

**WITHOUT
A HITCH**

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**Upgrade
your caravan:**
The accessories
guaranteed make
your holiday easier,
smoother and safer



“The beauty is in the details” is certainly true when it comes to caravans. It’s the accessories and upgrades that turn a simple caravan into a reliable, safe and enjoyable home on wheels.

To many caravan enthusiasts, a caravan is a blank canvas. Almost every aspect of a caravan can be upgraded, from couplings, brakes and suspension to heating, lighting and security. We take a look at what you can do to make your caravan more reliable and more enjoyable.



Towing and moving

Whether you're moving, towing or setting-down your pride and joy, you should be using equipment that fills you with confidence, works well every time and looks the business.

Couplings

The coupling is your link between you and your caravan. Beyond the typical fixed, ball and socket coupling, there are many different upgrades available – how you choose to couple depends on you and your caravan.

To choose one that is right for your set-up, you need to consider factors such as trailer mass, where and how you intend to tow and how the caravan is braked. Some couplings also focus on towing stability.

Here are your options:

Overrun/override couplings

This type utilises inertia to passively activate the caravan's brakes as the towing vehicle slows. Within the coupling, a spring, rated to the ATM of your caravan, is compressed as the trailer pushes against the slowing towing vehicle.

This compression actuates mechanical brake cables via a lever or hydraulic brakes via a master cylinder. This is an uncomplicated method for braking your trailer.

Benefits:

- ▶ Passive braking action means no intervention needed from the driver or tow vehicle
- ▶ Installation is straightforward and involves no complicated electrical work
- ▶ Suitable for mechanical and hydraulic brakes.

Note: This type of coupling is not compatible with weight distribution hitches as they restrict the compression movement of the coupling.



Product details:

Overrun/override couplings

Off-road couplings

Off-road couplings are required to have less restrictive motion than just the horizontal rotation of a typical fixed coupling. Better ones provide 360 degrees of articulation thanks to having a second axis of rotation. This greatly increases the tow vehicle's ability to traverse rough terrain.

Benefits:

- ▶ Go anywhere and in any direction with 360 degrees of head articulation
- ▶ Available as fixed or override types
- ▶ Easy to install.



Product details:
Off-road couplings

Stabiliser couplings

A sway control coupling is specifically designed to reduce sway on trailers with an ATM of up to 2500kg and with a maximum towball weight of 250kg. It works by gripping the sides of the towball with friction pads, counteracting any tendency for the trailer to sway and even eliminates small snaking movements, making towing safer. However, it's important that these types of couplings must be fitted to a towball that cannot rotate and unscrew itself.

Benefits:

- ▶ Greatly improved safety
- ▶ Allows you to make emergency manoeuvres with confidence
- ▶ Passive action needs no intervention from the driver or tow vehicle
- ▶ Easy installation
- ▶ Suitable for use with electric brakes
- ▶ Fits a 50mm towball.



Product details:
Stabiliser couplings

Jockey wheels

The humble jockey wheel takes the load when your caravan is unhitched from the tow vehicle and helps you manoeuvre it into position. However, it's an often-neglected accessory that can be upgraded for a variety of reasons. Common reasons for upgrading your jockey wheel include:

- ▶ Changed clearance requirements between the drawbar and ground, which you might expect with a new towing vehicle. A range of standard jockey wheels with extended heights are available to suit your height requirements
- ▶ Improving the jockey wheel's performance on soft ground. A jockey wheel with a larger diameter wheel and broader tread will have a greater surface area than a smaller jockey wheel, making it easier to use over soft ground

- ▶ Improving ease of use. There's no need to remove a swivel bracket jockey wheel from the caravan; instead, you just pull the release handle and the jockey wheel rotates into a suitable travelling position. Simply making it easier to retract and stow your jockey wheel. An auto-retracting jockey wheel automatically folds the wheel up to a travel position as you wind it up off the ground. This gives it better ground clearance when not in use.



Read more:

Attach your new jockey wheel in seven easy steps



Product details:

Jockey wheels

Caravan movers

Caravan movers are hand powered or electrically operated devices that move your caravan when it's unhitched from the vehicle.

They make moving your caravan safer and easier, negating the need to pull/push a three-tonne van. They also make it easier to reverse your caravan into tight spaces.

There are three key types: ratchet jockey wheels, motorised jockey wheels and traction rollers.



Read more:

Caravan movers: What are they and how do they work?

