

Just for kicks

As the World Cup kicks off in Germany, we report on the best footballs, including the official match ball and replicas

There are currently more than 240 million footballers playing in 1.5 million teams worldwide. And with the World Cup getting under way in Germany this month, there'll certainly be plenty more budding football stars pulling on their replica shirts and heading for the nearest available open space.

Sales of footballs are expected to rise to around £700 million this year and Adidas hopes to capitalise on World Cup fever with increased ball sales.

As Adidas chief executive Herbert Hainer boasts: 'We sold almost six million of the 2002 World Cup ball, more than six million of the 2004 European Championship ball and we

aim to sell ten million of the Germany (2006) ball.'

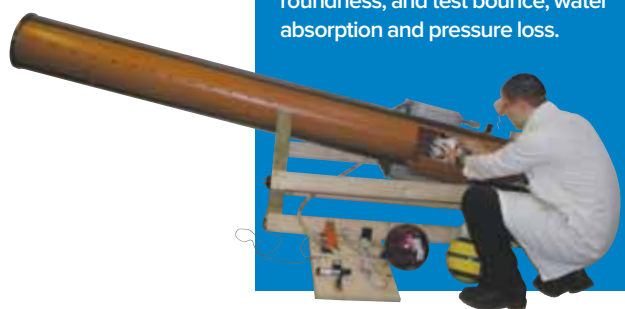
However, the official Adidas ball costs £75, and with so many other options to choose from – such as the official World Cup ball, the official English Premiership ball, the official England ball, not to mention all the replica versions – how do you know which ball is best?

We put the latest footballs (including match balls and replicas) from top-selling brands through rigorous tests. And we also invited England legend John Barnes to lace up his boots and give his expert view on how they compared.

We sent six of each ball to labs for rigorous testing

To test how well the balls hold up in use, our scientists use a machine to shoot each ball 2,000 times at around 30mph over 2.5 metres against a steel plate (below). We measure size, roundness and air pressure of each ball before and after testing and check for damage to seams and air valves.

We also check weight and roundness, and test bounce, water absorption and pressure loss.



PHOTOGRAPHY: TERRY NEALEY, JONNY THOMPSON

Insider information

We asked John Barnes MBE for his view of the balls on test

John Barnes twice won the league and FA cup with Liverpool in the 80s and 90s. He also won 79 England caps and now presents football on Channel 5.

John wasn't smitten with the new World Cup ball, the Adidas Teamgeist (1). He felt you could get more distance, speed and swerve than with traditional balls but that it was harder to control. John told us: 'For the World Cup, you want lots of goal incidents and action. But I think you could also get lots of misplaced passes and high and wide shots.'

John did rate Adidas's Teamgeist Replique (6), with traditional panelling. He found it easier to

control and liked its design: 'I'm not kicking it as hard or swerving it as much but, being a traditionalist, I prefer it.'

John felt the Nike Total 90 Aerow (5) had 'control, power, speed and accuracy' but he preferred the Nike

Tiempo (3): 'It's more like the footballs made 20 years ago.'

He wasn't too keen on the Adidas Capitano (4): 'It's like a disco ball.' But he was impressed by the Fairdeal ball (12), rating it as 'excellent'.



John Barnes gives his verdict on the Puma ball

Facts & scores

Interesting information – it's all about the balls

World Cup history

Adidas has made the official World Cup ball since the Telstar in Mexico 1970. Its 32 hand-stitched panels made it the roundest ball of its time.

Small ball?

The circumference of the Umbro EVO X ball is 1mm smaller than the 'Fifa approved' standard it claims to meet. Fifa and Umbro are looking into it.

USING THE TABLE

We tested the latest balls from top-selling brands.

Specification

Price For Best Buys

we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other balls are a guide to what you should expect to pay.

Online prices are in *italics*. **Fifa rating** Whether the ball has a 'Fifa approved' or 'Fifa inspected' rating (see 'How to buy', p48).

