

BACK PAGES

MEN WASH UP?

A 1967 report on detergents said: 'We believe that the housewife (or her husband) wants to know which brand will do most washing up for a standard squeeze.' We found this after speaking to 300 housewives.

GOOD HOLIDAYS We declared in 1966: 'The success of a holiday, we say, depends much less on a travel agency than on the weather, or whether the hotel has changed its cook, or you fall in love, or have a complaining temperament.'

SLIM CHANCE Our 1967 slimming supplement said: 'An averagely built man, 5ft 8 in tall who weighs 14 and a half stone with his clothes on, is carrying as much extra weight round with him as a very heavy suitcase – so heavy that he'd have to pay excess baggage for it on an aeroplane.'



The way we were

Rewinding to the battle between VHS and Betamax

These days we can watch a favourite show while commuting to work, program a Sky+ box by mobile phone and we'll soon be able to download programmes we've missed to a computer.

It's a far cry from 30 years ago when video cassette recorders (VCRs) were first sold in the UK.

In October 1977, there was only one machine available for home use – the Philips N1502. For our first comparative test in July 1979, machines typically cost £600, which would be equivalent to more than £1,800 today. A three-hour tape cost about £12, more than £35 in today's money. Machines were heavy – our first winner, the Sony Betamax, weighed in at a chunky 20kg.

Ah! The Betamax. Yes, this was the time when the format battled VHS for control of our recording needs.

Which? member Steve Swift, who rented a Betamax at the time, said: 'It was truly a fabulous machine. It's only recently been exceeded in recording quality by DVD recorders and PVRs. It generated flawless freeze frames, which took VHS 20 years to master.'

Sadly, he dropped it down three flights



Above:
Our first test of
video recorders
in July 1979

of stairs and found that even after repairs it was never the same again as the chassis was bent out of shape. Steve told the rental company he dropped it while 'dusting'.

Betamax was technically superior, but VHS machines were cheaper and the format became established in high-street rental stores more quickly (70 per cent of VCRs were rented in 1980).

We reported in 1982 on another new type of recording machine in 'Laservision – video of the future?', in which we featured the £500 Philips VLP700. Dinner plate-sized discs gave you half an hour playing time before you flipped them over to get the same on the other side.

We thought the picture quality was 'pretty good' but were more impressed by its 'still frame' and the ability to whizz effortlessly round the disc.

We were unsure it would catch on, though, and advised you to rent not buy, and this time our instincts were correct.

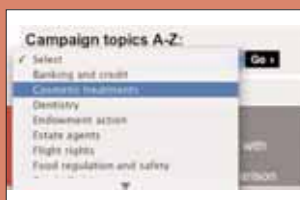
These days it's the VCR that seems to be on the way out. You can buy a DVD recorder for less than £100 and have better picture quality, while the PVR, which needs no tape at all, will probably be the device most of us adopt when our VCR chews up its last tape.

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