



PLUS

JUDGES' COMMENTS
ON 36 CARS
STARTING ON
PAGE 6

MONDEO IS MAGIC!

FORD SCOOPS TWO
CLASS AWARDS AND
OVERALL TITLE IN
THE 25TH YEAR OF
BRITAIN'S TOP
TOWCAR AWARDS

Supplement sponsored by Bailey of Bristol

BAILEY



Titanium X Estate CONQUERS ALL

FORD'S BRILLIANT new Mondeo Titanium X Estate has been voted Caravan Club Towcar of the Year 2008 in the country's longest running and most prestigious towing competition. Held, as usual, at the Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire, the competition attracted 36 entries representing 20 different brands. It was The Club's 25th year of running the competition – a fitting silver jubilee occasion in The Club's Centenary year.

Ford can be especially proud of this year's achievement because a Mondeo Zetec hatchback was also voted one of

the five class winners and an S-Max came within a whisker of picking up yet another award. But the company didn't have all the glory.

Škoda took multiple honours too, with Roomster Scout and Octavia Scout models shining above the others in their price classes. The final class award went to the much-improved Land Rover Freelander 2.

Two other category awards are made in The Caravan Club Towcar of the Year, for all-wheel-drive cars up to and above 1800kg. For the 'lighter' award, the judges' vote went again to the Škoda

Octavia Scout. There were more cars in contention for the over-1800kg award, which makes the Kia Sorento's triumph even more commendable.

TITANIUM SHINES

In nature, Titanium is a strong, bright metal with good corrosion resistance – a fitting epithet, then, for the latest car to bear the title Caravan Club Towcar of the Year.

Titanium X is one of two top model designations in the new Mondeo range (Ghia models are 'more wood than techno'), offering superb comfort and

ergonomic design as well as brilliant driving dynamics. The estate car bodywork, Ford claims, comes with almost 60% more torsional stiffness than its predecessor.

Mondeo has been a huge success since its launch in 1993. All versions of the latest model have wider track and revised suspension, and the cars' performance in this year's Towcar of the Year competition shows that a good towcar has become even better. The wide range of engines includes not only the five-cylinder 2.5-litre petrol unit that powered this year's overall winner but a 2.0-litre diesel that was in another class winner.

All models have electronic brakeforce distribution and stability control, while options include Ford-designed Interactive Vehicle Dynamics Control, which automatically regulates suspension settings, and Hill Launch Assist – which could be a boon for caravanners. HLA maintains brake pressure for a couple of seconds while you move your foot from brake to accelerator pedal.

WHERE, WHEN AND HOW

TESTING TAKES place at the Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire, probably the best car testing facility in the country. This year the cars were divided into five price categories, the theory being that anyone thinking about buying a new car will first consider how much they can afford to pay.

Manufacturers were invited to submit for testing any cars that were new launches in the period 1 August 2006 to 30 September 2007, or existing models that had been substantially modified (eg new engine, different transmission etc).

The Caravan Club also invites the previous year's overall winner to submit its car for re-testing – in this year's case, the Volvo V50 D5 SE.

The cars delivered are carefully scrutinized to make sure they conform to the exact specification declared on the testers' score sheets. Track tests, using six expert drivers, assess each of the cars' towing ability while another team of four 'caravanability' judges makes a careful assessment of each entrant's usability in everyday caravanning. Will it carry a set of awning poles, for instance, and do you have to get on



your hands and knees to plug in the caravan electrics?

All caravans are supplied by Bailey of Bristol and loaded to 85% of the relevant car's kerbweight. Noseweights are set at the car manufacturer's recommended limit, 7% of the caravan's running weight or the maximum stipulated weight for the coupling head, whichever is lowest.

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SAVE ON INSURANCE

GET UP to 10% discount on insurance for Caravan Club Towcar of the Year class-winning cars! Call 0800 028 4809 quoting TC08 for details and a personalised quote.



SPECIAL GUEST

GUEST OF honour was none other than Perry McCarthy, the original Stig from BBC TV's *Top Gear*, who witnessed the testing regime at Millbrook and later presented awards to the winning manufacturers at a celebratory lunch in London.



THANKS

THE CARAVAN Club gives its grateful thanks to Bailey of Bristol, who provided all the caravans used in Towcar of the Year; and to Al-Ko Kober for providing trackside help and technical assistance, ensuring all running gear was kept up to scratch.

TOWCAR OF THE YEAR 2008 AND £25,000 – £32,000 CLASS WINNER



The winning car with Perry McCarthy, alias the original Stig

The winners in detail

UNDER £16,000 CLASS WINNER



THIS PAGE FROM TOP: Caravan Club Towcar of the Year 2008 – Ford Mondeo Titanium X Estate. Big load lugger that looks great and drives even better. See p12

Škoda Roomster Scout 1.9 TDI. Roomster by name, roomy by nature – a great little performer with ideal engine and gearbox. See p6

Ford Mondeo Zetec. Smooth diesel-powered version of the Ford's fun-to-drive large family car. See p7

£16,000 – £20,000 CLASS WINNER



OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP: Škoda Octavia Scout TDI. Won its price class and went on to be declared best 4x4 for lighter caravans. See p8

Land Rover Freelander 2. Looks more like its big brother Discovery every day – and tows almost as well. See p14

Kia Sorento 2.5 CRDi XS. Latest version of a former Caravan Club Towcar of the Year champ shows it's still got a lot going for it. See p8

25 YEARS OF SUCCESS – PAST WINNERS



**£20,000 – 25,000 CLASS WINNER AND
UNDER 1800KG ALL-WHEEL DRIVE CATEGORY WINNER**



OVER £32,000 CLASS WINNER



OVER 1800KG ALL-WHEEL DRIVE CATEGORY WINNER



Who were the judges?

OUR CARAVANABILITY experts, as usual, were John Bramham, Mick Farr, Adrian French and Tom Collin. All four are extremely experienced caravanners (and three of them, coincidentally, former police officers).



