

1725-1899kg

Take your pick from **large estate cars**, big MPVs and 4x4s, all built to haul a heavier class of tourer



“One of the quickest, most economical cars in this class”

CLASS WINNER

BMW 520d SE Touring auto

List price	£33,345
Target Price	£31,680
Kerbweight	1790kg
85% match	1522kg
Max towing weight	2000kg
Towball limit	90kg

IT DIDN'T TAKE long to decide the winner in this class. The BMW 5-Series does it all. In a hurry? The 2.0-litre engine has 184bhp - more than enough poke for fuss-free overtaking when driven solo. Even with a 'van on the back the Five went from 30-60mph in 12.6 seconds.

That makes it one of the quickest cars in this class, yet it's also one of the most economical. Fitted with the optional eight-speed automatic

gearbox, the BMW promises 53.3mpg on the combined cycle. Carbon dioxide emissions of 139g/km are exceptionally low for a car with such strong performance.

Straight-line stability is beyond reproach. Even when towing at 70mph drivers almost forgot there was a caravan hitched up until they looked in the mirror. In the lane-change test there was some body



The dashboard is clear and it's easy to find a relaxed driving position

roll, and the tourer slid around dramatically but never took charge.

Hill starts are a doddle. Press a button to turn on the auto-hold feature and the outfit won't roll backwards - no need to apply the push-button parking brake. There's plenty of muscle to breeze up steep slopes in first gear or reverse.

Inside, the adjustable seat and wheel make it easy for the driver to



We couldn't quite squeeze all our luggage into the BMW's boot

get comfortable. Rear passengers could do with a little more knee-room, though, and we couldn't quite squeeze every bit of holiday luggage into the boot. This aside, the practicality judge was impressed with the self-levelling suspension and comprehensive handbook.

Our biggest complaint? The ride is over-firm - but opt for Variable Damper Control (£985) and comfort improves.

We say...

Towing	★★★★★
Solo	★★★★○
Practicality	★★★★○
Buying & owning	★★★★○

VERDICT ★★★★★
Fast, stable, spacious and practical, the 5 Series impresses in every department.

Top used car 1725-1899kg

Kia Sportage 2.0 CRDi Titan

12 months old	£16,960 (approx)
36 months old	£13,280 (approx)

Back in 2008, the Kia Sportage was our Budget 4x4 Award winner. Although its big brother, the Sorento, is better known in caravan circles,

the Sportage is a practical 4x4 in its own right. A kerbweight of 1,842kg means it makes a suitable match for most caravans.

When we tested the car three years ago we found it stable, although the 2.0-litre diesel had its work cut out towing an 85% match, as a 30-60mph time of 22.8 seconds showed. So long as you're not going anywhere in a rush, the Sportage is a fine

4x4. The cabin is roomy, with lots of head- and legroom in the back, and there's enough luggage space for a family's holiday gear.

Many more modern 4x4s better the Kia's 39.8mpg, but it's no gas-guzzler. Besides, you'll have saved plenty on price compared with most rivals. And the good news is the Titan spec comes with all the bells and whistles you'd expect of a pricier car.

Chevrolet Orlando 2.0 VCDi 163 LTZ

List price	£20,205
Target Price	£18,189
Kerbweight	1730kg
85% match	1471kg
Max towing weight	1500kg
Towball limit	75kg

YOU GET A lot of car for your money with the Chevrolet Orlando. It's heavy enough to be a suitable match for some hefty tourers, and if you haggle you should be able to pick one up for well under £20,000.

That buys an impressively roomy seven-seat MPV. Three individual seats in the middle row would be more flexible than the Orlando's bench, but even those sat in the third row should be comfortable enough for short trips.

With the rearmost seats folded away, we found space for all our holiday luggage. The car comes with a tyre-repair kit, which Chevrolet says can be used for towing if necessary, although a full-sized spare is a £150 option. Sadly, there's no information on towing in the handbook.

Hitch up and the Orlando is a capable towcar. The 2.0-litre engine can pull car and caravan from 30-60mph in 14.9 seconds. Stability is good up to 70mph, with little

BUDGET MPV AWARD WINNER



“An impressively roomy and capable budget towcar”

caravan movement recorded by the AL-KO ATC sensors. Through the lane-change test the Orlando started to lose composure at high speeds, but never felt ragged. The Chevy made a decent fist of the hill-start test, too, so long as the handbrake was pulled on firmly.

