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Retro teardrop camper

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The retro revival is in full swing



Forward to the past

Story by PATRICK HAYES

THE movement that started in the kitchen, with old-fashioned canisters, clock-faced scales and chrome electric toasters, has spread into the roads of the world outside with Chrysler's Cruiser, the Mini, the VW beetle and a spate of "teardrop" caravans.

The first of the teardrop vans, so called because of their streamlined shape, was built in the United States in the late 1930s but it was after the second World War ended in 1945 that they really took off.

The trend got going in Australia in 1948 when Keith Winser, the editor of *Motor Manual* (which later gave birth to *Caravan World*) alerted his readers to an article in the US magazine, *Mechanix Illustrated*, that was offering a complete set of blueprints for anybody who wanted to build their own teardrop van.

The van interior was fairly sparse, there was just room for a double bed and some storage lockers down each side. The rear of the teardrop was hinged and swung up

Above: The elegant lightweight teardrop can be color-matched to the owner's car.

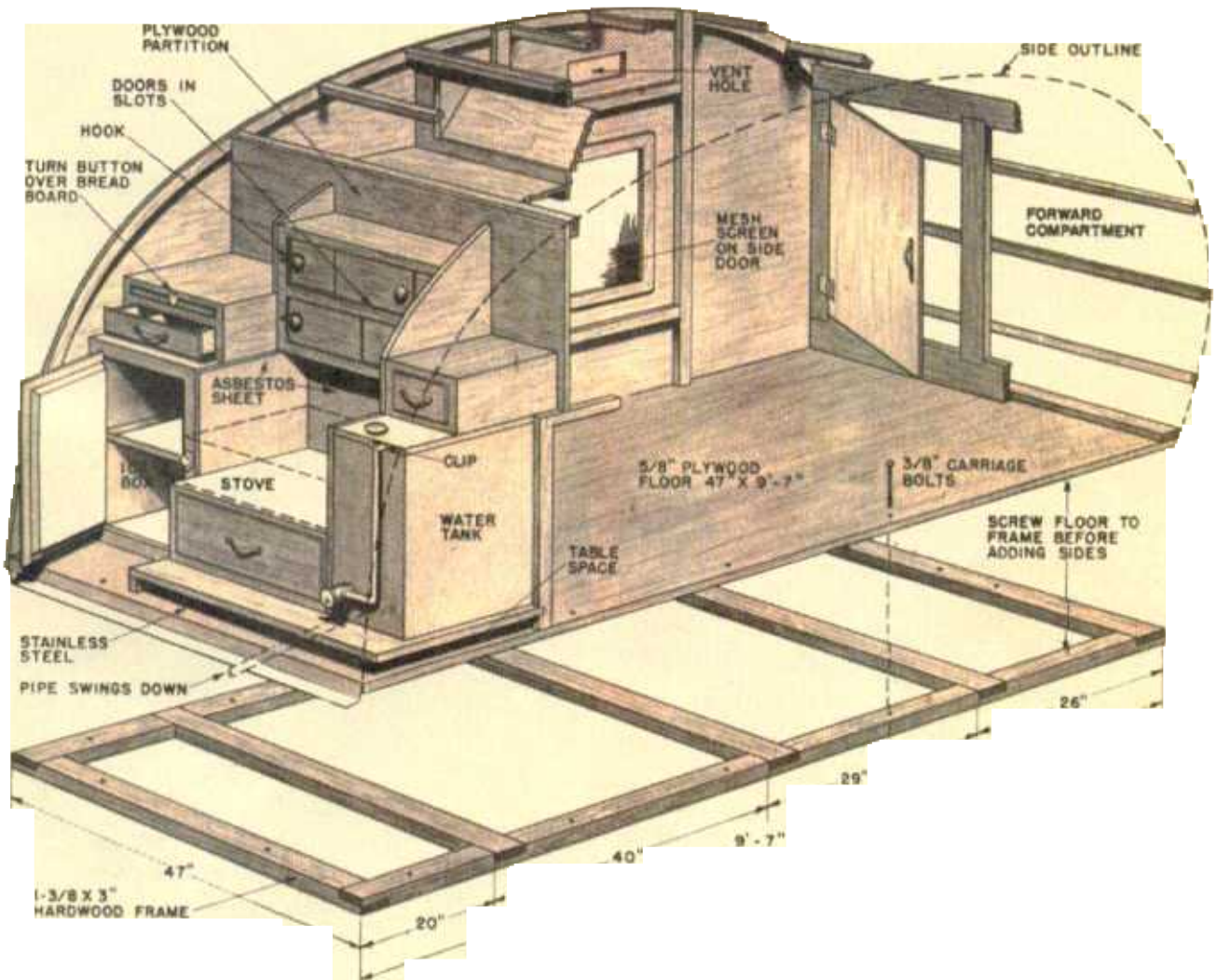
Above top right: Kitchen and pantry is under a lift-up panel at the rear.

Above right: Handy table for smoko.

Right: Kitchen has work bench and cupboards for storage.

Below: A rig with a difference – the smallest teardrop looks good behind a motorcycle trike.





Above: Instructions for building your own teardrop as published in *Mechanix Illustrated* in 1947. The exploded view was quite detailed and complete blueprints were available. **Right:** Fancy a red one? There'd be no chance of losing this in the park.

to provide a shelter for the built-in kitchen that projected into the space at the bottom of the bed.

The kitchen had a spirit stove, an ice box and a water tank and cupboards for storing food and implements. In this post-war period, sheets of plywood and materials like masonite were in short supply and the van was designed to take the best possible advantage of standardized material.