Driving judges are drawn from the caravanning and motoring press. This year the team was: Lesley Harris from *Auto Express*, Andrew Ditton, freelance caravanning writer, Sally Pepper from *Which Caravan?*, Barry Williams from *The Caravan Club Magazine*, Victoria Heath from *Caravan* magazine and motoring writer Sue Baker.



The Bailey connection

BAILEY OF Bristol takes the road safety of its products very seriously, and is proud of its 10-year association with The Caravan Club Towcar of the Year competition. The competition not only provides caravan owners with important information on the choice of a potential new tow vehicle but also provides a practical examination of Bailey caravans' performance.

During the week-long test the caravans are taken on over 250 circuits of the Millbrook Proving Ground – this involves lapping the high-speed circular track and tackling a demanding hill route. Throughout this period Bailey constantly evaluates how its caravans perform, gaining valuable feedback on towing dynamics and structural integrity.

This is just part of the company's ongoing work to ensure it remains at the forefront of towed vehicle design and technology. Other initiatives include funding Trailer Stability Studies being carried out by Bath University, for which Bailey has manufactured a fully-adjustable trailer rig which allows variation of the parameters affecting towing stability, leading to greater understanding of the factors involved.

If further proof were required of Bailey's commitment in this area, it was the first UK caravan manufacturer to fit the Al-Ko ATC Trailer Control System as standard specification (on its Senator Series 6 range), to provide owners with additional peace of mind while towing on the open road.

- 1977 Peugeot 406 GXXD 2.1
- 1998 Citroën Xantia 16 Exclusive
- 1999 Audi A6 Avant 2.5 TDI
- 2000 Seat Toledo 15
- 2001 Volkswagen Golf 16 4MOTION
- 2002 Peugeot 406 2.2 GTX HDI Estate
- 2003 Skoda Superb 16 2.5 TDI Elegance
- 2004 Subaru Forester 2.0 XT V
- 2005 Mazda6 2.0 D-Estate TS (136ps)
- 2006 Kia Sorento 2.5 CRDI XE
- 2007 Volvo V50 D5 Sport
- 2008 Ford Mondeo Titanium X Estate

CARS UNDER £16,000

ICONS



storage



towball/sockets/
ease of hitching/
bulb failure warning



towing information
in handbook



value for money
(running costs)

The icons are there to help you identify a particular car's strengths. They are shown in the order of the car's strong points. They do not necessarily provide an accurate comparison between models



CLASS WINNER Škoda Roomster Scout 1.9 TDI

£14,355 as tested

Škoda's Roomster mini-MPV did really well for a little'un. The 1.9-litre diesel engine isn't especially powerful but the output is well matched to its well-sorted gearbox. Ratios are just about right for

towing and the Škoda pulls well even in top (5th) gear. Like other small cars it can be put off its stroke by crosswinds, but the Roomster never failed to yank its caravan back into line. A nice conventional handbrake held the outfit easily on a tough 17% gradient, and it pulled away with just a bit of tyre scabble but no real problems. For

caravanners, the Roomster beats its similar-under-the-skin partner, the Fabia, because of its roominess. However, electric socket access was a little awkward and there was no separate warning for caravan roadlight failure.



Kia cee'd 1.6 LS CRDi

£14,735 as tested

Second-placed in its class, the Kia cee'd looks and feels classy for a car of its price, and the smart, modern design works well. Acceleration with a 1248kg caravan on the back was acceptable, and the car felt well in control of things despite strong crosswinds. Enthusiastic take-offs produced noticeable torque steer, and there was some wheelspin when starting off on a gradient – the car we tested was not fitted with traction control. Its handbrake action put a lot of other cars to shame. Despite a couple of let-downs, the cee'd is a very likeable car with Tardis-like load capacity as well as easy access to towball socket and a good, level attitude when hitched up. Comes with a seven-year warranty too.



KIA CEE'D 1.6 LS CRDI



ŠKODA FABIA 3 1.9 TDI



FIAT BRAVO 1.9 MULTI JET



DAIHATSU MATERIA



extra), getting all that power on to the road is not always easy and wheelspin can be hard to avoid on hill starts unless you balance clutch and accelerator just right. The Bravo is fast, and it remained stable on our test track until well over the legal UK speed limit. Load-carrying ability is compromised by its raked tailgate and the Bravo didn't score well in terms of value for money. Good handbook information on towing though, and it has both audible and visual warnings for caravan indicator bulb failure.



Škoda Fabia 3 1.9 TDI

£13,300 as tested

This version of the new Fabia features the same engine and transmission as the class-winning Roomster and, as you would expect, its performance figures are about the same. It's a little bit lighter but it handles a caravan almost as well despite having a noseweight limit of just 50kg. Top gear (5th) is usable when towing but don't expect too much in the way of acceleration without dropping down a

cog or two. Brakes are a strong point, including a firm and easy-to-use handbrake. Top of the class in terms of operating costs – covering CO₂/kg, insurance group, service hours and on the road price. Must try harder in terms of load carrying.



Fiat Bravo 1.9 MultiJet 150 Dynamic

£15,594 as tested

On the test track the Bravo's 1.9-litre diesel engine shone. It was the most powerful engine in its class, it revs really freely and 225lb ft of torque meant minimal gearchanges and easy start-offs. With no traction control, however (it's an optional

Daihatsu Materia

£11,385 as tested

Towing ability would not have been high on the list of attributes when Daihatsu designed the little Materia, and putting a trailer on the back of this 1.5-litre mini-MPV has a very noticeable effect on both acceleration and top speed. However, it was stable enough at all times and the quirky body styling makes it a practical small car. It's a surprisingly impressive load carrier but the swing-down towing socket is not only very difficult to access but the towball is set too low, resulting in a nose-down attitude when hooked up.



