



NEW ZEALAND FOR FREE

Ian and Heather Barber ship their motorhome to New Zealand with the intention of selling it there - a plan that was difficult but well worth it

“We should do this in New Zealand, I said to Heather, my wife and fellow England Rugby supporter, back in September 2007 as we drove all around France in our 2004 Hymer Starline cheering on our boys in their ‘very nearly’ double of becoming World champions.

Our plan was to follow England during the World Cup and then stay on and travel around NZ. We intended to be away for six months.

Four years later, we found ourselves on board the aptly named ‘World Cup 2011’ Emirates Air Bus 380 leaving a rather warm Heathrow on our way to New Zealand via Dubai. After a five-day stopover visiting our grandson in Qatar (plus his parents, of course, who are working there) we landed at a much cooler Auckland airport having organised just such a trip.

It’s said that anything worthwhile doesn’t come easy and initially this trip was no exception to that rule. We had originally planned to ship our still-loved but old Hymer out to New Zealand and, after the tournament, either sell it or ship it home.

“Not easy and ridiculously expensive,” we were told many times and how true that was to prove.

Our Hymer is wonderful for Europe but left-hand drives are disliked intensely by the New Zealand motoring public and outlawed as a permanent import by the government. It therefore made the sale of the Hymer in New Zealand after our trip a non starter. A-class motorhomes are also less popular as the cost of replacing windscreens is very expensive and many cannot be replaced at all.

On a more practical level, Customs and Ministry of Agriculture (MAF) clearance is difficult when the ‘van arrives on the port. When, and if, it does clear inspection should the vehicle not be collected immediately from the docks a charge of \$400 (£200) a day is incurred!

There was also the very significant problem of ‘compliance’. This we were to discover was one of the favourite words of the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association (NZMCA) and the NZ government. Waste water, fresh water, gas and electric connections all have to comply as does the usual round of engine and exhaust emissions.

If you want to free camp or use NZMCA sites, a Self Containment certificate has to be sought. This states you have a minimum supply of fresh water for the number of berths and all waste, both grey and black, is self-contained. All campers over 3,500kg also have to have an



Touring New Zealand before selling the ‘van for a profit

annual Certificate of Fitness, a bit like our MoT but needed irrespective of the age of the ‘van and those over 4,500kg require a Warrant of Fitness renewable every six months.

As the problems mounted and Heather’s research showed difficulties at the UK end as well, we began to despair and started to consider alternatives. However, as the cost of hiring even the most basic camper vans in New Zealand is about £1,000 a week and, adding the cost of the England rugby tickets and flight package, a trip using a hire ‘van was going to be well beyond our budget.

That’s when the adage, ‘success is when hard work meets good fortune’ became a fact. Heather had put in hours of research and then, one afternoon, good fortune played its part.

She had been investigating the almost unfathomable world of shipping charges, maritime insurance and *carnet de passages* when she was given the name of Paul Graveling at Castle European.

Paul, originally from Blackburn but a ‘Kiwi’ for the last 25 years, runs a business that primarily helps New Zealand travellers come to the UK, buy a motorhome, travel around Europe then ship it back. He works from home along with his wife.

He imports 20 to 30 ‘vans a year for travelling clients as well as a few for New Zealand residents who want a particular European model. Even taking into consideration the cost of shipping and other related costs, New Zealanders find importing from the UK very cost effective when compared to the cost of purchasing the same vehicle direct from a New Zealand dealer.

The more we chatted by email, the more we were convinced we had found the answer to our dilemma.

Paul advised if we bought a new ‘van in the UK we could export it to New Zealand without paying VAT because it was a ‘direct export’. He would then organise all the paperwork for clearing customs and the MAF inspection at the dock. He would see that the paperwork



Low loader from the Docks in New Zealand



New Zealand's Certificate of Self Containment





The welcome was fantastic



England didn't win, but you can't have everything

necessary for the payment of the Goods and Service Tax (the equivalent to our VAT) to the government was completed and arrange for the 'van's collection from the docks the moment it cleared customs.

Next, it would be transported by low loader to his home in Tauranga where he would organise for all the NZMCA compliance work and government road worthiness issues to be completed to make it road and camping legal. If we wanted, he could also organise the installation of a satellite system and any other extras we needed before we arrived.

As part of the service, on the day we were to land in New Zealand, he would collect us from the airport, deliver the 'van to a nearby campsite and even take us shopping for our essentials!

