

Easy riders

We help take the pain out of choosing the right pushchair for you and your baby

There's no life-changing experience quite like becoming a parent. And the build-up to parenthood can be pretty stressful. You'll find yourself having to buy items that you've never even considered before, and you probably won't know how to choose a pushchair that will cater to all your child's needs. After all, you've not met baby yet.

But don't despair. Over the next five pages we'll explain exactly what you need, introduce you to the different styles and highlight how they fit into your current lifestyle. We'll outline the pros and cons of each type – all-terrain, travel systems and strollers (see p68 for more details) – and introduce you to our Best Buys.

Each of the 21 pushchairs presented here has made it through an exhaustive array of safety, durability, stability and construction tests, which no other magazine can match. We also asked a group of experts, trained to understand what makes a pushchair easy to use, and a panel of parents and their babies to put the pushchairs through their paces.

So sit back and relax (while you still can) and use our advice to decide which of our Best Buys are the most appropriate for your budget and your lifestyle. And don't forget to check out our in-depth online reviews of more than 60 pushchairs at www.which.co.uk/pushchairs for more details.



Jargon buster

Pushchair phraseology in a language you can understand

■ **2-IN-1** A collapsible chassis and separate seat unit that can be adapted to use as a pram or pushchair. A 3-in-1 has a carrycot too.



■ **ADJUSTABLE LEG SUPPORT** These support the calves of children who can't reach the foot rest (see above).

■ **CAR SEAT COMPATIBLE** Some child seats can be coupled to a pushchair to form a travel system.

■ **CONCERTINA FOLD** The pushchair folds into three or more

segments to become wide and squat.

■ **PNEUMATIC TYRES**

Give a smooth ride on bumpy surfaces.

■ **RECLINING BACK REST** Lowering the back rest makes it more comfortable for a sleeping baby. The best pushchairs for



newborn babies recline to more than 150° (see left).

■ **SCISSOR FOLD**

The wheels come together during folding and the result is wide and squat.

■ **SUSPENSION** Generally gives a more comfortable ride, but padding and seat

design influence comfort too.



■ **SWIVEL WHEELS**

These are easy to manoeuvre on normal ground. Fixed wheels are best on rough surfaces, so choose swivel wheels that can lock (see above).

■ **UMBRELLA FOLD**

The cross-support bars on the pushchair unlock and its width decreases. The upper half of the pushchair folds over the lower half, making it long and thin.

Checklist

What to watch out for when buying a pushchair

Common problems

- Brakes that are difficult to engage or release
- Brake pedals that project over the wheels and catch on stairs
- Handles that are too tall, short or angled
- Uncomfortable handle grip materials
- Folding mechanisms that need great strength, incredible flexibility or more hands than you possess to operate them
- Storage space that is too small or hard to reach
- Folded pushchairs that are too bulky for your car
- Flexing frames or wobbly handles that make steering difficult
- The hood, padding or basket get in the way when folding

- The pushchair is too long and needs to be lifted to manoeuvre in tight spaces
- Harness is too fiddly to adjust or not tight enough for smaller children
- Too heavy to lift and carry when folded.

First-timers' mistakes

- Being beguiled by the design, colour or brand
- Buying a pushchair that leaves no space for anything else in your car
- Buying a pushchair that suits only one of the people who push it
- Buying a travel system but using the carrycot only a few times, and finding that the pushchair is unwieldy to use once your child has outgrown the car seat.

All-terrain

What are they?

Usually three-wheelers, these have large, chunky, pneumatic tyres, which make them ideal for crossing bumpy, rough terrain or loose surfaces, such as sand or gravel.

They often have a swivel wheel at the front, which makes them easy to manoeuvre on smooth surfaces, but the wheel can also be locked so it doesn't twist. This gives it the strength to cope with rougher ground. Some pushchairs also have added suspension to give a more comfortable ride.

Who should get one?

These will suit parents who love the great outdoors and who spend their free time in the countryside or parks, or who live in areas where the pavements are poor.

You'll need a big boot to put them in the car and a large storage space at home. They're often too large to use easily on public transport or in crowded places,



such as the high street or supermarkets.

PROS They provide a smooth and comfortable ride and can cope with rough ground. Some can be used for jogging with your child.

