

OPTIMA PRIME

INTRODUCED 15 YEARS AGO, THIS VERSATILE SLIDE-ON CAMPER WITH ENSUITE PROVES IT STILL HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO BE THE ULTIMATE UTE 'TRANSFORMER'.

WORDS AND PICS MATT WILLIAMS



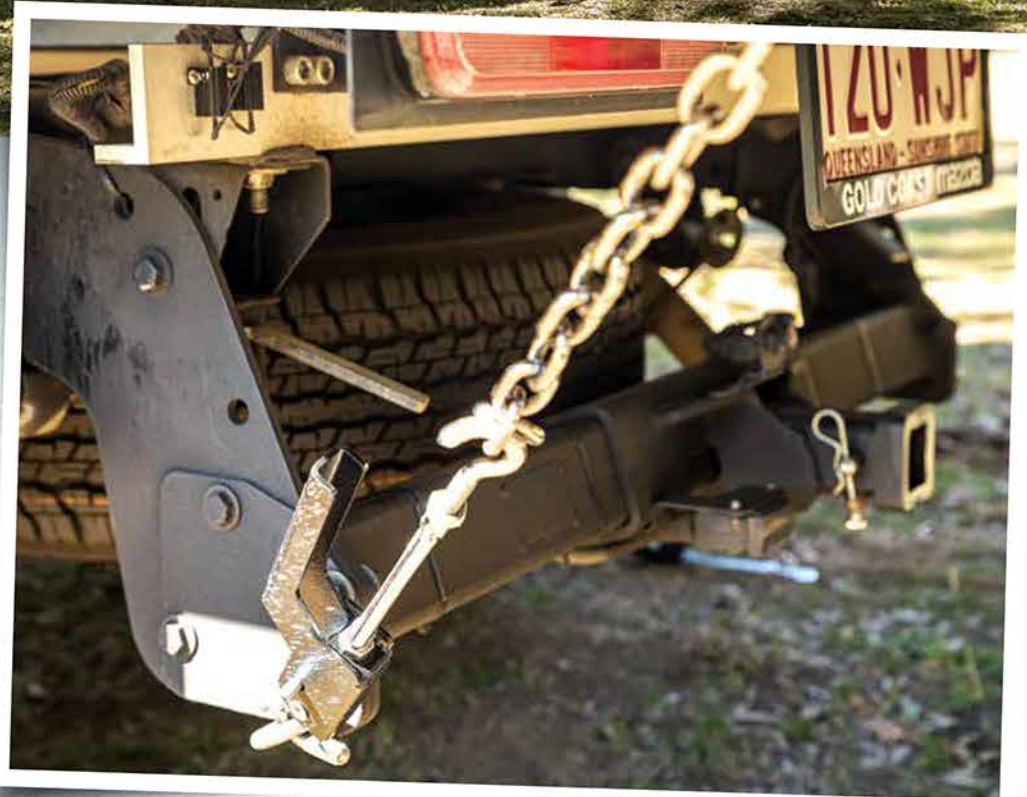
While you can happily live in the Ozcape with it attached, it's also easy to remove if you're in camp for a few days and want to drive some rougher tracks

HITS

- ▲ Bigger than it looks
- ▲ No setup time and loading/unloading can be done by one person
- ▲ Still able to tow a tinny
- ▲ Nothing more to add

MISSES

- ▼ Extra care required when negotiating tricky tracks
- ▼ Won't suit all utes



If I promise not to mention that the Optima Slide-On from Ozcape Campers is like a snail, carrying its home on its back with it wherever it goes, does it actually count because I've already mentioned it?

Perhaps you might like to ponder this and come back to it later after diving into our in-depth review of this fantastic offering from Ozcape Campers.

FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

As well as a global pandemic and putting my hand out for a couple of government welfare payments, there have been a lot of firsts for me this year. I've reviewed my fair share of motorhomes, caravans, hybrids and camper trailers, but never before a slide-on camper. Tick off another first for 2020.

And I must say, I've ticked it off in style with the

Optima. While you could argue that because this is my first that I don't have a lot of experience, and you would be right, but it's not hard to see that this camper is functional and built well.

