

Tools I bring

Chris Olsson

MN Airstream Club Newsletter Editor

When traveling with your Airstream, I feel that there are certain tools you should carry with you at all times. Most of them I hope you never need to use, or use very often, but when the need arises, having a good set of tools can save you time and frustration just in case something goes awry.

Here's the tools I carry with me faithfully. Almost all of them fit in a medium sized toolbox, with the exception of the socket set, which is in a separate toolbox.

Socket set (both metric and US Standard)

Normal hand tools (screwdrivers, pliers, wrenches, etc.)

Hammer

Small battery powered tire air compressor

VOM (volt ohm meter)

Pop-rivets & Olympic rivets

Rivet tool

Cordless drill

Drill bits for the different rivet sizes

Torque Wrench (lug nuts)

I check the lug nuts before every trip. If you have aluminum alloy rims (wheels), they should be checked every 100 - 200 miles. We have steel rims, so I check them before every trip, and then once a week while on the road.

No matter type of rims you have, if they were removed and re-installed for any reason, check them after 50 and 100 miles. Check the axle manual or your Airstream manual for the correct torque amount.

One thing we were taught by Kay's parents is to always carry pop-rivets of various sizes and a pop-rivet gun. Eventually, you will have rivet or two fail, and if it's in the outside skin somewhere, a failed rivet is now a hole for water to get in. Replacing the rivet is quick and easy, even if you have to drill out the old rivet that's still in the hole. The common sizes that I carry are shown below.



From top to bottom:

1/8" dia x 1/4" long

1/8 dia x 1/2" long

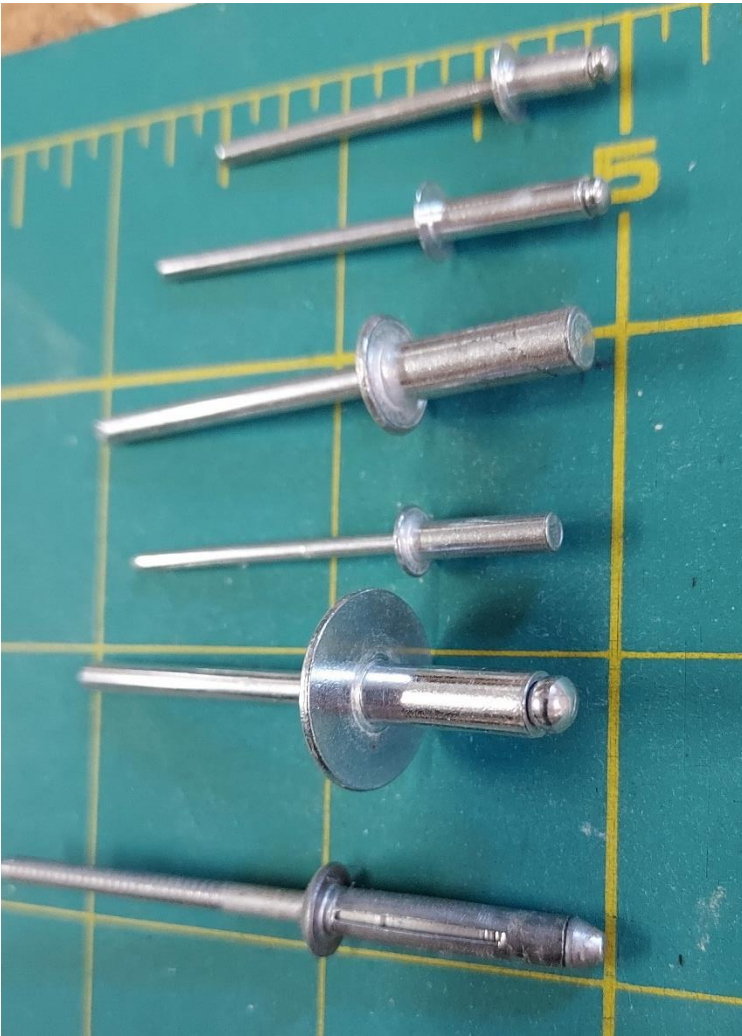
3/16" dia x 5/8" long closed end

1/8" dia x 3/8" long closed end

3/16" x 1/2" long large head

3/16" x 7/16" Olympic rivet

The closed end rivets are great for replacing rivets in the skin. On our trailer, we used them to hold the trim pieces on.



Here are the ends of the rivets. You can see that the two closed end rivets have a solid bottom so water will not leak through them.

In an ideal world, when replacing a rivet in the skin, you would drill out the old rivet using the proper sized drill bit (1/8", 3/16", etc.), and then squirt a drop of aluminum safe sealant in the hole, and then install the rivet. Note that most silicone sealants are NOT safe for aluminum. Vulkum (aka, Trempro 635) is the preferred sealant for airstreams, and is available from several online places (Vintage Trailer Supply and Out of Doors Mart to name two). If you buy a household sealant or caulk for your airstream, be sure it says its safe to use on aluminum. Home Depot and Menards also sell Trempro 635.

Most of you will never have a need for Olympic rivets (shown to the right). These are used to replace outside panels. Very useful in that you do



not need access to the back side of the panel to install regular "buck" rivets (which is how your airstream shell was put together at the factory). They are special in that the rivet has 3 wings that expand to really hold the backside of the panel. If you look closely at the picture, you can see two of the slits that separate the wings. When installed properly with sealant, they do not leak, and almost match the original profile of the factory installed buck rivets. This is accomplished using a special tool called an Olympic Rivet Shaver, which is quite pricey. We have one, so if you ever need to borrow it, let us know! 😊

If you have never seen a pop-rivet tool here a picture of one. It can be used for any of the rivets shown in the pictures.



Where to buy:

The rivet gun and the regular pop-rivets were bought at Ace Hardware. Any home improvement or hardware store will have them.

Be sure to buy all aluminum rivets! Many aluminum rivets have a steel mandrel (the center part used to expand the rivet as you install it with the rivet gun). Steel mandrels rust over time and do not play well in your airstream.

The closed-end rivets I bought at The Rivet Gallery (www.therivetgallery.com). Very prompt shipping service.

I buy Olympic rivets from Vintage Trailer Supply. I get the kind without the little rubber gasket. The gasket is supposed to provide a water-tight seal without using any sealant, but over time, it decays and then you have a loose rivet that leaks.

Hope you found this useful.

Until next time, safe travels.

Chris

Email: 055info@airstreamclub.net