

APPLIANCES TO RELY ON

Our annual survey of more than 14,000 readers puts the spotlight on the brands you can't trust and applauds those that are sure to give years of faithful service

OUR SURVEY

In November 2004, we sent questionnaires to 30,000 *Which?* readers. We received 14,296 replies. The responses we got are presented in two different ways.

First, a table shows the average reliability for each type of appliance, based on the overall percentage of appliances up to six years old that didn't break down. Each brand is then grouped into best, average or worst. (For some products that have been more recently launched, such as Bosch vacuum cleaners, we don't have six years' worth of information, so we've assessed their reliability over three years.)

Secondly, we also show graphs of the percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of appliance (whatever its age) to a friend. The numbers in brackets on these graphs are the number of owners of each brand.

Every year we consult thousands of you, our readers, about some of the appliances you rely on daily – the workhorses you don't appreciate until it's too late and they've broken down. It goes without saying that you want these products to last, as even the smallest problems can be frustrating.

Here's the first instalment of our annual guide to finding the brands that you can depend on, which takes account of more than 14,000 replies. This month we're looking at domestic appliances, including vacuum cleaners and washing machines. Next month we'll be bringing you news of the most, and least, reliable TVs, digital cameras and other audio-visual goods.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

Just as last year, results from our survey show that you won't go wrong with a Bosch or a Miele appliance. Each of these brands is particularly dependable in a couple of product categories. Bosch is in the top group for upright vacuum cleaners, dishwashers and washing machines. Miele makes trustworthy washing machines and is in the elite group for cylinder vacs. You don't have to worry about their products getting the job done, either. They're often among the highest scorers in our performance tests. It's no surprise, then, to find that Bosch and Miele also top the list of brands owners would recommend to people looking for new products. Miele stands out in six out of seven categories, and Bosch in five.

The main loser in this year's survey is Hoover. It's the only brand with below-average reliability for its fridge-freezers, washer-driers, tumble driers and washing machines. So it's no big shock to find that, when it comes to brands you're least likely to recommend, Hoover, along with Hotpoint, is below average in five categories.

That most iconic of brands, Dyson, fares poorly, too. It sits alone at the bottom of the reliability table for both its cylinder and upright vacuum cleaners, and joins a handful of brands as one of the least reliable washing machines.



VACUUM CLEANERS

Motor failure is a common cause of breakdown. High temperatures and the friction of moving parts mean something may eventually go.

VACUUM CLEANERS

Cylinder cleaners tend to pick up more dust than upright vacs – and it seems they're less likely to need repair, too. Only 10 per cent of cylinders in our survey needed repairing, compared with 23 per cent of uprights.

UPRIGHTS

In our surveys over the last six years, Dyson has been unreliable – and our latest results show that it's getting

worse. In 2002, 21 per cent of Dyson vacs up to six years old needed repair; that figure is now a dreadful 29 per cent. It's a real shame

Overall, 77% of upright vacs up to six years old haven't needed repair

BEST	Bosch ^a , Electrolux Panasonic, Sebo
AVERAGE	Hoover, Oreck
WORST	Dyson

Total number of upright vacs 4,572

^aBased on machines up to three years old

because its vacs, such as the DC07 Animal, around £260 online, are the only upright models we've found that clean really well.

Still, there are some consistently reliable brands at the top end of the table. Electrolux, Panasonic and Sebo are there for the third year running.

Buying the most reliable brands

Unfortunately, all the most dependable upright vacs lack real cleaning power in our tests. Each has strengths and weaknesses but none is good enough to be a Best Buy. For example, Sebo's Automatic X4 Extra does well on laminate floors but less well on carpets and traditional floorboards.

From our cleaning tests, we know that Bosch has started to make some decent uprights. Not enough of you own Bosch vacs for us to do our usual rigorous analysis. However, we've looked at how dependable they've been over the last three years rather

than the six years we use for other machines. It's not as thorough a method as we'd like, but it gives a good indication of reliability.

