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JANUARY 2013 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

# ConsumerReports®

**THE SMART-PHONE ISSUE**

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LAST-MINUTE  
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Page 16



# Top Phones

## Plus Slash your big bill

- ▶ Best & worst carriers
- ▶ 5 ways you're wasting money
- ▶ Android vs. iPhone vs. Windows



**Exclusive** Is Mom & Dad's money safe? PAGE 23

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**\$370**

Save this much by waiting until the end of your two-year Verizon contract to upgrade to a **Samsung Galaxy S III** instead of opting out after a year.

**\$80**

Buy a Smart Café My Invento **pod coffeemaker** for \$120 and save this much over a Starbucks Verismo.

**\$55**

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## Coming in February

Diets, treadmills, ellipticals, exercise cycles, infomercial exercisers, financial advice, washers, dryers, Windows 8 computers, snow blowers, and vegetable and potato chips.

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## Who we are

### Consumer Reports

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**What we do** We buy all of the products we rate. **What we don't do** We don't accept paid advertising; we get our money mainly through subscriptions and donations. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. And we don't allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes.

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• For news tips and story ideas, go to [ConsumerReports.org/tips](http://ConsumerReports.org/tips).  
• E-mail submissions for Selling It to [SellingIt@cro.consumer.org](mailto:SellingIt@cro.consumer.org).  
• For subscription information, go to [ConsumerReports.org/magazine](http://ConsumerReports.org/magazine) or call 800-666-5261. See page 60 for more details.

**Ratings** We rate products using these symbols:

- Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor
- ✓ **CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price.
- ✓ **Recommended product** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.
- ✓ **Recommended car** These tested well, are reliable, and performed adequately if crash-tested or included in a federal rollover test.
- ✗ **Don't Buy** We label products with this icon when we judge them to be safety risks or to have serious performance problems.

## ON YOUR MIND

## Arsenic in rice

Thank you for your important report on arsenic in rice-based food ("Arsenic in Rice," November 2012). I have followed a gluten-free diet for more than 10 years, and I am sure your report will have profound implications for many of us who have relied on rice as a substitute for wheat, barley, and rye. Although searching for replacements for rice will be difficult, I am certainly glad this information has come to light. Keep up the good work.

—Julie Whelan Milwaukee, WI

## Online stores, take note

Concerning online retailers ("Where to Shop Online," November 2012), my biggest irritation is that many online stores won't



show shipping costs until after you type in your credit card number and all required information. I like to know those costs beforehand to save time and effort.

—Larry Pitta Brooklyn, NY

## On Febreze and Pine-Sol

I was thrilled to see "Does Febreze Give Odors the Boot?" (Up Front, November 2012), bringing attention to the fact that air fresheners like this are not the answer or cure for odors. But I was disappointed to read in "All-purpose Cleaners: Few Do It All," that you rated Pine-Sol highly without acknowledging that this product is not necessarily safe either. Home brews can be a mix of water, vinegar, baking soda, and Castile soap. What is wrong

with a strong vinegar smell when it means cleaning with a nontoxic substance?

—Alyssa Owens Keene, NH

**Corrections** *Vehiclehistory.gov*, the website of the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, links to companies that charge varying fees to check vehicle identification numbers. In "Scamnation!," a report in the October 2012 issue, we noted incorrectly that VIN checks are free through that site.

In "Best Products of the Year" in the November 2012 issue, we incorrectly stated that the Generac GP5500 5939 generator has an electric starter. It does not.

## SEND YOUR LETTERS TO

*ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.*

## Ask our experts

**Q** When you cook with aluminum foil, is it best to have the shiny side facing the food or facing out, and why?

—Edward Maloney New York

It does not make a difference which side of the foil faces where for cooking, freezing, or storing food. The shiny and matte sides are a result of the manufacturing process and are purely cosmetic.

**Q** When you rate dishwashers, you generally say that pre-rinsing is unnecessary. But you also mention that many dishwashers are susceptible to filter clogging. Please clarify: Do some tidbits clog more than others?

—Abe Trenk Smithtown, NY

Dishes should be scraped of food, though pre-rinsing isn't necessary. That's because machines have a self-cleaning filter or a manual clean filter. The former is designed to grind up food so that it can go down the drain. The latter must be cleaned by hand if and when food accumulates. If food is allowed to build up, it could block water flow, and the machine might clean poorly.

**Q** Does organic rice contain arsenic?

—Micaela Kauffman Chicago

It can. Even though organic standards prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides, organic rice can contain arsenic if it is grown in areas where groundwater contains high levels of arsenic or where soil is contaminated from past use of arsenical pesticides. Also, fertilizer made from poultry waste can contain arsenic, and its use is permitted on organically grown crops.

**Q** My car came with original-equipment high-performance summer tires and I was going to replace them with the same. But tire manufacturers don't recommend



**THIS SIDE UP?** It makes no difference whether you cook food in foil with the shiny side out or in.

**using summer tires in temperatures below the mid 40s. On many winter mornings, I'll be driving with temperatures in the low 30s. What should I do?**

—Sterling Rorden Garden Valley, CA

A performance summer tire has a tread compound to provide exceptional dry and wet grip in warm climates, but grip diminishes at cooler temperatures approaching freezing. We've found that loss of grip is noticeable with a cold summer tire at winter temperatures. Performance all-season tires sound like a better choice for you, with their responsive handling and good all-weather grip. They also offer some traction on ice and snow. Summer tires have poor traction on snow and ice.

**Q** If you buy something with a credit card, why do they request the three-digit code from the back of the card? What does that code mean?

—Kathy Gibbons Eatontown, NJ

The three-digit number (it's four on the front of an American Express card) is a validation or security code. Retailers aren't allowed to store it, but they use it if you're buying something online or over the phone to confirm that you have the actual card and aren't just using a stolen account number.

## SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO

*ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts.*

This page highlights efforts of Consumers Union, the policy and action arm of Consumer Reports, to improve the marketplace.

## ▣ WHERE WE STAND

**THE ISSUE** The credit score you can see may be different from the one your lender uses.

**OUR TAKE** Your three-digit credit score has a big impact on your finances. It helps lenders decide whether to lend you money and on what terms. When you request your score from a credit bureau, you expect it to be the same one that lenders use. Too often, that's not the case.

A study by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau compared credit scores sold to consumers with those sold to creditors. It found about one in five consumers would be likely to receive a meaningfully different score from the one sent to a lender. That means you'd be likely to qualify for different credit offers—it could be better or worse—than you would expect



to get based on the score you bought.

That's not fair to consumers, who need a reliable score to shop around for credit and get the best deals. Consumers Union also believes that your credit score should be yours for no charge when you request a free credit report. So we're calling on the industry to take some of the mystery out of credit scores and make them more consistent, reliable, and available to consumers.

# 480

That's the number of kids who have ingested small, high-powered magnets in the past 10 years—almost half in the past year, according to a survey by the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition. Eighty percent needed endoscopic or surgical intervention. The Consumer Product Safety Commission and Consumers Union want a ban on the sale of the magnets. They're used in toys for ages 14 and older, but younger children are all too tempted by them.

