

# Airstream 101

## Introduction

1. What we will cover in this presentation – BASICS
  - a. Now that I have this trailer – what are the basic systems
  - b. Prepare for take-off – Campground selection, route planning, tow vehicle preparation, trailer preparation.
  - c. Take Off – packing the trailer, packing the tow vehicle, securing the inside and outside of the trailer, hitching up.
  - d. Landing – what to expect when you get to the campground, how to park, unhitching/hooks up to power/water/sewer/cable, setting up the interior of the trailer, setting up the outside of the trailer.
  - e. Departure – Plan the route, home or to next site, dumping the black/gray tanks, disconnecting and stowing water, cable and power cords, Securing the interior of the trailer, securing the outside of the trailer, hitching up to the tow vehicle, inspecting the campsite.
  - f. Arriving home – storing the trailer ready for the next trip. What to remove from the inside when storing, securing the outside.

## Basic Systems of an Airstream Trailer

1. Electrical
  - a. 110
    - i. Similar to your home. Use this when you have power provide at the campground. You will have a 20/30 amp or a 50 amp cord connected to your trailer
    - ii. Hooking up to the power pole at your campsite – make sure power at the pole is off, attach to power pole to the trailer before turning on the power. If using a surge protector, or EMS (electrical management system) turn the power pole on, before connecting to the trailer to ensure the power is stable and working then turn off the power, connect to the trailer and turn on the power.
    - iii. You should now have power to the trailer.
  - b. 12 volt system
    - i. Uses the trailer battery or the power converter that converts 110 v power to 12 volts.
  - c. Batteries
    - i. Power the 12 volt system. 30 amp, 50 amp
    - ii. Lead Acid, AGM, lithium
2. Water/Sewer
  - i. Tanks include at least a fresh water and gray water tank, larger trailers also have a black water tank. Know your tank capacity, and monitor.
  - ii. Fresh water tank fill is located on same side of trailer as the electrical hookup. Use a water hose designed for drinking water, not a garden hose. Use of an in-line water filter is recommended. Filling the tank can be tricky for one person. Using a water tank filler (VALterra or Camco) can make it easier. Filling from a source other than a hose can be made easier by carrying a flexible funnel.

- iii. The water pump is used when the trailer is not hooked up to an outside water source. It is pulling water from your fresh water tank, and is turned on by a switch usually located in the kitchen. Turn off the water pump before towing. If the water pump runs when nobody is using water, it can be an indication of air in the lines, a faucet dripping or a leak in the plumbing.
- iv. Dumping the gray/black water tanks
  - 1. Many people wear disposable gloves for this task. Always wash your hands after dumping, regardless of gloved or not – remember, you are dealing with raw sewage....
  - 2. When dumping, pull the gray tank LAST, the soapy water rinses out the sewer hose.
  - 3. The black tank, dumped first, needs the chemical digestants or sanitizers, breaks down and liquifies the waste. No formaldehyde containing chemicals. Use lots of water when flushing, needed to help break down solids. There is a valve to spray the tank after dumping, use this after each dump and let run for 5 minutes. You connect your 'dirty' hose to the water supply (not your fresh water drinking hose), and use the water to operate the sprayer. When finished, leave a few gallons of water in the black tank, add your chemicals, and you are finished. Stow your sewer hose.
- 3. LPG – Propane system
  - a. Each cylinder has its own shutoff valve. Have each valve open when the trailer is in use. An automatic changeover system is in place if you have more than one cylinder – the black switch is pointing to the 'primary' cylinder. If the red indicator is red on the regulator, that tank is empty, move the switch to the other tank which should turn the indicator light to green.
  - b. A propane leak detector is usually found under the fridge, and will sound an alarm if propane is detected. Chirping every 60 seconds indicates the trailer batteries are low, or the detector has expired after several years of use.
- 4. Heating/AC/Hot Water Heater
  - a. The furnace will act as your gas furnace at home, using propane as the gas source. The fan will use either battery power, or shore power if you are hooked to power. The controls are usually on a box mounted on the wall.
  - a. Air conditioning – Most are controlled by the same control on the wall that operates the furnace. The A/C is designed to bring the temp to approximately 20\* below the outside temp. There is a small tube located outside the trailer that will collect water if the A/C is used in humid conditions. Some airstreams have the ability to switch the air conditioner to act as a heat pump, or another heat source. This is most efficient if temps outside are above 40°F. You can choose this option on the control panel. The A/C will delay a few minutes before starting, to protect the compressor from 'short cycling'. The AC will only work when plugged into shore power.
- 5. Refrigerator
  - a. Features on refrigerators vary depending upon the size and type. Many will run on either electricity or propane, and either your 12-volt system or 110 when hooked to shore power. A fridge that uses propane needs to be level when running – even if used in electric mode.

