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Pull up your bobbysocks, because Teardrops are back, baby! Roothy checks out the custom-made Aussie Teardrop Campers... they're bitchin'

# Riposnorter Repro

Words by John Rooth Photography by John Rooth and Robb Cox



**M**y mate, Reiner Gudd, is best described as a bit eccentric. German born, he came to Australia in his 20s because "they take life too seriously over there". He's got a work ethic that's more 'have a drink and think about it' (à la me) and he's got a superb sense of humour – the poor bugger was a born Australian before he even got here!

Having trained as an electrician, he found working in Australia meant having a crack at whatever he wanted too. Like so many other skilled migrants, Reiner found his niche in the caravan industry and was soon owning and running a factory producing custom caravans 20 years before that was considered normal.

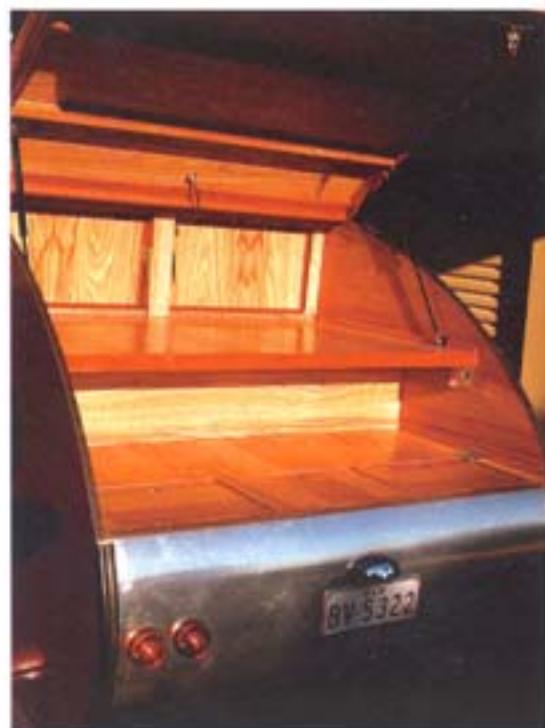
After a decade or so of punching away, Reiner decided to ease off a bit and repair other people's caravans instead. Working from home, his reputation for quality and fairness made him so popular that what should have been relaxing, started to look

like work. Before long, Reiner was looking for something to do that wasn't so serious!

Now, anybody else with his skills and abilities would have been raking it in right now with the huge boom the caravan industry is experiencing. True to form, Reiner's heading off in his own direction again, building something he loves, rather than trying to exploit a niche market. With this big bloke, life is all about enjoying it on the way through, rather than simply making a buck.

Hence the Teardrops. These little units were very popular back in the late 1930s with Americans looking for something more robust than a tent to go camping in. Motor camping was popular, but bad roads meant caravans weren't an option. With the increases in fuel prices, smaller motors and interest in all things retro, Teardrops are making a big comeback stateside again!





**Top Left:** This is the view from bed, sort of. With feet tucked under the shelf, it's easy to reach the radio and interior light. Sound quality is excellent and there's more packing room than you'd think

**Top Right:** Just try getting the kids out of the Teardrop! It's so cute my tribe wouldn't leave it alone, and young Tom got so carried away he offered to clean it! Try that with a 23-footer!

**Above:** Under the well-sealed boot lid is the kitchen-come-cupboard space. You can easily imagine a small gas cooker, backed up by a car fridge and basin. It wouldn't be hard to fit a tank, tap and sink if required

**Above Right:** Chassis and suspension is as simple as it comes and well suited to the measly 320kg weight. Lightweight maybe, but tough with it - we pulled it off-road with no fear at all. No brakes required at under half the 750kg limit

Of course, none of that bothered Reiner much; he'd always liked the shape and wanted to build one for himself and his lady Sam. At that stage, Reiner was involved in the trike game; those crazy three-wheeled motorbikes powered by Volkswagen engines.

He and Sam, always keen campers, were travelling all over the country and he was sick of putting up tents and packing them down again. The small dimensions of a Teardrop meant it could be towed behind their trike easily. In fact, they've been towed by motorcycles just as successfully.

But like everything Reiner does, people

started to take more than a passing interest in his Teardrop. A friend asked him to make one, then another, and another and pretty soon Reiner didn't have time to build anything except more Teardrops.

