, however they're more expensive to convert. The Rocker Roller is a more affordable option that is half the cost of the Simplicity and a good step up from the Rocker.

Caravan Heaters

We have now installed several Dometic Diesel and Gas Heaters. They aren't cheap but incredibly effective and ideal if you camp away from 240V.

**OUR NEW ADDRESS:
114-142 Colchester Road, Kilsyth**

News & Information

Book in Times @ Hardings

Whilst our new site is much larger we still need customers to be arriving or departing at their booked in times. We only have so many staff to serve you, plus we have the usual challenges of retail with many unplanned events such as phone calls and visiting customers. What we have found is the more we can plan and book, the better chance we have of giving you good customer service for your repairs. We have found the following points to be critical to ensure you and everyone else receives the necessary time with our staff;

- Arrive at the booked in time (arriving early may not always help us as it often causes vehicle congestion). If you're running early or late please call us so we can plan around it.
- Please don't turn up with your caravan un-announced.
- 3-4 hour installation time (minimum) if we are fitting a brake controller or electrics to your car so please allow this time in your day.
- Assume your caravan will be staying for around 4-5 days when booking in for a service. Most customers will have a mechanical service and then 2 small body work type jobs on their caravan. If we were to do the job on the same day we simply wouldn't be able to offer you the facilities of our 3 workshops. On book-in we will always discuss a collection date and we occasionally carry out DO NOW Services, however it needs to be clearly stated when booking in as we are limited to doing jobs from our body or electrical shop in this short period.
- Drop off in the morning, pick up in the afternoon. For the past 4 years we have worked with this system and we find it helps create a flow of vehicles/customers over the whole day rather than high peak periods where too many caravans arrive at once. Obviously we are still flexible so please talk to us if this doesn't work for you.



The Odd Spot

Finally something useful for those people who like the great outdoors...



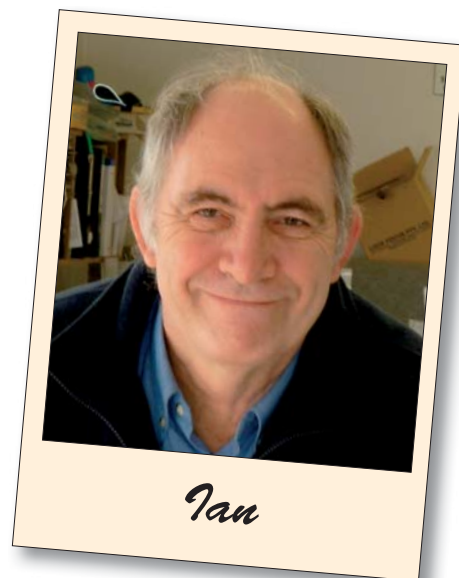
I listened to a recording of the late Len Beadell who created the Gunbarrel Hwy and many others. Anyhow his Audio CD called "The Shepparton Talk" is well worth a listen on your next trip. (www.beadell.com.au)

**OUR NEW ADDRESS:
114-142 Colchester Road, Kilsyth**

News & Information

Staff Profile

Ian joined the team at the beginning of 2010. Ian and Ed manage most of the jobs that come into the place, so if you haven't met Ian I'm sure you will soon. Ian has worked in the caravan industry for many years prior to joining our team and is a keen caravanner himself, so he has a wealth of experience. He also invented the 'Wunder bar' for winding down caravan jacks which some of you may have brought in the past. Outside of work he is heavily involved with 4 Wheel Driving and is a founding member of the Victorian Scout 4wd Service Unit.



Craig is one of our Body Repairers. Craig was a self employed painter by trade, and in his spare time is a classic car fanatic and collector of older classic caravans. In fact he's recently restored a 1950's Bondwood van that he did an incredible job renovating. Craig has also worked in the motor vehicle industry and has a real passion for Austin Cars, and has a personal collection at home. Craig brings to Hardings a broad range of skills. Craig will handle virtually any job within our body workshop and he will always have a particular interest in the older caravans that come through.

Perry is a more recent member of our Body Repair team. He joined Hardings after a long period running his own business and brought with him a lot of valuable skills having built two of his own homes! Perry has a broad range of skills from carpentry to welding, and as Perry is also a caravanner he will accept nothing other than what he himself would do on his own caravan, thus a high level of detail is always evident in his work. Perry enjoys his fishing whenever he can. He and his wife have 3 children and would like to retire to a country property in the course of time.



Elio is a member of our body repair team. He worked as a cabinet maker before joining us which means he handles the jobs such as building a kitchen in a fifth wheeler last year with ease. If you've visited our website recently you may have seen the unique Holden Motorhome that Elio restored last month. His current project at home is restoring his own Holden WB Ute however with 3 children he probably doesn't get as much time as he'd like to devote to the project!



Hardings Caravan Services
114-142 Colchester Road, Kilsyth 3137
Phone: 03 9729 8477 Fax: 03 9729 3096