

We all love to hear about success

This is a success story about Action Manufacturing, a firm that came about as the result of a merger seven years ago between two big players in the RV industry and now a company that is turning heads across many industries. They have been somewhat flying under the radar – until now. But first, let's have a little history lesson to get us to where we are today

Words Steve Lane Photos Bruce Mountain and supplied.

First: CI Munro was established in 1948 in Otorohanga originally building caravans, then began building motorhomes in the 1970s. The company was purchased by Tourism Holdings (thl) in 1995 and relocated to Hamilton in 2007, expanding into a much larger factory to cope with increasing demand of rental campervans for their Maui and Britz rental fleets.

Secondly, KEA Manufacturing was established in 1995 in Auckland as part of KEA Campers. Grant Brady, one of the founding members of KEA was running the manufacturing side of the business. KEA was the first to design and build a two-berth shower/toilet campervan to put into the rental market in New Zealand. Up until then anyone looking to rent a campervan with a shower and toilet had to rent a larger four or six berth van, which was not what everyone wanted. I remember Grant telling me he was laughed at by a few of his peers in the rental industry at the time. "They all reckoned there would be no demand for a van conversion with a shower toilet." How wrong they were – the two-berth campervan with a shower and toilet is nowadays a basic of every rental fleet in the country. That sort of outside-the-box forward thinking is what



still drives Grant Brady today in his position as Managing Director of Action Manufacturing.

Action is a combination of these two iconic names within the RV industry in New Zealand. When the two businesses merged in 2012, it was partly as a result of the GFC (Global Financial Crisis), that saw a downturn in tourism and ultimately less demand for rental campers in New Zealand and Australia. This left two factories running well below capacity and put pressure on both their production

facilities to remain viable and profitable. The result was that it brought these two businesses together to look at ways of maintaining a stronger manufacturing presence and ensuring continuation of large-scale manufacturing in New Zealand.

The merging of two businesses created several challenges. Not the least being a merging of cultures that needed to be addressed, not an easy undertaking at any time, in any business. Also, there were obviously the financials to sort out, but most important was trying to bring the best parts of the two businesses together while retaining a strong core base of good staff with experience and ideas.

Retaining good people is not easy when you move a factory from Hamilton to Auckland and ask staff to re-locate home and family. The move was the first thing that happened after the merger, when CI Munro moved their RV manufacturing from Te Rapa in Hamilton to Albany, Auckland where they set up shop in what is now Action's head office. This was the original KEA factory in Albany that used to build KEA motorhomes and that now produces Maui, Britz and Mighty Motorhomes and Campervans for Tourism Holdings in both Australia and New Zealand. They also

retained a smaller factory in Hamilton, and this facility has been building a wide variety of light commercial products, including all St John ambulances as well as mobile DHB dental and medical units for New Zealand and the islands.

The first three years were difficult for everyone involved, but by focusing on the people and improving processes through cycles of continuous improvement, the team at Action managed to slowly improve the overall business.

After four years the business was in great

shape and was starting to go places through some innovative developments – including the production of a world-class composite panel and flooring system they called Omnipanel, and this was beginning to gain traction within an ever-growing range of products produced by the company.

Omnipanel is the result of 20+ years of development in the Australian refrigerated truck industry, and Action Manufacturing has now adapted this to its RV and light commercial vehicles. Omnipanel is a panelling system with a lightweight Styrofoam core bonded

with European fibreglass that produces an exceptionally lightweight composite panel, greatly reducing overall weights. It also has incredible thermal characteristics, is very easy to repair, yet lightweight and extremely strong. "Many factories use composites, but invariably they are less commercially proven materials, often using open-cell polystyrene cores and simple hot melt gluing systems that haven't had that rigorous use that trucking and other commercial applications require," says Grant Brady. If you would like to know more about this great product check out www.omnipanel.co.nz

Action will celebrate its seventh birthday in February next year and is now going from strength to strength. It operates three factories, employs 250 staff, exports a range of products into Australia, and is proud to call themselves a large-scale New Zealand manufacturer and exporter.

And with the recent acquisition of 40-year-old refrigerated truck manufacturer Fairfax Industries, there will be some big changes in the refrigerated transport industry here as well as overseas with lighter and more efficient trucks that will help cut transport costs significantly.

Enter the Action EVERLAND: Albany is the base for the RV part of the Action business and



the team there noticed the volume of European motorhome imports coming into New Zealand and realised that the merger of KEA and *thl* coinciding with the closure of several smaller New Zealand RV manufacturers had left a large vacuum in the NZ-manufactured motorhome market. It happened during a period when currency exchange rates favoured importers, as well as an incredible surge in demand for RV product across New Zealand.

In a nutshell, there are now fewer motorhomes being built locally than in previous years, and Action wants to help change that. Action's response to the opportunity created by increased demand has been to begin investing in its own brand of motorhome for the local market. The Action EVERLAND has been designed to recapture some of the ground lost to imported RVs (mostly European) and they would like to see the EVERLAND reclaim a share of the local market and sit in a complementary way alongside some of the other New Zealand-made RV brands.

It's not easy surviving as a manufacturer in an open-market country like New Zealand, and the team at Action are continually challenging themselves to improve efficiency and pricing. One of the real frustrations for Action is the 'hilly playing field' around certain regulations. Gas, engineering and electrical standards are not equally applied to imported RVs versus those that are locally built, meaning that thousands of dollars in additional costs are borne by local manufacturers whereas European builds do not need to comply to these New Zealand standards. Imported vehicles come in fully built and only go through a basic compliance procedure. Grant Brady comments, "We are not saying that imports are unsafe, that's clearly not correct; our only beef is that they don't have to comply equally with New Zealand made. It doesn't sit well from a fairness perspective and it adds to our costs."

