

New Model

# HOME AWAY FROM HOME

THE CHANCE TO TAKE A BRAND NEW FULLY EQUIPPED MOTOR HOME ON THE ROAD FOR A FIVE DAY TRIP WAS TOO GOOD AN OPPORTUNITY TO PASS UP, EVEN IF IT WAS OSTENSIBLY AS A TEST OF IVECO'S DAILY LIGHT TRUCK.

When people say that we don't make vehicles in Australia any more, we make a point of setting them straight, because apart from the local truck makers, there is still a very strong manufacturing sector in RV vehicles, and with Covid this sector has absolutely boomed.

One of those vehicle makers is the Sydney based Avida, which has been turning out motor homes, caravans and campers from its Penrith factory for more than half a century.

Sure they don't make the truck chassis

the motor home is based on, but in every other way Avida and other RV makers are very sophisticated and capable of manufacturing complex vehicles, that are engineered and ready to handle the road and environmental conditions Australia will throw at it.

The chance to take the latest model Avida Busselton away for a five-day jaunt in the country was a tremendous opportunity, and one we couldn't pass up.

Now some might question why a truck magazine would be testing a motorhome.

A junket I hear you say, well sure, we'll

take that, but the test was actually arranged by the truck people at Iveco, who supply Avida with a lot of the chassis they build motor homes on.

Motorhomes are a good business strand for light truck makers and Iveco has very much focussed on serving the industry as it also does in its native Europe.

The Iveco Daily is a favoured chassis when it comes to motor home conversions, both in Europe and here in Australia and although Avida use a variety of chassis it generally favours the Daily.

Avida's operations manager, Billy

Falconer, met us at the company's Emu Plains manufacturing plant when we arrived to pick up the Busselton for our five day sojourn.

As you could imagine a company that has been in business for 56 years, and which has turned out as many RVs as it has, needs to be organised, and that is the impressive part of the Avida manufacturing operation. It is a very vertically integrated operation with everything from start to finish managed in house and many of the parts and components made in house using the latest computer aided design and manufacturing machines.

Avida motorhomes are built from the inside out, with all of the internal features built onto the platform before the one-piece sandwich-panel walls and roof are fitted. This allows all of the internals including cupboards, beds, seats, appliances and the bathroom facilities to be easily fitted on and properly mated before the vehicle is closed in and finished off.

The Busselton interior is very practical and one that exudes a strong ethos of build quality with excellent fit and finish, which is born out by a tour of the production line.

Avida is clearly doing something right, with a long waiting list for delivery, in fact if you ordered one today you would most probably have to wait until early 2022 before hitting the road. You don't have that sort of demand if you are building crook motorhomes.

The motorhome on test was the latest model in the Avida range, the Busselton. This is an all singing and dancing self-contained motorhome featuring a full kitchen, with both a two-burner gas stove top, a one plate induction cooktop and a microwave (when plugged into 240Volt), a sink, a fold down bench extension, and a proper two door tri-power fridge/freezer.

The dining area has a four-seater dinette with comfy upholstered banquettes and is but a two-step journey from the kitchen.

The two double beds, one downstairs adjacent to the dining area, and the other up the ladder in the peak above the driving cabin. Both are extremely comfortable and easy to access.

The full bathroom is at the rear of the vehicle, and is accessed via a sliding door and features a toilet as well as a separate full-size shower and a vanity unit and basin. Again easy to access and to use.

Other important creature comforts and features include air-conditioning via the roof mounted unit, LED interior lighting,

an electric roof hatch, a radio/audio unit, a compact quality LED smart TV with a built in DVD, soft close drawers as well as convenient and copious storage cupboards and stowage throughout.

For those on the road for extended periods the Busselton boasts both 100 litres of fresh-water storage and 100 litres of capacity in the grey-water tanks. For us, with just my wife and me on board, that capacity was plenty for us for our five-day jaunt, although we did empty both the grey water tank and the toilet cassette as well as refilling the drinking water when we had the chance in Hill End, but we really didn't need to bother, there was still plenty of capacity all around.

The really important addition to the Busselton is the slide out extension to the living/sleeping area that provides an additional 50cm of width when extended, which happens via an electrically powered mechanism, operated via a push button control when the vehicle is parked. That doesn't sound like a lot but it makes a huge difference when it is extended out.

There are two other Busselton variants that can be ordered without the slide out, for those on a budget, but from our perspective the convenience and added living space made a huge difference and made the unit so much more comfortable to live in.

When it was time to hit the road we set off west from Sydney over the Blue Mountains to the near Central West, concentrating our focus on the area around Oberon, Black Springs, Bathurst and the historic gold mining village of Hill End.