In fact, the Optima was the very first slide-on camper design from Ozcape way back in 2005. Over the course of the past 15 years, the design has remained relatively unchanged, with refinements being the key to an enduring product. Like a wise person once said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

BEHIND THE SCENES

After meeting with Ozcape's owner, Joe Ried, at the company's HQ on Queensland's beautiful Gold Coast, it was good to sit down and have a chat about his business and his customer base. Or should that be 'new friend base'? Apparently, while those that purchase a slide-on from Joe may start off as customers, they quickly become friends, and often call into the factory unannounced to share with the team where they have taken their campers around Australia.

Whilst Ozcape only distributes from the Burleigh factory and with the majority of its customer base located in south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales, Joe still sells all over the country and has friends from Perth to Parkham (that's in Tasmania, folks).

To get a proper feel for things, I was treated to a guided tour of the factory, where I got to observe a pair of new builds in various stages of completion.

Factory tours have always appealed to me. Seeing a neat and tidy workshop shows me that the guys and girls on the floor already put a price on appearance and attention to detail. Generally speaking, the finished product benefits from this mindset.

BUILDING IT UP

Being in the factory also allowed me to get up close and personal with how the Optima, and all of the Ozcape campers, are built.

Starting with a galvanised steel frame for some serious strength, a marine grade ply floor is then bonded and fastened to the frame. An edge-to-edge vinyl covering is then stuck down, with all furniture, frames and walls fixed on top.

Ozcape employs an 'inside out' build method, with the walls and roof being the last parts of the build process. This allows for the cavities between and behind the aluminium Qubelok framework to be fully accessed, making for a much neater and more efficient build. All wiring and plumbing has been run through these spaces, leaving minimal services to run underneath the floor of the camper.

For optimal thermal efficiency, 30mm fibreglass sandwich panels are used for all external surfaces. A single piece roof and an aluminium angle capping on all corners eliminates the likelihood of water or dust ingress into the living area.



The design has solo travellers in mind, so sliding on and off is made easy

The Optima is the largest camper in the Ozcape fleet, and while designed with a single cab, one tonne ute in mind, the space cab variants of the Mazda BT50 and Ford Ranger can handle the length and weight of the camper.

Joe recommends that a GVM suspension upgrade is carried out on your chosen ute to keep everything legal and for added peace of mind.

FROM BITUMEN TO BULLDUST

One of the beauties of a slide-on camper is that you can take the thing nigh on anywhere. Or anywhere you are confident of taking your vehicle. The only thing you need to worry about is obviously the height of the camper, and what that additional height does to your centre of gravity. In turn, you need to worry about how that affects your handling and offroad ability.

During the course of our testing, we did manage to find a few tracks with tight sections and a few ruts, but at no point could you call the tracks extreme. Where you take your camper will depend on your skills and how far you are prepared to push the envelope.

Every effort has been made to keep the weight as low as possible, but a change in driving habits will be required when the camper is attached.

YOU CAN, BUT DON'T NEED TO

And that leads me to another plus for the Optima. If you do want to tackle the gnarly tracks, then all you need to do is remove the camper and you can go play in the rough stuff to your heart's content.

That's right. You can take the camper off the tray, but you definitely don't need to. It all depends on what you're doing. Absolutely

The 270 degree awning gives plenty of space to relax, but be sure to peg it down if there's any wind



everything is available no matter how you choose to set up. Whether you are stopping for a quick overnighter and you leave the camper attached to the ute, or if you are spending a week at an awesome campsite and want to be able to go for a drive. The only thing is, you might need a small step ladder for the awning if you leave it on the back of the ute!

What that also means, is when it's time for a break during a big outback drive ('Survive the Drive and break every two hours!') you can access inside the camper to put the billy on for a cuppa or make use of the on-board toilet.

The rear entry of the camper features an integrated lower step at sub-floor level making access and egress much easier. This has enabled the fitment of a full height door, so only the tallest among us have to worry about knocking their heads.

IT'S TIME TO SLIDE

When you've found the perfect campsite and decided that you are going to slide the camper off, it really couldn't be simpler. In fact, a decent percentage of Ozcape campers are owned by single folks, so removing and re-attaching the camper had to be able to be accomplished by an individual.

Success comes down to its simplicity. You don't even need to worry about the site being perfectly level. The four electric legs will take care of that.

