What I Drive …

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As a slight variation on the traditional “How I treat” series, following an interesting discussion on the ACV List, we put out a call to members to show off their vehicles. Thanks to those who provided descriptions and comments which we have compiled here into what we hope will be a useful resource!

I have included edited comments and photos here in no particular order… I apologise to those we couldn’t fit in!

Enoch Bergman – Swan’s Vet Services

My practice partner David Swan made a couple of shrewd decisions regarding his work ute. Firstly, he was one of the first people in Esperance to put his practice logo on his vehicle. Both he and Nicole’s vehicles were badged. Over time, we have blinded our badging up, and interestingly, most other trades seem to have followed suit. I think it is beneficial for your clients to see how hard you work. Admittedly, as my work ute is my daily driver, it is hard to “have a vacation” from your vet role, but I would reckon that most of us don’t mind! Swanny’s second shrewd decision was transitioning from working out of a canopy to a trade body.

So… I reckon custom built boxes are awesome. Mine has two water tanks, reducing the likelihood of me running dry. It has a deep under drawer system which is fantastic for hiding all of the annoying and long stuff (calving jacks, jumper cables, tools for mending crushes, fetotome, head snare, poly pipe, yellow dog, etc.) The back and sides open up. There are no windows, so it is equipped with a wide view reversing camera. The left hand side is filled by my engel, hooked up to a red arc system driving two deep cycle batteries and a mean 240 v inverter (capable of running a big grinder). The rest of the left hand side hides a charger for my BCF duoscan, my BCF bluetooth screen battery charger, a container of epsoms, a container of sand lube, a drum of paraffin and a couple of ab buckets that hold my dirty boots overalls from the end of the day. The traditional blue plastic bins are accessed from behind, holding numerous pairs of waterproof coveralls, shoulder protectors, disinfectant, horse wormer, lube, all of my casting ropes, metal halter, and a big box of extra syringes etc. From the back things are well open leaving plenty of room to set up for AI, Semen Testing, or other activities. The drivers side has a great racked shelving system, which keeps all of my stuff reasonably organised and hides mess from my clients. Syringes, needles, end everything else are held in small plastic boxes nested in each drawer. My drugs are divided into three plastic containers. Ouchy drugs, sleepy drugs, and everything else! An LED light work also lives on that side, operated from within the cab, so that I can pull up to a job and illuminate the crush/field. I also hide a charger for my cordless clippers and for my Dewalt batteries that drive my Powerfloat and my Henderson Castrating Tool. Overhead lights on the doors and ceiling light up the drawers and work area. The wasted space near the ceiling is set up for 8 small flat poly boxes each organised into either a mobile OTC pharmacy or for specific duties (calving, foot work, drenching, etc.) This shelf system has allowed me to pack micro minerals, drenches, high volume S4’s etc. with me, creating sales opportunities. The trade body has racks allowing me to pack my surf board or bring home bits of timber salvaged from cattle yards. All of the added storage space gives me enormous flexibility.

On the outside of my box I am proudly badged with our clinic logo and I proudly proclaim my ACV membership and the schemes I am a part of. I am waiting for someone to ring me about my driving, but I also display my mobile number in case a cocky sees me in their area. (our practice services a wide area unserviced by local veterinarians)

For night driving I have an ARB bull bar and HID spotties. To keep me driving longer I have a 140 litre fuel tank. To make me look cooler, for a better ride, and to support the weight of the box I upgraded the suspension.

What would I add next time? Perhaps a bigger fuel tank, better water storage, an electric water pump, and a water heater. I reckon next time I might engage a boat builder to build the box from the ground up, like Miles Nye-Chart of Mt. Barker, and set it up so that it can be easily removed leaving a simple tray behind.
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Alice Birks – Poowong

You reminded me I hadn’t sent photos of my car setup, after going to the trouble of cleaning it for the photo a couple of weeks ago. Was waiting to get a night shot as I love it with the flouro light on at night (in canopy roof at back) … haven’t been keen enough to take a photo after dark, and haven’t had any late calls.

