

New tea maker promises a superior brew, from English Breakfast to Lapsang Souchong

Fine tea but not cheap



The £150 Fine-T is a cut above the kind of teamaker that was once a familiar sight in many homes. It's the first we've seen that's designed to be used with speciality teas. But can this slick machine do for the humble cuppa what espresso machines have done for coffee?

The elegant, bullet-shaped Fine-T from Meyer takes up less surface space than a coffee machine, but still has a plethora of settings to suit different types of tea. The idea is that everything from robust English Breakfast tea to aromatic Lapsang Souchong will be brewed to the perfect temperature and infusion time. You can override the settings to suit your own taste.

We made three mugs of tea from one brew (instructions state a maximum of four) and the process was quiet with hardly any steam.

Our testers found it easy to use. However, it's tricky to move the infusion basket lid and, while the self-clean program is useful, you have to hand wash the basket and teapot. The teapot dribbles from the spout when you fill the water chamber and tea can drip from the spout when you pour.

The Fine-T is available from John Lewis or www.fine-t.co.uk.

VERDICT This is a stylish way to brew a cuppa but, at £150, the



Fine T is likely to appeal only to the serious tea drinker. Others however, may prefer to rely on their trusted teapot.

Promising look for new Nikon

The Nikon 90 has a sensor of a type (CMOS) that is usually found on more expensive DSLR cameras. The camera has 12.3 megapixels and the quick test images that we have taken with the supplied kit lens certainly look good.

However, we'll fully test the camera before delivering our final verdict.

The D90 is solid and comfortable to use. The large 3-inch LCD screen is one of the best we've seen – it's the same one that Nikon uses on its £2,750 top-of-the-range D3. The

screen is bright and colourful, and offers 'live view' so you can see a scene through the viewfinder and the LCD panel on the camera back.

The supplied 18-105mm lens has more powerful image stabilisation than you usually get with a supplied kit lens. When fitted to the D90, it gives you a versatile zoom range of 27-157.5mm.

Unusually, there's an HD movie-recording mode, although you'll need to buy a separate HDMI cable to benefit from this on a big screen.

The Nikon D90 costs about £830 with the kit lens. It's intended as a replacement for the Nikon D80.

However, that great camera can still be found with an 18-55mm image-stabilised lens for £445.

VERDICT Promising image quality, kit lens versatility and an HD movie mode, but expensive compared with the D80.



Broadband on the move

Virgin Media is the latest major internet provider to offer mobile broadband.

It comes on an 18-month contract and allows you up to 3GB of data every month. That's enough for 2,000 emails, 100 hours web surfing, 200 music tracks and 100 two-minute videos.

Like most mobile broadband deals, the amount you can download is strictly controlled. Exceed it and each extra GB costs a hefty £15.

You get speeds up to 3.6Mbps depending on how good the network is in your area – you can check this on Virgin's website. Virgin claims 85% 3G coverage of the UK.

It's easy to set up. Put the Sim card into the supplied USB dongle and the dongle into a Mac or PC computer. We got it working in 15



minutes. Network connectivity was generally very good in a range of indoor and outdoor places in London, although we were more often able to connect with 3G rather than the faster HSDPA. Connecting and page loading times were very good with 3G and HSDPA.

At £15 a month, it costs the same as some Orange, Three and Vodafone deals with similar data allowances and contract lengths.

VERDICT It's good to have more choice of packages, but it's disappointing that Virgin Media's deal is so similar to its rivals.

10.000

the number of searches a day
on Google in 1998

WWW.FORBES.COM

235m

the number of searches a day
on Google in 2008

WWW.COMSCORE.COM

We take a first look at the
much-hyped iPhone rival

Google phone hits the shops

One of the most eagerly-awaited new mobiles since the launch of the iPhone has gone on sale.

The Google G1 has built-in satnav and is 3G and WiFi capable for fast email and internet access. You can zoom in and out to view an entire web page and can keep multiple web pages open at the same time.

There is a 3.2 Mp autofocus camera that unlike the iPhone, lets you send pictures via MMS. There isn't a proper flash though, and you can't record video.

The real draw of the G1 has been the operating system that Google has created for it.

Called Android, this is an open-source system which allows anyone to write programs for it from word-processing to games. In our first look test, we found it easy to download these, giving a potentially huge range of applications for the phone. Currently all the available applications are free, though it's possible there may be



charges for some downloads in future. There have been many applications developed for the iPhone, too. However, the iPhone is a closed-source system, which means Apple controls what's available.

We found the G1 large and heavy, but it has a generous 3.2-inch, 480x320-pixel screen. We're putting it through our full test and will publish the results shortly.

It's free with T-Mobile Combi and Flex tariffs of over £40 a month, including unlimited net browsing.

VERDICT It has an innovative open-source operating system, full keypad and fast internet. But it's heavy, can't record video and you can use only the supplied headphones.

