

Toasters

NEED TO KNOW

The latest toasters are packed with features that claim to do much more than brown your Mother's Pride. Reheat and defrost buttons, racks to warm your buns, and easy-to-clean crumb trays are increasingly common. But dazzling displays and design can't hide the fact that most toasters aren't very good at their core function – making toast.

Most of the toasters we tested struggle to toast evenly, especially on their first attempt. Evenness generally improves if you toast several rounds, as the heating element has warmed up, but the toast gets darker, too. Some toasters cause bad grid lines, where the clamps that hold the bread stop the heat from reaching the surface. And because there's more heat in the middle of the toaster, the side of the bread facing inwards is usually darker than the other.

SLOT SIZES

Then there's the near-universal problem of bread that pokes above the slot so that the top remains anaemic while the lower part crisps. You can't get round it by turning taller slices of bread on their side, either – most slots are too short. And on some models the bread carriage doesn't lift high enough to let you get out small items such as crumpets. If an item gets stuck, don't try to remove it with a metal implement – switch off the power and use plastic tongs.



REHEAT

A reheat function like the one on this Prestige is handy if your toast goes cool before you get round to buttering it – but the heat should be gentle enough not to make the toast much browner. However, with some toasters, such as the DeLonghi (15) and Breville (18), the reheating time is too short and doesn't warm the toast through properly.



1 Prestige

BEST BUYS

We weren't impressed with this batch of toasters – very few are capable of making evenly browned toast, especially if you prefer traditional loaves with a domed crust. Our Best Buy toasts more evenly than the other models, as well as being easy to use.

So the only model we recommend is the perkily styled **Prestige (1)**, £25 from Comet. It's the best for larger slices because it has the longest and deepest slots. And it's also the top choice if you tend to toast frozen bread. The plastic and stainless steel finish is easy to keep clean, and the controls are simple to use. The bun warmer is

disappointing because it fails to warm croissants through, but overall the Prestige is great value. It's available in almond or graphite, and a matching coffee maker and kettle are also available.

The Krups (2), £40 from John Lewis, is worth considering if you enjoy a continental breakfast. The reheating feature works well, and the bun warmer produces good results. Unfortunately, the slots are too shallow and short for larger slices of bread. It's easy to clean, and Krups also sells a matching coffee maker and kettle.

If all you want to do is toast fresh bread, the Kenwood (5) is another option.

BEST ON TEST

CRUMB TRAY

Crumb trays should make it much easier to clean your toaster – no more shaking the machine up and down to get old crumbs out. We like trays that slide out, like the one on this Prestige (below), but there are several different styles. The Kenwood (3) nestles on its crumb tray so it's easy to get at, but the Tefal (17) has a tiny little compartment underneath, which is hard to open without covering yourself in crumbs.



OTHER OPTIONS

You can buy some expensive toasters with features that sound exciting, but the extra cost doesn't necessarily make your toast any better. Our tests highlighted more drawbacks than delight.

The Kenwood (3) and the Rowenta (14) have motorised bread carriages that lower the bread at the press of a button. This might be useful for elderly or arthritic people who lack the strength to push the carriage down normally, but we found the carriages a bit temperamental. If you rush them or fail to put your bread in the correct slot, they won't work. What's more, if your toast begins to burn and you press the 'interrupt' button, the carriage rises up more slowly than on manual 'pop-up' models, so the burning will continue. (All the toasters on

test except for the Dualit (16) have an 'interrupt' button to prevent toast from burning.)

The fan-assisted DeLonghi (7) promises speedy toasting. The fan is surprisingly noisy and your toast is hidden by metal flaps that close over the slots. These flaps can trap larger slices of bread and make it slightly harder to load and unload than other toasters. If speed is vital, the Krups is a better bet.

DON'T BUY

The KitchenAid (19) has the dubious honour of being the most expensive and least able toaster in our tests. Although it's stylish and comes in a wide range of colours, we think it's one to avoid – unless you enjoy paying a fortune for unevenly browned toast.



EXTRA LIFT

Most toasters have an 'extra lift' facility, which should make it easier to remove small items such as crumpets. But not all of them rise high enough. We like the lever on this Krups, which allows you to set the bread carriage at four different heights, making it easy to remove crumpets, teacakes and rye bread.

Tips for top toast

Given that toasters are hardly fledgling or complicated technology, we're surprised at just how poor many of them are at toasting evenly. Follow our top tips to get better results from these tetchy little boxes.

● No matter how many browning control positions there are, we found that the middle setting usually gives

the best golden brown colour. Start at that point and adjust for your personal taste.

● Reduce the browning setting for dry or thin slices of bread and for sweet products such as teacakes or fruit loaf.

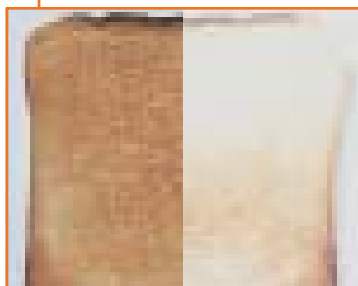
● If you want to make lots of toast but don't want the slices to get progressively darker, let the toaster cool for

at least 30 seconds before inserting the next rounds of bread.