Happily, Bosch uprights come out better than average, so you can opt for our Best Buy Bosch model with some confidence. The Bosch BUC11700GB Extraxx 17, around £130 online, is great on hard floors and carpet.

What do readers recommend?

The brands that you are most likely to definitely recommend are pretty obscure: Oreck, Sebo and Vorwerk. The fact that over a quarter of Dyson vacs broke down apparently hasn't put off the 39 per cent of owners definitely recommending them. This may be because, despite their unreliability, they're very efficient at cleaning – see p30 for a review of the Ball.

You're least likely to recommend household names such as Morphy Richards, Hoover, Electrolux and Panasonic.

CYLINDERS

Overall, cylinder vacs are one of the most reliable domestic appliances. Miele and Numatic retain their position at the top of the table for the third year in a row – only 1 per cent of Numatics up to six years old have needed a repair.

Our findings make depressing reading for Dyson owners, though. It languishes alone at the bottom of the pile for the third year running. And things are getting worse – in 2001, 14 per cent of Dysons up to six years old needed mending; now that figure is 22 per cent. A Dyson was over five times more likely to go wrong than a Miele.

Buying the most reliable brands

One of the most reliable brands, Miele, also makes the best-performing cylinder vacs. The Miele S571, £130, Miele Xtra Power 2300, £275, and Miele S4210, £130, are all brilliant on hard floors, carpets and floorboards.

But the only other hard-wearing brand, Numatic, is less impressive: its Henry HVR200 did poorly in our cleaning tests, especially on carpet.

Bosch makes some great cylinder models but in our survey, too few of you owned a Bosch for us to do our normal comprehensive analysis. Instead we checked on how dependable it's been over the last three years rather than six.

The good news is that its vacs came out as average, which is good enough for us to make them Best Buys. The

Bosch BSG 82000GB Ergomaxx, £120 online, is great on carpets and floorboards; the Bosch BSG 71810GB Formula, £75, is better on laminate floors.

What do readers recommend?

The most reliable brands, Miele and

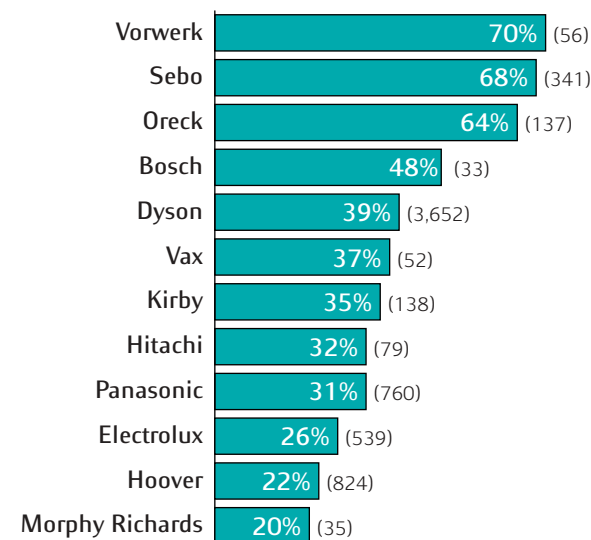
Numatic, are also those that owners are most likely to definitely recommend to friends.

Of the many brands that didn't impress you, Morphy Richards stands out. It sells more cylinder vacs than anyone else, but it's the brand that owners are least likely to definitely recommend.

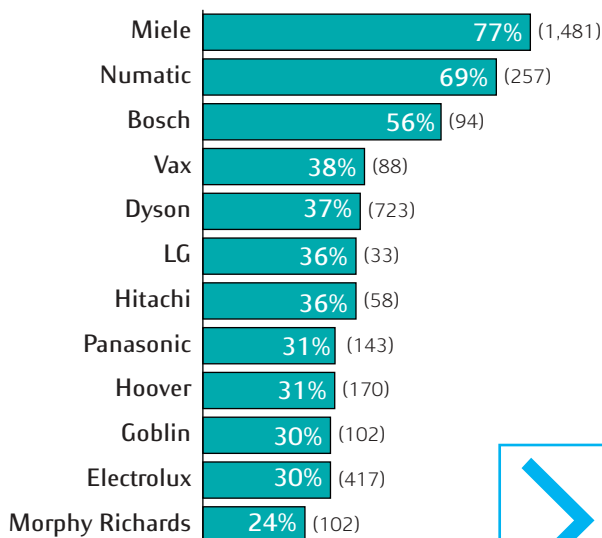
Vacuum cleaners

Percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of vacuum cleaner to a friend

