



17 YEARS
WITHOUT
A BREAK

Lone Frankis 69, retired
Lone Frankis' Miele vacuum cleaner has given her 17 years of faithful service without needing a single repair. She wanted a cleaner that was good on all floor types and bought the Deluxe S228i model in 1989 when we picked it as a Best Buy. 'I knew Miele were reliable because my family were always going on about how good they were,' she said.

OUR SURVEY

Last winter we sent online questionnaires to 18,985 *Which?* readers; 13,754 replied. We asked which appliances they had bought in the past six years, whether they had broken down and why. We also asked if they would recommend their brand to

a friend. The results were weighted according to the age of each machine.

KEY TO RESULTS

- Good reliability
- Average reliability
- Poor reliability

Appliances you can really trust

We reveal the most – and least – reliable brands of kitchen appliance and vacuum cleaner

Want to buy a freezer that's 100 per cent reliable? Or avoid wasting your money on a washing machine with a 30 per cent chance of breaking down? Then read on. Our annual product reliability survey draws together the experiences of 13,754 *Which?* readers to reveal Britain's most – and least – reliable brands for home appliances and audio-visual goods. This month we turn the spotlight on home appliances. Next month we reveal the winners and losers in home entertainment.

The winning formula

Bosch and Miele make ultra-reliable washing machines and dishwashers, according to our survey, and they are also the brands you are most likely to recommend to pals. Miele also makes reliable cylinder vacuums.

LG gets high praise for its fridge-freezers and upright vacuums, while AEG/AEG-Electrolux gets good ratings for its washer-dryers and tumble dryers. Special praise goes to Siemens freezers – they hadn't let down a single reader in their first six years.

Hotpoint and Hoover fared badly in our survey. Their washing machines and washer-dryers are both among the least reliable, as are Hotpoint's dishwashers. It's bad news, too, if you own a Dyson. It makes the least reliable cylinder and upright vacuums.

Doing the laundry

Buy a washing machine and tumble dryer rather than a washer-dryer – the latter tend to be mediocre at drying. Washer-dryers are also the least reliable of the three, though if you buy two separate machines rather than one you will probably need a repairman just as often.

Washing machines

Around one in six washing machines up to six years old has broken down, according to our survey, but the failure rate is almost double that if you own a Hotpoint. If you want to beat the washday blues, buy a Bosch or Miele, which both have a breakdown rate of just 12 per cent.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down

- 14% Pump/hose not draining properly
- 13% Problems with doors
- 12% Motor problems

Best Buys

If you want to buy a Miele or Bosch, there are several Best Buys (see p52-56). The Miele W3240, £760, produces great results on both short programs and cotton washes. The Bosch WBB 24759 Logixx (right), £900, has a 9kg capacity, making it ideal for large families. At the budget end we pick the Bosch WFL 2067, £270.

You recommend

Over 80 per cent of Miele owners would definitely recommend their washing machine to a friend. Owners of Bosch, AEG/AEG-Electrolux and Siemens machines were also keen to spread the word. By contrast, just under a quarter of Hoover owners would definitely recommend their machine. Owners of Hotpoint, Indesit, Whirlpool, Servis, Candy and Zanussi/Zanussi-Electrolux machines weren't impressed by their purchases either.



WASHING MACHINES

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 83%

Bosch	(2,777)	88%
Miele	(368)	88%
AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(474)	86%
Siemens	(190)	86%
Candy	(83)	83%
Whirlpool	(157)	83%
Zanussi/Zanussi-Electrolux	(726)	83%
LG	(129)	81%
Service	(62)	78%
Indesit	(180)	75%
Hoover	(210)	73%
Hotpoint	(627)	70%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 6,349 owners

Washer-dryers

Washer-dryers are the least reliable laundry product, with a quarter of all machines breaking down within six years of purchase. The complexities of having both a washing machine and tumble dryer combined means the chances of a problem occurring seem to increase.

However, AEG/AEG-Electrolux is one brand which is bucking the trend – less than 20 per cent of its washer-dryers up to six years old needed a repair. The brands to avoid are Hoover and Hotpoint. With over a third of models made by both brands breaking down within the first six years, owners might want to check the location of their nearest launderette now, just in case.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down

- 14% Main control not working
- 13% Pump not draining properly
- 12% Drum not rotating

Best Buys

We do not have any current Best Buy washer-dryers, but we are testing the latest range of products from major brands to see how they perform. Results will be published in *Which?* in October 2006.

