



# Stylish home away from home



**driven**  
with KEITH DIDHAM  
didhamk@abl.newsltd.com.au

What's it like being a car driver and getting behind the wheel of a modern motorhome? It's not such a frightening experience, writes **Keith Didham**

**H**ANDS up all car drivers who have cursed the owners of large motorhomes for being on the road. OK, that's most of you.

Motorhomes, you say, are big, ungainly, thirsty, are real slugs and have no place on the road. Right?

Far from it. The world of recreational vehicles has changed rapidly. Nowadays you don't even need a truck licence to pilot one — and they're dead easy to drive providing you remember they are more than twice as long and twice as high as your compact family car.

That ease of driving is becoming a big drawcard for those who are following the call in these tough economic times to holiday at home. And we are not talking about the traditional long-retired Grey Nomads here.

Enter Trakka's 730, a plush home away from home which, along with others on the market, is pulling interest from a new and younger breed of RV buyer.

"We're finding our 730 and the bigger 770 are drawing interest from the Baby Boomers who have done their overseas trip but now want to explore Australia," says Trakka's managing director Dave Berry.

That means they can rent their house out for a year, live on the road in luxury and recoupe most of their purchase price once they have got rid of the travel bug.

That's if they decide to sell and most motorhome owners it seems are hanging on to their new wheels because they love the gypsy lifestyle.

A shortage of near new vehicles on the market has kept residual values high although the economic crisis may change the playing field.

There are mixed messages coming from caravan park operators: while the number of visitors has softened in recent months, there is

an increase in first-time users, from two groups, the family campers on a budget and from mobile home owners.

Britz, one of the country's major campervan hire players, says it has noticed an upsurge in Australians renting vehicles as against overseas tourists.

"We have seen a huge increase in domestic bookings over the past five years, with Aussies making up over 40 per cent of our customer base," says Britz brand manager Johanna Penny.

You certainly don't have to rough it when camping in the Trakka 730.

At \$160,000 it lacks for little in terms of life's luxuries like leather upholstery, plush settees, air conditioning, double glazed windows, privacy blinds and a 48cm hi-def television with DVD player.

The Trakka is based on a Fiat Ducato, but the cabin is where any similarity with a delivery van ends.

Check the rear view mirror and you realise there's a kitchen, bathroom and lounge following behind and all fitted out in a timber, grey plastic and plush cream and navy blue decor.

A quick tour: up front above the cabin is a double berth but you need a ladder to get up there and it can be a bit of a struggle so it's best left for the kids.

Down below the leather upholstered driver and passenger captain's chairs can swivel to create a second lounge area.

Next is the galley with microwave, gas oven, gas hotplates, 175-litre fridge/freezer and filtered drinking water system.

Across the way there's a small wardrobe and the enclosed bathroom with shower and a trick chemical loo which powers in and out of the wall by remote control.

At the rear of the 730 is the U-shaped lounge. Another remote control slides out the centre section of the settee which then neatly converts into a double bed, or you can configure it with two singles.

The options list includes a stainless steel barbecue, solar charging, satellite navigation, satellite TV and reversing camera (a must for a vehicle this size).

The air conditioning, diesel heating and controls for the twin 100-amp/h house batteries are under the floor to keep the weight low while the 730 comes with abundant halogen lights, 130l



of fresh water, mains water connection, 14l of hot water, three gas bottles and 130l of grey water storage.

Setting up and plugging in takes less than a couple of minutes — even the power cord is neatly stored in its own locker while another locker is designed to house the barbecue.

The downsides: the 730's boot is on the small side and needs a couple of straps to stop the outdoor chairs from falling out. There's only one 240-volt power socket and it's not easily reached from the table.

The Ducato is imported from Fiat as a cab only with a German-built Alko chassis. Trakka then coach builds the body to its own design.

The Ducato has anti-lock brakes and traction control and the 3-litre turbo diesel has 115kW

and 400Nm of torque on tap. That may not sound sufficient for a vehicle which weighs in at 4250kg. But the engine, coupled with a six-speed auto (Fiat calls it the Comfortmatic) which also allows for manual shifting when required, gives

surprising perky performance thanks to its good range of usable torque.

We had no trouble cruising all day at 100km/h pulling 2000 revs and stretching to 110km/h at 2200 revs on the highway. A delay in upshifting gears in automatic mode took a little time to get used to, as did the predictable understeer but the 730 returned an impressive 13.5l/100km over a mix of rural, city and highway conditions giving it a range of about 900km. Trakka says its own testing over 7000km returned an even better fuel return of 12.5l/100km Berry likes to describe the 730 as the sportscar of the motorhome market. It's certainly no slug to drive and is easy to drive thanks to its light power steering and terrific forward visibility. Nor is it cumbersome in negotiating tight caravan park driveways but backing takes practise, and there's a 15.5m turning circle to consider.

Finding a park though for something that is 3m tall, almost 2.4m wide and 7.35m long is a challenge.



**SMART:** The Trakka730 is being marketed as the sportscar of the motorhome market.  
Pictures: Keith Didham



**PLUSH:** Little expense has been spared on the Trakka 730's classy interior.