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Guide to... THE BASICS

More and more people are discovering the pleasures of touring, but there's a lot of information to take on board. In the first of our new series of cut-out-and-keep supplements on a selection of hot caravanning topics, we look at the basics!

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Also available as a FREE ebook – see
www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how/ to download yours!





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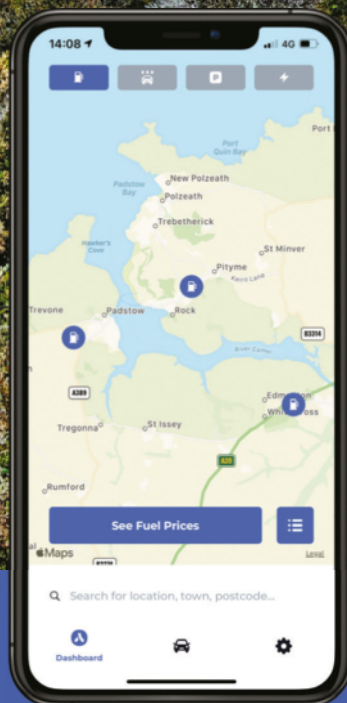
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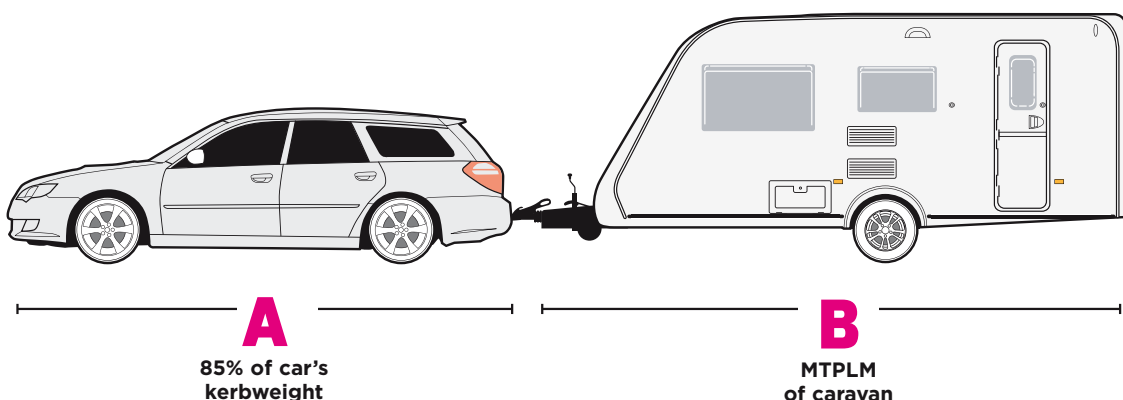
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WHAT CAN I TOW?

This is the key question for caravanners, especially first-timers, so here's what you need to know for safe (and legal) touring



BEFORE MAKING ANY decisions about buying your caravan, you need to know what you will be able to tow – here's a round-up of the essential details.

The 85% rule

In line with the views of the major caravanning clubs, *Practical Caravan* recommends using the '85% rule' when calculating a suitable car-and-caravan match.

This states that a caravan (**B**) should weigh no more than 85% of the car's kerbweight (**A**) (provided this figure is also within the car's legal maximum towing limit).

To calculate the 85% figure, simply divide your car's kerbweight by 100 and then multiply it by 85. For more on this, and licence requirements for towing, see p132.

Safe loading

There's more to safe and stable loading than a few facts and figures and 30 seconds with a calculator, however.

A stable car-and-caravan combination comes about because of many different factors; although very important, the matching ratio is just one. The stability systems fitted to the car and caravan, the condition of the

tyres and their correct inflation, whether the caravan is a single- or a twin-axle, download on the towball and the speed at which the outfit is driven are all important.

You may be allowed to tow at 60mph on certain roads, but back off even 5mph and you're likely to find the unit feels more stable – you'll arrive at your destination slightly later, but your trip will be more enjoyable, and safer.

What to put where

When mulling over matching ratios, it's easy to forget that how a van is loaded matters – not just the actual weight. A caravan loaded to 85% with every item of luggage stuffed under a fixed bed at the back could be less stable than the same van loaded to 95% with heavy items stowed close to the axle.

Heavy items should be kept in the car (provided the payload limit isn't exceeded), close to the rear wheels (push them as far forward as they will go when loading, keeping lighter items near the tailgate). Or keep them well secured in the van, over the wheels and on the floor, keeping a very close eye on your van's payload to ensure that you don't exceed it.

'Mulling over matching ratios, it's easy to forget that how a van is loaded also matters, not just the actual weight'





10 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Whether you're a newbie or an old hand, before you purchase a caravan you need to ask yourself these 10 key questions, to work out which outfit will be the right one for you

1 Will you need to change your car?

First and foremost – and especially if you are new to towing a caravan – you should follow the 85% guideline (see p133).

This states that when fully laden, the caravan should not weigh more than 85% of the car's kerbweight – so you need to find out the latter figure before you can start to consider which caravan to buy.

If you find a caravan that fits this rule with your existing car, all you have to do is fit a towbar (if it doesn't have one already).

2 What are you going to use the van for?

This is much more than just a question of deciding how many people are going to be sleeping in it, and going from there.

For example, it might surprise you to know that some caravanners don't view being in a caravan as going on holiday: they just use it to get away somewhere local for perhaps one night, or as a base for their hobbies, such as hillwalking or fishing.

If that's you, then you might only need a very basic caravan, fitted with minimal washing and cooking facilities, and possibly not even a fixed bed.

