



Airstream Tech Help Group

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This group, part of the WBCCI Technical Standing Committee, has been established to help the membership with any of their technical RV problems. Examples of questions that might be of interest to many members will be published in the *Blue Beret*. We will respond directly to you, in response to your email or letter describing a problem you are having. We hope you will find this new service of value in the care and feeding of your RV. You may contact us as follows: techhelp@wbcci.org or by mail: Howard Lefkowitz, 11508 Colt Terrace, Silver Spring, MD 20902

Trailer Step Screws Keep Breaking

Question 1: The screws on my steps keep breaking. They are special units with shoulders and the top left screw has broken four times. Why is this happening? What can I do about it?

Question 2: I keep losing screws from my steps especially on a caravan. How can I fix this?

Answer: Over the years the trailer vibration and weight of the steps tends to loosen the screws and cause wear to the step threads. Eventually the screws get loose, and with worn step threads, the screw can tilt. This puts a large side force on the screws and could cause them to break. Sometimes the screws get so loose they just fall out while you are on the road. The answer is to make sure the screws are always tight even when the step threads are worn. Thoroughly clean the screw and the step threads and then apply blue Loctite to the screw threads prior to assembly. There are several grades of Loctite, with the blue being removable with hand tools. Do not use the red version as it requires very high heat to remove the screw. Tighten the screws and allow the Loctite to dry for 24 hours. Do this to all of the screws and step threads, being sure you thoroughly clean them, prior to the Loctite application. You can use WD-40 to clean them just let it dry thoroughly before re-assembly.

Howard

Can I Operate the Converter Without the Batteries Present

Question: I have a 1998 Airstream 31' Excella trailer. I store the trailer in an attached, heated garage during the winter. While the trailer is being stored I remove the batteries and put them on a "Battery Minder."

My question is: Can I connect the unit to 110 volt shore power, turn on the converter and have power in the unit, so I can use the lights with the batteries removed from the trailer?

I have received conflicting answers on this question from Airstream Tech Support and an Airstream Dealers technician.

I would appreciate it if you could resolve this for me.

Answer: Both could be correct because it depends on which converter you have in your rig. As an example:

14.6. MYTH: Test an alternator by disconnecting the battery with the engine running.

False! A battery acts like a voltage stabilizer or filter to the pulsating DC produced by the alternator. Disconnecting a battery while the engine is running could **destroy** the sensitive electronic components connected to the electrical system such as the emission computer, radio, audio system, cell phone, alarm system, etc., or the charging system, especially with internal voltage regulators, because the peak voltage can rise to 40 volts or more. In the 1970s, removing a battery terminal was an accepted practice to test charging systems of that era. **That is not the case**

today. Static electricity and spikes from connecting and disconnecting batteries or test equipment could also damage sensitive electronic components.

Some early converters were based on using a ferroresonant transformer, which required the battery load to keep the voltages at a reasonable value. In this case if you remove the batteries, you could damage other components in the rig. Some converters are designed and filtered so there are no transient AC voltages on the output and they are completely regulated to provide no more than 14 volts with or without the battery load. For these you could run the converter with no batteries present without damaging any other components. When you put voltage on the 12 volt supply line, it is going to feed into lots of electronics in the rig and that is the concern.

This is not a simple yes or no answer because the penalties can be severe. The converter manufacturer has the answer. Airstream used a number of different kinds of converters over the years. Or, if you purchased a used RV, the converter may have been replaced so check with the manufacturer of your RV to get the right answer.

Howard

Want to Restore a Vintage Unit

Question: I have located an old Airstream in Michigan, which was used as a temporary shelter for outdoor activities on a year round basis. It is 18-20 feet long with a single axle, leaf springs and six bolt rim wheel hubs.

Is there anywhere on the running gear where the manufacturers name is

stamped? I need a source for the electric brake components.

The trailer is probably in the 2500 to 3000 pound range and I need a recommended tire size and source for the rims.

To tow the unit home will require that it be brought back to a safe running condition by a qualified repair shop. A second possibility is to rent a lo-boy U-haul trailer and tow it home on the trailer.

Any addresses relating to the axle, hub, brakes, and spring assemblies would be appreciated. I am not aware of the required ball size.

I do not have much free time right now but would appreciate any help so I can get this project finished.

About a year ago the local TV showed three or four Airstream trailers standing vertically alongside a property frontage. I think it was in the mid-west. I tried several sources but came up empty. Have you heard of this display?

Answer: Your trailer is a 50s model, because it has spring suspension. If you don't know the model or year, you can visit <http://www.vintageairstream.com/archives/index.html> to see trailer photos sorted by year and model as well as serial number decoding information.

Axles were probably made by various suppliers in the 50s, but they can be replaced by Dexter if necessary. If it is bent or the spindles are worn where the wheel bearings mount, replace it. A supplier of Dexter axles could easily do the job. The springs and shackles are a more serious concern. Assure that the shackle and pivot bolts are in good condition before towing. I know one case of a spring breaking loose on a newly purchased trailer. It did considerable damage. Check the springs. If any leaf is broken, replace both spring assemblies.

Brakes are best repaired by replacing the loaded backing plates (complete brake assembly). Your local NAPA store should have these or be able to get them. You will need to assure that the wiring from the seven-wire plug to the brakes is functional. Make sure the tail and turn signal lights also work.

Tires were initially 7.00x15's and can be replaced with radials of equivalent size. Tell the tire dealer that the new tires are going on a trailer weighing 3000 pounds. New rims need to fit the stud pattern and tires.

The ball size should be two inches. When the coupler is locked down on the ball, make sure that it can't be raised up

off the ball. If it can, fix or replace the coupler.

These are all the things that you must know function correctly before towing an old trailer for the first time. You want to get home alive and with the same trailer you left with. Any RV service facility should be able to handle all this work or parts of it that you don't do yourself.

If you have questions about axles or replacements, I suggest calling Luke's Maintenance & Repair (970-222-4065). Luke is in Colorado but is always willing to help Airstreamers over the phone.

The Vintage Airstream Club (<http://vintageairstreamclub.com/>) regional representative can provide local contacts. The Region 4 representative is Ken Faber, 2550 Oaklane SW, Wyoming, MI. 49519, Ph. 616-534-8282.

The picture of Airstream trailers standing on end comes from Florida. Photographer Bill Sargent markets a photo. A web search will find him. The owner of the trailers was involved in a code violation court case last year, and I think the court found in his favor.

Best of luck with your project.
Jim Cooper