Ratchet jockey wheel

These movers look very similar to a standard jockey wheel. Most fit using the standard jockey wheel clamp on either side of the drawbar. A ratchet handle extends from the axle of the jockey wheel and is used to both cock the ratchet and steer the wheel.

Benefits:

- ▶ Installs onto the drawbar like a regular jockey wheel
- ▶ Easy to operate
- ▶ Inexpensive.



Product details:
Ratchet jockey wheels

Motorised jockey wheel

The motorised jockey wheel adds more ease and control. Most units attach to the drawbar like your typical jockey wheel. Some, known as motorised trailer dollies, are designed to couple with the coupling, offering a sturdier connection with the caravan.



A motorised jockey wheel is bulkier and heavier than the ratchet type as it has a motor and an external battery; it is also more expensive.

Benefits:

- ▶ More power than a ratchet mover
- ▶ Provides more control over the caravan.

Traction roller

The traction roller attaches to your caravan's chassis, above each wheel. When engaged, its rollers press against each tyre and turn the caravan's wheels forwards or backwards through traction.

While other movers require you to be positioned at the caravan's drawbar, the traction roller's remote control allows you to stand in a position to see where the caravan is headed. You can even rotate a single-axle caravan on the spot, allowing you to squeeze your caravan into spots previously not possible.

An added bonus of the system's design means the caravan won't roll uncontrollably when moving up or down inclines of up to 28 per cent. It can also push a typical caravan onto a step of 4cm high.

Benefits:

- ▶ Greater control than jockey type movers
- ▶ Powerful, making it ideal for very heavy caravans
- ▶ Remote operation allows you to see what's going on
- ▶ Retracts and stows in situ
- ▶ Ideal for inclines and stepped approaches.



Product details:
Traction roller



Keeping steady: Caravan stabilisation

Once you've manoeuvred your caravan into position, you'll want equipment that ensures it remains steady while you're living in it. Many caravans, particularly older ones, don't feature this equipment as standard. Here are your options:

Corner steadies

As the name suggests, corner steadies are designed to stabilise the caravan at each corner – this is especially important when your caravan is unhitched from the towing vehicle, as it will prevent shifting while you and your payload move about the interior. Though it might involve some welding, they're relatively simple to install and, with a winding handle, effortless to operate. These shouldn't be used as a jack.

Benefits:

- ▶ Improves caravan's stationary stability
- ▶ Fold up with ease.



Read more:
Solid as a rock: How to fit corner steadies on your caravan



Product details:
Corner steadies

Landing legs

Corner steadies are strictly for stabilising your caravan and are not to be used to jack it up off the ground. Landing legs are ideal for levelling your caravan when parked on uneven ground. They're also great for raising your caravan up off its wheels to prevent flat spots in the tyres during extended periods of storage. However, landing legs are bigger, heavier and bulkier than corner steadies.

Benefits:

- ▶ Assists with levelling your caravan on uneven ground
- ▶ Ideal for long-term storage of your caravan
- ▶ Helpful in the maintenance of your caravan's undercarriage.



Staying safe on the road

Safety should always be your primary concern when towing your caravan. These upgrades make sure you stay safe and sound.

Weight distribution hitch (WDH)

WDHs are designed to ensure the towball weight of the caravan is evenly distributed across front and rear axles of the towing vehicle.

The weight of a caravan on the towball can cause the rear end of the towing vehicle to drop and its front end to raise, reducing the towing vehicle's capacity to brake and steer correctly. WDHs have tensioned arms attached to the towbar of the towing vehicle that reduce the load on the vehicle's rear axle and help spread the load between the towing vehicle's front axle and the caravan's axle(s).

Benefits:

- ▶ Safe weight distribution
- ▶ Ensures steering and braking of towing vehicle is not compromised.



Brakes

The override type of braking system is a passive system that brakes due to inertia. This system works fine, but it doesn't offer the finesse of an active braking system such as power-assisted or hydraulic braking; in addition, if your ATM is above 2000kg you will be required by law to upgrade to an independently powered system.

Let's cover the upgrade options:

Electric brakes

As the name suggests, these brakes are electrically activated. An inertia-activated controller unit, mounted in the front of the car in view of the driver, activates the caravan brakes as the driver brakes the towing vehicle.

The controller features a display that informs you of its status and allows you to dial in the amount of braking force the system should use.

