

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-on feral in the outdoors)!

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

Joolca makes one of the leading hot water systems for the outdoor market. Image: Joolca
This article is not intended to be biased; we don't have anything negative to say about either product. Rather, we've simply set out to research and highlight the differences between these two leading portable hot water systems, as well as other options on the market from [Companion](#).

Let's start with the more prominent question on our minds...

The Smarttek and Joolca are the sort of showers you take camping if you can't do without a few creature comforts! Image: Joolca

How does the Smarttek Black and Joolca HOTTAP V2 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.

Raising Water 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 their [HOTTAP V2](#) to have a 35°C rise above ambient.

Maximum Water Temperature

There's not much to compare here. 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 52°C to be their max temperature, and [Joolca](#) state that 50°C is their maximum. That said, we have seen Joolca units surpass this.

So, both units deliver the same maximum temperatures.

Both units have a similar maximum temperature. Image: Joolca

Which Units are Lighter?

This might not be a deal-breaker, but [Joolca](#) comes out in front at 4.2 kg. Even [Smarttek's Lite](#) unit at 4.5 kg weighs in heavier than Joolca's units, whilst the [Smarttek Black](#) version comes in at 5.5 kg.

Flow Rate Range

Smarttek boast a wider flow rate range.

The upper echelon of 6 litres per minute is the same for both brands, and is dependent of the flow rate of the water pumped into the unit. At the lower end, Joolca can be wound down to 2.5 litres per minute whilst Smarttek can go down a little further to 2 litres per minute.


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

Wind Performance

Smarttek tend to perform better in windy conditions. They claim that their units are made with interlocking parts, having 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.

Compared to the Joolca HOTTAP, the Smarttek external casings appeared to have less or smaller vents. This, in theory, creates better resistance to the burner being extinguished by wind.

That said, Joolca's HOTTAP V2 boasts better wind resistance than the previous HOTTAP V1 model, sporting separate dials for both water and flame control and enhanced capabilities when paired with the separately available, newly developed accessories. This now has both the Smarttek and Joolca HOTTAP V2 relatively equivalent to one another, in regards to how well they perform in windy conditions.

Let's face it: no one likes their shower disrupted!


The Joolca HOTTAP V2 offers a 5m UV-resistant shower hose. Image: Joolca

Hoses

Both brands are different. Joolca offers a 5-metre UV-resistant shower hose with their HOTTAP; essentially like a high-quality garden hose.

Smarttek, on the other hand, only offers a 2-metre hose - but it's a kink-free, stainless steel type that doesn't heat up or soften when in use. If you do require a longer shower hose though, they offer this as an optional accessory.

Runtime

Smarttek leads the way here, with an energy-saving 'Summer Mode' setting in their units providing 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 (i.e. 'Winter Mode').

In comparison, Joolca claim of about 15 hours from a 9 kg bottle on the maximum heat setting and 45 hours on low.


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

Included Pumps

Albeit smaller, Smarttek include a pump with their units, while you'll have to spend a little more on [HOTTAP V2 Outing Kit](#) to score a pump with your Joolca. The Smarttek kit comes with a 6 L/pm pump, plus longer hoses and cables so you can set up your pump some way from your hot water unit. The [Joolca HOTTAP V2 Essentials Kit](#), on the contrary, relies solely on a pressurised water source.

Smarttek supplies a 4.3lpm pump with both of their units, with [larger pumps](#) available as an optional accessory.

Input Water Pressure

This is different for both brands. I thought I'd add this one in to clear up the confusion. Smarttek claim 25-750kPa input water pressure on their units, but have only stated this upper limit to match the mains water pressure in Australia (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, compared to Smarttek, you'll need a higher input pressure to get the Joolca unit started, compared to Smarttek. That said, 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 V2 Outing Kit includes a 12V pumping kit for drawing water from any source.
Image: Joolca.*

Technical Support

Both Smarttek and Joolca sweeten the deal with their support line. From 9:00am until 5:00pm, five days a week, you can call the [Smarttek](#) helpline on 1300 119 906. There, you can speak to a technician who, 90% of the time, will be able to get your shower up and running again.

We always found [Joolca](#) to offer excellent product support too, but this seems to be limited to local hours. Their text line is 0488 845 868.

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

Testing Cycles

The Joolca units may be tested a few more times than Smarttek test theirs. Whilst Smarttek say their units have been tested 'in excess of 12,000 cycles, Joolca pips them at the post by claiming 15,000. Either way, both units have been tested to the equivalent of over 30 years of daily showers!

Warranties

Last of all, Smarttek back their Black unit with a three-year warranty, whilst Joolca offer two. That said, Smarttek's Lite unit only comes with a 1-year warranty.

Joolca tests their units 15000 cycles. Image: Joolca

So... which portable shower is best?

Well, by buying either, you're guaranteed access to their respective helplines whenever needed. Overall, both units achieve what most campers are looking for: 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.

Both units provide a reliably hot shower and the option to pump water from rivers, lakes, or just out of a bucket! Image: Joolca

What about the Companion AquaHeat?

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 [Companion AquaHeat Lithium Gas Shower](#).

In a nutshell, this unit offer better all-in-one portability, with an integrated rechargeable Lithium battery and the option to operate on disposable propane cartridge as well as ULPG 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 and shorter run times. For a basic, less-bougie, pared-back shower without all the bells, whistles, and embellishments - Companion also offer the [Rechargeable Camp Shower](#), the [12V Shower](#), and the [12V High Volume Camp Shower](#).

The Companion AquaHeat is another portable shower option. Image: Companion.

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