

IN ONE OF FOUR COLEMAN PRIZE PACKS

CARAVAN+RV

AUSTRALIAN

AVANS + MOTORHOMES + TRAVEL + LIFE

Ship
JOY!
Advice for
Choosing the right
portable
boat



TOWING 101

BACK-TO-SCHOOL BASICS FOR
CARAVANS & CAMPER TRAILERS



ESCAPE THE RAT RACE

WITH ...

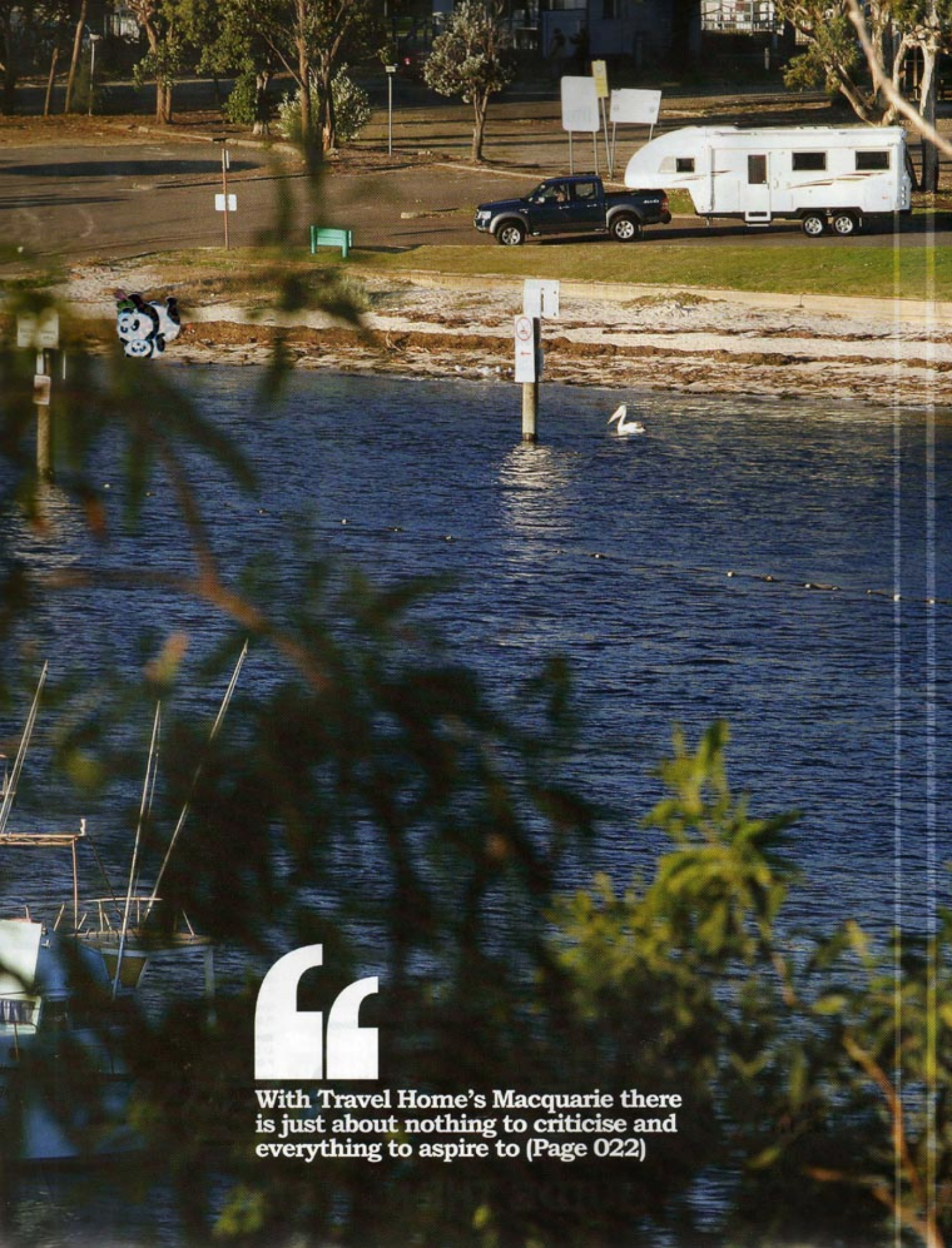
Travel Home 5th wheel
Trailcraft Panorama
York Peninsula
Jayco Expanda
Trakka Jabiru Xtra
CUB SupaMatic Escape
Paradise Independence

