



GET SET FOR A CARAVAN INVASION

Moves by America's biggest RV manufacturer to enter the Australian market signals a new wave of competition from imports

BY ROD BRUEM

Caravan and RV buyers could make big savings and gain access to better quality product as overseas manufacturers increasingly focus on Australia.

US motorhome giant Winnebago's move to "re-launch" into the local market has sent shockwaves through the local industry with some seeing it as just the start of a period of renewed competition.

The combined Australian and New Zealand market is regarded as the world's third biggest for RV and camping goods after North America and Europe. Its somewhat smaller status is more than made up for by a climate more suited to year-round outdoor recreation and consistent economic growth.

US motorhome giant Winnebago announced in July it had signed a new exclusive Australian partnership agreement with Brisbane-based Apollo, with plans to build motorhomes in Brisbane and import caravans from the US.

Industry figures see it as just the start of a wave of new competition hitting our shores from overseas manufacturers, with the real threat expected to come from China over the next few years.

"There are Chinese-made



Luke Trouchet
CEO, Apollo

components in nearly every RV today, but we can expect to see fully-made caravans as well as camper trailers being imported within the next three years, particularly if the Australian dollar remains strong," one industry insider, who declined to be named, told Time to Roam.

Apollo's plans to start importing Winnebago caravans remain on track with CEO Luke Trouchet travelling to the US to oversee the design and finish of the first model destined for downunder. The company plans to import Winnebago's "Minnie", which has been its fastest selling new product in the US. Company sources say they will finally go on sale here in November.

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Winnebago's Minnie - US best seller headed to our shores by Christmas



"Brand new (Australian-built) Winnebago motorhomes are now on sale and the website is up to date with the new model floorplans. Dealerships expected to be announced over coming months. It's all early days for this brand but Apollo are extremely excited about the opportunities ahead," a company spokesman said

Apollo's licensing agreement with Winnebago came after a long legal battle by the US company to wrestle back the naming rights from the NSW firm now trading as Avida, which had been building Winnebago branded motorhomes for decades.

As part of the final court settlement the Binns family-owned company won the right to market its motorhomes as "Avida, maker of the Australian Winnebago".

Company Director Samantha Binns agreed having two different companies marketing motorhomes carrying the Winnebago name could cause some confusion, especially with novice buyers.

However Ms Binns said Avida was determined to highlight it's historical connection.

"It's our heritage and we're very proud of that. Next year we celebrate 50 years of manufacturing in Australia and there are not many companies that can claim that." 

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