UPRIGHT VACUUM CLEANERS



CYLINDER VACUUM CLEANERS



Overall, 90% of cylinder vacs up to six years old haven't needed repair

BEST	Miele, Numatic
AVERAGE	Bosch ^a , Electrolux, Goblin, Hoover, Morphy Richards, Panasonic
WORST	Dyson
Total number of cylinder vacs 2,724	

^aBased on machines up to three years old

WASHERS AND DRIERS

Washing machine and tumble drier or a single washer-drier? Our surveys show that washer-driers are the least reliable laundry appliances, though the chances of a washer-drier needing a repair are no more than the chances of either the washing machine or tumble drier running into trouble, if you own both. The main problem is that washer-driers are mediocre at drying clothes.

WASHING MACHINES

Bosch, Miele and Tricity Bendix consolidate their position in the bracket of brands with above-average reliability for a second year.

Meanwhile, the bottom of chart has changed little in recent years. Hoover and Hotpoint have had below-average reliability in our last three surveys – and again they prop up the table, along with Indesit. Around a third of their machines needed a repair.

Buying the most reliable brands

Best Buys from the most reliable brands include the Tricity Bendix AW1260, £390. It cleans well but doesn't have the extra programs you'll find on many other models.

There are two Best Buys from another reliable brand, Bosch. The Bosch WFO 2466, £350, washes well and is easy to program. The Bosch WFX 2867, £420, is quieter and has lots of features, such as a childproof lock. Finally, the Miele W2203, £725, is a good all-rounder that gives a great wash.

Recently LG has started to make some great washing machines with large drums that do well in our tests. But because they're quite new, not enough of you have bought one for us to do our usual six-year analysis. However, looking at how models up to three years old have fared, LG has average reliability. The LG WM 14225FD, £450, has a whopping 7.5kg drum and lots of extra features, including a hand-wash program.

However, it's noisier than other machines.

The other new brand that made a big impact in our most recent test is Dyson. As with the LG, we looked at how dependable Dyson is over three years. The results aren't promising: nearly two thirds of machines needed a repair. But Dyson recently announced that it has stopped making washing machines.

What do readers recommend?

The proportion of owners who would definitely recommend their Miele washing machine outstrips any other brand. LG's large drums have gone down well with buyers, and Bosch and AEG-Electrolux owners also speak highly of them.

On the other hand, only a third of Hoover owners would definitely recommend the brand.

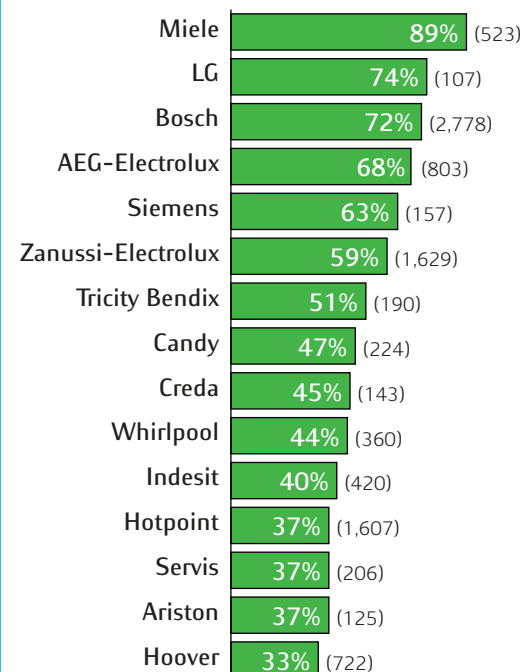


WASHING MACHINES

Pumps, buttons and the door seal are all areas for concern after a bit of wear and tear. Breaking a door catch is also a pain in the proverbial.

