



THE CLASSIEST CAR HAULERS COME IN SILVER

By Tom Bentley

Think of your Airstream as a tube of toothpaste. Now think of how nice it might be, as with many modern tubes of toothpaste, if the cap—the rear of your trailer—could pop open and swing wide, with its own retaining arm so that cap doesn't roll away. Wouldn't that be a nifty way to move things in and out of your trailer?

Mike Weber, the special events manager at Harper automobile dealerships in Knoxville, Tennessee didn't just think about it. He oversaw the gutting and careful remodeling of a 1972 Airstream Overlander International so that that end cap pops right open, to pop a promotional vehicle right in.

"We wanted a way to take the showroom out to the people instead of trying to get them to come to the dealership, and thought that an Airstream would be a cool way of showcasing some of our classic cars," says Weber. The dealer carries Porsche, Audi, Jaguar, Infiniti, Acura, VW, and FIAT vehicles, and with their Airstream hauler, they are carried in style.

The trailer not only carries a car, but because it's outfitted with luxurious bench seating, it's also a car showroom. Four local companies in total worked on the outfitting of the rig, including Barillaro Speed Emporium in Knoxville, which did all of the fabrication work, including strengthening the frame to accommodate the weight of the car, structuring the walls to help the rear door keep its form, and building the ramps inside to let the car get up over the wheel wells. They also did all of the main wiring and installed a generator to provide power when the trailer can't use hookup power.

"The rear door seemed to be the most challenging part of the conversion," says Weber. "There was extensive framing to be done in order for the rear door to keep its form while cutting it free. They custom-made huge and heavy-duty hinges to support the weight of the door. This is probably one of the most unique features of the trailer." The rig also has two flat-panel TVs and nine speakers added, for some multimedia kick. But the exterior is all vintage Airstream.

Weber and the folks at Harper are persistent: their first car-hauler candidate, a 31' Airstream, was stolen from behind the building a week after they obtained it. They'd already gutted it to begin the refurbishing. But they feel the 27-footer is actually better suited for the hauling tasks. They'll be taking the Airstream in and around East Tennessee to car shows, festivals, and other events, and intend to venture out of state to future national car club events.

"The trailer can accommodate many of our classic VW, Porsche, and Jaguar cars as well as new FIATs and a select few of our other new cars. Many of our classic cars aren't really roadworthy so it is best to haul them to help keep them in showroom quality," says Weber.


A pop-open Airstream—and particularly one carrying a showroom-ready car—isn't an everyday



OPPOSITE PAGE: The Harper car carrier gets the dealership out of the showroom and on-site at events such as a bike race in Knoxville, TN, in support of a cycling club the dealership sponsors. **ABOVE:** A reinforced frame and custom ramps get the car inside and up over the wheel wells of the Airstream. Local bike racers Mark Peet, Brad Spears, and Brian Mahoney chill out in the tailgate.



sighting. “The trailer is a huge hit wherever we go. Just driving down the interstate we get people that slow up just to look at it,” says Weber. “When people see the Airstream out in front of the dealership or out at events they seem to flock to it to get a closer look. We chose the Airstream because of their almost cult following and fan base. It’s totally different than any other car hauler out there on the road and definitely helps turn heads.”

That’s one cap that could lose a lot more than toothpaste if it popped off, but we’re trusting that this is a trailer that’s got its rear on right, and on to stay. 

A comfortable lounge and viewing bench make this custom Airstream more than just a toy hauler.

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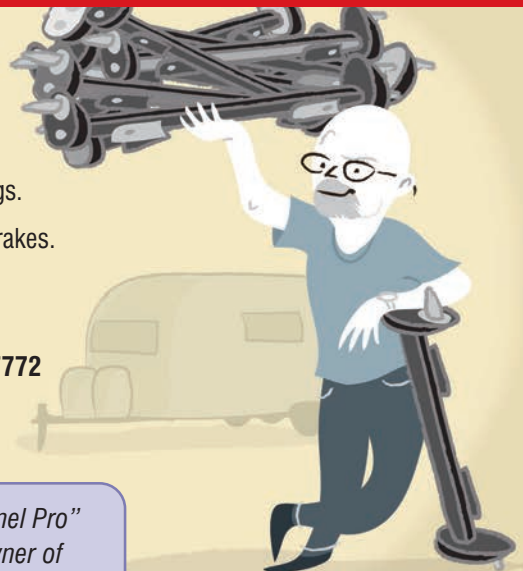
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