



# TORQUE TALK

A torque wrench is a car DIY essential... but which one should you go for?

**Kim Adams**  
 TODAY'S cars use lightweight metals to help keep fuel consumption down, but they mean that even the most basic of DIY maintenance needs care in order to avoid stripped threads and sheared bolts. Winding up a fastener until it feels tight, then adding a touch more, can land you with a big repair bill – undoing any savings made by servicing your car yourself. The easiest way to avoid damage is to use a torque

wrench, which will allow you to apply just the right amount of force with no risk of the fastener coming undone. A torque wrench is essential for major work such as replacing an engine's head gasket, but even changing brake pads can require one – and it's a useful piece of kit for when you're tightening bolts or nuts on alloy wheels. You can pay anything from less than £20 to more than £100 for a half-inch-drive torque wrench that should cover most car

jobs, but which is the most suitable one for you? To find out, we took a dozen from leading tool specialists to the max. **How we did it** WITH the help of AA engineer Rory Stockbridge, we measured accuracy using British Standard ISO 6789 as the basis. All units were within the tolerance. We then assessed the tools themselves, looking for ease of use, the common car scales of Nm

**Halford's 200139**  
 Price: £69.99 Range: 40-200Nm  
 Rating: ★★★★★  
**1 BEST BUY** Not the cheapest, but this is a superb tool with a range that covers most jobs. It has the same easy adjustment and scales with viewing window as its bigger brother (below), and comes with a calibration certificate. It also proved highly accurate in our lab trials. Push-through drive allows it to work in both directions, and the fine 72-tooth ratchet was the best in our test.

**Halford's 200295**  
 Price: £79.99 Range: 60-300Nm  
 Rating: ★★★★★  
**2 RECOMMENDED** The chain store has gone its own way with this torque wrench, and is all the better for it. Instead of the usual knurled adjustment, there's a comfortable plastic handle with a window for imperial and metric scales. Push-through drive lets it work both ways, and it was highly accurate in our lab tests. A higher but less usable range means it is our runner-up to its 200139 stablemate.

**Laser 5040**  
 Price: £167.98  
 Range: 40-200Nm  
 Rating: ★★★  
**3** YOU want for little with a digital wrench, and this is no exception. There's a choice of four scales on the LED display, while setting is simply a matter of tapping in the figure you want. This tool can be used in both directions and was highly accurate. There are several modes, plus a memory of recent settings. Top quality – but the alert was a little muted for us.

**Sealey Premier Line STW201**  
 Price: £89.33 Range: 30-200Nm  
 Rating: ★★★★★  
**4** THIS Premier Line is the closest to the Halford's pair, and seeing it on the podium with them is no surprise. It has a comfortable plastic handle and the scales are visible through a window, although the adjuster favours Nm. It too can be used in both directions, and there is a lever to flip the 32-tooth ratchet. It has a calibration certificate and did well in our lab tests.

**Sealey STW298**  
 Price: £165.86  
 Range: 40-200Nm  
 Rating: ★★★  
**5** YOU could argue that a digital wrench is overkill for the DIY mechanic, but they are good to use and, if you can justify the cost, worth considering. Both of our electronic wrenches proved very accurate in the lab and had calibration certificates. This Sealey narrowly gets the nod over the Laser (left) thanks to its fine ratchet and bigger visual warning as you reach the limit.

**Teng Tools 1292AG-EP**  
 Price: £59.99 Range: 40-210Nm  
 Rating: ★★★  
**6** UNIQUELY among the test group, this Screwfix-sourced wrench has an angular scale, which is sometimes specified for cylinder head bolts and the like. It also has the desired imperial and metric measures, although the final adjustment is biased towards Nm. It proved quite stiff at its maximum, but it does come with a calibration certificate.

**Silverline 633567**  
 Price: £17.83  
 Range: 42-210Nm  
 Rating: ★★★★★  
**7** A DEAD ringer for the Clarke (opposite), down to the handy extension bar and half to 3/8-inch-drive convertor, this is a cracking option for those on a tight budget. The pair were also closely matched in the lab tests and proved to be more accurate than some pricier tools. The finish is a little too shiny and rough in places, but it's easy to ignore at this price.



(Newton metre) and lb ft (foot pounds), the ability to torque in both directions and fine ratchets to allow work in tight places.

### Verdict

THE Halfords wrenches were the standout tools here. They were a breeze to set, highly accurate and well specified. The more usable range of the 200139 earns it

victory from the larger and more expensive 200295. Sealey's well made Premier Line STW201 is next up. Finally, the closely matched Silverline and Clarke just miss podium spots, but are our budget choices.

- 1 Halfords 200139
- 2 Halfords 200295
- 3 Sealey Premier Line STW201

### Contacts

**Clarke** 01992 565300  
clarkeinternational.com

**Draper** 023 8049 4333  
www.draper.co.uk

**Halfords**  
0845 762 6625  
www.halfords.com

**Kamasa/Laser**  
01926 815000  
www.toolconnection.co.uk

**Northern Industrial Tools**  
0845 605 2266  
www.northerntooluk.com

**Screwfix (Teng)**  
0500 414141  
www.screwfix.com

**Sealey** 01284 757500  
www.sealey.co.uk  
**Silverline** 01935 382252  
www.toolstream.com

### Laser 3995

Price: £45.46  
Range: 42-210Nm  
Rating: ★★

**8** THERE'S a quality feel to this satin-finished Laser, despite being very similar to the Clarke and Northern Tools units (right). It has the same 24-tooth reversible ratchet, but can be used in both directions and has Nm and oddball metres kilogram (m kg) scales – although the former can be hard to line up. As with the Draper (right) it comes with a dated calibration check.

### Kamasa SP3780

Price: £36.59  
Range: 13-203Nm  
Rating: ★★★

**9** SECOND offering from big player Tool Connection after the Laser (left) is cheaper, but it lacks the pleasing finish of its stablemate and is very similar to the Clarke wrench (far right). It also has the useful five-inch extension and convertor for using 3/8-inch drive sockets. As with the Laser it has a calibration check, but the hanging loop makes closing the case lid hard.

### Clarke CHT 141

Price: £22.79  
Range: 28-210Nm  
Rating: ★★★

**10** VISUALLY similar to the Northern Tools wrench (right), this Clarke combines the m kg scale with Nm. What gives it an edge is the 3/8-inch drive convertor for small fasteners and an extension bar which is handy for wheel changing. It also proved a touch more accurate in our tests. Alongside the similar Silverline (opposite), this is our budget pick.

### Northern Industrial Tools 558266

Price: £23.99 Range: 27-203Nm  
Rating: ★★★

**11** YOU can see where the money has been saved with this budget wrench from Northern Tools. The finish could be better in places and it only works in a clockwise direction, but it gets the job done. There are two scales, with the imperial lb ft being the most relevant rather than m kg, although there is a handy conversion table. A decent budget option.

### Draper Expert 58138

Price: £84.30  
Range: 30-100Nm  
Rating: ★★★

**12** FOR this money you'd hope for a bigger range, as a 100Nm maximum is half that of most rivals, and Nm is the only scale you get. The good news is that this is one of the best to set, thanks to a stepped adjuster and neat viewing window. It can be used in both directions – although switching could be easier – and proved to be one of the best in the lab.