

Hot stuff

Mike Cowton has warmed up the kettle and settled back to consider some of the pros and cons of buying the right stove



UNLESS YOUR camping menu consists of sandwiches and cold drinks, or you are going to dine out every night, it's a good bet that you will want to cook a meal or heat up a nice cuppa. Yes, we're talking stoves.

You have a choice from a wide variety of superb safe stoves that burn a diverse range of fuels. And, although choice can lead to confusion, not least because each stove has its advantages and disadvantages, we are here to help you make that purchase depending on the type of camping you enjoy and the number of people involved.

LIGHTWEIGHT ACTION

At the technical end, the backpacking stove is completely different from one suited to family camping. Weight and size are going to play a critical role in your choice.

Most backpacking appliances are compact and lightweight, simple and quick to set up, easy to light and fuel efficient. Stability can sometimes be an issue but it is possible to buy a stove base to overcome this potential hazard, or peg out your stove to prevent it tipping.

A backpacking stove usually has a single burner, and can weigh as little as two pounds without fuel. You can reduce that weight into ounces if you are into true lightweight backpacking. Fire up the stove, boil

The Zen of outdoor cooking – little beats the satisfaction factor

some water, place your food pouch in the bubbles, and when the meal is ready, use the water for a cup of tea. Job done.

COOKERS FOR FAMILIES

A family camping trip is going to offer more leeway in terms of weight and size, as the car boot takes the strain. Convenience, then, is a key factor, as is fuel efficiency and dependability. If it is your intention to camp with a partner or family, then go for a stove with at least two burners. Some stoves even feature grills but these are seldom that efficient...

Choice is often down to fuel – something you should feel comfortable with using. A gas stove burns butane or propane/butane mixes unlike a pressurised liquid fuel stove that tend towards petrol and paraffin. Unpressurised stove systems, like the Trangia, burn methylated spirits.

GAS BENEFITS

Butane, propane or Isobutene fuels are the easiest to use, and the varying sizes of the canisters and cylinder are readily available.

The advantages of these types of fuel are that they simmer well and are clean burning. Plus, when you remove the burner from the

canister, unless the latter is the piercable variety, it will reseal itself.

However, gas takes longer to boil the same amount of water when the pressure decreases inside the canister and, as you cannot recycle the used canisters, they have to be disposed of properly. There is also the added disadvantage that they do not work well in extreme cold – propane performs better than butane at low temperatures.

Of course, bulk gas purchase using a cylinder is cheaper (you rent the cylinder once and pay for the gas refills). Some stoves screw directly onto a cylinder but most connect via a regulator and gas hose. If you aim to take your stove when Continental camping always choose a cylinder from a gas supplier that sells refills abroad. Check your gas hose regularly and replace if damaged or coming to the end of its life – a 'use by' date is normally printed on its surface.

HOT PROPERTY

Liquid fuels, like petrol, work better in colder weather, burn hotter, and are versatile as you can use different fuel types. That said, they tend to be larger and heavier, they are harder to operate than their canister counterparts,

they require cleaning to maintain efficiency, and you will initially pay more – although running costs are often far cheaper.

A liquid fuel stove consists of a tank to hold the fuel, a pump to create pressure in the tank so the fuel will flow out through the fuel line, a valve to control fuel flow, and a burner where the gas mixes with air and burns. All liquid fuel stoves burn a fuel called white gas, which is a pure form of petrol that does not contain additives. Many liquid fuel stoves will also burn other dirtier forms of fuel including diesel, unleaded petrol and paraffin. Although such fuels share the high heat output and low temperature properties of white gas, they will eventually clog your stove, thereby increasing the frequency in which you have to clean it.

Although unleaded petrol is easily obtainable, it is volatile and emits fumes. Paraffin is also widely available, and burns efficiently. However, it does not ignite as easily as petrol, is messy to handle, it smells, and leaves an oily residue – once again you are looking at more frequent maintenance. Also, the stove will need priming, so an extra supply of a volatile liquid such as methylated spirits will be required.

CLEAN BURN

Although gas does not give out as much heat as a liquid fuel stove, it has significant advantages for the family camper. First, a gas stove is easier to use, the fuel comes in a bottle that screws into the stove or onto a regulator, and not poured into a small tank's filler spout. So all you need to do to start the stove is turn on the gas and light the burner.