The camper is attached to the chassis of the ute via four over-centre metal tie-downs on each corner of the camper. Simply release these four tie-downs, grab the remote control (which can also be attached by a long curly cord) and raise the camper enough to clear the two self-locating pins underneath the camper.



The shower can be used inside or out, so no tracking sand indoors at the beach



To my mind, these two pins are the secret to success, especially when it comes time to slide the camper back on. With their conical shape, you don't have to be 100 per cent accurate with your reversing skills, as the tapered pins will help to guide the camper into the perfect position on the rear of the camper.

However, I digress — it's not time to pack up yet!

With the camper raised high enough, the ute is free to drive out from underneath and then be used for day trips or popping into the closest town for more supplies.

Now it's time to lower the camper right down for maximum stability and to get everything level. Once again, this couldn't be easier thanks to the remote control legs. The legs can be lowered all at once, in pairs, or individually.

Next, eye it up so you don't roll out of bed! Or, if you're super pedantic, you could always buy a couple of little spirit levels from your local

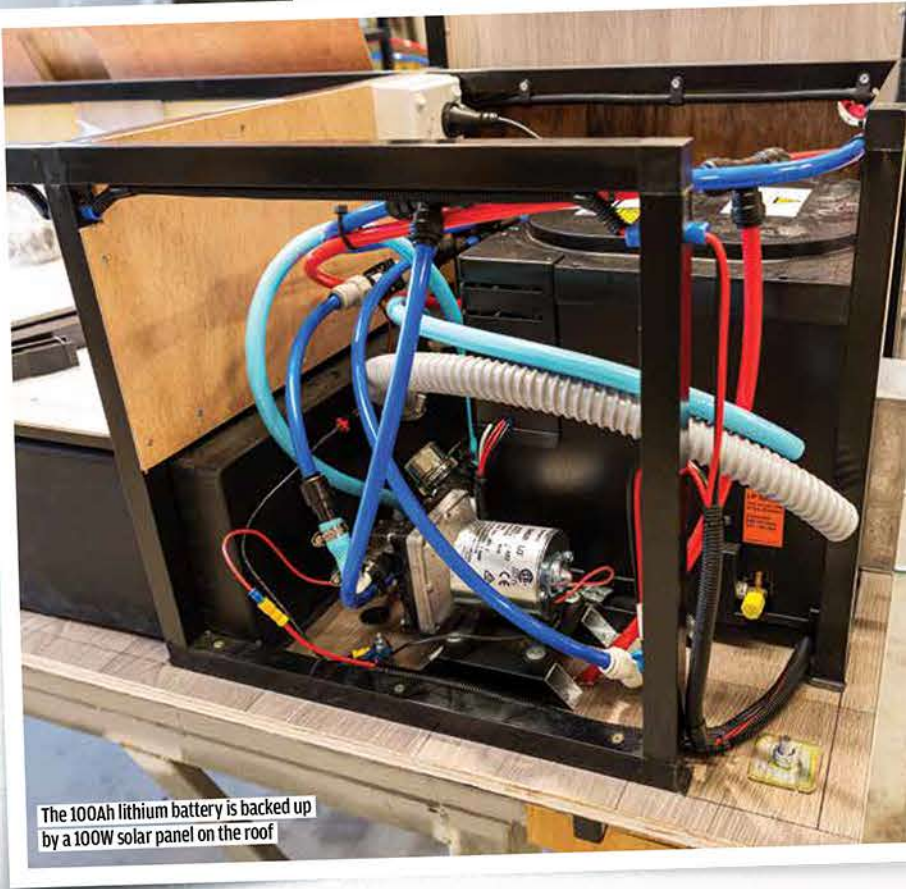
★★★★★

CTA RATINGS

OZCAPE CAMPERS OPTIMA

MATT WILLIAMS

1. FIT FOR INTENDED PURPOSE	★★★★★
2. INNOVATION	★★★★★
3. SELF-SUFFICIENCY	★★★★★
4. QUALITY OF FINISH	★★★★★
5. BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
6. OFFROAD-ABILITY	★★★★★
7. COMFORTS	★★★★★
8. EASE OF USE	★★★★★
9. VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
10. X-FACTOR	★★★★★



The 100Ah lithium battery is backed up by a 100W solar panel on the roof

CAMPER SPECS

OZCAPE CAMPERS 'OPTIMA'

