

Quieter cleaning

How to find a Best Buy vacuum cleaner to suit you

If you're fed up with having to shout yourself hoarse to be heard over the sound of your vacuum cleaner, two Best Buys this month could be the answer.

You can hold a conversation over the sound of the Miele S4281(1) and the Bosch BSG71266GB (4), which are among the quietest vacs we've tested. Elsewhere, though, the volume of the cleaners still varies widely.

Vacuum cleaners remain on sale for some years. So, alongside new models, our table includes previously tested Best Buys, such as the Dyson DC14 All Floors (14), which first appeared in 'Product news' in January 2005.

Dyson dominates in uprights and Miele holds the lion's share of cylinder Best Buys, but this time a couple of impressive cylinders from Bosch and Dyson add welcome variation.

Uprights are better for removing pet hair and good on large, clear surfaces. However, they're harder to use on stairs and noisier than cylinders. Cylinders tend to be more reliable, good under furniture and on stairs, but poor on pet hair unless motorised brush heads are provided.

Members often ask us about popular models such as the Nomatic Henrys. You can visit www.which.co.uk/vacuum-cleaners to find out our verdict on them.

Dyson dominates in uprights and Miele holds the lion's share of cylinder Best Buys



Testing these cleaners is a dirty business

Spreading the dust

We spread a 70cm strip of dust on to a carpet, then roll over it to mimic the effect of dirt being trodden in, which makes it more difficult to suck up.

We attach a vac to an automated machine and move it back and forth at a constant speed over the dusty carpet five times and then measure how much dust it's picked up. We repeat this test several times, measuring when bags or canisters are empty, partially full and full. The 19 vacs covered a total distance of nearly three and a half miles in this test.

To measure how well the vacs cope with floorboards, we use a wooden surface with a removable section, which has a groove 3mm wide and 10mm deep cut into it. We take out the section, weigh it, fill it with dust and weight it again, before replacing it. We then move the cleaner back and forwards across it five times. We take out the section and weigh it to see how much dust the cleaner has picked up.

What you should look for

TURBO BRUSH

If a cleaner has a turbo brush, using it will, in general, improve performance. But don't buy a machine just because it has one. The LG model we tested in October 2007 had a turbo brush and cleaned better than the similar LG model (9) in this test, which doesn't. However, the Miele S4211 (3) doesn't have a turbo brush but is still a great vac

REACH

For large rooms, a model with a long reach will save you having to unplug it and move to another socket to clean the whole space. The Bosch Best Buy (4) and the LG (9) and Vax (12) machines can all cover more than 10 metres of floor



BAGGED OR BAGLESS

Dust bags keep dust contained, so they're less messy to empty than the containers in bagless cleaners. However, you have to keep buying new bags, which cost between £3.50 and £7 for five bags (some include a new filter)

STORAGE

Uprights are quick to park and leave, but cylinders generally take up less space. The telescopic tubes and wrap-around hoses on the Dyson DC21 (5) and DC20 Stowaway Allergy (6) make these two particularly compact

WHICH? ONLINE

Go online at www.which.co.uk/vacuumcleaners for reviews of more than 75 models. This information is regularly updated with new models, availability and prices. See www.which.co.uk/loginhelp if you would like help with logging in.

1 CYLINDER

75% Miele S4281
£180

The S4281 is the best model we tested for picking up dust from floorboards, and it's good on other surfaces, too. It's excellent at retaining allergens, helped by a filter specially designed to tackle small particles. It's also pretty good at picking up pet hair.

However, the 8.7-metre reach is less than other Best Buys, so you'll have to unplug it more often as you move round the house.

As the bag gets fuller, you'll find it picks up a little less dust, so it's worth changing the bag if you notice performance drops. Cheapest at Currys.

WE FOUND The S4281 is light and gets in close to walls and corners.

Available Currys Weight 6.6kg Reach 8.7 metres Bagless No Replacement bags £6.99 for five, including filters

WHICH?
BEST BUY

2 CYLINDER

74% Miele Cat & Dog TT 5000 £179

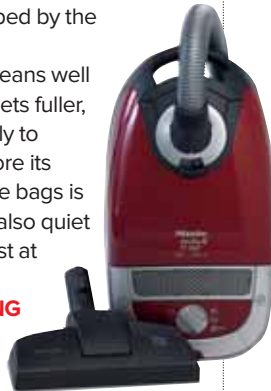
The name of this Miele gives a clue to its main strength – it's good at picking up pet hair, though it's less effective at retaining allergens. However, it handles all surfaces well, helped by the turbo brush.

The TT 5000 cleans well even as the bag gets fuller, so you're less likely to throw it away before its time. Changing the bags is easy, anyway. It's also quiet for a vac. Cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING

Miele is one of only two brands in our annual survey to have above-average reliability, according to our members.

