

How we test



An infrared camera takes the temperature of the hobs

Watching water boil

We heat a frying pan until the centre reaches 200°C, then use an infrared camera to assess the evenness of the temperature right across the cooking zone or burner.

We also time how long it takes for a pan containing 1.5 litres of water to reach 90°C on a medium burner or zone.

To test how easy the hobs are to control, we heat up a pan of oil to 80°C, again on a medium burner, at full power, and measure how much the temperature continues to increase once the burner has been turned off.

Finally, we cook stir-fry vegetables and rate how easy the controls are to use.

We also give ourselves the chance to be very messy. We spread a paste of mince and gravy over each hob, leave it to dry, then scrub away until the hob is clean.

Top of the hobs

Sales of stand-alone hobs are rising faster than a pan of boiling water. We look at which are the best models available

As our appetite for TV cooking shows increases all the time, it seems we're also becoming more interested in the look of our own cooker.

Built-in appliances, which many feel give a more stylish look to modern kitchens, are becoming increasingly popular. Between 2002 and 2004, sales rose 26 per cent, while seven per cent fewer freestanding cookers were sold. We look here at the different types of hob that are available.

Traditionally if you wanted controllable heat, it had to be gas

Traditionally, if you wanted controllable heat, it had to be gas, while if you wanted something easier to clean, you chose electric. Our tests show this is still true, but if you splash out on new technology such as gas on glass or induction (see 'Jargon buster', p63), you can combine style, speed, safety and controllability.

As induction hobs are less familiar to many of us, we give a few pointers on them ('What you should look for', below). We also ask a celebrity chef what he uses.

What you should look for

SIZE

Most hobs are 60cm wide. Wider models still fit a 60cm gap, as they're designed to overlap the worktop. The AEG 78001 (22) is the only Best Buy hob that needs a larger space

SAFETY/CHILD LOCKS

All the induction hobs we tested have safety locks to stop children operating the controls. Some ceramic hobs have them, too

POWER BOOST

This feature heats cooking zones on induction hobs more quickly, saving about a third of the time they normally take to heat. The rapid intense heat is good for stir-frying or searing meat

PANS

Induction hobs require ferrous pans (pans that contain iron). As a general rule, if your pots and pans stick to a magnet they'll work on an induction hob

Which should you choose?

Best for stir-fry

JOHN LEWIS JLBIGH702 £279 All the wok burners are great at stir-fry cooking, especially the burner on this John Lewis hob (3), which heats quickly, is easy to adjust and has simple controls.



Easiest to control the heat

WHIRLPOOL ATK717 £269 The Whirlpool (6) doesn't heat as quickly as some we tested but it's more precise – the pan of oil continued to heat by just 12°C after the hob was turned off.



Speediest hob

DE DIETRICH DT1304J £499 If you cook in a hurry, you'll like this model (24). It heated a pan of water in 5 minutes, 28 seconds, more than twice as fast as the slowest hob we tested.





1 GAS

76% Neff T2346 £199

This is stylish, with elegant oval controls at the front that are simple to adjust. It has one high-speed, two standard and one economy burner but no wok burner. It doesn't heat as quickly as some gas hobs on test but it is precise. The temperature rises little after the hob is turned off and heat is evenly distributed across each burner. It was one of the easiest gas hobs to clean. It's available at Comet and John Lewis.

WE LIKE If the flame goes out, the gas shuts off instantly.

Cheapest store Comet, John Lewis **Wok burner** No **Timer** No **Child/safety locks** No **Finish** Black or white ceramic, stainless steel

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



2 GAS

73% Indesit PI750AST £239

The Indesit was the speediest gas hob we tested. Handy extra features include the flame-failure cut-off system, which stops the gas flow if the flame is accidentally extinguished. The front controls are bulky and not stylish but they're easy to use and each knob has automatic electronic ignition. You can buy the Indesit at Focus or Boots online.

WORTH KNOWING You can buy a lid for the Indesit as an optional extra.

Cheapest store Focus **Wok burner** Yes **Timer** No **Child/safety locks** No **Finish** Stainless steel

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



3 GAS

73% John Lewis JLBIGH702 £279

If you're a big fan of stir-fry cooking, this could be the hob for you, as the wok burner was the best on test. There is also a useful burner specially for simmering. This John Lewis model heats a pan of water in less than ten minutes and the flame is easy to control. The stainless steel surface is easy to clean with a sponge and soapy water but you'll need to remove the three-piece cast-iron pan supports.

