

CONQUERING *Hero*

There are a small number of 4WD motorhomes available in the Australian market, but a recent arrival, the Suncamper Conqueror, might be a bit of a game changer.

WORDS AND PICS MALCOLM STREET



From top: It certainly looks more at home out in the scrub than it would in a caravan park; The large windows above the cab provide plenty of ventilation for the luton bed

Unlike caravans, offroad motorhomes are not that prolific. Indeed, some manufacturers don't offer them at all. There are two main reasons for this, one being cost and the other the lack of readily available base vehicles for the medium sized motorhome market.

However, for those prepared to make a few compromises — mostly in the size category — there are a few good options. Sydney based Suncamper Motorhomes have some considerable expertise in this area and its Sherwood model has been around for quite some years. Technically the Sherwood is a C class motorhome but given its size, it's more like a junior C class.

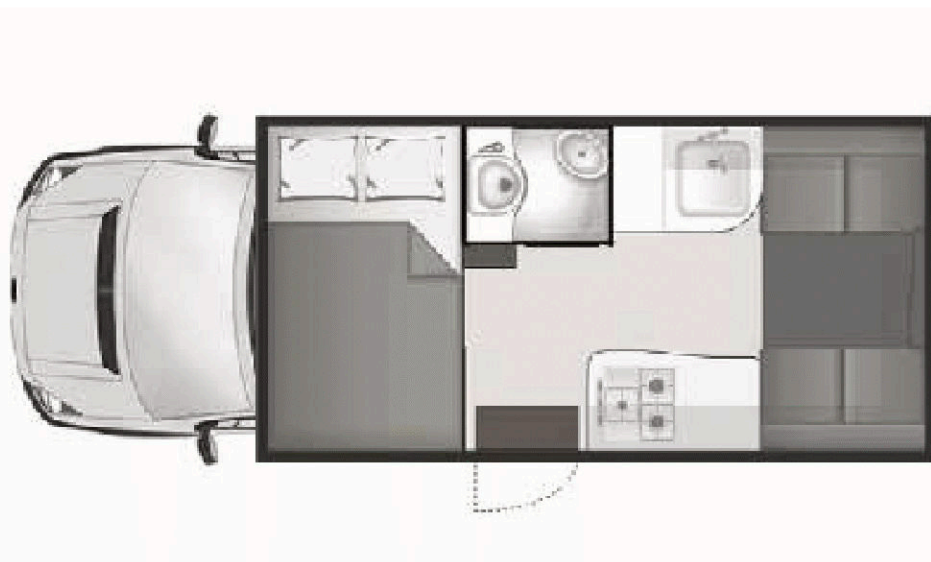
Based on the venerable Toyota HiLux cab chassis, there are a number of Sherwood layout options available, five to be precise — the E, L, R, S and T series — all with various combinations of double or single beds, different dinette layouts, seating arrangements and even wet or dry bathrooms.

HAIL THE CONQUEROR

The Sherwood E series was the original, and some think the best. However, a variation of that, with a few external additions, has recently been introduced. Called the Conqueror, it's an eye-catching motorhome. Indeed, it certainly drew attention as I motored along the old Pacific Highway. The Conqueror certainly has a fitness for purpose look about it.

BASE VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

A problem for motorhome manufacturers, in particular those who use the HiLux, is that the GVM hasn't been particularly great, especially when compared to some of the current competitors like the Ford Ranger and Mazda BT50. However, the 2020 model saw that increased to 3050kg. It's still not really adequate, so for the standard



4X4 Sherwood the HiLux gets an engineer certified GVM upgrade to 3500kg and for the Conqueror the GVM is better again at 3620kg. All the work is done by Pedders Suspension and Brakes.

That's good news for travellers, since even with the Conqueror having a tare (wet, that is with all tanks full) of 3140kg, it still has an impressive payload of 480kg. Suncamper fit a 1500kg tow bar to the Conqueror, which given it has a GCM of 5850kg, is being quite conservative. For those who like long distance travel in remote places, the 80L diesel tank has been replaced by a somewhat larger 140L capacity.

CONSTRUCTION BASICS

In its base form, the Conqueror has an aluminium frame for the walls and roof, and a steel frame for the floor area. For the external cladding, fibreglass composite panels with fire retardant foam are used for the 30mm walls and 45mm roof.

Inside the motorhome, all the cabinetry is made from plywood that is screwed and glued together. Double glazed acrylic windows are fitted all round and compared to the standard Sherwood, the Conqueror gets larger windows in the rear area. It also gets a larger rear nearside external storage area, a good feature since external storage in smaller motorhomes is often limited.