● Remove loose or protruding fruit from teacakes or raisin bread to prevent charring; fruit falling into the toaster can create a fire hazard.

● Never heat sugar-coated, greasy or filled products on the bun rack in case sugar or fat drips down into the toaster and starts a fire.

● For the same reason, never reheat buttered toast.



Toast from the Prestige (1), left, and the KitchenAid (19), right

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
Performance 80%
Convenience 20%

KEY

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

TABLE NOTES

We tested 19 of the best-selling and widely available models.

Specification

Price Lowest widely available high-street price. **Defrost** Allows you to toast frozen bread.

Extra lift See above.

Performance

Fresh bread/Frozen bread/Teacake/Crumpet How evenly each of these was toasted, based on three of each. **Bun warmer** How well the toaster warmed up a croissant on the

rack supplied. **Reheating** How well it reheated toast. **Speed** How long it took to toast. A model rated ★ took 1.5 minutes to toast fresh bread; a model rated ● took 2.5 minutes or more.

Convenience

Small items Ease of removing small items such as crumpets using the extra-lift feature.

Cleaning Ease of cleaning surfaces and crumb tray. **Ease of use** How easy it is to use according to the instructions.

Toasters

MODEL

- 1 Prestige Symmetry 50451
- 2 Krups Expert FEM231
- 3 Kenwood Eon TT900
- 4 Russell Hobbs 12325 satin
- 5 Kenwood TT370
- 6 Cordon Bleu 12092
- 7 DeLonghi Diablo CTF 2134C
- 8 Russell Hobbs Kudos 11417
- 9 Morphy Richards Beech 44411
- 10 Proline T2SSU
- 11 Morphy Richards Essentials 44150
- 12 Russell Hobbs Glass 10617
- 13 Morphy Richards Contemporary 44721
- 14 Rowenta Jasper Morrison TL900015
- 15 DeLonghi Argento CT02
- 16 Dualit Soft Touch 25076
- 17 Tefal Avanti 875915
- 18 Breville TT34 Lightning
- 19 KitchenAid Artisan SKTT780



BUN WARMERS

Bun or bagel warmers are increasingly common on stylish toasters, but most that we tried didn't warm croissants all the way through. Some, such as the Kenwood (3), below, have a separate rack that you place on top when you want to warm your croissant, but the permanent metal warming rack on this Krups was more effective. The integrated bun warmer on the Breville (18) catches on the toaster casing when you press the button to set it up.



2 Krups

Style over substance?

Small domestic appliances used to be functional and unexciting. But these days even our kettles and toasters are expected to make statements about who we are (or aspire to be).

Although it would be nice to have a kitchen full of stylish matching appliances, we've found you can't trust a company that makes a good kettle to make a good toaster. We've tested the toasters that match the Best Buy kettles from our December 2004 report – the Breville Lightning, Kenwood Eon, Morphy Richards Beech and Rowenta Jasper Morrison. Only the Kenwood Eon toaster (3) comes close to putting in a satisfactory performance.

And being tempted by a wide choice of colours could lead you down the wrong path, too. The toasters from

Morphy Richards (11 and 13), Dualit (16) and KitchenAid (19) come in a wide range of colours but toast too unevenly to impress us.



Matching styles but not performance: the Kenwood Eon (above) and Rowenta Jasper Morrison (below)



Specification			Performance							Convenience			Score
Price (£)	Defrost	Extra lift	Fresh bread	Frozen bread	Teacake	Crumpet	Bun warmer	Reheating	Speed	Small items	Cleaning	Ease of use	(%)
25	✓	✓	○	☆	☆	○	●	☆	●	○	★	★	60
40	✓	✓	○	●	○	○	☆	☆	☆	★	★	☆	59
80			○	○	☆	●	●		●	☆	★	★	57
25	✓	✓	○	○	☆	○	●	☆	●	○	☆	☆	56
30	✓	✓	☆	○	○	●	●	☆	●	○	☆	★	55
10	✓		○	○	●	☆	●	☆	☆	○	☆	★	55
50	✓	✓	○	●	☆	○	●	★	☆	★	☆	★	53
30	✓	✓	○	●	☆	☆			●	★	★	★	53
40	✓	✓	○	●	☆	○	☆	☆	●	○	☆	★	52
12	✓		○	●	○	●		★	○	○	☆	☆	52
13		✓	○	●	●	○	☆		○	●	☆	☆	51
40	✓	✓	○	●	☆	○			☆	☆	☆	☆	51
30	✓	✓	○	●	●	●	○	★	●	●	☆	☆	49
80			●	○	☆	●	●		☆	★	☆	☆	46
35	✓	✓	○	●	○	●		●	○	●	○	☆	44
50		✓	●	○	●	○			☆	★	☆	☆	44
25	✓	✓	●	○	○	○		○	★	☆	●	☆	40
30	✓	✓	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	☆	★	40
125			●	●	○	●			○	☆	★	○	34