

CLASS WINNER

Vauxhall

Astra 2.0 CDTi (160PS) SRi 5dr

LISTPRICE	£21,485
TARGET PRICE	£18,421
KERBWEIGHT	1453kg
85% MATCH	1235kg
MAX TOWING WEIGHT	1500kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

WE'VE BEEN LOOKING forward to towing with the new Astra and it didn't disappoint.

First and foremost, it's a swift and stable towcar. The 2.0 CDTi engine is more than strong enough for any suitable match, pulling car and caravan from 30-60mph in just 12.5 seconds.

Our judges were just as happy with how the Astra tackled an emergency lane-change, darting between the cones and dragging



The new Astra's cabin is far more stylish than its predecessor's

the caravan obediently behind it. Whether slowing from high speed or dealing with a crosswind, nothing seemed to faze the Astra, although more responsive steering would have been welcome.

The button-operated parking brake held car and caravan still on our 1-in-6 test hill, and the strong engine pulled cleanly all the way to the top. The shallower slope used in the reversing test posed no challenge at all.

Our practicality judge wasn't



There wasn't room for a full load of holiday luggage in the boot

quite as impressed as the drivers, however. The Astra didn't have room for all of our holiday luggage, and there was no sign of a 12V socket in the boot. Vauxhall told us the space-saver spare could be used when towing, but failed to include this advice in the handbook.

Leave the caravan behind and the engine's considerable punch makes it easy to make the most of any overtaking opportunity. It's quiet enough on long journeys and economical, too. You can

expect 58.9mpg, according to official figures.

There's plenty of head and legroom in the cabin, and the design and finish quality are a huge improvement over the previous-generation Astra.

The price tag of over £21,000 is rather high, although large discounts are available if you haggle. Make sure that you do, because the Astra is predicted to hold on to a modest 37% of its original price after three years.

We say...

Towing **** *** Solo **** Practicality *** **Buying & owning** Verdict ***

With great stability and a strong performance, a worthy winner.



GREEN WINNER

Skoda

Octavia Estate 1.6 TDI CR Greenline

LISTPRICE	£17,825
TARGET PRICE	£15,364
KERBWEIGHT	1460kg
85% MATCH	1241kg
MAX TOWING WEIGHT	1400kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

'GREEN' CARS HAVE a mixed record at the Towcar Awards, but

the Octavia Greenline is one of the best we've tested.

It towed well enough to keep the class-winning Vauxhall Astra honest. Stability at 60mph was fine but closer to 70mph it wasn't quite as composed as the Astra. Through the lane-change manoeuvre the caravan pushed at the rear of the car but this never became alarming.

If you want to gain or lose speed in a hurry, however, there are better cars than the Octavia Greenline. The 12-metre stopping distance is average, and the 1.6-litre engine took 22 seconds to pull car and caravan from 30-60mph. Driving into a headwind, a heavy right boot was needed to reach the legal limit, and a stronger response from low revs would be welcome.

We'd prefer a proper spare wheel to a get-you-home aerosol, but at least the boot took every last piece of luggage. There's lots of head- and legroom in the rear seats, too.

At £17,825, it's already good value but it's worth haggling to reduce it. Expect to get back around 39% of the original price after three years.



The Skoda's driving position is comfortable and easy to adjust

Official economy figures are exceptionally good for a car as large and roomy as this one. The Octavia's 64.2mpg makes it one of the most fuel-efficient cars on test, and carbon dioxide emissions of 114g/km will keep road tax bills low, too.

Although one or two cars tested narrowly beat those figures, they don't tow as well as the Skoda, which is why it wins this year's Green Award.

We say...

Towing	****
Solo	***
Practicality	***
Buying & owning	***
Verdict	***
A green and spacio	us towcar.

A green and spacious towcar, although not a very quick one.

Renault

Mégane Sport Tourer dCi 130 Dynamique Tom Tom

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LISTPRICE	£21,240
TARGET PRICE	£18,168
KERBWEIGHT	1441kg
85% MATCH	1225kg
MAX TOWING WEIGHT	1300kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

THE MÉGANE SPORT Tourer has few vices but it doesn't stand out, either.

Through the lane-change test the caravan began to pull the back of the car off-line at 35mph, yet on lower speed runs it was reasonably settled. However, when slowing down from high speeds, the Al-Ko ATC system showed the caravan beginning to wander. The relatively supple suspension benefits ride comfort but is a bit soft for towing.

The engine pulled car and caravan from 30-60mph in a respectable 16.2 seconds, and the

brakes proved strong. The electronic parking brake held the outfit still on the 1-in-6 slope, although some clutch slip was needed to pull up the hill without stalling or spinning the wheels.

Our practicality judge was impressed with the spacious boot and full-size spare. However, it's disappointing that Renault's handbook still quotes the towing limit with driver only on-board.

Fuel economy of 55.4mpg is good, but the Skoda Octavia is much more economical.

We say...

Towing	****
Solo	****
Practicality	****
Buying & owning	***
Verdict	***
A practical family estate but	

only an average towcar.

