

# Land Yacht

Voyages to Utah and Nova Scotia, from home port in Michigan, have racked up over 10,000 miles on the renovated Land Yacht.

*Photos and story by owner Matt Huff*

I remember when "Land Yacht" was an insult. We New Jersey boys were enthralled by nimble little cars from neighboring Britain and appalled by lumbering giant cars from distant Detroit. We dissed and dismissed as "land yachts" cars that spanned more than ten feet, weighed more than one ton, and displayed more chrome than an MG Midget did paint.

But later in life, I became enthralled by a different kind of Land Yacht – a 1964 Airstream TradeWind – and would even adopt its Land Yacht sales slogan as the design muse for the trailer's renovation. I imagine Airstream's chief salesman, Wally Byam, intended "Land Yacht" to inspire dreams of traveling far from one's home port without giving up the comforts of a high-quality home made of wood. That dream inspired our renovation, so we set out to design our dream yacht on wheels.

Yacht interiors want to be made of dark wood, and we wanted mahogany for several reasons. Its grain is so subtle it doesn't compete with the gorgeous reddish-brown color. And its color varies from board to board, an aspect of nature that man-made materials can't match. Mahogany is workable, cutting easily and cleanly, reducing the workload and stress for this amateur furniture maker. In the 1960s, many boats were made of mahogany inside and out because this wood resists rot caused by water, a trait nearly as desirable in Airstream trailers as in Chris Craft runabouts.

Every space counts in a yacht, and if a space can serve two purposes, so much the better. Trailer manufacturers have always made good use of space, as in their dinettes that convert to beds, an original feature in our trailer that we replicated in the renovation. We saved a lot of space by replacing one of the single beds with a bank of doors and





**Facing Page:** A sofa that converts to a double bed allowed the original curbside bunk to be replaced by ample storage and a long counter topped by a TV and audio system.

**Before Pictures:** The layout felt cramped before renovation. Mockups help visualize new layouts, and test for fit and comfort.



drawers that store clothes and tableware as well as hiding the electrical systems; it also tripled the counter space, which had been way too limited in the original design. We redesigned the other single bed into a couch that opens into a double bed; this increased the comfortable seating during waking hours and reduced the need for auxiliary heat during sleeping hours. Judging by floor plans of newer trailers, most customers don't want to set up a bed each night, but our sofa converts quickly and easily, and the huge space savings is worth the minor inconvenience.

Yachts need efficient galley kitchens, and long, thin trailers do too. We didn't change Airstream's original kitchen design very much, but adding a drop-down counter extension made it much easier to prepare meals and to clean up after them. We also fit garbage and recycling bins under this extension to free up storage space in the kitchen cabinet. We removed six inches from the kitchen bulkhead which made the whole interior feel bigger by improving the natural light and circulation.

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Mixed marketing message circa 1964. I'm on board with "Land Yacht," but towed by a bicycle?



Now that the renovation is done, Karen and Matt Huff can enjoy the dinette's final layout.



jumble the next time you dock. Besides deploying the usual tricks like clips, magnets, and bungee cords, we used locking knobs from the yacht industry for all the doors and drawers; the knobs push in to lock which also keeps the knobs out of the traffic lane in a narrow trailer, and they pop out when unlocked which also allows you to see at a glance which drawers need locking before setting out.

To capture the understated luxury of a classic yacht, we designed and built a bathroom vanity that looks like a pedestal sink centered in the rear window. (Bottom left photo) This focal point makes the rest of the trailer seem long and spacious and elegantly symmetrical. This is not, in fact, a pedestal sink at all, which would have wasted too much space in a trailer (as it would in all but the biggest yachts). It is a surface-mounted sink on a cabinet base that incorporates a tapered piece of radiator grille to suggest a pedestal.

Even the less visible bathroom plumbing takes its cues from the yachting world. We chose a composting toilet popular with boaters because it solved some space issues unique to vintage trailers. Trailers built in the 1960s had no gray tanks because gray water could drain directly onto the ground in those days. Using a composting toilet allowed us to eliminate the black tank and to fit a gray tank into its space between the frame rails.

We love our 1964 Airstream Land Yacht for its many traits that make it more like its contemporary British roadsters than the "land yachts" made in Detroit. It is light, agile, honest, simple, and as crudely streamlined as an MGA. And with apologies to Carly Simon, upon entering our Airstream we feel like we are walking onto a yacht.

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