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Aistream

Headline:

## American dream

Standfirst:

Laura James, editor of Aga magazine and author of Cool Camping, leaves her tipi to experience life on the road in a glamorous Airstream trailer...

Body copy:

I've just woken up on the last day of the half-term holidays to a view I can only describe as magnificent. The sun is rising over Derwent Water, great skeins of geese are streaming overhead and the Lakeland fells are bathed in warm reds and browns.

The view inside is pretty good too. It's all shiny and aluminium with sleek lines and the kind of curves that could only belong to a design icon. I'm in an Airstream trailer in the middle of the Lake District National park and it's seriously groovy. The Airstream exudes the kind of quiet chic of which a mere caravan could only dream. In fact, comparing it to a caravan is rather like comparing an Aga to a Baby Belling – cruel and unfair.

The Airstream's beauty is only matched by its ridiculously glamorous heritage. When Apollo 11 returned from its mission to the moon the astronauts were immediately whisked off to a custom-built Airstream, reconfigured as a portable quarantine capsule. There's an Airstream Village at the Burning Man Festival – an event in the Nevada desert that makes Glastonbury look like a vicar's tea party – and no self-respecting film set would consider itself complete without a super-shiny Airstream on site for its stars to hang out in.

I'm not sharing my space with the likes of Angelina Jolie or Brad Pitt, though. I'm here with my long-suffering husband, our two boys, Smudge the miniature sausage dog and Ziggy our black lab. Actually, I think bringing the labrador may have been a mistake; not because he isn't adorable, it's more that he takes up rather a lot of floor space.

The Airstream is attracting lots of attention from our neighbours, all hardened caravanners and campers. Well it is February and the overnight temperature is minus 5° C, so they have to be. It's pronounced gorgeous by everyone who comes by and all ask if they can have a quick look inside. This is hardly surprising as it looks as good inside as it does outside. There's a proper bedroom, with a real double bed. A dining area with leather seats, which cleverly convert into another double bed, and a highly specced kitchen with a large fridge freezer, gas cooker and microwave.

My boys are loving it. As soon as we arrive at the campsite they become almost feral and hook up with a bunch of other children and go off to pursue a Swallows and Amazons-style existence. Before I know it, there are seven children standing outside the front door of the Airstream showing me various sheets of ice they've discovered around the lake.

It's almost 80 years since the Airstream was invented and it's as cool and innovative today as it was at the time of its launch. And now, for the first time, you can buy an Airstream which has been designed specifically for the European market. It's taken almost four years and a huge amount of effort from Michael Hold, Anthony Slocock and David Rowell who loved the Airstream so much, they decided to import them officially.

To suit our roads, the European Airstream is seven inches narrower than in its American counterpart, but no less gorgeous for that. The trailers are, in fact, a piece of architecture and a timeless design classic which won't date. Little wonder many of those who have bought Airstreams are themselves architects.

I haven't towed one myself – ours was helpfully waiting for us when we arrived in Keswick – but am assured the so-called 'silver bullet' tows, well, just like a bullet.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about the Airstream is the sense one has of being right in the middle of a great adventure. You feel as if you can go anywhere. As I lay there with the window in the roof open, staring at the stars, I went through all the places in my mind that I'd like to go to in an Airstream. My first stop would overlook a Cornish beach.

#### One man's aluminium adventure

Airstream began as one man's dream. Wally Byam set out to build the perfect trailer. One that would move as if it were a stream of air. And – and this bit's important – one that would provide first-class living accommodation.

That's certainly how today's Airstream feels. Lying in bed, it's not unlike being in a smart, boutique hotel. The same clean lines, attention to detail and styling are present. The only thing missing is room service.

The philosophy at Airstream is simple. Change for the sake of change is silly. Don't make changes, make improvements. It's this kind of thinking that has ensured the longevity of the classic design and makes the Airstream incredibly desirable.

Wally Byam wrote that he created the Airstream in part "to place the great wide world at your doorstep for you who yearn to travel with all the comforts of home". This remains true today. I'm not the world's hardest traveler; when I camp in a tent or tipi, I take cashmere blankets and my pillows from home. The Airstream is perfect for me. It has central heating that works brilliantly, so even at -5°C, we remained perfectly warm. Inside, nothing feels make-do or there simply for the sake of design. The Airstream truly is the perfect marriage of form and function.

The Lake District, too, has been a revelation as I'd never visited before. Coming from Norfolk, the boys were enraptured by the hills and the lakes looked like something from a picture book. The campsite we stayed on was right on Derwent Water and we spent four days meandering around small villages and towns, thinking only about where we'd next eat. The whole thing was seriously relaxing, not just for me, but for the children too. The lack of computers, PlayStations and the like meant that they engaged much more with the experience and there was a real feeling of timelessness to our trip.

Sadly the time comes to leave. Rounding up the children proves tricky and Smudge the sausage dog has been taken off on a walk by Alexandra, the little girl who's staying in the caravan next door. We're all feeling a little flat, but the prospect of lunch in a pub with a roaring fire and listening to Cold Comfort Farm on tape in the car makes things slightly more bearable. Nevertheless, this is a trip we'll all remember for a very long time.

Leaving takes a while as there are so many goodbyes to be said and email addresses to be exchanged. Campers and caravanners are friendly folk and the sense of shared adventure means they like to stay in touch. There's also the returning to be done. Alexandra's mother agrees to trade Smudge for the broom I borrowed from her, although Alexandra feels this is a very poor trade indeed.

So, as we pack up and wave goodbye, I have a real sense that this is just the beginning of our Airstream adventures and there'll be many more to come...

The Airstream over here

Airstream's new European trailer fleet has been designed, tested and certified to match the capabilities of EU tow cars, narrower roads and specific EU adopted standards and swenational legislation.

Gross weight has been reduced by using lighter materials. Approach and departure angles have been increased for steeper drives or ferry ramps. The coupling height has been set to suit our vehicles. A completely new EU-style chassis and running gear has been introduced and all models have been independently certified by the UK's National Caravan Council.

Prices start at £35,730 for a base vehicle to a standard specification, with Airstream 'On the Road' packs costing from £600. The top of the range Airstream starts at £45,740.

Further information

You can call Airstream Europe on 015396 24141 or visit <http://europe.airstream.com>

For more on the campsite at Keswick, write to the Camping and Caravanning Club,  
Crow Park Road,  
Keswick,  
Cumbria  
CA12 5EP or call 01768 772392.