## ▣ ON THE RECORD

### 'Countrywide and Bank of America made disastrously bad loans and stuck taxpayers with the bill.'

—U.S. ATTORNEY PREET BHARARA *The Justice Department filed a lawsuit against Bank of America, accusing it of fraud for causing taxpayers more than \$1 billion in losses from selling bad mortgage loans to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.*

## CONSUMER VICTORY

**THE WIN** Cell-phone customers are now getting free alerts to avoid "bill shock."

**WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU** Some 20 percent of cell customers we surveyed in 2011 had been jolted by an unexpected charge on a wireless bill during the previous year. Companies weren't giving them good tools to keep tabs on their plan limits. In 2011, AT&T, Verizon, and other carriers agreed to send free alerts to customers before and after they faced additional charges for data, text, voice, or international roaming.

October was the deadline for companies to send at least two of the four alerts, and we're pleased that all participating companies are complying, according to the Federal Communications Commission. They seem to be on track to provide all four alerts by April. The FCC singled out Consumers Union for highlighting this problem and helping find a solution, and reaffirmed that, if companies fall short in upholding this voluntary agreement, it would consider imposing regulations to require these notifications. See our 12-page cell-phone section on page 28.



## ▣ FROM OUR PRESIDENT

### Naughty and nice

Why is it such a shock when a company treats us really well?

For our third annual Naughty & Nice list of loathsome and laudable policies and practices, we tapped the expertise of



CONSUMER REPORTS staffers and Facebook fans. Some companies were dinged for hidden or tricky fees, fine print, and punitive practices; others were applauded for generous and outstanding customer service. (Our list is based on specific policies and practices and isn't reflective of a company as a whole.)

Among the Nice: Honda, which includes rear-view cameras (a great safety feature) as standard equipment on most of its 2013 models; Drury Hotels, a chain of more than 130 properties that doesn't charge extra for a hot breakfast, hot food in the evening, wireless Internet everywhere, and more; and PNC Bank, which still has a basic free checking account with no minimum balance.

On the flip side: Putting your carry-on in the overhead bin on Spirit Airlines can cost up to \$100. (It's free if you can stuff it under the seat.) More travel woes: Most BMWs now come without a spare tire or jack. (Their run-flat tires won't survive a blow-out or a rip in the sidewall.) BMW isn't alone; check before you buy a new car.

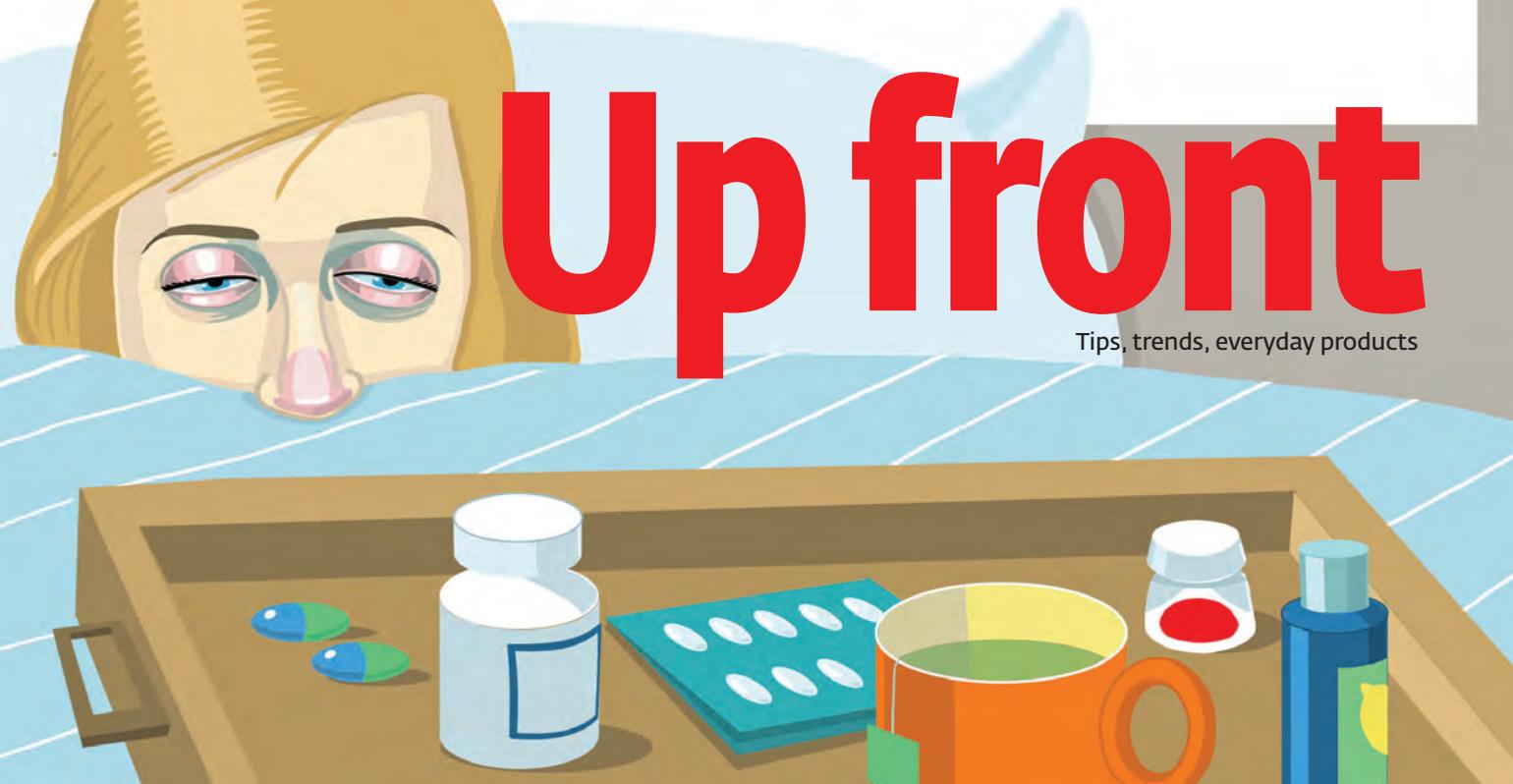
Abe's of Maine has a "30 day money back guarantee\*." That little asterisk leads to a laundry list of exceptions to the policy: fitness equipment, large appliances, microwaves, wine coolers, humidifiers, security items, marine and camping gear, sunglasses, watches, software, TVs, computer components, laptops, tablets, and bicycles.

So come on, dish! What policies make you grin or grinch? Chime in via Twitter (#CRNaughtyNice) and Facebook to let us know what you think. And if you're in New York City, stop by our booth at the Union Square Market through Dec. 24. In appreciation, you'll get 24 hours of free access to ConsumerReports.org, so you can check our Ratings as you do your holiday shopping (or post-holiday exchanges—thanks for the fruitcake, Aunt Sophie, but what I really need is a new camera).

*Jim Guest*  
JIM GUEST  
President

# Up front

Tips, trends, everyday products



## The cold facts about colds and flu

**HERE'S A NEWS FLASH:** There's still no cure for the common cold, which can be caused by any of more than 200 viruses. But that didn't keep Americans from spending \$4.2 billion on nonprescription cough and cold remedies in 2011, according to the Consumer Healthcare Products Association. Some may make you feel better; others won't. This guide should help you cope with the discontents of winter.