CONS They're usually heavy and very bulky and have a long wheelbase, which means they are difficult to turn in tight spaces. They can also be unwieldy on steps and in places where you'll balance the weight on the front wheel, such as going up kerbs. Smaller, lighter models tend to be basic and may not have the suspension to handle well on rough ground.



Worth considering

This narrowly missed out on Best Buy status but was well liked by parents

MOUNTAIN BUGGY URBAN £440

Pictured left, this is one of the most expensive pushchairs we tested. Thankfully, it handles brilliantly, despite its size and weight. We like its excellent brakes, and both the reclining and folding mechanisms are easy to use. However, it's large and difficult to move when folded, and the hard foam cover on the handlebar is a bit uncomfortable. You can fit the chassis with a carrycot, or use it as a travel system with the Best Buy Maxi-Cosi Cabriofix car seat instead of the seat unit. It is available in a wide range of colours and comes with a rain cover, hood and soft pram body.

SCORE 74%

Travel systems

What are they?

These 'all-inclusive' models aim to provide the answer to all your baby transporting needs in one stylish package. They can be used with a car seat and/or carrycot, but these aren't always included in the price. Some car seats and carrycots slide onto the chassis, others clip on or are fastened on with Velcro.

You'll often see a pushchair sold both on its own and as a travel system, where the price includes a compatible child car seat. The car seat is not always from the same manufacturer.

Who should get one?

The main benefit is that you can transfer your baby between car, pushchair, and house without disturbing them too much. This is great if you spend a lot of time on the move.

PROS They appear to be a bargain because they offer a lot of flexibility. Some are compatible with Best Buy car seats (see 'Keeping safe', *Which?*, June 2007, p70).



CONS Pushchairs that can be used as travel systems are often quite large. Babies often outgrow the carrycot and child car seat in around 12 months. You'll need space to store the various parts when you're not using them, and not all car seats are compatible with all chassis. Very young babies should not spend long periods of time in a child car seat.

77% Maclaren Techno XLR £295

This is an excellent pushchair for everyday use. It is easy to use as a travel system with the co-ordinating Recaro Young Profi Plus car seat, which is also a Best Buy. And you can also buy it on its own for around £180.

It handles all surfaces effortlessly and is a dream to fold. In addition, it is easy to get it off and on public transport and it's comparatively easy to store.

The only weak spot is the back rest recline mechanism, which leaves you crouching down to operate it with two hands.

It has changed slightly since our test. The new 2008 version has a buckle that is harder for a child to undo, new fabric colours and new hub caps (see 'Updated for 2008', p70, for more details). It is cheapest at Mothercare.

WORTH KNOWING Compared with most other travel systems, it's lightweight and compact when folded.

Available Mothercare Accessories Rain cover, hood, apron
Back rest positions Four 150° recline Yes



Strollers

What are they?

Stroller is an umbrella term that covers anything from the lightest, most basic buggy to more robust pushchairs that cater to every possible aspect of your child's comfort.

Generally, the simplest buggies are little more than a chair on wheels. As they get heavier, features such as a rain cover, shopping basket, reclining back rest and hood are added.

High-specification models will include features such as suspension or larger

wheels, 'footmuffs' or aprons to keep babies warm, storage pockets and accessories bags, bumper bars and cup holders. Some can even be used as a travel system with a compatible child car seat, but they tend to be larger and heavier.

Who should get one?

Every parent needs some kind of stroller, but the huge variety of styles and features means that some are suited more to particular activities or age groups than others, as illustrated by our Best Buys, below.

PROS Strollers are generally lightweight and compact, which is good if you live in a flat or rely on public transport. They're easy to carry up and down stairs and great for throwing in the back of the car, and when you're nipping to the shops or going on holiday.

CONS Some models aren't suitable for newborns because they don't recline enough for the baby to sleep. Many aren't ideal for bumpy ground, as they have hard plastic wheels, short wheelbases and no suspension.



76% Mamas & Papas Mamu Mu1 £35

This basic stroller is very compact, lightweight and easy to manoeuvre in tight spaces. It's suitable for babies who are older than six months and reclines to give sleepyheads a place to rest. It handles well on pavements and is excellent for using on public transport. It's small enough to push and park easily on the bus. Features are minimal – it has a small storage basket but lacks a hood or rain cover. The brake pedals tend to catch when pulling upstairs. Taller users may find the handles low. Cheapest at Mamas & Papas.

