



# Galley Tools: Pressure Cookers

Practical Sailor tested four 4- and 6-quart pressure cookers for this review. They are (from left) the Pro-Selections Pressure Magic made by Fagor, the Presto cooker, the Kuhn Rikon Duromatic, and the Fagor Futuro.

*Precision and simplicity rate highly when it comes to pressure cooking.*

No kitchen pot fights a bad reputation the way a pressure cooker does—one pot of lentils exploding in someone’s face can quickly wipe out 20 years of good memories. While today’s triple safety valves and stainless-steel construction have taken the trial-and-error out of pressure cooking and nearly eliminated accidents, there’s still something about boiling water under pressure that sets the butterflies free in a cook’s belly.

Despite the belly-flies, most galley cooks argue that the pressure cooker is the most versatile, most valuable pot on a boat. Pressure cooking is faster than regular cooking; it better preserves flavors and nutrients and can tenderize lean meats. If the user follows the instructions, it can be a sailor’s best friend, saving cooking fuel, water, and time—and having a lid that is locked on is a bonus.

## **PRESSURE COOKING 101**

There are four basic types of pressure cookers: jiggle-top/weighted valve, fixed weight, spring valve, and electric. The

jiggle-top is a decades-old pressure cooker design. A weight on the steam vent pipe begins gently rocking, spinning, or swinging when pressure is reached, indicating that it is time to turn down the heat under the pot. If the “jiggler” is bouncing rapidly, there’s too much pressure in the cooker and the heat should be further reduced to keep from losing too much cooking liquid.

Fixed weight cookers use a weight valve that is either fixed on the vent pipe or locked into place by the user. When pressure is reached in the pot, the valve raises up slightly, emitting wisps of steam and a slight hissing to indicate it is time to lower the heat.

Spring valve cookers are the most-advanced of the non-electric cookers. When pressure is achieved, a spring-loaded valve raises an indicator. These designs tend to vent the least amount of steam.

Electric pressure cookers reach and maintain pressure automatically.

## **WHAT WE TESTED**

*Practical Sailor* tested four pressure cookers from three manufacturers:

Presto, which has a 105-year history in the U.S. kitchen appliances market; Kuhn Rikon, a 70-year-old Swiss appliance maker; and Fagor, the Spain-based cookware maker. We evaluated two made by Fagor, the Futuro and the Pressure Magic. The Futuro is sold by several outlets in the U.S., including Galleyware Co. ([www.galleyware.com](http://www.galleyware.com)), and the Pressure Magic is a Pro-Selections Inc. product.

We plan to test another cooker, the Vitaquick by Fissler USA, for a follow-up report. It is replacing the company’s Blue Point cooker in the spring, but it was not available in time for this test.

The Presto cooker we reviewed is essentially the same design as the one the company sent us to test for our last look at pressure cookers in May 2000. In that test, we evaluated three cookers but favored the Kuhn Rikon Risotto.

Testers opted against testing electric cookers as *PS*’s past cruiser surveys have shown that most onboard cooks opt for non-electric galley appliances. The test pots were limited to stainless-steel 4- and 6-quart models, with the 4-quart

**AS VALUE GUIDE STAINLESS-STEEL PRESSURE COOKERS**

MAKER/MODEL	PRESTO (01341) <b>\$</b>	FAGOR FUTURO (GALLEYWARE)	PRO-SELECTIONS (FAGOR) PRESSURE MAGIC	KUHN RIKON <b>★</b> DUROMATIC
PRICE / WARRANTY	\$44 / 12 years	\$120 / 10 years	\$280 / Limited lifetime	\$200 / 10 years
TYPE / SIZE	Weighted valve / 4 quarts	Spring valve / 4 quarts	Jiggle top / 4 quarts	Spring valve / 6.3 quarts
DIMENSIONS (WxLxH)	18.4 x 9.8 x 7.5 inches	13.5 x 9.5 x 5.5 inches	14.5 x 10 x 8.5 inches	11.4 x 11.2 x 10.3 inches
WEIGHT	7 pounds	7 pounds	7.75 pounds	9 pounds
DISHWASHER SAFE	Yes	No	No	No
SUPPLIED ACCESSORIES	Manual / recipe cookbook	Steamer basket / food grater, cookbook	Stainless steaming basket	Cookbook
RATINGS				
USER-FRIENDLINESS (easy to use, pressure indicators, etc.)	Good	Good	Fair	Excellent
COOKOFF	Excellent	Fair	Fair	Excellent
EASE OF GETTING SEAL	Good	Fair	Fair	Excellent
EASE OF CLEANING	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
INSTRUCTION MANUAL	Good	Good	Fair	Excellent
RECIPE BOOK	Good	Good	Good	Good

