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Converting left to right

Light and low

This compact aerodynamically designed folding caravan is one sassy little number

By Jill Malcolm



When Bert Dove first saw the Eco-Tourer at the Sydney caravan show in 2006, his reaction was one of excitement.

"I kept going back to look at it," he said. "I thought it was a stunner. There was nothing like it in New Zealand."

So it is not surprising that Eco-Tourers are now sold from the yard of On Your Way RV, Bert's company in Tauranga.

The Eco-tourer is not a pop-top in the regular understanding of the term, which is associated with vehicles that have material extension walls. The extension walls on this van are rigid and like the rest of the cladding, insulated with a double fibreglass skin, so that when they are erected the unit is as snug and secure as a regular caravan. A double seal at the joining edges enhances this.

The day we photographed the Eco-Tourer was not one of Tauranga's best. Fickle winds and sharp rain showers kept us moving from one location to the next. If this wasn't the best of photography, it at least demonstrated how easy it was to set up the van. With a manual winder it took a couple of minutes to wind the walls into place; with an attachment to an electric drill it took seconds.

Opposite: Parked with the top erected, the Eco-Tourer is still a good looking

Below: Layout for model with double bed and shower

Outside

When it was launched in Australia in 2003, *Caravan World* magazine pronounced: "Not only is the Eco-Tourer simply beautiful inside and out, it works brilliantly, living up to the makers claims that it represents a new era in touring."

It is definitely a good looker with its low profile, slim lines and aerodynamic style. At the front is a roomy boot with stays for its lift up lid. The caravan itself has four drop down supports for stability on the ground. There is a double gas bottle locker on one side and at the rear is a spare wheel in a lockable metal cover.

Towing

On the short test drive, Bill was more than happy with its performance.

"With its low centre of gravity it was more like towing a light boat," he said. "And with its low profile the visibility was good. There was no detectable sway and it felt balanced and responsive."

We did not, however, have an opportunity to take it off road.

The braking system is electric with a manual over-ride handbrake. The tapered chassis is galvanised, heavy-duty steel and strong enough for off highway driving. Ground clearance is as high if not higher than any saloon car.

"Basically," Bert told us, "the Eco-Tourer will go anywhere the towing vehicle will go."

Storage

On this subject, a caravan of this size (outside measurement is 5.7m) that folds down to a height of 2.05m is a big advantage. And another feature improves it even more: the towing A-Frame folds up against the body of the van to cut 0.9m off the length. The unit is so light that it can be manually manoeuvred on the flat by one person. Of course, being so low, it is also be very easy to clean.

Inside

While is no decorator's dream, the interior has plenty of appeal for its neatness, accessibility and function. I was impressed to see how much room there was, even though all basic facilities are included – a three-hob cook top, a fridge, microwave, a good sized-sink and drip tray, and a three-quarter length, fold-down wardrobe.

As you enter the van a Formica top over two large "pot" drawers on the right, forms extra bench space; to the left is a fold-out table and with comfortably upholstered, café-style settees on either side. These fold down into a single bed for an extra guest. The amount of





Above: The galley and plenty of bench space
Left: The basin is outside the shower cubicle, between the shower and the folding wardrobe. Note the generously sized towel rail.



cupboard space is impressive. The standard configuration has a wardrobe, five drawers, five cupboards, eight overhead cupboards made of moulded fibreglass for easy cleaning; and a storage locker behind the seat. Not bad for an internal space that is 4.5m long and 2.2m wide.

The permanently made-up double bed in the caravan we looked at was at the back end of the van next to the shower and toilet. I didn't sleep on the bed but it seemed comfortable enough when I sneaked a quick lie down. There are two other possible layouts: a double or two single beds with no shower/toilet. In all formats an extra bed can be set up from the table and settees.

When I first saw the shower door I thought "Hah, only shorties in the shower." Wrong. A clever bit of designing has been employed to drop the shower base into a shallow well so that even a relatively tall person is able to stand up straight. You couldn't swing your soap

Hot dipped galvanised chassis
Radio CD player
Fold-up A frame
Fully insulated walls
Flush mount stove and sink with glass lids
Two gas bottles in side locker
Large front boot
Microwave oven
Four corner stabilisers
Wide track axle
12v water pump
Galaxy wind-out windows
Dometic range hood
Optional extras
Heron 2.2 air-conditioner
Battery system
Solar panel and regulator
Fiamma roll-out awning
Annexe side walls to suit rollout awning
LCD TV, roof mounted
DVD player upgrade
30-litre stainless steel drinking water tank
Dometic gas/electric hot water service
External shower
Midi Dometic roof hatch in lieu of standard
12v Fan-tastic roof hatch in lieu of standard



Left below: One Eco-Tourer set up and another ready for towing
Above: The double bed, shower door and storage cupboards

in it but it's perfectly functional. The hand basin with a bench surround and a towel-rail on the wall above is outside the shower well, between the shower and the wardrobe.

All this interior space is in something that – when lowered for travel – can barely be seen through the back window of the car. We thought the Eco-Tourer worth serious consideration for anyone wanting a lightweight, easily manoeuvrable towing vehicle that they could take almost anywhere and still have all the creature comforts of home. ■



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ECO-Tourer

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