Washing machines

Percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of washing machine to a friend



Overall, 83% of washing machines up to six years old haven't needed repair

BEST	Bosch, Miele, Tricity Bendix
AVERAGE	AEG-Electrolux, Ariston, Candy, Creda, LG ^a , Servis, Siemens, Whirlpool, Zanussi-Electrolux
WORST	Dyson ^a , Hoover, Hotpoint, Indesit

Total number of washing machines 6,382

^aBased on machines up to three years old

Avoid extended warranties

Buying a new home appliance normally also means being offered an extended warranty as peace of mind. But we've done the sums, comparing the average repair cost of a range of products from our survey with the costs of extended warranties.

For example, we found that the average cost of

repairing a washing machine is about £30, while it costs around £114 to buy a three-year extended warranty for our Best Buy Siemens WXL146A. So for a warranty to be of value, a machine would probably have to break down more than three times during the warranty period – something

that's very unlikely.

The manufacturer's guarantee should cover repair costs in the first 12 months anyway. And after the guarantee has run out, you have your legal rights to fall back on. Depending on how old the machine is, you may be able to claim against the retailer for a repair or replacement.

WASHER-DRIERS

It seems that it's beyond manufacturers to be able to make a really reliable washer-drier. The complexities of combining washing and drying means there's lots of potential for problems – so no brand comes out as better than average.

Even for the best-performing brand, Zanussi-Electrolux, 23 per cent of its washer-driers up to six years old have needed fixing. Yet again, Hoover seems to keep repairers busy: a staggering 42 per cent of its washer-driers have played up over the last six years.

Buying the most reliable brands

If you're after a reliable Best Buy, then the Zanussi-Electrolux ZWD1480W, £380, is your best bet. It cleans well and is the only washer-drier we've seen that comes close to drying as well as a tumble drier.

Both the Indesit WIDE127 and the Hotpoint WD640 did OK in tests, but neither is good at rinsing. We haven't tested a Bosch recently but will do for future reports.

What do readers recommend?

Miele owners are most likely to rave about their washer-driers: over 80 per cent would definitely put in a good word for them. But Bosch, AEG

Electrolux and Zanussi-Electrolux are also above average for recommendations. By contrast, Servis is one

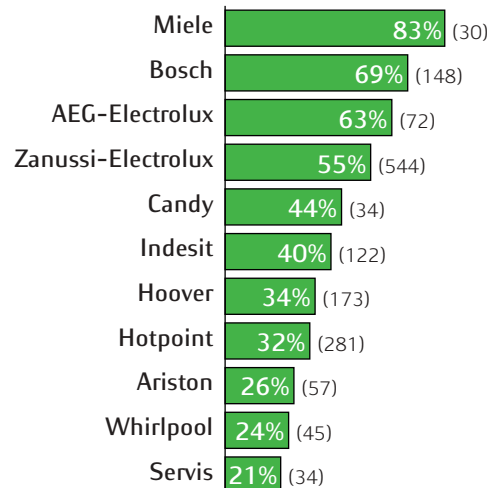
of the least liked brands – only 21 per cent of owners would urge their friends to buy a Servis washer-drier.

Overall, 73% of washer-driers up to six years old haven't needed repair

BEST	None
AVERAGE	Bosch, Hotpoint, Indesit, Zanussi-Electrolux
WORST	Hoover
Total number of washer-driers 984	

Washer-driers

Percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of washer-drier to a friend



TUMBLE DRIERS

Most brands of tumble drier are pretty reliable – overall, 12 per cent of models up to six years old have needed to be fixed. However, none is so far ahead of the pack that it can be called above average. And only Hoover can be singled out as below average: 24 per cent of its models needed repair.

