

# *Buying a Classic Airstream Motorhome!*

This Guide, and checklist is intended to break down the process of inspecting a 1980's through 1990's, Airstream Classic Motorhome.

It is intended as a general guide for potential buyers and 3<sup>rd</sup> party inspectors.  
How to spot the good and bad, on an Airstream Classic Motorhome.

It is based on my own personal experience, and several inspections I have been a part of.

I/We take no responsibility for accuracy, errors or omissions from this guide. The ultimate responsibility lies with the buyer, and we suggest a professional Vehicle Inspector, RV Expert or Mechanic.

It is mainly focused on the Chevy P30 based 20' though 36' versions, although some of the process could be used on earlier Argosy models, the Gillig bus chassis based 370, and also some of the Spartan Chassis Pusher Coaches, and later Aluminum bodied Land Yacht models.

There are 7 sections, to this guide;

- 1/ Research, Prequalification Process, and things to take to the inspection.
- 2/ Visual Inspection Process of Exterior, and repair costs.
- 3/ Visual Inspection of Underside.
- 4/ Visual Inspection of Interior, and repair costs.
- 5/ Inspection of Mechanical/Electrical/House systems, and repair costs.
- 6/ Road test.
- 7/ Assessment.

I use the \$ sign is an approximate reference point on price, at the time of writing, in 2017.  
Please note that this is for parts only, but where I have an idea of fitting costs I have added that as an approximate guide.

\$ is up to \$100	\$k is up to \$1000.
\$\$ is up to \$200\$	\$\$k is up to \$2000
\$\$\$ is up to \$300	\$\$\$k is up to \$3000
\$400 is up to \$400	\$4K is up to \$4000

And so on.  
Plus + is more than.  
Minus - Is less than, or up to.  
Make sense?

## **Section 1:**

I am going to assume the following:

A/ You know what an Airstream Classic Motorhome looks like, and why you want one.

B/ You have been trolling, or active in the Forums, and you know approximately what model, and length, suits your budget, family, and lifestyle

C/ You are prepared for owning a 25+ year old Motorhome, and have the skills, and/or finances to support it. The joke in the forums is that the purchase price is just the down payment!

D/ You have identified an example, or several examples, and are ready to move.

### **Title, Ownership, and Pre-Inspection Qualification.**

This is normally done via Email, to start with, but I ALWAYS want to speak to the seller by phone.

Avoidant seller, low prices, deposits in advance, or delivery only, are HUGE red flags... walk away, quickly, or run!

If it sound too good to be true, it normally is!

Clear?

Ok, here we go.

Does the seller have title, and is the title in their name, and free and clear?

Is there a lien, or any impediment to sell?

Which model is it?

What engine/transmission does it have?

How long have they owned it?

Mileage when they bought it, and now?

Who did they buy it from, and do they know, or have any history from the previous owner?

Do they have service history, receipts, or notes on work done, and when?

When did they last use it?

Where, and how, is the Motorhome stored usually?

Any known issues, damage, or modifications/upgrades?

What works, and what does not (write it down!)?

Why are they selling it?

Confirm the asking price?

Are there other parties coming to look, and if so, when?

I like to ask what their timing is, and what the bottom line is!

Assuming all the pictures, and answers, are acceptable, and the seller seems honest, it's time to see the Motorhome in person.

I suggest you print out this checklist, put it on a clip board, and note down, or tick each section as you go:

Things to take:

Notepad, and this Guide, Camera with enough memory and batteries(Or Phone), Flashlight, Digital Multi Meter(DMM), 120v plug circuit tester, Step ladder(Folding, freestanding, at least 5'), Movers Blanket, or Mechanics Creeper, to lay on, and one of the best to have, is another pair of eyes!

### **First Impressions are IMPORTANT!**

Upon arrival, stand and look at the Motorhome.

Does it look like the photographs you saw, and match the description?

It will tell you how honest the seller has been up to that moment.

Assuming you didn't just get back in your vehicle, and leave...

I would ask to see the Title, and proof of ownership, right there.

Make a note of the VIN number on it, as your first line item below this.

VIN# on Title:

## **Section 2:**

### **Exterior Checks.**

Take a deep breath!

Very first thing is to open the “Hood” on the front, with the two turnbuckles, and lower it gently. On the Passenger side frame upright, facing the front, there should be a small strip/plate, with the Chassis VIN number (Common for 80’s units to be 17 digits, starting 1GBJP37.....). On the inside of that same upright, should be a larger Airstream Production Number, hand stamped, on an Aluminum plate (Common is also 17 digits start 1A....). Write them both down.

VIN #

Airstream Production #

The VIN on the plate, and title should match!

The Airstream # is just a sequential production number, but is worth knowing.

So, shut the hood and take a step back, it’s time to start.

I would divide the Motorhome into 9 parts mentally:

1/ Front.

