

California Streaming

As the US classic arrives in Britain, [Martin Love](#) discovers why Airstream is the ultimate in trailer flash



AIRSTREAM 684

£45,740

TOTAL LENGTH: 28FT

BERTHS: 4

GOOD FOR: FREE SPIRITS

BAD FOR: FREE LOADERS

We're the best of friends/Insisting that the world keep turning our way/And our way is on the road again... Willie Nelson's cracked voice fills the car and we gustily join him for the chorus... *And we just can't wait to get on the road again.* We're heading to the north Norfolk coast for a week of big beaches and even bigger skies. As usual, we'll be staying in a rented property. But this one is a little different. It has wheels rather than foundations, and is built for a life on the road.

With their riveted aluminium walls, sleek aerodynamic shape and futuristic fuselage bodies, Airstream 'travel trailers' – the word caravan seems a little low-rent when applied to these polished beauties – have long been an essential ingredient of the all-American experience, acting like vast magnets for anyone with a passion for aesthetic perfection. People who'd never be seen dead in a run-of-the-mill caravan – the 'white goods' of the highway – see the Airstream as something different. And whether it's the iconic design or the colossal price tag, there's no doubt 'Streaming' is something James Dean would have done, while caravanning is for the likes of Alan Partridge.

The Airstream dream started back in 1929 when Wally Byam bought a Model T Ford chassis, put a platform on the back and pitched a tent on that. His wife was nonplussed by his idea of comfort and so he built her a tear-drop shaped metal structure. Neighbours expressed interest and the silver bullet's long journey began. Wally christened his creation the Airstream because they



Wagons roll: a pair of Airstreams at Sandringham. 'I'll have one,' said a fellow camper, 'if I win the lottery'

cruised down the road 'like a stream of air'. Since then, thousands of Airstreams have been sold, but almost all in America. Recently, however, Airstream has developed the '684' which is narrower and lighter, and has been adapted to the towing capabilities of our wimpy European cars – though it still comes in at two tonnes and 28 feet in length.

Like its American cousins, the 684 is made to the highest possible standard. Incredibly, an estimated 70 per cent of all Airstreams ever built are still on the road, which tells you as much about their build quality as the pride in ownership they evoke.

The retro, aircraft styling of the exterior is in stark contrast to the modern interior.

Gone is the smoked-glass, wobbly plastic shelving and wall-to-wall beige colour schemes of today's caravans. Instead you'll find tasteful, dark-stained wood panelling, leather seating, oval-shaped sinks, backlit storage compartments and splashes of lime green and orange. It's a mobile boutique-hotel room. On top of that there's central heating, solar panels, a satellite link and even a reversing camera. When it comes to the nitty-gritty, Airstream is no different to the other vans out there. There is a chemical loo and a waste-water collector, and the van has to be hooked up to an electricity supply – but it's just enough hands-on footering to remind you that it really is great outdoors.★

For more information about Airstream trailers, go to www.airstream-europe.co.uk. To rent an Airstream, visit www.airstream-rentals.co.uk

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY MICHAEL SCARBOROUGH RUNS OUT OF AIR IN YUGOSLAVIA

My Volkswagen Karmann Ghia convertible was quite a car and our drive through the outback of Yugoslavia in the Sixties was rather bold. Amazingly, the car's excuse for luggage space managed to hold all our camping gear and a month's food, and still left



room for a six-year-old.

Things started badly when a pump attendant mistook the bonnet catch hole for the petrol cap and managed to leave all our food and the car's interior reeking of petrol. North of Mostar, we got a puncture and the local

mechanic, having levered off the tyre, protested that I'd lost the inner tube. He knew nothing of tubeless tyres, but did know a farmer who might. He directed us towards the hills where we found a shack of a place. The farmer was pottering around in front of it with a chicken under his arm. 'Yes, I can do something,' he nodded, 'but first...' He picked up an axe and swiftly

decapitated the chicken which, for the next few minutes, scurried headless around the dirt yard. Unsettling, yes. But he did manage to botch a clumsy repair and, no, we didn't have chicken for supper.

A classic Karmann Ghia still tempts me, but then so does the VW camper van which replaced it.★

Do you have a memorable journey? Send it to us at journeys@observer.co.uk