

Trial by fire

THE MH BARBECUE CHALLENGE SEPARATES THE BACKYARD SIZZLERS FROM THE FIZZLERS.

Buy a grill on BTUs alone and you could end up getting burned. "A lot of men make the mistake of obsessing over this number," says David Kamen, of the Culinary Institute of America, "but it's not all about horsepower." We torched, tortured, and tested more than 20 grills to arrive at the picks below, assessing materials, design, construction, and heat performance. The goal: to gauge prowess with a range of foods and demanding cooking conditions.



Start cooking! We subjected each grill to a battery of tests using an infrared thermometer. Here's what we looked at.

ACCELERATION
(0–500°F timed preheat)

⚡ Weeknight cooking demands speed. A quick time in this rapid-fire challenge shows powerful, efficient burners, solid construction, and materials that retain heat.

RANGE
(highest/lowest sustained heat)

🔥 Steaks and burgers need scorching heat for a deep crust, while ribs and chicken need sustained low temps to coax them into a state of succulence. You need both temps.

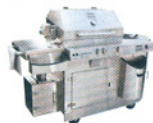
RETENTION
(recovery from 30-second lid lift)

🕒 You want a grill that rebounds like Rodman. To test a grill's resilience, we opened the hood for 30 seconds, then timed its recovery to the initial 500°F.

EVENNESS
(adequate heat distribution)

⚖️ We divided each grill's surface area into six zones and took sustained heat signatures from each. Ideally, there should be little or no variation among the zones.

THE GRILL MASTER
Kalamazoo Bread Breaker Two Plus Smoker Box



⚡ 7:15
🔥 895/216°F
🕒 1:07
⚖️ 11°F

The big-money Bread Breaker didn't disappoint, scoring top marks on highest and lowest heat and evenness of distribution. With 100,000 BTUs blasting over 864 square inches, plus an attached smoker and an infrared burner, this behemoth could slow roast a suckling pig or just sear a few steaks. (\$10,500, kalamazooogourmet.com)

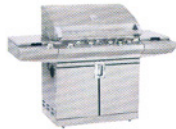
THE OVERACHIEVER
Weber Summit S-450



⚡ 4:50
🔥 700/270°F
🕒 0:38
⚖️ 12°F

This overachiever scored good marks for its grate space (650 square inches), infrared rear-mounted rotisserie burner, and dedicated smoker bed. The superior steel burners, a crucial component, topped our retention challenge, creating a blistering grilling environment and distributing 48,000 BTUs evenly. (\$1,500, weber.com)

THE CHOPHOUSE CHALLENGER
Char-Broil TEC Triple Burner



⚡ 5:28
🔥 795/265°F
🕒 1:38
⚖️ 28°F

Flames don't respect boundaries, making it difficult to simultaneously sear a steak and gently roast vegetables. Not so with this backyard beauty. The clever infrared burner locks out airflow and prevents heat transfer and flare-ups, so we were able to char beef at 800°F on one side of the grill and caramelize onions at 265°F on the other. (\$700, charbroil.com)

THE BARE-KNUCKLE BURNER
Ducane Affinity 4100



⚡ 3:30
🔥 775/260°F
🕒 1:30
⚖️ 50°F

This propane pit bull killed grills twice as expensive, reaching blistering temps twice as fast, on average. With 48,000 BTUs and 526 square inches of grill space, it's poised to cater your next summer blowout. (\$400, ducane.com) For better heat distribution, replace the stainless-steel grates with a cast-iron grill grate. (\$40, lodgemfg.com)

SMOKE 'EM OUT

Smoking meats is a leisurely process, requiring an abundance of patience and a six-pack. The Orion Cooker, a newcomer to the smoker set, picks up the pace by using convection heat, steam, and smoke to serve up flavor-infused meat two times faster than with conventional smokers. (\$150, orioncooker.com)



Build your own smoker for under \$50. Visit MensHealth.com, keyword **smoker**.

LEAVE YOUR MARK
DIAMOND GRILL MARKS
ADD PROFESSIONAL POLISH TO YOUR BACKYARD SPREAD.
DAVID KAMEN SHOWS YOU HOW.



1 Place the meat on the grill diagonally (ends at 2 o'clock and 8 o'clock).



2 After 3 to 4 minutes, rotate 45 degrees (5 o'clock and 10 o'clock).



3 Flip the meat and repeat on the opposite side.

FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT GRILLING TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD, SEE "THE SEAR FACTOR" IN THIS ISSUE.