Action do believe that they now have the scale and efficiency to compete, and that as they develop the Action EVERLAND brand – with keen pricing to compete with and match the



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6. Stylish interior and well-designed kitchen give the motorhome a bright and airy feeling
7. The Action EVERLAND is right at home on New Zealand roads

look and feel of the imported products – they will have a combination that can develop a strong following in the local market.

In developing Action EVERLAND the design brief has been to use the new composite Omnipanel body to create a great looking unit, while retaining the excellent durability elements of a rental RV while providing a spare parts and backup service in New Zealand all at a competitive price. A key message is that with the EVERLAND, Action is not trying to compete with the bespoke builders like TrailLite or Diamond Motorhomes, who specialise in giving you a bespoke 'all you want' build, but is focusing instead on providing a good-looking, durable and functional vehicle at a very competitive price. It's a mix of European good looks with a high-quality New Zealand build that's going to last and look good.

The first floorplan has been built on a Renault chassis that has won plenty of awards in Europe. It's fantastic to drive, with the best AMT (automated manual transmission) on the market, and plenty of power while managing great fuel efficiency. The Giltrap Spencer (GS) group of companies stand behind the Renault brand, so it will be well supported for

mechanical servicing and spare parts. If you combine a full vehicle manufacturer's warranty and support together with the availability of service and spare parts from Action, the New Zealand-made EVERLAND makes great sense. Over time the Action EVERLAND range will grow and offer a wider choice of options including both front- and rear-wheel drive, in both vans and motorhomes. The vision is to take the EVERLAND – plus more of what Action has to offer – to the rest of the world. "Anything that creates export opportunity and jobs for Kiwis has to be a good thing for everyone," says Grant Brady.

Factory tours are welcomed by the Action team in Albany and can easily be arranged. "One of our key sales tools has been to show people how we build in detail and explain why we use certain products and the benefits that they offer. By showing people what and why we do certain things, people can really understand how the vehicles are built and why they stand out in such a crowded market," says Grant Brady. "It's really hard to choose between all the offerings in New Zealand these days, so digging below the surface and understanding how our production line works can be a great way of learning about RVs in general. Even if you don't plan on buying an EVERLAND the Albany team believe it's still worth a look behind the scenes and they would love to show you how Action can produce a new motorhome every two and a half hours."

It's an exciting time for Action to seriously re-enter the retail motorhome market. They are ready and believe the market is looking for well-priced NZ made. So, give them a call if you'd like to know more about the Action EVERLAND or would like to book a factory tour. **RV**

W: actionmanufacturing.co.nz

WHAT MAKES THE NEW ACTION EVERLAND UNSTOPPABLE?

There's a lot to see in our beautiful country, with some of the best bits off the beaten track. That's why you need a motorhome that's done the hard yards, developed the best combination of performance, engineering and creature comforts through decades of experience and has runs on the board for reliability. In short, something that just won't stop!

MADE RIGHT HERE IN NEW ZEALAND.

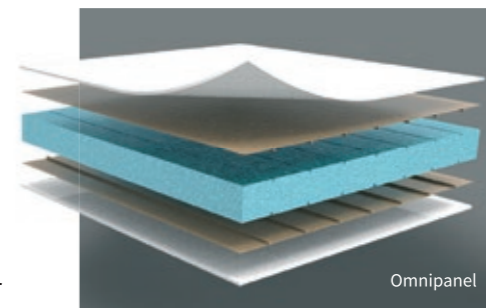
Designed and built in New Zealand, the Action Everland comes from the leading maker of motorhomes and campervans in the Southern Hemisphere, Action Manufacturing. In fact, Action has built more than 15000 rental tough motorhomes for the likes of Britz, Maui and Kea, not to mention ambulances for St John. So you know they're tough, safe and have been road tested over, literally, millions of kilometres.

DRIVES MORE LIKE A LIMO THAN A MOTORHOME.

Action's unparalleled experience has resulted in a refined combination of powerplant, chassis and suspension that delivers the performance, ride, handling and economy you would expect from a luxury car. The 110kW turbo Renault Master engine is ideal for cruising and has plenty of power to climb our mountains while front-wheel drive provides exceptional feel for the road.

QUALITY THAT GOES BENEATH THE SURFACE.

Everywhere you look on board an Action Everland you'll see superior build quality. However, some ingenuity is less obvious, such as the Omnipanel wall system. Made from styrofoam sandwiched between fibreglass, it is stronger, lighter and has water resistance and thermal qualities beyond anything else on the market.



What's more, the Everland's Omnipanel floors are fully sealed to prevent moisture or dust compromising the vehicle's integrity - or your comfort.

NON-STOP INNOVATION.

At Action, we're all about creating clever mobile spaces. For example, having a bed that lowers from the ceiling provides more floor space, a full-height, one-piece shower unit ensures no

leaks, and front seats that can swivel from their driving position can form part of the dining layout when parked.



It doesn't stop there, but you'll have to see an Everland in the flesh to believe how much innovation can be squeezed into one motorhome.

TEST DRIVE THE NEW ACTION EVERLAND.

No other vehicle on the market compares with the Action Everland. So if you're looking for a new motorhome, there's no stopping you now! To arrange a test-drive, or a factory tour, call 0800 EVERLAND or visit www.actionmotorhomes.co.nz



ACTION EVERLAND. UNSTOPPABLE.



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MEMBER OF THE THL GROUP



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