

The Magazine of the Consumers' Association of Ireland

Consumer Choice



www.thecai.ie

MARCH 2016

PUTTING CONSUMERS IN THE DRIVING SEAT.....

*The safest cars on the road according to Euro NCAP ratings
Plus child car seats that offer the best crash protection*



MONEY

- FINANCIAL RIGHTS OF COUPLES
- HOLIDAY HOME RENTAL SCAMS



LIFESTYLE

- PROPOSED GAMBLING CONTROLS
- VIRTUAL UK MAILBOXES



PRODUCT TESTS

- CHILD CAR SEATS
- EURO NCAP TEST RESULTS

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March 2016

Dear Members,

The Consumers' Association of Ireland (CAI) has put its name, logo and full support to an initiative of the European Alliance for Responsible R&D and Affordable Medicines. The Alliance includes societal representatives from consumer, patient, public health and healthcare professional organisations.

Across the EU and worldwide, the price of new medicines is rising year on year. Many Irish consumers travel abroad to try to affordably purchase their medicines but this is changing as, for example, in Spain, there has been a 58% increase in medicine prices since 2010.

The Alliance views this as being a result of ineffective and costly research and development (R&D) systems that reward new medicines with fixed-term patents.

This encourages unaffordable and unconnected price setting rendering the treatment for many diseases increasingly unaffordable for both individuals and national health systems.

There will be considerable media attention around the initiative and we hope that Members will support our measures here in Ireland to get much needed action for changes of policy in terms of affordable price setting as well as transparency of prescription and related charges. However, for this to happen there must be acknowledgement that this can only happen through consultation with independent stakeholders involved across the process.



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.

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Consumer Choice

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News Briefs

The latest information
on the world of the
consumer

Anti Anti-biotics

A European Parliament committee has voted to adopt stronger rules to restrict antibiotic use in livestock. MEPs from the Environment, Food Safety and Public Health Committee (ENVI) adopted the new rules. While they have backed a ban on the routine preventive use of antibiotics, the practice will only be allowed in a few narrowly-defined cases to be determined in specific terms by the European Medicines Agency. The MEPs have also mandated the Commission to not only restrict the use of certain antibiotics but to also prohibit their use if deemed necessary. The vote in plenary session will now likely take place at the end of March or early in April. There is, of course, the possibility that certain of these amendments will be challenged making it a space to watch closely.



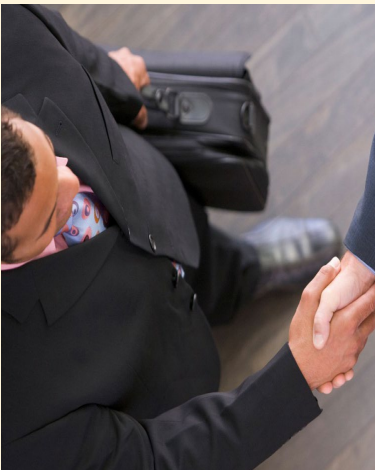
Creating in a Vacuum

A very special individual has designed a very special LED lamp. The person is Jake Dyson whose father created the now iconic series of vacuum cleaners and he has created an LED lamp with a life usage in excess of 37 years duration.

The lamp protects LEDs from overheating, which prolongs their life. But – in this case, to the point where, if you use the lamp continuously for at least 12 hours a day, you can extract 154,000 hours of use from it – or 37 years.

Called the CSYS Lamp, it looks a little like a crane with an extended arm. The design is intentional as it uses a heat-pipe technology that draws heat away from the LEDs using an aluminium heat sink built into the horizontal arm. This is a technology generally only found in satellites. The downside is its cost of €599. However, experts advise that, because LEDs use one fifth the energy of traditional halogen bulbs, a consumer could save €1,300 in energy costs over the 37 years – which puts you in profit!

NEED TO BE SITTING FOR THIS ONE



I read through Silicon Republic that mobile giant Three signed a deal to deploy ad-blocking technology across the UK and Italy followed by a rapid rollout across its operations in other countries. Why? No shock that there are three reasons – that customers should not pay data charges to receive ads; that their privacy and security must be protected and their data not exploited; and that they should not be inundated by excessive, intrusive, unwanted or irrelevant adverts.

So, before you wake up it is as well to outline a few important issues. 1: Three Ireland? “There are no fixed launched dates for the actual product” 2: The move is part of an opening barrage by telecoms operators that have lost out to Google and Facebook, which have made billions of dollars from advertising to mobile devices. So, the benefits will be confused for the very foreseeable future and with regard to the likelihood of the ‘valued customer’ benefiting? – well, look to the true meaning of the word ‘valued’ in context and you will be fully up to speed, to use someone’s jargon.

It Makes and Takes Calls

Almost on a daily basis there will be some pronouncement of the availability of smartphone technology at a low price. This needs to always come under the provision of Caveat Emptor as far as the CAI is concerned. However, it does appear that a very real contender has entered the marketplace and it is coming from India. There, they have just launched Ringing Bells 251. To put this into real and specific terms, the advice is that the phone is so named because that is the cost in Indian Rupee - 251 - or around €3.30.

There is no denying that it is of a lower specification than many of our better known, leading brands. But, it does come with 1GB of RAM, 8GB of internal, expandable storage and a 1,450mAh battery, all of which is operated through Android 5.1 Lollipop. It has 3G connectivity, wi-fi, Bluetooth and GPS. And, yes, it has a camera too. I cannot see this fly in Ireland - the Ringing Bell 330 would be equivalent to an alarm bell that, for the bunglers, would be just deafening. Sorry, I meant bundlers, of course.



INTRODUCING A MODE CHANGE

Staying with phones, it is interesting to read of concerns in the US at the toll of life-threatening accidents from drivers texting or simply dealing with the desire to “just have a quick look” at their phones while behind the wheel of a moving car. There, statistics clearly indicate that mobile phone use while driving is a much greater contributor to accidents and fatalities than alcohol consumption or over-tiredness and plays some role in a quarter of all road traffic accidents in the US.

Texting is the worst offence and cause. This is why there is the suggestion of introduction of a car mode similar to that of flight mode. Acknowledging that this would be one gigantic challenge as it could be mostly and simply ignored, the thought process is more positively focussed. The idea is to install car mode as a fixed setting that would require to be reversed. To make this attractive, the suggestion is that, during the period of car mode, the phone would have heavily restricted functionality. This could take the form of accepting inbound calls only with a full blocking on texts, email and all messaging. Personally, I like the idea. Actually, no, I love it.

Coding For The Classes

Our Schools members will be very interested in this news. In February, more than 50 teachers from around the country came together at the offices of Intel to learn how best to teach coding to children. Behind this meeting is a very significant action to bring reform to the Junior Cycle and bring new approaches and courses to the National Curriculum. This includes a short course on coding.

The demand is there. For years, short courses have been planned for the Junior Cycle. It was 2014 when the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

(NCCA) finalised seven different subjects. Coding was topical and popular. By way of illustration, last summer, 19 schools were chosen from over 120 that applied to trial out the coding course in particular. It is now well ahead of many of the other short courses up for testing.

The push for coding is coming from everywhere. Government, teachers, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Dell, Microsoft, Intel - all are engaged and making progress, and Ireland is the envy of Europe. Well done to all concerned - and long may it last.



Food & Health

 **by Clodagh O'Donoghue**

FSAI Advice Line figures for 2015

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) received 2,739 food-related complaints from consumers to its Advice Line in 2015. Although this figure is very much in line with the 2014 total of 2,738 complaints, the number of complaints relating to unsatisfactory hygiene standards rose 14% year on year and complaints relating to incorrect information on food labelling were up 10%. On the plus side, however, the number of complaints about unfit food fell 12% from 2014 and complaints relating to food poisoning dropped 4%.

In all, there were 1,052 complaints about unfit food with consumers frequently reporting

contamination of food with foreign objects. Advice Line records for 2015 reveal allegations of food contaminated with dead insects and metal as well as instances of an animal tooth in jam, a beetle in a burger bun, a worm in a chicken nugget, a metal screw in a cake and a piece of glass in a packet of frozen peas. Other examples of complaints coming under the unfit food category included mouldy bread being used to make sandwiches and undercooked food being served in food premises.

FSAI Information Manager Edel Smyth notes that “consumers have become much more conscious about the food they consume and are

increasingly vigilant about food safety issues” in recent years and describes this as a “welcome development”. Ms Smyth says that the FSAI continues to encourage any consumer who has a bad food safety experience to report the matter. The FSAI Advice Line operates between 9am and 5pm on weekdays and is staffed by trained advisors and food scientists. All complaints received by the FSAI are followed up and investigated by enforcement officers across the country. Consumers can contact the FSAI by phoning 1890 336677, by emailing info@fsai.ie, or through the ‘make a complaint’ section of the organisation’s website, www.fsai.ie.

Surprisingly high sugar levels in hot flavoured beverages

Last month, the UK-based campaign group Action on Sugar released the findings of its survey of hot drinks sold in popular coffee shop and fast food chains and the results are somewhat alarming. Most consumers today are aware that a 330ml can of Coca Cola contains a very substantial nine teaspoons of sugar (or 35 grams – 4 grams per teaspoon) but this new survey shows that 35% of the 131 hot drinks surveyed contain the same amount or more sugar – a fact that many consumers might find surprising. Topping the table for sugar content was a Christmas-themed beverage – the Starbucks Hot Mulled Fruit drink in the Venti (or extra-large) size. This crammed in an extraordinary 25 teaspoons or 99 grams of sugar into its serving – and, given that the recommended limit for sugar intake for adults is 30 grams or seven teaspoons a day, this represents more than three times the recommended

daily intake figure.

Taking festive-themed beverages out of the equation, the most sugary hot beverage offering was Costa’s Chai Latte in the Massimo (or large) size with 79.7 grams or 20 teaspoons of sugar, some of which were sugars (or lactose) that naturally occur in the milk. Not far behind was Starbucks’ White Chocolate Mocha, again in the Venti extra-large size, with 73.7 grams or 18 teaspoons of sugar.