The canopy is made by Lowline and I designed the interior. Cheap stackable draws along both sides with hollow area up the centre from back for calf puller, foetotome, waddy, ropes etc. Fridge at front in centre, need to stand on dry cow bucket to access it at times but it allowed more drawers. Mesh on windows for safety and security but therefore difficult to clean windows. Everything can be removed easily and nothing too heavy to move into storage if required. Can pull out drawers containing non-fridge drugs on hot days and put in air-conditioned room.

Things I use most are accessed from back canopy door.

Gerhard Labuschagne – Tarwin Vet Group:

About 230 000kms and two vehicles ago I decided to invest a bit more. At my age, time at work is just planning for the next CAMPING trip into this vast land, so I planned it so that it can be used as a carry top camper as well. Four legs makes it easy to lift it up for removal allowing me to use it as a normal ute carting things around. My local dealer in Meeniyan www.utepod.com.au is quite willing to custom build these pods. Cost was about double the cost of a canopy + pull out drawers but it will hopefully last till the end of my career, just changing vehicles. Easy access more secure and much cooler than a canopy.

Multiple uses: 1. Working vehicle: Extra Cab vehicle enough to carry sensitive equipment in the back and maximum one student. Extra space on the tray is handy for carrying a bucket of water and wet, dirty smelly stuff (post uterine prolapse in the paddock) Also works fantastic for doing calf surgery. Also fitted an additional water tank under the tray for working and CAMPING!

The work surface that folds down gives access to the drawers and is handy to use for setting up lab for semen testing (out of the sun and rain). A 1000W power inverter as well as an extra 12V battery for microscope, and CAMPING.
Easy access to bulky items that does not slide around.

Can lock side doors to secure access to fridges and equipment. Dog cages are great to carry equipment in as well as animals. Subdivided for 2 dogs or 1 dog plus equipment. Can lock these cages. Opening at the back to hose out dog droppings. Top doubles as a table when bull testing - good height for microscope - not bending over all day and can’t get knocked about. Can rig shade over top if required. Drawers below eye level so can see all stuff that’s in them. All gear dry and no dust. Reflects heat and doesn’t double as a glass oven. Quick access - pull up and all gear there ready.

Carry Top Camper: After cleaning the vehicle (biggest job) it takes me about 45 minutes to turn it into a roof top camper. When CAMPING carry fire wood, jerry cans and, extra spare wheel in the space at the back.

Ian, Hugh, Tim - Taroom Vets

Love the fridge, carry dog vaccine, cattle vaccine, beer. Has to be better for all drugs. Can lock access to fridge to safeguard beer. Can still carry gear on top.

Downsides- heavy, needed heavier springs and have to drag around. Bit of a pain to lift off 15-20min job.

Leisa Brown - Guyra District Veterinary Services:

Fridges are waeco 30L and run off 2 deep cycle batteries. Designed and over engineered by Dr Tim Wright. Inspired by Dr Bill Roughan. Built locally by a quasi boilermaker.

So I had the back of my ute made locally and have been extremely happy with it. The only thing I need is a way to keep my lube etc standing up and some LED lighting.
I really like having all my gear in storage containers so that I can just grab the relevant tub and have everything I need. We keep all our other gear (bull testing, dental, ultrasound etc) stored in the shed at the clinic and only pack it when it is needed. We also don’t really have the heat extremes here so just pack an esky and ice brick as needed.

The other thing I really like about my set up is that I can transport my dog (and any patients) in the cage up the middle. This is also a major benefit when I have filthy gear (after rotten calvings).

Rupert Mothersole – Rosabrook Vet Services

Dual cab backseats great for animal health products (drench etc) clean work-clothes and papers, and weekends away. Love the canopy, clean, secure, and somewhere to hide from the rain when writing out labels etc. Bosston canopies (Perth), great product, pricey but good investment. Water tank completely essential under wheel arch. Lights on doors also indispensable.