First, to minimize the chance of catching the flu, most people at least 6 months old should get vaccinated every year (flu viruses change annually, and so does the vaccine). An exception: people allergic to eggs, since the vaccine is grown in eggs. Wash your hands often, and get plenty of sleep. If you do get sick:

**For a cold.** Rest, drink liquids, gargle with warm salt water, and use a neti pot to flush the nose with distilled saltwater; suck on nonmedicated lozenges or swallow a bit of honey (don't give lozenges to young kids or honey to babies under 1 year old); and

take a bath or shower to let warm, moist air loosen phlegm. Try over-the-counter painkillers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic) or ibuprofen (Advil and generic) for aches and pains. Echinacea, vitamin C, or zinc lozenges might shorten the duration of a cold, but they won't keep you from getting sick. And although earlier research hinted that vitamin D might aid against respiratory infections, a well-designed clinical trial published in October in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that vitamin D won't help adults ward off or recover faster from the common cold.

Skip most remedies aimed specifically at colds. See the box at right for specifics.

**For the flu.** Rest and drink fluids. Use over-the-counter painkillers, and consider taking elderberry fruit extract and n-acetyl cysteine, which some research has shown might relieve flulike symptoms. Children younger than 5, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with suppressed immune systems should see a doctor

immediately if they have flu symptoms. A prescription antiviral drug such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) may shorten the duration of the illness by a day or so if started within 48 hours of symptoms. Consult a doctor also if you develop trouble breathing or if an existing problem such as diabetes or asthma grows worse. Most other people shouldn't need to see a doctor. Antibiotics won't help a flu or cold: They treat bacterial infections, not viruses.

### Meds to try, and to avoid

Research hasn't established that cold medicines actually work. If you try them, avoid multisymptom remedies, whose mix of ingredients can raise the risk of side effects and overdoses, especially if you take them with other drugs. Instead, choose over-the-counter meds by active ingredients and buy single-symptom formulas.

For a drippy nose, try nasal sprays or drops with oxymetazoline (Afrin, Neo-Synephrine Nighttime) or antihistamines such as chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton) and diphenhydramine (Benadryl Allergy). Generic versions of those products work the same and are likely to cost less. Note that using the drops or sprays for more than a few days can cause symptoms to come back, or "rebound."

Inhaling camphor or menthol vapors creates a sense of improved airflow, but there's little objective evidence of a benefit, says the American Pharmacists Association.

### How to tell the difference

Illness	Onset	Symptoms	Fever	Severity	Duration
<b>COLD</b>	Gradual	Sore or scratchy throat, then runny or stuffy nose, sneezing; finally a cough; fatigue.	Low or none	Mild to moderate	A week to 10 days, but cough can linger for weeks more.
<b>FLU</b>	Sudden	Chills, dry cough, headache, muscle aches, stuffy nose, extreme tiredness, weakness.	100°F or higher	More severe	One to two weeks, but weakness and fatigue may last for weeks more.



## Sparkling wines shine

**IT'S NOT EASY** for sparkling wines to excel. Their flavors are subtler than those of still wines, and even slight off-tastes can be noticeable. Yet our expert tasters found four to recommend, including a CR Best Buy for \$16.

To make the grade, a sparkling wine should be:

- Complex, with flavors that are toasty (as in toasted nuts or bread) and yeasty (as in baker's yeast) and may include fruit such as apple or pear. In general, the longer the wine is in contact with the sediment from yeast fermentation (known as lees), the stronger the bouquet.
- Harmonious, with no overpowering flavor. Acidity (contributed in part by the bubbles) should be balanced with light fruit flavors, but the wine should be tart enough to end with a crisp finish.
- Free of corked flavor and bitterness.
- Smooth, with a creamy "mouth feel," not coarse like seltzer water, with its prickly large bubbles. And sparkling wine should have a medium to full "mousse," a foaminess from the bubbles.

As if that weren't enough, there are goals for bubbles (lots of them, small, and forming continuously) and color (from pale yellow to slightly copper or salmon). And a true Champagne (two are in our Ratings) must be from the Champagne region of France and meet other requirements.

**Bottom line.** The four recommended wines are crisp, with citrus and apple notes. The others have fewer yeasty notes, are less complex and less balanced, or have flavor drawbacks. Yeasty/toasty wines such as G.H. Mumm (a Champagne) and Roederer Estate pair well with savory foods including stuffed mushrooms, crab cakes, sautéed or fried fish, and caviar with toast. More tart and fruity choices like Gruet and Gloria Ferrer go well with fruit, salads, sushi, and spicy Asian food. It's best to drink these wines within a year or so.

### And for dessert ...

Our expert tasters also tried seven moscato wines and judged Yellow Tail very good. At \$6 a bottle, it's also a CR Best Buy. Moscato, from one of the oldest winemaking grapes, is rising in popularity (witness its mention in several rap songs). It's usually sweet, with a low to moderate fizz from carbon dioxide. Moscatos go well with light appetizers and sweet desserts.



## Yogurt taste tests show Greek is good

Greek yogurt—usually thicker, creamier, and higher in protein than the regular kind—is selling like hotcakes, and new products are jostling for space in stores. Our experts found three worth trying.

### WORTH A TRY



**Dannon Oikos Traditional raspberry**  
160 calories  
4.5 grams fat  
17 grams sugars  
Very full and rich; fresh-tasting, creamy dairy and berry flavors.



**Dannon Oikos Fruit on the Bottom 0% Fat strawberry**  
120 calories  
0 grams fat  
18 grams sugars  
Thick, smooth; fruit shreds. Big floral strawberry flavor, some dairy and sweetness, slightly chalky.



**Stonyfield Oikos Organic 0% Fat strawberry**  
110 calories  
0 grams fat  
16 grams sugars  
Thick, creamy, smooth; fruit shreds and seeds. More sour than sweet, fairly balanced strawberry and dairy flavors.

### DON'T BOTHER



**Dannon Light & Fit Fruit on the Bottom 0% Fat strawberry**  
80 calories  
0 grams fat  
6 grams sugars  
Thick, smooth; fruit shreds. Slightly chalky, more sweet than sour, lingering artificial-sweetener flavor, jammy strawberry, some dairy.



**Yoplait Fruit on the Bottom 100 Calories strawberry**  
100 calories  
0 grams fat  
9 grams sugars  
Thick, smooth; fruit shreds and seeds. Chalky, astringent, big lingering artificial-sweetener flavor, slightly bitter, lingering aftertaste.

Consider also an excellent Greek yogurt from earlier tests:



**Fage Total 2% with strawberry**  
140 calories  
2.5 grams fat  
16 grams sugars



## Gotcha! Beware of 'fast cash'

Several major banks, including Fifth Third, Regions, U.S. Bank, and Wells Fargo, now target some consumers with account advance loans (aka payday loans). Though secured by the customer's direct-deposit paycheck, the loans incur fees of \$7.50 to \$10 per \$100 borrowed. Regions promotes a "21 percent Annual Percentage Rate" and "No additional Annual Percentage Rate," but fine print says that the rate "may be 120 percent or more." After you use the loan proceeds, repayment is automatically sucked from your next direct-deposited paycheck, Social Security benefit, or other electronic deposit of \$100 or more. If you still owe, the rest is automatically taken from your checking account on the loan's final due date, commonly 35 days after origination.

What if the borrower is short the next week? No problem! Simply "make another advance, which would impose another fee," chirps U.S. Bank. Banks may offer "cooling off" periods, so someone who repeatedly borrows over six months in a row must abstain for one month before resuming. But such measures are "ineffective," says Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, which, with 250 other groups and experts, opposes this type of loan.

**Bottom line.** Avoid pricey, unforgiving payday loans. If you often need fast cash before payday, contact the Association of Independent Consumer Credit Counseling Agencies at [aiccca.org](http://aiccca.org) or the National Foundation for Credit Counseling at [nfcc.org](http://nfcc.org) for free or low-cost advice.

