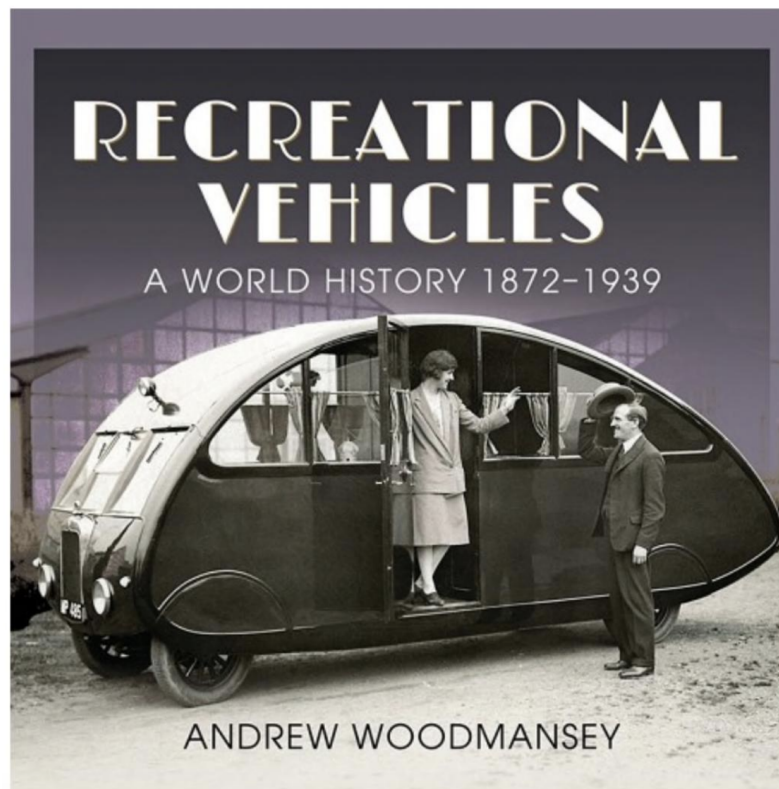


Recreational Vehicles. A World History 1872-1939

Author, Andrew Woodmansey

Andrew Woodmansey's new book *Recreational Vehicles. A World History 1872-1939* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Transport, 2022) is an entertaining and informative introduction to this type of road vehicle. For the purposes of his book, Woodmansey defines the Recreational Vehicle (RV) as one 'that contains sleeping facilities and is used for leisure' (6). It came into existence in the late nineteenth century when the vehicles were still horse-drawn and it was refined throughout the twentieth century in a series of innovations and improvements illustrated by the author.



In the Introduction Woodmansey notes: 'During the research for this book, the history of the RV has been partially rewritten. It is now clear that the RV is older than some may have thought' (8). He does not give any evidence for this statement, such as a review of the existing literature around RV's, and this reticence as to his source material dogs the book throughout. Woodmansey begins his story with the early caravans, which, as they were used as dwellings as well as for work were not RVs, but contributed something nonetheless to the typology. While the leisure caravan, a nineteenth-century conception, was reported in the British press through the 1870s and 80s, the breakthrough to its broad acceptance was, according to Woodmansey 'The Wanderer' an RV designed and commissioned by Scottish surgeon William Gordon Stables in 1884. As 'The Wanderer' was 'as far as we currently know, the first purpose-built recreational vehicle in the world' (28) we would expect it to be well documented and recorded in the literature

and it is. But none of this literature is referred to in the text where references to the national Motor Museum website would have been useful as they own the vehicle. And they give a number of references for further reading. <https://nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CAMC-Factsheet-WGS.pdf>. Stables' book *The Cruise of the Land Yacht Wanderer* is also well-known as a swift Google search shows. There is nothing wrong with what Woodmansey has written, but it is uncontextualised in the literature which appears to be extensive, so the author's actual contribution to new knowledge can't be ascertained.

The British chapter comprises short sections arranged chronologically on key caravaners, caravan makers, clubs and technological developments, from horse drawn, to motorised homes to the caravans pulled by cars we are familiar with today. It is absolutely loaded with photographs which provide the most valuable resource for the historian. There follow similar chapters dealing with France and Belgium the first of which includes discussion of Charles Louvet's fascinating Carling Homes based on the aerodynamic design of aircraft (3); the United States (4); Germany (5) Australia (6) and New Zealand (7). Chapter 8 veers somewhat off message by including special purpose vehicles that were not strictly leisure vehicles. But this section contains some wonderful examples that speak volumes about social, political and cultural history such as mobile libraries and health services, restaurants, and work-related vans. Woodmansey might have referred to Norm Darwin's pioneering study *Early Australian Automotive Design* (2017) which includes Australian designed mobile X Ray laboratories and a dental surgery designed for the WWI war effort. All these chapters follow the same format of short texts accompanying illustrations which probably reflects the way Woodmansey organised his research data. They contain interesting historical - cultural and social - notes but these remain isolated in each chapter and are not arranged into a through-line of argument.

The Australian section is naturally of interest here and it includes snapshots of some very intriguing early caravaners. But it is marred by an ill-fashioned introduction to Australian history. For example, the statement 'later in the nineteenth century as European-style agriculture eventually became established and sheep and cattle farming began to prosper' (164) is erroneous. The lucrative whaling and even the sheep industry started in the eighteenth century and by 1840 Australia was a wool producing powerhouse, producing more than two million kilos of wool each year and it had built the infrastructure to support the industry, both in rural and urban centres. Later in the nineteenth century it was not emerging but was a dominant world force in wool production. There are numerous other misconceptions about Australia's development in this section of the book which would have been better left out. Woodmansey goes on to introduce the reader to early Australian caravaners with brief snapshots of their vehicles - Frank Styant Browne in Tasmania, E J Brady from New South Wales, Romeo Lahey from Queensland and Victorian Charles Barrett. All of these men took to the caravan not primarily for leisure but with a purpose - painting, accruing copy for journalism, field naturalism and conservation. It would have been useful to contextualise these examples within the British material. Did Styant Browne know of *The Wanderer* for example given how early his caravan was or was his an independent development? Although Australians were apparently slow to take up the caravan, which is curious given their early enthusiasm for long road races and

interstate and cross-continent driving, the examples of the 1920s and 30s cited by Woodmansey are accompanied by some terrific photos which beg further research.

A three-page Appendix illustrates a number of drawings for patents but as these are not linked to the previous text in any way, and the nature of the patent is not discussed they have limited use. Darwin's discussion of patents is a good model for how they can be included in the text effectively.

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, the shortcomings in referencing are an impediment to the full enjoyment of this book and its achievement. To be really useful, there would be endnotes to each chapter, citing the sources of all the opinions and statements the author makes. In this way, the reader can both verify those statements and further the research. While Woodmansey does cite sources for longer indented quotes he does not give sources for the many quotes sprinkled through his text which is problematic. Google searches on the topic show a vast amount of existing data in this very interesting field of automotive history and it would be useful to know how Woodmansey is situated in this context.

No doubt Woodmansey's compilation of material from a part of western Europe and the Anglosphere is new and the abundant illustrations are a highlight of his book. Noticeable in these illustrations from the earliest years is the presence of women, such as the resourceful Rayner Sisters in the 1920s who recognised the new mobility that the caravan afforded them (174) suggesting one line of further research. But there are many others that the material gathered in *Recreational Vehicles. A World History 1872-1939* might give rise to, and this is a valuable legacy.

Harriet Edquist