

Play it again and again

Our latest survey reveals the most reliable and the most recommended audiovisual products and the brands that you can really rely on

If any of your audiovisual equipment has broken down recently, you're in an unfortunate minority. We've looked at nine different products – flat-screen TVs, Freeview set-top boxes, digital radios, MP3 players, camcorders, digital cameras, DVD players, DVD recorders and personal video recorders (PVRs) – and found that reliability for all these goods is very solid overall. Unlike for previous surveys, we are no longer looking at video cassette recorders or traditional cathode-ray tube (CRT) TVs, as manufacturers are phasing these out to make way for new technology.

This year's survey found that digital radios and DVD players were the most reliable products, with 97 per cent of respondents saying that their machines hadn't needed repairs. The least reliable were PVRs, which scored 90 per cent. And Sky+ PVRs achieved the lowest score of any product category with just 79 per cent reliability. However, we have found that certain brands come out well across the board.

Top of the charts

Sony comes top or equal top of the reliability charts more than any other brand. For TVs, MP3 players, digital radios, camcorders, digital cameras and DVD recorders, the Japanese giant rules the roost. Only three brands have managed the magic 100 per cent for the reliability of specific products. Bush received a perfect score for its PVRs (no mean feat when you consider that PVRs were the least reliable product in our survey) while Sanyo and Sharp's DVD players both had 100 per cent reliability.

We also asked whether members liked their products enough to recommend them to friends and here the results threw up one or two surprises. For example, Sky+ boxes do well despite their poor reliability in our survey. However, as with reliability, it is Sony that excels in terms of recommendations, featuring in the top three in all categories except for Freeview set-top boxes.

SOLID SONY

David Wright 44, head of ICT for charity organisation Radar

Remember 1992? George Bush's dad was US President, football's Premier League was founded and David bought his 'super-reliable TV'.

'I've had it for 15 years and I haven't had a single problem with it,' says David. 'And I'm not going to replace it until it dies or I feel like treating myself. The only time something went wrong was when my nephew was let loose with the remote and messed up the tuning.'

You can't blame the TV for that. So top marks for reliability – but in the digital age, a slightly larger screen would be a plus. 'The set's a bit too small to read the text from the Freeview box,' he says.



Sony comes top or equal top of the reliability charts more than any other brand

OUR SURVEY

Last spring, we sent out 30,000 questionnaires to members, 10,817 of whom replied. We asked about the reliability of audiovisual products up to six years old. For newer items, we don't have six years' worth of results, so we've assessed reliability over the longest time possible.

The Which? reliability index is based on the proportion of machines that have needed repair. Scores for each brand are adjusted to account for sample size and product age – so brands won't be penalised if a lot of owners have five- or six-year-old models. We also show whether each brand's reliability score is good (above average), average or poor (below average). There must be at least 50

owners of a brand for it to receive a score, but all brands are included in the category averages.

We also asked readers whether they'd recommend their brand to a friend. The boxes show the brands that had the highest percentage of people who would definitely recommend to a friend, with the sample size in brackets. Sample sizes for recommendations and reliability differ as some respondents did not answer both questions.

KEY TO RESULTS

- Good reliability
- Average reliability
- Poor reliability

Flat-screen TVs

With reliability scores of 99 per cent for Sony and Samsung flat-screen TVs, the manufacturers can do little better. In fact, there's not much room for improvement with other brands all within six points of the top.

We found plasma screen TVs to be slightly less reliable than LCD ones. Plasma screen owners should check their TV menus to see whether there is a long-life option, which reduces the TV's brightness. You might not notice much difference in the picture but the display should stay sharper for longer, as plasma sets fade over time.

Best Buys

We don't feature any Samsung Best Buys in our latest TV test



(www.which.co.uk/tvs), but there are a couple of Sony Bravia LCD TVs among our Best Buys. We recommend the 32-inch KDL-32S2530 (£600) or the KDL-32V2500 (£850) as well as the Panasonic TX-32LXD70 (£900). For more information on these three Best Buy TVs, see 'Product news', p10. If you fancy something smaller, the 26-inch KDL-26S2010 should tempt you at £695.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines break down

General picture problems	22%
Reception giving poor picture	15%
Complete failure	11%

FLAT-SCREEN TVS

Reliability of flat-screen TVs up to four years old
Average = 95%

Samsung	(190)	99%
Sony	(451)	99%
Panasonic	(431)	95%
Sharp	(77)	95%
LG	(85)	93%
Philips	(132)	93%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 1,923 owners

You recommend

Of our nine current flat-screen TV Best Buys, all but two are made by Sony or Panasonic. This makes it hard to argue with our survey respondents who advocated these two brands more strongly than any others. Samsung comes out well, too. In contrast, Sharp (50 per cent), Philips (45 per cent), and LG (41 per cent) were less strongly recommended.

