



# Moving on *Streams of Air*

By Amy Conry Davis | Photography courtesy of Shutterstock and Airstream

First designed in 1936, the iconic Airstream trailers have moved beyond travel and into mainstream culture.

When it comes to timeless Americana, the iconic Airstream travel trailer rides high alongside blue jeans and baseball. Even those unfamiliar with the name could likely recall a time they glimpsed an unmistakable “silver bullet” rolling down the highway.

Originally meant for recreational purposes, these trailers have moved beyond campsites and into the landscape of pop culture. They make cameo appearances in film and television, do double duty as food trucks and funky coffee shops. They become mobile libraries, art studios, and quirky “glamping” accommodations. Even NASA liked them. After the Apollo 11 lunar mission in 1969, the astronauts were

quarantined in a modified Airstream for 21 days.

There’s just something about their bright and shiny contours that evoke a sense of history, adventure, and touch of Bohemian cool.

In fact, a younger, more selective clientele is shopping for Airstreams, according to Ron Lester, sales manager at Foley RV Center and Airstream of Mississippi in Gulfport.

“They like nice things and have nice toys,” says Lester. “They’re fairly outdoorsy. They’re tech savvy. And they appreciate the fact that Airstreams are extremely green compared to other types of campers.”

In the past, it was mostly retirees who wanted





something easy to handle and a little luxurious. As more people are now working from home, domestic road travel has taken on a new meaning for working professionals.

“Because of the ability to work anywhere, it allows the person that is not retiring to say ‘I can still take my family and go on the road,’” Lester explains. “As long as I bring my internet with me, I can do my job in the comforts of my Airstream anywhere in the United States.”

According to Lester, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major factor in growth. With international travel at a halt, many of his customers were looking for other ways to spend their disposable income and trailering around the country offered an easy fix.

#### AN ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY

The distinctive aluminum design of Airstream trailers hasn’t changed much since Wallace “Wally” Byam created the first one in 1936.

Byam was somewhat of an eccentric jack-of-all-trades. He spent years experimenting and constructing various models, mostly from plywood. When his part-time hobby began to feel more like a lucrative business venture, Byam opened a factory.

When World War II broke out, Byam put his flourishing business on hold and worked for the aerospace company Lockheed Martin, but he continued to develop his ideas. Like a plane in flight, Byam strove to perfect an aerodynamic trailer that would move like a “stream of air” down the road.

The Airstreams of today, now owned by Thor Industries, are all about luxury and modern amenities, made with green building materials and eco-friendly construction in mind. They come equipped with Bluetooth capabilities, solar technology, and state-of-the-art entertainment systems.

#### THE PROS AND CONS

Once inside an Airstream, it’s easy to understand

what the fuss is about. Its silvery, high-tech interiors evoke a spaceship, submarine, and child’s tree fort, all rolled into one.

When it comes to traveling, though, there are several practical items to consider. On the upside, having a pull-behind trailer means home is there at every step of the way. Whether plugged into a campsite or “dry camping” without hookups, a trailer has everything you need.

On the other hand, navigating rocky or narrow roads can be tricky, and backing up with a trailer is always an anxiety-inducing task. Prior planning is important when it comes to pulling into a new town, especially a crowded city. Drivers also need to learn where water sources and dump stations are located along the route.

More than a dozen Airstream-only parks are scattered around the country. These campgrounds share similar amenities as other RV parks, but Airstream parks have a special ingredient — community. Top of Georgia Airstream Park, for instance, has been around since the 1960s. They regularly hold rallies and events and even sell a cookbook with campers’ recipes. The Cumberland Plateau Campground in Crossville, Tenn., features over 100 sites, a meditation garden, clubhouse, and walking trails.

It’s hard to say what direction Airstream will take as it moves into the future. But, like any icon, its fans believe the legacy will live on. Whether it’s for a weekend trip or a lifetime, as Wally Byam once said, “go see what’s over the next hill, and the one after that, and the one after that.”

[airstream.com](http://airstream.com)

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