ROOM TO GROW

Words
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When Bushtracker co-owner Matthew Kurvink felt the pains of a growing family, he decided to future-proof his next van, the indomitable 24

Pics Phil Cerbu

AS SEEN IN CARAVAN WORLD

MEASURING UP

PROS
- Near gas-less design
- Quality finish
- Good after sales support

CONS
- Requires a US ute to tow

"Aside from trialling new products, Kurvink also wants to test the way we live with caravans. *LP gas is a dangerous substance, especially when stored under compression...*"

BUSHTRACKER 24

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Overall length 9.15m (30ft)
External body length 7.32m (24ft)
External body width 2.4m (8ft)
Travel height 3.1m (10ft)
Internal height 2.03m (6ft 6in)
Tare 3840kg
ATM 4495kg
Ball weight 225kg

EXTERNAL
Frame Aluminium box section welded and double riveted
Cladding Fibreglass
Chassis Steel
Suspension Simplicity LSC (Load Sharing Coil)
Brakes Electric
Wheels 20" (matched to tow vehicle)
Water 450L (90L potable drinking / 360L non-potable)
Battery 900A lithium / 3000W inverter / 120A charger / 2 x 50A DC to DC chargers
Solar 1,400W (6 x 180W panels, 4 x 80W panels)
Air-conditioner 2 x Dometic Ibis 4 inverter
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control N/A due to it being standard on the tow vehicle

INTERNAL
Cooking Thetford twin induction
Fridge Dometic RUC8408 224L compressor
Microwave Panasonic convection
Toilet Thetford porcelain bowl
Shower Separate shower / toilet (across rear of van)
Lighting LED smart lighting with customisable switching and voice Siri control
Hot water Gas/electric

PRICE AS SHOWN
On application

PRICE FROM
$144,500

ADDITIONAL OPTIONS FITTED
2 x Outdoor showers (near side / off side)
Grey water tank 90L
Water sterilisation unit (twin filter & UV)
Electric awning
Webasto diesel heater
3 x electric-opening skylight hatches
Daewoo mini washing machine and dryer combo
Dometic 17 bottle dual zone wine fridge
Blackbutt timber benchtops
Nespresso coffee machine on slide
Ice maker installed on slide
Dometic slide out kitchen with large storage drawer above
Internal 32" TV / external 22" TV
Fusion Apollo head unit with 2 x internal speakers, 2 x external speakers, 2 x sub-woofers
Winegard ConnecT mobile wifi / 4G

MORE INFORMATION
To enquire about this caravan, please visit www.bushtracker.com.au or call 07 5476 5833

Caravan World has always had a love affair with Bushtracker. Like many Queensland based custom caravan manufacturers, the Kunda Park company always pushes the limits of what can be done with our homes away from home.

Known for low-volume bespoke caravans, the wait can be a year or more for a new build but the time is spent where it matters – building the van well. Owners are invited to be more than just a buyer, they become part of the family and fabric of what Bushtracker does. Ideas are shared from existing owners and personal touches are welcome, though there are some limitations. To prevent a potential liability leaving the factory the team limits builds to known chassis specifications and standardised body sizes. With most buyers on their third van at least, these limitations rarely need enforcing. Buyers tend to know what will work, and massage their dreams into a popular size and weight van.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A wine fridge is one of the luxurious extras; it's a dream build for director Matthew Kurvink; there's plenty of storage for all the family; it's built to be tough

What, however, happens when the wish-list gets too long? The 24.

When planning his next build, Bushtracker Director, Matthew Kurvink started by writing down his dreams. Things like being totally gas-less, a wine fridge, coffee machine, ice maker, Winegard wifi, privacy for the kids; more than enough water, AC and storage as well as a rather heavy hardwood benchtop. The problem was keeping it under 3500kg ATM. As soon as Kurvink realised that part of his dream was a touch too far fetched, the decision was made to go to 4495kg, the weight limit of his chosen suspension and coupling. That allowed almost all his dreams to come true.

THE BOSS' BUILD

Kurvink invests heavily in his new builds, with each new caravan becoming part of the show-circuit when not on remote excursions. Being close to his key suppliers allows Kurvink a chance to properly test the latest technology before putting it into mainstream manufacture. A great example is the Ibis4 air conditioners from Dometic. The 24 provides Bushtracker with a chance to test how these popular lightweight units handle a big volume van. Although Dometic suggested two for the size of the 24, Kurvink has trialled running just one to a great result in this well-insulated caravan. Fantastic news for new buyers who can realise the saving of only one, should they want.

