



## Fast Facts: The Airstream Club

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The Wally Byam Airstream Club (WBAC), with its rallies, caravans, and programs, profoundly touches the lives of Airstream owners throughout North America.

Most club members own one of the iconic, aluminum, silvery trailers with rounded roof corners, unquestionably the most recognizable travel trailer on the road. These remain Airstreams best-selling RVs. Other club members have large Airstream “Class A” motor homes (although production of these RVs was discontinued in 2006). Today, Airstream also builds and sells smaller, motorized “Class B” RVs, which are basically van conversions built on the Mercedes Sprinter chassis. Owning any RV manufactured by Airstream makes one eligible for membership in WBAC.

Early Airstream owners were avid travelers with a strong desire to see the world, but some were reluctant to travel by themselves. Wally Byam, the man who started the Airstream Company to build travel trailers in 1931, came up a solution to this problem 20 years later. He organizing a group of 50 friends in 1951, leading them on a “caravan” through Central America. Roads were few and far between and often impassable, but the group completed the trip, safe and sound. This first caravan was so successful that another to Mexico was staged in 1952.

During a caravan to eastern Canada in 1955, the Airstreamers decided they should formally organize into a club, calling it the Wally Byam Caravan Club International. This remains the official name of the club, but it is also known today as the Wally Byam Airstream Club and The Airstream Club International. The organization began with 80 charter members but grew to become one of the largest trailer organizations in the world, with about 13,000 members today.

Airstream caravans became even more daring and spectacular. Caravan #8 in 1956, went to Europe and a report on it was featured in the June 1957 National Geographic Magazine. In 1959, Caravan #20, the subject of a documentary film, traveled 9,000 miles, traversing the length of Africa from Capetown to Cairo. And in 1963, Caravan #35 went around the world, taking a full year. In 1985, more history was made when a group of WBCCI members in 11 trailers traveled though China. The same trailers were used eight more times over the subsequent three years for tours of China by other club members.

Caravans remain a principal feature of the club, with dozens organized and conducted each year in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The other common activities are “rallies,” held by local clubs and units at a designated location with places of interest to visit nearby. Local rallies are usually held over a long weekend; Region or International rallies can last a week or more.

In 2019, WBAC is holding its 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual International Rally in Doswell, Va., from July 20 to 27. It is the first time in the club’s history that Virginia was chosen as the location for the annual event. The previous five International Rallies were in Gillette, Wyo.; Farmington, N.M.; Lewisburg, W.Va.; Escanaba, Mich.; and Salem, Ore.

VISIT THE RALLY WEBSITE: <https://doswell.wbcci.net/>