

TO RUSSIA, WITH LOVE

(AND THERAPEUTIC LIGHT)

By Tom Bentley • Photos by Martin Cranshaw

Airstreams have been around so long, and have achieved such an iconic status in the U.S. that we might forget that other countries haven't had much exposure to the sleek silver carriages. Take Russia, for example: Martin Cranshaw just returned from a September 2010 jaunt through Russia and the Ukraine, where as an account manager for a London-based company that handles PR for Airstream Europe, he shepherded a 2009 Airstream International through a maze of customs, customizations for the trailer itself, and the challenge of having a Russian security guard assigned to him who barely spoke English.

Cranshaw noted the scarcity of anything like an Airstream on his jaunt: "We didn't see one trailer or caravan on the road in Russia or Ukraine, so we were greeted by confused looks almost everywhere we went. The fact that the Airstream looks UFO-like probably reinforced their 'arrived from another planet' thoughts! On event days, the Airstream's exterior and interior was again a source of intrigue—a real crowd puller, which of course is key when you are using one as a promotional vehicle."

The promotional campaign was for Solta Medical, a U.S.-based firm that sells "aesthetic medical devices" that use the application of radiofrequency energy, laser energy and broadband light to help aging and sun-damaged skin, and to treat acne. Solta engaged Samuelson Wylie Associates, the U.K. firm that employs Cranshaw, to help promote their equipment outside the U.S.

This is the second Airstream tour the two companies have collaborated on—the 2009 venture (also called the "Solta Illumination Tour") went through nine European countries, including Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The same hardy International was used in the 2009 tour, covering 6,200 total miles. Cranshaw braved driving snow in Vienna and 80-degree temperatures in Madrid, while keeping the International steady on the road.

The International is a 534, a European model that underwent many modifications in order to house the Solta demonstration equipment. The trailer alterations were performed at Airstream Europe, based in Tebay, Cumbria in the U.K.

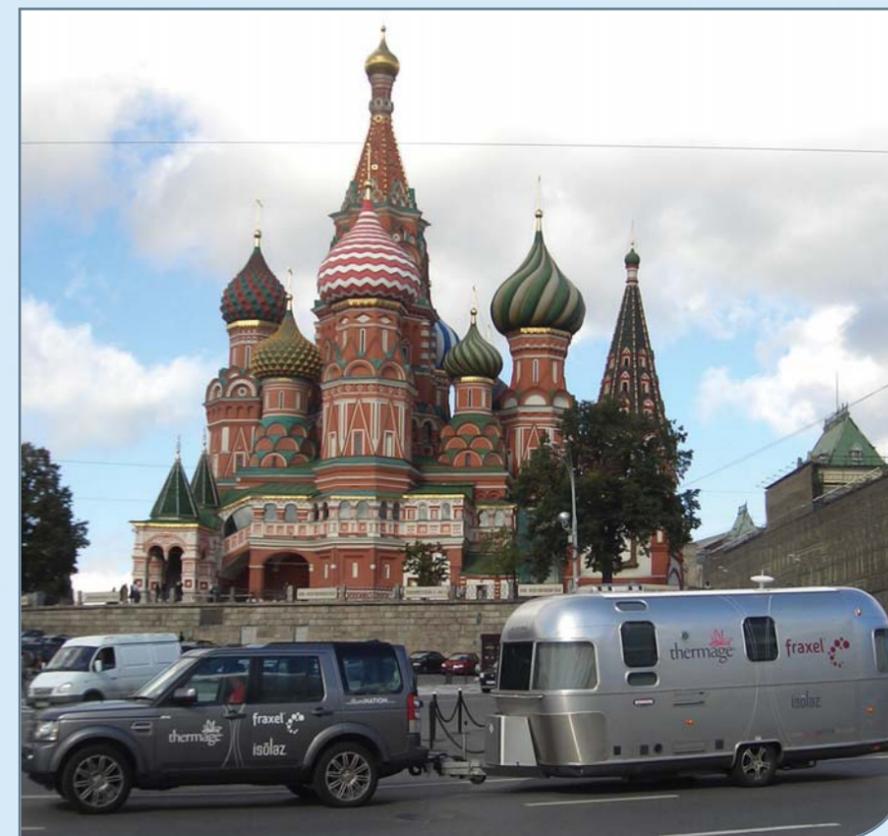
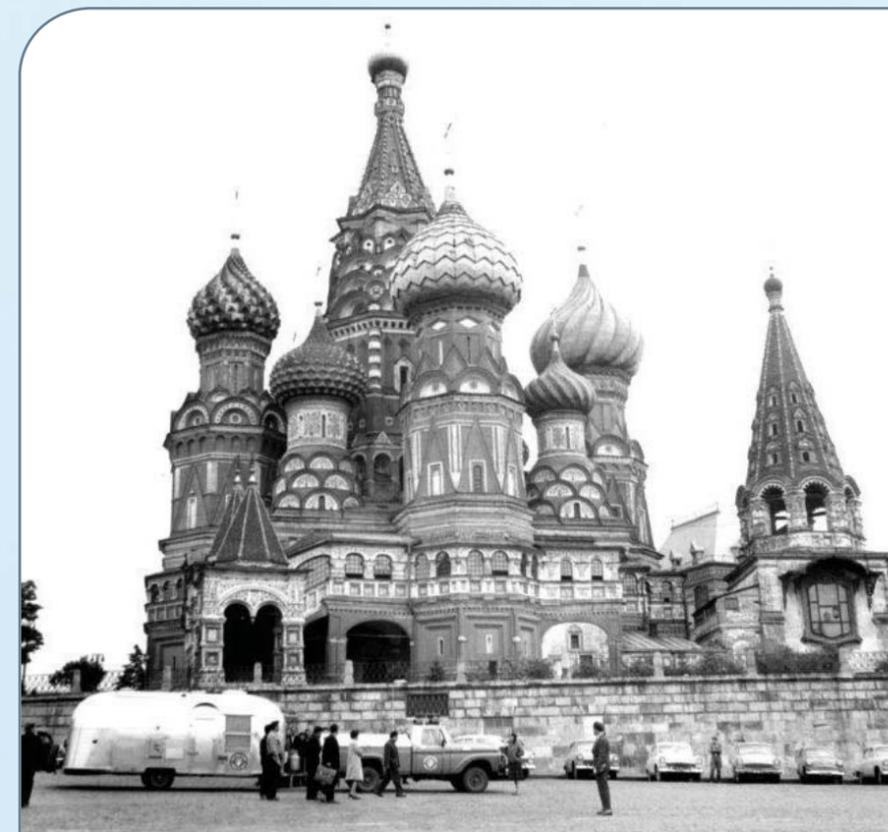
Explains Cranshaw, "The wet [bath]room and galley were replaced with a bespoke [custom] hand basin unit and storage, and opposite a storage cupboard and work surface were put in. The bed was replaced with a padded, adjustable treatment table with space around for Solta equipment. New lighting and electrics throughout were required, but the original table/leather sofa/overhead storage and fridge/TV configuration were retained."

