

A FAMILY TAKES FLIGHT IN A CLIPPER

PART ONE

BY BOB THOMPSON & CARL JAMESON AUTHORS OF THE ILLUSTRATED FIELD GUIDE TO VINTAGE TRAILERS

When *Field Guide* co-author Bob Thompson got a call to help with the renovation of a 1953 Silver Streak Clipper, he knew he had to share its story with the readers of *Vintage Camper Trailer* magazine. So, beginning in this issue, he and co-author Carl Jameson will be documenting its renovation into an on-the-road home and office for Michael and Susie McConnell and their two children.

While their part of the story begins with a call to Bob's woodworking company Bobland (madeinbobland.com), the beginning of the story for the McConnells came with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the reality of life in lockdown began to set in, Susie and Michael faced the same challenges as countless other families: home was now an

office, school, and daycare rolled into one. And if their home was to be all those things for the foreseeable future, they thought "why couldn't home be anywhere we want to be?" Such as on the road in a vintage trailer.

The couple found the shell of their to-be abode in southern California in the form of a 1953 Silver Streak Clipper. They had the unique aluminum framework for the interior components fabricated in Long Beach. Then they pulled the trailer to Portland, Oregon to begin the process of repairs, upgrades, building out the interior, and systems work.

The design concept for the trailer is relatively straightforward: keep it as open and spacious as possible inside and do all the living outside. Two long, curved lower cabinet banks will

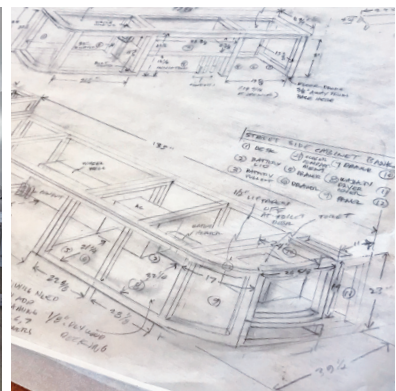
convert to one giant sleeping platform big enough for the whole family. The design envisioned by Susie, owner of Susan Diana Harris Interior Design (susandianaharris.com), is modern and sleek with no visible hardware. Discreetly housed within are the necessities to facilitate life and work off the grid, including a pullout sink, stove, storage, HVAC system, a composting toilet, and a massive battery bank to power Michael's design office in the trailer's aft.

As they simultaneously live in and work on their Clipper, the McConnells are already testing the full-time trailer lifestyle. Follow their trailer renovation adventure with us.

In our next article, we'll interview the McConnells in-depth and share some updates from the road.

