

[all change]

We review new products

Shoe mouse

Sometimes our zest for new products exceeds our good sense, as with our shoe 'sniff' test on the Shoe Mouse (Lakeland, £12.95).

When you put this battery-operated gizmo in smelly shoes after wearing them, it emits a squeak for two minutes, which, says Lakeland, 'breaks down odour-causing bacteria, sanitising and deodorising shoes.'

We asked five volunteers to use the



The Shoe Mouse kills bad smells

mouse in one shoe for a month. We then asked if they could smell the difference.

Four of our testers thought it made some difference, albeit small. The effects were most apparent right after treatment, when a faint whiff of ozone replaced 'the cheesy smell'. The effects lasted a few hours.

Our testers judged the device no better than other odour-killing methods. Even so, three testers thought they'd buy one, to keep shoes smelling squeaky-clean.

A fridge-freezer for all seasons

The Siemens VarioZone KG28XM40GB is the first of its kind – a mix-and-match fridge and freezer. You can change the two compartments of this model into pretty much any combination to suit your chilling and freezing needs. For example, if you were preparing for a party, and needed to chill wine and canapés, you could convert both compartments to fridge mode in time for the festivities.

As a conventional fridge-freezer, with the lower compartment as a freezer and the upper as a fridge, the VarioZone was as good as our current Best Buys, scoring ★ as a fridge and ★ as a freezer.

Converting the lower compartment to a fridge worked well, too. It's easy to manage the conversion process by scrolling through the different menus on the LCD panel and selecting the right settings. However, to get the most out of VarioZone, you do need to follow a few guidelines. For example, if you convert the upper compartment to a freezer, the

temperature is lowered to only -7°C, which means it's suitable for storing pre-frozen foods such as ice cream for up to a week, but isn't suitable for long-term storage or for freezing fresh foods.

Our only criticism is that it can take several hours more than the two hours claimed by the manufacturer to chill the normal fridge to a freezer temperature. So some planning ahead is essential.

The VarioZone is pricey, at £774 from www.tribaluk.com, but it's cheap to run and worth considering if you want the extra flexibility it offers. If you're not after a stainless steel finish, you might be tempted by the Bosch FlexiMaxx KGX28M20, £699 from www.pantheronline.co.uk. This model uses the same technology, but is white and has small differences in the exterior and interior design. If all you're after is a conventional fridge-freezer, our top scoring model in our last test was the Hotpoint FFA81P, £470.



Pure launches

Pure is well known for its digital radios, so we were eager to test its micro system, the Pure Legato (£349 from John Lewis), which combines a single-disc CD player, built-in amplifier and FM and DAB radio tuners.

Most impressive is the DAB radio's ReVu

function, which lets you pause a live broadcast and resume listening later. You can normally store about 20 minutes of output and can rewind or fast forward to replay sections of a stored broadcast.

However, the speakers aren't great,

Micro and mini hi-fis

MODEL

1 Denon DM31S

2 Pure Legato

	Price (£)	Features					Use Ease of use	Sound quality			Score (%)
		MP3 CDs	Amp	Radio	CD	Tape		Radio reception	CD	Tape	
1 Denon DM31S	280		IIII	III	II		●	★	☆		67
2 Pure Legato	349	✓	III	IIII	III		☆	★	●		58

er

Keep it cool: the Siemens has two compartments that can each be used as a fridge or a freezer

WHICH? EXTRA

For results on 27 fridge-freezers, including reliability, see www.which.co.uk/fridgefreezers



its first hi-fi

which means that sound quality suffers. Our expert panel was particularly disappointed by the CD sound. It's nowhere near as smooth sounding as the Best Buy Denon DM31S (see 'Beautiful music', *Which?*, November 2004, p36). The clarity of speech on the DAB radio was also fuzzy.

The Legato has other flaws. The nine-second delay before a CD starts feels too long, and the volume jumps irritatingly when you switch between modes.

TABLE NOTES

Features

MP3 CDs Will play MP3 recordings on CD. III These ratings summarise all desirable features for each component (the more III, the better).

SCORE

This ignores price and is based on:

Sound quality	60%
Ease of use	25%
Features	15%

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ●	
Best	Worst
■ Best Buy	

Barcode microwave not on our wavelength

A microwave that knows what it's cooking and sets itself accordingly sounds like a great idea.

The Beyond Microwave oven, £140, has a barcode scanning 'wand' built into it, with 2,500 barcodes stored in its memory.

In theory, you just scan the barcode of the product you want to cook with the wand and the microwave automatically sets the appropriate cooking time.

However, when we tested it, we were less than impressed. We tried it on 53 microwavable products bought from nine supermarket chains – including ready meals such as lasagne,

chilli and sausage and mash. It failed to recognise 31 of these entirely and, with those that it did recognise, it didn't always cook them properly.

The manufacturer has tried to tailor cooking times to suit the oven. Unfortunately it doesn't always seem to have got it right. In most cases, the cooking times differ from what is stated on the food's packaging for a microwave of this power.

Sometimes the oven overcooked food but, more seriously, four products were undercooked, failing to reach a safe temperature for killing off bacteria.

You can 'teach' the microwave cooking times for products that

it hasn't got in its memory banks but, from what we've seen, we think the barcode scanner is a gimmick.

If you bypass this feature, it can actually reheat a ready meal well but it can't defrost items such as mince evenly without beginning to cook the meat at the edges – it rates as a ● on our defrosting scale.

Overall, this is an average microwave oven with a gimmicky feature that's best avoided – and it's very expensive for a solo microwave oven.

For information on other microwave ovens that do the job much better, see last month's main report, 'Hot stuff' (*Which?*, March 2005, p38).

