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The Giles family enjoy the great Adelaide Hills outdoors. Photo: Jody Pachniuk Source: The Advertiser

WE know what you'll be doing this summer - hitching a vintage van to your vehicle and heading into the sunset.

Four decks of playing cards; three packs of textas, paper and colouring books; one bulk sunblock pump pack; two huge Eskys; four days' pantry and fridge provisions; one toaster; one kettle; one old TV; one bulging bag of novels – fat and thin, for young and old; one fold-up gazebo; one camp table; five deck chairs (assorted sizes); five pairs of thongs, sandals and sneakers; five sets of sunhats, bathers, beach towels, goggles and boogie boards; five toiletry bags; five suitcases (two large, three small); five bike helmets and five bikes — you can fit an awful lot into a five-metre caravan.

And if you're Doreen, the Giles family's beloved 1974 Viscount Royal, you'll also be packing a growing collection of original 1970s crockery and cutlery (with matching party platters, punch bowl and wine decanters); five sets of wigs, satellite-dish sunglasses and wildly patterned, op-shop-sourced, 100 percent-polyester threads; a whole lot of Led Zeppelin, Neil Young, Rolling Stones and Abba and one genuine Livin'-in-the-'70s banana lounge. Oh, and that's before you add the two adults – former Calvin Klein model-turned-image consultant and The Advertiser My Week Men's Style columnist, Paul Giles, 45, and his wife, secondary school teacher and artist Jacinta Smart, 45 – and their three kids, Bella, 12, Lucy, 10, and Harry, 6.

Packed to her tin roof Doreen the caravan may be, but she landed firmly on her well-worn treads when six years ago, after 32 years' faithful service to a one-van clan, the Giles family fell for her – and her \$2,500 price tag. It was fate, really, Paul says.

"I was scouring the internet, looking for a van to use as extra guest accommodation at our shack in Aldinga, and when I found her it was almost too good to be true.

"She was the spitting image of the 1975 Viscount Royal that was my bedroom from the age of about eight to 14, so she just felt like home."

Paul's parents had bought the '75 Viscount to solve a space issue that arose suddenly when Grandpa died and Grandma was welcomed into the family's three-bedroom home. Unlike his two brothers, young Paul eagerly volunteered to move out back. The upside? His own space with a fridge, double bed, record player and portable black-and-white TV – and did it ever impress his friends (especially the girls, but shhhh! Don't tell his mum). The downside? In winter it was freezing and in summer he sweltered. Plus, there were those late-night treks to the loo. "But once I got in there, there was no dragging me out," he says, laughing. "I loved it."

Doreen features the same teak laminate cabinetry and vinyl upholstery and had been lovingly maintained and garaged by her previous owner and namesake.

"We travelled to Moonta to buy her and we'd paid the deposit and were driving home, listening to the local country radio station when Olivia Newton John's 'Jolene' came on," Paul says.

"We changed the words to Doreen and sang it loudly all the way home from Moonta to Adelaide."

In her six years with the Giles family, Doreen has inspired a whole lot more than bad singing. She's taken them to weekend getaways on all of SA's peninsulas – the Fleurieu for quick weekend escapes, the Yorke when they have a week and the Eyre when they have a good two weeks. And she's responsible for the collection of wigs, sunglasses, nylon tracksuits and '70s homeware – boosting sales in op-shops from Robe to Streaky Bay.

"A big group of us – family and friends – get together every summer at Robe and we always have a fabulous '70s cocktail party in front of Doreen," Paul says. "You can't come unless you're wearing deadly '70s gear and you've brought a plate of '70s food."

On other trips, when it is just the nuclear family, Paul says the sense of community is still very strong.

"Caravan parks are just geared towards making friends. You sit out the front in your deckchair and people walk past and call out to you and you have a chat – and if you cook in the communal kitchen, you meet people – which is fantastic because you wind up swapping the curry you've made for the fresh fish or cray they've just caught that day.

"And people tend to go to the same parks each season, so you catch up with them over the years."

Above everything, Paul loves the quality family time that caravanning engenders.

"The kids love it. They just get along with a lot less; just colouring books and card games. We swim, go for long walks, head into the local townships to check things out and get supplies or have lunch or a pub dinner, or grab a coffee and a paper. And Jacinta and I can do the tag-team thing so we both get time to just read a book or laze about and think."

But it's not all beer and skittles living in Doreen's close quarters. Strict rules are necessary:

- Absolutely no farting inside the van. Ever. Need to fart? Out you go.
- Fart jokes every time anyone leaves the van? Obligatory.
- No stinky food to be cooked inside.
- No food likely to result in stinky farts to be eaten for the duration of the trip. You eat it? You need to fart? Out you go.
- No liquids for the kids after 6pm (to avoid those late-night treks to the loo).

Play by the rules and everyone's a happy camper, Paul says, adding that it's easy to see why so many people are falling for the charms of vintage vans. But change may be in the wind for this ahead-of-trend family.

"We're thinking we might upgrade Doreen... I'm looking at maybe a 1980 Franklin Caravelle. I reckon it's time to move into the '80s, and a bit of a Miami Vice vibe..."


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