\$7.95 ISSUED03
SPRING07



www.caravanandriv.com.au

GA TOURING GUIDE THE NSW CENTRAL WEST



With Travel Home's Macquarie there is just about nothing to criticise and everything to aspire to (Page 022)

Travelling HOME

WORDS GLENN TORRENS // PHOTOS PHIL COOPER

The Travelhome Macquarie fifth-wheeler is beautifully designed and built, great to tow and supremely comfortable







ABOVE 1 Travelhome occupies similar space to a caravan yet offers enormous interior room **2** Sensible manufacturing process ensures high construction standards **3** Travelhome has a quirky style all its own

Bridging the gap between the dedicated one-box motorhome and the flexibility and versatility of a caravan/car combo is the fast-growing category of what are known as fifth-wheelers. Taking their name from the trucking industry's colloquial term for the tray-mounted coupling ('fifth-wheel') of a semi-trailer, fifth-wheelers' big advantage is the fact they pack extra living room into the space wasted by a caravan above its draw-bar. They're also more stable when being towed and arguably easier to manoeuvre.

But there are drawbacks. You can't simply drop one of these onto the towbar of your Falcadore or Nissitoyo wagon. No, you need to buy a ute or pickup and have it appropriately modified to accept the fifth-wheel coupling.

Travelhome came about when Newcastle, NSW-based trade vehicle body specialist Geoff Dutch decided he wanted to retire and hit the road. As well as building alloy trays, Geoff's career includes designing and building Holden Commodore-based New One Tonners seven

years before Holden decided it was a good idea.

Geoff was about half-way through converting a V8 Holden Commodore sedan into a full-on motorhome (yes, really) for his Big Trip when ideas began to take over. Geoff began sketching ... Before he knew what had hit him, the Commodore V8 motorhome project was pushed aside, retirement was postponed and Geoff was building his Travelhome prototype.

TECHNICALLY TALKING

The Travelhome Macquarie – the company's only offering for now – is manufactured on the shores of Lake Macquarie near Newcastle NSW, hence the name. Built on a box-section zinc-coated steel chassis rolling on dual AL-KO rubber suspension axles, it bristles with smart design. Up above, the one-piece moulded roof wraps over and interlocks with the walls, adding stiffness and reducing the need for silicon sealer – and the potential for leaks. One-piece moulded fibreglass body caps front and rear flow through the air easily and look good. The rear end's coach-like lift-up door reveals a large boot. The materials – fibreglass roof and ends; timber-cored laminated fibreglass walls – are inherently insulating to help take the strain off the heater/air-con unit.

Clever design continues inside, too, with the fit-out and furniture constructed from

One night stand

Shoal Bay Holiday Park is one of four terrific holiday parks operated by Port Stephens Shire Council north of Newcastle, NSW. The park is just metres from the beautiful blue waters of Port Stephens, 60km from Highway 1. Like many, the park hosts a few dozen privately-owned holiday vans and has plenty of cabins, including the park's unique Safari Bungalows, large tents permanently erected on wooden platforms, complete with ensuites and fridges. We parked the Travelhome on one of the park's concrete-padded powered van sites (\$29 low/\$52 high per night). Although a hugely popular summer holiday destination, Port Stephens teems with activities all year round. For 4WD adventurers, the huge sand dunes of Stockton Beach are only minutes away and diving, snorkelling, and whale and dolphin watching tours run from nearby Nelson Bay. Shoal Bay Holiday Park: (02) 4981 1427.



Fifth-wheelers provide living space where it's wasted in a van



ABOVE 1 Fifth-wheelers, like Travelhome, require a dedicated tow car with tray-mounted hitch installed
2 Rear boot is a useful size and a great addition

+ Pleading the fifth

Towing a fifth-wheeler is easier than towing a caravan, but there is more of a commitment to fifth-wheel holidaying/travel due to the modifications required to the tow vehicle. Only utes are suitable for fifth-wheeler towing and must be modified with a tray-mounted hitch that is spliced into the chassis rails through the tray. This hitch is relatively easily removed for week-to-week urban use, leaving just the rails installed on the floor.

The Travelhome is stable and secure on-road, with only a hardening of the ride over ruts and bumps due to its dual-axle layout.



pre-fabricated units of welded, powder-coated aluminium rather than traditional timber. You don't need to know each night as you snuggle into your pillow, but the furniture is loaded onto the floor before the walls are spliced into place. What you will appreciate – ironically, by not even noticing – is the fact these modular alloy furniture units are moisture-impervious, zero-maintenance, low-dust, light, stiff and squeak-free. Look around, and in contrast to many RVs, the only visible use of timber in the construction of the Travelhome is the benches and drawer bases. Check out every nook and cranny, look anywhere you like and the workmanship is superb.

