

THE BOG STANDARD

John Sootheran takes a (non-literal) deep dive into the increasingly civilised and sanitary world of camping loos and finds there's nothing to be sniffy about

It's understandable that entrants to the world of camping – be it in a tent, campervan, caravan or motorhome – have a slight apprehension around the subject of toilets.

But let me start by reassuring all that camping toilets have come a long way in the last few decades. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that the washrooms in modern caravans and motorhomes are as good as many hotels I've stayed in.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

In most modern portable toilets, waste is kept in a cassette in the base of the loo. In a caravan or motorhome, the cassette is generally located in a locker below the toilet, accessed through an external hatch.

Before use, the cassette must be part-filled with toilet chemicals. These speed up the breakdown of waste matter, and



Easy Camp's Little Loo pop-up tent costs from £76. Toilet not included

most are fragranced to counter any malodorous deposits.

Modern camping toilets also have flush systems that employ either a manual pump mechanism or an electrically-operated flush to circulate a scented sanitising solution from a pre-filled reservoir around the toilet bowl. This cleans the bowl and further helps to eliminate odours, or at least disguise them!

When not in use, the cassette is sealed from the toilet by a sliding blade valve. This prevents odours escaping from the cassette, and also forms a tight seal for when the cassette is transported to the Chemical Disposal Point (CDP) for emptying.

The blade valve is opened when the loo is used – allowing the waste to drop into the cassette below – and then sealed shut again. This is done manually using a sliding handle on the side of the unit.

I reckon a family of four will need to empty the cassette after one day, while for a couple it should be two or three days.

Once the cassette is full, a red warning light or indicator shows. It's a foolish person who ignores this.

EMPTYING THE CASSETTE

Cassette emptying is the least enjoyable part of camping life, but it's both easy and sanitary.

Ensure that the blade-valve is closed, then separate the seat and bowl section of the unit from the cassette or step outside and unlock the cassette locker, grip the cassette handle and pull it slowly out with a slight lifting motion. A full cassette is quite heavy, but caravan and motorhome versions usually feature an extending handle and wheels to make transportation to the CDP easier.

► From left to right: Thetford Aqua Rinse Spray for keeping your loo bowl gleaming; caravan toilets are sophisticated bits of kit these days, thanks, in this case, to Thetford; grip and lift the orange handle to release the cassette to empty it



At the disposal point, undo the cap on the fill/empty pipe and rotate it to allow the contents to be poured out. Hold the cassette by the two handles, using your thumb to press the tank vent button. This button allows air into the cassette as you pour, preventing airlocks, which cause splashing.

Once the tank is empty, use the short hosepipe nearby to add a couple of litres of water to the tank through the fill pipe, replace the cap, agitate the tank gently and give it a good swirl around. Pour this water away and the cassette will now be clean. Finally, add a litre or two of water and a dose of loo chemical to the cassette, and give that a good shake to coat the inside of the tank. That's the worst bit out the way!

Rinse down the CDP and wash your hands carefully at a nearby sink before taking your cassette back to your pitch. Before refitting, I spray the cassette with a scented disinfectant, and also give the interior of the locker a quick spray. The tank then slides back into its locker, and you'll hear a click once it's correctly positioned. Lock the hatch.

With portable loos, refit the cassette to the bowl section by aligning the two halves and clicking them together.

USING A CAMPING TOILET

Ensure you have sufficient flush fluid, and that the cassette has chemicals in it.

Check that the overflow warning light or gauge isn't activated. Lift the lid and give a short burst of flush fluid to coat the bowl.

Open the blade and do your business, or layer the base of the bowl with paper first, and keep the blade open for as short a time as possible to let everything drop to the cassette holding tank. Finish up and flush the loo, ensuring it is left clean and that the blade valve is closed after use.

Note whether the fill-light is illuminated. If it is, alert the Chief Emptier.

FEELING FLUSH

Most leisure loos feature a flush mechanism. Each has a reservoir that you can add a small amount of flush chemical (usually pink in colour) to, and then topped up with water.

On camping toilets, the reservoir is accessed via a screw-on cap at the back of the unit, while on caravans and motorhomes there is a fill-point under a flap on the exterior of the vehicle, close to the toilet. Simply pour in the recommended amount of flush-chem, then top up with water. Doing it in that order ensures good mixing.

Toilets have a mechanism to activate the flush. In modern leisure vehicles, this is done electrically at the touch of a button. A small pump is activated, which deposits the flush liquid around the bowl.

In camping toilets, the flush is manually operated via small bellows or a piston system, both of which are pumped by hand.

TOILET CHEMICALS

There are two main types of toilet chemicals. Flush chemicals are mixed with water in the flush reservoir and help to rinse, disinfect, descale and deodorise the toilet after use.

