

Over 80 years of customised Caravans

With a history spanning the evolution of RVs in Australia, Roma Caravans has carved its own niche in the custom-build market





When you do something for over 80 years, not only do you get to learn from your mistakes and watch the come-and-go of industry trends, you simply can't help but get good at it.

The Palmarini family are third generation Italian Australians, coming out here and bringing a taste of the traditional workmanship into our caravan industry. Back in 1928, Victorio Palmarini started the company, building beautiful customised vans for the Aussie family holiday.

After more than 30 years, Victorio passed the business on to his son Tony, who subsequently brought his sons Brendan and Mark to the family operation. With years of work and help from a talented and visionary crew, the brand has grown to become one of the most established and best-known names in caravans in the country.

It is not Roma's aim to be the biggest manufacturer, as customised construction cannot be mass-produced. Roma's

intention is to expertly create products to suit personal needs that are as unique as the individuals buying them.

THE SHARP EDGE

Custom caravans are big business, and this sector of the industry sees players regularly come and go. One of the keys to longevity is undoubtedly the ability to adapt and adopt modern styles, materials and techniques into established platforms. This is especially relevant to the types of constructions ordered by people who have the money for exactly what they want.

While every caravan is individually designed and built under strict supervision, staying on the leading edge of technology is also very important to Roma. The company introduced slide-out rooms to Australia, as well as fibreglass one-piece shower cubicles guaranteed not to leak. Roma's fibreglass fronts and rears are exclusively made and fitted with the latest in LED lighting.

Part of the challenge of melding traditional craftsmanship with modern materials is producing the balanced,

completed picture. These caravans are fitted with extensive timberwork and joinery in predominantly European styling, which Roma manufactures in a purpose-built plant worth over half a million dollars.

When you are asking people to pay for such extravagant investments, nothing can be too hard. Invitations to luxury such as the 'Opulence' and 'Elegance' do not suggest limited choices. The company's reputation has largely been built on the good relationship with its customers, with many coming back repeatedly as their needs change.

In fact, Roma likes to see its customers as members of the organisation and gets them involved in the construction every step of the way. Tours of the workshop and the project in stages are arranged on request. "A happy customer has a hundred friends, an unhappy one has 1000," laughs Director, Brendan Palmarini.

Further signs of Roma's adaptation are the future plans for its long-standing model, the Sov'reign. In an attempt to compete with some of the

lower-priced vans on the market, the Sov'reign will now be built in its own factory to standard specifications. This will allow Roma's production methods and quality to be showcased without the expense of customisation.

There are two other factory sites sharing the production burden of the other models, storage and the administration offices, and a showroom with examples of past and present achievements. Beyond the building process, customers are allowed to come and pick up their finished van, which is backed by a genuine 12-month warranty. You can even bring your old van to trade in.

FAST FACTS

Back in late 2008, we featured a highly customised caravan built by Roma in conjunction with American couple Lynn and Louise Rogers, devoted members and founders of the 'Escapees RV Club out of Texas' boasting around 100,000 members. As world-class tourers, Lynn and Louise were not going to buy off the shelf, and in fact brought some technology over with them during their multiple trips planning and building the big Elegance, including a Lithco slide-out that was electrically operated with manual override. They also incorporated some other modern features: such as a sink filler hole back to the water tank so as not waste

water waiting for it to come through hot; five water tanks, including one with a macerator that pumps and breaks down black water for easy disposal; and three 180Ah batteries for serious long-term free-camping. Some of the custom ideas on this van have gone on to become regular points of design in Roma vans. Few prospective buyers will get as involved as the Rogers, but anyone that buys a Roma is encouraged to become actively involved in the building process. This obviously means fewer surprises and greater final satisfaction. In an industry with more twists and turns than a mountain trail, it's no wonder Roma is still roaming along.



Timber joinery is a major part of most designs



Custom building is a slow process that finishes only a couple of units per day

The family side of the business shows pride bigger than one of their triple-axe rolling hotels. After seven decades, every van still gets the Managing Director's personal seal of approval before it leaves the factory.

Brothers Mark (Product Development) and Brendan (Director) like to keep a close, personal feel for what is going on in the company. Their outlet on the Hume Hwy at Campbellfield is their biggest, selling over 100 vans every year to proud new owners. ■

FOR MORE INFO

Contact your local Roma dealer to discuss how Roma can customise their vans to suit your caravanning needs.

COMPANY NAME: ROMA CARAVANS

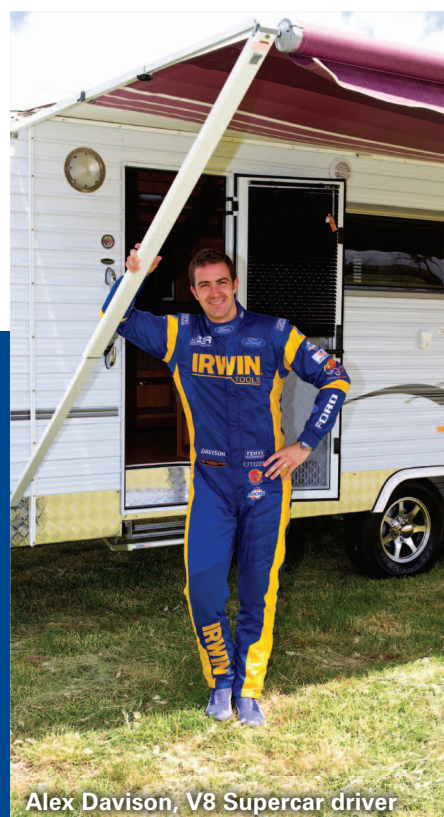
ADDRESS: 18/70B Hume Hwy, Campbellfield VIC 3061

PHONE: (03) 9357 7440

EMAIL: info@romashowroom.com.au

WEBSITE: www.romashowroom.com.au

The van's delivery and presentation day gave Brendan (left) an excuse to do a few laps in one of the V8s



Alex Davison, V8 Supercar driver

HARD AT PLAY

A few years ago, V8 Supercar driver Alex Davison was looking for some sponsorship and a place to live. One day he found himself wandering into Roma's showroom and subsequently struck up a friendship with racing enthusiast and all-round nice guy, Brendan.

Since then, Roma has gone on to create a business relationship with and become a major sponsor of Stone Brothers Racing. As part of his 2011 sponsorship, Alex has been supplied with a triple-axe luxury van to tour with and attend race meets.

Alex's father Richard and late grandfather Lex were very successful in open-wheel racing categories and the boy started in the same vein by serving his driver apprenticeship in a go-kart. He went on to win the 1995 Australian Karting Championship and progressed even further to driving V8s at 200km/h. This will be his third year with Stone Bros and he'll be seen in the #4 Irwin Racing Falcon.

The Palmarinis are keen race enthusiasts, and hosted a presentation day when the van was delivered that included hot laps and a big family day for the drivers and their loved ones. Barely able to stop grinning, Brendan says there are plans for Roma to become more actively involved with other great Australian sporting events.