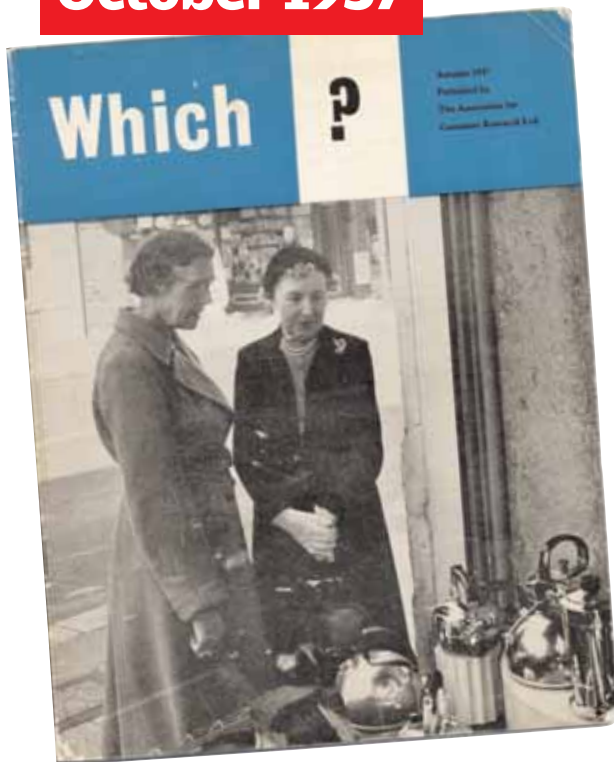


October 1957



October 2007



The first edition of Which? memorably portrayed two behatted ladies admiring a shop window of kettles. Fifty years and 587 covers on, we're still going strong

50 years of Which?



Why the consumer fight is still far from over

Which? Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith celebrates our half century

Which? was born in 1957, nurtured by a small volunteer group working from a garage in London's Bethnal Green. Some 100 reporters attended the launch of the magazine, but it was three days before any press articles appeared – because of the fear of libel. However, word got out and the magazine was an immediate hit. We struck a chord with consumers desperate for independent product information. And in just ten years the organisation had attracted more than 500,000 subscribers and had become a major force for good across the UK.

It's sobering to think that in 1957 you could buy a kettle that might kill you. But relentless campaigning and pressure by Which? and – most importantly – by you, its members, transformed the safety of many products, from toys to sofas and from nightwear to domestic appliances.

Changes to laws

By the late 1960s we decided that consumers needed more help than testing information – so we set about revolutionising consumer rights by campaigning for changes to laws and regulations. In 1973 the Fair Trading Act established the Office of Fair Trading; and further lobbying brought health and safety, and a bigger range of deceptive practices, under the act's umbrella.

In 1983 our safety ratings helped achieve higher standards for cars, while our calls for seat belts to be fitted in new cars helped make it compulsory to 'clunk click' for every trip. Our annual car survey is now the UK's biggest and we know that manufacturers take note of it.

Which? helped reform shop opening hours with the Sunday Trading Act in 1994. We also launched the Rip-off Britain campaign in 1999, when a huge boycott of new cars by the public led to cheaper prices and better competition across Europe. The creation of the Food Standards Agency in 2000 is widely regarded as one of our biggest single

victories with the BSE crisis providing the perfect opportunity for action on food safety.

More than two million people have actively engaged with our campaigns in recent years. Our current online guide to challenging unfair bank fees has been downloaded more than 400,000 times and this year, following more campaigning by us, three major pieces of legislation were passed – on pensions reform, estate agents and legal services.

Relevant and responsive

Fifty years ago Which?'s offer was new and challenging. Today, Which? is a household name and the second-largest national consumer organisation in the world. The face of consumer journalism has been transformed, with the 'Best Buy' term that we first used in 1958 now seen everywhere.

Although we have widened the range of issues we cover and increased the number of products we test each year, we haven't changed our commitment to making you as individuals as powerful as the organisations you have to deal with in your daily lives.

We are as relevant and responsive to your needs today as when we began. Products have improved and consumers have more rights, thanks to the intervention of Which? – but there is still more to do. Food labelling, for example, is still too often misleading; promotions of unhealthy foods to children go well beyond what parents feel is responsible; financial products are often too complicated and a bad deal for consumers. And we have other areas to confront us – the internet offers great opportunities, but also new challenges to consumer rights.

Over the past half century you have supported us, demanded high-quality information and helped us improve consumer rights. Long may that continue. We are 50 years old, but the best is yet to come.