

Sweet Treat!



Campino is a famous German lolly, and makes a sweet name for this excellent all-new campervan...

by Richard Robertson



Despite entry level pricing the Campino looks good and is well equipped. The roof is Southern Spirit Campervans' own design and includes 25 mm insulation, while the Porta Potti and grey water tank provide self-containment at no extra cost.

Despite the market potential there are really only a couple of major players in the Australian campervan market: Frontline, which sits around the entry level and has the lion's share of the campervan business, plus Trakka at the premium end. Discoverer and Sunliner are in there too, while Winnebago is a recent arrival, but it's safe to say that apart from Trakka's upmarket (and appropriately priced) Trakkadu, there's little innovation or that's interesting in lower priced campervans. Until now...

Southern Spirit Campervans is Brisbane-based and since inception has converted privately owned vans into custom campers and motorhomes. Run by German-Italian husband and wife team Olli and Pia (Pia writes our TechTalk column), the business has a loyal following and turns out quality conversions from its small workshop. Custom vehicles aside, Pia also runs a thriving **online shop** selling quality RV accessories, many from the well know German manufacturer **Reimo**.

The Campino is their first foray into a small-run production vehicle; the result of a perceived market opening for an innovative, well thought-out and well built campervan that won't break the bank. On the Campino's **new website** it says Australian built, German engineered, Italian designed and Japanese reliability. I think they're on to something...

Entry Level?

To keep the price down and ensure ready acceptance, Toyota's venerable HiAce has been chosen as the launch vehicle, although a VW T6 version is also under development. In the case of the test vehicle, which was the first production vehicle and effectively a 'conforming prototype,' a used HiAce was chosen. Production Campinos will obviously use a new HiAce – it's the LWB model – and pricing starts at a highly competitive \$61,990 drive-away for a 2.7 L petrol with a 5-speed manual gearbox. I say highly competitive because the Campino has a high level of standard equipment, including

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Next to the external mains power inlet is this weatherproof box that accepts leads from an external TV aerial as well as satellite or cable. There's a matching outlet inside, plus a TV power socket. You just need to add the television and aerial and you're in business.



a grey water tank and Porta Potti, making it eligible for self-contained status straight out of the showroom. If you're quick you can snap up the test Campino – a late 2012 HiAce petrol auto with 63,000 km – for \$54,500.

Before moving on to the conversion itself, a few words about Toyota's HiAce. Produced by the millions it's the quintessential box on wheels. A delivery van first and foremost that's been adapted to a wide range of other uses, it's priorities are to maximise load space and reliability. In those regards it excels for its size, and it's generally accepted in the motoring world that like all Toyota's, the HiAce is 'bulletproof'. Maximising load space, however, has lead to compromises from an

occupant viewpoint: You sit over the front axle and engine, so ride quality and handling aren't optimal, while the flat nose provides marginal frontal crash protection. Over the years Toyota has upgraded the cab and it's quite well appointed now and surprisingly comfortable. But the HiAce is what it is – and as long as you realise that it's fine.

Driving...

The biggest surprise wasn't how the HiAce drove, but rather, how quiet the camper conversion was. There wasn't a squeak or rattle throughout the day, other than occasional harmonics between the engine and metho stove at idle. In all honesty I can't remember the last time – if ever – I've driven a



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vehicle so quiet. It was truly impressive and, I think, an indication of just how well designed and built the Camino is.

Underway the 2.7-litre 4-cylinder petrol engine is reasonably refined and mated well to the 4-speed automatic transmission, which on brand new models now has 6

speeds. For the new model Toyota quotes a combined fuel figure of 9.8 L/100 km (28.8 mpg) and a county usage rate of 8.3 L/100 km (34 mpg): impressive for a petrol-powered box on wheels!

Standard equipment on new models includes dual front air bags, ABS, brake

assist and electronic stability control; an impressive radio/CD system with voice recognition, Bluetooth phone connection and steering-wheel controls; cruise control, cab airconditioning, electric windows and side mirrors; power steering, remote central locking, and a reversing camera with its

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Below: The U-shaped lounge, with removable centre cushion and board, provides extra seating and gives the Campino's interior a cosier feel. **Bottom:** The table is a good size and has a decent range of adjustment, though not vertically.