Suggestions have been made about the possible contribution of these beverages to the rising obesity epidemic. In fact, of the 131 drinks in the survey, 98% would receive a red label for sugar under the UK’s voluntary traffic light labelling system. A red label denotes high levels of sugar, salt or fat in a food and alerts consumers so that they can make an informed decision about whether or not to consume the product. Under the traffic light labelling

system, products that contain more than 22.5 grams of sugar per 100 grams are deemed to be high in sugar and should only be eaten occasionally. Echoing this, Kawther Hashem, Registered Nutritionist and Researcher for Action on Sugar, noted that “these hot flavoured drinks should be an occasional treat, not an ‘everyday’ drink” and has advised consumers to have a plain hot drink instead or to ask for their drink to contain a minimal amount of syrup, preferably sugar free, in the smallest serving size available.

The vast majority of the beverages in the Action on Sugar survey are available in Ireland. As a result, consumers here might like to look a little more closely at the nutritional information on offer before they order a large hot chocolate or other flavoured beverage and ask themselves if they are ‘sweet enough already’.

Money News



Money News by *Róisín Moloney Weekes*

Ireland is feeling charitable again

Research carried out by Amárach Research for Fundraising Ireland reports that Irish people claim to have donated 30% more to charity over the 2015 Christmas period than they did over the same period in recent years.

Apparently, one in three Irish adults say they made a donation to a charity in response to a Christmas charity appeal in 2015. Similar numbers of donors were recorded for the same period in 2014. Overall, 89% of people surveyed said they gave the same or more in 2015 than they gave to a specific Christmas appeal the previous year.

The average donation people say they made to a charity over Christmas 2015 was €16.40, an increase from €12.50 in 2014. This shows a rise of €3.90 or more than 30% on the average amount donated in 2014, and an increase of 64% on the average sum people say they donated in 2013.

This research also looked at public trust in the charity sector and 57% of respondents said they had no opinion or did not trust charities to some degree. In 2014, 47% of survey participants gave similar responses to this question. Clearly, public trust in the charity sector is worrying, and the increase in donations comes despite this lack of trust.

Fundraising Ireland CEO Lucy Masterson has said that this research, now in its fourth year, continues to highlight the unfailing generosity of Irish people and their willingness to support those working with people in most need and that it also puts a spotlight on the charity sector to continue to work tirelessly to rebuild trust. According to Ms Masterson, given the generous giving of the Irish people, the charity sector has a responsibility to ensure "that we give back open and transparent information about how donations are used, that we give value for money, that we give measureable details about the real impact we are having on people's lives."

With that in mind, Ms Masterson has noted that "Fundraising Ireland will be putting a huge emphasis this year on the need for charities to focus on the impact donations are having on people's lives... It is only in assessing impact that we can be sure that we are using donations as effectively as possible, that we can be sure that we are making the right decisions and putting the right investment into those who need it most."

The research also uncovers a gap between what Irish donors expect of



charities and what they believe that people working in charities should be paid. Although 60% of survey participants agreed that charities should get the best professionals to work for them, just 38% agreed that those high-level professionals should be paid competitive wages. In total, 46% of those polled said that senior management working in the charity sector should be paid less than senior management in similarly sized companies in the private sector.

The research was conducted online with a representative sample of 1,000 people aged 16 and over and interview fieldwork was carried out 11th-18th January, 2016.

Lotto risk

Since October 2015, the National Lottery has added two more numbers to the jackpot draw, increasing the total to 47. This equates to odds of a 10.7 million-to-one chance of winning. You may be of the view that it is just a bit of fun. The outlay is considered by many consumers as so little and so insignificant in terms of risk that it is not such a big deal. We must, however, keep in mind that since the government's decision to privatise the Lotto, prices have increased. A minimum two-line play has risen from €3 to €4. This means the popular Lotto Plus option has now increased to €5.

With Lotto Plus draws twice a week, together with the regular Lotto jackpot on Wednesday and Saturday, the Daily Millions and the Millionaire Raffle to choose from, the insignificant risk and outlay can quickly add up. Mixed with the EuroMillions temptations, it could become a daily habit.

The new operator of the lottery, Premier Lotteries Ireland, says that it is offering bigger jackpots, with the average jackpot increasing from €4 million to €6 million. Of course, bigger jackpots increase public interest and, in turn, increase ticket purchases

dramatically, giving a win-win situation for the Lotto.

How many times do you do the Lotto? Be honest and do the sums - and you may just be surprised how this product, which is seen by many as comparable to purchasing a newspaper or a carton of milk, can cost you the price of an annual holiday.

If you do continue to indulge, remember to watch out for the new Lotto Plus Raffle Draw, which has been added to Lotto Plus tickets, with numbers from 0000 to 9999 - if your four digits come up you win €300.

Holiday Rental Scams

As with any time of the year, we must be vigilant for scrupulous fraudsters trying to scam consumers and the latest scam to be aware of involves holiday home rentals. Scammers are targeting holiday hopefuls online and offering holiday homes for rent together with photos, reviews, addresses and tourist information on the area. The idea is that the renter will pay upfront for some or all of the agreed rental price.

It is important that consumers protect themselves against such scams by doing all they can to ensure such listings are genuine before making the booking. Consumers should ensure that they use reputable websites and look

up user ratings and reviews. They should do as much research into the person or company offering the rental as they possibly can. In addition, consumers should always use a secure method of payment, such as PayPal or a credit card, and make sure to never send cash or use a money-wiring facility.

If you find yourself in a situation where you think you have been scammed, you should inform the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation or contact your local Garda station immediately. You should also immediately contact your bank or credit card company and explain your situation, as they may be able to act to stop the transaction completing if they are made aware soon enough.



Home Repossessions

With improvements in the economic outlook and increasing prices in the property market, it has become easy to overlook the many long-suffering consumers in the lengthy and difficult process of having their homes repossessed through the courts. With orders to repossess being granted in large numbers on a weekly basis, 2015 saw an increase in the number of families becoming homeless. As the process of repossession through the courts is drawn out and taxing, there is some concern for unrepresented borrowers attending court for repossession hearings. MABS maintains that there is an increasing number of borrowers attending court in repossession proceedings unrepresented and without receiving adequate advice on the process, the outcomes or the options available to them. Many have never had any dealings with the legal process, are intimidated by it and are often fearful and confused. MABS recommends that anyone who has been

called to attend court should go and should get advice before attending. Even when legal proceedings have commenced, it is still not too late and in many cases, with MABS support, people may still be able to come to a sustainable agreement with their lender. MABS is particularly well placed to advise and assist people in over-indebted situations. MABS, as well as being a free service, is independent, confidential and non-judgemental. MABS has over 60 offices nationwide staffed by experienced and well-trained money advisers. MABS supports all kinds of people with all kinds of debt. MABS has, as a core principle, a holistic ethos - that is, the person and their full situation is central to the MABS process and the resolution of financial difficulties.

People concerned about debt issues should contact the MABS helpline at 0761 07 2000, which is available Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.



Product/Tech News

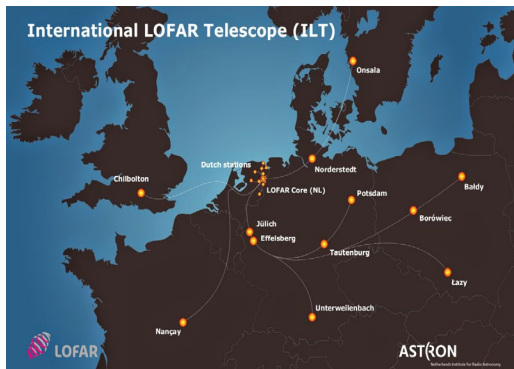
Help through a sticky patch

Scientists from the University of Warwick in the UK are developing a skin patch that can deliver targeted pain relief more effectively than ever. A key problem with pain relief that is taken in the form of a tablet is that even though the pain may be in a specific area, the medication has to travel through the bloodstream and affects the whole body. This makes it hard to control dosage, increases the chances of side effects and limits the impact the medication can have in relieving the pain. However, a solution may come in the form of the world's first-ever ibuprofen patch that can dispense medication through the skin for up to 12 hours.

Although medical gels that contain ibuprofen are already available, they are messy to apply, less consistent and do not contain as much of the medication. The new transparent patch can incorporate up to 30% ibuprofen by weight, which is between five and ten times higher than what is possible with most other medication-containing patches and gels. The patch is made from a new flexible polymer that was custom-designed by adhesive company Bostick and the ability of this new substance to incorporate large amounts of pain reliever is set to pave the way for the development of new longer-acting over-the-counter pain relief products to help treat chronic conditions like arthritis, neuralgia and back pain.

The transparent patch is discreet and reportedly adheres to the skin well, allowing the concentrated ibuprofen to gradually leach from the polymer through the skin and get straight to work at the site of the pain. Afterwards, according to the researchers, the patch can be peeled off easily with little discomfort and leaving no adhesive residue.

The product, which will be commercialised by University of Warwick spin-off company Medherent, is scheduled to hit shops within the next two years.



Ireland's eye on the stars

Birr Castle in Co Offaly is to become the site of the latest expansion of the world's largest connected radio telescope. LOFAR, which stands for Low Frequency Array, is a network of radio telescope arrays that are designed to act together as a single radio telescope with a dish wide enough to reach from eastern Poland now all the way to the middle of Ireland, allowing it to study deep space in extraordinary detail. There are already 50 stations in the network spread across six partner countries - the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, France, Sweden and the UK - and the addition of the Irish station will enable LOFAR to expand its view of the universe by 30% once it becomes active at the end of the year.

A radio telescope captures radio frequency wavelengths via antennae and the signals are sent to a central supercomputer that can translate these signals into images. The LOFAR stations consist of multiple antennae placed in the ground and the wider the area covered by the antennae, the better the image the telescope can capture. Thus, with 200 antennae planned to be positioned in Birr, a location that still has relatively little radio interference, the expansion of the project into Ireland will help to significantly improve the radio images of the universe that can be produced.

An award of €1.4 million from Science Foundation Ireland plus a further €500,000 from universities and philanthropic donations have enabled this project to go ahead and, according to the Irish LOFAR (I-LOFAR) website, LOFAR will "revolutionise our understanding of exploding stars, see galaxies further into the universe than ever before, find new planets around other stars, and provide a new insight into the workings of our solar system".

Some big questions that the project will seek to answer include what the universe looked like soon after the Big Bang and whether we are alone in the universe - and according to I-LOFAR, the new station will bring Irish researchers to the forefront of astrophysics and information and communications technology.

