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Top tips on choosing your tow-car and making the most of caravanning



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Choosing the ideal tow-car

Whatever type of tow-car you have in mind for your caravan, there are some essential safety considerations you need to bear in mind when it comes to choosing a suitable make and model...

Is your tow-car worth the weight?

To ensure safe towing, you need the correct weight balance between your car and caravan. This relies on your car's 'kerbweight'. The UK definition of this is the weight of your tow-car with a full fuel tank, liquids (lubricants, oils and water) adequate for normal operation, as well as a standard set of tools and equipment. It excludes the weight of the driver, other occupants or load.

Once you know your car's correct kerbweight, you can now calculate the correct weight of your caravan. This is known as the "Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass" or "MTPLM" and should equate to 85% of your car's kerbweight.

Here's how you can calculate 85% of your car's kerbweight:

Car's kerbweight ÷ 100 = 1% of your car's kerbweight

1% of car's kerbweight x 85 = MTPLM

For example: your car's kerbweight = 1300kg; 1% = 13kg; 13kg x 85 = MTPLM of 1105kg

Please note, some car manufacturers will stipulate a towing figure of less than 85% of the car's kerbweight, whilst others will state the car is unsuitable for pulling a caravan. So to be on the safe side, you should always make sure to check the car's handbook.

If you have any questions about regulations regarding your next tow-car, our expert staff are always on hand to help. Just ask when you pop into your nearest Carcraft showroom.

Top tips on choosing your tow-car and making the most of caravanning

Let's torque about engines...

Other important factors to consider are engine size and torque. Your car needs to be sufficiently powerful to pull a caravan at a sustained speed, as well as having enough towing capacity to deal with steep gradients.

Fast doesn't always last

For example, a 600bhp sports car might have you whizzing along nicely on the flat, but it's going to struggle when faced with much of an incline. Which means you'll have to build up speed again – until the next hill.

Choose a car to suit your caravan

Whilst most 2.0 litre cars are sufficient to pull a standard-sized caravan without any difficulty, if you want to tow something larger you may want to consider upgrading to a 4x4. With more beef beneath the bonnet and torque worth talking about, you can negotiate those hills with ease. The downside of course is when you're driving solo, you may find your car is a little slower than you'd like.

So overall, it's best to choose a car with good torque over the car's entire rev' range. This gives you pulling power from standing to cruising with acceptable fuel consumption. As a rule of thumb, the bigger the engine the greater the torque.





Manual or automatic? Diesel or petrol?

Whilst we all have our preferences for gear and fuel type, there are some things you might want to especially consider when choosing a tow-car.

- An automatic car offers smoother restarts and less risk of wheel spin as power is fed evenly to the driving wheels.
- A manual gearbox on the other hand makes it easier to match speed to torque – whereas an automatic may allow for ‘slippage’, resulting in loss of power and extra fuel consumption.
- In hotter climates or over long hill climbs an automatic may overheat. Some manufacturers even exclude automatic transmissions from towing.
- Of course, with manual gear selection, depressing the clutch and selecting the gear can become tiresome after a while, especially in urban areas.
- Diesel offers substantially more miles per gallon, however, traditional diesel engines have lacked power.

- Newer turbo diesel engines can perform equally to their petrol counterparts – especially those with torque at low revs.
- Any petrol engine car between 2.0 and 2.5 litres, chosen for torque and power, will meet most towing requirements.

Making your journey as safe and comfortable as possible

Besides considering the performance and power of your new tow-car, there are a couple more things you might like to think about before purchase.

- Will your new tow-car comfortably accommodate family members, pets and baggage?
- Is it going to be practical for use when you’re not towing?
- Have you chosen something that’s going to be reliable and not leave you spending half your holiday at the side of the road?

Top tips on choosing your tow-car and making the most of caravanning

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Safety first...

Caravanning can be great fun and provide real freedom – but it does come with some special safety requirements...

- The vehicle you're using to pull your caravan should be fitted with a good quality towbar to European safety standards.
- When fitting a towbar, always seek professional assistance and stipulate the type of caravan you're pulling.
- It's an offence, under the Road Traffic Act, not to have a towbar that meets letter ratings and does not exceed the manufacturer's towing limits.
- If the towbar obscures any part of the registration plate, it must be removed when not in use.
- Rear view mirrors must enable the driver to see the road behind the trailer on either side – it's the law in many European countries to have these mirrors fitted to your car.
- Your caravan should carry a number plate from a registered supplier, with black letters on a reflective yellow background illuminated at night.
- Always check your brakes, reversing lights, indicator and headlights are working and clear.
- Remember to use a stabiliser when towing, as this lessens the risk of hazardous 'snaking'.



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Make sure you're packed and ready for the journey



There's nothing worse than reaching your destination only to realise you've left something essential behind. Here are some handy reminders on those crucial items you can't afford to be without ...

- Leisure battery for powering electrical appliances
- Low wattage appliances that won't drain your juice
- Enough sleeping bags for you and your family
- Melamine dining sets are durable and scratch resistant
- A high capacity water hog keeps enough H₂O on tap
- Every caravan needs a Wastemaster to get rid of waste water
- A three-way fridge keeps things cool whether running on gas, electricity or 12 volt battery
- A portable TV or DAB radio are also handy – especially for those rainy days
- Pack a spirit level too as the caravan needs to be level for the fridge to work
- Although many caravan parks provide them, it's always best to pack at least one of your own gas bottles

You'll find many of these items and more at **Carcraft's Motorstore**
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