With a gross vehicle mass of 4.5 tonnes the Iveco Daily rear drive Avida Busselton can be driven on a car licence, however you can upgrade the GVM to give it a higher load capacity, but it then requires a light rigid licence and all of the rigmarole that goes with that.

We are big fans of the Iveco Daily in all its guises. It is one of the standouts in the van/light truck market in terms of performance and dynamics and it makes the perfect base for a motorhome like the Busselton.

The heart of the Daily is its three-litre four-cylinder turbo diesel, which pumps out peak power of 125kw between 2900 and 3500rpm and 430Nm of peak torque between 1500 and 2600rpm. Most importantly the engine is mated to one of the finest automatics on the market, ZF's eight speed auto, which is used across an enormous range of automotive platforms





“ONE OF THE GOOD PARTS OF A MOTORHOME IS THE ABILITY TO ADAPT TO LIFE ON THE ROAD”



and by a plethora of manufacturers. It works particularly well behind the torquy Iveco donk.

Once we had loaded our clothes, a few groceries and supplies and some additional accoutrements for staying in some off the grid places, we slid into the cab of the Iveco and hit the tarmac, heading west over Bells Line of Road with our pooch perched on his dog bed just behind us.

The Busselton is a reasonable size unit on the road being 7.5 metre long and 2.32 metres wide with a height of 3.125 metres and as long as you adjust your thinking to the fact that you are actually driving a truck that is equipped as a mobile home then you quickly adapt to what is a pretty easy vehicle to drive.

Slip the auto into D and you are away, with the option of manual gear shift at the touch of the lever, either up or down the box. This is where the ZF comes into its own selecting the right gear for the engine's power and torque characteristics, without fuss or bother.

The engine pulled superbly up the steep Kurrajong Hill and we motored across Bells after a quick lunch stop at the superb Grumpy Baker in Bilpin, for one of the

best pies this side of the Birdsville Bakery.

The Busselton is not a sports car, but you can get along at a reasonable cruise speed meaning travel times are a little bit more than you would budget for a car, but not that much more.

We arrived in Oberon mid-afternoon, grabbed a coffee and some fresh country steaks for the barbie, before heading to our secluded campsite by a little creek on the edge of a state forest.

Arriving and setting up for the first time needed a bit of re-reading of the instructions, to ensure we didn't stuff up, after having been briefed by the Avida people before our departure.

In the end it was fairly easy, chocking the wheels on one side to give a level playing field, rolling out the integrated awning and then sliding out the extension.

Soon we had our portable fire pit set up and the flames were crackling while a cold libation was being consumed with some cheese and olives, a peaceful rural vista spread out before us.

Unlike camping, where every item has to be fished out of a nook or container in the vehicle, tents or trailers have to be set up, and there is often a lot of fuss and bother, the beauty of a motorhome is that

you have a kitchen just a few steps away inside. Everything is stowed in easy to access places and when the sun goes down lighting is a simple throw of the switch.

The Busselton has a lot of nice interior design features including a slide-out pantry, those soft-close drawers, a number of USB charging points and dimmable lighting. The trim finishes on the seats and beds are hard wearing and easy to keep clean, as are the nicely finished bench tops and cupboard doors that are easy to wipe and have a nice feel.

The nerve centre of the Avida is a control panel just inside the door that monitors all of the onboard systems, including battery levels, the electric system and monitoring the LPG, the water supply, the fridge and lighting.

Entering and exiting the living area is made easy with an electric operated stow away step, which like everything else is simple and easy to operate.

Our time in the Busselton wasn't during hot conditions, so we didn't have to fire up the air con. However the many louvred windows and cross ventilation opportunities meant that you could get a good airflow through the Busselton to stay cool on a hot day, especially with the

roll out awning on the left-hand side. We reckon you wouldn't have to fire up the air con unless it was really hot.

The main door has an integrated mesh screen, that also allows the breeze to flow if the main door is pivoted open with the screen door locked in place, which will stop the bugs getting in. A trap in the bush however, is to forget the mesh door while dining outside in the evening and overlook that the lights inside will attract bugs, a factor that caused a bit of a headache on night one. Not a design fault with the Busselton more operator brain fade in this case.

By the time we had enjoyed our steaks, salad and a couple of glasses of fine local red, we turned in for an extremely comfy and quiet night's sleep, 20km from Oberon and a 1000 miles from care.

A leisurely brekky before a nice hot shower, an easy pack up and we were back on the road heading for the magnificent Mayfield Gardens for a ramble around. Even if you aren't into gardens this is well worth the visit, a magnificent landscape amazing gardens along with a great café and restaurant

When it was time to head for our next overnight stop at Hill End, we trundled

off at a leisurely pace, taking in what was a superb early autumn afternoon in the Central West.