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

Driving future trends

A new global study reveals what consumers are looking for from their cars in the future – and shows that although they will continue to want the convenience of a car, they will not necessarily need to own one in the traditional sense. Conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value and forming the second part of the company's *Automotive 2025* report, the new study is entitled *A New Relationship – People and Cars* and looks at how consumers around the world want cars to fit their lives. Over 16,000 consumers in 16 countries – including the US, China, Russia, the UK, France and Germany – were surveyed to find out how they personally expect to use vehicles in the next ten years. The report reveals that consumers are very interested in 'self-enabling cars' – vehicles that can learn, heal, drive and even socialise. Such vehicles include autonomous, self-driving cars as well as those that can be fixed without human intervention due to their ability to diagnose faults, repair themselves and compensate for problems. Cars that incorporate cognitive computing to learn and assimilate to driver behaviours and the environment around them also hold an appeal for consumers. According to the report, the cognitive car of the future will "know who the occupants are, make decisions for them, and even be a trusted companion".

But it is not only the car that will change – ownership models are likely to evolve also as 42% of survey respondents said they would consider alternative ownership models like subscription pricing, 24% would be interested in fractional or shared ownership, and 36% said they liked the idea of on-demand ride sharing.

Overall, the survey shows that the car is set to remain a key fixture in personal transportation but that consumers are ready for industry innovation that will deliver a more personalised experience and are prepared to embrace the car as another smart device that is part of the expanding Internet of Things.

Brush up on dental hygiene

A toothbrush sitting in a glass or holder in your bathroom can come into contact with a range of germs from a variety of sources – but a new product seeks to keep it clean and safe. The Brushield toothbrush cover is a small innovation aimed at protecting your toothbrush from the bacteria and viruses that fly through the air when a toilet is flushed, from cross-contamination with other toothbrushes sitting in the same holder and from germs that multiply in the moist environment that occurs when toothbrushes do not dry out between uses.

Although not a new concept, the Brushield is touted as being the best toothbrush cover available and is made from aircraft-grade aluminium with a magnetic locking system to keep the cover firmly in place around the head of your toothbrush. In addition, the Brushield has been treated with silver-ionic technology that, it is claimed, will kill 99% of bacteria it comes in contact with and will apparently remain effective for between five and ten years. Meanwhile, air-flow channels are incorporated into the cover that enable the toothbrush to dry out completely between uses, which further helps to kill any germs with which the bristles have come into contact. And, of course, the toothbrush cover is also useful for travelling, keeping your washbag free of toothpaste stains.

Following a massively successful funding campaign, the Brushield is due to start shipping in April priced at around \$29 (€26 approx.) for those who are now feeling squeamish about the nasty bugs that may be lurking on their toothbrush.



Rise and shine

Getting out of bed in the mornings is rarely easy, and some find it significantly harder than others.

Those who have a tendency to deal with the bedside alarm going off by pressing the snooze button repeatedly have a new offering to consider. The Ruggie is a 40cm x 60cm mat made from rebounding memory foam that doubles as an alarm clock. With a bright LED display to show the time and touch sensors incorporated into the rug, the alarm will only shut off if the user plants their feet on it.

Not dissimilar to the alarm clock on wheels that you have to chase across the room in order to turn it off, the Ruggie offers you no option to snooze and the only way to terminate the sound is to physically leave the warmth and comfort of your bed and to go and stand on it for a full three seconds. By the end of this time, the manufacturer claims, you will be wide awake and ready to begin the day.

The Ruggie is also fitted with a USB port through which you can connect it to a computer and drag in sound files of your choice. Thus, you can choose to be greeted with a series of motivating statements to get your day off to a positive start.

The manufacturer is keen to expound the virtues of sleeping less and living more and suggests that if the Ruggie manages to get you up just five minutes earlier every day and you live to be 80 years of age, you will have gained 100 days in your lifetime. Many have clearly been convinced by this line of reasoning as the product has proved hugely successful on crowdfunding site Kickstarter, raising almost C\$400,000 dollars (€263,000 approx.) to date – far, far surpassing its C\$50,000 original funding goal.

Of course, the same principle would work if you simply positioned a normal alarm clock with a good loud annoying ring or beep far away from the bed so you had to cross the room to turn it off...

Virtual UK Mailboxes – how to dodge delivery dilemmas



REPORT by Sarah Breathnach

The frustration of being unable to purchase products online due to 'UK only' delivery restrictions may be a problem of the past for Irish consumers. An increasingly popular innovation known as a 'virtual UK mailbox' may provide a solution.

The way we shop is rapidly changing. According to Eir's Connected Living Survey, today, three in five of the Irish population shop online. What is perhaps more surprising is the finding that Irish consumers are the most active international online shoppers. A recent report released by PayPal and Ipsos examining the online cross-border shopping habits of over 23,200 consumers in 29 countries found online shopping across borders to be more prevalent in Ireland than in any other country worldwide. The report, which also investigated consumer attitudes to cross-border shopping, found that Irish consumers, more than consumers from any other nation, trust online stores from other countries as much as online stores in their own country. By the end

of 2016, Irish consumers are expected to have spent in excess of €2 billion on products from international websites. It is reported that after UK shoppers, Irish online consumers are the most likely to shop on UK websites. When asked about their tendency to choose international retailers, Irish online shoppers cited access to better-priced goods and a lack of availability on Irish websites as their primary reasons.

Even though Irish consumers do more cross-border shopping than any other country, overall we still shop less online than our European counterparts. Delivery restrictions coupled with high shipping fees, particularly on UK sites, are a continued nuisance for online consumers based in the Republic of Ireland. Irish consumers find themselves losing out on good-value online prices because the retailer either does not ship to the Republic of Ireland or the 'savings' that would have been made on the purchase are spent on excessively high postage costs. What is particularly frustrating about this is that consumers are only being faced with these issues at the later stages of the checkout process.

The prevalence of this problem has led a number of independent shipping companies to create a way for Irish consumers to circumvent this obstacle by providing customers with a 'virtual UK address'. Customers can then enter this as the shipping address when purchasing goods

from online sellers. The parcel arrives at the virtual UK address, where it is then forwarded on to the Irish consumer for a pretty competitive rate. Many of the larger online retailers, including Amazon and certain distributors on eBay, offer free UK delivery to customers on certain items. Irish shoppers may make small savings on postage using a virtual UK mailbox by availing of the free UK delivery and subsequently paying the relatively small forwarding fee.

Taking a closer look

Parcel Wizard, Parcel Motel and Parcel Connect are among the companies that offer this service, with each company differing slightly in their pricing and the way in which they deliver. We took a closer look at these three providers to give you an idea of how the service works.

How a virtual UK address operates

The UK Virtual Address is most often a depot in Northern Ireland belonging to or used by your service provider. Once your parcel has arrived at the virtual UK address, your parcel will either be re-addressed and sent on to your local collection point or delivered directly to your door (depending on your chosen provider).

How to avail of a virtual UK address

We found that customers can gain access to a virtual UK address by registering

online with one of the service providers through their dedicated websites. Online registration is quick and generally free.

Table 1: Virtual UK address pricing and other details

	Parcel Wizard	Parcel Motel	Parcel Connect
Cost per package	from €3.85	from €3.95	from €4.50
Point of payment	Online	Online	In-store
Size and weight restrictions (maximum)	40 x 40 x 60 (cm) 20kg	41 x 38 x 64 (cm) 10kg	40 x 40 x 60 (cm) 10kg
Delivery or collection	Home address delivery	Local Parcel Motel lockers	Local Payzone shops or in-store parcel collection points
Dispatch time from virtual UK address	Home delivery within two working days	Available for collection within one working day	Available for collection within one working day

NB: Parcel Motel lockers and in-store parcel collection points are usually found in supermarkets, newsagents, and petrol stations nationwide.

Convenience

The service providers enable you to either schedule home deliveries or collect delivered items from a convenient location at a time that suits (Parcel Motel runs a 24/7 service), providing the bonus of never missing another delivery.

Traceability

All of the service providers we looked at allow customers to track their parcel. Customers are informed via SMS once their parcel is ready for collection or delivery.

Things to remember

With Parcel Motel, packages must be collected within 48 hours - after this, charges for a 'second stay' will be incurred. Parcels that have not been collected after three charged stays will be held for 30 days and then disposed of. Parcel Wizard will hold parcels for a maximum of 21 days before they are returned to sender. It should also be noted that the three service providers we investigated all provide virtual UK addresses in Northern Ireland; therefore, consumers may still run into difficulty on the few sites that require a British mainland address.

Could I save money on delivery charges?

To gauge whether using a virtual UK address to avail of free UK delivery could save consumers money, we chose five popular small items and compared the cost of delivery directly to the Republic of Ireland with the cost of the forwarding fees charged by the aforementioned virtual UK address providers. As the table below indicates, savings were identified.

Table 2: Estimated cost of direct delivery to the Republic of Ireland versus estimated cost of using a virtual UK address service on randomly chosen items with free UK delivery.

Product	Cost of item	ROI delivery	UK delivery	Estimated potential savings after forwarding fee
DVD Box Set	£12.99	£4.99/€6.35	Free	€1.85 - €2.50
Women's Designer Fragrance	£48.50	£4.99/€6.35	Free over £40	€1.85 - €2.50
UK Brand Clothing Item	£ 31.00	£ 10.00 /€12.70	Free	€8.20 - €8.85
PS4 Game	£ 24.32	£4.56/€5.80	Free over £20	€1.30 - €1.95
Designer Men's Watch	£ 99.00	£ 15.99 /€20.40	Free on this item	€11.49 - €12.14

Products were priced from a range of online retailers. Prices and exchange rates correct at time of research (9th February 2016).

The verdict

Companies offering a virtual UK address service say that they are designed to make UK online shopping "hassle free" for Irish consumers. It seems the advent of this service may indeed, at least to some degree, relieve the headache of inconvenient and unpredictable delivery times, UK delivery restrictions, and high postage costs for online consumers based in the Republic of Ireland.

Proposed Gambling Controls



REPORT by **Róisín Moloney Weekes**

The February 2016 issue of *Consumer Choice* saw the publication of 'Supporting your Local Lotto', an article investigating the use of local lotteries as a fundraising mechanism for clubs and societies. We asked who regulates such lotteries and we questioned how consumers are protected.