CARS £16,000 – £20,000

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF ESTATE SE 2.0 LITRE TDI



Volkswagen Golf Estate SE 2.0 litre TDI
£18,366 as tested

Volkswagen has had a lot of success in this competition over the years and deservedly so. The Golf Estate SE 2.0 litre TDI doesn't let the side down – in fact it achieved the second highest score in this group. Like the class winner, it has oodles of torque (236lb ft) transmitted through a six-speed manual gearbox, and it's a car you want to drive enthusiastically. The rewards are a comfortable drive, no problems with instability and a workmanlike towcar with plenty of usable luggage space. A restart on the severe 17% gradient was quite easy with care, the standard-fit traction control taking care of a hint of wheelspin. Good value for money in terms of operating costs, and easy access to sockets. A sloping tailgate reduces load space but not by any significant amount.



Škoda Octavia 1.8 TFSI
£19,725 as tested

Not as highly thought of as its diesel-engined compatriot in the next price class, the petrol-powered TFSI still has many virtues. It is fast, its brakes are superb and the whole of the interior exudes quality. In fact the Octavia is one of those cars where everything feels 'just right' from the driving seat. However, the TFSI engine is so powerful that keeping everything under control with a caravan on the back needs care. It didn't feel as sure-footed as some cars at high speed and, despite traction control, there's a tendency to spin the front wheels on take-off, especially on a gradient. The six-speed gearbox is great to use but the top two ratios are on the high side



CLASS WINNER
Ford Mondeo Zetec
£18,952 as tested

Mondeo Man really is a lucky chap these days. The latest incarnation of Ford's best seller is a giant leap forward in both quality and style. Fitted with the company's free-revving 2.0-litre diesel engine and six-speed manual gearbox, the Zetec was quick off the line and remained stable even at 80mph on the test track. Traction control is standard and a hint of wheelspin on the hill start was quickly brought into line, after which the outfit shrugged off our demanding test route. This engine and gearbox make for relaxed towing

and, with 250lb ft of torque to play with, not much gearshifting is necessary – but it's such a precise piece of engineering that enthusiastic drivers will want to. The car's interior is streets ahead of some more expensive competitors too. With parcel shelf removed, the Mondeo is an impressive load carrier with a deep boot and it sat perfectly level when hitched up. Criticisms? The parking brake could be more effective and door mirrors could be bigger – but you'd fit extending ones for towing, wouldn't you?



ŠKODA OCTAVIA 1.8 TFSI



SEAT ALTEA XL STYLANCE 2.0 TDI



when towing. Nice and level with a caravan attached, nothing much to fault regarding towball and socket connections and reasonable towing data provided – but high running costs compared with the competition.



Seat Altea XL Stylance 2.0 TDI

£17,885 as tested

The Altea is one of those medium-size cars that always feels solid and well put together. In 2.0-litre TDI guise it is also fast and has the sort of handling that makes you want to drive it enthusiastically. Put a caravan on the back and it doesn't disappoint. In particular, the gearbox (six speed) is a delight to use and the ratios are just right. A conventional handbrake held the outfit rock steady on our tough hill test, and though there was a bit of wheel scrabble on take-off (on a newly-dampened surface), the Seat's traction control soon got things in

TOYOTA AURIS T180 D-4D 2.2 5 DOOR MANUAL



MAZDA 3 2.0 DIESEL TS²



order. From the driving seat, a lovely car let down only by very thick A-pillars that obstruct forward vision. If load capacity features high on your list of requirements in a reasonably sized and priced towcar, then look no further.



Toyota Auris T180 D-4D 2.2 5 door manual

£19,395 as tested

Toyota's new Auris sticks in my mind for the way in which it shrugged off the stop-and-restart on our tough 17% gradient. Helped by torque of 295lb ft, the car and caravan rolled away as if they were on the flat. And though the handbrake action is unconventional – the lever is almost vertical – it worked very well indeed. There was no instability on our high-speed circuit but the ride could have been more comfortable. Only 50kg nosweight limit and not the best load carrier in its class. However, little to fault in terms of socket access and handbook information.



Mazda3 2.0 Diesel TS²
£17,222 as tested

There were quite strong crosswinds during our testing period and in these conditions you need size and weight in a towcar rather than all-out power.

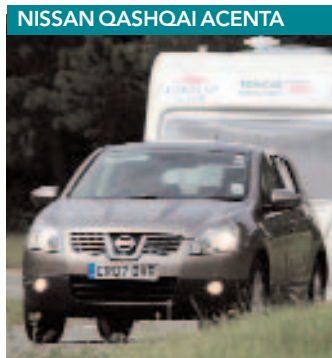
CARS £16,000 – £20,000 continued

The Mazda was quite severely buffeted at times, with the result that it didn't make for a relaxing tow. Plenty of torque from Mazda's 2.0-litre diesel engine (266lb ft) meant relaxed gearchanging on the flat and the brakes, including handbrake action, were very good. Socket mounting appeared a little flimsy and as a load carrier it's a mid-table finisher. Handbook information on towing is impressive and both audible and visual warnings alert you to a faulty caravan indicator.



Nissan Qashqai Acenta
£16,819 as tested

Nissan's new hatchback has some appealing features for caravanners: usable loadspace, good visibility due



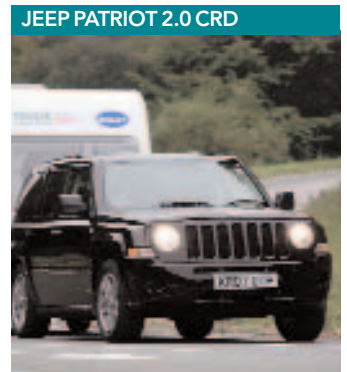
to a higher than average driving position and big door mirrors, and a handbrake that holds easily even on a severe slope. With only a 1.5-litre diesel engine, however, it has to be worked hard to keep up with the traffic flow. Buy a Qashqai Acenta and you can expect a car that's hard to beat in terms of running costs – it pumps out low emissions, is in a low

insurance group and is competitively priced. It's also more than adequate as a load carrier.