You recommend

Bosch is the top rated washer-dryer brand among *Which?* readers, but with only 62 per cent of respondents definitely recommending their brand, it is clear that fewer of you are impressed with your washer-dryer than you are with other appliances. AEG/AEG-Electrolux is also rated above-average by readers, but Indesit and Hoover would receive a recommendation from just 16 per cent of their owners. Hotpoint fares slightly better, but still only 26 per cent of owners would recommend it.

WASHER-DRYERS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 73%

AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(81)	81%
Bosch	(121)	77%
Zanussi/Zanussi-Electrolux	(339)	73%
Indesit	(81)	69%
Hoover	(68)	65%
Hotpoint	(112)	65%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 1,010 owners

Tumble dryers



Tumble dryers are the most reliable laundry appliances – only 12 per cent of machines up to six years old had needed a repair in our survey and no brands received a 'poor' rating. The most reliable brand of the lot is AEG/AEG-Electrolux.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down

- 17% Drive belt trouble
- 13% Problems with controls
- 12% Door difficulties

Best Buys

AEG-Electrolux doesn't just stand out in our reliability survey – it also does well in our performance tests. The AEG-Electrolux T59800 (above), £700, is one of our top-scoring models and is one of the first of a new generation with better energy efficiency ratings. It dries swiftly and evenly and is easy to use. The AEG T57810, £585, offers a good range of drying times

and convenient features. The AEG T56800, £400, is great for those who hate ironing because it leaves fewer creases than any of our other Best Buys, while the AEG T57800, £469 online, doesn't have any weak spots. If you are looking for a vented tumble drier the AEG T37400, £229, offers good value.

You recommend

Around four-fifths of you who own a Miele would definitely recommend it to a friend. Bosch and AEG/AEG-Electrolux owners are also keen to spread the word. But only around 30 per cent or fewer of *Which?* readers with a Hotpoint, Hoover, Indesit, Creda, or Candy tumble dryer would definitely tell friends to go out and buy one.

TUMBLE DRYERS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 88%

AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(221)	92%
Tricity Bendix	(53)	90%
Bosch	(605)	88%
Candy	(83)	88%
Creda	(683)	88%
Hoover	(112)	88%
Indesit	(71)	88%
Miele	(150)	88%
White Knight	(482)	88%
Zanussi/Zanussi-Electrolux	(429)	88%
Hotpoint	(542)	86%
Whirlpool	(217)	86%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 3,946 owners

Two reasons not to buy a warranty

If you pick a Best Buy kitchen appliance, don't waste your money on an extended warranty. With reliability rates of around 80 per cent for most quality brands, chances are you'll never make a claim. The figures below show just how much you could be throwing down the drain.

Reason 1

Average cost of a Best Buy washing machine*	= £549
Cost of a five-year warranty from Comet	= £170
Average reliability of five-year-old washing machines	= 86%
Chances of making a claim during warranty	= 1:7

* Average price of 11 Best Buys in latest report, p52-56

Reason 2

Average cost of washing machine repair	= £71*
Cost of five-year warranty	= £170
Average amount wasted if machine breaks once in five years	= £99
Average amount wasted if machine breaks twice in five years	= £28
Number of times machine needs to break to justify warranty purchase	= 3**

* Based on responses from 912 *Which?* readers. Survey conducted 2005

** Based on average repair cost

Keeping your cool

On the whole, breakdowns are a rare occurrence on refrigeration appliances. Fridge-freezers are slightly less reliable than stand-alone fridges and freezers, but you are getting two products in one.

Fridge-freezers



One in ten fridge-freezers up to six years old goes wrong. The most reliable brand is LG, with a breakdown rate of just 5 per cent. Maytag and Whirlpool are the least reliable brands – 20 per cent of Maytags up to six years old have needed a repair.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top two reasons why your machines broke down
24% Thermostat failure
16% Door difficulty

Best Buys

No LG fridge-freezers have performed well enough in recent tests to be Best Buys. The Bosch KGU30605GB Classixx, (left), £300, performed well on test and is a better option.

