

The Airstream Shuffle

I hail from a family of campers and RVers. A long time ago, my father came home with an early version of today's motorhome that was a cross between a storage building and a bread truck. Nothing in or on that vile beast was made for comfort. It was a truck. I think Daddy liked it because he could drive and smoke while Momma cooked.

Daddy insisted that my brother and I ride on the double bed at the back of the bus. I think that kept us out of his hair. For someone prone to motion sickness, this presented a triple recipe for disaster. Consider that my brother and I were at least thirty feet from the nearest air conditioning vent. Mix the faint odor of the holding tank with a sweet whiff of Daddy's pipe tobacco and add to that a touch of carbon monoxide, the aroma of whatever Momma was burning and the constant motion of the truck and I can tell you, I was not a happy camper. Carsick does not even begin to describe my condition. It took Daddy about an hour and a full holding tank to figure out I was not a good fit for the back seat. I quickly secured myself a place in the shotgun position.

After I got a little older, my parents bought a succession of trailers. By then I was chasing girls and riding the roads and didn't really want to go camping on the weekends. And although Daddy argued that it was perfectly safe, Momma was uncomfortable riding in the trailer, cooking as it was being towed. Though she eventually gave in, her motion sickness and good reason soon prevailed and she abandoned the trailer for the relative comfort of the Oldsmobile 98.

Mother also drew the line when it came to attending club functions and caravans. According to my mother, those events were evidenced by singing around the campfire, ear hairs, wrap around sunglasses, bolo ties and Bermuda shorts with black knee socks and wingtips. Momma commented on the way some of the participants walked on their way to Bingo. "The Airstream Shuffle" she liked to call it.

When their last trailer was sold, Momma thought her shuffling days were over. However, in his late 70s Daddy came home with a huge new motor home. After three or four trips Momma abandoned ship. She told me that she knew she was getting old and that her days were growing short, but that she had no intention in hastening things along by hitting a bridge abutment as my father cat napped at 70 miles per hour.

So I come from camping people...for better or for worse. My wife and I have cussed and discussed this issue and she finally relented. I think she might just have provided the rope with which I could very well hang myself. I have bought myself a motorhome.

I couldn't just buy any motorhome. I had to have something different. I was never attracted to slide out rooms and track lighting in the ceiling...I call it the neo-brothel look. I have, however, always been attracted to quality. In many ways, my '78 GMC Royale fits me to a tee. Much like the car I drive, this motor home is old, but well-built. They have an incredible reputation and following – these bullets on wheels, but after my first few days of ownership, I might just need some convincing.

They drove it in from Texas, the former owners. They are braver souls than I, for on my first excursion - a mere 20 miles to the river and back – I might as well have been at the helm of the Queen Mary. My bride was quietly screaming that my wheels were off the pavement while the side mirrors told another story. I was straddling the yellow line, holding the wheel with a death grip. I put my feet in the coach and my trust in the Lord.

Unlike my first experience in my father's Condor, this thing does have plenty of air conditioning. Trouble is, as soon as we arrived at the river the generator that runs the a/c quit. Left with nothing but dash air, my thoughts were immediately transported back to 1964. In my mind I was once again lying on the back bed suppressing the urge to gag.

Our trip from the river was equally fun. It has been as dry as a power keg around here for 6 weeks, but let me venture out in a 35 year old motorhome with non-functioning windshield wipers and watch it pour. I thought about strapping Elise to the front bumper so she could wipe the windshield with a squeegee, but about that time the torrent stopped.

The next day I burst an air bag and discovered that I have good tires...they're just the wrong size. I have a small propane leak and the generator is still "iffy." Even so, I have a new friend who is an expert on these creatures and he is kind enough to help me along the way. I'm looking forward to the adventure, even if it breaks us in the process.

"Lawdy Mercy" as my grandmother would have said. Lawdy Mercy indeed!

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