

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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International Rallies - The First 10 Years

The approaching 60th anniversary of the first WBCCI International Rally and the upcoming 61st WBCCI International Rally in Salem, Oregon, make it an appropriate time to review the history of some early WBCCI International Rallies, specifically 1958 to 1967, the first 10 years. Here are some highlights, year by year:

1958 – 1st International Rally – Bull Shoals, AR, July 3-6, 1958 – 300 Airstreams:

In early 1958, Airstream decided to host a rally to celebrate Wally Byam's birthday. Since Wally was born on July 4th, the dates of July 3-6th, 1958 were selected and a central location at the Bull Shoals Dam was found. The rally was patterned after the International Rallies Wally Byam attended in Europe in the mid-1950s, with invitations sent to special guests and trailer clubs across Europe as well as to all Airstream owners in the U.S. and Canada. The village of "Byamville" was created with a colorful Market Street lined with small stands and booths operated by local merchants who sold food, groceries, handcrafted items, souvenirs, and trailer supplies. There were no buildings or tents, no electricity or water. Programs were held on a large open stage. The star entertainment was Pat Boone's father-in-law, Red Foley. After its successful completion, WBCC leadership decided to make the rally an annual event.



Wally's Birthday Party - 1958

1959 – 2nd International Rally – Wisconsin Dells, WI, July 1-6, 1959 – 515 Airstreams: The Rally Fee was \$1.50 per night per trailer and this was the first International Rally to use a partial "Wagon Wheel" parking formation.



The rally theme was "Welcome to Alaska, our 49th State", because July 4, 1959 would be the day the U.S. flag with 49 stars became official. Each Unit was asked to prepare a 5-minute skit on the rally theme. Special boat trips to the Wisconsin Dells in WWII era amphibious "Ducks" were enjoyed by many. Other tours, including fishing, boating, riding, and golfing were provided in addition to "in camp" activities. A "Teen Queen" (beauty) contest for the daughters and granddaughters of club members was offered for the first time. This contest would remain a fixture of International Rallies into the early 2000s. Wally and Stella flew in for his July 4th birthday party, received the first ever "Key to the City" from the mayor of Wisconsin Dells, and then flew to Cape Town, South Africa to begin the 1959-60 African Caravan.

1960 – 3rd International Rally – Colorado Springs, CO, July 1-6, 1960 – 868 Airstreams: This International Rally was hosted by the Colorado Unit and was called the "Traveling WBCC

Ranch". It was the first International Rally to ask club members to spend only \$2 bills to demonstrate to the area the financial impact of hosting the Rally. Activities included a Wally Byam's Birthday Dinner Party on July 4th, followed by the showing of African Caravan movies. Wally's birthday cake was constructed from cupcakes for the first time - 3000 in total! Wally gave Government Savings Bonds to the top three Teen Queen contestants. This was the last International Rally that Wally Byam personally attended as he was already feeling the effects of the illness that would take his life in 1962.



Wally, Stella, Teen Queens and Cupcakes

A WBCC registration book was positioned at the top of Pike's Peak to be signed by members. One member even pulled his Airstream to the top!

1961 – 4th International Rally – Hershey, PA, July 1-5, 1961 – 960 Airstreams: The rally theme was "More Fun in '61". The Hershey Chocolate Factory provided tours for club members on June 30th, and all Hershey Estates activities, including the amusement park, were open to club members. July 4th was "Early American" Costume Day as well

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as the day for Wally Byam's Birthday Party Barbecue, but Wally was unable to attend due to his illness. Movies of the 1960 European Caravan were shown one night. The International Rally was getting bigger, as evidenced by the first appearance of a trailer locator board and an on-site U.S. Post Office, as well as the ability to attract top-tier entertainment. On the final night, Duke Ellington and his band performed, courtesy of Airstream.