## Ratings Sparkling wines

All tested products In order of taste.

CR Best Buy  Recommended

Rec.	Product	Origin	Price	Comments
<b>VERY GOOD</b>				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	G.H. Mumm Brut Cordon Rouge (champagne)	France	\$40	Intense, complex; ripe apple and yeasty/toasty notes. Slightly fuller mousse, more yeasty style than the rest.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gruet Blanc de Noirs	NM	16	Attractive array of fruit mixes nicely with slightly yeasty flavors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roederer Estate Anderson Valley Brut	CA	21	Nice fruit balances tart, yeasty flavors. More intense and fuller mousse than most.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gloria Ferrer Blanc de Noirs	CA	18	Smoother mouthfeel than most; lots of ripe fruit.
<b>GOOD</b>				
	Scharffenberger Brut	CA	18	Simple but tasty, easy-drinking.
	Ayala Brut Majeur (Champagne)	France	42	Nice and tart; some classic yeastiness. But less intense than most, with some off-notes (think sherry).
	Freixenet Brut Cordon Negro	Spain	10	Simple but adequate. Slightly rubbery off-notes.

Others tested, with slightly more evident off-notes: Piper Heidsieck, Chandon, Trader Joe's Blanc de Blanc, and Yellow Tail Bubbles.

## Lost in translation: Many labels no sense make

A dish towel that's "bibulous" and suitable for "bowels." A toy helicopter that used wrong can "create the human body or blame damage." A pair of 6-inch "miedle mose" pliers. Those are just some of the inscrutable package labels readers have sent us recently. Most, but not all, have been on inexpensive products made in China.

Although the Federal Trade Commission cracks down on false claims, and the Food and Drug Administration regulates labels on products under its jurisdiction, there's no law against mumbo-jumbo on many other goods.

Sometimes directions amuse, but often they confuse. It might be a challenge to operate a flashlight that directs you to "Placethe hand ring with finger and add speed uninterruptedly so as to reach the useeffect" or a bicycle light whose instructions begin, "Twists off the screw, breaks off the card buckle, takes away on the bicycle handle,

screws tight the screw to fix to the appropriate position in." Do you need to heed the warning on a jelly product that says, "The people under 3 years old and more than 60 years old are forbidden to eat alone"?

Exactly who is behind the perplexing prose? "A lot of foreign companies are overly confident in their language abilities," says Eric Mora, business development manager at Precision Language & Graphics, a translation firm in Schaumburg, Ill. "They might have an employee who speaks some English but isn't a native speaker, and that can lead to all sorts of blunders, both grammatical and cultural." Other times, foreign suppliers will try to cut corners with Google Translate or another free online service intended mainly for casual conversation.

As for U.S. retailers that import these products, label quality control is a low priority. "We sell more than 10,000 items," says Kelly Wu,

Feeling that hear well for so long.  
It cannot easily get rust this stainless materials  
It can use for cutting eyebrows and nails.

Directly buckled in the waist, the clothing, the package, the bag, the bicycle, may also carry buckles with matches according to the graphical representation method.

6 Don't put it under the direct sun to avoiding melt, keep it on where under 120° F

manager at Dollar Empire in Vernon, Calif. "It's not possible to check every single letter. I do find a lot of mistakes, but there's nothing we can do about it."

Our advice: Caveat emptor—and use common sense. It's one thing to spend a few bucks on a lemon juicer with the words "please do not overuse the product so as not to damage it." But buying tires or a chainsaw with the same warning? That could translate into a serious problem.

# Spread it on: Best jellies and jams

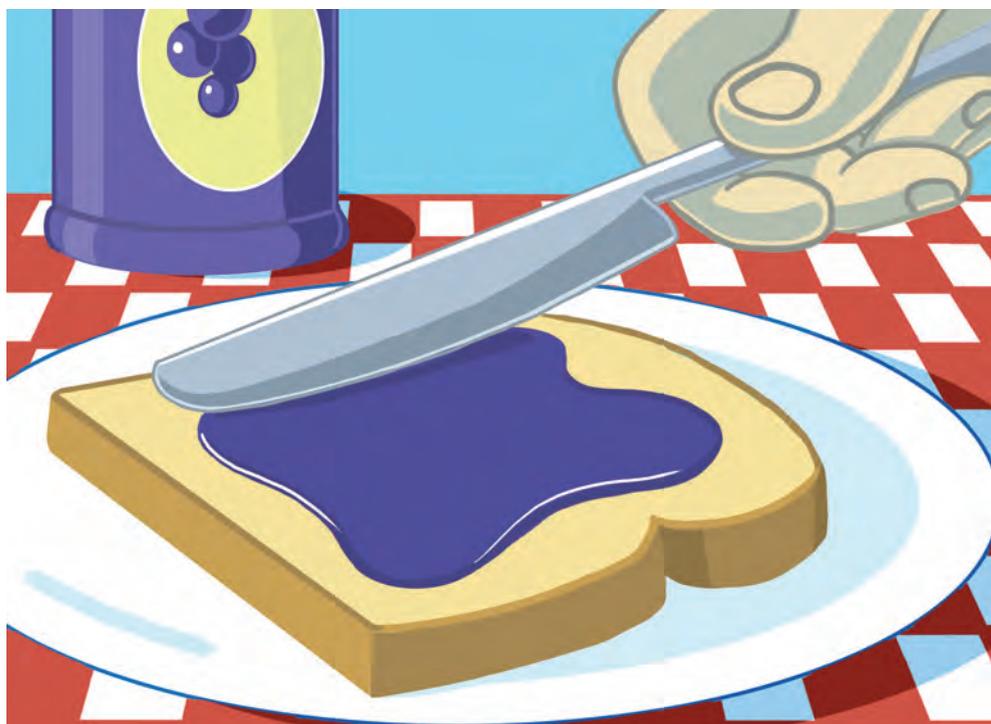
**SMUCKER'S** (“bringing you the goodness of jams, jellies, preserves, and smiles”) and Welch’s (“makes the most delicious jams, jellies, and spreads”) are two of the biggest names in jellies and jams. And most of their products did well in our tests. But other brands—365 Everyday Value grape and Bonne Maman and Trader Joe’s strawberry—scored at least as high. And Smucker’s Simply Fruit was just OK.

Among the lower-rated products was the priciest one in the bunch. The label on Stonewall Kitchen, \$7.05 per jar (31 cents per tablespoon), says, “Whole, sun-ripened, sweet strawberries make our strawberry jam an exceptional American classic bursting with memories of summer.” Not according to our trained tasters, who found a musty off-taste in some of our samples.

Ratings are based on how the products tasted plain.

**Grape jellies.** The top four all have a strong grape flavor and are quite sweet. Differences weren’t very noticeable. The lower-rated Market Pantry is a looser gel and creates a gummy feeling in the mouth. “Concord,” by the way, simply refers to the type of grape used to make jelly and juice.

**Strawberry jams.** Bonne Maman and Trader Joe’s have big fruit flavor and big strawberry pieces; Welch’s strawberry flavor has a hint of grape; Smucker’s Seedless is thicker than most of the tested jams, with a uniform texture; and Smucker’s Low Sugar has some fresh strawberry fla-



vor but is a bit sour and more runny than others. The lower-rated strawberry jams have off-tastes. Archer Farms lost points for a slight medicinal flavor; Polaner and Smucker’s Simply Fruit taste a tad pruney.