Putting the bed together will feel like less of a chore if it's just for one night, and the space and weight savings you will achieve by opting for such a layout mean that you can probably get away with a much more economical tow car, too.

However, if you are planning to use your tourer for what most people would probably think you use it for – as a base for regular family holidays – then you would probably require a larger model, perhaps one that does have a fixed bed.

There is also a growing trend among caravanners to opt for a seasonal pitch – somewhere they take their caravan at the



start of the season and then leave it there, coming back for occasional weekends.

If that is your plan, you can afford to max out on space and weight (within permissible limits), because you will only be towing the caravan twice – at the beginning and then at the end of the season.

3 Where will you be travelling?

If you think that you are likely to be using your caravan for travel abroad most of the time, it might well make sense to go for a Continental model which still has the door on the Continental side (A).

Most Continental caravan manufacturers that maintain a significant UK presence have now switched to offering their caravan doors on the 'correct' UK (near) side, but some still have doors fitted the Continental way.

4 When will you be touring?

Caravans are generally better insulated than motorhomes, so they potentially make better vehicles for winter touring. Most new caravans now come with Grade 3 insulation, which is designed to show they are suitable for this purpose.

As for heating: most caravanners doing all-year-round touring opt for the Alde wet heating system. As well as providing uniform heat, this also removes the need for any cumbersome ducting trailed around the van, where it can sometimes obstruct parts of the otherwise useful storage areas.

5 How do you like to sleep?

One popular layout, particularly for seasonal tourers, is an island bed (B) in the rear of the van (usually with the washroom behind it), with the kitchen in the middle before you get to the front lounge.



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A If you do a lot of touring abroad, you might prefer a van with the door on the Continental side **B** A floorplan with an island bed offers plenty of adaptability **C** Think about the kind of meals you plan to cook while on tour **D** If you prefer to make good use of site facilities, a luxurious washroom might not be a priority **E** An awning can be a really good investment, providing flexible living and storage space



Such a floorplan is particularly appealing because couples can use it for touring mostly by themselves, yet still have enough space when they bring along occasional guests or have children to stay for a short while.

Bear in mind that you will probably hold on to your caravan for several years, so if you have a growing family, their needs will change. If you opt for bunk beds, make sure they are large enough for teenagers (assuming they still want to be in them).

6 Will you be doing much cooking?

The caravanner in the glossy brochure may be chopping up a fancy Waldorf salad, but in real life, you are more likely to be putting together simple meals on tour.

In our experience, cooking in a caravan (**C**) often involves reheating stuff that is already cooked. So a spacious fridge and a microwave are two extras that you might not want to go without.

7 Do you really need a fancy washroom?

As with kitchens, washrooms in general are rarely going to match the den of pampering you probably have at home.

Still, campsite toilet blocks are so variable that your van's washroom could be better than what is on offer on the outside (**D**).

But even if you don't use the washroom very often, it can still serve as a useful place

to hang wet coats, or leave your awning if it hasn't dried by the time you need to head home (if weight restrictions allow).

Caravanners tend to spend more time levelling the van when they arrive on site, so showers in vans tend not to have the double drains found in motorhome showers, which are designed to allow water to drain even when the vehicle is not level. Some more expensive vans do have them, however.

8 What about the awning?

Awnings (**E**) really can make all the difference to your holiday, providing you with double the living space or more.

They also offer you a bigger area for mealtimes, so you can take your foldaway table outside and leave the caravan's front lounge up as a bed or an area for watching TV. The awning also provides relatively secure storage for bikes and barbecues.

With an inner tent, they can give you additional sleeping spaces, relieving you of the thorny problem of working out who is going to sleep where inside the caravan.

Bear in mind, however, that there might be times when you can't rely on the awning for accommodation – if the site warden asks you to take it down in bad weather, or you have an early ferry to catch, so you want to take it down the night before you leave. In such circumstances, you would need to work out who will be sleeping where.



9 Will you be taking bulky luggage?

You really want to keep what you carry in the caravan itself down to an absolute minimum, to stay within both the van's payload and the 85% rule.

However, particularly given the extra carrying space available, you are more than likely to want to take some lightweight outdoor furniture with you, and possibly a barbecue as well.

If so, make sure that there is somewhere you can stow these items inside the caravan. You could leave them loose down the aisle, but things do tend to move about en route, and they could cause damage.

You might also like to have external locker doors, so you can easily retrieve these items once you arrive on site.

Another question to consider is bikes. Again, it's probably not a good idea to store these inside the caravan, down the aisle. The most secure place for them is on a bike rack, set somewhere on the back of the car or on the A-frame.

10 Do you need to think about any extras?

A motorised caravan mover can be a real godsend to help you shift your tourer onto the pitch if you think you are going to struggle by just using brute force, or your own reversing skills.

A self-levelling system will also remove a great deal of the potential hassle when it comes to trying to level your caravan, and means that you don't have to use up valuable storage space with levelling blocks (although you might still want to bring the blocks with you, to rest the steadies on if the pitch turns out to be soggy).

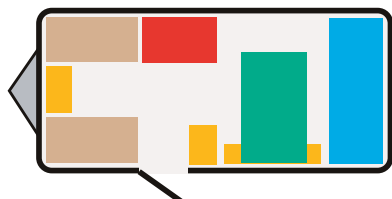
Both of these do add to the cost of the caravan if you are on a budget. Caravan levelling systems are also heavy.