The Orlando is a worthy winner of the Budget MPV Award.



Build quality is sturdy rather than upmarket. There's plenty of space

We say...

Towing	★★★★○
Solo	★★★★○
Practicality	★★★★○
Buying & owning	★★★★○

VERDICT ★★★★★
Space for seven, a healthy kerbweight and great value for money.

Toyota RAV4 2.2 D-4D XT-R

List price	£25,255
Target Price	£23,490
Kerbweight	1725kg
85% match	1466kg
Max towing weight	2000kg
Towball limit	75kg

THE TOYOTA RAV4 is a smart buy. It's keenly priced, well equipped and performs well in the JD Power Customer Satisfaction Survey.

Judged as a towcar, however, it's solid but unexceptional. The 2.2-litre engine pulled car and caravan from 30-60mph in 15.4 seconds, but a 30-0mph stopping distance of 12.2 metres was disappointing. In the lane-change test it was

happy at lower speeds, but the stability control worked overtime on quicker runs.

Straight-line stability was fine, though, with only slight steering corrections needed between 60 and 70mph. The handbrake needed a strong tug before it held in the hill-start test. It took plenty of revs to reach the top of the hill.

We say...

Towing	★★★★○
Solo	★★★★○
Practicality	★★★★○
Buying & owning	★★★★○

VERDICT ★★★★★
A good 4x4, but one that's up against some strong opposition.



Nissan X-Trail 2.0 dCi 173 Tekna

List price	£28,880
Target Price	£26,921
Kerbweight	1735kg
85% match	1475kg
Max towing weight	2200kg
Towball limit	100kg

YOU COULD DO worse than the Nissan X-Trail for all-season 4x4 towing. The 2.0 dCi 173 engine offers stacks of low-down pull, hauling car and caravan from 30-60mph in a brisk 13.4 seconds. The strong engine came into its own on the hill start. The handbrake needed a very firm pull to hold the outfit still, but climbing the

slope was fuss-free in both first gear and reverse.

The lane-change test was another story. The back of the car slid sideways dramatically on the final, high-speed run. In a straight line, though, the X-Trail was stable.

Healthy discounts are available, and 44.1mpg on the combined cycle is good for a 4x4 of this size.

We say...

Towing	★★★★○
Solo	★★★★○
Practicality	★★★★○
Buying & owning	★★★★○

VERDICT ★★★★★
One of the best mid-sized 4x4s, thanks to a strong engine.

1725-1899kg

Kia Sportage 2.0 CRDi KX-2 4WD

List price	£22,815
Target Price	£21,713
Kerbweight	1754kg
85% match	1491kg
Max towing weight	2000kg
Towball limit	80kg

A couple of our testers found the handbrake held initially on the 1-in-6 test hill, then released a second or two later. Otherwise the Sportage pulled up the slope with no telltale smell from the clutch in first gear and in reverse. Kia's prices aren't as low as they were a few years back, but even so the Sportage is good value.

We say...

Towing	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Solo	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Practicality	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Buying & owning	★ ★ ★ ○ ○

VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Good value and capable, despite a disappointing lane-change test.

SOME 4X4S STRUGGLE in the lane-change test, and the Kia Sportage was one of them. Even at low speeds the car lost grip at the front and rear, although the driver never lost control. Driven normally the Sportage needed the odd steering correction to keep straight and true, but nothing alarming. It did feel unsettled in strong winds.



Mitsubishi Outlander 2.2 DI-D GX4 4WD SST

List price	£30,299
Target Price	£28,586
Kerbweight	1780kg
85% match	1513kg
Max towing weight	2000kg
Towball limit	100kg

removing the towball to get to the winder and release the spare wheel. In the lane-change test the Mitsubishi leaned heavily and pushed wide rather early. A 30-60mph time of 17.8 seconds shows that overtaking while towing needs a long stretch of clear road. Still, straight-line stability at 60mph and up was secure.

We say...

Towing	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Solo	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Practicality	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Buying & owning	★ ★ ★ ○ ○

VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Not cheap to buy, but well equipped. A sound seven-seat towcar.

