



GLOBAL GYPSIES PTY. LTD.

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GREY NOMADS GO BACK TO SCHOOL

At age 60, 70 and even 80, many grey nomads are going back to school. But they're not signing up at the traditional learning establishments...they're going to caravan school!

Right across the country these senior 'students' are signing up for towing courses, buying training books and DVD's about caravanning and generally trying to learn more about their new hobby – and for some, their new lifestyle.

One of Australia's leading towing trainer, Jeremy Perks of Global Gypsies, says it's an extremely positive development. "For years holidaymakers were towing caravans with no training at all. You might be pulling a couple of tons behind you and travelling at up to 100 kilometres per hour. This is quite frightening when you consider the amount of training that truck drivers undergo to handle similar loads!" he says.

Since introducing their unique "*Caravan Confidence Convoys*" in 2003, Global Gypsies have trained hundreds of novice caravanners. They've also led numerous caravan safaris and produced their own towing training DVD which sold over 1000 copies in the first month alone.

"There is a growing demand for both recreational and accredited towing training," says Jeremy. "In addition to holidaymakers who want a safer and stress-free caravanning experience, we've had several companies approach us for accredited towing training to meet Occupational Health & Safety or insurance requirements."

The caravan training course Global Gypsies offers is a two-day event for novices which combines a half day of theory with 1½ days of practical training travelling in convoy and staying overnight in a rural caravan park. This enables participants to experience most situations they would confront during a real-life caravan adventure – packing the vehicle, hitching and unhitching, driving on the highway, passing or being passed by trucks, arriving at and departing from a caravan park, setting the van up (particularly the awning!), packing it up again, and of course, the all time pet hate – reversing. Jeremy says the course also has hidden benefits such as reducing stress levels, minimising arguments, and even saving marriages! The course costs \$350 per van/vehicle and is held several times a year; the next session is scheduled for February 2008.

For people who can't (or don't want to) spend a whole weekend away, the company also offers private one-on-one training sessions of three hours' duration for \$250 and special corporate sessions for companies.

Course participants come from a range of ages and occupations and can be couples, groups or singles. "A lot of ladies who have recently been widowed or divorced phone us and say, 'My husband and I always went away in the van together and now I'm on my own. I'd really like to continue caravanning, but I don't know what to do. Can you teach me?'.

“It’s really gratifying to see these ladies take off on their own adventures after they’ve done a course with us,” Jeremy says, “they feel really empowered”.

Yank Tanks

Jeremy and his partner and co-Director Jan Barrie recently visited the USA and were astounded by the number of caravans and “RV’s” on the roads. In fact, one in 12 Americans now owns an RV! The couple say the mobile homes are much larger there, too – many of them are like moving mansions! They predict that the trend towards larger vehicles will also happen here in spite of fuel prices and environmental concerns.

In the US, the caravanning market is well catered for with over 16,000 caravan parks, many of them especially designed for larger vehicles. But Jeremy questions whether Australia is sufficiently prepared for the expected flood of mobile boomers, particularly those travelling in larger vans. A survey conducted in May 2007 estimates that the usage of caravan park accommodation in WA will increase by 13% in the next five years, and that’s only based on responses from existing caravanners.

Jeremy says, “We need to figure out how to cater for this growing market. In high season it can be a battle trying to find caravan parks for smaller vans, let alone large ones, and this is exacerbated if you’re travelling in convoy. Our company recently led three very successful caravan convoys - one was for the Winnebago Club and we had 30 huge motorhomes travelling together.”

Wagons Ho!

And the popularity of group caravan travel is on the rise which will put even more strain on facilities. “It’s as if people are reverting to the old days of the wagon trains when people went on adventures together led by a wagon master. It’s also about safety in numbers, particularly as people get a little older and start to lose some of their confidence,” he says.

Jeremy believes that accommodation for the growing number of caravanners is an issue that State Governments and local Shires need to address urgently. Sales of caravans are climbing all the time and with land prices at a premium, the amount of caravan parks is shrinking to make way for more profitable enterprises. New, and better equipped, paid – or even free – camping areas are obviously needed, and the destinations that provide them will reap the benefits.

Tourism WA and motoring organisations have recognised the growing importance of caravanning as a legitimate contributor to the tourism industry, thanks in no small part to persistent lobbying by the Caravan Industry Association. Both the RAC(WA) and NRMA(NSW) are promoting caravan safaris and are encouraging their members to purchase the Global Gypsies caravan training DVD, while many WA caravan dealers recommend the company’s towing training programs to new caravan purchasers.

Jeremy welcomes these initiatives. “If we are going to have more caravans on the roads, then we need to have better educated caravanners. We estimate that through our courses and our DVD we’ve probably trained over 5000 people, but with more than 350,000 caravanners on the road, we still have a long way to go!”, he says.

For more information about caravan training or the DVD, contact Global Gypsies on 9341 6727, admin@globalgypsies.com.au or visit www.globalgypsies.com.au .