SPECIFICATIONS

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 5.85m (19ft 2in)
 Width 2.21m (7ft 3in)
 Height 3m (9ft 10in)
 Tare (wet) 3140kg (full fuel and water)
 GVM 3620kg
 Payload 480kg

MECHANICAL

Base vehicle Toyota SR HiLux
 Engine 2.8L turbodiesel
 Max power 150kW@3400rpm
 Max torque 500Nm@1600-2400rpm
 Gearbox 6 speed auto
 Wheels 17in

EXTERNAL

Water 95L fresh, 43L drinking
 Battery 1 x 120Ah
 Solar 405W
 Inverter 2000W
 Air conditioner Opt
 Gas 2 x 4kg

INTERNAL

Cooking Thetford 2 burner
 Microwave Opt
 Fridge Thetford DE105 90L 12V compressor
 Bathroom Thetford cassette toilet/ combo shower
 Hot water Swift 28L gas/elec

PRICE AS SHOWN

\$194,990

MORE INFORMATION

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Clockwise from top left: The two burner cooktop; Entertainment options can be controlled from the wheel; Everything underneath is well-protected; Tough mud-terrain tyres come standard; The bench extension; A compact sink space



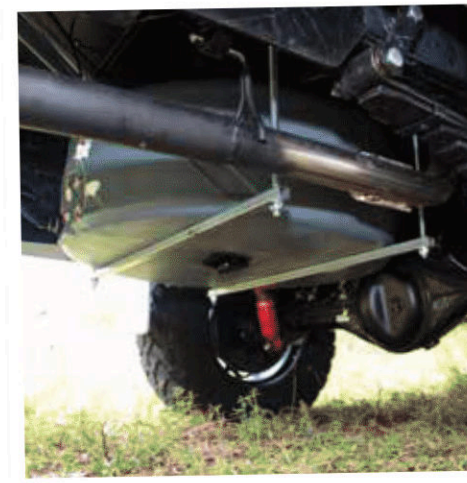
CONSTRUCTION EXTRAS

While the basics of the motorhome construction might sound a bit standard, the extra goodies fitted to the Conqueror certainly aren't. Undoubtedly the stand out feature is the roof mounted brush bar that runs across the front and down both sides. What adds to this attention grabber are the four LED spotlights and 60in light bar mounted on the brush bar. Additionally, the Rival alloy bumper bar has a 30in light bar fitted.

Anyone who does a serious amount of night driving is certainly going to appreciate this vehicle!

The Rival bumper bar is an item of interest too, as it's lighter than the original, has full ADR compliance and has an underbody bash plate, two recovery points and is winch compatible.

Other features of note are the 17in alloy wheels fitted with chunky 265/70R17 mud terrain tyres, snorkel, bonnet scoop with Raptor protective paint, front wheel arch



flares, a Toyota TRD grill and headlight surrounds.

At the rear are two larger than life spare wheels mounted above the bumper bar and a roof ladder of a type I have not seen before. It consists of four small fold out steps which are a little tricky to negotiate but very unobtrusive.

All of the above might sound like a long list but in addition to being practical, they all add to the general 'look' of the Conqueror. There are of a course a few normal expected items like the awning, Dometic security door, gas bayonet and better than usual external lighting.

INSIDE LOOK

Certainly, the general layout of the Conqueror looks familiar. There's a luton bed over the driver's cab, small club lounge in the rear, mid area kitchen and a bathroom cubicle behind the driver's cab. What's different from previous models is that the general appearance has been given something of a makeover, the result being a very contemporary and attractive look to the interior. Concealed latches on the overhead lockers, leather upholstery on the rear dinette, stone benchtops and a relocated electrical control panel all make an amazing difference. LED lighting is fitted throughout, including some touch operated/ dimmed strip lighting.

General cupboard storage is quite good for this size motorhome, but it's still limited compared to something more conventional, so light weight packing isn't a bad idea.

Given the rough road/remote living theme of this motorhome, there isn't an air conditioner fitted as a standard item (it's optional) nor is there a microwave oven, as both items require 240V mains power for operation. However, the Webasto diesel heater and 12V Sirocco fan are included for all year-round travel.

Undoubtedly the biggest disadvantage of this style of motorhome, not just those made by Suncamper, is the lack of walk-through cab access. The existing hatch is quite small and not really practical.

AS SEEN IN THE WANDERER

BRIGHT BED AREA

Above the cab, the lutan bed measures 1.9m x 1.53m (6ft 3in x 5ft). Blue/white reading lights are fitted above the nearside end of the bed and, just in case that's not enough illumination, the roof hatch has inbuilt strip lights as well. A small step and grab handle eases the bed access but like any motorhome this size, it's a bit awkward.

Ventilation is well assured with two good sized windows on either side plus a large roof hatch. Indeed, the latter is large enough it's possible to stand on the bed and reach out to do something like clean the solar panels!



Clockwise from above: Plenty of light around the lounge; It's eye-catching alright; 93 litres of fridge space

NEW FRIDGE

Cooktops and fridges don't change much but the Conqueror has new-look items for both. The Thetford cooktop has two burners which sit above the ceramic glass base, rather than being recessed. Under the bench, the Norcold DE105 fridge doesn't have any external vents, thus reducing dust ingress, but because it circulates air internally, it may increase the general internal temperature. It will be interesting to see how much effect that has on very hot days.

