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Licensing laws create a state of confusion

Calls by some grey nomads for a national driving licence and a federal vehicle registration system look to have fallen on deaf ears.

Despite the explosion in the number of long-term interstate travellers, there are no plans to develop a uniform approach to simplify remote renewal of these vital documents.

It means grey nomads seeking to renew licences and registrations while interstate will continue to face a complex bureaucratic tangle. The costs involved in vehicle registration in each state vary wildly and the current ad hoc system is far from user-friendly for people constantly on the move. A NSW driver seeking to re-register his vehicle while in WA, for example, will have to find an 'approved' mechanic to inspect the vehicle, ensure approval is sent to the RTA, and then hope the 'unusual' request doesn't get lost in the system. Heavy trucks which constantly travel interstate are granted 'federal' licence plates but there are no such concessions for the average grey nomad.

Similarly, some out-of-home state motorists wishing to renew their drivers' licences must download an online photo kit, get a photo taken and find a



Is a national driving licence the answer?

qualified witness to verify their identity or post their original licence to their home state's motoring body. Then they must wait for their new licence to arrive via snail mail.

"I know from experience the problems of renewing away from home," said Tasmanian grey nomad Lorraine Home-wood. "National drivers' licences would be the way to go, along with national registration of our vehicles."

And it seems there are influential people who agree. Andrew McKellar is the Executive Director of the Australian Automobile Association.

"The AAA supports a nationally consistent approach to road rules, driver licensing and vehicle registration require-

ments across all states and territories," he told *the Times*. "We are acutely aware of the inconvenience and safety concerns arising from these differing requirements across Australia for travellers, and believe this situation needs to be addressed."

While states and territories do now exchange licensing information such as demerit point details, the South Australian government says any more changes would need to be considered nationally by various transport ministers.

SURVEY
 Would you like to see a national driver licence and a uniform system for vehicle registration?
 Yes No

Walmart ban marks end of an era in US

Many a self-contained grey nomad has cast envious eyes towards the welcome mat rolled out for our free camp loving US counterparts. Walmart retail stores in North America have famously opened their huge car parks to overnighting RVs forever. A free night's camping with the reassurance of security patrols has been the stock-in-trade of American 'snow birds' since the lifestyle was born.

However, it may well be that the chill winds of economic hardship are blowing the tradition away at a time when the savings it delivers are most needed.

Many Walmarts are now banning overnighting RVs. The latest to adopt a 'They shall not camp' policy is the store in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada.

Sandra Kaiser from shopping centre owner, Smart-Centres, says the primary target is RV owners who stay for days and weeks.

"More campers were staying for longer periods of time," she said. "We were losing parking spaces that we have to provide to our tenants."

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Characters of the Road

On-the-road lifestyle suits John and Wendy to a tee

Two-and-a-half years ago, John, 57, and Wendy, 53, rented out their Melbourne home and hit the road

What do you travel in?

2008 Patrol ST 3-litre common rail turbo diesel towing 20'6" Compass caravan. The caravan has a separate toilet and shower.

Why does your rig suit you?

The van is big enough to be a real home without being too hard to tow or fit into caravan parks, and the Patrol is very comfortable. The van never leaves the blacktop, but the Patrol can take us up almost any dirt track once we have set up camp.

Where do you like to camp?

We were always city people and we do like our creature comforts, so we virtually always stay at caravan parks.

Best thing about the lifestyle?

The quest for eternal summer – we both hate the cold!

What do you miss?

We sometimes miss being part of a community – in Melbourne John was president of his tennis club and Wendy was on the golf club committee. We make up for it by staying for several months in one place



John and Wendy feel their van is just the right size

and joining the golf club, so we can be at least temporary members of a community.

On the-road hobbies?

We're both very keen golfers so play wherever we find a course with grass greens, which in Australia is an awful lot of places! We do a lot of walking in national parks, and always do the heritage walk in towns we stay at. In the van, we spend more time than we should on the computer, and we read and do crosswords and other puzzles.

Scariest nomad experience?

Having a tyre on the Patrol blow when towing from Kalbarri to Geraldton. At the time we had a truck right up our rear and we couldn't pull

over immediately, even though we were wobbling all over the road.

Anything you'd do differently?

Probably not, we've made an incredible number of mistakes along the way but hopefully each one only once and none of them have been too major.

Advice for wannabe nomads?

