

1425-1574kg class winner

There's a choice of estate cars, hatchbacks, crossovers and MPVs in our second-lightest weight division. We name the best on test



The Passat's huge boot took all our holiday kit. Its dash is user-friendly and as a towcar, it's stable at speed



Volkswagen Passat Estate

2.0 TDI 170 Bluemotion Technology Sport	
List price	£26,250
Target Price	£24,303
Kerbweight	1563kg
85% match	1329kg
Towing limit	1800kg
Towball limit	90kg

LAST YEAR'S OVERALL champion takes class honours again. The Passat does so much well that it is almost irritating. It makes a superbly stable towcar, whether travelling at speed in gusty winds, or changing direction fast in an emergency.

Al-Ko ATC data shows very little movement from the caravan when slowing from high speeds. The large boot swallowed all our luggage, and the practicality judge was pleased with the Passat's comprehensive handbook and full-size spare wheel. If we're being picky, the location of the electric socket is rather fiddly.

There's not much else to complain about. As a solo drive, the Passat is comfortable, quiet and refined. The 2.0-litre diesel engine has plenty of power to pull any suitably matched caravan and makes this car impressively swift in regular driving.

It's also exceptionally economical, returning 60.1mpg on the combined cycle. Emissions of 123g/km keep VED costs low. That earns the Passat this year's Green Award.

We say...	
Towing	★★★★★
Solo	★★★★☆
Practicality	★★★★☆
Buying & owning	★★★★★
Verdict	★★★★★

A capable estate and excellent towcar. Impressive economy and emissions.



Did you know...
just **4 of the 34** cars tested have a full-size spare wheel as standard

Top used car 1425-1574kg

Vauxhall Astra 2.0 CDTi SRi 5dr
12 months old £12,740 (approx)
24 months old £11,070 (approx)

Few family hatchbacks are as stable as the Vauxhall Astra. A couple of years back, it was one of the surprise packages of our tests, proving unflappable when pulling a van and impressively quick, thanks to the powerful 2.0-litre diesel engine. Leave the caravan behind and the SRi can really shift, although the ride is on the firm side, especially around town. Rear-seat space isn't very generous and the boot is quite small. Running costs should be low, thanks to fuel economy of close to 63mpg for recent versions equipped with the Start/Stop system. Steep depreciation means these cars can be picked up for surprisingly little, even after just a year on the road.

5 more cars in this category reviewed on the next pages

1425-1574kg the best of the rest



The Mazda's dash is neat, but the finish is rather dark and sombre

Mazda 3

2.2D 185 Sport Nav	
List price	£21,495
Target Price	£19,828
Kerbweight	1528kg
85% match	1299kg
Towing limit	1500kg
Towball limit	75kg

THE MAZDA'S 182bhp engine is almost overkill in a small hatchback. It means the 3 takes towing in its stride. If anything, it felt quicker than the 30-60mph time of 16.4 seconds suggests.

The firm suspension is unforgiving when the car is driven solo, but when towing it delivers impressive stability all the way to 70mph. The 3 nailed the lane-change test: on the fastest run, the caravan flailed about, but the Mazda dragged it straight again.



"In the fastest lane-change test, the Mazda dragged the tourer straight"

Light, front-wheel-drive cars sometimes struggle with the hill start, but the Mazda pulled up the slope confidently, even in wet conditions.

The practicality team wasn't as impressed as the drivers, because the 3 didn't have space for all our

luggage. Mazda told us that owners shouldn't use the space-saver spare wheel while towing, although there was no warning of this in the handbook.

Standard equipment is generous, and the 3 has a good reputation for reliability.

We say...

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

Confidence-inspiring and stable, but hurt by modest practicality.

Mercedes-Benz B200

CDI Blue Efficiency Sport	
List price	£24,710
Target Price	£23,296
Kerbweight	1475kg
85% match	1254kg
Towing limit	1400kg
Towball limit	80kg

IT MAY BE the smallest Mercedes in this year's competition but, pound for pound, the B-Class is at least as impressive a towcar as the big E-Class Estate.

Straight-line stability is a strong point, even when towing at speeds that would get your collar felt in the UK. In the lane-change test, the B-Class refused to be bullied by the caravan, no matter how fast they were going.

Going from 30-60mph in just 13.6 seconds, performance is impressive. The slick gear-change helps – it's much smoother than you'd expect of a manual Merc.

The electronic parking brake held the Mercedes still on the 1-in-6 slope in the hill-start test, although the wheels tended to spin in damp conditions.

For such a short car, intelligent packaging frees up plenty of

luggage space, and there was room in the boot for all but two items of holiday gear. Passengers are also well catered for, whether in front or in back.

