

## Queensland Regal Caravans

Based in the PM's hometown of Nambour, Queensland Regal Caravans builds its business on family values.

When Kevin Rudd buys his first Regal, he'll be able to shop in his old stomping grounds, at an RV dealership run by a working family, for working families.

Along with his parents Bob and Gay, Ryan Hodge runs a family-oriented van dealership in Nambour, with an almost maternal care for its customers. If you buy a van at Queensland Regal Caravans, the marque's exclusive Qld dealership, the Hodges will want to hear all about your subsequent adventures.

"That's something we pride ourselves in," Ryan says. "Being a family business, it's all about the extra service you get. We follow everyone up, and make sure everyone's having a good time."

### THE MAN

Ryan has been on board for 12 years, and has seen the 40-year-old business's transition from the motor industry into the RV world. "The motor industry was going nowhere," he says. "So to stick with something with wheels, we went with caravans." From a Mazda dealership with 48 staff, the Hodges now run a tight ship of four.

Number four is workshop man Dave. All warranty repairs, minor modifications and additions can be done onsite, thanks to his technical expertise and the facilities afforded by a multi-million-dollar makeover of his workshop.

With a history of tenting all though Far North Qld and Cape York, it seems Ryan revels in the luxury of van travel. In fact, he often has the opportunity to put trade-ins through their paces before they're buffed up and dressed ready for sale.

"We actually go caravanning quite a bit," he admits. At any one time, 40 vans (roughly a third of which are new) are displayed onsite, split between the indoor and outdoor show areas.

The Hodges still have good auto-industry contacts, so if you're after a full-rig combo, they can cut you a lean deal.

### THE VANS

You'd expect a van maker that's weathered four decades in the business to have ramped up production to

near-epic levels. Not so with Regal. Ryan says that the manufacturer, based in the caravan heartlands of Campbellfield, Vic, is focused entirely on quality, not quantity. Only 150 vans a year roll out of the factory. "They're very high quality, the finish of them – they're extremely well finished, when compared with other brands. We just don't have any dramas with them," Ryan says, adding that you really notice the difference in cupboards, drawers and fine-detailing in general.

Every van is fully customisable and you can take size to extremes if you like – Queensland Regal Caravans will fit out a 44ft (13.4m) monster for the ultimate big-van fix. At the opposite end of the scale, vans start at 11ft (3.4m), and camper trailer-lovers are well served by the selection of mid-range Johnno's Camper Trailers purveyed by Queensland Regal Caravans.

The Regal range includes a number of twin-axle on-road and offroad vans, from the full-offroad Pathfinder and the semi-to-full offroad Safari (both dealer exclusives), to the RSV (Regal Special Vehicles) configurations.

Interestingly, Ryan says that the dirt-hungry models are much more popular. That could be something peculiarly Qld, or it could be a trend towards free camping, which might be further evidenced by the increasing demand for self-sufficiency and self-containment. As a Honda and Kipor generator dealer, and a solar-power installer, Queensland Regal Caravans knows all about providing power in the bush.

Accessories are an ever-bigger focus for Regal buyers. "It's all about the gadgets," says Ryan.

"Roll-out fridges, roll-out barbecues, upsized fridges, washing machines – anything that opens and shuts."

There's even a 'remote-controllable' van, with hot water, air-con and other electrics that can be manipulated from afar.

### THE FUTURE

Ryan's customer service philosophy is simple, tried and true: "Look after them." Word of mouth, he explains, gets around quickly. "If you don't do the right thing by someone, 500 people will find out quicker than if you do the right thing. Make sure it's done properly."

The congenial vibe is definitely helped along by the Hodges' positive experience of the RV industry. "As far as the people go, the caravan industry is far better," he says.

Meanwhile, having invested heavily in their current premises after outgrowing their Caloundra digs, travel plans are on hold. The clan is hard at work, building a business for the next generation. Asked if his two children are going to take the helm one day, Ryan pulls no punches. "That's the whole idea," he says, and laughs. "The poor buggers!"

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Ryan Hodge (below left) has worked with Queensland Regal Caravans, which has a modern workshop (below), for 12 years.

