



# The press gang

Would you pay £80 for a new steam iron? You might after you've read the results of our latest tests

We spend around three months of our life ironing, so it makes sense to choose a model that will get the work done with the minimum of effort.

For this report we've tested both conventional steam irons and steam generator irons. Generators are one of the most eye-catching developments in the market since Hoover steam irons hit the high street in the early 1950s – and our tests prove that the best generators can outperform the best steam irons.

What distinguishes a generator from a conventional model is the fact that the water tank is separate from the iron. The mains power cord is attached to the generator and an additional connection cord links, separately, the water tank and power supply to the iron.

This means the iron itself is often lighter and the tank can hold more water, so you can work for longer without having to stop to refill it. Generators tend to produce more steam than conventional steam irons, too, which enables them to eliminate creases faster.

On the downside, you may need to rethink where you store your iron if you make the switch to a generator, because most of the models we tested are around twice the size of a conventional steam iron and the tank can be quite heavy to carry.

Generators also take longer to heat up and tend to be more expensive – our cheapest Best Buy costs £80. If you want a conventional steam iron, see p56 for the Best Buys, which range in price from £20 to £80.

## What you should look for

### SPRAY BUTTON

A directional spray built into the front of the iron is handy for removing stubborn creases

### STEAM SHOT BUTTON

This provides a burst of steam – particularly useful for vertically steaming curtains or hanging clothes

### BUTTON NOTCH

Some irons have a notch in the soleplate or a recess just above to make ironing around buttons easier

### CORD TIDY

A cord tidy compartment or clip makes storage easier. If you can keep the cord kink-free, it also lessens the risk of it getting damaged

### USING THE TABLES

We tested generators and steam irons from leading brands. All the generators have a tank capacity of around 1 litre. The more stars the better.

### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give cheapest available high-street prices. Prices

for other models are a guide. Online prices are shown in *italics*.

**Size** This is the size of the iron itself. For generators you also need to allow room to store the water tank. In this test, tank sections measured between 35x8x22cm and 39x20x26cm (l x h x w).

**Cord length** Cord length from socket to iron.

For steam generators this is the length of the cord from the water tank to the iron itself.

**Weight** For generators this is the weight of just the iron, not the water tank. For steam irons it's the weight of the iron with a full tank of water.

### Features

**Anti-calcium cartridge** Irons with a ✓ have replaceable cartridges.

### Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Performance	50%
Convenience	30%
Durability	15%
Instructions	5%

## Water on tap

**Most of the irons on test work well with tap water**

Buying demineralised or distilled water for your iron is not essential any more – every model we tested will steam with ordinary tap water. Calcium in your water supply will form limescale that clogs the steam vents over a period of time but the cleaning systems and anti-calcium functions built into all the irons we tested will prevent any serious damage.

Several of the generator irons in our trial have changeable anti-calcium filter cartridges. With the steam irons, pressing the burst of steam or anti-calcium button will force limescale out of the vents under pressure.

However, some makers, such as Bosch and Domona (see below), suggest using distilled water or a mix of tap and distilled water in your iron if you live in an area which has particularly hard water, such as Essex, Hampshire and Norfolk. You can check water hardness in your area with your water supplier.

## Facts & scores

Expert advice from our irons testing team

### Cartridge costs

The anti-calcium cartridges for this Domona cost £25 for six – and will need replacing regularly if you live in a hard-water area, unless you use a proportion of distilled water.

**1 GENERATOR****80% Philips GC6103 Provapor Azur £80**

The Provapor Azur produced 60 per cent more steam than average in our trial, enabling our experts to speed through our test pile of laundry. It ironed on all settings to a very high standard and performed brilliantly on linen. It also proved to be a low-maintenance iron – at the end of our durability test (see 'How we test', right) it was still working well without having been cleaned. The controls are simple to use and the steam button is well placed. At just 1kg, it was one of the lightest irons on test and proved easy to handle and manoeuvre. It's also less than half the price of our other Best Buy generator. Available from Argos and Tesco online.

