

# Raising the bar

Words by Claire Smith. Images by Rebekah Robinson

The Kiwi-built ACM Platinum 8.3 is the 'blank canvas' of motorhomes, allowing new owners to completely customise the layout, decor and more

**W**hen MCD caught up with Keran Miller of Kiwi Autohomes late last year, the business was a few years into its distribution relationship with Auckland Coach & Motorhomes (ACM) and it was busy times. Kiwi and ACM have just launched their new top-of-line model, the ACM Platinum 8.3, and it's already proving popular with orders from this year's Covi show filling the books for the rest of the year. You'd be forgiven if,

at first glance, the fine craftsmanship and high-spec detailing led you to think this was a European import. But, like all ACM models, the Platinum 8.3 was carefully crafted right here in New Zealand.

ACM is headed by Chris Cunard, a boat builder by trade who moved into the motorhome industry several years ago and quickly became a highly sought-after retrofitter and repairer. Kiwi became the sole distributor for all ACM products in 2015. "Deciding on the layout and details of your

motorhome can be a daunting task," Keran says. "But our team brings together many years of skill and experience to turn that daunting task into one that's enjoyable, exciting, and very rewarding."

## BUILD YOUR OWN MOTORHOME

One of the big benefits of ACM's motorhomes is their level of personalisation and the Platinum 8.3 is a fine example. Want the lounge up front? ▶▶



No problem. Want a permanent bed? Done. Want a full-size piano in the lounge? It wouldn't be the first time! Prefer a bigger kitchen? The choice is yours. You get the picture.

Keran explains that the design process begins with blank canvas. "We give you the total freedom to create the motorhome of your dreams, with everything exactly how you want it. And the list of options is really only limited by your imagination."

The vehicle reviewed (which Chris has built to his own preferences) provides a prime example of the bells and whistles available, from the customised exterior paintwork to the teak floors and keyless entry.

### A SMOOTH RIDE

Having joined Chris and Keran on a drive of the new Platinum, I can vouch for the incredibly smooth passenger experience. The comfy leather captain's seats are not only heated but they also feature Iveco's smooth suspension. Case in point, as we turned off the main road



The lounge provides plenty of space for... lounging!

towards our photoshoot site, we encountered a road that had multiple potholes the size of small paddling pools. I instinctively braced myself for the bumps and jolts but was pleasantly surprised at how smooth the ride remained.

### ROAD READY

As someone who prefers his freedom camping a little on the intrepid side, Chris' motorhomes are built to take New Zealand's less-than-ideal roading state in their stride. What's more, you won't be disappointed when you hit the open roads either. With a grunty three-litre turbo diesel engine under the hood, the Platinum 8.3 has some pretty impressive pick-up (I also have it on good authority that it can comfortably reach impressively fast speeds without so much as a shudder).

Speaking of freedom camping, this particular Platinum 8.3 lets you go off-grid for a decent stretch with a 3000-watt inverter, 500amp/hr battery, 300-litre water tanks, 300-watts of solar, and built-in Wi-Fi.

### LEVEL UP

Arriving at our destination, Chris demonstrates one of the Platinum 8.3's impressive features—self-levelling legs, which are controlled with a digital switch



The swivelling captain's chairs are heated, with suspension



The Platinum is completely customisable to your layout preference



Cook up a storm in the huge oven

pad just inside the door. Chris deploys the automatic 10-tonne capacity levelling legs that set the motorhome perfectly level within seconds. And if needed, you can also use them individually, to jack up a flat tyre for instance.

### ROOM TO STRETCH OUT

Once parked up by the beach, it soon becomes apparent why Chris chose this particular layout—a U-shaped lounge in the rear. The extra-wide seats, finished in luxurious tan leather, measure two metres in length are framed by impressively large outwardly opening windows.

Chris is a tall unit, but sprawled out on the seats, you can see there's plenty of room for several other tall units. "For me, it's important to have a big, usable lounge space. One that gets you out of the cab zone and into a space that is designed to unwind, relax, and enjoy the amazing



scenery that took so long to get to.” In the kitchen, Chris has used a white Corian benchtop. It’s seriously solid and thick and wouldn’t look out of place in a modern home—not your usual motorhome fare, but an example of what you can have should you desire it. Complete with sleek black German-imported tapware and a full-size oven, the result is clean, elegant, and practical.

The black on white theme continues in the bathroom, which includes a full-size house shower (again, made so the big and tall won’t have to hold their elbows in, or duck to get their head wet).

Up front, the bed is tucked away in the Luton and accessed by wide, sturdy permanent steps. When not in use, it can be pushed upward and out of the way and is just as easily pulled down level at bedtime.

“Personally, I’d rather have the bed out of the way during the day and give the space to a roomy lounge. But, if a Luton bed is not your preference, we can redesign the layout to suit,” Chris explains.

You don’t have to spend long inside the Platinum 8.3 to realise that Chris and his team take a huge amount of pride in their work. Chris says that each of the 15 tradespeople involved in the manufacturing process have been handpicked for their skills as craftsmen. “Because each build is customised, there’s no templated design or ‘factory line’ processes. Our team works together to deliver exceptional results every time, and when each motorhome is complete, we all have a sense of excitement and

pride,” he says. And this is apparent in the finish and design details—from the eye-catching curves to the faultless seams and joins.

Chris has designed his motorhome with top-spec materials throughout. Like all of his motorhomes, you won’t find a scrap of MDF anywhere; ply is used throughout. The floors and internal steps, however, are all teak hardwood, giving extra strength and durability. The carpet is plush with underlay, providing a soft, luxurious feel underfoot.

### HIDDEN EXTRAS

Some of the coolest features of the Platinum 8.3 are the hidden extras that are not immediately obvious, for instance, the FinScan smart power system, which allows you to monitor/control things such as battery management, water tanks, central and water heating, keyless touchpad entry, and lighting. In fact, you won’t find a single light switch in this motorhome. But what you can do is set night/day modes, so that all your lighting preferences are pre-set and managed at the touch of a button. The night mode is particularly handy. When you get up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, soft floor lighting automatically turns on to illuminate the way, turning off again when you’re back in bed. No more stumbling in the dark or waking up your partner with glaring lights.

### VERDICT

It’s no secret that New Zealand motorhome builders don’t have the mass

#### Specifications

<b>Vehicle make/model</b>	ACM Platinum 8.3
<b>Engine</b>	3L turbo diesel
<b>Transmission</b>	8-speed automatic
<b>Berths</b>	4
<b>Approx. overall length</b>	3100mm
<b>Approx. overall height</b>	8300mm
<b>Tanks</b>	300L grey/ fresh
<b>Gas</b>	2 x 9kg
<b>Price (as reviewed)</b>	\$308,000

production capability or quick and easy access to componentry that larger European manufacturers do. But what manufacturers like ACM offer is individually crafted vehicles—built in close partnership between buyer and builder—that can be completely customised. And with every build, Kiwi manufacturers are raising the bar and creating some strong competition in the motorhome marketplace. It’s an exciting time for both manufacturers and buyers alike, and we’ll be watching closely to see what other new developments and innovations Kiwi Autohomes and ACM bring to the market over the coming year. ■

**For more details visit contact 0800 288 646, sales@kiwiautohomes.co.nz or visit nzbuiltcampers.co.nz.**



The overcab bed is easily pulled down



Levelling legs



The FinScan smart power system