

The Magazine of the Consumers' Association of Ireland

# Consumer Choice

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JULY / AUGUST 2014

## Get sorted for the summer with Consumer Choice

### € MONEY

- GRIND SCHOOLS
- SCHOOL ALLOWANCES
- DISPUTE RESOLUTION

### ☀ LIFESTYLE

- AIRPORT SHOPPING
- LIVING LIGHTLY
- HEALTHY BARBECUES

### 📺 PRODUCT TESTS

- EBOOK READERS
- CAR TYRES
- LAUNDRY APPLIANCES

► Plus - so much more inside!

## July/August 2014

### The Consumers' Association of Ireland

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Dear Member,

It is summer 2014 and, as we put the issue 'to bed,' the changes continue in our political and financial environment many of which leave consumers with concerns and questions. Will a restructured and re-shuffled Government bring positive considerations and acknowledge the urgent necessity for changes in taxation, health, energy, transportation, environmental and many other areas where struggling citizens are finding it impossible to accommodate the most basic of consumer necessities and services?

What will the October budget provide by way of helping a struggling nation manage bills, budgets and debts that now need to provide for full property taxes, the new and - still - unclear system of water charges, as well as, just announced, increased postal rates and fuel prices?

By way of blowing away some of the cloud of negativity here at the CAI we are hoping to shine some rays of positivity toward Irish consumers this summer with the launch of our free app! The free CAI App can be downloaded from the Apple site and will provide all consumers with instantly accessible detail of their consumer rights and entitlements as well as access to CAI's independent product tests and, of course, Consumer Choice and CAI membership benefits. The creation of the free app has been made possible with the help of greatly appreciated support and project funding through the Minister and Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI).

The CAI Council and staff take the opportunity to wish you and your family a warm and relaxing break and hope that you enjoy this bumper issue of Consumer Choice.



**Dermott Jewell**



### Our Reports

Reports in Consumer Choice are based on market research, laboratory tests or user surveys, all of which are independently and scientifically conducted. Free goods are never accepted for testing – all samples are purchased. Occasionally items may be borrowed for review purposes only.

The reports are produced in the main by our own Editorial staff. Some material is occasionally drawn from other foreign independent consumer magazines.

Because Consumer Choice carries no commercial advertising it is not swayed by bias or influence and can point out advantages and flaws in goods and services that other magazines may not be able to do.

Reports on any article relate only to the articles or goods mentioned, and not to any other article of the same or similar description. We do not necessarily price or report on all brands or models within the class, and the exclusion of any brand or model should not be taken as a reflection on it.

### Consumer Choice

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► **Plus - so much more inside!**



# News Briefs

The latest information  
on the world of the  
consumer

## *Traffic Light System Hard to Digest*

As highlighted by our colleagues at BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation) and of which we are long-standing members, Irish consumers are to enjoy a public consultation on whether to adopt the UK's hybrid scheme combining traffic lights and reference intakes (RI) which is currently being rolled out by retailers and food companies. As we had advised you previously, the Department of Health told BEUC that, so far, they have yet to decide whether or not to recommend the scheme. As a great many UK products are sold in Ireland, it was generally believed that, pragmatically and positively, Ireland would allow products with the traffic lights labels on its market. However, last December Ireland was one of the seventeen countries which expressed concerns about the scheme at the Agriculture Council. The Department's concerns include the impact on dairy products, including cheese, which they say have nutritional benefits (calcium, vitamin D). They fear many cheeses will carry red light warnings. They will – and quite naturally and correctly. However, it would be our contention that this is a fact already well known and expected by consumers. So – what are the other 'concerns'???



## **Never Bean Done Before**

In the USA, Starbucks has begun rolling out wireless charging mats for devices after a trial period across a small number of their stores proved to be hugely successful and appreciated by consumers.

The company now has commenced installation of the wireless mats with an initial determination that they will be built into a minimum of 10 tables in each of Starbucks' stores. Installation is confirmed to commence this year and on the west coast. Expansion will be nationwide in 2015. However, there is no advice available regarding plans or even consideration for an international rollout.

To be realistic this is not surprising as the company and its 'Powermat' supplier must be certain that the mats will actually charge phones that, lets be honest here, require the most intricate of charging devices at the best of times – that are plugged in! There is opposition and competition here and so the game for dominance is seriously on. To that end, Powermat has invested in mass production of small 'rings' which plug into the phone's charging socket to enable the seamless and wireless charging. Speaking of which, these will be available for purchase at a small cost!

## **PAL OF MINE NOTION**

Amazon has recently, albeit rather quietly, announced that it is to introduce a new online subscription payment service for SMEs in a further bid to challenge PayPal's dominance in the sector.

Amazon users now have the choice and ability to pay utility and mobile phone bills as well as digital download subscriptions using the new service. How it works is that the company will take a percentage of the transaction fee. This could be significant revenue as currently this facilitating structure would account for over 40% of their entire revenue. Separately, and eagerly awaited, is the unveiling of the Amazon smartphone with 3D capabilities – without the need for 3D glasses. Paying in 3D – Ohh that's upsetting!



Some years ago I wrote about car-sharing in certain of the US states where insurance-related difficulties had been overcome. Now a recent German start-up company, WunderCar, has launched its similar service outside of Germany commencing with the official launch of an app that allows people with a car to sign up and offer lifts to users. The app is now available for Dublin residents across both iOS and Android mobile devices. Of course, all drivers, and their cars, will need to pass a rigorous background check first with each potential driver also required to accept a personal or phone interview. A rating system for both drivers and passengers will allow them to rate each other after the journey. What is particularly unique in this is how it will be the passenger who will determine the amount to pay making it what has been described as the first 'pay-what-you-want' transportation alternative in Ireland. The German experience has produced results showing that consumers are willing to pay on average 20% more than suggested even though these payments are voluntary. I can't wait to see the comparative figures for Ireland.....

## Technical Progress: Lifestyle Positivity.

Silicon Republic recently carried detail of a continuing trend towards what they likened to a more cyborg-like future citing how a small company has produced a 3D-printed leg for the benefit of amputees. Going under the name Robohand, the company has already produced other body parts in a similar fashion, including fingers and arms, both of which were similarly produced using the 3D-printing method which encompasses a variety of movable parts at a reasonably low cost. Interestingly, the company is headed by a former carpenter who would be the first to insist how, in order for it to be a success, all of its products

must be of a significantly improved design to those in existence. Outlining how the unit must sustain weight from the human body, it will also have to accommodate different surfaces and environments that exist in the everyday world. What is quite exceptional in all of this is how, once the final design and testing has been completed, the schematics and necessary requirements to build the leg will be posted online and will allow the person downloading this information to freely build the leg for themselves or someone else. That however, as I see it, could be the seriously expensive problem here for the patient. Of course, the reverse could

occur with a small start-up opportunity staring some gifted hi-tech production engineer in the face.



## SUITE OF SWEET SOLUTIONS

As, apparently, 52% of all Irish consumers would like to pay more for their 'fizzy' drinks.....!!

A bill requiring all cans and bottles of sugary drinks to carry the warning 'Drinking beverages with added sugars contributes to obesity, diabetes and tooth decay' has been approved by the California Senate. The bill is part of efforts deployed by the state of California to reduce soft drink consumption and improve population health. The role of sugar sweetened beverages in the obesity epidemic is well documented with both the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledging that both are interlinked. Allied to this, Consensus Action on Salt

and Health (CASH) has set up Action on Sugar in the UK. Their statistics indicate how '80% of sugary fizzy drinks contains six or more teaspoons of sugar in a 330ml can'. It is their call that I see as the real answer to the problem and that is to seek a maximum sugar content per can or portion. This, again as correctly and sensibly pointed out by Action on Sugars, would reduce the overall sweetness so consumers' tastes can adjust and, more importantly, the fact that nine out of ten sugar drinks would currently receive a 'red' traffic light under the front-of-pack labelling scheme, does this not present a far better solution for all concerned?

# Food & Health

 by Clodagh O'Donoghue



## New logo for authentic online pharmacies



With a growing number of people buying medicines online, these consumers need to be sure that the online pharmacy they are dealing with is authentic and safe. To this end, the European Commission has introduced the design for a common logo for online pharmacies so that consumers can quickly and easily verify that the pharmacy is authorised and that it provides authentic medicines.

In January 2013, the Falsified Medicines Directive came into force and, on 24th June 2014, the Commission adopted an implementing regulation under this directive to establish the

design for the common logo and the technical requirements for ensuring its authenticity. Falsified medicines refer to fake medicines that pass themselves off as real, authorised medicines but that may contain ingredients that are of bad quality or in too high or too low a dose. Falsified medicines are different to “counterfeits,” which denote an infringement of intellectual property rights. As falsified medicines have not been properly evaluated under strict EU authorisation procedures to determine their quality, safety and efficacy, these medicines could be harmful to consumers’ health. According to European Commissioner for Health Tony Borg, “when buying medicines online, consumers must be aware that unless they buy from legally-operating online medicine suppliers, they run the risk of buying medicines that are falsified.”

To safeguard consumers’ health, the new logo – as pictured above – will appear on the websites of legally operating online pharmacies in the EU. The rectangle beside the

word “click” will feature the flag of the EU country where the service is established and the text will be translated into the official language/s of that country.

In the near future, consumers buying medicines online will be able to check for the logo on an online pharmacy’s website and click on it. This will bring them to the national regulatory authority website, which features a list of all legally operating online pharmacies and other legally authorised retailers of medicines in their respective country. Consumers should then check that the pharmacy they are considering buying medicines from is listed. If so, consumers then can continue with their purchase. If the pharmacy is not listed, consumers should refrain from buying from that website and instead use one of the legitimate medicine retailers listed on the national regulatory authority’s website.

The regulation should enter into force over the next four to six weeks and member countries have then one year to get ready for its application.

## Sugar levels in children’s drinks

With the summer holidays under way, children will hopefully get to spend lots more time outdoors engaged in fun and active play and their parents will be looking to keep them well-hydrated after all that running around. In this context, parents might like to take a look at the very interesting infographic available on the safefood website that highlights in stark terms just how much sugar is in drinks we commonly give our children.

The graphs show the number of grams of sugar in a wide range of beverages popular with children and they also display how many cubes of sugar each modest-sized drink contains, with one sugar cube accounting for approximately 5g of sugar. So, for example, it may not come as a surprise

that a 200-ml serving of Lucozade contains a massive seven cubes of sugar and that the same amount of Club Orange boasts a very substantial five cubes of sugar. However, possibly more surprising is that, in the “regular squashes and cordials” graph, a 200-ml serving of blackcurrant-flavoured Ribena contains four cubes of sugar, and among ready-to-drink fruit juice drinks, Amigo orange drinks and Capri Sun apple and blackcurrant drinks contain five cubes and four cubes of sugar, respectively. Even among unsweetened fruit juices and smoothies, there can be high levels of sugar, with, for instance, 200ml of Copella, Tropicana or Squeez orange juice containing four cubes of sugar, as does an Innocent mango and

passionfruit smoothie. “Diet” fizzy drinks and no-added sugar cordials and squashes typically contain zero cubes of sugar.

Safefood points out that water and milk are the best drinks for children at any time and that a small glass of 100% fruit juice or smoothie is fine to have once a day, counting as one of a child’s “five-a-day”. The advice is to read the labels on your child’s drinks to check sugar levels. And if you are finding it tricky to monitor your child’s sugar intake, the safefood.eu website has a downloadable one-week Sugary Drinks and Treats Diary that parents can use to see if they are happy with the amount of sugar their child is consuming or if there is room for improvement.

## Teenage Employees

**Is there a teenager in your home? Have they started a job this summer? Do they know their employment rights?**

Children and young people have specific rights under numerous acts including the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996 and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Children and Young Persons) Regulations 2001 SI 350/2001 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. Within this legislation children are defined as those that are under the age of 16 years, whereas young people refer to people aged 16 and 17 years. This legislation generally prohibits the employment of children except in employment authorised by the Minister for Jobs. Children over 14 years may do light work outside school term where the hours worked do not exceed seven in any day or thirty five in any week. Those between the age of 16 and 17 years may work eight hours a week

doing light work in school term time. Children may also be employed by family doing non-industrial work. A child under the age of 16 years may not work between 8pm and 8am and must get regular breaks including a 30-minute break in each four-hour work period. 16-17 year olds are less restricted - however, their maximum working day must not exceed eight hours and their working week must be less than 40 hours. They may not work between 10pm and 6am. They must also get a 30-minute break for every four and a half hours worked.

Where a young person is employed on licensed premises, the work must be general duties only and not involve the sale of alcohol. An

employer is obliged to request a copy of the young person's birth certificate to verify their age. In the case of a child under 16 years, employers must receive a letter of consent from a parent or guardian. Children and young people must be paid a minimum of €6.06 as outlined in table 1 below.

### Minimum hourly rate of pay

Experienced adult worker	€8.65
Under 18	€6.06
Over 18 in 1st year of employment since they turned 18	€6.92
Over 19 in 2nd year of employment since they turned 18	€7.79

## Is political talk harming consumer sentiment?

The ESRI/KBC report tracks consumer confidence in the Irish economy. Figures released in June show that the KBC Ireland/ESRI Consumer Sentiment Index has decreased for May to 79.4 down from 87.2 in April. This figure is, however, up from 61.2 in May 2013. This is in contrast to findings in December, January and February, which had consistent increases that were the highest in seven years. The three-month moving average fell slightly to 83.2 in May from 85.3 in April. So what can we draw from this? David Byrne from the ESRI commented on the recent decrease in consumer sentiment as a reflection of the dis-improvement in perceptions of the current economic environment and of the outlook for the next year. The index of current economic conditions fell also - households appear more negative

about the current buying climate and about their financial situation compared with 12 months ago. The index of consumer expectation fell as a result of a more negative perception of future household finances amongst consumers. In addition, Austin Hughes, KBC Bank Ireland, noted that it is not particularly surprising that consumer sentiment weakened in May. The turnaround in the Irish economy is very uneven and many households remain under pressure. So we can't expect a straight line improvement in confidence. That said, the scale of the drop in the sentiment index in May is much greater than might have been anticipated. The size of the drop in sentiment in May is difficult to explain. Mr Hughes however points to the election campaign, concerns about water charges and medical cards as a

cause for consumers taking a gloomier view than previous months. Through the survey period, there was an intense focus on financial and economic strains and the sense is that this debate amplified consumer worries and prompted a sharp drop in confidence.





# Irish consumer prices 118% above EU average

According to Eurostat research, consumer price levels varied in 2013 from 48% of the EU28 average in Bulgaria to 140% in Denmark. Consumer prices in Ireland are on average 118% higher than the European Union norm. This in turn causes concern about Ireland's competitiveness. Ireland ranks more expensive in foods, alcohol, restaurants, hotels, transport and electronic goods. Ireland ranked the fifth most expensive of 28 member states, behind Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg and Finland, with prices estimated to be 118% of the EU average, more expensive than the UK, France, Germany and Spain. In the area of food and non-

alcoholic beverages prices, Ireland was 17% higher than average. We ranked most expensive in the EU for purchasing cigarettes and alcohol. The cost of restaurants and hotels in Ireland was found to be 28% above the average, placing Ireland third behind only Sweden and Denmark as the most expensive place to stay and eat out. We also scored 111% above average prices for personal transport and 105% for electronics. Commentators have highlighted the risk of becoming uncompetitive within the EU. High taxes are also a factor in this situation with increases in the areas of VAT and excise duty implemented as part of the fiscal austerity process.



## Roaming

When heading abroad, roaming charges have become a major concern for consumers. We have all heard some horror stories of extortionate bills being run up unbeknownst to the consumers while travelling. Here is what you need to know - when you wish to use your mobile phone abroad you need to connect to a local network, which will in turn charge your own operator for handling the calls and texts. Currently, there are caps on prices for phone calls made and received when using your phone abroad and this is known as a eurotariff. Since July 2013, a new tariff was introduced for the EU with a maximum limit for calls made put at 24 cent plus VAT per minute and 7 cent plus VAT per minute for calls received. Data charges were capped at 45 cent plus VAT per megabyte and SMS text messages at 8 cent plus VAT. Data roaming limit is capped at €50 and when this limit is reached the customer must be asked to confirm that they wish

to continue browsing. Other positive measures introduced in recent years include operators no longer being able to charge for the receipt of a voicemail while roaming in the EU. Also operators are obliged to charge per second. Remember before you travel to check with your provider or with ComReg which is the cheapest network available in your destination. When you arrive at your destination you may be automatically connected to one. You then have to manually connect to the network you choose, the cheapest one for you. You can switch from your current home provider if it is not the best value in your destination. We can look forward to more favorable conditions for mobile phone customers in the future as the European Parliament recently voted to abolish roaming charges across the EU as of December 2015. This move will be discussed further, with a final agreement on the legislation expected by December 2014.





# Product/Tech News

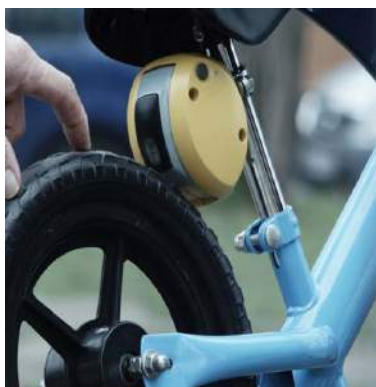
## Braking news

Teaching your child to ride a bike is a significant moment in a parent's life but all too quickly the child gets the hang of the whole cycling thing and is racing away like a miniature Evel Knievel, causing more than a little stress for the parent chasing behind. If your child has a need for speed or seems oblivious to shouted instructions to slow down or not get too far ahead, a new product has just become available that should help parents keep their little ones safe even at a distance.

The MiniBrake is a remotely operated bike brake that can allow parents or other guardians to actively prevent potential accidents by bringing the child's bike to a smooth stop. The manufacturer is keen to answer what is likely to be most parents' first question – no, the MiniBrake will not cause a child to come to such an abrupt stop that he or she will flip over the handlebars and hurtle headfirst to the ground. The device does not cause the young cyclists to fall over even if they are going fast because the brake is applied to the rear wheel rather than the front wheel and the brake works by putting pressure on the wheel, not by suddenly blocking it.