This year sees the launch of the new Coleman 100 per cent propane cylinder and appliance range to the UK market. Unlike many other fuels, 100 per cent propane easily copes with changing altitudes and lower temperatures. Using every single gram of gas in the cylinder, it is also a cleaner combusting fuel, producing less carbon dioxide and, as a result, less pollution.

WHAT'S HOT

There are plenty of good value stoves on the market to suit your every need, and you will find that most are almost identical in performance. Here is my choice.

FOLD N GO

The trailblazing propane stove range from Coleman includes the Fold N Go (RRP £69.99), a foldable design with locking handle for easy transport and storage. The

burners are set 32cm apart for very large pans. Each burner is independent and fully adjustable, from fine simmer to full boil. The stove also features InstaStart for matchless lighting.

LET'S TWISTER AGAIN

Transforming a classic is never an easy task, yet Campingaz has successfully delivered with a redesign of the Twister stove. Most models in the all-new Twister Plus stove range [RRP £16.99 to £29.99] feature a new ergonomic control section for easier handling, particularly when igniting. This new style has sharp-angled, wider pan supports that are perfect for cooking with larger based pans. All Twister Plus stoves benefit from Campingaz's unique Easy Clic Plus connection for simple one-click connection. The Twister Plus PZ Kit features the new Twister Plus PZ stove in addition to two aluminium pots and a universal handle.

Of course, Campingaz also produces the Chef range of family stoves – that two-burner and grill combination much loved by campers in the UK over

HIGH PERFORMER

SunnCamp's self-contained Uno Portable Gas Stove (RRP £22.99) features a high-speed cast alloy burner, automatic push-button ignition and built-in pressure safety device. Designed for use with a SunnGas SG1220 gas cartridge, the weight, including the spill tray, is 1,740g without the gas. You should get up to two-and-a-half hours' use from one cartridge.

FAMILY FAVOURITE

The Grillmaster (RRP £89.99) from SunnCamp benefits from a stainless steel hob, two fully adjustable high-speed burners, lid and side windshields, and a high-speed grill, so is perfect for family camping when cook wants to prepare several foods at once. The unit and enamel coated grill pan fold neatly into a compact case.

COLD CALL

Designed for use on universal EN417 self-sealing cartridges, which are available worldwide, the Alpine stove (RRP £29.99) from SunnCamp comes with Piezo automatic ignition, and fuel pre-heater for efficient operation in cold weather. It has a fully adjustable, stainless steel, high-speed burner, built-in windshield, and a stable tripod stand. Importantly, it will boil a pint of water in two-and-a-half minutes. ■

Top tips

- ➲ Always test-run your stove at home before every trip, checking beforehand for wear and leakage
- ➲ Attach fuel canisters, or fill, with care
- ➲ Cushion the stove from potential damage whilst in transit
- ➲ Some canisters are designed to stand upright during stove operation, others lie flat. Know which type you have
- ➲ Do not cook without adequate ventilation
- ➲ Do not cook near inflammable surfaces
- ➲ Ensure you have enough fuel to finish cooking before you start
- ➲ If you do run out of fuel ensure the stove is cool before you refill it
- ➲ For safety use a stove on a level surface
- ➲ Clean spilled fuel, food, dirt and mud from your stove
- ➲ Let your stove cool after use and before you put it away

Jargon Buster

Electronic ignition – eliminates the need for matches

Boil time – a rating that indicates how long it takes to boil water

Burn time – the length of time that a stove will burn on a full cylinder or tank. The rating is normally subject to altitude, pressure and temperature changes

Capacity – the amount of fuel that a stove will hold

BTU – the British Thermal Unit is a measurement of heat output. The higher the number, the hotter, more efficiently the stove cooks.

Flame adjuster – regulates the speed that fuel is released in order to control the size of the flame, and thus the temperature that you are cooking with

Windshield – most larger stoves come with built-in back and side windshield which block the wind. For single burner stoves it is worth investing in a separate foil windshield which is tough, light and stiff, and can be cut to size

Websites

- Campingaz
Web campingaz.com
- Coleman
Web coleman.eu
- SunnCamp
Web sunnflair.com