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New, US-built caravans set to create a colourful presence on Australian roads... especially in pink!

Like 'Hoover' for vacuum cleaners, 'Harley' for motorcycles and 'Duco' for paint, the word 'Winnebago' until recently was the generic term for large American-style motorhomes in Australia.

But that's changing with the Australian-owned and Queensland-based Apollo Group [rolling out its new Australian and New Zealand distribution arrangement](#) for the quintessential American brand.

Under the new arrangement, Apollo not only takes over the marketing of a whole new range of motorhomes, but also an entirely new range of compact Winnebago caravans, or 'Minnie Winnies' as they have been dubbed.

Built at Apollo's Brisbane factory, the Winnebago motorhomes and campervans built on Fiat and Mercedes-Benz-powered chassis are essentially 're-badged' Talvor models, albeit with slightly different layouts and interior décor.

However the Minnie Winnie caravans are built by Winnebago's Indiana HQ in the US and are sent to Australia largely assembled to be finished off here with the addition of locally sourced appliances and other changes necessary to meet our specific local regulations.

You're certainly not going to miss them on Aussie roads. Along with a stylish grey gel coat fibreglass exterior colour, the four-model 'Minnie' range stretching in size from 15ft 8in to 23ft body lengths – some with slideouts – can also be ordered in eye-catching yellow, green, red, orange and pink body colours, provided you're prepared to be the centre of attention.

We know, having recently spent a few days living with the smallest model in the new Australian range – a pastel pink, 4.8-metre, long three-birth 1806AUS, which at around \$46,990 delivered in Queensland is the entry model to local Winnebago ownership.

'Pink?' Well it's certainly a colour for the brave, but there's another reason, as Apollo Motorhomes is supporting the National Breast Cancer Foundation with that van, donating \$500 from the sale of every unit.

Besides, we took it to Burleigh Heads on Queensland's Gold Coast and with plenty of skin on display while we were there, it fitted easily in with the scene and garnered many unexpected positive compliments!

As one of the first batch of 50 – mostly grey – to land here, our 'Minnie' like its brothers incorporated a number of changes to make it less 'American', including a new, lighter interior finish and more modern fixtures such as flick mixer taps

Packing a lot of wanted features into a small footprint, Apollo calls this Minnie a 'studio' van and sees it ideal for adventurous couples looking for a compact, easy-to-tow caravan without sacrificing on features.

A large bed, full kitchen, dinette and a corner bathroom tick off these boxes, but the 1806AUS also comes with a number of items that you only find on the option list of most Australian caravans in the \$40,000-\$50,000 bracket, such as a power-operated awning, four-speaker JVC sound system, TV, a roof-top mounted reverse cycle air conditioner, four gas burner cooktop, grill and oven, microwave and a decent-sized 186-litre fridge freezer.

AI-Ko ESC stability control is optional, as is a rooftop panel for the pre-wired solar. About all that's missing from the standard Aussie coterie is a body-mounted picnic table and a stubby holder in the cutlery drawer!

Perhaps the most appealing thing about this Minnie Winnie however is its ease of towing. With its short length and 2150mm (7ft 1in) width and maximum laden weight of less than two tonnes, the 1806AUS can be hauled effortlessly by most compact SUVs and barely needs towing mirrors because of its slim hips.

The standard tandem axle layout – unusual for a caravan of its compact size – helps here, making it easy for even a lighter tow car to maintain the speed limit and keep up with other freeway traffic, even on moderate hills.

The tandem layout and stubby length also makes the 1806AUS easy to manoeuvre and, when home, easy to park and store and we think these features will put it high on the shopping list of many first-time caravanners.

On the downside, the standard AI-Ko rubber suspension – as with most British and European vans – can make the Minnie a little 'bouncy' on uneven road surfaces when lightly laden.

While certainly given an Aussie 'twang' by Apollo, there's no taking the American completely out of a US-built caravan, with some of its hardware a little unfamiliar and 'clunky' compared with locally built caravans.

The bi-fold step, for example, is solid and works well, but you can't wind the left rear body leg down unless it's folded.

