

USA

On the Road Again - and Again and Again

By Ted Landphair

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In the 1930s ? the era of streamliner trains, planes, and automobiles ? a travel trailer with a shiny aluminum skin made its debut. Its very name ? Airstream ? suggested smooth, aerodynamic travel. Many people who bought these shiny little trailers loved to show them off so much, they towed them in caravans around the globe.

Airstream trailers have been called land yachts, or silver bullets for their gleaming, rounded, art deco design. They are still being made, though today the company offers far fancier options than existed when these trailers first headed out across the landscape 74 years ago.



Shiny Airstreams come in all sizes. Here's a tiny

Shiny Airstreams come in all sizes. Here's a tiny one. Kind of doubt this one has all the comforts of home.

Airstreams became a symbol of American wanderlust, creating a mystique and romance about hitting the road.

The Airstream story begins with a remarkable adventurer named Wally Byum, who took over a company that produced the first Airstream Clipper in 1936. Its riveted-aluminum shell borrowed the burnished look of the new Pan Am Clipper airplane and of streamlined steamships and railroad locomotives. The polished shell was so light that two workers could easily lift it onto its bed.



So much a part of popular culture did
Airstreams b

So much a part of popular culture did Airstreams become that someone used their design to create Christmas ornaments.

Early Airstreams resembles a boat cabin, with a small but highly efficient kitchen area, a tiny restroom with shower and even a tub, and couches that fold into beds.

To this day, as many as 5,000 owners bring their Airstreams to rallies in U.S. cities. Some clubs formed by owners of vintage Airstreams have 1,300 members or more. One club member told us, mobility is a human right, and you can never get enough of it.

Vintage Airstreams were smaller and more mobile than today's monstrous and motorized recreational vehicles. As one Airstreamer put it, It didn't used to be such a big deal to hook up and go someplace.

[To learn more about Airstreams and those who love them, check out Bryan

Burkhart's book on the silver bullets of travel. It's called "Airstream: A History of the Land Yacht," published by Chronicle Books of San Francisco.]

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