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Budget beater

Tested Blue Tongue Campers Off-Road Trekka

THE NEWEST CAMPER FROM THE BLUE TONGUE RANGE SETS A NEW STANDARD IN AFFORDABLE FAMILY CAMPERS, BY **DAVID COOK**

Ask any Aussie camper trailer manufacturer how they started out and there's usually a common thread to their story. Either they weren't happy with what they could find already available, thought they could do a better job, or were keen to get involved in a business that was already their recreation. Usually it's a combination of all three.



Karl Geddes

It was this exact trail that brought Karl Geddes and Andrew Walter to the business of building and selling one of the best finished budget camper trailers on the market. A reputation they've established in a relative short time.

Blue Tongue Campers are built in their workshop at Kirrawee in Sydney's south. Previously both men worked in the construction industry, Karl being a builder and Andrew handling the plumbing work on his jobs.

"We just didn't want to make our living doing that sort of work anymore," Andrew explains, "but we carry with us the builder's ethic of trying to use the right tools and components on every job and providing customer service, because we come from a background where customer satisfaction is paramount.

"We were all campers. Karl still has small kids while mine have all grown up, but we all enjoyed the pleasures of sleeping under canvas. I'd never been involved with camper trailers, having come from a background in tents, but we were all looking for something

to do that we enjoyed. When we started up four years ago there weren't as many import campers around and it seemed like a good thing to get into.

"We researched the market and found that while there were already Australian trailers with imported canvas tents on the market, many were of poor quality so we set out to raise the bar. We have an aim to make continual product improvements and add detailed features, while some of our competitors are reducing the quality to make them cheaper."

While camper trailers can range in price from \$3,500 up to \$60,000 and more, Blue Tongue is firmly embedded in the lower price range.

"This end of the market is family territory; it's what they can afford," Andrew says. "The \$40,000 to \$50,000 units are out of the reach of most and so we set out to build a quality product at an affordable price.

"We mostly aim our products at families, mostly those with kids. We have massive tents for those people and smaller tents when we are selling just to couples. We have



light trailers for those with smaller cars and heavier trailers for those who want to go off road. We try to cover the gamut of experiences that people will cover with a camper.”

They also offer a 9 foot tent with all aluminium poles which has been very popular with the “grey nomads” and those just wanting a fast easy setup. It is available on any of the Blue Tongue range. The guys obviously hit the right note in their quest for value for money and sold over 300 campers in their first year in business. Production has remained at the healthy level of 300-400 units per year since.

Most sales go to NSW but they have been finding a ready market in Queensland and Victoria and in the next 12 months plan to start attending shows in Queensland to support their new dealer outlet there.

The one non-Australian aspect to the Blue Tongue campers is the tent, which is imported. Using this as their basis the guys began researching campers and have continued to modify their products in line with customer feedback and their own experiences with them.

The Blue Tongue range features seven different campers, from \$3500 to \$10,500 in price. The tent essentially remains the same and it’s the nature of the trailer underneath which determines the price. If you want no more than to stay in caravan parks on major highways then the bottom of the price range is likely to suit, essentially

as a tent transporter, but for those who want more gadgets or want to go offroad and so require tougher suspensions and a heavier chassis, then the range can encompass that as well.

“It’s an ever evolving product line,” says Andrew, “and we’ve just released our new trailer to try to offer more space for our customers.”

The latest addition to the range is the Trekka, which, like all the trailers from Blue Tongue, is a side-fold soft floor in which the canvas tent pulls off the side of the trailer and the vinyl floor sits on the ground next to it.

It is designed as either an off-road or semi-off-road trailer with mechanical brakes, smaller rims with highway duty tyres and seven-leaf slipper springs on the semi-off road units. The off-road versions come with electric brakes, all terrain boots on larger rims and eye-to-eye shackle spring sets.

Essentially the Trekka trailers offer a range of features not available all together in other Blue Tongue campers. This includes increased storage, fridge slide, luggage racks, bike racks and a drawer which slides through the middle of the camper to access internal storage capacity and can be accessed outside. It’s much more heavy duty construction all round, topped off with enamel paint rather than hammertone for a more durable finish.

There are three kitchen options with a basic powdercoat finish, a 304 grade stainless steel set-up and a top of the range

slide-out stainless steel unit with two-burner cooktop and grill.

There are two choices in colour: a grey and a blue with grey roof.

There is a choice of three tents, all free standing and requiring pegs and ropes only for windy conditions.

Option 1 has a 25 square metre tent with side awning to accommodate four or more people.

Option 2 covers a huge 40 square metre to sleep eight or more

Option 3 covers 20 square metres with aluminium poles for easier set-up for up to four people.

All have external walls and flyscreens available to enclose the awning, with some ground level windows featuring lower half clear poly windows to prevent splash from the ground wetting the interior in heavy rain.

The trailer is assembled to order to suit the customer and the waiting time is between a day or two, or up to a month, depending on demand and the level of fitout.

These are smart looking and well finished campers, able to take you into the bush with security. Features such as space for up to four jerry cans in a lockable compartment, rear mounted spare and silver polyurethane coated 14 ounce canvas roof to reflect up to 98 per cent of UV radiation and heat for internal comfort make these well equipped to take on the Outback.

As with all Blue Tongue campers they offer full electrical fitout as an optional

extra because of the great variability in what people want.

"We will often say to customers that if they're not sure what they want or need to take the camper away a few times and then we can undertake whatever it is that they want when they get back," says Andrew.

"Our basic standard range of trailers does not have a lot of items on it because if you put everything on people think why should I pay, say, for a fridge slide if I already have a fridge set-up in the back of my car? We don't like having lots of things on display and then having to tell customers, 'Oh, that bit's extra, and that's extra.' 📍

pros



- > Value for money
- > Good finish for budget price
- > Australian made trailer
- > Good range of options
- > Reflective canvas roof for cooling

cons



- > Imported canvas
- > Spreader bar tent set-up takes time
- > Lack of a stone guard as standard

Manufacturer **Blue Tongue Campers**
 Model **Off Road Trekka**
 Price **\$9900**

For full details and specifications go to:
www.bluetonguecampers.com.au

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GIC EXTREME RANGER

A similar range and format to Blue Tongue, with locally made trailers and imported tents of a similar nature and size. Detail and finish is not as high as with Blue Tongue, without automotive pinch weld rubber seals, fridge slide, luggage rack, alloy wheels, internal drawer and some other options. GIC tents do offer a skylight roof window over the main bed and the Extreme Ranger comes with independent suspension and stone guard. **Price \$11,900.**



EXPLORER LAWSON

Soft floor design similar to the Blue Tongue Trekka and GIC Extreme Ranger, but with all Australian canvas. Very similar in fitout and layout to both the GIC Extreme Ranger and the Blue Tongue Trekka. It has optional side lockers and a standard steel roll-out kitchen and full length roll-out drawer beside the kitchen. There is no cooker offered as standard but two and three-burner cook tops are available as options. Two-year warranty. **Price \$16,950**