



Travelling and finding suitable accommodation while on the road can be more difficult for people who are disabled.

That was what Sue Denmark, who is confined to a wheelchair, and husband, Stephen, found when they wished to join others for extended trips.

“Some resorts and hotels do cater for our needs but many do not,” Sue told CW. “And, to be fair, it is difficult for holiday places to cater for various disabilities – they are all different.”

The Denmarks considered taking their own accommodation with them in the form of a caravan.

“That too proved very difficult at first,” Sue explained. “There seemed to be few caravan manufacturers who were prepared to go much beyond widening the entry door. Then, we talked with Jessica Reddy and Leigh Andrews at Alan Graham’s Caravans in North Gosford, NSW, and that was when we began to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

“We had several meetings. Leigh recommended a Supreme caravan and our dream travel accommodation moved a little closer to reality.”

What Supreme, Leigh and Sue did between them was totally redesign the interior of a Supreme Spirit. Some aspects were adapted from standard design features, but others were done from scratch. One of the problems with designing a van for people with disabilities is that no two people will have the same

Complete ability

This modified Supreme Spirit wheelchair-friendly caravan is an affirmation that RVing is possible for people in many situations.





Above: The Spirit is a dream made real for Sue and Stephen Denmark, with dogs Tiffany and Barnaby.
Left: Supreme Caravans and Leigh Andrews of Alan Graham's Caravans helped the Denmarks' modified Spirit caravan come into being.



Above: The kitchen has all the essentials despite the van's central walkway being made wider. **Above right:** A separate entry door contains a Tieman 350kg wheelchair lift that Sue can operate.



The non-standard item is, of course, the wider door containing a Tieman 350kg wheelchair hoist. Interestingly, this setup goes together very well – nothing looks too out of place.

Of course, the entire van has been designed principally to meet the needs of Sue, and the Tieman hoist has been set up so that she can wheel herself onto the hoist. She then uses a hand controller to lift herself and the wheelchair hydraulically into the van.

INSIDE WORD

There are a number of conventional items inside, but the layout is very different. It's rear bathroom is slightly larger than usual, and the kitchen bench is on the nearside. However, the dinette is a sideways arrangement along the offside wall. The two single beds at the front are positioned at right angles to each other.

Undoubtedly the most obvious difference is the walkway down the middle of the van. It is wide enough to easily accommodate a wheelchair. The efficient use of space, though, became even more apparent when we had five people and two dogs in the 23ft (7m) van – there was still room to move around and it didn't feel crowded.

The wide walkway made an amazing amount of difference – as did the two doorways, making getting in and out easy for those on foot as well.

The kitchen looks fairly conventional

needs, so it is very much a custom arrangement. Jim Farrell, marketing manager of Melbourne-based Supreme Caravans, told CW that the manufacturer was happy to help.

"We were delighted to be asked by the Denmarks to help out. This Spirit isn't the only wheelchair modification we've completed."

Refining the layout and design took a some time, but once the caravan was finished CW was invited along for the official 'opening' of *Umina*, the Denmarks' special caravan.

"It's not a caravan – it's a dream," Sue told CW.

What a special occasion the unveiling was, too. Sue and Stephen hadn't seen the finished product and were clearly very excited when looking through their new caravan.

We should also mention that the other family members, Tiffany and Barnaby – two instantly at-home-in-the-caravan poodles – are obviously planning on enjoying the RV lifestyle, too.

Sue and Stephen are going to tow the Spirit with a Nissan Patrol, given the van's Tare weight of 2550kg. The vehicle has also been fitted with an unusual-looking roof rack. It is actually a special hoist that enables Sue to be lifted relatively easily out of the front passenger seat.

FREE WHEELIN'

From the outside, the Spirit appears to be a fairly standard van, except for the larger-than-usual second door. The build is fairly conventional, with a DuraGal chassis, Al-Ko Roller Rocker load sharing suspension, two 9kg gas cylinders on the drawbar and an A&E awning.



Above: The versatile Lagun table, which swivels in most directions, makes the dinette more accessible.

with a cooktop, sink and microwave on one side, and fridge on the other. We noted with interest that the microwave has been set low, under the grill. In addition to the usual cupboards, drawers and overhead lockers, there is a low desk/table situated at the

front end of the kitchen bench, which can easily be used by Sue in her wheelchair.

Not only does it take a laptop computer, but the wall behind has a powerpoint, flatscreen TV mounting, 12V socket and TV antenna connections.

On the other side of the van, the dinette consists of a sideways facing lounge seat with a multi-adjustable Lagun table. We've only come across these recently, but they are made by a marine supply company – they adjust every which way and are quite stable as well.

