

# Motorhome beginners' guide

Trying to choose between a caravan or a motorhome? We answer your most frequently asked questions to help you make the right buying decision.

## ***How are motorhomes categorised and what's available?***

- Motorhomes are categorised according to the number of berths (sleeping capacity) and also the length of the overall vehicle.
- Smaller motorhomes usually have a fridge and stove, larger ones may have a cassette toilet and hot-water shower.

## ***What size motorhome will we need?***

- Basic two berth motorhomes (or camper conversions) are terrific for two people on a budget. However, because smaller motorhomes don't have toilet and shower facilities, travellers are restricted to camping in caravan parks and using public amenities.
- Many of the truck based six berth motorhomes are designed to suit families or two couples travelling together.
- The larger the motorhome, the higher the running costs.
- However the larger the motorhome, the greater its creature comforts and the more time you'll be happy to spend away from home!
- A 23-foot maximum length allows access to most car parking spots in cities and scenic lookouts.

## ***What are the pros and cons of travelling in a motorhome compared to towing a caravan?***

- Motorhomes usually have access between the driver's cabin and the body so there's no need to leave the vehicle to camp.
- There's no 'set up' involved in camping with a motorhome.
- Passengers can be carried within the motorhome (providing the seats have the appropriate belts.)
- Motorhomes can be parked more easily and less conspicuously than a car and caravan.
- Ease of parking means access to and ability to stop at lookouts and scenic places that caravans might have trouble accessing.
- There are no tow hitch, chains or levelling bars to attach.
- Motorhomes are easily reversed.
- Motorhomes require full registration and insurance rather than the cheaper caravan alternative.

- Caravans give you the option of leaving them parked while you use the tow vehicle for day trips.

### ***Are motorhomes difficult to drive?***

- Small campers and motorhomes are as easy to drive as a medium-sized car.
- Most modern motorhomes, even the truck based six-berth and eight-berth models, have automatic transmissions and power steering.
- Anything up to a six-berth motorhome (single axle) can be driven on a normal car licence.
- Apart from the need to allow for the extra height and width of the body, motorhomes are usually an easier alternative to towing a similar sized caravan.

### ***Can I go off-road?***

- The truck-based motorhomes have better ground clearance and higher rated tyres. They are more suitable for dirt roads and tracks than many cars and caravans.
- A motorhome can usually be taken anywhere you'd take a normal car, with extra allowance being made for overhanging branches and the like.
- Several Australian companies convert four wheel drive vehicles into campers and motorhomes.
- Some motorhome manufacturers include four-wheel drive truck chassis as an option, allowing their customers to build large off-road capable vehicles.

### ***Where can I stay overnight in a motorhome?***

- Virtually anywhere you can park safely without obstructing traffic and where it isn't signposted 'No Camping'.
- Rest areas alongside major roads.
- However waste water must be stored until it can be dropped in an appropriate place.
- Any caravan park powered site can be accessed by a motorhome.
- Some parks reserve special areas for motorhomes.

### ***What sort of bathroom facilities are available?***

- The most common motorhome toilet is the cassette style. Chemicals break down the waste which can be emptied down any toilet as required.
- Some large motorhomes have full flush toilets and black water holding tanks.
- Showers fed by LPG gas hot water systems are also common. Although small, they are very practical.

### ***What about the electrical systems?***

- Motorhomes usually have a 240 volt power inlet which can be hooked up to power the larger appliances such as air conditioners and microwaves.
- They will also have 12-volt DC lights and minor appliances, powered either from the vehicle battery or a separate deep cycle battery.
- Inverters are used in some cases to enable the 12-volt system to be transformed to limited 240 volt AC power.
- Solar panels are often used to charge the deep cycle house batteries.

### ***What is a 'fifth wheeler' and what's the difference?***

- A fifth wheeler, often called a goose neck trailer, is a caravan/motorhome style trailer that attaches through the 'fifth wheel' to a position directly above the tow vehicle's rear axle.
- Being articulated, they are easier and more direct to tow than a caravan yet allow the tow vehicle (usually a tray back ute or truck) to be used independently.
- Very popular in the USA, fifth wheelers are rapidly becoming more popular in Australia as recreational vehicles.

### ***What sort of accessories should I be looking for?***

- 240 volt air conditioning is very popular, especially for travellers intending spending time in the tropics.
- A roll out awning is a great addition to any motorhome, creating an instant verandah wherever you travel.