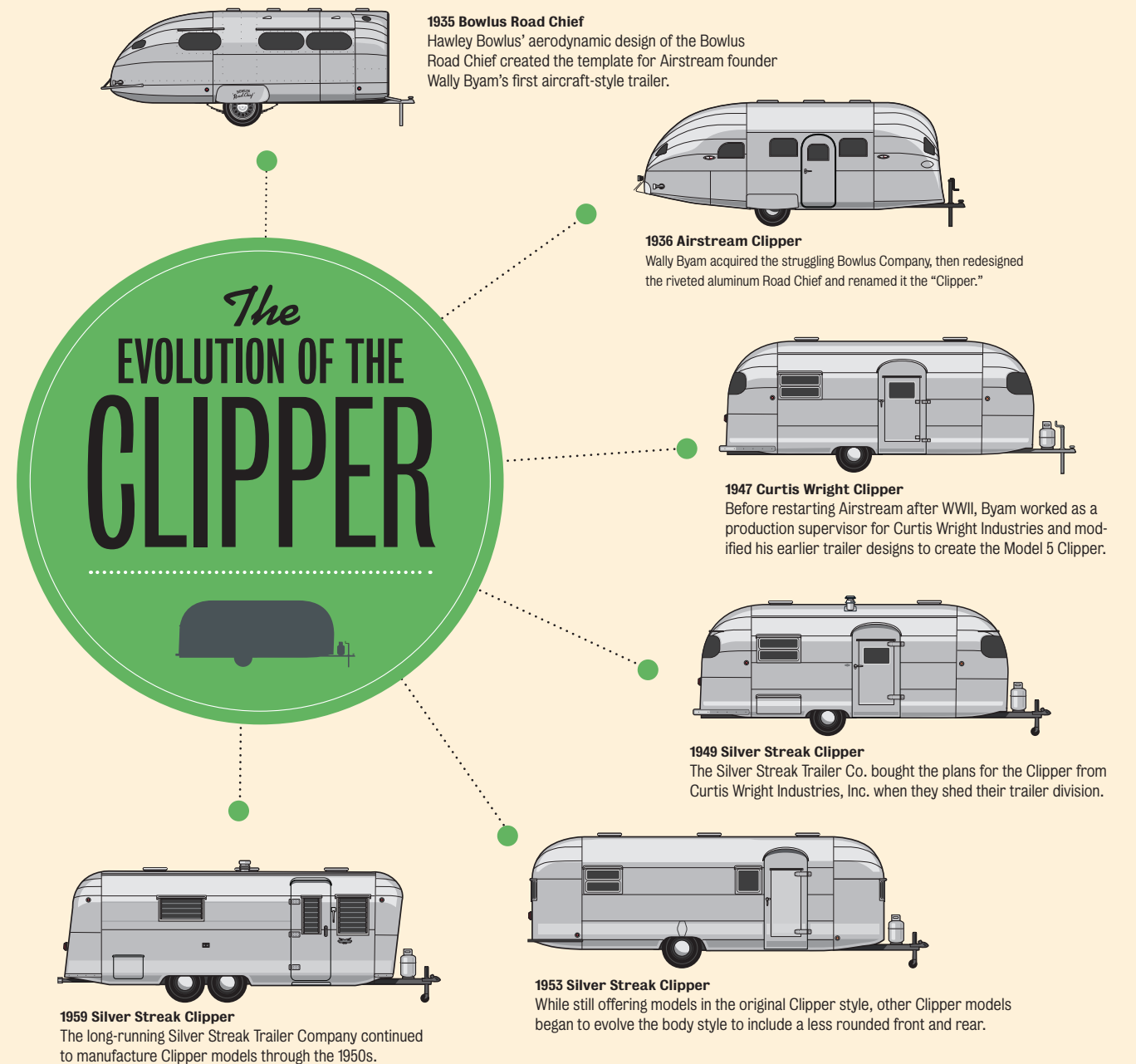


TOP: The McConnells pass through LA-area fires, Silver Streak in tow, on the way north to Oregon. (photo: Susie McConnell) **ABOVE RIGHT(clockwise):** Michael, Susie and their two children. (Photo: Michael McConnell) **BELOW:** A work in progress: The Clipper as a jobsite in Portland, OR; Michael sits among aluminum framework that will be his office (Photo: Michael McConnell); detailed drawings and measurements made for planning out the functions of the various compartments; author Bob Thompson works on the decking for the kids' play area in the nose of the trailer.



VINTAGE TRAILER FIELD GUIDE

As we follow the 1953 Silver Streak Clipper renovation progress, it got us thinking about its family tree. Clippers have their roots in the earliest innovations of travel trailers, and the name evokes nautical imagery of fast, streamlined sea ships and Boeing's 314 Clipper, the Transatlantic "flying boat."



VINTAGE TRAILER MUST-HAVE ITEMS



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A FAMILY TAKES FLIGHT IN A CLIPPER | PART 2

THIS IS OUR SPACESHIP

BY BOB THOMPSON & CARL JAMESON
AUTHORS OF THE ILLUSTRATED FIELD GUIDE TO VINTAGE TRAILERS



This article is the second of three about the McConnell family and their renovation of a 1953 Silver Streak. The first article of this series can be found on pages 26 & 27 in the May/June 2021 issue. The McConnell's trailer was nearly complete when we sat down with them in mid-May 2021, a few days before they lifted off from their Portland, Oregon landing pad & home base since Fall 2020 and headed into their future. This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Carl: Let's start with the basics. Michael, you're a designer in researching Artificial Intelligence, or AI, and how it can be applied to solve complex problems, plus you've designed green homes. Susie, you owned your own design business specializing in modern, colorful interiors, with a lot of experience in home automation. How did you two meet each other?