YOUR PERFECT FLOORPLAN

Before you head for the forecourts, you need a clear idea of your ideal caravan, starting with the all-important floorplan. Here's our run-down of some popular layouts, who they are good for and who should avoid them

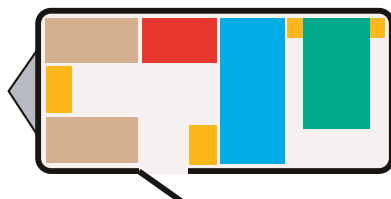


1 Transverse island bed, rear washroom

Island beds are a surprisingly recent addition to caravans, an introduction from the world of motorhomes. Tourers are a bit wider than motorhomes, so it is far more common to see them with a transverse island bed, which takes up less overall length.

Good for Couples who will be mainly travelling on their own

Less good for Parties with small kids who might need the toilet at night

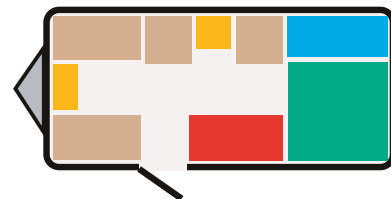


2 Transverse island bed, central washroom

Transverse island-bed layouts with central washrooms are slightly less common than those provided with end washrooms. With that washroom usually spread right across the caravan, they do offer more privacy for whoever sleeps in the island bed.

Good for Family parties where the adults want some privacy

Less good for Anyone who is looking for a really airy interior



3 Rear corner bed, corner washroom

Rear corner beds take up less length and space than island beds, and are almost as popular. With a corner washroom, you can introduce them into relatively short vans, because bed and washroom take up the same amount of length.

Good for Those who want a fixed bed in a shorter caravan, or larger families where the parents want some privacy

Less good for People who are seeking a more luxurious washroom



4 Single beds, end washroom

This can often feel like two separate lounges; with a couple of extra scatter cushions, you could turn the single beds into additional seating during the day.

Good for People who like interiors to be airy, and the toilet out of the way

Less good for Those with children liable to need the toilet at night. Less practical if you carry heavy sports kit

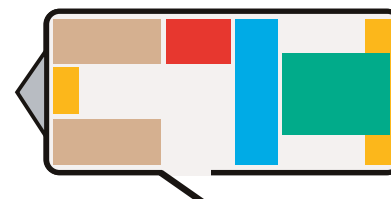


5 Single beds, central washroom

This layout, with a central washroom spread across the caravan and two single beds right behind it, is just about hanging on among UK manufacturers.

Good for Couples who want luxury but also their own sleeping space, or friends who are travelling together

Less good for Those who enjoy a sense of camaraderie on tour



6 In-line island bed, central washroom

Some layouts offer an in-line island bed – that is, one that runs lengthways from the back of the caravan. For obvious reasons, these tend to be longer vans, often with twin axles.

Good for Confident tow car drivers who like a luxurious bedroom

Less good for Anyone planning to travel with bulkier items stored in the caravan

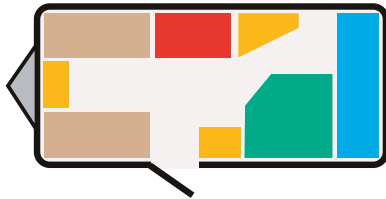


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KEY

- Seats/beds
- Kitchen
- Washroom
- Fixed bed
- Bunk bed
- Table/cupboard

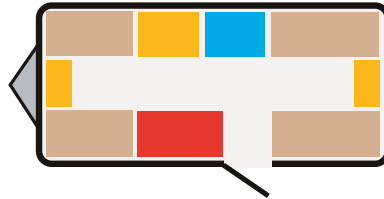


7 Corner bed, end washroom

Having an end washroom behind the rear corner bed overcomes the problem of the washroom being poky, as they are often huge – although that does tend to make for a longer caravan overall.

Good for People who want the luxury of a large fixed double bed and a washroom on hand. Particularly good if there are usually just the two of you

Less good for Anyone who travels with children who are liable to need access to the toilet at night

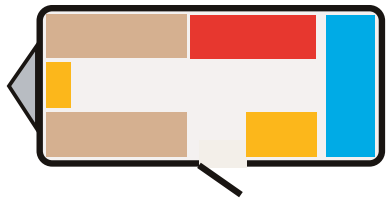


8 Rear lounge

Caravans with two lounges – one at the front, one at the back – were once the mainstay of all tourer ranges. But they have almost entirely petered out, due to the advent of fixed beds. There are still one or two such models on the market.

Good for Large families, or couples where one is an early riser or who want to bring a grandchild along with them for occasional trips

Less good for Anyone who finds putting up beds a chore



9 End washroom

This layout, featuring a large and usually luxurious washroom at the rear, has become increasingly popular with buyers in recent years, particularly in two-berth caravans.

Good for Couples who usually tour by themselves and still want to have some home-style luxuries

Less good for Anyone who finds making up beds a chore, or who might travel with an extra guest for a longer period of time

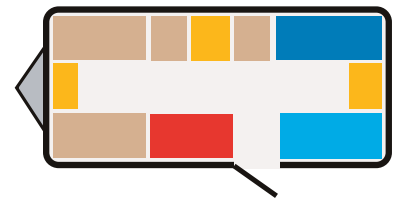


10 End kitchen

If you are a keen cook who thinks that the stricter confines of a caravan should not prevent you from rustling up a quick cassoulet while you're on tour, then this layout, which has the kitchen spread most of the way across the back of the van's interior, could just be the right one for you.

Good for Chefs in the caravan

Less good for People who think that a comfortable washroom is a more important priority

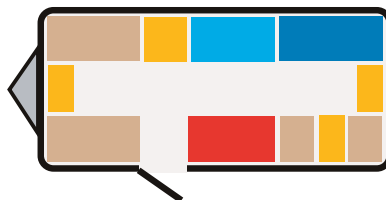


11 Lateral bunks, corner washroom

In what is possibly the most popular layout option for families, with this floorplan, you have a pair of bunks in one rear corner and a corner washroom in the other, with the two usually being separated by a substantial wardrobe.

