



There are four major ways to maintain and use a vintage Airstream trailer: preservation, restoration, refurbishment and modernization. The criteria for choosing among these four approaches depends first on the trailer, and second on the Airstream lifestyle you choose.

Preservation is maintaining the trailer in its original condition with minimal repairs necessary to keep it operable, safe and road worthy.

Restoration is repairing and rebuilding the trailer and its original components to return the trailer to as-new condition when first built.

Refurbishment is replacing trailer components and features with ones of similar or better function from the same period or era of manufacture without strict adherence to originality.

Modernization is replacing the trailer's original design with a different design incorporating newer appliances, fabrics and features. Modernization can invoke a past, present or future period of time, but basically encompasses a clean slate rebuild of a gutted trailer.

Keeping the Time Capsule

Preserved trailers are time capsules that instantly transport someone to the trailer's era upon entering. Trailer candidates for preservation will be trailers of any vintage era (1934 to 1979) in good or better original condition. It will be easier to find and live with a later-model vintage trailer than an older one because there are more late vintage trailers than old ones and, as a class, newer trailers can be expected to be in better condition and have more amenities than older ones.

Preserved trailers may show wear and tear from ordinary use and may include a few minor alterations by former owners, but no major modifications or updates will have been made to the trailer. Replacing components that wear out, like tires and light bulbs, is part of trailer maintenance consis-

tent with preservation.

Preservationists must adapt themselves to the trailer and not vice versa. In a contest of wills, the trailer always wins. You must be content with existing trailer functionality. You can supplement the trailer to make camping more enjoyable, but you cannot permanently improve or upgrade it. Modern safety features such as turn signals and tail lights can be added to a preserved trailer in a non-permanent manner. The older the trailer, the more challenging preservation becomes both mechanically and stylistically.

Any major design change or improvement swings the renewal needle from restoration towards refurbishment.

Restoring - The Hardest Path of All

Trailers needing major repairs to become operational can be either restored or refurbished. The difference boils down to your access to original materials and repair parts, and the level of dedication you have to bringing the trailer back to its original factory new condition.

A full restoration requires replacing the worn interior fabrics with identical fabrics which may be impossible to find, so there is some leeway in using period appropriate fabrics on interior soft goods. If the refrigerator dies, it must be repaired in a restoration but can be replaced in a refurbishment.

Any major design change or improvement swings the renewal needle from restoration towards refurbishment. Given the limited access to original trailer goods, particularly soft goods, most trailer renewals will be refurbishments instead of restorations.

A fully restored Airstream under my definition is the rarest Airstream of

all. Preserving an Airstream is easy by comparison because it involves far less effort and a subservient will.

Restorers must have willpower equal to that of the trailer in their hunt for original material and parts or the best possible equivalents. Restoration requires a compulsive dedication to renewing the trailer to factory original condition without deviation. This is a path to happiness for the obsessive among us.

Refurbishment and Modernization - The Popular Choices

Refurbishers have much more leeway than restorers in renewing trailers, and their will prevails over that of the trailer. They can use fabrics and flooring evocative of, or appropriate to, the trailer's time period. They can alter the interior design and floor plan to suit their camping needs if less than a wholesale makeover. They can use current appliances and fixtures that are better than the originals. They have more freedom to express themselves in renewing their trailer. Most vintage Airstreams that are renewed are refurbished instead of restored, and they probably have the most satisfied owners because the trailer is suited to their needs, and not vice versa.

Modernizers rip it out, tear it up and start all over again. They create a new trailer inside an old shell, typically using the latest appliances, electronics and lighting in the process. The interior design theme can be from any era, past, present or future.

Modernizers fully express themselves in the renewal process, often incorporating vintage Airstream design principles of light weight, best materials, newest technology and maximum efficiency into their trailer renewal. Modernization is a happy path for those whose egos are constrained by a trailer's aluminum shell, for those whose imagination is irrepressible, and for those who seek to create a trailer they think Wally would build today were he alive.