Starting with a galvanised and powder-coated steel chassis that he designed and builds himself, running on leaf springs and trailer wheels, Reiner's Teardrops get their dimensions from the original concept, which was that everything had to be cut out from a 4ft by 8ft sheet. That's how plywood and aluminium always came, so that is how big a Teardrop is. There's a choice of plain aluminium or powder-coated finishes for the exterior sheeting.

## CARAVAN REVIEW: AUSSIE TEARDROP CAMPER



Inside, he's built plywood shelves and cupboards, and the boot is also very useful, especially for carrying kitchen-type stuff.

The base model only has one door, but so far almost every Teardrop Reiner's built has got the two-door option. I had no trouble at all getting my 100kg bulk in and out and found the nights I slept in the Teardrop where as comfortable as any caravan. The floor is covered by a high-density foam mattress and there's enough room for a six-footer to sleep. The Teardrop shape means all the space is around your head, so there's no sense of claustrophobia and plenty of room to shuffle in and out of a change of clothes.

I'd like to report on the towing characteristics, but that's almost impossible. Why? Because you can't feel it, that's why! Hooking up is easier than wheeling out the lawnmower – the ball weight is

only 30kg – and the aerodynamic body shape and light weight means the Teardrop just tucks in and tows without a care in the world.

Similarly, it doesn't take much space to store and must rate as the most easily manoeuvred 'caravans' I've ever had anything to do with.

Don't confuse lightweight with weak though, as these Teardrops have already proven themselves over huge distances through all parts of Australia without any problems.

During our test period, the 'drop was towed up several loose dirt tracks at speed, where it stayed exactly behind the tow vehicle and was put through its paces up some ugly tracks at Black Duck Gully. Once again, no problems at all, and if you did get it stuck, recovery is as easy as lifting it out!

There was no change in the fuel consumption of the Jeep and even behind

the wife's small 1.6L car, the performance difference wasn't noticeable. Thank heavens we could see it in the mirror!

In fact, the only 'problem' I had was the non-stop barrage of people who wanted to look and talk about the little Teardrop. Most people thought it must be a restored vintage caravan, but everybody thought it looked cute. Wish they'd said the same about me...

All that and I can't fault the little unit's comfort factor at all. During one chilly night on top of a windy hill, I was as snug as a bug wrapped up in a doona in the Teardrop. On a hot coastal night, the doors on either side and the roof vent were all opened to make the most of the breeze, and with the screens shut, the insects were kept out too. You can have a hell of a lot more to do exactly the same thing!

No, there's no kitchen, but there's space to put all the things you need for



cooking and washing up under the back lid. Reiner knows he could have installed a sink or a water tank or whatever, but felt anything that complicated the sheer simplicity of his Teardrops probably wasn't worth it.

We carried a couple of 5L water containers, a bucket and bowl, a small camp stove and a picnic set in the back and found that easy access made knocking up a cuppa or a meal as easy as a van anyway. Yes, you're out in the open, but some of us don't mind that – unless it's raining.

As far as features go, the motorcycle battery (charged from the tow vehicle) tucked in the rear powers the exterior and interior lights and a quality radio/CD and speakers. Reiner likes his music and likes to read at night too, so I guess that explains their inclusion. But when you're all tucked up with a book, there's not much difference between being here or in a plush motel room, this side of a cou-

ple of hundred dollars anyway.

Yep, and now it's all happening again. From pottering around building the occasional Teardrop for himself and friends, Reiner's now pretty much back to work full-time.

That's okay, he loves his little Teardrops, but rather than doing the 'hire staff and grow thing', Reiner's quite happy to have Llew Jenkins, a very talented chap in his own right, come over and help out. Having been friends for 20 years, Reiner knows Llew's work and input is superb, but more importantly, Llew won't get pressured into taking things too seriously either!

This still leaves us with a hell of a quandary. Having lived with one of my mate's Teardrops for a month or more, I can't help wondering why anybody would need much more! Easily stored (the biggest problem is keeping kids out of it) and easily towed, it offers a very

comfortable night's sleep anytime and anywhere and kept the camping and cooking gear altogether too.

The only thing I'd like is some sort of annexe so that there's a bit of outside shade and another option other than eating in the rain. Reiner tells me he and Llew are already working on that, or at least they will be after their coffee... **GMW**

#### FACT FILE

Manufacturer:	Aussie Teardrop Campers
Weight:	320kg
Base Price:	\$8750
Price as Tested:	\$9500
Off-road Price:	\$12,500

#### CONTACT

Aussie Teardrop Campers  
Tel: (07) 3800 1338  
Email: reinerj@bigpond.net.au  
Website: www.aussieteardrops.com