

2026 International Airstream Rally in Salem, Oregon

It was a simmering June weekend at the fairgrounds in Salem, Oregon, where thousands of Airstream owners converged on every available space to camp out. I noticed only a few days before the coming

national holiday that many folks were wearing red and white, but where was the blue? Amid the silver sea of trailers, I saw plenty of American flags, banners and ribbons fluttering in the hot air, but the dominant show of colors honored another occasion—Canada Day. Members of the Wally Byam Caravan Club International explained to me that each July 1st they wear the country's colors to show support for their fellow Airstreamers up north.

If you have Airstream rally before it's quite a sight. This was my first, so I'm sure I had all the wide-eyed experiences that most people have. Perhaps my one-day visit with this unique club will fill you in on what it was like.

Airstreams, Airstreams Everywhere!

At first glance, the massive gathering of trailers (and some motorhomes) could be mistaken for a used RV sale of biblical proportions. However, as I wandered down various paths of this camping community, instead of "For Sale" signs, there were name placards, license plates and stickers from all over the country. I also noticed how each unit was personalized in some way.

Temporary front yards were enhanced with pink flamingos, lawn chairs, wire fencing, portable barbecues, and even a few plastic wading pools. Many folks had colorful awnings that matched window coverings and even tablecloths on outside folding tables. Airstreamers with the need for green even had both potted and hanging plants near their trailer doors.

You can learn a lot about some of these adventurous campers just by the unique decals and personal wood carved signs displayed in or around the Airstreams. It seemed a certain couple favored the Southwestern states with bumper stickers from Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, while others sported only the WBCCI decal and the required numbers for the rally.

Many signs indicate that trailer inhabitants are married couples like the "Barlows" and other are less formal like "Ed & Nelly Live Here." There are long time members like Ralph and Genet Dixon who have been a part of WBCCI since 1962. Several families with kids in tow were also enjoying this big event. I spoke to a few who travel year-round and home school their children on the road. What a way to learn about American history and geography!

Housed within rows of Airstreams was a retired rodeo cowboy, former school teacher, a wood-worker, musician (still playing his guitar), as well as cat lovers, dog lovers, bird watchers, anglers, golfers, hikers, nature lovers. All with one thing in common, the love for Airstream trailers!

FRIENDSHIPS NEW AND OLD

On this particular summer day—nearly 100 degrees in the shade—there's not much outdoor activity. A few folks endure the afternoon heat to walk their beloved dogs or stroll along the grassy fields to check out other Airstreams with their trademark aluminum exteriors buffed to an almost blinding sheen.

It may seem to the casual outsider that nothing much is going on, but a closer look in the shade of colorful cloth awnings reveals club members gathered in small groups. Even larger herds of Airstream lovers can be found under an expanse of trees across the street from the cement fairgrounds.

For many people I visited with, this event isn't just a vacation, it's a way of life. A good percentage of WBCCI members live in their Airstreams year round, traveling solo or in groups all over the United States. Many schedule stops to attend various rallies, some live more day to day, and still others plan to follow the good weather from coast to coast and every place in between.



Friendships form over the years and the somewhat relaxed atmosphere makes it easy to meet someone new at every turn. In fact, if you are curious like me and decide to cruise the Airstream aisles, more often than not you will be greeted with a friendly hello or even find yourself in a quick exchange about the weather or where the best stores are in town.

VAST VINTAGE

One of the most popular areas at the rally appeared to be the section dedicated to vintage Airstream models. Most of these folks have renovated old models, others have actually had the good fortune to own their trailer for 30 or 40 years and just can imagine having anything else.

Some old models included a 1952 Flying Cloud, 1961 Tradewind, 1965 Caravel, 1979 Excella, and plenty of Land Yachts, Globetrotters and Argosy's. The rarest among these aged but beautiful trailers was a 1937 Torpedo. Some models have been fully restored to their original design using materials from that period, while others have been slightly modified.

The current trend among younger generations (and even some from the Hollywood scene) is to purchase older models through Internet auctions or private sale, and restore them with a retro look from that time period and often adding more of today's conveniences like microwaves and satellite dishes. Many purists will work to keep the original décor and layout of their vintage Airstream but almost all will compromise on one modern necessity—air conditioning.

Restoration projects can get costly and time consuming but those diehards who have tackled this awesome task, claim it is all worth it in the end. If this peaks your interest, find more about vintage Airstreams or other related information by looking at some of our suggested links: airstream_weblinks.htm

PET PEOPLE

So many of us consider pets part of the family and so it goes with many Airstream travelers. At this rally they were grouped in a special pet friendly section on the grassy fields near the outskirts of the grounds.

Every few hundred feet I spotted large silver trash can marked with signs "Pet Waste Only" and all pet owners out of courtesy are expected to do their duty (so to speak) and pick up after their furry family members.

Man's best friend outnumbered all other pets, though I came across a parrot and was surprised to find a friendly feline tethered to a leash outside one trailer. This little guy was not enjoying the heat but still managed a welcoming meow and accepted a couple of strokes on his head. He posed proudly for a photo then resumed a napping position, evidently quite accustomed to the curious with cameras.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Airstream owners seem to travel in style, not only do they live in beautiful trailers but at rallies they can expect a certain amount of services that I found helpful. Volunteers within the club operate nearly all the services, and the ones I met were quite friendly and informative.

If you want to know about the weather, where to find a grocery store, or have a medical emergency, the Wally Byam Control Center is there for you. Control is a mobile unit with CB radios that members can reach by tuning to a designated channel or simply walking up to the center and talking with the people in charge. That's where I was directed when I inquired about restaurants around Salem, since I didn't happen to bring my own kitchen or house on wheels.





A less glamorous but equally important service was the Honey Bucket truck. It literally makes "house" calls going unit by unit down each row unloading sewage tanks. This fellow was dedicated, even in such hot conditions, though clearly not a volunteer for this dirty job.

Another helpful feature is the mobile post office. At this location they actually had a small building or rather shack with sidewalls that opened. Anyone traveling with the club could send or retrieve mail. In a very organized fashion there were various boxes marked with letters from the alphabet that contained dividers filled with envelopes. This traveling PO box allows people to keep in touch with friends and family, as well as receive things like magazines or even prescription refills for medications.

After an couple hours hiking up and down the rows of trailers to enjoy their beauty up close, I found myself a little wilted from the heat. I fortunately discovered that I could see more of this enormous rally with the help of a tram--basically a tractor with wagon attached. At least four, driven by volunteers, were always available, and some offered padded seats others were simple wood slats. All had roofs for shade and they gladly stopped just about anywhere you wanted.



ENTERTAINING END

As the sun lowered in the sky and the air became a little cooler, the brilliant reflections off the vast row of trailers dimmed to a warm gray glow. More Airstreamers came out from their protective shelters and gathered in various locations to share meals, some even ventured into downtown Salem to try out the local cuisine.

Earlier in the day I had seen signs advertising the evening's entertainment. I was told that various groups perform anything from square dancing to comedy skits. Also special musical groups visited the rally during the long weekend to share their talents in the large auditorium.

I personally didn't have a ticket but I later heard that it was a pretty exciting evening. Being that this was an international rally, among the honored guests were WBCCI members from Canada who proudly posed for a group photo. What an end to my first heartwarming Airstream Rally experience!



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