The MiniBrake is attached to the seat post of the bike using a single Allen key and can be adjusted to suit most bike models. A push of the button on the oval-shaped remote control will cause the brake to press down on the rear tyre and bring the bike to a stop within half a metre. The MiniBrake system has a range of 50 metres, and when the child reaches the limit of this range, the bike automatically comes to a stop. An LED light on the side of the braking unit indicates the life of the battery and that all parts are in working order, and if the battery runs down, the brake is automatically applied to avoid a situation in which a parent would be unable to stop the bike.

The device is suitable for children from the age of two years and up to a maximum weight of 77lb, and parents who feel it might help their stress levels on days out this summer can buy it online from the MiniBrake website at a cost of €109.



## Smart drinking

The Vessyl is a very smart cup indeed. San Francisco-based Mark One, the company behind the Vessyl, claims that its product automatically detects what you are drinking, whether mass-produced or homemade, and measures the caffeine, calories, fat, protein, sodium, and sugar that the beverage contains. It will estimate how much you need to drink to achieve optimum hydration and an accompanying app will monitor your drinking habits. The Vessyl will even identify the precise brand of the beverage – and those who have tried out this aspect have been impressed by the device's accuracy in this regard.

The manufacturer is keeping the details of how its device works under wraps but it will say that sensors are used – not unlike the sensors used for quality control in a bottling factory – and a processor and algorithms help match your beverage to one of thousands of drinks that the company has tested. However, the Vessyl goes beyond a simply party trick and will instantly display the nutritional content of any beverage, including your homemade smoothie, and whether your coffee is weak or strong. The information is displayed vertically along the cup once it is tilted and a bright blue line indicates your hydration level, which is calculated taking into account your weight, height and other characteristics entered into the Vessyl app. The battery reportedly lasts five to seven days and can be wirelessly recharged in an hour via the supplied coaster.

Aimed primarily at the health conscious, the Vessyl connects with Apple and Android mobile devices over Bluetooth and the content of every beverage you drink is synced back to your smartphone to help you analyse and hopefully improve your consumption habits. The Vessyl can handle all liquids, from boiling water to beer, and it has been designed to be thermally efficient, keeping hot liquids hot and cold beverages cold. All this cleverness comes at a price, and the Vessyl costs \$199 (€146 approx.), though it is available for pre-order until August 12th at a reduced price of \$99 (€73 approx.) with an additional shipping fee for orders outside the US.

**The products featured on these pages have not been tested by the Consumers' Association of Ireland and their inclusion here is not, in any way, an endorsement of them.**



Product News by Clodagh O'Donoghue

## Rooftop view

A new product lets you keep an eye on any cargo you happen to be carrying on the roof of your car as you drive along. RoofScope is a simple device aimed at those who transport bikes, boats, surfboards, camping equipment, extra luggage or even large items of furniture on their car roof. Even though drivers may have spent ages checking and rechecking all straps and fixings, paranoia about how their rooftop load is faring out of sight can easily set in as they drive along – and RoofScope offers an alternative to having to regularly stop to make sure that everything is fastened securely.

RoofScope is a wide-angled mirror that can be attached to the bonnet of a car and positioned so that the driver can see the rooftop cargo from the driver's seat. The mirror is mounted on the car bonnet by means of a silicone suction cup, though the UK manufacturers stress that the device should not obstruct the driver's view in any way. The mirror is then angled to give a clear view of the roof-rack or rooftop cargo and is locked into position. The device reportedly remains safely in position and correctly angled at high speeds and an added benefit is that its presence on the car bonnet serves as a reminder to the driver that there is a bulky load on top, to hopefully help in avoiding collisions with overhead obstacles like garage doors.

The company is seeking funding on Kickstarter for a new and improved version but so far this appears to have failed to ignite huge interest. The current version of RoofScope is available on the company's website at a price of £19.99 (€25 approx.) and for those purchasing from outside the UK but within the EU, postage will be arranged at cost.



RoofScope



Runbell Kickstarter

## Bell for urban runners

The running trend shows no sign of slowing down but those who like to jog in the town or city inevitably encounter less speedy pedestrians who might often get in runners' way. Essentially a bicycle bell for runners, Runbell is a simple device worn on the fingers to help joggers warn the unsuspecting pedestrian that they are approaching from behind in the hope that the pedestrian might step to the side and the runner won't have to reduce speed. The little "ping" sound made by Runbell serves as a polite warning and also saves other users of the footpath from getting a fright by being suddenly overtaken at speed by a determined jogger.

A little reminiscent of a "knuckleduster," the Runbell comes in male and female versions and consists of an aluminium grip that fits over the index and middle fingers and a brass bell with a spring-mounted striking mechanism that is activated by the thumb. Soft silicone inserts are provided to help fit different-sized fingers and these can be removed altogether if you want to wear the Runbell over gloves in colder weather.

Fresh from a successful Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, the product is due to start shipping from September at a cost of \$25 (around €18).

## Calorie-free flavour

UK-based company Lick Me I'm Delicious, founded by food inventor Charlie Harry Francis, has created a machine that will deliver all the taste sensation but with none of the calories normally associated with enjoying our favourite foods. The Edible Mist Machine is a spherical device that can create inhalable vapours which are then sucked through a straw and swirled around the mouth by anyone looking for a guilt-free flavour hit.

Harris uses what he terms "ultrasonic vaporisation" to produce over 200 flavours that range from the fruity (Golden Delicious apple, cooked pineapple, wild and ripe

strawberry) to the flowery (lavender, geranium, damask rose). There are tastes for those who like to indulge themselves without worrying about their waistline (bitter and white chocolate, tiramisu, zabaglione) and for those who like a tipple without suffering the after-effects (vodka, rum, vermouth). And then there are flavours for the more adventurous gourmand – such as wood, damp forest, moss and myrhh. Although the Edible Mist Machine is not available to buy as yet, it can be hired out by those looking to flavour-theme their events or to spice up their social gatherings.





# Beachproofing your gadgets

It seems that it is getting harder for us to separate ourselves from our technological devices. Even on holidays, we look to our tech to keep us entertained by the pool or beach. Whether it is getting engrossed in a bestseller on your ebook reader, watching a thriller on your tablet, or snapping shots on your smartphone, our gadgets are indispensable and we are unwilling to leave them behind. But these are all costly items, and as you lie on the sand with the water lapping at your feet, your precious devices are in grave danger of getting ruined.

There are a number of waterproof bags and cases on sale to protect your devices from potentially disastrous splashes or accidental dunkings and from sand getting lodged in ports or scratching screens. The more expensive offerings suggest that they can keep devices dry and safe as you surf, swim or scuba dive. Some offer features such as headphone jacks and come supplied with lanyards or armbands so you can keep your bagged devices with you at all times.

Our colleagues at Consumer Reports in the U.S. have tested a number of these clear waterproof cases and found them to work pretty well. In the tests, the specially designed bags stayed dry when briefly dunked in water and kept out sand sprinkled along their seals. The bags allowed testers to operate the key functions of the devices inside, swiping and tapping touchscreens, for example, to adjust volume and brightness controls. Testers were even able to shoot photos through the clear cases, though the images tended to be on the cloudy side depending on the thickness of the bag. The plastic material increased glare on the enclosed devices' screen so they are easier to use in the shade than bright sunlight. Testers also found that the better the fit, the easier the device was to use.

Consumer Reports then performed the same tests with devices popped into a humble slider bag – the kind of zipper bag that is available in supermarkets and that consumers buy to keep sandwiches fresh or for storing food in the freezer. Interestingly, this inexpensive option also did fine in the tests. The organisation used the U.S. Hefty brand of slider bag but suggests that any good-quality zipper or slider bag will provide passable protection at a cost of around 20 cents. The thinner plastic of these bags tended to become crinkly as the devices inside were used, detracting from readability, and controls were a little harder to operate due to the fact that the bags were not an exact fit for the devices. However, the zipper bags had no problem protecting the devices from a brief immersion in water and sand wiped away easily, though it did stick inside the zippered tab.

In conclusion, Consumer Reports offers the following advice:

- Bag your devices if bringing them to the beach, pool or any other place where they might incur damage.
- Find a bag that fits your device well. If the bag is a bit baggy, try to create a vacuum seal by closing it nearly all the way, leaving just a half inch or so open, pushing all the air out and then closing it fully.
- Replace the bag periodically, especially if sand has scratched the surface.
- Place your device in the bag before setting off and try not to take it out again until you are back home and have removed any sand or water from the outside of the bag.

A brief survey of prices shows that water resistant bags for devices of different sizes are available from around €5 and, of course, a Ziploc bag will cost significantly less. More high-end bags and cases that claim to be 100% waterproof are available from around €25. Of course, another option is to leave your pricey gadgets at home altogether and bring an old-fashioned paperback or a glossy magazine to the beach for entertainment instead.





# Stealth Health: Keeping the BBQ delicious while cutting the calories

The barbecue is often looked on as a Bacchanalian feast where all dietary concerns go up in smoke. But we've devised a way to fire up the grill without punishing the scales.



REPORT by Alex Tierney

## At a glance

- Healthy burgers
- Shish Kebabs
- Drinks
- General Advice

Quick question: what do you think about when you hear the word "barbecue"? A spectacle of sunshine and busy sizzling? Smokey-rich, mouth-watering aromas? Ice-cold drinks and garden tables heaped with hearty fare? Chances are the one word that doesn't instantly pop into your head is "healthy". And yet, at a time when the desire for a healthy diet shines openly in many minds and lurks like a guilty murmur in others, we have taken it upon ourselves to investigate this extravagant summer repast and see if there are ways for you to indulge without waking up your waistline.

Disclaimer: It is not in any way our intention to turn the barbecue into a lettuce leaf. We simply believe that it is possible to cut some calories from

the menu while keeping everything as delicious as it always was. We appreciate that this is sacred ground and will proceed to offer you our tips with due care and diligence.

## The Burger

Meat is the essential element in 99.9% of barbecues, and of all the different types and guises it comes in, the burger is the most celebrated. Think a no-nonsense beef patty sandwiched in between two lightly-toasted buns with all sorts of glorious garnishes and sauces for company. At the same time, consider the calories involved here: extras aside, a quarter-pound of beef will carry in the region of 240kcal, while the buns can ring the bell at anywhere between 100

and 200kcal. But if your heart is set on a burger, what can you do to appease that unique type of hunger short of eating one? Quite a lot actually.

**Chicken** - An oft over-looked option is chicken. It is lighter than beef but no less delicious and can make for a genuinely delectable burger. An average breast of chicken has 180kcal, which is a noteworthy reduction straight off. Prior to grilling, slice it lengthways in two (or three, depending on the thickness) and rub smoked paprika and garlic powder into each piece, making sure to wash your hands afterwards. This is a way of giving the chicken a flavour-to-remember without having to marinate it for long periods of time.

**Toppings** - These days many restaurants have a tendency to serve burgers built tall as towers, each pinned with a central skewer, and precarious the moment you take your first bite. It looks good on a poster, but in reality it is often awkward, messy, and ultimately unnecessary. When adding toppings, exercise restraint. 50g of cheddar cheese has roughly 200kcal and 17g of fat, so instead of capping the meat with ungainly slabs, slice thinly: cheese is still cheese even when it comes in cuter amounts.

**Sauces** - Tomato, lettuce and red onion are all well-respected, responsible citizens of the calorie world, but when we're dealing with sauces, a few cautionary notices are called for. A tablespoon of Heinz Ketchup contains 15kcal and 3.4g of sugar. (Note the tablespoon is a strict measurement and doesn't permit high, overflowing mounds.) The current guideline daily amount of sugar is 90g, but the World Health Organisation is proposing to lower it to 25g, meaning three tablespoons of ketchup would account for nearly half your allowance by their standards.

Other sauces are even worse. A tablespoon of Chef Barbecue Sauce rings the bell at 19.2kcal with 4.28g of sugar for luck, while the same amount of Hellman's Mayonnaise carries a jaw-dropping 100kcal with 11g of fat. Extra-light mayonnaise, however, has only 10kcal, and you can work flavoursome wonders with it by adding grated lemon zest or grated garlic.

Low-fat natural yoghurt is a particularly healthy option: mix in some smoked paprika, roast some garlic in their jackets, crush them, add them in, and you have yourself a very respectable sauce for topping or dipping.



**Buns** - Processed white breads are looked upon unfavourably these days, and cutting down on burger or hotdog buns is advised. Some restaurants offer a replacement bun comprising two lettuce leaves, and the more intrepid reader might like to know that tomatoes sliced in half, Portobello mushrooms, and flattened circles of sweet potato have all been used at one time or another. The bread-bun, though, is a traditional accompaniment and if you can't take a burger seriously without one, we recommend keeping the bottom bun and only removing or replacing the top. That way you hang onto the traditional taste while halving the traditional calories.

### Shish Kebabs

Instead of sausages, which hold a daunting amount of calories and fat, we recommend shish kebabs. Any food that provides space for a high-vegetable count is to be desired, and shish kebabs by their very nature enact a sort of harmonious, colourful marriage between vegetables and meat - their appearance alone is a tantalising promise. Again, we would recommend chicken - though if you're sick of chicken, small chunks of steak won't put you across any red line. Thread the meat onto the wooden skewers along with a variety of fresh mushrooms, punchy red onion, juicy sweet tomatoes, and peppers, the last of which are particularly delicious when barbecued, trust us. If you find that some of the vegetables are still slightly undercooked by the time the meat is done, you can cook each separate ingredient on its own skewer (one for chicken, one for onion etc.) and then mix them together on a plate at the end.

Vegetarian kebabs have huge potential. Halloumi cheese is in vogue right now, and though not every halloumi recipe will be necessarily low on calories, there is a wonderful one to be found on BBC Good Foods that mixes low-fat halloumi with onion, courgettes and cherry tomatoes, all flavoured with olive oil, lemon juice, thyme, mustard, and seasoning. The result: a very creditable 194kcal and 11g of fat.

### Salads

Salads have always been present at the barbecue table, bunched freshly in glass bowls with two wooden spoons for serving. Of course, there are

thousands of different ways of making a salad but one tip we would offer is that you should measure out your dressings carefully. The word "salad" is so entwined with our idea of health and dieting that we often consider it an infallible guarantee of low calories, no matter what the actual salad contains. But salad dressings are heavy in oil, and 100g of a raspberry and mint dressing comes in at 488kcal, meaning that if you pour it liberally over the greenery below, the calorie count will go up.

### Beverages

It has been said time and time again, but soft drinks really are the worst thing you could drink (a can of Coke contains a whopping 40g of sugar) and alternatives to them should be explored. One drink that is consistently underestimated is plain, good-old fashioned water. Simply add ice, a couple of slices of lemon and lime and some crushed mint, and you have yourself a very worthy refreshment.



**Wine and Beer** - Far be it from us to rule these out. A standard glass of red wine, measuring 148ml, contains 125kcal and 1g of sugar, which isn't bad news at all. Contrary to popular belief, white wine generally holds a similar amount. The one thing to watch is the alcohol percentage: a higher number here means a higher number of calories.

With regard to beer, a pint of Heineken has roughly 222kcal, but we would recommend that you purchase your beer in smaller units. For example, Lidl have a selection of Finkbrau beers that come in 25cl bottles. The trick is that when



tend to drink slower and consume a smaller amount overall.

### A last general piece of advice

As with the beer bottles, so with the plates, according to many contemporary studies. Companies such as Google have found that when they reduce their canteens' plate sizes, their employees eat less. The barbecue presents a different problem because its structure encourages a staggered method of eating: people put food on their plates, eat it, and then get more. But try and tighten the borders of your plate by placing your entire meal on it to begin with: that way you will know how much you're eating, and will more than likely eat less.

### And a quote from Oscar Wilde to make you feel better

"Everything in moderation, including moderation."

### Food Safety Reminders:

- Steaks can be served rare, but burgers, chicken and pork must be cooked all the way through
- Keep cooked meat away from raw meat. Do not use the same utensils, chopping boards and plates on cooked meat that you did on raw meat
- Wash your hands after handling raw meat; wash any utensils, chopping boards etc. you may have used
- Do not reuse sauces that were used to marinate raw meat
- Make sure frozen food is completely thawed before cooking
- Allow leftovers to cool before putting them in the fridge. Make sure you put them in within two hours of cooking.

### Useful websites

[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)  
[www.efsa.europa.eu](http://www.efsa.europa.eu)

### Reference Intake (New Guideline Daily Amount from Dec 2014) for average, moderately active adults

Calories	2,000
Sugar	90g
Fat	70g

### Meats

	Calories	Sugar	Fat
Breast of chicken 162g	180	0g	3.4g
Beef burger 113g	230	0.2g	15.7g
Sausage 86g	294	0.2g	25.7g

### Sauces

	Calories	Sugar	Fat
Ketchup 15g	15	3.4g	0g
BBQ Sauce 15g	19.2	4.28g	0g
Mayonnaise 15g	100	0.2g	11g







# When Duty-Free Calls...



REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue

## At a glance

- Duty-free shopping
- Getting value
- Airport shopping checklist

**Don't get carried away when you are headed away on holidays – Consumer Choice looks at what to consider when it comes to duty-free shopping to make sure you really are getting a good deal.**

There is nothing like a little retail therapy to get you off to a flying start when you are headed abroad and, for many, the holidays begin as soon as they pass through airport security and hit the duty-free shopping area. Or if they are headed home from a trip abroad, holiday makers may well view the duty-free shop as the last chance for a spot of holiday spending and foreign bargain hunting before they get on the plane back home. Those in the holiday spirit might be tempted to view all that is on offer under the duty-free banner as a bargain and there is certainly some great value to be had. However, as ever, consumers need to be savvy about their purchases – they must ask themselves whether this item is really a bargain, will they be allowed to take it into their destination country without incurring any further cost, and are there any compelling reasons why they might be better off buying the item at home or from a regular retailer?

