

How we test tow cars

The Tow Car Awards is the toughest, most thorough towing test event in Britain. Here's what every vehicle goes through in our search for Britain's best tow car

EVERY CAR GOES through a battery of tests at the MIRA proving ground. Before being taken on the track, the caravans are weighted to 85 per cent of the car's kerbweight – a sensible maximum for secure and stable towing – or less if this exceeds the vehicle's legal towing limit.

TOWING

One of *What Car?*'s expert road-test team handles the most demanding manoeuvres. The lane-change test reveals how each car will perform if forced to swerve in an emergency. The driver's subjective impressions are compared with hard data from the AL-KO ATC Trailer Control System. Acceleration and braking are measured using satellite-tracking equipment.

Other tests include a low-speed slalom to assess brake feel and steering response, and a constant radius bend to test each car's grip and handling balance. Nobody wants a slipping handbrake or an over-heating clutch when tackling a slope, so we put each outfit through a hill-start test on a 1-in-6 incline. Every car also tackles the hill in reverse. High-speed stability is assessed at motorway speeds – and beyond if the car is happy at the legal towing limit of 60mph.

SOLO DRIVING

Although the towing tests are at the heart of our assessment, we think



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Data from the caravan stability system is analysed; the MIRA test hill; all caravans are weighted to 85 per cent of the car's kerbweight; the lane-change test

it's important to remember that even the keenest caravanner is likely to spend far more time driving without a caravan than with one. That's why *What Car?* scores each car for day-to-day driving.

PRACTICALITY

Little things make a difference to how well suited a car is to towing: such as whether extension mirrors are

easy to fit, whether the electrics power your 'van's fridge as well as the running lights, and whether the car's puncture repair provision is suitable for use when towing.

Big things make a difference, too, such as whether the boot is large enough to cope with a typical load of holiday luggage. All of these details are assessed by our practicality test team.

BUYING AND OWNING

We're looking for cars that are easy to live with as well as great to tow with. Value, safety, equipment, running costs, reliability and resale values are all considered under the heading of Buying and Owning.

Thanks to Admiral Fire Extinguishers, AL-KO, Milenco, Witter and all the volunteers for their help with the tests.



How does towing affect fuel economy?

Everyone knows that towing a caravan puts a dent in your car's fuel economy, but just how much does the miles-per-gallon figure change? Are heavier, more powerful vehicles affected less than slower, lighter cars? Does the economy of petrol cars hold up better than diesels?

To find out, we've teamed up with *What Car?*'s True MPG testers. Sophisticated emissions equipment measures CO and CO₂ emissions, which in turn give an accurate picture of a car's fuel economy. It's high-tech stuff and it takes time to calibrate and use, but we think it's worth the effort for robust, accurate results.

The broad-brush findings are below. For more detailed analysis, go to www.practicalcaravan.com or the August issue of *What Car?* magazine.

Car	Type	Solo MPG	Towing MPG	% change
Volkswagen Golf 2.0 TDI 150 GT DSG 5dr	Diesel hatchback	46.2	25.3	45%
Dacia Duster 1.5 dCi Ambiance 4x4	Small SUV	43.9	27.8	37%
Mazda 6 2.0 165 Sport 4dr	Petrol saloon	47.3	27.3	42%
Land Rover Discovery 3.0 SDV6 XS	Large SUV	26.9	18	33%