

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BRENDAN BATTY

# LIFE IN THE 'SLOE LANE

The American behemoth of RVs is back on our shores with its latest Aussie beach-named vehicle – the Winnebago Cottesloe





**WIN-WINS** (1) A microwave sits above the 190-litre fridge. (2) The Mercedes Sprinter cabin has all the car-like comforts you'd expect from the premium marque. (3) Two of the dinette's seats have seatbelts so four people can be legally driven in the RV.



Is it a Winnie or isn't it? The last four years have been eventful for the long enduring, but somewhat confusing trademark. For 40 years prior, we Aussies (please read that with an American accent – "Oss-sies") have known the Winnebago brand through a mixture of Hollywood flicks and home-grown Australian motorhomes.

But then, the folks of Winnebago Industries in the US decided that the folks of Winnebago Motorhomes Australia – now known as Avida – didn't have the right permissions to be using the name. A legal battle ensued, Winnie Australia became Avida Motorhomes and, not long after, manufacturing and rental giant, Apollo Group, signed a more concrete deal with the Yanks and started reviving the Winnebago name in Australia once again.

Built under licence in Australia, the new Winnebago motorhomes and campervans are less like the A-class buses loved by movie stars and American RVers, and more like the easy-to-drive, well designed motorhomes so popular in Australia, which is a fair dinkum good thing. And so that we remember they are definitely Oss-sie, all are named after Australian beaches – Byron (although there's no 'Byron Beach', but we'll let that slip), Whitehaven, Airlie, Balmoral, and, as we're testing here, the Cottesloe.

The 'Sloe' (don't let our nickname fool you) is based on the Mercedes Sprinter, with a 2.2-litre turbo diesel that's good for 95kW and 305Nm. On our test, acceleration is strong and there's always a little left along the highway. This is the least powerful of the Merc engines available but, typical of the marque, the engine feels refined and stays quiet. We can't get enough of the seven-speed automatic, which is the smoothest shifting transmission of any commercial van used by Australian motorhome builders.

It's not just the mechanicals that make the Sprinter a great van, it's also comfortable to drive, with an upright and high-riding, but otherwise car-like cabin. The seats are supportive for the class, and the dash is modern with everything today's nomad needs – Bluetooth, a good stereo, navigation and a reversing camera. There's also climate control, and steering wheel mounted controls for the stereo, cruise control and dash menus.

In fact, the only things the standard Sprinter really lack are somewhere to sleep, shower and cook dinner, but Winnebago has stepped up where Mercedes has stopped short. In fact, the Cottesloe's floor plan is exceptionally good in almost all areas.

The two-berth motorhome is 7.7m-long (23-feet), with over 5m of internal length from the back of the driver's seat. For all

that, it seems a lot longer and, even without a sliding section, feels wide and spacious all the way to the rear bed. That's largely because the long kitchen and bed dominate the passenger side, without any tall features obstructing the view.

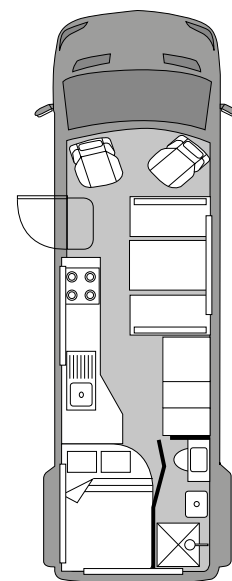
The excess of bench space can't be stated enough in the Cottesloe, but it's not the kitchen's only good feature. A long bench also means long storage options. Over and above, there's plenty of space for everything a kitchen needs – and probably leftover space for things it doesn't. In more detail, that's three overhead cabinets and five under-bench drawers with two cupboards. Also, sandwiched between the 190-litre fridge and the rear ensuite, is a full height pantry and wardrobe.

Typical of most RV kitchens, there is also a four-burner stove with grill and oven underneath, a discreet rangehood, and LED lighting under the overhead cabinets to make sure you can see what you're burning (there's also a fire extinguisher).

At dinnertime, there is plenty of room around the dinette for two and just enough for four. The forward facing bench is fitted with seatbelts, too, so the motorhome can cart four, even though it can only sleep two. A comfortable space, some will be frustrated that the standard 22-inch TV is all the way over at the bed and, realistically, too far



It's hard to argue with a long, open floor plan, a big kitchen and full bathroom



### WINNEBAGO COTTESLOE

#### VERDICT

- + Outstanding floor plan, Mercedes Sprinter base
- Access to the bed
- = A Winnebago winner for us "Oss-sies"

#### FAST FACTS

**MAKE:** Winnebago  
**MODEL:** Cottesloe  
**VEHICLE:** Mercedes-Benz Sprinter  
**ENGINE:** 2.2L turbo diesel  
**MAX POWER:** 95kW  
**MAX TORQUE:** 305Nm  
**TRANSMISSION:** 7-speed auto  
**EXTERNAL LENGTH:** 7700mm  
**EXTERNAL WIDTH:** 2330mm  
**EXTERNAL HEIGHT:** 3100mm  
**BERTH:** Two  
**GVM:** 4490kg  
**WARRANTY:** Merc - 3 years, Winnie - 2 years  
**RRP:** \$139,634, drive-away, QLD  
**CONTACT:**  
 Winnebago Australia  
 1800 825 867  
[GOWINNEBAGO.COM.AU](http://GOWINNEBAGO.COM.AU)

away to see from the dinette. Adding insult to injury, the large window around the bed doesn't really make it a great space for sitting, as there's not enough solid wall to lean against. A second telly can be fitted at the front, as an option at least.

At the rear, Winnebago has squeezed the ensuite and double bed next to each other, both essentially in north-south orientation. For the nodding off part, that means someone has to climb over another depending on sleeping and waking times. It's the one compromise of what is otherwise a really open and roomy floor plan. In the end it will show where the buyer's priorities lie (pun intended).

The ensuite is less compromised, though. While not full width, as is the prevailing fashion, it still has a separate shower and toilet, a small vanity cabinet, hand basin and enough room to swing around in (sans cat, however). Hot water is courtesy of the Truma 14-litre gas/electric hot water system, while the RV can store 100-litres of fresh and 100-litres of grey water. That's not a lot for an otherwise self-contained motorhome with a shower, but it can hook up to mains pressure when needed.

Thankfully, all other tanks are sufficient for decent time away. It has two 100Ah house batteries and two 4.5kg gas tanks, which will keep everything running longer than the water does, most likely. Other comforts

include a Truma Aventa air conditioner, two roof hatches and an electronic entry step. Move outside, and there's a handful of storage boots, plus a 4.5m long awning.

So is it a Winnie like we're used to? We think so. We can certainly see some American influence in the colour scheme, but there is no denying this is a fine Australian motorhome for an Australian traveller. It's not going to suit everyone – features like the non-island bed will turn people away (in fact, only one of the five Winnie motorhomes has one). Then again it's hard to argue with a long, open floor plan, a big kitchen and full bathroom – and, truthfully, you couldn't have all that with an island bed. **AD-RV**