

Subject: Class-A Motorhome Grandfathering +

April 5, 2007

This began originally as part of a response that I wrote to a blog posting by an "Art and Carol" that was forwarded to me, but that I have been unable to get back to the party of origin, due to some form of email malfunction technicality. However, it does address the "Grandfathering" issue to some degree, as well as some of the other misnomers that seem to keep popping up.

Unfortunately, Art and Carol represent the blind leading the blind. They are very ill informed and are basically taking their own personal philosophy and attempting to "spin" it into fact. They even write about the problems they have had with an Airstream motorized Class-A product in one part of their missive and in the next say that everyone else should be able to easily keep their old Class-A's running. I believe that kind of statement(s) is referred to today as an oxymoron. They also come to expound on the longevity of Class-A motorhomes, but yet they found out the same thing that all Class-A owners know and that is in general the life expectancy is shorter than that of a trailer, as they are far more complex a product and therefore far more can and will go wrong with them. Art and Carol appear to have been willing to go to any length to remain a part of the Club. Why? Could it be the people and not the product after all since they did not seem to care what they owned, as long as it said Airstream on it? Now will everyone choose this same course? No! Many will not have the option for a number of reasons and, like it or not, we cannot afford to accelerate our membership loss rate and expect the Club to survive, as we know it today.

The Special Motorhome Committee considered "Grandfathering" and there are many reasons why it is not really a viable option and it is not well thought out. If we tried "Grandfathering" Airstream would not be happy to the tune of a 6 figure monetary subsidy being withdrawn. That would be a very devastating financial blow to our Club. Like it or not we have ties to not only Airstream, Inc., but to Thor Industries, Airstream, Inc. owner. Do you really think that Thor is going to just stand by and allow Airstream, Inc. to continue that kind of subsidy, plus other support if we allow their competitor's products into WBCCI, for whatever the reasons or time frame. Corporate reality says, NO WAY! This is only one of many problems. What you are suggesting would make Class-A owners second-class citizens, with no other options. MAL's can join a Unit. Most of those currently owning Class-A motorhomes do so for health considerations, so they do not really have any other option if they want to keep on RVing. Paul, do you really think that a second-class member, with no rights, is going to be motivated and have the same enthusiasm as a "real member" to volunteer and work their hearts out for the Club? Do you really think that Class-A motorhome members are going to relate well to such a magnanimous offer to basically become lackeys for the "real" members of the Club? I think not, that is just not a part of human nature! You want to tell Life-Members they are now, not really Life-Members. If you do that then the Club had better be prepared to start hiring attorneys, as they will be suing to recover their money that they put down in good faith to be life long members, only to now have the rug jerked out from underneath them. Segregation will not build fun and fellowship and it will most certainly not build a strong vibrant Club. Today the Club is built really by word of mouth and disenfranchising 20% of the membership will not help our main form of gaining new members. Just as loosing 20 % plus of the membership will not help. Remember, that when this 20% loss is combined with our current rate of attrition (6% per year and climbing) this will work

out to be a catastrophic loss in the range of 33 to 50% in the next 3 to 5 years. When this happens the Club will be out of business, as we know it today. You absolutely will not have anything to be proud of.

This motion came out of a special committee created by the International President to meet an emergency situation brought on by Corporate Airstream's announcement of their getting out of the Class-A motorhome business. We, the WBCCI membership, had no warning that Airstream Corp. was going to cease production of the Class-A motorhomes. Unfortunately, Airstream Inc's decision inadvertently exacerbated our already serious problem of yearly eroding membership and basically putting our collective backs to the wall, by running us, the Club, out of time. We lost any cushion that we may have had in addressing the issues of membership, which the Club has been doing to cut the attrition rate. If you think there are complaints now about how quickly the IBT has moved on this issue, just image how much worse it would be if we had not and let the Club fail. If we, the IBT, did not act quickly, thereby letting the Club fail, then we would have been negligent and irresponsible. Unfortunately time is of the essence, which necessitated a quick response. In the time it would take to try and do what Art and Carol think should have been done the Club would have failed. Also, due to the constant fluctuation in membership and type of unit ownership it is impossible to ever arrive at absolute numbers, they would always be a best estimate, which is what we have today. The IBT gets all of the flack, but remember in the end, contrary to what Art and Carol may think and say, it comes down to the members making the decision and taking the responsibility for that decision when they vote. The IBT has met its responsibility to the membership by putting forth a positive and workable motion that will allow the Club to continue to survive, and even then the work will be far from being over, when it comes to keeping the Club strong and viable. We can ill afford to "fiddle while Rome is burning."