### Duty-free basics

Ireland has been credited with the invention of duty-free shopping and the world's first-ever duty-free shop was opened in Shannon Airport in 1947. Employees at the airport noticed that trans-Atlantic passengers who had to change planes on the way from Europe to the US were spending a lot of time at the airport waiting for their connecting flight,

although they were not officially entering the country. The area in the airport in which these passengers waited was legally a neutral territory that did not belong to any nation. Ireland's Ministry for Finance permitted a shop to be opened behind the passport control line and prices here were lower because the goods were exempt from the usual custom fees or taxes associated with these purchases since the goods had not crossed the border of the state where they were sold. This simple but ingenious idea spread rapidly and was soon adopted all over the world.

The goods are free of local government custom fees or other taxes because they have not technically been imported into the country of sale and so, clearly, the best bargains to be had in duty-free shopping are among those categories that are the most heavily taxed, i.e. alcohol and tobacco. Since June 1999, the sale of duty-free items to anyone travelling within the EU has been abolished, so passengers can only avail of true bargains in alcohol and tobacco purchases if they are travelling outside the EU and, in this instance, savings can be a whopping 50% or more. When travelling within the EU, passengers must pay the duty-paid price for alcohol and tobacco products, which is comparable and, on occasion, may be more than the cost of an equivalent purchase

bought in the supermarket before you leave for the airport.

## Duty-free allowances

So as long as you are leaving the country and the goods are for your personal use, you can purchase items relieved of the local government sales tax. However, limits apply to what you will be able to bring into your destination country without incurring customs fees upon arrival. Customs allowances vary from country to country but table 1 below shows what you are entitled to bring into Ireland when travelling from a non-EU country. Although Gibraltar, the Canary Islands and the Channel Islands are part of the EU, they are subject to special fiscal provisions and the duty-free allowances for countries outside the EU apply.

Table 1: Duty-free allowances for travellers arriving in Ireland from a country outside of the EU:

Maximum quantities	Items
<b>Tobacco Products</b>	
200	Cigarettes OR
100	Cigarillos OR
50	Cigars OR
250 grams	Tobacco
<b>Alcohol Products</b>	
1 litre	Spirits (gin, vodka, whiskey) OR
2 litres	Intermediate products (sherry, port, sparkling wine)
4 litres	Still wine
16 litres	Beer

In addition, travellers are permitted to bring in other goods - such as perfume, clothing and gifts - free of duty as long as the combined value does not exceed the following limits:

Up to €430	For persons aged 15 years and over
Up to €215	For persons aged under 15 years.

If you bring an item into the country worth more than the relevant limit of €430 or €215, then you will be required to pay import duty on the full value of the item and not just the portion of the value that exceeds the limit. You should also remember that if you are bringing back any duty-free goods bought when travelling out of Ireland, these count as part of your allowance.

Duty-free and tax-free goods are not available for purchase by those travelling within the EU unless for immediate consumption on aircraft or ferries and all duties or taxes have to be paid on any such goods on arrival in Ireland. If you buy duty- or tax-paid goods in shops or supermarkets in another EU country, no further duty or tax will be charged but there are limits on the quantities of alcohol and tobacco products individuals can bring into the country in their checked luggage and these must be for personal use. If the goods are equivalent or less than the limits specified, they will be viewed as being for personal use but if these limits are exceeded, you may have to demonstrate to customs that the items are for personal use. For details, see <http://www.revenue.ie/en/customs/leaflets/pn1878.html>.

## Getting a duty-free bargain

Duty-free stores originally specialised in heavily-taxed items like alcohol and tobacco products but now they offer a range of

goods that are not subject to the same level of duty and taxes and so may not be significantly discounted. Here is where a consumer, whether in the holiday spirit or not, must make sure that what they are buying represents true value.

Perfumes and cosmetics are a very popular product category for airport retailers, with ARI Ireland - which manages the travel retail operations at Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports under the retail brand The Loop - reporting that these products represent over 50% of total sales. We looked at a random selection of beauty products and fragrances available in Irish airports via The Loop's online shopping operation and compared prices with regular high-street retailers. In general, there are savings of around 20% to be garnered by shopping in the duty-free shops, as you can see from table 2 below. If the item is something you are planning to purchase anyway either for yourself or as a gift, it makes sense to avail of this discounted price. But it may be worth checking what prices are like for the same product in regular shops in your destination country, as you may find even greater savings can be made. As ever, there is no substitute for doing a bit of homework before plunking down your cash and the internet has made this kind of research very easy indeed.

Table 2: Beauty products and fragrances in airport shops compared with regular retailers.

Beauty products and fragrances	Airport price (€)	Regular price (€)
Clinique Dramatically Different moisturizing lotion 125 ml	€35.70	€40.00*
Clinique Take the Day Off make-up remover 125 ml	€17.00	€21.00
Creme de la Mer Moisturiser 60ml	€208.25	€245.00
Jo Malone fragrance 30ml	€38.40	€48.00
Jo Malone Body Creme 175ml	€49.60	€62.00
Clarins Beauty Flash Balm 50ml	€27.00	€36.00
Calvin Klein Deodorant CK One 75g	€12.00	€14.62
Issy Miyake L'Eau d'Issy Pour Homme EDT 125ml	€64.10	€80.50

Prices sourced from theloop.ie and regular retailers on 26th June 2014

\*item also offered by a regular retailer at a temporary sale price of €32.50 on the day we checked.

The goods available in the duty-free shopping area have expanded way beyond alcohol, tobacco and beauty products to include such items as leather goods, jewellery and electronics. In some cases, it can be tricky to compare like with like to gauge whether you are getting a good deal and although with goods where comparisons are more easy to make – such as electronic goods – the discounts may not be huge and there may be greater peace of mind in purchasing a costly gadget from a shop to which you can return easily if a fault develops with your purchase as your contract is first and foremost with the retailer. If buying an expensive item from an airport shop, check if there are other branches of the retailer near to home to which goods may be returned if necessary or if there is a system for returns in place, such as the Heathrow Shopper Promise at Heathrow Airport in London, which offers a 60-day returns service on behalf of Heathrow retailers. Subject to terms and conditions, this policy guarantees airport shoppers a full refund if they change their mind about their purchase, though you do have to incur the cost of posting the item to Heathrow – the cost of this is only refunded if the item is faulty – and you are advised to insure anything you put in the post.

## Beyond price

Apart from making sure that the price is right, what else should travellers consider when buying items in the airport? With any purchase they make consumers should ensure that they won't fall foul of any regulations at their destination that will mean they ultimately lose out. Depending on where you are travelling to, there may be rigid restrictions on what may be brought into the country. For example, travellers coming from outside the EU are prohibited from bringing a range of items into the EU, including plants, live or dead animals, poultry or eggs and hay, straw, or articles packed with these materials. As a way of

controlling the spread of infectious animal diseases and protecting animal and public health, bringing certain foodstuffs – specifically, products of animal origin – into the EU for personal consumption is subject to a number of criteria including severe restrictions on the quantities that may be imported. According to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland website, travellers may only bring meat, milk and related products into Ireland from outside the EU if the products come from the Faeroe Islands, Greenland or Iceland and their weight is 10kg or less. Powdered infant milk and special pet food are subject to slightly different rules, and up to 2kg of other animal products – such as honey, live oysters and live mussels or snails – may be brought in from countries outside the EU (up to 10kg if the products are from the Faeroe Islands, Greenland or Iceland). For full details of these rules, see [http://www.fsai.ie/faq/import\\_export.html](http://www.fsai.ie/faq/import_export.html). Foodstuffs that are exempt from these rules include bread, cakes, biscuits, chocolate, and any food product not containing any fresh or processed meat or dairy and with less than 50% of processed egg or fishery products.

Anyone deciding to buy alcohol or perfume at the airport after passing through the security gates should think ahead to ensure that they won't encounter difficulties relating to regulations that limit liquids on flights. Anyone on a non-stop flight should be fine once the airport shop puts the liquids in sealed, "tamper-evident" bags. It can be trickier, however, if the flight has transfers with further security checks and there is no opportunity to put the liquids into checked baggage. Also, anyone who has opted to only take carry-on luggage onto their flight should consider if they treat themselves to a large bottle of perfume, for example, on their outgoing journey whether it will fall foul of the 100ml restrictions on liquids in hand luggage on the way home. In Irish airports where The Loop runs travel retail operations, customers can avail of a service that lets them shop before their outward-bound journey and then leave their purchases at the airport to be collected when they get back to Ireland. This means they can take advantage of duty-free bargains without having to lug the items with them as they travel and avoid any potential difficulties with either weight restrictions or regulations about carrying liquids in hand luggage on the way home.

## Airport shopping checklist

When doing a spot of airport shopping, consider the following:



- Airport duty-free shops vary from country to country and from airport to airport so there is no substitute for being informed as to the regular retail price of a purchase you are about to make. Although there may be major savings to be made on heavily taxed items like the old reliables of alcohol and tobacco, items on sale in the duty-free area of airports can range from pens to jewellery to leather goods and these may or may not be significantly discounted. You will need to have your research done at home or use your smartphone to do a little investigating before you decide to make a purchase.

- Just because the stores in the duty-free area of the airport do not have to pay customs tax, they do not necessarily have to pass savings on to customers. In addition, airports tend to charge high rates for shop space so the retailers' overhead costs may be high, which they may then try to pass on to customers. This means that buying the same item in the local town or online may be cheaper.

- If you do nab a bargain in either the alcohol or perfume departments, make sure you don't run into difficulties with regulations that limit liquids on flights. As noted above, liquids bought in duty-free shops and contained in sealed bags should not cause a problem unless there are flight transfers to be considered and no opportunity to pop purchases into checked baggage. A difficulty can also arise if you opted to bring only hand luggage and your purchase will exceed the 100ml liquid restrictions on your return journey. Think through your liquid purchases, as a bargain is not a bargain if the item is confiscated and you don't get to enjoy it.

- You should also make yourself aware before you travel of the varying rules surrounding goods that may be taken into your destination country in terms of the quantities





of duty-free items permitted or the total value of goods allowed so you can avoid any custom fees that might need to be paid. For instance, when travelling within the EU, you can bring 800 cigarettes into Ireland that have been bought in another EU country with duty and tax paid (e.g. in a shop, supermarket, etc.). However, since 1st January 2014, you can only bring a maximum of 300 cigarettes into Ireland for your personal use that have been bought in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania. As the Revenue website notes, the EU member states to which the restriction applies are subject to review, so it is advisable to check the situation on [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie) before travelling.

- There may also be rigid rules surrounding the kinds of products that may be brought into the destination country, including certain foodstuffs. Rules can vary significantly across different countries so to avoid having items confiscated, incurring a

fine or encountering any legal difficulties, again it is wise to check out the regulations before making your purchase.

- When purchasing an item abroad, the exchange rate may need to be taken into account and a quick calculation done to ascertain if the item is really the bargain it appears to be.
- You don't have to do your buying in a holiday frenzy, with some airports offering online shopping facilities so you can do your homework before leaving your house to see what is on offer and how prices compare to regular retailers.
- One way of budgeting your spending and being efficient with your time is to pre-order your purchases online. Some airports offer this facility, including the Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports, where you can order and pay for perfume, chocolates, alcohol or other products online via [theloop.ie](http://theloop.ie) and collect

them from designated areas once you arrive at the airport. Other airports, including Heathrow in London and Frankfurt Airport let you order goods online and then pay when you collect them.

- It can be a bit of a gamble to try to work out whether the airport on your outbound journey or the airport on your inbound journey will represent the best value for items of interest to you, but again, airports that offer online shopping facilities let you check out prices before you fly, making it less of a gamble and more an informed decision about where you are going to do your shopping. See table 3 to compare prices for a number of goods in three airports.



Table 3: How three airports compare

	Dublin	Heathrow	Frankfurt
<b>Alcohol - duty-free</b>			
Absolut Vodka 1 litre	€16.95	€17.66	€17.90
Baileys Irish Cream 1 litre	€17.50	€20.71	€17.90
Bombay Sapphire Gin 1 litre	€20.95	€24.98	€24.50*
<b>Beauty products and fragrances</b>			
Clarins Beauty Flash Balm 50ml	€27.00	€29.44	€32.00
Calvin Klein Eternity men Eau De Toilette spray 100ml	€56.30	€54.43	€58.00
Issy Miyake L'Eau d'Issy Eau de Toilette 50ml	€54.70	€49.06	€59.00

Prices sourced from the online operations of the three airports on 26th June 2014.

Heathrow prices converted from sterling to euro.

\*item at a temporary sale price of €16.50 at Frankfurt Airport on the day we checked.



**YOUR CHOICES MAKE  
A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE**

# Waking up to Living Lightly - the EU Generation Awake campaign



REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue

At a glance

- Water footprints
- Food waste
- Resource efficiency

The Generation Awake campaign is an ongoing initiative of the European Commission that seeks to help people consider their consumption habits and the consequences on the environment, natural resources, quality of life, health and well-being. The campaign, which targets the 25-40 age group, is aimed at raising awareness of just how many valuable resources are used to make the everyday things we take for granted, how many precious materials remain in items that we no longer value and are willing to toss in the bin, and how we can become more resource efficient.

Resource efficiency focuses on doing more with less, using such limited resources as water, metals, minerals, and food in a sustainable way and minimising our impact on the environment. Both as individuals and a society, there is an urgent need to change how we treat these resources, which are being used faster than they can be replaced. As the Generation Awake campaign notes, with the world population heading toward 9 billion, there should be a focus on improving the environment rather than damaging it and we need to manage raw materials like water, minerals and timber more efficiently throughout their life-cycle, from when they are first extracted to when they are eventually disposed of. Consumers can play their part by thinking about the lifespan and impacts of the products they buy and about how they use energy and water.

## The three Rs

Maximising resource efficiency can be achieved by reducing what you buy in the first place, reusing as much as possible as often as possible, and recycling everything that can be recycled. Suggestions on the Generation Awake website for reducing your environmental impact include using recyclable bags for shopping, choosing product refills over single-use containers, and if you do need a product that you will use only once - such as a book or a tool - borrowing or renting rather than buying. Wherever they have the choice, consumers are advised to buy reusables over disposables - for example, opting for rechargeable batteries over regular disposable batteries - and to think about repair potential when purchasing new products.

The next best option after reuse is recycling, as it avoids the water and air pollution associated with extracting raw materials and less energy is needed to make new products from recycled materials compared to creating a product from raw materials. For example, it requires 70% less energy to recycle paper compared with making it from virgin raw materials and recycling an aluminium can saves around 95% of the energy needed to make a new one from raw materials. When it comes to recycling, Ireland is below the EU average. According to the European Environment Agency, Ireland's recycling rate is 36%, compared with the EU average of 39% and way behind Europe's champion

recyclers, Austria and Germany, which boast rates of 63% and 62%, respectively.

## Water footprints

One key area that Generation Awake highlights is the urgent need to consider our use of that most crucial of resources - water. The Awake Water Guide indicates the total amount of freshwater used to produce and consume a product, which is calculated by adding the total direct and indirect volumes of water used through the product's lifecycle. Taking the example of a potato, the direct water usage is the water used to wash and boil the potato before eating, whereas the indirect usage is all the water used throughout the supply chain, including such water-intensive processes as the irrigation of crops. According to the Awake Water Guide, the water footprint of a slice of bread is 48 litres; an apple accounts for 82 litres; a cup of coffee requires 132 litres; 2,495 litres of water are needed to produce a t-shirt; and it takes a whopping 15,415 litres of water to produce 1kg of beef. Our individual water footprint is the sum of the water footprints of all the goods and services we consume, so, as the guide points out, someone who drinks lots of coffee and eats meat regularly will probably have a far higher water footprint than a vegetarian who drinks tap water. Our direct water usage, the water we use for showering, cooking and so on, only accounts for 4% of our total water footprint - so our indirect footprint accounts for the vast majority of the water

## Sources of food waste in Europe

### Manufacturing

By-products, such as carcasses & bones from meat production  
Misshapen products  
Damaged products  
Overproduction

### Food services

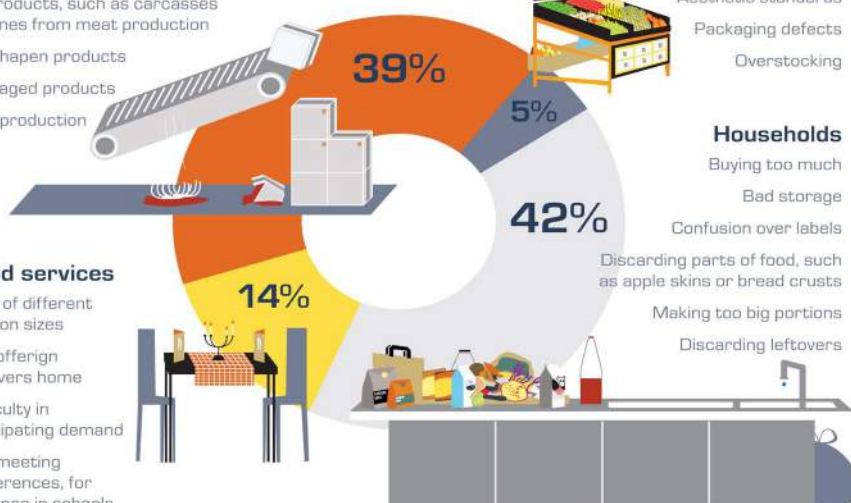
Lack of different portion sizes  
Not offering leftovers home  
Difficulty in anticipating demand  
Not meeting preferences, for instance in schools

### Wholesale and retail

Temperature changes  
Aesthetic standards  
Packaging defects  
Overstocking

### Households

Buying too much  
Bad storage  
Confusion over labels  
Discarding parts of food, such as apple skins or bread crusts  
Making too big portions  
Discarding leftovers



we use. In this context, the Awake Water Guide suggests ways of reducing our indirect water footprint, including eating less meat, buying fewer clothes and purchasing more second-hand products instead of newly manufactured goods.

In the Generation Awake Consumption Guide, there are a number of tips on how to minimise our direct water footprint by reducing the amount of water we use – a topic that will be of particular interest to Irish households which will start receiving bills for water consumption in January 2015. Recommendations here include controlling tap flow volume and installing a dual-flush system in your toilet to introduce a quick flush that uses 70% less water than a standard flush.

