

Mobile providers cut call prices

# Roaming costs start to drop

**MOBILE PHONES**

Mobile-phone companies are cutting the price of calls while abroad after the European Commission demanded an end to rip-off charges, but many price cuts won't begin immediately.

The commission wants an end to all charges for receiving a call when travelling in the EU. It also wants the cost of making a call while abroad to be the same as making a call in the phone owner's home country.

O2 has now announced My Europe, which will include two different packages. The first is for customers who use their phone regularly abroad. O2 say that users who sign up for the package will receive inbound calls for free, while charges for outbound calls will be comparable to domestic rates.

O2's second package is aimed at less-frequent travellers and will see UK customers paying 35p a minute to make or receive calls anywhere in the EU. My Europe will be rolled out later this year.

Orange, T-Mobile and Vodafone have also announced plans to cut call costs in

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Roaming calls in Europe get cheaper

Europe. Vodafone says that by next April the average cost of its roaming calls in Europe will be less than 37.7p per minute, down from more than 61p a minute in 2005.

T-Mobile has already cut the cost of incoming and outgoing calls to 55p across 29 European countries and the United States and Canada, while Orange says it has cut at least 25 per cent off existing roaming rates by allowing customers to buy bundles of cheaper minutes.

**TAKE ACTION!**

**Keep the costs down**

It's easy to run up a big bill abroad, so plan ahead. Before you leave, ask your provider which foreign network is cheapest, and select it when you arrive. Alternatively, you can buy a local Sim card for the

country you're visiting.

Online retailers such as 0044.co.uk and uk2abroad.co.uk sell Sim cards for most countries. Ask your provider if your mobile is locked, preventing you from using a Sim card from another provider. You can arrange to unlock it.

# Avensis cars hit by faulty lights

**CARS**

Car giant Toyota has admitted a fault with the headlights on its popular Avensis model but isn't planning a recall.

The admission came after reader Donovan Riley from London told us how his headlamps failed as he drove along an unlit country lane. A mechanic later told him the Avensis lights often fail since water gets into the lights and the bulb holders melt.

Around 30 Avensis drivers have aired similar gripes on the Toyota owners' club forum. Affected owners have to pay about £400 for replacements outside warranty.

Donovan said: 'I don't feel I should pay anything, as it looks as if this could be a design fault.'

Toyota told us it would investigate and act if necessary, adding that there was only 'a small number of cases' so it was 'no great concern at the moment'. But, posing as an Avensis owner, we spoke to three dealers; all had heard of the fault.

Toyota couldn't confirm which cars have the problem. It said that owners who have already paid for repairs should complain to their Toyota dealer, which may offer a goodwill gesture.

Donovan Riley's bill for both lights was £420 after a goodwill reduction. He'd bought the 2003 Toyota Avensis last September. In March, just after the three-year warranty expired, the lights failed.

**TAKE ACTION!**

**Speak to your dealer**

If you've paid for new headlamps, contact your local dealer and ask for a goodwill payment. Let us know how you get on.



Toyota doesn't plan an Avensis recall

## Public vote Supermarket legal advice

The government is planning to allow supermarkets and other high-street retailers to offer legal services, such as divorce advice, to consumers (see 'Question time', p76). We asked: Would you trust a supermarket if you were seeking legal advice?

**No: 61%**

**YES: 24%**

**Don't know: 15%**

Survey of 1,019 adults carried out online for Which? by Explorandum between 12 and 14 June. Findings don't necessarily represent our views

Council admitted it didn't have a contract to issue the tickets

# Parking fine victory

**PARKING**



**Pam and Geoff Bryan successfully appealed the parking fine and won a reprieve for 361 others**

**A** couple have successfully overturned a parking fine they got even though they were showing a disabled permit – and won a reprieve for hundreds of others who were fined in the same car park.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council claimed Pam and Geoff Bryan hadn't properly displayed their Blue Badge. The council said the date on it was clouded by an anti-glare strip on the windscreen. Pam and Geoff said the attendant needed only to bend down to see it, and they appealed (see 'Campaigning by you', March 2006, p75).

But the appeal never ruled on this because a wider issue arose. It transpired that the council had a questionable permit

**'It's only fair it should refund people and I think it ought to write to them'**

of its own – its licence to run the car park. Stoke had had an agreement with supermarket Lidl to enforce restrictions at the car park in Longton where the Bryans parked. But the council forgot to renew the contract two years ago. Once Stoke had admitted this, it agreed to refund all 361 drivers who were fined from August 2004 until October last year, when it ceased fining.

Pam, 58, a retired headteacher, said: 'I couldn't believe that a council that's so hot on persecuting drivers for any slight misdemeanour turned out to be so incompetent itself!'

The move is in stark contrast to the attitude of the London Borough of Camden. Camden admitted to a parking appeal that its signs on Pancras Road, near King's Cross Station, had been legally dubious. It promised *Which?* that it would review each case of the 17,000 drivers it fined on that road while the signs were up (see 'Council rapped over 17,000 dodgy road fines', May 2006, p7).

But now Camden says it isn't reviewing every case and has halted the review. It admits the signs didn't comply with rules but says they were clear.

## **Which? tackles cancelled flights and compensation**

**Liz Edwards takes on the firms that don't pay up**



To me, 'extraordinary' means something unusual or unpredictable. Bad weather somewhere else doesn't qualify.

But Easyjet begs to differ.

The airline cancelled Nathalie Gibbins' evening flight from Gatwick to Barcelona last November, after making passengers wait more than two hours at the gate. Staff just shut up shop and told the stranded passengers to go home and sort out an alternative themselves.

Nathalie's only option was a flight late the next day. As the point of her trip was to attend a christening that day, she opted for a refund.

Under EU rules, you're entitled to compensation for cancelled flights. In Nathalie's case this should have been €250 (about £170).

Airlines can avoid paying if unavoidable 'extraordinary circumstances' are to blame. This is supposed to mean strikes, bad weather preventing take-off, or a safety problem.

But when Nathalie, 28, asked Easyjet to pay up, it refused, blaming bad weather earlier in the day in Scotland, which meant the plane reached Gatwick late, which meant no crew was available.

We told Easyjet that the direct cause of the cancellation was its failure to provide a crew – an avoidable problem. But it insisted that the weather was to blame.

It did admit it should have given passengers more help, including food and drinks vouchers during the delay (also part of the rules). It reimbursed Nathalie's £70 taxi home.

Nathalie is now taking advice from our lawyers.

See [www.which.net/campaigns/yourrights/flights.html](http://www.which.net/campaigns/yourrights/flights.html) for more information on these rights.

### **TAKE ACTION!**

#### **Appeal to the council**

■ If you were one of the 361 fined by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, call 01782 234234 for refund information.

■ Pam's MP, Robert Ffello, has put down an Early Day Motion (EDM) calling for Blue Badge enforcement to be fairer. She wants more MPs to sign it. Go to <http://edmi.parliament.uk> and search for EDM number 1933 for details.

■ If you want to challenge a ticket you haven't yet paid, ask the council. If it rejects this, see [www.parkingandtrafficappeals.gov.uk](http://www.parkingandtrafficappeals.gov.uk) or [www.parking-appeals.gov.uk](http://www.parking-appeals.gov.uk).