

Small sizzlers

Summer fun at the beach, bach, or at home? A portable barbecue will let you cook up a feed, wherever you go.

TEST: BILL WHITLEY

Some barbecues seem big enough to be the space shuttle's launch control - which is fine if you want your barbie permanently in the backyard. The portable models in our latest test make barbecuing a moveable feast. They're also small enough to be stored away at the back of the garage in winter.

We put eight gas-fired models costing less than \$300 to the test. We wanted to know if they would bring that X-factor to summer cooking and make it worthwhile getting out the barbecue tongs and gear.

Cooking performance

Sausages: Our 10 sausages were cooked on a pre-heated cooking surface for eight minutes on the first side, then turned and cooked for a further five minutes. They were then assessed for evenness, colour, and tenderness.

The best performer was the Gasmate Cruiser, followed by the BBQ Factory Getaway. Poorest were the Gasmate Adventurer (not enough heat) and the Meteor (too hot - it burnt the sausages). The Gascraft gave us unevenly cooked sausages.

Steak: We cooked four pieces of rump steak on a pre-heated surface - six to eight minutes on one side, with a further four to five minutes on the other. Timing depended on how quickly the barbecue cooked. The steaks were assessed for cooking evenness, colour, and tenderness.

Best performer was the BBQ Factory Getaway, (very evenly cooked steaks). Next best were the Gasmate Adventurer



IT'S A PITY THE TWO MODELS WITH CAST-IRON HOTPLATES DIDN'T COOK BETTER - WE THINK IT'S A MORE DURABLE MATERIAL.

and Rio (cooked without burning). The steaks on the smooth area of the Rio's hotplate cooked better than those from its ribbed area.

The poorest was the Alpha (the steaks were dried rather than cooked). Also poor was the Meteor (again, too hot - we got blackened curled-up steaks). The Meteor would require careful adjustment of the gas control to achieve acceptable results.

Ease of use

Portability: Some barbies were more portable than others.

The Gasmate Adventurer's compact size and shape made it the easiest to carry and store. The Gascraft was also very compact.

The BBQ Factory Kiwi Deluxe and the Alpha were lightweight for their size.

The BBQ Factory Kiwi Deluxe and the Meteor required a spanner to attach and remove the gas-supply hose - that's a hassle when you want portability.

The Gasmate Rio is marginally portable. It couldn't be carried with one hand; you'd need to carry the stand separately. (But it did have the largest hotplate of our test models.)

Controls: The Gasmate Rio had the best set-up here. Its controls were at the front of the unit, with the piezo starter incorporated into the gas-control knob.

Each of the other models had its gas-control knob on the right-hand end of the unit - so it wasn't very easy to adjust the control while you were cooking. It was also difficult to see what position the control was in.

The Gascraft and Meteor required a match to start them. The Gasmate Adventurer and the Gascraft had the piezo starter and starting match-hole, respectively, at the opposite end of the unit to the gas control, which made lighting difficult.

Cleaning: The easiest to clean were the Gasmate Rio and the BBQ Factory Getaway. All the Gasmate models and the

BBQ Factory Getaway had a cooking plate that drained to a cup-like container, so you wouldn't have to clean the inside of the barbecue housing.

Models with a grill ended up with cooking residue falling down into the barbecue housing, which is a pain to clean. But you need a grill for smoky flavours – and these are often what makes a real barbecue. Of the models with a grill, the Meteor was the easiest to clean.

Stability: The BBQ Factory Getaway could only be used on its pedestal. But with the lid closed, leaning lightly on the handle pulled the barbecue off its pedestal.

All the other models were stable when they were being used.

Wind protection: With its two side shields, the Gasmate Adventurer had the best protection against the wind. The Alpha had the poorest: its lid easily blew shut.

Hotplates: non-stick vs cast-iron

Five of the eight models in this test were fitted with non-stick cooking surfaces. While these surfaces work well when new, you need to be *extremely* careful with them:

- Avoid scratching the cooking surface – use non-metallic cooking utensils.
- Don't overheat the cooking surface (otherwise it'll be permanently damaged).

The four barbecues with non-stick cast aluminium hotplates outperformed the other models in our test. Thicker, cast hot plates spread the heat more evenly than thinner sheet aluminium.

The Gascraft and the Meteor had cast-iron cooking surfaces, which we think is

a more durable material for a barbecue. It's a pity they didn't cook better.

Safety

All the models had some sharp edges or protrusions that could cause minor scratches during cleaning or moving them around.

The Gasmate Adventurer, Cruiser, BBQ Factory Kiwi Deluxe, and Alpha all had a rather vulnerable and unsupported gas-control valve protruding from the right-hand end of the unit.

The BBQ Factory Getaway is dangerously unstable when you're using it.