- b. Cooling takes a while using a gas fridge, up to 12 hours. Loading the fridge with items that are already cold or frozen will help the process along.
  - c. Some people recommended that your propane tanks are shut off when towing, which means the fridge will not continue to cool. Packing it with ice in both the freezer and fridge will keep it cool enough during travel.
6. Wheels/Tires
    - a. See the Marching On articles about tires.
  7. Braking

### Prepare for Take Off

1. Campground selection
  - a. Sources include: many application options, clubs (Harvest Hosts, Good Sam, your local Airstream club)
  - b. Consider your camping preferences – full hookups important, easy access from highway, remote setting, what activities available, restaurants/grocery stores available.
  - c. Local, County, State and National Parks are a good source
2. Route selection – using a route planning app (RV Trip Wizard...others designed for truckers or RV users). Consider you are at least 10' high and need a wider turning radius than your car.... Fuel stops, rest stops? Usually, you will need more time to get there, and may need more breaks or shorter travel days.
3. Is your tow vehicle is prepared and in good working order? Tires and brakes are especially important to have in top condition.
4. Trailer preparation is completed – any items you may need are purchased and stowed. Tires are in good condition, propane levels are adequate for your trip, water tank is filled appropriately, black and gray tanks are empty. Battery is charged and working.
5. You are comfortable driving, backing and maneuvering – practice if needed before you leave.

### Take Off

1. Gather campground information, review your route and plan your stops along the way (fuel, rest breaks)
2. Load the trailer with food, clothing, kitchen/bathroom/bedroom linens if they had been removed for washing.
3. Water tank should have some water for use along the road, fill if no water hookup at campground.
4. Review interior of the trailer: Turn on battery shut off switch, all windows/vents closed, lock TV's to the wall, turn off water heater and water pump, check all cabinets and drawers for secure latch, remove anything on walls and countertops that can move/fall, check fridge is latched securely, latch shower door. Close curtains, skylight shades if it is a hot/sunny day.
5. Review exterior of the trailer: awnings are tight and locked down, stabilizers are up, all outside furniture is stowed, vents are closed and latched. **Steps up and locked in place.** All exterior storage latches are closed and locked.
6. Attach removable towing mirrors if using

7. Hitching: Several kinds of hitches/sway or stabilizer bars – read manuals and understand your specific set up. Knowing your Gross Axle Weight Ratings (GAWR), your Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR), the Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR), and the trailer weight, will allow you to adjust as needed.
  - a. Use a system for hooking up the trailer to the tow vehicle – a check list that you tick off as you complete a step, or count how many steps you have completed, assuring you have it all completed.
8. Check trailer lights, remove chocks (if using)

### **Landing**

1. Backing into a site
2. Check trailer level, side to side. Check proximity to hookups if available (water hose, electrical cord, sewer hose will all reach to the campground posts)
3. Adjust level if needed – variety of options available to use for leveling.
4. Chock wheels of trailer.
5. Unhitch trailer, dismount towing mirrors if used.
6. Level trailer front to back, set stabilizer jacks.
7. Stow trailer hitch parts and connect utilities if available.
8. turn on propane
9. Turn on water heater and Switch fridge setting to auto.
10. Open vents/windows or set heat/AC

### **Departure from campsite**

1. Review interior of trailer (Take Off, #4)
2. Dump gray and black tanks – clean and stow hose.
3. Disconnect from all utilities if used – clean and stow cords/hoses etc.
4. Stabilizer jacks up
5. Review exterior of Trailer (Take Off #5)
6. Attach removable towing mirrors if using.
7. Hitching (Take Off #6)
8. Check trailer lights/remove chocks
9. Check campsite – picking up trash, campsite is clean and ready for next camper

### **Arrival at home/storage facility**

1. Empty fridge, turn off if on, wipe out. Depending on how long the fridge was running, some frost may have built up, which will melt after you leave – place a towel under freezer and in freezer to catch drips. Leave fridge door slightly ajar.
2. Empty trailer of any food items not in sealed, hard containers – boxes, bags, soft containers with food invite rodents/insects.
3. Clean bathroom, floors, take home any linens and/or rugs for washing.
4. Wipe down cupboards, cabinets sinks.
5. Stow hitch, stabilizer bars. Lock trailer doors, and hitch if stored at a storage facility.
6. Turn off Battery shut off switch.
7. Promise her you will return soon for another adventure!