



5 Best Power Inverters

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We recommend these products based on an intensive research process that's designed to cut through the noise and find the top products in this space. Guided by experts, we spend hours looking into the factors that matter, to bring you these selections.

A good power inverter offers great convenience, and it needn't cost the earth. Does that mean you can just opt for the cheapest power inverter available, or should you invest a little more for added functionality and higher output?

BestReviews was created to help you answer tough buyer questions. If you're ready to buy, our recommended power inverters above have passed our stringent evaluation procedures and offer a terrific range of affordable solutions.

Anyone on the move - in a car, truck, RV, or motorboat - can take advantage of a power inverter. That's because each of these vehicles has a battery (usually 12 volts) that is useful for running a laptop, DVD player, or even a refrigerator. But the vehicle battery is direct current (DC), and all those devices run off of alternating current (AC). That's where the power inverter comes in.

A power inverter has one job: to convert DC to AC. Buy one small box that plugs into your cigarette lighter socket or attaches directly to your battery, and you can plug in all those devices and charge your smartphone, run power tools, or set up lights at your campsite.

A power inverter doesn't generate electricity. It takes the battery's DC output and changes it to AC. You keep the power inverter right in the vehicle with you. Left unattended, some power inverters can drain the battery. Most have an alarm that warns you when the battery is getting low or an automatic sensor that detects low power and shuts things down. To restore power, just run your motor. Your vehicle will recharge its battery after a while.

Connectivity: All the power in the world won't do you any good if you can't plug in your devices. Low-power inverters typically have a single AC (household) socket and one or two USB ports. High-power inverters might have four AC sockets and four USB ports. But not all USB ports are the same. On cheaper power inverters, the supply to USB ports can be as low as one amp. On more powerful models, it can be greater than two amps. That can make a big difference in charging times.

It's vital you have enough connectivity for your demands, but it must be balanced with your power requirements. There's no point in having four AC sockets on a 150-watt inverter. There isn't enough output to power that number of devices.

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Higher wattage drains the battery faster. If you use a 300-watt power inverter, your battery is going to drain approximately twice as fast as it would if you were using a 150-watt power inverter. If you want to run a laptop (about 300 watts) and have the kids watch a DVD (about 200 watts), then you need a bigger power inverter. And you would need a massive, commercial-vehicle battery to support a 10,000-watt inverter.

So how do you know what wattage is right for you? Add up the watts used by all the devices you think you'll run at the same time (the watts they consume should be marked on them), then buy the smallest inverter that can comfortably power them. If all you want to do is recharge your smartphone (about 20 watts) and run your tablet (about 120 watts), a 150-watt power inverter should do the job.

In low-power environments (smartphones, tablets, laptops), it's not a significant problem. If you're thinking of investing in a high-power inverter and running major appliances, it's always safest to check with the manufacturer of the appliance to see if it will run on MSW or requires PSW.

PSW: When displayed on an oscilloscope, AC current forms a pure sine wave, also called a true sine wave. It looks like a series of smooth arcs. Some battery chargers for cordless power tools must always be used with PSW inverters.

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