**★** Best Choice    **\$** Budget Buy

**GALLEY**

of the cookoff.)

Testers also considered each cooker’s construction, ergonomics, user-friendliness, clarity of instructions, price, warranty, and the accessibility of customer help and spare parts.

**PRESTO**

We tested model 01341 from the Wisconsin-based Presto. The cooker is a simple 4-quart stainless-steel pot with a single, extended handle and a weighted valve. It also has a “helper handle,” or small bump handle, to help the cook lift and pour from the pot. While the long handle may be more ergonomic, it presents some stowage challenges in galleys tight on cabinet space.

To lock the lid, users line up the arrow on the lid with the arrow on the handle—which allows the lid to drop down into its track—and turn the top handle clockwise.

Once pressure inside the Presto builds to 15 pounds, the jiggle valve begins rocking gently. The Presto’s pressure regulator maintains cooking pressure automatically, but should the jiggle top begin bouncing rapidly (and loudly), then heat should be reduced.

The cover lock indicator shows at a glance when there’s pressure inside the pot. According to Presto, users should never lift the weighted valve to quick-release pressure.

Along with the pressure regulator and the ergonomic handles, Presto’s features include a cooking rack and a specially designed base for even heating.

The Presto pot offers no song and dance, and this is to its benefit in many ways. Straight-forward simplicity can pay off with less fuss, lower maintenance, and fewer spare parts to keep on hand. Few things can go wrong with it. Lock on the lid, heat up, lower heat, set the timer, and release pressure according to instructions.

The only downsides testers noted were that the weighted top is not connected to the pot and can easily be lost, and the long handle requires extra storage space.

While the pot took the longest to heat up, testers felt that the difference between three minutes and the other pots’ one to two minutes was negligible.

being optimally sized to fit a stove burner and the 6-quart being ideal for those cooking for large crews or who plan to do some canning. Most of the models we tested are available in multiple sizes.

All of the products we tested are mainly constructed of 18-10 stainless steel, although some have aluminum in their heating base. With the exception of the Pressure Magic, the test cookers are made to reach 15 pounds of pressure; the Pressure Magic reaches only 10 pounds. Two of the test cookers, the Fagor Futuro and the Presto, are UL (Underwriters Laboratory) Listed, which means they’ve been third-party tested and certified as meeting specific safety standards.

**HOW WE TESTED**

Testers assembled and used the cookers according to the cookers’ individual instruction manuals. Although this seems obvious, reading the instructions for your pressure cooker is an essential part of the process. All pressure cookers work under the same idea (pressure inside the pot), but each achieves this

differently. Users should be familiar with how the lid seals to the pot, how this seal is achieved, how to lock down the lid, and how to tell whether the lid is improperly sealed as the pot begins to heat. Understanding how steam and pressure are released from the pot, knowing what indicators to look for, and knowing when pressure has been completely released, are important steps in the cooking process.

After testers carefully read the manuals, they filled each pot with 3 cups of water, and using an electric stovetop, brought the pressure up until steam was released. We tested releasing pressure from each pot and noted how easy it was to determine whether there was neutral pressure inside the pot.

Next, testers cooked a pound of quartered potatoes under pressure in each pot, according to its manual. Finally, we cooked a selected recipe from the recipe book provided with each pot to gauge the quality of the recipes and the cookers’ performance in real-world use. (See “Taste Test” on page 23 for the results

## Pressure Cooker Cookoff

Testers thumbed through the recipes manufacturers supplied with the test cookers, looking for easy meals that would feed a family of four. The cooking—and tasting—tests allowed us to rate the cookers based on real-world use. Testers followed the recipes explicitly. Here are the results:

### PRESTO

Testers cooked a pot roast in the Presto. The recipe called for a short list of ingredients: only the meat, water, oil, onion, salt, pepper, and a bay leaf. Cooking a pot roast onboard can be impractical because of the long cooking time, but with the Presto, a roast big enough for four was done in 30 minutes, using a very low-heat, low-fuel setting. The roast was super easy to cook, and the meat was tender and filled with flavor. **Bottom line:** Yum!