Meanwhile, in the rear, the system employs magnets to actuate the drum's brake lever arms to engage the brake shoes. Installation should be done by a qualified professional.

Benefits:

- ▶ Increased control compared to override type braking systems
- ▶ Better feedback via brake controller
- ▶ Relatively easy to upgrade to from an override system
- ▶ Improves resale value.



Product details:
Electric brakes



Electrically activated hydraulic disc brakes

Hydraulic disc brakes on a caravan work in the same way as those on your car. They offer improved braking performance and reduced maintenance requirements over any form of drum brake.

Typically, hydraulic disc brakes are activated using an override type coupling. However, like an electrically braked system, a hydraulic system can be upgraded to be controlled with a brake controller. As with electric braking, this upgrade should be completed by a qualified professional.

Benefits:

- ▶ Increased stopping power
- ▶ Increased control over braking power
- ▶ Better feedback via brake controller
- ▶ Reduced fade
- ▶ Reduced maintenance
- ▶ Improves resale value.



Product details:
Hydraulic disc brakes

iQ7 XTREME

If your caravan has hydraulic brakes, the iQ7 XTREME is an innovative pneumatic/hydraulic braking system that offers even greater control over your caravan's braking and significantly reduces stopping distances. Power actuated systems such as iQ7 XTREME are a requirement by law on any caravan or trailer in excess of 2000kg (2500kg in New Zealand).

The system is comprised of an in-car controller, mounted in the front of the car and in view of the driver, and a compressed pneumatic/hydraulic actuator, mounted on the caravan's drawbar.

The iQ7 XTREME controller features a pressure-sensitive pad affixed to the tow vehicle's brake pedal, giving you better control. This system is far more cost effective than traditional air-braking systems.

As a bonus, the system also features an in-built breakaway activation, which brings your caravan to a stop should it become unhitched in transit. Most systems require a separate breakaway switch and power source.

Benefits:

- ▶ Safer towing with significantly reduced stopping distances
- ▶ Greater control over braking via vehicle's own brake pedal
- ▶ In-built breakaway activation
- ▶ Improves resale value.



Read more:

Safe adventuring with these three innovations in caravan towing tech



Product details:

iQ7 XTREME

Electronic stability control (ESC)

One of the most dangerous situations you can be in when towing a caravan is if you're forced to swerve in order to avoid an obstacle on the road. Without any assistance, caravans can snake or sway in this situation. However, ESC significantly reduces speed and braking distance in an emergency manoeuvre, giving you the most control possible and keeping your caravan stable.

Caravan stability can also be affected by high winds or by buffeting from other large vehicles in combination with poor road conditions. ESC helps control the 'sway' effect in these situations.

Benefits:

- ▶ Safely avoid hazards in emergency situations
- ▶ Reduces speed and braking distance in a controlled manner
- ▶ Safer towing by controlling dangerous caravan sway under normal driving
- ▶ Monitors stability/lateral movement of both car towing vehicle and caravan
- ▶ Works in off-road conditions
- ▶ Improves resale value
- ▶ Attracts insurance discounts from some providers.



Read more:

Safe adventuring with these three innovations in caravan towing tech



Product details:

Electronic stability control

Independent rubber suspension (IRS)

As the name suggests, IRS provides your caravan with independent suspension. However, unlike complicated independent suspension systems, independent rubber suspension is a very elegant design.

Rubber elements inside the axle tube resist the torsional movement of an inner axle, simultaneously providing suspension and shock absorption. In addition to adding independent suspension, this upgrade ensures minimal maintenance for years.

Benefits:

- ▶ Durable and long lasting
- ▶ Fewer moving parts
- ▶ Fewer points of failure
- ▶ Less maintenance required
- ▶ A relatively straightforward upgrade thanks to fewer components.



Read more:

Ask an expert: The top three areas of concern in caravan maintenance



Product details:

Independent rubber suspension





Heating, cooling and energy saving

Here are a few accessories you might not have considered, including heating, cooling and LED lighting.

Heating

Given that we tend to caravan in the summer, heating is one of those necessities you may not think of until you need it. Heating your caravan is an upgrade worth considering, especially if you're travelling in the cooler months and in colder areas such as the Outback in winter or alpine areas.

