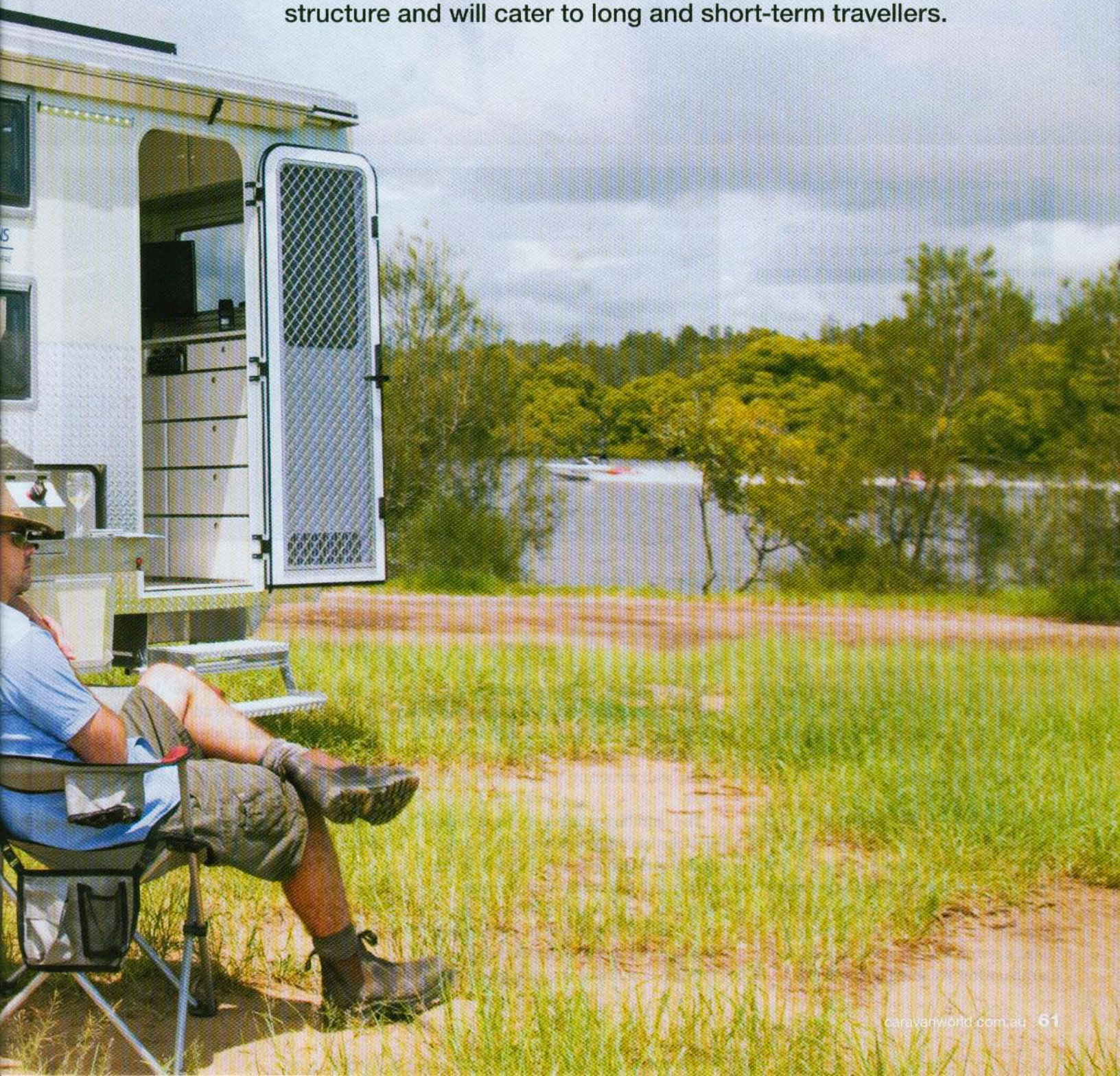


WORDS AND PICS DAVID GILCHRIST

SPIRITED INNOVATION

This custom offroader from Free Spirit features a new design structure and will cater to long and short-term travellers.





