

Take a range check

We scratch beneath the shiny surface to reveal which range cookers are fit for your kitchen

TV home-improvement shows tell you that a range cooker is just what you need to give your kitchen professional appeal. To find out whether this is really the case, we've spent 14 weeks probing beyond their beguiling first impressions to explore just what you really get when you spend between £500 and £3,000 on a dual-fuel range cooker.

Most cookers offer two ovens, including one with a fan function, one or more grills, a hob with different-sized burners and a warming or storage drawer. The bigger the range, the larger the ovens. Griddles and hotplates are also common.

Unfortunately, while they all make exceedingly good cakes (see 'How we test', p62), not one of the cookers we've tested is perfect. One of the most common problems we found with range cookers, even some Best Buys, was that the grilling facility was disappointing. A number didn't brown the food effectively.

Getting the best from them requires a degree of culinary knowledge that will help you negotiate their foibles.

So if toast is your forte, forget about a range cooker – you just don't need an expensive kitchen ornament that will get in the way. However, proficient cooks can exploit their flexibility to make meals that will impress even the most demanding dinner guest.



THE LONE RANGER

Christine Pearson

Keen cook Christine wouldn't be without her range cooker. 'I've been using one for more than 25 years and I like the flexibility,' she says. 'I've got two ovens, a hob and an eye-level grill. It's great for small economical meals

made with the hob or small oven alone.'

When her family visits, she can cook huge joints of meat in the large oven and use the smaller one at a different temperature for side dishes or desserts. There's always space to warm the plates, too.

Christine is looking for a new one right now. She has yet to find the perfect model. 'They all seem to have drop-down doors, which are hard on my back,' she says. 'And I wouldn't buy a stainless steel one – they show every fingermark.'

What you should look for

GRIDDLE

These large cast-iron slabs can have flat or ridged surfaces. They are heated by the gas burners and are excellent for searing meat and vegetables

DROP-DOWN DOORS

Large drop-down doors can be inconvenient if you have to lean across them to place dishes on the shelves. They're also difficult for people who have a bad back

OVEN VOLUMES

Most have two ovens: a large one of 50 to 75 litres, and one of 20 to 35 litres. One usually has a fan and the other is conventional



WOK BURNER

A high-powered gas burner used for stir frying or rapid boiling

WIDTH

Ranges vary from 90 to 150cm. Bigger ones tend to have more hob burners and larger ovens – two large side-by-side ovens for ranges 100cm or over. The 90cm ranges often have a tall oven next to a grill compartment and a smaller second oven

CATALYTIC LININGS

These oven liners absorb grease and dirt, then burn it off at up to about 275°C. They're easier to clean than enamel surfaces

Getting the best out of your oven

How to choose the right oven function for the right meal

Range cookers usually offer two different types of oven or a blend of the two. To get the best from them, it pays to choose functions that suit the food you're cooking.

OVEN TYPES

Conventional These have an element at the top and bottom of the oven, which are used together for baking or roasting.

Fan Food is cooked by preheated air, warmed by a circular heating element at the back of the oven. It is circulated around the oven using a fan. Food can be placed in the cold oven because it heats up quickly. The heat should be even throughout the oven, allowing you to bake and roast on two levels at the same time.

Multifunction These ovens combine top and bottom heating elements with a fan, and sometimes even a grill. This gives you an enormous flexibility for different kinds of cooking including roasting, batch baking and browning off.



WHAT'S BEST WHEN COOKING

Fan-assisted grill Good for large quantities of poultry, sausages or red meat.

Top and bottom heat Also known as convection heating, this is used for baking or roasting.

Top and bottom heat with fan Can be used for baked fish, braised vegetables or kebabs. It's also best for cooking potatoes and battered or breaded foods.

Bottom heat Used to finish off the bases of food such as pizzas, pies and quiches.

Top heat Used to finish off the top of food for additional browning of dishes such as lasagne or cauliflower cheese.

Intensive bake Suitable for cooking quickly food with a high moisture content such as quiche, bread and cheesecake.

Base heat with fan Used to cook pies: the bottom element ensures that the base is cooked, while the fan allows the air to circulate around the filling.



The facts behind our tests

Probing questions

We use temperature probes to measure how accurately a fan oven maintains the right temperature, when set to 150°, 180°, and 200°C. They also help check whether heat generated by using all the hob burners at once affects the oven temperature.

