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Our promise

Expert advice when you need it

Which? aims to help you choose the best goods and services – and avoid the worst. We're entirely independent – we take no ads, no freebies and everything we test is paid for at full price. Since

1957 we've informed, influenced and campaigned on behalf of all consumers in the UK.



Best Buys

These are products that achieve high total test scores.

Don't Buys

These are products that have performed extremely poorly in at least one of our key tests or that have achieved very low total test scores.



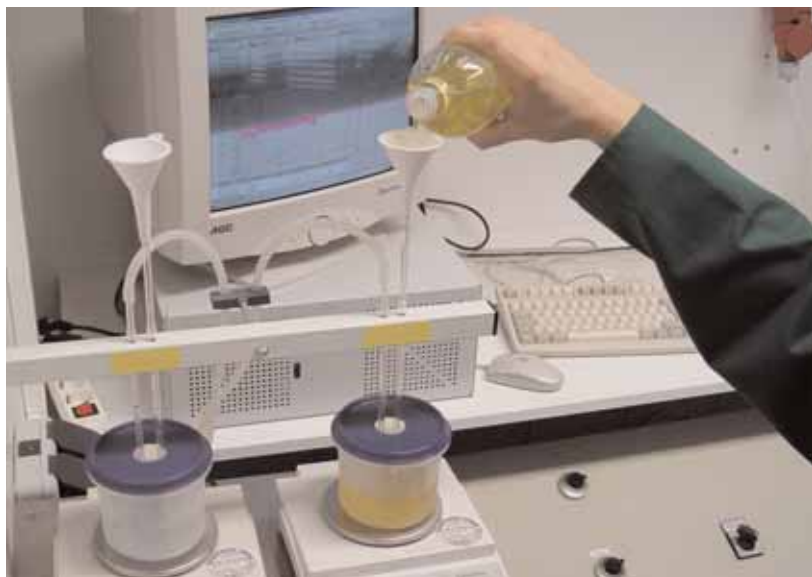
Exceptional Value



Our coveted award is given on those rare occasions to products that are both of superb quality and outstandingly priced.

MEMBERS' HELPLINE Call 01992 822 800/0845 307 4000 **EMAIL** which@which.co.uk

Only around a third of the 285 vets we phoned across the UK offered consistent pricing across services **PAGE 23**



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Comment

A hit-and-miss life?

We all like to imagine that the concept of the customer being king is so ingrained in British business life that consumer problems should be an endangered concept on the verge of extinction.

But, nearly 50 years on from the launch of Which?, we continue to be surprised by finding more examples of questionable practices that prove that still too many suppliers of goods and services see customers as unwanted intrusions.

Our investigation on p12 into how well garages service our cars shows that this is an industry sorely in need of sorting out – and the actual broadband speed provided compared with the promises made by suppliers, which we outline on p40, is bordering on becoming a major consumer scandal.

However, it's not all bad news. Many of the nation's best heritage sites, on p18–22, are offering great days out with a true desire to give the customer genuine value for time and money. And manufacturers of consumer goods, such as televisions and digital cameras, are continuing both to improve their goods and to lower their prices; they know if they don't, someone else will.

Although internet connections and dodgy car repairs can cause us to believe the life of the consumer is a little hit and miss, the whole market does tend to show the value of shopping around – whether it is for a credit card or for a Christmas tree.

Some businesses may not believe the customer is king, but those that do are the ones in which you might want your pension fund to be a shareholder. And it's always worth giving the bad businesses a bloody nose by one simple method – walking away.

Don't let confusion wear you down

It's easy to let bureaucracy and small print get the better of us. We can feel deskilled by legal verbiage that seeks more to confuse and confound rather than help and explain.

But, as our report on p32 about financial statements indicates, there are ways to beat the system. Just boil down the issues and ask the simplest of questions. Life is never that complicated and only those with something to hide seek to make it so.

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THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

2,760

The number of pieces of music we listened to, to rate the sound quality of our 25 plug and in-ear headphones. To find out whether you're in tune with our verdicts, go to p50.

1,500

The number of photos taken and developed to test the picture quality from our 13 single-use cameras. Our results are at your disposal – see p58.

522

The number of cakes we made to test evenness of baking at different levels in the fan ovens of our range cookers. More about this and a whole range of info on p61.