

Steve's Straight-Talking Caravan Buying Guide

The questions to ask, the traps to avoid and the numbers that matter. Written by a second generation caravan man, not a marketing team.

2026 Edition



G'day, I'm Steve

My dad manufactured caravans, so I grew up around them and learned vans from the build side before I ever sold one. I've been in this industry 22 years, and I run Sunrise Caravans at Burpengary with my own name and face on it.

Here's what a lot of people don't realise: a big chunk of vans can't legally carry what the buyer plans to put in them. That's the truth nobody at the caravan show wants to talk about, and it's why I wrote this guide.

We've helped more than 1,500 families into the right van. The right van starts with three questions. They're the same ones I'll ask you if you walk into our yard:

- Where will you travel with the van?
- Where is the caravan going to be parked? Do you have enough room on your driveway?
- Are you after single or tandem axle?

Keep your answers in mind as you read. Every section of this guide comes back to them.

1. Weights first, because this is where people get caught

The most expensive mistake buyers make is falling in love with a van before checking whether their car can legally tow it. Write down your vehicle's braked towing capacity, towball download limit, GVM and GCM. The van's ATM must sit under your tow capacity, and the loaded ball weight must sit under your towball limit.

Payload is ATM minus tare. A realistic payload is 300 to 600kg for couples and 600 to 900kg for families. Water is 1kg per litre, so a full 100L tank is 100kg before you've packed a single shirt. Add gas bottles, a full fridge, bikes and clothes and it climbs fast.

Every van we sell comes with its weighbridge docket, so you know its real weight, not a brochure guess. For your loaded weights, run the whole rig over a public weighbridge. It's the only way to know what you're really towing.



Run your own numbers through our 5-check calculator.

Scan the code or visit

www.sunrisecaravans.com.au/towing-weights-cheat-sheet. Pop in your car and van numbers and it tells you straight whether the combo is legal.

Nothing you type is saved or sent to us.

2. Layouts and berths

A couple doesn't need six berths, and a family with teenagers doesn't want to share one bed. Think about where the bikes, fishing rods and camp chairs will live. Island beds are popular because you can walk around them, but a rear bed can free up storage and a separate kids' zone. Bring a tape measure and check bed lengths and bathroom space for your tallest traveller.

Tip: write down your must haves before you visit. Permanent bed, separate shower and toilet, big fridge, bunks. Rank them. It stops a shiny van talking you out of what you actually need.



The Sunset Family Haven at our Burpengary yard. Step inside and check the layout.

3. Power: 12V, 24V and 48V systems

If you want to free camp, power is everything. 12V systems are common and affordable. 24V suits bigger loads and larger fridges. 48V is the premium setup for long stays off grid and running the aircon of an evening. Match the battery to what you'll actually use in a day, not to a salesperson's optimism.

We design and install 12V, 24V and 48V systems in our own Burpengary workshop, so the advice comes from the people who wire them, not from a brochure.

Tip: ask for a written power audit showing daily amp hours used, solar input and usable battery capacity. If the numbers don't stack up, neither will your trip.

4. Off road versus on road

On road vans are lighter, cheaper and perfect for bitumen and well kept gravel. Off road vans carry a stronger chassis, independent suspension, higher clearance and tougher protection. If your plans include the Cape, the Gibb or remote Queensland stations, off road is non negotiable. If you're doing sealed highways between caravan parks, an off road van can be more weight than your tow vehicle needs.

Tip: be honest about where you'll really travel in the first three years. Buy for the trip you'll actually take, not the one in the ad.



The Sunrise Platinum 17ft off road van at Burpengary.

5. New versus pre loved

Every new van we sell carries a 2-year manufacturer's warranty, current compliance and your choice of inclusions and colours. A pre loved van can save you money, but check it properly: water damage, rust, axle condition, appliance age and registration history. A used van with a known service history beats a cheap van with hidden leaks every time.

Tip: budget about 10% of the purchase price for setup, accessories and safety gear in the first year, even on a new van.

6. The walk through

Open every cupboard, drawer and hatch. Run the taps and check underneath for leaks. Turn on the aircon, the fridge and the hot water. Look at the joins in the cabinetry, the hinges and the sealant around windows and roof fittings. Press the floor near the sink and shower for soft spots. A good dealer will welcome a thorough look, not rush you past it.

Tip: take photos and a video as you go. After three vans they all blur into one.

7. Finance, insurance and rego in Queensland

Caravan finance works like a car loan, usually over a longer term. Compare the comparison rate, not the advertised one, and ask about early repayment fees. Our finance partner is Finetic, and they can talk you through the options in plain English before you commit.

Insurance should cover your agreed or market value, your contents and roadside assistance. In Queensland a caravan changing hands needs a safety certificate. None of this is exciting, but getting it wrong is expensive.

Tip: sort a finance pre approval before you start negotiating. It protects your budget and strengthens your position.

8. The mistakes I see again and again

Buying too big too soon is a regret I hear a lot. So is trusting a brochure payload instead of a real weighbridge weight. The other traps: cheap suspension that fails on outback roads, batteries too small for the off grid plan, skipping an independent inspection, and buying from a dealer with no workshop to look after you after the sale.

Tip: if a deal feels rushed, it usually is. Go home, run your numbers through the 5-check calculator, and sleep on it. The right van will still be the right van tomorrow.

9. Your 10-point pre purchase checklist

- ☐ My tow vehicle's braked towing capacity is confirmed in the manual.
- ☐ The van's ATM is under my tow capacity with a safe buffer.
- ☐ The ball weight fits my towbar and vehicle limits.
- ☐ I've worked out a realistic payload including water, gas and gear.
- ☐ The layout suits the travellers and the storage we need.
- ☐ The power system matches how we camp, parks or free camping.
- ☐ The chassis and suspension match the roads I plan to travel.
- ☐ I've inspected for water damage, rust and working appliances.
- ☐ I understand the warranty, servicing and spare parts situation.
- ☐ Finance, insurance and registration costs are all budgeted.

Why buyers choose Sunrise

We're a family owned dealership at 290 Eastern Service Rd, Burpengary, and we've been at it since 2010. One showroom, one yard, and more than 1,500 families sent off on their trips. We run 8 or more group trips a year with our owners, plus one big annual trip.

- Every new van carries a 2-year manufacturer's warranty
- Every van comes with its weighbridge docket, so you know its real weight
- Every handover happens at our Burpengary yard, where we walk you through the whole van before you tow away
- Our own on site service centre
- Insurance repair work done in our workshop
- 12V, 24V and 48V power systems designed and installed in our own workshop
- Annexes and awnings fitted on site
- Warranty work away from home handled through a national warranty network
- Australia wide delivery
- Finance through Finetic, explained in plain English

What to do next

Book a showroom tour at www.sunrisecaravans.com.au/book-tour and come walk through the vans with us. Bring your tow vehicle details and I'll tell you straight what it can and can't tow.

Can't make it in? Send us your car through the tow check on our towing weights cheat sheet and we'll check it against the vans on the yard: www.sunrisecaravans.com.au/towing-weights-cheat-sheet

Or just ring us: (07) 3888 4455. No BS. No pressure.



The Burpengary showroom. Come and walk through the vans.