Consumer Choice highlighted the lack of legislation governing this area and documented some court rulings that demonstrate the effects of the lack of such controls. These cases resulted in consumers being compensated for losses suffered as a result of irregular practices by clubs.

We enquired with the Department of Justice and Equality as to what controls were in place and we were told that "there was no central regulator with responsibility for oversight of such lotteries and, accordingly, there are no rules (except those set out in the act) governing the operations of these lotteries". The rules set out in the Act deal with the granting of licences and ensure that the lottery is for a charitable purpose, but this legislation does not address the concerns raised in our article.

We further asked the Department of Justice and Equality whether there were any plans to regulate this area given the potential for abuse and the lack of controls evident in some clubs together with the lack of consistency from one club to another.

The Department of Justice and Equality informed us that "the General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill (currently with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel awaiting drafting) makes provision for the licensing and monitoring of such lottery activities by a dedicated regulator to be established in

accordance with the legislation".

The Department noted that the General Scheme is available at the following link, with the material on lotteries to be found at Head 19: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Gambling+Control+Bill+2013.pdf/Files/Gambling+Control+Bill+2013.pdf>.

On review of this Bill, *Consumer Choice* makes the following observations: It appears that while the Bill offers some protection to consumers in the form of tighter restrictions on licensing, in general it does not in fact address the issues raised in our article. Particularly, the need for tight controls for the running of lotteries is not addressed. A dedicated regulator is referred to in the Bill and while this sounds promising, if we look to the Charities Regulatory Authority, a somewhat similar organisation to what is being proposed, our confidence may wane. The Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) was established under Part 4 of the Charities Act 2009 giving the CRA statutory powers of investigation with respect to charitable organisations. This Part of the Act has not yet been commenced so the CRA is not currently empowered or resourced to conduct statutory investigations of charities. So while a regulator is, in theory, a solution, a commitment to real solutions is required. An authority with no power to investigate appears a futile exercise. In any event, there is no time scale given as to when such legislation would actually be drafted and indeed enacted. So we would call on the Department of Justice and Equality to give this issue the priority it requires.

With the proposed legislation lacking to such an extent, consumers are reminded to remain vigilant. While

the charitable and local nature of these lotteries can make it harder for consumers to question how such fundraisers are run, the Consumers' Association of Ireland would encourage consumers to ask their club for transparency. Such lotteries require strict controls and, until the Department of Justice and Equality provides suitable legislation, it is up to consumers to keep an eye out for abuses. Supporters may feel that looking to their sporting governing bodies for guidance in dealing with problem areas is an effective route for achieving stricter controls. It is important to remember that a flawed, unregulated system is problematic for both clubs and supporters.



Choice Comment

In light of the fact that the Gambling Control Bill was approved by Government in July 2013, we would consider it necessary that consumers demand better from our new government as well as from any organiser of any lottery. The use of taxpayers' money is lauded daily as a priority for focus, intense scrutiny and robust audit.

The Consumers' Association of Ireland considers it more or, at least, equally essential that all individuals, clubs and supporter groups collecting monies directly from the taxpaying contributor be fully and openly accountable under law or conscience.



When Love and Money Collide

In a modern world of diverse family formations, Consumer Choice investigates the financial rights of cohabiting couples compared with the traditional married unit.

At a glance

- Automatic rights
- Relevant cases
- Prenuptial agreements



REPORT by *Róisín Moloney Weekes*

2010 saw the introduction of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act. This law was designed to put cohabiting couples on an equal footing with married couples, providing for situations where one party was left in a vulnerable financial position by the ending of the relationship or the death of their partner. Recent trends in family formation mean that family units are not always bound together by marriage. Unbeknownst to many, the legal protection offered by marriage has always been greater - however, five years after the enactment of this legislation, we look at whether the playing field has been levelled.

Automatic rights

To begin with, it is important to be aware that a married couple accrues automatic rights on their marriage. For example, from the moment of marriage, each party gains an automatic right to their spouse's estate on their death - this

is not dependent on how long they are married. These rights stand regardless of whether the deceased spouse had made a will directing something different - they cannot avoid their spouse's right to a share of their estate. In contrast, the cohabitation legislation does not confer any automatic rights on couples.

Qualifying cohabitants

The situation for cohabitants is somewhat different. First of all, in order to qualify as a co-habitant, one must be one of two adults, either of the same or of opposite sex, who live together in an intimate and committed relationship for a minimum of two years if there are children of the relationship or five years if there are no children.

A major difference between cohabiting couples and married couples is that a cohabitant has to litigate to obtain relief from a court. In practical terms, this means that the courts have seen surprisingly few cases before

them relating to cohabitation litigation. Unless one is entitled to legal aid, which is means tested and difficult to secure, taking a case can be an expensive risk to take. The lack of cases taken since the enactment of this legislation in turn leads to uncertainty as to how the courts will deal with certain cases, and this increases the uncertainty for potential litigants as to whether they will succeed in their claims. The end result of all this means that it is simply more difficult for cohabiting couples to assert the rights they may have compared with the automatic rights of the married couple. If, despite these hurdles, one chooses to take a case, they must be able to demonstrate that they are qualified cohabitants. This can be difficult as there is no definition as to what is an 'intimate and committed' relationship and who is to say when a relationship ended. In the case of a marriage, the date and time of the beginning of the marriage is clear to see. Secondly, a

qualified cohabitant must satisfy the court that he/she is financially dependent on the other cohabitant. They must also show the court that this financial dependence arises as a result of the relationship. The Act does not tell us what 'financial dependence' means but the Minister for Justice at the time stated that the Act was intended to apply to those in 'extreme financial difficulty' and those left 'high and dry' as a result of the relationship coming to an end. The Minister said that the Act is not designed to redistribute finances of a couple that has split up. If, therefore, a cohabitant can obtain financial security by another means, he/she is expected to do so and if he/she is in a worse financial position as a result of the breakdown of the relationship it is irrelevant. This is certainly not on par with the breakdown of a married couple's relationship. Importantly, it should be known that any claim against a cohabitant or their estate must be made within two years from the ending of the relationship or, in the case of death, within six months of probate being granted.

Relevant cases

We see the impact of this legislation in real terms when we look at cases that have gone through the courts, two of which we outline here.

Firstly, we consider the case of *MO'S v EC* taken in the Circuit Family Court. In this case, the woman applying to the Court for relief had lived with the respondent man for 25 years before splitting up. The Court found that despite the fact that they may have split up on a number of occasions, she was living with him the requisite amount of time, she was in an intimate and committed relationship at the time the relationship broke down and finally she was financially dependent on the respondent, with this dependence arising from the breakdown of the relationship. Having met all these hurdles, the woman was granted a settlement for herself and their dependant child of property and maintenance to the value of 10% of the man's assets, notwithstanding the fact that they were together for over 25 years. It can be safely said that one would expect a very different result from proceedings of a separated married couple in similar circumstances.

A second case that offers some insight into the situation at present is the case of *DC v DR*, which was heard in the High Court in 2015. The plaintiff in this case was a man who was in a

relationship with a woman for over 20 years when she died in 2014. She died without leaving a will and he made a claim against her estate. The plaintiff had to satisfy the Court that he was a qualified co-habitant and that he had lived with the deceased in an intimate and committed relationship for in excess of five years as they had no children. The deceased woman's family argued that because he kept a house elsewhere their relationship did not qualify as being intimate and committed. Much of the arguments presented asked whether or not there was financial dependence and whether the couple held themselves out as being a couple. The Judge concluded that they were qualified co-habitants and the plaintiff was awarded 45% of his deceased partner's estate. These cases demonstrate the very different outcomes that can be achieved, together with how difficult it is for cohabitants to establish that they are indeed in a committed and intimate relationship. While this legislation is a step in the right direction, it does not offer financial certainty for families by any means.

Prenuptial agreements

If we are to look at means of securing the financial future of a relationship in good times and in bad, we may look to prenuptial agreements. Prenups are probably most commonly associated with US film and television programmes but do they offer a mechanism for increased financial certainty in marriage? The answer is, of course, not so straightforward. Traditionally, prenuptial agreements were deemed to be unconstitutional because divorce itself was unconstitutional and we could not contract to do something that was unconstitutional. When divorce became possible in Ireland, the position on prenups remained unclear.

In theory, these contracts are entirely legal but in the event of legal proceedings in relation to a divorce, prenups will not bind a court as they have no legal standing.

The most a prenup can do is to have a persuasive effect on the court - how persuasive the contract will be will depend on the fairness and reasonableness of the agreement, whether the agreement was entered into openly with full financial disclosure and whether independent legal advice was obtained. Ultimately, a court will not grant a divorce unless it is happy that full and proper provision has been made to all parties.

One party that has been calling for prenups to be put on a statutory footing is the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA). Despite being traditionally conservative, the lobby group is seeking protection for the family farm. So, despite the current status of prenups, they could very soon become a different beast, given the political influence of the IFA.

While utterances of financial considerations in romance may seem to be in bad taste, we must encourage all parties to become aware of their financial standing within their relationships. Both those with assets to protect and, equally, those investing in a relationship and gaining rights to such assets by default to their investment in a relationship should be aware of their position. Without doubt, it remains that those who marry are in a far greater position than any other family formation. We can balance circumstances some bit by ensuring we have valid wills and perhaps own property jointly. Despite its lack of romance, a trip to your solicitor may certainly be a worthwhile investment for a long and happy financial union, in good times and in bad, until death do us part!





Euro NCAP Test Results

Putting safety first, Euro NCAP test results drive standards and reveal the safest cars on the road.



REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue

At a glance

- **Best in Class cars of 2015**
- **Future testing**
- **Choice Buys**

The European New Car Assessment Programme, Euro NCAP, seeks to provide motoring consumers with an objective and independent evaluation of the safety performance of new cars on sale in Europe. Its five-star rating system aims to help consumers to compare vehicles more easily and identify the safest choice for their needs. The safety rating is derived from a series of vehicle tests, designed and conducted by Euro NCAP, that represent, in a simplified way, real-life accident scenarios that could result in injuries or fatalities for car occupants or other road users. In addition, Euro NCAP results incentivise manufacturers to improve the safety of their cars and to exceed the minimum safety standards required by legislation. The overall number of deaths on European roads has continued to decrease over the last decade, with the continued improvement of vehicle safety playing a key role.