## Food for thought

Another area that Generation Awake considers in its Consumption Guide and other materials is food waste. The figures suggest that average households in Europe discard around 25% of the food they buy by weight. Households account for 42% of food waste in the EU and this is attributed to a number of practices including buying too much food, poor storage, confusion over labels, discarding parts of food such as apple peels and bread crusts, preparing portions that are too large, and throwing out leftovers.

According to stopfoodwaste.ie, over one million tonnes of food waste is disposed of annually in Ireland and each person is throwing out about 80kg of food waste every year. Although the exact cost of the food going into domestic bins is difficult to estimate and depends on the kind of food that is thrown out, the Stop Food Waste site suggests that Irish consumers are binning between €400 and

€1,000 each year. Both the Generation Awake and the Stop Food Waste websites have suggestions on how to cut down on food waste, including ways to adjust shopping habits to avoid buying too much, proper storage practices for items likely to go off quickly – such as fruit, vegetables and bread – and ideas for making use of leftovers.

One initiative under way at European level to help reduce the amount of food finding its way into our bins is a proposal to scrap 'best-before' dates on long-life products. A group of EU member states, led by the Netherlands and Sweden, is pressing the European Commission to bring in rules that would result in manufacturers no longer having to put a best-before date on foods that are designed to be kept in storage for long periods of time, such as rice and pasta. Current EU legislation requires all food to carry a best-before date irrespective of whether the products have a long shelf-life or not. Estimates suggest that around 15% of food waste is caused by best-before dates on packaging that lead consumers to wrongly assume that the item in question is no longer fit for consumption, and so the item ends up

in the bin. Another contributor to food waste in households is the trend towards promotional offers, such as buy-one-get-one-free deals, that can lead consumers to buy more than they might reasonably use – such deals may provide significant savings on non-perishable goods, such as washing powder, but when offered on perishable goods, like bags of salad, for example, the savings become negligible if the items go off before you can use them. Similarly, experts have pointed to the need to sell food in a range of packaging sizes to ensure that consumers do not have to buy a higher volume of food than they need.

## Going back to living lightly

People have been recycling for centuries, aware that valuable resources are scarce and reusing items out of necessity. In ancient times, it was common to melt down metal swords, pots and other objects that had served their purpose to produce something new – such as coins, statues or household items – that would then go on to have a long and useful life. However, as goods became more cheaply and readily available, and with necessity no longer focusing our minds to the same extent, it became far easier for increasingly time-poor individuals to throw away items than to go to the trouble of finding a further use for them.

The Generation Awake campaign looks at a number of areas in which we are not living as lightly as we could and offers ways that we can reduce our impact on the environment. The campaign suggests that by being informed about the consequences of our choices and making smart day-to-day decisions that consider the environment, we can make a more sustainable world for ourselves and our children. For information on the impact of various items and daily habits on natural resources as well as tips, recommendations and sustainable alternatives, visit the Generation Awake website at <http://www.generationawake.eu>.







# Mediation: Dispute Resolution - Naturally.

A simple search will quickly highlight how mediation is an activity that has been practised for centuries. Some cultures regarded the mediator as a sacred figure, worthy of particular respect for their peaceful means of dispute resolution. Depending upon which source you land upon, you will have the choice of determination as to whether it was first developed in China, ancient Greece or in Roman times. Suffice it to say we have been seeking and benefitting from the intercession of neutral mediators for a very long time.

However, it is the more traditional and formal deliberations of our court system that has been the most familiar route to which we would be consistently directed in seeking to resolve our differences. But now, as waiting lists and costs have grown and the value and importance of privacy and confidentiality has become sacrosanct, it has been to alternative means of resolution that we have significantly turned our attention and none more so than that of mediation.

In researching this article I have read various expert practitioners' current comments which, despite the fact that oceans separate them, are in full agreement in tone and issue at concern. They all signal a change in support from many legal representatives to clients who are not comprehensively appraised of

the process of mediation and its benefits. They even go so far as to recommend these clients to reject the consideration of mediation.

This, at a time when Ireland is poised to introduce the Mediation Bill, indicates how much demanding work is ahead in creating a positive, supportive and enlightening awareness amongst consumers for what I would suggest is a most natural dispute resolution process.

## Natural Reaction

One of the very first words we speak is a plain, simple and, impressively for such a young mind, a usually very determined - No! As our life progresses in stages of growth, knowledge and experience, the value of 'no' and its impact becomes quite effective and powerful - especially when 'yes' would have been the expected or preferred response.

What then follows is generally determined by the circumstances and context within which the negativity is expressed, to whom it is directed and what is our intention or preferred alternative. At a young age our parents would have referred to this as a tantrum, quickly resolved and more quickly forgotten and forgiven. As we age though and, debateably, should, with continued constructive adult education and guidance,

know better, our disagreements can be viewed by us as being more serious in nature and significance, we can allow them to fester and grow often seeking and needing support from family, friends, colleagues and, yes, again, despite our stature, our parents, not necessarily to resolve them but rather to actually prolong them.

This progression to third party intervention is for validation, assistance and degrees of support in determining what is it that we are demanding. Is it fair and realistic or is it perhaps a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what was intended? Or, has it been stated with no good reason and solely as a human reaction under difficult circumstances that now seems difficult to remember in terms of reasonableness? One thing is certain, our view is determined by example and, importantly, our experiences. But, not just our own experiences but those of our family, friends and colleagues which we process and integrate into what becomes our value base and ethical standpoint.

As we age and become more inquisitive, as well as experienced, it can prompt us to be significantly more challenging, open to debate and, interestingly, more inclined toward open, exciting and positively intended confrontation.

As we progress and grow, as consumers we contract daily with providers that we pay for goods and services; as employees we contract with our employers to provide our work and skills in return for their payment; in business we contract with other third party businesses to build and improve our surroundings and lifestyles.

In all of these personal and commercial contractual engagements there are terms and conditions that apply, obligations and undertakings that are relied upon and an overarching prevailing expectation that trust and goodwill will bring these contracts to a successful and beneficial completion.

Of course, while commonly referred to as unnecessary and almost discourteous insertions intended really for other people, penalty clauses - increasingly with significant, detailed, specific and damaging consequences - are provided in the event that one party believes it is necessary to call a halt to proceedings. Arguably, we rely upon systems, rules and legal provisions to determine our rights and entitlements. Confrontation is much less the chosen option.

The thread for both action and response is therefore seen to be determined through personal experience, trusted relationships, ethic values and a conviction that it is right to stop and say no - but argued through the proper channels and especially the tried, tested and long established facilities of the courts. The recommendation for continued personal engagement would be therefore not to do so.

## To Whom Now Do We Turn

The pattern throughout dispute would be similar in the majority of cases in that personal interaction and intervention occurs in increasing levels of ranking from e.g. a consumer to a builder, through to the architect, to the supplier and, depending upon the progress or lack of it, up the ranking until someone, frustrated at the lack of any party's acceptance of responsibility, decides to seek legal advice. This is mirrored in cases of individuals and families in contention with the actions of nurses, carers, doctors, consultants and inevitably hospitals and nursing homes where the care for a loved one becomes a matter of intense division and entrenched and determined opposition.

Throughout the process the reality of life is that cost will, generally, intervene with varying levels of significance. When this point is reached a

number of possibilities arise.

It may be the case that the cost of fighting what has become a matter of principle as opposed to a significant matter of financial loss brings the reality that other available options need to be explored.

I have had many consumers advise me that what was initially an issue of money had now progressed beyond that to that of principle and fairness.



Again, this prompted a suggestion for a review of options - alternatives - that could alter the approach to remedy.

The pattern I referred to above takes a toll on the quality of personal interaction upon which the contract was originally based. It has moved far away from the individuals involved and their level of engagement is frequently replaced, and determined, by legal advisors who, acting upon our direction and often despite their advice to the contrary, must say, definitively and robustly, no!

This is why mediation, I do believe, has the potential to revisit what was a positive personal interaction, provide better clarity and understanding of the issues and restore a level of trust that can be built upon to mutual current and possible future benefit.

With this in mind it is important to note certain of the findings (released March 2013) from what was the first joint survey by CEDR Ireland, together with the Irish Commercial Mediation Association, of the attitudes of civil and commercial mediators and commercial lawyers.

***"Emphasis remains on client stories with little consideration for the feelings which are driving and influencing the conflict"***

***'There is a trend for mediations to become somewhat more legalistic and consequently more adversarial. This has the effect of moving the process away from the principals with an increasing emphasis on submissions'***

***'The number one reason mediators provided when asked what was in their view... the greatest obstacle to***

***preventing the use of mediation to settle commercial disputes was the reluctance on the part of lawyers to advise their clients to submit to mediation. "***

***"Indeed, one of the lawyers that completed the survey stated that "There are too many practitioners who do not understand the process, and this may undermine it critically".***

## Mediation

The points made within the survey goes to the heart of the matter.

Mediation is described within the proposed Mediation Bill as:

***'A facilitative and confidential process in which a mediator assists parties to a dispute to attempt by themselves, on a voluntary basis, to reach mutually acceptable and voluntary agreement to resolve their dispute'***

This presents the possibility to and potential for both sides to engage and interact, likely after a lengthy period of complete and legally counseled separation, together, and revisit and discuss the breakdown within that agreement they previously, together, happily put into action.

It is, of course, a great personal achievement, on each of their parts, that they have agreed to do so. So, does this not highlight and better reflect the reality of the growth in experience that I refer to earlier in our lifetime learning? They have been locked into third party documented detail of what is their disagreement and have lost a significant degree of personal engagement and life-learned maturity through third party encouraged distance. Is it not therefore the most realistic and natural of steps to be advised of the benefits of mediation at this stage?



Now, I am not naively suggesting that all

parties to all disputes will even wish to consider the mediation process but I do believe that the choice must be offered but also, importantly, encouraged and outlined in positive terms.

However, having said that, I would consider that it is at this point that such a seismic change of approach requires the application of great preparation to assist in its potential for success. This, again in respect of the indicated survey finding, clearly indicates how a trained, accredited and registered mediator is essential to the facilitation of a voluntary and personally achieved agreement by the parties.

This is where we come to the serious nub of the problem. In the United States, there is a reflected difficulty emerging with regard to legal advice and understanding for the parties of what place mediation really holds in their particular dispute.

Mark Baer is a distinguished and respected family law practitioner and a great advocate for mediation who, in May of 2013, questioned how **'... those involved in the legal system have created confusion in the marketplace regarding the concept of mediation itself. If those involved in the legal system don't know what mediation is supposed to be, how can we expect the general public to grasp the concept?'**

Those concerns and evaluations are highlighted within the CEDR Survey which refers to:

- **'Misperceptions about mediation which include that it is the same as a settlement meeting';**
- **'It is 'soft law';**
- **'It is a sign of weakness to suggest mediation';**
- **'Public lack of knowledge of the process and the benefits of the process'.**

It becomes clear how engagement with the public could feed into and facilitate a wider level of appreciation within the business sector as to the benefits of mediation. However, it will be the means through which the very specific distinction of how mediation is a confidential and personal facilitation that will be key. Why? Because for one thing this is not a situation where the mediator will offer a possible solution or steer a preferred solution of one party for support from the other. This is not a friend's input but the assistance of an experienced individual completely disconnected and unknown to the parties who will allow them to privately outline their position, without interruption, in a

private space – and help them find their solution to their problem.

The joint survey concludes how:

***'With the expected enactment of the Mediation Bill this year, it will be interesting to see whether that will act as a catalyst for the growth of mediation in Ireland in the future.'***

And notably ***'In the interim, it seems that the main catalyst for change will be through educating the public and professions as to the benefits of mediation'.***

### **The Alternative in ADR**

Public perception of the term 'alternative' requires some consideration at this point.

Perception of the term 'alternative' can act as a barrier to initial consideration, never mind actual acceptance of mediation, as it may be mistakenly and poorly outlined as being a poor and substandard substitute to the real and established route of legal action through the court system. What is suggested throughout my specific research here is that there is a growth in the number of consumers who are so advised and with the additional context that it can be agreed to accept and agree to mediate as a delaying measure. Regrettably, this is advanced through the absence of unbiased advice for consideration of the reality that mediation could hold real value and realistic potential for resolution of the dispute.

### **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)**

Mediation, when an explanation of its meaning or function is requested, is almost immediately described simply as a system for alternative dispute resolution. You would have to determine for yourself which structure is most offended by this most basic of interpretation Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in general or Mediation in particular.

Its supreme confidentiality is omitted and the enormous value of the voluntary commitment from both parties is too. However, what is entirely ignored is the relevance of Mediation in context. By this I mean that the well reasoned explanation of how 'One goes to court for an interpretation of the law' rings loud and true here. Mediation facilitates the just resolution of the issue with mutual consent. In terms of value, equitable resolution and healing that is, simply,

immeasurable.

Mediation has existed for thousands of years and its origin lies in the manner for resolving personal disputes privately by means of valuing compromise and respecting the fact that the parties acknowledged this to be important. This is precisely the point. It restores our consideration to the point where we question our position of declared loss and, in context, whether or not a personal element has affected the volatility of our refusal to settle the matter under dispute. We come to consider or reconsider the true cause of our dispute and the potential – or otherwise – for recognition of their being another element to the issue that could provide for mutual reconciliation, agreement or acknowledged difference in part or in whole.

It particularly and often, essentially, provides for the opportunity simply to be face to face with the individual refusing to settle and also to settle and clarify, in plain language, precisely what is their reason not to do so.

My experience has shown me how, on many occasions, it was the third party heavily, albeit naturally, legalistic engagement that had closed out all personal interfacing and that had actually acted to exasperate those concerned, escalate the level and intensity of determined opposition and prolong the dispute and its attending and growing costs.

The key to mediation is that the process assists and requires us to restore and utilise the very capable powers of reasoning and fairness that we have acquired and improved through our life. It restores our person-to-person capabilities and consideration for agreement that is natural dispute resolution or, if you prefer, NDR.

Essentially, it moves us beyond no and gets us, at least, to possibly.

### **Dermott Jewell**







**2014 has brought some changes to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and here is what you need to know.**



**REPORT by Roisin Moloney**

# The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

The back to school costs have never been so tough on parents with research carried out by Barnardos last year estimating the basic back to school costs for a primary school child are as high as €400 and €785 for a first-year student. Coming to that time of year again, any help available is much needed.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BTSCFA) is designed to help parents with the cost of uniforms and footwear for children going to school. In order to qualify for this allowance, parents must be in receipt of certain social welfare payments or be taking part in training, employment or education schemes. Children must be between 4 and 22 years of age and the allowance only applies up to second-level education. This year, the Department of Social Protection will pay BTSCFA automatically to many

customers with children under 18. This means that many families do not have to apply for the payment. If you qualify automatically for the allowance, you will get a letter telling you when and how your allowance will be paid. You should have received this letter by 13th June 2014. If you did not receive an automatic payment you must apply for the allowance. If any of your children are aged 18 or over, you must apply for the allowance for them and provide evidence that they are in second-level education from 9th June 2014.

The Department of Social Protection will examine all applications received and will post updates to their website on the progress being made in processing these applications. Applicants will get a letter informing them of the decision and, where payment has been awarded, when and how the allowance

will be paid. If the allowance is refused, information on how to request a review of the decision will be provided.

You may qualify for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance if you are:

- receiving a social welfare payment (including Family Income Supplement) or a Health Service Executive payment, or
- participating in an approved employment scheme (back to work scheme) including JobBridge, or
- taking part in a recognised education or training course, or
- involved in an Area Partnership Scheme or attending a SOLAS, Fáilte Ireland or LES training scheme.

In general, you must be getting an Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) with your payment, although there are some exceptions to this. For example, you may be getting a qualifying payment but you are not getting an increase for your child because the rules of the scheme do not provide for a child payment – examples here include Maternity Benefit or Adoptive Benefit. In such cases, you can still claim BTSCFA if you meet the other criteria. In other cases, an IQC is not paid because the income of your spouse or partner is above the specified limits but if your overall household income is within the limits outlined below you may qualify. You cannot claim BTSCFA for a child that is not resident in the State.



Foster children are not eligible for the BTSCFA because the financial support foster parents receive includes help with the cost of clothing and footwear for the child. If you have applied for a social welfare payment or have appealed a decision not to award you a social welfare payment and are waiting for a decision on your application, you should apply for the BTSCFA. Your entitlement will be established once a decision is made on your application or appeal.

To qualify for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, your total household income must be less than the amounts set out in the table below. All your dependent children are taken into account for the income limits (including children who do not qualify for BTSCFA, because they are under four).

Your total household income includes your main social welfare or Health Service Executive payment and any other income you may have including wages (before tax, but excluding PRSI and a standard travel allowance of up to €20 per week), maintenance, savings and investments.

Savings and investments including property- but not your home - are assessed as follows:

Capital	Weekly means assessed
First €5,000	not taken into account
Next €10,000	€1 per €1,000
Next €25,000	€2 per €1,000
Balance	€4 per €1,000

#### Income limits for couples 2014

Couple	Income limit
1 child	€563.60
2 children	€593.40
3 children	€623.20
4 children	€653*

\*The income limit is increased by €29.80 for each additional dependent child.

#### Income limits for lone parents

Lone parent	Income limit
1 child	€410.10
2 children	€439.90
3 children	€469.70
4 children	€499.50*

\*The income limit is increased by €29.80 for each additional dependent child.

Any income received from Rent Supplement or Mortgage Interest Supplement, Family Income Supplement,

Blind Welfare Allowance, Rehabilitation Training Allowance, rehabilitative employment (up to €120 per week), Domiciliary Care Allowance, Mobility Allowance and the Student Grant Scheme is not counted.

The allowance paid for each eligible child aged 4-11 on or before 30 September 2014 is €100. The allowance paid for each eligible child aged 12-22 on or before 30 September 2014 is €200. Children aged between 18 and 22 years must be in full-time second-level education in a recognised school or college. The scheme is open from 1st June to 30th September 2014. Application forms are available online from the [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie) or at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/BTSCFA.pdf>. You can also get an application form in all social welfare offices and Intreo centres, via SMS (text "Form BTSCFA" followed by your name and address to 51909) or you can email the Department at [BSCFA@welfare.ie](mailto:BSCFA@welfare.ie).