Benchtop space is moderate but there's a bench extension that swings out from the front bed, across the doorway. Just watch your head when you step in! Also, the wire basket slide-out pantry acts as a bench extension as well.

On the other side of the motorhome, the black enamel sink with smoked glass lid is fitted into its own cabinet. It's the type that includes a removeable draining board and rack, cutting board and washing up bowl. However, there really isn't anywhere for the drainer, so the rear table is the next best thing. Filtered drinking water is supplied to the sink.



TRAVELLING ALONG

The latest generation HiLux comes with a 2.8L turbodiesel engine that delivers 150kW of power and a generous 500Nm of torque, which is mated to a six-speed automatic transmission. All of this means the Conqueror is a brisk performer on the road. Though I did not have the opportunity to try any serious offroad stuff, it seemed that the Hilux is a willing performer.

I was wondering how much the Pedders suspension upgrade might affect ride comfort, but the answer is not much. Because of increased ride height, there is a tendency for smaller motorhomes like this to suffer from a bit of rock n' roll when cornering, but generally speaking the ride wasn't too noticeable. Buffeting from strong winds or passing trucks was probably more noticeable.

Some manufacturers leave the existing rear-view mirror in situ, but they aren't really adequate for safe driving and I appreciated the fact Suncamper has fitted Clearview extension mirrors. In conjunction with the reversing camera, they work a treat.

On the information/entertainment front, Toyota's latest inclusions are a new sound system, Bluetooth connectivity, touchscreen infotainment, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, most of which can be operated from the steering wheel. Suncamper has added a few items too, like the GME UHF CB radio, tyre pressure monitoring system, and a Hema navigation system. It's all very shmick!

STAYING CLEAN

Possibly the only area in the Conqueror where there aren't any surprises is the bathroom. It's just big enough to turn around in with a combo wet unit with a bench style cassette toilet and a flexible hose shower. Also fitted in are a small corner wash basin, extendable towel rack and wall mirror. A fan hatch delivers the ventilation.

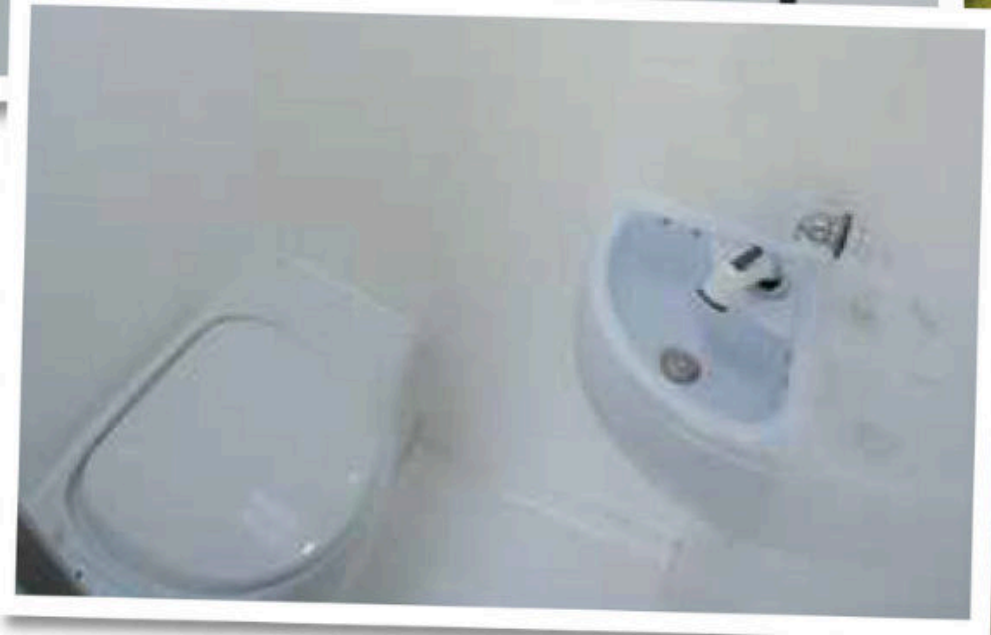
REMOTE TRAVEL

To deliver the necessary 12V power, the Conqueror comes with a 120Ah lithium battery and 405W of solar panel capacity. Also, for those who need it, there's a 2000W inverter. Water capacity consists of a 95L freshwater tank and a 43L drinking water tank. For preserving the environment, a 43L grey water tank is a standard item.

THE BOTTOM LINE

As noted previously, the Conqueror does draw plenty of attention. Undoubtedly built for the serious 4WD enthusiast, the Toyota-based motorhome does have a great deal going for it, including the legendary Toyota reliability.

Certainly a motorhome for one or two people, it's a ruggedly built, yet one with just about all the usual travelling comfort items. 🚚



Clockwise from right: It definitely looks the part; The bathroom's compact but it gets the job done; A lean, mean, pristine machine