The table accommodates wheelchairs very well. Alongside the dinette seat is a waist high cabinet with drawer and cupboard. Under the seat, complete with drawer, is the usual storage area, but part of that is taken by the gas/electric hot water heater.

Up front, the two innerspring mattress single beds have been set at right angles to give ease of access and wheelchair space. Above the beds are overhead lockers of various sizes and in the nearside front corner is a small wardrobe, with drawers underneath. Access to the under-bed storage area is by floor locker doors.

Quite a few of the larger caravan bathrooms we have seen are packed with storage compartments, in addition to the essential items such as shower, toilet and wash basin. This one is quite large, too,

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Above: Even with three people and two dogs inside, the van doesn't feel crowded. **Right:** The bathroom is uncluttered so that Sue and her wheelchair can fit.



but in order to give plenty of wheelchair manoeuvring room, it is simply fitted out with the three essential items, plus some solid looking handrails and high overhead lockers. A side window and two roof hatches provide all the necessary ventilation.

Lighting throughout the van is all 12V and a mixture of ceiling fluorescent units and halogen reading lights for the dinette and beds. In addition to the

fore and aft skylight hatches, there is a centrally-mounted air-conditioner.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This is a caravan with a difference, but one that can still be used conventionally. There wasn't any doubting Sue Denmark's enthusiasm for her new holiday transport.

It's good to see that Supreme and the team at Alan Graham's Caravans have taken the time and trouble to help one more family enjoy the caravan lifestyle, especially with someone whose needs are somewhat different from those of the majority.

"I hope you get to put a lot of smiles on many disabled people's faces as you have done for me," was Sue's comment. "Where will we travel? Who knows? I do know that I will not be sitting at home listening to everyone telling me about their trips.

"To see Stephen travelling with me as my partner and not just as a carer will be wonderful. I will be one happy camper."

**Alan Graham's Caravans and RVs,
514 Pacific Highway, North Gosford,
NSW, (02) 4328 4800, web:
www.alangrahams.com.au
For your nearest Supreme dealer,
visit www.supremecaravans.com.au**



Supreme Caravans Spirit (special disabled use)

- External length** 23ft (7m)
- External width** 7ft 9in (2.36m)
- Interior height** 6ft 5in (1.95m)
- Nameplate ATM** 2950kg
- Nameplate GTM** 2841kg
- Nameplate Tare Weight** 2550kg
- Frame** Timber
- Chassis** DuraGal
- Suspension** Load sharing leaf spring
- Cooktop** Swift four-burner
- Fridge** Dometic RM4601 186L
- Microwave** NEC 23L
- Shower** Yes
- Toilet** Thetford cassette
- Lighting** 12V
- Gas supply** 2 x 9kg
- Fresh water tank** 160L
- Price** \$76,000 custom

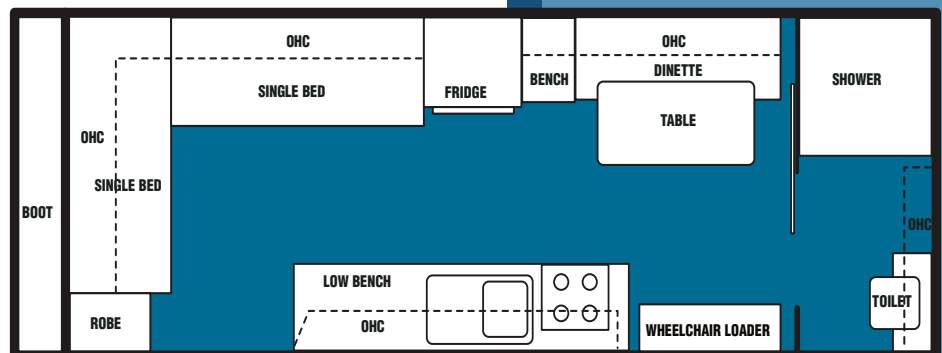
liked

- Watching Sue Denmark's face as she looked over her new caravan

now I'm being picky

- I'd like to see more players in the RV industry take a flexible approach to those whose abilities are limited in some way

floorplan



RVING FOR THE DISABLED

We believe the RV industry has much to offer disabled people. Persistence is definitely required if you are looking for mobile accommodation and with this design, Alan Graham and Supreme clearly worked hard to meet Sue Denmark's requirements, and congratulations are in order.

A bit of lateral thinking is good in terms of the RV used. In this case a caravan was ideal and for other disabled people, a motorhome or fifth wheeler may suit.

For instance, we have seen a very well equipped motorhome that suited the disabled owner perfectly because it meant no transferring between a tow vehicle and the living quarters.

Whatever the RV used, it's a matter of figuring out what works best for the user.