Susie: The internet.

Michael: I met her online and went on a date in San Francisco on a mural walk in the Mission. I thought I'd be home in a couple of hours. The date just went on and on.

Susie: A couple of things came up on our first date that we joke about. Michael was saying that he likes to run experiments. And I

said that I'm trying to slow time down.

Michael: Yeah, I just run an experiment. I have lots of theories.

Susie: And we were recently talking about how this project is to run experiments too.

Bob: I was thinking about how you first told me you were planning to live in this trailer as a family. Living in a vintage trailer full-time seems daunting and crazy to a lot of people. I'm just curious how you guys see your lifestyle and why it's going to be great.

Michael: It is crazy. We fell into it. We had watched the whole tiny home movement, but I didn't imagine that we'd be doing it until we really learned how much outdoor space was more important.

Susie: The pandemic happened, then we got

separated from our community. We weren't allowed to go to the beaches or trails for a while. So, fortunately, we're very privileged, which is not, definitely not everyone's experience at all, but we had a yard. We learned that we didn't need our house except for utilitarian reasons. We required our yard.

Carl: Why did you decide to buy a vintage trailer?

Susie: They're gorgeous. They've lasted forever. They still roll. This trailer is well designed. We wanted a gutted trailer. We did not want to spend time doing the demo, and I wanted a clean slate.

Michael: The shell itself holds its value, and the work that we do improve it since it's already lasted 70 years because it's amazing

aluminum; it's higher quality than the new trailers today.

Carl: Are you attracted to the Clipper or Silver Streaks in particular or just a type?

Susie: We liked "alien eyes," a Curtis Wright Clipper.

Michael: I like the robot eyes of the Silver Streak and its awning windows.

Susie: I like the fact that both ends are curved, the windows are operable on both ends. And I can't even imagine how stuffy it would be without that kind of draft. We still need to figure out how to do at least one fire egress.

Bob: So how long did you look?

Michael: It was funny. We were originally just talking about traveling and vacation. And then, and then we're talking about considering buying one of these. It was just, just in an instant.

Susie: Yeah. Decisions made.

Michael: And so, we only took a few days before we were, we made the offer on it, found it.

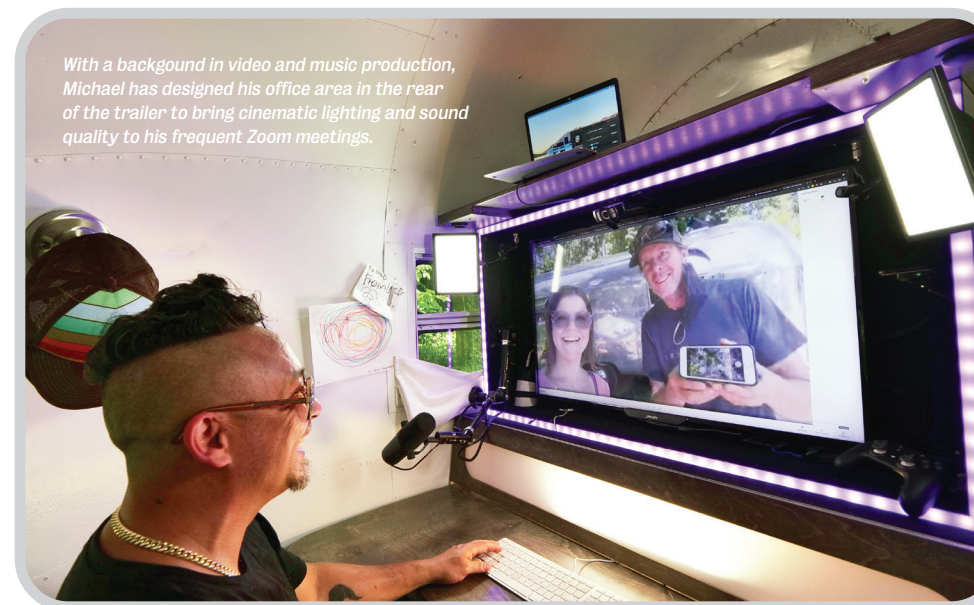
Susie: We were looking early enough in the pandemic where there were options. I liked the space, and I love that it was just empty. I wanted to make it feel spacious. I'm very sensitive to my environment, which is probably the reason why I'm a designer, and a