Completed application forms with supporting documentation should be returned to Department of Social Protection, PO Box 131, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. The application may take several weeks to be processed. When you do receive the decision and if you are unhappy with that decision, you can send a letter to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Review Section at the address above explaining why you are not happy with the decision and asking that the claim be reviewed. A review should be requested within 21 days of getting your decision.



# Grind Schools



REPORT by *Roisin Moloney*

**With Leaving Certificate results pending, Consumer Choice examines what grind schools offer for those who are considering repeating.**

## At a glance

- How much do they cost?
- What's included?
- Researching alternatives

The Leaving Certificate is the main means by which students enter third-level education so getting a place in university remains almost entirely dependent on the number of CAO points students obtain in the Leaving Certificate exams. For those who do not achieve the results they require, they may consider repeating the Leaving Certificate to achieve higher points. Under pressure to achieve the required level of CAO points, you may be tempted to enrol in a private fee-paying grind school that has particular emphasis on maximising CAO points.

## Money Matters

With a highly rated education system in Ireland, you may wonder what is the difference between grind schools and regular schools? In Ireland, most secondary schools receive state funding, including many fee-paying schools, such as boarding schools. Grind schools are, however, the exception to the general rule and do not receive state funding. Grind schools are privately owned, profit-seeking enterprises funded by the fees paid by students. As a result, the fees for such schools are extremely expensive and require considerable financial investment. Consumer Choice compared the cost of a year's tuition in grind schools across the

country in 2009/2010, 2011/2012 and again for 2014/2015, see table 1 below. Fees for the current year range from €4,900 in Dean College Cork to €6,900 in Yeats College Galway for the 6th year program. Compared with the 2011/2012 survey, it appears that the grind school industry is flourishing in Ireland with fees remaining the same or in some cases increasing. Fees can be paid in instalments but in most cases this will increase the overall cost - for example, Limerick Tutorial College charges €6,400 for one payment and this then rises to €6,700 if payment is made in instalments over the first two terms.

## Hidden costs

Despite the extremely expensive fees outlined in table 1, many grind schools charge for extras such as supervised study in the evenings. Limerick Tutorial College, for example, charges €1.00 per night for evening study and a further charge for weekend study. Many grind schools charge for photocopying as well as charging for extra grinds a student may require. Students may also need to attend Christmas and Easter revision courses and substantial extra costs can apply here. It is important to be clear what a school will cost on top of the tuition fees as extras can add up over the three school terms.

Some schools offer a dedicated career guidance service along with their regular tuition, while others do not offer such a service. This service may be vital to students, assistance with getting to grips with all available routes to a particular career or area of study can provide alternative realistic solutions. Filling out CAO applications and UCAS applications are essential as the points alone will not get you where you want to go - careful consideration and thought must be given to this process.

It may be the case that you/your son or daughter will require accommodation to attend a particular school that is too far from home. Many schools facilitate students in finding suitable lodgings. Both Limerick Tutorial College and Yeats College have accommodation officers who will help students find housing; accommodation is approved and subsequently monitored on a continuous basis. Other schools offer a list of suitable accommodation which is exclusively reserved for use by the college's students. Other schools, however, do not offer assistance with accommodation. This is a major added expense and suitable accommodation is crucial to supporting a dedicated and focused student, as grind schools do not offer many chances for students who misbehave.



**Table 1. Grind School Survey**

School	Location	Fees 2014/15	Fees 2011/12	Email	Tel
Ashfield College	Main Street, Templeogue D6W	€6,250 €6,495*	€5,950	info@ashfieldcollege.ie	014904050
Bruce College	Audley House, St. Patricks Hill, Cork	€6,500 €6,670*	€6,500 €6,690*	susan@brucecollege.ie	0214504122
Limerick Tutorial College	12/14 The Crescent, Limerick	€6,400 €6,700*	€6,400 €6,625*	Limericktutorial@eircom.net	061315522
Yeats College Galway	Grammar School Building, College Rd, Galway	€6,900	€6,900	yeatscollegegalway@eircom.net	091533500
Institute of Education	79/85 Lower Leeson St. Dublin 2	€6,800 €6,995*	€6,750 €6,900*	info@ioe.ie	016613511
Deane College	36/37 Mary Street, Cork	€4,900	€4,900	deanecollege@eircom.net	0214274722
Hewitt College	Hewitt House, St. Patricks Hill, Cork	€6,500 €6,700* €6,800*	€6,000 €6,500*	Admin@hewittcollege.com	0214550430
Brookfield College	Tralee, Co. Kerry	€5,200 €5,400*	€5,200 €5,400*	info@brookfieldcollege.ie	0667145896

Note \*. The price is the higher one if fees are paid in instalments rather than in one payment.

## Choosing a school

Each potential student must attend an interview process with school staff and at least one parent. At this interview, students' suitability will be measured based on motivation levels, expectations, previous exam results and school reports. Schools also run a very strict policy on student behaviour with class disturbances or breaches in discipline resulting in severe consequences including expulsion, often without a refund of fees. Both parents and students should take the time to consider individual students' suitability to such an institution because it is simply not for everyone and can end up being a costly mistake in many ways.

So with such a great investment, can you be guaranteed the results you need? Well, of course, there is no guarantee and to make matters worse, research of schools' previous performance is not easy to obtain. The use of league tables in selecting a school can be somewhat useful in choosing a school - however, there is no official information available as to which school produces the best results. National newspapers such as the Irish Times and the Irish Independent have compiled their own tables based on

assessing which 'feeder schools' are most successful at gaining university places for their students and these tables are worth checking out. However, there remains no official publication of school ranking. With only the information made available by the individual grind school, there is a clear lack of transparency. Grind schools are not obliged to publish this important information regarding results and this makes a difficult decision even harder for consumers.

## Other options

With grind schools a big business in Ireland, we must consider the industry as a whole. Grind schools generate business out of the points system, which can accurately be described as a rat race. The pressure to achieve high points in order to compete for university places is being met with grind schools for those who can pay, resulting in greater inequality within the education system. This system also pressurises parents to fork out extortionate sums of money in order for their child to get ahead. We must also be reminded that education cannot be defined by just the number of points a student gains. Education is about so

much more and many grind schools focus solely on academic results with little or no extracurricular activities. Perhaps time would be better spent researching alternate colleges and universities that may be suitable for entry into the career required. It is worth spending some time looking at overseas universities, which may in some cases be easier to gain entry to, particularly in Scandinavian countries, which have world class universities and a low number of students. Often, research will uncover third-level institutions that have very low fees, courses taught through English and lower entry requirements. A good place to carry out such research is [www.eunicas.ie](http://www.eunicas.ie). Eunicas is an Irish-based business that offers a support service for students wishing to research and apply for programmes of study throughout Europe. Eunicas is independent and charges users of their service a fee of €28 as opposed to charging the universities listed on their site, therefore ensuring unbiased information is available. The site was set up to facilitate the growing number of Irish students who are unable to access their preferred programme at home and also for students who wish to study abroad.



# Ebook Readers



Whether you are heading away on holidays or looking to pass the time on the daily commute, an ebook reader can be an essential companion for an avid bookworm. **Consumer Choice** thumbs through our test results to help you find an ebook reader that you won't want to put down.



REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue

## At a glance

- Improvements and developments
- The lengths we go to...
- Two Choice Buys

Ebook readers are becoming increasingly popular and seem to be especially favoured by commuters who can get a lot of reading done on their electronic devices while travelling to and from work. Of course, ebook readers are particularly handy when it comes to journeying farther afield, as these

slimline, lightweight devices are easily tossed into your luggage when heading away on holiday to provide ample reading material by the pool without incurring astronomical excess baggage charges in the same way that a couple of heavyweight paperback thrillers or 800-page historical novels might. Although these devices are improving incrementally all the time, they are not subject to the constant changes and latest must-have features that are common with other technologies and that leave your old device looking out-moded and antiquated before it has even time to get a bit scuffed. So if you get the decision right when you first buy your ebook reader, you are unlikely to

feel the need to upgrade for some time to come.

## Improvements and developments

Ebook readers are portable electronic devices, generally with energy-frugal black-and-white screens primarily designed to display the digitised versions of printed books. These devices are about as thin as a smartphone and are much lighter than a single hardcover book but with the ability to hold thousands of titles. Screen size is typically around 6 inches, so they are generally larger than a smartphone and smaller than most tablets and can fit easily



into a handbag or large pocket.

Ebook readers use electronic ink (e-ink), a matte grey-on-grey image of text that gives the perfect amount of contrast, with little or no glare from the screen even in sunshine. E-ink displays simulate the appearance of a paper book and do not require a backlight, which means less strain on the eyes for prolonged reading sessions. E-ink is made up of small transparent capsules containing negatively charged black particles and positively charged white particles suspended in a clear fluid. A negative charge pushes the black particles to the surface of the capsule to form black text whereas a positive charge does the reverse. E-ink takes about half a second to “form up” once the page of the ebook is turned. The batteries on ebook readers are exceptionally long-lasting because e-ink displays do not use any power until you “turn” to the next page and the screen is refreshed. An ebook reader is capable of delivering thousands of page turns and can last weeks in standby mode on a single charge.

The latest ebook reader models have higher resolution screens, sharper text and faster processing chips to deliver speedier page turning and a more immersive reading experience. The massive and growing popularity of tablets is influencing ebook reader design for the better, with all models on test sporting a touchscreen so that page turns and menu access are all done swiftly and easily by tapping or swiping the screen with your finger. In earlier versions, ebooks were downloaded onto an ebook reader by connecting the device to a computer via a USB cable but all our models on test have wi-fi connectivity so you can download content directly without needing access to a PC. An ebook reader with wireless 3G access offers the greatest flexibility for obtaining new content for the reader but such devices will cost considerably more to buy and for most people, wi-fi access is sufficient.

Because ebook readers do not incorporate a backlight to enable you to see the screen, older versions could not be read in low light without the aid of an external booklight. Newer versions have introduced illumination for the display that lets you read in bed without disturbing your sleeping partner. Instead of using a backlight to provide this illumination, many ebook readers use a series of small lights that shine onto the e-ink page from the edge of the display for more comfortable reading. All but one of our models on test provides built-in illumination.

### The tablet/smartphone option

With a range of ebook reader apps available, ebooks are increasingly being downloaded to smartphones and tablets. Given their small size, smartphones have portability on their side, and the larger dimensions of tablets, combined with their versatility, make them popular choices for reading ebooks. All our dedicated ebook readers on test have black-and-white displays, and while they are ideal for reading print, those who want a device for browsing through colour magazines might prefer to opt for a tablet.

However, multipurpose devices are generally less suited to ebook reading than dedicated ebook readers. The colour LCD screens on tablets and smartphones are more visually stunning but they typically display text less crisply than ebook-reader screens, and once a backlight is introduced, it becomes very difficult to provide the ideal reading experience, particularly for lengthy reading sessions. When it comes to reading in bright sunlight, you are much more likely to find yourself squinting at the screen on smartphones and tablets than on an ebook reader. In addition, tablets tend to be heavier to hold in your hand for long periods. If you are looking for a multifunctional device on which to read the occasional ebook, smaller tablets like the iPad Mini and the Google Nexus 7 might present good options as they are more comfortable to hold than their larger counterparts as well as being significantly cheaper.

### Opting for an ebook reader

Buying an ebook reader makes most sense if you are an avid bookworm or someone who often lugs books among several favourite reading locations. One major appeal of an ebook reader is that you don't have to be particularly tech-savvy to use it. These are simple devices dedicated to performing a single task very well indeed, so those who

might struggle to navigate other electronic devices should have no problem mastering the more limited range of features on an ebook reader.

An ebook reader can also be a good choice for those with a visual impairment as type size can be enlarged and some models also allow fonts to be changed. Some ebook readers offer a text-to-speech option that turns the content into an “audio book.” Compared with the emotion and pace of a real audio book, the text-to-speech function can sound stilted and mechanical, but some may see this as an advantage, as it allows them to put their own interpretation on the material.

If anyone in your household already has an ebook reader, it is a good idea to buy a device by the same manufacturer as you will be able to share books without having to buy them all over again. Ebook readers are a less costly purchase than many other electronic devices, with models on test coming in at around €150 or lower, unless you want such nonessential extras like 3G capability or a high-definition screen, which push the price up.

If you are a voracious reader who flies through fiction and breezes through bestsellers, an ebook reader can be an essential holiday companion. You won't have to decide before you even set off what kind of books you will fancy reading when you are on the beach as you will have a whole library at your fingertips and can download something new if the whim takes you. However, a traditional paper book can take a lot of bashing and is undoubtedly substantially more robust than an ebook reader. Even though we test for durability, at the end of the day, an ebook reader is another pricey electronic device that requires a certain amount of care and attention. You will find some recommendations for protecting your ebook reader and other electronic gadgets on the beach this summer on page 10 of this issue.





# the lengths we go to...



When conducting the viewing test for e-readers in our labs, three experts evaluate the readability of the display, rating it for sharpness, contrast and reflectiveness, under different lighting conditions - in bright sunlight (around 80,000 Lux), in a living room environment (around 200 Lux), and in dark surroundings (around 1 Lux). The contrast ratio is measured while displaying a white page with a black square in the centre, again under various lighting conditions - direct illumination with a daylight source as well as indirect illumination with fluorescent lamps and with bulb lamps, both in an office surrounding. Testers assess how easy it is to buy and load an ebook onto the device, using a USB connection, wi-fi and 3G, if available. As well as downloading books from non-specific websites and online bookshops, testers consider the access and navigation features of the ebook reader's specific online bookshop, including the number of books available, the ease of finding a particular book, the presence of ratings and recommendations, and the ease of paying for the ebook and getting it onto the ebook reader. When rating reading comfort, testers assess the ease of use while reading an ebook in different situations as follows:

- i) While standing, as, for example, on public transport. Here special attention is given to one-handed operation and the weight and grip of the device.
- ii) While seated, with special attention given to such elements as button alignment, page turning and the angle dependency of the display.
- iii) While lying in bed, with a particular focus on holding comfort and button noise when turning pages.

Durability is important in a device that is carried around so much and a scratch test is performed that involves applying a stylus point to the screen and increasing the force of the stylus point to a level where first scratches or other problems appear. Ratings include both the value of the force and the amount of damage incurred.



## 1. Amazon Kindle Paperwhite 3G €220

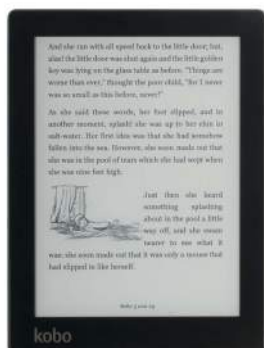
The **Choice Buy** Amazon Kindle Paperwhite 3G is significantly more expensive than any other ebook reader on our table but our testers found it to be the easiest to use of all the devices with the best range of special features. It also scored top marks in our viewing tests with a screen resolution of 1024 x 758 and an excellent e-ink display that lets you read even in bright sunlight - and thanks to the built-in illumination, reading in dim or dark conditions is not a problem. In terms of convenience, our testers found that everything worked fluently and securely with a responsive touchscreen that makes for swift and simple operation when turning pages, navigating through menus and so on. The always-on 3G capability means that you can download books from the extensive Kindle store without having to wait to locate a wi-fi hotspot and there are no annual contracts or monthly fees to be paid. This is also a hard-wearing and durable device that proved itself resilient to scratches and bumps, so you can carry it around from place to place without worrying too much about it. With no speakers or headphone sockets, the Paperwhite cannot play music files or audio books and, as with all Kindles, it does not support the ePub format so users won't be able to buy ebooks from third-party stores.

## 2. Amazon Kindle Paperwhite €135

The **Choice Buy** Amazon Kindle Paperwhite is essentially the same great device as the first Choice Buy without 3G capability. Forgoing the option of downloading a book from just about anywhere means that the price comes down considerably - so you can save €85 by choosing to download material ahead of time or wait for wi-fi access to obtain new content and still enjoy the considerable advantages of this excellent device including the fantastic e-ink screen for superb readability in all lighting conditions, built-in illumination, a swift and responsive touchscreen and very good durability. Both of these Kindles can be locked by a PIN code to prevent unwanted access and although there is no memory card slot to increase internal storage, the Paperwhite can hold up to 1,000 books, which should be ample for even the most voracious reader. Users will be tied to the Kindle Store, which has over 1 million ebooks, magazines and newspapers to choose from, and our testers judged it to offer the best interaction between shop and registered readers of all the online bookstores tested. Your entire library is backed up in the cloud in case you lose or damage your Kindle and Paperwhite owners can transfer contents to other Kindle devices via Whispersync technology. Web browsing is available on the Paperwhite but it is fairly basic, in black and white, and does not compare to the functionality of a tablet or smartphone.

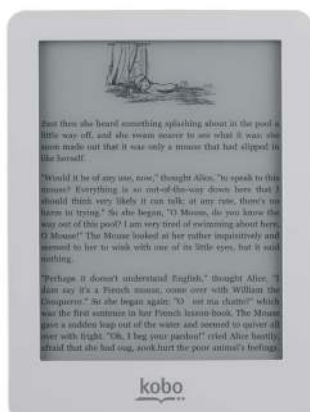
# About the rest

Although they did not quite achieve Choice Buy status, the other ebook readers on test all have much to recommend them and could represent good options for those who do not wish to be tied to the Kindle Store.



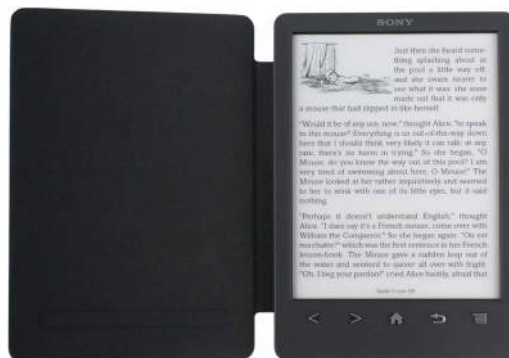
## 3. Kobo Aura €149

The Kobo Aura is a little smaller than previous Kobo ebook readers and it is the lightest device on test, making it very comfortable to hold for long periods. The high-resolution e-paper display offers great readability in a range of lighting conditions and, for reading in poor light, the built-in illumination can be controlled via a handy on-off button instead of through the touchscreen. It is not quite as quick as the Kindle Paperwhite in terms of page turns and opening up content and our testers did not find it as easy to use, but it did well in our durability tests, proving itself to be quite resistant to scratches. It is compatible with the ePub format, so users can download material from third-party stores and the library as well as the Kobo bookstore, which offers a wide range of books, magazines and newspapers.