WE LIKE The large front-mounted controls are clearly marked and easy to use.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Wok burner** Yes **Timer** No **Child/safety locks** No **Finish** Stainless steel

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



10 GAS ON GLASS

74% Neff T2866 £389

This chic-looking gas-on-glass hob has a large central wok burner. You ignite this by pushing down the control knobs and there is a safety device that cuts off the gas if the flame goes out and the burner fails to reignite. The controls are positioned at the front and are easy to operate. The Neff heats a pan of water in less than 11 minutes – similar to standard gas hobs. However, it's more precise: the temperature rose by just 12.5°C after it was switched off.

It's available online.

WE LIKE The glass surface is easier to clean than standard gas models.

Available Online **Wok burner** Yes **Timer** No **Child/safety locks** No **Finish** Black hard glass

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Woks

A perfect way to cook a quick, tasty meal

Oriental stir-fry cooking is popular, and lots of gas hobs now feature a high-powered wok burner perfect for this type of cooking. This could be a larger fourth burner or an extra burner in the middle of the hob that provides an intense, rapid heat. All gas models apart from the Best Buy Neff (1) have a wok burner. And the gas-on-glass

Facts & scores

Some of the extra points you might want to know

No wok burner

This Neff is the only standard gas hob that we tested that does not have a special wok burner.

Slow to boil

The slowest hob to heat a pan of water to 90°C was this Whirlpool, which took 12 minutes and 26 seconds.

It's a gas

This AEG, together with the Electrolux EHG770, Hotpoint GF640, Neff T2866, Whirlpool AKT717 and Zanussi ZGF782C, includes kit which allows you to connect them to bottled liquefied petroleum gas.

If you're a big fan of stir-fry cooking, the John Lewis JLBIGH702 could be for you



Neff (10) has one as well. Wok burners heat up more quickly than standard gas burners and are easy to control. All the wok burners we tested produced an evenly cooked, tasty stir-fried meal in minutes.

Jargon buster

How to tell your induction from your gas on glass

■ **DUAL ZONE** On electric hobs, a dual zone allows you to operate an inner zone within the main ring, to save energy when cooking with smaller pans.

■ **GAS ON GLASS** These have gas burners mounted on top of ceramic glass so they look more stylish than other gas hobs. They don't heat as quickly as electric

ceramic models but are more precise and easier to control. Unlike standard gas hobs, the flat ceramic surface is easy to clean.

■ **INDUCTION** Induction hobs are quick, safe and efficient. They are quicker and cheaper to run than other hobs because it is just the pan and not the whole cooking surface that heats.

This means you can touch the surface next to the pan without burning yourself. They are more expensive to buy. You'll also need pans that contain iron. Because of the electromagnetic field it uses, induction may not be suitable if you have a pace-maker. We also found there was a loud humming



noise; De Dietrich and Whirlpool say their models can be noisy when using more than one cooking zone.

■ **TIMER** Many induction hobs have a timer that can be used to program zones to switch off automatically when you want them to stop cooking. None of the gas hobs we tested has this.

MODEL	SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) wxd	NUMBER OF BURNERS/ZONES	SPEED	TEMPERATURE OVERSHOOT	HEAT DISTRIBUTION	WOK BURNER	EASE OF USE	EASE OF CLEANING	
GAS										
1 NEFF T2346	199	58x51	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	76
2 INDESIT PI750AST	239	68x51	5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	73
3 JOHN LEWIS JLBIGH702	279	68x51	5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	73
4 HOOVER HGD640GHX	205	59x51	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	72
5 HOTPOINT GF640	220	73x51	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	71
6 WHIRLPOOL AKT717	269	73x51	5	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	71
7 ZANUSSI ZGF782C	256	68x51	5	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	71
8 STOVES 700GC	284	68x51	5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	70
9 ELECTROLUX EHG770	225	68x51	5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	68
GAS ON GLASS										
10 NEFF T2866	389	71x52	5	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	74
11 WHIRLPOOL AKM441	319	58x51	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★	73
12 AEG 79902G	524	73x51	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★★	65

USING THE TABLE

We tested widely available standard gas and ceramic hobs and some of the latest induction and gas-on-glass models from 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 can expect to pay. Online prices are in *italics*.

