How the tests were done

We go the extra mile to find the most suitable cars for towing your caravan, which is why the Towcar Awards test is known as the UK's most thorough, rigorous towcar assessment programme. Here's how we did it...

Towcars lead a hard life. Pulling a tonne or even two tonnes behind a fully loaded car gives the engine, gearbox, suspension and brakes a tough workout.

Few of us have the luxury of running a car purely for towing, so the same workhorse that pulls our caravan on the family holiday must also cope with the commute

and the school run, trips to the tip and the weekly shop. That's what the Towcar Awards are all about. Britain's best towcar should be a great all-rounder, not a car that's good at towing and little else. This year we've rated 41 models, not just for towing a caravan or trailer, but based on how they perform in everyday driving, their space and practicality, running costs and value for money.

Caravanners ask a lot of their towcars, and are equally demanding of these towcar tests. We've listened to feedback from readers and Club members, and have introduced a reversing manoeuvre into the test programme this year, plus there's a score for the hill-start test in the data pages.

We hope you'll find that this year's Towcar Awards are the best vet.



David Motton Head Judge

Towing

Every car tows a Swift caravan around two separate test routes at the MIRA proving ground. The first replicates everyday towing, while the second involves some more extreme manoeuvres.

The first route begins with a slow-speed reverse up a shallow slope to check the strength of the transmission and engine. The best cars will happily reverse at a crawl, with engines at little more than tickover and no protest from the clutch. Each outfit also performs a hill start on a 1-in-6 slope. This year we've given each car a hill-start score, which you'll find in the data pages.

Every car is taken up to 60mph to test the car's acceleration, gearing and stability. If it is happy at 60mph, another run is made at 70mph (10mph above the UK speed limit for motorways and dual carriageways). Each car is then driven over a rough section of tarmac so that



MIRA's steep test hills provide a tough challenge for any car

ride comfort can be assessed.

A low-speed slalom tests the brakes, handling and steering, while a constant-radius bend shows how the car corners.

The more aggressive tests are carried out by the performance driving judge. Each car is driven flat out from 30-60mph, as might happen when joining the motorway, and the time is recorded using satellite tracking equipment. A 30-Omph emergency stop shows which cars have the best brakes.

A lane-change test is undertaken at increasing speeds (30mph, 32mph and 35mph) to test how each car will respond when swerving to avoid an accident. The AL-KO ATC stability system fitted to each caravan is disabled so it doesn't interfere with the outfit's behaviour, but objective data from the system's sensors shows how stable the caravan is when slowing from high speeds.

For both test routes, the cars are matched to a Swift caravan weighted to 85 per cent of the kerbweight of the car.

The expert verdict of What Car?'s experienced team of road testers provides the solo score. This section of the judging considers what each





The lane-change test really pushes a tourer to the limit

car is like to drive without a caravan or trailer behind it, including ride and handling, performance and refinement. Passenger space is also assessed.

Practicality

If there were such a word as 'towability', that's what this part of the judging would be called. There are 101 things that make the life of a towcar driver easier, from easily



Our practicality judge checks the size of the spare wheel

accessible electrics and informative handbooks to a healthy noseweight limit on the towbar. Those things are assessed here.

Our practicality judge uses a typical holiday luggage load to check if the luggage area is well shaped, and confirms if the spare wheel (assuming there is one) is suitable for towing.

Buying and owning

Even a very good towcar can still turn out to be a bad buy if

it's overpriced, expensive to run or loses its value quickly. That's why we've examined What Car?'s data on every car, including the Target Price, which is a realistic discounted price you should be able to achieve at your local dealer.

Cars that score well in this part of the assessment have to be economical, well equipped, perform well in independent crash tests and also have strong resale values.

Thank you

Our thanks go to AL-KO for preparing the ATC units to provide stability data. Thanks also to Witter for assistance in checking towing electrics, Milenco for the loan of its mirrors and adaptors, and to Admiral Fire Extinguishers. In particular, we have to thank the volunteers from The Camping and Caravanning Club who gave up their time to make the tests possible.





Nigel Donnelly As the editor of Practical Caravan, Nigel lives and

breathes touring. When he's not in a caravan or writing about one, he's probably towing, which makes him an ideal addition to our panel of driving judges.



lain Geddes After two years of assessing each car's practicality, lain

joins the driving judges as The Camping and Caravanning Club's representative on the panel. lain's day job is senior technical advisor at the Club.



Steve Huntingford A new member of the judging panel for 2010, Steve is a road

tester at What Car? and this year's performance judge. With the best part of a decade's experience, Steve has driven everything from the smallest city cars to the most expensive luxury models, and everything in between.



Nigel Hutson
One of the original
driving judges, Nigel
has towed with almost

200 cars since 2007 and keeps coming back for more. He is a Class 1 police driver, currently works as a collision investigator, and is a life-long caravanner.



David Motton
A former editor of
both What Car? and
Practical Caravan.

David is currently *Practical Caravan's* towcar editor, and tows with around 70 different cars every year. David has been one of the driving judges since the Towcar Awards began in 2007.



Barry Norris Barry has been closely involved in the Towcar Awards every year,

with stints as a practicality and driving judge giving him unrivalled knowledge. This year he's back as practicality judge, checking luggage space, towing electrics and handbooks down to the smallest detail.

