



Consumer news

We want you

Car buying scams

Have you fallen victim to unfair practices when trying to sell a car privately in a publication or on a website? Tell Bob Tolliday.

Outlet shopping

Have you visited an outlet shopping village? Whether it made you an avid bargain hunter or you found a load of tat, contact James Tallack.

Digital TV switchover

Do you live in the Whitehaven area of Cumbria, where digital switchover will begin? Tell David Holes how preparations are going.

Baggage compensation

Has an airline lost your baggage? Did you get compensation from the airline or on insurance? Let Jo Langenhan know.

Investments

Have you invested in wine, film, fashion, jewellery, antiques or a race-horse syndicate? Contact Martyn Saville with the details.



Tradespeople

Have you had a bad experience with a builder, decorator, plumber or electrician? If so, tell Alice Judd.

Carbon offsetting

If you've tried carbon offsetting, tell Simon Spruce all about it.

Send full contact details to helpwanted@which.co.uk or **Help Wanted, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH. Go to www.which.co.uk/helpwanted for more requests online.**
(We cannot respond personally to all replies)

Chinese manufacturers hit after concerns over lead paint

Dangerous toys are taken off sale

PRODUCT SAFETY

Forty years after Which? first highlighted the dangers of lead paint in toys, the issue hit the headlines again last month.

Following problems with its Chinese manufacturers, Mattel Inc has recalled millions of toys, including Fisher Price models, with lead in their paint and others containing magnets that could easily be swallowed.

The crisis began when Mattel recalled 83 products, including Nickleodeon's Dora the Explorer,

when it found that manufacturers had used a paint pigment that violated safety standards. Two weeks later, it revealed that the problem also affected Sarge cars from the movie *Cars* because they also contained lead paint.

Mattel also had a recall notice last year on toys containing small magnets that could come loose. Last month it extended the recall to some Barbie, Batman and Polly Pocket figures. Its actions follow a string of other recalls of Chinese-



Check Barbie and other toys online

made toys this year for lead-paint problems including some toys from the Thomas & Friends Wooden Railway range sold by the RC2 Corp.

High levels of lead in children have been shown to affect mental development. In 1964 Which? called for a ban on lead paint in toys. This prompted our successful three-year campaign that ended with the 1967 Toy (Safety) Regulations Act, which severely limited the amount of lead used.

TAKE ACTION!

To find out whether a toy you own is affected, go to www.mattel.com or www.fisher-price.com. If it is, stop your child using it and email helplineuk@mattel.com or call 01628 500303 for further advice. Mattel will arrange for the return of the item and offer a replacement toy of equivalent value. It will not issue full refunds.

Handbrake concerns grow

MOTORING

Our July article on Vauxhall Vectra handbrake problems (p5) has had a huge response, with 41 motorists contacting us about similar 'roll-away' incidents.

We've heard from another 28 owners whose parked Vectras have rolled away and crashed. We've also received 12 reports of problems on Vauxhall Signums, Corsas, Astras and one Zafira.

We've passed our findings on to Vauxhall, which said it will investigate Vectra incidents further. However, a spokesman added that the company had not heard of

problems with other models, saying they represented 'such small numbers against numbers of vehicles sold, it seems likely that these are due to driver error'.

Vauxhall has contacted Vectra and Signum owners with advice on the correct way to park.



TAKE ACTION!

The Highway Code says that if parking on a hill apply the handbrake firmly, and select a forward gear when facing uphill and turn the steering wheel away from the kerb, or reverse gear if facing downhill and turn the steering wheel towards the kerb. You should also use 'park' if your car has an automatic gearbox.

49,000

Sarge cars from film *Cars* recalled in the UK and Ireland

MATTEL

13 million

broadband connections were active at the end of 2006

OFCOM

4 in 10

drivers using a satnav system have got lost

WHICH.CO.UK



Misleading online travel quotes are forced out

Price crackdown

TRAVEL

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has forced 13 airlines to stop misleading passengers with inaccurate quotes online. They were flouting the law by not including all taxes and fixed charges in headline prices.

This follows reports in *Which?* that travel companies failing to include compulsory costs were preventing consumers from comparing flight and package holiday prices.

Travel companies were warned by the OFT in February and May to sort out their prices or face action. Following such action last month 11 airlines have changed their home pages and booking processes, so all compulsory prices are included. The other two – Aer Lingus and Ryanair – have changed their home pages and had pledged to change their booking processes as we went to press.

This followed moves by travel association Abta to ensure its members are also compliant with the rules. It handed out fines and reprimands to several that were failing to comply by its June deadline.

But reader Jo Dowding says she faced unexpected costs this summer after booking with Expedia, which is not an Abta member.

When she made a booking in June for a four-night stay at the Oasis Beach Hotel, Dubai, she was quoted £369, but was asked for £74 in tax at the hotel's reception desk.

It was only when she checked the small print on her web printout that she saw the mention of 20 per cent local tax.

'I just wasn't expecting it. The price Expedia quoted me was significantly different from what I ended up paying'.

An Expedia spokeswoman said it was sorry that Ms Dowding felt surprised by the extra charges and believed the price quoted did comply with the law.

She said Expedia relied on information from the global distribution system (GDS), which supplies it with prices and availability. She added: 'Unless full and accurate information is displayed all the time within the GDS on prices for accommodation including all charges, it's extremely difficult for travel providers to comprehensively provide information regarding prices inclusive of taxes or other charges and fees.'

The OFT has called on consumers to notify it of misleading prices on 0845 404 0506.



Jo was asked for £74 more at the hotel reception desk

AIRLINES FORCED TO CHANGE

These airlines should now give total prices online

Aer Lingus; Bmibaby; EasyJet; Flybe; flythomascok; Germanwings; Globespan; Jet2; Monarch; Ryanair; Sky Europe; Thomsonfly; Wizz Air

Uncover annoying charges

In our June issue we launched a search for cases of extra charges that you don't expect when choosing a product. With your input we're ready to expose more and help you avoid surprise extra costs. Keep sending in examples to news@which.co.uk

Satnav exposed

Readers have told us that they've bought satnav systems, only to find that the maps on them are out of date, with upgrades costing up to £90.

Fight back Your average shop assistant may not know whether the maps are up to date, so check dates on the manufacturer's website before buying. We've asked manufacturers to provide free updates for up to a year after purchase – we'll let you know about our progress.



Broadband exposed

Having problems with your broadband connection?

What are you paying for helpline assistance? You could pay £5 to talk for ten minutes with Tesco Telecoms, £2.60 with Virgin Media or nothing to Waitrose Broadband from a landline.

Fight back If you think you'll need help getting connected, check helpline costs before signing up. Before calling for help, ensure all cables are plugged in and you've entered the right username and password – these are common errors according to *Computing Which?*. See *Which?*, August, p40 for our broadband satisfaction survey.

We think satnav maps should be updated free for up to a year after purchase