You recommend

The brand most frequently recommended by readers is Bosch, followed by Liebherr, Miele, Samsung and – despite its unreliability – Maytag.

FRIDGE-FREEZERS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 89%

LG	(153)	95%
Beko	(185)	92%
Liebherr	(93)	92%
Neff	(109)	92%
Bosch	(916)	89%
Candy	(67)	89%
Electrolux	(138)	89%
Hotpoint	(523)	89%
Indesit	(60)	89%
Samsung	(290)	89%
Servis	(62)	89%
Zanussi	(271)	89%
AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(111)	86%
Hoover	(73)	86%
Lec	(91)	86%
Miele	(82)	86%
Siemens	(101)	86%
Whirlpool	(199)	83%
Maytag	(75)	80%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 4,067 owners

Freezers



Freezers are the most reliable appliances in this survey – four in a hundred need repair in their first six years. Chest freezers are more reliable than uprights. Siemens and Lec are the most reliable brands; least reliable are AEG/AEG-Electrolux and Proline.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top two reasons why your machines broke down
24% Thermostat problems
16% Condenser breakdown

Best Buys

The Bosch GSL14425GB, £250, is a Best Buy worktop-height freezer. If you want a tall freezer, the Whirlpool AFG 3680 (above), £400, is a Best Buy.

You recommend

Bosch, Miele and Liebherr are the brands you're most likely to recommend to a friend.

Fridges

All the major brands of fridge are pretty reliable, with none scoring below 90 per cent in our survey. Beko and Neff came joint top in our survey, with a breakdown rate of just 3 per cent over six years.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down
40% Thermostat problems
21% Door difficulties
12% Accessories broken



Best Buys

Currently our Best Buy tall fridge is the Hotpoint RLA61 (below), £280 – now named RLA64 after a few cosmetic changes. It maintains a steady temperature and cools food quickly. Although not one of the most reliable brands in our survey, with only one in ten Hotpoints up to six years old needing a repair, we have no hesitations in recommending it.

If you want a fridge that fits under your worktop, the Bosch KTR18425GB, £230, is our current Best Buy. It has a large capacity and several useful features such as shelves that slide out on rollers for easy access and refilling.

There are no current Best Buys from Beko or Neff.

You recommend

Bosch is the fridge brand most often recommended by Which?

FRIDGES

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 93 per cent

Beko	(243)	97%
Neff	(137)	97%
Lec	(157)	95%
Whirlpool	(188)	95%
Bosch	(614)	93%
Siemens	(56)	93%
AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(130)	91%
Electrolux	(157)	91%
Frigidaire	(83)	91%
Hotpoint	(463)	91%
Liebherr	(82)	91%
Miele	(116)	91%
Zanussi	(150)	91%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 3,061 owners

readers. Other favourites are Miele, Liebherr, Siemens and AEG/AEG-Electrolux.

Only around one in three of you who owns an Electrolux, Frigidaire, Hotpoint, Lec or Whirlpool would definitely recommend it to a friend.

FREEZERS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 96 per cent

Siemens	(53)	100%
Lec	(122)	99%
Beko	(172)	98%
Frigidaire	(99)	98%
Miele	(83)	98%
Bosch	(607)	96%
Electrolux	(193)	96%
Hotpoint	(383)	96%
Iceland	(73)	96%
Zanussi	(160)	96%
Liebherr	(75)	95%
Whirlpool	(222)	95%
AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(112)	93%
Proline	(97)	93%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 2,975 owners

Cleaning up

Cylinder vacuum cleaners are far more reliable than uprights. One in four uprights needs a repair in the first six years, compared with fewer than one in ten cylinders.

However, these headline figures do not reveal the whole story, as two brands have muddied the waters. Unreliable Dyson (below) dominates ownership of uprights among our survey respondents and if you remove their figures from the mix, the average reliability rating for upright vacs is a far more respectable 85 per cent.

Similarly, if you remove star brand Miele from the cylinder vacuum market, overall reliability there falls to 87 per cent.

There is another reason to buy a cylinder, though – they tend to pick up more dust.



Upright vacuum cleaners

It is bad news for Dyson, as for the seventh year in a row it has come bottom of our reliability survey for upright cleaners. This year a scary 31 per cent of Dyson vacs up to six years old had needed a repair.

