Reflecting his Stance in Life

Sure, Jordan Gross was a first-team All-American, made the Super Bowl as a rookie, and was a three-time Pro Bowl selection, all things to be proud of. But what’s he proud of now? For one, recently backing his 25-foot Airstream into a tight parallel parking spot at the Woodford Reserve Distillery in Kentucky with a bunch of bikers looking on.

“I had to back it into a tight space with all these guys on motorcycles watching. When I got out, they gave me a round of applause.” Gross is no stranger to applause, but these days most of it doesn’t come from a football field.

The former offensive tackle for the NFL’s Carolina Panthers retired at 33 last year, still a high-profile player, but he felt it was time. “The NFL is incredibly demanding mentally, physically, and emotionally. It’s hard on your family and your body. It was time for me to get out while I still had memorable thoughts about my experience,” he says.

He wouldn’t change anything about his career, a dream come true, but he sensed his moment. “I felt if I stayed any longer I wasn’t going to go out with everybody singing my praises. My play was starting to suffer, as well as my quality of life. It takes a big piece out of you lining up every Sunday.”
But Gross hasn’t abandoned football entirely: he’s the game-day sideline reporter for the Panthers radio network and the host of a TV show called “This Is Gross,” produced through the Panthers and airing on Time-Warner cable sports. Gross is in charge of the programming, which includes him and another former Panther, Travelle Wharton, discussing the past week’s game, and doing things like taking a camera out to follow a player’s movements before the game, interview stadium tailgaters, or film the kitchen staff in action.

“A variety of things, all light-hearted—we just have a good time. Travelle and I hash it out, but if I say I want us to wear grass skirts, that’s how it would be. There’s a lot of freedom to be creative and be myself,” says Gross.

Freedom and creativity are what drew him to his Airstream as well. He owns a 2011 25” Eddie Bauer model, which he loves because of the Sunbrella seats and the rear hatch. “You can open up the back and put in mountain bikes and dog crates. It’s kind of indestructible for dogs and kids and mud. The rear opens up, with a screen door that slides down. It’s like you’re outside,” he says. Since part of his growing up in a rural community was learning how to tow things, his distillery performance was no big deal. “I grew up pulling boats, and trailers and motorcycle trailers,” he says.

He calls his Panthers work a “heavy part-time job,” which gives him a chance to enjoy traveling in the trailer. He’s nearly pulled it cross-country, driving from Charlotte NC to the Outer Banks and back, and then from Charlotte to his hometown in Fruitland ID. He put another 5,000 miles on it this past summer. Gross spent time in Yellowstone, Jackson Hole WY, parts of Iowa and on a trip with his mom, visited Dollywood, staying at an Airstream-only campground in Tennessee.

Dollywood was an awesome KOA, and that was a huge surprise how nice it was. But the beauty of Airstream travel is that we don’t have a schedule when we are traveling because we’re content about wherever we end up. We know we’re going to be somewhere comfortable, even just being able to find a little pullout. We were in Rawlings, Wyoming and there were no trees anywhere, but we cooked dinner, we played cards, no matter where you go in an Airstream, you’re comfortable and cool,” Gross has done a good deal of travel with his wife Dana and his two kids, son Teddy and daughter Rainey. “I took the kids on a last-minute trip this past weekend, to Kings Mountain State Park in South Carolina. My wife was busy with a tennis tournament so me and the kids and the dog went and stayed overnight and came back in the morning. It’s easy: everything’s ready to go and it’s so comfortable. At night the lighting is so perfect and we get the music going. The kids are raring to go every time.”

Gross loves the easy pace of trailer travel: “The beautiful thing is you can only go so fast. I set the cruise at 65 and hang out in the right lane. In cars, Americans push the speed limit, but when I’m pulling my trailer, I’m right-lane driving and it’s a great thing. My license frame says ‘Life is good, spread good vibes,’ and that’s my mantra now,” he says.

Gross thinks the Airstream itself is a source of good vibes. “They are classic Americana. You think about the station wagon pulling the Airstream on Route 66 in the fifties or sixties. That’s awesome; I’m sad I didn’t get to experience that phase of America. In the trailer we have every comfort and convenience—I can’t call it camping when we have air conditioning and a TV, but I don’t feel it’s a gluttonous piece of equipment. You’re connected to the outdoors rather than with a lot of other RVs, where you pull in, shut the blinds down and don’t go outside again,” he says.

Gross figures that he and his Airstream are going to be making the rounds for a long time. “People are inquisitive about Airstreams—they think they are cool. When you drive it, people give you the thumbs-up. I love the simplicity of the design, and the history of the trailer is outstanding. And I love quality craftsmanship. I try to buy things that I’m not going to have to buy again in five years. Most people that know me think the Airstream is a great reflection of my stance in life,” he says.

If you see a big, smiling guy in a silver Ford Expedition pulling a silver bullet behind, give him a wave. But don’t try to get around him or block his path—he might be retired, but he still knows how to defend his territory.

WHY DO SO MANY AIRSTREAM CUSTOMERS COME FROM NEAR AND FAR?

Check Out the 17 Reasons Our Customers Love Us!

George & Martha Sutton
George M. Sutton RV
541-686-6296
Huge Selection • Great Service • Expert Sales Staff

SUPPORT • BAMBI • FLYING CLOUD • INTERNATIONAL • SERENITY • STERLING • CLASSIC • EDDIE BAUER

2400 West 7th Ave. • Eugene, OR
Mon-Sat: 8:30am - 6:00pm • Sunday after Church

...but if I say I want to wear grass skirts, that’s how it would be.