Jeep Patriot 2.0 CRD
£17,459 as tested

Without being too unkind to the Patriot, it is a bit of a sheep in wolf's clothing. It's got the looks of a serious towcar but doesn't quite deliver all that's promised. Full-time all-wheel drive provides plenty of traction even when taking off on a severe hillclimb, and it's mostly stable at speed. But you have to work it hard and the ride is hard with an uncomfortable pitching motion. The six-speed gearbox has a long action and top gear is too high for towing, but the 'box is pleasant enough to use. Towball height



appeared a little high when solo but there was sufficient give in the suspension to create a level connection with hitched to a caravan. Better than average stowage space and socket access.



CARS £20,000 – £25,000

Ford S-Max 2.0 TDCi
£22,327 as tested

Second-placed in its class, the S-Max showed again that Ford has got it right for caravanners. Fitted with a slightly modified version of the 2.0-litre diesel engine used in the Mondeo that won the previous price class, the S-Max's impressive acceleration was helped by a slick-shifting six-speed automatic gearbox. I encountered one wobble at very high speed (beyond the UK limit) but the car was always in control. The brakes are very good – including an oddly-shaped parking brake that looks more like an aircraft throttle control. The cabin is well appointed and MPV bodywork very versatile. As you'd expect, Ford's popular MPV is an exceptional load carrier – however, the S-Max doesn't come with a spare wheel but puncture repair sealant and a compressor instead.



OVER 1800KG AWD CATEGORY WINNER
Kia Sorento 2.5 CRDi XS
£23,465 as tested

An old Caravan Club Towcar of the Year favourite and past winner, the Sorento reappeared in its latest 2.5-litre diesel, manual transmission guise and showed exactly why it has done so



CLASS WINNER AND UNDER 1800KG AWD CATEGORY WINNER
Škoda Octavia Scout TDI
£20,035 as tested

One problem with a competition that goes on for several days is that weather conditions can vary between testing one car and another. This Škoda drew the short straw when I was driving, with a wet track and strong crosswinds. All the more notable then that it was an absolute delight to drive, with a willing engine, sweet gearbox with well-chosen ratios and full-time four-wheel drive. Pulling away on

well in this competition before. The four-cylinder engine churns out torque aplenty and full-time four-wheel drive ensures the car is always well planted on the ground. Gear ratios are just

our very severe hill start was easy, and on the twisty alpine section it handled confidently with predictable turn-in. A comfortable ride and nicely-built interior just added to the pleasure. With reasonable access to the towing electrics, efficient warnings for faulty trailer bulbs and fairly impressive load characteristics, the Octavia is a good all-round towcar. But the best reason for buying one is its running costs – the best of nine in this class.



right for towing. It pulls well from speeds below 50mph in top, 5th, gear yet even at 60mph the engine is doing only 2000rpm. There was never any trace of instability, even at high speed.



Inside, the Sorento is a comfortable and attractive car and a pleasure to drive and the only real criticism I had was that the handbrake only just held on our – very tough – 17% hill test. Restarting on this gradient was easy, even in high ratio. A 120kg noseweight limit, bags of storage and extensive towing information in the handbook highlights the importance of the caravan market to Kia.



CARS £20,000 – £25,000 continued

NISSAN QASHQAI TEKNA ALL-MODE 4X4 AUTO



VOLVO C30 2.0D SE SPORT



Nissan Qashqai Tekna All-Mode 4x4 Auto £22,254 as tested

With a bigger engine and six-speed automatic transmission, the Qashqai Tekna All-Mode 4x4 scored more highly than the front-wheel-drive model in the previous class. I found no problems with performance and stability was never in question even at 70-mph-plus. Brakes, and notably the handbrake, were excellent and the car made short shrift of our demanding hill route. Unfortunately for Nissan, this Qashqai was up against some very stiff opposition. Good access to towing gear means easy hitching/unhitching.



Škoda Superb 2.0 TDI £20,468 as tested

A V6 diesel Superb was crowned Caravan Club Towcar of the Year five years ago, and this latest version confirmed that the car makes a stable towing platform with good driving characteristics. However, the 2.0-litre TDI with six-speed manual gearbox lacked the sparkle of the former champ. Forget top gear when towing and beware too many steep hills. After several restarts the Superb was smelling a bit 'clutchy'. For more normal, relaxed towing it remains a

DODGE NITRO 2.8 CRD AUTO



very nice car, well appointed and very well put together, though it didn't live up to its name in terms of load carrying capacity. Towing electrics are easily accessible.



Volvo C30 2.0D SE Sport £21,395 as tested

If you are looking for a small, sporty coupé for occasional use as a towcar, you won't go far wrong with a Volvo C30 2.0D SE Sport. Everything about it is classy and for caravanners there are some nice unexpected extras like excellent door mirrors and superb handbrake action. However, it's not a mainstream towcar. In first gear the car pulled away effortlessly on our hill start but as you move up through the gears you find the top ratios (five and six)

ŠKODA SUPERB 2.0 TDI



front, leafspring rear) is hard. That also means a fairly uncomfortable ride. Interior noise levels are high too, and the gearbox feels agricultural. Positives include an abundance of storage space, a noseweight limit of 120kg and easily-accessible electrics. Isuzu should also be applauded for stowing tools under the rear seat, giving easy access in the event of a puncture.



ISUZU RODEO DENVER MAX LE



Dodge Nitro 2.8 CRD Auto £24,036 as tested

Selectable four-wheel drive, a big diesel engine and automatic transmission will attract caravanners to the Dodge Nitro 2.8 CRD Auto, with its chunky go-anywhere looks. Unfortunately it felt a bit lethargic on our test track and although it didn't become unstable once wound up to a decent speed, it didn't feel as well in control as some other competitors. Switching from 2WD to 4WD when the going gets rough couldn't be simpler: you just turn a knob. Back on tarmac, the footbrake worked well enough but had a lot of travel, while the handbrake just would not hold the car and caravan on our 17% gradient. Noseweight limit is an impressive 126kg but storage not as generous as in some other SUVs.



