

Ask the experts



Clifford wants to know about buying duty-free on airlines

Duty-free

On an indirect flight from the US to the UK, I bought a bottle of gin on the first leg of the journey. It was given to me in an ordinary plastic bag. On arrival at Amsterdam, the airport where we transferred flights, I tried to go through a security checkpoint but the gin was confiscated. I assumed in-flight purchases would be deemed safe – who is at fault?

CLIFFORD BATHER,
BARTON-UPON-HUMBER

Restrictions on carrying liquids in hand luggage can cause problems when your journey involves a transfer. Unless you have access to your checked-in luggage during a transfer, don't buy liquids on the flight.

Contact your airline to see whether buying liquids may be a problem at a connecting airport – some airlines seal items to avoid such complications.

DAB radio problem

I have two Pure DAB radios, which get good reception, but my Hitachi micro-system's DAB reception is poor. Since I had a DAB aerial installed, reception is reasonable, but the Hitachi cannot tell the difference between Radio 5 Live and Radio 5 Live Sports Extra. Hitachi says it can't help. Do you have any ideas?

HUGH NICKLESS, PETERSFIELD

As your Pure systems have good reception, it's unlikely that you're in a poor reception area, so the problem is probably specific to the Hitachi.

The unit could be faulty, so it might be worth returning it for repair or replacement. If it's replaced and problems persist, it might be down to the model.

In this month's micro hi-fi report (see p44), all five Best Buys have DAB reception, including the Pure Legato II at £349. For a cheaper model, consider the Sony HCD-GS30DAB, at £150, which just missed out on a Best Buy score.

In-car DAB reception

I recently bought an in-car DAB radio – the JVC KD-DB101 – but was frustrated with poor reception at first. The stick-on windscreen aerial that came with the radio was useless in a mixed reception area or when covering any distance.

Which? focus on Drinking water

All you need to know about drinking water safely in the UK

Water safety

How safe is UK tap water?

Independent tests show that our tap water is among the safest in the world. The Drinking Water Inspectorate reported a 99.96% compliance with standards by UK water companies in 2006. Contamination is rare, usually caused by local pollution, such as old pipes, not the water supply.

However, don't drink or cook with water from a hot-water system or bathroom taps. It usually comes from a storage

tank and isn't as fresh or safe as mains water from cold water taps.

If your drinking water is discoloured or has a bad smell or taste, contact your water company immediately.

Sources of water

Is it true that tap water is recycled from sewage?

No. Our drinking water is sourced from natural underground wells, reservoirs, lakes and rivers. Water is carefully treated to remove any contaminants that may be found in these sources.

Lead levels

Can tap water contain dangerous levels of lead?

According to the latest figures, less than 0.5% of UK drinking water contained lead in

unacceptable amounts. Build-ups can affect the nervous system and child development.

Natural lead deposits do occur, but lead pipes in older homes, often those built before 1970, are a more likely cause.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate website – at www.dwi.gov.uk – advises on how to check your pipes.

Discoloured water

Should I be concerned if my water isn't clear?

Don't assume it's safe to drink until you have advice from your water company.

The most usual cause is disturbance of mineral deposits that can happen, for example, when water flow speed changes.

Also, chalk deposits or excess



air can turn water white. Leave white water to stand: it will clear from the bottom up if it's caused by excess air. Hard water that contains a lot of dissolved minerals, such as calcium, magnesium and potassium, can be milky or have brown deposits, but it isn't harmful. Using a water filter can reduce minerals.

Fluoridation

Is there fluoride in my water, and is it harmful?

Fluoride is present in drinking water from areas with high natural



Your consumer questions answered by our experts, plus the most popular topics among Which? members

I had to invest in an amplified external digital/analogue aerial, for another £50, to get reasonable reception. Might this be a solution for Alan Kerr – who appeared in June's digital radio report (p72) – to resolve his problem of receiving certain stations in certain areas?

SIMON NISSENBAUM, BOLSOVER

You're right – an amplified external digital/analogue aerial can improve DAB reception in some circumstances, but it requires specialist installation.

Another solution might be a DAB splitter, which uses the existing FM/AM antenna and splits the signal, making it suitable for DAB tuners. It tends to work best on cars that have traditional external

fluoride levels in the rock. And some water companies add small amounts of fluoridation chemicals to prevent tooth decay, but they must meet strict standards to ensure they're not harmful. The maximum fluoride concentration allowed is 1.5mg/litre, whether it's present naturally or added.

Your water company will tell you whether local water has added fluoride and the concentration level.

Refilling bottles

Is it safe to keep refilling my bottle from the tap?

Yes – provided that you wash it regularly to get rid of any bacteria. Avoid touching the tap with your bottle, as bacteria could be passed on this way.

See our article on bottled versus tap water, p33.

Ask your questions

Send us your questions or ideas for 'Which? focus' to asktheexperts@which.co.uk or write to Ask the experts, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH.

antennas rather than concealed or amplified aerials. Drivers should speak to their local car audio retailer for advice on fitting DAB receivers.

National Insurance

I've read that the number of years of work needed for basic state pension has been reduced to 30. I have already completed 46 years' work and have asked for a refund on my National Insurance (NI) contributions but have been told that the earliest date for male age exemption is 65. Could you explain why this is?

ADRIAN FLANAGAN, CONSETT

For people retiring from 6 April 2010, the number of qualifying years to be eligible for full state pension will be 30 – reduced from 44 and 39 years for men and women, respectively.

However, you can stop making NI contributions – and claim your state pension – only at state retirement age.

For men, this is 65 (but will start to increase from 2024). So although you've worked for more than 44 years, you can't get a refund on your NI contributions – as it covers

more than just your state pension.

For women born after 6 April 1950, the retirement age is 60, gradually increasing to 65 between 2010 and 2020, and further from 2024.

Train reservations

I booked tickets with Cross Country trains online but have been unable to reserve seats for the outward trip. The train company, booking company and station have all been unable to help. Being sure of a seat is important, as the journey is more than four hours. Do I have a right to a reservation and who should make it?

CHRISTINE WARNER, SHIPLEY

There's no hard-and-fast rule regarding reservations – it is entirely at the discretion of the train operator.

With more frequent services in particular, it's not always deemed practical to operate a reservations system. However, it may be worth being persistent with the operator, stating how long and crowded the journey can be, to see whether it can make an exception.



Simon asks about a solution to poor in-car DAB radio reception

Top reads

Each month, we ask you which articles you read in Which?. Here are the most popular reports from our June issue

- 1 Digital cameras
- 2 Sunscreens
- =3 Digital TV
- =3 Premium rate numbers
- 5 Holiday money
- 6 Washing machines
- 7 Photo processing
- 8 Digital radios
- 9 Travel insurance
- 10 Laundry tablets



Top calls

The top 25 subjects dealt with by lawyers from Which? Legal Service in June

- 1 Parking tickets
- 2 Local builders
- 3 Neighbour disputes
- 4 Local garage services
- 5 BT
- 6 Tenants' rights
- 7 John Lewis
- =8 3 Mobile
- =8 British Gas
- =8 Curry's
- =8 Thomson
- 12 Orange
- =13 British Airways
- =13 Npower
- =15 Carphone Warehouse
- =15 Comet
- =15 Speeding tickets
- =18 Dell
- =18 MFI
- =18 PC World
- =21 Everest
- =21 First Choice
- =21 Thomas Cook
- =21 Tiscali
- =21 Local plumbers



Parking: your top concern