

The way we were

Which? has suffered quite a few jokes at its expense



Not the Nine O'Clock News parodied the Which? style

Would you believe that Which? once tested nuclear weapons? Or that Church of England vicars competed to have their sermons awarded Best Buy status?

These are just two of the wilder imaginings of comedians who have poked a little gentle fun into the ribs of Which? over the years.

We have usually enjoyed a good relationship with the press, including the flurry of flattering press

reaction to our 50th anniversary last month.

However, our more pompous moments have attracted the attention of quite a few eager to take us down a peg or two. An organisation that can begin a test of lavatory paper, as we did in July 1959, with the words 'Lavatory paper is not a gay subject, nor one much discussed in polite society' must expect the occasional joke at its expense.

Everyone from former *Times* columnist, the late Bernard Levin,

to the comic magazine *Punch* and even the TV satire show *Not the Nine O'Clock News* has had a go.

In 1983, *Punch* carried a mock Which? test, claiming: 'Our testers have subjected the latest Tridents, Cruises, Pershings and, in collaboration with our colleagues at Vitch, SS20s to rigorous laboratory analysis to check them for safety and effectiveness.'

One measure of the increasing success of the organisation in the early days was the increase in the number of pieces poking fun at it.

There was perhaps an edge to some of the pieces that appeared in the trade press. Many manufacturers were very suspicious of Which? and its 'bunch of amateurs' in the early days.

Something of this attitude is shown in a 1959 cartoon from *The Grocers' Gazette*, which showed the unshaven owner of a fictional firm, the Rusty Valley Peach Canning Company, peering out of the window of his boarded-up company HQ. He is told by the postman: 'You can come out now, chum. Which? has not mentioned your brand.'

BACK PAGES



LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Our lonely-heart researchers joined dating agencies in 1995 and found that some didn't even ask for proof of identity. Men were able to join under a false name and be sent names, phone numbers and even addresses of female clients.



SOLAR POWER

There was a trend for homes to install solar power when we looked at the subject in March 1996. We were clear about the environmental benefits, but warned that it could take 15 to 20 years for you to recoup the money spent on installing such a system.

MILLENNIUM BUG 'Defusing the bomb' was the overexcited title of a 1999 report on the Millennium Bug. We said the bug had the potential to cause 'mayhem' to traffic-control

systems, the NHS and the world's banks. Software that promised to test and fix

your computer cost up to £45, but we thought you needed to spend little or nothing.



WHICH.CO.UK

Get your computer up to speed

Is your broadband as fast as it could be? Visit www.which.co.uk and you can test it out. We show you how with our broadband speed checker



Which? investigation into broadband

In August's edition of *Which?* we investigated broadband speeds and found that, on average, promised speeds of up to 8Mbps (megabits a second) achieved only 2.7Mbps, and, for some, speeds were barely faster than dial up (0.056Mbps).

After we published our findings, members expressed concern about the service they were getting, so we have added a broadband speed checker to our website. Visit www.which.co.uk/broadbandspeed and put your broadband package to the test. We have also added a second test so you can find out what speed you should be able to get at your address (ADSL broadband only).