### FAGOR FUTURO

Testers cooked rice with chicken and Chorizo sausage from “Tastefully Under Pressure.” The ingredient mix was colorful and looked promising, but the rice came out too soft, and the pre-cooked sweet corn and green peas turned mushy after cooking under pressure. **Bottom line:** The recipe needs some tweaking, but the cooker performed well.

### PRO-SELECTIONS PRESSURE MAGIC

Testers cooked Navy Beans with Ham from the Fagor/Pro-Selections Pressure Magic cookbook. Our first go at the simple recipe was unsuccessful, and the beans remained rock hard despite



40 minutes of cooking. After trouble-shooting, re-reading the instructions and a demonstration by Pro-Selections, we found that the problem had been the central knob not being tight enough. Once this seal was established, the Pressure Magic worked well, cooking a second set of pre-soaked beans into a tasty soup. **Bottom line:** Testers found the cooker to be less user-friendly than some others, but the recipe was simple and the beans were delicious.

### KUHN RIKON DUROMATIC

Testers made Savory Black Beans from the Kuhn Rikon cookbook. Each recipe in the book has a graph showing the time needed to cook the recipe. This is helpful for quick-glance planning, but it doesn't take into account prep time. The test recipe's preparation was somewhat labor-intensive (chopping, dicing, and mincing, followed by browning and sautéing before the actual 10 minutes of pressure-cooking). In the taste test, testers reported that the beans had a medium-amount of flavor and that the cooking time could be shortened. **Bottom line:** The recipe needs some editing to suit testers' tastebuds, but the cooker performed flawlessly.

After five minutes of cooking according to instructions, the potatoes were just slightly overcooked. Testers also cooked a 2-pound pot roast in 30 minutes, according to instructions. The roast was perfectly done and made a tasty, easy meal for a family of four.

The Presto pot was the only one tested that is dishwasher-safe. It can be used on any electric or gas range, and comes with an instruction manual with 70 recipes.

**Bottom line:** The straight-forward cooker design stays the same year after year for a reason: It works. Priced far below the other test products, this traditional cooker gets the *PS* Budget Buy.

### FAGOR FUTURO

The Fagor Futuro is a 4-quart, spring-valve pressure cooker. The dial-format spring valve is a handy feature: When there's pressure inside the cooker, the pressure indicator (a yellow dot on the lid handle) rises. When the valve is up,

the pressure cooker cannot be opened. When there is no pressure inside the cooker, the valve is not raised. Testers liked the pot's self-locking safety feature (a plastic pressure lock) and its built-in safety mechanisms that prevent excess pressure build up. Another helpful feature is the plastic operating dial/valve on the lid, which allows users to choose automatically release pressure, set pressure at two levels, and unlock the lid.

The Futuro can be used on gas, electric, ceramic, or induction stovetops. The aluminum-encapsulated base allows for even heat distribution, but it should not be washed in salt water—something to consider if you typically wash your dishes in salt water and rinse with fresh.

The Futuro's short handles are a great space-saving feature, allowing for easier storage than the long-handled Presto and taking up less real estate on the galley stovetop. The cooker comes with a stainless steamer basket, a food

grater, and the “Tastefully Under Pressure” cookbook, which offers 90 recipes and sections on canning foods.

Testers gave the user's manual two thumbs-up for its excellent troubleshooting section, but we found the illustrations difficult to interpret.

In *PS*'s galley tests, the Futuro reached pressure in just one minute, but the test potatoes were slightly overcooked after following the Futuro's instructions.

**Bottom line:** This well-made pot would be a good choice for someone short on storage space, but testers prefer the simplicity of some other cookers.

