

REAL PEOPLE ON REAL ADVENTURES

CAMPER

AUSTRALIA

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YOUR GUIDE
TO KICKING UP
DUST IN THE
WESTERN DESERTS

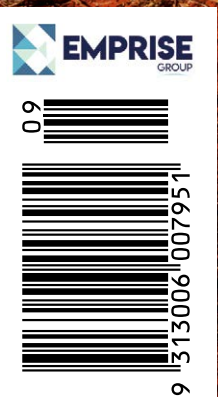
WANDERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ESSENTIALS
WEST AUSSIES
NEVER LEAVE HOME WITHOUT

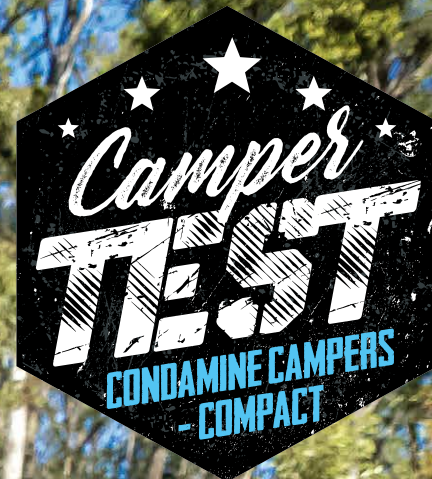
HOW TO SURVIVE
OUTBACK TRAVEL

PLUS

THE
CAMPER
MAG SAMPLER







COMPACT IN SIZE. NOT IN STATURE.

DOES THIS PINT-SIZED OFFERING FROM BOUTIQUE MANUFACTURER CONDAMINE CAMPERS HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO SUCCEED IN THIS HIGHLY COMPETITIVE SEGMENT OF THE MARKET?

WORDS AND PICS MATT WILLIAMS

At the end of the day, you have to be happy with what you do. And if you're a manufacturer of camper trailers, you have to be satisfied with the product you put out to market.

This is especially the case if you are a one-man band that designs and builds your own camper trailer from the ground up. Chatting with John Huth (owner, CEO, CFO, labourer and floor sweeper) of Condamine Campers about his latest camper, the Compact, you can tell he's pretty happy. He has every right to be.

NEW KID IN TOWN

John has been building camper trailers out of his shed in South East Queensland since late 2014. First, there was his flagship Condamine Camper followed by a toy-hauler variant. Never one to sit on his hands, 2020 has seen the Compact join his stable.

The Compact is a mid-priced, two-up camper trailer built with the same quality and attention to detail as its older siblings. There's no denying the DNA of the Compact to those that have come before it. All of the best ideas have been carried over, as well as a few new ones.

The new Compact is a meld of proven ideas and new innovations



It's a blessedly lightweight camper with a tare of just 1050kg



The rooftop-tent style accommodation includes a comfy queen mattress





The 270-degree awning throws plenty of shade, while the pair of 250W solar panels will keep you juiced up

HITS

Lightweight with massive payload

Excellent off-grid attributes

Build quality and attention to detail

Value for money

MISSES

The size of the awning when stored

Access to battery and associated electrical equipment

STREET SMARTS AND OFFROAD CRED

Apart from the apparent prerequisites when purchasing a trailer (ie how many it sleeps, how much water/battery/solar it has?) a primary consideration has to be how well it tows.

Let's face it, that new trailer you just bought is going to spend a lot of time getting pulled around this great country – so it better do a good job of it.

Things such as tare and ATM have to be considered, as well as the suspension system employed and the overall balance of the trailer. And let's not forget about the its centre of gravity, offroad ability and the availability of spare parts if, heaven forbid, you had a failure out the back o' Bourke! So, let's see how the Compact stacks up.

While it may be compact, it's also an absolute lightweight, tipping the scales with a tare of only 1050kg, meaning you would have to put more than 950kg of payload into it before going over your ATM of 2000kg. Maxing out at 2000kg, even mid-sized 4WDs and SUVs are going to be able to drag the Compact on holidays and adventures.