Good for Larger families with children of widely differing ages

Less good for Anyone who values privacy above all

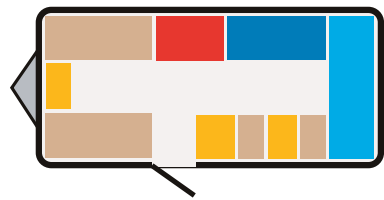


12 Children's room

This layout, with a pair of bunks in the rear offside corner next to a small dinette that can also be turned into two more bunks, appeared in the past couple of seasons and has been rapidly gaining popularity among buyers.

Good for Adults and children who like to have some space of their own

Less good for Anyone who thinks the adults should have a fixed bed

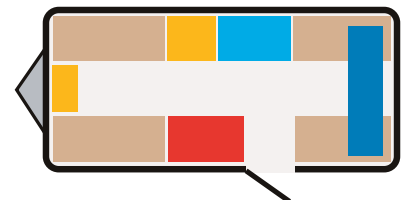


13 Lateral bunks, end washroom

As with rear corner beds, this option, which has the washroom spread right across the rear of the caravan, is also a very popular choice.

Good for Families who need a large washroom, or where the children want to be together

Less good for Adults who want easy access to the washroom



14 Transverse bunks

This arrangement, which provides bunks spread across the back of the caravan, has now disappeared from UK ranges, but is still being offered by some of the Continental manufacturers.

Good for Large families who prefer smaller caravans

Less good for Families who like to spread out during the day





BUY USED WITH CONFIDENCE

Buying pre-owned can save you money, but you'll need to take care. **John Sootheran** has some top tips to help you minimise risk and bag the bargain caravan of your dreams!



1 Typically, a used caravan can be bought from a major dealership with full facilities (A), from a smaller dealership (often found on former petrol station forecourts), or from a private individual via a small ad or a portal such as eBay or Gumtree.

If you are buying from a dealership, aim to pay for all of your purchase, or even just the deposit, on a credit card. This ensures your entire outlay will be covered by Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act (between £100 and £30,000). Different legislation offers protection above this amount.

2 Large dealerships have reputations to protect, so buying from one

is seen as being a pretty safe bet. Check our Owner Satisfaction Awards results (issue 423) to find dealerships that have impressed other readers.

3 Private purchases are covered by the principle of 'caveat emptor' (buyer beware): the responsibility for checking any purchase's suitability or condition lies with the buyer. You will have very little comeback if something proves to be wrong.

4 Private sellers often throw in lots of extras with the sale, but with dealers, you'll have to negotiate fairly hard. They can make money on your part-exchange, finance, the new van

and extras they sell you, so negotiate on all of these to get the very best deal.

5 Don't forget to double-check that your tow car can safely and legally pull the caravan you are thinking about buying. Next, consider the layout very carefully. Is it right for you and your family? Sounds obvious, but getting basic decisions such as these wrong could prove costly.

6 Meet the vendor at their home to view the caravan, not in a random car park or service station.

7 Research similar vans for sale, to get a rough idea of the price you should pay. Print out a screen grab to check the caravan you're viewing is the same year as that stated in the advert.

8 Online forums can offer a great deal of very useful advice and in-depth detail about problems to look out for with specific ranges and models.

9 View the caravan in daylight and when it's not raining. Give the exterior a good once-over, looking for evidence of problems such as dents and damage, cracks, scratches, filler and mismatched paintwork.

10 If you're operating on a tight budget and don't want to pay an independent expert to check your prospective purchase, do make sure that you give the caravan a thorough inspection yourself. This should include all of the electrics (when plugged into the mains and on leisure battery). Ask the vendor to chill the fridge before



you arrive. Likewise, request that the space- and water-heating system is on when you arrive (especially with Alde heating, which takes longer to warm up). You'll soon know if everything's working as it should. Check tyre wear, exterior lights, hitchhead mechanisms and the handbrake and spare wheel. Then step inside the caravan to scrutinise the taps, shower, toilet flush, and the hob, oven and grill.

11 The paperwork is also important. Be sure to inspect the caravan's most recent service documents, to check for any advisories.

12 Inspect all of the windows closely. Are any of them scratched or misted up?

13 Remember, any van that's been used for one two-week holiday once a year, rather than five UK tours and a trip to Spain, will have experienced much less in the way of wear and tear, but might have suffered from spending long periods immobile in storage.

14 Have a CRiS check carried out on the tourer. This compares the caravan's VIN number with a database listing stolen, damaged and written-off vehicles. The 17-digit CRiS number will be displayed on at least seven of the van's windows, and stamped onto the chassis. Thieves often try to remove the number by grinding or scratching it off. Walk away from any caravan that shows CRiS damage. Find out more at www.cris.co.uk/cris-check.

15 Check all of the van's ownership and service documentation (B). Has it been regularly and properly serviced? Was the servicing carried out by a reputable technician? Ask who has done the servicing when you call the seller, then check them out online.



16 Examine the age of the tyres (C). You'll find this information on the tyre wall. It consists of two numbers, for example, '37 16', which denote that the tyre was made in week 37 of 2016.

In that case, the van's tyres – however much tread depth remains – should be replaced some time in the next few months, because they'd be five years old in the 37th week of 2021.

17 Check the van's condition matches its declared age and usage.

18 Examine the floor for any signs of delamination. You should be able to feel if the outer veneer of the plywood floor has bubbled up. Then take a look inside the cupboards and under the beds and sofas, too.