The Miele T4652C, £800, is the best condenser model. The Bosch WTL6307 Exxcel, £430, is cheaper and has a bigger capacity. Two AEG-Electrolux models have also caught our eye: the T57800, £570, and the cheaper T56800, £450.

What do readers recommend?

Miele, Bosch and AEG-Electrolux come highly recommended by owners. But Hoover, Indesit, Candy, Crusader and Hotpoint owners are much less likely to make a definite recommendation to their friends.

Overall, 88% of tumble driers up to six years old haven't needed repair

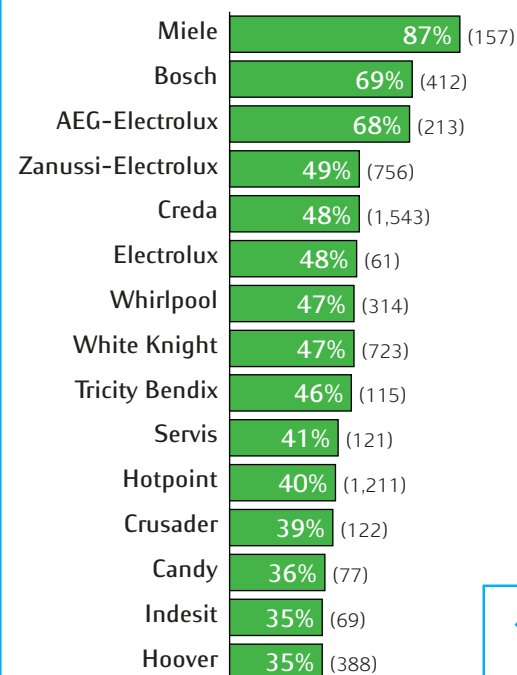
BEST	None
AVERAGE	AEG-Electrolux, Bosch, Creda, Hotpoint, Miele, Tricity Bendix, Whirlpool, White Knight, Zanussi-Electrolux
WORST	Hoover
Total number of tumble driers 3,441	

Buying the most reliable brands

There are loads of Best Buy vented tumble driers in the average-reliability group (see p54). The highest scoring is the Miele T4123, £485 online, while the Bosch WTA4108, £300, is excellent value. For similar money, you could opt for the AEG-Electrolux T37400, £300. Finally, the WhirlpoolAWZ 3413, £190, is a bargain.

Tumble driers

Percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of tumble drier to a friend



OTHER APPLIANCES

Fridge-freezers and dishwashers are, overall, pretty reliable, so a breakdown should be a rare occurrence. But some brands are still much more reliable than others.

FRIDGE-FREEZERS

For years our surveys have told us that you can rely on refrigeration appliances to go the distance. Happily, this year is much the same.

Overall, fridge-freezers are one of the most steadfast appliances. But pity poor Hoover owners – 17 per cent of its fridge-freezers needed a repair.

Buying the most reliable brands

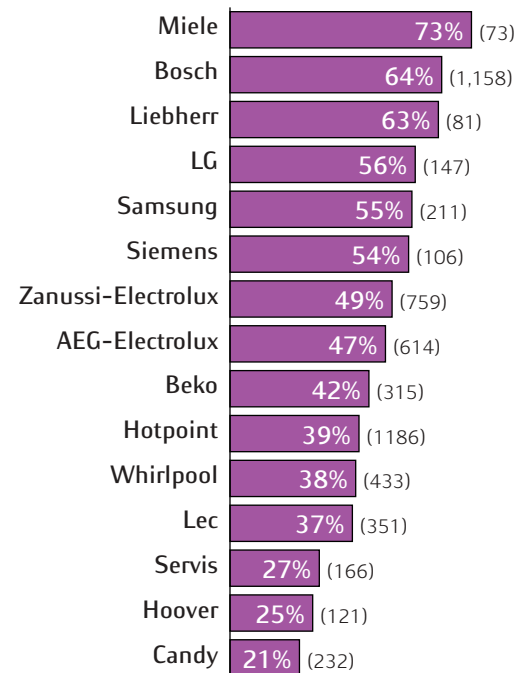
Unfortunately, quality and reliability don't come cheap. Our Best Buys, the Siemens KG36P320GB, £530, and Siemens VarioZone KG28XM40GB, £778 online, both have top-notch cooling power and flexible storage space to keep groceries in mint condition.

