

# [all change]

We review new products

## Powerful batteries

Disposable batteries can be a lifesaver but they often have a short life. However, Energizer e2 Lithium and Panasonic Digital Xtreme Power claim a much longer life in very high-drain products such as digital cameras.

We tested the AA size of both against AA Duracell Ultra M3 batteries, the top scorers from our last big test.

In all four of our tests, Energizer lasted the longest. Duracell came

second except in the test of the batteries in digital cameras, where it came third behind Panasonic.

Energizers are clearly the best batteries overall, but they're expensive at around £6 for two. For digital cameras, the Panasonics are a better value at £4.50 for four, offering more photos per pound.

For other high-drain use, such as in remote-controlled toys, Duracell Ultra M3s are long lived and, at £4 for four, very good value. Duracell Plus (£3) is a cheaper alternative.

# Lacklustre finish in a flash

There was no shortage of volunteers to try Flash's new car wash, a hand-held spray gun that attaches to your garden hose. Eleven car washers offered to test this 'revolutionary' new car wash system. But by the end of the trial they weren't so keen: only one said they'd recommend the product to a friend, and two of our volunteers ended up getting drenched when the product's connection seal broke.

To use the device, you insert the wash filters, fill with shampoo and connect to a hosepipe. Next, set the dial to rinse and spray the car. Then set the dial to shampoo, spray soap on and scrub with a sponge (not provided). Next, set the dial to rinse, spray on water and remove the suds. Finally, set it to auto dry, spray on the filtered water and leave to dry.

Many of our volunteers said that the soap didn't give a good lather and that dirty areas took a few tries. A few of our triallists felt that the soap lacked cleaning power. One even gave up and resorted to using washing-up liquid instead. The 'special

de-ionising rinse' that claims to dry without leaving marks was more of a success, however, with over half of our triallists reporting a better finish than with ordinary water. Some people still gave their cars the once-over with a leather cloth, though, to remove spots and streaks.

Flash's claim that you get a showroom finish without the need to hand dry and polish was thought to be an exaggeration by most of our volunteers, as it implies a waxed finish. It doesn't compare with a standard wax or polish.

Lots of our volunteers were put off by the ongoing cost of replacements for the system. When you've spent £20 or more on a car-wash product, you might be a little miffed to discover that you'll have to spend a total of £8 on soap and filter replacements every ten or so washes.

On the upside, people generally found it easy to use, but we don't think that's a good enough reason to buy this expensive and gimmicky product.

## the gadgeteer

### #10 Hal-5 Robot Suit

What greater interface of man and machine could there be than a robotic suit that grants you super-human strength? The HAL-5 works by detecting the electrical nerve impulses of the wearer's muscle movements and synchronising its electric motors with them. The suit is designed to be used in emergencies (earthquakes or when the power steering in your car fails) and to help workers carry heavy loads. Strangely, the makers have chosen to demonstrate this enormous power by photographing the suit lifting a six-stone woman – hardly superhuman.

HAL-5 can also help old and disabled people get about, so don't be surprised if an octogenarian wins Olympic gold for weightlifting. It's not available yet, but in 20 years we'll all be wearing them...



## Sony's

We tested Sony's NW-HD1 music player for our May 2005 issue. Although we didn't think it was quite as good as the iPod (it wasn't as easy to use and sound quality with supplied headphones wasn't up to scratch), it was still impressive. However, it was let down by not being able to play MP3s, the oldest and most popular format for compressed digital music. This has been



PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENHOLM, STUDIO 21

## Three in one

If you're a gadget lover who likes multitasking, check out the versatile Sonorix OBH-0100, a portable 128MB audio player combined with a wireless stereo headset.

At around £100 online, it doesn't seem cheap, but the list of functions is impressive.

There are three ways to use it: standalone music player, PC headset, or mobile phone hands-free device. It also comes with Bluetooth, which lets electronic devices communicate wirelessly over short distances (up to 10m).

We found that the Sonorix does everything it claims to but not equally well.

As an MP3/WMA music player, the sound is dull and lifeless – a long way short of our Best Buy iPod Shuffle. Irritatingly, you can adjust the bass and treble only via a PC.

It can store the equivalent of a couple



This Sonorix headset is also a music player and mobile phone hands-free device

of hours of music (or even some data, such as Excel files), which can be wirelessly transferred from your PC. The 'dongle' supplied enables you to connect even if your PC doesn't have Bluetooth.

Pairing it with a Bluetooth mobile phone enhances the sound well and, depending on your mobile's functionality, it will allow voice dialling. It also allows you to listen to broadcasts from the internet (called streaming) via both

your mobile and PC. But if cabin fever kicks in, the headphones include an integral microphone, which allows you to talk over the internet with real people.

However, there are a few niggles. The padded headphones are comfortable but not adjustable, while the multi-function controls are confusing and awkward – even the nimble-fingered will take time to get used to them. But if you love gadgets and you hate wires, this product could be for you.

## latest MP3 player

fixed on the MP3-compatible NW-HD3.

The HD3, which comes in red, lilac, black and silver, is easy to use – the buttons and the menus are logically laid out and easy to

understand, although some minor control markings are a bit indistinct. As with the HD1, sound quality with the headphones supplied is only average, but Best Buy headphones

improve it. Sony has now started talking up the even newer NW-HD5 (around £200), which it claims has a longer battery life than the HD3. We'll be testing the HD5 in a future report.



**KEY**

★ ☆ ○ ● ●

Best —————> Worst

■ Best Buy

### MP3 players

#### MODEL

	Specification				Sound quality		Convenience		Score
	Price (£)	Weight (g)	Dimensions (hwxwd) (mm)	Memory supplied	Supplied headphones	Best Buy headphones	Ease of use	Battery life (hr)	(%)
1 Apple iPod 20GB	210	170	104x61x14	20GB	★	☆	★	12	86
2 Sony NW-HD3	160	143	62x91x16	20GB	○	☆	☆	22	66