Fast as a salon dryer

You can dry your hair as quickly with the 1000W BaByliss Eco Dry as you can with a machine twice as powerful, claim the manufacturers.

We found it matched the drying speed of salon-style hairdryers. Our tester dried her long hair as quickly with it as with a new 2000W dryer.

Assuming it uses the energy stated, you'll save about 166 watts of electricity when drying your hair for ten minutes – enough to power a low-energy light bulb for eight hours. It lacks style though, looking similar to a 1000W BaByliss we recommended in 1988.

There's ionic drying and a cool shot button, but otherwise the Eco Dry has fewer heat and temperature settings than many hairdryers. Use it on high power and it's very powerful, so if you're trying to coax your style along gently you could end up windswept.

VERDICT It's light, compact, fast and fairly quiet, but there's little choice of heat and speeds.



Toasting success?

The iconic Dualit brand, best known for its toasters, has popped up with an espresso maker that has the chunky, easy-to-use dials and striking design that is typical of the brand.

The Espresso is easy to set up and takes ground coffee and ESE ('easy-serving espresso') pods. The pods hold about an espresso's worth, pre-compacted ready for use.

It makes good cremas but vibrates noisily – enough to move a light espresso cup around. You can also make lattes or cappuccinos. The steamer nozzle is shielded by rubber, which should aid milk frothing and stop your cup being chipped on the metal pipe. It comes in stainless steel or cream, and costs about £149.

VERDICT You can make good strong espresso with ground coffee or pods, but it's noisy.



Top toys

We take a look at toys predicted
to be top sellers this Christmas

Ogobe Pleo £200

Stroke this robot dinosaur and it walks, talks and 'eats', thanks to sensors under the chin, feet and on the body. It tracks objects, 'sees' colours and can tell light from dark. It has microphones to enable it to 'hear'. Our young testers thought they'd quickly get bored of it. It's widely available.



Bladez 3D remote control helicopter £50

You can fly this indoors or outside. The controller requires four AA batteries and a 12-minute charge should give about eight minutes flying time. Our testers, who had little flying experience, got to grips with the controls within 20 minutes and reported that it was great fun. It's widely available.



Dalek Voice Changer Mask £35

If you have a child of at least five who loves Dr Who, this could be for him or her. It's convincing from the front, but there's just a strap at the back. Some found the mask more comfortable than others and we have some concern over the limited visibility through the front grille. It's widely available.



Henry desk vacuum £9.95

This novelty mini-vac is certainly an eye-catching way to cope with spilt crumbs from a lunch eaten at your desk. It runs on two AA batteries you have to buy. It's available from prezzybox.co.uk.



This new Panasonic is a bit of a compact and a bit of an SLR

Best of both worlds?

The £599 Panasonic G1 is an unusual beast. It's bigger than most compacts and has a lens you can change – something you normally find on a digital SLR.

But it's also smaller than an SLR and doesn't have the mirror between the lens and camera body that an SLR has.

The G1 has a three-inch LCD display and an electronic viewfinder to help you compose shots. When the camera is brought up to eye level, the Live View LCD switches itself off. You can alter the LCD's position through a vertical and horizontal plane, making it easier to compose shots when in a crowd and photographing over heads in front of you.

The camera has a feature called intelligent auto mode that is



common on most new Panasonics. The idea is to let the camera decide on the best settings for particular conditions. In this mode, you don't have to worry about some of the more fiddly exposure settings, saving time when all you want is to grab the picture.

You can tinker with shutter-speed, aperture and white balance settings manually, and the ISO can be set between 100 and 3,200. It comes with a 14-45mm kit lens

and you can buy a 45-200mm telephoto lens for about £330. However, if the camera is bought with both lenses, the 45-200mm lens is half price.

We're testing the G1 camera now and will publish results as soon as we have them.

VERDICT Panasonic aims to bring the versatility and creativity of a DSLR to a smaller, lighter, easier-to-use camera. It lacks a video mode, though.



Satellite TV without a dish

If you fancy watching satellite TV, but don't want a big dish stuck on the side of your house, the Selfsat H21D could be for you. The flat antenna gives more than 130 digital TV and radio channels on Freesat (including BBC and ITV channels). You can also pay for subscription channels, such as Sky.

It receives high-definition pictures so you'll be able to watch BBC and ITV HD programmes and can feed up to four satellite boxes at a time. To watch Freesat, you also need a Freesat box or Freesat TV, such as the Panasonic PZ81.

There are four models costing from £149 to £199 depending on how many TVs or satellite receivers it works with. The instructions claim that Selfsat can be installed in a few minutes. We found it took 67 minutes from unpacking to getting a picture, but that's still quick.

Once assembled, you point it in the right direction (usually south). If there are obstructions in the line of sight, you may struggle to get a signal, so a traditional aerial or an installation engineer may be required. At least two people are needed to tune the Selfsat – one to adjust the antenna, the other watching the TV to check when you have a picture. It's available via Eurosat.

