



Words and pics Iain Curry

The Easy Life

Ah, the easy life. Not something you'd usually associate with a good offroad trip away, but no matter how hardcore you like your excursions, nobody really enjoys setting up complicated living quarters after a long and tiring day. When it comes to making camp, it really is the quicker the better.

The new Companion Uteback camper from Cameron Canvas is certainly one for the convenience crowd. You don't have to worry about towing as everything's already strapped on your ute's back, and once in position, your tent is up satisfyingly quickly thanks to a design that doesn't require pegs, poles or guy ropes.

The impressive setup is to be expected from such a long-established and well-respected name in the industry. Cameron Canvas has been producing canvas products for 35 years (and camper trailers for the last 25 years), all from the company's base in Lonsdale, SA. On offer is a complete range of on-road and offroad trailers with various canvas tops, and there is a real emphasis on the customer configuring the product to their exact requirements. With this uteback and at the workshop/showroom, I got a feel of old-time quality custom workmanship combined with innovation that

CONVENIENCE IS KING WITH THE USER-FRIENDLY COMPANION UTEBACK CAMPER FROM CAMERON CANVAS.





With your camper on the back, you can go anywhere your ute can go.



can only come with experience. No mass production here.

ON THE BACK

The weight of the uteback is approximately 480kg, meaning it isn't the lightest nor by any means the heaviest traytop unit on the market, leaving a lot of payload for most utes. And thanks to the custom nature of the Companion Uteback, each is adjustable to allow clamping on to the majority of both single and double cab vehicles.

For quick stops, a 30L drawer fridge and a drop-down kitchen with cooker and barbecue plate come as standard and can be accessed in seconds. For single cab models, as with our Nissan Patrol test vehicle, a slide with the capacity for a large fridge cleverly folds out to a user-friendly low level.

There's a small sink filled via an electric water pump drawing from a 55L tank, while the unit also has 12V wiring to connect to your vehicle's 12V system.

There is sufficient rather than loads of storage, but Bronte Scholz from Cameron Canvas is quick to point out that storage can be customised to each customer's demands. And to allow additional carrying ability for single cab utes, a cantilever aluminium roof rack as standard comes in very handy.

The main reason there isn't more space for

your things within the uteback – and this will appeal to many – is the low bed height. Most traytop campers have the bed on top of the unit, but the Cameron offering is far lower, and easily accessible with excellent and very wide three-step aluminium steps meaning you don't need to climb over your partner. Intelligently, a dust-proof and lockable steel clothes drawer slides out between these steps.

GRAND OPENING

We've all had trips away where the stifling heat, torrential rain or freezing cold have meant you want your tent set up in a hurry. Cameron's Concept Top is a real saviour in such circumstances. Once the PVC road cover is removed, an easy climb up the wide aluminium steps has you freeing the tent and pulling it out and down to the ground. It already has its shape and you're instantly under cover.

A bit of fixed pole manoeuvring inside and the job is done: no pegs or guy ropes to worry about. In another show of clever design, the PVC road cover that was on the camper unit while driving now doubles as an awning for over the kitchen area. Set up here again is simple, with two poles needed but no guy ropes as the whole setup is impressively rigid.

The tent itself has two extra large fully zippered doorways featuring fly-meshed doors and zip flaps. A large fly-meshed main window combines with windows around the





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bed to create a very light space if desired. As for extra space, a large 5.4x2.3m optional annexe can be strapped to the side, supported by three poles, to create a decent living area. This would probably be a good option to go for if you were planning to stay in one place for any length of time.

Built by a company that has been producing its own canvas products for decades, the Cameron Uteback's camper top is aimed at surviving tough Australian conditions. Dynaproofed 508gsm canvas is used for the roof and walls, meaning they are waterproofed to the core as well as breathable and resistant to UV light, rot and mildew.

Again emphasising the rugged and durable nature of the Cameron Canvas product, its canvas is double-stitched and reinforced at stress points.

SUMMING UP

Like most traytops, the Cameron Canvas Companion Uteback features four supporting jack legs for easy tray-top removal, freeing up your vehicle for day excursions. This, along

with the other standard features, ensures all is in place to get out into the bush with your home on your back and minimal hassle.

Because Cameron makes everything to order, the uteback can be designed for single or dual trayback utes in both 2WD and 4WD, and for those with a styleside ute, the good news is a camper relevant to these vehicles is in early production at Cameron Canvas.

Positively, this unit is not loaded with luxury features you may not deem necessary, helping keep the basic cost down at \$18,000, (\$19,400 as reviewed, drive away) but endless options are there should you want them. No doubt travellers will love the Cameron Companion's ease of use and clever design, its ability to be customised for specific needs, and the honest quality of the construction and materials used.

Cameron Canvas, 38 O'Sullivan Beach Road, Lonsdale, SA 5160, (08) 8186 6666.

For more information, including your nearest dealer, visit www.cameroncanvas.com.au



Right: Storage drawers located around the trayback make organising easy. **Below right:** The camper cover doubles as a kitchen awning. **Below left:** Fold-up steps to the bed mean you don't have to fiddle with a ladder.

