



AIRSTREAM: Driving Quality Through the Decades by Angela Sabarese



Airstream trailers from decades ago are still on the road today because Wally Byam, the company's founder, "did not make changes, only improvements" to an already brilliant design. These "silver bullets" embody a visionary architectural design that has given Airstream the well-deserved title of the oldest and classiest manufacturer of recreational vehicles in the United States.

What started as a hobby on his own property quickly became a successful business for Byam in 1931, when he opened the first Airstream factory. The first model that set off his successful career was the Torpedo Car Cruiser, from which every model thereafter was inspired. For \$465, Airstream advertised that buyers could "travel to Hollywood from any Western point," and by 1932, more than 1,000 Torpedo Car Cruisers had been purchased. At the time, not even 50 trailer manufacturing companies existed; then, by 1937, there were about 400.

1950s. With business thriving, Airstream had outgrown its factory in California and relocated to Jackson Center, Ohio in 1952, where the trailers are still manufactured today.

As Airstream's popularity continued to flourish, so did its appearance in contemporary culture. The company even played a role in the moon landing in 1969, when fears that the returning astronauts would be carrying diseases with them prompted NASA to quarantine the ones who traveled on Apollo 11. Airstream's role was to construct a "mobile quarantine unit" to take Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins to the USS Hornet.

Today, Airstream manufactures six different travel trailers and three different touring coaches, all of which embody the quality of the original models from the 1930s. The current trailer models, which include the Classic, International Serenity Series, International Signature Series, Flying Cloud, Basecamp,



(Above) The latest Airstream trailer, the 2018 Globetrotter / (Opposite page) Airstream Sport / www.airstream.com

THE AIRSTREAM'S BODY "IS A BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF ART AND AERODYNAMICALLY VERY FUNCTIONAL ... IT'S GOT A GREAT WINDOW RIGHT ABOVE YOUR PILLOW, SO WHEN YOU WAKE UP IN THE MORNING, YOU'RE LOOKING RIGHT AT THE OCEAN OR WHEREVER YOUR BACKYARD IS THAT DAY."

Matthew McConaughey, Actor

When World War II erupted, however, the trailer companies took a hard hit and closed down as the country's collective focus shifted toward assisting the war effort. The United States government issued an order stating that travel trailers could not be built for any reason other than to back the war effort, since aluminum was needed for building planes. Byam decided to close the Airstream factory because he wanted his trailers to be used for travel, and not as substitutes for homes.

It turned out that World War II would positively impact Airstream's future in other ways. After closing the factory, Byam and some of his staff ended up working in aircraft factories, and the skills they learned would influence the manufacturing of Airstream trailers when the company reopened after the war. Out of all 400 trailer companies that had been started in the 1930s, only Airstream survived the war.

In 1948, Byam and his friend, Neil Vanderbilt, traveled to Europe and toured the land affected by the war in an Airstream trailer. Byam's purpose was to see if there was anything about the trailer that he could improve. As a creative inventor, he naturally found that improvements could be made. Airstream trailers became the first to implement hot water heaters in the

and Sport, and Globetrotter, come in various sizes that meet the standards of a range of customers.

Even some celebrities are fans of the beloved travel trailers. Actor Matthew McConaughey said the Airstream's body "is a beautiful piece of art and aerodynamically very functional... It's got a great window right above your pillow, so when you wake up in the morning, you're looking right at the ocean or wherever your backyard is that day."

Today, many Airstream enthusiasts have remodeled their old trailers. Ralph Lauren purchased Airstream trailers, remodeled them in a way that represented the vintage aspect of the brand, and accepted bids from customers. Many owners mix vintage and modern styles in their redesigns, making the interior of their travel trailers look like their homes away from home.

Airstream's quality has continued to improve as models have been updated through the decades. With approximately 65 percent of all Airstreams ever built still on the road, it is clear that Byam's creation has stood the test of time as the quintessential quality travel trailer.

For ongoing coverage of affordable and luxury transportation, see the next issue of the *Graphis Journal*.

The Classic	Basecamp	International Serenity	International Signature	Flying Cloud	Sport
Price: Starting at \$135,600	Price: Starting at \$35,900	Price: Starting at \$67,600	Price: Starting at \$65,600	Price: Starting at \$62,200	Price: Starting at \$44,900
Sleeping Capacity: 1-5	Sleeping Capacity: 1-2	Sleeping Capacity: 1-4	Sleeping Capacity: 1-4	Sleeping Capacity: 1-4	Sleeping Capacity: 1-4
Interior Width: 8' 1"	Interior Width: 6' 4.5"	Interior Width: 7' 7"	Interior Width: 7' 7"	Interior Width: 7' 7"	Interior Width: 7' 7"
Exterior Length: 31' 3"	Exterior Length: 16' 3"	Exterior Length: 19' 2"	Exterior Length: 19' 2"	Exterior Length: 19' 2"	Exterior Length: 16' 4"
Exterior Width: 8' 5.5"	Exterior Width: 7'	Exterior Width: 8'	Exterior Width: 8'	Exterior Width: 8'	Exterior Width: 8'
Exterior Height w/ AC: 9' 9.5"	Exterior Height w/ AC: 8' 6.25"	Exterior Height w/ AC: 9' 9"	Exterior Height w/ AC: 9' 9"	Exterior Height w/ AC: 9' 9"	Exterior Height w/ AC: 9' 3"
Interior Height w/ AC: 6' 7.5"	Interior Height w/ AC: 6' 3.5"	Interior Height w/ AC: 6' 7.5"	Interior Height w/ AC: 6' 7.5"	Interior Height w/ AC: 6' 7.5"	Interior Height w/ AC: 6' 4.5"
Fresh Water Tank: 54 gal.	Fresh Water Tank: 22 gal.	Fresh Water Tank: 23 gal.	Fresh Water Tank: 23 gal.	Fresh Water Tank: 23 gal.	Fresh Water Tank: 23 gal.
Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: 10,000lbs	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: 2,585 lbs.	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: 4,500lbs	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: 4,500 lbs.	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: 4,500 lbs.	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: 3,500 lbs.

AN AIRSTREAM IS A LOT LIKE A FIRST LOVE: YOU ARE LURED BY HER CHARM, SEDUCED BY HER BEAUTY, AND ONCE BITTEN, YOU ARE FOREVER CHASING AFTER HER MYSTIQUE.

Bruce Littlefield, Author, *Airstream Living*