WE THINK It's best for using in shopping centres and keeping in the car as a backup when toddlers get older.

Available Mamas & Papas Accessories None Back rest positions Two 150° recline No



76% Ziko Alfie £150

This fashionable pushchair is excellent for everyday use. It's suitable to use from birth, the back rest reclines easily to four positions and the leg rest can be adjusted. However, the harness, which is not secured to the pushchair at the shoulders, may be uncomfortable for a child to lie on and can get in the way when you put baby in the seat.

It's easy to push on all surfaces, although the brake levers may scrape slightly on stairs. It is compact when folded and has a carry handle, so it's easy to lift and store. It's also an excellent choice for people who use public transport. Cheapest from Mamas & Papas.

WE FOUND The shopping basket capacity is only average and it's hard to access with the back rest reclined.

Available Mamas & Papas Accessories Rain cover, hood with storage pocket, 'footmuff' Back rest positions Four 150° recline Yes

Worth considering

This model would definitely have been a top Best Buy, but it's getting hard to find

SAFETY 1ST SURF STROLLER £65

The unusual-looking Surf Stroller was a hit with parents, despite its basic range of features. It's very lightweight and compact when folded, making it easy to lift and carry, especially in its carrying case.

It's fairly easy to push on pavements, around obstacles and up and down kerbs, but doesn't perform as well on bumpy surfaces and stairs, as the brake levers project beyond the small wheels. It comes with a rain cover, sun shade and carrying case.

The unusual wheel arrangement and lightweight chassis mean it's not great for use on buses. It's worth noting that you can't recline the back rest, so it's not suitable for infants or great for sleeping children.

SCORE 77%



How we test

We added two new tests to our regular thorough assessments

Ups and downs

To explore how easy a pushchair is to use on public transport, we set up two simulations of common public transport obstacles. First, we tested them on escalators. The pushchair was pushed on to our 'escalator' set and held there for 60 seconds while facing both up and down. We looked at how well it balanced and how easy it was to keep on the steps.

On the buses

Each pushchair was set up in its largest configuration and pushed up onto the bus simulator, which has a step height of 250mm, then back down again. After boarding, the pushchair was pushed around the gangway, past the driver and into the pushchair parking bay, where we applied the brake. Then we turned the pushchair round and exited.

Updated for 2008

What's new for the new year?

Several manufacturers have updated their pushchairs since we tested.

Both **Maclarens (7 and 19)** now have a buckle that is harder for a child to undo, new fabric colours and new hubcaps.

The **Britax Voyaga Ultra (8)** has been updated. Britax said: 'We have changed the car seat attachment; the fabric styling has been improved and the hood shape changed for better enclosure in rearward facing mode.' We do not believe that these changes affect the test score.

Britax also told us that the **Verve (12)** has been updated as the Verve+. The hood height can now accommodate a larger child, there are updated fabrics and improved durability. The Verve had no problems during our durability tests.

The 2008 **Bugaboo Cameleon (10)** has several new features that aren't present on the 2007 model we tested. These include new tyres and new folding and handlebar mechanisms. Our lab has advised us that these would not change its score.

Facts & scores

Features to focus on

Tough fit

The **Phil and Ted's Sport (6)** can be fitted with a wide range of child car seats, but the fabric strap and metal bar accessories used for this are considerably more fiddly than other seat attachment methods and our lab experts found them very impractical. Therefore, we have not rated the attachment in the table (see 'Car seat attachment' in the table, right).

Town and country

The **Bugaboo Cameleon (10)** can be used with its small swivel wheels at the front for 'city' mode, or in 'rough terrain' mode with the larger tyres forwards.

Wheely useful

The **iCandy Apple (11)** is supplied with two sets of front wheels, so you can use it in a three- or four-wheel configuration, depending on your preference.

BABY BENEFITS

The best a child can get

Baby and Toddler Essentials is a must-have book for parents, expectant parents and even grandparents. And it's now available at a special price of £9.99 (£1 off the RRP), with free P&P.