Research which rig you can afford and will suit you. Do a towing course if you haven't towed before. Have at least an idea of what you intend to do, so you don't end up in Darwin in summer and Tasmania in winter. Most importantly, don't put it off – we've met too many people who were 'always going to go' but had health issues and left it too late.

Nomads in Brief

Van park robbed

A van park in Orange, NSW, has been held up by a balaclava-wearing gunman. The park's 58-year-old manager was left 'shaken and upset' after an intruder threatened her with a shortened firearm and demanded cash. She handed over a small amount of money. The man fled.

Mice on the march

Australia is likely to experience the worst mouse plague in living memory by late spring-summer 2011-12 based on state government reports. The availability of food from rain-damaged crops means the mouse population has not declined as expected this winter.

Caravan crushed

A carport has collapsed onto a parked caravan and vehicle after a car slammed into a Perth home. The Commodore apparently failed to take a bend and became airborne before crashing into brick pillars supporting the carport.

New for oldies?

Victoria's RACV says the physical frailty of older drivers means they are more likely to be injured or killed in a crash. It says mature motorists can stay safer by embracing new vehicle technology. 59% of RACV members aged 65+ drive cars older than 10 years, and 15% drive cars older than 20 years.

QUIZ CORNER

GRAB A CUPPA AND TEST YOUR GREY MATTA

AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD OF LIFE ON THE ROAD



DO YOU KNOW

1. On a clear Outback night, how many stars can the naked eye detect? (A) 645 (B) 2,235 (C) 5,780
2. Which Australian beach reputedly has the whitest sand on earth?
3. Which is the driest state in Australia?
4. How long is Australia's longest stretch of totally straight road?
5. Several Central Queensland towns are absolute gems. Name one.

(Answers on page 4)

the Grey Nomad Times



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Letters to the Editor **Share your thoughts with fellow nomads**

Dear Editor,

Re: older motorists story (*Grey Nomad Times*: Issue 4). I should think there are a number of contributing factors.

1. We are as a nation all getting older. More older people = more older people involved in accidents I should imagine.

2. I agree with that part of the article that suggests that possibly people are driving rigs that are too big. Some of the fault here must lie with the manufacturers that do not seem to be coming up with up with too many new and really innovative designs in the small end of the market.

3. I cannot help but also wonder if the hunt to find a caravan park and / or a independent camp later in the day may be an extra hazard, especially in those areas that are not very RV friendly and prohibit most independent camping?

4. To all my fellow grey nomads – travel outside of peak periods, don't look to drive more than 200-300 kms a day max. and take plenty of breaks to walk and freshen up. Have plenty of 'no drive' days.

Annie



Can older drivers cope with long journeys?

Dear Editor,

Hmmmmmm – I'm not sure the statistics are as relevant to

overall accidents as portrayed.

For instance South Australia may have a higher level of ageing population hence a higher degree in the statistics. Possibly Queensland is similar.

To what degree do older / senior Australians figure in overall driving statistics nationally? Has anyone checked?

What is the point that you are making – don't travel? This seems contrary to the spirit of the Australian spirit of adventure.

Mike (Roostertales)

Dear Editor,

My husband and I work in a caravan park. We are amazed at the number of older caravanners who cannot reverse their vans onto a site. Many times my husband has to go and reverse for them. Our view – if you can't reverse your van, you shouldn't be towing it!

Tracey

Dear Editor,

Re: stuck in a rut story (*Grey Nomad Times*: Issue 4). I was one of those dreamers stuck in a job and always talking about 'doing the grey nomad thing'. Unfortunately, commitments had to come first. Now I have been retired for three years and am still talking about 'the grey nomad thing'.

I did share a short trip in a caravan down the east coast of Australia with friends and loved every 'free' moment of it. This year has been an horrific year of bad health. I have had three operations within three months, am on the waiting list for a hip replacement, and still I dream of the open road and have decided it is 'now or never'.

So ...my home is on the

market and, once sold, I will buy a motorhome. I have warned my three sons that I am spending their inheritance and they laughed and said: "Go for it, mum. Follow your lifetime dream .. we are fine." Besides they can now use the motorhome to take holidays in! The bottom line is: I am going to do it and, better still, I am now doing something about doing it.

Robyn (Acco)

Dear Editor,

In my opinion the greatest hindrance to the adventurous Australian is the over regulation of any activity that is seen by some nameless numbskulls as dangerous.