Add in the fact it is only 1.9m wide, it's also going to fit down any track the tow vehicle can fit, with one exception – the awning bag. You're going to have to keep a close eye on the passenger side on tight tracks as the awning bag is massive and will no doubt get caught on sticks and branches.

When it comes to the suspension, the Compact runs the Cruisemaster XT Independent

system with coil springs and twin shocks on each wheel. On-road manners and offroad ability are well catered for by this setup. Being such a widely used suspension system, availability of replacement parts also won't pose a problem.

Complementing the suspension are the Federal Couragia mud terrain tyres (265/70R17) wrapped around 17in black steel rims. With the articulation afforded by the Cruisemaster DO35 hitch up front, you'll be tackling the challenging tracks with aplomb.

While on our test circuit, it was the lack of wheel travel and traction of the tow vehicle that stopped our forward progress up the trickiest of sections, not the trailer.

"STAYING FOR LONGER OR NEED SOME EXTRA PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS, THEN YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO SET THE AWNING UP."

CAMPER SPECS

CONDAMINE CAMPERS COMPACT

TRAILER

Tare 1050kg

ATM 2000kg

Payload 950kg

Ball weight 60kg

Suspension Cruisemaster XT Independent coils with twin shocks

Brakes 12in electric drum

Coupling Cruisemaster D035

Chassis 150 x 50 x 3mm hot-dipped galvanised chassis

Body 2.5mm powder coated aluminium

Wheels 17 x 8 black steel rims

Tyres 265/70R17 Federal Couragia MT

Style Compact camper trailer

DIMENSIONS

Body size 2850 (L) x 1900 (W) x 1800mm (H)

Towed length 4500mm

Awning size 2.5 x 2.5m Square Back Deluxe SupaPeg 270-degree Awning

ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 1 x 9kg

Water 2 x 90L fresh water tank

Hot water service Girard Instant gas

Cooktop Dometic three-burner gas

Kitchen Slide-out custom made with Dometic three-burner, Dometic sink with permanent hot and cold water plumbed and bench space and flip-over serving bench, stainless steel preparation bench

Inverter Optional

Solar 2 x 250W

Options fitted 65L Thunder Fridge

PRICE AS TESTED

\$39,750

ENQUIRIES

CONDAMINE CAMPERS

85 Sungold Road, Chambers Flat, Qld 4133

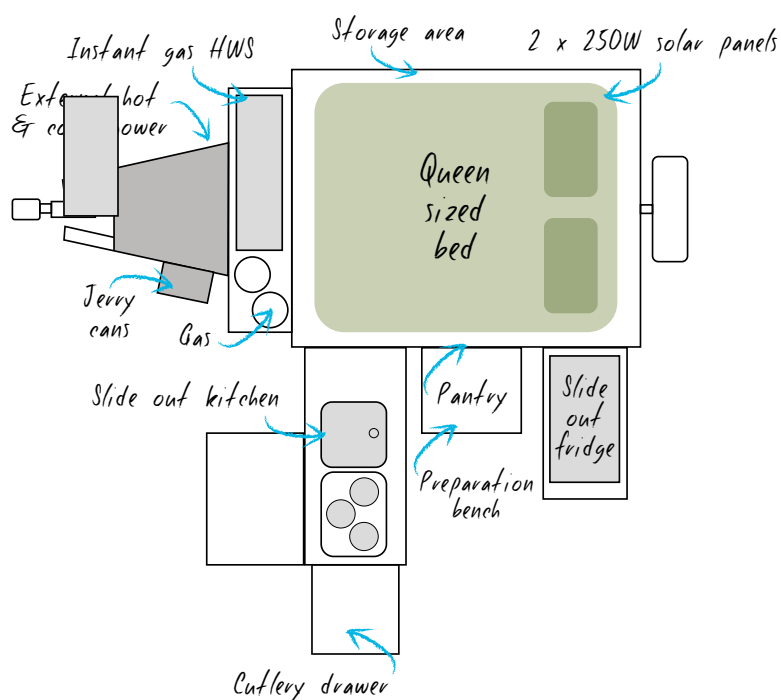
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camper.hemax.com

More pictures Specs to compare



STEP RIGHT UP

With rooftop tent-style accommodation on the Compact, there was a need to work out a way to get the occupants up and down quickly, safely and easily.