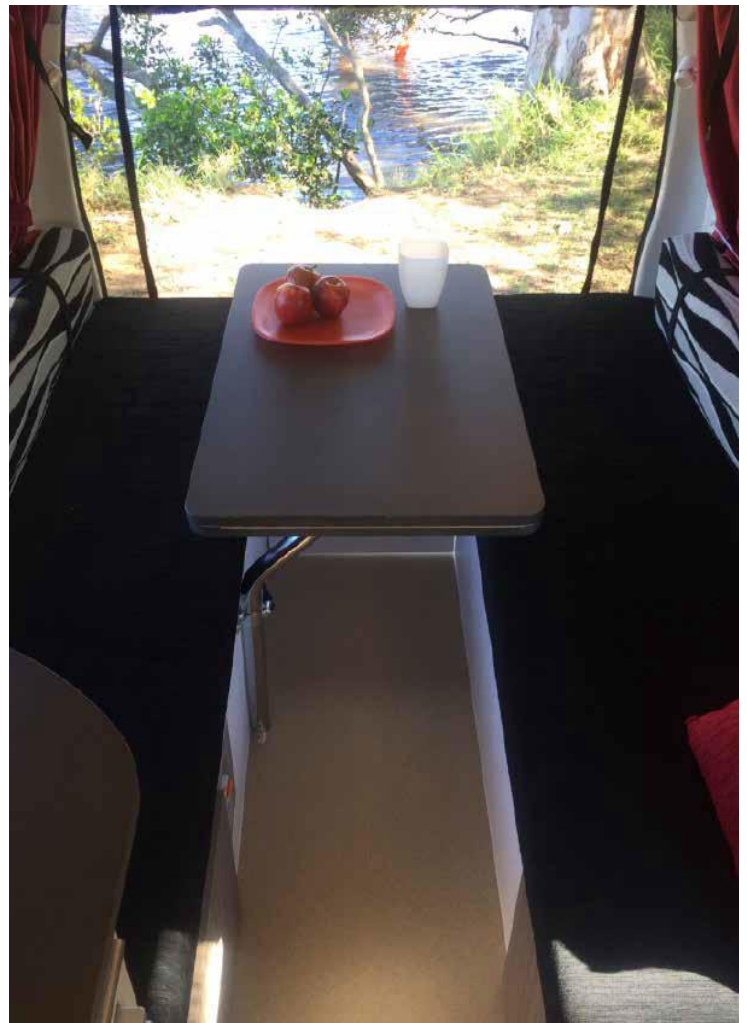


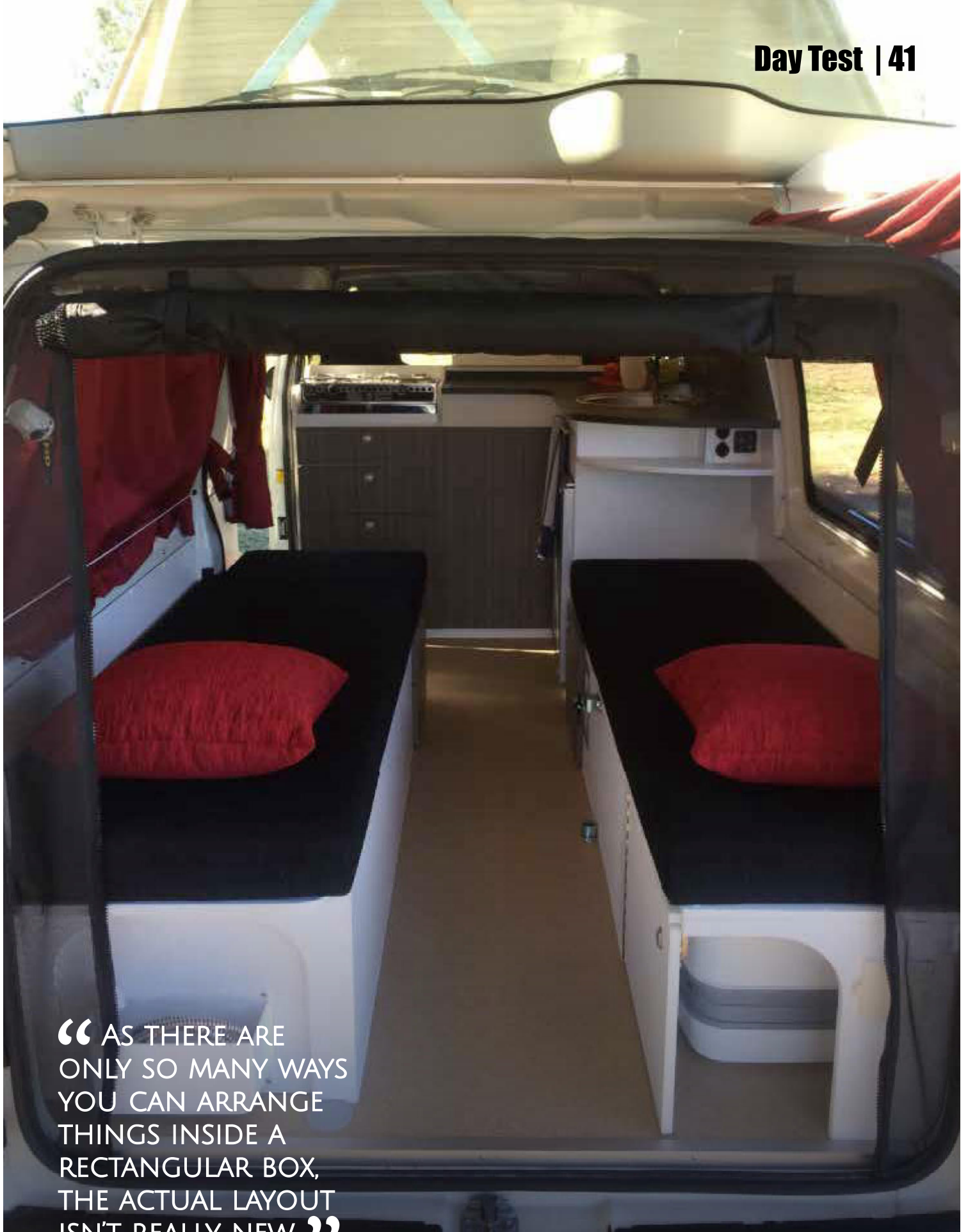
camera in the internal rear-view mirror. It's also worth noting the cab can seat three, but the centre seat has a low-height back and lap-only seat belt. The good news is this seat's back folds forward and becomes a useful centre console, complete with cup holders and a mini desk.

