

How to Buy a Pressure Washer

(The ultimate guide to help you purchase the right pressure washer.)





With the hundreds, even thousands, of pressure washers on the market today, we know it can be difficult to select the unit that best meets your needs. That's why we at Alkota have put together this Buyer's Guide. This guide answers the questions about pressure washers that we most often field from our customers. If you have any additional questions about pressure washers or a specific unit, be sure to **contact your dealer or Alkota at 800.255.6823.**



Model shown: the Tiny Terror Xtreme Series

What's most important: HP, PSI or GPM?

First of all, it's important to understand what each of these acronyms means. HP stands for horsepower, PSI for pounds per square inch and GPM for gallons per minute.

The HP of a pressure washer is divided up to produce both the pressure at which the water is released (PSI) and the number of gallons that are released (GPM). For example, a 2 HP motor can produce 2.1 GPM at 1600 PSI or it can produce 3.0 GPM at 1100 PSI. Cleaning power is a function of both volume and pressure.

Size does matter.

When selecting a pressure washer, first determine the minimum PSI you need to break the bond between the dirt and the surface you are cleaning. The chart on this page can help you, or you may wish to contact your dealer if you need help.

After selecting a pressure washer with at least that PSI level, look at the GPM rate. The higher the GPM, the faster your cleaning job will be. That's because once you have the necessary pressure to remove the dirt and grime, the only way to make your job faster is to increase the rate at which water is released.

You can lower the cleaning pressure capacity of a larger washer simply by changing spray nozzles or using a variable pressure wand. You can not make a smaller washer bigger. Horsepower is horsepower; a 2 HP motor can not pump over its capacity.

Always buy a unit big enough for your needs. Buying a unit that does not have adequate cleaning power will cost you extra clean-up time and repairs in the future.

PSI Needed for Various Applications

Use	Minimum PSI Needed
Cars and SUVs	1500+ PSI
Industrial applications	1500+ PSI
Trucks, trailers, tractors, combines, silage choppers, cotton pickers	1800+ PSI
Decks, fences, siding	2000+ PSI
Livestock shelters	3000 PSI
Large surfaces such as driveways, patios	3000 PSI

What are units of cleaning power?

The measurement units of cleaning power is an easy way to rate pressure washers. To determine the units of cleaning power for a machine, multiply the PSI by the GPM (PSI x GPM). This calculation helps you compare different pressure washers, to determine which one is most powerful. The higher the number, the more powerful the pressure washer.

Units of Cleaning Power		
GPM	PSI	Units of Cleaning Power
2.0	1600	3,200
3.0	1100	3,300
3.0	2000	6,000
4.0	1800	7,200
4.0	3000	12,000
4.8	1800	8,640
5.0	3000	15,000

For example, let's say you are considering one washer with 2 GPM and 3000 PSI and another washer with 4 GPM and 2000 PSI. Which is better? The units of cleaning power on the first washer are 6,000, while the second unit has 8,000 cleaning units. The second machine is more powerful and will likely be the best choice for your needs.

Do I want a gas or electric pressure washer?

Gasoline engines are best when you need a portable unit. Since electric motors are quiet and emit no exhaust, they are ideal for indoor use. With the Alkota trailer mount you can conveniently carry water along with you.

What's the difference between belt drive and direct drive?

The drive refers to how the pump is connected to the power source, such as a gasoline engine or an electric motor. Direct drive means that the pump is connected directly to that source, while a belt drive unit transfers energy from the power source to the pump along an intermediate belt.

Direct drive pumps are more compact and typically cost less than belt drive pumps. However, direct drive pumps are not as durable or as long-lasting as belt-driven ones. The connected power source and higher RPM generate heat, shortening the life of directly-driven pumps. Excessive vibration, a problem with the direct drive, can also cause a shorter life. And with direct drive, any damage or stress on the power source also damages the pump.

With belt drive, the pump is separated from the motor, protecting the pump from added stress and heat, extending the life of the unit. Belt drive pumps also generally operate at a lower RPM, causing less heat build-up which further protects the pump.

Should I buy a hot water or cold water pressure washer?

It always depends on what you are cleaning and how fast you want to get the job done. If you need to clean grease or oil, hot water will do a better job of breaking down the grime. Hot water can decrease cleaning time and help detergents and chemical cleaners work better. They also sanitize in areas where bacteria is a problem.

Hot water power washers typically do cost more. Hot water units heat the water using a heating coil, and this component is complex. Make sure the coil on the unit has at least 1/2" inner diameter; a narrower coil could become lined with build-up, reducing the pressure of the machine. The coil should also be spiral wound with even spacing to prevent soot build up, which interferes with combustion.

On Alkota pressure washers, the coil actually forms the combustion chamber, so there is no troublesome insulation. The even coil spirals also allow adequate air flow, improving combustion and fuel efficiency.

