



SLIDE-ON CONSIDERATIONS

All caravans, campers and Slide-Ons have their pros and cons. What you choose to be your home away from home will depend on you - and your preferred style of camping. As in many walks of life, its 'horses for courses'. In this document, we aim to answer some common questions about Slide-On camping, and hopefully to address some issues from left field too.

When you choose a Slide-On camper, you free your tow ball. This may be because you plan to tow a trailer for boats, motorbikes or kayaks. Better still, maybe you've chosen to tow nothing at all so you can go the places others can't & make 3 point turns on outback tracks. Either way, there are unique aspects to a Slide-On lifestyle that it's worth considering before you head into the Great Outdoors.

The weight of it all: When you're travelling like a hermit crab with your home on your back, weight is the biggest consideration. As a result regardless of what style of camper you choose, fuel economy is destined to suffer. But you also need to understand the Kerb weight, Gross Vehicle Mass (GVM) and Gross Combined Mass (GCM) and its relevance to how you use your Slide-On.

Consider this. Let's say your vehicle has a Kerb weight of 2500kg, a GVM of 3500kg and a GCM of 5000kg. This means that your vehicle can be loaded with no-more than 1000kg, and can pull a trailer of 2500kg. But it can't do both these things at the same time! For every kilogram you add to your vehicle, you reduce your towing capacity by the same amount. This includes the weight of your 4x4 accessories. Yes, the burden of your winch, bulbar, sidesteps, ute-tray, passengers, fuel, luggage, water and even the 15 litres of waste in your portaloo are included in this magic number.

So, think about the capacity of your vehicle. Would it make sense to have a GVM upgrade to carry your Slide-On and to accommodate everything you need to travel with? Of course it does. RACQ and the Victorian Police have conducted random checks on the roads for 4x4 and caravan weights in the last 3 years; the result across the board was that 1/2 of all caravans and 1/4 of 4x4s were overweight.

When you opt for a GVM upgrade, don't choose the minimum viable option. Instead of a simple 100kg improvement, consider committing to an upgrade of 300 - 500kg. Why? Because it gives you options. Whether it's to pick up a few cases of wine along the way, or to add an unexpected passenger now and again, don't leave yourself short.

That said, don't be too concerned either if you end-up nudging your GVM when you're fully loaded. You just need to be aware of the implications. The thing that changes most here is the rig's centre of gravity (CoG) which you'll especially notice with a fully laden Slide-On. This, in turn, will affect your vehicle's braking (a variable that's affected by any caravan, camper or Slide-On). Brake controllers are the fix for when dealing with trailers. However, if you're fitting a Slide-On, it may be prudent to upgrade your brake pads and rotors to those specifically designed for 4WD's and for heavy duty performance.

The key is to know your vehicle, know your own driving abilities, stay within these boundaries and drive to the conditions. Then seek out professional driver training to fill in the gaps. After all, driving skills are perishable and should be periodically refreshed.

Leave Home –at Home: This is where the phrases like ‘be honest with yourself’ take hold. You’re going camping to experience nature, to see something special and to escape the Rat Race. So, do you really need to carry with you the trappings of life that you’re actually trying to escape?

When you’ve whittled down your list of ‘needs’ to a realistic level, consider too whether you’re maximising the utility of every item that you pack. The key principle is to ensure that the items you travel with have at least two, or more, uses. If they don’t, then you’re taking the wrong things.

Consider quantity as well. Why take an extra set of forks? Or several extra blankets? When was the last time you conducted a tucker-box clean out? If there are things in your Slide-On that you haven’t used in the last three trips, then you don’t need them. Combined they waste space, weight and fuel.

Be prepared: The exception to ‘three-trip’ rule is your emergency supplies. Mother Nature can have a nasty sense of humour - and accidents can happen at any time. Being prepared for the unexpected: having the right kit with you when you need it – and knowing how to use it - is the best way to stay safe on the roads. And cutting corners could be the worst decision you ever make. So, ensure you always carry a Personal Locating Beacon, a first aid kit, fire blanket, fire extinguisher, survival kit and Bug-out Bag.

Consider too that sometimes you may wish to release the Slide-On from the ute-tray to go exploring. If you break down or are injured away from your Slide-On, will you have the gear you need to respond? Where’s your recovery gear, fire extinguisher and first aid kit? The day you unleash your house from your back is probably the day you’re going to need them. Do you have enough water and non-perishable food in your vehicle to last 48hrs? And if you leave someone back at camp while you head-out, ask yourself ‘what if?’ something goes wrong. Will everyone be able to respond effectively? If you’re unsure, consider professional training. Don’t leave it to chance.

Lighten up: Weight reduction starts at point of purchase. Do you have a steel bulbar, or what about your rear tray? By choosing aluminium you can save around 100kg. Aluminium is also the best choice for roof racks, mounting kits, brackets, and other similar components. Apply this thinking to your tableware and you’ll find options for lightweight cutlery, plates and vessels. Then ask yourself, where else can I lighten up?

Do you have a dual-cab? Is anyone sitting in the back seats? If not, consider removing the seats to free-up a further 25kg. Then utilise the space for items like your fridge. And, while we’re on the subject of stripping-down, are you really going to be using the trailer hitch?... Once you start thinking ‘outside the box’, you’ll view the contents of your glovebox, under-seat and under-tray storage bins with a far more methodical eye.

About the Author: Scott Heiman is a 25 year Army veteran, former Australian Federal Police instructor and Environmental Scientist. He is a survivalist, fisherman, hunter, all-round remote area tourer and experienced 4WD’er. He’s operated in every State and Territory of Australia and in the jungles of the South Pacific and South-East Asia. He is the Managing Director and Principal Consultant of Heiman Habitat which regularly contributes to national circulation outdoor magazines, including CAMPER, Caravan World, OUTDOOR and 4x4 Australia. Scott has a Bushcraft and Survival column in Archery Action magazine and conducts group workshops for professional and recreational remote area operators.