

AIRSTREAM®

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Airstream to Showcase Riveting Legacy with a Rare Look at the Original Clipper *The Company's First Model is On Display Now at its Heritage Center Museum in Ohio*

Jackson Center, OH (May 6, 2024) – Airstream, Inc., iconic creator of the world's premier recreational vehicles, is delighted to announce a landmark addition to its vintage RV collection: what is believed to be the first riveted, aluminum Airstream travel trailer ever produced by the company. This historic model joins the distinguished lineup of vintage units on display at the Airstream Heritage Center, located within the company's headquarters in Jackson Center, Ohio.

Visitors from across the country and around the world can now view a new exhibit featuring what is believed to be the very first Airstream Clipper model manufactured in 1936. Heralding the advent of an American icon, "Clipper #1" was designed and built by Airstream founder, Wally Byam, and is the first rounded, riveted aluminum travel trailer manufactured by the company. It will be presented on display alongside more than a dozen vintage Airstreams, including the final Clipper model the company produced in 1941 before Byam paused manufacturing at the onset of America's involvement in World War II.

The display is made possible by the generous support of David and Mary Gulley of The Gulley Collection, which owns both Clipper models and provided them on loan.

"This is our history on full display," said Bob Wheeler, Airstream President & CEO. "Clipper #1 is the vision of Wally Byam made real – the inspiration for the iconic 'silver bullet' design that's become synonymous with freedom and making travel dreams come true."

Unlike other travel trailers of the era that quickly faded into obscurity, from these humble beginnings Airstream went on to become a beloved part of the American travel experience, an icon that represents freedom, travel, and adventure.

Collector David Gulley of The Gulley Collection – an avid Airstream traveler in addition to being one of the world's foremost Airstream collectors – noted the historic relevance of this iconic model, which signaled Byam's shift from building Masonite travel trailers to the riveted aluminum models that have made Airstream an American heritage brand.

"This is where Airstream as we know it today started," Gulley said. "If Wally Byam hadn't switched to aluminum, none of us would be hitting the road in our Airstreams today."

Wheeler praised The Gulley Collection for its support in making these historic models available for public display at the company's 16,000-sq-ft museum.

"The Airstream Heritage Center was built to showcase almost a century of this company's history – the design, the innovation, and the incredible travel stories that stretch across the years and around the globe," said Wheeler. "We couldn't be more proud to have this historically important model on display alongside more than a dozen vintage Airstream models, and we're immensely grateful to The Gulley Collection for their generous support."

The addition of Clipper #1 alongside Airstream's own 1938 Clipper (nicknamed "Old Grand Dad") and The Gulley Collection's 1941 Clipper (nicknamed "Old Grandma") means Airstream now houses three of what are believed to be only twelve Clipper models known to remain.

Rediscovering Airstream's First Riveted Aluminum Travel Trailer

Though Airstream was founded in 1931, its first travel trailer designs hearkened to the popular teardrop shapes of the era. But like many engineers of the early 20th Century, founder Wally Byam was fascinated by the durability, strength, and style provided by the humble rivet and flexible aluminum. Ancient technology adopted for use in bridges, shipbuilding, early aircraft, blue jeans, and more, the rivet became synonymous with Airstream design when the company launched the Clipper model – its first rounded aluminum travel trailer – in 1936.

That first model was documented extensively in photographs produced by Byam in an effort to market his upscale travel trailer to travelers seeking an elite way to see the country. But after World War II, the whereabouts of Clipper #1 were lost to the passing of time. Legends abound: The model was said to have been sold to then President of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas. Rumors were that it ended up in a traveling Mexican circus. And then – as with many relics of the past – its story faded into mystery.

In 2017, an Italian collector discovered what he thought was an Airstream Clipper near Mexico City. The trailer was in pitiful shape, with crumpled panels and a dilapidated interior. The words "Circo Mundial" were painted on the exterior, and a sign advertising the traveling circus was found inside the unit. When Gulley heard about the model, he began to suspect its provenance, but it wasn't until Gulley was able to purchase and transport the trailer across the USA-Mexico border and eventually to Silver Lady Restoration in Oklahoma, that a team of Airstream historians were able to examine the trailer in hopes of confirming its origin.

Alongside Airstream historian, Joe Peplinski, the team examined rivet patterns, measurements, and exterior component placement on the newly discovered trailer and compared them to the extensive photographic record of Clipper #1. This "Airstream fingerprint" confirmed what the team suspected – that while this Clipper was in terrible shape, it was, in fact, the world's first riveted aluminum Airstream.

Bringing a Piece of History Back to Life

Led by Rick and Rose Larson of Silver Lady Restoration in Lawton, Oklahoma, the restoration effort had the primary goal of preserving as much of the original trailer as possible. The trailer was separated from its chassis so the frame could be rebuilt. Then, the iconic shell was carefully disassembled down to its aluminum frame. They saved everything that could possibly be preserved, including all but three aluminum panels, several walls, the aluminum bed frames, the sink and icebox, and even the trash receptacle. Using the same tools and methods used in 1936, the team rebuilt the Clipper, smoothing out panels on an English Wheel and rebuilding the interior with the guidance of original interior photos. For pieces that could not be preserved, exact copies were created using the original pieces as a template. All in all, the restoration took 40 weeks.

For more information on all Airstream products and the Airstream Heritage Center, please visit airstream.com.

About Airstream

Airstream, manufacturer of the iconic “silver bullet” Airstream® travel trailer, is one of the longest-tenured recreational vehicle manufacturers in the world. The company’s mission, as set forth by founder Wally Byam, is to create well-designed, high-quality products that allow people to follow their dreams and explore the world in home-like comfort. A steadfast commitment to Byam’s creed, “Let’s not make changes, let’s only make improvements,” has made the aluminum Airstream travel trailer a timeless classic. An unwavering focus on innovation keeps the company at the forefront of technology and customer experience in both the towable and motorized sectors. Airstream is based in Jackson Center, Ohio, where a team of skilled craftspeople hand builds each travel trailer and upfits every Mercedes-Benz® and RAM® touring coach, adding daily to the brand’s reputation for quality and innovation. Learn more about Airstream, our dealers, and current travel trailer and touring coach models at airstream.com. For the latest news on Airstream, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter and Instagram. Airstream, Inc. is an operating company of Elkhart, IN-based THOR Industries, Inc. (NYSE: THO). THOR is the sole owner of operating companies which, combined, represent the world's largest manufacturer of recreational vehicles. For more information on THOR Industries and its products, please visit thorindustries.com.

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