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Are you sick and tired of setting up your tent each night or are simply dreaming of escaping the hustle and bustle for weeks at a time without trying to squeeze everything you need into the car? Then in this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, Ben and Lauren get the caravan expertise of Kevin Leslie, to break down what you need to know when upgrading to a caravan.

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Links to things mentioned in this episode:

- [Caravan and Camping in Australia Book](#)
- [Caravan towing safety SA Gov](#)
- [Buying a safe caravan/camper trailer SA Gov](#)
- [Trailer Weight Distribution video](#)
- [Caravan kitchen gear](#)
- [Caravan awnings](#)
- [Caravan accessories](#)



Caravan & camper trailer boom in Australia

Over the last few years due to the restrictions on travel, there has been a huge boom in the caravan and camper trailer industry as many people turn to holidaying at home.

When you're thinking about upgrading to a caravan, there are lots of factors to consider including the size, how many people will be sleeping in the van, and where you want to take it. But, the very first thing you'll need to determine is the towing capacity of your car.

Towing capacity of your vehicle

Cars have a towing capacity, and they have a download capacity on the towball. Look in the handbook of your vehicle to check how much weight it can tow, this figure will need to include everything you will be carrying in the van so all your water, gas, food, clothes, gear, accessories, furniture, and more.

The download capacity, on the other hand, is how much weight there is on the drawbar of the caravan pushing down on the back of the car. Some cars can't tow anything without a distribution bar, so make sure you do your research as you may need to make this upgrade if that's the case.

Caravan or camper trailer?

If you're considering upgrading from your family tent, then you're probably tossing up between a camper trailer or a caravan, so let's break down some key differences that could help with your decision.

Of course, caravans come at a higher cost compared to camper trailers, but they both require a safe place to store them at home. What's great about a camper trailer is that it's got everything you need ready to go, with no packing required. Camper trailers are the same size and space as a tent but depending on the design, they can take up to 30 minutes to set up. Caravans also provide everything you need in one handy package but are faster to set up. There are no pegging points with a caravan unless you are using an awning or annex. You just park it, get it level, put down the stabilisers, plug it in if you're in a caravan park, and that's it!

Off-road capability

If you are planning on travelling on rough roads, then your van needs to be set up for it. Consider how the chassis, suspension, and everything else underneath the caravan will manage, and make sure it's designed to handle corrugations, rocks, ditches, and washouts. An off-road van will accommodate these conditions, but they are significantly heavier and that needs to be considered when calculating your towing capacity. If bush camping is your style, then an off-road van will allow you to get the most out of your adventures.



Check the towing capacity of your car before buying a caravan. Image: Dometic

Changing layout and increasing capacity

If you're planning to renovate an older second-hand van, there will be some limitations if you

want to change the layout to increase the capacity. You can get clever with the interior space by modifying a double bed into bunk beds, which would then sleep the average family. But you are limited by the internal dimensions and any alterations will depend upon the style of van.

What to look for in a second-hand van

The big issue with older caravans is that the sealant they used had a shorter lifespan, so it shrinks or cracks which lets water into the van. One of the first checks you should do is to look for water stains in the roof corners, windows, frames, and inside the cupboards along the back of the wall.

Examine the overall condition of the van, and make sure everything still runs by plugging it into power. Ask them to run the fridge for a couple of hours before you get there to see if it's working, as these things are very expensive to repair. Check the suspension, pipes, hoses, water tanks, and shock absorbers for general wear and tear like you would when examining a second-hand car. Timber frames can rot too, and you won't know how much damage there is until you take the skin off so be wary of that.

It's worth taking photos of any problem areas, and showing them to a repairer so you can get a quote on the cost before you go ahead and make a purchase. You might still come out on top depending on the condition of the van, so it's worth looking into repairing instead of buying brand new.

Types of caravans

Many are drawn to windup campers as they look like they can be towed by a smaller vehicle, but they are a bit deceptive. Once loaded with gear they can weigh up to a tonne, so they're not a great option for cars that have a limited towing capacity.

There are also pop-top styles to consider, they have a lot in common with a standard caravan, but the roof will pop up and down as the name suggests. Pop tops are designed to make storage easier at home in your shed while also offering some wind resistance too.

Dangerous modifications

It's really important to ensure your caravan is safe to drive on the road, so don't make any dangerous modifications. For example, some people add a fold-up boat trailer on the back of a van, which adds a lot of weight behind the axle. Weight distribution is very important and it's essential that your van is never tail or nose heavy. For the safety of yourself and other road users, make sure that you load your caravan properly to avoid unnecessary dangers.

Gas & 12V

Don't ever modify gas in your caravan, ever. 12V additions are fine, and there are so many 12V options today such as TVs and microwaves that you can add to your van and enjoy some more creature comforts. But, if you want to add a powerpoint or anything like that, you will need to get it done by a licensed operator.



Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our [Facebook group](#) and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.

Catch you out there!