Aside from trialling new products, Kurvink also wants to test the way we live with caravans. LP gas is a dangerous substance, especially when stored under compression like it is in the bottles we tend to strap to the drawbar of our vans. Plus, it's not renewable. It is however, a powerful heating source, so has been

AS SEEN IN CARAVAN WORLD

"The weight was without sway and barely noticeable when towing to and fro on the highways. It was noticeable, though not too limiting, when going up Newman's Track to Mount Terrible"

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Bushtracker 24 is designed for all the family; a heavy duty hitch is needed; it features the impressive Load Sharing Coil suspension

relied on for hot-water services for decades. Now that power storage technology has come of age, we are on the cusp of a major change, one that Kurvink embraces.

The hot water system in the 24 can run gas-less and the cooktop is powered solely by electricity, making the inside of the 24 properly gas-less. That is not to say it doesn't carry gas, as the outside kitchen still burns LP gas and the hot-water system can run on it, but soon Kurvink plans to trial an electric BBQ and an electricity-only hot water system.

CONSTRUCTION

A highlight in any Bushtracker is the build. A fully welded alloy frame on a steel chassis makes the skeleton tough, with a traditional, repeatable production method. Beyond that are some clever touches.

The chassis and A-frame are 4mm all the way to just behind the suspension mounting points, where it becomes 3mm. The hangers for things like the fresh and grey water tanks are on the floor frame, not the main chassis rails, meaning the tanks' lowest points are well above the bottom edge of the chassis rails.

The body is clad with 3mm thick fibreglass panels that are patch repairable and with a regular polish will look fantastic for years.

The internal walls are laminated CNC-cut ply with customisable finishes. Between the skins is cut-to-measure solid, fire-resistant insulation. I was lucky enough to see a few Bushtrackers in build and the routing of the wiring was exacting, as was the insulation.

FAMILY FIRST

The 24 is not just big on the outside, it's massive internally, with an emphasis on a growing family. This means storage has to be plentiful and the layout thoughtful of inquisitive hands. The Dometic 17 bottle dual zone wine-fridge is lockable and located low in the kitchen to aid weight balance.

The Blackbutt hardwood dinette and benchtops are really only an option for people committed to a heavy caravan as the benchtop alone weighed in around 60kg, but it looks fantastic and will handle the wear and tear kids will throw at it.

The triple bunks are 2m long and have a light, 12v charging plugs and a fan each plus a massive window. Privacy is by a black-out curtain.

The ensuite has a separate shower, toilet and basin with a washing machine and plenty of storage. The finishing here is exemplary with a tile-like laminate feature the back wall and a good sized mirror over the bench.

POWER HUNGRY

Builders of family vans must consider that kids chew through power. The endless number of screens clasped to their little fingers do not charge themselves and when they run out, all hell can break loose so Kurvink chose to fit as many solar panels as possible on the roof around the Ibis4's, with total capacity coming to 1400W. They feed through an Enerdrive BMS capable of a whopping 120A charging. It features app control and monitoring as well the capacity to control the AC remotely and twin DC-DC charge controllers through the twin 50A Anderson plugs. The filtered power heads to a mammoth 900Ah lithium battery bank that in our five days on the road never dipped below 60 per cent. Considering that it ran the fridge, the stove, AC and the hot water for the family of five, that's massively impressive.

USB chargers litter the walls internally and wireless chargers are built into the bedhead – a great feature that considers where mobile phone technology is headed. 240V is available throughout internally and outside near the kitchen. Powering them is a 3000W pure-sine inverter also from Enerdrive which can handle the existing gear and any typical household appliances with ease.

The fridge is a new model from Dometic too. It is tropical rated, has 224 litres of capacity and uses wire racks to allow the internal fan to move the air around your food more freely. Like a household fridge, it has a veggie drawer on the bottom, made possible by the compressor living at the top of the unit. An LCD screen allows users to quickly gauge the temp inside and, with the contemporary styling matching the look of the vans' decorm, it looks great.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★★★½☆☆
"Hard to judge but good with the inclusions fitted"

TOWABILITY
★★★★½☆☆☆☆☆
"Requiring a big tow-rig adds cost but on and off-road, the 24 towed brilliantly"

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★½☆
"Hard to beat"

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
★★★★★★★½☆☆
"Big beds all-round, lots of power outlets and space make this a fantastic family tourer"

LIVEABILITY
★★★★★★★★½☆
"Immensely liveable with more mod-cons than a new apartment"

CUSTOMER CARE
★★★★★★★★½☆
"Warranty is better than most as is apparent after sales service"

SELF SUFFICIENCY
★★★★★★★★½☆
"Remote water systems and oodles of power make this near perfect"

INNOVATION
★★★★★★★½☆☆
"Bushtracker are pushing the boundaries with no gas inside the van and the plan for no gas at all"

X-FACTOR
★★★★★★★★½☆
"This van drips innovation, quality and an enviable finish — unbelievable"

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The main bed has storage on either side; a hardwood dinette will handle the wear and tear of family life; each bunk has a light, charging port and fan; tile-like laminate gives the bathroom a classy touch

THIRSTY WORK

Power is one thing but without water, remote holidays wouldn't be possible so the team hung five – yes, five – fresh water tanks, a dedicated drinking tank and a grey water tank between the chassis rails. Totalling 350 litres for general water use, 90 litres for drinking and 90 litres for the grey when full, the 24 carries a lot of weight. Often an issue when the tanks are placed either too far forward or rearwards, connections between the water tanks ensures the substantial weight is evenly distributed. Each tank can be isolated by way of ball-valves.