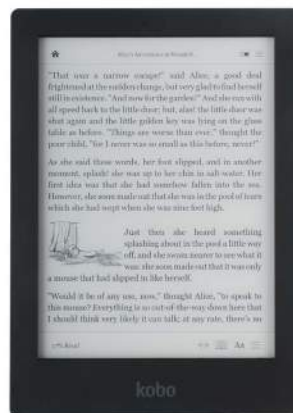
## 5. Kobo Glo €119

The least expensive ebook reader on test, the Kobo Glo, as its name might suggest, comes with an adjustable built-in light to let you read in the dark and our testers found that the six-inch screen provided excellent readability in all lighting conditions. This device is lighter than the Kindle Paperwhite and is comfortable to hold with one hand. As it is compatible with the ePub format, you can use the wi-fi connection to buy ebooks from a range of online bookstores as well as from the extensive Kobo store. With no physical buttons, all operations are carried out on the touchscreen, which sometimes can be slow to respond, and there is no facility to play music or audio books. The internal memory can be extended using the micro SD card slot and there is a built-in web browser that is fine for occasional internet access but won't replace a smartphone or tablet.



## 4. Sony PRS-T3 €150

The Sony PRS-T3 performs all the basics of an ebook reader well but it lacks some features offered by other devices in a similar price range. The 1020 x 758 screen is very clear and comfortable to read even in bright sunlight. However, with no built-in light, you will need an external light source for reading in dim or dark conditions. This Sony device allows users to operate it either via the touchscreen or via a number of physical buttons, which some may find easier to use. As it is compatible with the ePub format, you can download books and content from a variety of sources, and as of mid-June 2014, owners of this ebook reader can shop on Kobo.com directly following the closure of Sony's own ebook store in March of this year. The Sony PRS-T3 was more easily scratched in our tests, but it comes supplied with a useful cover that should prevent it from getting damaged too quickly.



## 6. Kobo Aura HD €169

The Kobo Aura HD offers a high-definition screen with a resolution of 1440 x 1080 and indeed this device did score top marks in our viewing test though text and images were not significantly sharper than on the Kindle Paperwhite. It has an excellent built-in light to provide gentle and even illumination for reading at night. With a 6.8-inch screen, this Kobo device is larger and heavier than other ebook readers and is approaching the size of a small tablet – and although some may appreciate the bigger display, others may find it less comfortable to hold for long periods. With room for 3,000 books and a memory card slot to further increase storage capacity, users of this ebook reader won't run out of reading material and they have the option of buying from the well-stocked Kobo Store or from third-party bookstores. Despite the Aura HD's super-high-resolution screen, those keen on buying a Kobo ebook reader may well find that the less expensive Kobo Aura or Kobo Glo will suit their purposes just as well.

MODEL		SPECIFICATION				TEST PERFORMANCE									SCORE
		Price (€)	Weight (g)	Sceen size (inches)	Screen resolution (pixels)	Reading light	Ease of use (30%)	Viewing test (20%)	Loading/Buying (20%)	Reading comfort (13%)	Formats (5%)	Build (5%)	Battery (5%)	Special features (2%)	%
1	Amazon Kindle Paperwhite 3G	220	218	6	1024x758	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	78
2	Amazon Kindle Paperwhite WiFi	135	208	6	1024x758	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	77
3	Kobo AURA	149	173	5.9	1024x758	✓	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	68
4	Sony PRS-T3	150	194	6	1024x758		★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★	67
5	Kobo Glo	119	182	6	1024x758	✓	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	66
6	Kobo AURA HD	169	243	6.8	1440x1080	✓	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	66

USING THE TABLE

Star ratings are out of five.

**Price:** Typical retailer’s price if you shop around.  
**Screen size:** Measured diagonally in inches.

TEST PERFORMANCE

**Ease of use:** Includes ratings for the structure and operating speed of the menu, the speed of opening an ebook and pdf file, the speed of page turning, and the ease of use of adjusting settings and of operating various features and functions, such as handling bookmarks, inserting notes and organising content.  
**Viewing test:** The contrast, sharpness and readability of the display in bright sunlight, interior lighting and dim light conditions.  
**Loading/buying:** The ease of loading a book onto the ebook reader via a PC or directly using wi-fi or 3G from a non-specific online bookshop, lending library or website as well as the access and navigation features of the ebook reader’s predefined online bookshop, including the choice of books and the ease of downloading and paying for books.

**Reading comfort:** Ratings for the ease of use and comfort of holding and reading the ebook reader while standing, seated and lying in bed.  
**Formats:** The range of file formats supported by the ebook reader.  
**Build:** Includes an assessment of the overall manufacturing quality and durability of the ebook reader as well as the results of the scratch test and drop test.  
**Battery:** Rating based on the experience of the ebook reader during the test period and an electrical measurement of the battery current that includes the normal reading state, page turning, standby and automatic shut-down function to predict the device’s operational time.

Useful contacts

**Amazon**  
tel 0044 203 356 6212  
www.amazon.co.uk

**Kobo**  
tel 1800 812 879  
www.kobobooks.com

**Sony**  
tel (01) 413 1700  
www.sony.ie

Ebook prices

A random selection of titles currently available shows how prices compare between printed and digitised versions of the same book

Title	Paperback copy*	Kindle Store**	Kobo Store
Chestnut Street by Maeve Binchy	€19.30	€8.28 (\$11.31)	€12.99
The Fault in our Stars by John Green	€9.99	€2.48 (\$3.39)	€5.49
The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt	€9.99	€4.36 (\$5.95)	€5.99
Mr Mercedes by Stephen King	€16.99	€9.32 (\$12.73)	€13.99
Philomena by Martin Sixsmith	€10.99	€2.48 (\$3.39)	€5.77
The Thrill of it All by Joseph O'Connor	€13.99	€7.50 (\$10.24)	€12.99

Prices found 3rd July 2014  
\* Typical retailer's price if you shop around  
\*\*Converted from the U.S. dollar prices on amazon.com



# Car Tyres

 **REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue**

At a glance

- Tyre test results
- Tyre maintenance
- Nine Choice Buys



**If you are planning to hit the road this summer, make sure your tyres are strong performers. Consumer Choice has road-tested two tyre sizes to track down nine Choice Buys.**

Consumer Choice has put two more tyre sizes from a range of manufacturers through their paces, rigorously testing how various products cope on wet and dry roads, with measurements for stability, handling and braking. We also look at how hard-wearing these tyres are and we rate their impact on fuel consumption and their noise levels. Our latest batch of tests consider tyre sizes 175/65 R14T and 195/65 R15V. Size 175/65 R14T is used for smaller cars and fits such models as the Ford Fiesta, Peugeot 206, Renault Clio, and Toyota Yaris, among many others. Size 195/65 R15V is fitted to midsize and large family cars and suits models including the Vauxhall Astra, Audi A3, Volkswagen Golf, Honda Civic and Toyota Auris.

## Tyres on test

In our tests of tyre size 175/65 R14T, the top performer on dry surfaces was the Bridgestone Ecopia EP150, which slightly outperformed the Continental ContiEcoContact 5 with a marginally shorter braking distance. Six tyres impressed in the all-important wet-road tests, with Hankook's Kinergy Eco K425 gaining the highest score thanks to its performance in the areas of wet grip and resistance to aquaplaning. The Continental and Pirelli tyres also displayed excellent grip on wet

surfaces but they were less impressive in the aquaplaning tests – an area in which the Falken Sincera SN832 Ecorun excelled, garnering top marks both when driving on the straight and around corners. The ContiEcoContact 5 and Michelin's Energy Saver + are both advertised as fuel-saving and long-running tyres, and our tests show that the Michelin product has the lowest fuel consumption and longest estimated lifetime of the tyres in our current batch, with the Continental tyre coming a close second.

In terms of fuel consumption, the difference between the best and worst performers – Michelin's Energy Saver+ and Bridgestone's Ecopia EP150, respectively – is very small indeed, with just 4% or 0.2 litres/100km separating them. Although the Michelin tyre was found to be the best for wear, the Continental tyre was very close behind, and our testers found that only the ContiEcoContact 5 achieves the right balance between wear and wet performance. When it came to examining the tyre size 195/65 R15V, all products delivered very good to excellent performances in the dry-road tests, with the Bridgestone Turanza T001 and the Continental ContiPremiumContact 5 garnering the highest scores. Whereas the Bridgestone tyre was slightly easier to

control at the maximum speed limit, the Continental product performed better in terms of braking. Other outstanding performers on dry surfaces in this tyre size were the Hankook, Pirelli, Vredestein and Michelin products, with the best braking score achieved by Dunlop's Sport BluResponse.

In terms of the wet-road tests, Goodyear's Efficient Grip Performance generated the highest score overall thanks to its aquaplaning performance, though the ContiPremiumContact 5 actually had better wet grip. Of the tyres on our table, around two-thirds showed no weaknesses on wet surfaces, which may indicate a greater focus by manufacturers on wet grip improvements as a result of the EU tyre energy label that became mandatory in November 2012. As noted in previous tyre reports, this classification rates tyres for wet-road braking, fuel economy and noise. The EU tyre energy label does not take into account tyre wear, which is important for consumers looking to save money by purchasing long-lasting products. For this reason, despite turning in excellent performances on both wet and dry surfaces, the Continental and Bridgestone tyres have not made it to the top of the table and into our Choice Buys due to their merely average rating for tyre wear. Michelin's Energy

in terms of tyre wear, with a significantly higher rating than other products on test, and it also offered the lowest fuel consumption but failed to make our Choice Buys with a weaker wet-road performance.

### Regular tyre checks

Given that your tyres are the only point of contact between your car and the road, it is important that they are kept in tip-top condition to help ensure safe driving as well as to preserve quality and performance. According to experts, doing a regular safety check every two weeks takes a just few minutes and can even save you money by reducing fuel consumption.

1. First, perform a visual check, looking for anything unusual in the way of bulges, cuts, lodged debris, signs of age deterioration or other abnormalities, which, if not dealt with, could lead to lead to more serious problems whilst driving.

2. Next, check the tread depth of your tyres. As your tyre tread wears down, you have less control when driving and stopping in wet weather. The tread grooves disperse water from underneath your tyre, helping maintain control, and the more tread depth a tyre has, the more water it can disperse, reducing the risk of aquaplaning. Make sure to replace worn tyres before the tread depth reaches the minimum legal limit of 1.6mm, at which point tyres and brakes may only be 55% effective in the wet.

3. Lastly, it is important to check tyre pressure to make sure your tyres are not over- or under-inflated. Tyre pressures may vary depending on the vehicle model and the load being carried. Your car's handbook will tell you how much air you should have in your tyres. Correct tyre pressure reduces the risk of losing control of your car and it even saves fuel. If the tyre pressure is too low, you will use more fuel and cause

premature wear to the edges of the tyres, shortening their life. Over-inflating tyres, on the other hand, can lead to unpredictable handling and accelerate tread wear along the centre of the tyre.

In addition to these regular checks, the Road Safety Authority recommends that you ensure that your wheels are correctly aligned and balanced for the proper upkeep of your tyres and vehicle. Wheel alignment involves adjusting the angles of the wheels so that they are perpendicular to the ground and parallel with each other. This can help to maximise tyre life, reducing uneven or rapid tyre wear, and ensures that your car will drive straight and true on level surfaces. Wheel balancing allows the tyres and wheels to spin without causing any vibrations. A "scalloped" or "cupped" wear pattern on tyres indicates that the wheels are out of balance.

## the lengths we go to...

Tyres are tested in very strict conditions to bring you our independent results. In our current batch of tests, the size 175/65 R14T tyres were fitted to a Ford Fiesta and the size 195/65 R15V tyres were fitted to a Volkswagen Golf 7. All tyres are run for around 400-500km on a dry track before the tests begin and then the handling characteristics of the tyres are investigated in practical tests on different test circuits.

The rating for handling performance on a dry-road surface is based on the subjective evaluation of two drivers who assess stability, steering response and linearity when driving straight ahead at a maximum speed of 150km/h and they also rate the tyres' performance when changing lanes, negotiating s-bends, and turning corners at high speed. Testers brake from 100kph down to 1kph and the distance travelled is measured to assess braking performance.

To determine how the tyres handle on a wet surface, testers drive around a handling course a number of times under conditions of simulated continuous rain as fast as possible while maintaining control of the car and the lap times are measured and the performance subjectively assessed. Drivers brake from 80 kph down to 20kph, with measurements taken for how far the car travelled. When considering the tyres' propensity to aquaplane, testers drive through a stretch of running water, accelerating in a straight line and around a 200m-diameter circle to see how well the tyres disperse the surface water.

To rate tyre wear, tyres are mounted on a weighted test rig and cover around 5,000km, at which point they are measured for wear and the results are extrapolated to predict how long they will last before tread depth falls below the legal limit of 1.6mm.





### 1. Continental ContiEcoContact 5 €69 (Size 175/65 R14T)

The **Choice Buy** Continental ContiEcoContact 5 delivered one of the best performances of models in this size in our dry-road tests, scoring top marks for stability and handling with very good braking capabilities to give a great overall score in this category. This tyre also has great wet grip, doing an excellent job in terms of braking and handling in wet conditions, but it fared less well in our aquaplaning tests, struggling particularly when turning corners. However, this is a very fuel-efficient tyre and it is exceptionally long lasting, garnering a very high score for tyre wear. The ContiEcoContact 5 is the most expensive tyre in this size in our current batch, but testers felt that it was the tyre on test that best balanced wear and wet performance.



### 2. Hankook Kinergy Eco K425 €51 (Size 175/65 R14T)

The **Choice Buy** Hankook Kinergy Eco K425 delivered a very good performance across all our dry-road tests, scoring strongly in terms of stability, handling and braking. Where this tyre really shone was in terms of wet grip, outperforming all other tyres in this batch with excellent handling on wet surfaces and great results in our aquaplaning tests. This is one of our quieter tyres, with a very good interior noise rating, and it was not too noisy from outside the car either. The Hankook Kinergy Eco K425 offers fairly low fuel consumption and tyre wear was satisfactory on this product without being particularly impressive.



### 3. Pirelli Cinturato P1 Verde €52 (Size 175/65 R14T)

The **Choice Buy** Pirelli Cinturato P1 Verde demonstrated excellent handling on dry surfaces and also did very well in the braking and stability tests. On wet surfaces, this Pirelli tyre was great at handling and braking and performed strongly in the aquaplaning in a straight line test. However, it fared less well in the aquaplaning around a corner test, struggling here slightly. Though quite quiet from the inside of the car, this tyre is fairly noisy when assessed from the outside. Fuel consumption with this tyre is satisfactory though slightly higher than some other products on test. Tyre wear is fairly good on the Cinturato P1 Verde, so it should last a reasonably long time.



### 4. Bridgestone Ecopia EP 150 €52 (Size 175/65 R14T)

In our dry-road tests, the **Choice Buy** Bridgestone Ecopia EP 150 outperformed all other similarly sized models in our current batch, narrowly beating the Continental ContiEcoContact 5 with a slightly shorter braking distance. When it comes to handling on wet surfaces, this Bridgestone tyre again is the top-ranked product but it is not the best performer on wet overall as other models fared a little better in braking and aquaplaning tests. Interior noise for this tyre was about average and exterior noise was a bit below average. Although the Bridgestone was the worst performer in terms of fuel consumption, as noted above, the difference in consumption levels between the products is very small, and tyre wear is satisfactory.



### 5. Falken Sincera SN832 Eco-run €48 (Size 175/65 R14T)

One of the least expensive tyres on test, the **Choice Buy** Falken Sincera SN832 Ecorun is a good all-round performer. It turned in a very solid performance across all our dry-road tests for stability, handling and braking. On wet surfaces, it particularly impressed in the aquaplaning tests on both the straight and circular tracks, garnering extremely high ratings, though it fared less well in terms of directional stability in wet conditions. Noise levels were about average both from inside and outside the car. The Falken Sincera SN832 Ecorun, as its name might suggest, scored very well for fuel consumption, being fairly fuel efficient. Although among the lower scoring models for tyre wear, this tyre should still last a reasonable length of time.



### 14. Goodyear Efficient Grip Performance €66 (Size 195/65 R15V)

The first of our **Choice Buy** tyres in size 195/65 R15V, the **Choice Buy** Goodyear Efficient Grip Performance provides superb handling on both dry and wet surfaces. Indeed, this tyre is the best performer in its size in this batch of tests on wet roads, narrowly beating the Continental ContiPremiumContact 5 thanks to the Goodyear product's aquaplaning test results. Fuel consumption is quite low for this tyre, which compared favourably to other models on test, and tyre wear is satisfactory, ensuring you won't need to buy new tyres too soon. However, this is a fairly noisy tyre, both for those inside the car and those on the outside.





### 15. Hankook Kinergy Eco K425 €65 (Size 195/65 R15V)

The **Choice Buy** Hankook Kinergy Eco K425 shone in all our dry-road tests, scoring top marks for stability, handling and braking distance in one of the best performances among the tyres in our current batch. It also performs very well on wet roads, especially in terms of handling, but braking distance, directional stability and resistance to aquaplaning are all very good too. This Hankook tyre scored average for noise levels in both the interior and exterior assessments. Fuel consumption is acceptable for cars fitted with these tyres, though not particularly impressive, and our testers found that wear was slightly on the higher end though these tyres should last for a reasonable amount of time.



