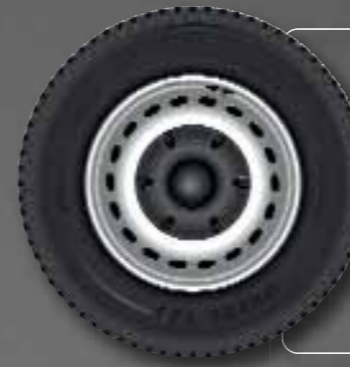


TORQUE TALK

Caravan wheel fasteners tightened correctly? **George Hinton** tests a selection of wrenches available for under £100



THE WHEEL DEAL

Caravanners are urged to check the tightness of their wheel fastenings within 50 miles of a wheel change or service and prior to every long journey, so a torque wrench should be in everybody's tool kit. While you can pay hundreds of pounds for a top-of-the-range digital-readout tool, here we look at six popular, half-inch-drive mechanical wrenches which all give a satisfactory level of accuracy. You will, of course, also require an appropriate socket to fit your caravan (usually 19mm) and, with many of these, an extension bar. We found the common 5in (125mm) length fits most caravans but a few, with deeply-inset wheels, might need a longer one. Compliance with BS 6789:2003 means your wrench will be accurate to better than 4%, as all these are. Lengths are taken from the centre of the drive spindle – some maker's figures include the box!

1. Draper 3001A

An attractive satin chrome finish sets this tool apart and the engraved scale is marked in Nm and lb ft. However, the latter is in odd fractions, eg 51.6/73.8/81.1, which does not make setting as easy as it might be. The Nm scale is in straightforward 10kg increments. The coarse ratchet has just four clicks for every 90° rotation, which could make life difficult in tight locations. Draper offers a repair service, a £14 repair kit and will recalibrate the tool for £15.

COARSE RATCHET

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £52.12
Range: 22-154lb ft/28-210Nm
Length/weight: 16½in (420mm)/3lb (1.35kg)
Contact: 023 8049 4333, draper.co.uk

2. Teng 1292AG-EP

This Swedish tool is smartly finished in red with a black knurled vernier sleeve, the deeply-engraved scale being in matt silver. However, while the metric scale is in 10kg increments, the lb ft is a mixture of alternate seven and eight pound steps, eg: 33/40/48/55/63 etc. The ratchet gives six clicks for every quarter turn. The adjuster proved impossible to take to the top of its scale with bare hands, which slipped on the sleeve as it became stiffer to turn, but this might ease with use. The factory calibration certificate supplied also showed it was less accurate at the upper end. To have the calibration re-checked on despatch adds £43 to the price.

DIFFICULT AT HIGH FORCES

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £68.80
Range: 30-150lb ft/40-200Nm
Length/weight: 17in (430mm)/3lb 10z (1.4kg)
Contact: 01525 711500, pit-pass.com

3. Clarke CHT 141

This wrench is finished in polished chrome. Although its working range is quoted in lb ft as well as Nm, the two engraved scales on the shaft are in multiples of 14Nm and m/kg only, with a paper conversion chart supplied for you to work out Imperial values. Otherwise it's easy to use – the rotating vernier scale is divided into 14 for the intermediate forces. This is no problem where your caravan is concerned, but could be inconvenient for older machinery where torques are quoted in Imperial only. The CHT 141 comes with a 5in (125mm) ½in drive extension bar and ¾in drive adaptor.

METRIC SCALES ONLY

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £43.14
Range: 20-154lb ft/28-210Nm
Length/weight: 17in (430mm)/3lb (1.35kg)
Contact: 01992 565333, clarkeinternational.com

4. Kamasa SP 3780

All polished chrome, including the knurled vernier adjustment sleeve, the sample Kamasa was commendably accurate, yielding at 80.1 when set to 80lb ft. The medium ratchet has six teeth for each 90° rotation. The Imperial scale is marked in 10lb increments, making it very easy to use. I have owned an example of this particular model for around 25 years and it is still as good as new. A recalibration service is available at £15. The Kamasa comes with a 5in (125mm) ½in drive extension bar and ¾in drive adaptor.

RELIABLE

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £51.82
Range: 10-150lb ft/13-200Nm
Length/weight: 16½in (420mm)/3lb (1.35kg)
Contact: 01926 815000, toolconnection.co.uk

5. Halfords Professional

Distinguished by its black painted finish and black plastic handle, this also differs from the others tested in having a push-through drive bit instead of a reversible ratchet. It has a very easily-read black-on-white setting scale and a red indicator line, visible through a window. Easy to adjust, its fine ratchet has 18 teeth per 90° rotation. More importantly, it was also the most accurate and well within BS6789, yielding at 119.97 to 120.69Nm at the 120Nm setting. Together, these features more than compensate for the screw-together tubular storage case and lack of extras.

VERY ACCURATE

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £69.99
Range: 30-150lb ft/40-200Nm
Length/weight: 16½in (420mm)/3lb (1.35kg)
Contact: 08457 626625, halfords.com

6. Sealey Premier AK624

This is finished in satin chrome and has a black knurled vernier handle. The ratchet has six steps for each quarter turn. The primary setting scale is lb ft in 10lb increments, whereas the Nm scale is fractional, starting at 28 and rising in 10lb equivalent steps, making it less simple to set. It is well within the expected 4% accuracy according to the accompanying test certificate, tending to over-read slightly in the mid range (136.5 for a true 133Nm) and under-read at the top (198.3 for a true 204Nm). Remember each wrench is tested individually, so variations can occur. The AK224 is essentially the same tool but without the calibration certificate, at £63.54.

SOLID PERFORMER

AT A GLANCE

RRP: £77.94
Range: 20-150lb ft/28-200Nm
Length/weight: 16½in (420mm)/3lb (1.35kg)
Contact: 01284 757500, sealey.co.uk

NEXT MONTH
In the frame: video cameras



PLEASE NOTE THAT THE RANGES QUOTED IN THE 'AT A GLANCE' PANELS ARE AS ACCURATE AS WE COULD OBTAIN