

CAMPERTRAILERS.ORG

- Camper trailers galore
- 3800+ members
- Explore the outback



BIRDS OF A FEATHER

There's a secret society out there for those of you that own camper trailers and foster a love for the Aussie outback.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID COOK

If there's one phrase that you will hear around the campfires of the CamperTrailers.org members and read on their web pages, it's 'like minded people', and with a love of life off the road and the smell of the bush, all enjoyed courtesy of their camper trailers, it's obvious why so many members have gathered together, at least in cyberspace.

CamperTrailers.org is a web-based assemblage of those who find simple pleasure in their camper trailers and the life to which they lead. It was founded on September 30, 2001 when a Sydney-based 4WD enthusiast bought himself an Ultimate camper trailer. Ari Palsson wondered if there were others who were equally as keen as himself, and it seemed to him the only way to find out was to float a web-based community.

He created a group on Yahoo and slowly began to pick up

adherents. The growth though, was slow. It was not until after their website was launched in February 2004 that the group began to feel strong enough to organise a 'national' get together and by mid-2005 they had 1600 members. In the three years since then that number has more than doubled. In April this year the website recorded more than 1.5 million hits for the month and the group welcomed its 3500th member. As this is written membership exceeds 3800 and is growing at about 20 per week.

Obviously they are doing something right. So just what is it that makes this group so successful and popular?

For a start, right now there's a blossoming interest in camper trailers. The option of seeing Australia without the inconvenience of having to erect a tent every time you stop, and without having to haul the bulk of a caravan around yet

still retain a few comforts seems to have struck a chord with an ever larger number of people. The capacity to be able to tow virtually anywhere your 4WD can go is an added attraction.

You can't head out of any major city in the nation today without seeing campers somewhere along the road. Where there might have been 30 to 40 manufacturers of camper trailers two years ago, the CamperTrailers.org website now lists 197 manufacturers in Australia, and the list is being added to all the time. Many of these manufacturers require an order in advance as they're flat out and you can wait for anything up to six months (or more) for your trailer.

So the timing was right, but obviously there's more. The principle reason for the success is that the website and the group are run by keen camper trailer enthusiasts, who understand what it is that camper trailer owners want to read about and enjoy, and they make sure they provide it.

Ari Palsson is no longer associated with the group, his interests having moved on and he's now involved elsewhere, but during his tenure as the 'owner' of the group (a term Yahoo applies to those who start groups on their platform) he had a number of knowledgeable members obviously keen to assist, and the group's three leaders have now evolved into the position of co-owners: Kevin Phillips, Rob Sanderson and Ron Dickson.

Phillips, from the ACT, came into camper trailers from 4WDing. "I bought a second hand Trak Shak and haven't looked back," he admits. After a period with an Aussie Swag, which he bought new in 2005, he's moved on to a Trakmaster off road van.

Sanderson is in many ways the public face of the group. It is he who welcomes every new member with a personal email and publicly on the website. The group sanctions a number of gatherings through the year, including a major 'national' rally in mid-NSW every October. There are get togethers in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, with talk of some for the WA members. At these there are organised activities and plenty of opportunities to talk campers and the outdoors around campfires and billy tea. In the past year there have been 14 sanctioned gatherings around the country.

As Phillips said at his Copeton Waters (Inverell) welcoming speech at the October 2007 national rally, "One can conclude that not only do we like talking about camper trailers and camping but we also like getting out and doing it."

In 2008 the national gathering headed to Peak Hill (see sidebar), south of the Copeton Waters site of the previous three get togethers to hopefully attract more Victorian and South Australian members. In 2009 it will move to Nyngan, in NSW's central west.

Interestingly, camper trailers aren't exclusively associated



with Australia, and in their own forms are popular in South Africa, but while there is not one local manufacturer in the USA, it is the biggest source of hits on the CamperTrailers.org website, with even more hits than from Australia. And probably even more uniquely, the third biggest source of hits is China. There are also members in such places as Turkey and Dubai, where people are building their own trailers based on information gleaned from the site.

“By any measure, I am certain that the health and growth of our group has far exceeded Ari’s original expectations,” Phillips said at Copeton Waters. “Above all, enjoy the lifestyle, the company, and this great country that the camper trailer god has given us to explore!”

If you’re interested in camper trailers then this is the website and group for you. You’ll get smatterings of it elsewhere and it will always be incidental, but at CamperTrailers.org it’s number one, and if you can’t find an answer to your problems here then you’re probably not going to find it anywhere. 📷

GETTING TOGETHER

As a national group, the CamperTrailers.org people figured there ought to be a national gathering, where the names seen on postings can be matched with faces, vehicles and trailers.

September 29 to October 3 saw the sleepy town of Peak Hill, in NSW’s central west, receive a financial shot in the arm when 74 camper trailers and more than 180 people filled the local showgrounds. It was the biggest gathering yet for the CamperTrailers group, with attendees from all states except WA, and by all accounts the most successful.

Attendees were kept busy with workshops on solar power, batteries, GPS systems, bio-diesel, wheel bearing maintenance, satellite TV and camp cooking, as well as tai chi, tours of the local gold mine, tame the toilet tent (trying to wrestle the uncooperative structure back into its bag - 10.5-seconds was the best this year), a BBQ breakfast put on by Dave the (local) butcher and a great night with local band ‘Give ‘Em Anything’.

All up, the week raised \$702 for the local pre-school, an estimated \$450 for the local junior football club, an estimated \$4500 towards a new amenities block for the showground and put an estimated \$20,000 into a small community that’s been doing it tough in the drought.

It was a win-win week for all concerned.