IN BRIEF

- Innovative van with new construction materials
- Custom-built for the NT outback
- Ready for fun and business with a laptop dock

RATINGS

Comforts
Build quality
Value for money





Innovation, true game changing innovation, doesn't happen very often. But that's what Qld's Free Spirit Caravans is aiming for. I recently took the company's custom-built 5.21m (17ft) Free Spirit for a trial run on the Sunshine Coast to see what its latest had to offer.

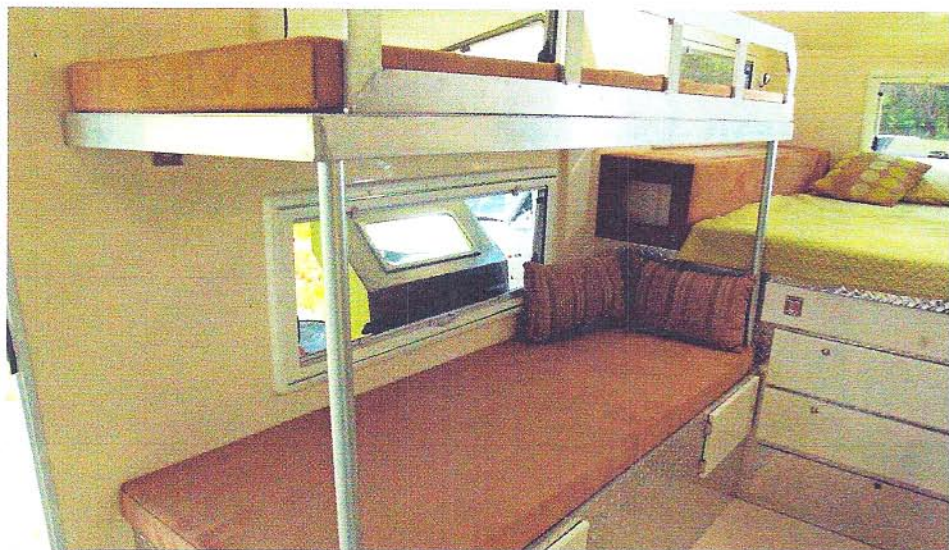
Free Spirit director Ralf Brosch and his team are dedicated to providing "lightweight, long lasting, tough and very capable offroad vans". The first glance suggested this van was right on the money.

With its new owners hailing from the NT, this van needed to suit a range of travelling options, from acting as the base on weekend hunting trips, to becoming a home-away-from-home for extended family camping. This meant original design was key.

In order to give the Free Spirit a run for its money, we hitched it to a dual-cab Holden 4WD. The 3.5L V6 engine purred as if there was nothing trailing behind it, which is just the way it should be when you head off into the wide-open spaces of the Australian outback.

NEW DESIGN

Towards the end of 2010, Free Spirit made the decision to keep its van weights down by using a strong, yet lightweight, aluminium chassis. In order to solve the potential problem of an aluminium chassis giving way at welded joints, the manufacturer patented its one-piece



chassis built from cold rolled aluminium – no welded joints along the main chassis rails.

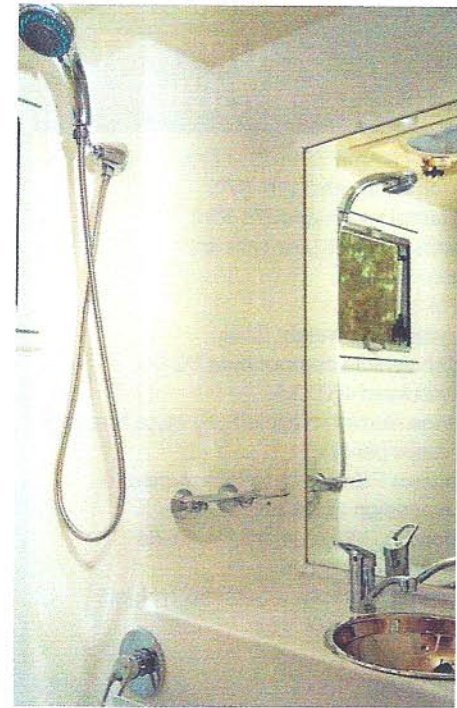
Looking for further innovation, Free Spirit has patented a method of incorporating aluminium framework within the composite walls during the fibreglassing process. This means its aluminium framework is an integral part of the wall structure, rather than added later.