Philips had an outstanding reliability score of 99 per cent

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Sony (448) **80%** Panasonic (427) **78%** Samsung (189) **60%**

Freeview set-top boxes

Freeview allows you to receive about 40 channels rather than the standard five, and with an average reliability score of 95 per cent, the chances are you'll be getting your extra entertainment fix with few problems.

Philips had an outstanding reliability score of 99 per cent, and it was the only manufacturer to be rated better than average. The only poorly rated brand was Pace, although it doesn't make Freeview boxes any more. We were surprised to see that 28 per cent of owners

had had problems with their boxes but that these weren't severe enough to warrant repair.

Best Buys

Unfortunately, we don't have a current Best Buy Freeview set-top box from any of the brands we have reliability data for. The best Philips model we've tried is the £40 DTR210/05, which lost marks for a poor EPG, the on-screen programme guide. For more, see the latest test in *Which?*, May 2007, p54.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines break down

Box freezing	22%
Picture freezing	15%
Weak/bad signal/interference	12%

FREEVIEW SET-TOP BOXES

Reliability of Freeview set-top boxes up to six years old
Average = 95%

Philips	(255)	99%
Panasonic	(268)	95%
Thomson	(188)	95%
Goodmans	(163)	93%
Nokia	(134)	93%
Pace	(139)	91%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 2,820 owners

You recommend

In our survey, people were less likely to definitely recommend set-top boxes than any other product. Even super-reliable Philips had only 21 per cent of respondents willing to definitely vouch for it, just one point ahead of the least reliable brand – Pace. Nokia was the lowest with just 11 per cent who would definitely recommend it. However, the Finnish company no longer makes set-top boxes.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Panasonic (264) **35%** Philips (249) **21%** Pace (136) **20%**





Digital radios

The rock-solid overall reliability of digital radios means that none can be considered better or worse than average.

Our age-adjusted score shows that only 3 per cent of all the digital radios in the survey needed repairs. However, 9 per cent of owners reported they had had problems where repairs had not been necessary.

Best Buys

Our current tabletop Best Buys include the Roberts Gemini RD-6R (£166), Pure Evoke 2 (£120), Roberts Gemini RD 7 (£120) and the Pure One (very good value at only £50). If you want a portable Walkman-style radio, try the £176 Pure PocketDAB 2000. Visit www.which.co.uk/digitalradios for more details.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

General problems with digital radios
Auto tuning 28% Complete failure 13% Volume 10%

DIGITAL RADIOS

Reliability of digital radios up to four years old
Average = 97%

Bush	(90)	97%
Goodmans	(105)	97%
Intempo	(94)	97%
Pure	(826)	97%
Sony	(107)	97%
Roberts	(466)	96%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 2,298 owners

You recommend

Pure was the most highly recommended and widely owned brand of digital radio among those who took part in our survey. Pure usually does well in our tests so this doesn't surprise us, nor does the success of Roberts (synonymous with radios) or Sony. Despite strong reliability, Bush and Goodmans had less than a quarter of people definitely recommending them.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Pure (822) 59% Roberts (462) 48% Sony (105) 37%

MP3 players

This is the first time we've included MP3 players in our survey. And while there is a huge number of diverse brands on the market, only three were widely enough owned by respondents to gain reliability scores in our survey. Out of all the brands, a massive 42 per cent of MP3 player owners had an Apple iPod.

However, it was Sony that was the most reliable brand, with Creative and Apple taking the two runner-up slots. Twelve per cent of respondents had problems with players that weren't serious enough to warrant repair.

Best Buys

In our latest test (*Which?*, May 2007, p40), Creative and Apple both have Best Buys.

Creative's Zen V comes in 1GB (£50), 2GB (£70) and 4GB (£116) versions. If you're looking for something from Apple, the iPod Nano is available in 2GB (£99), 4GB (£129) and 8GB (£169). Honourable mentions go to Sony's NW-S703F (£75), NW-705F (£95) and NW-706F (£125), which we recommend as the best for long journeys, thanks to their hefty 47-hour battery life.



BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top five reasons why your machines break down
Display freezes 18% Complete failure 13% Battery life declining 10% Doesn't switch on 10% Hard drive failure 10%

MP3 PLAYERS

Reliability of MP3 players up to four years old
Average = 93%

Sony	(209)	96%
Creative	(223)	93%
Apple	(857)	92%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 1,906 owners

You recommend

Interestingly, the order for recommendations is the opposite to those for reliability. Apple's iconic iPod received most praise from respondents – 61 per cent of those asked said that they'd definitely recommend one to a friend. Creative and Sony players found favour with a respectable number of owners, too.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Apple (834) 61% Creative (216) 47% Sony (205) 42%

Apple's iconic iPod received most praise from respondents



Camcorders

next camcorder test will be in next month's edition of *Which?*.