This is compounded by the growth of the 'sue at all chances' culture that has caused many avenues to be shut away.

Dan

Dear Editor,

I love reading the grey nomads newsletter. We have done lots of camping and caravanning over the years. However it's very difficult to get away on long trips now because my partner still has to work full-time. It's just great to read the stories of the experiences and places that others are enjoying. One day we will get out there again and then we will have our own stories to tell.

Monica

Dear Editor,

I am absolutely enjoying the Grey Nomad Times. Keep it rolling.

Monica (another one)

Dear Editor,

In reply to Paul and Liz (Letters ... *Grey Nomad Times*:

Issue 3). About nine months ago my partner and I decided we'd had enough of working mundane jobs for mortgage payments, rising electricity bills etc..

We have sold up and brought the vehicle, a Hyundai iLoad (need this to fit the 'toy' in, a Yamaha motorcycle) and the van, a Jayco Eagle. We are off into the wild blue yonder on Christmas Eve.

Just decide to give up on your material life and discover your souls and your magnificent country, and the friends (GNs) who also appreciate it. Just say 'now is the time'.

Jeannette & Rick



Help for free campers to see the light

Dear Editor,

I have enclosed some tips below which may be helpful to others.

We have mounted 55 watt driving lights on the four sides of our van roof which enable us to see all around the van at night while free camping. This is for security and to check the vehicle is safe.

Another tip for those folks with wind down stays is to have a bar made with a socket welded on the end to fit your cordless drill and bingo your stays go up and down in half the time.

Colleen and Keith

the Grey Nomad Times



Space age campervan takes us into the future

A space-age campervan that could help revolutionise the grey nomad lifestyle is due to hit the market in 2014.

The Ecco's futuristic design includes collapsible walls and a flip-top upper deck that opens up like a Swiss army knife to double the vehicle's size. Lucky owners can then darken the windows for privacy when the vehicle is stationary.

The 4.5m-long teardrop-shaped Ecco sleeps up to five people and boasts a kitchen, bathroom and lounge area. The walls of each room are collapsible and the seats fold down to create extra room.

The electric-powered vehicle will produce zero emissions as its solar paneled roof charges the battery. An eight-hour charge promises to keep it running for 24 hours, and the aerodynamic campervan will be able to reach a top



The shape of things to come?

speed of 145km/h.

Passengers enter the vehicle from the rear by a huge stairway which is folded into the ceiling. Both the driver and passenger have a circular window built into the large doors which open vertically towards the sky. The huge windscreen gives travelers a panoramic view of the road.

"We want this vehicle to be as iconic as the VW camper van," said a spokesman for NAU, the Swiss company which designed the Ecco. "We want to bring the freedom of the road back to generations of the future." NAU says it has not yet decided on a price for the vehicle.

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NEW COMPETITION

Still time to win big in our kayak comp

You must hurry now to enter our great NSW paddling guide comp. With kayaks growing in



popularity as the watercraft of choice for long-term travellers. The 265-page 'Paddling Around New South Wales' by Scott Rawstorne is the highly sought-after prize in our water-themed competition. Simply tell us about your 'water adventure' in 175 words or less to enter. Entries must be received by October 24. The winner, as judged by the Editor, will pick up this great prize. Result announced in *the Grey Nomad Times* on October 28.

GADGETS OF THE ROAD

Getting to grips with GPS

by David Lewis

When considering which GPS unit to buy, the process can be daunting. An average GPS display in a shop contains 10-20 units of varying prices and with varying capabilities. The guide below should help you decide which GPS features are important to you and which aren't.

Bluetooth – a wireless technology that allows you to 'hook up' a capable mobile phone, and then use the GPS unit as a hands-free device to speak on the phone while you drive.

Camera – yes, some GPS units are actually fitted with a

camera! One of the potentially handy features is 'GPS tagging' which will tag the photo with the location where it was taken.

Screen Size – the standard screen size is 3.5 inches, but you can pay a premium to have a larger 4.5 inch screen

Map updates – all GPS units will require map updates, to include new or altered roads over time. Some of these updates can be quite expensive, so it's best to check into the ongoing costs before making a purchase.

Text-to-speech – this feature essentially gives the GPS unit

the ability to tell you things like street names. This means the difference between 'turn left in 100 metres' and 'turn left into Smith Street'.