What the HiAce lacks in charisma and finesse it makes up for in sheer practicality and reliability. You could buy one and do laps of Australia for years, being pretty confident it wouldn't need anything more than scheduled servicing. When it comes to ultimate reliability, nobody beats the Japanese.

Design

The HiAce's drawback as a camper conversion is the lack of a walk-through cab. What it does allow, however, is considerable kitchen and living space when coupled with clever design. And clever design is what the Campino has in spades.





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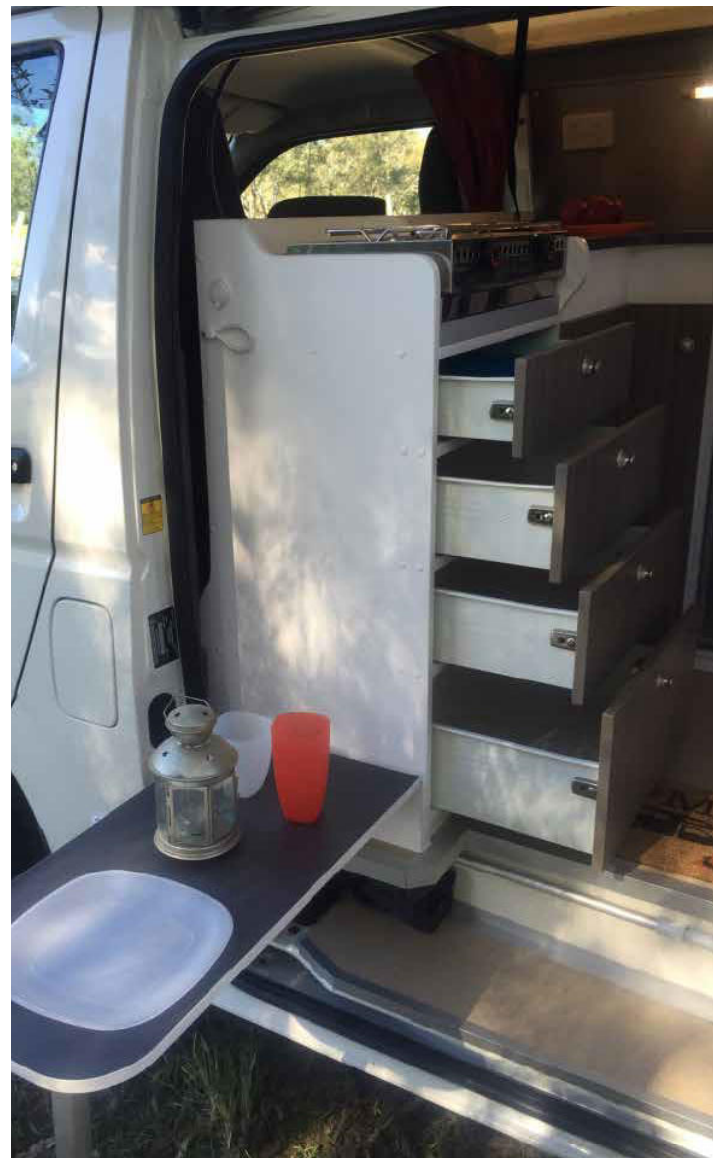
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Above: While the HiAce precludes a walk-through cab it does provide room for a large L-shaped kitchen. Note the light on a flexible arm over the cooker, which can also be bent to shine over the outdoor table. **Right:** While the cooker unit doesn't hinge and swing outside like some, the cooker is removable and the drop-down table makes a handy place for it. Note the generous drawer space that's also easily reached from inside or out.

