

RECREATIONAL VEHICLE ACCESSORIES

Comforting RV extras

Whether you want to make your RV just a bit more like home or maybe you want to bring 'old faithful' up to standard, accessorising is the answer. Accessories can increase aspects like safety, longevity, efficiency and best of all comfort. If there is a better or easier way to do something, count me in!

There is a plethora of RV accessories available today, driven by the rapid and continual growth of the caravan and motorhome industry. There is something for almost anything and the secret is to talk to experts who can advise you on the best options.

If you just take a walk through any caravan park you'll see how far the industry had evolved. In-built satellite TV, computers and roll out awnings were rare a few years ago and now they are almost becoming a standard accessory.

When on the road many people develop ideas to make life that little bit easier and quicker. It's interesting to see the ingenious things people come up with and how fast successful ideas spread through the RV community.

While some accessories like air-conditioners and awnings need to be fitted by a specialist, a keen DIY handyman is more than capable of installing smaller and less involved accessories like a TV antenna. If you get into trouble fitting an accessory, any accessory retailer would be more than willing to offer some advice.

Water

Water hoses get water in and out of your RV; however the drinking water hose must be non-toxic so your water is odourless and tasteless. **Tip:** don't fill your van's drinking water tanks with your garden hose as they are not made out of that non-toxic material. You may also want a water filtration system if you plan to fill your tanks at caravan parks and want to get rid of any bugs. You can spend \$50 to \$300, depending on how many of the bugs you want to get rid of and where you're going.

Water tanks are often built under the RV and are black to stop things growing in your water. When you aren't using the tanks they should be stored full so there is no air for bugs to breed in. If you haven't used the tanks in a while, flush them out then refill them.

Towing aids

Towing mirrors are a very important safety addition to your towing vehicle because you don't want to risk your caravan or trailer being damaged by something you can't see. Mirrors can cost you anywhere from \$15 each to \$300 for a pair. The type you choose depends on your car and they all have different attachment points. They are designed to not damage the finish on the car but if you are worried about putting suction caps or magnets on the paint the mirrors, can be attached from the door frame.

You also have the option of reversing cameras which include a monitor which is hooked up to where the driver can see it. They can cost from \$300 to \$1,500 depending on whether you want sound, colour or the option for it to be a television when not in use. **Tip:** always have the camera turned off when driving.

Manoeuvrability

You may also need a jack which, to be used on a caravan, will be different to the one which fits your car. **Tip:** store it in the boot of your car or caravan for easy access.

When you get to where you are going you will need to manoeuvre your caravan or trailer into position. Jockey wheels are usually 12 volt powered and these can push up to 3 tonne. Jockey wheels can also be used when you return home and are reversing your caravan or trailer into your driveway. You also have the option of a solid 6 or 8 inch rubber wheel or an 8 inch pneumatic wheel, or a 10

inch pneumatic wheel which you will be able to reduce the tyre pressure of, for better traction on soft surfaces.

Stabilising

Once you're in position you will need to lower the corner stabilisers. You can have drop down, wind down or hydraulic stabilisers, these can be fitted after purchase if you find you have trouble lowering the standard ones. **Tip:** make sure they are securely up when travelling.

Cooling and lighting

There are hatches on all caravans and they can be used simply for extra light or can be adapted with a 12 volt fan as an alternative to air-conditioning. This type is rain sensitive and shuts off automatically, costing around \$400 to \$600. Some hatches have a solid roof, while others have a perspex cover. They should always be down when travelling. The plastic can be deteriorated by the sun and a hit from a branch can shatter them. You can purchase a lid to protect the plastic or quite cheaply replace it.

Air-conditioning can be fitted after purchase to an older van. The options are a split system which means less height and more access. A roof top or ducted system can be slightly cheaper to install but would not be suitable for a pop-top caravan. The system does need to be fitted by a professional and they will recommend the best option for your RV.

RV fridges are generally three-way. This means they run on gas, 12 volt or 240 volt depending on what is available. When you first turn your fridge on it will take at least three to four hours to get cold and it won't work if the RV is more than 20 away from level. If you're not sure it's working, check whether the vent is warm.

Extensions

Awnings are a great way to extend your RV when there just isn't enough space inside for your kids to stay out of each others way or you want to be able to sit outside on a warm night and chat to the people in the site next to you. Awnings and subsequently annexes, can be custom built. Awnings simply attach to the side of your caravan or trailer and roll out and back on a spring system. A small bag awning can be fitted to a camper/tent trailer or 4WD. **Tip:** fold up your awning when you're not using it and at night. It can catch the wind and get damaged. You can also purchase a de-flapper which stretches the awning out, these cost \$30 to \$300 and can easily accommodate additional walls.

Power

Solar panels can be used to become partially self-sufficient but they can become expensive and space consuming to allow for full sufficiency. As a charging medium they can recharge 12 volt batteries which would allow you to stay away from powered sites for longer than normal.

A gas fuse can also be fitted for your safety. It requires that when you turn the gas on, you must also push the gas fuse button to get any gas flowing. Plus if there is a leak in the line, there is an auto shutoff function. These start at around \$30 in price.

Security

After buying your RV and looking forward to your future travels, you want to make sure it is secure. There are a number of ways to secure your RV while you are away and when you return. You have the ability to lock your RV to the towing vehicle while you are parked. There are also hitch locks which lock onto the caravan or trailer over the ball joint to prevent anyone hooking their car up to your van and these only cost around \$25, or a lock which secures the caravan to your driveway. You also have the option to install security screens or personal alarms and immobilisers. This is a relatively small addition, considering the adventures you would miss out on if your RV was stolen or damaged.

Whether you are just 'keeping up with the Jones's' or you want to save your back, accessories are a great way to personalise your RV and make your self-drive holidays that little bit more enjoyable. Visit any of the preferred suppliers on this page to see what is available and possible.

VEHICLE ACCESSORIES

The more the merrier

Accessorising is not only an exercise in 'keeping up with the neighbours' it can also improve your comfort and safety as well as the longevity and resale value of your vehicle.

There are of course drivers who do seek out the biggest, shiniest bull bar and the chunkiest looking lights. For many, accessorising is a hobby in itself and 'the more the merrier' is their motto.

Almost anything you can imagine can be fitted to your vehicle, from towbars and roof racks to GPS and upgraded suspension. Just remember, you get what you pay for.

Bars

Attaching a bulbar to your vehicle not only allows for protection but also a mount for extra lights or bike racks.

While a bulbar is for protection from animals, a nudge bar is often only for mounting lights and other accessories. It can protect the most expensive part of your vehicle, the engine, if someone knocks into you in a car park. **Tip:** check with the manufacturer/fitter of your bar that it is airbag approved.

Suspension

Modifying your suspension allows for more ground clearance when driving off-road. Added suspension also increases the stability and comfort of the ride.

Lights

When you are doing a lot of driving on outback roads at night you will feel more comfortable, the more you can see. The brightness is directly related to how much you pay. The finish on the reflector also determines how much light is projected out. **Tip:** if you can see yourself in the reflector they will have a good quality output.

The light fitting is also important and should be very high quality steel. This means it won't move once you have positioned it and won't fall off over corrugated roads.

Batteries

Most cars can be fitted with a second battery. The primary battery will run the car and lights while you are driving. The additional one will recharge from this one and run your accessories when you are stopped.

Jacks

A high lift jack is best for a 4WD which has a large front and rear bar. Several brands of recreational 4WDs aren't able to be used with a high lift jack. You will also need a jacking plate for soft surfaces, a foot square multi-ply board will do the job.

For more advice on accessorising your vehicle and setting it up for towing, please contact the preferred suppliers.