

Buying a Used Caravan

Buying a second-hand caravan can save you money, but it requires extra diligence to avoid hidden problems. Here's what you need to know to make an informed purchase:

Supplementary Documents required

- VSB1 Revision 6 Road Vehicle Standards (Available on the Caravan Help website).

1. The Paperwork

- VIN Matches chassis and registration Papers

2. Define Your Needs and Lifestyle

- Travel Goals:** Will you use the caravan for short weekend trips, long vacations, or full-time living?
- Family Size:** Ensure the caravan has enough sleeping spaces and seating for everyone.
- Destinations:** Consider whether you'll travel on highways, explore off-road locations, or stay in caravan parks.
- Frequency of Use:** Determine how often you'll use the caravan to balance cost with features.

3. Exterior

Towing and stabilising

- Check the tow hitch operates smoothly and locks securely
- Check the hitch is compatible with your vehicle
- Check for damage and rust
- Check if the jockey wheel raises and lowers with ease
- Test jockey wheel bearings
- Check the stabilisers and ensure they're easy to deploy

Roof

- Check for leaks or poor seals
- Check for fading paint, rust and scratches
- Check tv aerial
- Check ladder to roof
- Check air conditioner unit
- Check solar panels
- Ensure there are no signs of sagging, damage, or potential leaks.

Walls

- Check for stone damage, rust and bends
- Check straightness of wall and chassis
- Check seals around windows. Doors and vents
- Look for dents, scratches, rust, or cracks.
- Check the panels for discolouration to spot previous repairs
- Look for any holes in the panels (no matter how small)
- Check for out of place stickers or graphics as this can be a sign of hidden damage
- Check the seals around windows, doors, and joints for wear or leaks.

Windows and lockers

- Check all windows for scratches, cracks and condensation
- Open windows to check they aren't blown
- Check the window seals for splits or faults
- Make sure there are no cracks in the external locker boxes
- Check the locker door locks all have barrels
- Look inside all lockers and check the hinges are all intact
- Check for any suspicious smells in lockers
- Check all the seals for locker doors are not split.

Chassis and A frame

- Signs of rust, cracks and scrapes
- Unusual sounds when you rock the caravan
- Look along side to make sure its straight
- Any sign of rust on chassis
- Check undercarriage for rust (most will be galvanised steel)
- Look for any splits in the a-frame cover
- Check for rust, bends, or cracks in the chassis. (this applies the brakes when you brake in your car)
- Check that there is a breakaway cable and that it's not damaged
- Check the hitch head mechanism operates as it should
- Check the jockey wheel bar is not bent and can be wound up and down
- Make sure the tyre on the jockey wheel is in good condition

Awnings and Canvas

- Seals in good condition
- Awning opens/closes easily
- No sign of mould on any canvas
- Visual signs of damage/repairs

Wheels and tyres

- Make sure all the tyres are in date
- Check tyres for cracks or bulges
- Check the tread (1.6mm minimum)
- All the wheels should be the same (it can cause serious damage whilst towing)
- Tyres in good condition
- Tread
- Wear indicators
- Even wear
- Previous repairs or punctures

Brakes and Bearings

- Check brake pads/shoes
 - Check hand brake if installed
 - Unusual sounds when caravan rolls slowly
 - Type of brake system
- Check bearing movement

Suspension

- Inspect shock absorbers for wear
- Check compression
- Unusual sounds when being used
- Check for oil or other liquids around the shock absorber
- Check for rust

lights and electrics

- Check the brake lights, road lights and side lights all work
- Make sure the indicators and reverse lights work
- Check the light clusters for cracks, water or condensation
- Check the 12-pin plug is present and not bent
- Check the 12-pin plug is not corroded
- Check the cables and sockets are not exposing any wires
- Inside the battery box ensure the battery terminals are not corroded
- Check external power points and aerial works

Water Tanks

- Water Tanks – how many
- Size of water tanks
- Inspect wear on bottom of water tank

Gas Bottles and Connections

- Does the gas work
- Check seals and connectors
- Check date stamp on gas bottle for age
- Gas bottles correctly fitted and stamped

Pop Tops

- Easily raise and lower the roof
- Check for leaks and holes
- Check for wear on canvas and seals
- Struts for pop top in good condition

4. Interior**Frame**

- Knock the walls to check for hollow spots and cracks
- Look at overall shape of interior frame for bends

Water Ingress

- Any presence of a musty smell
- Check for water stains around walls and windows
- Check to see if any leaks have been plugged
- Check for soft walls or ceilings, and a musty smell.
- Use a damp meter to detect hidden moisture.