THE OUTLANDER HAS one big advantage over other 4x4s in this weight class - seven seats. The rear of the cabin may be cramped and the seats fiddly to fold, but they're there if you need them.

With the back seats in the floor, we found room for all our holiday luggage. However, the practicality judge was not impressed with



Volkswagen Sharan 2.0 TDI 140 SE

List price	£26,970
Target Price	£24,844
Kerbweight	1774kg
85% match	1508kg
Max towing weight	2200kg
Towball limit	100kg

AS AN MPV, the Sharan is truly excellent. As a towcar, with this engine at least, it doesn't quite hit the mark. The trouble lies with the 138bhp diesel engine. In the lighter VW Passat saloon, it can feel a little underpowered. With the Sharan's extra weight to drag around, it struggles. The 30-60mph time of 19 seconds is tardy. Braking power is also disappointing - 11.5 metres to stop the outfit, even on a dry track.

We've no complaints about the Sharan's stability, though. Steering corrections were only needed in a strong crosswind. In the lane-change test the big VW showed the caravan who was boss, even at high speeds.

The Sharan's auto-hold feature held the outfit still on a 1-in-6 slope with no need to use the push-button parking brake. Climbing to the top needed some clutch slip and plenty of revs, but nothing untoward.

With or without a caravan, the Sharan's cabin is a comfortable, quiet place to be, with plenty of



"An excellent MPV, but the engine struggles when towing"

space in all three rows and seemingly endless ways to slide and fold seats.

Tuck seats six and seven into the floor and there's enough space for a family's holiday luggage. Our practicality judge was also impressed by the car's Trailer Stability System and the self-sealing tyres, which are designed to remain usable after a puncture.



It's a little dour inside, but the Sharan feels like a quality car

We say...

Towing	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Solo	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Practicality	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Buying & owning	★ ★ ★ ○ ○

VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ○ ○
The new Sharan is a brilliant MPV, but underpowered as a towcar.

Seat

Alhambra MPV 2.0 TDI CR Ecomotive S

List price	£24,060
Target Price	£22,302
Kerbweight	1822kg
85% match	1549kg
Max towing weight	2200kg
Towball limit	100kg

UNDER THE SKIN the Seat Alhambra is essentially the same car as the Volkswagen Sharan, but it costs less to buy. No wonder *What Car?* made the Alhambra its MPV of the Year 2011.

There's lots of room inside for up to seven passengers. The middle row of seats can be slid forward on runners, so those in the third row can still enjoy reasonable legroom.

With all seven seats upright there's enough luggage space for a quick supermarket run, although if seven of you are on holiday you'll need a roof box. With the rear seats folded away there's plenty of luggage room. That scored brownie points with our practicality judge, as did the healthy 100kg noseweight limit.

It's not just the Alhambra's space that makes it a comfortable family car. The suspension does a fine job of soaking up bumpy roads, and even at motorway speeds the cabin is hushed.



"The Seat is stable, but the engine is short of poke"

As a towcar, however, we have the same reservations about the Alhambra as the Sharan. The 2.0-litre diesel pulls cleanly from low revs but is short of poke for towing. The brakes felt mushy, and needed 12 metres to stop car and caravan from 30mph. However, the Sharan is stable, needing steering corrections only in a stiff breeze.



A sound driving position and space for seven make for a practical MPV

We say...

Towing	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Solo	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Practicality	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Buying & owning	★ ★ ★ ○ ○

VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ○ ○
A practical MPV and a stable towcar, but feels underpowered when pulling a van.

Vauxhall

Insignia Sports Tourer 2.0 CDTi (160PS) 4x4 SE

List price	£28,745
Target Price	£24,223
Kerbweight	1843kg
85% match	1567kg
Max towing weight	1800kg
Towball limit	85kg

WHATEVER YOU DO, don't pay list price for a Vauxhall Insignia. *What Car?*'s mystery shoppers have found huge discounts available. Just as well, since the Insignia is predicted to hold on to just 33% of its original asking price after three years.

You can look forward to many miles of happy towing with the Insignia. This 4x4 version has a high kerbweight, making it a suitable match for a wide range of vans. It has enough punch to tow them, too, thanks to the 2.0-litre diesel's 258lb.ft of torque. The engine can sound gruff, but it's certainly willing.

