



This is a battle of two portable hot water systems, the Smarttek Black and the Joolca Hottap. These are the sort of showers you take camping if you can't do without a few creature comforts, or just don't want to go 'full-feral' in the outdoors.

If you're reading this then it's more than likely that you are comparing two or more portable hot water units... hopefully, this article will help you with your choice.

Just for transparency, we only sell the Smarttek systems. We have sold and recommended Joolca in the past and we believe both products are leading the way for portable hot water systems in the camping and leisure market



Joolca makes one of the leading hot water systems for the outdoor market.

This article is not intended to be biased, we don't have anything negative to say about either product. We simply set out to research and highlight the differences between these leading portable hot water systems as well as other options in the market from Coleman and Companion.

Luckily for us Smarttek have a number of features in their favour and represent excellent value for money, so let's start out with the main question on our minds –

How does the Smarttek Black and Joolca Hottap Hot Water Systems compare?

Let's look at some of the details.



The Smarttek Black allows you to enjoy hot water in any climate outdoors.

Smarttek units raise water to a higher temperature above ambient

The Smarttek Black unit can bring the temperature to 42°C above ambient on low water flow and maximum heat settings in winter mode. They also have a Lite unit with a smaller heat exchanger and a burner that can achieve almost 35°C above ambient.

Joolca on the other hand claim a 30°C rise above ambient.

There's not much to compare when it comes to maximum water temperature

Australian standards require these portable units to cut out at 55°C but there is a variance of around 10% for this. Smarttek has indicated that 55°C to be their max temperature and Joolca state that 50°C is their maximum but we have seen Joolca units go above this.

So there's not much to compare here, both units deliver the same maximum temperatures..



Both units have a similar maximum temperature.



Joolca units are lighter

This might not be a deal-breaker but Joolca comes out in front here at 4.2 kg. Even Smarttek's Lite unit at 4.5 kg weighs in heavier than Joolca whilst the Smarttek Black version comes in at 5 kg.

Smarttek units have a wider flow rate range

The upper echelon of 6 litres per minute is the same for both brands and is dependant of the flow rate of the water pumped into the unit. At the lower end, Joolca can be wound down to 4 litres per minute whilst Smarttek can go all the way down to 2 litres per minute.



The Smarttek Lite is a more compact option for warmer climates. Image: Smarttek

Smarttek have better performance in wind

Smarttek claims that their units are made with interlocking parts that make them rain, dust, shock and wind-resistant. We haven't field-tested this but some quick research online indicates that this is potentially the case.

The external casings do appear to have less or smaller vents when compared to the Joolca Hottap. This, in theory, creates better resistance to the burner being extinguished by wind. Let's face it, no one likes an interrupted shower!



The Joolca HOTTAP offers a 5m UV resistant shower hose.

The hoses are different

Joolca offers a 5 metre UV resistant shower hose with their Hottap, which is like a high-quality garden hose.

Smarttek on the other hand only offers a 2-metre hose. But it is a kink-free stainless steel hose that doesn't heat up or get soft when in use. If you do need a longer shower hose, Smarttek offers this as an optional accessory.

Smarttek lead the way when it comes to runtime

Smarttek has an energy-saving 'summer' setting in their units that can provide users with 50 hours of hot showers from a 9 kg gas bottle on the lowest heat setting and about 16 hours on maximum heat.

In comparison, Joolca claim of about 15 hours from a 9 kg bottle on the maximum heat setting.



Smarttek provides a kink-free stainless steel hose. Image: Smarttek



Smarttek includes a pump, albeit smaller, with all their units

You'll have to spend a little more on Hottap Outing to get a pump with your Joolca. This kit comes with a 6.0lpm pump and longer hoses and cables so you can set up your pump some way from your hot water unit. Whereas, the base Hottap model relies solely on a pressurised water source.

Smarttek, on the other hand, supplies a 4.3lpm pump with both of their units and have larger pumps available as an optional accessory.

The input water pressure is different

I thought I'd add this one in to clear up the confusion.

Smarttek, claim 25-750kPa input water pressure on their units, but they have only stated this upper limit to match the mains water pressure in Australia which is 750 kPa. However, the units have actually been cleared up to 1500 kPa. Joolca, on the other hand, claims an input water pressure range of 70-900kPa but I can't confirm if the units are cleared for higher than this.

So you'll need a higher input pressure to get the Joolca unit started when compared to Smarttek. But both units easily achieve the upper limit required to connect the units to a mains water supply.

In the borderline impossible instance that your shower is connected to a fire truck or other ludicrously high-pressure water supply, an overflow valve kicks in on the Smarttek units to prevent damage. I'm all but certain that the Joolca units feature the same type of valve.



The Hottap pump is available separately.

Smarttek offers a pretty sweet technical support line

From 9am until 7pm, 7 days a week, you can call the Smarttek helpline on 1300 119 906. There you'll be able to speak to a technician who, 90% of the time, will be able to get your shower up and running again.

This being said, we always found Joolca to offer excellent product support but they seem to limit this to office hours.

For more on how to set up and use the Smarttek Black, check out the video above.

The Joolca units may be tested a few more times

Whilst Smarttek say their units have been tested 'in excess of 12000 cycles, Joolca pips them at the post by claiming 15000 cycles.

Either way, both units have been tested to the equivalent of over 30 years of daily showers!



Smarttek offer a better warranty

Last of all, Smarttek back their Black unit with a 3-year warranty whilst Joolca offer 2. Smarttek's Lite unit however only comes with a 1-year warranty.



Joolca tests their units 15000 cycles.

So which portable shower is best?

Well, by buying a Smarttek from Snowys you not only get the service and product backing that we supply, but you also get Smarttek's technical helpline 7 days a week. In reality, both units achieve what most campers are looking for, which is a reliably hot shower and the versatility of using water from both mains water supply as well as the option to pump water from rivers, lakes or just out of a bucket.



The Coleman Hot Water On Demand is another option you have. Image: Coleman

How does Smarttek stack up against the Coleman Hot Water On Demand and Companion Aquacube?

Now that we've pulled the fine details apart for the high-end units, you may be wondering how they compare with others on the market like the Coleman Hot Water On Demand and the Companion Aquacube.

In a nutshell, these units offer better all-in-one portability with a built-in power supply and the option to operate on disposable propane cylinders as well as LPG bottles. This makes them easier to move around the campsite.

But the buck stops there!

Despite being more portable these units offer lower flow rates, shorter run times and, based on customer reviews, a question mark over reliability. I couldn't obtain a few of the details on these units, but we've collated what I could find on all products mentioned in this article in the table below for easy comparison.



I hope this was helpful. We'd love to hear your thoughts on what you think the best portable shower unit is.