Kia

Venga 1.4 CRDi 3 Ecodynamics

LISTPRICE	£15,360
TARGET PRICE	£14,733
KERBWEIGHT	1445kg
85% MATCH	1228kg
MAXTOWING WEIGHT	1300kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

KIA HAS A strong reputation for its towcars, but the Venga isn't the company's finest hour.

The hill start is where it really came unstuck. However hard you yanked on the handbrake, the outfit coasted back down the hill. Plenty of revs and clutch slip were needed to persuade the Venga to the top.

At high speeds the Kia didn't feel settled. At 35mph through the lanechange test the car and caravan began an argument the caravan seemed in danger of winning.

Performance proved modest, needing 34.9 seconds to go from 30-60mph. There's a lot of noise from the engine when it is worked really hard, too.

Our practicality judge was underwhelmed, as the boot didn't come close to swallowing all the holiday luggage, and the towing information in the handbook was confusing.

On the plus side, the Venga is exceptionally economical (62.8mpg) and very well equipped. Against such strong opposition, however, that was simply not enough.

We say...

Towing	****
Solo	***
Practicality	***
Buying & owning	***
Verdict	***
A very poor hill star	t took tho

A very poor hill start took the Venga out of contention.



Kia

Cee'd 1.6 CRDi 115 2 5dr

£14.955 LISTPRICE £13,844 TARGET PRICE 1468ka KERBWEIGHT 1248ka 85% MATCH 1400kg MAX TOWING WEIGHT TOWBALLLIMIT 75ka

THE SECOND OF two Kias in this weight class, our judges much preferred the Cee'd to the Venga. For one thing, it's a much quicker

car. The larger diesel engine in the Cee'd has stronger low- and mid-range pull than the Venga's engine, shaving 14.7 seconds from the 30-60mph time. It's quieter and smoother as well as more powerful.

The Cee'd was also much happier in the hill-start tests. Reversing was fuss-free, and on the steeper slope for the forward hill start our only complaint was that the handbrake needed a very firm pull before it held.

Through the lane-change manoeuvre, the Cee'd gave a good account of itself, even at 35mph. However, at 60mph and above the car needed more steering input

than either the Astra or Octavia to stay straight and true.

Of more concern is the poor braking, taking 13 metres to stop from 30mph. That's a full 2.1 metres further than the Astra.

A larger boot would have scored more points with our practicality judge, and it's a shame there's no Trailer Stability Programme to help keep car and caravan on course.

Yet you might be prepared to live with these compromises when you know the price. At less than £15,000 before haggling, the Cee'd is very good value, especially when you take running costs into account.



The cabin has a better finish since the car's recent facelift

With an official fuel economy of 62.8mpg, the Kia isn't far off the Green Award-winning Skoda Octavia. The five-year warranty is another point in its favour.



We say...

Towina Solo Practicality

Buying & owning

Verdict

Disappointing brakes but otherwise a reasonable towcar.

Subaru

Impreza 2.0D RC

LISTPRICE	£21,500
TARGET PRICE	£20,354
KERBWEIGHT	1530kg
85% MATCH	1301kg
MAXTOWING WEIGHT	1600kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

THE IMPREZA IS a fine choice for allweather touring. Four-wheel drive is an advantage on slippery grass or mud, and it helps avoid wheel spin when pulling away on a hill.

We enjoyed towing with the Impreza. Crisp and responsive brakes stopped the outfit quickly, and stability through the lane change rivalled the Vauxhall Astra.

However, this Subaru's aggressive looks suggest a performance the 2.0-litre diesel didn't deliver. The

30-60mph time of 24.1 seconds is leisurely, and headwinds put a noticeable dent in the car's speed.

The small boot and lack of a proper spare put more daylight between the Impreza and our favourite cars in this division. You should be prepared to take a hit on depreciation, too. The Subaru is predicted to hold on to just 30% of its original price after three years.

Ne sav...

Towing	***
Solo	***
Practicality	***
Buying & owning	***
Verdict	***

A good choice for four-season touring, but there are better cars.

Ford

Kuga 2.0 TDCi Titanium 2WD

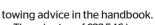
LISTPRICE	£23,546
TARGET PRICE	£20,630
KERBWEIGHT	1573kg
85%МАТСН	1337kg
MAXTOWING WEIGHT	2000kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	105kg

LAST YEAR'S CLASS winner remains one of our favourite towcars this time around.

With a 30-60mph time of 15.6 seconds, the Kuga quickly gets up to speed on motorways and A-roads. Stability is good, and although the Al-Ko ATC system showed the caravan to be moving around when slowing from 70mph, it could hardly be noticed by the driver.

However, in an emergency stop the caravan could be felt giving the Kuga a hefty shove, and the stopping distance of 12.7 metres is disappointing.

A comfortable ride combines with fine handling, with or without a caravan in tow. It's one of the most enjoyable cars in this class, although not the most practical. The boot isn't as large as we'd like, so a couple of items from our typical luggage load had to be left behind. More points were lost for the shortage of useful



The price tag of £23,546 is now looking rather steep when there are so many able cars in this class that cost less.

we say	
Towing	***
Solo	***
Practicality	***
Buying & owning	***
Verdict	***
Still a very fine towo	car, although

quite an expensive one.





