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World's
fastest tractor



Our cars of 2019
The tank for hire
Rupert's Italian job
Car vs bike: off road
Festive road trip
Inside Tamiya



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THE WICKER PLAN

From figgy pudding to Gentleman's Relish, piccalilli and bizarre preserves, Christmas hampers can be a minefield of culinary disappointment. So we decided to build our own by way of a national road trip in an everyday all-rounder.

Richard Webber procures a 520d Touring and hits the road

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON





Under way in Edinburgh and the 520d's noisy run-flats make their presence known

Taking reprieve from a festive fog of fortified wines and gin, it was the Victorian ruling class that struck upon the idea of a Christmas hamper: an annual gift of seasonal goodies for its servants. Things are a little less formal in the Autocar office these days, but master of the house Tissshaw has nonetheless tasked me with sourcing a cache of yuletide treats for the team this year.

Hamper champs Fortnum & Mason charge up to £6000 for filled baskets, but we reckon we can build our own for considerably less than that, even accounting for the overheads of a nation-wide road trip. And so it is that photographer Max Edleston and I set off from Edinburgh driving an everyday hero that ticks all of our mission's boxes: a BMW 520d xDrive Touring. In its generous boot sits an empty hamper, ready to fill with the finest local produce we can find.

There's a bassy rumble from the 19in run-flats as we skip over the West End's cobbles, but having slacked off the adaptive dampers (a worthwhile £985 option), we first sample the car's talent for comfort, which soon extends to a northward

motorway blast into Perthshire. The tyres pipe down and the punchy 187bhp engine settles at 1600rpm in top, the 5 Series channelling the spirit of the 7 Series limo with which it shares many innards.

Our first stop is the Innis & Gunn brewery on the edge of Perth. Inside the high-roofed industrial unit and among huge, gleaming, 30,000-litre tanks, office co-ordinator Neil Everett shows us one of the company's defining secrets – an 'oakerator' that percolates the beer through wood chips made from ex-spirit barrels. A few days of this transforms a red beer into 'Blood Red Sky' with the help of rum-soaked chips, while 'The Original' uses toasted bourbon casks to make a sweet, rich, buttery ale. Everett recommends 'Vanishing Point', an 11% ABV stout mellowed in bourbon casks for 12 months, as a Christmas



Innis & Gunn's beers are infused with wood chips made from casks used to store spirits



alternative to port, so we grab a couple of bottles among others including the Inveralmond real ales also brewed here.

With the hamper clanking, we break west in search of an even stronger poison. The back road to Crieff is well-surfaced and open enough to merit the BMW's Sport mode, toggling the damping, steering, transmission and engine into their most aggressive settings. That's a relative term, of course, because while our car carries M Sport spec, comfort is never abandoned. Still, we're able to carve enjoyable lines and carry ample pace beneath the autumnal canopies, red squirrels diving from our path.

Just past Crieff we park alongside the rushing River Turret, where a cluster of ancient, postcard-ready

white buildings wear the pagoda tops that mark out Glenturret as a whisky distillery. Officially they first made the national spirit here in 1775, although illegal production began in 1717, arguably making it Scotland's oldest distillery.

Traditional methods prevail: general manager John Laurie shows us the 6000-litre Douglas fir washbacks where yeast ferments the warm, malted barley solution into booze. Carbon dioxide oozes from it, and a large bubble pops just as my colleague hangs his head in for a peak, almost flooring him. A worker named Grace Gow perished that way in 1870 and today a single cask whisky is named for her, but thankfully the 'Edleston 22-year-old' remains un bottled for now.

We see the chubby copper stills

THE INNIS & GUNN BREWERY

“BEER IS LIKE LIFE ITSELF. ITS MOMENTS ARE BEST SAVOURED WITH THOSE WHO JOIN YOU ON THE JOURNEY.”



that help produce a smooth, light whisky, and meet the mouse-hunting Glenturret cats that bask in their warmth. Then we learn about the bourbon barrels and sherry casks of American and European oak that, in time, lend flavour and colour to the spirit. All are used to create the sweet and fruity 'Triple Wood' single malt, so that's the bottle we leave with.

