

Why you should always have a tow bar

Kev popped his head over the hedge, to watch Lano backing the ute up to his garage. 'Off somewhere then?' he inquired, as Lano opened the driver's side door to get a better line on the twin paved driveway segments, neatly bisected by crisp green lawn, that led up to his auto-lift remote controlled roller doors. The motion-sensors for the antique-look carriage lamps on each side also came on as the ute moved within range, and Kev could see Lano punching codes into the remote to flick them off again. Damned things were hypersensitive. Came on every time the bloody cat wandered by, all hours too. Sometimes Kev swore they responded to moths that flickered past. Shit, an over-ambitious patio lily blooming could set them off he reckoned, or the breeze on the multi-coloured variegated designer flax in planters that Lano had colour-blocked against the three bay garage wall. Kev couldn't see the point of motion sensors himself, but that was Lano, into every new gadget, always a sucker for the latest thing. 'Taking the boat down the coast for a few days', Lano told him, coming over. 'Sharyn says she feels the need for a bit of a trip away.'

Kev and Trina had watched with interest as Sharyn and Lano had turned themselves into boaties, come home with a big new trailer sailor, traded in the Toyota for one of those Great Wall Chinese utes to pull it along. Lano of course had then spent weeks acquiring all the latest gear to go with it, electronic fish detection equipment that scanned the bottom and recorded your top spots with GPS satnav. precision. 'Fish don't stand a chance!' he'd reckoned, rubbing his hands with glee - 'Just wait till we wind up the new Weber triple cooktop then mate!' He had matching His'n'Hers boxes of setline hooks, with scalers and gutting knives neatly recessed into the lids, and he'd spent hours over the back with Nick, who farmed mussels down the Sounds, learning

about how to get licensed for crab pots and how to operate a scallop dredge and where the big snapper might be biting. Sharyn had the new portable foldout Baby-Q to match the big pool-side outdoor kitchen array – and she'd spent days online, ordering up all the latest boating outfits in navy and white stripes with matching canvas plimsolls and pea jackets. 'Very Duchess of Cambridge, I don't think', Trina had sniffed, 'There's some looks you simply shouldn't attempt at plus size 22. Not when you're only 5 foot 3'. But of course she didn't say anything, well not to Sharyn anyway, she was still angling for her mayonnaise recipe, the one she used on that baby potato and broad bean salad. 'I always make it a rule,' she would say virtuously, 'never to get on the wrong side of a neighbour'.

Kev and Trina weren't into boats. Lano had come over a few times with the catalogues when he was thinking about buying, and Kev had tried to summon up a bit of interest – but Trine had made it clear that it wasn't on. 'I can't be doing with it darls,' she'd said. 'You're forever backing it up and putting it in and taking it out and putting it back and hosing it down and stowing stuff away and painting and varnishing and on and on'. 'Yeah well,' Kev had said. 'Fuel costs a fortune too. Reckon by the time Lano gets a fish home it'll have cost him three times what he'd pay at the chippie. That's if he ever catches any.' He pinged up the calculator on his iPad and did the sums. 'Not to mention,' Trina continued, 'the Look.' 'Eh?' said Kev. 'The Look,' Trina said. 'They've all got it. That scraggy bottle blonde and over done faux tan thing. Horrible. All penciled in eyebrows and white three-quarter jeans and rope-soled wedgies. Can't fathom why they do it.'

'Might take the van out this weekend love,' Kev ventured. 'What d'ya think? I'd like to try it over the saddle before the summer'. 'Lovely,' said Trina. 'I'll air everything out and check the supplies in the kitchenette.'

Kev and Trina's Belair De Luxe Cruisetta was absolutely their pride and joy. From the moment they'd spotted it on the lot, they'd known it was the one. 'You see,' Kev'd told Lano, 'a caravan gives you so much independence. Specially when she's all set up with ensuites and her own disposal system.' 'Freedom camping', Lano had said – 'yeah I can see the benefit. A bit like the boat, really. Of course, no fishing – unless you're going for trout, or investing in a whitebaiting stand – but it means the wide open spaces, doesn't it. Back to basics – but with all mod cons.' There they'd agreed. You got used to your comforts. Tents and back packs and such were all very well for the young things, but hell, you were established, you could afford it. Why not splash out? The Cruisetta came with its own mini flatscreen TV, and a bar fridge – a real home away from home. 'We can stay away as long as we like,' Kev said. 'Right away from the crowds. No pressure.' 'Same with the boat', said Lano. 'Choose your locale. Move on when you want. Best of all – ' he dug Kev in the ribs – 'No bloody lawns to maintain!' and they'd both roared with laughter. 'So where are you off to this week?' 'Oh,' said Kev, 'not quite sure yet... somewhere over the Bay...' and he made a mental note to ring Shona and book them in.

When they got home on Monday morning, Lano was already back and busy hosing down the boat and trailer. Kev parked the van down the side of the house under the big plum tree, and Trina tidied away all the leftovers. 'I might just get you to help take down the curtains too,' she told Kev. 'Get the dust out of them and have them up fresh for the next trip.'