SLIDE-ON CAMPER

Tare 900kg (as tested without water tank filled)

ATM Refer to vehicle GVM

Style Slide-on camper

Body Fibreglass sandwich panel

DIMENSIONS

Overall length 4.45m

Floor length 2.625m

Width 2.26m

STANDARD ACCESSORIES

Water 86L potable/40L grey

Kitchen MobiCool 3 x gas, 1 x electric cooktop with grill

Fridge Dometic 95L three-way fridge

Microwave Camec 20L

Toilet/shower Ensuite with combined toilet/shower

Bed 2100mm x 1400mm running east/west or can be configured into two single beds running north/south

Battery 100Ah Enerdrive lithium w/ 20A 240V charger and 40A DC/DC

Solar 100W single solar panel

Hot water System Truma 14L gas/electric

Air conditioner Dometic 2.4kW reverse cycle

DRS Dometic dust reduction system

OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Gas space heater

Upgraded lithium battery

PRICE AS TESTED

POA

ENQUIRIES

OZCAPE

Address 72-74 Dover Dr, Burleigh Heads QLD 4220

Phone (07) 5520 7388

For email, please use email inquiry form on website

Web ozcape.com.au

camper.hemax.com

More pictures Specs to compare



One of the self-locating pins that make re-attaching the camper so much easier than it might have been

hardware shop to make sure it's level.

With the camper all sorted, you're probably going to want a bit of shade while enjoying the fresh air and views. Working in conjunction with SupaPeg, the Optima is fitted with a 270-degree awning that attaches to the passenger side of the camper via an exclusive aluminium extrusion.

If you look closely, you'll also notice the hinge has been modified to suit the 90-degree corner at the rear. Traditionally, a 270-degree awning attaches back to the vehicle or camper with a strap, but not so on the Optima. A special bracket on the offside rear corner receives the arm of the awning and is fixed into place with a quick-release linch pin.

Grab your awning poles from the cylindrical storage hatch at the front and if it's a super windy day like it was for our review, it's probably a good idea to peg everything down.

There's another storage compartment on the

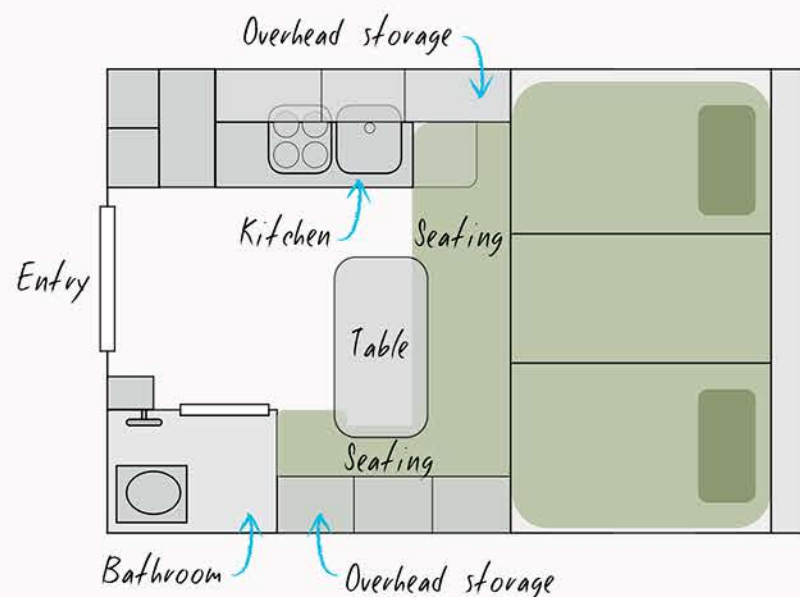
passenger side, but this is for the 9kg gas bottle.

Inside the hatch, there's also a handy utility shelf above the gas bottles which is the perfect spot for your tie-downs.

On the driver's side, a large storage compartment is big enough to swallow a generator, a Baby Q, your outdoor table and a couple of camp chairs and still have room for more.

WELCOME TO THE TARDIS

Now, I've done my fair share of motorhoming through Australia, New Zealand and Europe, and when I stepped up inside the Optima, I felt as though I had been transported back to a far-flung destination. The only thing was, the interior of the Optima felt bigger and more luxurious than the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter and Ford Transit motorhome conversions that I was used to!