Another short westbound hop comprises generously wide A-road, along which the 5 Series bounds effortlessly below the seasonal tan, titian and tangerine of Perthshire's rolling hills as the eight-speed auto 'box melts between gears.

We turn onto the River Earn floodplain at Comrie and soon find Cultybraggan – a vast WWII POW →



Glenturret has been a distillery since 1717, albeit illegally at first; John Laurie (above, on left) warns Webber of the potential dangers



WEBBER'S ROUTE

Starting in Edinburgh, we drove north into Perthshire then cut west for our first few stops before looping into The Trossachs and turning south towards Glasgow.

We then followed a south-easterly path to London on the motorway network, with forays into Dumfriesshire, the Lake District and south-east Staffordshire.

JAMES LAFFERTY, NELISSA LAIDLAW, SIMON LAIDLAW, ZACK LAIDLAW, SEEMA LAKRA, PREM LAL, ANTHONY LAMBERT, SCOTT LANGLANDS, EWAJAN LUNSON, WILLIAM & PAMELA LUNSON, MALCOLM LAY, IAN LEADER, ANDREW LEARMOND, COLIN LEOLIF, STEPHEN LORIMER, WILLIAM & EDITH LOWE, RAYLEIGH LOWMYRE, SIMS ARYLINCH, ANDREW LYON, KELLY LYONS, MICHAEL LYONS



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AB 111	DFB 6	4 HER	7 KH	MPS 7	RCH 18	TES 5S	68 CT	KS 17	15 PU	64 TD
5 AJC	7 DRW	HH 2	KH 3	MRT 1M	RBW 3	TK 25	CK 20	26 LD	32 RB	77 TK
69 AB	30 DKY	46 HLT	K2 HAN	S1 MTH	44 REG	898 TR	67 DC	11 LE	68 RD	88 TK
AHM 1D	D1 SHY	CAR 16K	K1 RRK	A1 MTV	RIA 58	1 UA	33 DL	58 LN	92 RD	15 TM
AJ 66	DT 6	GO 92	KS 17	44 NDY	RJH 34	36 V	85 DO	47 LW	34 RE	TP 28
AK 7	E 33	LEK 9	KS 5	77 N	RK 83	88 X	47 DM	92 LW	RG 65	88 TS
V8 AML	10 EMS	3333 J	8 LB	S57 NGH	5 RKB	10 XE	38 DW	MC 64	RG 67	65 TU
111 000	EG 6	88 JA	LEM 4	NT 2	RL 25	6 XK	DW 50	24 ME	RG 69	61 TH
B 22	E635 AMG	JAK 8E	LJ 3	570 NY	8 RLA	20 Y	73 DS	53 MF	96 RM	73 TL
3 BET	JA59 UAR	JES 164A	11 LJS	OI 3	RO 13	2x2'S	52 EA	73 MK	59 RS	TK 25
B 73	3 FDM	5 JHL	P11 LLL	OR 6	9 RSC	38 AS	84 GT	29 NL	93 RW	57 UD
BBC 5	JN11 FER	9 JMM	39 LYN	50 OT	59 RS	BD 24	84 GS	84 NT	12 RV	49 WB
BIL 394	2 FMW	14 JO	LYR 11K	GG12 OVE	5 RY	56 BJ	73 GN	16 OJ	29 RV	WC 45
8 CAW	91 G	JOS 11	7 MB	17 PB	2 S	71 BN	56 HM	11 OU	60 RY	70 WN
CB 26	5 GDY	JOS 16E	12 MCJ	3 PMW	6 S	76 BN	31 JH	80 OL	38 SA	41 WR
CC 373	4 GJS	JOY 1S	MEL 355A	93 PPP	SBG 3	17 BV	53 JB	53 PD	32 SM	22 WL
CHU 880Y	9 GKY	JRA 55	MAX 960	16 PR	SCT 71	30 BV	97 JM	76 PN	86 SN	15 XV
31 CJJ	HAJ 1G	88 K	MJB 5	8 PSA	0017 SPY	CB 46	34 JP	60 PS	39 SR	72 Y