▼ One Chem offers concentrated, formaldehyde-free, two-in-one flush and cassette chemicals – expect to pay around £7 for a 40-dose bottle



▲ Modern toilets such as this Thetford C220 use an electric flush to distribute flush liquid



- ▲ Measure loo chemicals into the cassette according to the instructions on the manufacturer's label
- ▼ Thetford is well known for its cassette toilets and supplies toilet chemicals in liquid and pod form



Toilet cassette chemicals go into the waste cassette and help to minimise the build-up of gases and bad odours while speeding up the decomposition of the waste.

Both of these chemicals are pleasantly perfumed. They can be more environmentally-friendly than in the past, with formaldehyde-free and biodegradable versions. Some companies offer two-in-one toilet fluids that serve both purposes. Buyers should note the recommended dilution of the liquids, to see which offers the best value.

Take care not to splash undiluted loo chemicals onto the plastic parts of your camping toilet or caravan, as they may stain the surface.

LOO ROLL

Toilet paper that's specially made for non-mains-sewerage toilets has been developed and is recommended if you are likely to use a fair bit of loo roll.

This product is soft and strong like its domestic equivalents, but is designed to break down more quickly than regular alternatives and is less likely to block flush mechanisms and waste storage cassettes, though basic toilet roll from budget supermarkets is likely to break down in a similar way.



▲ Quick dissolving loo roll, and recycled toilet tissue for camping and caravanning toilets

CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

Modern camping loos are relatively low maintenance, and, by keeping them fastidiously clean, you will minimise any odours.

To achieve this, you need a good quality, low-abrasive cleaning product. Remember that most loos are plastic, not porcelain, and harsh cleaners may damage the surfaces, making it more likely that bacteria can adhere to them on a microscopic level.

Using a good brand of (pink) flush fluid should fragrance the room, keep your loo bowl bacteria-free, and a short burst of flush fluid before the loo is used makes the surface more difficult for germs to adhere.

The rubber O-ring seal on the cassette can perish over time, so it's worth lubricating it regularly with a blast of silicone spray or olive oil. This should keep it flexible and slow any deterioration.

If your cassette is ever overfilled, you may find the slide-valve won't close properly. This is a tricky situation and requires delicate handling. Carefully extricate the cassette from its locker and unblock the valve, or carry it to the disposal point keeping it horizontal.

You should go equipped just in case your cassette ever does overflow (usually down to kids ignoring the red light!). My advice is to check the loo and empty before bedtime, as it's more convenient than in the middle of the night.

When you're putting the van into storage, after a trip, or at the end of the

season, flush away all the pink flush fluid so the reservoir is empty. There is often a drain tube so you can empty the reservoir completely, avoiding stagnant water the next time you use it. For longer-term storage, rinse the cassette out thoroughly, before adding a litre or so of diluted loo chemical and rocking the container so that all the interior surfaces are coated. That should minimise any bacteria build up in the weeks or months of storage.

Try to avoid towing with waste in the cassette. A Thetford C220 loo has an 18-litre capacity, so, when full, it will weigh around 18kg. That's not only a chunk off your payload, but if the cassette's at the rear of your van, it could add to any unsettling pendulum-effect when towing.



▲ Maintain the rubber seal of cassette toilets like this Dometic Saneco to keep it in good condition



◀ **Outwell Double Seahaven** has loo and shower sections

LOO TENTS

Many campervans have a camping toilet in a cupboard, but a better solution, I think, is to pitch a loo tent next to your campervan or tent.

The best versions take minutes to erect and provide all the privacy needed. I like the Easy Camp Little Loo (£76.99) and Outwell's Seahaven (£99). The latter comes in single and double (£167) format, which offers toilet and showering spaces.



◀ **Dometic Saneo CW toilet** for caravans and motorhomes
▶ **Dometic 972 portable toilet** for tents, trailer tents and campervans



CAMPING AND CARAVANNING TOILET BRANDS

- blue-diamond-products.co.uk
- dometic.com
- easycamp.com
- One-Chem amazon.co.uk
- outwell.com
- thetford-europe.com
- trobolo.com

▼ **A Thetford Fresh Up kit** can update a toilet in a second-hand caravan or motorhome



FRESHEN UP

If you've bought a used caravan or motorhome, you may like the idea of refreshing your loo by purchasing a freshen-up kit for your specific toilet. These kits contain a new toilet seat and cassette and cost from around £120 online - Dometic and Thetford make them. 🚫

COMPOSTING TOILETS

These toilets are perfect for the eco-conscious camper as they don't require water, chemicals or electricity, and the waste can even be used as compost.

Swedish firm Trobolo makes urine-diverting composting loos (pictured right) and claims that, because the liquids and solids don't mix, there are no bad odours. And German brand SOG modifies existing cassette toilets to be chemical free.

Because no damaging chemicals are needed, the waste can be disposed of safely, and users just have to add a handful of 'litter' to the solids container after use. Trobolo even sells the kits to build your own composting toilet.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

You will find more details on camping toilets, how to look after them and even further detail on choosing the right camping toilet roll in our Expert Guide online at myccc.co.uk/toilets and check out our video advice on How to maintain a cassette toilet at bit.ly/CCHowToVideos