Number of burners/zones

The number of cooking areas or zones the hob has.

Test performance

Speed How long it took to heat 1.5 litres of water to 90°C on the middle-sized

burner. The quickest (★★★★★) hobs took less than 7 minutes 30 seconds; the slowest (★★★) took between 10 minutes and 12 minutes 30 seconds.

Temperature overshoot We heated a pan of oil to 80°C on the middle-sized burner, then measured how much the temperature increased after the burner was switched off. With the best

(★★★★★ hobs this was less than 13°C; with the worst (★) it was more than 50°C. Best was the Whirlpool AKT 717 (12°C), worst was the Neff T1333 (52°C). **Heat**

distribution How evenly heat is distributed across the burner/cooking zone. With ★★★★★ models there was a difference of 15°C or less; with ★ hobs it was more than 50°C. **Ease of use** Basic

controls and programmable features. **Ease of cleaning** How easy it was to remove parts of the hob and clean surfaces.

Score

Ignores price and based on:
Speed **20%**
Temperature overshoot **20%**
Heat distribution **20%**
Ease of use **20%**
Ease of cleaning **20%**



11 GAS ON GLASS

73% Whirlpool AKM441 £319

Heat distribution across the burners is more even on this model than on any other on test, with less than 15°C between the hottest and coldest parts of the burner. A flame-failure device cuts off the gas if the flame is accidentally blown out. The controls are clearly marked and easy to use – you simply push and turn them to ignite. It's available from Boots online.

WORTH KNOWING You can buy an LPG conversion kit as an optional extra.

Available Online Wok burner No Timer No Child/safety locks No Finish Black glass, stainless steel

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Handy
warning
lights let
you know
when the
Whirlpool
AKM613
is hot



13 CERAMIC

65% Whirlpool AKM613 £319

The Whirlpool was the most responsive ceramic hob. When we turned it on then switched it off, the heat rose less than on other ceramic models. The controls are right of the cooking zones, which may be awkward for left-handers.

Messy cooks will be pleased that dried-on food came off with a damp sponge. You can buy the hob online from Boots, Co-op and Sainsbury's.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

WE LIKE Control knobs can be removed when you want to clean them.

Available Online Wok burner n/a Timer No Child/safety locks No Finish Black ceramic glass



14 CERAMIC

60% John Lewis £299

This John Lewis four-zone electric hob was the fastest ceramic hob we tested but, like other models of this kind, the temperature continues to rise quite a bit even after it's turned off.

The electronic touch controls at the front are easy to use and each zone has a residual heat indicator so that you know when the hob is hot enough to start cooking.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



22 INDUCTION

80% AEG 78001 £745

The AEG was the most expensive model on test but it does have some novel features to justify the price tag, including an electronic timer and 'minute minder' to help prevent pans boiling over and to avoid over-cooking. The temperature rises little after it's turned off and it has two powerful boosters for even quicker cooking (see 'What you should look for',

p61). There is also a handy child-safety lock. The AEG is available from B&Q.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

WE LIKE A zone-free option means you can place pans anywhere on the hob – ideal for big casseroles and fish kettles.

Cheapest store B&Q Wok burner n/a Timer Yes Child/safety locks Yes Finish Black ceramic glass

Contacts

AEG
0870 535 0350
www.aeg-electrolux.co.uk
Baumatic
01189 336 900
www.baumatic.co.uk
Belling
0870 458 9663
www.belling.co.uk
De Dietrich
08707 503 503
www.dedietrich.co.uk
Electrolux
0870 535 0350
www.aeg-electrolux.co.uk
Hoover 0870
950 2943
www.hoover.co.uk
Hotpoint 0870
150 60 70
www.hotpoint.co.uk
Indesit 0870 150
6070
www.indesit.co.uk
John Lewis
0845 604 9049
www.johnlewis.com
Neff
0870 240 0080
www.neff.co.uk
Stoves
0870 458 9663
www.stoves.co.uk
Whirlpool
0870 600 8989
www.whirlpool.co.uk



23 INDUCTION

80% Neff T4344 £627

Neff's four-zone induction hob is more controllable than standard ceramic hobs. The touch controls are a doddle and it's packed with features including a memory function that lets you store power levels and cooking times for each zone – useful for cooking a favourite dish. Each zone has a timer with a switch-off function and alarm to let you know when your food is cooked. It's available online only.