In Euro NCAP ratings, the number of stars reflects how well the car performs when tested but it is also influenced by what safety equipment the vehicle manufacturer is offering in each market. Thus, a high star rating demonstrates not only that the test results were good but that safety equipment on the tested model is readily available to all consumers in Europe. The star rating goes beyond the legal requirements, so a car that achieves a low number of stars is not necessarily unsafe, but it is not as safe as its competitors that were rated better. Those looking for the safest options should take note of those vehicles that garnered a five-star rating and Choice Buy status.

The tests

Euro NCAP introduced the overall safety rating in 2009 based on the evaluation of four key areas of vehicle safety: Adult

Occupant Protection (for drivers and passengers), Child Occupant Protection, Pedestrian Protection and Safety Assist technologies.

The Adult Occupant Protection rating is determined following frontal impact, side impact and whiplash tests. In 2015, a full-width rigid barrier frontal impact test was added to the “offset-deformable barrier” test (designed to replicate a head-on collision between two on-coming cars), the side mobile barrier test (simulating another car striking the side of the vehicle) and the side pole impact test (replicating instances where vehicles travel sideways into rigid roadside objects like a tree or a pole). The whiplash tests - which simulate low-speed, rear-end collisions - are aimed at promoting best-practice seat and head restraint design, and tests are also performed to assess the effectiveness of autonomous emergency braking city systems that can intervene by applying the brakes to try to avoid a collision at low speed, potentially preventing a distracted driver from colliding with the rear end of a stopped vehicle in front or alternatively reducing the speed significantly to minimise potential neck injuries to occupants of both cars.

The Child Occupant Protection rating covers a number of areas, including the protection afforded by the child restraint systems in frontal and side impact tests and the car’s ability to accommodate child car seats of various sizes and designs. The newest European standard for child restraints is called i-Size and all i-Size restraints use Isofix, a fitting system that attaches child restraints directly to the car’s frame. Euro NCAP tests reward cars that offer provisions to ensure safe transport of children, such as i-Size ready seating positions, Isofix anchorages in various seating positions, and a front-seat airbag-disabling switch.

Given that around 14% of all road fatalities in Europe are pedestrians, Euro NCAP evaluates the level of pedestrian protection offered by vehicles with a series of impact tests to assess the potential risk of injuries from vehicle front-end structures, including the bonnet, windshield and bumper. The procedure seeks to promote the inclusion in vehicles of energy absorbing structures and such deployable protection systems as pop-up bonnets and external airbags.

Euro NCAP’s Safety Assist score reflects the driver assist technologies that promote safe driving, accident

avoidance and injury mitigation. Such technologies formerly included electronic stability control (ESC) to help the driver maintain control of the car but since 2014, the fitting of ESC systems has become mandatory so Euro NCAP has ceased testing in this area. The single most effective item of safety equipment in any car is still the seat belt and the presence and effectiveness of seatbelt reminder systems are rewarded. The tests also promote the installation of voluntary-set speed assistance systems that help drivers control their speed by informing them of the current speed limit, warning them when the car goes above this limit and actively preventing the car from exceeding the set speed threshold. Finally, Euro NCAP gives credit when cars provide lane support systems that warn drivers when they unintentionally leave the road lane or change lane without indication.

Future testing

As older technology matures and new innovations are introduced, Euro NCAP’s five-star rating system continuously evolves, with tests updated regularly, new assessments introduced, and star levels adjusted, becoming tougher each year. As a result, the year of test is critical for a correct interpretation of a car result and comparisons are best made between cars tested within a calendar year so that all vehicles are assessed against the same standards. In addition, star ratings cannot be compared directly between different categories of vehicles and our table divides 2015’s tested vehicles into their various groups, with information on those that received ‘Best in Class’ designations provided in the box below.

As part of the effort to continually improve and enhance its tests, Euro NCAP will extend its testing in the area of Child Occupant Protection in 2016. Since testing began in 1997, child-sized crash dummies representing children of one-and-a-half years and three years have been placed on the rear seat of the car in the child restraints recommended by the car manufacturer during impact tests. However, many children of six years and older no longer use integral child car seats and their safety depends on adult seat belts and other provisions in the vehicle. To evaluate the effectiveness of these systems, as of January 2016, Euro NCAP has introduced two new dummy sizes – representing a six-year-old and a ten-year-old child – into the crash

tests. The aim is to offer new insight into the safety of children in passenger cars and promote greater effectiveness of restraint systems for children as they grow.

Another population group that Euro NCAP is seeking to better protect through its testing are pedestrians. Vulnerable road users - which include pedestrians, cyclists and motor cyclists – account for nearly half of all deaths on Europe’s roads and research has shown that the installation of effective pedestrian detection systems on cars could prevent one in five fatal pedestrian collisions. With this in mind, from 2016, the Euro NCAP safety rating will be expanded to include autonomous emergency braking (AEB) technology for pedestrians. Such technology uses lasers, radar and/or cameras to detect an imminent collision and carry out an emergency stop or substantially reduce the impact speed. Some cars, mainly in the premium sector, already have this technology fitted and the new tests will help identify which AEB systems work best, better informing both consumers and manufacturers.

Useful contacts

Euro NCAP

www.euroncap.com



Best in Class for 2015

Every year, Euro NCAP publishes a list of the vehicles that have performed best in their respective categories. As noted above, star ratings cannot be compared directly between different categories of cars, so the 'Best in Class' listing denotes those vehicles that have performed better than their competitors. To determine the category leaders, a calculation is made of the weighted sum of the scores in each of the four assessment areas – Adult Occupant Protection, Child Occupant Protection, Pedestrian Protection and Safety Assist.

In the supermini category, two cars – the Honda Jazz and the Suzuki Vitara – were neck and neck in terms of their overall safety performance, one edging ahead of the other in different parts of the assessment. Ultimately, however, the Honda Jazz was awarded Best in Class status due to its fitment strategy for advanced safety systems.

In the small family car category, Euro NCAP awarded the Infiniti Q30 with its Best in Class designation – however, as this car is not as yet available in the Irish market, we have not included it in our table. The Q30 turned in a strong performance overall and particularly impressed in terms of pedestrian protection with its active bonnet.

Among large family cars, two models delivered identical overall results – the Jaguar XE and the Toyota Avensis, though the Jaguar won out in the category as all of its safety equipment is fitted as standard. The Toyota Avensis also offers some driver assistance technologies as an option and generally costs less.

The VW Touran topped the small multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) category, and in terms of off-road cars, the Mercedes-Benz GLC performed best among smaller vehicles. Among large off-roaders, the Volvo XC90 not only was Best in Class in its category but it was the car that achieved the best overall performance of 2015, with outstanding scores of 97% for Adult Occupant Protection and 100% for Safety Assist.

Finally, Euro NCAP focused special attention in 2015 on roadster sports cars, a segment where the importance of safety is often downplayed by manufacturers, and, indeed, none of the vehicles in this category achieved five stars, though the Mazda MX-5, with its four-star rating, performed best.



1. Honda Jazz (Supermini)

Designated Best in Class for 2015 in the supermini category, the **Choice Buy** Honda Jazz easily achieved a five-star rating in the Euro NCAP tests despite its small size. This five-door hatchback scored very highly for adult protection in frontal impact and side barrier tests and the standard-fit autonomous emergency braking system provides additional protection at the low speeds at which many whiplash injuries are caused. A lane departure warning system and a speed assistance system are both options that are expected to be extensively fitted to this model and so qualified for assessment by Euro NCAP.



2. Suzuki Vitara (Supermini)

Again from the supermini category, the **Choice Buy** Suzuki Vitara scored highly across the Euro NCAP tests. The car generally protects adult occupants – both driver and passengers – very well in various impact scenarios and scored maximum points for its protection of the one-and-a-half-year dummy, with the three-year dummy also well safeguarded. All of the child car seat types for which the car is designed could be properly installed; front and rear seat belt reminders are fitted as standard; and a driver-set speed limitation system is optional but is expected to be fitted to most cars sold and met Euro NCAP's requirements.



8. Renault Mégane (Small family car)

From the small family car category, the **Choice Buy** Renault Mégane offers very good protection to all members of the family in different impact scenarios. The front seats and head restraints do a good job of safeguarding against whiplash injury from a rear-end collision, and the Mégane scored maximum points for its protection of both the one-and-a-half-year dummy and the three-year dummy in the full-scale crash tests. An optional speed assistance system, which is expected to be extensively fitted on this vehicle, uses an on-board camera to determine the speed limit at any point and the driver can choose to allow the system to limit the car's speed as appropriate.



9. Opel Astra (Small family car)

Scoring highly across the Euro NCAP tests, the **Choice Buy** Opel Astra delivers very good protection in the event of a collision to both adults and children inside and pedestrians outside the car. The Astra achieved full points for its protection of the one-and-a-half-year dummy and, for the three-year dummy, protection was good apart from marginally raised neck tensile forces. As the autonomous emergency braking system is an option that is expected to be widely sold, it was included in the assessment and performed satisfactorily. The assessment also included the optional driver-set speed limiter and lane keep assistance system and these were rewarded.



10. Honda HR-V (Small family car)

The **Choice Buy** Honda HR-V delivered good protection to adult occupants across all the impact tests and particularly in the side barrier test. The HR-V has an autonomous emergency braking system fitted as standard that does a good job of providing additional protection at the low speeds at which many whiplash injuries are caused. Also as standard are seatbelt reminders for front and back seats, with a lane departure warning system and a speed assist system both offered as options but expected to be widely fitted and so qualifying for Euro NCAP assessment. Child occupant protection and pedestrian protection were also judged to be generally good in this car.



11. Jaguar XE (Large family car)

The **Choice Buy** Jaguar XE was awarded Best in Class in the large family car category thanks to the high level of protection it affords to both adult and child occupants in a range of impact scenarios. It has an 'active' bonnet that can detect when a pedestrian has been hit, causing the bonnet to lift and providing greater clearance between the surface and the hard structures in the engine compartment. This system generally worked well in tests. In addition, the Jaguar XE offers a range of effective, standard-fit driver assist technologies, including seatbelt reminders, a driver-set speed limiter, and an autonomous emergency braking system that works at both low and high speeds.



