

[take issue]

Give your view and get involved

YOUR LETTERS

Taxing confusion

Your October piece on low-cost airlines was very interesting. My wife and I use these airlines quite a lot.

One thing that bewilders me is how different airlines calculate the taxes, fees and charges. For example, for a BA flight from Gatwick to Toulouse departing 18 October and returning a week later these worked out at £45.30 per person, whereas with EasyJet they were just £14.50. BA says its figure includes a fuel charge – but of more than £30 each?

As for Ryanair, which keeps the taxes for cancelled flights, it seems to me to display an air of arrogance and indifference to its customers. I still don't understand how it can legally do that. That said, in three years of travel to and

A plumber hits back

In your September article on plumbers' prices, you recommend that people steer clear of plumbers who don't charge VAT, as this may mean they won't pay tax either.

I'm a self-employed plumber but I am not registered for VAT because my annual turnover is below the threshold where registration is compulsory – and the savings I would make by claiming back VAT don't warrant the extra paperwork and accountancy fees I'd incur



if I were to register voluntarily. But this doesn't mean that I don't declare to my accountant every job done. Nor does it mean that I don't pay the full tax due on all the money I earn.

*Dennis Cordwell
Clacton-on-Sea*

from France, we have been lucky with Ryanair and EasyJet and only once had a problem when the French air traffic controllers went on strike. The moral of the story? Make sure you get proper travel insurance.

*Julian C Price
Milton Keynes*

Line management

My query concerns your report on home-phone companies (September, p24). My line is with BT but I make calls through

Onetel. If I were to switch to Onetel for my line as well, who would be responsible for maintaining it?

*Len Marchant
Surrey*

BT remains responsible for maintaining all lines – this is covered in the charge it makes when it rents lines to other companies. As a Onetel customer, though, you should contact Onetel if you have problems: it will liaise with BT to get the fault fixed.

Serps: sold short

Like those in your September report (p10), I contracted out of Serps on the basis of information I thought was government backed. Having seen the performance of all my private pension plans fall, I feel ripped off by

pension providers and the governments that have effectively acted as their agents.

I think providers and governments should jointly ensure no one is worse off for contracting out. But I expect nothing will be done – and millions of us will never again trust their advice.

*Mark Johnson
by email*

Teething troubles

Is it possible to get a second opinion before accepting a dentist's recommendation to have work done?

*J Hancock
Bristol*

Everyone has the right to ask another dentist for a second opinion – but the NHS doesn't cover this, so you may have to pay. Dentists have the right to disagree on what the best treatment is, just as patients can refuse treatment they don't want. See p67 for news about dental charges.

contact us

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Letters, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH

Senders of all letters printed receive a Which? book

HELP WANTED Help us with our research for future reports

Buying car tyres

Have you ever bought, or tried to buy, tyres online? If so, and you'd be happy to tell us about your experience, write with full contact details (including a phone number). David Evans.

New-car owners

Contact us if you own any of these: ● new BMW 3-series (from Mar 2005) ● BMW X3 ● Chevrolet Lacetti ● Citroën C1 ● new Fiat Multipla (from Sep 2004) ● Honda FR-V

● new Lexus GS (from May 2005) ● new Mercedes A Class (from Feb 2005) ● Mitsubishi Grandis ● Mazda 5 ● Peugeot 107 and 1007 ● Smart forfour ● new Subaru Legacy (from Nov 2004) ● new Suzuki Swift (from May 2005) ● new Vauxhall Tigra (from Sep 2004) ● new Vauxhall Zafira (from Aug 2005) ● new VW Passat (from July 2005) ● VW Golf Plus (from June 2005). We'll need full contact details (plus a phone number),

the exact model and age of car and exactly when bought. We'll select ten owners of each model and conduct interviews by phone. Nikki Lewrey.

Out-of-hours health care

Have you needed health care outside normal GP surgery hours in the past year? Did you know who to contact? Was it hard getting help? Did you have problems? Tell us your experience and help with our new campaign. Frances Blunden.