Our experts also rated the nutrition of each jelly and jam—based on calories, sodium, and sugars—and judged the products good or very good. Polaner All Fruit is the only one with fiber (3 grams).

**Bottom line.** The very good grape jellies taste similar, so choose by price. The very good strawberry jams have slightly different textures. Choose Bonne Maman or Trader Joe’s if you favor strawberry chunks; Smucker’s Seedless if you don’t like seeds. Try Smucker’s Low Sugar if you’re looking to limit sugar. And note that the words “all fruit” or “simply fruit” didn’t guarantee a tastier jam.

## Film stars: Three cleaners remove haze from dishware

**Got hard water?** Chances are you’ve also got hazy dishes and a whitish film on your dishwasher innards. For some consumers, these residues have increased since polluting phosphates were banned from dishwasher detergents. And they’ve helped spur the market for detergent additives designed to eliminate hard-water buildup.

We put three such products to the test: Finish Power Up Booster Agent, Glisten Dishwasher Cleaner & Hard Water Spot Remover, and Lemi Shine Original. To ensure the toughest possible conditions, we loaded dishwashers with glassware that was nearly opaque from being washed in extremely hard water (more than 300 total parts per million, or about twice the concentration found in many households). The

dishwashers themselves were also hazy with mineral buildup.

When we used the same amount of each product—about 50 grams—all removed the haze from our glassware and cleaned the dishwasher. But if you follow Finish’s directions for machines with a prewash-detergent dispenser, as we did at first, you could be disappointed. If your dispenser holds far less than 50 grams, as ours did, the product won’t work nearly as well. Indeed, even after running a second cycle with the Finish additive, we saw very little improvement. Only the third time, when we placed 2 tablespoons directly into the bottom of the dishwasher (following instructions





- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

☑ Recommended

## Ratings Jellies & jams

All tested products

In order of taste, within types.

Rec.	Product	Nutrition	Per tablespoon		
			Cost	Calories	Sugars (g)
<b>GRAPE JELLY</b>					
<b>VERY GOOD</b>					
☑	365 Everyday Value Organic Concord (Whole Foods)	○	16¢	50	13
☑	Smucker's Concord	○	9	50	12
☑	Welch's Concord	○	5	50	13
☑	Welch's Concord Squeeze	○	8	50	13
☑	Great Value Concord (Walmart)	●	4	50	8
<b>GOOD</b>					
	Market Pantry Squeezable (Target)	●	7	50	8
<b>STRAWBERRY JAM</b>					
<b>VERY GOOD</b>					
☑	Bonne Maman Preserves	○	27	50	13
☑	Trader Joe's Preserves (Made with Fresh Strawberries)	○	12	50	12
☑	Welch's Natural Spread	○	8	40	10
☑	Smucker's Seedless Jam	○	12	50	12
☑	Smucker's Low Sugar Preserves	●	15	25	5
<b>GOOD</b>					
	Archer Farms Preserves (Target)	○	23	50	12
	Polaner All Fruit with Fiber Spreadable	●	14	35	6
	Smucker's Simply Fruit Seedless Spreadable	●	17	40	8
	Stonewall Kitchen Jam	●	31	30	7

### TALK THE TALK

**Jellies** are made from fruit juice and may include sweeteners, spices, pectin, or preservatives.

**Jams and preserves** (federal rules use those terms interchangeably) blend crushed or chopped fruit with the ingredients in jellies.

**Spreadable fruit** No federal definition.

**Reduced-sugar products** contain at least 25 percent less sugar per serving than a specified alternative product. There's no federal definition of "low sugar," claimed by one Smucker's jam.

### BY THE NUMBERS

# \$167 million

Sales of strawberry jams and jellies last year. Grape jams and jellies: \$156 million. Based on Nielsen data.

### CLAIM CHECK

## A lint-eating Lizard

**The claim.** "It's like a magic wand!" says the website for Lint Lizard, a clear, flexible tube designed to suck up dryer lint, which can cause a fire if too much accumulates. You thread one end of the tube through the dryer's lint-trap opening and attach the other end to your vacuum cleaner. Lint Lizard cost us \$10.99 plus shipping.

**The check.** In one dryer, we collected and weighed the lint removed by each of three methods we tried in succession. First we took apart ductwork and removed lint by reaching into nooks and crannies with



our hands. Then we used a vacuum cleaner and crevice tool. Then we used the Lint Lizard. In a second dryer, we simply compared the amount of lint collected by a vacuum cleaner plus crevice tool with the haul collected by Lint Lizard.

**Bottom line.** It's almost like a magic wand! Our reaching hands removed 8 grams of lint; a vacuum cleaner and crevice tool managed to suck up another 4 grams. And the Lint Lizard? Another 15 grams. In the second dryer, a crevice tool and vacuum cleaner removed just 0.3 grams of lint, after which Lint Lizard gulped 52 grams. Drawbacks: The Lizard's sharply angled tip and curved hose made it miss a bit of lint in some nooks and on some surfaces, and it may not fit into very narrow openings in some dryers. Its sharp tip could also harm plastic ductwork (but it's best to have metal dryer ducts).



for machines without a prewash dispenser), did the glassware and dishwasher tub come clean. Glisten and Lemi Shine did their job as directed, though you may need a second wash cycle to eliminate buildup fully.

**Bottom line.** All three products ultimately proved effective, but they may require trial and error, depending on your dishwasher and the level of film buildup. That makes price a key factor. At 31 cents per ounce, Lemi Shine offers the best value. Finish costs 40 cents per ounce; Glisten, 87 cents per ounce.

Choosing the right dishwasher

detergent could also help. In recent tests, we found that Cascade Complete With Dawn ActionPacs was excellent at resisting mineral buildup while getting dishes and pots clean. And a rinse agent can help eliminate water spots, a less severe condition than white haze. Note that the Finish and Lemi Shine products shouldn't be used with any dishwasher detergent that contains bleach.

### A CLEAR VIEW OF HAZE TESTS

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for our video.



## 5-MINUTE CONSULT

# What my patients have taught me



**Orly Avitzur, M.D.**, a board-certified neurologist, is a medical adviser to Consumer Reports.

**LISTENING TO MY** patients' experiences has been a unique privilege of being a physician and is one of the principal reasons I love my job. Hearing their symptoms helps me reach a diagnosis (and talking with me can be cathartic for patients). It also helps me expand my medical acumen and make

better treatment decisions. And it has often led me to make better choices in my own life. Here are things I've learned:

**When it comes to exercise, respect your limits.** The "no pain, no gain" mantra couldn't be farther from the truth. Just ask the 70-year-old retired administrator I saw recently. He admitted to having bench-pressed 600 pounds while striving for a senior weight-lifting record. The strain had dislocated his shoulder blades, creating a "winged" appearance and resulting in months of excruciating pain. Likewise for the 28-year-old whom I diagnosed with nerve damage from doing side crunches while wearing ankle weights. So common are these tales that although I exercise every day, I now know to avoid adding excessive repetitions, weight, or resistance just to prove I can.