Not wanting to use a ladder or portable/folding steps, and having them take up valuable storage space, a bespoke solution was required.

Rear access was out due to the location of the single spare wheel, as were both sides of the camper. The only option left was the drawbar, but that had to remain clear and free of obstruction so that a full-sized tailgate (like those found on a Toyota Prado) could open fully even with the camper still attached.

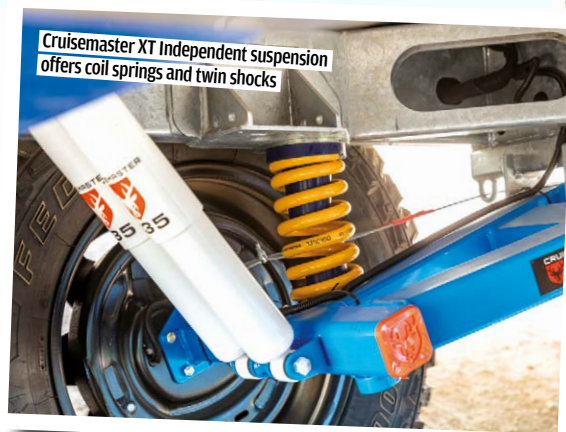
Thankfully, John didn't mind thinking outside the square and came up with a simple, lightweight solution – a removable aluminium step.

During transit, the step attaches to the front of the storage box using quick-release fixings, similar to those found on the tray sides of utes. When at camp, the step is removed from its storage position and attaches to the A-frame with the same style fixings.

This allows the occupants to get easily onto the A-frame, then use the toolbox as the next step to get into, and out of the sleeping quarters. If required, a grab handle can be fitted to the front box for additional support.

The pop-top tent features a 25mm composite fibreglass panel on the roof for its lightweight, strength and thermal properties. Its massive windows and the elevated position allow for plenty of ventilation, even on the warmest of nights at camp.

A single, roof-mounted LED strip light provides more than enough illumination and charging your gadgets is taken care of by a single 12V or twin USB socket located in the corner of the tent.



Cruisemaster XT Independent suspension offers coil springs and twin shocks

RUNS IN THE FAMILY

Just like those that have come before from Condamine Campers, the Compact is built tough to tackle our worst outback tracks and it's also made to last. A one-piece 150 x 50 x 3mm hot-dipped galvanised chassis and drawbar provides the backbone of the sub-floor assembly. Laser-cut outriggers and cross-braces offer additional strength and support while also minimising overall weight.

To balance the overall weight distribution, the two 90L water tanks are positioned fore and aft of the axles. Typical of the rest of the build, plumbing, gas and wiring is as neat as a pin and run in a way to minimise damage from errant sticks and stones.



The slide-out stainless steel kitchen is accessible at any time, even a roadside cuppa



A removable aluminium step attaches to the drawbar to access the rooftop tent



A couple of snaps and the pop-up sleeping quarters are ready for snoozing

PARK IT UP

Once the perfect campsite has been found, the setup time for the Compact has a lot in common with its dimensions – pretty small.

If the awning is not required, it's just a matter of getting it all level before flicking a couple of latches front and rear and lifting the pop-top which raises a full 800mm to reveal a queen-sized, pillow-topped, innerspring mattress. But more on this later (see breakout).

This is all that would be needed for a quick overnighter.

If you are staying for longer, or need some extra protection from the elements, you're going to need to set the awning up. You'll need to do that before raising the pop-top.

I have a bit of a love/hate relationship with awnings. I love the shade and cover they give but hate how bulky they are and how far they protrude from the side of the camper, making them vulnerable to snags and damage.

The 2.5 x 2.5m Square Back Deluxe SupaPeg 270-degree Awning is no different. It's a great awning, but gee whiz, it also sticks out like a sore thumb.