**WE LIKE** The lock on the steam button delivers continuous steam so you don't have to keep your finger on it.

**Cheapest store** Argos **Tank capacity** 1 litre **Generator tank size** 39x20x26cm **Removable water tank** No **Weight** 1kg **Auto shut-off** No

**2 GENERATOR****76% Rowenta DG7140 £175**

The Rowenta was a consistent performer in our tests, producing a good standard of ironing on all heat settings. Steam output was greater than average, making short work of our laundry test. The soleplate is particularly smooth, gliding well and providing a quick, crease-free finish.

This is a tidy package all-round – the iron rests neatly and securely on the generator and the cord compartment is well designed, allowing you to let out as much cord as you need. Steam is generated by squeezing a trigger under the handle which is easy to operate. The Rowenta is available from Argos and Currys.

**WE LIKE** The cord storage compartment has room for the mains lead and the boiler-to-iron cord, so the whole unit packs away neatly.

**Cheapest stores** Argos and Currys **Tank capacity** 1 litre **Generator tank size** 36x18x24cm **Removable water tank** No **Weight** 1.3kg **Auto shut-off** No

**How we test**

Our tests reveal which irons can run for 200 hours – and steam through a laundry mountain

**The 200-hour test**

We ran each steam iron for 200 hours to test its durability – the equivalent of more than four years' domestic ironing and enough time to tackle 1,400 long-sleeved shirts.

Manufacturers advise that you clean your iron regularly to stop limescale build-up, but in reality many people don't. We carried out this test without cleaning to see how well the irons would perform in tough conditions and most of them made it past the

100-hour mark without needing any maintenance.

The Morphy Richards 40655 Turbosteam was still going strong at the end of 200 hours, but we recommend regular cleaning, as most models generated 25 per cent less steam after 150 hours than at the start.

**Olympic ironing**

To test performance, we washed and dried 63 skirts, shirts and trousers and stored them for 14 hours before we steamed and pressed them.

**Contacts**

**Bosch**  
0870 240 0060  
www.boschappliances.co.uk

**Breville**  
0161 621 6900; www.breville.co.uk

**Domena**  
01825 768899; www.domena.com

**Domotec**  
0800 132509  
www.domotec.uk.com

**Morphy Richards**  
0870 060 2615  
www.morphyrichards.co.uk

**Moulinex**  
0845 602 1454  
www.moulinex.co.uk

**Philips**  
0845 601 0354; www.philips.co.uk

**Rowenta**  
0845 602 1454  
www.rowenta.co.uk

**Russell Hobbs**  
0161 947 3000  
www.saltoneurope.com

**Tefal**  
0845 602 1454; www.tefal.co.uk

MODEL		SPECIFICATION					FEATURES			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
		PRICE (£)	TANK CAPACITY (litres)	SIZE (cm) (l x h x w)	CORD LENGTH (m)	WEIGHT (kg)	BUTTON RECESS	AUTO SHUT-OFF	ANTI-CALCIUM CARTRIDGE	DURABILITY	PERFORMANCE	CONVENIENCE	
GENERATORS													
1	PHILIPS GC6103 Provapor Azur Doublespeed	80	1	29x14x12	1.7	1	✓			★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	80
2	ROWENTA DG7140 Pro Precision	175	1	28x14x12	1.8	1.3	✓			★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	76
3	TEFAL 2835A Pressing Compact	100	1	30x14x13	1.7	1.3				★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	68
4	DOMOTEC DSG00001	68	1.1	28x13x13	1.7	1.1	✓		✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	64
5	DOMENA Class 150 Silver Pro	240	1.1	21x15x9	2	1.2		✓	✓	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	63
6	BREVILLE IR18 Ultimate Glide Digital	100	1.1	28x14x12	1.6	1	✓	see <sup>a</sup>	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	61
7	MORPHY RICHARDS 42345 Aquamax Premium	50	1.1	25x13x12	1.6	1.1	✓		✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	47

<sup>a</sup> Enters sleep mode if button not pressed for 15 minutes



#### 8 STEAM IRON

### 73% Breville IR20 Diva Extra Glide £30

Don't let this Breville's pink exterior fool you into thinking it's a lightweight fashion accessory. It's actually one of the heavier irons on test when it has a full tank of water and this extra weight means you don't have to apply much pressure to get the creases out. The steam button is well positioned, easily within reach of your thumb. This iron has an anti-scale filter that doesn't need to be changed and the self-clean button is easy to use. The Breville IR20 Extra Glide is available from Argos. **WE FOUND** The handle, which incorporates the 'power on' light, is particularly comfortable to use.