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Former POW camp at Cultybraggan is now home to 31 businesses

“ Taking to the moorland south of the camp, the car gets a workout over the undulating B-road ”



← camp of 100 Nissen huts built to hold 4000 of the Wermacht's deadliest. It fostered its share of horrible wartime histories before becoming a training camp that hosted almost every Scottish army cadet for decades. I earned an exemption (pipe band duties, not bone spurs), and a peek inside a peeling, unrestored hut makes me glad.

The camp is now community-owned, reborn as both a tourist attraction and a home to 31 diverse small businesses – one of which is Strathearn Cheese, which uses local

milk to make up to 200 cheeses daily from a tiny room in what was the camp guards' kitchen block.

Co-owner Drew Watson greets us while hand-turning truckles of 'Wee Comrie', a pleasantly mild, buttery cheese named for the nearby village. But his star product is 'The Strathearn' – a rinded cheese repeatedly washed in whisky from our friends at Glenturret while maturing for a month. It won gold at the World Cheese Awards shortly after production began in 2016.

A sniff of the chilly maturing

room's regulated atmosphere gives a preview of The Strathearn's 'robustness'. Then we try a sample, prompting Edleston's face to fold, while my tongue takes a convulsion. It's addictively flavoursome and we buy some immediately. Watson throws in some oatcakes and we procure a complementary tomato chutney at nearby Hut 17.

Taking to the moorland south of the camp, we trace the River Knaick while birds of prey circle overhead. The car's Adaptive mode gets a workout over the undulating,

twisting B-road, predictively adjusting the Drive Control settings to deliver swift, composed progress, then it's an easy, half-hour main-road amble to Callander, just south of the Highland Boundary.

The town is home to the Campbells Shortbread bakery – the oldest in Scotland – which has been run by seven generations of Campbells since 1830. We're tight for time so buy some from a shop on Main Street: a tin for the hamper and a pack for immediate sustenance, which charges us nicely for the final stint to an overnight stop near Glasgow.

We take the indirect route, skirting Lochs Venachar and Achray as the sun sets somewhere unknown among the cloud bomb above us.

It's dark by the time we reach the Duke's Pass, catching only glimpses of its heathy beauty as the optional adaptive LEDs squint into each bend. In Sport mode there's a muted growl as revs are kept usefully high to help punch out of corners, but the apices tighten and body roll escalates, so I ease off in favour of passenger comfort. It's the first time the car has felt its 1810kg kerb weight. Civilisation is soon re-joined at Stirling. →



Strathearn Cheese has made its home – and a name for itself – at Cultybraggan



Campbells shortbread offers much-needed in-car energy boost

1700L

Maximum boot capacity is, in theory, big enough for 39 hampers such as ours – or £114,000-worth of Glenturret single malt.



“
We switchback onto the A701
to enjoy the sinuous stretch
to the Devil's Beef Tub
”

OPTIONAL EXTRAS: BUILT-IN HAMPERS



ROLLS-ROYCE PICNIC HAMPER

From £30,000

For fine dining al fresco, this leather, teak and aluminium box includes Wedgwood porcelain plates, stainless steel cutlery and wine glasses made from hand-ground lead crystal.



MULLINER PICNIC HAMPER

From £22,000

Penned by luxury design house Linley, this customisable set of three Beluga hide-trimmed compartments contains a dining set, illuminated champagne cooler and cashmere rug, all securely docked in the Bentley Bentayga's boot.



MERCEDES-BENZ PICNIC HAMPER

£83

Stuttgart's contribution is a steal in this company, its more rustic – not to mention more modestly priced – willow basket containing a full dining set for two, including tablecloth. A volkshamper, relatively speaking.

