



SHERPA LEISURE

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The *light* side of leisure

| DEALER PROFILE | SHERPA CARAVANS

Words & pictures by RICHARD VAN RYNEVELD

After many years of out and about camping in anything from tents, caravans, campers and motorhomes, I have learnt that people are extremely loyal to their particular brand of "house on the road".

And especially loyal are the Sherpa owners.

This light, maneuverable, all-fiberglass caravan can be towed by almost any sedan vehicle. Putting one of the larger variants, the Rambler, to the test (*Caravan & Outdoor Life* – November 2016), I was particularly impressed with the build quality, strength and roominess of this seemingly small caravan. In fact, in my review I compared its interior to a well-built cruising yacht!

On my latest trip up to Gauteng I met up with owner Neville de Meillon at the Sherpa Leisure factory in Plantation Road, Edenvale.

Neville was born with caravanning in his blood. Growing up, the De Meillon family had a Sprite Musketeer. They towed the Musketeer with a big Rambler V8 – which is where the name of the one Sherpa model comes from.

Neville goes on to reveal that his love of caravanning led him to buy his first caravan when he was only 19 years old.

He says: "It was a Gypsy 4... I got it from a place called Sunseekers.

"I towed with a Cortina XLE. It was

one of those jobs with a vinyl roof," and he laughs at the memory.

It's hard to believe that Neville, with the support of his wife Karen, only started building the first Sherpa prototype from home some 12 years ago.

In just over a decade, Sherpa Leisure has gone from strength to strength. A few years back when I collected the Rambler, the factory was in one building.

Now the Sherpa team has taken over the adjoining building for a large showroom and final finish area.

After a cup of coffee, Neville says: "Why don't I take you on a walkabout of our whole factory... take as many photographs as you like."

The first thing I learnt is this: every single component of the Sherpa range is made on the premises. From the chassis to the state-of-the-art moulds for the caravan bodies, the tents, and even the curtains are made right here on the factory floor in Edenvale.

As I am taking pictures of the row of moulds, Neville says, "Wait, they look untidy," and he quickly gets two of the guys to turn the constructions at a similar angle for the photograph.

He explained that there has to be two people to turn the moulds, one on either side: "We are very particular about safety at the factory."

There is also a set-down procedure for ensuring the moulds were supported at all

times. It is this attention to detail, found throughout the Sherpa Leisure factory, that is so impressive.

Basically all Sherpa caravans are built to order. The client is king! Standing on the showroom floor was a caravan that was specially designed so the owner could wheel his motorcycle from the large back access door. The bed cleverly folds away, and specially reinforced tie-down bolts have been built into the body to ensure that the motorbike is securely fastened at all times.

Neville had also built a custom-made Sherpa for a client in a wheelchair.

These little caravans are tough! I know of a Sherpa client who has taken his caravan all the way to the Maasai Mara in Kenya. The same client recently came back with absolutely no hassle from a long trip through Angola.

Back in the factory, one of the guys in charge of the moulding explains: "All our caravan bodies are monocoque construction." The word monocoque is a French term for "single shell" (or "single hull" with boats).

Monocoque, or structural skin, is similar to an egg shell – a structural system where loads are supported through an object's external skin. A true monocoque carries both tensile and compressive forces within the skin and can be recognised by the absence of a load carrying internal frame.



SHERPA INSURE

You can now insure your Sherpa caravan with a tailor-made insurance! Sherpa Leisure and CaraSure have been associated for many years and have mutually decided to establish an insurance product specifically for Sherpa caravans. CaraSure, who are the leaders and only specialists in Leisure Vehicle insurance in South Africa, has insured thousands of caravaners for almost 15 years.



Above left The client is king at Sherpa. This customised units allows the owner to get his motorcycle into the caravan. **Above right** Every part of a Sherpa caravan is made at the factory in Edenvale, from the moulds to the curtains. **Left (inset)** The FibreTrail 1800 luggage trailer that weighs just 180 kg and can carry up to 380 kg.

In other words, that little "egg-like" caravan body is as strong as blazes!

A new product I saw on the showroom floor is the FibreTrail 1800 luggage trailer. Weighing in at a mere 180 kg with a load capacity of 380 kg, the FibreTrail comes out with either an aluminium or galvanized steel chassis.

Meanwhile, as you might have read

in a previous *Caravan & Outdoor Life*, Sherpa caravans are now being exported to Australia. A company called Express Caravan in Queensland are the agents for Sherpa. And closer to home, Paarl Suzuki is now a sub-agent. They are selling the Sherpa Tiny Lite due to the fact that so many Suzuki Jimny owners tow these vans. 🗨️

CARAVAN RANGE

Model	Tare	GVM	Berths	Price
Rambler	920 kg	1400 kg	3	R215 000
Rambler B	920 kg	1400 kg	2	R245 000
Tiny	560 kg	1000 kg	2	R165 000
Tiny Lite	560 kg	750 kg	2	R115 000
Rough Roader	580 kg	1000 kg	2	R184 000