

[take issue]

Give your view and get involved

YOUR LETTERS

Password protect

Your March report on ID fraud started me thinking. Surely the answer to someone being able to identify your mother's maiden name is to make it up – or would this itself constitute fraud?

Mike Symonds
Herts

Apacs, the body that represents the banking industry, told us that it is perfectly acceptable to make up your mother's maiden name. Don't forget, too, that banks usually allow you to change existing passwords.

Landline tip

Your feature on 0870 and 0845 numbers ('Breaking the code', March, p33) was really informative. I thought your other readers might like to know that there is an internet site

★ 'Exotic pets' was vetted

We were disappointed by your piece on exotic pets (March, p35). You gave no suggestions about how these animals should be protected and cared for. The very reason such animals are described as 'exotic' is because they come from other parts of the world where they're not considered pets anyway. This was one of the rare occasions when *Which?* let us down.



Paul Reed
and Christine
Chrystal
West Sussex

We apologise
to everyone

who has criticised this article. We had no intention to promote illegal trade in pets or irresponsible ownership. We took advice from an expert zoologist, who assured us that the pets featured are all legally available. We'd stress how important it is for anyone who's considering buying any pet to first read up on its needs and to think carefully about whether they'll be able to care for it properly.

(www.saynoto0870.com) where you can search for a landline equivalent of any 0870 number. The site also allows you to add numbers which are not already listed.

Peter O'Hea
Emsworth

Train update

I noticed you didn't include Chiltern Trains in the 'Delays' table in your February

report on the state of our railways. Your table gives the impression that the lowest percentage for trains arriving late is 14 per cent, but I believe the percentage for Chiltern Trains is in fact lower.

Lance Pierson
London SW6

You're right. Latest figures show that just 8 per cent of Chiltern Trains are delayed, making it the best-performing operator.

Since we published our article, several of the train operators we featured have improved considerably for the percentage of trains arriving on time. In particular, Midland Mainline's and Great Western's percentages of trains delayed have dropped from 30 to 15 per cent and 26 to 19 per cent respectively.

contact us

letters@which.co.uk

Letters, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH

Bull-bar ban

There's no point having rules to make cars more pedestrian friendly ('Protecting pedestrians', March, p18) if owners can fit a set of bull bars to them. These lethal devices should be banned, especially on 4x4 vehicles.

Chris James
Chandler's Ford

All industry experts agree that steel bull bars present a danger to pedestrians. Car makers have voluntarily banned them for all new cars, though they can still be fitted as an after-sales accessory.

However, tests show that plastic or high-density foam bars, which some makers fit, can improve protection, though not if lights or other things are mounted on them.

The EC is proposing to ban steel bull bars, whether new or as an after-sales accessory. We are in favour of this proposal.

HELP WANTED Help us with our research for future reports

Legal expenses insurance

Contact us if you've used legal expenses insurance in conjunction with your car, house or travel insurance, to get legal advice or take legal action. Dept AJW.

Campaigners

Are you involved in a local campaign? It could be anything from keeping a library open to improving facilities for cyclists, like Paul Messing, pictured right. Whether you're working

on your own or as part of a group, contact us at speakout@which.co.uk.

New-car owners

Contact us if you own one of these: ● new BMW 3-series (from Mar 2005) ● BMW X3 ● Chevrolet Lacetti ● Citroën C4 ● new Fiat Multipla (from Sep 2004) ● new Ford Focus (from Jan 2005) ● Honda FR-V ● Kia Cerato and Picanto ● new Land Rover Discovery (from Nov 2004) ● new Lexus

GS (from May 2005) ● new Mercedes A-class (from Feb 2005) ● Mitsubishi Grandis and Colt ● Peugeot 407 ● Renault Modus ● Seat Altea ● Smart ForFour ● new Subaru Legacy (from Nov 2004) ● new Vauxhall Tigra (from Sep 2004) ● new Volvo S40 or V50 (from Apr 2004). Write to Dept NL with full contact details (plus phone number), and the exact model and age of car. We'll select ten owners of each model for phone interviews.



Tell us about your campaign activities. Paul Messing did

contact us

helpwanted@which.co.uk

Help wanted, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH

Please quote the department given – it helps us direct your reply to the right person. We are unable to help with individual

problems or to acknowledge all your replies. You'll find more requests for help online at which.co.uk/whichextra



Choice words

Which? members rubbed shoulders with MPs from the three main political parties at the Which Choice? conference, held in March. Aimed at putting the consumer back at the heart of the debate about choice in public services, the conference focused on the four areas people have told us they care most about – health, food, pensions and education. We also launched our report setting out the key principles to be addressed if choice is to work for everyone. These include access to high-quality services and products and to impartial, clear information to guide people's choices.

More than 100 delegates from the public and private sectors attended the conference, which was chaired by Nick Clarke from BBC Radio 4's *World at One*. You can download a summary of the day's debate, as well as a copy of our report, at www.which.net/campaigns/choice/conference/index.html

CRACKS IN BANK CODE



There's good news and bad in the latest edition of the Banking Code, which is now in force. We welcome measures that will increase transparency in the way banks deal with customers, such as making sure that summary boxes are put on all credit card agreements. But we're disappointed that the revisions didn't address other major concerns facing consumers.

Chief among these are the length of time it takes to transfer money electronically and the fact that credit card cheques are being sent to customers who haven't requested them.

Which? will continue to lobby for change either within the code itself or via legislation. In the meantime, you can get a copy of the code from your bank, building society or card issuer.

Drug regulator fails to act

Stronger sanctions against drug companies that publish misleading adverts and better monitoring of side effects. These were just two of the welcome recommendations from the Health Select Committee (HSC) in its report on the influence of the pharmaceutical industry.

The report criticises medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, for failing to ensure that drug companies which produce misleading adverts are dealt with effectively and speedily, and for not keeping a close enough eye on the safety and efficacy of medicines.

But we'd have liked the committee to

have said more about weaknesses in the system for reclassifying prescription-only drugs to over-the-counter status. This is especially worrying in the light of evidence from *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*. Our sister publication for healthcare professionals found no robust clinical proof to justify reclassifying simvastatin, a cholesterol-lowering drug, as the over-the-counter product Zocor Heart-Pro.

We'll press the next government to take the recommendations of the HSC seriously.

● For more about our campaigns, go to www.which.co.uk/campaigns



Which? is calling for better controls, as more and more drugs become available off-prescription

round-up

● Credit bill axed

Vital revisions proposed in the Consumer Credit Bill failed to become law before Parliament was dissolved. It means we won't now see long-overdue reforms to tackle unfair credit agreements, nor have easier and cheaper routes to redress. We hope the new government will table a new bill.

● Better food info

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee's report on food information contains a number of our recommendations, including a call for better nutrition information when eating out.

● Businesses, beware

Which? can now apply to the courts for an enforcement order on businesses that trade dishonestly (by selling unsafe products, say, or using unfair contracts). The courts must take further action against any business that ignores our order.

CAMPAIGNING BY YOU

Libby Johnston successfully campaigned for information in a health journal to be updated. Libby, pictured with husband Sean, contacted the editor of *Balance* (from Diabetes UK) after reading an article on statins, used to lower cholesterol. Libby, who was taking statins, told us: 'I was worried that the article failed to give adequate details about statins' side effects, which can include temporary or permanent muscle damage.'



If you have a complaint about something in a publication, write to the editor. And if you think information on medicines is misleading, contact the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency on 020 7084 2000.

contact us

Share your campaign speakout@which.co.uk
Speak Out, PO Box 44
Hertford X SG14 1SH