The side-by-side American-style AEG-Electrolux S7388 KG, £1,346 online, is spacious and easy to use, but it's not good at freezing food quickly.

If you're after a built-in model, the AEG-Electrolux Santo C7 18 40i, £620, performed OK in our tests and is cheap to run.

Fridge-freezers

Percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of fridge-freezer to a friend



What do readers recommend?

Most owners of Miele, Bosch or Liebherr fridge-freezers will definitely tell friends to invest in their brand.

There's good news for those on a budget, too.

Owners of more affordable brands such as LG, Samsung and Zanussi-Electrolux give them the thumbs up. But few owners would definitely recommend their Candy, Hoover or Servis machines.

Overall, 92% of fridge-freezers up to six years old haven't needed repair

BEST	AEG-Electrolux, Siemens
AVERAGE	Ariston, Beko, Bosch, Candy, Daewoo, Hotpoint, Indesit, Lec, LG, Liebherr, Miele, Neff, Proline, Samsung, Servis, Whirlpool, Zanussi-Electrolux
WORST	Hoover
Total number of fridge-freezers 4,372	

DISHWASHERS

For the second year, Bosch and Neff top our list. This is Neff's third appearance in the top

bracket. But Diplomat (MFI), Indesit, trendy Smeg and Whirlpool sit in the below-average category.

Buying the most reliable brands

We have two Bosch models in our Best Buy list. The Bosch SGS47E02, £350, is very easy to use; the Bosch SGS 65L02 GB, £480, is quiet and gives a good quality finish. Unfortunately, all the models that we have tested from the other most reliable brand, Neff, are no longer on sale.

Most of our Best Buy dishwashers are from AEG-Electrolux, which is in the average category for reliability. The AEG-Electrolux F40850S, £300, AEG-Electrolux F50740, £300 online, and AEG-Electrolux F60870M, £470, form a hat-trick of Best Buys that take the stress out of doing the dishes.

What do readers recommend?

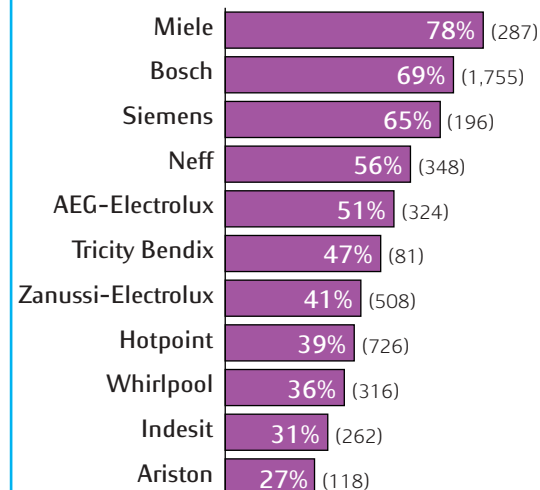
Like last year, Miele, Bosch and Siemens are the most highly recommended brands.

However, there are quite a few brands that owners are less

enthusiastic about recommending – notably Indesit, Whirlpool, Hotpoint and Zanussi-Electrolux. Only 27 per cent of Ariston owners would definitely recommend their dishwashers.

Dishwashers

Percentage of owners who would definitely recommend their brand of dishwasher to a friend



Overall, 86% of dishwashers up to six years old haven't needed repair

BEST	Bosch, Neff
AVERAGE	AEG-Electrolux, Electrolux, Hoover, Hotpoint, Miele, Siemens, Technik, Zanussi-Electrolux
WORST	Diplomat (MFI), Indesit, Smeg, Whirlpool

Total number of dishwashers 3,360