Lane guidance – this feature means the GPS unit can not only tell you when and where to turn, but which lane you need to be in to do so safely.

These features are just the tip of the iceberg but are the most 'variable', and prices of units can differ wildly based on these.

• Have you found GPS useful on the Big Lap? Any tips for nomads considering a purchase?

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 5. Emerald, Sapphire or Rubyvale

the Grey Nomad Times



On track for a great off-road journey

'Great Drives' negotiates the dust, loneliness and stark beauty of the Oodnadatta Track



The Oodnadatta Track is one of the icons of unsealed road driving in Australia.

Despite its remoteness and legendary status, the track can normally be enjoyed by grey nomads towing conventional vans or driving large rigs.

It stretches 630 kilometres between Marree and Marla in South Australia and delivers some eerie and moonlike desert scenery.

Coming south from Marree, you can take an early detour to Lake Eyre. The vast salt lake is normally dry but, when it fills with water - like now - the wildflowers, wildlife

and water birds are amazing. Sightseeing flights over the lake are available.

Springs feeding water from the Great Artesian Basin litter the track and that's why the original Ghan railway (which ceased service in 1980) was built here. Remains of old sidings and Overland Telegraph Repeater stations can be seen. The Coward Springs rail siding has certainly been a welcome sight for many a dusty driver and the campground here even has a soothing bore to relax in. It's a great place to exchange tales with fellow travellers and to learn about the area.



Worth it ... the Painted Desert

As the track continues through the vast treeless landscape, the occasional twisted metal sculpture and sign help keep motorists interested and amused.

William Creek, which boasts a single digit population, is one of Australia's least populated towns ... unless you count the flies! The hotel is an absolute must-stop. If you're in a 4WD you can also take a side trip to camp at Lake Eyre North. It's a further 200 kilometres to Oodnadatta and there are

several historic sites to enjoy along the way, including the Old Peake Telegraph Station and Homestead ruins. An artesian waterhole near Neales Crossing is a great spot to swim and camp. The hub of Oodnadatta (pop: 150) is, of course, the ever-welcoming Pink Roadhouse ... and it's well worth a stop.

A further 200 kilometres brings you to Marla, but a side trip to the Painted Desert - which is as spectacular as it sounds - is highly recommended.

Reaching the Stuart Highway again is almost a disappointment for adventure-loving travellers but, for those not ready to return to the blacktop, the Strzelecki Track beckons. That, however, is another story.



ASK JACLYN and Heidi



Our experts solve your grey nomad etiquette dilemmas

Dogged by Guilt

Dear Jaclyn and Heidi,
After years of dreaming, my husband and I are on the verge of becoming grey nomads. However, I can't bear the thought of leaving our gorgeous Golden Retriever behind. My son and his family are moving into our house to look after 'Toby' but I don't want to say goodbye. My husband Bill says the dog will be well cared for and I am being silly. He thinks I will forget about Toby once we are on the road but I know I won't. Toby is looking at me now with those big, beautiful eyes and I sense he knows what we are planning. I feel so guilty. Please help.

Shelley

Oh, Shelley. I really do sympathise. I am not a dog owner myself but understand how

these wonderful creatures can become part of the family. I know Golden Retrievers are big dogs but have you considered taking a trip in short hops and staying at pet-friendly van parks? Travelling with a dog does restrict where you can stay but there are plenty of grey nomads who do it. Alternatively, you might try taking a few short trips so both you and Toby can see how you feel about these separations. Absence may make the heart grow even fonder and those reunions would be something special. I really hope you can find a way to make this work.

Jaclyn

Oh for Pete's sake! If there's one thing that's worse than the whining of an over-pampered pooch it's the whining of their

self-indulgent owners. Newsflash, Shelley ... Toby is an animal with cute eyes! As long as he's fed and exercised, he won't even notice you're gone. Hit the road with Bill and enjoy the national parks, the beaches and camping wherever you want. Leave the sneaking around with hidden dogs, paying over the odds at 'pet-friendly' van parks, and pretending not to be interested in seeing 'pet-unfriendly' beauty spots to the overly-sentimental grey nomad underclass. After a few months of sunsets and carefree happy hours, you'll realise that scooping up dog poo and taking walks that you don't want to take is not what retirement should be about. Let your son deal with 'Toby' ... he owes you!

Heidi

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