



Putting the screws on

Take the strain out of winding your steadies. Sam George and six power tools do the twist

Is a power winder as effective as the manual steady winder supplied with your caravan? We decided to check it out. If you ask people why they use power winders, the majority will tell you it is because they are a lot quicker than winding the steadies by hand. But there's another, more important reason. Assuming that the power winder incorporates a clutch – as do the majority of cordless drills – then the steadies will exert equal pressure on the ground, so minimising the risk of your chassis twisting.

How we did the tests

- 1 We positioned a height gauge at the side of the caravan and placed a set of scales under the rear nearside steady.
- 2 We then noted the time it took to wind down the steady by hand until the caravan just started to lift. The pressure needed was about 35kg (80lb).
- 3 We tested each winder – a reversible cordless drill, or screwdriver – noting how long it took to deploy the steady from its 'locked' (i.e. tight-stowed) position until the caravan just started to lift.
- 4 As each winder had a number of torque settings we tried each in turn, beginning with the lowest, until we found the one which was strong enough to lift the caravan.
- 5 We also felt it important that the winder should be capable of overcoming the locked-stowed position as it simulated a steady

screw covered in road grime and muck – something which happens to all steadies, especially after a tow in bad weather.

- 6 We used two extension sockets: the Pyramid Corner Extension (£6.95) and the ESA Extension Socket (£19.95). The former is designed for use with a cordless drill, whereas the ESA unit is for use with either cordless drills or power screwdrivers.



POWER WINDERS ON TEST

	Richmond 3.6v	Black & Decker 3.6v	Power Devil PDD2125K BEST BUY	Black & Decker KC7251CN	Pyramid Products Black Spur	Black & Decker KC1882CN
Tool	Power screwdriver	Power screwdriver	Cordless drill	Cordless drill	Cordless drill	Cordless drill
Voltage	3.6v	3.6v	12v	7.2v	14.4v	18v
Charging time	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	Initial 3hrs/1hr thereafter	3hrs	3hrs	1hr
RPM	200	180	0-550	0-600	0-700	0-500/0-1600
Speeds	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	1	1	1	2 (slow/fast)
No. of torque settings	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	5 + hammer	5 + masonry	5 + masonry	10 + masonry + hammer
Setting needed to lift van	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	No.4	No.5	No.5	Any
How long until van started to lift?	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	8 secs	9 secs	7 secs	8 secs ('slow' speed)/ 4 secs ('fast' speed)
Chuck	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	Keyless	Keyless	Keyless	Keyless
Brake time: free-running chuck	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	1sec	1sec	A few seconds	1sec
Weight of drill (approx)	(see note, below)	(see note, below)	1.5kg	1.5kg	1.5kg	2.5kg
Storage provided	Case	Case	Case	No case	Case	Case
Extras	Range of bits	Range of bits	Small drills, screwdriver bits, six small sockets	Selection of drills, screwdriver bits	-	-
Warranty	1yr	2yrs	1yr	2yrs	1yr*	2yrs
Guide price	£20	£35	£60	£50	£80	£150
Star rating	(not rated)	(not rated)	★★★★★	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★

*Does not cover clutch burn-out caused, for instance, by a seized steady

HOW WE CHOSE THE BEST BUY For use as a power steady winder, the Power Devil must be the best buy. The Black & Decker KC 1882 CN is a top class drill in every way and would wind your steadies easily and quickly – it was almost too fast for us (we would certainly not use its 'fast' speed in a real world environment). Few of us would happily pay £150 just to wind our steadies up and down unless our primary need was for a top class electric drill.



Richmond screwdriver

Black&Decker screwdriver

Power Devil PDD21 25K

Black&Decker KC725 1CN

Pyramid Products Black Spur

Black&Decker KC1882CN

NOTE We had always felt that winding steadies was beyond the capabilities of light-duty tools but because our E.S.A brand socket is marketed as being suitable for these as well as power drills, we felt honour-bound to try it out with a couple of screwdrivers. Our only reservation in using the E.S.A extension with a power drill was that the hexagon shaft, being designed to fit a power screwdriver, seemed rather on the light side compared to the Pyramid extension socket. Additionally, it is far more expensive. Nevertheless it is a well-made unit and gave no problems when used in a cordless drill. In use, neither screwdriver would wind the steady down from its locked, stowed position on any of their torque settings. Neither would they wind the steady up and 'lock' it in the stowed position so you could be confident that it would not tend to unwind during towing. However, providing the steady was not 'locked', both wound it down and up, although neither had the power to exert any real pressure to ensure that the steady was hard down on the ground. So, you would need to finish the job manually.