

[product news]

One-off reviews of recent launches

All change for lane change

The self-driving car, so beloved of futuristic movies, has edged a little closer with Honda's new lane-keeping assist feature.

The new Accord EX ADAS features a ground-breaking new system – Advanced Driving Assist System (ADAS) – consisting of two complementary systems to aid both driver control and safety at speed. One helps maintain lane control and the other controls speed and distance from the car in front.

Lane Keeping Assist System (LKAS) uses a camera to monitor the car's position within the white lines defining the traffic lane.

At speeds over 45mph it applies gentle directional correction via the electrically-powered steering (EPS) on bends greater than a 200m radius to help keep the car in its lane.

If it can't maintain the line and the car veers outside the lane without you indicating, it beeps at you and a warning light comes on. If you choose to override it, that's OK – it lets you steer but still warns you if you drift across lanes without signalling.

The nearest similar system we know of is Citroën's Lane Departure Warning System (LDWS),

as fitted to the C5, which monitors and warns about lane position but doesn't steer the car.

Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) uses a radar system to recognise the distance to and speed of the vehicle in front. At speeds above 20mph, you set your desired speed and a minimum distance to be maintained from the car in front.

On a clear road, the car will maintain your chosen speed. If the radar senses a car in front, the computer applies the brakes to maintain the preset distance. If the car in front pulls away, the system activates the throttle to return to your preset speed. Jaguar and Mercedes offer similar systems on some vehicles.

We tried the Accord EX ADAS, and the adaptive cruise control effectively maintained our preset distances from cars in front, braking and accelerating smoothly and progressively.

The lane-keeping assist system managed its task quite well. On sweeping bends, system-generated steering inputs were noticeable and held the car's line, but they could be readily overridden by the driver if required.

It's a useful aid, but at higher speeds the warning signal isn't loud enough to drown out the engine

1 A small LKAS camera beside the rear-view mirror monitors the road markings on either side and feeds data to a computer



2 LKAS applies correct steering torque to keep car in the centre of the lane



Finger-tip controls on the steering wheel keep you on the straight and narrow

the gadgeteer

Ever since the US Navy strapped military apparatus to a bunch of dolphins, it's become obvious that animals and gadgets go together well.

The Snackshotz Treat Launcher is a gun to shoot food at your dog.

According to the press release, Snackshotz helps fight dog obesity by encouraging dogs to exercise.

It probably doesn't do much for human obesity, though, as it removes the need to walk across the park and find a stick.

For more information go to www.snackshotz.com



Gadgets a-charging while y

A backpack with a solar panel is just what you need to charge your gadgets on the go. The Juice Bag Daypack and Voltaic Backpack both work well, although less so in overcast skies.

In bright conditions the panels charge a battery pack in about eight hours, around the same time a typical battery charger would take – or you can charge your personal stereo without significantly

drawing on the battery.

In cloudy conditions both bags provide some useful power but only enough to trickle charge the battery.

The Juice Bag works slightly better of the two in dull conditions. It costs £200 from ESC Outdoor (01273 487509, www.esc-outdoor.co.uk).

It is worn as a rucksack or over your shoulder and is easy to pack as it has a zip that

opens the full width of the bag and straps that are easily adjustable.

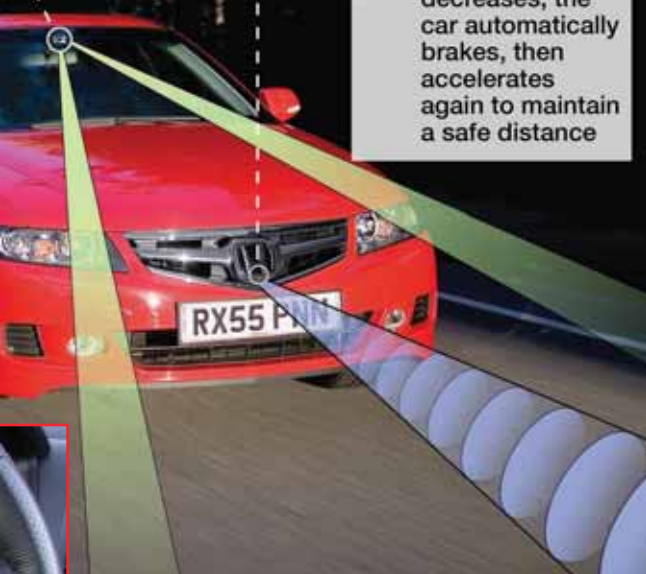
It only has a car lighter outlet so you'll need an in-car battery charger to use it.

