

Airstream's New

# "Safari Sport"

By Rich Luhr

## Slimmer and lighter for the new Airstreamer

**If you're reading this magazine because you'd like to own a NEW Airstream "someday" and are wishing Airstreams were smaller, lighter, and less expensive, your day has come.** Reaching back through several decades of product designs for the best ideas of its past, Airstream has launched the "Safari Sport" series, and it is aimed squarely at you.

Initially coming in 17 and 22 foot lengths, this sweet new series looks sleek as an otter. The bodies are European width, meaning no more than 7.5 feet on the outside. (That compares to current production models that run either eight or 8.5 feet externally.)

And they are light – really light. Where the 2007 Safari trailers started at a 4,500 GVWR (Gross Vehicle Weight Rating), the 2008 Safari Sport comes in as low as 3,500 GVWR. According to Bruce Bannister, Director of Product Development and Engineering, Airstream hasn't made a trailer in these lengths at such light weight since the Caravelle model of 1981. The 17-foot Safari Sport can easily be towed by a smaller SUV or minivan powered by a V6.

That's no accident. To cut weight, Airstream engaged in a strenuous design exercise in which virtually every component of the trailer was reviewed. "We were ruthless ... going piece by piece, system by system, and making all configuration decisions to deliver our goals," says Bannister.

A major goal of the re-design was to make a trailer that could be towed by the huge number of small SUVs and minivans on the road today. According to Bannister, new buyers often already own these vehicles when they go Airstream shopping. New buyers are becoming a very important part of Airstream's customer base, comprising an unprecedented 27% of buyers in 2006.

Many of the weight-saving changes and new materials are invisible to the casual eye. But experienced Airstream owners will note that the rear bumper and the frosted glass entry window have disappeared from the Safari Sport. The awning and air conditioner have become options, and the stone guards have been replaced by invisible "Coach Guard Wrap Protector Film." The result is a streamlined shell reminiscent of the clean, uncluttered look of late 1960s Airstreams.

The 17-foot Safari Sport harkens back to the late 1960s and early 1970's Caravels, but with modern improvements. It sleeps two, and it's



2008 Airstream Safari Sport - 22-foot model

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The long dinette of the 22-foot Safari Sport seats four comfortably and the lack of permanent beds gives a spacious feeling in a small space. Photo shows the optional convection microwave.





positioned as a convenient little weekender that's easy for first-timers to handle. A huge closet and drawers under the front L-lounge give plenty of storage space for a trailer of this size.

The little Safari Sport shares a rear bath design with its big sister, the 22-foot Safari Sport. This bath extends across the back of the trailer and offers a roomy and functional shower and plenty of elbow room at the vanity. It's reminiscent of 1970s Airstream and Argosy rear baths but much better laid out.

The 22 footer is a four-sleeper that can also go just about anywhere thanks to its nimble length. Surprisingly in an era when most Airstreams have tandem axles, the 22-foot Airstream is a single-axle model (another nod to its light weight and European slimness). The floorplan in the 22-footer is a rear-entry like the popular 25FB and 27FB floorplans, but the resemblance ends there. Walking into this trailer reveals a spacious, inviting interior in a relatively small space. It has no permanent beds, but instead a huge dinette and sofa that convert to beds to sleep four.

"Designing for a younger 'active weekender' audience and usage pattern led us to all kinds of changes, including the choice of convertible beds, which are great for this type of unit," says Bannister. By comparison, the existing Safari and Safari SE models offer a step up to permanent beds, greater widths and lengths, more amenities, features, and options, but with higher price and weight.

The re-designed Safari Sport pulls from the past and gives us some hints of the future. Inside, 1970s Airstream owners will recognize the overhead cabinets instantly. Even though the tambour doors are now silvered instead of wood-grained, there's no mistaking that classic roll-up door design. In a compact unit like the Safari Sport, their appeal over conventional doors is immediately obvious – they can be opened or closed without intrusion into the interior space.

On the other hand, owners of late-model Airstream B-vans and observers of Euro-style RVs will recognize the range, sink and oven by Italian manufacturer SMEV. Airstream is pioneering the use of the compact SMEV oven – a US first. These appliances not only cut weight but the range and oven are highly efficient on propane.

Despite being lighter, the Safari Sport series does retain a lot of the expected Airstream amenities, such as an aluminum underbelly

wrap, torsion axles, a full-height dry bath, powered roof vent, outside storage, MP3 player or satellite radio input to the stereo system, full-size spare, an outside shower, directional TV antenna, stabilizers, alloy wheels, and LED taillights. The two-way fridge is either three or four cubic feet depending on the trailer length.

The factor that will really bring a smile to the face of new buyers is the price. The 17 footer comes in under \$30,000, making it by far the lightest and most affordable fully equipped Airstream on the lot. It's still a premium product compared to "white box" RVs, but offered at

a great price for people who are ready to step up to an Airstream for the first time.

Optional equipment for the Safari Sport include the Zip-Dee patio awning and the electronic toys: the convection microwave, a low profile rooftop air conditioner, and a TV/DVD combination unit installed on an articulating arm. Four interior décor options are available: Oatmeal, Kiwi, Stratus, and Sharkskin. The new Safari Sport series should be available through Airstream dealers starting late Summer 2007. ●●●



LEFT: Cooktop and sink by Italian manufacturer SMEV give the interior a European look and close down for added counter space. ABOVE: A roomy rear bath with new ABS plastic shower is a big feature of both Safari Sport models. BELOW: The front L-lounge and exterior of the 17 foot model.



## 2008 Airstream Safari Sport

### 17-foot model

Dry weight: 2,799 lbs before options  
 GWVR: 3,500  
 Manufacturer's Suggested Retail: \$29,985

### 22-foot rear-door model

Dry weight: 3,400 lbs (est'd) before options  
 GWVR: 4,000  
 Manufacturer's Suggested Retail: \$34,965



Specifications were accurate at press time, but are subject to change. Check with any Airstream dealer advertising in this magazine for actual capacities and specs.