Now the little teardrop has been reborn and people who want to go touring in small cars are seeing it as an elegant fulfillment of their desires. It is a good-looking and practical





Left: Aussie Teardrops are available in two widths.

Above: A guard can be fitted to protect the body from stone damage.

Below left: Inside there are storage lockers and a DVD player.

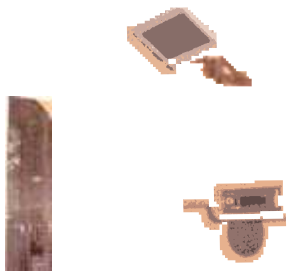
camper that in its modern form weighs in at just 320kg for the smallest version and 370kg for the biggest.

Queenslander Reiner Gudd of Aussie Teardrop Campers is keeping the classic shape and appearance of the teardrop vans while taking advantage of modern materials and components.

the box

1/240 volt refrigerator independent suspension is an and there's all off-road version with a tough fibreglass body.

Inside there is still a double bed and but its range of entertainment possibilities have been expanded to include an LCD screen, DVD player



If you haven't saved up quite enough to get a teardrop van just yet, you can always get a model to help keep your dream alive.

Tasmanian woodcarvers Ann and Ross Lovell make elegant but sturdy models of cars and teardrop caravans, as well as life-size (well, for a child anyway) rocking horses.

They are carved from salvaged Huon pine, a beautiful and rare timber that was cut down up to 100 years ago.

Ross Lovell says the cars and caravans are not scale models. "Although their proportions are about right, we think of them more as caricatures. The finish makes them a very tactile object. They are strong enough to withstand a good playing with by a child, although they are mostly displayed on desks and bookcases," he says.

Although some cars and caravans (and Ann's rocking horses) are sold through a gallery in Salamanca, Hobart, most cars and vans are ordered through their web page.

Ross says: "We have done trophies and corporate gifts, but mostly they are for model collectors and people wanting a unique model of their own sports car - with a caricature of themselves at the wheel (and wife/husband in the passenger seat) and sometimes with a teardrop caravan.

"There are many hours of work in each car and caravan and although our prices (see



the web site at <http://maclovell.customer.netspace.net.au/>) vary according to the degree of difficulty (for instance, whether the car has just a driver, two people or a hard top instead, or even a case on the boot), I hope you will agree they are reasonable." As a rough guide, the cars and vans can cost from \$110 to \$300.

Ross says that he and Ann enjoy sending their works overseas; their cars and vans

have found homes in the UK, USA, Greece, Switzerland and Germany.

"We get a real buzz out of the thought that our Tasmanian work has found its way to a home on the other side of the globe," Ross says.

Their work has been featured in *Australian Classic Car* and *Healey Marque* (USA) magazines and now, of course, in *On The Road*.



Go retro with Reo

Teardrop caravans do not have to be tiny. Melbourne caravan manufacturer Recreational Vehicle Industries is making the streamlined Reo van that has room inside for a kitchen (complete with a 90 litre Dometic three-way fridge, sink, range hood and two-burner Smev stove) and a table with dinette seats on either side.

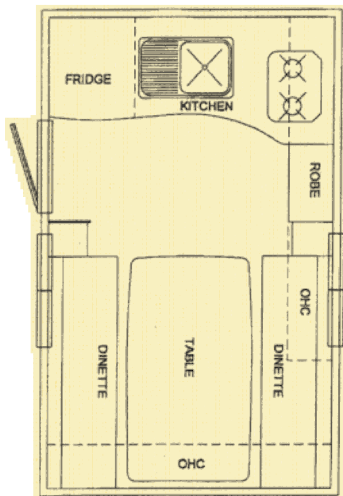
At night, the table converts easily into a queen-size bed.

The body of the Reo is made from fibreglass sandwich panel that provides strength while keeping the weight down. The caravan rolls out of the factory fully equipped and weighing around 800 kilograms and that means that towing it will not require a large car or a heavyweight fuel bill.

The Reo is 4.75 metres long, including its "A" frame. Interior length is 3.7 metres.

The price tag is about \$23,990.

For more information, contact Recreational Vehicle Industries, telephone (03) 9305 5636.



finished in woodgrain veneers and make the point that the craftsmanship that went into the early teardrops is still alive and well, at least at this Queensland factory.

The kitchen is still under a lift-up panel at the rear of the van but it is fitted out with modern cooking gear. There is also provision for a portable ice box on the "A" frame.

The new teardrops come in three sizes. The bodies on the standard models are 1200mm (4 ft) wide and 2400mm (8 ft) long. There's an EL model that is about 2700mm (9 ft) long and the EW model which is also wider at 1500mm (5 ft).

The Belmontear standard models cost about \$9750. The tougher off-road version with scrub-bashing bars all round is called the Desertear and costs about \$11750. The EL versions add \$600 to the price and the EW version costs another \$1200.

A range of options is available so the teardrop traveller can have more windows, a door on each side and his van exactly the same color as his tow car.

Also available is an annex, with or without walls, that provide much more living space.

For more information call Reiner Gudd on (07) 3800 1338 or visit www.aussieteardrops.com (all the information is there for people who own a small car and want to go exploring throughout Australia).

Above: Doors on both sides are an option for fresh air lovers. The doors can also be fitted with security panels.

Below: An extra ice box can be fitted to the "A" frame. The van's shape and size is certainly a crowd pleaser, as this photo shows.

Bottom: "You must remember this..." A family enjoys a picnic beside their teardrop van in 1946.