2/ RH Front Quarter.

3/ RH Bodyside.

4/ Entrance Door.

5/ RH Rear Quarter.

6/ Rear.

7/ LH Rear Quarter.

8/ LH Bodyside,

9/ LH Front Quarter.

Walk the whole exterior slowly at ground level, clockwise is my choice, starting at the front.

Visually scan the bodywork from the lower edge, to above the window line.

When I say “Note”, I mean write down, and/or photograph each section. You would be wise to know, or have a record of this for later.

Note:

Aluminum Panels, for clear coat condition (or polished), dents, damage, obvious repairs, patches, corrosion, missing rivets, unusual rivets (\$ to \$10K+). Front, Cockpit sides, Front roof, rear cap, sides, and lowers, are press or stretch formed.

Aluminum panel paint condition (where applicable), remembering that this is the only way damage can be hidden (\$ to \$4k).

Body Moldings, mid and lower, if present. Molding trim, or bump strips (\$ to \$\$\$ per piece if available)

Front Grill, and Headlamp castings, for missing parts, damage, paint, and condition.

Badges, and Airstream letters, for presence and condition.

Front and rear bumpers, over riders, and rubbers, for damage, cracks, and repairs (\$ to \$1000)

Wrap damage or deterioration. These are the plastic parts between bumper and bodywork (up to \$500 per piece)

Wrap Paint condition (\$ to \$\$)

Windows, Doors, and compartment doors condition, fit, and finish.

Glass Condition. Look for cracks, chips, or fogging of the windshields, windows, and condition of seals, and tap to be sure its glass, not Lexan (Estimate \$900 per side for Windshield glass, plus \$400 for seal, Fixed front cockpit side glasses, and rear curved glasses are NLA new, side windows or curved glass is \$\$ to \$1k each)!

Windshield wipers arms, blades, washers, and pipes are present, and condition (\$ to \$\$).

Condition of Headlights, Tail lights, side markers, and reflectors (\$ to \$500).

### **General Compartment check.**

Unlock and pull out each storage compartment.

If they lock, and are keys present?

Check for smooth opening.

Check compartment floors for leaks, rust, and holes.

### **Battery Compartment.**

Should be minimum of 3x batteries. 1 Chassis Battery (\$), and 2 House Batteries (Deep Cycle/Marine \$\$ to \$500).

Check for rust in the floor.

Check battery condition visually and with DMM. 12.6V minimum.

Check for Battery Isolators.

### **Genset Compartment.**

Note model, and size. OEM was Kohler, and Onan

Up to 31' normally 4000/5000w, 32.5' up is normally 6000/7000w.

Note Hour meter reading.

Check for oil leaks, gas leaks or smell, and bad wiring.

Look at the condition of the fuel lines/Pipes if visible.

Functional tests later.

### **LPG Compartment:**

Condition of LPG tank, rust, dings, dents, or damage.

Condition of any rubber pipes and fittings, smell of gas etc.

### **Refrigerator vent compartment:**

Rust, leaks, yellow stains, gas, or ammonia smells.

### **Hot water Heater Compartment:**

Rust, corrosion, leaks, gas smell, etc.

### **Water/electrical reel compartment:**

Presence, and condition of water and electrical reels, and black tank hose storage.

### **Roof.**

Get on your step ladder, and look at the roof, one section at a time (Don't lean it on the bodywork!).

Note:

Hail, dents, or other panel damage (\$ to \$5k approx.).

Condition of AC units, and covers (\$ for cover to \$2k for replacement AC, each).

Leaks, or stains from AC units running down shell (\$ to \$\$).

Condition of vent covers (\$ for cover to \$500 for replacement unit).

Sealant around apertures, fans, and vents (\$ for sealant).

Presence, and condition of: Clearance/running lights (\$), Remote Roof Spot lamp (\$ to \$1k), and

Rear view camera (\$ to \$500).

## **Section 3:**

### **Underside Inspection:**

Again, I suggest you divide the Motorhome into manageable sections.

Grab your Creeper/Blanket, and flashlight.

I do not suggest you get under the Motorhome unless it is safely blocked, and jack stands are used.

### **Radiators, Engine, and transmission, and Exhaust:**

Note:

Leaks, drips, or stains from: Engine Oil, coolant, Transmission fluid, exhaust, etc.

New components.

### **Front Brakes, Steering, and Suspension:**

Note:

Leaks or stains, Flexible brake pipe condition, brake caliper, pad, and rotor condition.

Evidence of recent greasing.

Any new looking components (Plus is Blue, Supersteer steering components).

Condition of shock absorbers, and steering damper, bushings, and joints.

Presence and condition of the front spring helper airbags (\$\$).

### **Rear Drive Axle and Suspension:**

Note:

Leaks or stains from axle housing. Condition of Airbags. Cracks, hissing, pipe condition (\$\$\$\$).