### 16. Dunlop Sport BluResponse €66 (Size 195/65 R15V)

The **Choice Buy** Dunlop Sport BluResponse tyres were most impressive while driving on dry roads. They handled very well, felt very stable and had the shortest braking distance of all the tyres on test in this size. These tyres also turned in a very solid performance across all our wet-road tests, with good handling, stability and braking in wet conditions as well as managing to resist aquaplaning both while driving straight and going around corners. These tyres have among the lowest fuel consumption of those tested and noise levels are about average. Though slightly higher on wear than some other tyres in our current batch, the Dunlop Sport BluResponse tyre should last reasonably well.



### 17. Pirelli Cinturato P1 Verde €72 (Size 195/65 R15V)

The **Choice Buy** Pirelli Cinturato P1 Verde tyre excels on dry surfaces, garnering top marks for handling, stability and braking. These tyres are also excellent in terms of handling and braking in wet conditions, but they struggled to resist aquaplaning in our tests, especially around corners, and this brought their overall wet-road rating down a little. However, our testers found the Pirelli tyre to be one of the best at balancing wet performance and tyre wear, achieving very good overall scores in each category. These tyres are quite noisy and they are the worst performer in terms of fuel consumption in tyres of this size – though the difference between the tyres tested is small with the Pirelli tyre just 5% higher than the most fuel efficient tyre, the Michelin Energy Saver +, which means it uses 0.3l/100km more fuel.

## Tyre markings explained

The letters and numbers moulded onto a tyre's sidewall indicate its size, composition and technical capabilities. Taking a 195/65 R15V tyre as an example,

195 - refers to the tyre's width in millimetres (195mm).

65 - refers to the tyre's sidewall profile, which is the height of the tyre side expressed as a percentage of its width (65%).

R - refers to the tyre's radial construction. All tyres today are radial, instead of the formerly used cross-ply construction.

15 - refers to the diameter of the wheel rim in inches (15 inches).

V - indicates the tyre's speed rating, which must equal or exceed the maximum speed of your car. The V speed rating indicates that this tyre can reach speeds of up to 240kmph.

The tyre should also feature an E-mark to confirm that the tyre meets EU or international (UNECE) standards in relation to its dimensions, load and speed rating and that it has been tested to ensure adequate tread depth and performance ability.

MODEL		SPECIFICATION	TEST PERFORMANCE						SCORE
		Price (€)	Dry road (20%)	Wet road (40%)	Tyre wear (20%)	Fuel consumption (10%)	Noise (10%)	Indoor high speed test (0%)	%
Tyre size 175/65 R14T									
1	Continental ContiEcoContact 5	69	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	69
2	Hankook Kinergy Eco K425	51	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	67
3	Pirelli Cinturato P1 Verde	52	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	67
4	Bridgestone Ecopia EP 150	52	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	65
5	Falken Sincera SN832 Ecorun	48	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	65
6	Nokian Line	54	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	63
7	Firestone Multihawk	47	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	59
8	Michelin Energy Saver+	65	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	58
9	Barum Brillantis 2	45	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	56
10	Vredestein T-Trac 2	50	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	56
11	Semperit Comfort-Life 2	51	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	50
12	Goodyear Efficient Grip Compact	48	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	50
13	Avon ZT5	52	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	32
Tyre size 195/65 R15V									
14	Goodyear Efficient Grip Performance	66	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	68
15	Hankook Kinergy Eco K425	65	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	68
16	Dunlop Sport BluResponse	66	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	67
17	Pirelli Cinturato P1 Verde	72	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	66
18	Fulda EcoControl HP	62	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	64
19	Nokian Line	64	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	64
20	Vredestein Sportrac 5	59	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	63
21	Semperit Speed-Life	61	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	60
22	Kumho Ecowing ES01 KH27	65	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	57
23	Yokohama BluEarth (AE01D)	70	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	54
24	Michelin Energy Saver+	71	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	52
25	Bridgestone Turanza T001	66	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	50
26	Continental ContiPremiumContact 5	70	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	50
27	Nexen N blue HD	52	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	50

### USING THE TABLE

Star ratings are out of five.

**Price:** Typical retailer’s price if you shop around. All prices were found online.

#### TEST PERFORMANCE

**Dry road:** The stability, handling and braking of the tyres in dry conditions.

**Wet road:** The braking distance, aquaplaning and handling of the tyres in wet conditions using simulated continuous rain.

**Noise:** The noise rating of the tyres based on subjective assessments from inside the car and technical measurements from outside the car.

**Fuel consumption:** Fuel consumption measured at a constant speed of 100 kph.

**Tyre wear:** The durability of the tyres.

#### Useful contacts

**Bridgestone**  
<http://www.bridgestone.ie>

**Continental**  
[www.conti-online.com](http://www.conti-online.com)

**Dunlop**  
[www.dunlop.eu](http://www.dunlop.eu)

**Falken**  
[www.falken-europe.com](http://www.falken-europe.com)

**Goodyear**  
[www.goodyear.eu](http://www.goodyear.eu)

**Hankook**  
[www.hankook.ie](http://www.hankook.ie)

**Pirelli**  
[www.pirelli.com](http://www.pirelli.com)

# Washing Machines

 **REPORT** by Clodagh O'Donoghue

At a glance

- Previous Choice Buy models
- Water and energy saving tips
- Six Choice Buys



**When it comes to getting the laundry pile under control, a Choice Buy washing machine can really help lighten the load.**

It can sometimes seem that doing the washing is a never-ending, futile task, with the laundry basket filling up almost as soon as you have emptied it. Though a great washing machine won't reduce the speed at which the laundry pile builds up, it can at least deal efficiently with dirty clothes – delivering outstanding washing, rinsing and spinning to leave them spotless. We have six Choice Buy models that excel at lifting dirt and grime to provide effective cleaning and pristine results. We also look at some models that we recommended in previous issues and that remain more than up to the task.

## Previous Choice Buys

Many of the Choice Buy washing machines we discussed in the January 2013 issue of

Consumer Choice are still available in shops and we remain very happy to recommend them. There was a range of freestanding appliances to choose from, including the Choice Buy Miele W1914, a 7-kg capacity machine that delivers outstanding cleaning performance on both cottons and synthetics. An expensive model, we recently found this appliance for €1,050, but as well as leaving clothes spotless, the Miele W1914 is very energy-efficient, extremely easy to use and offers plenty of features including a 20-minute wash for lightly-soiled clothes and an extra-quiet setting to reduce noise. For around half the price, the Choice Buy Bosch WAQ28461GB (€576) features a slightly-larger-than-average 8-kg drum and excels at washing, rinsing and spinning both cottons and synthetics. Tests found that wash times are not particularly fast and the spin cycle is quite noisy but this model delivers great results and has some interesting features, including a self-cleaning detergent drawer – aimed at preventing the build-up of excess detergent and mould – and a useful LCD display.

For large households, the Choice Buy Hotpoint AQ113L297E (€590) has a huge 11-kg drum to cope with heavy wash loads

and it produces spotlessly clean cottons and synthetics. This is a silver appliance but a white model, the AQ113L297I, is also available and both versions are very energy efficient. Another freestanding washing machine, the Choice Buy AEG L75470FL is great at cleaning cottons in particular, with a relatively fast synthetics cycle and a spin cycle that is extremely effective and not too loud. With a €700 price tag, this 7-kg machine is energy and water efficient and comes with a range of quick-wash programmes for those in a hurry for clean clothes.

If you are looking for a model that can be integrated into your fitted kitchen, the Choice Buy Hotpoint BHW129 is still a good option. Priced currently at €500, this machine takes up to 6.5kg of laundry and delivers excellent results on cottons, though wash times here are a little slower than average. The synthetics wash is also very effective and this appliance is exceptionally quiet on the wash cycle with good noise levels on the spin cycle also.

For full reviews of these appliances, please see the January 2013 issue of Consumer Choice.



# Maximising water and energy efficiency

According to uswitch.ie, laundry is one of the biggest sources of energy cost for consumers, with the average washing machine alone accounting for up to 7% of a household's electricity bills. With energy costs continuing to rise and water charges imminent, many households are looking to use their washing machine as efficiently as possible. Beyond choosing an energy-efficient appliance when making a purchase, the following are some steps you can take to maximise efficiency:



- To get the best value out of the water and energy you are using, try to wait until you have a full load to wash. Even if your washing machine is smart enough to detect the weight of the load and reduce water consumption accordingly, half loads will use the same amount of electricity. The 40°C cottons cycle on washing machines is designed to take a full drum load of laundry so when you are buying a new appliance, consider whether you will be able to fill an 8-kg or 9-kg drum on a regular basis, and if not, it might be better to opt for a smaller capacity machine that holds up to 6kg or 7kg of clothes.
- Lowering the temperature of your wash - switching from 40° to 30°, for example - can often achieve cleaning results that are as just good with today's detergents while using a very significant 40% less electricity and also being gentler on the environment. There is, however, a downside in that regularly washing at 40°C or less will not completely eliminate mould and bacteria from your appliance. To deal with the build-up of mould and the possibility of a resulting musty smell, it is necessary to do a service wash once a month, which involves running the machine without any clothes at a high temperature of 60°C. Manufacturers' instruction manuals often contain recommendations for what cycle to use for cleaning the drum.
- Extra-rinse programmes are wasteful of water, so try to avoid using these unless really necessary - for example, if someone has sensitive skin in the household and you want to make sure as much detergent as possible is removed from laundry. If you are finding detergent residue on your freshly washed clothes, rather than immediately reverting to the extra-rinse programme, check that you are not overloading the machine and try using less detergent - tests by our colleagues at *Choice* magazine in Australia show that you can use up to one-quarter of the recommended amount of a top-performing detergent and still get a good wash.
- Treat heavily soiled items of clothing with a suitable detergent or soap before popping them into the washing machine as this will help eliminate the need to rewash garments that come out of the drum still stained at the end of the washing cycle.

## Useful contacts

### AEG

tel 0044 8445 611611  
[www.aeg.co.uk](http://www.aeg.co.uk)

### LG

tel 0818 276955  
[www.lg.com/uk/](http://www.lg.com/uk/)

### Bosch

tel (01) 450 2655  
[www.bosch-home.co.uk](http://www.bosch-home.co.uk)

### Miele Ireland

tel (01) 461 0710  
[www.miele.ie](http://www.miele.ie)

### Hotpoint

tel 0818 365008  
[www.hotpoint.ie](http://www.hotpoint.ie)

### Siemens Ireland

tel 1890 626041  
[www.siemens-home.com/ie/](http://www.siemens-home.com/ie/)





**Cottons wash**  
★★★★★  
**Synthetics wash**  
★★★★★  
**Rinsing**  
★★★★★  
**Spinning**  
★★★★★  
**Energy use**  
★★★  
**Water use**  
★★★



**Cottons wash**  
★★★★★  
**Synthetics wash**  
★★★★★  
**Rinsing**  
★★★★★  
**Spinning**  
★★★★★  
**Energy use**  
★★★  
**Water use**  
★★★



### 1. Miele W5780 €1,300

The **Choice Buy** Miele W5780 certainly does not come cheap but this is an excellent washing machine from a highly reliable manufacturer that will deliver outstanding cleaning, leaving laundry spotless. The rinse cycle is extremely effective so there should be no detergent residue on your clothes and, with a very efficient maximum spin speed of 1400rpm to get rid of excess moisture, your laundry won't need to spend too long in the tumble dryer or on the line. The 7-kg capacity drum should be sufficient for most households and it features the manufacturer's patented honeycomb design aimed at protecting delicate items as they are washed. You will get plenty of features for your money with this appliance, such as a delay start, a child lockable control panel, a "water control system" designed to prevent flooding and a large range of programmes, including a 20-minute "express wash" for those in a hurry.

### 2. Miele W3370 €950

The **Choice Buy** Miele W3370 is again one of our pricier Choice Buys but this high-quality freestanding washing machine will deliver first-class cleaning on both cottons and synthetics. Again featuring the manufacturer's honeycomb drum, which Miele says uses a thin film of water to cushion and protect clothes during the wash cycle, this 7-kg machine will be gentle on your more delicate garments while getting them spotless. It is great at removing detergent during the rinse cycle and is extremely effective at spinning to get most of the water out of your clothes, reducing the drying time needed when you take your laundry out of the machine. You can delay the start of this easy-to-use Miele model by up to 24 hours and a time-left display lets you know how much longer you will have to wait for your clean clothes.



**Cottons wash**  
★★★★★  
**Synthetics wash**  
★★★★★  
**Rinsing**  
★★★★★  
**Spinning**  
★★★★★  
**Energy use**  
★★★  
**Water use**  
★



**Cottons wash**  
★★★★★  
**Synthetics wash**  
★★★★★  
**Rinsing**  
★★★★★  
**Spinning**  
★★★★★  
**Energy use**  
★★★  
**Water use**  
★★



### 3. LG F12B8QDA €500

The **Choice Buy** LG F12B8QDA does a great job of cleaning your dirty clothes and offers plenty of features and programmes. This 7-kg machine particularly excels at washing synthetics but it also delivers very clean cottons as well as providing very effective rinsing and spinning capabilities. This LG model offers a wide range of programmes, from baby care and skin care to sportswear, and handy features include a time-delay function, a child lock and a time-remaining LCD display. However, one downside is that tests found this washing machine to be very heavy on water use. If something goes wrong with this machine, the manufacturer says that instead of having to call out an engineer, you can make use of the Smart Diagnosis feature that will enable your smartphone to detect the source of the problem through a series of noises emitted by the appliance. In addition to this white model, a silver version, the F12B8QDA5, is available.

### 4. Siemens WM14Y590GB €850

The **Choice Buy** Siemens WM14Y590GB is a feature-laden washing machine that is great at washing cottons and even better at cleaning synthetics. With very good rinsing capabilities, your laundry will emerge detergent-free and the highly effective spinning function means it shouldn't take your clean clothes too long to dry. The generous 8-kg capacity of the drum should accommodate most households' needs and a warning light will flash to indicate if you have overfilled the machine. The wide variety of programmes on offer on this appliance include a 15-minute quick wash, a "hygiene" setting and a textile guard re-proofing programme to wash waterproof clothing without damaging it. An LCD display shows the time left to run on the current cycle and other information and this clever machine will automatically add an extra rinse if you have used too much detergent. This Siemens model is very easy to operate, though it does use more water than average.

**Cottons wash**  
★★★★  
**Synthetics wash**  
★★★★★  
**Rinsing**  
★★★  
**Spinning**  
★★★★★  
**Energy use**  
★★★★  
**Water use**  
★★★



**Cottons wash**  
★★★★  
**Synthetics wash**  
★★★★★  
**Rinsing**  
★★★  
**Spinning**  
★★★★★  
**Energy use**  
★★★★  
**Water use**  
★★★



## 5. Bosch WAQ24461 €432

The **Choice Buy** Bosch WAQ24461 is great at lifting dirt out of your cottons and excels at cleaning synthetics. Its rinse function does a satisfactory job of getting detergent out of clothes and this machine will give your laundry a really good spin to get rid of excess moisture. However, speed is not this machine's strong point as you will have to wait 2 hours and 42 minutes for a full load of cottons. The drum capacity is above-average at 8kg so you will be able to fit in lots of laundry at once and this is a very easy-to-use appliance with a door that opens wide, a large aperture facilitating loading and unloading, and clearly marked, well-spaced controls. This model features the manufacturer's Active Water technology, which Bosch claims helps reduce water use, and tests found that it used less water than other machines on the cottons programme, though water use on the synthetics programme was about average.

## 6. Miele W3164 €800

Another freestanding washing machine from Miele's W3000 series, the **Choice Buy** Miele W3164 is great at tackling tough stains and delivers high-quality cleaning on both cottons and synthetics washes. The drum holds 7kg of laundry, which suits the needs of most households, and this is quite a speedy machine compared to other models tested so you won't have to wait too long for your clean clothes. The rinse cycle does a reasonable job without being overly impressive and the spin cycle is very effective at wringing water out of clothes, meaning they spend less time in the tumble dryer or hanging on the line. An LCD display shows the time remaining on a cycle and you can delay the start of a wash by up to 24 hours. This Miele model offers special programmes to suit a range of clothing types, including shirts, dark garments and denim.

# The dirt on detergents

A great washing machine can only go so far in delivering clean clothes; it also helps to use a highly effective detergent. However, the array of products on supermarket shelves can be bewildering, as you not only have to decide which brand to buy but you also need to work out whether powder, tablets, liquids, gels or capsules will do the best job.

Tests on laundry detergents carried out by our colleagues at *Which?* in the UK and at *Choice* in Australia have consistently found that, when it comes to stain removal, powders outperform liquids and gels. The tests typically assess the ability of the detergents to remove a range of common stains - from makeup and grass to tomato and blood - and results reveal that, particularly for deep-coloured stains like wine or tea, powders and tablets are more effective. Powders and tablets are also better for keeping your whites bright and because they contain bleach, they have the added bonus of helping prevent bacterial build-up in your washing machine that can occur from regular low-temperature washing. In addition, they are generally less expensive than liquids.

Though they will not keep your whites quite as bright, liquids and capsules will be gentler on your coloured clothes as they do not contain bleaching agents that break down the coloured dyes in fabric and so they will not cause fading, as powders might. The best-performing products will also effectively remove a variety of stains, including grease, makeup and food.

Liquids and particularly those in capsule form, tend to be the dearer option among laundry detergents, but if you have lots of coloured clothes that rarely get badly stained and that you want to keep looking pristine, it may be worth spending a little extra. However, if you have lots of white cottons in your laundry basket that see a lot of action, whether on the football pitch or in the playground and garden, powders will be more than equal to the task. The best option may be to have both kinds of detergent in your cupboard, so you can gauge the laundry as it goes into your washing machine and make your choice accordingly.

Interestingly, in its most recent tests of liquid capsules, *Which?* found that both the branded Ariel 3 in 1 Pods (bio) and Aldi's own-brand Almat Biological delivered excellent results. Whereas the Ariel product costs €10.35 for 19 pods, *which* works out at 54 cents per wash, the Aldi product costs €4.29 for 20 pods, with the cost per wash being a very modest 21 cents.