dark space or a crowded space, or overhead cabinets, all of that would not make me want to be in it. I've been just trying to figure out what would work for me, for him and the whole family because, generally, that works for my clients.

Michael: Another thing about it is that the trailer is just so light. It's about 1800 pounds. So it started at a pretty low weight, and by continuing to use aluminum for the build-out,



A point was made to include the children in the renovation brainstorming process. The oldest child shares a few of her ideas.



With a background in video and music production, Michael has designed his office area in the rear of the trailer to bring cinematic lighting and sound quality to his frequent Zoom meetings.



The McConnells had a topographic map of the US custom-made and mounted inside the Clipper to help the children track their travels.



Susie demonstrates the pullout cooler fridge that tucks under one of the two main benches.



A NASA-worthy power bank is designed to keep business rolling even when the family is boondocking. A massive subwoofer mounted into the floor completes the package.

we were able to keep it light enough for our car to tow.

Bob: I was going to ask you about lightweight framing and its design and construction. How did you guys arrive at that?

Michael: Well, we started in CAD. Susan designed several different layouts, so a lot of the design was influenced by maximizing the space. So, a space that, that serves multiple purposes, so everything in it needs to do two or more things. And then we were a little bit influenced by what parts we could find, like the size, the smallest size cooler or air conditioner unit or heat or something like that.

Susie: If we could, I would have had everything 20 inches or lower, you know, the benches. So, I did it so that it has three heights. There's the console, which is the desk, the highest. And then the benches are 23 inches, and then the stage, what we now call the stage in the front of the trailer is the lowest level. So I didn't want to have more than that because then it felt crowded. I didn't want to have pointy corners because people will run into it, especially little ones.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE





The McConnell's daughter peruses their article in the previous issue of VCT Magazine from the comfort of a vast sleeping platform.

Michael: Eventually, we arrived at the lowest we can get it and still fit everything we needed. And then, we embellished the design a bit brought the curves out. And then, from there, we turned it into a 3D model to make sure it looks like how we wanted it.

Susie: And Michael masterminded where all of the audio electrical water, fresh and gray water would go. So we went with a 2" square frame. And a lot of that is used to house the conduit for all of the different utilities.

Michael: That also allowed me to run all the extra stuff that I wanted. A full enterprise network runs across the entire trailer with access points in the roof, floor, and door in different places.

Susie: And all of that framework happens without taking up the storage space.

Bob: What did you know before you started, and what did you learn on the job?

Michael: Electric was the easiest part because I've done professional car audio installations and security installations and run recording studios. After working in the music



The use of hidden compartments keep the Clipper's interior clean and open. The youngest McConnell shows us his stash his toys.

industry, no amount of wiring overwhelms me. My learning curve was on the plumbing, the gas, and the HVAC. And I was trying to figure it all out ahead of time.

Susie: And coming from the design standpoint, for years I've been designing homes for people and their families. So, can we get the windows tempered? How can we keep it safe?

All of those kinds of decisions also came from my work experience.

Carl: You are nearing the completion of the trailer. What was the most enjoyable of building it, and what advice would you give readers?