### PRO-SELECTIONS PRESSURE MAGIC

*PS* tested Pro-Selections Inc.'s 4-quart, jiggle-valve Pressure Magic Super Cooker, which is made by Fagor. Testers found the spring-arm lid lock-down system to be a bit tricky: Despite reading and re-reading the directions several times, and multiple testers conducting more than a half-dozen trial-runs on





*The Kuhn Rikon's two-setting pressure indicator (top) allows for accurate cooking. The Pressure Magic (center) uses a unique crossbar and valve pressurizing system that testers found challenging. The Fagor Futuro features a temperature dial and a lid-lock button.*

two different stoves, it took a conversation with Pro-Selections before testers were successful in getting the cooker to reach and maintain pressure.

The Pressure Magic has a crossbar over the top of the lid that serves as a backup for the two safety steam valves. To seal the pot, the cook turns the knob in the middle of the crossbar, raising the crossbar until it is firm against the two steel safety clamps. Should the pot's safety valves clog or malfunction, excess pressure will raise the lid up against the crossbar clamps, and pressure will spill out through a small gap created between the lid and the pot.

According to Pro-Selections' Barbara Niemi, most women users tend to undertighten the lid, and that, apparently, had been one of testers' problems. Heeding the manual's "do not over-tighten the lid" warning, we failed to get the gasketed lid tightened enough to achieve a proper seal, so steam escaped from under the lid and pressure was not maintained. Once we followed Niemi's advice to tighten the knob until it could no longer turn and we tightened the central nut holding the knob on, reaching and maintaining pressure was no problem.

The central nut should be sufficiently tightened when the cooker comes from the factory; however, our's was not.

Using the Pressure Magic is simple, but it is unlike any other pressure cooker we've seen and its instructions do not offer clear trouble-shooting advice. Even those familiar with pressure cookers found the manual to be little help when trying to diagnose the pot's failure to cook. The supplied instructional DVD, however, does a fair job of walking users through getting started with the cooker.

Once testers finally achieved a seal on the Pressure Magic in galley tests, it pressurized in less than a minute and the potatoes were perfectly cooked after the prescribed 12 minutes.

Accompanying the Pressure Magic were three terrific cookbooks and an instructional DVD. The literature includes instructions for water distillation. The Super Cooker also can be used for frying or dry roasting, and it was the only one with a limited lifetime warranty.

**Bottom line:** While testers gave the Pressure Magic kudos for its multi-tasking ability, they found it to be a real challenge to use, and its price is the highest in the test field.

### KUHN RIKON DUROMATIC

We tested the 6.3-quart Duromatic spring-valve cooker from Swiss appliance-maker Kuhn Rikon. The tall pot is extremely well made, with necessary safety and functional features, and no unnecessary flare.

The spring-valve system allows for greater accuracy in cooking. When one red ring appears on the visual pressure indicator, internal pressure has reached 8 pounds per square inch (psi) above the external pressure. When the second red ring appears, pressure has been raised 15 psi, the maximum pressure. Having these specific indicators not only means better accuracy—and consequently better cooking—but they also mean quieter cooking, and the ability to cook with less water and less steam, which retains

more of the food's nutrients and taste.

The Kuhn Rikon heated and cooked like, well, Swiss clockwork. The test potatoes—and the Savory Black Beans taste test dish—were cooked just right in the Duromatic.

Testers found setup and sealing the pot to be easy, and the pressure indicators are clearly defined and easy to read. The pot has compact handles and an encapsulated-aluminum base for even cooking.

The manual comes with a 100-page FAQ and recipe book, which has 50 recipes.

**Bottom line:** Read and follow the Duromatic's instructions, and you'll have a gem on your hands. It gets the PS Best Choice.

### CONCLUSION

After weighing all the data—and sampling all the food—testers found that when it comes to pressure cookers, simplicity reigns. They appreciated the Presto's decades-old design, its consistent performance, and its price tag, tapping it the Budget Buy.

The Pressure Magic is a well-made cooker, but other test products were more user-friendly and less expensive. Testers liked the Futuro's adjustable settings option, but it was edged out by the top-notch Duromatic. The Best Choice, the efficient and user-friendly Duromatic, carries a hefty price tag, but it's a solid investment for cruisers and offshore passagemakers. ▲

### CONTACTS

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