The Voltaic, £130 from Natural Collection (0870 331 3333, www.naturalcollection.com), has comfortable straps, numerous pockets and is easy to pack. Many adaptors for mobile phones and other devices are



3 ACC radar sensors behind the Honda badge monitor the distance from the car in front

4 If the gap with the car in front decreases, the car automatically brakes, then accelerates again to maintain a safe distance



and radio noise. You may only notice if you're looking at the display and see the light.

A vibrating signal in the seat, similar to that used by Citroën, would be more effective. It also has problems where the white lines aren't consistently marked – for example, it couldn't pick out lanes around road works, indicated with reflective markers. In this situation the system switches off.

The EXADAS costs £25,880 and competes with a strong line-up of compact executive cars including the Audi A4 3.2FSI, BMW 325i SE, Jaguar X-Type 2.5 V6 SE, Lexus IS250 SE and the Saab 9-3 2.8T Aero.

Verdict Positive progress from Honda, which should improve safety, but it's no substitute for attentive, careful driving. The ACC works well and when the LKAS applies steering inputs, they are effective within the system limits. But when the car veers out of lane, the lane-change warning signal needs to be more apparent.

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENNHOLM

You go a-walking



supplied and there is a charge indicator.

You can either charge up the rechargeable lithium battery pack or run your gadgets from it directly.

Both bags are an improvement on solar devices we've previously tested.

Verdict Both bags are worth considering, and could prove handy on the go or on holidays in the sun.

Musical images

The just-about-pocketable Sony Cyber-shot M2 is a camera with a twist. Not only does it allow you to take snaps and movies, but you can also view slideshows of your photos with background music.

The camera has an internal memory 'album.' If the album option is turned on, the image is stored twice when you take the photo, once on to a removable memory card and once in

mostly easy to use and overall image quality is reasonable.

Shutter delay is great – one of the best we've seen. Battery life is also very good, as is the time delay to the next shot after you've taken one. One thing that we did find a turn-off, however, was that the zoom control buttons were hard to press, being too small and too flush with the body.

Its movie quality is better than that of most other cameras.



the album at a low resolution. The album holds up to 1,100 pictures. These, or those on the memory card, can then be viewed as a slideshow. When the slideshow is activated, the camera displays each photo one by one on its screen, accompanied by music if you want it.

You can control how quickly the pictures change, and you can select one of four music tracks or load your own using a computer and the supplied software.

As a camera, it's OK. It lacks some of the controls that the more enthusiastic photographer will appreciate, but it's

Unlike most others, you can even use the optical zoom while recording.

The Sony Cyber-shot M2 costs £380 from Jessops but there's no memory card supplied.

Verdict An especially good camera for movies and showing your photos, but it's expensive.

Roundup

TVs ONLINE

We've just finished testing a large batch of 40 new TVs. Results are online at which.co.uk/tvs. All the best are high definition ready.

Top is the LCD Panasonic TX-32LXD52 (£1,160), followed by the plasma Panasonic TH-42PV500B (£1,800), the plasma Pioneer PDP 436FDE (£2,260), and the Sony KDL-W40A12U (£2,300).

But among the 40 are some of the worst TVs we've ever seen – full report next month.

WONDER SUIT?

A costly trip to the dry cleaners may soon be a thing of the past. Marks & Spencer claims its newest creation is the first men's suit that can be washed and then tumble dried at home or at the nearest launderette.

At £130 we reckon M&S might have a real hit on its hands, so over the next few weeks we'll see whether the suit matches its billing.

See next month's *Which?* for the results.

Man at M&S? Our man Paul Smith tests the suit