The enormous sandwich is then chopped into bars before entering an 'enrober', coating them in chocolate.

The whole place is a buzz of machines and stripy-coated workers, with sweet aromas ranging from roasting coconut to baking biscuit swirling all around. Some parts are top-secret – such as the custom-made contraption that de-peaks

the blobs of mallow – but we can photograph others.

Many are electronically controlled, but the machine that individually wraps 420 Caramel Wafers in foiled paper each minute works via a blur of gnashing, manually adjustable metal cams. Another sensor-driven station uses robotic carbonfibre arms tipped with super-soft vacuum cups

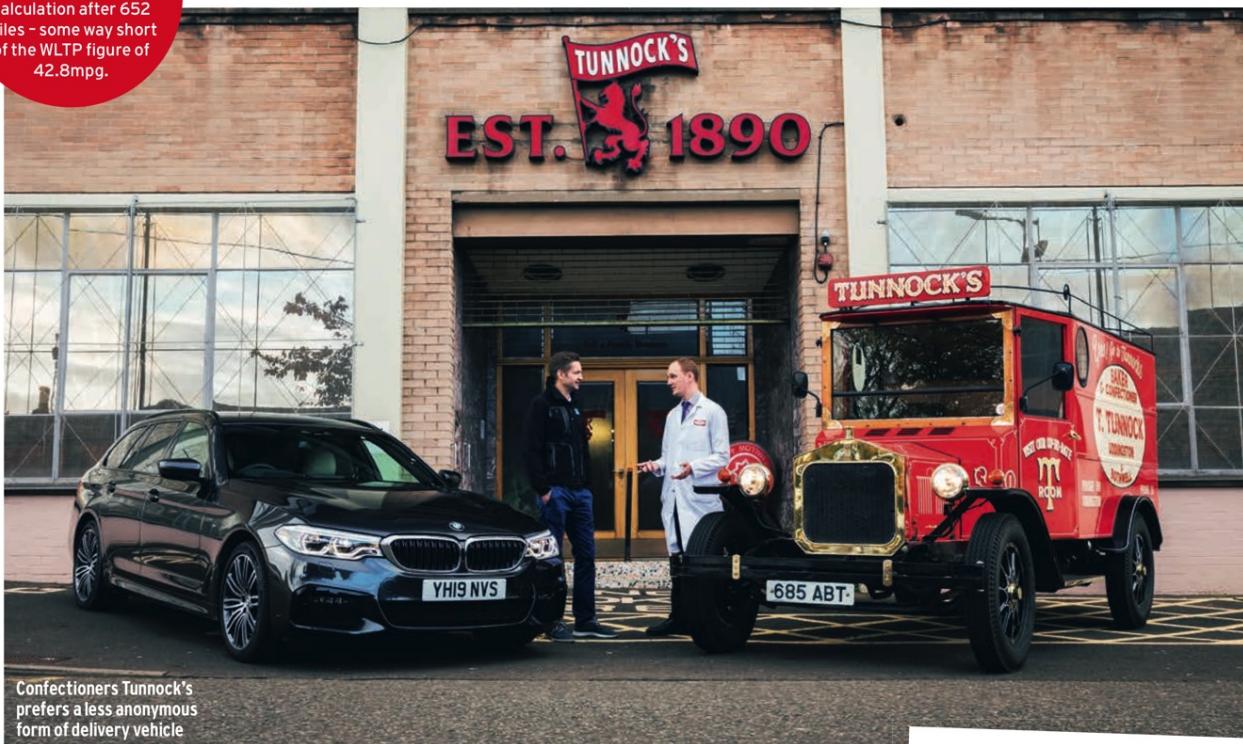
to neatly place each Teacake into a pack of 12. It's both mesmerising and mouth-watering, and we leave with a generous haul of goodies in tow.

The M74 provides an express conduit to our next stop at Moffat, but before reaching town we switchback onto the A701 to enjoy the sinuous stretch leading to the dramatic natural hollow of the →

36.0mpg

Our final fuel economy calculation after 652 miles – some way short of the WLTP figure of 42.8mpg.

where each is smothered in caramel before the next layer is hand-placed.



