# How the tests were done

We use the UK's most rigorous assessment to find the best cars for towing your caravan

YOU CAN'T TELL how well a car will tow just by looking at a spec sheet. The only way to know for certain is to hitch up a caravan and put the car to the test.

That's just what we've done with 50 new cars. As ever, we've brought back last year's winners to act as benchmarks for the more recent models, and lined up a selection of all-new and freshly updated cars. Our task? To find the very best new towcars, whatever your budget. Our tests aren't just about towing, though.

Even the keenest caravanner is likely to spend more time commuting or on the school run than heading off on holiday. That's precisely why we also consider what a car is like to drive every day, judging its space and practicality, value and running costs before choosing our winners. That way you can be sure our recommended cars are great all-rounders. We've also looked back at some of the best cars tested in past years to suggest some great used buys.





Good reversing on a slope is vital



The following explains how we find Britain's best towcars.

Each car tows a Swift caravan, weighted to 85% of the car's kerbweight or its legal towing limit, whichever is lower. The caravans have had the AL-KO ATC anti-snake system disabled and the stabilisers removed so as not to mask the car and caravan's behaviour.

The driving judges take each car on a set route around the MIRA proving ground. The parallel straights on a 1-in-6 slope. Last year we are used to test acceleration and high-speed stability. If a car is happy at 60mph, it is driven up to 70mph on the return leg, (10mph above the

"Our task? To find the best towcars, whatever your budget"

UK speed limit for motorways and dual carriageways).

The cars then head to one of MIRA's test circuits, where handling is assessed through a constant radius bend. A low-speed slalom tests the brakes, steering and cornering

Next, the drivers assess how quickly each outfit pulls straight after a short, sharp steering input. Then each car is driven over a rough road surface to assess ride comfort. before a hill-start test takes place introduced a reversing manoeuvre, which we've made tougher in 2011 by using a steeper gradient.

The performance driving judge performs even more extreme manoeuvres, and uses data from tracking equipment. Each car performs a 30-60mph acceleration test in two directions (to allow for any wind), and a 30-0mph braking test to show which cars stop most quickly in an emergence The ATC system then records the



Cars are driven with and without caravans to judge overall performance

outfit's stability when slowing from 60mph.

Finally, each outfit goes through an emergency lane-change test at increasing speeds (30mph, 32mph and 35mph) to see which cars stay under control when swerving to avoid an accident

Most towcars must also earn their keep as everyday cars. That's why What Car?'s team of expert road testers has judged what a car is like to drive without a caravan or trailer. Refinement, ride and handling, performance and passenger space are all considered.

Some manufacturers make towcar drivers' lives easy, with mirrors that easily accept towing extensions, accessible electrics and generous oseweight limits. Such details are

assessed in the 'practicality' section. Points are awarded if the manufacturer has fitted a Trailer Stability Programme to help avoid instability, and if the spare wheel is suitable for use when towing. There's little point in a car that tows superbly but doesn't have space for holiday luggage, so our practicality judge

tries to find room for a typical load

of suitcases, bags and a pup tent.

sensible buy if it's overpriced, expensive to run, or performs poorly in crash tests. That's why we've analysed What Car?'s data on every car, including the Target Price: a real-world discounted price that you should be able to achieve surveys, fuel economy and resale values all contribute to the score.

# **THE JUDGES**



## **Steve Cropley**

Joining the judging panel for the second time, Steve Cropley is the Editor-in-Chief of Autocar magazine. He is one of the world's most experienced motoring journalists and a European Car of the Year juror.



# **Nigel Donnelly**

As Practical Caravan's Editor, Nigel Donnelly regularly tows in Britain and on the Continent. He has a keen sense of what caravanners need from their cars, and knows good value when he sees it.



## **lain Geddes**

The Senior Technical Advisor at The Camping and Caravanning Club, lain is the only panellist this year who has served as a driving and practicality judge. He is in charge of the practicality assessment.



# **Steve Huntingford**

Our performance judge, Steve's day job is a road tester at What Car?. With the best part of a decade's experience of testing cars on road and track, his task is to push both cars and caravans to their limits.



Nigel has been one of our driving judges every year since the Towcar Awards started. He is a lifelong caravanner and a police Class 1 driver. Nigel currently works as a collision investigator.



# **David Motton**

The Towcar Editor of Practical Caravan. David Motton tows with as many as 70 different cars each year and has been a judge since 2007. He is a former Editor of What Car? and Practical Caravan.



# Sue Taylor

Back for a second stint as a driving judge, Sue tows horseboxes and trailers with a wide variety of towcars. She has been Features Editor of the Club's magazine, Camping & Caravanning, for more than 10 years.



Thank you Our thanks go to AL-KO, for preparing the ATC units to provide stability data, and Witter for assistance in checking towing electrics. We're grateful to Milenco for the loan of its mirrors and adaptors, and to Admiral Fire Extinguishers. In particular, we want to thank the volunteers