CHEVROLET CRUZE VOLKSWAGEN GOLF ESTATE PEUGEOT 3008



Chevrolet

Cruze 2.0 VCDi 125 LS

LISTPRICE	£14,995
TARGET PRICE	£13,291
KERBWEIGHT	1502kg
85% MATCH	Not legal
MAX TOWING WEIGHT	1200kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

IF NOT FOR its low towing limit, the Chevrolet Cruze would have been one of this year's surprise packages. However, a restrictive maximum towing weight of just 1200kg rules out pulling an 85% match.

Yet from the way it performs you'd swear the Cruze could easily pull more. The 30-60mph time of 16.3 seconds is helped by towing a lighter caravan but is still impressive.

It only struggled in the emergency lane-change on the final high-speed

run. As it slowed from over 60mph, the Al-Ko ATC showed some caravan movement but nothing alarming.

The Cruze took the reversing test in its stride. The handbrake needed a firm pull before it would hold on the 1-in-6 hill but the Chevy pulled to the top with some clutch slip.

The list price of £14,995 is cheap for a car with this much space but it's a shame there's no hatchback version.

We say...

Towing	****	
Solo	***	
Practicality	****	
Buying & owning	***	
Verdict	***	
Keenly priced but hampered		

Keenly priced but hampered by a restrictive towing limit.

Volkswagen

Golf Estate 2.0 TDI Sportline

LIST PRICE	£22,065
TARGET PRICE	£20,621
KERBWEIGHT	1495kg
85% MATCH	1271kg
MAXTOWING WEIGHT	1500kg
TOWBALLLIMIT	75kg

AS AN ALL-ROUND package, the Golf Estate has a lot going for it. No other car in this class can match the VW's practicality score. The combination of plentiful luggage space, a full-size spare and the Trailer Stability Programme as standard ticked most boxes.

Inside, there's plenty of room for passengers and its cabin is better finished than previous generations.

However, it doesn't tow as well as the class-winning Astra, and was less precise and confident in the lanechange test. Acceleration was more subdued. The 30-60mph sprint took 21.8 seconds: more than eight seconds longer than the Vauxhall.

Some judges found the Golf stalled in the reversing test, and the handbrake needed a firm pull before it would hold on the 1-in-6 test hill.

The price tag of £22,065 isn't cheap compared with the Skoda Octavia, which is equally spacious and only slightly slower.

We say...

Towing	***
Solo	***
Practicality	***
Buying & owning	
Verdict	***

Competent in most areas. Not as polished as the Golf hatchback.





Peugeot

3008 2.0 HDi FAP 150 Sport

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LISTPRICE	£20,195	
TARGET PRICE	£19,033	
KERBWEIGHT	1529kg	
85% MATCH	: 1300kg	
MAX TOWING WEIGHT	: 1500kg	
TOWBALLLIMIT	: 70kg	

AS THE 2010 What Car? Car of the Year, there were high expectations of the Peugeot 3008.

As a family car, it works very well. The cabin has lots of storage space, and levers either side of the boot fold the rear seats flat quickly and

easily for a trip to the tip. Even with the seats upright there was enough space for our practicality tester to fit in a full load of kit. A little more legroom in the back would be useful, otherwise the cabin is impressive.

The 2.0-litre engine is excellent, too, quiet and smooth enough to make the 3008 a relaxing companion for long journeys. It's no slouch, either, and accelerates from 30-60mph in just 13 seconds.

We have no complaints about the 3008's hill start. The electronic handbrake held the outfit still, releasing without fuss. The strong engine pulled car and caravan to the



The interior of the Peugeot 3008 is just as striking as the outside

top of the hill without drama and the reversing test was also glitch-free.

Yet the 3008 lost out in the lane-change test and when slowing from speed. The back of the car was pushed around by the van at higher speeds, and the Al-Ko ATC recorded more movement than desired when decelerating. The numb steering didn't inspire confidence, either.

That said, we can see why What Car? rates the 3008 so highly.

We say.

no su ,	
Towing	***
Solo	***
Practicality	***
Buying & owning	***
Verdict	***

Better family car than towcar but a very impressive all-rounder.

Top used cars 1425-1574kg

Volkswagen

Golf Estate 2.0 TDI SE

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36mth old	£12,215 (approx)
THE CLASS WINNER in 2008,	
the Golf Estate is our favourite	

used buy in this weight class now. It may not be the cheapest used car around but it makes a very impressive towcar.

For starters, it's very practical. There's plenty of space inside for both passengers and luggage. In fact, many larger estates are no more roomy on the inside.

It also tows very well, with lots of pulling power from the 2.0 TDI engine. It's easily strong enough to cope with any suitable match. Official figures promise 51.4mpg for a three-year-old car and that will come with the noisy oldgeneration engine. Year-old cars will have the much-improved common-rail diesel. It will cost you more but it's very definitely the better car if it falls within your price range.

Stability is good enough for long towing trips to be a breeze.