

gearbox



A Mug for the Morning Drug

The Car and Driver coffee-container torture test.

➤ Mornings without coffee are like Mr. Roarke without Tattoo: A little something is missing. Since many of us refuse to go java-deprived on our morning commutes, we need our coffee to be transportable. But the flimsy paper cups foisted on us by baristas allow the liquid to cool too quickly. And even with a plastic lid and that little green stick to plug the sip hole as protection, an early-morning case of butterfingers or a panic stop can ruin your drive, not to mention your pants. There are hundreds of travel mugs on the market, each with some variety of flipping, rotating, or spring-loaded lid mechanism to ensure spill-proof sipping. We rounded up six and abused them to reveal any weaknesses. Let the scalding begin. —K.C. COLWELL

HOW WE TESTED:



• First, we filled each mug to its advertised volume and tested thermal efficiency by pouring in 200-degree water and checking the temperature after four hours.



• Then, in an homage to the Shake Weight infomercial, we vigorously shook each mug for one minute to check for spillage.



• Next, we dropped them from 20 feet onto grass because, well, because that could happen.



• And for our final and most realistic trial, we placed each mug on the roof of a car, hopped in, and pulled away in a hurry.



Bubba Bottle Classic

24 oz., \$7 (www.shopbubba.com)
The Bubba website calls this unit a "slim thermal with a lot of space." But this single-wall, stainless-steel mug is not designed for coffee, and it quickly becomes too hot to hold. Slim and cheap it may be; thermal, not so much.

HEAT RETENTION: 100 degrees after four hours.

SHAKE WEIGHT TEST: After one oscillation, the simple flip-top cover popped open, releasing a geyser of coffee.

20-FOOT DROP: The impact popped the cover; the coffee returned to earth.

DRIVE-AWAY: See 20-foot drop.

BOTTOM LINE: As ever, you get what you pay for. Note: Bubba makes other insulated mugs.



Contigo AUTOSEAL West Loop Stainless-Steel Travel Mug

20 oz., \$20 (www.gocontigo.com)
The Contigo had one feature none of the others had: a push-button-operated seal that opens and closes the coffee gate.

HEAT RETENTION: 139°
SHAKE WEIGHT TEST: Not a drip. After extreme agitation, a press of the button released both pressure and foamy coffee.

20-FOOT DROP: No leakage.
DRIVE-AWAY: The mug landed on its plastic lid, which blew out, leading to near-complete coffee loss. This might be why Contigo sells \$6 replacement lids on its site.

BOTTOM LINE: This large mug is our pick despite the drive-away failure. It is the most convenient and keeps coffee plenty warm.

Highwave JOEmo

14 oz., \$17 (www.highwave.com)
This mug is more of a traditional Thermos-style unit in the sense that it has a screw-on cap. Beneath that is a push-button toggle to allow on-the-go coffee consumption.

HEAT RETENTION: 149°
SHAKE WEIGHT TEST: With or without the cap completely screwed on, we couldn't shake loose any sweet, brown liquid gold.

20-FOOT DROP: Took the drop like a champ. No spillage.

DRIVE-AWAY: Did not lose a drop.

BOTTOM LINE: Spill-proof it may be, but the Highwave's toggle forces you to put your fingers near the coffee stream. Do you know where our hands have been? Also, the unit promises a 14-ounce capacity but holds only 12 ounces.



Sun's Tea Double-Wall Glass Mug

18 oz., \$16 (www.sunstea.com)
This is about as elegant as a traveler gets. Unfortunately, it doesn't have a sipping feature.

HEAT RETENTION: 95°
SHAKE WEIGHT TEST: No spillage whatsoever.

20-FOOT DROP: The bottom of the inside glass wall broke on impact, filling the chamber with very sharp coffee.

DRIVE-AWAY: It's glass. What do you think?

BOTTOM LINE: Buy this mug if you hate the look of stainless steel, but be aware that it won't keep your liquids hot for very long. Oh, and it'll also break if you drop it because, y'know, it's glass.

Thermos Nissan Travel Mug

14 oz., \$28 (www.thermos.com)
Thermos is the Kleenex of insulated liquid carriers. That is why we have two here. This one has a spill-proof, screw-on cap that is partly open to let fluid through, just like an old-timey Thermos—the kind you'd imagine a construction worker from 1958 using.

HEAT RETENTION: 134°
SHAKE WEIGHT TEST: The screw-on lid kept all the coffee in the mug.

20-FOOT DROP: No leakage.
DRIVE-AWAY: No leakage.

BOTTOM LINE: The screw cap is secure but awkward to use, and the handle may make this mug incompatible with cup holders. Despite being the priciest here, its heat retention is only so-so.



Thermos Stainless King Travel Tumbler

16 oz., \$26 (www.thermos.com)
Our second Thermos tested has a more modern-style, spill-proof feature: a rotary toggle that, when turned, opens the floodgates. There is even an indicator that shows if the toggle is open or closed.

HEAT RETENTION: 160°
SHAKE WEIGHT TEST: No coffee escapes when the rotary indicates "close." Some coffee comes out during a violent shake when "open."

20-FOOT DROP: Not a drop spilled.
DRIVE-AWAY: Same as above. The impact threw the lid out of alignment, but it still worked.

BOTTOM LINE: Expensive and user-friendly, this Thermos will keep your beverage hot. But it's not quite as convenient as the one-push Contigo.