It's fair to say entry-level campervan interior design has changed little over the last few decades. Even the materials used seem to be largely the same, but the Campino changes all that. Because of their European heritage and close Euro RV business connections, Olli and Pia have approached the Campino's design from a fresh perspective – and it shows.

As there are only so many ways you can arrange things inside a rectangular box, the actual layout isn't really new. There's an L-shaped kitchen that runs across the vehicle, behind the cab's seats, then returns towards the rear, down the driver's side. There are also two single beds that can be made into a large double/queen and all that

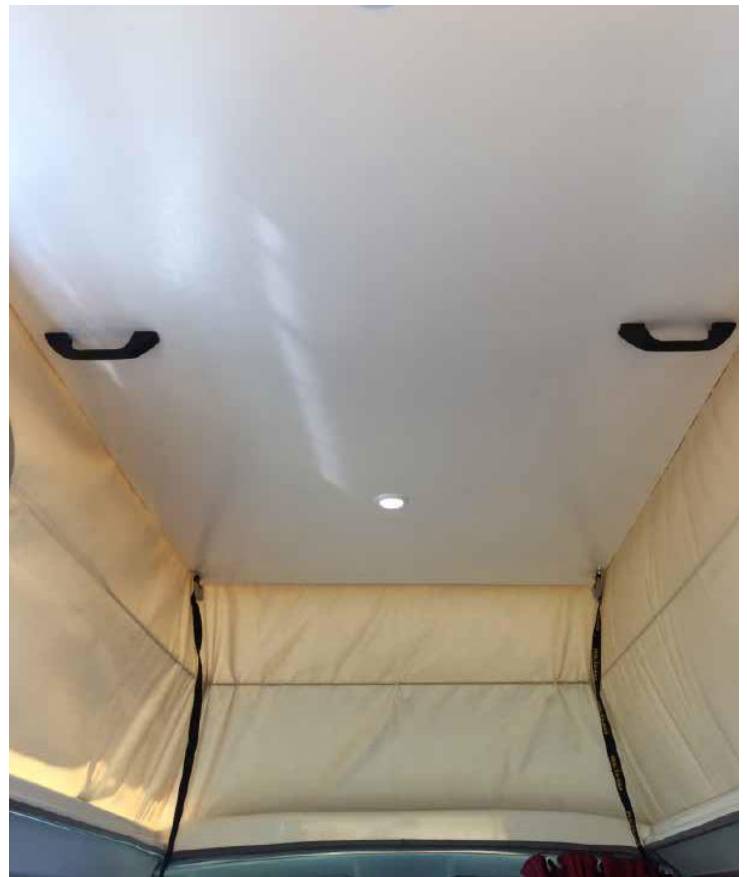




sits beneath a traditional pop-top roof. Hardly cutting edge on face value you might think, but that's where you'd be wrong. If the Devil is in the detail, this time he's wearing a halo and is a fellow you really want to know.

Le Differenza!

Starting from the roof down, here are the things that set the Campino apart. The pop-top is their own design and strong enough to walk on. It also has 25 mm of insulation and a 3 mm easy-clean ceiling. Its gutters are designed to channel rain away from the side door while its skirt has zippered and screened side windows (a third window is optional). The roof is held down by simple webbing straps that loop through sprung buckles and hold the roof securely in place when travelling. If you like, a fixed hi-top roof is optionally available. While flush glass windows on both sides add a streamlined look, security insect screens have been added to the smallish sliding windows for increased ventilation. A three-metre Dometic awning is also standard and most thoughtfully, the winder handle has been shortened just enough to remain easily useable, but store conveniently in the gap between the entry step and floor.



