

Home away from home

Although neither hippy nor gypsy, **Scott Thomas** hit the road in this modern day Kombi and found some great out of the way fishing spots along the way.

REGULAR travellers on Highway One would be familiar with the Trakka brand of campervans and motorhomes, and no doubt envy them passing by. I'd often admired their stunning simplicity at campgrounds. As I struggled to drive a tent peg into hard ground, a Trakka's nearby crew were already set up, and grappling a cold beer.

Not this time round. Trakka were kind enough to throw me the keys of one of its new Trakkadu TS Off Road models for an extended weekend. Long enough to convince my girlfriend to tag along and squeeze in some quality fishing time in the NSW Snowy Mountains.

Trakka's owner and director Dave Berry established the company in 1973 fitting out Volkswagen vans to suit Australian travellers. There are still a few hippies driving those original campers around, but 35 years of refining this great Aussie camper has revealed a whole new vehicle, packed full of innovative features.

General manager Martin Poate gave me a tour of the factory and showroom at Mt Kuringai in Sydney's Northern Suburbs. Trakka's range includes standard size Volkswagen vans through to multiple berth motorhomes, and it's all done on site, from the vehicle's raw shell, to finished fit-out.

Once only the domain of "grey nomads", boaties, fishos, surfers, skiers, walkers, you name it, are starting to realise the benefits that this style of vehicle has to their chosen sport. Picture, crawling out of bed as the sun rises, and already being at the fishing spot. This was the scenario at our chosen camp, 1600 metres above sea level, riverside in the Snowy Mountains. With my gear already rigged, I was on the river before the crowds gathered and the trout were spooked. After all, this was school holidays, and the early riser invariably caught more fish. Meanwhile, and

without sounding too chauvinistic, my girlfriend was preparing breakfast back at the van – the scenario was faultless.

On the dirt

The Trakka Trakkadu Off Road camper features an imported "off-road" pack from Germany, which includes: snorkel, raised suspension, off road tyres, gas shocks, alloy bash plate and lowered gearing. First and second gear took some getting used to, being so low, but proved invaluable on the dirt. I didn't get a chance to test the snorkel, which I'm sure was a relief to the crew back at Trakka. But I did take it off the sealed road in search of some "out of the way" fishing spots. The Trakkadu features Electronic Stability Control and Electronic Rear Diff-Lock. When the going gets tough, simply switch into low range and keep on going.

Back on the road

The powerful Volkswagen 2.8i, five-cylinder turbo-diesel delivers 128kW to the Trakkadu, more than enough to push us along effortlessly. Other features include a six-speed manual transmission – unfortunately the off-road model doesn't come in auto at this stage. There's also cab air-conditioning, radio/CD player (in this case pre-loaded with a *Best of Cold Chisel* CD), remote central locking, power windows and cruise control. Sitting up high in the driver's seat, the vision was excellent and the spacious cab interior deceiving – the van felt much bigger from inside. Our drive took a good six-hours and was accomplished in comfort with the help of the aforementioned standard equipment and features.

Boaties will find the excellent towing ability



ABOVE: The elevated roof is easy to erect, allows plenty of headroom and has two large ventilation panels, ideal in hot weather.

BELOW: The Trakkadu carries with it plenty of grunt and is ideal for slippery boat ramps.





a bonus for an already versatile vehicle. The 400Nm of torque and 2500kg towing capacity should take care of most boatie's towing ambitions. Some would assume a campervan to have poor towing visibility, however the Trakkadu was equal to most 4WDs. There was excellent vision through the back window and side mirrors. The "4motion" all-wheel drive and low range option would also help with slippery boat ramps.

Under the big top

Although it's a pleasure to drive, setting up camp at the end of the day is more my style. And that's where the Trakkadu really excels. Our first night was spent at Jindabyne's Snowline caravan park, right on the banks of Lake Jindabyne and gateway to the Snowy Mountains. This gave us a chance to utilise some of the van's features before heading up the slopes. Obtaining a powered site, we were able to use the 240-volt power to charge phones and camera batteries. We also filled the 50 Litre reservoir before leaving. And as we later found

out, this water came in handy for a refreshing and hot outdoor shower.

Away from all the comforts of the caravan park, we were prepared to rough it, but actually, nothing really changed; the only noticeable difference was the lack of 240 volt power. Otherwise, thanks to the auxiliary battery, which charges while driving, we had enough power to run the van's lights and enough gas to keep the fridge and three-burner stove going for a considerable time. And on the subject of lights, it's an often neglected area, but strong, bright lights, in my opinion, make camping all the more enjoyable on those dark dreary nights. For those who enjoy a good TV show while camping, there's room for an aerial that spirals around the ceiling of the camper. The TV can be mounted at the rear of the bench.

The 85 Litre fridge is powered with both 12 and 240 volt power. The fridge size was more than adequate for an extended long weekend. The other great feature of a campervan's fridge was the time saving it provided. We visited the shops,



ABOVE: The 85 litre fridge carries enough supplies for an extended weekend away.

filled the fridge with food, warm beer and wine and proceeded to go fishing. Several hours later, the food and cold drinks were waiting for us.

The pop-up roof is easy to put up – simply unzip the sides, unhook a couple of latches and with the help of gas struts, just push up. This roof allows plenty of headroom down the cooking or business end of the van.

Eating meals can be done in two ways. Inside, the passenger seat swivels and a small table mounts just near the fridge and cupboard. One person can sit on the swivelling seat, the other on the bench seat. If the mozzies are tame and the weather's fine, the same table can be mounted outside and a 2.5 metre outdoor awning will protect you from the elements.

When the time comes to call it a night, it's a simple matter of sliding the back bench seat down and forward to create a two person bed. At first it felt rather firm, but I can assure you a good night's sleep was had by all.

Besides the fridge, the entire one-piece cupboard includes a decent size sink, three burner stove, drawers and storage for saucers, plenty of bench space for preparing food, and towards the rear, there's a clothes cupboard for your best outfit. It really is a home away from home.

There are plenty of other features in this great camper that I won't have time to include, however there's one that is worth a brief mention. The optional diesel heater is an ingenious idea. This runs independently and can be powered in conjunction with a timer so the van is nice and warm on your return from a cold day on the water. And I found it's also ideal for drying wet shoes.

Bigger campervans and motorhomes will



ABOVE: The Trakkadu was a pleasure to drive, and being easy on the eye, turned more than a few heads.

LEFT: The unique graphics by artist Dennis Baker, adds privacy and allows light in and a view out.



the lifestyle most of us lead, not only in our chosen recreation, but also our daily lives. It wasn't easy to hand back the keys and return to the big city rat race.

Trakkadu 6 Speed Manual TDJ starts at around \$82,000, as tested with 4Motion \$118,700. More information on (02) 9472 9000, website: www.trakkadu.com.au

obviously sleep more people and won't feel so cramped, however, and it takes some getting used to, this is only a standard size van. You can take it to the shops, drop the kids off at school, make a cuppa on that cold winter's day at the kid's soccer. And best of all, you don't need to park in the bus zone.

When it comes to versatility – the Trakkadu claims first prize. This is a campervan built to suit