



GLOBAL GYPSIES PTY. LTD.

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TOWING IS NO LONGER SECRET MEN'S BUSINESS!

Ever ask a lady caravanner how she feels about towing and reversing? If so, you might get a response like, *"That's secret men's business!",* or *"Reversing means divorcing!";* or *"We tried to learn together but ended up with tyre levers at 20 paces!"*

Although there are thousands of highly skilled female caravanners out there who can handle their vans better than the boys, unfortunately there are also still a lot of ladies who shy away from learning towing skills. Many of them might like to learn how to handle their caravan or camper trailer but either don't have the confidence, or don't know anyone who can give them objective, unemotional tuition that doesn't end in tears and a nuked relationship!

Fortunately there's a happy solution! With several professional and affordable towing training courses now available in Perth, the ladies are lining up to learn! One of WA's best towing and 4WD trainers, Jeremy Perks of Global Gypsies, believes one of the reasons his company's courses are so popular with women is that their instructors have been taught the mysterious art of *"Girlspeak"*. "But our training isn't just designed for women, it's ideal for anyone who's a towing novice and wants to embark on the caravanning lifestyle," he says.

"Our courses are personalised, one-on-one sessions – no big groups, no pressure to compete. We'll even go to the client's home if they're a bit nervous. We start the caravanning story at the beginning and then ratchet up the content if the student's knowledge is more advanced. We talk about real life situations they can relate to; we eliminate jargon and clearly explain the necessary terminology. There's no patronising attitude, no such thing as a silly question and plenty of time for explanation, discussion and hands-on practice," he says.

Learning how to tow safely and correctly from an expert makes good sense. If there are two of you caravanning, both partners should have the necessary skills. What happens if one of you gets sick or injured? Or if you're involved in an emergency and the other driver has to take over? Novice caravanners can spend a fortune on a new rig, yet some are reluctant to spend a fraction of that on learning how to tow their investment properly. Smart 'newbies' take a towing course.

Reversing Is a Common Concern

Jeremy says the most common concern for novices is reversing. There are a number of different techniques - the non-verbal, hand-signals-only version which he teaches, the older style 'left-hand/right-hand down' method, plus a range of individual systems travellers have created for themselves. For some couples there is also the "War of the Roses" technique in which they have no particular system for reversing and always end up in an argument!

Towing Tales

Statistics are hard to come by but Jeremy believes that the factor responsible for most caravanning accidents is inexperience on the open road, particularly when hit by a strong cross wind or when passing, being passed, or being approached by large trucks. In these situations, inexperienced caravanners tend to over-react, which means the rig may start to sway or ends up on the shoulder of the road with its wheels on loose gravel. Panic sets in and the driver over-corrects. The vehicle and rig go out of control and the caravan 'jack-knifes', or swings around 180° until it is almost parallel with the vehicle and still moving. This is a recipe for disaster, particularly at high speeds, and it can happen in seconds.

Observing such an incident a decade ago was actually the catalyst for Global Gypsies to introduce their towing training program. Over the years, Jeremy has acquired a trailer-load of towing tales - some amusing, some troubling and others downright scary.

During one training session, a chatty well-meaning husband kept interrupting the instructor and giving his wife his own instructions. Jeremy kindly suggested that he cut the commentary but when this proved impossible, the hubby good naturedly agreed to put duct tape over his mouth until the session was over! It worked a treat and the couple now happily tow and reverse as a team using hand signals only - hopefully polite ones!

Another student with a van barely off the showroom floor was so pleased with the results of his training that on the way home he was busy telling a friend about it on his hands-free phone. As he approached a corner, his attention waivered for a split second and he didn't allow a wide enough clearance for the rear of his van to take the bend. He promptly cleaned up a road sign and put a huge gash along the side of his brand new caravan. Oops.

But the scariest incident occurred when a novice caravanner arrived for training with the caravan hitched incorrectly to the vehicle. The safety chains were not attached correctly and the 'cup' which is supposed to be locked in place over the towball had not been secured. This meant that the 'floating' tow ball was carrying the entire weight of the caravan by sheer balance and good luck. Had the driver hit a bump or stopped suddenly, the tow ball would have bounced out of the cup and the van would have either smashed onto the road, continued travelling forward uncontrollably, veered onto the shoulder or swerved into oncoming traffic. At best, vehicle and caravan would have been severely damaged; at worst, this 'unconscious uncoupling' could have caused a serious accident, injury or even death.

Towing is about knowing and novice caravanners owe it to themselves, their family and others on the road to learn how to tow safely and correctly. The private, half-day Global Gypsies towing course costs \$385 per van/vehicle (one or two people) and can be arranged at times and venues to suit. For clients living near the CBD who are a little nervous about taking their new 'baby' out for the first time, the trainer will even come to them.

The company has also created a package combining a professionally-produced 90-minute towing training DVD called "*Caravanning with Confidence*" with a "*Towing Checklists*" booklet which costs \$34.95 including GST, postage and handling.

**For more information, contact Global Gypsies on 9341 6727,
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