This really is the Panasonic and Sony show: top reliability scores of 96 per cent, most highly recommended by members, and the majority of our Best Buys. Camcorders were pretty reliable overall with a score of 92 per cent: only JVC scored below average, with 88 per cent. Our

Best Buys

If you want a DVD camcorder, our Best Buys are the Panasonic VDR-D310 (£390), the Sony DCR-DVD 506E (£500) and the Canon DC50E (£500). For mini-DV camcorders, we recommend the Panasonic NV-GS320 (£365).

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines break down

Not recording **20%** Complete failure **13%** Cassette jam **10%**

CAMCORDERS

Reliability of camcorders up to six years old
Average = 92%

Panasonic	(342)	96%
Sony	(719)	96%
Samsung	(81)	92%
Canon	(236)	90%
JVC	(281)	88%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 1,787 owners

You recommend

Sony and Panasonic were the most popular brands with over half of owners saying they would definitely recommend one to a friend. It's hard to argue with this advice. Canon wasn't far behind, while JVC and Samsung didn't do so well, with just 35 per cent of respondents saying they would definitely recommend them.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Sony (717) **58%** Panasonic (339) **55%** Canon (236) **48%**

Digital cameras

Of all the products in the survey, digital cameras had the highest ownership figure, with 64 per cent saying they had one. And there are few reliability worries for any of the main digital camera brands. With just two points difference between the top and the bottom scores, none is significantly better than the average of 96 per cent.

Kodak and Sony were top. Overall, 6 per cent of users had encountered less serious problems that didn't require the camera to be repaired.

Best Buys

We last tested large digital cameras in April this year and digital single-lens reflex

PRODUCT RELIABILITY



(DSLR) cameras last month. There's a huge range of models available. The Best Buy DSLRs are Canon's EOS 350D (£350) and the Nikon D50 (£415).

Compact cameras are more convenient, though. Our Best Buys currently range from around £550 for a Sony Cyber-shot DSC-R1 to just £100 for a dinky Nikon Coolpix L6.

DIGITAL CAMERAS

Reliability of digital cameras up to six years old
Average = 96%

Kodak	(412)	97%
Sony	(721)	97%
Canon	(1,461)	96%
Nikon	(595)	96%
Fujifilm	(943)	95%
Konica Minolta	(209)	95%
Olympus	(838)	95%
Pentax	(205)	95%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 6,498 owners

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top four reasons why your machines break down

Battery	15%
Complete failure	14%
Memory card failure	9%
Zoom/focus	9%

You recommend

Canon, Sony and Nikon are the brands that our respondents were most likely to recommend. However, despite impressive reliability, Kodak was one of the least recommended brands with only 38 per cent, while Pentax was two points behind.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Canon (1436) **68%** Sony (705) **60%** Nikon (588) **59%**

TUNEFUL OLD TIMER

John Ker 56, audiovisual consultant

John has a radio that's the same age as *Which?* – a 1957 Grundig. And it's just as reliable. He bought the radio for £15 and spent a further £245 having it restored. John believes this is excellent value for money.

'I doubt you could buy a one-box radio today that sounds as good as my Grundig,' he says.

He loves the classic German engineering, typified by a beautifully weighted knob on the front which moves the position of the aerial inside the case to get optimum reception. 'It's a gem,' John told us.

It will be interesting to see whether we have similar dedication to our iPods in 50 years' time.



DVD players



Sanyo and Sharp deliver perfect reliability scores. Goodmans, Pacific and Panasonic are also above average, but with no one on the survey getting less than 96 per cent, it seems DVD players are a dependable bunch.

Best Buys

From our latest test (*Which?*, June 2007, p60), we don't

have any Sanyo or Sharp Best Buys. Sony may receive only an average reliability score, but 3 per cent failure is by no means a catastrophe, and so we recommend our Best Buy Sony DVD player – the DVPNS15, which is a very reasonable £45. This DVD player was way ahead of its rivals in our test.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons your machines break down

Refuses to play discs **26%** Takes a long time to read disc **17%** Picture problem **12%**

DVD PLAYERS

Reliability of DVD players up to six years old

Average = 97%

Sanyo	(62)	100%
Sharp	(76)	100%
Goodmans	(106)	99%
Pacific	(186)	99%
Panasonic	(713)	99%
JVC	(217)	98%
Philips	(429)	98%
Alba/Bush	(366)	97%
Pioneer	(112)	97%
Sony	(804)	97%
Hitachi	(76)	96%
LG	(115)	96%
Samsung	(161)	96%
Toshiba	(385)	96%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 4,776 owners

You recommend

Despite unbeatable reliability scores, just 31 per cent of Sanyo and 27 per cent of Sharp DVD player owners would definitely recommend their brand to friends. The most highly recommended brands were Panasonic, Sony and Pioneer.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Panasonic (708) **58%** Sony (797) **57%** Pioneer (110) **52%**

DVD recorders

DVD recorders are more complex than DVD players, so it's not surprising that their overall reliability is five points lower. We also found that 9 per cent of users had difficulties with their recorders but didn't need to have them repaired – about twice as many as for DVD players.