Michael: It's been fun building for our kids, building spaces that they like to crawl in, and put their stuff in. They contributed to the designs, and they get so excited about it.

Susie: My philosophy is to build what you want, not what you think you should build. And I said that to my clients before, too. They're like, what about resale value? I'm like, well, are you going to live in it? You know, if you're living in it, build it for you, make it your home.

Bob: Does the trailer have a name?

Susie: The Spaceship.

In our final article we'll continue our interview with the McConnells and get an update from the road about their fantastic voyage.



The interior theme features rounded corners, clean design and wide open space. The aluminum tube steel framing is visible on the sink pullout in-progress to the left.

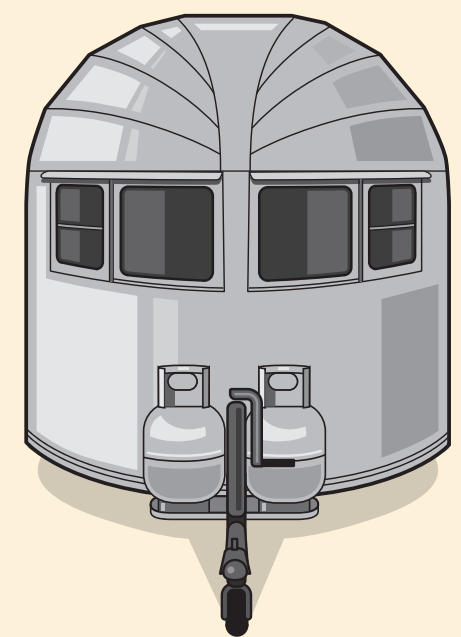
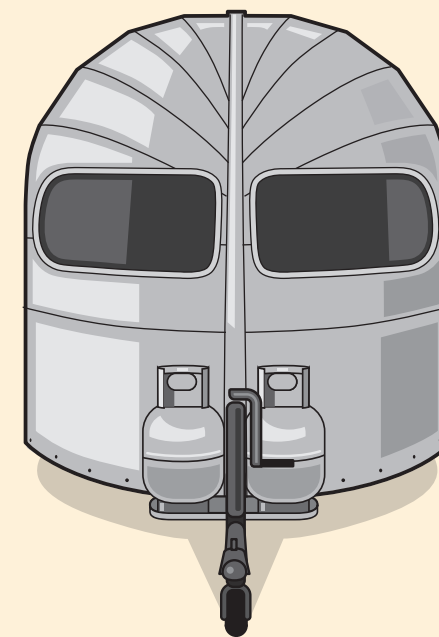
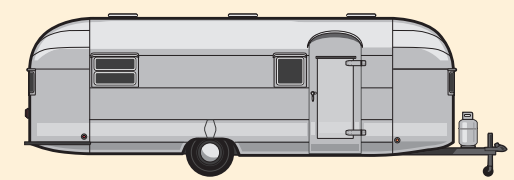


A craft needs landing gear. Michael raised the axle of the trailer to ensure clearance no matter what alien terrain they encounter in their travels.

Vintage Trailer Field Guide

Shakespeare said "the eyes are the windows to the soul," but in the case of a Clipper, the eyes literally are windows. In our interview with the McConnells they mention the "Alien Eyes" of a Curtis Wright Clipper and "Robot Eyes" of their Silver Streak Clipper, so we thought it was a perfect opportunity to take a closer look at these distinctions.

ALIEN - VS - ROBOT



Curtis Wright's Clipper design featured front and rear windows affectionately nicknamed "alien eyes" by trailer enthusiasts. Silver Streak continued that style after they bought the plans from the original manufacturer.

When Silver Streak introduced longer 25-foot Clippers into their line they modified the body shape and gave the "eyes" a robotic-looking makeover as well. And for few short years in the early 1950s, aliens and robots lived side-by-side in perfect harmony.

