

BUSINESS LIFE

camp, and in such surprisingly spacious beds, that it took them hours to get to sleep. Where were we, you ask? Why, in our driveway, of course. The only sensible place to do a dry—or in this case wet—run of the trailer before really hitting the highway.

About 1 A.M. I awoke, frozen, and realized another piece of vital instruction I hadn't gotten during the handoff was how to work the heating system. I fumbled with a flashlight and the outside gas tanks and finally figured it out. The next morning, however, I learned that I had been too slow: My 2-year-old son, Walker, awoke with a nice head cold. The next blow: Our destination—the dry lakebed of El Mirage to watch the last of the year's speed trials—was shut down because of 35 mph winds.

Instead we braved the ten-mile drive to a waterside park in Newport Beach, Calif. And although a questionable interior aroma grew steadily stronger, the novelty of our temporary home, the gorgeous setting, and our sunset pizza party

FEEDBACK fortunejoyride@hotmail.com



THE AGE OF AIRSTREAM
J.F.K. exits a mobile hospital in 1961; parked in Red Square in 1960; and setting a speed record with a '65 Dodge.



reignited my enthusiasm. We were in back-to-basics mode (albeit with lots of modern conveniences) and enjoying every simple minute of it. We even forgot to test the flat-screen TV.

After a few days the realities of life in

the can eventually crept in (which would happen to me in anything short of a movable Four Seasons), and we ended our journey. I realized that I had initially missed the real point: Airstreams are hot again because they are high-end folk art,

sculptures that represent American pride and skill. In an age where people at the pointy end of the earning curve are starting to scale back on all that is big and wasteful, Airstreams are authentic statements about the simple life without sacrificing looks or comfort—especially when you customize them (see box). To that point, 40% (and growing) of today's Airstream buyers are “design aficionados” who see Airstreams as cool retro collectibles. They use them in new ways, from mobile architecture and fashion statement to guest house. (Tony furniture supplier Design Within Reach now offers an incredibly chic 16-footer.)

I just hope that Airstream can bridge all its different customers and remain faithful to the details (bring back the sunburst!). As is true with many longtime brands, the loyalists have kept it alive—but it is the new blood who will make or break the future. **F**

MY PLEA TO ALAN MULALLY

In which the author begs Ford's CEO to produce the Ford Airstream.

DEAR ALAN: I am writing to you because I recently had the opportunity to spend an afternoon with your advanced-design team and their brilliant Ford Airstream hybrid hydrogen fuel-cell concept that you unveiled in Detroit. I was once again struck by its back-to-the-future interpretation of Airstream's iconic shell, its clever solutions for entertainment and comfort, and its swish yet simple interior. You may agree those superlatives are not usually put together for any

current family mover from Ford. The Ford Airstream concept actually achieved something that I honestly thought would never be possible: It made me desire what is essentially a minivan. If it can win over a family-vehicle skeptic like me, imagine how easy it will be to conquer buyers who already want such a thing—even with a simple gas engine or hybrid system. But you must already know this. So when will you announce production? —Sincerely, Sue

HIGH CONCEPT
Ford's appealing Airstream van