JEEP WRANGLER UNLIMITED 2.8 CRD



aren't suited, and I wasn't totally happy with its stability. Unfortunately, great exterior styling doesn't lead to impressive load carrying, but full marks to Volvo for ease of socket access and supplying decent towing information.



Isuzu Rodeo Denver MAX LE £23,686 as tested

To be fair, this isn't really what you would call a mainstream caravanning car, though with four-wheel drive and high or low ratios selectable at the push of a button, this is the sort of vehicle that would easily tug your caravan out of a sticky situation. Even in two-wheel drive it tackles all sorts of terrain, up hill and down dale – partly because the suspension (torsion bar

Jeep Wrangler Unlimited 2.8 CRD £23,589 as tested

With the same big four-cylinder diesel engine and five-speed automatic transmission as in the Dodge Nitro, the Jeep Wrangler offers a similar hard ride and limited performance. At least the handbrake would hold with this car, though the lever was at the top of its travel. With the car's utilitarian looks and 'take apart' bodywork it will appeal to a certain sector of the caravanning market, just like the Land Rover Defender. For more conventional caravanners, though, there are more comfortable alternatives. Noseweight limit is a class-leading 170kg but the towball was too high: 485-490mm when hitched to the caravan, resulting in a nose-up ride.



CARS £25,000 – £32,000



CLASS WINNER AND CARAVAN CLUB TOWCAR OF THE YEAR 2008

Ford Mondeo Titanium X Estate 2.5i
£25,252 as tested

Ford's new Mondeo is a leap forward in many respects, and although the outgoing model was a good towcar this Estate version with 2.5-litre petrol engine (one of only two in this

year's competition) is excellent. The five-cylinder engine produces maximum torque from just 1500rpm, making restarts easy; and although maximum power isn't reached until it's doing 5000rpm there is power aplenty to move its caravan briskly up to speeds of 80mph (where allowable) and beyond. More importantly, it does so without any trace of instability. Handling is so good that you know exactly what the

outfit is doing. Well-weighted steering helps you position the outfit precisely, the brakes are excellent and the six-speed gearbox, as usual in a Ford, is a delight. Add to that a well-appointed interior, comfort and an ability to swallow a huge amount of luggage and you have a winning towcar.



more seriously affected by crosswinds. Nothing dangerous, but at the limit it seemed the V70 was slightly less in control of its caravan than the V50. Nice features included a really easy restart on our 17% gradient and an effective electronic parking brake. A good load carrier, and pretty detailed towing information in the handbook. Nice and level when hitched up, but not the cheapest in terms of running costs.



Nissan X-Trail Aventura Explorer Extreme
£26,981 as tested

Masses of torque from Nissan's 2.0-litre diesel engine and fairly low intermediate gears pay dividends in getting the X-Trail on the move, and once you have wound it up to a decent speed you should have no trouble with instability. In two-wheel drive there was a little wheelspin on very severe hill starts before traction control (standard) cut in, but if I'd needed 4WD it would have been a

Mitsubishi Outlander 2.0 DI-D Elegance

£25,188 as tested

Mitsubishi's Outlander has the advantage of selectable four-wheel drive and should be on the shortlist of anyone looking for a serious towcar. The low-emission 2.0-litre diesel engine is free-revving and so well-matched to the six-speed gearbox that it was one of the few cars in this year's contest in which sixth gear was usable when towing. Stability was not an issue: when the Outlander's caravan was pushed out of line by a crosswind, this beefy car took control immediately. Drivers are presented with a comfortable and well-designed cabin, with bigger-than-average door mirrors and all controls in the right place. Brake action, including handbrake performance, was well above average. To top it all, the Outlander has a noseweight limit of 100kg. Our caravanability judges could find little to fault, with value-for-money running costs and the ability to consume as much luggage as you could throw at it. The socket is well located for easy electrical connection too.



Volvo V50 D5 SE Sport

£25,445 as tested

Voted Caravan Club Towcar of the Year 2007, the Volvo put in an impressive performance again this year. The sweet-sounding five-cylinder diesel engine is mated to a five-speed automatic transmission and could get you into trouble if you don't keep a watch on the speedometer. Progress is fast and seamless, but the car has impressive stopping ability too and the parking brake works a treat. Inside, the environment oozes quality, and there's room in the back of this stylish 'sportwagon' for a fair bit of kit. There were no problems with stability, as you'd expect from the contest's returning champion. An accessible electrical socket, reasonable running costs and good load capabilities.



Volvo V70 2.4D SE

£28,945 as tested

Fitted with a slightly detuned version of the five-cylinder diesel engine in the V50, this model also differed by having six-speed automatic transmission. Acceleration was brisk and seamless but I found the V70



simple matter of turning a dial. The X-Trail's handbrake is on the 'wrong' side (ie designed for left-hand drive cars) but in practice it worked better than most in this year's competition. Here's another vehicle with an abundance of storage space, with a useful underfloor slide-out unit in the boot ideal for concealing valuables. Easily accessible socket too, and nice and level when hitched.



Mercedes-Benz C220 CDI
£28,797 as tested

Make sure you read the handbook before you tow with a manual-transmission C-Class; the driving technique for getting away on hills can seem daunting. Keep your feet on the footbrake and clutch as you release the (foot-operated) on/off parking brake then, as you move your right foot to the accelerator, pressure in the brake system is maintained for a couple of seconds while you engage the clutch. In practice it works but it needs practice. If you stall, you have to act swiftly to get your left foot on to the parking brake. On the track, the C220 was brisk and the six-speed gearbox well suited to towing. High-speed stability was not a strong point, though. Promising pretty reasonable running costs for a Merc, the C220 disappoints as a load carrier – it swallowed only half our typical caravanner's load.



Renault Grand Espace Tech Run dCi 150
£25,278 as tested

With just driver and ballast to simulate one passenger on board, the 2.0-litre diesel Espace struggled, needing second gear to tackle a long 14% straight that many cars took in third gear – not a good start for a large people carrier. At speed the Renault didn't feel in control, either, but at least the brakes work well. The electronic 'push-button on, auto-off' parking brake is particularly useful when you are towing. You need to lose a couple of seats to turn this Renault into a decent load carrier.