19 Damp is the hidden caravan killer. Does the interior smell damp when you enter? Heavily fragranced caravans might be hiding something. In particular, look for any signs in corners, including those under the beds and in lockers. In addition, check back through the

paperwork for any notes about damp that has previously been picked up by a professional tester.

20 Investigate the van's electrical connector. Is it going to be compatible with your tow car?

21 Check out the roof of the caravan for evidence of damage, and likewise, make sure that you also look underneath for any potential problems with the chassis and the floor.

22 Do all of the van's accessories work? This includes things like the motor mover, auto-levelling, air-con, alarm, tracker and satellite dish.

23 How old is the leisure battery and is it a reputable brand? Is the gas bottle included in the sale?

24 Are any remote controls supplied and if so, are they functioning as they should?

25 Are all of the keys available, and do they work properly?

26 Remember, if you intend to bring your new purchase home with you, you'll need a numberplate for it!

27 Use any problems you find, along with the associated repair costs, to negotiate on price. Take a pen and paper with you to make notes, and factor in the time and travel that the repairs will incur, as well as any lost touring time.

28 Always remember the golden rule: if a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is! And avoid becoming involved in sales with caravans that are 'abroad at the moment' – this is very likely to be a scam.





BUYING A USED TOW CAR

Looking for a pre-owned tow car? There are so many excellent models on the market, it can be tough to decide which one is right for you.

Start your research with our expert tips from **David Motton**

THE RIGHT TOW car isn't going to make your caravan holiday, but the wrong one could quite easily break it.

A vehicle that is stable, practical and reliable means every journey should start and finish without stress. But choose a car that's sluggish, unstable or unreliable, and every towing trip will be something you simply have to grin and bear.

Making the right choice is important, whether you are shopping for a new or a used tow car. If you are looking at the secondhand market, though, there are some additional pitfalls to be aware of.

You'll need a car that's suitable for the task, and one that's been well looked after by its previous owners. Older cars might not come with any warranty, so choosing a car that won't let you down becomes even more crucial than when you're buying new.

Here are our tips to make sure that you purchase a used tow car to be proud of.

1 Start with the caravan

Whatever age of car you are planning to buy, the first question you need to ask yourself is: "Will it safely and legally tow my caravan?"

To find the answer, you need to start by knowing the weight of your tourer. Don't match by Mass in Running Order, use the Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass (MTPLM). This is the heaviest the van is allowed to be when fully loaded.

Let's say your caravan has an MTPLM of 1350kg. To abide by the 85% guideline, which both of the big caravanning clubs recommend for safe and stable towing, means choosing a car with a kerbweight of 1588kg (1350 divided by 85, multiplied by 100). So you'll be looking for a car with a kerbweight of 1588kg or more.

To stay on the right side of the law, your vehicle will also need to have a legal towing limit of at least 1350kg.

2 FWD, RWD or 4WD?

Most modern cars are front-wheel drive. Some vehicles, usually executive saloons and estates or high-performance cars, are rear-wheel drive.

SUVs are often, but not always, 4x4s. Some estates and MPVs have 4x4 versions, such as the Volkswagen Passat Alltrack.

Setting aside the question of value for a moment, 4WD vehicles generally make the best tow cars, especially if you plan to tour all year or you often stay on farm campsites. They also weigh more than 2WD models, which helps with matching ratios.

However, a 4WD model isn't necessarily going to be the right choice for everyone. A 2WD version will provide better fuel economy than a 4WD, and will generally cost less on the used market.

In addition, if you are considering a 4WD version of an estate or MPV, you might have to search far and wide to track down a good secondhand example, whereas 2WDs will be more plentiful.

If most of your towing takes place in the summer months, and you generally stay on hardstanding pitches, you might not derive enough benefit from 4WD to justify the higher purchase price and running costs.

3 Manual or auto?

There's really no hard-and-fast rule when it comes to the question of whether a manual or an auto is better to tow with. This simply comes down to the driver's personal preference.

That said, always carefully compare the towing limits of manual and automatic versions of the same model. You can't assume they will be the same. For example, a 2011-2015 Honda Accord 2.2 i-DTEC manual has a legal towing limit of 1500kg. That drops to just 1100kg for the automatic.



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4 The right fuel type

There's no doubt that diesel engines aren't nearly as popular as they used to be, certainly among new car buyers.

Falling sales in the new market have also made secondhand car buyers more cautious about choosing diesel, because of quite understandable fears about resale values and whether cars will be allowed into clean air zones in towns and cities.

Values of diesel cars have weakened over the past few years, although they started out from a position of strength, typically holding on to more of their original price than their petrol counterparts.

That has now flipped around, and petrol values are usually a few percentage points stronger than diesel values, but the price of used diesels hasn't collapsed.

What's more, this softening of diesel prices can play into the hands of the canny tow car buyer. You pay less than you would have done a few years back for a similar car, and still get the benefit of better fuel

economy. If you recall our petrol versus diesel comparison of two Volkswagen Tiguan in 2018, the diesel returned 30.3mpg and the petrol 20.8mpg towing the same caravan on the same route.

So for our money, with more pulling power and greater fuel economy, diesel is a better bet for regular towing.

You can also tow with a handful of pure electric cars, and some self-charging and plug-in hybrids. Of these, on the used market, the Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV (for example) might be on your shopping list. Although it's no better than middling as a tow car, it could make sense for an owner who mostly completes short journeys and can regularly rely on electric power alone.

5 Read the reviews

Every month, we put two new tow cars to the test – and all of our assessments are extremely rigorous. What's more, each issue of *Practical Caravan* also includes a buyer's guide to a particular used model.