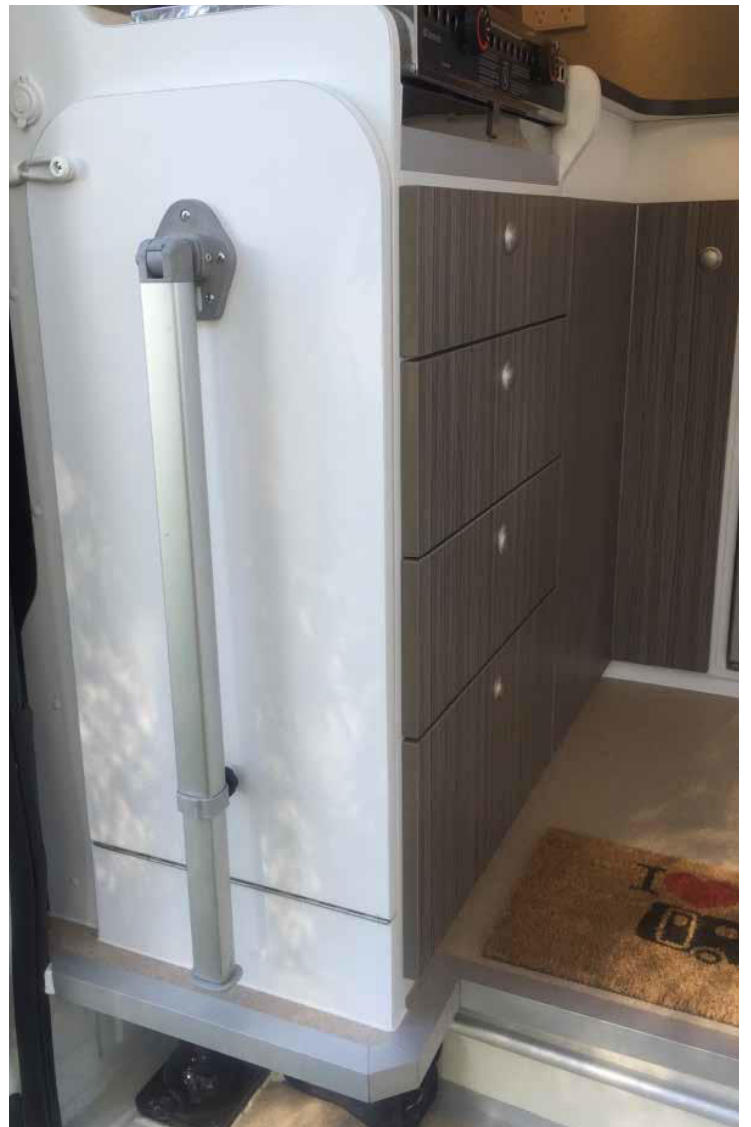
Top: The roof skirt has two screened windows standard and a third optionally available. **Above:** Headroom is excellent all the way through, while full roof insulation and touch operated LEDs that are also dimmable are excellent inclusions. The roof is nicely weighted for manual operation, but powered Airlifters are an option too.



The Campino is LPG-free and uses an Origo portable metho stove, so there's no gas locker. However, a cold water shower at the rear is standard and an optional small electric hot water system for it and the kitchen sink can be ordered. Fresh water is 52 L and grey is 40 L, the latter complete with an Odour Stop S to prevent smells coming back up through the sink. The fresh tank also has a small drain valve so you can empty or flush your potable water if desired. Very thoughtful.

A 120 W solar panel is optional, but as the Campino comes pre-wired, including the solar regulator, it's a low-cost extra at \$480. Speaking of power, a sizeable 120 amp hour AGM deep-cycle house battery is standard and all wiring is heavy duty 6 mm, while dual 100 amp-hour house batteries

Top: The Origo portable metho-burning stove runs cooler than gas and so cooks slower, but keeps the Campino LPG free. I'd carry a portable canister-style gas cooker as well. **Right:** The drop-down external table has a height adjustable leg to compensate for uneven ground. Note the 12 V socket in the top corner so you can run accessories outdoors too.



can be ordered (and accommodated in the standard battery box). TV is optional, but again the van comes prewired and includes an weatherproof external connector for both TV and satellite/cable aerial leads, plus an internal power socket and aerial points. Still on power, an impressive integrated and flush-fitting Votronic monitoring and operations panel is fitted. German (of course), it's a simple, elegant and high tech device that provides accurate voltage readouts for the house and vehicle batteries, plus percentage readouts for the fresh and grey water tanks. Best of all it's unaffected by incline, so water readings are always accurate. Imagine that!