# Tumble Dryers

**Our independent labs have taken 27 tumble dryers for a spin to bring you seven Choice Buys.**



**REPORT** by Clodagh O'Donoghue

## At a glance

- **Heat pump technology**
- **Money saving tips**
- **Seven Choice Buys**

When it comes to drying clothes, the most cost-efficient, environmentally friendly way is undoubtedly to hang them outside on the line. However, this is obviously “weather-permitting” and, according to Met Eireann, Ireland has on average between 150 and 225 wet days a year, depending on the part of the country you’re in. This leaves a lot of days when hanging out the washing is not feasible and so a good tumble dryer can come in handy. In

our independent tests, we look at the effectiveness, energy efficiency and ease of use of the latest tumble-dryer models to help you choose from the wide range of appliances available.

## Tumble dryer types

When shopping for a tumble dryer, the first thing to decide is whether you are looking for a condenser or vented model. A vented dryer blows the damp air from the laundry outside through a hose that will need to be hung out a window or attached to a vent – so this limits where the dryer can be positioned in your home. In contrast, condenser dryers can be placed anywhere as they collect the water in a removable container inside the machine. As you can see from our table, condenser dryers are generally more expensive than vented models and the water container will need to be emptied after virtually every cycle. Some condenser models come with a hose that can be used to run waste water into a drain, saving you the job of emptying the water container. There are a small number of gas-powered vented tumble dryers on the market, which tend to cost less to run than electric models and deliver good

drying performance. Gas-powered models will need to be installed by a registered gas fitter and, like all vented dryers, the damp air is expelled through a hose, which will need to be connected to a wall or a window vent.

## Heat pump technology

Tumble dryers tend to be heavy on energy use but heat pump technology is becoming more common on condenser dryers and delivers greatly increased energy efficiency without extending the drying time. Heat pump tumble dryers use a closed loop system that reuses the hot air in the drum to dry laundry instead of letting the heat escape. A small heat pump is used to heat the air that dries the laundry inside the machine and the warm, damp air is then cooled to remove the water, which is collected in a container. The cooled air is then reheated and recycled within the dryer. The table below demonstrates the impressive energy-use scores of the condenser dryers that feature heat pumps compared with dryers that lack this technology and, indeed, our top six Choice Buys have heat pumps. Naturally, the substantially reduced energy consumption

translates into far lower running costs, a major consideration when purchasing a power-hungry appliance like a tumble dryer. However, heat pump dryers tend to be very expensive to buy compared to other dryers and may only be worth the expense for heavy users – for example, those who put on a full load several times a week – who will be able to really reap the benefits of the reduced energy bills.

### Size matters

When you are choosing a tumble dryer, it is worth taking time to think about the size of drum that will suit your household's needs. If you buy a machine with a capacity that is too large, you may find it difficult to fill and so hard to use efficiently – though, of course, when the capacity is on the small side, larger families may need to run it more often in order to have a sufficient supply of dry clothes, pushing up running costs. The dryers in our latest batch had a maximum capacity of between a compact 3kg and a very generous 9kg. Naturally, larger capacity means a physically bigger dryer, so the amount of space you have available in your kitchen or laundry area may well determine the capacity of the machine you buy. It is useful if you can buy a dryer that is large enough to take a full load from your washing machine, so you don't have to split your laundry to dry it in two batches. The rated maximum capacity of a tumble dryer refers to a cottons load and programmes for drying synthetic fabrics generally recommend you dry only half that amount – so, for example, a 7-kg capacity machine will allow you to dry 3-3.5kg of synthetic fabrics in one go.

### Features to look for

Tumble dryers today offer a number of features that you may find useful or

appealing. Look out for features that increase efficiency and convenience or that improve performance and avoid pricey extras, such as a huge range of programmes that you will never use.

**Sensor drying:** A sensor detects when the laundry in the drum is dry and automatically turns off the dryer. This is aimed at preventing overdrying of clothes and reducing energy wastage.

**Time remaining display:** It is useful if you can see how long you have left to wait for your dry clothes and many models with sensor drying will estimate the length of time the cycle will take.

**Reverse tumbling:** Many tumble dryers reverse the direction of their drum at regular intervals, which minimises tangling and allows the clothes to dry more evenly.

**Delay start:** This feature lets you set your dryer to turn on at a later time in the day.

**Warning lights:** These let you know if it is time to empty the water container on condenser dryers or if the lint filter needs cleaning to improve efficiency and prevent any potential fire risk.

**Stackability:** If space is in short supply in your home, some tumble dryers are designed so that they can be stacked on top of a washing machine of the same brand.

**Reversible door:** On some tumble dryers, you can choose the direction in which the door opens, giving you more options when it comes to positioning the appliance in your home.

### Money saving tips

Even if your tumble dryer's energy consumption rate is less than impressive, there are a number of easy ways to minimise your drying costs.

- Make sure that when your clothes are still in the washing machine that you use a high-spin cycle to get as much moisture out as possible before popping them into the tumble dryer. Spinning the water out of your clothes uses less electricity than drying them out.

- Try to avoid running your dryer with a half load – if you can, wait until you have a full load of clothes to dry. Drying one full load uses less energy than running two smaller loads.

- Sort out loads into heavy and lightweight fabrics, as lighter materials will take less time to dry and having fabrics of similar weights in the load will improve evenness of drying and help automatic sensors to work better.

- When loading the dryer, take time to untangle your laundry – as clothes that are scrunched up into tight balls will take longer to dry – and place each item into the dryer separately. This allows warm air to circulate better throughout the clothes and again increases the evenness of drying.

- When drying duvet covers, it is a good idea to close the fastenings to prevent smaller items of clothing getting trapped inside and taking longer to dry.

- Choosing the iron-dry programme will leave your clothes slightly damp and so easier to iron – and it also means they will spend less time in the dryer, therefore using less electricity.

- Remember to clean the lint filter after each use, which will maintain airflow and helps the dryer to work as efficiently as possible – as well as being an important safety measure as it reduces the risk of fire.

## Testing change

All the products we report on are assessed by expert, independent laboratories and our test programmes evolve to take account of new developments in any given product area. We are always trying to improve our tests in order to offer the best possible advice to consumers.

To this end, we have introduced some changes to the way we test tumble dryers. We have placed an increased emphasis on the exactness of programmes, which used to form part of our overall drying tests. These tests assess how accurate the drying programmes are in terms of the results achieved. We are also putting greater importance on energy consumption given that running costs are a key factor in owning a tumble dryer and the likelihood that manufacturers will prioritise energy efficiency in the future. The ease-of-use weighting has also been slightly increased to reflect the importance of these appliances being user-friendly. These adjustments have led to small changes in the scores of tumble dryers we had tested previously.



### 1. Miele T8164WP €1,250 (Condenser)

The **Choice Buy** Miele T8164WP is a heat pump condenser tumble dryer that will make quick work of drying your synthetics and also does a very good job on your cottons. Although the initial purchase price is very substantial, the heat pump technology means that this appliance is far more energy efficient than many other condenser dryers, so there are savings to be made on running costs, particularly for heavy users. This dryer has a 7-kg capacity and it excels in terms of drying your laundry evenly, with the sensors working very effectively to detect when there is no remaining moisture in your clothes and turning the appliance off to prevent overdrying and to further reduce energy bills. There is also an option to set this machine to run for 20 minutes at a time, but you won't be able to delay its start time until later in the day. The Miele T8164 also scored top marks in terms of condenser efficiency, so little water will escape from this appliance to cause damp problems in your home. However, our testers found that this was a fairly noisy dryer and your clothes will emerge from the drum quite creased, so you will need a good steam iron to sort them out.

### 2. Miele T8860WP Edition 111 €1,700 (Condenser)

The **Choice Buy** Miele T8860WP Edition 111 is certainly an extremely expensive appliance, but this heat pump condenser tumble dryer will deliver dry clothes quickly with excellently even results, so you won't find a stray soggy sock amongst your otherwise perfectly dried items. In addition, the heat pump technology ensures excellent energy efficiency, bringing down running costs – though it may take many years to recoup the initial hefty investment. The drum holds a generous 8kg of laundry so it should suit larger households with substantial drying needs. The sensors on this machine do a good job of turning this appliance off when there is no moisture left in the laundry and you can also opt to use the timer. All controls are clearly marked and this is generally a very easy appliance to use. If noise is an issue for you, this model could be a great option as it is one of the quietest tumble dryers in our current batch of tests. However, our testers found that, unless you use the iron-dry programme, dried clothes will be left very creased so you may find you'll also need to invest in a Choice Buy iron.



### 3. Zanussi ZTH485 €500 (Condenser)

The **Choice Buy** Zanussi ZTH485 is our cheapest Choice Buy condenser tumble dryer and, given that it features heat pump technology to significantly reduce running costs, this could prove a great value option for buyers. As well as being more energy efficient than conventional condenser models, this 7-kg tumble dryer makes swift work of drying both cottons and synthetics and it scored top marks for evenness of drying. The machine's sensors do a good job of assessing the correct drying time for each load and detecting when your laundry is ready and you can also use the timer, which can be set to run from between 10 and 120 minutes. This Zanussi is straightforward to use with a clear control panel, an LCD screen to let you know the time remaining on the cycle and a lint filter and water container that are easy to remove. One downside is that this machine is quite noisy compared to other tumble dryers but you can delay its start time by up to 20 hours so you can set it to run when the noise it makes won't cause too much of a problem.

### 4. AEG T76485AH €700 (Condenser)

The **Choice Buy** AEG T76485AH was a Choice Buy when we last looked at tumble dryers in January 2013 and it has retained its Choice Buy status. This dryer delivers efficient drying performance with very even results, so there should be no soggy surprises when you unload your laundry, and it has a spacious drum capacity of 8kg, making it a good choice for larger families with heavy wash loads. Using the latest heat pump technology, this dryer is extremely energy-efficient, scoring top marks in our tests, and its sensor drying technology means that the machine stops when clothes are dried to the required level – though our tests found that the sensor worked better on cottons than on synthetics. There is also a timer that may be used to set the machine to run for between 10 and 120 minutes. The AEG T76485AH is not too noisy, thanks to the manufacturer's Silent System, and it is very easy to use, with features including an electronic display showing programme information, a delay start option, and an interior light in the drum. This model is stackable and the direction of the door opening can be reversed, giving you a range of positioning options.





### 5. Samsung DV70F5E0HGW €660 (Condenser)

The **Choice Buy** Samsung DV70F5E0HGW again features heat pump technology, so its energy efficiency score is excellent, meaning that running costs on this appliance will be greatly reduced compared to conventional condenser dryers. The drum capacity of 7kg should be sufficient for average-size households, and this dryer has a sensor to detect when clothes are dry – though our testers did not find this worked as well on synthetics as it did on cottons – and you can also use the timer to set the machine to run for between 30 and 150 minutes. This dryer is first-rate at keeping condensation inside the machine, and if you would rather not have to empty the water container regularly, a supplied hose can be used to run off the waste water down a drain. Useful features on the Samsung DV70F5E0HGW include a remaining time display, a child lockable control panel, and the option to delay the start time for up to 19 hours. However, creasing was an issue with this machine so you will likely have to spend some time ironing your clothes afterwards.



### 6. Bosch WTW863S1GB €900 (Condenser)

Again the heat pump technology on the **Choice Buy** Bosch WTW863S1GB translates into excellent energy efficiency, with the appliance scoring top marks in our tests, so using this dryer should not push up your electricity bills. The sensor does a superb job of knowing when to stop the machine to prevent overdrying on both cottons and synthetics, though our testers found that the drying times on this appliance were slower than average, so you will have to wait a bit longer for your dry clothes. When your clothes do emerge from the 7-kg drum, they will be very evenly dried, however, and not too creased, though a little ironing may still be needed. Without being particularly quiet, this dryer is not as noisy as many other models on test and you can delay the start time for up to 24 hours to run the programme at a time that suits you. As well as the very effective sensor, this dryer has a timer that will set the machine to run for 30-minute cycles. Other features offered on the Bosch WTW863S1GB are a time remaining display, an interior drum light and a useful self-cleaning condenser.



### 7. Miele T7644 C €998 (Condenser)

The **Choice Buy** Miele T7644 C has retained its Choice Buy status since our January 2013 tests due to its excellent drying performance. It is the only Choice Buy in our current batch not to feature a heat pump and this shows in its energy-consumption score. However, what it lacks in energy efficiency it makes up for in the speed at which it will deliver your dry clothes, particularly your synthetics. The sensor on this machine is also very accurate so there should be no problems with overdrying either cotton or synthetic fabrics. As well as automatic controls, this dryer has a manual timer that can be set for a minimum of 15 minutes and a maximum of 120 minutes. Its 6-kg drum means that this model has a smaller capacity than some full-sized dryers but it offers a range of useful features, including a delay timer, a drum light and indicators to let you know when to clean the lint filter and empty the water container. The Miele T7644 C can be stacked on top of another appliance if space is tight and it is easy to use and not too noisy.



### 22. Bosch WTA74200GB (Vented) €440

Those looking for a vented tumble dryer might like to consider the Bosch WTA74200GB, which - although not quite a Choice Buy – impressed our testers in terms of its speedy performance when drying both cottons and synthetics and the evenness of the results. As it is a vented dryer, it will need to be positioned where the damp air can be expelled through a hose connected to a vent or hung out of a window. The drum will fit up to 7kg of cottons and 3.5kg of synthetics and as well as a generally effective automatic sensor, you can use the timer to set this machine to run from 20 to 180 minutes. It is pricey for a vented dryer, costing twice as much as most of the other vented models on test and it did not score well in terms of energy efficiency. However, it offers a number of useful features, such as the ability to delay the start time for up to 24 hours, an interior drum light, and a child lockable control panel. In addition, of all the models in our current batch of tests, this Bosch dryer left clothes the least creased.

MODEL		SPECIFICATION							TEST PERFORMANCE													SCORE
		Price	Size (cm) (hxxwxd)	Energy label	Full load (kg)	Heat pump	Sensor	Empty water display	Lint filter display	Exactness of programme (10%)			Programme time (15%)			Evenness (10%)	Condenser efficiency (10%)	Creasing (5%)	Ease of use (20%)	Energy use (25%)	Noise (5%)	%
										cottons cupboard dry	cottons iron dry	synthetics cupboard dry	cottons cupboard dry	cottons iron dry	synthetics cupboard dry							
Condenser																						
1	Miele T8164WP	1,250	84.5x59.5x59.3	A	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	70
2	Miele T8860WP	1,700	85x59.5x59.5	A	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	69
3	Zanussi ZTH485	500	84.5x59.5x64.5	A+	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	66
4	AEG T76485AH	700	85x59.5x64.5	A	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	65
5	Samsung DV70F5E0HGW	660	85x59.5x65	A++	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	65
6	Bosch WTW863S1GB	900	84x60x64	A++	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	64
7	Miele T7644 C	998	84.5x59.5x64.5	B	6		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	63
8	Beko DCU 9330	340	85x59.5x64	B	9		✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★	★★	57
9	Bosch WTE84106GB	430	84x59.5x65	B	7		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	56
10	Zanussi ZDC47201W	270	84.5x59.5x62.5	C	7		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★★	55
11	Beko DCU 6130 W	300	85x60x57	B	6		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★	53
12	Beko DC 7110 W	230	85x60x57	C	7			✓	✓	★★★★★	★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★	★	45
13	Indesit IDC85	270	84.5x59.5x63	C	8			✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	45
14	Hotpoint TCYM 750C	370	84.5x59.5x62.5	C	7.5			✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	43
15	Hotpoint TCFG87C6G	450	85x59.5x63.5	C	8		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★	42
16	Hotpoint AQC9BF7S1	580	85x59.5x64.5	B	9		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★	★	41
17	Hotpoint TCEM80C6P	330	85x59.5x64	C	8			✓		★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	40
18	Hotpoint TCM580P	350	85x59.5x62	C	8			✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	38
19	Hotpoint TCEL87B6A	430	85x59.5x63.5	B	8		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★	37
20	Candy GCC590NB	370	84.5x59.5x60.5	B	9		✓	✓	✓	★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★	★	37
21	Hotpoint TCFM70C6P	330	84.5x59.5x62.5	C	7			✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	36
Vented																						
22	Bosch WTA74200GB	440	84x59.5x64	C	7		✓		✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	na	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	59
23	Indesit IDV75S	200	84.5x59.5x57	C	7					★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	na	★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	57
24	Hotpoint TVEM70C6P	250	84.5x59.5x58	B	7					★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	na	★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	56
25	White Knight C44AW	200	85x59.5x56.5	C	6					★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	na	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★	54
26	White Knight C372WV	140	67.5x50.5x51.5	C	3					★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★	★	★★	★★★★★	na	★	★★★	★★	★★★★	41
27	Bush TDV6W	175	84x59.5x56.5	C	6		✓			★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	na	★	★★	★★	★★★	41

### USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

#### SPECIFICATION

**Price:** Typical retailer’s price if you shop around.  
**Sensor:** This feature automatically turns the machine off when it detects that the laundry is dry.  
**Empty water light:** Lets you know when the water container on condenser models needs to be emptied.  
**Lint filter light:** Lets you know when the fluff from the lint filter needs to be cleaned. Ideally this should be done every time the dryer is used.

#### TEST PERFORMANCE

**Exactness of programme and programme time:** The results delivered by the drying programme and the time taken to complete the programme for the following:  
**Cottons cupboard dry:** Fully drying a load of cotton fabrics, with the dryer filled to 70% of its rated capacity.  
**Cottons iron dry:** Drying a 70%-full load of cottons with some moisture retained so that they are ready for ironing.  
**Synthetics cupboard dry:** Fully drying a load of synthetic fabrics, with the dryer filled to its rated maximum capacity for synthetics.  
**Evenness:** Whether all items are evenly dry or some are still soggy while others are bone dry.  
**Condenser efficiency:** How little water from the laundry escapes from the dryer.  
**Creasing:** The extent to which the items that have been dried are creased and in need of ironing.  
**Ease of use:** The ease of loading and programming the appliance and of removing the water container and cleaning lint filters and heat exchangers.  
**Energy Use:** The energy consumption of the appliance when it is in operation and on standby.  
**Noise:** How noisy or quiet the appliance is at the loudest part of the drying cycle.

#### Useful contacts

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