Filling the tanks is the usual affair with a mains-pressure system on the drinking system for use in parks. Getting water remotely is a particular interest of mine and it seems to be Kurvink's too as he installed a double filter system, UV steriliser and a lift pump for drawing water from creeks, lakes etc.

KING COILS

Suspended off the 4mm main chassis rails is one of the most impressive new suspensions on the market, the Load Sharing Coil (LSC) from Simplicity Axles. Using progressive rate coil springs, the new design is softer on light loads than the traditional leaf design Simplicity uses in its load sharing suspension, but still has the capacity to suspend a gargantuan 4495kg.

Like a traditional independent system, there is no axle linking the right to left sides of the van. This allows for great clearance down the centre of the van but unlike what you see from the likes of AL-KO and Cruisemaster, the wheels either side are joined by a central pivot. Using the central pivot, the articulation of the system is unparalleled. Each wheel has the ability to absorb a bump or lower to a falling surface like the traditional systems but there is a massive difference. As a wheel either rises on a bump or falls to a dip, the other wheel on the joined side reacts in the opposite direction. For instance, should you be driving through a dry river bed like we found in our Flinders-Gammon ranges trip, and the front wheel is compressed up the bank, the pair of wheels pivots with the front rising forcing the rear down. The amount of travel is impressive, with the wheels able to fully fill the wheel arches or drop an astonishing amount, keeping them in constant contact with the ground.

Inching down steep surfaces requires a good braking system as well as good tyres. The 24 has both, of course, but they are useless if the tyres lose contact with the ground. With Load Sharing from Simplicity, you're assured of better ground contact giving more grip for braking and a safer tow.

"USB chargers litter the walls internally and *wireless chargers are built into the bedhead*"

TOP TUG

Unfortunately, Nissan America has stopped producing the impressive Titan XD Diesel you see here. The news arrived only days after our trip concluded and is a real shame as the refinement and styling of the XD is a step above most other US based trucks I have sampled. There are still a number available for sale through importer ASV, and secondhand units pop up fairly often on popular car sales sites online.

The XD doesn't pack the ridiculous tow capacity of some of the category like the Silverado or Ram 2500 with only 5443kg, but it's enough for the 24. Importantly owners can make use of the 1179kg payload while still legally being able to tow a 3500kg van, something the popular Nissan Patrol and Toyota Land Cruiser struggle to do without a GVM upgrade.

The Titan has 231kW and 752Nm of torque. The power runs through a six speed gearbox which gives the Titan one of the most car-like drives of its category, though its car-like fuel capacity is an issue.

98 litres of fuel is simply not enough when using an observed 22 litres per hundred km driven with the 24 in tow. Kurvink found a simple and elegant solution by way of a bed-mounted 200 litre auxiliary tank. That gave the Titan the range needed to keep up with the rest of the team.

SUPPORT

Some of you will know that I led the charge for the adoption of the controversial Customer Care criteria in reviews. The reasoning was to try to help you understand how the builder compares on things like warranty and after sales service. It's a hard area to judge due to vague and sometimes illegal warranty information supplied by builders, but is already helping change the industry for the better while giving you a clearer understanding on your rights. You can read John Ford's reporting on how the criterion is progressing in his report on page 68.

Within the Bushtracker community the company has an unparalleled reputation. The company founded an un-moderated forum for customers to share experiences, ask questions and report back on suggested changes. I spent quite some time trawling through the years of published work and found no complaints that alarmed me.

Bushtracker provides a 24 month warranty on the construction and materials and a 10 year warranty on the chassis frame. This is more than most, especially on the frame which is often only around three to five years. A top effort by the team that clearly shows confidence and pride in the work they do and the products they supply.

FAMILY VALUE

A base Bushtracker 24 starts at only $144,500 picked up from the factory. I think that's a relative bargain compared to other vans of its size. Unfortunately though, I cannot score it on what it could be. We judge on the price as reviewed.

I tried squeezing the driveaway price from Kurvink but can only report it as somewhere over $200,000 but south of $250,000. The factory will price a replacement for you but with this being the first of its kind, we were told a few details may have been added and changed in development that may not have been accurately accounted for.

Is that great value? That's hard to gauge and I suspect many will react negatively to the price without truly appreciating what went into it. I've sampled only two other vans in this price range and both also blew me away with the build and inclusions. Although possibly an unpopular opinion, I will say this 24 is a better than fair price for what you get.