




There's Holden vs Ford, and Land Cruiser vs Patrol – but you will not find a topic that causes greater divide around the campfire than an Engel vs Dometic debate.

Which one really is the best portable fridge?

Rather than listening to stories about someone's mate's uncle's neighbour that had a fridge that didn't work very well... let us take you through some key differences, so you can make your own assessment.

Which Fridge is More Reliable?

- When it comes to reliability, Engel tends to come out on top. With a company history spanning over 50 years, it is not uncommon to hear of an Engel still functioning after 40 years.
- The Engel is built with a steel exterior, and there are plenty of stories about Engel fridges surviving endless outback tracks, falls from the back of Ute trays, and vehicle rollovers.
- Don't believe us? Check out this magic machine, owned by Snowys blogger Bob West. When this photo was taken, it had almost been 30 years of living in the back of a mate's farm ute – often not tied down, always uncovered, and out in the weather. Its bruised and battered facade is deceptive, continuing to spit out delicious sandwiches and cold drinks in the tough Flinders Ranges environment. This photo is a testament to how tough these fridges are:

 30 years old, battered, but still working – a legend in reliability. Image: Bob West

- With regards to product development though, Dometic has been leading the pack. Unfortunately, this has made them the guinea pigs when it comes to new technology.
- In the early days, Dometic were not known for their reliability – but on our experience, the Dometic CFX range looks to be changing this.
- After chatting with one of Adelaide's leading fridge repairers, it seems the Dometic CFX is tremendously reliable, especially in comparison with its older CF counterpart.

Features?

- Both fridges have battery protection and the ability to set the temperature.
- Both fridges will run from 12 or 240V.
- The Dometic has a built-in bung for washing out the interior, making it easier to clean.
- The Dometic CFX range has elements that are flush with the sides, while the Engel cooling elements are attached to the side. The latter creates a gap that is hard to clean.
- Dometic features a USB output, so you can charge mobile devices or lighting etc.
- Dometic also features wireless technology and an app, so you can control your fridge from your smartphone.





The Engel MT-V45F 40L Fridge Freezer. A fine size for an outback 4WDing trip or long weekend away.

Power Draw?

Power draw is extremely variable as there are many factors to consider, such as:

- The ambient temperature
- Which setting you have your fridge on
- The contents of the fridge, and how cold was it before you filled it
- How often you open the lid

Find out [how to increase your fridge efficiency here](#).

Let's assume both fridges are operating in identical conditions, and power consumption is calculated as an average over 24 hours. Both are current 40L models.

- At low ambient temperatures (20-30 degrees), both fridges will use similar amounts of power and both are considered very economical.
- When the temperature heats up (40+ degrees), the Engel will start to use more power than the Dometic
- For the reasons outlined below, the Engel will still use a little more power – but not as much as previously thought.
- The Dometic is still one of the most efficient fridges on the market.

Why Does Engel Use More Power?

- The Engel compressor uses less moving parts, making it very efficient in cooler conditions.
- Their compressor is limited to a maximum 2.5amps per hour.
- This design means it can run out of puff very quickly. Before long it will be flat-out trying to stay cool, and will remain running almost constantly, using more power over a 24-hour period.
- Engels are made from metal, so they are very strong. The downside is that metal conducts more heat than plastic, and it's much harder keeping a hot, metal box cold than it is to keep a plastic one.

Why is the Dometic so Efficient?

- Dometic use a variable speed compressor that has the ability to work harder in the hot conditions.
- This allows the fridge to cool down quickly so it can turn itself off and 'cycle', which reduces the average power consumption.



The popular Dometic CFX3 35 Fridge Freezer 36L. Ideal size for a couple travelling on an extended camping trip, or even a weekend.

Where are Engel and Dometic made?

- Engels use a Sawafuji Swing Motor, which is made in Japan. The fridge/freezers themselves are made in Thailand.
- Dometic fridges are made in China and used to have the German “Danfoss” now known as SECOP compressor. The CFX range runs a new compressor developed by the brand, also made in China, called the VMSO3 (Dometic proprietary Variable Motor Speed Optimization).

The Verdict

Not many adventurers would be disappointed with either of these fridges. There is a lot to be said about Engel’s reliable history, but you pay extra for this and meanwhile sacrifice a little on efficiency.

You may not have the same reliable history with a Dometic CFX yet, but the efficiency, functionality, and lower price tag mean they’re great value for money.

Some believe that the Dometic out-spec the Engel on paper, and appears to be much better value for money. Snowys blogger David Leslie says he has owned a Dometic since 2010 and it has never missed a beat – and uses less power than his mate’s Engel every time (which he loves to hear about).

For more information, read more from David Leslie on how to power your camping fridge for longer, and a guide to help you purchase the right portable fridge for you.