Land Rover Defender 90 Station Wagon
£26,351 as tested

A Land Rover Defender will take you anywhere, it will go on forever and it won't complain if you put a big caravan on the back. Whether you could live with its uncomfortable ride and noisy interior only you can say. At high speed it didn't feel all that happy, with lots of buffeting; and the brakes don't inspire confidence. Handbrake performance is good, though, and the LR shrugs off hill starts. Rear seats have to be folded sideways to create load space, and then you turn Defender into a two-seater only. Excellent 150kg noseweight limit.



SsangYong Rexton II SX
£27,279 as tested

Although the Rexton didn't get unstable at speed, it took too long to get there and there was too much body roll. At slower speeds it did not give a comfortable ride and on the hill route it was difficult to get the parking brake to hold. Good points include a high noseweight limit (128kg) and the mirrors give good visibility. The towball was too high – 540mm from the ground – so when hitched the nose of the caravan was pointing upwards. cavernous rear storage compartment, though, and the tool kit was handily placed beneath the nearside rear seat.



Hyundai Santa Fe 2.2 CRTD CDX+ 7 Seat
£26,360 as tested

The Hyundai controlled its caravan well enough in strong crosswinds but the ride wasn't comfortable. Five-speed manual transmission has a nice enough action, which is just as well as it needs plenty of use. The Santa Fe struggled up our long 14% gradient and, although it managed to restart on the tough 17% hill, the handbrake just wouldn't hold. Credit where it's due – full marks to Hyundai for supplying detailed towing information, there is a good amount of storage space and the vehicle sits level with caravan behind.



CARS OVER £32,000



CLASS WINNER
Land Rover Freelander 2
£32,728 as tested

Land Rover's Freelander has grown into a better-looking, better-equipped 4x4 with a style that is bound to appeal to caravanners. Whether they will pay over £30,000 for one remains to be seen, but the diesel-engined, auto-transmission version tested here would not

disappoint them. The six-speed gearbox changes seamlessly when left to its own devices, it copes easily with hill starts and descents (just leave matters to Hill Descent Control if you are off-road) and on the flat you won't find the Freelander put off its stroke by gusty crosswinds. Icing on the cake is a pair of big, square door mirrors and a high enough driving position to give you

some view through many caravans. Towing electrics are accessible, the noseweight limit of 150kg is good and the handbook is pretty comprehensive. It also swallowed most of our load. A worthy winner of the top price class.



transmission. Somehow it seemed sluggish off the mark, but speed picked up rapidly to well over the UK limit. At high speed the Shogun was buffeted strongly by crosswinds and didn't always feel completely in control. Performance on our hill route was impressive, with easy take-offs on steep gradients helped by a decent handbrake. Even on the 17% hill our Shogun/Senator Louisiana outfit got away in two-wheel drive rather than having to engage 4WD or low-ratio. Shogun interiors are much improved, and the high driving position and big mirrors are a boon when towing. A rear-mounted spare wheel means the towball sticks out a long way for clearance – mind you don't catch your shins. Storage compartment took a full load with little complaint.



Mercedes-Benz R320 CDI
£44,418 as tested

Compared with the ML, the R-Class had 'only' a 3.0-litre V6 under the bonnet but the same column-stalk-operated auto transmission giving a choice of seven speeds. Gear changes were imperceptible and despite the smaller engine – in a car that weighs 2270kg empty, with a 1930kg caravan on the back – progress was fast. Again, though, there were times when this big people carrier was put off its stroke by strong winds. Self-levelling air suspension at the back is a bonus, in theory at least, but at slow speeds there was a tendency for the caravan to 'snatch' a bit too much. You need to get down on hands and knees to access the 13-pin socket, and to fit in a full load two of the rear seats need to be down.



Mercedes-Benz ML420 CDI
£53,500 as tested

Another car that has improved over the years, Mercedes-Benz's ML was submitted with 4.0-litre V8 engine and seven-speed automatic transmission. What else would you expect for almost £54,000! Gear selection is controlled by a steering column stalk. To be honest, the ML420 shrugs off caravan towing with such ease that it seems nit-picking to criticise, but the controls, especially the steering, are so light that you can tend to over-compensate for any misalignment due, for instance, to crosswinds. Like other M-B models it has a foot-operated parking brake, but that's no disadvantage with automatic transmission. An excellent load carrier with 140kg noseweight limit and it sits level with a caravan hooked up. Thumbs up for handbook information, but an expensive car to buy and run.



Mitsubishi Shogun 3.2
DI-DC Warrior LWB
£32,691 as tested

The Shogun tested came with a big (3.2-litre) four-cylinder diesel engine and five-speed automatic

MITSUBISHI SHOGUN 3.2 DI-DC WARRIOR LWB AUTO



MERCEDES-BENZ ML420 CDI



MERCEDES-BENZ R320 CDI





BAILEY CARAVANS

safe on track, safe on the road

FOR THE past 10 years The Caravan Club has used Bailey caravans for testing cars in its Caravan Club Towcar of the Year competition. This year's testing made use of models from all four of Bailey's current ranges: Discovery, Ranger, Pageant and Senator, loaded to weights that varied from 880kg to 1968kg.

All models come with a three-year manufacturer's warranty and six-year body integrity guarantee, and all use Al-Ko fully-galvanised chassis. Pageant and Senator are fitted as standard with hitch-head stabilisers and for 2008 Senators are also fitted with Al-Ko's fully automatic ATC trailer stability devices – Bailey being the first manufacturer to offer this safety aid.

It is worth pointing out that The Caravan Club disconnects all anti-snaking hardware for Towcar of the Year testing, and it is a testament to both Bailey and Al-Ko engineering skills that none of the caravans in this year's competition misbehaved on the test track.



DISCOVERY SERIES 5

This is Bailey's low-cost, low-weight range offering three models with ex-works weights with a maximum of just 993kg. Mercury, Neptune and Mars models offer two, five and six berths at prices from £8599 to £8999.