Call 01903 828557 quoting code BTW0208, or visit www.which.co.uk/books



MODEL	SPECIFI		
	PRICE (£)	WEIGHT (kg)	FOLDED SIZE (xwxwd) (cm)
ALL-TERRAIN			
1 MOUNTAIN BUGGY Urban	440	12.2	107x64x39
2 MAMAS & PAPAS 03 Sport Surefix	180	12.6	41x59x122
3 MAMAS & PAPAS Mamu Mu3	99	9.4	43x63x87
4 GRACO Trekko	220	13.2	60x66x95
5 BEBECAR Icon AT	364	9.4 ^a	118x61x36
6 PHIL AND TED'S Sport	330	12.2	96x61x33
CAR SEAT COMPATIBLE			
7 MACLAREN Techno XLR	295	8.2	112x33x35
8 BRITAX Voyaga Ultra	260	13.2	92x61x43
9 BEBE CONFORT Loola	230	13.8	35x105x43
10 BUGABOO Cameleon	555	9.4	90x59x31
11 ICANDY Apple	280	9.8 ^a	90x60x33
12 BRITAX Verve	150	7.3	70x45x39
13 MAMAS & PAPAS Pliko Mod +	390	9.8	44x35x102
14 JANE Carrera Pro	235	11.6	49x43x102
15 STOKKE Xplory	770	12.0	108x45x57
STROLLERS			
16 MAMAS & PAPAS Mamu Mu1	35	5.8	19x28x99
17 ZIKO Alfie	150	8.2	49x27x104
18 GRACO Mojo	90	7.8	109x36x26
19 MACLAREN Techno XT	160	7.6	34x33x108
20 MAMAS & PAPAS Mamu Mu2	65	7.4	105x30x38
21 CHICCO SimpliCity	94	9.6	95x50x43

^a Chassis only

Contacts

Bebecar 020 8201 0505
www.bebecar.co.uk

Bebe Confort 020 8236 0707
www.bebeconfort.com

Britax
01264 386034; www.britax.co.uk

Bugaboo 020 7385 5338
www.bugaboo.com

Chicco 01623 750870
www.chicco.co.uk

Graco 0844 412 1212
www.graco.co.uk

iCandy 01462 484858
www.icandyuk.com

Jane 028 9084 9045
www.johnstonprams.co.uk

Maclaren 01327 841300

www.maclarenbaby.com

Mamas & Papas 0870 830 7700
www.mamasandpapas.co.uk

Mothercare 0845 330 4030
www.mothercare.com

Mountain Buggy
01404 815 555
uk.mountainbuggy.com

Phil and Ted's
01234 344230
www.philandteds.com

Safety 1st
01842 763281
www.safety1st.com

Stokke www.stokke.com

Ziko 0870 830 7700
www.mamasandpapas.co.uk

CATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE									SCORE %
FROM BIRTH	CAR SEAT COMPATIBLE	TRAVEL SYSTEM	DAY-TO-DAY USE	STORAGE SPACE	RECLINE	FOLDING	CAR SEAT ATTACHMENT	COMFORT TO PUSH	MANOEUVRABILITY	PUBLIC TRANSPORT	OFFROAD		
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USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price. Prices for other models are a guide to what to pay. If a model is easier to find online, the price is in *italics*. **Weight** Without accessories. **From birth** Pushchairs with ✓✓ can recline more than 150°, which is best for newborns. Those with ✓ can recline more than 120°. **Travel system** These include child car seats in the price

given. We've tested those that can be used with car seats that score 50 per cent or more in our annual test.

Test performance

Day-to-day use This looks at how well the pushchair works generally, including carrying, cleaning, using the brakes and harness, and also transporting it by car. **Storage space** How large and accessible the storage space is. **Recline** How easy the seat is to recline and adjust. **Folding** How easy it is to fold and unfold. **Manoeuvrability** How easy it is to push on a

wide range of surfaces. **Public transport** How easy it is to use on escalators and buses. **Offroad** All terrain pushchairs only. How well it dealt with offroad surfaces.

Score

Ignores price, applies to the pushchair only and is based on:

Manoeuvring	30%
Day-to-day use	20%
Folding	15%
Pushing comfort	10%
Reclining	10%
Storage	10%
Use on public transport	5%

OUR RESEARCH

When choosing pushchairs to test, we consult manufacturers, market intelligence reports and industry experts, then check availability on the high street and online. We include top-sellers and new releases from the most popular brands, those with innovative features and interesting models from lesser-known brands.