Send us your experiences of buying tyres online

contact us

helpwanted@which.co.uk

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

Please quote the name given – it helps us direct your reply to the right person. We regret that 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/whichestra



Better legal service

Consumers look set to get a better deal at a fairer price from the legal services profession, following the government's announcement of a radical shake-up of the industry. Proposals include a new regulator, the Legal Services Board, to oversee the professional bodies, and an independent Office for Legal Complaints, to help consumers get redress if things go wrong. They should also mean access to legal services is no longer restricted to traditional law firms.

The reforms won't come in for a while, so in the meantime, the government is to bring in the Compensation Bill. This will regulate firms which help people with compensation claims ranging from endowments to personal injury, thus ensuring that anyone using such firms is protected as soon as possible.

Go to www.which.co.uk/campaigns for more about our campaign to reform legal services.

CHIPS WITH NOTHING

The government's School Meals Review Panel has published proposals setting tough new standards for school lunches to ensure pupils get essential nutrients.

The panel recommended that schools serve hot meals, cooked on site. Caterers will have to remove low-quality foods high in fat, salt and sugar, and serve up at least two portions of fruit and veg with each lunch. Sweets, crisps and fizzy

drinks will be banned from vending machines. In addition, it proposed that schoolchildren be taught cooking skills.

Which? has been involved in putting these proposals together. If accepted, they'll be a great step forward in our healthy eating campaign.



Foundation launches award

Consumers can be troublesome devils. One look at our regular 'Campaigning by you' section, below, proves that you're prepared to fight for what you believe in. So are we. In fact, we've spent nearly 50 years tackling the issues that matter to you – through our magazines, our campaigning activities and now through the Sheila McKechnie Foundation.

For more than eight years, Sheila was Which?'s campaigner-in-chief. Now the foundation established in her name is launching the Sheila McKechnie Award for Consumer Action to celebrate and support the next generation of campaigners.

The award is just one of a clutch on offer to budding campaigners across the country who can demonstrate that they, too, have the

will to succeed. In return, they will be rewarded with a support package to help their campaigns. Winners will also get the chance to bend the ear of experienced campaigners, spend time with politicians, journalists and other people in positions of influence, and hone their campaigning skills at training days.

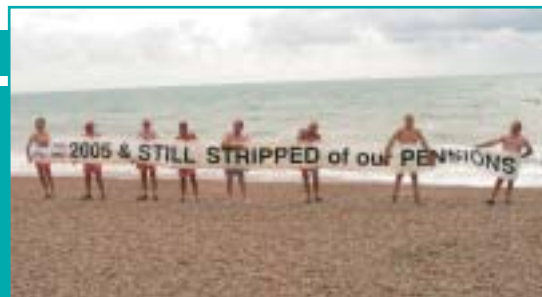
The foundation is designed to encourage anyone and everyone who is campaigning to apply for an award. If you know someone who fits the bill, or you simply want to support the work of the foundation, go to www.sheilamckechnie.org.uk to find out more.



Sheila McKechnie: the driving force behind the new award scheme

CAMPAIGNING BY YOU

The Pensions Action Group represents some 80,000 consumers stripped of their pension rights because their employers went bust before the Pension Protection Fund came into force. It wants full rights restored to these workers, some of whom have lost pensions built up over 30 or 40 years. John Hayter, a member of the group, told us: 'What's happened to us is worse than Maxwell. This is legal theft by the people supposed to protect our pensions.'



Visit the group's website at www.pensionstheft.org for more.

contact us

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

roundup

● Progress on ATMs

Nationwide BS and Halifax/Bank of Scotland are taking up our suggestion of bringing in clear green signs on their cash machines to show they are free. A good move – and one we'll be pushing the rest of the industry to follow.

● Dental charges

The cost of replacing or repairing some dentures has almost doubled under the new system of dental charges – to a staggering £183. We've told the government to bring the cost down so that pensioners, in particular, aren't out of pocket.

● Estate agents

Former minister Lord Dubs is to introduce a Private Members' Bill in the House of Lords that would require all estate agents to sign up to an independent redress scheme. Unfortunately, it's unlikely to become law but we'll continue to put pressure on the government to keep its promise to legislate.