**Cheapest store** Argos **Tank capacity** 350ml  
**Iron weight (tank empty)** 1.5kg **Auto shut-off** No



#### 9 STEAM IRON

### 73% Morphy Richards 40706 £40

The 40706 generated more steam than most, and made short work of woollens ironed on its medium heat setting. It also produced a better finish on linen ironed at higher temperatures than any of our other Best Buy steam irons. The controls are easy to use and the temperature dial moves freely without being loose. It's quite heavy when the tank is full, so it's not good for vertically steaming clothes or curtains, but that weight means you need less pressure on the board. It's available from Argos.

**WATCH OUT** Buy now – it's due to be replaced shortly.

**Cheapest store** Argos **Tank capacity** 400ml  
**Iron weight (tank empty)** 1.5kg **Auto shut-off** No



#### 10 STEAM IRON

### 70% Rowenta DX1300 Effective £20

At just £20, this iron is a real bargain. It proved light and manoeuvrable in our tests and was just as durable as more expensive Best Buys. Performance dips slightly when it comes to the highest temperature setting – there's not quite enough steam to get perfect results on linen. But there is plenty of steam on the medium heat setting, making short work of woollens. The 250ml water tank is smaller than on any of our other Best Buys, but this iron heats up fast, making it ideal for 'iron and wear' types. This one is available from Argos.

**WE FOUND** This Rowenta is ideal for those on a tight budget.

**Cheapest store** Argos **Tank capacity** 250ml  
**Iron weight (tank empty)** 1.3kg **Auto shut-off** No

At only £20, the Rowenta DX1300 is a real bargain and just as durable as more expensive Best Buys

WHICH?  
BEST  
BUY

WHICH?  
BEST  
BUY

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENHOLM, NICK WRIGHT

## Iron like a professional

It takes our professional tester around three minutes to iron a shirt. We may not be able to improve your ironing speed but we can help you achieve a better finish



**1** First iron the collar, then the yoke (the part at the back of the shoulders)



**2** Take one sleeve and iron the cuff open, then the sleeve itself. The shirt should have a crease along the outside of the sleeve



**3** Iron the main body of the shirt by first ironing half of the front, then the back, then the remaining front half



**4** Put the shirt on a wooden hanger with the top button done up to keep creases at bay

For best results, use starch and steam (fabric permitting). If you don't currently use starch but want to give it a try, experiment by using it on collars and cuffs to start with.



## Facts & scores

### Points of interest from our steam irons test

#### To the point

Irons haven't changed much in size or shape since the 18th century, but the soleplates on these Philips models are a bit different – they have a noticeably tapered point towards the nose to get into hard-to-reach places.

#### On the level

This Moulinex is the only iron on test not capable of vertical steaming, so you'll be able to iron items only on the board with it.

### MODEL

#### STEAM IRONS

- 8 **BREVILLE** IR20 Diva Extra Glide
- 9 **MORPHY RICHARDS** 40706 Comfigrip Professional
- 10 **ROWENTA** DX1300 Effective
- 11 **PHILIPS** GC4340 Azur Precise
- 12 **TEFAL** FV9250 Program 8
- 13 **TEFAL** FV8210 Aquaturobo
- 14 **PHILIPS** GC3232 EasyCare
- 15 **MORPHY RICHARDS** 40655 Turbosteam
- 16 **ROWENTA** DX8300 Professional Auto-off
- 17 **RUSSELL HOBBS** 12235 Steam Glide
- 18 **BOSCH** TDS1016GB Power Steam
- 19 **BOSCH** TDA8313GB Sensixx Comfort
- 20 **MOULINEX** CHL431 Principio 20
- 21 **RUSSELL HOBBS** 12660 Thermocolour



## 11 STEAM IRON

## 69% Philips GC4340 Azur Precise £69

The Azur Precise has more masculine styling than our other Best Buys and the handle has plenty of gripping room for large hands. It's quite heavy, too, but the smooth soleplate glides well over fabrics, and its controls are easy to reach. It performed particularly well on woollens ironed on the medium heat setting. It's also quick to heat up for those last-minute jobs. The Philips is available from Argos, Comet, Currys, the Co-op and John Lewis.