MODEL

- 1 **ADIDAS** Teamgeist
- 2 **UMBRO** X400
- 3 **NIKE** Tiempo
- 4 **ADIDAS** Capitano
- 5 **NIKE** Total 90 Aerow
- 6 **ADIDAS** Teamgeist Replique
- 7 **MITRE** PRO100T
- 8 **MITRE** PRO100R
- 9 **NIKE** Mercurial Vela
- 10 **UMBRO** Evo X
- 11 **PUMA** V1.06
- 12 **FAIRDEAL** World Cup Ball
- 13 **NIKE** Total 90 250



90% Adidas Teamgeist £75

Traditionalists such as John Barnes might think it's harder to control, and predicts misplaced passes, but our tests show this is a superb ball. It's close to perfectly round, it bounces evenly and loses little of

its shape or air pressure after use. Its weight rose by an average of just 0.4 per cent after our water absorption tests, far less than any other. It's available from JJB Sports and Sportsworld.

WORTH KNOWING A gold version, to be used in the final, is also available.

Cheapest store JJB Sports **Weight** 431g **Panels** 14 **Fifa rating** Approved **Other claims** Official World Cup 2006 match ball, two-year stitching and shape guarantee



84% Umbro X400 £8

It may have no Fifa rating, but we think this Umbro matches up to balls used in competitive games. It picks up a bit more water than some Best Buys but is unbeatable for durability; it lost no air after use and kept its shape. And there were no visible scuff marks or damage to the seams or air valve. Amazingly, overall it's better quality than the Umbro ball it copies, the Evo X (10). Available online and from independents.

WE LIKE Fit for all your own World Cup replays this summer.

Cheapest store Online **Weight** 430g **Panels** 32 **Fifa rating** n/a **Other claims** n/a



82% Nike Tiempo £16

This traditional-looking ball is one of the roundest on test and it bounces consistently. It has no Fifa rating but it stood up well to our durability test; it lost only a small amount of air and kept its shape. It doesn't pick up much water either. Its overall test score was higher than Nike's official Premiership ball, the Total Aerow 90 (5), and it's more than £40 cheaper, from independents.

WORTH KNOWING It comes in several designs, with or without club logos.

Cheapest store Independents **Weight** 437g **Panels** 32 **Fifa rating** n/a **Other claims** Two-year stitching and shape guarantee

Contacts

Adidas 0870 240 4204; www.adidas.com/football
Fairdeal 0870 766 5196; www.fairdealtrading.com
Mitre 020 8970 2838; www.mitre.com
Nike 0800 056 1640; www.nike-football.com
Puma 01924 425500; www.pumafootball.com
Umbro 0161 492 2222; www.umbro.com

WHICH?
BEST BUY

WHICH?
BEST BUY

WHICH?
BEST BUY

SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE							SCORE %
PRICE (£)	WEIGHT (g)	FIFA RATING	ROUNDNESS	PRESSURE LOSS	BOUNCE	WATER ABSORPTION	ROUNDNESS AFTER USE	PRESSURE LOSS AFTER USE	LOOKS AFTER USE	
75	431	Approved	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	90
8	430		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	84
16	437		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	82
15	423		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	81
60	439	Approved	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	76
13	436	Inspected	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	71
70	432	Approved	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	66
10	421		★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	65
20	431		★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	65
40	431	Approved	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	65
54	430	Approved	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	63
25	442		★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	62
13	425		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	53

Test performance

Roundness Balls rated ★★★★★ are roundest. **Pressure loss** Balls rated ★★★★★ lose very little air between uses.

Bounce Balls rated ★★★★★ bounce consistently in warm and cold conditions. **Water absorption** Balls rated ★★★★★ absorb the least

amount of water. **Roundness after use** Balls rated ★★★★★ retain their shape best after continuous use. **Pressure loss after**

use Balls rated ★★★★★ lose the least air after continuous use. **Looks after use** Balls rated ★★★★★ have no damage to their

material, seams or air valve after continuous use. **Score** Ignores price and is based on:

40% Durability
20% Water absorption
20% Pressure loss
20% Technical tests



81% Adidas Capitano £15

This is designed to 'capture the warrior's mentality that David [Beckham] brings to the game'. Pentagonal panels make it the joint roundest ball and it bounces well, losing no air pressure after use. We saw scuff marks and slight seam damage but it retains its shape. It's available from Argos and Sportsworld.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

WORTH KNOWING You can buy a mini version at Argos.