Insects

- Check for signs of insects and rodent presence around kitchen and sleeping areas

Seals

- Inspect and feel the seals in all walls and windows
- Check how the furniture is connected to the walls

Appliances

- Check gas connections
- Test hotplate and oven
- Check water connections
- Test taps and water flow
- Check seals
- Check fridge
- Test electrical sockets
- Test Air Conditioner
- Inspect electrical tags for compliance and age

Bathroom

- Check if shower, toilets, taps and sink work
- Check plumbing for leaks
- Check to see if hot water works

Lights and Electrical Components

- Test lights
- Check solar panels and all parts of the system to see if the work
- Test TV Works
- Test radio works
- Check resource monitor is accurate, does it show water and power?
- Does satellite TV (VAST) receive a signal
- Do all remotes work correctly

Kitchen

- Check cupboards for Mold
- Check hinges and knobs
- Inspect fire extinguisher for use and age
- Open cupboards, drawers, and doors to check for damage or wear.
- Cupboard doors open/lock properly
- Test hinges and locks.

Flooring

- Walk across the floor to ensure its firm and not spongy.
- Check floor for level

Plumbing

- Ensure there's no sign of leaks or blockages.
- Check taps, water pumps, and the toilet.

Roofing

- Roof hatches open/lock properly
- Windows open/lock properly
- Other appliances – working
- Screens/curtains in good condition

5. Confirm the Paperwork

- Check registration is current
- Check ownership documents
 - Ensure the seller is the legal owner and has proof of purchase.
 - Match the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) on the caravan to the documents.
- Check service history
 - Review maintenance and repair records to understand the caravan's history.
- Check warranty
 - If applicable, check whether any manufacturer or extended warranty is transferable.
- Check the Personal Property Securities Register (PPSR)

6. Test Tow the Caravan

- Hitch the caravan to your vehicle and take it for a short drive
 - Check stability while towing.
 - Ensure no excessive swaying or unusual noises.
 - Test the braking system while towing.

7. Verify Legal Compliance

- Confirm the caravan meets local road safety standards.
- Check that the weight of the caravan is within your vehicle's towing capacity.

8. Ask About Accessories

- Find out if the caravan comes with extras like
 - Awnings, water carriers, or leveling ramps.
 - Solar panels, batteries, or gas bottles.
- Ensure these items are in good condition and included in the price.

9. Budget for Repairs and Upgrades

- Be prepared to spend on minor repairs, such as resealing windows, replacing Tyres, or updating upholstery.
- Check the condition of safety essentials like smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, and gas detectors.

10. Negotiate the Price

- Use any issues found during the inspection as leverage to negotiate a lower price.
- Research similar caravans online to understand the market value.

11. Buy from a Trusted Source

- Private Sellers:** You may get a better price, but there's less legal protection. Be cautious and conduct thorough checks.
- Dealers:** Offer more protection and may include warranties or after-sales support. Check their reputation through reviews and ratings.

12. Trust Your Instincts

- If the seller avoids answering questions or refuses inspections, consider walking away.

13. Post-Purchase Checklist

- Insure the caravan immediately after purchase.
- Schedule a professional servicing with Caravan Help to ensure everything is in good working order.
- Familiarise yourself with towing and maintenance before your first trip.

Disclaimer

This material is provided for the purposes of general information and understanding and should be used as a guide only. It should not be used as a substitute for expert guidance or specific advice as offered by a qualified professional.