Best Buys

There are three types of DVD recorder: DVD/PVR combos have a digital tuner, the on-screen guide (EPG) lets you decide which programmes to

record to the hard drive – programmes you want to keep can be burned to disc; DVD/HDD models, similar to PVR combos but with an analogue tuner and no EPG; and finally those that record straight to disc. From our latest test (*Which?*, June 2007, p62), our Best Buy straight-to-disc machine was the Sony RDR GXD360 (£230). Our Best Buy DVD/PVR combo is the Sony RDRHDX860 (£400). Philips has the Best Buy DVD/HDD combo, the DVDR 3460H (£300).



BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons your machines break down

Refuses to play discs **18%** Takes a long time to read disc **15%** Does not record **14%**

DVD RECORDERS

Reliability of DVD recorders up to four years old

Average = 92%

Sony	(349)	96%
Philips	(174)	94%
Toshiba	(74)	94%
Panasonic	(779)	92%
Liteon	(69)	92%
Pioneer	(57)	92%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 1,970 owners

You recommend

The brands members would most happily recommend are Pioneer and Panasonic. Sony appears in third place – strange that it's not higher when you consider its reliability score. Toshiba manages a 38 per cent definite recommendation rate, while Philips and Liteon are less impressive with 34 and 24 per cent respectively.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Pioneer (57) **65%** Panasonic (773) **62%** Sony (343) **52%**

ONLINE

FREE website access

For even more information on the latest audiovisual Best Buys and further information on all the products featured here, go to www.which.co.uk

PVRs



With a 100 per cent reliability score for its personal video recorder (PVR), Bush outstrips the competition. Panasonic and Sony were both above average, with 94 per cent. Most interesting is the poor showing by Sky's own PVR, Sky+. Nearly a quarter of our survey's respondents owned these and the reliability was just 79 per cent, the lowest score for any product in our entire survey (see 'Sky+ gets a minus mark', right).

Best Buys

We don't have any PVR Best Buys from Bush, Panasonic or Sony, though the last of these does have a Best Buy DVD/PVR recorder (see opposite). Despite a poor reliability score, Sky's PVRs did well in our latest test (*Which?*, May 2007, p54) – we liked the fact that they were easy to use. Just as well if you're a Sky subscriber, as they are your only option.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons your machines break down

Box freezing 18% Picture freezing 10% Does not record 9%

PVRs

Reliability of PVRs up to six years old

Average = 90%

Bush	(54)	100%
Panasonic	(332)	94%
Sony	(250)	94%
Philips	(116)	92%
Samsung	(69)	92%
JVC	(57)	90%
Sharp	(56)	90%
Thomson	(84)	86%
Sky	(534)	79%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 2,311 owners

You recommend

The favourites among readers surveyed were Panasonic and Sony, with around half who owned these brands saying that they would definitely recommend one to a friend. Sky boxes do well here, too, despite their reliability woes. Bush, Samsung and JVC do reasonably well, but less than a third of Philips, Sharp and Thomson owners would definitely recommend their machines.

YOUR TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

Panasonic (329) 51% Sony (249) 49% Sky (530) 46%

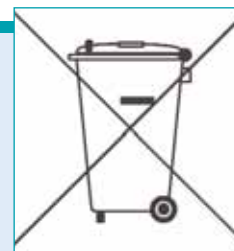
Out with the old

How to get rid of your audiovisual goods

As part of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive, which came into force this month, manufacturers and retailers will have to contribute towards paying for goods to be recycled. However, they are not obliged to offer free collection from your home. Some companies will offer an in-store service where people buying new

products can return old ones free. For more details, go to www.environment-agency.gov.uk/weee or call the Environment Agency on 0870 850 6506.

You can also enter your postcode at the Recycle Now website (www.recyclenow.com) to find out where to recycle in your local area. Schemes such as the Freecycle Network



The WEEE logo

(www.freecycle.org) focus on giving away unwanted working items. The British Heart Foundation also accepts electrical goods in good working order and offers free collection. Visit www.bhf.org.uk for more details.



SKY+ GETS A MINUS MARK

Jann Reinke-Duffy housewife

'I think the Sky+ technology is amazing but it drives us bonkers,' says Jann Reinke-Duffy of south London. Last year, her family had Sky+ installed but had problems viewing some channels, though they could record without any problem. They got a replacement system, but it was still flaky.

'Sometimes we lost the picture, had to go back to BBC1 and then back to the channel we were watching to get the picture back,' Jann told us. Recently they suffered total failure. 'My daughter is devastated that she's lost Toy Story,' she says.

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