**Tag Axle(Where applicable):**

Sighting down body, note any obvious lean or camber in the tag axle wheel acceptable is + or - 0.25deg, replacement is \$ for bearings to \$4000+ for the complete axle)

**General Underbody and Frame:**

Cracks, Rust, damage, bends, new components, dangling, or poorly secured, hoses, pipes or wiring. Damage to underside of flooring plate which is an aluminum sheet. Look for dripping or stains too, that sometimes signify leaks into the interior, or from water tank or plumbing issues.

**Rear frame, Gas tank, and tow bar:**

Especially check rear overhang frame for bending, and road damage, due to road strike. Pay particular attention to the rear mounted gas tank for road rash, leaks and pipework issues. Weak spot is known to be where the fuel filler pipe passed thru the chassis rail on the driver's side.

Look for, and at the Tank protection bars, if fitted, and any casters or frame mounted wheels/skids for damage or wear.

Look at the tow bar, for bending or upgrades.

**Wheels and Tires:**

Note each wheel type, and condition (Steels with SS covers were Standard, or Alcoa Style alloy (\$\$ for steel, to \$500 Alloy each). Note, Drive axle inner wheel may be steel regardless of outers. Note condition of Valves and Valve stems, and if the valve for the inner dual wheel is visible and accessible.

Balance weights visible, or beads/Centramatic balanced?

Note each tire for the following:

Size (Normally 8R 19.5 or 225/70 R19.5 acceptable).

Condition, and wear pattern. Bulging, splits, crazing, cracks.

Write down DOT date stamp for each tire.

It will be the last 4 digits of the number on the tire (\*\*\*\*3712 would be Week 37 of 2012, and only 3 digits means it was made before 2000 meaning its junk!)

Remember 6 years maximum age (\$\$ to \$500 each x 6 or 8!).

**Leveling Jacks (If applicable):**

Note: Presence of all 4, Condition, position, leaks, rust, or damage (\$ to \$1000)

**Black and Grey Tanks:**

Note: Condition, Repairs, Leaks, Cracks, smells, or drips, from the tanks, or any pipework to, or from them (\$ to \$1000).

## **SECTION 4:**

### **Interior Visual inspection:**

Note:

Entrance door opens/locks with the Key?

Deadlock in the handle on the rear side of the entrance door locks/unlocks with a key?

Does the door open and close well, and latch close easily?

Rotate the door fully open and latch it with the body mounted open position latch.

Condition of entrance door, inner surface, and privacy shade?

Inner door/fly screen present, and opens/closes separately.

Did the step open or extended to greet you?

Might be vacuum or electrically powered, single or dual step.

Condition of entrance area trough?

Step up inside the Motorhome.

First impressions time again!

Use your nose.

Musty, moldy, or overpowering air freshener smell?

Use your eyes, and sweep what you can see.

Neat, clean, and tidy, or dirty, full of junk/personal effects?

Walk to the Cockpit.

Note condition:

All cockpit windows from the inside, as cracks, chips, and leaks, are easier to see.

Dash top, Dash instrument panel, passenger fascia, side trims, Seats, carpets, cockpit curtains, sun visors, cockpit roof, Dog house (engine cover).

Lift carpet where possible, below the side windows both sides and look for stains, dampness, or water damage (\$ to \$1000).

Examine floor area ahead of passenger seat if possible for leaks from windows, or HVAC unit.

Working backward, examine lounge area.

Seating surfaces, configuration, flooring, walls, and windows, Blinds, etc.

Lift jack knife sofa and look under for shell leaks, Auxiliary heater condition, and storage.

TV, Entertainment setup, Antenna, etc.

Look up at roof area, cabinetry, lighting, front AC unit and/or vent.

Moving rearward again, to kitchen/Dinette area.

Flooring, cabinets, and worktop surfaces, sink, and facet.

NuTone unit or attachments?



Cooktop/Range condition and model?  
Microwave model, and condition?  
Refrigerator model, condition? Icemaker?  
Open the door and smell for mold, or ammonia (\$ to \$3000+)  
Cupboards and cabinets, looking for condition, leaks, etc.  
Dinette area for condition, leaks.

Moving rearward to Bathroom area.  
Shower cubical, fixtures, door/curtain  
Toilet, sink, facet, medicine cabinet.  
Walls, flooring, ceiling, AC unit and/or vent.

Moving rearward to Bedroom area.  
Mattress, cabinets, closets, walls, flooring, windows, curtains/blinds, ceiling.  
Lift/remove mattress and plywood support.  
Fresh water tank area is below. Should be large (60/80 gallons).  
Look/Smell for leaks, mold, water pump and pipes.  
Grey water piping is original, old and brittle, and Blue/red is PEX replacement.  
Smell for Gasoline (leaks or failing filler pipe from fuel filler)