Features include 3kW heaters, cookers with three-burner hob plus grill and oven, and big gas/electric fridges.

RANGER SERIES 5

Next step up is the Ranger series, seven caravans fitted with large, panoramic sunroofs to help maximise a

feeling of lightness inside. Large, aircraft-style overhead lockers offer good storage in Rangers, while on the equipment front there is a four-burner hob, blown-air heating and fully-sprung upholstery. Prices range from £9895 to £11,875.

PAGEANT SERIES 6

With Pageant (seven models, £11,795 to £12,645), buyers have even more in the way of home comforts. Apart from higher quality furniture and furnishings, a microwave oven, directional TV aerial



and stereo radio/CD/MP3 player become part of the standard specification. A range of interior layouts is offered, sleeping two, four or five adults.

SENATOR SERIES 6

Bailey describes its Senator models as offering 'the ultimate touring experience' and it's not hard to see why. One two-berth and five four-berth models, priced from £13,980 to £16,450, feature energy-saving interior lighting, heated towel rails and 17in flat screen TVs.

For more details see bailey-caravans.co.uk

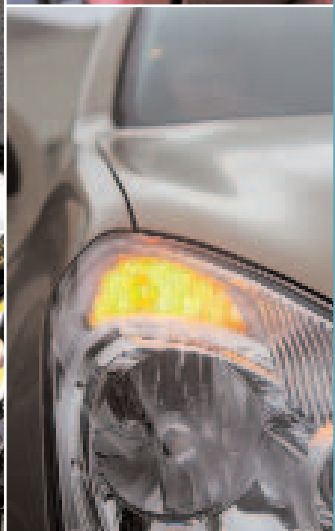


THE COMPETITORS

MAKE/MODEL	CARAVAN WT (kg)	NOSE WEIGHT LIMIT (kg)	GEARS/ SELECTION/ DRIVE	FUEL/ CYLS/ CC
UNDER £16,000				
Daihatsu Materia	880	50	5/MAN/FWD	P/4/1997
Škoda Fabia 3 1.9 TDI	995	50	5/MAN/FWD	D/4/1896
Škoda Roomster Scout 1.9 TDI	1067	50	5/MAN/FWD	D/4/1896
Kia cee'd 1.6 LS CRDi	1248	75	5/MAN/FWD	D/4/1582
Fiat Bravo 1.9 MultiJet 150 Dynamic	1220	60	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1910
£16,000 – £20,000				
Nissan Qashqai Acenta	1250	75	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1461
Mazda3 2.0 Diesel TS ²	1262	75	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1998
Jeep Patriot 2.0 CRD Sport	1398	75	6/MAN/AWD	D/4/1968
Seat Altea XL Stylance 2.0 TDI	1312	75	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1968
Volkswagen Golf Estate SE 2.0 TDI	1192	75	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1968
Ford Mondeo Zetec	1325	80	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1997
Toyota Auris T180 2.2 D-4D	1233	60	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/2231
Škoda Octavia Estate 1.8 TFSI	1139	75	6/MAN/FWD	P/4/1798
£20,000 – £25,000				
Škoda Octavia Scout TDI	1301	75	6/MAN/AWD	D/4/1968
Škoda Superb 2.0 TDI	1290	75	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1968
Volvo C30 2.0D SE Sport	1202	75	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1997
Nissan Qashqai Tekna All-Mode 4x4	1432	75	6/AUT/F-AWD	D/4/1994
Ford S-Max Zetec	1522	80	6/AUT/FWD	D/4/1997
Kia Sorento 2.5 CRDi XS	1755	120	5/MAN/AWD	D/4/2497
Jeep Wrangler Unlimited 2.8 CRD	1683	170	5/AUT/R-AWD	D/4/2777
Isuzu Rodeo Denver MAX LE	1632	120	5/MAN/R-AWD	D/4/2499
Dodge Nitro 2.8 CRD SXT	1713	126	5/AUT/F-AWD	D/4/2777
£25,000 – £32,000				
Mitsubishi Outlander 2.0 Di-D Elegance	1437	100	6/MAN/R-AWD	D/4/1968
Ford Mondeo Titanium X Estate	1360	80	6/MAN/FWD	P/5/2521
Renault Grand Espace Tech Run dCi 150	1600	80	6/MAN/FWD	D/4/1995
Volvo V50 D5 SE Sport	1333	75	5/AUT/FWD	D/5/2400
Land Rover Defender 90 Station Wagon	1606	150	6/MAN/AWD	D/4/2401
Hyundai Santa Fe 2.2 CRTD CDX+ (7st)	1584	88	5/MAN/R-AWD	D/4/2188
Nissan X-Trail Aventura Explorer Extreme	1449	100	6/MAN/AWD	D/4/1995
SsangYong Rexton II SX	1784	128	5/AUT/AWD	D/5/2696
Mercedes-Benz C220 CDI	1347	75	6/MAN/RWD	D/4/2148
Volvo V70 2.4D SE	1511	75	6/AUT/FWD	D/5/2400
OVER £32,000				
Mitsubishi Shogun 3.2 Di-CD Warrior LWB	1917	135	5/AUT/R-AWD	D/4/3200
Land Rover Freelander 2	1737	150	6/AUT/AWD	D/4/2179
Mercedes-Benz R320 CDI	1930	85	7/AUT/AWD	D/6/2987
Mercedes-Benz ML420 CDI	1968	140	7/AUT/AWD	D/8/3996

Prices are for cars as tested, including manufacturer-approved towing equipment. **Class winners in red.** In cases where 85% of a car's kerbweight exceeded the Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass of the heaviest caravan, excess ballast was loaded into the car