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A FAMILY TAKES FLIGHT
IN A CLIPPER | PART 3

READY FOR L L O T L L S



This article is the third of three about the McConnell family and their renovation of a 1953 Silver Streak. Part One is on pages 26 and 27 in the May/June 2021 issue. Part Two, "This is Our Spaceship" is on pages 32-35 in the July /August 2021 issue. We spoke with Michael and Susie McConnell in late May 2021 and have kept in touch with them since. We edited this interview for length and clarity.

BY BOB THOMPSON & CARL JAMESON
AUTHORS OF THE ILLUSTRATED FIELD GUIDE TO VINTAGE TRAILERS

Carl: What's your hypothesis of how it's going to be living with your family in the trailer full time?

Michael: There'll be lots of challenges. I believe that will pop up. That's what comes with this type of experimentation, like where to put our trash and things like that.

Susie: Dry camping.

Michael: We're excited about seeing more parts of the United States or more of nature for ourselves and the kids. I don't know what that experience will be like to be completely off-grid with a family. I'm excited to find out.

Carl: What do you think the kids are going to learn?

Michael: That their parents aren't normal eventually.

Susie: But there's a positive.

Michael: We're hoping for the good things that we heard about that, of traveling and seeing things, at an age where you could go around and do it and where you could remember it, I think will be nice.

Susie: We've talked about having, like having two homes, not necessarily big ones, but two locations, to spread out our year. It gives us a kind of freedom too. I've been studying subjects like: how can we do this with less water? How can I cook with less water? How can I clean, do laundry with less water, less energy? These are all things that all of us need to learn. Like there's a finite amount of resources available. Things are going to get more challenging, and we need to start learning how to do this. Granted, Americans are really bad at this. There's a lot of people on this planet who are already doing this, you know. I believe that no

matter where you are in the world, you're going to be moving around a lot.

Carl: You're talking about experimenting with climate change resilience for everyone, not just Americans.

Susie: Yeah. But especially Americans. We are so used to having lots of packaging and trash and things, you know, we're so used to having a lot of electricity, a lot of water, that's not everybody's experience. So doing something like this seems to be a good way for people to learn how to live more efficiently and not have it be a loss in their comfortable lifestyle, but have it be sexy to live that way.

Michael: I always wanted to build a house, but that's such a big thought probably was to happen. It takes a long time. And so, you know, I didn't realize that I was doing that initially, but then, but then I was like, wait a minute. I am building my own house. It comes with a lot of work.

Bob: How does it feel at nighttime when you have the star projector on and you're in your own space, a space that you built for your family?

Michael: Extremely fulfilling. We were lying down, watching these projected stars, galaxy dust on your ceiling in a shape that feels very much like we are traveling in a little spaceship. You know, it may be rolling on the ground, but it is a spaceship.

Susie: When we have the galaxy star lights shining on the ceiling, it's like, wow, this is so much space. I mean like the idea of buying a house or building a home, but you know, the more I do this, the less house I want.