A little different to most other 270-degree awnings that hinge from the rear left corner, the awning on the Compact hinges from the front left. It swings around to give full cover along the near side of the camper, the kitchen, A-frame mounted storage box and the entry/exit point to your sleeping quarters. It's close to perfect, except for its darn size when packed away!

With the awning set up and the pop-top raised, it's time to get the kitchen set up to start cooking dinner. Alternatively, the kitchen and all storage lockers are fully accessible at any point in time, perfect for quick road-side morning tea or lunch stops.

Borrowing heavily from the larger Condamine Camper, the kitchen on the Compact proudly carries on the family tradition. While not having as much pantry storage as its big brother, the Compact still holds its own, especially considering that this camper is only designed for two tourers.

A large stainless steel kitchen pulls out from the front of the camper, complete with a flip-over stainless prep bench, a Dometic three-burner gas cooktop and stainless sink with plumbed hot and cold water.

Another stainless-steel preparation/server tray pulls out from beneath the pantry. At the rear, a fridge slide, large enough to handle up to a 95L fridge takes pride of place.



OFF-GRID POTENTIAL

The Compact has a lot going for it, not only as a quick weekend pleasure machine but also for those more extended forays into the wild when annual leave comes around. Especially when it comes to its off-grid attributes.

Up front in the storage box, there's a single 9kg gas bottle, storage for two 20L jerry cans as well as providing the home for the Girard Instant gas hot water system. Out the front of the toolbox, a hand-held shower will rinse the red dust away.

The filler necks for the twin water tanks can also be found here, and 180L of freshwater is going to keep a couple going for a while, even if they are using the shower.

Keeping the 100Ah of lithium battery at maximum potential is a pair of roof-mounted 250W solar panels. If you prefer to park up in the shade, the Compact comes pre-wired with a solar input for a portable solar panel.

If you think 100Ah of lithium power isn't enough, there's space for another battery to up your capacity to 200Ah.

A Redarc Manager30 battery management system looks after all the charging inputs while the BCDC charger pumps in the amps when driving. A 240V mains point allows you to keep everything topped up at home and ready to go at a moment's notice.

All of the electrical controls, switches, 12V and USB charging points are located in an easily accessible panel above the slide-out kitchen. Perhaps a little inconvenient is the location of the battery, fuses and circuit breakers which is below a lift-up panel at the bottom of the pantry.



Dusty day? A hand-held shower to the rescue



The 100Ah lithium battery has room for a 'friend' in the toolbox



Federal Couragia mud terrain tyres help tackle the rough stuff



With the step in place, close the toolbox lid and bunny-hop up into your bedroom

CTA RATINGS

CONDAMINE CAMPERS COMPACT



MATT WILLIAMS

1. FIT FOR INTENDED PURPOSE	★★★★★
2. INNOVATION	★★★★★
3. SELF-SUFFICIENCY	★★★★★
4. QUALITY OF FINISH	★★★★★
5. BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
6. OFFROAD-ABILITY	★★★★★
7. COMFORTS	★★★★★
8. EASE OF USE	★★★★★
9. VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
10. X-FACTOR	★★★★★

As an Aussie-built unit with a price tag under \$40K, the Compact has a bright future in the smaller camper market



"THE COMPACT HAS A LOT GOING FOR IT. NOT ONLY AS A QUICK WEEKEND PLEASURE MACHINE BUT ALSO FOR THOSE MORE EXTENDED FORAYS INTO THE WILD WHEN ANNUAL LEAVE COMES AROUND."



Big windows mean fantastic ventilation and great views



Keen to go off-grid? So is the Condamine Compact

THE BOTTOM LINE

In a very competitive market segment, the Compact from Condamine Campers can definitely walk tall. It's a 100 per cent Aussie-built camper that's tough, with excellent offroad and off-grid credentials, low tare and heaps of payload and will give you change from \$40K, which has to be a good thing in my books. **CTA**

A tag-along tour is a great way to develop a 'new normal' sense of adventure and make new mates, too



A TASTE FOR ADVENTURE

ADVENTURING LOOKS DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE, BUT THEY ALL START WITH A DESIRE TO EXPERIENCE AND EXPLORE SOMETHING NEW



A LITTLE WHILE back we were settled around a campfire at an archery event chatting with friends about our next trips away. Over the years, we'd all had our own experiences under the stars, so I was a bit surprised when our camp buddies commented that they'd love to come 'adventuring with us'. It struck me that we each had very different perspectives on what it means to get out into the great outdoors.