WHICH?  
BEST BUY

**WORTH KNOWING** Philips has done it again – at least one of its irons has been a Best Buy in every test over the last decade.

**Cheapest store** John Lewis **Tank capacity** 350ml  
**Iron weight (tank empty)** 1.6kg **Auto shut-off** 10 minutes on heel, 30 seconds on soleplate



## 12 STEAM IRON

## 69% Tefal FV9250 Program 8 £80

This Tefal may look a little bulky but it did well in our performance tests. The 8 in its name refers to its eight steam settings, selected using a paddle, which requires less dexterity than a dial to operate. The water tank is also easy to fill. There is an anti-calcium valve to prevent limescale build-up which is meant to be removed and cleaned once a month, but we found this fiddly. The Tefal is available from Argos, Currys and Debenhams.

WHICH?  
BEST BUY

**WORTH KNOWING** A water jug is not supplied but the wide water inlet can be filled using an ordinary kitchen jug.

**Cheapest store** Argos **Tank capacity** 350ml  
**Iron weight (tank empty)** 1.7kg **Auto shut-off** 8 minutes on heel, 30 seconds on soleplate

## Added extras

There is more to the modern iron than meets the eye. Our experts highlight two new ideas

### Philips GC4340 Azur Precise, £69



Steam irons can remain hot enough to burn your skin for several minutes after they have been switched off at the end of an ironing session. This Best Buy Philips model (11) comes with a heat-resistant cover that can be fitted over the soleplate while it is still warm. Irons should always be placed out of reach of children's hands, but if you have youngsters who are into everything, this device might provide extra peace of mind.

### Rowenta DX8300 Professional, £70



This Rowenta (16) has a handy garment protector plate. It clips over the iron's soleplate and is designed to reduce its surface temperature, allowing you to use steam to get the creases out of delicate 'cool iron' clothes that otherwise could not be ironed on a steam setting. This device really impressed our professional ironer when she tested it.

SPECIFICATION					FEATURES		WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
PRICE (£)	TANK CAPACITY (ml)	SIZE (cm) (l x h x w)	CORD LENGTH (m)	WEIGHT (kg)	BUTTON RECESS	AUTO SHUT-OFF	DURABILITY	PERFORMANCE	CONVENIENCE	
30	350	30x14x12	3	1.9	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	73
40	400	30x15x12	3	2	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	73
20	250	27x14x12	2.1	1.6	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	70
69	350	30x15x12	3	2	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	69
80	350	31x16x15	3	2.1		✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	69
100	350	31x16x15	2.9	2			★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	68
30	300	30x15x12	3	1.8	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	66
20	400	28x13x12	2	1.5	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	65
70	375	30x15x12	2.2	2	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	65
25	320	30x15x13	2	1.7	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	63
75	350	31x16x13	3	1.7	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	62
40	270	29x15x12	3	1.5	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	61
13	180	26x13x12	1.8	1.5	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	60
35	280	29x15x12	2.9	1.7	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	60

See p54 for the notes on using the table

## MEMBER BENEFIT

### Free website access

#### More information online

Which? members have free access to [www.which.co.uk/steamirons](http://www.which.co.uk/steamirons). This contains longer reviews of all 21 irons tested for this report.

## What next?

### The iron that promises to put an end to burned shirts

You're ironing a favourite shirt when the phone rings. You rush to get it, leaving the iron face down. Result: one ruined shirt.

The Oliso auto-lift aims to prevent this by sprouting legs that keep it clear of the fabric when you release its touch-sensitive handle. It was launched in the US in 2005 but won't arrive here before the autumn.