6 Satisfaction and reliability surveys

Check reliability and owner satisfaction surveys to narrow your shortlist of cars. Reliabilityindex.com is a good source, based on claims made by owners of the thousands of cars with Warranty Direct cover.

7 Towball, or not?

One of the oldest clichés in used car buying guides is to walk away if the car has a towball. While this is nonsense, it does pay to check what the car has been towing.

If you are buying from a private seller, ask what they tow and make sure it's not more than the car could reasonably handle.

If the car has a towball, be sure it has been maintained, especially in terms of the clutch and the gearbox. If it doesn't have towing gear, look into the cost of having this fitted before you buy. Check with the manufacturer if cars with factory-fit towing gear have additional cooling fitted, because this can be extremely expensive to retrofit.

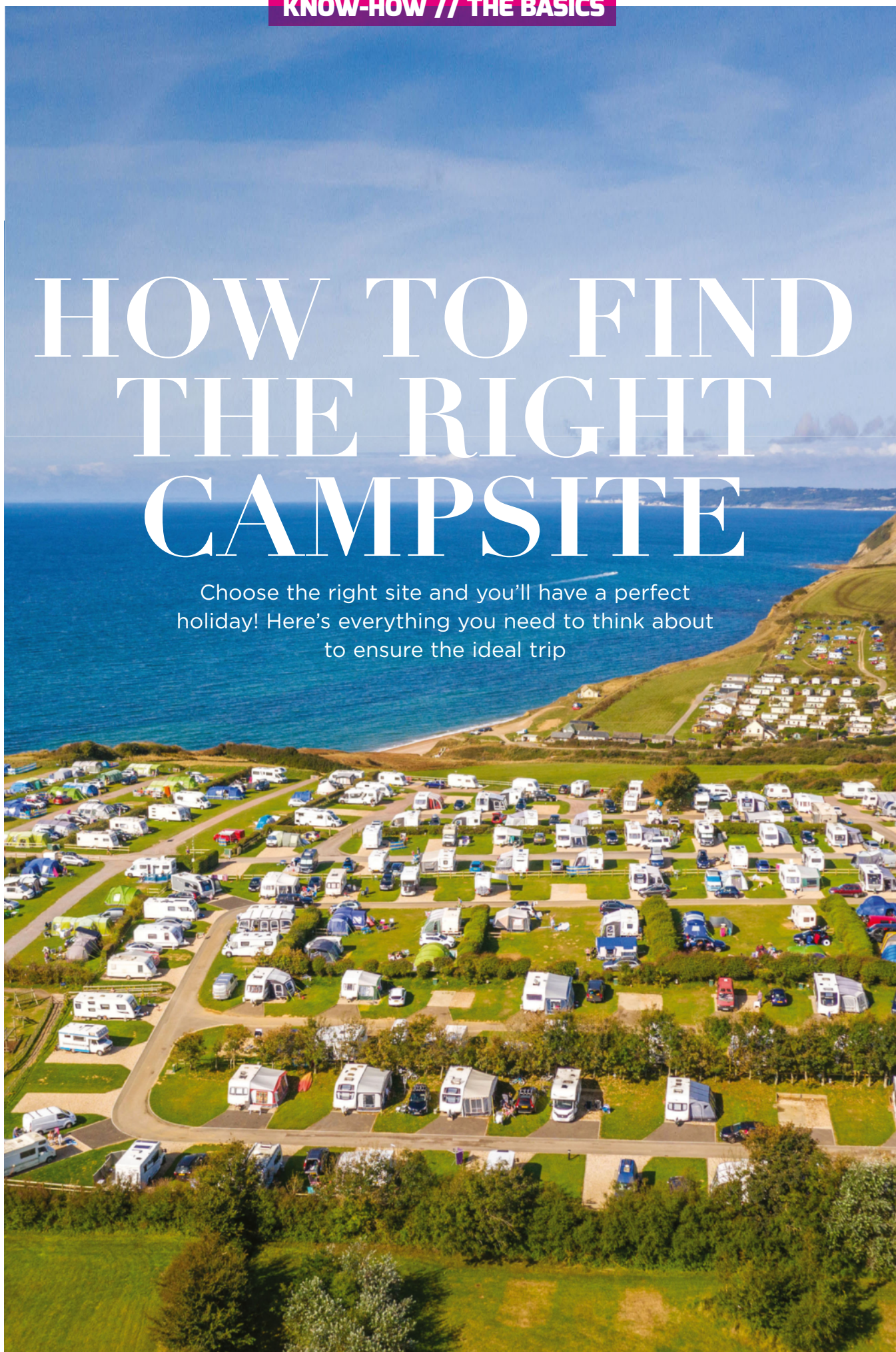
‘There's no hard-and-fast rule on whether manual or auto is better to tow with. This comes down to personal preference’





HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT CAMPSITE

Choose the right site and you'll have a perfect holiday! Here's everything you need to think about to ensure the ideal trip





When it comes to choosing somewhere to stay, there's a great deal to assimilate. But it's a really important decision – being unhappy with your site choice can ruin a trip. There are thousands of campsites to choose from, so here's how you can narrow things down.

Who do you think you are?

Start by considering your needs. A family with two teens will require quite a different set-up to one with under-10s to keep happy, or one that comprises just adults.

Interests are important, too. Will it be coast, rivers, lakes, countryside, moorland, mountains or towns?

Your idea of a break might be one with few decisions to make because activities are laid on and meals are available within a holiday park environment.

Alternatively, you might prefer a campsite deep in the countryside or on the coast, where you make your own fun.

Low on the readies?