For me, trips to outback Australia formed the backbone of travel itineraries in my youth. These trips generally involved covering lots of distance over a relatively short period of time, and lots of overnight camping in places where other people were few and far between.

When my husband was growing up, recreational travel entailed members of his geographically dispersed family converging at a remote property somewhere where they'd set

up camp, live off the land hunting, and spend time reconnecting.

These travel habits, which we formed in our youth, helped to define how we prefer to travel today as adults. So we're comfortable clocking-up big distances in remote and regional Australia, isolated from population centres. And we're also happy to stop for three to four days with friends and family to chill out among fellow campers.

For our campfire friends, however, camping looked a lot different to them. It was something that happened close to home, at one of a small handful of locations, and usually in a large family group among a community of other campers. It wasn't that they didn't like the idea of going to new destinations and travelling further afield, they just didn't know where to start. And they were happy to

acknowledge that the uncertainty about how to plan a trip, and what might happen along the way, hindered their ability to break the routine. Tagging along with us promised the safety, security and stability that would make a different type of camping experience seem a bit more manageable.

I have to say that, before that night around the campfire, it wouldn't have occurred to me to describe our family road trips as 'adventuring'. When we set out on the highways and byways of this great country, we're supported by modern communications equipment, well maintained rigs, first aid kits, contingency supplies and a trained bushcraft and survival expert (my husband). We travel on well-surveyed roads; we know their quality before we start; we check meteorological conditions to reduce our chances of being



SHE'LL BE RIGHT

A trip to the snow with your 4x4 has a different set of planning factors



Not everyone can see themselves zip lining over a ravine at 80km/h



Teaching kids how to abseil and rock climb will unleash their inner adventurer



Skin diving for dinner is adventure for some and normal for others

caught out and stranded; we know how to reduce the risks from stinging plants and biting animals; and we tell people where we're going.

Looked at in this context, a journey of a several thousand kilometres into remote Australia looks like a 'walk in the park' when compared to, for example, the experiences of our pioneering forebears. Consider, for instance, the adventurous spirit displayed by 21-year-old Matthew Flinders when, in October 1795, he set off from Sydney Cove, with George Bass and a 14-year-old boy, in an eight-foot long boat to begin his first detailed coastal survey of the newly established colony. His tiny vessel was little bigger than a bathtub!

It wasn't made for open waters and neither Flinders nor his novice crew had any idea what they would encounter. Yet, they succeeded in their endeavour. Moreover, this first taste of adventure gave the young navigator the confidence to do more. And do more he did, culminating in the first circumnavigation of the entire continent in 1801.


There's a famous Chinese proverb that states 'a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step'. But there's also a principle in psychology that tells us that people are hard-wired to avoid uncertainty. While some people are more tolerant of it than others, it's natural to worry, avoid and eliminate uncertainty where possible. There's even a phobia to describe the persistent fear of the unknown.

So it's understandable why we might want to avoid it on a recreational trip. After all, holidays are supposed to be fun, right?

It's any wonder sticking with routine can look like an attractive option.

It's obvious that, when it comes to working out what's an 'adventure' all depends on what you're used to. A walk to the local park can be an adventure if you've never been there before and you don't know what you'll find when you get there. When it comes to overlanding,

one way to break the routine may be to get out there with someone who's done it before, whether it's a competent family friend with a well-equipped rig, or a tag-along tour operator. They can help you develop a 'new normal' for your travel habits, gain confidence and, in so doing, expand your horizons.

However you choose to take things to the next level, one thing's for sure. If you give yourself permission to start 'adventuring', chances are you'll be glad you did. 

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