

Van Life Freedom: Gerdette Rooney

Maggie whips off the magnetic curtains to embrace the dawn light over Blackwattle Bay. It immediately transforms her illegal bed for the night into an inconspicuous tradie's vehicle. On her brisk walk to the fish market for a caffeine fix, she lets out a little yelp of smug happiness at her new acquisition and suddenly appreciates her new situation.

Freedom is hers at last – to take off when she likes to the hills or the coast – and not worry about booking accommodation and paying scary prices. She has recently purchased Sheila, a 2016 Caddy VW from a cleaning company who had to let her go during the Covid epidemic.

While still complying with the 5km limit, Maggie was bonding with her new soulmate 2km from home, treating them both to a harbour view for the weekend that would be the envy of many.

Sheila's interior resembled Frida Kahlo's inner sanctum with colourful cushions and throws providing a bed fit for a harlot's tryst. Maggie's favourite LP covers from the 70's adorned the side panels and USB fairy lights glowed warmly as she finished her riveting novel the evening before. The newly purchased gadgetry from the Jaycar store had been a mind-boggling education in the latest technology.

A small chest fridge plugged into the cigarette lighter had chilled her Chardonnay and dips nicely and doubled as a little side table. She listened to Van the Man croon her favourite music on a Vintage Sony Walkman resurrected from the attic. Once settled comfortably, she just couldn't resist calling her old friend Karen in Christchurch on WhatsApp to gloat about her new toy. 'It is just the best thing ever,' she insisted. 'The ultimate in freedom!'

Maggie outlined her plan to take off when the pandemic ended and head south to the Shoalhaven River. A compact inflatable kayak was stuffed into a portable fire pit at the rear of the van all set to shoot the rapids at Kangaroo Valley. 'There's even room for you to squeeze in too, on your next visit,' she declared. 'It will be like old times when we did sleepovers as teenagers,' she jested.