Budget is another important consideration. If the coffers are light, you might prefer a low-facility, eco-friendly campsite. Low season is a good time to tour on a budget, and you can often find excellent deals for midweek touring, too. A stay of seven nights or more can sometimes earn you an extra night for free.

What about pets?

Owning a caravan means your pets don't have to go into kennels – you can take them with you. You just need to find a pet-friendly campsite with dedicated space to exercise your animal, on-site or on walks nearby. Some campsites even provide outdoor dog showers, so you can hose down your pet after a muddy outing.

Most sites require dogs to be kept on leads, which ensures comfort and safety for all guests, and some limit the number of dogs allowed per unit.

Join a club

Becoming a member of one or both of the major UK touring clubs – the Caravan and Motorhome Club and The Camping and Caravanning Club – gives you access to 4500 campsites. The Clubs list sites that they own, affiliated sites and Certificated Sites/Locations.

CSs and CLs are small, independent sites for members only, which take five units, often on working farms or in beautiful countryside; some are areas within larger sites. Most will provide a supply of fresh

water, but you should always check the website listing for other facilities.

If you are thinking of touring abroad, both Clubs can help with arrangements, offering deals for ferries, European site bookings and vehicle insurance.

The important stuff

Make a list of what you need from a site.

If you are only stopping for one or two nights, this might be as simple as a nearby pub where you can get a meal.

If you are staying longer, look for easy access to public transport, which saves you the stress of driving into busy areas and having to park.

Washroom facilities on most sites include showers, toilets and basins, family rooms and amenities for wheelchair users; many have dishwashing and laundry facilities. Check the website for details and reviews.

Reviews and awards listed on websites are very good indicators of how well a campsite is run. For eco-friendly credentials, look for the David Bellamy Awards symbol.

Super-clean washroom facilities can earn themselves a Loo of the Year Award.

Visit Britain and the AA grade campsites, while in our annual *Top 100 Sites Guide*, the winning sites are voted for by their guests (to download your free copy, go to www.practicalcaravan.com/top100-archive).

Sites for the grown-ups...

Select an adults-only site if you are grown-ups seeking peace and quiet. Tranquil Parks (tranquillparks.co.uk) lists 43 independent, family-owned adults-only parks located across England and Wales.

Fishing and touring are often bedfellows, with access to lakes at, among others,

Take a look at holiday park operators such as Flower of May (flowerofmay.com), which owns several family-friendly parks in Yorkshire.

Full-facility sites usually have a complement of static caravans, some privately owned, others available for hire. The ambience throughout will be busy and family-friendly.

Other holiday park operators to take a look at include Lancashire's Holgates (holgates.co.uk), whose Silverdale campsite is a regular finalist in our *Top 100 Sites Guide*; Parkdean Resorts (parkdeanresorts.co.uk) – 32 of its 67 UK-wide parks accept bookings from touring visitors; southern-based Park Holidays (parkholidays.com), which operates campsites in Devon, Essex, Kent and Suffolk; and Away Resorts (awayresorts.co.uk), which has centres in England and Wales.

Adventure, theme, location

Enjoyment of outdoor activities might also guide your choice. Adventure Campsites (adventurecampsites.com) lists sites across the British Isles offering adventures close by, such as walking the Brecon Beacons, and coastal or lake-based watersports.

Alternatively, you could select a location, in which case, the regional tourist board will have information about accommodation. Otherwise, a theme, such as Scotland's famous whisky trail, could be the way to go.

Touring further afield

If you're thinking about travelling a bit further afield when Covid restrictions allow, there's plenty of helpful information to be found. As mentioned above, the Caravan and Motorhome Club and The Camping and Caravanning Club can arrange and book ferries and campsites abroad.

If you are planning to tour during the low season, you might also consider picking up an ACSI camping card (campingcard.co.uk), which can provide you with savings of up to 60% at participating campsites across Europe. Eurocampings (eurocampings.co.uk) lists 9854 sites inspected annually by ACSI.

There are plenty of useful books, too, such as *Touring Europe 2021 in a caravan, motorhome or tent*, published by the Caravan and Motorhome Club.

Last, but by no means least, do read the regular travel features in *Practical Caravan*, where you're guaranteed to find plenty of brilliant touring inspiration!

CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!



'A family with teens needs a different set-up to one with under-10s to keep happy, or one comprising adults'

Eye Kettleby Lakes (eye-kettlebylakes.com), in Leicestershire; Henfold Lakes (henfoldlakesleisure.co.uk), in Surrey; Sumners Ponds (sumnersponds.co.uk) in Sussex; Woodhall Country Park (woodhallcountrypark.co.uk) in Lincolnshire; and Fields End Water (fieldsendwater.co.uk) in Cambridgeshire.

... and for families

Families often prefer full-facility campsites, providing children's clubs, play areas, fields for ball games, pools and a restaurant, café, bar or clubhouse. Some provide crazy golf and petting zoos; others, spas and a gym.

