

# Tradies go camping too

or stay overnight on longer jobs away from home.



There are many tradies out there who already have the perfect vehicle to go camping with; they just don't know it yet!

Start with a 4WD ute and tradesman's canopy similar to that shown in adjacent photos. Add two bunks with built in storage units underneath. The storage units can accommodate tools and fittings for the majority of the time when used for work and be replaced with camping gear when camping.

The 'bunks' are built of 20mm welded Duragal steel framework faced with 9mm MDF finished with a satin varnish. The steel framework is fixed to the ute canopy with 8 x tech screws, enabling one or both units to be installed/removed in a matter of minutes.



The design has evolved a number of times over the years, during various off road trips, into its current configuration. The steel framework and MDF have made the various modifications and refinements reasonably

easy to achieve. One recent modification was to change the top drawer units (also built out of 9mm MDF), to move in a sideways direction so as to not encroach across the gas stove and/or cutting board that pull out rearwards. When rebuilding the drawer units I made the length, width and height a multiple of the plastic fruit containers that we use to store just about everything. (Regular readers of 'Western 4W Driver' will be familiar with the plastic fruit containers as, reliable, functional



and cheap storage units). Stored in the drawer under the cutting board are the dinner plates and the cutlery. To the rear of this drawer is where the eggs are stored (just visible in the picture in a grey plastic shopping bag). Regrettably the plastic egg storage boxes available from camping stores cannot hold our rather large, home grown, free range eggs. So the eggs are simply contained in a normal extra large size carton and are sitting on 25mm foam mat to absorb vibrations and knocks.



With the 4 x sideways sliding drawers shut, the Engel can be slid on its heavy duty drawer slides to the back of the vehicle for easy access. The heavy duty plastic storage containers (which can be seen in some of the pictures) are also used as drawers. The top rim of the plastic containers slides on 20mm steel tube welded under the bunks. These are

good sized, functional containers for clothing, foodstuffs, fruit and vegetables etc.

A pull-out awning attached to the side of the roof rack makes a great addition to this setup, adding a reasonable sized area to set up a table and up to four chairs comfortably under cover from the sun and any light rain showers. The rear annex pictured here can be fully enclosed and can handle heavy rain and strong winds when adequately secured down by guy ropes.



The only concern with this concept so far, is that there is very little room between the top of the bunks and the roof of the canopy, making it extremely difficult to get into and out of bed. I know as I had my ute like this for 5 years. It is very comfortable and secure once in bed but you have to be somewhat of a contortionist to achieve this. Getting up for a pee in the middle of the night to empty out some of the additional beers consumed at your idyllic campsite can be a real pain in the proverbial as well. This system is also limited to only two persons able to sleep in the ute at the same time.



The addition of a pop-top not only solves the getting in and out of the bunk/s problem but also adds an additional bunk for one or two more persons if the top is extended forward above the cab. I say one or two extra persons because this new upper story bunk is either a very wide and comfortable single bunk or a size challenged double bunk suitable for two younger children or two

very friendly adults. If you opt for the pull-out awning to be included within the confines of the pop-top roof when closed then you will have even less space for a double bunk but still ample room for a large single with space left over for storage (clothes, toiletries etc.) 'Popping' the pop-top is simply achieved by crouching in the rear of the vehicle, with your back pressing against the inside of the roof and starting the lift by straightening your legs. The 4 x scissor-lifts then take over lifting the roof a full 900mm. This allows anyone to comfortably stand in the back, get changed etc. and have plenty of head room above the top bunk.

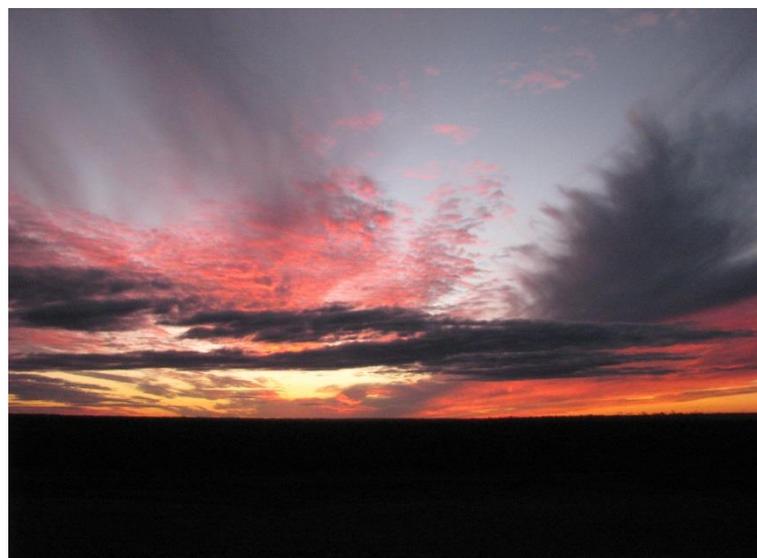
You will notice in the photo that we carry a second spare wheel on the roof. The extra weight of this wheel proved too much for the scissor-lifts alone to lift. This problem was satisfactorily solved by the addition of a gas strut to push on each of the side scissor-lifts as they opened, easily lifting the pop-top and the additional weight of the spare wheel.

In the first couple of photos you will notice an amber light (often essential when working on mine sites) and a UHF CB antenna. These items together with the fold down bracket they are mounted on have been incorporated on the new pop-top roof. Also seen in the second photo is one of the two red rollers fitted to the back of the roof rack used when carrying extension ladders etc. The rollers have also been moved to the rear of the pop-top and could also be used to load a small dingy or a couple of kayaks.

If you look closely at the first two photos you will notice that the black under body storage box has a sharp 90° rear corner. This encroached too far into the departure angle of the vehicle when the going got tough resulting in the bottom corner of the box hitting the ground, rocks etc. This has since been modified by cutting back the 90° corner to a much friendlier 45° corner, resulting in much less bottoming out on steep exits.

The rear canopy has a built in, under-floor, 36lt water tank (very useful on work sites for washing hands etc.). For extended trips an additional purpose built 50lt water tank slots in between the bunks in front of the Engle fridge and plumbs into the under body tank. Again for extended trips, an additional long range (85lt) fuel tank is located in the front of the canopy and an additional battery connected via a 'Redarc' battery isolator is permanently squeezed in under the bonnet.

All the lighting for the canopy has recently been upgraded with LED strip lights. These are (if you'll pardon the pun) brilliant. So much so that we have added in a remote control dimmer to reduce the brightness when doing anything other than cooking or washing up. We use shade cloth mats to help keep the amount of dust down around the vehicle when camped and they make quite a big difference. The canopy doors are fitted with 'door ajar' switches linked to a warning buzzer in the



cab. This gives an adequate warning of a door open should you decided to move/relocate the vehicle without first checking that all the doors are closed first before moving the vehicle.

One very good and important advantage to all of the above, should you decide to upgrade your ute to a newer model (as I am now in the process of doing – D-Max), the whole back can be relocated onto your new ute!

I hope this article has been of interest to you and provided you with some useful ideas.

Maybe we will see you out there sometime, somewhere.

Bernie Webb

*Note: When this article was published in Western 4WDriver it was renamed;-*

*Tradies Transformation – on Page 150 of the 88<sup>th</sup> Edition*