

Mobility no barrier to the great outdoors

BY SANDRA ARGESE

FINDING caravan accommodation isn't always easy.

Just ask avid camper and caravanning enthusiast Anthony Wake, who at age 18 would spend most Friday afternoons emptying his car of his work tools and replacing them with camping gear to spend the weekend out by the river; a setting he labelled his "happy place".

But a life-altering vehicle accident in late 1991 changed everything.

Becoming a T4 paraplegic from a spinal cord injury, Mr Wake was left with no movement or feeling from his chest down.

"This may have limited my physical ability, but it did not diminish my passion for travelling around Australia and enjoying life in the outdoors," he said.

"I was forced to change the way I achieved most things, and camping was one of them."

Years later when Mr Wake and his wife decided to purchase a caravan, it didn't take long for them to realise no one was building caravans for people with a disability.



Mr Wake started the Accessavan brand to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

"I called many caravan dealers and visited sales lots with no luck," he said. "One response I got was, 'I'm sorry, we don't cater for you people'."

"I decided I needed to design and build caravans myself as someone who knew exactly what it was to live and camp with a disability."

Mr Wake is now the Owner and Manager of

Victorian-based Accessavan, which launched its first wheelchair-accessible caravan in 2008 and has been going strong since.

"The frustration of not having the freedom to holiday like the able-bodied population gave me the drive to make a change, not just for me, but for all people with a disability," he said.

In 2016 the Australian



Bureau of Statistics reported one in five Australians were living with disability – 4.3 million people or 18.3 per cent of the population.

Mr Wake said it was important for people with a disability or who were mobility impaired to have the opportunity to experience, explore, enjoy and interact with the Australian environment.

He said there was an array of products and inclusions which could make this easier.

Ramps, wider entry doors, wheelchair hydraulic lifts, the comfort of a quality bed and hoists were some examples.

"There are four-by-four power wheelchairs available to get you places, such as on a sandy track up to a look out, camping on a river or just walking your dog along a deserted beach," Mr Wake said.

"Beach wheelchairs have now been made more available. If you want to swim in the surf or surf fish, these types of wheelchairs will allow you to achieve that."



Mr Wake said more awareness needed to be raised around accessibility in the caravanning sector.

"It is essential awareness is raised that all people can and should be able to holiday when and where they want," he said.

"There are no excuses, as many good tow vehicles can be fitted with hand controls that enable driving in the same manner as able-

bodied people, so we need to promote a shift in thinking.

"Many events, attractions and national parks around our country promote access for wheelchairs and people with disabilities. This provides the opportunity to enjoy caravanning to its fullest by all."



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