

In a world where planned obsolescence has become the norm, Evernew vans are still built to last a lifetime.

THE *long* HAUL

PICS JOE PRESS



Think of the number of consumer products whose manufacturer expects you to use them for a lifetime, perhaps even pass them down to your children? Cars? No. Electronic gadgets? Definitely not. You probably don't even need to remove your shoes to count the amount of products that'll stand the test of time.

You won't see it in writing and it probably doesn't make a good business case by modern standards, but the caravans of Evernew, which is currently celebrating its 50th Anniversary, are built for an intended lifespan of 30 years or more.

THE NEED TO ADAPT

This philosophy dates back around 30 years to the early 1980s when Evernew faced a sink or swim decision.

With the caravan industry collapsing and up to 80 per cent of its players shutting their doors or going broke, co-founder Bruce Bailey decided to do without his dealer network, sell direct and custom build.

To succeed with that formula he also needed to build caravans that would last. Approximately 80 per cent of all Evernew pop-tops and caravans are sold by word of mouth and about two thirds of them are bought by former Evernew owners. This is supported by a confidential analysis carried out a few years ago by a leading caravan insurance company that showed of all the policies written, those for Evernew caravans were renewed most frequently.

To find out why, *Caravan World* has spoken to owners (see page 52), spoken at length to Bruce Bailey and visited Evernew's modest factory in West Heidelberg, Vic, established in 1976.

There's no indication of anything special as you enter the industrial site in Crissane Road. Spread over two buildings, Evernew at first sight is a typical small caravan manufacturer, but spend time with its production manager, Darren French, and look deeper into what goes on, and you'll be impressed.

Darren is an electronics engineer whose family has been involved in the aircraft industry. He's also Bruce Bailey's son-in-law and has worked with him to streamline the production process for many years, the last eight on a full-time basis.

For a start, he'll take you to a bare chassis, custom-made for Evernew by Campbellfield-based G&S Chassis, which itself has been in business since 1975.

The robust 150x50mm main bearers and matching A-frame on the offroad chassis that G&S builds for Evernew is not exceptional, but the fabricated cross-bracing every 450mm (18in) for extra torsional rigidity and the additional steel plate bracing in areas subject to the



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Far left: The custom-made chassis receive extra rigidity courtesy of fabricated cross-bracing. **Below:** Evernew has always opted for timber framing over aluminium in the belief that it's more durable over the long term.

greatest flex, certainly is.

Then step inside a partially-finished van and Darren will show you the extra bracing in the walls and the much larger than customary 70mm diameter Oregon roof beams spaced 450mm apart on average and checked into the walls.

Further along the line you'll see up to five separate layers of waterproofing going into the ceiling of the van. As Darren points out, most large caravans spend their life out in the elements and water ingress is the quickest way to shorten their life.

Despite a move to 'flat-pack' pre-cut furniture by higher-volume manufacturers, traditional 'stick' furniture is used in the interior fitout of every Evernew – a necessity for a small volume custom builder – but there are other good reasons, as this traditional construction method and the fitting of bulkheads allows further support for the walls and roof. Most Evernew caravans have solid wood cabinetry, although other materials are available on request.

Finally, the furniture is secured to the frame by steel screws from both the front and back, adding extra strength.

The debate among Australia's most respected offroad caravan manufacturers about aluminium versus timber framing has raged for years, but Darren, with his aeronautical





Top left: Evernew's production manager, Darren French, displays the 70mm Oregon roof beams checked into the walls. **Top right and above:** The Evernew team builds up to 3.5 vans a week.



and engineering background, is firmly on the side of tradition.

"We've looked at aluminium, but over a 30-year lifespan, aluminium is increasingly subject to metal fatigue that wood and steel aren't," he said. "Look at all the old wood-framed aircraft that are out there, while the aluminium ones have to be scrapped every 20 years.

"A steel structure would be fine, but it would be too heavy and timber has the added advantage of allowing some movement with temperature and road surface, so it minimises the chance of other rigid components cracking."

He uses similar reasons for sticking with ribbed, lightweight aluminium exterior cladding, although Evernew's new 50th Anniversary 900 Series caravan uses a new silver Camec product.

"To get the 30-year lifespan we aim for, we have to allow some flexing in the walls, so our cladding is attached in 10in (254mm) sections to allow room for the sheets to move as the van bends and flexes."

Because they are engineered to last, Darren says Evernew can also offer a higher payload.

"We build to individual customer requirements and because many are long-term travellers, while for others their Evernew is also their home, they tend to carry more than most caravanners. When you allow for filling the dual water tanks in ensuite models, and carrying things like portable generators and outboard motors, many people need 500-600kg over the van's Tare weight – sometimes as much as 1000kg."

BESPOKE BEAUTIES

Because every customer is different, so is every Evernew, and Darren says no two are ever the same.

"There is no such thing as an ideal caravan and people's needs change. They have families, they travel as couples, they sometimes re-marry and have different needs and preferences, so we often see the same customers several times, sometimes for larger caravans, sometimes for smaller ones," said Darren.

"While Evernew was building tri-axle

caravans up to 35ft in length in the 1970s for the mining industry, 25-26-footers are generally the largest we make today and our 50th Anniversary E900is caravan at 19ft 10in internal length with a rear separate shower and toilet ensuite now represents what most customers want."

However, being a custom builder, Evernew will build just about anything that the customer wants, from 12ft (3.66m) pop-tops upwards, providing it is feasible from an engineering standpoint.

"There could be an 8-10in variation in where the wheels are located on the chassis, depending on how the caravan is packaged. We believe it's our job to work this out, but some salespeople just take the order and tell the chassis manufacturer to work the loadings. Unfortunately things can get lost in translation between the sale and delivery, and the caravan doesn't work," Darren said.

"We had one customer who came to us with a great idea for his caravan that included a queen-size bed and a shower-toilet in a 12ft van. The only problem was that he had drawn the bed just 3ft long! Eventually we made the van work for him properly at 19ft 6in!

"Others come in with pages of drawings and sketches of the caravan they want us to build them and we do our best to turn their dream into reality.

"We built one with seats 2in bigger to suit a large couple and installed a 'snore-proof' door in another."

The lead time from order to delivery is usually four to six months, depending on what else is on the line at that time, with Evernew's current workforce of 25-30 people typically building from three to 3.5 vans a week, and many customers, often engineers and successful professional people, start planning their van with Evernew a year or more before they retire.

So what, we asked Darren, was the main reason people gave when asked why they purchased an Evernew?

"It works," he said. **cw**