According to our readers, one of the main reasons for a Dyson needing repairs is a split or broken hose – over ten times more Dysons had this problem than all other vacs combined. This is not a terminal problem and is easy to fix – Dyson will supply you with a new hose for £23 (free if your vac is under two years old). But it is still pretty irritating. More serious is the fact that Dysons are also prone to breakdowns because of problems with power and suction – nearly twice as many as other cleaners, in fact.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down
25% Split/broken hose
22% Lack of suction
19% Power problems

If you want to buy an upright, there are some consistently reliable brands available. For the fourth year running Sebo, Panasonic and Electrolux come top in our survey. To this elite list, we can also add LG.



Dyson's are also prone to breakdowns because of problems with power and suction

Best Buys

Plenty of people prefer upright cleaners, but few are as good as a cylinder at keeping the house clean. Dyson uprights do clean as well as cylinders, but poor reliability prevents us from recommending them.

The Sebo Felix 1 Premium (left), £230, is the one to buy. It's not only a reliable brand but is also a top-drawer cleaner. Its main strength is on laminate floors but it is also great at cleaning pet hair from carpets.

You recommend

Sebo and Oreck were the brands most likely to be recommended to a friend.

UPRIGHT VACUUMS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 74%

Sebo	(241)	92%
LG	(85)	86%
Panasonic	(299)	83%
Electrolux	(224)	80%
Oreck	(54)	77%
Hoover	(285)	72%
Dyson	(2,775)	69%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 4,337 owners

Cylinder vacuum cleaners

More than 50 per cent of you who have a cylinder cleaner own a Miele, and it seems to be a great choice. Just 4 per cent of them up to six years old have broken down, which is an impressive result.

As it did the previous year, Dyson came rock bottom in our survey. Electrolux also has poor reliability.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down
18% Power problems
17% Suction difficulties
16% Split/ broken hose

Looking at the reasons why cleaners broke down, five times as many Dyson owners had problems with power and suction than all the other brands combined.

Best Buys

In our last nine vacuum-cleaner tests Miele has consistently produced good results, and five out of seven of our current Best Buy cylinder vacuum cleaners are Miele. The Miele S4510 (right), £166 online, Miele S5210, £140, and Miele S4210, £119, are excellent all-round cleaners, especially on wooden and laminated floors. The Miele S380, £88 online, is the cheapest Best Buy model but that low price doesn't mean a sacrifice in quality. The Miele Parquet & Co, £150 online, is designed for parquet floor but also does a great job on carpet.

If you don't fancy Miele, you can do a lot worse than buying a Bosch. With 94 per cent reliability you can also be reasonably confident your

new purchase won't break down. The Bosch BSG72025GB Pro Pets, £110 online, does a great job on all floor types and is the best for picking up pet hair. The BSG 71810 Formula, £90, produces fantastic results on wooden and laminate flooring but is not quite as good on carpets.

You recommend

Not surprisingly, Miele is the cylinder vacuum cleaner brand that is most often recommended by you to your friends. Numatic, maker of the iconic Henry vacuum cleaner, is also popular with its owners.

By contrast, just under a quarter of Electrolux owners would recommend their cleaner, while Panasonic and Dyson also get less than favourable ratings.



CYLINDER VACUUMS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 92%

Miele	(1,732)	96%
Bosch	(232)	94%
Numatic	(125)	94%
Panasonic	(74)	92%
Electrolux	(200)	88%
Dyson	(517)	84%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 3,299 owners

Dishwashers



Dishwashers are pretty reliable, with 14 per cent up to six years old needing a repair on average.

It's a hat-trick for Bosch and Neff, as for the third year on the trot they top our brand league table. Joining them on the podium are Miele and Siemens. The least reliable brands, according to our survey, are Indesit, Hotpoint and Zanussi/Zanussi-Electrolux.

BREAKDOWN SUMMARY

The top three reasons why your machines broke down
19% Not draining
14% Pump problems
12% Door difficulties

Best Buys

The Miele G 1230 SC (left), £650, is currently the best dishwasher we've tested. It's a bit pricey but it's outstanding on its main and economy programs, with unblemished results for cleaning and drying. If you can find it, the Miele G 1220 SC, £530, is virtually identical and much cheaper. The Siemens SE55M570GB, £520, is our Best Buy semi-integrated dishwasher, while if you are looking for a built-in model, our Best Buys include

the Miele G 1270 SCVi, £850, and Neff S5457, £570.