The trailer was driven to "event days" in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and to Kiev in the Ukraine. Representatives from Solta and Ekomir Exports of Moscow (Solta partners who helped with translations) demonstrated the dermatological devices to Russian and Ukrainian physicians and the media. Of course, the logistics of such a venture in Eastern Europe are considerable: Samuelson Wylie had to plan all the routes, procure VISAs, deliver the Airstream via three separate ferries and thousands of miles of road, set up the equipment on the demonstration days, and provide support during the events.

Cranshaw said that the staging of the tour was complex, but ultimately satisfying. "My favorite part of the experience, although not so enjoyable at the time, was successfully negotiating Russian and Ukraine customs. At eight and nine hours respectively, to enter each country, there was a degree of relief all-round when we made it across the borders. We also defied the odds by circumnavigating the Kremlin and parking the Airstream in full view of security outside St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow before running across a six-lane



ABOVE: The Airstream International, set up for a short stay at the Hotel Salute, Kiev, Ukraine. BELOW: Open for an event outside the Belvedere Restaurant, Kiev, Ukraine.



Martin Cranshaw managed to pose the modern EU Airstream in nearly the same place as the 1964 "Wally Byam Around The World Caravan," at the Cathedral of St. Basil on Red Square – a rare feat.



Lining up at the Stockholm ferry terminal in Sweden, on the way to Helsinki, Finland.



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highway to take a few pictures! Many Russian and Ukrainian people involved in the tour didn't believe this was possible."

Cranshaw had the benefit—though also the challenge—of having his own security personnel assigned to him for the tour, which supplied some of the trip's lighter moments. "Sergei's English was about

logistical tangles made for unexpected moments. "Staying outside of the main cities in Russia was very difficult to organize. On the run from Moscow to Kiev, our Russian contacts eventually managed to arrange for us to stay in a place called Brjansk not far from the Ukraine border, and it was described to us as a city where the fox and

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as good as my Russian. When we were first introduced I asked him if he would like to put his bag in the boot, but he turned to me and said very seriously: 'that is not my lunch.' It was like a scene from a Bond film."

Cranshaw grew to appreciate Sergei's presence over the course of their journey. "Each time we stopped to refuel or for a comfort break he scanned the forecourt before instructing me to go about my business as quickly as possible. On one particularly long drive, during which we didn't see a soul for many hours, we came across a pedestrian crossing in the middle of nowhere. It was surrounded by deserted fields and looked so out of place that Sergei and I just looked at each other and burst out laughing."

Cranshaw travelled alone to Russia before being joined by Sergei for their excursion through Russia to Kiev. The colorful sights in Moscow and St. Petersburg were a big contrast to long, uneventful legs of the journey. However, as mentioned, Russian

rabbit say good morning to each other! Without my Russian friend staying up all night guarding the vehicles I think we would have been staring at an empty car park in the morning," said Cranshaw.

One of Cranshaw's colleagues took the Airstream home, bringing it from Kiev via Poland, Germany and the Netherlands, where it was ferried back to the U.K. Its home base is Tebay, Cumbria, in England's northwest. The International (and truly it is) will be kept in dry storage until the next event; the successes of the two previous tours mean that Solta is planning a 2011 tour, dates and location pending.

Since the beds have been removed, no one has the opportunity to sleep in the International on the tours, but the Airstream travel experience is not lost on Martin Cranshaw. "Pitching up in the countryside surrounded by amazing scenery, away from the crowds and being self-contained in a beautiful, cool Airstream is definitely on my 'To do' list," he said. Perhaps Sergei will be available for guard duty too. ●●●