**Listen to your body.** Many patients can recall nascent symptoms that they ignored, thinking that they would go away. One of my earliest lessons came as a resident when I saw the father of a colleague who had ignored several weeks of heartburn. When he arrived at the emergency room with severe abdominal pain, his chest X-ray showed a perforated ulcer, a life-threatening condition. He had been self-medicating with antacids but didn't mention the symptoms to his doctor. I've learned to heed early symptoms so that they don't develop into worse problems. I've also learned a harder lesson:

**Don't try to treat yourself.** I saw a schoolteacher with migraines and fatigue recently who was shocked when I told her she'd been consuming about 700 milligrams of caffeine a day from her daily use of Excedrin Migraine coupled with her latte habit. She had made her headaches worse and had developed insomnia, conditions that went away when she reduced



**LIFT WITH CARE** You can't reap the benefits of exercise if you're sidelined by a nerve injury.

the caffeine and was properly treated with prescription migraine meds. Doctors are notorious for self-medicating, and I was no different. Battling a chronic sinus infection, I once took three consecutive courses of antibiotics and ended up with pseudomembranous colitis, a gastrointestinal condition. Of course, most patients can't write themselves a prescription, so they rely on the plethora of

over-the-counter treatments available, which leads to my next lesson:

**Just because it's over-the-counter doesn't mean it's safe.** Last month I saw a 30-year-old landscaper who had taken a body-building supplement and ended up in the emergency room with blurred vision and a severe headache. He was diagnosed with a brain hemorrhage from dangerously high blood pressure. Everyday items in our medicine cabinets can cause problems, too. Too much acetaminophen can cause liver damage; sleeping pills and allergy drugs can cause over-sedation. I use nonprescription drugs sparingly, if at all, and restrict my supplement use to vitamin D.

**You can't take care of others unless you take care of yourself.** I often ask my patients, after they admit that they haven't gotten around to finding a primary-care doctor, if their children have a pediatrician. The answer is always yes, which raises the question, "Don't you deserve the same care?" Although we often take excellent care of others, when it comes to our own health we toss all wisdom aside, getting too little sleep, eating poorly, forgoing regular medical exams. As they say before takeoff, put on your own oxygen mask first. You'll be of more help to others if you're ready yourself.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Tattoos aren't all butterflies and roses

No, you're probably not in the market to get inked (although yes, CONSUMER REPORTS readers are a hip and wild bunch). But you probably know someone who is. Twenty-one percent of all adults in the U.S. admit to having at least one tattoo, according to a Harris Interactive poll taken this year, up from 14 percent in 2008. But as tattooing spreads, so do the associated health risks, including skin infections, allergic reactions, and bloodborne diseases. In Rochester, N.Y., 19 customers of a tattoo parlor were recently infected with *Mycobacterium chelonae*, an organism that causes a skin rash and, if left untreated, can



harm the lungs. The outbreak was traced to contaminated ink the parlor had purchased from another state. In addition, many states don't license tattoo parlors, so almost anyone can hang up a shingle, sometimes with as little preparation as a 3-hour training course.

**Bottom line.** Anyone in the market for a tattoo should check out the artist's credentials and the cleanliness of the shop. For tips on how to do that, plus other advice for the would-be inked, go to [ConsumerReports.org](http://ConsumerReports.org) and search for "tattoo."

#### TIPS FOR SAFER TATTOOS

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for our video.



# Don't get taken guarding your ID

**ABOUT 50 MILLION** U.S. consumers spent \$3.5 billion in 2010 to buy products that are claimed to protect their identity. But do-it-yourself safeguards are just as effective as paid services, according to Javelin Strategy & Research, a California consulting firm. And self-help costs little to nothing; the paid services cost \$120 to \$300 annually. Here's why you don't need to buy ID-theft protection:

## ❑ Marketing can be deceptive.

Regulators have slapped the ID-protection industry several times for deceptive marketing practices. Last summer, after actions by federal regulators, Capital One and Discover Financial Services agreed to pay a combined \$410 million in refunds and penalties related to deceptive marketing of identity protection, credit monitoring, and other services. Prior to that, Affinion, Experian Consumer Direct, and LifeLock had been caught and punished for alleged deceptive marketing practices, such as not adequately disclosing automatic sign-up after "free" trials and promising to prevent ID theft, even though the services don't actually do that.

## ❑ The threat is exaggerated.

Two-thirds of cases of ID theft reported to the annual National Crime Victimization Survey involve stolen credit cards, not stolen identities. Federal regulations limit your liability, usually to \$50 per account, and even that is often waived by card issuers. Add stolen debit cards and check forgery, and existing-account fraud makes up 80 percent of so-called ID theft.

**Do it yourself for less.** Sign up for free online banking and mobile apps to monitor your checking and credit accounts daily.

## ❑ New-account fraud is uncommon.

The most destructive type of ID theft is having your name, birth date, and Social Security number used to open credit accounts, tap your health insurance, or file a tax return in your name to steal your refund, among other crimes. But less than 1 percent of households experienced that form of ID theft in 2010, according to the Department of Justice.

## ❑ Credit monitoring is flawed.

The core of many ID-protection products is credit monitoring, which looks for fraud-



ulent new accounts on your credit reports. But most e-mail and mobile alerts from those services raise false alarms about routine changes in your file. And if fraud is detected, you might not be "warned" until days, weeks, or months after the fact.

**Do it yourself for less.** Get free annual credit reports from each of the three major credit-reporting bureaus—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—by going to [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com). Stagger your requests every four months from one bureau to the next. You're also entitled to a free credit report from each bureau after you place a 90-day fraud alert on your credit file—which you should do every 90 days if you've been notified of a security breach, your wallet has been stolen, or you detect other red flags of ID theft. The alerts prompt lenders to more carefully verify applicants using your ID.

## ❑ Web scans offer false security.

Some services scan online black-market chat rooms for your stolen Social Security number or credit-card numbers. But if crooks are found to have your ID data, you can't get it back from them.

**Do it yourself for less.** If your data turn up on a scan, protection companies advise you to place a security freeze on your credit reports. That prevents new creditors from getting access to your file when someone tries to open an account, so they're more likely to deny a crook's credit application.

But you can freeze your files without paying a service to scan the Web. There's a small fee for each freeze in most states, unless you're already a victim of ID theft.

## ❑ \$1 million insurance is overkill.

Most services offer up to \$1 million in ID-theft insurance. But they don't pay if your loss is covered by federal consumer protections, your homeowners or renters insurance, or a merchant, which is the norm. The majority of ID-theft victims had zero out-of-pocket loss in 2011, according to Javelin. A minority did lose money—the average was \$309 for existing-account fraud and \$1,205 for new-account fraud.

## ❑ Alerts are overpriced.

Six of the eight biggest ID-protection services offer e-mail or text alerts when they detect that your identity might be fraudulently used in credit, cellular, and utility-service applications. You can stop the crime by responding "That's not me."

That simple service might be worth paying for, but it comes rolled up with other unnecessary services. One expert says corporations already use the underlying ID-scoring technology to stop most fraudulent applications without alerts.

**Do it yourself for less.** If you think the service is worthwhile, buy stand-alone alerts for \$5 a month and get a free ID-theft protection risk assessment at [myidalerts.com](http://myidalerts.com).

# Biggest consumer complaints to CPSC



**DISHWASHER FIRE** A consumer sent this photo of his destroyed appliance to SaferProducts.gov.

**APPLIANCE PROBLEMS**, including fires, topped the list of incidents filed in 2012 with a federal database that gives consumers a way to report complaints and view timely information about potential product hazards.

CONSUMER REPORTS' analysis of the almost 5,500 complaints that were published online at SaferProducts.gov in the first nine months of 2012 found reports of 14 deaths and 1,573 injuries associated with a wide range of products.

Appliances such as refrigerators, clothes dryers, and dehumidifiers accounted for 2,029 complaints in the database run by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Children's nursery equipment and supplies ranked second with 339 safety reports. But those incidents included four deaths, higher than any category, including unlicensed recreational vehicles, which were linked to three deaths.