Cheapest store Argos **Weight** 423g **Panels** 12 **Fifa rating** n/a **Other claims** n/a



76% Nike Total 90 Aerow £60

Used by the English Premiership, this ball bounces consistently. If unused it won't go flat quickly but it lost more air pressure after use than other Best Buys, though it kept its shape. There were no scuffs or damage. It's available from independents, JJB Sports and Sportsworld.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

WORTH KNOWING Also available in 'hi-vis' yellow and blue for dull winter days.

Cheapest store JJB Sports **Weight** 439g **Panels** 26 **Fifa rating** Approved **Other claims** English Premiership official match ball, two-year stitching and shape guarantee



71% Adidas Teamgeist Replique £13

This has classic panels but is similar in quality to the official Teamgeist. It won't go flat and doesn't absorb much water. It didn't lose much air and, despite some wear at the seams, retained its looks and shape. It's available from Argos, JD Sports, JJB Sports and Sportsworld.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

WE LIKE Even top players could mistake this for the official World Cup ball.

Cheapest store Argos **Weight** 436g **Panels** 26 **Fifa rating** Inspected **Other claims** Two-year stitching and shape guarantee

How to buy

Fifa logos explained

Manufacturers can pay a licence fee for 'Fifa approved' or 'Fifa inspected' logos, which show whether a ball meets international match-ball standards set by Fifa, football's governing body.

A Fifa-inspected ball must pass tests for weight, size and shape, loss of air pressure, water absorption and bounce. Fifa-approved balls must pass these, plus a durability test.

We found there's not a lot of difference in quality between



balls with the two logos. Three out of five Fifa-approved balls we tested scored lower than the Fifa-inspected Adidas Teamgeist Replique. And balls without a Fifa mark aren't necessarily worse. The Umbro X400 which got the second highest score overall, doesn't have a Fifa rating.

Which should you choose?

Best for ethical shoppers

FAIRDEAL WORLD CUP

BALL, £25 This ball (12) is hand-stitched in Pakistan by workers who receive better pay, health insurance and improved working conditions, and part of the money made by each Fairdeal ball goes towards strengthening the local economy. John Barnes rated it 'excellent'.



Best for kids

UMBRO X400, £8 Well made and durable, the X400 (2) is perfect for kids in the garden or the park. And even if it does end up wedged in a tree, at £8 it won't break the bank to buy a new one.

Best in the wet

ADIDAS TEAMGEIST, £75/ TEAMGEIST REPLIQUE, £13

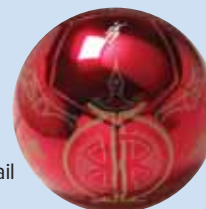
Adidas claims it has 'improved all-weather performance' and the Teamgeist (1) is certainly water resistant. And the cheaper alternative, the Teamgeist Replique (6) barely picks up any water, either.



Best for style

ADIDAS CAPITANO, £15

If David Beckham is a style icon to you, go for this Becks-branded ball. And if your football skills fail to dazzle your mates, the shiny pink Capitano (4) certainly will.



SUMMER FUN COMPETITION

Enjoy summer to the full with our great prize of Best Buys: one Adidas Teamgeist football, two Prince 03 tennis racquets, six bottles of Asda Chilean Chardonnay 2005 vintage, six bottles of Asda Extra Special

Rioja Reserva 2001 vintage, and one European Outdoor Chef barbecue.

Turn to p79 for more details and full competition rules.

TO ENTER, SIMPLY ANSWER THIS QUESTION

Which is the longest day?

(a) 14 June 2006 (b) 21 June 2006 (c) 28 June 2006

Worth
£579