What finally convinced us that he was our saviour was his assurance he could sell the 'van on our behalf in New Zealand when we had finished our travels there. Not only that, he was also 'extremely confident' he would get back all of our costs on the purchase, shipping, conversion costs, insurance and compliance charges in the selling price effectively meaning the 'van would have cost us nothing for the duration of our time in New Zealand.

It almost sounded too good to be true and we were a little apprehensive at our apparent good fortune. Nevertheless, we decided to set off around the southwest in our Hymel in April 2011 to look for a suitable new 'van. If we found one we liked enough to live in for six months, we could make our final decision then.

After viewing a number of 'vans at several dealers, lady luck was with us once again. We found the perfect 'van for the trip at West Country Motorhomes, near Bristol. Ever mindful of Paul's advice to buy a right-hand drive coachbuilt (not A-class) with the habitation door on the left-hand side, West Country had a new 2011 Auto-Trail Delaware on the forecourt. At 7.90 metres in length, with the bigger 3.0-litre Fiat engine (something else New Zealanders wanted) and an island bed, we could see ourselves living in it for the duration of our trip.

It also turned out Paul had the 2010 model of same 'van as his own vehicle. Karma indeed! This was compounded when it transpired West Country had dealt with Paul in the previous week when they had sold another 'van to a

New Zealander who, having toured Europe for 12 months, was shipping it back home.

Being of the 'belts and braces' persuasion, our previous internet search of Castle European through forums and the New Zealand Companies House had confirmed Paul was who he said he was. This, coupled with his dealings with West Country and the shipping line we intended to use for sending the 'van to New Zealand, made up our mind. We decided to commit and Simon at West Country gave us a truly great price for the purchase of the Auto-Trail.

Now we were committed, Jackie at West Country could not have been more useful at the UK end of proceedings as she had dealt with the shipping of motorhomes overseas in the past. She and Simon organised the extra leisure battery and mud flaps for the 'van, the transport to Southampton docks, the transfer of the Fiat warranty to New Zealand and a hundred and one other bits and pieces.

Heather and I boxed up all the essentials that motorhomers need for a new 'van like plates, pots and pans, bedding and barbecues, stowing them before the 'van left for the docks. Once there they would be transferred to a pallet and travel onboard the ship alongside the 'van for a cost of £250.

Paul was fantastic. He liaised with Jackie at West Country, the shipping company, customs, Fiat and the authorities in New Zealand, keeping us informed every step of the way. The 'van arrived at Southampton in August and, six weeks later, was on Auckland Docks. It cleared Customs and MAF and the 'van and the pallet were transported on a low loader to Paul's home. There he organised all the compliance and conversion items and had a satellite system and extra TV fitted in the bedroom.

In the meantime we organised membership of the New Zealand Motor Caravan Club who have a reciprocal agreement with the Caravan Club in the UK. We could then enjoy its benefits and site handbook and get a discount for insurance of the vehicle to commence from when it was to leave Paul's house. We booked onto a campsite in Auckland for when we arrived in New Zealand and for the duration of World Cup tournament. Our precious match tickets arrived and we set off for Heathrow with fingers crossed for English rugby.

Paul and Diane delivered the Delaware to its pitch the day we arrived in Auckland and collected us from the airport as promised. After showing us everything was in working order on the 'van and providing us with a list of 'reminders' about all the new bits and pieces added, they took us supermarket shopping and finally left us then for the next part of our adventure.

Things had gone like clockwork. It was just a shame the England boys didn't deliver their part of the bargain!

We had a fabulous time at the tournament and even though England was disappointing, as we had tickets for all the quarter and semi-finals as well as the much coveted final itself, the quality of the rugby made up for it. Auckland is a wonderful city and the New Zealand people took the tournament to their hearts.

Paul began work selling the 'van on our behalf and, as we totally trusted him by now, we were quite prepared to leave it with him while he did this. This had the added advantage of allowing us to use the 'van until the very end of our trip and plan our departure to suit. We parked up on a site five minutes by bus from Tauranga city centre while we prepared the 'van for sale, booked our return flights and organised the shipping home of our personal possessions from the 'van.

Paul was true to his word and sold the Delaware on our behalf in less than three weeks. Incredibly, he got us such a good price for it that we actually made money on its sale even after its purchase and all the shipping and running costs for four months. ■

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