Lighting is 12 V LED, of course. In the ceiling are two touch-operated units and there's an swivelling LED strip next to the double 240 V outlets above the kitchen bench, plus a pair of small reading lights by the bedheads. Cleverly, there are two small, swivellable spot lights in the tailgate. These act as outdoor lighting when its raised or internal lighting if you order the optional tailgate tent. There's also an LED light on a flexible arm behind the passenger seat that can illuminate the cooker or be positioned to shine over the outdoor table (which I'll come to shortly).



Above: In keeping with campervans of this size the single beds are a bit narrow on their own, so making up what is basically a queen sized bed at night would probably be the norm. **Below:** The Votronic control panel is simple, unobtrusive and accurate. Note readouts for the house and vehicle batteries.



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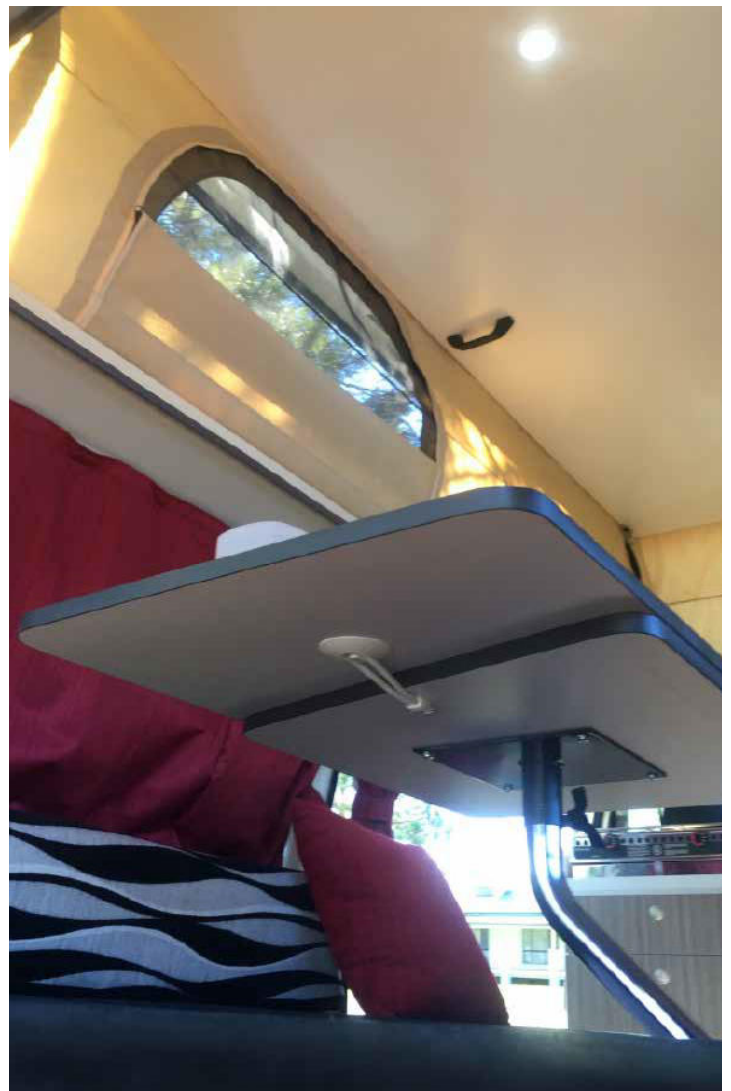


Clockwise from top left: The Porta Potti can be relocated to this front cupboard for inside use, night or day; The kitchen's corner cupboard is cavernous and also home to the grey water tank and even a small garbage bin; The table has a hinged section underneath that folds out when removed from the pole to become the bed's main centre board. It's strong, sturdy and well made, like the rest of the Campino.

Inside

By now you should have the idea this is anything but a poverty pack campervan despite its entry-level price tag. In the same way a lot of thought went into the standard inclusions, a lot of time and effort also went into making the layout practical and liveable.