WE LIKE Residual heat indicators tell you whether it's hot enough to start cooking or if it's too hot to touch.

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Available Online Wok burner n/a Timer Yes Child/safety locks Yes Finish Black ceramic glass

Facts & scores

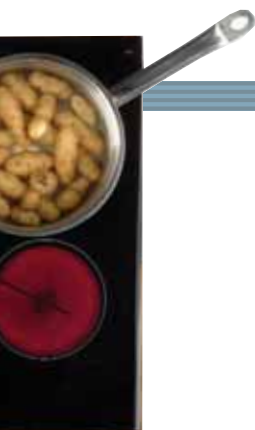
Here are some of the other features we found with the hobs on test

Quickest gas hob

This John Lewis model heated a pan of water in seven minutes and 49 seconds, almost five minutes faster than the slowest hob that we had on test.

A cooking circle

The Baumatic B45 has three cooking zones and is circular rather than the traditional rectangular shape you'd expect.



Insider information

Top chef Brian Turner CBE gives his expert view

We asked chef Brian Turner, a popular guest on TV shows such as *Ready Steady Cook*, for his views on the best hob types.

Brian uses a gas hob both at home and at work. He says: 'It's worth spending time and money on a decent hob, particularly as that's what you cook on most of the time. I'm a traditionalist, so for me you can't beat a gas hob. Chefs prefer to use gas because you can see the flame, you feel the intensity of the heat and can control it more easily. Induction can feel unnatural and takes away some of the skill. But once you've mastered it, people won't be

able to say what sort of hob the food's been cooked on. Gas on glass looks great but there's the fear you might drop a pan and scratch the glass top.

'Some new features are useful. If they work for you, then fine. But don't throw away money just to have something your neighbour doesn't. If you do a lot of stir-frying, go for a hob with a wok burner. I think you lose a sense of achievement if you rely on memory functions and you rarely cook a dish the same way twice. For example, lamb shanks are never the same size. Even if they're the same weight, they'll be a



different shape [so different timing may be needed]. You can knock touch controls without noticing, so I think large, simple controls at the front of the hob are best. If they're at the side you'll have to reach over the hob

and might burn yourself. Looks are important but fashion changes and you'll have to keep changing with it. A built-in hob can look great in a new kitchen but prioritise functionality over design.'

JLBICH602

There are nine temperature stages for cooking. The hob is generally easy to clean but we had to use a special ceramic cleaner on more stubborn stains. **WORTH KNOWING** The hob includes a safety lock to stop children from accidentally switching it on.

Cheapest store John Lewis **Wok burner n/a** **Timer** No **Child/safety locks** Yes **Finish** Black ceramic

MODEL	SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE					SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) wxd	NUMBER OF BURNERS/ZONES	SPEED	TEMPERATURE OVERSHOOT	HEAT DISTRIBUTION	EASE OF USE	EASE OF CLEANING	
CERAMIC									
13 WHIRLPOOL AKM613	319	58x52	4	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	65
14 JOHN LEWIS JLBICH602	299	59x52	4	★★★★★	★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	60
15 NEFF T1333	475	58x51	4 ^a	★★★★★	★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	57
16 INDESIT MK64R/PV604IX	260	58x51	4	★★★★★	★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	56
17 BAUMATIC B45	389	52 ^b	3 ^a	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	55
18 BELLING CR60	309	58x51	4	★★★★	★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	53
19 ELECTROLUX EHS6651	435	59x52	4 ^a	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	53
20 ZANUSSI ZKF641X	300	57x50	4 ^a	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	53
21 AEG 66300KFAN	469	61x56	4 ^a	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	52
INDUCTION									
22 AEG 78001	745	71x52	4	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	80
23 NEFF T4344	627	63x51	4	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	80
24 DE DIETRICH DTI304J	499	58x51	4	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	79
25 WHIRLPOOL AKM990	719	58x51	4	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	72

^a There are also a number of small zones within the main rings to save energy when cooking with smaller pans ^b Diameter (cm)

See p63 for notes on using the table