

# Keeping your caravan clean

## Caravan protection pays off, discovers Michael Browning

I have to confess, I was previously sceptical about dealer-sold caravan protection. I wondered if it was so good why manufacturers didn't treat their products with it before they left the factory to face the elements in dealers' yards or in the hands of owners.

Like those ubiquitous vitamin supplements that chemists try to ram down our throats, was it overkill and simply an opportunity for the dealer to recoup profit lost in clinching the deal?

So I tried it on my own caravan in advance of a major Outback red-dirt trip, to find out.

The idea behind most RV or vehicle paint protection systems is to place a barrier between your vehicle's factory finished surface and all the things that might degrade it: UV light, bird, bat and sap droppings, red oxide staining and other penetrating dust and road grime, with all the corrosive elements they contain.

This is particularly relevant for caravans, as they either get infrequent use during holidays, or are asked to survive long periods outdoors in harsh conditions – often during summer when water restrictions in drought-prone Australia don't allow hose washing and force you to 'dry wash' – or not at all.

This is even more relevant for fibreglass-clad caravans, as harsh UV light exposure can cause yellowing over time, unless you keep them wax-polished regularly, or covered.

Why don't RV manufacturers apply these treatments to every new caravan, hybrid or motorhome? Cost – both of the product itself and the manual labour required to apply it in an industry that is already very competitive and hence, end-price conscious.

Polishing a full-height off-road caravan standing nearly three metres tall poses some special challenges for 'older' travelers, who are generally advised to stay off ladders in their Senior years and have less upper-body strength to work a microfibre cloth above shoulder level.

So, as my composite fibreglass-walled Trakmaster Extreme caravan was specifically purchased to do all the 'hard' inland red-dirt trips that you wouldn't take a regular caravan on, all this was particularly relevant and I looked for an exterior protection solution.

My search took me to RVGard, one of the largest suppliers of automotive and RV protection products in Australia that has coated more than 8,000 caravans in its nine years in business and, according to its own statistics, has had only about five warranty claims in that time.

According to its website, RVGard is sold nationally through 70 branded stores and more than 300 authorised application and inspection centres, claiming to be the largest organisation of its kind in Australia. I could have had a mobile agent come to my home, but instead I elected to take my van to my nearest dealer, Hinterland Caravans of Burleigh Heads, as from past experience I have been very impressed with the quality and cleanliness of their service centre and it had the right under-cover equipment and platforms to allow the best application.

Most RVGard products – both exterior and interior protection – are applied to new caravans before delivery, so my Trakmaster, which was already two years old and had red dirt stains from more than 20,000km of remote area travel, posed a special challenge, something that Hinterland's Service manager Cameron Carter took on personally as a pre-condition for applying RVGard.

A starting point was to give it a detailed exterior clean, before the milk-like product was hand-applied to the caravan's entire exterior surface, a process that usually takes about two and a half hours.

It certainly gleamed like new again when I collected it two days later (the wash took one day and then it was allowed to dry thoroughly before RVGard was applied), but the result was pretty much what I wanted. Some paint protection treatments intensify the original colour, but RVGard went over decals and everything without any obvious tone change.

The four-week, 6,000km Outback trip that I then made recently gave it a real workout. Travelling through northwest Queensland in the tracks of pioneers Burke and Wills took us to the Gulf of Carpentaria towns of Normanton, Kurumba and Burketown, before heading south to remote Lawn Hill (Boodjamulla) National Park, right on the Queensland/Northern Territory border.

With a raging drought in progress, proper washing was completely out of the question, although I did give both sides of the van a cursory clean with a bucket of water and a sponge when I got back to the coast. This is something I normally wouldn't do, for fear of scratching the fibreglass gelcoat, but true to its promise, there were no ill effects, thanks to the RVGard.

In particular, I was really impressed with how easily the dirt washed away, as without the protection it would have gripped the van's surface, but now was on a slippery slope, so to speak.

I should have used RVGard's official PH-neutral shampoo, but I didn't have any, so I just used drinking-grade tap water. RVGard specifically warns against using bore water, heavy detergents like truck wash and even dishwashing detergent for cleaning.

When I got back home – with drought conditions still being experienced in SE Queensland, I decided to clean the entire van using the Premium Waterless Wash that was provided with the RVGard maintenance pack.

Even more impressively and with very little effort, the dirt came off quickly and cleanly on microfibre cloths, which I just washed, dried and re-used later. The product is so gentle that even over-spray on the plastic windows from the plunger bottle produced no scratching and there were no residual red dust strains, so there is little or no evidence of our hard off-road travels.

But the best news is that unlike conventional wax polishing, I don't have to do this on an annual basis., which is something that owners of the increasing number of (increasingly expensive) fibreglass clad caravans now being sold must face if they want to keep their van from yellowing or staining, thereby reducing its re-sale value.

I only had the exterior protection treatment, but a full exterior and interior treatment on an average sized new caravan costs about \$1,800 – something that presumably could be packaged as part of your deal on a new van.

The treatment includes a free 12-monthly inspection by the applying agent and a lifetime national warranty when RVGard is applied to caravans up to two years old. This warranty is not transferable to subsequent owners and when applied to used caravans older than two years, limited to five years.