Alfred the Great test

A fan oven that doesn't heat up evenly can leave your cooking both burnt and anaemic. Our baking test, which involves making more than 552 cakes, checks the evenness of baking at different levels in the fan oven. A good result is evenly-raised, golden brown cakes.

Contacts

Baumatic 0118 933 6911
www.baumatic.co.uk

Belling 0871 222 2503
www.belling.co.uk

Bosch 0870 240 0060
www.bosch.co.uk

Britannia
01253 471111
www.britannialiving.co.uk

Cannon 0870 150 6070
www.cannoncooking.co.uk

Delonghi
0845 600 6845
www.delonghi.co.uk

Electrolux
0870 595 0950
www.electrolux.co.uk

Falcon 0845 634 0070
www.falconappliances.co.uk

Flavel 0845 600 4921
www.leisurecp.co.uk

Hotpoint
0870 442 7665
www.hotpoint.co.uk

John Lewis
0845 604 9049
www.johnlewis.com

Leisure
0845 600 4921
www.leisurecp.co.uk

Neff
0870 241 3383
www.neff.co.uk

New World
0870 444 9929
www.newworldappliances.co.uk

Rangemaster
0870 789 5107
www.rangemaster.co.uk

Smeg
0870 990 9907
www.smeguk.com

Stoves
0870 444 9929
www.stoves.co.uk

Zanussi-Electrolux
0870 527 7727
www.zanussi-electrolux.co.uk

How to keep a cooker clean

Ranges aren't easy to keep spotless, so follow these handy hints

Different parts of your range will require specific cleaning treatments. Always read the manufacturers' instructions for advice.

Stainless steel Remove fingerprints immediately. Wipe with a clean cloth wrung out in hot soapy water, then polish with a soft dry cloth. Remove stubborn marks with stainless steel cleaner or rub in a few drops of baby oil to restore the finish. Avoid wire wool pads, which can scratch the surface.

Enamel Wipe regularly with warm soapy water. Use a cream cleaner for stubborn marks.

Cast-iron griddle Scrub while still warm with hot tap water and dry

immediately. Remove stubborn residues by scrubbing with salt and olive oil.

Catalytic or stay-clean oven liners

These can be cleaned by removing the shelves and leaving the oven on maximum for 20 minutes after cooking. Remove splashes with a damp sponge once it's cooled down.





67% Rangemaster Toledo 110 Dual Fuel £1,349

This large, stylish range has a fan oven that heats up quickly, and the temperature is extremely accurate. The grill works fairly effectively and the wok burner and the griddle produce great results. It's convenient, too, with a small storage compartment, warming plate and a roasting shelf that can be clicked into the oven door. Available from Comet, Currys, John Lewis and MFI.

WORTH KNOWING It comes in five colours including cream and black.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Hobs** Five **Oven** volumes 74 and 74 litres **Features** Storage compartment, warming zones, griddle, non-tip shelves, roasting shelf, wok ring **Other sizes** 90cm **Guarantee** Two years



65% Falcon Continental Dual Fuel £2,100

This cooker is a happy blend of retro good looks and decent cooking ability – it's fairly easy to clean, too, though the hob base is fingerprint prone. Only its poor grill lets it down. There are two large ovens with catalytic side walls, the fan oven heats up quickly and its temperature accuracy is spot on. It comes in six colours. Available from John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING The wok stand is rather high, which makes it slower than others for stir frying.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Hobs** Five **Oven** volumes 64 and 67 litres **Features** Storage compartment, non-tip shelves, wok ring **Other sizes** None **Guarantee** Three years

WHICH?
BEST BUY

A cooker that does not heat up evenly could leave your cooking both burnt and anaemic



64% Cannon Traditional 1000mm £1,200

There's a lot to keep you occupied with this feature-packed range, which is good at most things except grilling. The gas hobs include a wok burner with independently controlled inner and outer flames and an evenly heated griddle. There is also a separate enamel-lined grill compartment. The fan oven heats up well but cooking temperatures are slightly higher than they should be. Available from B&Q and Comet.

WORTH KNOWING It comes in two colours – anthracite and cream.