We say

- Go portable! Why be chained to the backyard for your summer entertaining?
- Hot-plates cook more evenly than grills.
- Be careful with non-stick surfaces – use only non-metallic cooking tools and don't overheat the surface.
- Gas canisters are convenient. But refillable cylinders work out much cheaper.

PROFILE

BEST OVERALL GASMATE CRUISER G2107

Price: \$179

Good points: Best at cooking sausages. Best stability. Non-skid rubber feet. Two gas-supply options. Readily portable.

But: No grill.

Comment: Care needed to avoid damaging non-stick cooking surface.



Fuel choice

Four of the models tested could be fuelled from either a refillable LPG cylinder or a disposable gas canister. A canister is a lightweight and convenient way of transporting gas, but the gas costs much more than from a refillable cylinder. The Coleman (0.46kg) canisters we used cost \$12.99 each compared with \$20 to \$22 for refilling a 9kg LPG cylinder.

Gas connectors: There are two types of fittings commonly used for connecting a barbecue to a portable LPG cylinder. The "companion" fitting is the smaller of the two and is usually used with 1kg to 3kg LPG cylinders. The "POL" fitting is used with 9kg cylinders. The Gascraft uses the companion fitting; all the other models use the POL. Adaptors are available to convert one type to the other.

MODELS	\$	%	OUT OF 10		TECHNICAL BITS			FEATURES			
			PRICE	OVERALL SCORE	PERFORMANCE	EASE OF USE	WEIGHT (KG)	DIMENSIONS HxWxD (MM)	COOKING AREA (M ²)	GRILL	HOTPLATE
✓ Gasmate Cruiser G2107 (China)	179	79	9.0	6.2	8.0	255 x 562 x 425	0.13		NSCA	●	●
BBQ Factory Getaway G2002 (China)	250	73	9.0	4.8	8.9	300 x 810 x 490	0.15		NSCA	●	●
Gasmate Adventurer G2727 (China)	160	71	6.9	7.4	7.4	200 x 595 x 430	0.11		NSCA	●	●
Gasmate Rio G2006C (China)	278	69	7.1	6.6	10.2	350 x 800 x 470	0.20		NSCA	●	
Meteor GB1061 (China)	196	61	6.0	6.2	12.3	260 x 540 x 390	0.25	R	CI		
BBQ Factory Kiwi Deluxe Portable ER8102P (China)	90	60	6.6	5.2	7.4	225 x 650 x 440	0.14	W	NSSA	●	●
Alpha Tailgate ER-8102P-2 (China)	130	58	6.3	5.0	7.6	225 x 640 x 440	0.14	W	NSSA	●	
Gascraft Portable hooded BBQ PG02 (China)	80	55	5.4	5.6	8.4	205 x 575 x 360	0.11	CI	CI		

GUIDE TO THE TABLE OUR TEST was conducted by an independent laboratory in New Zealand. **PRICE** taken from a survey in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch during November 2007. This is a good price to aim for. **SCORES OUT OF 10** Performance (60% of overall score) based on assessments of evenness, tenderness, and colour when cooking sausages and steak. **Ease of use** (40% of overall score) assessed on assembly, storage, carrying, controls, stability, wind protection, and cleaning. **TECHNICAL BITS** Dimensions Height, width and depth measured when folded. Weight measured after being set up for use. **FEATURES** Grill W (wire), CI (cast iron), R (6mm round bar). **Hotplate** NSCA (non-stick coated cast aluminium), CI (cast iron), NSSA (non-stick coated sheet aluminium).

Food safety

Summertime – the great Kiwi season of picnics and barbies. Wholesome home-cooked food, right? Not necessarily! Warm summer temperatures and outdoor cooking provide an ideal situation for food poisoning. But with a few simple steps you can keep your family's insides happy this summer.

CLEAN: After touching raw meat, wash your hands with hot soapy water for 20 seconds and dry them well on a clean dry towel.

COOK: Cook chicken, pork, meat patties, and sausages thoroughly until no traces of pink meat or juice are left. Use a meat thermometer to check temperatures.

Use one set of tongs for raw meat and another set for cooked foods. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Don't keep foods in the "danger zone" (5°C-60°C).

Eat food as soon as possible after it's cooked.

Boil marinades you've used for raw meat, before serving them with cooked meat.

COVER: Cover and chill leftovers – do this as soon as possible after cooking. Bin perishable food that's been left out for more than two hours.

CHILL: Keep food in the fridge (or in a chilly bin with frozen slicker pads) until you're ready to cook and/or eat it. Wrap raw meat securely, so that meat juices don't contaminate other food. Chill all perishable foods (such as cooked vegetables, luncheon meats, and potato salads) until you're ready to serve.

Defrost meat and poultry fully – this means it cooks evenly on the barbecue.

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