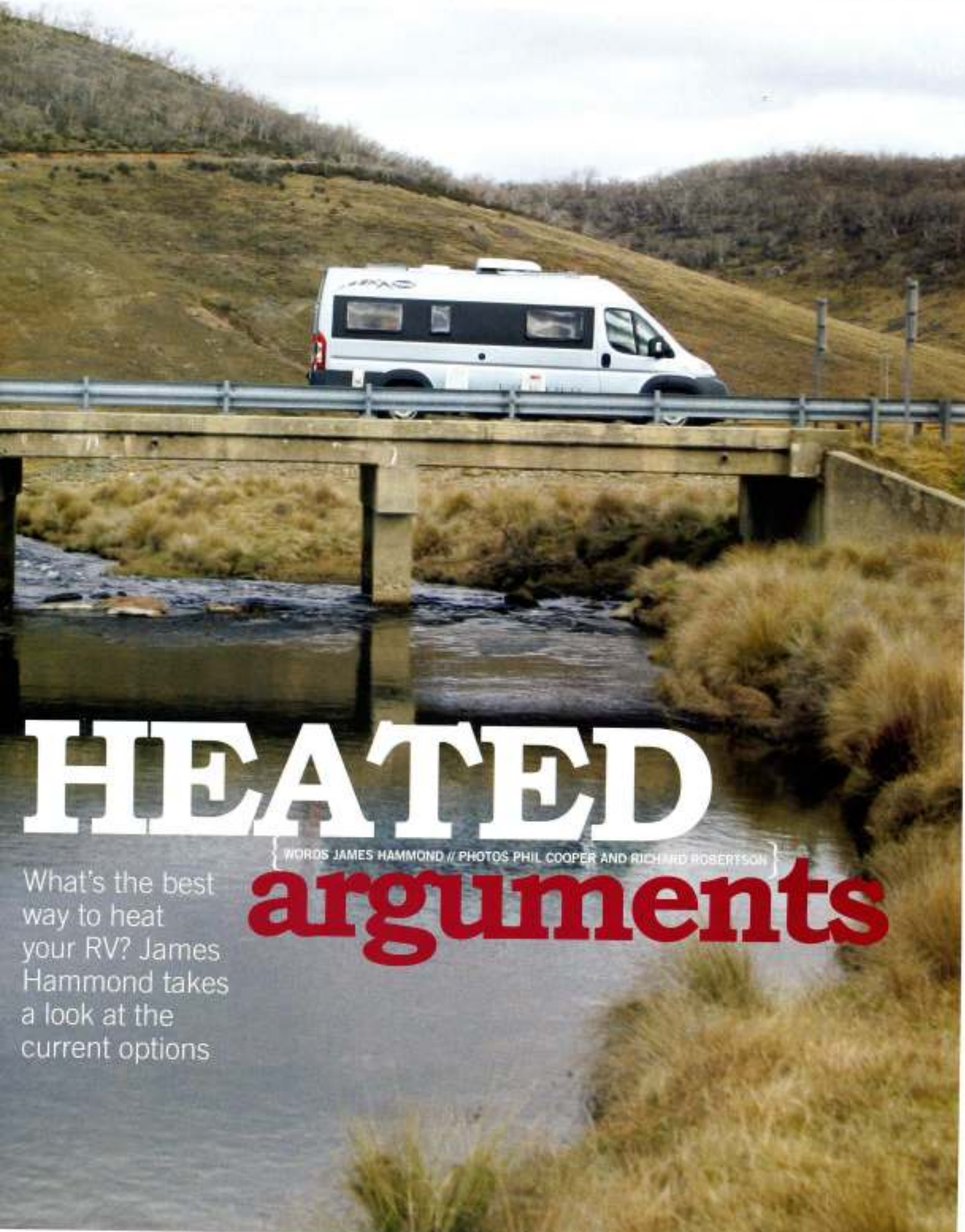




**W**hat better time to think about heating your motorhome or caravan than right now, at the beginning of summer. Why? Because you'll probably muck about, put it off and before you know it, it will be winter again. And fore warned is fore warmed, if you know what I mean.

Many RV owners head north when the mercury drops and scoff at the need for heating. That's fine, but hardly realistic if you want to get your money's worth from your recreational vehicle. Personally, I prefer crisp mornings and tourist-free days to sweaty nights in crowded caravan parks. However, I don't like to freeze; so despite brochures extolling the virtues of full insulation, a couple of inches of polystyrene doesn't offer all that much protection from the cold.



# HEATED

WORDS JAMES HAMMOND // PHOTOS PHIL COOPER AND RICHARD ROBERTSON

# arguments

What's the best way to heat your RV? James Hammond takes a look at the current options



**Diesel heaters  
only burn a  
small amount  
of fuel and are  
quiet, too**

in caravan parks each night. The differences were marked, but more on that later.

These heaters burn a small amount of diesel fuel in a tiny furnace, blow hot air around it and then duct it into the vehicle. They draw a negligible amount of 12V power for ignition and the fan, and although noisy when starting up, they quieten right down in operation. Outlet nozzles can be positioned almost anywhere, at floor level, and it's quite common to have one in the lounge/dining area and another in the bathroom (which is ideal for drying wet clothes, shoes and towels).

The Airtronic system in the Trakka Torino uses 8 watts of 12V power and 0.1 litres per hour of diesel, on low, to produce 850 watts of heat. This is 1 watt and 0.02 lph less than the smallest Webasto unit at its lowest setting. The Airtronic unit is also slightly more powerful, producing 2200 watts of heat at maximum setting, compared to the Webasto's 2000 watts.

I've used both brands in the past and

found them equally effective in the real world. I once free-camped during an unseasonably cold snap, near Armidale, and it snowed. Despite howling winds and lots of swirling white stuff outside, my motorhome remained a cosy 22°C inside. That night made me a convert.

On our recent adventure the Airtronic-equipped Torino kept a quiet and comfortable temperature as required, while the other unit also kept us warm, but much more noisily. Indeed, we had to repeatedly turn off the roof-top A/C during dinner to avoid shouting across the table. The roof-top system also produces a far more intrusive stream of hot air than that which wafts up from a floor vent, and can be swiveled in different directions.

The Airtronic system has a digital controller that includes a seven-day timer and numerous other functions, plus precise temperature adjustment and even a ventilation-only mode. The Webasto units I've seen and used have a simple,

rotary thermostat switch that controls on/off and temperature. Both companies also make combined hot water and vehicle heating systems, but that's another story.

An advantage of proper heating that's often overlooked is in the battle against the RV owner's perennial enemy: condensation. Keeping your vehicle warm inside on cold nights reduces, or eliminates, condensation, and the resultant chance of mould and mildew developing.

### WARM REGARDS

I quickly warmed to diesel-fired central heating and regard it as the best all-round heating solution. You can free camp in winter, operate it while your RV is running and, with the Airtronic's timer system, program it to come on before you return to the vehicle, or wake up in the morning. Yes, it is expensive – about \$2000 to \$3000 on average – but against the cost of a new RV that's not such a big ask (a statement sure to spark many more heated arguments).

## + RV HEATERS



**BELOW** Airtronic's heater offers a control panel which allows you to set a timer, and the temperature. Easy

