



Visiting the Airstream Factory and Repair Center in Jackson Center Ohio isn't a spur of the moment trip (if you live as far away as we do). My parents live in Columbus Ohio and since our family was due for a visit we looked into how to tour the factory. Turns out it is very easy to do, but not so easy to get to! Jackson Center was about 1 hour and 45 minute trip from Columbus. The last 15 or so miles is on a two lane road straight as an arrow through farmland and tiny towns. Tours start weekdays at 2:00 and no prior reservations or tickets are required. Just show up in time to fill out a half page form. They provide ear and eye protection at no cost. There were about 60 people waiting on the Friday we were there. I was surprised there were two large Amish families touring with us. I was also surprised that only one other family owned an Airstream (a '68). The form is quite clear that photography inside the factory was strictly forbidden with the exception of the banner at the entrance. A cup of rivets are there for souvenirs.



Inside the lobby was a great gift store. It had A LOT of stuff in it (the picture shows only part of it). We purchased a few tshirts and was happy to get a flag for our camping flagpole. They also sold every part you would need to replace something in your Airstream. It was a bit pricey.





It was a short walk through the lot to get to the factory entrance. On the way were two famous Airstreams. I'm sure you will recognize the gold one. The older one was from the 1930s. It was the first trailer built by Wally.





A shot of the interior:



Walking inside the factory was very exciting. Since Friday is a half day for most workers it wasn't very noisy and our ear protection wasn't required. I spoke to a few workers and told them that we still enjoyed our '75 Tradewind and that our family treasures it. You could tell they were very proud of the work they do!





Our tour guide Dan has worked for Airstream since 1958. He was quite the character and full of stories. He told me the air conditioner in my '75 Tradewind "was the best air conditioner Airstream ever put in a trailer". Since that is the only major appliance that worked when I bought our Airstream I believe him!





It was amazing to see how the furniture was built by hand. The flooring gets cut by a “CNC” machine (computer controlled) as does the aluminum for the Airstream both inside and outside. It was interesting to see the holes cut out for the windows, door, and access panels are not completely cut out until after they are ‘curved’ in the jig. Once in the jig two workers rivet the panels onto the frames. The Airstream shells are pushed by hand by just two people to the next step in the assembly. After these steps the shells are lifted onto the steel trailers. The trailers are ready with full suspension, wheels, tanks, wiring, and jack. Then it is on to wiring, insulation, and window/vent installation. Each and every Airstream goes through a 30 minute leak test in a room that simulates a powerful rainstorm. They sure look amazing when they come out of those test rooms. Brand spanking new and shiny! The final stages are installing the furniture and systems. We got to see a few Airstreams headed overseas and how they need to meet different regulations. The interiors of the new Airstreams are simply gorgeous. They look like Manhattan apartments! For the ‘tech’ people the LED lighting and control panels were quite slick. We were welcome to tour the inside of any finished Airstream we wanted to. One that sticks out (I sure wish he would have let me take a photo!) was a “Tommy Bahama” edition that had a liftgate on the rear of the Airstream. It opened up the entire back end and had a built in screen door to keep out the bugs. We saw several “Basecamp” Airstreams that Dan said they couldn’t build fast enough. The factory is currently producing about 90 Airstreams per week.

The tour lasted almost two hours and we passed on the invitation to take a look at the Airstream facility across the street that produced the Mercedes based Airstream RVs. They were amazing to see all lined up in the lot though! We had a great time and it was time well spent. I would certainly consider going again simply to get such a great look at the new models.