Our practicality team was impressed to find that a handy reversing camera is included in the price. However, Sport models are much more expensive than SE versions, which are already well equipped. The SE also

rides more smoothly than the lower-slung and stiffer Sport, and would be our choice.

We say...

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

A stable and swift towcar, but others are cheaper to buy and fuel.



Stylish and sporty, the cabin of the B-Class packs in a lot of space



"Pound for pound, the B-Class is as impressive a towcar as the big E-Class"

Fiat Doblo

1.6 Multijet 105 My Life	
List price	£16,705
Target Price	£14,675
Kerbweight	1505kg
85% match	1279kg
Towing limit	1300kg
Towball limit	60kg



All-round visibility is great, and the Doblo's dashboard is simple

SO LONG AS you're not in a hurry, the Doblo makes a reasonable towcar. However, it takes a tedious 28.2 seconds to go from 30-60mph with a caravan in tow. The Doblo stops better than it goes, needing 11.8m to come to a standstill from 30mph in damp conditions.

In a straight line at a steady 60mph, the Doblo needed some steering correction to hold its course, but it wasn't alarming. Bells did begin to ring in the lane-change test, though, when the caravan pulled the back of the car out during the fastest run.

As you'd expect of a van-based MPV, the Fiat has plenty of room for luggage, with space for a full load of holiday kit. However, the low towball limit is disappointing and the handbook is short on towing info. Surprisingly, it warns drivers not to exceed 80kph (50mph) when towing.

The keen price is appealing, and official figures promise strong fuel economy, but the Doblo is some way off the best in this weight class.

We say...

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

Practical and likeable, but it struggled in the lane-change test.



Subaru XV

2.0D SE	
List price	£26,295
Target Price	£25,528
Kerbweight	1480kg
85% match	1258kg
Towing limit	1600kg
Towball limit	75kg

YOU CAN MAKE a stronger case for choosing a Subaru XV if you're going to tow than if you're not. Four-wheel drive helps pull a van whatever the weather, and hill starts are fuss-free. Still, some judges said the clutch whiffed a bit after reversing uphill.

The XV hauls from 30-60mph in 14 seconds – quicker than expected, given its power and torque. However, the stopping distance of 15m from 30mph is mediocre on a dry track.

At speed, the XV proved stable, but it needed more steering correction than the best in this class, especially above 60mph. The ride isn't comfortable enough, solo or when towing. What's more, there's too much noise at speed.

Subaru's thorough aftersales package is appealing, though, and includes regular cleaning and free scratch repair. However, the manufacturer says the standard puncture repair kit isn't suitable for towing, and the price takes the XV too close to upmarket rivals.

We say...

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

Rugged appeal, but the XV's price and poor stopping hold it back.

Chrysler Delta

1.6 M-JET 120 SE	
List price	£19,195
Target Price	£18,071
Kerbweight	1485kg
85% match	1262kg
Towing limit	1300kg
Towball limit	60kg

THE DELTA ISN'T a bad car, but it was a long way from the top of most judges' score sheets. On the plus side, it looks distinctive and has plenty of space. It stopped well from 30mph, needing just 11.6m, and stayed in charge of the van through the lane-change test.

However, even at 60mph, the car needed too much steering

correction to stay on course, and took some time to recover after sharp steering inputs. The handbrake needed a firm pull before it would hold the outfit still, although the Delta pulled up the slope comfortably enough.

Despite plenty of luggage space, the low towball limit and the lack of a trailer stability program hurt the Chrysler's score.

We say...

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

Distinctive looks aside, there's no compelling reason to pick a Delta.



Did you know...

only **2** cars this year can't legally pull **85%** of their kerbweight

Test Figures

Volkswagen Passat Estate 2.0 TDI 170 Bluemotion Technology Sport	☀️
30-60mph	13.1 seconds
30-Omph	10.8m
Mazda 3 2.2D 185 Sport Nav	☀️
30-60mph	16.4 seconds
30-Omph	11.1m
Mercedes-Benz B200 CDI Blue Efficiency Sport	☁️
30-60mph	13.6 seconds
30-Omph	12m
Fiat Doblo 1.6 Multijet 105 My Life	☁️
30-60mph	28.2 seconds
30-Omph	11.8m
Subaru XV 2.0D SE	☀️
30-60mph	14 seconds
30-Omph	15m
Chrysler Delta 1.6 M-JET 120 SE	☀️
30-60mph	19 seconds
30-Omph	11.6m
Test conditions	wet 🌧️ damp 🌫️ dry ☀️