Available Argos and John Lewis Weight 9.1kg Reach 9.8 metres Bagless No Replacement bags £6.99 for five, including filters

WHICH?
BEST BUY

The DC21 Motorhead is our only bagless Best Buy cylinder cleaner

4 CYLINDER

72% Bosch BSG71266GB Pro Energy £130

The Bosch's long reach lets you clean more than 10 metres of floor without unplugging it. It's great on all surfaces, even without a turbo brush, and picks up dust well as the bag fills. There are better models for pet owners, as it's slow to pick up hairs, but the Pro Energy is good at retaining allergens.

WORTH KNOWING This is a very new model, but Bosch stockists should be able to order it in for you.

Available John Lewis/Independents Weight 7.1kg Reach 10.1 metres Bagless No Replacement bags £6.99 for five, including filters

WHICH?
BEST BUY

5 CYLINDER

69% Dyson DC21 Motorhead £330

The Motorhead, our only bagless Best Buy cylinder cleaner, works well on all surfaces, even when the dust container becomes fuller. The motorised brush head makes this vac a real speed demon when it comes to pet hairs, and it takes only a moment to clean them from the brush afterwards. Untangling long hairs is more of a chore. Allergen retention is excellent. It's a heavy and noisy machine, though, like most Dysons. See also 'Giving the husband a break', p54. It's cheapest from Argos and Comet.

WE LIKE It's the fastest cylinder Best Buy for picking up pet hair.

Available Argos, Comet Weight 10.5kg Reach 9.6 metres Bagless Yes

WHICH?
BEST BUY

3 CYLINDER

74% Miele S4211 £129

This has been a Best Buy for a while and continues to outclass many newer models. It's good on all surfaces and at picking up pet hair. Similar to the S4281 (1), it has a short reach, but they're both light and each has a carry handle that makes it easy to pick up. As an older model, it has more basic filters than the S4281 – probably the reason it's not quite as good at tackling allergens. Like that model, it has a tube that is telescopic and height adjustable. Cheapest at John Lewis.

WE FOUND The S4211 Max (which we haven't tested) has a turbo brush and costs £180. A turbo brush for the S4211 is £40 from Miele (see contacts).

Available Argos, Comet, Currys and John Lewis Weight 6.6kg Reach 8.6 metres Bagless No Replacement bags £6.99 for five, including filters

WHICH?
BEST BUY

14 UPRIGHT

65% Dyson DC14 All Floors £259

The DC14 All Floors does exactly what it says on the dust container – you'd be hard pressed to find another upright that performs as well on every surface. Extra features include 'brush control', which turns off the motorised brush bar for delicate surfaces, and 'large debris pick up'. The DC14 All Floors is cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING

The Allergy version of the DC14 costs £20 more, and the Animal version for pet owners costs £40 more.

Available Argos, Currys and John Lewis Weight 8.3kg Reach 10 metres Bagless Yes

WHICH?
BEST BUY

15 UPRIGHT

65% Dyson DC14 Origin £190

The DC14 Origin is a more basic version of the All Floors (14). It's good at cleaning carpets and hard floors, though not quite as good as that model. It's also good at picking up dust from carpet when the container starts to get fuller. Despite being cheaper than the All Floors, it's better at picking up pet hairs – gobbling them up in super-fast time. That said, however, it's poor at retaining allergens. Cheapest at Argos.

WORTH KNOWING Dyson doesn't recommend using the Origin on hard floors but we didn't notice damage to laminate in our tests. If you are worried, opt for the All Floors version.

Available Argos Weight 8.3kg Reach 9.7 metres Bagless Yes

WHICH?
BEST BUY

16 UPRIGHT

64% Dyson DC18 Slim Allergy £300

The Slim Allergy is another Dyson that lives up to its name. It's lighter than the DC14s and capacity is smaller, but it's great at retaining allergens. It's excellent on hard floors and reasonable on carpet, too. It makes swift work of picking up pet hair, and the brush can be turned on or off to suit the floor surface. Cheapest stores Argos, Comet and Currys.

WORTH KNOWING The similar Dyson DC18 Slim All Floors is also a Best Buy, but isn't quite as good for allergen retention. See www.which.co.uk for a full review of it.

Available Argos, Currys and Comet Weight 7.2kg Reach 8.2 metres Bagless Yes

WHICH?
BEST BUY

GIVING THE HUSBAND A BREAK

Jane Richardson 46, pharmacist

The Richardson family have an unusual solution to the stray hairs from their black labrador, Coco, which have proved too tough a challenge for their current vac.

Jane Richardson said: 'My husband Steve periodically has to get down on hands and knees and rub the carpet with a training shoe to clump up the hairs so they can then be picked up.'

We gave them a Best Buy Dyson DC21 (5) to see if its great pet hair pick-up could retire the shoe and give Steve a rest.

Jane said. 'It's much better at picking up dog hairs.' It even passed her husband's shoe test: 'Steve did some vacuuming with the Dyson and tried the shoe trick again and there were no dog hairs to be seen.'

Watch out

Tips on buying a vac

It's difficult to know how good a vac will be just by looking at its specifications.

