

## Doctor falls for Spanish lottery con

### LOTTERY SCAM

A GP from Rotherham has been duped out of £93,000 by a bogus Spanish prize draw. The doctor, who did not want to be named, was tricked into believing he had won in the El Gordo lottery.

The con began when a letter arrived saying he had won €615,810 (around £400,000) in November 2005. He faxed back the release form with his bank details and was put in contact with a so-called 'bank manager', who persuaded him to send £2,000 commission to transfer the money to the UK.

The doctor was then repeatedly duped into sending more money after the gang told him he would lose his winnings. Over an eight-month period he transferred a total of £93,000.

He said: 'Every time I sent money it came up with different ideas. It threatened me that if I did not send money I would lose everything, until I said I couldn't send any more.'

Thousands of people have been conned by bogus Spanish lotteries, making them the UK's top scams.

The doctor was tricked by the typical technique of the El Gordo scam, in which con artists ask for release fees and banking charges until the victim has no more money to send.

The Office of Fair Trading said it's the biggest amount lost in this con. There is a real El Gordo Spanish Lottery that has no connection to this fraud.



Another holiday headache

Readers are disappointed when Father Christmas gets it wrong

## All you don't want for Christmas

### PRESENTS

Not-so-thoughtful gifts like a radio-controlled rat and a book on slugs were among the 'highlights' in our survey of least favourite Christmas presents members had received.

In April, we asked 16,812 online panel members whether they had been given an unwanted present last Christmas. More than a third had been given such a surprise.

Smellies such as toiletries, perfume and aftershave topped the list – with one in five receiving one. Most often they didn't like the smell or it wasn't their usual brand.

Clothes were the next most unpopular – 17 per cent were given unappealing items such as jumpers, boxer shorts, ties or socks.

**'Presents I received weren't required'**



Sacks of useless presents mean many are glad to see the back of that red suit

One in eight people was unhappy with a gadget, particularly novelty devices or those that didn't work properly.

Nine per cent of people disliked a book – typically they already had it or were not interested in the subject. Some gifts were even harmful – for those allergic to fragranced toiletries or chocolate.

But our favourite Christmas rant comes from a self-professed Scrooge: 'I had asked all my friends and relatives to either buy me nothing at all or to buy an animal for a family abroad. Quite a lot of people ignored this or did both.'

'The presents I received weren't required. I had earrings and a necklace that I didn't like and also toiletries that I'm allergic to. I had ornaments that I have nowhere to put and perfume that I don't wear. I also received a book I already have.'

## Go gadgets go, please

It's estimated that we spend £2 billion on gadgets we don't use. A quarter of people have said they'd bought a gadget they thought wouldn't be used.

In October, we asked 1,770 Which? online panel members what was the most useless gadget they had received. More than 60 per cent had received one, with car devices

topping the list. At number two was the foot spa. One lucky person had three of the next least popular gadgets: 'I had a juicer – I already had non-electric ones I'm happy with. I got an electric knife, which I'm unlikely to use. And I received a coffee maker – I already had a cafetière, which is what I wanted in order to reduce clutter on the counter.'

## Protection fears for travellers

### FLIGHT RIGHTS

A Court of Appeal decision that allows holidays to be sold without consumer protection looks set to have huge implications for holidaymakers.

Following the judgment, tour operators Tui (formerly Thomson) said it will sell fewer package holidays and

more dynamic packages – holidays with the different parts priced separately which require no financial protection.

This means more passengers will have to make their own travel arrangements if their airline goes bust while they are away. Also, tour operators' duty of care to clients, under the EU Package Travel Directive, will not apply.

For instance, the family whose children died from gas poisoning in Corfu in October had booked through Thomas Cook. If the tragedy leads to legal action it will take place in the UK. If the family had been on a dynamic package, it would have had to sue the hotel.

A trading standards spokesman said the ruling could mean a return to 'the bad old days' of taking complaints to foreign courts.

Regulator's website protects kids from mobile phone charges

# Premium-rate guide

## PHONE BILLS

New website Phonebrain.org has been set up to help children get savvy about using costly premium-rate phone lines.

The launch of the site comes as figures show mobile phone ownership among children has rocketed, with 51 per cent of ten-year-olds and 70 per cent of 11-year-olds now owning a phone.

Parents can ask a mobile network to bar calls to premium-rate numbers that start with 09 but they cannot put a bar on texts to a five-digit premium-rate shortcode. These premium-rate text messages can be used to buy services such as ringtones and games.

But if youngsters do not read the small print or get the instructions wrong, they can find themselves locked into paying a weekly subscription for something they do not want.

The website, set up by premium-rate industry regulator Ictis (see p80), aims to help children understand how premium-rate services work and educate them on the potential costs through interactive games and quizzes.

There is information for parents as well, including a section on each mobile network's policy on protecting children.

Earlier this year, the company behind the Crazy Frog ringtone fad was ordered to issue refunds after parents complained that their children were being tricked into running up huge bills.



Alison Biddulph was locked into phone fees by Crazy Frog

The TV adverts did not make clear that ordering the ringtone tied customers into a weekly subscription of up to £5 a week, Ictis ruled.

John Biddulph's daughter Alison, who was 12 years old at the time, had all her phone credit swallowed up after sending a text to request the ringtone.

She was then automatically billed for a text message you pay to receive rather than send. John said: 'She had to keep the phone switched off because it was eating money and it wasn't clear how to stop it.'

John received a refund six weeks later.

**Their children were being tricked into running up huge bills**

## And finally... not quite everything

This is what can happen when the lawyers and the marketing people don't talk.

Reader Cliff Jessett spotted this sale poster in a local bookshop window.

'Everything' in this case is clarified in smaller print as... not everything. And after 'everything' has gone, we'd imagine it's safe to say stocks have run out.



**GET IN TOUCH**  
Send your examples of daft or misleading products or promotions to Jaclyn Clarabut PO Box 44 Hertford X SG14 1SH

### MOBILE GIANT FACES FINE

The Carphone Warehouse could be fined up to £50,000 for making silent calls. Ofcom found that it generated too many abandoned calls between April and July. It broke new rules that companies should limit silent calls to 3 per cent or less of all calls they make.

### SAT-NAVS TO BE TESTED

The Department for Transport plans to rate satellite navigation systems. It is considering a star-rating system, or a logo for sat-navs that pass its test, which will include assessments of whether they encourage use of rat-runs (side roads) or illegal manoeuvres.



### FLYERS TAKE ACTION

Ryanair passengers who missed flights because of long airport queues are taking legal action after the airline made them forfeit tickets. Three travellers contacted Which? Legal Service and are set to claim that the airline did not use reasonable skill and care in its service while extra security checks were in place from August.

### LIGHTS OUT ON TRADITION

The government plans to ban the manufacture of traditional light bulbs in an effort to get people to switch to energy-saving equivalents. Replacing a 100-watt traditional bulb will save electricity and knock around £6 off your annual bill.



### CHILD DEATHS REPORT

A joint report from the Audit Commission and the Healthcare Commission, released this month, is expected to make recommendations for reducing the number of child deaths caused through unintentional injury.

### CONTACT US

If there's something you'd like us to investigate, call 0800 252088 and leave a message or email [news@which.co.uk](mailto:news@which.co.uk)