1962 – 5th International Rally – Auburn, WA, June 30-July 5, 1962 – 1717 Airstreams: The 100-acre rally site was open to club members from June 15 to July 10 which allowed the opportunity to attend the "Century 21 Exposition" 1962 World's Fair in Seattle, just a 40-minute drive away. Chartered busses took club members to the Fair each day during the official rally. The rally theme was "International Fair", with each day having an individual theme: 6/30 – Mexican, 7/1 – Canadian, 7/2 – European, 7/3 – Oriental, 7/4 – American, and 7/5 – All Nations. The Rally Fee was only \$10 and parking, for the first time at an International Rally, was in a complete (though oval) Wagon Wheel formation, with the event tents located in the center. Sixty different committees were needed to organize and run the rally. Wally's July 4th birthday cake was now up to 6000 cupcakes, each with an individual candle!



1963 – 6th International Rally – Bemidji, MN, June 29-July 5, 1963 – 1882 Airstreams: Bemidji, in the "Land of Paul Bunyan", provided a rally site at the Beltrami County Fairgrounds. The rally theme was "Vacationland". Rally activities continued to offer the types of events that had been provided every year since the 2nd International Rally,

including a 4th of July Parade, unit skits, meals, hobby shows, and Teen Queen, square dancing, horseshoe, and golf contests. The top name entertainment was comedienne Phyllis Diller. The July 4th Fish Fry, possibly the largest ever, was followed by Wally Byam's birthday cake made of 6500 cupcakes.

1964 – 7th International Rally – Princeton, NJ, June 22-July 6, 1964 – 1969 Airstreams: The Rally site, in a large field in the Princeton suburb of Skillman, NJ, opened early on June 15 to allow club members to take advantage of the proximity to the 1964 New York World's Fair and the New Jersey Tercentenary and Fair. The rally theme was "300 Years of Progress". Planned rally activities began on June 22, but the official Opening Ceremony was not until June 29. June 30 was officially declared Wally Byam Caravan Club Day at the World's Fair and 80 busses were chartered to transport 3500 rally goers to the Fair. Airstream provided a "hospitality center" in New York City's Astor Hotel from June 22-30 to serve as a temporary meeting place for club members touring Manhattan. Wally's birthday cake on July 4th consisted of 10,000 cupcakes. A daily rally newspaper was organized

for the first time. It was called the "Blue Beret" and in 1965 it would evolve into the monthly club magazine of the same name.

1965 – 8th International Rally – Laramie, WY, June 29-July 5, 1965 – 2592 Airstreams: A rally site of approximately 150-acres was located next to the University of Wyoming, which opened the doors of some of its buildings for use by the club. The rally theme was simply "Western". Lynda Bird Johnson, daughter of the current U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson, attended the rally at the end of a 5-week tour of the U.S. west in an Airstream trailer. Arrangements were made so that WBCCI members could attend the Shrine Circus in Laramie for free by merely displaying their ID badges and blue berets. There was a special tribute to Wally Byam on July 4th by Airstream Company President Art Costello, but no birthday party or cupcakes.

1966 – 9th International Rally – Cadillac, MI, June 29-July 5, 1966 – 2828 Airstreams: The 150-acre site used for the rally required the erection of a building large enough to seat 10,000 persons. The nearly 10,000 attendees doubled Cadillac's population for the duration of



10th International Rally - Santa Rosa, California - 1967

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the rally! The rally theme was “Funderland” to highlight the promise of fun in all of Michigan’s wonderlands, including lakes Cadillac and Mitchell, just a short distance from the rally site. This was the last International Rally to utilize a complete (though oval) Wagon Wheel parking formation and the Rally Fee was now \$15 including early parking starting on June 22. Representatives of the British and French Caravan Clubs attended the rally making it a truly international affair. Evening entertainment included the Teen Queen contest, various caravan films, square dancing, and ballroom dancing.

1967 – 10th International Rally – Santa Rosa, CA, June 29-July 5, 1967 – 2156 Airstreams: Airstreams were parked in a big “X” formation on the run-

ways of the former McClellan Air Force Base, which had been constructed in 1942 to mimic the deck of the aircraft carrier “Hornet”. To date, this was the only International Rally held in California. A San Francisco style cable car was used to transport attendees around the rally site. Most activities were in a 40,000 square foot tent that sat 7,000 and was claimed to be the largest tent in the world. The 1st Caravan America Tour sponsored by the Wally Byam Foundation, a 4-week tour of the U.S.A by a group of 25 English families in Airstream trailers, ended at the rally. A group of 20 French families began the 2nd Caravan America tour of the U.S.A. at the rally.

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