The Iveco's hill climbing ability again proved itself as it rumbled along with a reasonable ride. But with the stereo filling the cab with our Spotify playlist, the sun shining and the dog sitting comfortably, we tackled the twists and turns of the Hill End road.

The Busselton allows for the driver and three passengers, with the comfy front driver and passenger seats in the cab, which are equipped with arm-rests and can be swivelled around to face the living area. Along with those there are another two seats in the back, which can be seatbelt equipped as an option for safer travel.

The Daily handles very well for a light truck, largely because of the engine forward bonneted design, which puts the cab back a little behind the axle line. The fact that it has independent front suspension with leaf springs, anti-roll bar and reasonable damping helps its ride and handling capabilities. You can bet if you based a motorhome like this on a Japanese cab over light truck the ride would not be all that good.

The Iveco is also fitted with a suite of built-in safety features include ABS, driver and passenger airbags and electronic stability control which means it is a lot harder to wind up in strife on the road.

The Hill End road and many roads around the Central West were in pretty ordinary, pot holed condition after the late summer rains and storms but the ride wasn't too bad, as long as you watched the speed and treated them with respect. We even tackled a little bit of well-manicured gravel with ease.

Manoeuvrability of a behemoth like this can be daunting for some, but as previously said once you get your brain tuned in, so long as you take it slowly and easily you will be just fine. You just need to allow a bit more room than you would normally budget on. The built-in reversing camera also makes backing into campsites or parking spots a breeze.

One of the good parts of a motorhome is the ability to adapt to life on the road. While we spent night one in a remote bush camp, our second night would be on a booked powered site in the Hill End camping area, with a bunch of other vanners and campers. Here we could plug into 240volts, top the tanks and use



the National Parks supplied fire pit for another blaze to sit around in the evening.

When you have the luxury of a home on wheels, with the facilities at hand, you can easily wash up and put the clean jeans and t shirt on, and head to the Hill End pub for a counter meal if so desired, which is what we elected to do.

Hill End is a living breathing museum that has preserved a lot of the buildings from those bustling, rollicking gold rush days of the 1850s, but today it is a sleepy and easy-going village with a great old pub with terrific pub grub, just across the road from the general store and café. While the pub has a nice ambience the people staffing the general store really need to consider selling up and moving on, because they're clearly pretty tired with the task of serving customers, either that or they need a bit of an attitude adjustment.

It was a good place to park up for the night because the pub and general store were walking distance from our mobile palace. However one of the drawbacks of a big motorhome is that if you do realise you have forgotten a vital ingredient or need to buy something and you are a few kilometres from the nearest store, it is a pain to pack up and drive there and back. Once you are anchored down for the night

that tends to be it, unless you want to retract the slide out, pack up all the tables and outdoor chairs and anything else you have set up. That is probably why you see so many motorhomes towing little Suzuki 4WDs on A-frames these days.

Speaking of towing, the Busselton can tow up to just over 3.5 tonnes while staying inside its Gross Combination Mass or GCM of 8 tonnes, given that GVM of 4.495 tonnes.

In terms of fuel consumption the Avida was pretty impressive. Despite some heavy hill work, we recorded an average fuel consumption of 14.5litres/100km during our 500km trip. That isn't too bad for a light truck particularly if you compare it with some dual cab utes, which return fuel figures that aren't too far away from that when fully laden.

We said farewell to Hill End the next day and drove a relatively short distance to a lovely free camp on the banks of the beautiful Turon. After negotiating a short dirt track we found a superb spot under an old wooden bridge, which after the sun went down was silent for the evening.

The fact that the Avida is largely self-contained meant we could stay for a couple of days without being plugged into the grid. It was a glorious and very relaxing place

with the river burbling past our front door and no reason to move, the embodiment of what motorhome travel is about.

All too soon, our time with the Busselton was over and we had to head back to home base and take our mobile-home back to its real owners. Parting was such sweet sorrow!

However if you are in the mood for owning one of these it does come at a hefty purchase cost, with the Busselton as tested wearing a price tag of just a shade over \$191,000, which is the driveaway cost and includes the optional rear passenger seatbelts.

Part of the package is a three-year factory-warranty, as is the case with all Avida products, along with a five-year structural guarantee as well as two-year emergency roadside assistance back up.

Would we buy one? Well we loved our time with it and if we had a different mindset, we probably would. However our philosophical view is that we would be reticent to invest so heavily in such a vehicle, despite its many qualities. But that is our own personal view, you may want to own a Busselton and roam at your will, and that is fine too. If you do we would highly recommend this Avida or any other model from its range. 📺



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