



# Mobile palace for show jumpers

Horses can travel in horse floats ripping along behind the 4x4, however many of those at the serious end of the horse business these days go for horse trucks. **Craig Silby** travelled to Taupo to report on the ultimate in accommodation for horses and their owners.





**K**aren Burnett and her daughters Hannah and Briar love their horses, and show jumping is what you'll find them doing throughout each summer. With up to 15 events to attend each season, including ones across Cook Strait in Christchurch, it's an exciting and busy time.

The family now has a truck that ensures they and their valued horses travel safely in superb comfort. Once they are at each show the horses are then housed in yards or stables.

Some in the show jumping set make do with rickety old converted trucks that barely hang together; others travel in custom-made horse trucks that could put some luxury apartments to shame.

"At the 'Horse of the Year' show there can be over 1000 trucks on site," Karen explains. "You could almost call it a travelling town."

Until recently she and the girls had a Mitsubishi Fighter that could take five horses and had a comfortable accommodation area. But as they got more serious they got more horses; now Hannah and Briar both have three horses each. The Fighter was just too small so they decided it was time to get a bigger truck.

They considered lots of options and had lots of ideas, but as far as Karen was concerned she wanted a Scania.

"In the horse world Scania is the pinnacle [a revelation that must bring total joy to CablePrice beancounters. Ed], it's what you see at all the horse events in Europe and I found out you can get them with an auto, which is just perfect for me."

Karen discussed her options with CablePrice's Napier salesman Paul Roche, who liaised with Andy Wright at Classic Horse Coaches in Dannevirke, and the end result is this magnificent beast I tested at its home in Taupo.

The base cab chassis is a Scania G 380 LB 6x2MNB with the CG19 sleeper cab. The truck was custom specified ex-factory to suit the role. Particular attention was paid to the suspension to make sure the ride was as plush as possible for both the humans and the horses. Paul specced air suspension for all axles including the front steer axle, which allows Karen to separately adjust the ride height front and rear and provides a magic carpet-like experience on the highway.

"The auto is probably the best feature as far as driving the truck is concerned," says Karen. "I was absolutely amazed that I could just jump in and drive the truck all the way back to Taupo from Hawke's Bay, no problem at all."

It goes to show how far trucks have come when you can comfortably hand over such a large truck to a relatively inexperienced driver

and be confident they should have no trouble operating the vehicle.

To be fair; Karen is a very conscientious driver. I was very impressed with her ability and confidence behind the wheel, considering her only real experience driving trucks is with their previous Mitsubishi, which was a far smaller truck overall. The Scania is a very big truck and quite a beast to manoeuvre, but Karen could put several more experienced drivers to shame.

The 12-speed Opticruise automated transmission is mated to a Scania multi-stage hydraulic retarder. When these features are used in conjunction with the cruise control and downhill speed control there is not a lot left for the driver to do other than watch the surroundings and steer. The computers take

over and progress the truck safely along in a very efficient manner.

The truck is utterly effortless to drive except for the fact it is so large – you need to keep your wits about you when manoeuvring around tight spaces. The rear view mirrors are excellent, with a wide field of view once you get used to their concave shape, which slightly distorts the distances.

The cab interior has been fitted with leather multi-adjustable seats on both sides and has a monitor set-up above the windscreen that can remotely show the horse compartment, or the rear view for help with reversing. There's an access port/hatch set into the rear wall of the cab to allow free access to and from the living quarters. This has a seal that can move with the cab so it



can move independently of the truck body on its air suspension.

Moving down the left side, beside the entry door is a compartment that opens to reveal a BBQ that slides out; beside that is another compartment that has a small fridge, a sound system and several storage lockers. Above is a roll-out awning, which is sure to be a hit during summer with friends and family.

Around the other side are more lockers – there's even one specifically designed to take a small motorbike, which they use to get around events once the motorhome is set-up on-site.

The whole rear panel cantilevers down to make a ramp for the horses at the back of the motorhome. A ladder attached to the back of the ramp gives access to roof storage, where they can carry up to 14 bales of hay. Up the ramp through the rear is secure accommodation for up to six horses. This is climate-controlled, has hot and cold running water and can be monitored via the in-cab rear view monitor.

Before entering the living area via the fold-away staircase, you extend the hydraulic slide-out compartments each side, giving an



almost 4m wide living space inside.

"You can buy ready built pop-out units from overseas that bolt right in, but for this

job we custom made our own hydraulic system so that we could build Karen exactly what she wanted," Andy Wright from





The kitchen is fully contained in one pop-out. It has a full size fridge/freezer.



Looking down from the Luton

Ahead is the hatch to the cab interior. Above it, in the Luton, is a double bed with windows to the front and sides and a pop-up hatch that gives more space and light. There's room to sleep up to eight people in the motorhome. The wall panelling has a dark wood grain finish, which along with the Italian stainless steel fittings, shows a

Classic Horse Coaches explains.

Inside you're confronted by a luxurious apartment suite. To your left is the open space offered by the two pop-out wall units. The left unit contains a stylish, modern kitchen with full-size fridge/freezer and large-screen TV above; the right pop-out unit contains a booth-type leather lounge area with table and stools. All furnishings and fittings are of the highest standard and make for an awe-inspiring sight.

strong sense of quality.

Across from the entrance is the bathroom, which has a single bed above. It is easily as big as some houses' en suites and has very high quality features and fittings.

"The water pressure is as good as, or better, than you'd get at home. We wanted the coach to be just like a holiday home – we are away most weekends each summer so we wanted to try and make this truck fit our

needs as best we could," Karen explains.

The family are fully self-contained on-site with all the comforts of home, the horses have everything they need and everyone can contentedly enjoy their summer travels. Karen thinks they have at least another six years of it ahead.

Andy and the team at Classic Horse Coaches have done an exceptional job. Karen gave them a blank canvas – she told them what design, materials and appliances she wanted and the Classic Horse Coaches team figured it all out, exceeding her expectations.

Steve Bennett is the company's cabinet/furniture maker, and custom designed the cabinetry to use up all of the space available. Martijn Domper oversaw the areas of panel fabrication, exterior cladding, window insertion and painting, and chief welder/engineer Paul Buchanan was also involved in the innovative horse truck layout.

Andy's area of expertise is in car painting/panelbeating and coach building, and he specialises in custom paint jobs, while the luxurious soft furnishings are made on site by



BBQ, fold-out steps, bar fridge and stereo portal – this side of the body is all set up for a party



The six-bay horse accommodation



Clever slide-out bay for the bike that is used for getting around shows. Note the ramp.

Andy's wife and business partner Sandra. These are complemented by the team at Sloans Saddlery in Waipukurau, which is responsible for the quality upholstery.

As an added bonus, Andy and Sandra

are into the horse event scene themselves so they have a good understanding of what's required.

The Scania horse truck's many clever design and engineering features – not to

mention the highest quality furniture making and technology inside – combine to make it possibly the biggest and best built horse truck in the country.

Everyone involved should take a bow. ■