BHP@RPM – LB FT@RPM	CO ₂ g/km	INS GRP	PRICE
102@6000 – 98@4400	169	8D	£11,385
105@4000 – 240@1800	129	4E	£13,300
105@4000 – 240@1800	139	5E	£14,355
113@4000 – 188@1900	125	6E	£14,735
150@4000 – 225@2000	149	10	£15,594
105@4000 – 240@2000	145	5	£16,819
143@TBA – 266@2000	162	9E	£17,222
138@4000 – 229@1750	180	11E	£17,459
138@4000 – 236@1750	157	8E	£17,885
138@4000 – 236@1750	148	12	£18,366
138@4000 – 250@2240	156	8E	£18,952
175@3600 – 295@2000	164	13A	£19,395
160@5000 – 250@1500	176	TBA	£19,725
140@4000 – 320@1750	173	10E	£20,035
140@4000 – 320@1900	169	12E	£20,468
136@4000 – 320@2000	151	12E	£21,395
150@4000 – 320@2000	208	10	£22,254
128@4000 – 236@1750	194	11E	£22,327
168@3800 – 392@2000	209	13	£23,465
174@3800 – 295@2000	263	10E	£23,589
165@3600 – 293@2200	N/A	12A	£23,686
174@3800 – 339@2000	250	11E	£24,036
138@4000 – 228@1750	183	12E	£25,188
216@5000 – 236@1500	222	14E	£25,252
110@4000 – 340@2000	196	13A	£25,278
180@4000 – 350@1750	184	15E	£25,445
121@3500 – 266@2000	266	13	£26,351
153@4000 – 253@1800	191	13P	£26,360
170@3750 – 360@2000	198	14E	£26,981
185@4000 – 297@2300	233	14A	£27,279
170@3800 – 295@2000	156	14E	£28,797
163@4000 – 340@1750	195	14E	£28,945
168@3800 – 275@2000	280	14A	£32,691
158@4000 – 295@2000	224	13E	£32,728
224@3800 – 376@1600	253	20D	£44,418
306@3600 – 516@2000	294	18A	£53,500



TOPS TO TOW

CARAVAN CLUB MAGAZINE TOWCAR TESTER CLIVE WHITE OFFERS SOME TIPS ON CHOOSING YOUR IDEAL TOWCAR

IF THIS Towcar of the Year 2008 supplement has whetted your appetite for a new towcar, here are a few pointers to help you get it right.

The Caravan Club Towcar of the Year competition is an excellent guide and starting point. Along with each written description in this supplement take a look at our specification tables, where you'll find brief but relevant details about this year's entrants.

The type or style of car you require may be governed as much by the size and weight of your caravan as it is by your own or your family's needs. For instance, if you have a big family and a big caravan your choice is likely to be restricted to a large MPV or 4x4. For those enjoying wider choices, the variations can become more complex; but don't fall into the trap of buying a car exclusively for towing, only to end up with one that doesn't fulfil your other – perhaps more important – needs.

I often speak to caravanners who have bought an off-roader or people carrier for the caravan they use a couple of times a year, yet complain bitterly that it's expensive, unwieldy and too big for their everyday needs. Like most things, your towcar choice needs a bit of thought, a bit of research and a good dose of common sense. If, for example, you drive 10,000 miles a year but tow 1000, then perhaps there's room for compromise – as long as it's a safe compromise. Maybe if there's just two of you, that family hatchback you fancied might accommodate awning, gas cylinders and tinned foods, enabling your caravan to be towed at an acceptable weight ratio, saving the purchase of that estate car which is far too big for 48 weeks of the year.

But let's start with the towing basics. Your ideal towcar must have adequate power to pull your caravan and enough weight to control it. Transmission choices are up to you – automatics these days are excellent, with some even sensing a trailer being towed and adjusting their gear selection to suit. Engines? Well, 34 out of 36 entries in this year's competition were diesel. That speaks for itself – though I have to concede



“34 out of 36 entries in this year's competition were diesel. That speaks for itself”

that a car with an exceptional petrol engine won this year's competition. Modern diesels are ever more refined and produce lots of pulling power with very good fuel economy.

You also need a heavy enough car for your caravan. The Caravan Club recommends that your holiday-ready caravan (containing all your possessions) shouldn't weigh more than 85% of the car's kerbweight. So aim for this, but in any event never tow a trailer weighing more than your towcar.

You'll also need to know the noseweight, or 'static vertical download' if we're getting formal. This is the weight your loaded caravan's hitch imposes on the towball. While you want it as heavy as permitted, this load shouldn't exceed the car maker's maximum load nor the caravan coupling's maximum load. Typically, family car noseweight limits range from 50kg to 80kg, with some 4x4s going beyond 150kg – though most caravan

couplings have a maximum noseweight figure of 100kg. One other recommendation you'll see is that the 'ideal' noseweight of your caravan is 7% of its laden weight. Because of towcar and/or caravan limitations, this figure may be difficult to attain; but it's worth trying to get as close as possible.

The Caravan Club recommends having your towcar fitted with the car manufacturer's approved towing equipment. As far as the ever-more-complex vehicle electrical systems are concerned, this advice is probably more important now than ever before; and if you experience problems your recourse to a single supplier should simplify matters. That said, independent towbar makers produce only Type Approved equipment. Again, be careful about electrics and wiring kits – non-manufacturer-approved kits could cause warranty problems if faults occur. Oh, and do you want twin 7-pin sockets or a single 13-pin? For current UK

caravans you may need a 2x7-pin-to-13-pin adapter – cost from around £15 to £40, with extra cable to lash down. While 13-pin sockets are becoming more common on cars, some car makers still offer a choice. The majority of new UK caravans will be fitted with 13-pin plugs by some time next year.

Kerbweights, noseweights, power/torque figures, towing equipment prices etc should all be available from your car dealer. But not all know about towing. If the dealer is vague, disinterested or unwilling to find out, vote with your wallet and go somewhere else. But The Club is here to help through its Technical Department, *Club Magazine* Towcar Tests and, of course, Caravan Club Towcar of the Year competitions. Members can download a detailed leaflet, *Choice of Towcar* from www.caravanclub.co.uk, or it is available from The Club's Information office on 01342 336611.

Happy and safe towing!