Cheapest stores B&Q, Comet **Hobs** Six **Oven** volumes 49 and 45 litres **Features** Warming drawer, griddle, slow cooking **Other sizes** 60cm **Guarantee** One year



64% Flavel Milano 100 ML10FRS £650

This stainless-steel cooker is blessed with an excellent fan oven and convenient features, including eight gas burners. The large storage compartment is easy to open. The hob is easy to clean, as are the enamelled pan supports. Unfortunately, the separate grill is a disappointment. This model is exclusive to Currys, but the similar Flavel AP10FRS and FN10FRS are also widely available.

WORTH KNOWING The oven shelves are not very strong, so don't overload them.

Cheapest store Currys **Hobs** Eight **Oven** volumes 55 and 51 litres **Features** Storage compartment **Other sizes** 60cm **Guarantee** One year

EXCEPTIONAL VALUE which?

WHICH?
BEST BUY



65% Hotpoint EG1000GX £750

Although it's quite hard to keep the hob clean, this stylish stainless-steel range (only colour available) offers reasonable all-round performance at a good price.

The hob looks unusual with its five gas burners arranged around a centre-front ceramic hotplate. It also has a useful warming drawer with a button for heating it up. The inner glass panel of the oven doors is removable for easy cleaning. Available from Comet.

WORTH KNOWING Unusually, the pan supports sit directly on the hob base, so you'll have to clean up spills carefully to avoid damaging them.

Cheapest store Comet **Hobs** Five **Oven** volumes 50 and 51 litres **Features** Warming drawer, slow cooking, non-tip shelves **Other sizes** none **Guarantee** One year

EXCEPTIONAL VALUE which?

WHICH?
BEST BUY



64% Rangemaster Elan 110 Dual Fuel £1,699

If you've got a big kitchen and want lots of cooking options, this colourful (available in black, cream and racing green) 110cm-wide range is a good all-rounder. You can adjust the cooker's height from 95 to 108cm, so it's particularly useful for tall people. The ovens heat up quickly and accurately but you can't see what you're cooking inside. It has one of the better grills we tested. Available at Comet, Currys, John Lewis and MFI.

WE LIKE The useful roasting shelf can be clipped on to the oven door.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Hobs** Six **Oven** volumes 65 and 70 litres **Features** Storage compartment, wok ring, non-tip shelves, griddle **Other sizes** 90cm **Guarantee** Two years

WHICH?
BEST BUY

How to buy

What to think about before you make that big purchase

■ WHERE SHOULD I BUY?

Retail parks with larger branches of Comet, Currys and MFI usually have several in stock, as do John Lewis stores (see 'Contacts', p62). However, you can save a lot of money by buying online: The Rangemaster Elan (6), for instance, costs between £1,475 and £1,888 online. But before clicking 'buy', always compare delivery costs and read customer reviews of the service offered.

■ HOW LONG WILL DELIVERY TAKE?

Although retailers usually say that delivery takes two to six weeks, most of our cookers arrived within a month; some took less than a week.

■ WHO WILL INSTALL IT?

Dual-fuel range cookers require connection to the gas and electricity supplies and this must be done by qualified professionals. You'll need to contact a Corgi-registered gas engineer and an electrician who can certify that their work complies with Part P of the building regulations (see 'Contacts', p68, on the cooker hoods report, for registered bodies). Comet, Currys and John Lewis all offer connection services, costing between £60 and £100. Connection might not take place on the same day as delivery, so check with the retailer.

■ DO I NEED TO BUY AN EXTENDED WARRANTY?

Range cookers usually come with a standard one- or two-year guarantee. This can be extended to three or five years for between around £50 and £200. We don't have specific reliability figures for range cookers but freestanding cookers are fairly reliable – only 19 per cent up to six years old need repairs. Their main weak spots are problems with their doors, ignition and dials, and the oven not heating up.



Facts & scores

Hot and not-so-hot points about some of the range cookers on the market

Bad vibrations 1

This Leisure is a reasonable choice for its cooking ability, but vibrating shelves and glass panels also make it a noisy one.

Dirt traps

This Britannia is available with a variety of hob options, including six burners, four burners with hotplate or ceramic hob. Unfortunately, the hob burners are screwed on in three sections creating long dirt traps on the hob top.

Browned off

Less than a quarter of the grill in one of this Neff's ovens browns effectively. The best grill in our test browns almost three quarters of its total grill area effectively.