12. Toyota Avensis (Large family car)

The **Choice Buy** Toyota Avensis achieved good overall scores for adult occupant protection and child occupants are also well safeguarded, with maximum points scored in the impact tests involving the one-and-a-half-year dummy. The Avensis narrowly lost out to the Jaguar XE as the Best in Class car for its category, mainly due to the Jaguar XE's standard fitting of a range of driver assist technologies. The Toyota model offers a lane departure system and a driver-set speed limitation system as options and comes with autonomous emergency braking, which performed well in tests both at low speeds typical of city driving and at higher speeds typical of motorway driving.



13. Audi A4 (Large family car)

The **Choice Buy** Audi A4 is a large family car that scored maximum points for the protection delivered in the impact tests for the one-and-a-half-year and three-year child dummies seated in rearward-facing restraints. Adult occupants were also generally well protected and the seats and head restraints provided good protection against whiplash injury in the event of a rear-end collision. The Audi A4's active bonnet performed well in tests helping to increase protection for pedestrians and this car also offers an autonomous emergency braking system that recognises pedestrians - though this system was not rewarded in the 2015 results, Euro NCAP will start testing such functionality in 2016.



14. Kia Optima (Large family car)

Another large family car, the **Choice Buy** Kia Optima scored maximum points for protection of adult occupants in a number of the impact tests as well as full points for protection of the one-and-a-half-year dummy in the frontal offset test. In addition, forward movement of the three-year dummy in a forward-facing restraint was not excessive. Included in this assessment were an optional lane departure warning system and a speed assist system that is again offered as an option and that uses data from a digital map combined with information from a windscreen-mounted camera to inform the driver about the speed limit at any point.



15. Skoda Superb (Large family car)

The **Choice Buy** Skoda Superb delivers good protection to all family members, as demonstrated across the various impact tests, with maximum points scored in adult side barrier tests and for the protection of the one-and-a-half-year dummy seated in a rearward-facing restraint. An autonomous emergency braking system is available as standard in some countries and as an option in others. Its performance in low-speed city-driving tests was good, but as it is not standard equipment throughout Europe, the system was not included in the overall score. However, an optional driver-set speed limitation system is expected to be sold in sufficiently high numbers to warrant inclusion in the assessment.



16. Mercedes-Benz GLC (Small off-road car)

Awarded Best in Class in the small off-road category, the **Choice Buy** Mercedes-Benz GLC scored maximum points in a number of the adult dummy impact tests, including the side barrier test and the more severe side pole impact test. The GLC again scored full points for its protection of the one-and-a-half-year dummy in frontal and side impact tests and the three-year dummy also enjoyed generally good protection. This car has an automatic airbag deactivation system that switches off the front passenger airbag when it detects the presence of a rearward-facing restraint and that automatically switches the airbag back on when the seat is occupied by an older child or an adult.



17. BMW X1 (Small off-road car)

The **Choice Buy** BMW X1 is a small off-roader that will keep its adult and child occupants safe, achieving high scores particularly in adult side impact tests and across all the tests involving the one-and-a-half-year and three-year dummies. The autonomous emergency braking system is fitted as standard and performed well in the Euro NCAP assessments at the low speeds at which many whiplash injuries are caused. The X1's 'pop-up' bonnet features sensors that can detect when a pedestrian has been hit and actuators that raise the bonnet to give greater clearance between the surface and the hard structures in the engine compartment, with the aim of minimising injury to pedestrians.



18. Kia Sportage (Small off-road car)

The **Choice Buy** Kia Sportage does a good job of protecting its adult occupants, even in the challenging side pole test. Young children are also generally well protected and, in side barrier tests, both the one-and-a-half-year and three-year dummies were properly contained within the protective shells of their restraints. The Sportage offers autonomous emergency braking as an option, but this system is not expected to be fitted widely enough to be included in the Euro NCAP assessment. The autonomous emergency braking system can recognise pedestrians as well as other cars but, again, this aspect cannot be rewarded as Euro NCAP will only start testing this functionality from this year.



19. Renault Kadjar (Small off-road car)

The **Choice Buy** Renault Kadjar is a small off-roader that affords particularly good protection to the driver, with maximum points scored in frontal impact tests, but passengers will also be well protected. An autonomous emergency braking system is available as an option but it is not expected to be widely fitted, so neither its low-speed whiplash protection nor its high-speed performance was assessed. An optional speed assistance system uses a camera to inform the driver of local speed limits and the driver can manually set the system appropriately. As both this and a lane departure system are expected to be extensively fitted in cars sold, they were included in the assessment.



20. Hyundai Tucson (Small off-road car)

All vehicles in the small off-road category achieved a five-star rating and the **Choice Buy** Hyundai Tucson is no exception. In general, adult dummy readings indicated good protection of occupants of different sizes and seated in different positions for frontal and side impact simulations and tests also showed that front- and rear-seat occupants were well protected against whiplash injury in the event of a rear-end collision. An autonomous emergency braking system is available as an option but, as it is not standard equipment, it was not included in the assessment. An optional lane departure system and camera-based speed assist system are expected to be extensively fitted and qualified for assessment in the tests.



21. Volvo XC90 (Large off-road car)

Leading the large off-road category, the **Choice Buy** Volvo XC90 not only achieved Best in Class status but garnered the highest overall score for 2015. This SUV was awarded a massive 97% for its Adult Occupant Protection and scored maximum points for its protection of both the one-and-a-half year and three-year dummies across the full-scale crash tests. The standard-fit autonomous emergency braking system again achieved maximum points, bringing the car to a halt before collision at all test speeds. Also fitted as standard are a lane assistance system, a speed assistance system, and seatbelt reminders for front and rear seats, including the optional third row of seats – earning the Volvo XC90 an outstanding Safety Assist rating of 100%.



22. Audi Q7 (Large off-road car)

The **Choice Buy** Audi Q7 can be bought as either a five-seat or a seven-seat vehicle and the five-star rating applies to both configurations, with the seven seater scoring additional points for Child Occupant Protection. All of the child restraints for which the Q7 is designed could be properly installed and accommodated and the optional third row seats have integrated child restraints with Isofix anchorages. A standard-fit autonomous emergency braking system performed well in Euro NCAP tests both at low and high speeds. This SUV has an active bonnet to boost pedestrian protection and its standard speed assistance system is a driver-set speed limiter with an optional camera-based system that also informs the driver of local speed limits.



23. Lexus RX (Large off-road car)

Another large off-roader, the **Choice Buy** Lexus RX does a good job of protecting both adult and child occupants. Its standard-fit autonomous emergency braking system scored maximum points in Euro NCAP assessments of its low-speed performance, with impact avoided at every test speed against a stationary car, and it also works well at higher speeds, successfully avoiding collision with a slower moving and a braking car in tests. This system can detect pedestrians as well as other vehicles. Also standard equipment on the RX are seatbelt reminders for front and rear seats, a lane departure system, and a road-sign recognition system that informs the driver of the speed limit, though no option is provided for limiting the speed of the vehicle.



24. VW Touran (Small MPV)

The **Choice Buy** VW Touran is a small multi-purpose vehicle that impressed with the level of protection afforded adult occupants overall and maximum points were scored in the side impact and the more severe side pole tests with good protection of all critical body regions. Children are also well protected, and all the child restraint types for which the Touran is designed could be properly installed and accommodated, including those in the optional i-Size-compliant third-row seats. The Touran has an active bonnet with sensors in the bumper that detect if a pedestrian has been struck and actuators that lift the bonnet, providing greater clearance between the surface and the hard structures in the engine compartment – and this generally performed well in tests.

The full-width rigid barrier test

All of the cars in our current batch have undergone the new full-width rigid barrier test, which was introduced in January 2015. As car structures have become stiffer in recent years, this has helped to reduce lower leg and head injuries as the passenger compartment is less likely to collapse. However, the increased structural stiffness means higher compartment decelerations that have to be dealt with by the restraint systems in the front and rear seats during a crash. These decelerations can result in significant injuries, particularly to the chest area of more vulnerable, smaller or elderly car occupants.

The new Euro NCAP test involves cars being driven against a rigid barrier at a test speed of 50km/h, placing enormous demands on the vehicle's restraint systems. A small female dummy is positioned in the front driver's seat and the rear passenger side seat. The decelerations of the chest and the degree of chest deflection are measured and must come within strict limits – with the aim of encouraging manufacturers to design and fit more sophisticated restraints. However, a balance needs to be achieved between a restraint system that is sufficiently stiff to restrain a male dummy in the offset deformable test – where the barrier overlaps with half of the car bonnet – at a test speed of 64km/h and a restraint system that does not put injuriously high deceleration forces on a small female.



