

Try before you buy

ARB's marketing guru hires a Far and Wide camper to quell his pre-purchase jitters.

It was Easter 2009, and enough was enough. Even as experienced campers and keen 4WDers, my wife and I found packing our Land Rover Discovery for a week in Vic's High Country with our two young children a nightmare.

We thought we'd pop along to the next caravan and camping show and buy a camper trailer, but despite working in the 4WD industry for over 15 years, I was overwhelmed by the range.

Just when we thought we'd found one design that suited us, another would leave us equally impressed. We eventually narrowed it to four models.

A camper trailer is a significant investment, and as we planned to travel frequently, we wanted to make the right decision. We decided to hire a few models over the following months, and work out which design suited us best.

HIRING OUR FIRST CAMPER

The first decision was whether we went for a hard or soft floor camper, so we kicked off our series of road tests with a hard-floor design from Far and Wide Campers.

Far and Wide Campers is a family-owned business in Melbourne's south east. Like many manufacturers, its camper design evolved over the years through the business owners' camping and touring experience. David and Cyndi Downie demonstrated the



Desert Trek camper and within an hour, it was attached to the Discovery and we were on our way.

The Discovery 3 is a superb tow vehicle, and handled the trailer with ease, however, the Far and Wide Camper looks equally at home behind a smaller 4WD. Its chassis and checkerplate body are made of aluminium, which makes it one of the lighter hard floor campers on the market. In addition to being lighter than steel, aluminium doesn't rust, and our hire camper looked great, despite recent trips to the Flinders Ranges and Cape York.

Far and Wide models have LED trailer lights which are water and dust resistant and experience fewer bulb failures compared to traditional lamps. However, before collecting the camper, I learned that the Discovery 3's in-built diagnostic system doesn't recognise trailers fitted with LEDs taillights, causing

Above: The Discovery 3 is a great tow vehicle but needs a special adaptor if the trailer's reversing lights are LED.

SPECIFICATIONS Far and Wide DESERT EDGE

Tare:	940kg
ATM:	1600kg
Suspension:	Eye-to eye rebound
Brakes:	Hydraulic
Coupling:	Treg
Hire:	From \$86 per day, extras inc.



Far left: The camper packs up very neatly with no protruding components to get knocked off in the bush.

Left: The slide-out kitchen is well equipped and quick to access.

Below: Within a few minutes you're ready for a good night's sleep.

the lights to flash. It's overcome by the LED adaptor module, which I picked up from the local Land Rover dealer.

FIRST NIGHT

We kicked off our trip with a night at Buchan Caves Reserve near Orbost, Vic. This is a great place for the kids, as the camping area attracts a lot of wildlife. The caves are spectacular, and are suitable for people of all ages.

As we were only there for one night, we didn't erect the awning. We were extremely impressed at how easy this camper was to set up. We unclipped the roof rack, which became the base and then unclipped the floor from the main body. We then pushed the roof rack up and over and the camper opened up in a very controlled manner, with the gas struts. The floor clipped back into the rack/base, and we extended and



Heaps of wildlife at Buchan Caves to keep the kids entertained.



FAST FACTS

Buchan Caves Reserve, Vic
Unpowered sites for two adults start from \$18, for bookings visit http://svc114.bookeasy.com/accom_rates/buchan-caves/

Cave tours cost \$8 child, \$11.50 senior \$14 adult. Family tickets and discounts for multiple tours apply.

For more information, phone Buchan Caves Reserve Visitor Centre on (03) 5162 1900.

Narooma, NSW
For more information, phone Narooma Visitor Information Centre, on 1800 240 003, or visit www.eurobodalla.com.au

tensioned the internal roof support.

The kitchen is well designed, sliding out from the front left of the trailer. The four-burner stove, grill and sink and tap with running water allowed us to whip dinner for the kids in no time.

“THE INTERIOR OF THE CAMPER FEELS QUITE SPACIOUS, DUE IN PART TO THE HIGH ROOF OVER THE BED.”

MOVING ON

We started the day with a guided tour through one of the caves, and intended to visit the Croajingolong NP, near the NSW/Vic border, however, the temperature had reached 39°C and a bush fire was burning west of the park.

So we travelled up the coast where the weather forecast predicated cooler conditions. By late afternoon we were at Narooma, on the beautiful Sapphire Coast.

After erecting the camper, we set up the awning. This takes a bit longer and is best-handled by two people. However, it provides a massive amount of coverage, extending the full length of the camper and around the front as well. It shelters the front of the trailer where most of the storage is. A

massive box forward of the kitchen normally accommodates an Engel 32L fridge, but as we had a 47L ARB fridge in our vehicle, we stored all of our kitchen utensils and food here instead. A smaller storage box sits opposite the main one, and a tent pole tube and two gas cylinders are on the drawbar. There's room for three jerry cans, which when combined with the onboard 70L water tank, covers most families' requirements.

The tent area uses Australian-made canvas, and is equipped with large windows and mesh screens. We slept soundly in the warm weather beneath the tropical roof. The queen-size bed lifts to reveal another large storage area, which is also accessible via the rear hatch when the camper's closed. There are plenty of lights inside the camper with many powerpoints and a stereo system. The camper has an onboard battery system and is also supplied with 240V inlets and outlets.

The interior of the camper feels quite spacious, due in part to the high roof over the bed. Our kids were comfortable on the floor of the camper, but older children or bigger families would probably appreciate the add-on room that is available.

All in all, we liked the Far and Wide camper. It's priced from \$29,990, which we think is good value given the specification

level. Far and Wide has three models in the range, though these can be modified to suit your needs.

I think it says a lot when a company's confident enough to offer units for hire. Our unit had every conceivable kitchen utensil, bed linen, clothes line, dust pan and brush and more. David and Cyndi even gave us beds for the kids, solar panels, a fridge and a generator. Far and Wide will refund your hire fee if you buy one of its campers after your road test, but conditions apply. ■

For more information, visit www.farandwidecampers.com.au or phone 0432 488 156, (03) 5971 1661.