Bad vibrations 2

The fan on this Bosch oven hums annoyingly and makes cooking with it a far less pleasant experience.

Style over substance

The control panel of this Baumatic range looks great, but the knobs are close together and quite difficult to use, with small and thin markings on a reflective background, which makes them hard to see.

MODEL		SPECIFICATION	
		PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (hxxwxd)
1	RANGEMASTER Toledo 110 Dual Fuel	1,349	93x110x61
2	FALCON Continental Dual Fuel	2,100	91x101x60
3	HOTPOINT EG1000GX	750	92x100x61
4	CANNON Traditional 1000mm	1,200	91x100x61
5	FLAVEL Milano 100 ML10FRS	650	91x100x60
6	RANGEMASTER Elan 110 Dual Fuel	1,699	95x110x60
7	ELECTROLUX EKM11440CN	1,202	91x110x62
8	DE'LONGHI DFS090DO	500	89x90x60
9	RANGEMASTER Classic 90 Dual Fuel	1,299	93x90x61
10	BELLING 100DFDO	899	92x100x60
11	JOHN LEWIS JLRC101	1,499	92x100x60
12	LEISURE EB10FRX	1,000	90x100x60
13	BRITANNIA Sigma 100 cm Twin	2,899	86x100x60
14	NEFF F3470	2,279	91x100x60
15	NEW WORLD NW90DFDO	649	90x90x60
16	BOSCH HSB745A55E	1,624	90x100x62
17	STOVES Richmond 900DF	1,300	89x90x59
18	ZANUSSI-ELECTROLUX ZCM1030X	1,094	96x100x60
19	BAUMATIC Royal Chiantishire BRC3BDY	1,467	87x90x60
20	SMEG SUK92MBL5	1,279	90x90x59

USING THE TABLE

We tested best-selling models from the leading manufacturers. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press.

Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay.

Multifunction oven

Includes a fan function.

Grill compartment Separate from the ovens.

Test performance

Oven preheating time We measure the time it took to reach 150°, 180° and

200°C as indicated by the thermostat light turning off. A ★★★★★-rated oven heats up in about half the time of a ★-rated oven. **Oven accuracy** How well the ovens maintain the set temperatures of 150°, 180° and 200°C. A ★★★★★-rated oven was within 2°C of this temperature, a ★-rated oven was out by more than 15°C. **Grilling** More than 70 per cent of the grill area browned effectively on a ★★★★★-rated grill, and less than 40 per cent on a ★-rated grill. **Hob performance** How quickly and efficiently the hob heats up and its effectiveness at simmering.

			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE										SCORE %
FAN OVEN	MULTIFUNCTION OVEN	GRILL COMPARTMENT	OVEN PREHEATING TIME	OVEN ACCURACY	GRILLING	HOB PERFORMANCE	HOB EFFECT ON OVEN	USING CORE FUNCTIONS	USING ADDITIONAL FEATURES	CLEANING HOB	CLEANING OVEN	REMOVING FINGERPRINTS	
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Hob effect on oven

Whether using all the hobs at the same time has any effect on the temperature of the top ovens. A poor result indicates that the oven temperature is reduced by more than 20°C. **Using core functions** How easy it is to use the core features of the cooker, including the grill, oven and hob; opening and closing the doors; loading in and out of the oven/grill; the visibility of the food and the clarity of the control markings. **Using additional features** The convenience of any storage compartment warming function; the ease

of setting any programmable features and the ease of using the separate grill compartment. **Cleaning hob and oven/ Removing fingerprints** Cleaning the hob, pan supports and oven using a sponge and hot soapy water; the success of this cleaning approach and the amount of effort required to get the cooker properly clean and fingerprint free.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Ease of use and noise	35%
Hob performance	20%
Oven performance	20%
Cleaning	15%
Grill performance	10%

You can save a lot of money by shopping online but always compare delivery costs and read customer reviews of the store's service

SEARCH FOR MORE BEST BUYS**FREE website access**

A greater selection of range cookers, more top tips on cleaning and advice on getting the best out of your cooker online

Visit www.which.co.uk/rangecookers and you'll discover loads more about range cookers including information on the other cookers in our table and even more on the exciting ways to cook on a range. Our website also has details of the latest Best Buy oven cleaners and frying pans. If you have problems logging on to our website, visit www.which.co.uk/loginhelp for a step-by-step guide to the process.