MODEL		SPECIFICATIONS			TEST PERFORMANCE					
		Price (€)	Model tested	Body type	Kerb weight (kg)	Adult Occupant Protection rating %	Child Occupant Protection rating %	Pedestrian Protection rating %	Safety Assist rating %	Overall Euro NCAP rating
Superminis										
1	Honda Jazz	from 16,595	1.3 'Comfort', LHD	5 door hatchback	1100	93	85	73	71	★★★★★
2	Suzuki Vitara	from 19,995	1.6 GL+, LHD	5 door hatchback	1114	89	85	76	75	★★★★★
3	Mazda 2	from 15,995	1.5 'Core', LHD	5 door hatchback	1027	86	78	84	64	★★★★
4	Mazda CX-3	from 20,695	2.0 'Core', LHD	5 door wagon	1231	85	79	84	64	★★★★
5	Mini Clubman	from 28,960	1.5, RHD	5 door hatchback	1300	90	68	68	67	★★★★
6	Hyundai i20	from 15,995	1.2 GLS, LHD	5 door hatchback	1100	85	73	79	64	★★★★
7	Opel Karl	from 11,995	1.0 'Enjoy', LHD	5 door hatchback	920	74	72	68	64	★★★★
Small family cars										
8	Renault Mégane	from 20,990	1.5dCi, LHD	5 door hatchback	1318	88	87	71	71	★★★★★
9	Opel Astra	from 19,995	1.4 'Enjoy', LHD	5 door hatchback	1240	86	84	83	75	★★★★★
10	Honda HR-V	from 23,995	1.6 'ES', RHD	5 door hatchback	1259	91	79	72	71	★★★★★
Large family cars										
11	Jaguar XE	from 40,635	2.0 diesel 'Prestige', RHD	4 door saloon	1569	92	82	81	82	★★★★★
12	Toyota Avensis	from 25,995	1.6 D-4D 'Touring Sports', LHD	5 door wagon	1550	93	85	78	81	★★★★★
13	Audi A4	from 34,950	2.0 TDI S tronic, LHD	4 door saloon	1564	90	87	75	75	★★★★★
14	Kia Optima	from 27,949	1.7 diesel 'EX', LHD	4 door sedan	1515	89	86	67	71	★★★★★
15	Skoda Superb	from 26,995	2.0 TDI 'Ambition', LHD	5 door liftback	1472	86	86	71	76	★★★★★
Small off-road cars										
16	Mercedes-Benz GLC	from 50,280	220d 4MATIC 'Exclusive'	5 door SUV	1845	95	89	82	71	★★★★★
17	BMW X1	from 38,400	sDrive18d, LHD	5 door SUV	1320	90	87	74	77	★★★★★
18	Kia Sportage	from 27,995	1.7 diesel GL, LHD	5 door wagon	1425	90	83	66	71	★★★★★
19	Renault Kadjar	from 24,990	1.5dCi 'ZEN', LHD	5 door hatchback	1420	89	81	74	71	★★★★★
20	Hyundai Tucson	from 25,745	1.7 diesel GLS 4x2, LHD	5 door wagon	1494	86	85	71	71	★★★★★
Large off-road cars										
21	Volvo XC90	from 63,450	D5 'Momentum', LHD	5 door SUV	2040	97	87	72	100	★★★★★
22	Audi Q7	from 72,125	3.0 TDI quattro, LHD	5 door SUV	1995	94	88	70	76	★★★★★
23	Lexus RX	from 69,650	450h, LHD	5 door wagon	2155	91	82	79	77	★★★★★
Small MPVs (Multi-purpose vehicles)										
24	VW Touran	from 29,725	1.6 'Comfortline', LHD	5 door MPV	1483	88	89	71	76	★★★★★
25	Fiat 500X	from 19,750	1.6 diesel 'Pop Star', LHD	5 door hatchback	1386	86	85	74	64	★★★★
26	VW Caddy	from 30,425	2.0 TDI 'Comfortline', LHD	5 door hatchback	1483	84	78	58	68	★★★★
Roadster sports cars										
27	Mazda MX-5	from 27,995	1.5 SE-L, RHD	2 door roadster	1030	84	80	93	64	★★★★
28	Audi TT	from 47,150	2.0TFSI 'Sport', FWD, RHD	3 door hatchback	1230	81	68	82	64	★★★★
29	BMW Z4	from 48,400	sDrive 18i, LHD	2 door roadster	1395	69	61	91	46	★★★

USING THE TABLE

Star ratings are out of five.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price: The starting price as quoted by the car manufacturers.
Class: Euro NCAP ratings are comparable only between cars of similar mass and with broadly similar structures.

TEST PERFORMANCE

Adult Occupant Protection rating: This rating incorporates scores obtained in the front, side barrier and side pole impact crash tests, as well as whiplash protection.
Child Occupant Protection rating: How good the car would potentially be at protecting a child in a crash, using child car seats recommended by the car manufacturer.
Pedestrian Protection rating: How good the car would potentially be at protecting a pedestrian in a collision with a car.
Safety Assist rating: Rating given for active safety controls provided by the manufacturer.

Child Car Seats



Our Choice Buy child car seats not only provide excellent crash protection but they also are easy to install and use, ensuring they are correctly fitted every time.



REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue

At a glance

- **The i-Size standard**
- **Fitting and safety**
- **Three Choice Buys**

It may be that the most dangerous thing your baby or child is likely to do on a daily basis is to travel in a car, and so parents and guardians must ensure that their small passengers are as well protected as possible by using a good-quality child car seat that is correctly installed in their vehicle. Our rigorous tests measure the level of protection each car seat model will provide in the event of a frontal or side impact but testers also assess how straightforward each car seat is to use, what is the likelihood that it will be incorrectly installed in a car, and how simple is it to fasten a child into the seat and to adjust the harness, straps and so on as the child grows. Experts also consider the space and comfort afforded to the child by the car seat and how much room the restraint will take up in a car. All these criteria are combined to arrive at the overall score and only those child car seats reaching the highest standards are awarded Choice Buy status.

Legal requirements

The law requires that babies and children

travelling in a car or goods vehicle (apart from a taxi) must be secured in a child restraint appropriate for their height and weight until they reach 4 feet 11 inches or 5 stones 9 pounds. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that all passengers are using seat belts or the appropriate child restraint and a minimum of three penalty points plus a fine will be incurred by a driver who allows a child to travel without the proper restraint. When it comes to determining which child car seat is appropriate, weight and height are the key considerations rather than age. Child car seats in Europe currently fall under two regulations that are running in tandem with one another. Under the older regulation, UNECE R44, which is likely to remain in force for another few years, child car seats are categorised by weight. See our box below for details on the different weight groups. However, newer regulations under the R129 standard have been adopted that are running concurrently with the older rules and have introduced changes that mean that height, rather than weight, is the key

determining factor when selecting the right car seat for your child.

The i-Size standard

In July 2013, R129 entered into force aimed at strengthening safety standards for child car seats, and this regulation introduced the new European-wide i-Size classification. The i-Size standard seeks to make it easier for parents to choose the appropriate child car seat by basing their decision on the child's height, rather than age or weight considerations as is the case with the older R44 regulation, which was found to be confusing for consumers. A key aspect of the new provision is the requirement that children be kept in rearward-facing child car seats until they are 15 months of age, instead of up to 9 or 12 months, as advised in the previous EU regulation.

The new standard adds side impact tests to the frontal impact tests required under the older regulation and child car seats made to the i-Size standard will fit in all 'i-Size ready' cars, which will provide Isofix fittings that will

enable the child restraint to be securely and directly fitted to the frame of the vehicle. When *Consumer Choice* last looked at child car seats in October 2014, there was only one i-Size approved model on test, but this number has grown to three in our current batch, including one Choice Buy.

Table 1: The weight group categories under the UNECE R44 child car seat regulation.

Weight group	Type of restraint	Weight range	Approximate age range
Group O	Rearward-facing baby seat	up to 10kg	Birth to 6-9 months
Group O+	Rearward-facing baby seat	up to 13kg	Birth to 12-15 months
Group I	Forward-facing child seat	9-18kg	9 months-4 years
Group II	Booster seat	15-25kg	4-6 years
Group III	Booster cushion	22-36kg	6-12 years



A guide to Isofix



With the Isofix system, you can simply ‘plug in’ a compatible car seat to the mounting points in the car, making the seat easier to install correctly with less chance of incorrect fitting compared to car seats that use adult seat belts that must be correctly routed through the seat’s belt guides. Child car seats with Isofix are generally now fastened to the vehicle seats through three anchorage points - two bars that stick out of the back of the car seat or base and that can be locked into the car’s Isofix fittings plus a top tether or a support leg, both of which are designed to stop the car seat from tipping forward in the event of an accident. A top tether connects the restraint to the top of the car’s seat and acts as a stabilising cord - though there is evidence that people often attach top tethers incorrectly, so care should be taken to follow the instructions exactly if your child car seat has this feature. A support leg is used to brace the seat or base against the car floor and this feature is generally easier to install properly than a top tether. Indeed, some models provide visual indicators that change from red to green to let you know that the support leg has been correctly positioned and the new Maxi-Cosi Pebble Plus works with the 2WayFix base that comes with batteries powering an audible alarm that will sound if the support leg becomes loose. However, support legs can only be used with cars that have solid floors - i.e. those that do not have under-floor storage - so you will need to check that your car is suitable for these types of fittings.

Isofix child car seats come in three main varieties:

- Car seats for younger babies that do not themselves have any Isofix connectors but that clip onto a base, generally bought separately, that is secured to the car via Isofix fittings and that remains in place when the child car seat is lifted in and out.
- Car seats for older babies and toddlers that have integrated Isofix connectors and quite substantial built-in bases that, again, are usually left installed in the car.
- Car seats for older children with built-in Isofix connectors that attach to the car but an adult seat belt is also used to hold both the child and seat in place.

Since 2011, all new cars must provide a certain number of seating positions with Isofix attachment possibilities, and indeed, most of the child car seat models tested in our current batch can be secured to a car via Isofix as an alternative to using the adult seat belts.

Fitting comments

More stringent standards and regulations and ever-improving design are all very well, but unless the child car seat is actually fitted correctly, the child's protection will be severely compromised. At a minimum, your child's car seat should be compatible with your car and fitted correctly – but all too often this is not the case. As part of its Check It Fits campaign, the Road Safety Authority of Ireland (RSA) has indicated that one in ten child car seats in use is not compatible with the car in which it is placed. Even more alarmingly, the organisation has found that three in four child car seats are incorrectly fitted. This means that the car seat is unable to provide the protection it is designed to offer in the event of a collision – and, as the RSA notes, an incorrectly fitted child car seat can lead to serious injury or even death in the event of a collision. The RSA site offers detailed and valuable information on how to fit child car seats for the different weight groups as well as outlining best practice for transporting premature babies that fall under the minimum weight. In addition, the RSA continues to run its Check It Fits campaign – an invaluable free service for parents and guardians who want to ensure that they are using the right child car seat and installing it correctly. See our Check It Fits box for details.

Rear-facing versus forward-facing

Rear-facing car seats afford much greater protection than forward-facing seats. The RSA notes that children are five times safer in rear-facing seats than forward-facing seats, and, according to the European Child Safety Alliance, whereas a forward-facing child car seat reduces injuries by 60% compared to using no child restraint, rearward-facing seats reduce injuries by 90%. This is due to the fact that babies' heads are much heavier in relation to their bodies than those of older children or adults and their neck muscles have not developed sufficiently so that, in a frontal impact in a forward-facing seat, the forces placed on a baby's neck by their head can be too great to withstand. However, if the baby is in a rear-facing seat, a frontal impact will result in the child being pushed further into the seat, supporting the head and back and limiting the movement of the head and the pressure on the neck. For this reason, the new R129 regulation

Check It Fits

The Check It Fits service is a full-time programme run continuously by the RSA in which a team of experts travel the length and breadth of the country holding free events during which members of the public can check that the child car seat they are using is correctly fitted in their car. These experts are familiar with almost every kind of child car seat on the market and can answer any questions users may have. So for those who regularly transport children in their car, it might be worthwhile to find out when the next Check It Fits event is on in their area and make it a priority to attend. For a list of upcoming event locations, go to <http://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Road-Safety/Education/Check-it-fits/Check-it-fits/Check-it-fits-region/2016/>.

mandates that babies are restrained in rearward-facing car seats until they are at least 15 months old. Many parents move their child to forward-facing seats too quickly but the new i-Size standard is designed to make it more comfortable for children to remain in rearward-facing seats – and hence more protected – for longer. In addition, more child car seats are becoming available that can keep children rearward-facing until they are four years or even older.

