



Wally Byam fulfilled his dream

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Airstream's founder was a born traveler

Some men climb mountains and some men move them. A few do both, and Wallace M. ("Wally") Byam (1896-1962) was a member of that elite minority.

Wally Byam, Airstream's founder, was practically born a traveler. As a youngster, he traveled with his grandfather, who led a mule team in Baker, Ore. Later, he was a shepherd, living in a two-wheeled, covered donkey cart. After finishing high school, Wally signed on with the Merchant Marine, serving three years and working his way up from cabin boy to ship's mate. He then entered Stanford University, earning a law degree in 1923.

But Wally never practiced law. Instead he found work in the rapidly growing advertising business, later owning his own agency. He soon became a publisher, starting several magazines.

One of these, a do-it-yourself publication, had an article describing plans for construction of a travel trailer. When readers complained about the plans, Wally tried them and agreed the plans were no good. He built his own model and then wrote an article describing how to build the improved trailer for less than \$100. He sold plans for \$5.

Soon he was building improved versions of this trailer in the backyard of his Los Angeles home. The Airstream was born.

The trailers sold well and by 1930 he abandoned his other careers to build trailer full-time. The first trailers were built of plywood, but he soon switched to Masonite.

Byam introduced the name "Airstream" in 1934 because the new aerodynamic trailer he was producing cruised down the road "like a stream of air". The new trailer was the "Clipper," with a riveted aluminum body, which would sleep four, carried its own water supply and was outfitted with electric lights.

During World War II, Byam took his experience with aluminum fabricating to the aircraft companies. Then after the war he opened Airstream Trailers Inc. in California. In 1952, demand was so great a second plant was opened at Jackson Center, Ohio.

Byam's attentions to detail and his concern with customer satisfaction were crucial to the company's success. He conducted "bull sessions" with owners and accepted criticism, suggestions and complaints.

He continued his pursuit of the great outdoors by leading caravans of Airstream trailers around the globe, to Mexico, Canada, Europe, the Orient, Africa, Alaska and the Near East.

Byam died in 1962, but his technical and organizational skills had been absorbed by his successors, and the company continued to flourish.

Over 60 percent of all Airstreams ever built—including some built from the original \$5 plans—are still rolling down the highways. Airstreams have survived millions of miles down some of the roughest roads in the world, realizing Wally Byam's dream of freedom to go where others only dream of traveling, and living the Airstream Way of Life!



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