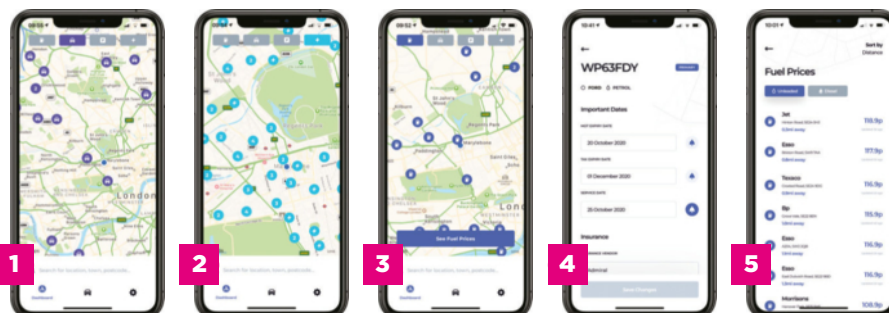




myAutomate

KNOW-HOW // THE BASICS

Advertisement feature



1 Car wash map 2 EV map 3 Fuel map 4 myDriveway 5 Fuel prices

Meet the business... MYAUTOMATE

Download this free app and you can access essential, up-to-date motoring information for caravanners, all in one place

MOST OF US rely on our phones, and in particular, apps, to help us in everyday life. Motoring is one area where there are plenty of device applications available. But what if you want a wealth of handy services in one easy-to-use app? That's where myAutomate comes in.

myAutomate is a free app that's available on both Android and iOS, and designed to make your motoring life that much easier – and cheaper. Within the app, you can search for your nearest fuel station, car wash, parking spot and electric vehicle charging point, making it brilliantly useful if you're out on tour in an area that you've never visited before.

You can also check fuel prices – which are updated daily – so you can get the best deal for your money.

What's more, you can store all of your vehicle's details on your own 'driveway', providing you with useful reminders about when your MoT, tax, service and insurance are due.

Early days

So how did myAutomate get started?

"We began as a company in 2020, and there were four of us involved from the start," says Managing Director Andrew Watson, who has a business background in fuel. "The app was developed in 2020, and was launched at the tail end of September last year.

Our launch coincided with the second lockdown, so it's been interesting! However, we've done well and things started to pick up in March this year."

So what was the thinking behind the app? "It grew out of discussions around making driving easier," says Andrew. "We wanted to incorporate lots of other, different elements into one app: electric vehicle points, car washes, and other day-to-day aspects that people use all the time. We wanted to get better information for everyone and put it all in one place..

"We tried to target people who drive for leisure, including caravanners and motorhome drivers – particularly anyone who is travelling and who doesn't know where their nearest fuel station or parking spot is. Interestingly, the fuel price section is the one that is used most."



Andrew Watson,
Managing Director

Next developments

So what's next for the myAutomate app? "We want to increase the amount of data provided by the app, and make that information more filterable,"

says Andrew. "We're also planning to look at facilities for the less able, and how we can incorporate that into the app – at the present moment, we're just at the beginning of that development work. And of course, we always welcome feedback from users!"

Find out more about myAutomate at www.myautomateapp.co.uk and download it for free from Google Play or the Apple App Store



ESSENTIAL TECH TIPS

Caravanning is all about learning by doing, but here are four essential tips to get you pitch perfect on your first tour!



How to... Obtain fresh water

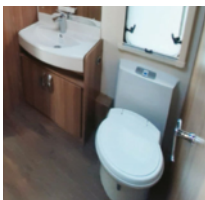
These days, most caravanners use a portable water-carrier to bring fresh water to their van. The term 'Aqua-roll' is to caravanning what Hoover is to vacuum cleaners:

a catch-all term to describe the brilliantly simple, but quite indispensable, rolling water-barrel.

Few people would be able to carry 50 litres of water (that's 50kg!) from tap to tourer, so rolling carriers are ideal in their simplicity, usability and storability.

Simply fill up the barrel, wheel it back to the caravan and drop in the Truma or Whale submersible pump (depending on your caravan's spec).

The impeller inside the pump is lubricated by the water, so don't let it run for extended periods when the barrel is empty. New pumps are easy to find, but cost in excess of £50, so you want them to last.



How to... Empty a chemical toilet

Unlock the cassette locker and open the hatch. You usually need to nip the yellow or orange handles together with the grey grip to release the cassette. The orange

grip doubles as an extending handle, so you can trundle the cassette along on its wheels.

At the disposal point, twist the fill/empty nozzle and remove the cap. Put this cap well away from the disposal hole – you don't want to have to fish it out. Now press the orange vacuum-release button on the cassette and pour the contents into the disposal point. The button also lets in air, minimising the risk of any splashing.

Rinse the empty cassette several times with clean water. Before replacing it, add the correct dilution of blue or green cassette chemical. Remember, always empty it at a dedicated disposal point – nowhere else.



How to... Change a gas bottle

Caravan gas bottles should always be securely strapped into their locker, and the regulator pigtail fitted and tightened with a 30mm spanner. It should also be noted

that gas fittings have a reversed thread, so you actually undo the connections by turning the nut clockwise, which might at first seem a bit counterintuitive.

Ensure that the gas bottle is turned off at the top tap before removing it. When the pigtail pipe is separated from the bottle, you will smell a small amount of gas, but as long as the bottle is turned off, this is normal.

Finally, screw the plastic stopper into the bottle's brass thread, to protect it and help prevent any minor amount of leakage.

When retightening the pigtail nut on the gas cylinder, ensure that it is hand-tight, but do not overtighten it, because this might damage the threads and make removal more difficult next time.



How to... Put up an awning

Many caravanners consider their awning a touring essential, the easy way to add living and storage space. But awnings are not known as 'divorce in a bag' for nothing

– putting one up can be tricky until you get the hang of it. It's definitely worth the effort, though.

Although putting up an awning can look complicated at first, it really is a case of following a logical sequence. We have plenty of expert advice about how to set one up on our website, so head there for step-by-step guides to erecting both full and porch awnings – you'll find them at www.practicalcaravan.com/advice/how-to-put-up-a-full-awning and www.practicalcaravan.com/advice/how-to-put-up-a-porch-awning.

'We have plenty of expert advice about how to set up an awning, all on our website, so head there for our step-by-step guides'