'Have a good time?' Lano called out. 'Very relaxing,' Kev replied. 'We took her up across the saddle: bit winding, but otherwise she just zipped along... Parked up the river for a while, coffee by the rapids, you know how it is...' He knew Lano was envious of the espresso machine he'd fitted in the

kitchenette. 'Boat go ok?' 'Whipped along,' Lano told him. 'Took it right down past the glaciers, Okarito way, lovely bit of coast that.' 'Never been there' Kev said, 'Might put it on the list.' 'Got some fish for you,' Lano offered – 'All filleted and ready. Shaz did some on the Baby Q. Top stuff. I'll send it over.' 'Must say the boat's standing up well,' Kev remarked. 'Not a scratch on it. Still looks like a bought one.' 'Well you've got to keep them A-1,' said Lano, buffing the paintwork with a chamois. 'Saltwater's a bugger if you don't keep on top of it'. The sun glinted off the railings, and the newly washed coils of rope and canvas covers steamed a little in the morning sun. It certainly looked pristine - could have been wheeled out new into the boatyard. Kev wondered how Lano did it.

Sharyn popped across with the promised fish for Kev and Trina – 'Nice bit of snapper' she said, handing over a Lock and Lock patent plastic clip-top box with a frozen slicker pad inside to keep the fish fresh. Trina took the catch out later to cook up for Kev's lunch. 'You have to hand it to them,' she said, 'they fillet this stuff like professionals! Never any bones or skin, big fat pieces – and all the brown bits trimmed away. I couldn't buy better at the Supermarket.' 'Well they can't catch that much though,' said Kev, forking it down with a mouthful of salad. 'Nick over the back told me he frequently sees Sharyn buying up big at Guytons up the Port. Kilos of the stuff, he says. Mostly snapper too.' 'Goodness,' said Trina. 'I wonder what she does with it all.'

By evening, Trina had the van curtains all washed and ironed and ready to rehang. 'May as well do them now' she said to Kev, 'before the news comes on. Get everything squared away and ready, in case we decide to take off again.'

As she locked up for the night, she took another look around. Everything was exactly as she would want, the sage green squabs on the fold down bed all fresh looking, the

kitchenette gleaming, the white pine woodwork waxed, every speck of dust off the windows. She'd been so proud when Shona from the Motel had commented on how well they kept it up. A lovely set-up, she'd judged it – and of course, should they ever actually want to pull off the road and sleep over in it, there it all was, ready and waiting. Not that they ever had. There were some great little motels all over these days, with proper kitchens and good hot showers and those huge kingsize beds that seemed to be everywhere now – cable TV too, no need to squint at the laptop to catch up on your favourite program when you got home. No – so far at least, they'd always managed to get into a nice motel or B & B, park the van round the back – and really you know, it was so convenient: you could hang your clothes in the Cruisetta's little wardrobe, carry your own bathtowels and even Kev's memory-foam pillow, no trouble, not having to pack the car up until you couldn't see out the rear window as so many did. They could pull over at the scenic reserves and beauty spots, make a real coffee on Kev's machine and a cuppa with the brand of tea she preferred and her own brown earthenware pot... All the advantages with none of the worry, that's what Kev said. Shona at Bide-a Wee was getting to be quite the old friend. Just so long as Lano and Sharyn never found out – well she shuddered to think. They'd not hear the end of it – them and that flash boat of theirs.

She wondered, not for the first time, why Sharyn had agreed to have Lano buy the thing. It wasn't as if either of them were the outdoors type. As far as Trina could remember, Sharyn had never actually been known to swim. She might have the absolute latest flotation vest life jacket – and a series of cunningly draped swimsuits would appear on the washing line after every weekend away - but had any of them ever in fact hit the surf? Even with the pool at home Sharyn just ensconced herself on the banana lounge and knocked back frozen malibu daiquiris and midori cocktails.

What that woman was doing owning a boat, Trina simply could not imagine.

Next door, Lano sat at the computer, entering his mileage log onto the Excel spreadsheet file he'd created when he got the ute. He was certainly pleased with its overall performance. People said some harsh things about the Great Wall brand, but so far, it had more than done the job. He'd made Franz in really good time – and despite the fuel costs out on the Coast, highest in the country they said, it had come in under what he had budgeted. Easy towing too – even Sharyn could have done it – not that she ever offered, and anyway, he was enjoying the challenge. Might take the boat down to the Southern Lakes next long weekend: right through the Haast – now there would be one in the eye for old Kev and Trina. They seemed to just poozle about with that caravan of theirs, little trip here, little trip there – nothing really intrepid, not what you'd call real towing, like him and Sharyn. Yes, it'd been a top purchase, the trailer-sailor. Really met their needs. Take it down to Wanaka next then, and Te Anau – maybe Manapouri. He clicked on the online AA route planner, and began calculating the mileage and fuel charges. Once he'd sorted the dates, he could get Sharyn onto booking some real nice accommodation.

This time, who knows - they might even put the boat into the water.