## Fire concerns

For appliances, fire was the primary safety problem cited. Not surprisingly, kitchen ranges and ovens topped the list of appliances related to fire hazards, with 304 incidents reported. But dishwashers were a very close second with 277 reports, followed by microwaves and refrigerators with 115 and 102 complaints, respectively.

The numbers echo the findings of a report in our March 2012 issue that found that more than 15 million appliance units had been recalled in the previous five

years for defects that could cause a fire.

Shoes were also high on the list of complaints with 252 reports, including 185 that required hospital admission, an emergency room visit, or treatment by another medical professional. Many involved "toning" athletic shoes that usually have strongly curved, thickened soles. But they can cause falls and other injuries, according to the reports. The other product categories that ranked in the top 10 for safety

## A lawsuit over a complaint was decided in secret.

complaints were toys; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment; cookware and tableware; furniture; laundry, fabric care, and sewing products; indoor lighting; and grills.

Since SaferProducts.gov was created in March 2011, more than 11,000 reports of harm or safety risks associated with consumer products have been filed.

The database was created by the CPSC under a congressional mandate to allow consumers, doctors, firefighters, and other emergency responders to file publicly searchable reports about potentially dangerous products. Some reports posted on the site also include photos or videos documenting product defects and the injuries or damage that resulted.

The CPSC must post consumer safety

complaints online within 20 business days of receiving them, but it must first notify manufacturers and give them a chance to respond. If any information submitted is shown to be false or misleading, the complaint must be corrected to appear in the database.

In the first legal challenge to SaferProducts.gov, a company that a federal court allowed to be identified only as Company Doe filed suit in October 2011 to stop the CPSC from posting a report filed by a local government agency about a consumer injury allegedly related to that company's product. Company Doe contended that the injury report was "baseless" and would cause "irreparable harm to its reputation and financial well-being," according to an opinion released in October by Judge Alexander Williams Jr. in federal district court in Greenbelt, Md.

## Federal appeal filed

The judge's opinion revealed that he had already decided in the company's favor after nine months of proceedings that were conducted out of public view with no opportunity for public participation. His ruling also sealed the case, permanently preventing consumers from getting any information about the identity of the company or the evidence presented. In the court document released to disclose the judge's ruling, portions were blacked out so that no information would be revealed about the company's name or the nature of the harm alleged. The rationale for the decision was also blacked out.

Ken Paulson, president of the First Amendment Center, a public policy institute at Vanderbilt University, says, "If there is an allegation that a company has done something wrong, it is possible a company can rebut that charge, but in this country we have a tradition of open courts allowing us to see the process and hear the evidence, so it is especially disquieting when matters of public interest like this are taken out of public view."

Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, is appealing the court's decision to seal the case, along with Public Citizen and the Consumer Federation of America, two other advocacy groups. The appeal seeking to unseal the records in this case is before the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

## RECALLS

### AUTOMOBILES

#### '12-'13 Nissan Altima

Vehicle may have been equipped with transverse link bolts and power steering



rack bolts that were not properly torqued. Bolts could loosen and fall out, which may lead to loss of control of the car.

**MODELS** 13,919 '12-'13 Nissan Altima vehicles.

**WHAT TO DO** Dealer will properly tighten the bolts. Call Nissan at 800-647-7261 for details.

### HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

#### Jeld-Wen/ Reliablit interior bifold doors



Lower pivot pin can break, and door may disengage from overhead track and fall.

**PRODUCTS** 170,800 bifold doors sold at Home Depot, Lowe's, and other building products retailers between February 2011 and March 2012 for \$40 to \$80. Jeld-Wen has had 12 reports of broken pivot pins and doors disengaging, leading to three minor injuries.

**WHAT TO DO** Stop using the door. Contact Jeld-Wen at 877-228-4888 or [jeld-wen.com/newhardware](http://jeld-wen.com/newhardware) for free replacement hardware and technical assistance.

#### Tricam Easy Reach step stools



Top step/standing platform can break, causing user to fall.

**PRODUCTS** 84,000 Easy Reach by Gorilla Ladders 3-Step Pro Series step stools sold at Home Depot from April 2012 through August 2012 for \$27. Tricam has had five reports of the standing platform breaking.

**WHAT TO DO** Stop using the stool. Contact Tricam at 855-336-0360 or go to [gorillaladders.net](http://gorillaladders.net) to arrange for a full refund.

#### Champion Power Equipment generators

Fuel can leak from carburetor, posing risk of fire.

**PRODUCTS** 8,600 portable generators sold at Costco from December 2011

through July 2012 for about \$699. There have been 11 reports of fuel leaking, including eight fires and two cases of property damage.

**WHAT TO DO** Stop using the generator. Contact Champion at 855-236-9424 or [championpowerequipment.com](http://championpowerequipment.com) for a free repair kit to be installed by an authorized dealer. You can also return the unit to Costco for a full refund.



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▣ **Water filters** (carafe-style)  
**Clear2O** CWS100A, \$23  
**ZeroWater** ZP-010, \$38  
**ZeroWater** ZD-013, \$35

▣ **Food processors**  
**Cuisinart** DLC-2011 CHB, \$200  
**Cuisinart** DFP-14BCN, \$200  
**KitchenAid** KFP715, \$100



▣ **Knives**  
**Zwilling J.A. Henckels**  
 Twin Professional "S," \$315  
**Wusthof Trident**  
 Classic #8418, \$350  
**Ginsu** Chikara, \$75

# 25 Great

**Introducing the ultimate gift guide:** electronics, small appliances, and other gear in 25 categories. That should cover you no matter what your loved ones (or, hey, you) want. We've tested all these models, and we recommend them. Pictured products appear first on the category lists and other choices follow. Happy shopping.



▣ **Cordless drills**  
**Hitachi** DS18DSAL, \$170  
**Rigid** R9600, \$180  
**Craftsman** 17310, \$100

▣ **Plasma TVs**  
**Panasonic** Viera TC-P55ST50 (55-inch), \$1,300  
**Samsung** PN51E550 (51-inch), \$850  
**LG** 50PA5500 (50-inch), \$650



PHOTO (TV SCREEN): GANDEE VASANI/GETTY IMAGES



**SLR cameras**  
**Nikon** D3200, \$700  
**Canon** EOS Rebel T3, \$500



**Headphones**  
**Klipsch** Image S4i (II), \$100  
**Bose** QuietComfort 15, \$300  
**Grado** Prestige SR80i, \$100



**Smart phones**  
**Samsung** Galaxy S III (16GB), \$200 to \$280 (varies by carrier) with two-year contract  
**Apple** iPhone 5 (16GB), \$200 with two-year contract

# gifts



**Laptop**  
**Apple** MacBook Air 13-inch MD231LL/A, \$1,200  
 See page 41 for First Looks at new Windows laptops.

**Hand mixers**  
**KitchenAid** Architect Series KHM920A[CS], \$80  
**KitchenAid** Artisan KHM7TWH5 7-Speed Digital, \$80  
**Cuisinart** Power Advantage HM-50, \$50



**Cookware**  
**Calphalon** Contemporary, \$450  
**Scanpan** Classic, \$500 (non-stick)  
**Starfrit** Alternative Eco Pan, \$110 (non-stick)