Confectioners Tunnock's prefers a less anonymous form of delivery vehicle



Tunnock's makes 13 million of its treats every single week; Caramel Wafers and Teacakes in particular are national institutions

← Devil's Beef Tub. It's damp, but the xDrive system staves off understeer to make for confident fast cornering. A truly engaging drive would need a bit more keenness from the engine, gearbox and steering but in the context of this trip, I'll take those slight concessions. Presumably the Police Scotland 5-Series Touring training vehicle we encounter was chosen for similar reasons.

In town we collect some Moffat Toffee from the eponymous shop. These boiled, pearlescent golden lozenges sold in distinctive houndstooth packaging have been made by the Blacklock family since the late 1800s using a secret ingredient that gives an unusual, tangy flavour. It's really not like toffee at all but it is delicious. It's a struggle

to tear ourselves away from the rows of traditional confectionery jars, but as is becoming routine, we open the Touring's indispensable tailgate window and the load cover electrically retracts so we can pop our swag straight into the hamper.

We soon cross into England then veer off to become enveloped by the brooding, sun-streaked peaks of the Lake District. Opting for

Webber is spoiled for choice but the Moffat Toffee is the one to go for



another back-road diversion, we take the B5322 through St John's in the Vale. It's a landscape straight from Postman Pat, all tweed farmhouses and dry-stone walls that dice the lush hillocks into tiny fields.

Upon reaching Grasmere, we weave through slate-stone buildings to pull up outside the little whitewashed Church Cottage on

the edge of St Oswald's Churchyard – resting place not only of William Wordsworth but also Sarah Nelson, who started selling her distinctive Grasmere Gingerbread from the cottage in 1854. The spiced slices – at once chewy and crumbly – are still baked here and sold from behind a minuscule counter, the queue to which regularly spills out of the door and on to the pavement.

Attired in shop-regulation Victorian garb, Abbey Davison hands us a tin of gingerbread, thoughtfully tied in Autocar-branded ribbon, and a jar of Cumberland Rum Butter – a boozy local spread that's ideal with mince pies. I can't sample that but the gingerbread must be eaten fresh, so I oblige as we drive on: messy but worth it.



“
It's late, it's cold and I'm glad of the heated steering wheel as we press on to Kendal

Buzzard Valley's
Pete Viggers talks
grape growing



Grasmere Gingerbread has a 165-year history; Autocar magazine isn't that far behind



All ready for the ingrates at the office



In the gloaming we pass pretty Rydal Water, the scene fringed by autumn leaves – beside the lake, beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze – then Edleston artfully captures the last of the light on the slipway at Royal Windermere Yacht Club. It's late, it's cold and I'm glad of the heated steering wheel (£185 well spent in these climes) as we press on to Kendal where we grab a slab of Romney's Mint Cake during our first fuel stop before eventually bedding down outside Preston.

Our closing day is a motorway slog to the office in London, but we bisect the trudge with a final stop at the bucolic haven of Buzzard's Valley Vineyard near Tamworth. Co-owner Pete Viggers leads us through the 8000 vines of red and white grapes that wine-maker Leon Jones uses to turn out up to 18,000 bottles annually. The soil here is

good for grape-growing, and all are hybrid varieties developed to cope with the English climate – they even produce a sparkling wine using the Champagne method, and have diversified into gin, too.

We buy a selection, including the 2017 Sly Fox – an award-winning red that apparently goes perfectly with strong cheese. We've had to confine The Strathearn to Tupperware in favour of retaining long-term nose function, but that pairing should work beautifully.

All that remains is the final schlep to the office, which the 5 Series ruthlessly gobbles up to complete a 652-mile total. What an excellent companion it's been: practical yet luxurious, comfortable yet game. And what a hamper we deliver, groaning under the weight of indulgences within. It'll never last until Christmas. 