Even well above the UK legal limit the Insignia felt stable, and pulled the caravan straight quickly after short, sharp steering inputs. However, in the lane-change test the Vauxhall was pulled off-line on high-speed runs.



"A high kerbweight makes it a suitable match for a wide range of vans"

The electronic parking brake held the outfit still on the 1-in-6 test hill. A careful balance of throttle and clutch was needed to tow to the top.

There wasn't room for a full holiday luggage load, and there's not as much legroom in the back seats as in many family estates. However, the space-saver spare can be used to tow, as long as it's fitted on the front axle.



The deep bumper makes loading tricky and we'd prefer more space

We say...

Towing	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Solo	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Practicality	★ ★ ★ ○ ○
Buying & owning	★ ★ ★ ○ ○

VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ○ ○
The benefits of four-wheel drive with the luggage space of an estate.

1725-1899kg

Mazda

CX-7 2.2D Sport Tech

List price	£27,580
Target Price	£25,704
Kerbweight	1865kg
85% match	1585kg
Max towing weight	1800kg
Towball limit	85kg

LAST YEAR'S CLASS champion only just misses out to the all-round excellence of the BMW 5 Series. Even so, it takes the Editor's Choice Award.

The CX-7 has been set up for firm, sporty handling, and it shows. There's little roll when cornering and plenty of grip. In the lane-change test the Mazda was firmly in control of the caravan right up until the final high-speed run, when the tourer began to push and shove at the back of the car slightly.

For an outfit with a combined weight of well over three tonnes, stopping from 30mph in just 10 metres was very impressive. The brakes aren't just powerful - they're easy to apply smoothly, too. The handbrake needed a firm pull before holding the outfit still on the 1-in-6 slope. There were no dramas coping with the steep gradient in first gear or reverse provided the driver used plenty of revs.

PRACTICAL CARAVAN EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD

"The CX-7 has been set up for firm, sporty handling"



Nigel Donnelly, Editor of Practical Caravan, selected the CX-7 for his award

Inside, there's enough space for five to get comfortable, although we couldn't find room for all of our holiday luggage. You'd also need to empty the boot to get the jack out.

The Mazda drinks fuel quicker than most rivals (37.7mpg, according to official figures), but that must be weighed against the keen list price and generous standard equipment.



Better-finished plastics would give the Mazda CX-7's cabin a lift

We say...

Towing	★★★★★
Solo	★★★★★
Practicality	★★★★○
Buying & owning	★★★★★

VERDICT ★★★★★
Still one of the best 4x4 towcars you can buy for sensible money.

Mitsubishi

L200 2.5 DI-D

Warrior Double Cab

List price	£22,379
Target Price	£21,261
Kerbweight	1875kg
85% match	1594kg
Max towing weight	2700kg
Towball limit	120kg

WITH ITS HEFTY kerbweight, the Mitsubishi L200 will tow most tourers. However, there are certain compromises. While the latest version of the L200 is more economical and emits less than its predecessors, this is still a thirsty car. Expect an official figure of 34mpg.

The 2.5 DI-D pulls well enough, though, hauling car and caravan from 30-60mph in 15.3 seconds. The volume of engine noise and bouncy ride soon become wearing, however. In a straight line the odd steering correction was needed between 60 and 70mph but nothing untoward.

However, in the lane-change test the slow-witted steering had the driver working hard to make each turn. The unsophisticated rear suspension struggled to cope with pushing and pulling from the caravan, which unsettled the L200 too easily.

"The Mitsubishi L200 will tow most tourers"



Hill starts are much more to the Mitsubishi's liking. So long as the handbrake was pulled firmly, the outfit held steady, and the L200 pulled up the slope easily going forwards or in reverse. In slippery conditions you can select four-wheel drive, although throughout our tests the L200 coped just fine sending power to two wheels.



No need to travel light because the L200's payload is over a tonne

We say...

Towing	★★★○○○
Solo	★★★★○○
Practicality	★★★★★
Buying & owning	★★★★○○

VERDICT ★★★○○○
Makes sense if you can enjoy a pick-up's tax advantages, but there are better buys.