Unlike traditional campers and their particleboard cabinetry, the Campino uses lightweight and high-strength Euro-sourced ply, plus quality German Hafele and Hettich-brand hardware and real laminate bench and tabletop surfaces. The L-shaped kitchen has a stack of four drawers of varying depths beneath the cooker and these are also easily

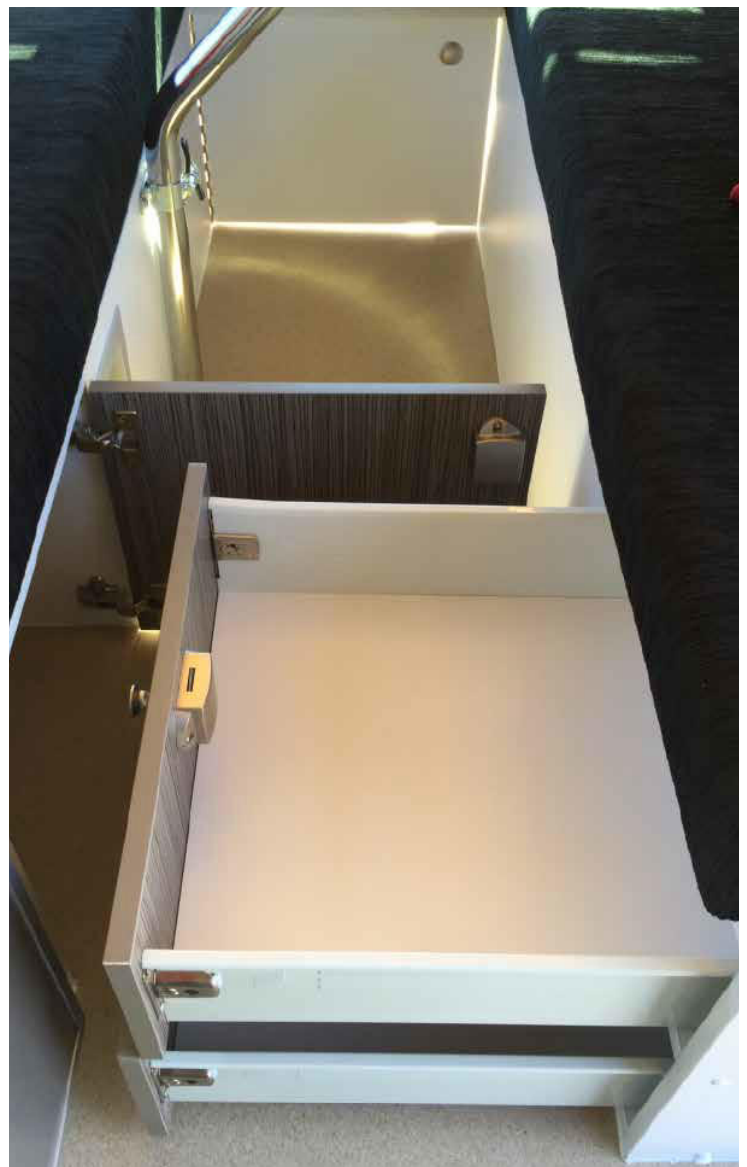




Above: There are motorhomes costing two and three times as much that have smaller kitchens. **Right:** Storage is abundant, with these drawers as well as bulk storage available under the kerb-side bed.

reached from outside. The cooker is portable and so can be used outside if desired. To this end a fold-down table with height adjustable leg hinges off the kitchen end panel. It also makes a handy place for drinks and nibbles come Sundowners! In the corner of the kitchen's L is a double-hinged door that reveals quite cavernous storage, while next to it and beneath the round sink (with folding tap and glass lid) is the 80-litre Waeco 12 V compressor fridge.

The kitchen bench doesn't just cut off where it joins the driver's side bed, it curves around to provide valuable over-bed-end work space, which is mimicked by a second shelf below. The latter makes an ideal place to put phones/iPads/etc for after-hours charging from the nearby 12 V sockets and 5 V USB outlets.



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At the rear a zippered insect screen is standard, while the Porta Potti has two 'homes': one in the driver's side rear corner (handy for outdoor or tailgate-tent use) and the other in a cupboard under the front end of the bed – also on the driver's side – for in-vehicle use. This front potty cupboard can also be used for general storage, plus there's another pair of drawers that open opposite it, across the aisle, from under the forward end of the kerb-side bed. That same bed has considerable lengthways storage underneath, in addition to which the end panel at the back, which also holds the shower hose and nozzle, can be removed for carrying extra-long items.

The lounge/bed is the final and perhaps most obvious innovation. In normal use it's U-shaped across the rear, but the centre section is removable to provide a long aisle for loading a bike or whatever, or just easy

access via the tailgate. With the centre section (seat cushion and base board) removed you discover a hinged cupboard door at floor level that forms a front panel when it's in place. It stops things in the boot from sliding into the aisle (and vice versa). With the aisle open it simply hinges around and closes off the Port Potti from internal view. Very clever!

