

Ruff and Tuff

The Royal Flair designed Tuff Roder is a solid and capable dirt road pop-top tourer

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY GIL SCHOTT





Mesh gusset between the A-frame members behind the toolbox



Everything's handy on the control panel



Very tidy undersides



The fridge-top bench provides extra space

I guess it's hard to define just what a 'classic' dirt-road caravan looks like, but the Royal Flair designed Tuff Roder may well be a candidate.

Chequerplate skirts, a nice kick in the tail and high clearance are clear indicators of what we tend to expect in a dirt roader.

Incidentally, the Tuff Roder is built by Royal Flair to a specification by the crew at Queensland RV. Whatever its pedigree, the Tuff Roder looks to be a pretty useful little van, ideal for poking into some of those beautiful little back corners around the country.

ON THE OUTSIDE

The Royal Flair Tuff Roder is an attractive aluminium-clad van, with its chequerplate skirts on front, rear and sides and that distinctive cutaway rear

end. Nice decals and a high clearance make it look the goods. Being a pop top, it will present a fuel consumption advantage over a full van, but the real advantage for pop tops in the sticks is the lower clearance. Ducking under overhanging branches is always nerve wracking, so it helps to be a bit lower.

The Tuff Roder is built on a hot-dipped galvanised chassis with a galvanised floor and rear cutaway to provide clearance on steep crossings. She rides on Control Rider suspension – trailing arm with shocks and coil springs. A water tank is fitted directly behind the axle, protected by a galvanised shield. The underside is very clean and neat, just what you want in a dirt roader.

On the A-frame is a Highlander coupling forward of two 4.5kg gas bottles.

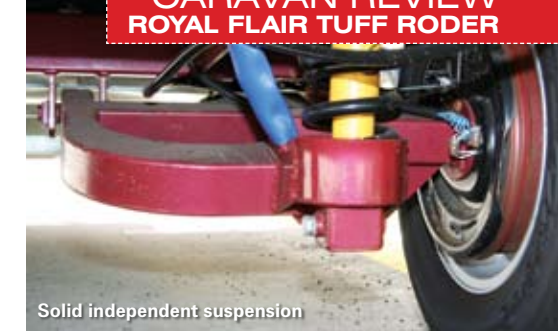
I reckon a stone shield would be a handy accessory in front of the bottles. Directly behind these is a big chequerplate toolbox flanked by jerry can holders. It's a really useful size, but it would be worth watching the weight loaded into it. Right behind this box is a gusset fixed beneath the arms of the A-frame. A roomy boot is positioned behind the A-frame and a roll out awning is fitted. External lighting is good. I particularly liked the big light directly above the external shower, fitted on the driver's side rear.

The power system on this Tuff Roder is very useful. Two 88W solar panels are fitted, along with three 100A batteries and 40A charger.

There has obviously been a bit of serious thought put into the Tuff Roder. It certainly looks like it would be at home in the scrub.



Wardrobes and bedside tables feature in the bedroom



Solid independent suspension



The bedroom is comfy and has plenty of storage space



The interior is bright and open

KEY ASPECTS

- ▶ Good dirt-road capability
- ▶ Outside shower/light
- ▶ Independent camping ability
- ▶ Solid build

ON THE INSIDE

The Royal Flair Tuff Roder has a forward positioned door, with dinette/lounge forward, kitchen area to the rear above the axles, and the bedroom occupying the rear.

The dinette is positioned right opposite the entry door and features a spacious lounge across the front. Between the doorway and the lounge is a handy cabinet with bench top, and drawer and cupboard beneath. A roomy dinette table faces the door and a smaller forward-facing lounge backs onto the fridge section.

Three lockers with glass doors are fitted at pop-top level above the forward lounge, and a line of lockers runs above the dinette along the driver's side. The forward window has a stone cover and provides plenty of light, as does the side window above the dinette table. Personal lights are fitted to the walls above the lounges on the driver's side wall.

Directly above the smaller lounge at pop-top level is a locker containing all the electric controls, water gauges and so on. This is a good feature and it should be a standard for all vans. Right alongside this is the stereo control and a wall clock

The lounge/dinette area is very comfortable and just the spot for kicking back after a day's fishin' or fossickin' out in the back blocks.

CARAVAN REVIEW ROYAL FLAIR TUFF RODER



RATINGS

ON THE OUTSIDE:	8/10
ON THE INSIDE:	8/10
IN THE KITCHEN:	8/10
AT THE DINETTE:	8/10
IN THE BEDROOM:	7.5/10
KEEPING CLEAN:	7.5/10

SPECIFICATIONS

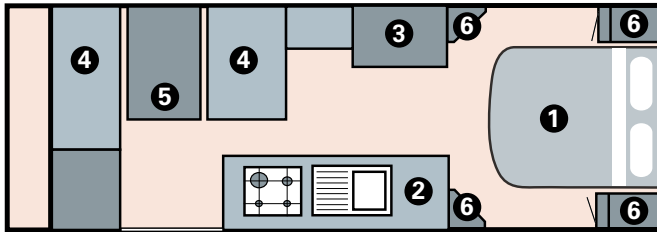
MANUFACTURER:	Royal Flair
MODEL:	Tuff Roder
BODY LENGTH:	17ft (5.18m)
WIDTH:	7ft 6in (2.29m)
TARE WEIGHT:	1925kg
PRICE AS TESTED:	\$51,990

THANKS

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KEY

1. Bed
2. Kitchen
3. Fridge
4. Lounge
5. Dinette
6. Storage



Forward of the dinette area is the kitchen. The main area is to the rear of the door on the kerb side. The cook top is positioned by the door and features three gas burners and one electric hotplate, with a grill beneath. A 12-volt rangehood and light is positioned above the cooker.

A stainless steel sink is fitted alongside the cook top, and while there is limited bench space here there is plenty directly opposite over the fridge. A full set of cupboards and drawers is fitted below bench level, while a locker and microwave oven are fitted above. Backing the kitchen area is a vinyl splashback and a tea towel rail is fitted above the sink, which is handy.

There is no window backing the kitchen, but with the door adjacent and the zip-open windows in the pop-top skirt, ventilation is no problem.

On the driver's side opposite is a 118L compressor fridge with a spacious bench above, and fitted over that at pop-top level is a Heron air conditioner. A telly on a swivel arm is fitted to the side of the air-con cabinet, so it can be seen from both lounge and bed.

All in all, the kitchen is quite practical, with plenty of storage and adequate room.

The bedroom is positioned in the rear of the Tuff Roder and features a queen-sized bed flanked by mirrored wardrobes, with bedside tables and scanties drawers beneath. Above the bedhead is a handy shelf, with two big overhead lockers at pop-top level.

Big windows are positioned on either side, allowing plenty of air to circulate on hot nights. These carry screens and curtains for privacy. Personal reading lights are fitted above the bed. Main cabin lights and a fantastic hatch add to the brightness of the Tuff Roder.

Overall, the interior layout of the Tuff Roder is comfortable and practical. It may not have the timberwork of other vans, but it's a neat van nonetheless.

WRAP-UP

If you want to head off the tar and out among the weeds, you'll need a van set up like the Tuff Roder. She's plenty comfortable, well set up for independent camping, and has everything you need for an extended stay in the bush. ■