VERDICT The Selfsat H21D could be a cost-effective way of getting high-definition TV channels and it's quick to set up. But you will need to have an obstruction-free view to the south and it takes two people to tune it.



New green pans taking on Teflon

Typhoon's GreenPans are sold in partially recycled packaging. However, their main 'green' claim is that they're made with Thermolon, a ceramic non-stick coating that is said to require only half the amount of energy to produce as Teflon (resulting in lower CO2 emissions).

The saucepans are heat resistant up to 450°C, compared with 260°C for traditional pans, and this may protect the pan's interior for longer.

Our first impressions are good. It heated up quickly and food didn't stick.

It's also lighter than a cast-iron pan, which is the usual alternative to Teflon.

Some consumers in the US reported that they'd had a problem with the pans scratching on the outside after short periods of time, but we didn't find this.

If you're considering GreenPans as a step towards greener living,

we'd suggest only switching from your existing pans when they reach the end of their life.

GreenPans are available at independent cookshops and online. Prices start at £16.

VERDICT The Typhoon GreenPans are reasonably priced. They have good heat distribution, too. However, as Thermolon is a new coating we don't know how well it will perform long-term.

Top-performing brand enters new market

Miele launches upright

Miele has eight cylinder vacuum cleaners that are current Best Buys, so when we found it was launching its first range of uprights, the S7s, we were keen to see how they performed. Our first impressions are positive.

We tried out the S7510 Autocare and found it picks up things you can see, such as crumbs, from carpets and hard floors. We'll have to wait until our labs have fully tested one of the range before commenting on how well it tackles things you can't see easily with the naked eye, such as dust.

There's a 10-metre cable which helps in cleaning large rooms and the swivel neck makes it easy to move around, if heavy. You can tilt it almost flat to get under furniture.

It comes with attachments including a soft brush and stair and gap nozzles that fit neatly to

the body of the machine for storage. There is a height-adjustable tube on the hose for curtains and stairs. The machine also has an automatic setting that adjusts brush height when you move to a different surface and it throws a pool of light in front to ensure no dust stays undetected.

Removing the dust bag can be tricky, but putting in a new dust bag is simple.

There are five models in the S7 range with different colours, a model for cat and dog owners and for allergen sufferers. Prices range from £249 for the S7210, to £369 for the S7580 AutoCare HEPA.

VERDICT The S7510 Autocare is manoeuvrable and has a long reach, but it may feel heavy after you've vacuumed for some time.



John Lewis Sewing Machine

£49

This is the cheapest John Lewis sewing machine and is aimed at those new to sewing or who want to customise old clothes. It's available along with in-store classes for knitting and sewing. John Lewis will offer free advice from experts to set you on your mending way.



Nutriheat Hair Nutrition System Straightener

£79.99

This claims to be the 'next generation' in hair straightening. It releases a formula enriched with silk proteins, via a capsule, to nourish your hair while straightening. It's available now from Argos.



A radio that recharges its own batteries

DAB portable radios tend to use a lot of power. If you'd rather not throw out batteries, you might like the Roberts Ecologic 1 DAB radio. It has a built-in charger to power up its rechargeable AA batteries. It's easy to use, with large, buttons and a display that can show time and

date, station frequency, and text. The Ecologic 1 costs around £49.99. The slimmer Ecologic 2 is £59.99, the Ecologic 3, with a claimed battery life of about 120 hours, is £69.99.

VERDICT A worthy attempt to tackle power use, but we'll test the eco claim.



CREDIT CRUNCH COMPARISON

These pocket camcorders aim to make taking and sharing video as easy as possible

Flip Mino

The slim, trim Mino follows the success of the Flip Ultra pocket camcorder (more than a million sold in the US). Manufacturers claim it's 40% smaller. Like the Ultra, it has 2GB storage, 60 minute recording time and video resolution of 640x480 pixels. It replaces the Ultra's buttons with a touch-sensitive surface and has a built-in rechargeable battery, giving twice the life of the Ultra's AA batteries.



VS

Flip Ultra

The Ultra is heavier than the Mino but fits in a trouser pocket. We found the sound and picture quality is poor compared with full-size camcorders. However, both the Flip and the Mino are ideal for those who want to upload film clips to video sharing sites such as YouTube. Unless you want the marginal improvements in features offered by the Mino, such as battery life, you may decide to pay £30 less and opt for the Ultra.



Lavazza A Modo Mio

£119

These coffee pod espresso machines include the black Saeco Extra (£119) with a steam spout and adjustable cup rack. The red Seaco Premium (£159) has temperature control and extra dose. Available at Fenwicks, House of Fraser or www.lavazza.modomio.co.uk.



Microsoft Explorer Mouse

If you want to use your mouse on a wide range of surfaces, this could be the one for you. A rechargeable battery is included which you top up by dropping the mouse on to the neat charging pad. It's available on the high street.