Adam Williams – Capricorn

For me, it was important to be useful as a family vehicle as well as a work vehicle. So keeping things tidy is important, albeit difficult when shooting between jobs quickly (yet safely). It also means that I generally have two car seats in the back seat at most times. This is ok as it provides some security for transport of delicate items like microscope, ultrasound, etc. I didn’t get a chance to tidy before my photos, but you get the idea.

I have BlackWidow drawers as they came with my previous vehicle. They are a great unit and I wouldn’t change them. I’m sure I could utilise a slide on them, however, I’m sure I’d get things caught in the slide and just frustrate myself anyway. They are now 13 or so years old and still work brilliantly. The tops can be removed relatively easily for cleaning and I have found cleaning with a scrubbing brush and some washing powder and hose is brilliant (on the few occasions I have felt inclined to do it). Drawers are trade height and each drawer is big enough to fit a full set of golf clubs with a large bag with some space to spare. Side panels lift up for further storage of less frequently used items like extension leads, spare fuel, tow cables, tool box, etc. Solid lockable drawers mean I can be more comfortable with security of drugs like S8s and my more valuable gear in general. They can be quite heavy, but they run smoothly and this to me is a plus, provided I’m not parked on a steep hill.

There is enough space behind the drawers (cabin end of tray) to fit a fold up table and stool for semen testing and surgery (the stool is a necessity with my terrible hips, although I get plenty of strange looks at first).

The trade height would be an issue without a high roof canopy. The newer versions don’t measure up to the old ARB height. ARB no longer do high roof for Tritons, but Flexiglass have a moderately higher top version. This has been adequate to fit our liquid nitrogen canister. Lift up windows on sides were a necessary inclusion when I up graded to the new ute, as sliding windows frustrated me no end in the old ute. When my dog...
travels with me, she sleeps in the passenger foot well. The canopy has a light which works quite well, think it is old school bulb, but haven’t actually looked. I carry about 4-5 headlights anyway.

I looked into water tanks/bladders but elected to go cheap. We use 20L distilled water containers in the clinic, so I recycled one. I attached a drinking quality hose to this and ran it out the side panel of the drawer unit and attached a tap to the end. The container is fixed to the tub fixing point in the corner (cabin end of tub) using a tie down strap. This setup cost me about $25, compared with the obscene cost of commercial versions. It is easy to fill with my hose at home and provides good source of clean water for uterus flush, scrubbing, cleaning up and drinking - especially in the current heat!

The ubiquitous tubs referred to previously work best for me as I can keep my hendra kit, bandage, lube, boots, paints, fly/wasp spray, aerogard, safety specs in these, as well as sharps containers and bins.

I do have a fridge but it is a pretty small unit, however, can be taken out and hooked to mains overnight very easily. It doesn’t run the whole time during the day, so I keep limited supply of particularly heat sensitive drugs in there. The canopy keeps the back surprisingly cool, especially relative to the cabin. I can tell this by the temperature of my cleaning/drinking water.

With my standard setup, I have room on weekends for golf clubs and push cart. During the week I have room for our portable xray machine, bull gear, etc.

My wishlist for work purposes would include: Reversing camera - perhaps at next service, Dust seal +/- vent for canopy, Spotlights - although I find the newer lights are pretty good if kept clean(ish), Dual battery and fridge, Elec circuit access in back.

Anthony Lo Conte:

Here’s my setup. Cost me $75 in marine ply, glue and screws, has no rollers, just graphite under the drawers to help them slide. Omission of rollers allows greater drawer depth and I can fit heaps of gear on top.

Debbie Twiss – The Vet Group:

The “ice cream truck canopy” has plenty of room for gear, main disadvantage is lack of rear vision and width of canopy obscuring side vision.

Inverter on left side and 12v plug for boiling/heating water as needed. If I’m off work for the week the two drawers slide out and the casing comes out as well.

And lastly – a picture of Al Murray’s Subaru. Now only a backup vehicle I’m told …