Then there's the sliding Perspex screen in the secondary flywire entry door that



Total photo(s): 20 - click to enlarge

not particularly user-friendly, while the wind-out windows themselves are things we don't see these days on Aussie vans.

However, these are relatively small issues that may not trouble owners once they become familiar with their 'Minnie'.

Outside, there's cavernous, full tunnel storage-space via two external hatches under the transverse front bed, but this is spoiled for longer objects by the battery compartment on the right hand side.

However, a separate compartment for hoses and power cords would be nice. No need to store the jockey wheel though, as it flips up conveniently.

Inside, the first impression is that it's a bit dark; thanks to a combination of relatively small windows, a relatively low ceiling height and cream and brown décor. More white would create a greater impression of size.

On the more positive note, the transverse queen bed across the front of the van unquestionably saves floorspace and has allowed a compact kitchen, opposing two-seater dinette and a squeezey, but useable rear corner bathroom to be incorporated into a small space.

True, there's little benchspace, but you can 'plate up' on the dinette table on the nights when you're not sitting out under the electric awning. And you might need to open the bathroom door to dry your feet, but the rewards are the ease of towing and manoeuvring a small caravan.

We liked the privacy curtain that allowed the bed to be blocked off visually from the living areas, and the pretty good cupboard space under the bed and in the pantry cupboard on the rear wall next to the bathroom.

However this isn't a caravan for a long road trip, but rather one to take on shorter holidays and to live in and enjoy, regardless of the weather.

The price, from \$46,990 is certainly right, although the \$40,000-\$50,000 bracket has seen a lot of new entrants in the past year or so and buyers will no doubt shop around.

But they will be battling to find a more truly compact caravan for the money and if they can live with the gloomy décor and adjust to the American hardware, we think they will be tickled pink with this Minnie Winnie.

VERDICT

The Minnie Winnie is a great new addition to the Australian caravan scene that goes a long way to accommodate Australian tastes.

While there are much larger, slide-out models available with up to six berths and \$70,000-plus price tags, the smallest and cheapest 1806AUS, combines the sturdiness of Australian and US design with the size and weight to match many of the Europeans.

And you can really make a statement if you're game enough to tick the 'colour' box!

WE LIKED:

- >> Adventurous colours
- >> Compact, space-saving layout
- >> Loads of equipment
- >> Ease of towing

NOT SO MUCH:

- >> Gloomy interior
- >> Clunky US hardware
- >> Overhead cupboards need struts to hold open
- >> An A-frame external tap and maybe a small tool box would be nice

WINNIE MINNIE 1806 AUS

Travel length: 6185mm (20ft 3in)

External body length: 4785mm (15ft 8in)

External body width: 2150mm (7ft 1in)

Travel height: 2921mm (9ft 7in)

Interior height: 2000mm(6ft 4in)

Tare weight: 1455kg

ATM: 1975kg

Ball weight: 150kg

Body: Fibreglass composite over aluminium frame with polystyrene foam wall insulation, 16mm plywood floor and plastic enclosed underbelly

Chassis: Galvanised 150mm I-beam chassis rails

Suspension: Tandem axle Al-Ko independent rubber

Brakes: 10-inch electric drum

Stability Control: Al-Ko ESC optional

Wheels: 15in alloy with 205/75-15 tyres

Fresh water: 140L

Battery: 1 x 100Ah deep cycle AGM

Solar: Optional - pre-wired

Air-conditioner: Reverse-cycle, roof-mounted

Gas: 2 x 4.5kg

Hot water: 22.6L Suburban gas/electric

Cooking: Dometic four-burner gas cooktop, plus grill and oven

Fridge: Dometic 186-litre 3-way

Microwave: Camec 900W

Toilet: Dometic cassette

Shower: Combined shower and toilet ensuite

Lighting: LED

TV: 19in standard with external antenna

Price (drive-away Qld): from \$46,990

Options fitted: Pink exterior colour (\$500)

Supplied by: [Apollo Motorhome Holidays](#), Northgate, Qld

More info: [Winnebago Australia](#)

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