



# Consumer news

## Get involved

### We need your help

Please include full contact details and a daytime phone number

■ [helpwanted@which.co.uk](mailto:helpwanted@which.co.uk)

### Hospital car parks

Send us your experiences, good or bad, of hospital car parks. Were you impressed? Did you get a discount? Tell Liz Edwards where it was and when you parked there.

### N Ireland members

Do you think you are getting a raw deal compared with consumers in the rest of the UK? Tell Jenni Conti the consumer issues that matter to you.

### Love to talk?

Want to try switching home-phone companies? If so, Ceri Stanaway wants to hear from you, especially if you make lots of calls abroad or to mobiles.

### Become an OM

All *Which?* subscribers are associate members of Consumers' Association. But as an ordinary member you can vote in Council elections, nominate candidates and stand yourself, attend AGMs and receive our annual report and accounts. Call 01992 822800 or log on to [www.which.net/aboutus/whoweare/membership.html](http://www.which.net/aboutus/whoweare/membership.html)

### Traffic jams

Are you regularly stuck in jams on your daily commute? Have you missed an appointment because of gridlock? How do you avoid wasting time stuck in traffic? Send Pete Tynan a brief summary of your experiences.

Fears that children may receive messages in error

## Reverend's shock at sex texts

### MOBILE PHONES

**R**everend John Searle was shocked when he turned on his new mobile and received three texts from adult subscription services.

John, a retired Methodist Minister from Oxfordshire, contacted the provider Orange, which stopped the calls and refunded him the cost of receiving them. But the incident highlights a problem that occurs if old numbers aren't cleaned before reuse.

John said: 'This raises very serious questions about the potential corruption of minors, and at the very least offends adults. Buyers should be warned at point of sale that they may be given a recycled number.'

It's estimated that more than five million under-16s own a mobile and it's common practice for networks to reuse old numbers. There are no regulations governing how long companies should wait. Orange waits six months, as do T-Mobile and Vodafone.

Icstis, the body that regulates premium-rate calls and texts, said the previous owner of the number had signed up to receive the texts in May 2005. John bought his phone the following November, six months and



Reverend John Searle complained to Orange

**'Buyers should be warned at point of sale that they may be given a recycled number'**

three days later. Orange told us it doesn't promote the sale of mobiles to under-16s. It said: 'During the quarantine period, if the third-party provider tries to contact the customer, it receives a message saying the number is no longer in use. The provider is obliged to remove the number from its list. If it fails to do so, as in [this] case, the services will still be active.'

Watchdog Ofcom wouldn't say how many complaints it has had on the issue.

#### TAKE ACTION!

##### Report the problem

■ If you have a similar experience, contact your service provider and ask it to bar the services and issue a refund if necessary.

## The distinctive blue Smartie disappears

### FOOD AND HEALTH

**F**ans of the blue Smartie will be saddened by news that Nestlé Rowntree has dropped it from UK sale. But it's good news for people who don't like artificial colours.

The confectionery giant has removed artificial colours from the candy-coated chocolates, spelling the end of the blue sweet because it can't be made with natural colours.

The blue sweets, which first appeared in UK packs in 1989, will be replaced with white ones this month. But the blue ones will still be sold overseas.

Smarties no longer come in a round tube. The packaging has been updated and the sweets come in a six-sided 'hexatube' which carries the message 'no artificial colours'.



PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN TRENHOLM, ROBIN BECKHAM, HAD DON DAVIES

**80,000**

UK homes that install  
broadband each week

OFCOM

**£185**

average spent on a kid's party,  
excluding gifts and venue hire

VIRGIN MONEY

**£232**

likely spend if you see all England  
World Cup games in a pub

CAHOOT



We set up hidden cameras and tested out the service offered by traders

# Bungling locksmith exposed

## LOCKSMITHS

None of the locksmiths in our latest undercover sting asked us for proof of identity before getting into our house.

This worrying finding makes it much more important to ensure that you have the most secure five-lever type of door locks, as these are the hardest to pick.

In April we hired the house kitted out with hidden cameras used by Surrey trading standards officers in their annual sting of dodgy tradesmen. We invited six locksmiths chosen at random to gain entry for our bogus householder – a 70 year-old retired trading standards officer – who had lost her key while out shopping.

'A decent locksmith should be able to get you inside with minimum damage to the door and lock,' says Geoff Turner, Chairman of the Master Locksmiths' Association. 'But there are a lot of cowboy locksmiths out there.'

Although none checked our identity, five locksmiths successfully gained entry with no damage and charged a fair price. The work of the sixth was described as 'abysmal' by our experts. This locksmith was from the company called Brighton Locksmiths Ltd of Lancing.

The door in question was fitted with a basic two-lever lock, which any competent locksmith could easily pick. But our bungling locksmith attacked it with a drill, screwdriver, chisel and pliers.

He correctly said that, for the best security, the door should be fitted with a secure five-lever lock, but he fitted a less secure three-lever lock instead.

The price quoted over the phone was £135 and he charged us £141. But the job should cost around £60.

Our expert Geoff Turner said: 'He did a good job for a builder but not a locksmith.'

The other five visits were more pleasing. We used AJB Locks Direct, Access Locks

and Security Ltd, Dyno Locks, Locktight Security and Reactfast. The locksmiths all used the right method to get in, charged between £45 and £75 for the work and arrived when they said they would.

We found sub-contracting is a problem. In three cases the companies we called had sub-contracted the work to another locksmith, which made it difficult to know who was going to arrive.

Surrey Trading Standards Officer Vaughan Jones said: 'This makes it hard to avoid a trader who may have ripped you off previously.'

The Master Locksmiths' Association is calling for the regulation of locksmiths to deter those in the industry who rip off vulnerable householders.

**'He did a good job for a builder but not a locksmith'**

### TAKE ACTION!

#### Checklist for using a locksmith

- Make sure your external door locks are at least the five-lever type and meet British Standard 3621.
- If using a locksmith, check it's a member of a trade body, such as the Master Locksmiths' Association. Its members undergo extensive training and police checks. Always get a price over the phone, ask when the locksmith will arrive and the name of the company that will do the job.
- A competent locksmith should never badly damage your door. The maximum damage should be no more than an 8mm hole that can be covered by the lock plate.



A retired trading standards officer pretended to be locked out. Inset: our hopeless locksmith used a heavy-duty drill to remove the lock but specialist picking tools would have caused less damage