Other safety precautions

Once you have bought a good-quality car seat and fitted it correctly, there are a few other things that you can do to make sure that your child is as safe as they can possibly be:

- Avoid strapping your child into a child car seat in a bulky jacket as this can reduce the effectiveness of the car seat and bulky clothes can cause a child to slide out of the restraint in the event of a collision. Instead, use blankets placed over the harness to keep your child warm.
- Beware of buckle crunch and ensure that only the webbing of the belt goes

across the seat frame. If the buckle of the adult seat belt lies across the frame of the child car seat, pressure exerted in the event of an accident or even sudden braking could cause the buckle to fail, potentially opening and allowing the child to be flung out of the seat completely unrestrained.

- Ensure that the harness straps are at the right height just above your child's shoulders and that they are not too tight or too loose. The harness should be sufficiently snug that only one finger should fit under the straps.
- When using an adult seat belt in conjunction with a booster seat or cushion, ensure that the lap belt does not lie across the abdomen but that it instead rests on the child's hips. The belt should also sit at the child's shoulder rather than across the neck or arm.
- A rearward-facing child car seat should not be used in the front passenger seat unless the passenger airbag has been deactivated, as if the airbag went off it would strike the child car seat with considerable force.





1. Maxi-Cosi Pebble Plus €200 (From birth)

The **Choice Buy** Maxi-Cosi Pebble Plus, an updated version of a previous Choice Buy, the Maxi-Cosi Pebble, is suitable from birth and is i-Size approved. This car seat may be secured either using a car's adult seat belts or via the manufacturer's 2WayFix base (costing around €250) with a support leg that rests on the car floor - and both configurations yielded a high level of crash protection in our tests. The Pebble Plus will last until a child is 75cm tall, so it should be suitable for babies up until they are around 12 months old, at which point, owners of a 2WayFix base might like to swap this seat for the Maxi-Cosi 2WayPearl, designated a Choice Buy in our October 2014 report and suitable for children up to 105cm in height or around four years of age. Installing this seat is quick and simple, with little chance of incorrect fitting, and it is roomy and well padded with good leg support for small passengers - though when combined with the 2WayFix base, this is a bulky seat that will take up a good deal of space in the back of a car.



14. Cybex Solution M-fix €220 (From 15kg)

The **Choice Buy** Cybex Solution M-fix can be fitted into a car using either the adult seat belts or the Isofix connectors - and both methods will deliver equally excellent protection for your child. In our labs, this seat earned four stars in our frontal impact tests and, with the help of the manufacturer's linear side-impact protection system, garnered a particularly impressive five stars in side impact tests. Designed for children weighing from 15kg to 36kg, this seat is solidly built and intuitive to use, with little likelihood of incorrect installation in your car. In addition, testers had no problem with fastening buckles, adjusting straps, or cleaning the removable, machine-washable cover, generating a very good overall ease-of-use score. With plenty of padding and an adjustable backrest, your child should be very comfortable in this seat - however, it does take up quite a bit of space in the back of a car, which is something to consider if you have more than one car seat you are trying to fit in.

13. Britax Kidfix SL SICT €200 (From 15kg)

The **Choice Buy** Britax Kidfix SL SICT is an excellent car seat for children who weigh between 15kg and 36kg, which corresponds to between approximately 4 and 12 years. The manufacturer touts this seat's side-impact cushion technology (SICT) and indeed, the Kidfix SL SICT scored top marks in our side-impact tests, providing first-rate protection, and children will also be well protected from injury in the event of a frontal collision. This seat won't be a hassle to use - fitting it correctly in your car using either the adult seat belts or the "soft-latch Isofix system" is very intuitive and problem-free, as is buckling up and adjusting the shoulder straps. Cleaning is made simple thanks to the easily removable and machine-washable cover. This seat will likely take up quite a bit of space in your car, but it offers very good comfort for your child and, at 5.7kg, it is not too heavy to lift if you need to swap it between cars.

Worth
Considering

2. Cybex Cloud Q €305 (From birth)

Another child car seat that may be used from birth and that narrowly missed out on achieving Choice Buy status is the Cybex Cloud Q. A Group O+ child car seat, it is suitable for children until they reach a weight of 13kg, and it provided excellent protection in our impact tests. This seat may be installed using the Q Fix Isofix base, priced separately at around €150, or via the car's adult seat belts - with both configurations yielding high safety scores. Retractable side impact rods are designed to help direct the force of the impact away from the small passenger, but parents will need to remember to put these into position in order for them to do their job. The Cybex Cloud Q may be used as part of a travel system with a compatible pushchair and has the advantage of being able to be fully reclined, allowing a baby to lie flat when the seat is used outside the car. It is also nicely padded and roomy enough to provide a good level of comfort.

15. Britax Kidfix SL €155 (From 15kg)

The Britax Kidfix SL just missed out on being deemed a Choice Buy, not scoring quite as highly as its sibling, the Britax Kidfix SL SICT, which offers superior side-impact protection. Nonetheless, the Kidfix SL - a high-backed booster seat that is suitable for children from 15kg to 36kg (corresponding to around 4-12 years) - achieved very good scores in the impact tests across the board and has the advantage of being particularly easy to use with little chance of this seat being incorrectly fitted in a car. It has soft latches that can be slotted into Isofix connectors for those cars that have them - and this will keep the seat in place when it is not in use - though the seat can also be installed solely via the vehicle's adult seat belts. Testers noted that this car seat is fairly bulky, so you will need to check there is room for it in your car, and though the seat is spacious and well-padded, it is quite upright, which could affect comfort.

MODEL		SPECIFICATIONS			TEST PERFORMANCE														SCORE
		Price (€)	Child weight range (kg)	ECE group	Weight of seat (kg)	Safety (50%)				Ease of use (40%)						Ergonomics 10%			%
						Overall safety score	Frontal impact	Side impact	Seat design	Overall ease of use score	Avoiding incorrect use	Fastening buckle	Fitting in car	Size adjustment	Cleaning and workman-ship	Overall ergonomics score	Space for the child	Comfort for the child	
From birth																			
1	Maxi-Cosi Pebble Plus	200	Birth to 12kg	i-Size approved from 45cm to 75cm	4.5	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	79
2	Cybox Cloud Q	305	Birth to 13kg	0+	5.7	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	73
3	Joie i-Anchor	240	Birth to 18kg	i-Size approved from 40cm to 105cm¹	8.0	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	55
From 9kg																			
4	Maxi-Cosi Axissfix	400	9 to 18kg	i-Size approved from 61cm to 105cm²	12.0	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	70
5	Joie Trillo Shield	156	9 to 36kg	I / II / III	5.5	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	69
6	Cybox Pallas M-fix	360	9 to 36kg	I / II / III	10.1	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	68
7	Britax King II LS	245	9 to 18kg	I	10.5	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	66
8	Maxi-Cosi Tobi	259	9 to 18kg	I	8.8	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	63
9	Britax King II ATS	260	9 to 18kg	I	10.6	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	62
10	Chicco Oasys	350	9 to 18kg	I	13.8	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	58
11	Recaro Young Sport Hero	235	9 to 36kg	I / II / III	8.4	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	44
12	Chicco Gro-Up	185	9 to 36kg	I / II / III	6.3	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	43
From 15kg																			
13	Britax Kidfix SL SICT	200	15 to 36kg	II / III	5.7	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	77
14	Cybox Solution M-fix	220	15 to 36kg	II / III	6.4	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	75
15	Britax Kidfix SL	155	15 to 36kg	II / III	5.7	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	74
16	Joie Trillo LX	115	15 to 36kg	II / III	4.9	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	71

¹i-size approved, from 40 cm to 105cm in rearward position and from 71cm to 105 cm in forward facing position
²i-size approved, from 61 cm to 87cm in rearward position and from 76cm to 105 cm in forward facing position

USING THE TABLE

Star ratings are out of five.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price: Typical retailer’s price if you shop around.
ECE Group: See the Weight Groups box above for details on corresponding weight guidelines.
Weight of seat: Weight of the child car seat in kilograms without the seat base.

TEST PERFORMANCE

Overall safety: The combined safety of the seat taking into account the front and side impact test results as well as the seat design.
Front impact/Side impact: Ratings for the level of protection provided in simulated front and side impact collisions using forces that accurately reflect what happens in serious real-life crashes.
Seat design: cludes ratings for the stability of the seat when fitted in the car and for the design of the belt routing to provide optimum protection.
Overall ease of use: Includes ratings for comfort, the clarity of the instructions, and the amount of space the seat takes up in the car as well as for the ease of correctly installing the seat into the car, fastening the child into the seat and making any size adjustments.
Avoiding incorrect use: Rating for how well the seat is designed in order to prevent incorrect use.
Fastening buckle: Rating for the ease of securing the child in the seat.
Fitting in car: Rating for the ease of installing the seat in the car.
Size adjustment: Rating for the options provided by the harness to adjust to the shoulder height of the child and the ease of adjusting the straps.
Cleaning and workmanship: Rating for the ease of removing and replacing the child car seat’s cover, whether the cover is machine washable, and the ease of cleaning the cover and other seat elements as well as the quality of the construction of the seat and the cover, how well the cover fits the seat, and whether there are sharp edges that present an injury risk to the child.
Ergonomics: Includes ratings for the space requirement of the seat when installed in the car, the seating position and the angle at which the child’s body is placed as well as the space available for the child in the seat and the comfort of the seat, including the level of padding, the leg support provided and whether the seated child’s view is obscured due to the seat design.

Useful contacts

Britax
www.britax.co.uk

Cybox
<http://cybox-online.com>

Maxi-Cosi
<http://www.maxi-cosi.co.uk>

Road Safety Authority of Ireland
www.rsa.ie



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