Maybe its time for those doing all of the complaining to take on more of the leadership roles, such as Region and International Officers, Rally chairmanships and get better informed and more involved. I guarantee you that I would have no problem sharing the load or giving it entirely to anyone who wants it and would welcome them with open arms. So, "come on down!" Also, of note, is that at the National Hobo Rally this year, in answer to a question from the audience, we found that 48 out of the 88 rally chairmen, or 55%, owned Class-A motorhomes, which is very disproportionate to the 20% overall ownership. For the Rose Parade Rally, which admittedly takes a lot less volunteers, the number rises to 90% of ALL of the volunteer workers.

We always come back to the same point and it is choices; members versus product, i.e. a vibrant Club with many actualities across the U.S. and Canada, or fragmented pockets of individual Airstream owners, who will be lamenting about how great it used to be when the "Club" had more MEMBERS and activities. These are the choices that you, the membership, are being called on to responsibly consider. Heaven help you if you make the wrong choice and it all disappears.

Also, Paul, you allude to the "magical" answer(s) of how to recruit younger members. I strongly suggest that you write a book on this, because it will be second only to the Harry Potter series in popularity, as everybody who is involved with organizations in the U.S., and most likely the world, has been waiting years for this information. I do not believe that your statements about the

potential younger members are at all realistic, as I see no current basis for this. If my understanding is correct the Units that you allude to, do not appear to do so much beyond their Unit's sphere of travel. The Club has tried a number of things to increase membership and we all talk about planning / updating things to attract younger members. Well younger members do not have the time nor the inclination to join no matter what we do. You may disagree, but ALL organizations in the U.S. share the same national stat and that is younger people are NOT joining ANY organization, not just WBCCI. These are the demographics that we must face, again, like it or not they exist. Last year's stats seem to real bring this home, as only around 8% of non-WBCCI members purchasing an Airstream choose to join the Club or over 90% of the non-WBCCI member Airstream purchasers chose not to join our organization.

It has been my experience at a number of levels involving the organization and putting on different events that the young people in our Club, at this point in their lives still work and may even have young families, so they really do not have the time to devote to volunteering to make these events happen. Yes, there are individual exceptions, and I am personally thankful to them. This also does not in any way mean that they do not volunteer at all when they come to an event, it just means they do what they can for the time they are present. One case in point would be our International Rally and the time commitment it takes. Going back to the stats for the Hobo Rally listed above, very few, if any, of the Class-A motorhome driving chairmen are young or newer members. If the membership chooses to alienate, disenfranchise or force out the 20% of our membership that are Class-A members, who appear to, percent wise, volunteer disproportionately more than the average, I can guarantee that the National Rally will become immediate history (this should not be taken as just rhetoric or a threat, but just a cold hard and extremely unpleasant fact). (By the way, many of these Class-A motorhome driving chairman have been asking and looking for years for replacements, but they (fortunately for us) also keep telling us "IF YOU CAN'T FIND ANYONE ELSE WE WILL DO IT AGAIN.") I believe this also applies to our International Rally chairmen. I also want to make it clear that YES!, we do need more members, younger, older or in between, and they all need to be welcomed, but targeting just one area (younger members) will absolutely not do it. We are already recruiting new and younger members Paul, but the problem is that we are losing members faster than we are able to recruit them, just like every other major club or fraternal organization in the U.S., and also, contrary to your statement, the primary reason we are losing membership (a whopping -32%) is due to health related issues, with our not having any control over an additional -16%. Don Shafer writes in his most recent article, the membership needs to seriously consider and evaluate what will be in the best long-term interest of the membership (Club), i.e., because no members, no WBCCI. This issue is about membership, not product!

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