

SOFT LANDING



Words
and pics
JOHN FORD

Under new ownership, the legendary Sunland brand is in good hands. We reviewed its latest compact van, retailing at under \$100k and packed with all the offroad essentials.

IN BRIEF

- ⊙ Single-axle couples van
- ⊙ Offroad suspension and engineering
- ⊙ Quality off-grid equipment





"Jason brings his years of experience in manufacturing for the building industry and expertise in smart caravan manufacture to the table"

MEASURING

UP



PROS

- ⊕ Light weight for a mix of suitable tow vehicles
- ⊕ Roomy single-axle layout
- ⊕ Solidly engineered aluminium chassis and composite body
- ⊕ Under \$100k threshold



CONS

- ⊖ Some will opt for more battery power

ABOVE Exploring Queensland's beautiful Bribie Island National Park

Okay, first up, a confession. We bogged the van in deep sand on Yarun/Bribie Island. In my defence, it was a first for me when reviewing a van, and the track had been badly chewed up with 400mm soft sand. Happily, Jason Wylie, the new owner of Sunland Caravans, could see the funny side, and we had a comfortable van to sleep in and a freezer full of fish in my car to keep us nourished. Who would get the double bed in the van might have been an issue, but we finally got moving again, so that was a problem we didn't have to face.

We have headlined Sunland Caravans as legendary, and that's not an overstatement. The original owner, Roy Wyss, liked to do things differently and became something of

a legend in the caravan industry. Roy was an innovator who was fearless in stepping out of the customary way of building a van made to tackle the worst roads the Australian outback can dish up. Roy led Sunland as an early adopter of composite construction and the first and still the only manufacturer with an aluminium chassis.

When Jason Wylie heard that Roy was considering retiring after more than 20 years of building vans, he made an offer Roy couldn't refuse, and a new chapter began. As part of the deal, Roy's son, Tarot, stays on as general manager at Sunland.

Jason brings his years of experience in manufacturing for the building industry and expertise in smart caravan manufacture to

the table. He started Design RV and made it a success over the past three years. Following the sale of Design RV, he was looking for an upper-echelon offroad brand to complement his new project – the imported X-Series – and he decided that Sunland was the perfect fit.

Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, Jason purchased a new factory to the east of Caboolture, Qld, and moved the business and the 52 employees in the first couple of months of ownership. Production is already streamlined, and strict quality control procedures are in place. As part of Sunland's rebranding, this compact single-axle van seen here joins the lineup, and as a sub \$100k offer, orders are already flowing in.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT This 18ft 6in model breaks new ground for Sunland; The shower plumbing in a rear hatch; Cruisemaster trailing arm suspension

■ "It's a capable offroader with rugged Sunland DNA"

THE BUILD

While there have been previous single-axle vans in the range over the years, they have been the exception, so this 18ft 6in breaks relatively new ground, with its \$98,000 selling price as a deliberate ploy to announce a new direction for the brand. And while it might be missing some of the current array of high-end electrics, it's a capable offroader with rugged Sunland DNA.

At the base of the build is a rivetted and professionally engineered aluminium chassis welded to a substantial steel A-frame. A 20-year chassis warranty should convince any sceptics about the durability of the alloy chassis. The body is formed from locally sourced Link Composite panels of fibreglass skins over XPG foam that are mated together into a unit that is both immensely strong and has high thermal insulation. The front, roof and rear walls are a single-piece construction to ensure weather resistance and that the walls, floor, and roof bond together in an immensely robust unit.



Underneath is a Cruisemaster trailing arm suspension rated at 3000kg and customised to be 50mm narrower than standard to suit a narrower-than-usual body designed for tight tracks. Upholstery and CNC-cut furniture are made in-house, and his commitment to fine detail has been carried over to the new processes.

Over the past few years, we have seen single-axle vans increase in length due to heavy-capacity 3000kg suspension setups. By adding length, there's more room at less cost both in initial outlay and in maintenance of things like tyres and wheel bearings. Such a setup needs careful design to allow proper weight distribution. You also need to upgrade tyre and wheel load ratings, and higher-rated tyres have stiffer sidewalls and might deliver a harsher ride. The new Sunland seems a sensible compromise with a 2800kg maximum weight while still bringing 779kg of payload.

SUNLAND 18'6'

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 5.6m (18ft 6in)
Overall length 7.8 m (25ft 6in)
Width 2.48m (8ft 2in)
Height 3.08 m (10ft 1in)
Tare 2021kg
ATM 2800kg
Payload 779kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 227kg
Ball to tare ratio 11.2% (calculated)

EXTERNAL

Frame Composite panel
Cladding Fibreglass
Chassis Aluminium C-section with 150mm x 50mm steel A-frame
Suspension Cruisemaster XT trailing arm 3T
Coupling Cruisemaster DO35
Brakes 12in drum
Wheels 16in alloy
Water 190L freshwater, 60L grey water
Battery 2 x 150Ah K1JO lithium
Solar 2 x 200W
Air-conditioner Sanjo
Gas 2 x 8.5kg
Sway control N/A

INTERNAL

Cooking Three-burner gas cooktop
Microwave Flatbed
Fridge 190L compressor
Bathroom Full-width ensuite with shower and Thetford cassette toilet
Washing machine Top load
Hot water Instant gas

PRICE FROM \$98,990

OPTIONS FITTED Nil

PRICE AS SEEN \$98,990

MORE INFORMATION
To enquire about this caravan:
Sunland Caravans
 59 Alta Road
 Caboolture Qld 4510
 P: 07 5499 2250
 E: sales@sunlandcaravans.com.au
 W: sunlandcaravans.com



ABOVE AND BELOW The front, roof and rear walls are a single-piece composite construction; Chassis detail

"A 20-year chassis warranty should convince any sceptics *about the durability of the alloy chassis*"



THE EXTERIOR

Smooth fibreglass walls have a neat look, and a lower Raptor style covering in matt black breaks up the large area of white. A Cruisemaster D035 offroad hitch and holders for twin 8.5kg gas bottles are at the drawbar. A full-width alloy toolbox includes a passenger-side slide-out for a fridge and tie-downs up top for firewood. Further back is a full-width tunnel boot, 12V and TV access points and a manual twin-tread step.