The plumbing and all of the necessary electrical wiring is laid in channelling and fibreglassed within the wall during construction. This provides greater durability and longevity because the electrical cabling is well protected and less likely to move or rub when the van is rattling along some rougher roads.

Top: Full outdoor kitchen – complete with fridge and freezer – is ideal for outdoor living. **Above:** Bench seats convert into bunk beds.

Even after all of these new designs, Ralf's team kept innovating. Out went the company's standard aluminium flooring, and in came a high-impact-resistant one-piece floor. This stuff will take some solid knocks.

Speaking of knocks, a generous and robust stoneguard provides plenty of protection for the exterior wall panels that would normally cop the occasional belting from a low hanging branch or a rock flung from a tyre.



MEASURING UP

I LIKED

- One-piece honeycomb flooring
- Cold rolled one-piece chassis rails
- Fibreglass sandwich construction
- Excellent internal and external storage

I WOULD HAVE LIKED

- More space around the dining table
- Provision for small internal kitchen

OUTDOOR LIVING

This offroad Free Spirit is all about what goes on outside. Facing some typically tropical NT conditions, the buyers demanded some exterior comforts. Consequently, Free Spirit's design could best be described as a camper/caravan hybrid.

"This is like a campervan within a caravan," Ralf Brosch said. "Having a whole pull-out kitchen, this van has enough facilities to allow for a long period of camping without re-supply."

The pull-out kitchen Ralf speaks of means there is no kitchen inside the van. The entire kitchen, including bench, fridge, freezer, cooker and pantry, is outside. Also on the outside are incredibly

Clockwise from top left: Plenty of room to relax; shower/toilet combo; the slide-out dining table comfortably caters for four; no space is wasted.



REVIEW

form two bench seats at the very sturdy slide-out aluminium table. A good-sized shower/toilet combo sits in the rear offside corner.

Given it is primarily designed for remote camping, it makes sense that this van uses low-consumption LED lights inside and out. There are even underbody LEDs, which are sure to help you see that croc sneaking up on you from out of a tropical billabong.

Any travellers keen to get well offroad to do some hunting need not worry about the safety of their weapon – the van includes a gun safe secured by two separate electronic combination locks.

WORK AND PLAY

If you need to get some work done while you're out camping – and many people do – this van features a whizz-bang mobile office, complete with laptop dock, printer, wireless internet, wireless mouse and keyboard.

When using the laptop, all you need

do is sit back with the wireless keyboard and mouse and use the TV instead of your laptop screen. This means your workstation is essentially wherever you sit inside the van. The TV aerial boosts the Next G signal for mobiles and internet.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With so many similar caravan and camper trailers being rolled out every year, it's refreshing and exciting to see some genuine innovation and outside-the-box thinking. This van can cater for all kinds of travellers, from quick weekenders to long-term offroaders.

While its design might not be for everyone – the wholly exterior kitchen may be an acquired taste – it must be remembered that it is a custom design and could have any number of features changed or specified at the design stage.

Either way, it is hard to deny that as a company that prides itself on originality and can-do design, Free Spirit is rapidly making a name for itself. [www.freesprit.com.au](#)

Right, top to bottom: Copious amount of easily accessible storage; all external doors are very well sealed and protected; towing the Free Spirit is a breeze – and it looks great.