Dining is on a good-sized table with a basic chrome pole mount that provides a reasonable degree of positioning choices but no height option. A Lagun table is available and for \$165 would be a good choice, especially as when the standard pole is removed to make up the bed it leaves a big fixture on the side of the bed that could do some damage if bumped in to. This is perhaps the most obvious design/price compromise and I think it does the Campino no favours.

The shower's detachable hose has a high quality brass connector that should last years, plus there's a water pump toggle switch alongside. The nozzle has a trigger too, and while cold water is standard a small hot water system is available.



As mentioned, you have the choice of single beds or a double/queen. To make up the latter you need to remove the table and fill the aisle with bed boards. Cleverly, this mostly comprises the dining table, which has a piano-hinged section that folds away underneath during normal use. Combined with the small centre board and cushion that make up the U-shaped dinette, it's all you need for the bed conversion (plus the lounge bolster cushions to fill it in, of course). The beds are slightly different lengths – 1.75 m and 1.85 m – with the longer one on the kerb side. I found even the long one too short for my 185 cm frame, but a flip-up extension is now optionally available that would do the trick.

What I Think

You don't need to have been reading between the lines to realise I think the Campino is an excellent campervan, entry level or not. The quality of workmanship and engineering appears first class, while the thoughtfulness that has gone into it is apparent. Olli and Pia travelled Australia in a campervan for quite some time before starting their business and the experience shows.

If you're looking for a vehicle that can be a daily driver as well as a holiday escape machine and want one that's innovative, modern and very well made, take a long, close look at the Campino. It even comes with a choice of interior colour schemes, plus you can build and price your Campino on the website, then email yourself the quote. How sweet is that?



The rear insect screen is another excellent standard inclusion that adds to the Campino's practicality. A tailgate tent is optional but will likely prove popular, providing invaluable living space but storing away in a compact bag under the bed.



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Specs

GENERAL

Make	Southern Spirit Camervans
Model	Campino
Type	Campervan
Berths	2
Approved Seating	2
Licence	Car

VEHICLE

Make/Model	Toyota HiAce LWB
Engine	2.7 L VVT-i 4-cylinder petrol
Power	118 kW @ 5200 rpm
Torque	243 Nm @ 4000 rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Safety	ABS, Stability Control, Traction Control, Airbags
Fuel	80 L

WEIGHTS

Tare Weight	2095 kg – Fresh/Grey/Fuel tanks full
Gross Vehicle Mass	2800 kg
Max Payload	705 kg
Braked Towing Capacity	1400 kg max

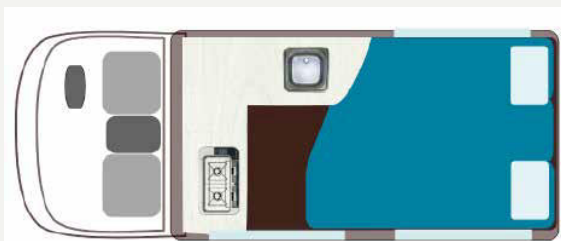
DIMENSIONS

Overall Length	4.65 m (15' 3")
Overall Width	1.70 m (5' 7")
Overall Height	2.01 m (6' 7")
Internal Height	1.35 m/1.95 m (4' 4"/6' 4") Roof down/up
Single Bed - driver's side	1.78 m x 0.52 m (5' 10" x 1' 9")
Single Bed - kerb side	1.85 m x 0.55 m (6' 1" x 1' 10")
Converted to double	1.85 m (max) x 1.56 m (6' 1" x 5' 1")



Specs

EQUIPMENT	
Slide-Out	No
Awning	Dometic wind-out
Entry Steps	Integrated
Cooker	Origo OH3000 portable spirit stove
Rangehood	No
Sink	Dometic round with fold-down flick mixer, glass lid
Fridge	Waeco 80 L compressor
Microwave	Optional
Lighting	12 V LED
12 V Sockets/USB Outlets	2 x 12 V, 2 x USB
Air Conditioner	No
Space Heater	No
Hot Water System	Optional
Toilet	Porta Potti Qube 335
Shower	External – cold (hot optional)
CAPACITIES	
Batteries	1x 120 AH AGM
Solar	Opt
LPG	N/A
Fresh Water	50 L
Grey Water	40 L
Hot Water	Opt
Toilet	10 L carry tank
PRICE	



Pros

- Price
- Quality workmanship
- Standard inclusions
- Self-contained
- Layout
- Practicality
- Practical options
- Payload

Cons

- Bed length
- Table support intrusion

Contacts:

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