Don't be fooled into thinking a higher wattage machine will do a better job of cleaning your carpet. Its design, the nozzles and the filters all affect how well it will pick up dust and keep it in.

A low wattage doesn't automatically mean a quieter machine. Good insulation can make a vac quieter.

Many retailers have machines on display so you can see for yourself if it's small enough for your cupboard. And pick it up to check it's light enough for you to carry upstairs.

MODEL	SPECIFI		
	PRICE (£)	WEIGHT (kg)	CAPACITY (litres)
CYLINDER			
1 MIELE S4281	180	6.6	2.4
2 MIELE Cat & Dog TT 5000	179	9.1	2.9
3 MIELE S4211	129	6.6	2.3
4 BOSCH BSG71266GB Pro Energy	130	7.1	2.7
5 DYSON DC21 Motorhead	330	10.5	2.3
6 DYSON DC20 Stowaway Allergy	270	8.7	2.2
7 DYSON DC19	149	8.0	2.1
8 PANASONIC MC-CL673K	100	7.5	2.3
9 LG VKC902HT Basic Care Compressor	150	9.1	1.8
10 HOOVER TFC6283001	200	9.4	1.8
11 DIRT DEVIL DDCYL5	70	6.8	1.3
12 VAX VZL-704 Performance Z Complete	150	9.4	2.1
13 ELECTROLUX Z4492 Powerplus	60	6.1	3.3
UPRIGHT			
14 DYSON DC14 All Floors	259	8.3	2.8
15 DYSON DC14 Origin	190	8.3	2.8
16 DYSON DC18 Slim Allergy	300	7.2	1.8
17 ELECTROLUX Z8801AZ Power of Red Reach	180	10.8	3.4
18 ELECTROLUX Z2952A Envirovac	69	7.5	2.5
19 HOOVER PS7205001	120	8.6	1.8

LONGER-LASTING HOOVER

Helen Robertson

Reliability is a key part of Which? testing, and reliable is certainly the word for Helen Robertson's Hoover Senior 638.

She bought the vac in March 1959 and it's still going strong: 'It's had new brushes and a new belt but that's it.'

Helen did buy a new small cylinder cleaner a few years ago but didn't like it: 'The hose had a mind of its own.'

She said the Senior does look its age: 'People would probably marvel at my stinginess, but it's efficient as far as cleaning my carpet is concerned, and I've always had the attitude that if something works, don't change it.'



CATION		WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE										SCORE %
REACH (m)	BAGLESS	CARPET	LAMINATE	WOODEN	PET HAIR	STAIRS	MOVING	EMPTYING/ CHANGING	ALLERGENS	NOISE	RELIABILITY	
8.7		★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	Above average	75
9.8		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	Above average	74
8.6		★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Above average	74
10.1		★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Average	72
9.6	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★	Below average	69
9.7	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★	Below average	62
9.3	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	Below average	61
9.4	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	Average	60
11.8	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★		54
9.1	✓	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★	Average	46
7.9	✓	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★		45
11.3	✓	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	Average	45
7.3		★	★★★	★★★★	★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★	★★	Average	41
10.0	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★	Below average	65
9.7	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★	★	Below average	65
8.2	✓	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★	Below average	64
7.1	✓	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★	Above average	48
7.3	✓	★★	★★	★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★	★	Above average	41
6.5	✓	★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★	★	Average	40

TABLE NOTES

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price. Prices for other models are a guide. See www.which.co.uk/shopping for latest prices. **Weight** With accessories. **Reach** Distance from plug to cleaning head.

Test performance

Carpet/laminate/wooden How well a vac picks up and keeps dust from these surfaces. **Pet hair** How quickly a vac collects this from carpets. **Moving** How easy a vac is to move around.

Emptying/changing How easy/hygienic it is to empty bag/canisters and change filters. **Allergens** How well the filter retains pet allergens. **Noise** The more stars the quieter. **Reliability** A brand is expected to be at least average in our annual survey before it can have a Best Buy. High-scoring Dysons can be Best Buys as they have a five-year guarantee. A blank means we don't have enough data to judge reliability.

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
 Cleaning/filter **55%**
 Convenience **35%**
 Noise and energy use **10%**

OUR RESEARCH

When selecting vacuum cleaners to test, we consult manufacturers, market intelligence reports and industry experts, then check availability on the high street and online. Tested models include top sellers from the most popular brands, products with innovative features, models from some lesser-known brands and widely available Best Buys from previous tests.

Contacts

Bosch 0870 240 0060
www.boschappliances.co.uk
Dirt Devil 0800 525089
www.dirtdevil.co.uk
Dyson 0800 279 5127
www.dyson.co.uk
Electrolux 0870 605 5055
www.electrolux.co.uk
Hoover 0870 950 2943

www.hoover.co.uk
LG 0870 873 5454
www.lge.com
Miele 01235 554455
www.miele.co.uk
Panasonic 0870 535 7357
www.panasonic.co.uk
Vax 0870 606 1248
www.vax.co.uk