Quick setup means more time for this

Camper TEST
OZCAPE CAMPERS
OPTIMA

"OVER THE COURSE OF THE PAST 15 YEARS, THE DESIGN HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY UNCHANGED, WITH REFINEMENTS BEING THE KEY TO AN ENDURING PRODUCT."



A generously sized bit of storage

On your right as you enter is the ensuite with combined shower/toilet/vanity. Surprising, there was plenty of shoulder room inside, and your knees aren't up around your ears when sitting on the Thetford toilet.

Cleverly, the vanity tap extends to become your showerhead as well. Not done with that bit of trickiness, the crew from Ozcape also supply a suction-cup-mounted shower holder that you can attach to the outside of the van if you want to get back to nature for your evening shower. Or perhaps you just need a quick rinse down after a swim at the beach.

On the passenger side runs the kitchen and pantry, with the lounge/dinette running along the opposite wall. The sleeping area occupies the front of the camper in the cab-over section.



Covers for the sink and cooktop maximise prep space



Tambour doors keep everything in place during rough drives



The massive bed can also convert into two singles if needed



"THE INTERIOR OF THE OPTIMA FELT BIGGER AND MORE LUXURIOUS THAN THE MERCEDES-BENZ SPRINTER AND FORD TRANSIT MOTORHOME CONVERSIONS THAT I WAS USED TO!"

For such a small space, the kitchen packs a lot of punch. A 3+1 gas/electric cooktop with grill and a microwave (240V mains only) will cover all your cooking needs if you're not firing up the Baby Q. What would normally be limited bench space is a thing of the past thanks to glass covers on the cooktop and over the sink. For even more preparation real estate, there's a laminated panel that lifts into place to the right of the hotplates.

A Dometic 95L three-way fridge sits under the bench as well as ample drawer storage. There's a combined pantry/wardrobe in the rear corner that also allows access to the camper's electrical system under a false floor.

Overhead cupboards feature tambour doors, so there's absolutely no chance of finding your plates and glasses broken and strewn across the floor after a day on the rough tracks.

Up front, the bed is massive. It's 2100mm long x 1400mm wide running in an east/west direction. But here's the kicker. You can convert it into two single north/south beds by lifting up the two lounge cushions. Talk about versatility.

The lounge/dining area is super comfy with enough room to stretch out and read a book or relax inside if the weather is poor. Convenient

storage is located under all the seats, allowing full access to the external storage locker from inside.

To think that you can fit all of this on the back of a ute is really quite amazing!

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

Now to your journey type: off-grid overloading or caravan park cruising? Just like the girl in the taco ad says, "Why not both?" The Optima is set up for whatever type of touring your heart desires. Being a slide-on, you also have the option of towing a tinny or a trailer full of toys. Think jet-ski or quad bike. The list goes on.

When it comes to getting away from it all, the Optima has an 86L freshwater tank and a 40L grey water tank. Now I know weight is always going to be an issue, and where you store it, but a little bit more fresh water wouldn't go astray, especially if you're going to make use of the shower regularly. Maybe an under-tray tank could be an option while still staying under your GVM.

Power is supplied to the camper thanks to an Enerdrive lithium package consisting of a 100Ah battery, 20A 240V charger and a 40A DC/DC charger. This is backed up by a 100W solar panel on the roof.

If you do prefer caravan parks, there is a mains hook-up point which will power up the 240V sockets inside, as well as the microwave and Dometic air con unit.

Hot nights off-grid are taken care of thanks to the big windows with screens all round as well as the Sirocco 12V fan. The rear door is a two-piece model which allows airflow and cross-ventilation while still providing full security.

THE FINAL WORD

For those who want versatility in spades, a slide-on camper would be an ideal choice. Creature comforts and mod-cons of a caravan or luxury motorhome combined with the offroad ability of a 4WD ute all while not having to tow, will appeal to a lot of buyers.

In fact, Joe says a lot of customers don't realise something like a slide-on camper exists until they see one at a show. They turn up looking for a camper trailer and then see an Ozcape camper and are immediately drawn in.

To be honest, I think a slide-on camper should be on a lot more people's radar. 