The rear is neat and simple because the spare is located under the van and forward of the wheels to keep the correct weight balance. A hatch at the back opens to inspect the shower plumbing, and another houses the taps and pump for the water supply.



ABOVE With the entryway behind the wheel arch, the bed is at the front and away from the door for maximum privacy

LIVEABILITY

The benefits of a more extended single-axle van are apparent when you step aboard because, for a single-axle design, there is a lot of living space, including the all-important north-south bed and a usable ensuite. With the entryway behind the wheel arch, the bed is at the front and away from the door for maximum privacy, which is essential to some owners. The ensuite is to the right as you enter, and it's a traditional design with a Thetford cassette toilet, a descent-size vanity with a floor-mounted top-load washing machine and a roomy shower. White furniture and big windows

lend a bright, well-ventilated impression, and a clear Perspex shower door adds to the feeling of space. Storage is excellent with deep overhead cupboards and a set of drawers down low.

I like the light, cool-toned colours and large windows in the living space for the upbeat vibe. The black upholstery at the cafe dinette matches a black fridge further back and is neatly finished with cushions that give comfortable support.

A basic kitchen bench runs along the passenger side and includes a gas cooktop, a black sink with a matching mixer and

draining board and about 500mm of preparation space. For a single-axle van, it's a good compromise of space, and I imagine most buyers will explore options for outside cooking.

Access to the bed is good all around, and like most modern vans, there are storage nooks, reading lights, and charging points. A leather magazine holder is a bonus. Storage is generous for this size van, and that's important for long-term travel. In addition to the high cupboards and the bench, there's room under the lounges, and the whole space under the bed is open.

RIGHT The bright bathroom with washing machine is surprisingly spacious

“White furniture and big windows lend a bright, well-ventilated impression”

ROUGHING IT

With two 200W solar panels and a pair of 150Ah of lithium battery power, there's enough onboard power to keep the 12V fridge, lights and water pump operating so couples can spend time off-grid without worrying if the drinks will stay cold. The batteries are KIJO, so they are as good as you will get, and the rest of the electronics are all quality equipment and are installed professionally in-house. Batteries are chassis mounted, and you can check the state of charge on a REDARC RedVision screen in an overhead cupboard in the kitchen. I noted a wiring diagram there, too, and you might think that was a strange thing to mention, but I have to tell you it's rare to find in a caravan, so all credit to the Sunland team.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

Sits under \$100k, where the current market searches

TOWABILITY

Lightweight and well-balanced for a great towing experience

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

Couples will appreciate the extra room and offroad ability

BUILD QUALITY

The new direction for Sunland doesn't compromise quality

LIVEABILITY

A single-axle van with ample room for a couple

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Enough solar and battery to run what you need in suitable weather

CUSTOMER CARE

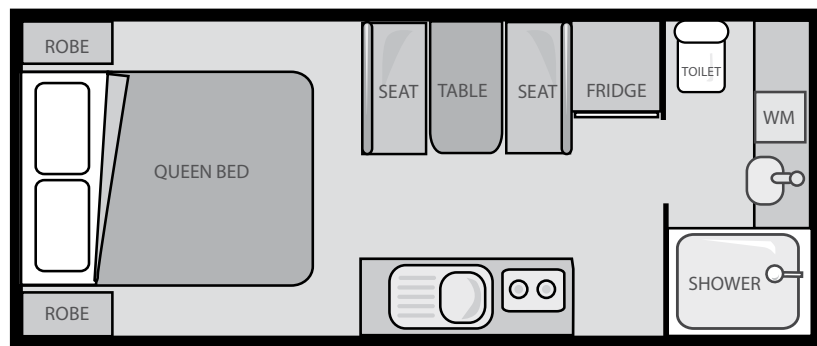
A 20-year chassis warranty and a commitment to customer service

INNOVATION

The only major manufacturer with an aluminium chassis and one of the first with composite body construction

X-FACTOR

Sunlands exude an aura of the outback spirit



TOWABILITY

Let's set aside the beaching of the Toyota for a minute and report on how things went before coming to an ignominious halt. It felt great out on the highway and regional roads behind the LandCruiser, and we easily made our way through urban streets and tight roundabouts to Bribie Island National Park and Recreation Area. The van was almost empty, and it had a naturally well-balanced feeling. It handled well without undue bounce or pitch over the rough ground in the park. The 2021kg tare weight and 2800kg ATM will be a bonus for easy towing with a range of twin cab utes, and something like a Prado or Pajero should be a good match.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This single-axle van is aimed at couples who want a capable, properly engineered offroader with a stable reputation. It deserves a place on this sort of buyer's shortlist. An entry-level Sunland makes sense for the new brand owner looking to make a splash in the local caravan pool. Jason brings new ideas around production to the company, and his plans to streamline production include ever-increasing quality improvements. This latest model should earn a good share of attention because the sub \$100k market is prime territory for new buyers. Sales are already flowing in from buyers interested in the Sunland ideal without the budget for the more traditional versions.



ABOVE AND BELOW Nooks, cupboards and a drawer around the bed; With batteries gone there is plenty of storage under the bed