

# [product news]

One-off reviews of recent launches



## Roundup

### SKYGNOME

The Skygnome is a triangular device that relays audio from your Sky satellite TV box to anywhere in your house. Its range is said to be up to 30 metres. TV without pictures may sound daft, but don't forget that Sky provides dozens of digital radio channels, too. We're planning to test it as soon as it's released.

### ALBA DVD RECORDER

DVD recorders were very expensive – nearly £1,000 – when they launched but prices have been tumbling ever since. Alba has launched a model, the RDVD 1000, that's the cheapest yet – £99. But is it any good? We're putting it through its paces and will give you our verdict soon.

### DUALIT MINI OVEN

Famous for its iconic toasters, Dualit has just launched a table-top oven. Designed for small spaces, or as an extra oven when you're entertaining, the oven has defrost, bake, grill and convection functions. We'll be reporting on it early next year.

## New vacuums disappoint

There's a strange kind of circularity about vacuum cleaners. Back in 1956, *Which?*'s first ever vac report recommended Hoover's Constellation Cleaner: a wheel-less cylinder machine that floated on air. Nearly 50 years later, a new attempt at marrying vacuum cleaner with hovercraft technology has appeared, in the form of the cylinder Air Rider (£230 mail order from 0845 606 6832 or [www.airrider.co.uk/home](http://www.airrider.co.uk/home)).

Meanwhile, the original pioneer, Hoover, has redesigned and relaunched The One model, an expensive bagless upright that scored just 14 per cent in our 2004 tests. With another big ad campaign behind it, we were keen to see whether the new version, Hoover The One Touch (£200, widely available) was an improvement.

Sadly, both the Air Rider and the Hoover did badly in our tests. The Air Rider's results are particularly poor: we found it picks up less than 50 per cent of dust, even with an empty bag. The Hoover One Touch begins promisingly, collecting around 70 per cent of dust when empty. But pick-up dwindles to about half when the machine fills up. By comparison, the cylinder Miele S571, best on test in our last vacs report (see table), picks up 75 per cent of dust and doesn't lose suction as the bag fills. Neither of the new vacs coped well with pet hair, but both models achieved much better results on laminate floors, and the Hoover cleans floorboards well. We also found no major problems using these machines. However, while the Air Rider,

Vacuum cleaners	Price	Cleaning				Using				Score
	(£)	Carpet	Laminate	Wooden	Pet hair	Moving	Stairs	Emptying	Noise	(%)
<b>MODEL</b>										
1 Miele S571	125	☆	★	★	○	☆	☆	★	☆	70
2 Hoover The One Touch	200	●	☆	☆	●	●	○	○	●	43
3 Air Rider ARG 101-A	230	●	★	●	●	☆	○	○	○	20

## Time for a wristwatch TV?

A watch that's also a TV is the telly addict's dream. The NHJ Wearable VTV-201 is the rather flawed reality.

It's an analogue TV with a 1.5-inch colour screen. Cramping all the electronics into a device you can wear on your wrist is, without doubt, a technological feat. And, considering the size of the screen, the picture quality is

acceptable, but actually using it is a pain. The trouble is that the headphone lead acts as the aerial and, to achieve a decent reception, you often find yourself waving your arm around semaphore-style trying to get a watchable picture. When you eventually get the right spot, it's often not in a particularly comfortable

Picture quality is OK – but reception is unreliable





Neither Air Rider (far left) nor Hoover The One Touch (below) are great vacs

with its cushion of air, was certainly easy to manoeuvre, our lab has rated other machines – such as the Miele Xtra Power 2300, another Best Buy from our last test – higher for this.

**Verdict** Although the hovercraft idea is fun, the Air Rider's poor pick-up abilities mean it's best avoided, which is why we've made it a Don't Buy. The Hoover is better than its predecessor, and good on hard floors, but we don't recommend it for carpet cleaning.

#### USING THE TABLE Cleaning

**Carpet/Laminate/Wooden** How well the vac picks up and retains dust from these surfaces.  
**Pet hair** How efficiently the vac collects pet hair from carpet.

#### SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:

Cleaner/filter	55%
Using	35%
Noise/energy	10%

#### Using

**Moving** How easy it is to manoeuvre the vac on carpet. **Stairs** How easy it is to use the vac on stairs. **Emptying** How easy it is to empty the dust canister. **Noise** The higher the rating, the quieter the vac.

#### KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●  
Best —————> Worst  
■ Best Buy ■ Don't Buy

position for prolonged viewing. You change channels by pushing a button to scan across the frequencies. Unfortunately, the sound doesn't mute while it does this, and you're subjected to loud squawking noises while it finds the next channel, which isn't very pleasant.

Battery life is limited – you get about an hour of viewing between charges. And would you really want to wear this

watch? While undeniably small for a telly, it's chunky and unstylish for a watch – definitely not one for the fashion-conscious. Watch functions are very limited: you push a button and it displays time and date for a few seconds in 70s-style digital format – hardly the cutting edge of chronology. It costs £130 online.

**Verdict** A neat idea but the reality disappoints. Not recommended.

## Flavour shaker

Jamie Oliver, the naked chef and saviour of school meals, has come up with a new kitchen gadget. The Flavour Shaker consists of a plastic container with a ball inside for whipping up marinades, seasonings and dressings. He reckons that it will 'change your cooking for life'. We can't help feeling that he's overstating it a little.

It looks like a miniature bowling skittle, with two halves that come apart so you can add ingredients such as herbs, spices, garlic, seeds, oils and vinegars. After screwing it back together, you just shake it and the heavy white ball 'crushes, grinds, blends and mixes' the contents.

Our trialists gave it mixed reviews. Some



Jamie Oliver's alternative to the pestle and mortar is no great shakes



found it quite an effort to crush garlic, and fresh ginger defeated them completely. The result didn't always impress – with tougher items, such as nuts, they didn't always get the right consistency. Some found it was good fun, dancing round the kitchen while they shook, but others thought it wouldn't suit elderly or infirm people because of the vigorous shaking required.

Essentially it's an alternative to a traditional pestle and mortar or electric coffee grinder for grinding up

herbs and spices, with the bonus that you can add 'wet' ingredients such as oils, too. However, none of our trialists thought it outperformed this more conventional equipment. Would they buy one? Almost all said no. And they were shocked to be told the price – £20. 'You've got to be kidding,' said one. 'Wouldn't pay more than a fiver for it,' said another.

**Verdict** Fun product that can produce decent results, but overpriced.

## the gadgeteer

### Gadgeteer #14 iDog

For years mankind has basked in the companionship of canines – for three reasons: dogs can't answer back, they're easily amused by fetching sticks, and they can always muster a doleful look when they've done something bad. If dogs have a weakness, it is that they have no rhythm. The iDog changes all that. Plug it into an MP3 player, or place it next to a hi-fi, and it dances (well, flaps its ears in time to the beat). According to the press release, iDog is able to convey its 'mood and personality' through a series of coloured lights mounted on its forehead. Just imagine how the acting careers of Keanu Reeves and Arnold Schwarzenegger could have been enhanced by a similar system. The iDog costs £30 in toy shops.