You recommend

Owners of Miele, Bosch and Siemens are most likely to recommend their brands to friends.

DISHWASHERS

Reliability of machines up to six years old. Average = 86%

Bosch	(1,857)	91%
Miele	(347)	91%
Neff	(306)	91%
Siemens	(189)	91%
Electrolux	(55)	86%
AEG/AEG-Electrolux	(314)	84%
Whirlpool	(240)	84%
Hotpoint	(291)	81%
Zanussi/Zanussi-Electrolux	(199)	81%
Indesit	(147)	74%

Sample size in brackets. Total sample: 4,490 owners

Checklist

If an appliance breaks down within the first 12 months of purchase, the maker's guarantee should cover the cost of any repair. Here's what to do after that.

■ **Make a claim** After the first 12 months you may still be able to make a claim. A key statutory right is that every product you buy must last for a reasonable length of time.

■ **Six years** This can be up to six years after you've made a purchase (five years in Scotland), depending on the product. Most appliances in our survey are considered to have life spans of over five years.

■ **Defect present?** If you want to make a claim, the breakdown must be as a result of a defect that was present at the time of purchase, though you needn't have been aware of it.

■ **Talk to the retailer** Claims should be made against the retailer, not the maker. Contact the head office of the retailer and explain that the product hasn't lasted a reasonable amount of time. Tell them that you'd like it investigated and either repaired or replaced if it is faulty.

■ **Prove it** The maker may ask you to provide evidence of any fault if your product is more than six months old. The easiest way to do this is to contact an independent repairer and ask it to prepare a report. You should be able to claim back up to £200 for the cost of the report.

■ **Repair or refund** Once the problems has been identified as a manufacturing fault, contact the retailer and you'll be entitled to a repair or a full or partial refund, depending on the nature of the problem and how much you've used the product.

■ See 'Salim gets £1,100', p80, to read how one member obtained a refund with our help.

BEST PLACES TO BUY

So you've opted to get a Best Buy Bosch washing machine. Now where are you going to buy it?

We interviewed more than 2,000 shoppers in 80 locations across Britain in November and December 2005 to see how they rated a range of electrical retailers.

The best store – and by a clear margin – is John Lewis, according to our survey. Shoppers were impressed by the products it offered (including the range and quality), with 76 per cent of the people we asked rating it either excellent or very good. John Lewis also came out on top for customer service.

Local specialist shops also did well in our survey, again scoring highly for their customer service.

Supermarkets Asda and Tesco were rated the most convenient places to buy electricals and got top marks for their low prices.

But there is bad news for some of Britain's best-known stores. Argos, Comet, Currys and Dixons received below-average overall satisfaction scores. Powerhouse did even worse, scoring badly across the board.

RETAILER	RATINGS (%)					
	PRODUCTS	CONVENIENCE	CUSTOMER SERVICE	PRICING	IN-STORE EXPERIENCE	OVERALL SATISFACTION
1 JOHN LEWIS (132)	76	50	74	57	64	79.8
2 LOCAL SPECIALIST (112)	54	59	68	33	59	74.2
3 ASDA (109)	58	74	61	66	57	73.9
4 TESCO (112)	60	69	60	70	66	73.6
5 CO-OP (106)	60	58	55	48	52	71.6
6 ARGOS (224)	63	58	47	60	49	67.6
7 COMET (194)	59	55	55	54	50	67.0
8 PC WORLD (121)	63	50	54	38	53	66.7
9 CURRYS (196)	64	51	60	51	54	65.8
10 DIXONS (157)	54	47	50	37	49	63.0
11 POWERHOUSE (101)	45	41	49	31	45	60.8
AVERAGE SCORES	60	55	56	51	53	68.0

USING THE TABLE

Retailers

Since our survey was conducted, Dixons stores have been

rebranded as Currys.digital. Sample size is in brackets.

Ratings

Figures are the percentage of

respondents who rated each store as excellent or very good in that category.

Overall satisfaction Score out of 100.