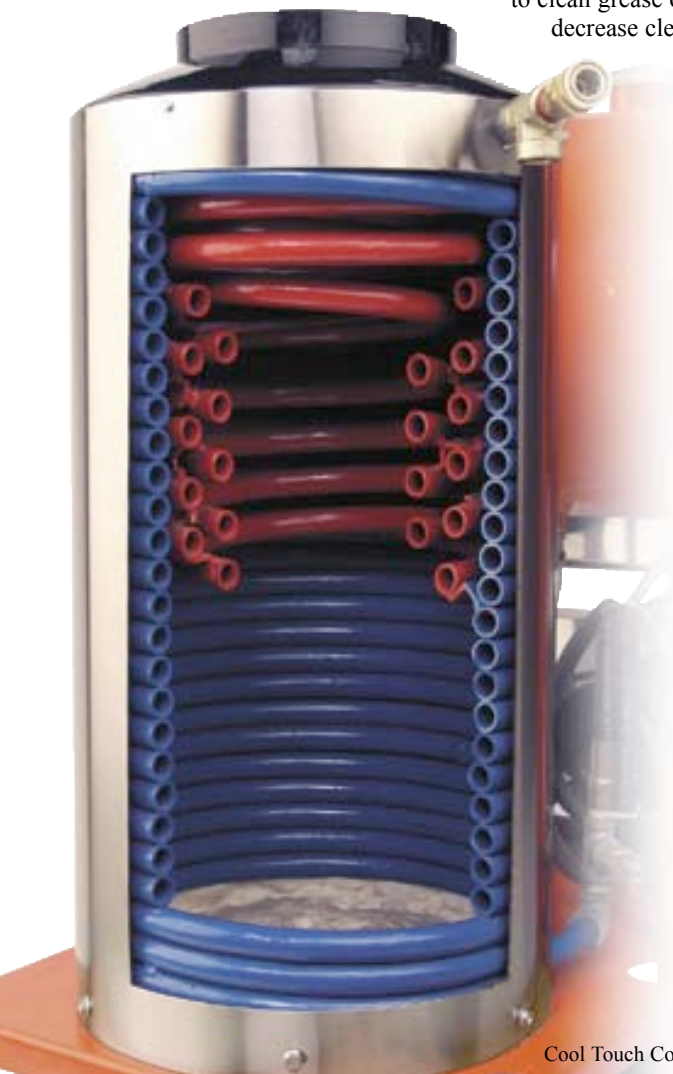
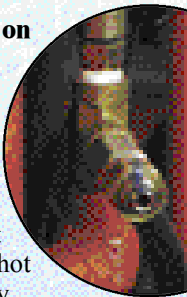
Cool Touch Coil

1.800.255.6823

What safety features should I look for?

A number of features will make your pressure washing equipment safer and easier to operate:

- **A safety relief valve on hot water units.** This valve should be mounted between the pump and the coil inlet, not on the coil outlet. Valves mounted on the outlet will spray dangerous hot water in an emergency.
- **Automatic shut-off switch.** This turns the heat source off if it receives an insufficient flow of water.
- **Float tank/anti-siphon device** protects water sources from contamination.
- **Trigger gun** increases operator safety.
- **Thermostat** regulates heat.



Should I buy a portable or stationary unit?



Alkota's trailer mounted high pressure hot water system

This depends on your needs. If your dirt is confined to one room, a stationary unit might be best. However, if your stationary unit is permanently installed, service and repairs can be more expensive since the technician will need to travel to your location.

A portable unit is convenient, especially if you have multiple areas to clean. Pay close attention to the tires on a portable unit.

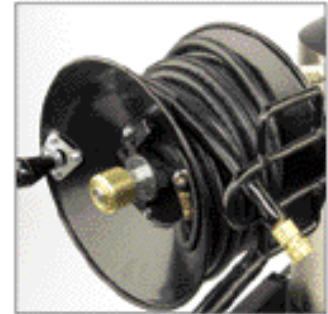
Make sure they are well lubricated and roll easily. Also make certain the unit is not top heavy; a top heavy unit can be dangerous for an operator to transport.

When I buy a pressure washer, what other equipment will I need to make my pressure washer efficient?

If you will be using your pressure washing equipment for vehicle washing you may want to install a water softener depending on water conditions. It may enhance the performance of your machine.

For any pressure washer, you may want to purchase other accessories to get the most productivity out of your machine. For example, different brushes, nozzles, wands or chemicals can help meet the demands of your specific cleaning job. Hose reels can also increase safety and extend the life of the hose.

Hose Reel



How will I need to maintain my pressure washer?

Like any equipment, your pressure washer will last longer and perform better if you take proper care of it. Your dealer can walk you through maintenance for the pressure washer you are considering. As with all equipment, make sure you purchase a machine for which parts are readily available.

Is there a difference in pressure washer brands?

In the pressure washer industry certain components may be similar between brands but you should always make sure to select a brand that is easily serviced. Consider where the manufacturer is located; U.S. manufacturers make for more accessible parts delivery and better maintenance. The manufacturer and dealer's experience may also reflect what kind of service you can expect down the road.

Above all, buy a pressure washer that will work efficiently in your specific situation.



OLD VALUES. NEW IDEAS.



Form #BG-6-04. Printed in the U.S.A.

Alcester, South Dakota 57001
1.800.255.6823 www.alkota.com