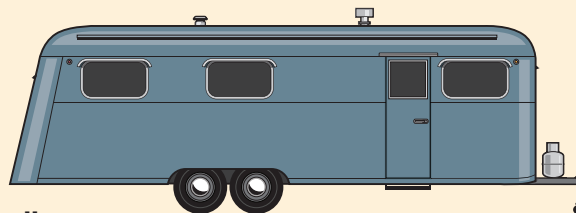
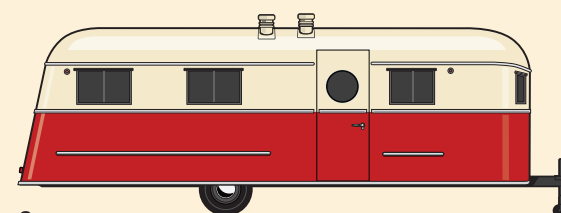
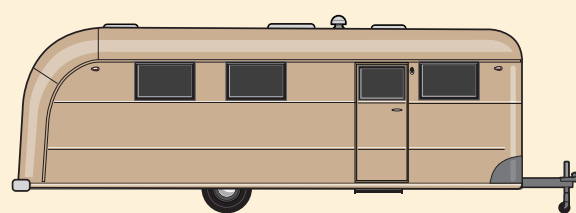
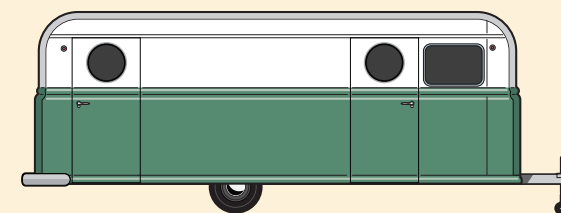
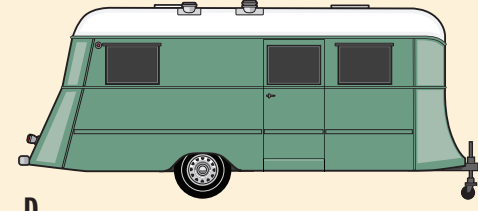
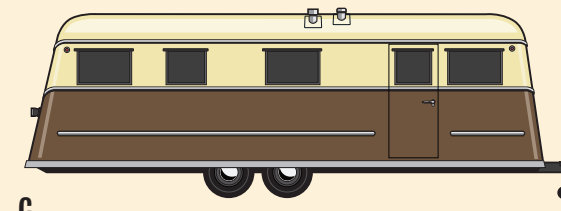
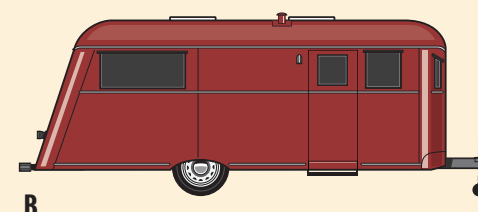
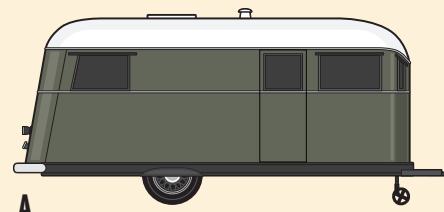


The McConnells lifted off from their secret hideaway near Portland, Oregon in mid July 2021. On their last communication the family stated that they were navigating around wildfires in the Lake Tahoe region. And that some of their communication systems were down due to low batteries and weak wi-fi. We wish them the best of luck on their journey.

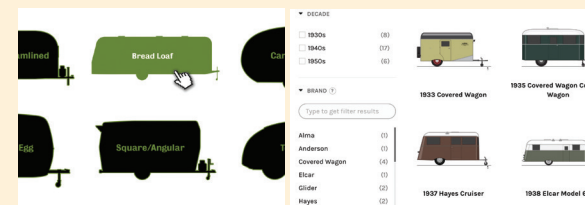
THE Illustrated Field Guide to VINTAGE TRAILERS

Breadloaf Challenge

Usually we pore over the pages of The Illustrated Field Guide to Vintage Trailers to inspire our challenge theme. But this time around we simply logged into to our new Vintage Trailer ID App (see below), clicked the "Search by Body Style" icon for Breadloaf and instantly had a page full of these pre- and post-war beauties to choose from. And why are these trailers called Breadloafs? We think you can figure that out for yourself.



SUBSCRIBE TO VINTAGE TRAILER ID APP TODAY!



We've created a digital companion to "The Illustrated Field Guide to Vintage Trailers," that builds on the field guide's information and illustrations. With a few clicks you'll discover connections between trailers by manufacturer, brand, year, body style, skin material, exterior finish, and length. More trailer models added monthly!

VINTAGE TRAILER FIELD GUIDE.COM

A: 1937 Covered Wagon B: 1940 Shult Commodore C: 1940 Glider Tandem 125 D: 1938 Hayes Crusader E: 1948 Palace Royale F: 1946 Vagabond Model 23 G: 1949 M System Special Deluxe H: 1947 Owooso Model 27

ANSWERS