



Sprinter An Automatic Choice For Campervans

When it comes to selection of the base vehicle for a campervan, whether a panel van or coach-built, it could be said that the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter is an automatic choice – simply because of its transmission.

“It’s the only vehicle in its class with a true automatic transmission – the others have automated manuals,” explains United Campervans Director Nicole Edgerton. “And when you’ve been driving a proper automatic you don’t want to be in a vehicle that feels like it’s coming to a stop in the middle of an intersection.”

With a fleet of 600, United Campervans is the second-largest in the motorhome rental industry in New Zealand and the only major one still owned and operated by the family that founded it.

“Most of our customers are Europeans and, increasingly, Australians and we pitch ourselves at the top end of the market with newer vehicles,” Nicole says.

In fact United’s Premier class fleet vehicles

are guaranteed to be less than three years old and this year the company is commissioning a total of 150 new Mercedes-Benz Sprinters to ensure the guarantee is met. Some 80 are Sprinter cab-and-chassis, which will be fitted with four and six-berth coach-built bodies. The remainder are Sprinter panel vans, 50 standard length versions fitted out as two-berth units and 20 longer vans set up as two-plus-one berth campers.

All of the Sprinters are powered by the Mercedes-Benz high-tech 2148cc four cylinder diesel engine with ratings of 109hp (80kW) at 3800rpm and 280Nm at 1600-2500rpm driving, of course, through the company’s five-speed fully automatic transmission.

The Sprinters come standard with an array of safety features, including an intelligent ESP stability program, ABS, EBD and BAS on the all-disc braking system, and an immensely strong cabin structure, and United Campervans specifies a passenger airbag in addition to the standard driver’s one.

The company operated Fuso, Fiat and Toyota vehicles but began purchasing Mercedes-Benz Sprinters in 2008 and has now ordered more than 200 in total. Nicole says the Toyotas are too small to accommodate showers and toilets and their associated holding tanks and she is working towards having these facilities in every vehicle in the fleet. United is a member of the Freedom Camping Forum and caters for tourists for whom being able to camp beside a beach or river is a major part of the appeal in renting a campervan. Stickers in the vans and information at the depots advise customers about the rules of freedom camping.

According to Nicole, European customers take it for granted that the vans they hire will meet the latest environmental and safety standards, and as the vehicles are in the workshop for a thorough check after every hire period extended service intervals are not as important in campervan rentals as they are to other operators.

“Last year when we started building on cab-and-chassis the (Japanese) Yen was high and the

Sprinters were cheaper than the Fusos we had been running,” she adds. “Apart from that it was the true automatics that influenced our decision.”

Supreme Motorhome Manufacturing in Henderson, West Auckland, constructs the coach-built bodies and fits out the vans to a particularly high standard with features such as curved cabinetry, LCD televisions and DVD players, beds up to king-size, toilets and showers, pressurised hot and cold water systems and microwave ovens.

The campervans are hired from depots in Auckland and Christchurch, both sited conveniently close to the international airports.

Typically the vans cover 30-40,000km a year. Nicole says that among the top-end campervan rental companies offering new vehicles, United sets itself apart from the rest by the standard of service it offers customers and the quality of its vehicles. “We take pride in a high customer satisfaction level,” she says.

In 2003 United became the first motorhome company to receive the Qualmark standard and just a year later became the first rental operation in the world to achieve a Green Globe Benchmarked Certification standard. Three years later the company took this to Silver Certification level.

Nicole explains that for the Green Globe certification the company’s overall impact on the environment is accurately measured, then steps are taken to reduce it.

United also offsets the environmental impact of its 600-strong fleet with a commitment to plant 30,000 native trees as part of the Motuora Island Reforestation Project in Auckland’s Hauraki Gulf. The measure equates to six trees planted for every campervan hire.

But, she says, the company doesn’t heavily promote its environmental activities to its customers. “It’s more something we do for our own satisfaction as a family,” she explains.