Thanks to its on-board electronically-managed house batteries, Travelhome can be used for bush camping, independent of 240V power. The system automatically recharges itself when plugged into 'shore'.

INSIDE STORY

Travelhome offers a roomy, pleasant living environment. Up front, the two single beds (a queen-sized mattress is optional) are installed under the Travelhome's distinctive dome. Access is by climbing three stairs and as we proved during our usual overnight evaluation, the beds are comfortable and there's plenty of room to sit upright. An overhead hatch and two side windows let in plenty of natural light without compromising privacy. There's ample storage for doo-dads and each bed has



The modular furniture is built from lightweight powdercoated aluminium



a reading light and – big plus, folks – power points for electric blankets.

Unlike many RVs, the sink/vanity and mirror is installed outside the shower recess, adding to its usefulness: Jan can start on her hair while John takes a shower before dinner at the RSL. There's generous wardrobe space, too, with provision for hanging shirts and jackets and fixed baskets for other clothes. The whole bedroom/ensuite can be partitioned off from the living and kitchen area.

The kitchen is mounted mid-ships and is sensible in its layout with the sink and cooktop on one side, and fridge (a good-sized 150-litre unit), microwave and slide-out pantry on the other. More smart design: the overhead cupboards (one above the sink, one over the dinette) feature simple and durable roll-fronts rather than side or top-hinged doors. Adhesive drawer dividers are provided loose with each new Travelhome so customers can install them in positions to suit their own needs. The cutlery drawer is full-size and two big drawers take care of the pots and pans. A slide-out pantry has adjustable shelves for different sized cereal boxes. Nice.

A big thumbs-up to the house-sized sink installed in the Travelhome. Anyone who has tried to wash dishes in a doll-house sink will realise how frustrating that can be. There isn't much excess benchspace in the Travelhome, but what's there is useful and there are four power points for toasters and kettles. Thoughtfully, there's a 12V socket for charging mobile phones, too.

At the rear, the lounge/dining area is ample, with comfy wrap-around seating and a generous-sized table that can also be used outside the van. Large windows (and two roof hatches/skylights) give it a beach-house ambience and there's plenty of overhead lighting at night. Travelhome uses industry-standard pop-out windows with flyscreens and privacy blinds with its own matching interior curtains. The bright, durable upholstery is zipped and press-studded for easy cleaning.

It's well set-up for outdoors living, too, with the optional flat-screen TV able to be mounted and plugged in to the living side of the van under the huge roll-out awning.

IN THE END

I reckon Macquarie is a benchmark for mobile living design. It's a one-size-suits-all size, is beautifully built and its bed, kitchen and lounge layouts eliminate most of the space and day-to-day usefulness compromises associated with travelling or living in a big white box. Don't be put off by the size of the Macquarie, sure it looks intimidating, but fifth-wheelers are actually easier to tow than a caravan. And for nervous or first-time RVers they're easily a better bet. Big in America, they're now taking off here in Australia.

There is just about nothing to criticise and everything to aspire to. I have little doubt that in future evaluations, I will be asking myself "Is this thing as good as a Travelhome?"



+ Fast Facts

TRAVELHOME MACQUARIE 25

MANUFACTURER Travelhome

MODEL Macquarie 25

LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT 7500/2220/2850mm

TARE WEIGHT 2150kg

HITCH DOWN LOAD 500kg

PRICE FROM \$98,970

OPTIONS FITTED

+ Entertainment Lifestyle Pack \$3810: electric entry step, 15-inch flat screen with three brackets, DVD/CD/MP3 stereo, 6 speakers, aerial, external aerial socket.

PRICE AS TESTED \$102,780 + ORC

+ Verdict

TRAVELHOME

+ Superlative design and construction; terrific living area; tows easily

— Can't think of any. Seriously



CONTACT Travelhome

T 1300 785 495

W www.travelhome.com.au

+ On the road

The Travelhome is stable and secure. With the hitch 'weighing' 500kg in the centre of the tow car's tray, it feels (for the most part) like a ute with a load of bagged cement on board. Placing the down-load high over the centre-line of the axle, rather than low and several feet behind it (as with a conventional towbar) reduces the 'tail wagging the dog' tendency of similarly large-sized caravans. The ride is firm, however, as the tow car's springs are dealing with a greater mass.



+ Floorplan