Here's a brief overview of your options:

- ▶ **Diesel-powered:** A cost-effective option if you have a large area to heat or spend a lot of time in cooler climates
- ▶ **Gas-powered:** Much quieter than diesel but can be more expensive to run
- ▶ **Combination gas/electric:** Gives you the flexibility of using gas while on the road and electricity when camped at a powered site
- ▶ **Electric:** For powered sites only. Underfloor heating is an unobtrusive way to use electricity. It can be built in, or added by slipping a purpose-built membrane under the floor mat

- ▶ **Space heaters:** Diesel, gas, electricity or a combination. Space heaters draw air from within the van, heat it and pump it back in again. Some space heaters can be set up to operate in conjunction with the hot-water unit, while others are mounted to the chassis of the caravan. They're an efficient way to heat large areas.



Read more:

Turn it up! The best solutions for caravan heating

Cooling

For those days when even the shade is too hot, you need an air conditioner.

Fortunately, there's a substantial range on offer:

- ▶ **Rooftop:** This style of air conditioner is a no-brainer as cold air falls. A rooftop unit will cool your caravan more quickly than a built-in or portable air conditioner
- ▶ **Built-in:** Ideal when rooftop mounting isn't possible or height clearance is an issue. This style of air conditioner can be easier to install
- ▶ **Split system:** Much quieter than other systems as the compressor can be mounted elsewhere, such as over the drawbar, where it isn't in contact with the caravan wall. You will just need to make sure that the drawbar is rated to carry the load
- ▶ **Portable 12V:** A simple solution if the cost and difficulty of installation is too great, heaters can be set up to operate in conjunction with the hot-water unit, while others are mounted to the chassis of the caravan. They're an efficient way to heat large areas.



Read more:

A caravan for the big lap: Real advice from real people

Beat the heat: Five ways to keep your caravan cool this summer

LED lighting

More efficient than regular halogen and tungsten lighting by up to 90 per cent, LED lighting is one way to make a big difference for very little investment. The obvious improvement is in the drain on the caravan's 12V power supply while the caravan is disconnected from 240V power. A typical 1.5W LED light gives off the equivalent light of a 10W tungsten bulb.

LED lighting often has a smaller form factor than tungsten and halogen, allowing LED lights to be fitted in a larger range of locations within the caravan's interior. Thanks to this, most common light fittings such as domed ceiling lights, reading lights and downlights have an LED replacement to suit.

Benefits:

- ▶ Improves the quality of light inside the caravan
- ▶ More energy efficient
- ▶ Longer lasting (by factors of years)
- ▶ Can fit existing light fittings.



Read more:

**Let there be light:
Ways to improve caravan lighting**



Security

Here are three anti-theft technologies designed to deter thieves from taking your pride and joy. While nothing is truly 'unstealable', simple deterrents such as these can make all the difference.

Coupling lock/security cover

A coupling lock fits over the top of your coupling. When your caravan is attached to your tow vehicle, it ensures the coupling cannot be released from the towball. When your caravan is uncoupled, the lock prevents it from being coupled to a vehicle.

Benefits:

- ▶ Prevents caravan from being uncoupled from your vehicle
- ▶ Ensures that the caravan can't be coupled to another car.

Universal coupling lock

A universal coupling lock works with a variety of different couplings. This type of lock features a towball secured by a lockable bar that arches over the head of the coupling. A universal coupling lock is only used when your caravan is uncoupled.

Benefits:

- ▶ Works with a variety of couplings
- ▶ Prevents caravan from being coupled to another vehicle.

Anti-Theft System (ATS)

If your caravan is stolen, ATS gives you the best possible chance to get the caravan back. It incorporates both GPS tracking and Microdot technology to provide multiple forms of protection: if the caravan is moved beyond its defined parking spot, a downloadable smartphone app will alert you and allow you to track the caravan with a high level of accuracy; then, when the caravan is recovered, microscopic Microdots – which are etched with a unique security identification number – will allow you to prove your ownership to the police.

Benefits:

- ▶ Provides accurate tracking of your caravan if it is stolen
- ▶ Proves ownership of the caravan.



Read more:

Secure your pride and joy: 11 caravan anti-theft ideas. The anti-theft technologies you need to know about



Product details:

Anti-Theft System

Conclusion

If your caravan is a blank canvas, you can paint a pretty picture with any of these upgrades. Each one can add value – not just at resale, but by improving the safety and performance of your home away from home. For more ideas and much more information, check out [Without A Hitch](#), speak to an [AL-KO Authentics dealer](#), or contact an [ESC certified installer](#).

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