**Drip coffeemakers**  
**Kalorik** CM2582, \$80  
**Mr. Coffee** BVMC-SJX33GT, \$40  
**Waring** Pro CMS 100, \$60



**Toaster ovens**  
**Breville** Smart Oven BOV800XL, \$250  
**Breville** BOV650XL, \$180  
**Oster** TSSTVMNDG, \$80





**Stand mixers**  
**Breville** BEM800XL, \$300  
**KitchenAid** Classic K45SS[WH], \$200  
**Hamilton Beach** Electric 6322[1], \$180



**E-book readers**  
**Amazon** Kindle Paperwhite with special offers, \$120  
**Barnes & Noble** Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight, \$120  
**Amazon** Kindle with special offers, \$70



**Speaker system**  
**Edifier** Spinnaker Bluetooth Speaker System, \$350

**GPS navigators**  
**Garmin** Nuvi 2455LT, \$160  
**Magellan** Roadmate 3055, \$150  
**Garmin** Nuvi 2250LT, \$150

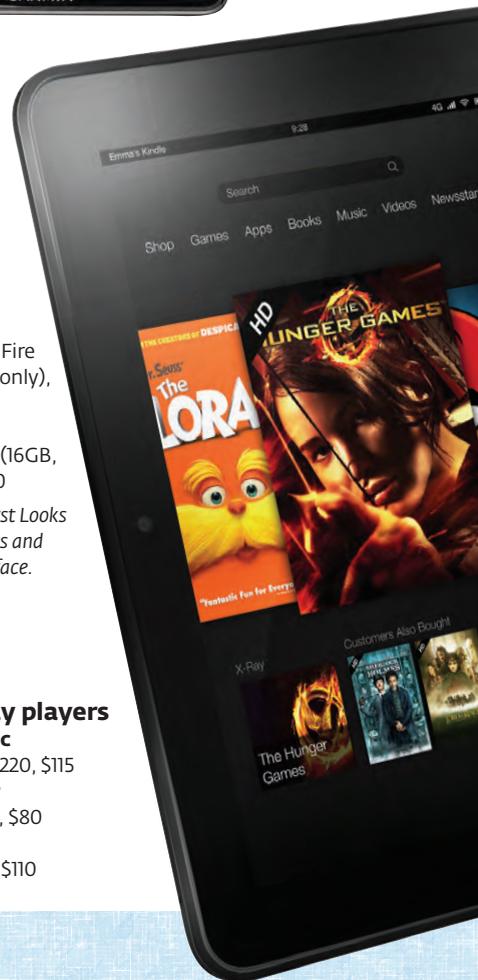


**Rugged point-and-shoot cameras**  
**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-TS4, \$320  
**Canon** PowerShot D20, \$350

**Blenders**  
**Vita-Mix** 5200, \$450  
**Ninja** Master Prep Professional QB1004, \$60  
**KitchenAid** KSB 565, \$100



**Tablets**  
**Amazon** Kindle Fire HD (16GB, Wi-Fi only), \$200 (plus \$10 for charger)  
**Google** Nexus 7 (16GB, Wi-Fi only), \$200  
*See page 20 for First Looks at new Apple iPads and the Microsoft Surface.*



**Blu-ray players**  
**Panasonic** DMP-BDT220, \$115  
**Samsung** BD-E5300, \$80  
**Toshiba** BDX5300, \$110





- ▶ **LCD TVs**  
**Vizio** E552VLE (55-inch), \$850  
**Samsung** UN46EH5300 (46-inch), \$750  
**Sony** Bravia KDL-40EX640 (40-inch), \$800



- ▶ **Gas grills**  
 (medium-sized)  
**Vermont Castings** Signature Series VCS322SSP, \$1,000  
**Char-Broil Gourmet** TRU-Infrared 463250512 (Home Depot), \$400  
**Kenmore** 16142, \$350

- ▶ **Camcorders**  
**Sony** HDR-CX210, \$370  
**Canon** Vixia HF R300, \$350  
**JVC** Everio GZ-EX250, \$400



- ▶ **Single-serve coffeemakers**  
**DeLonghi** Nescafé Dolce Gusto Circolo, \$150  
**Smart Café** My Invento, \$120  
**DeLonghi** Nescafé Dolce Gusto Piccolo EDG200T, \$100  
**See page 43 for full Ratings.**



## The Consumer Reports Bottom Line Price



## The bottom line in new car negotiations

The Consumer Reports Bottom Line Price is the one number you need to be a smart negotiator.

We've taken the invoice price and figured in available national rebates, unadvertised dealer incentives and holdbacks.

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For service in Canada go to:  
[www.ConsumerReports.org/canada27](http://www.ConsumerReports.org/canada27)

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# Hot new tablets

Three recent arrivals are welcome additions to the market

**RAPID CHANGES** in tablets are bringing more choices, new features, and better prices. Here's a rundown based on our initial tests (we'll fully test all of them soon):

Apple squeezed its highly successful iPad into a more affordable and smaller package, the iPad Mini. Our tests found Apple's new tablet as good as its larger siblings in almost every respect. We also found it more convenient for reading because it's smaller and lighter. For details, see the facing page.

Microsoft finally entered the market with a serious competitor to the iPad and Android tablets—the Surface with Windows RT (the new operating system for tablets based on Windows 8.) Larger than most tablets, the Surface is a fine piece of hardware, with a built-in stand, great add-on keyboards, and an excellent display. It runs versions of classic Office applications. But Microsoft has a ways to go on its app store.

The Barnes & Noble Nook got a major update with the 7-inch Nook HD and 9-inch

Nook HD+. The Nook HD has the highest screen resolution among smaller tablets, and Barnes & Noble kept the starting price at \$200, a true bargain. It also improved the shopping experience and added other innovative features, such as user profiles. The Nook HD+ starts at \$270.

These new tablets lived up to expectations in many ways, our preliminary tests showed. But as with other tablets, if you also want a physical keyboard, you must pay extra. For our assessment of the variety of add-on tablet keyboards, see page 22.

## The Nook HD delivers on its display

The Barnes & Noble Nook HD is the highest-resolution tablet of its size. Priced at \$200 for 8GB (\$230 for 16GB), it has a screen whose resolution is 243 pixels per inch. That's not much less than the 264 pixels per inch on the third- and fourth-generation iPad with Retina display. Here's how it stacked up in our preliminary tests:

**Images and text look great.** Its 7-inch screen lived up to expectations, delivering images that nearly equaled those of the Apple iPad Retina screens. Viewing angles

were similar to the iPad's, as was the ability to read in bright light. We did find that colors weren't quite up to iPad standards, thanks to slightly yellow, less-saturated colors. And we found the text on the Nook HD almost as crisp as the iPad's.

**Magazines are a strength.** At 0.7 pounds, the Nook HD is among the lightest tablets and narrow enough to fit in one hand. So it almost feels as if you're holding a small magazine. It's certainly better for reading one than the previous Nook, which squeezed text into a narrow column. On the Nook HD, text fills the entire screen. Scrolling is smooth and magazine pages curl as you turn.

If you're an avid magazine reader, however, you'll probably prefer the Nook HD+, whose display is larger and has a slightly squarer shape, making it better suited to publications. It can accommodate an entire page of type without forcing you to clumsily scroll around the page as you read. It wasn't available to test at press time.

**Video and audio were fine.** Streaming video appeared quite good on the Nook HD. Sound was less tinny than you'd expect on a device this size, but still not as loud as on the new iPad Mini. Touch response was also fine, and games that require swiping were easy to play. But photos that you view in landscape mode have black task and status bars above and below the shot, shrinking it.

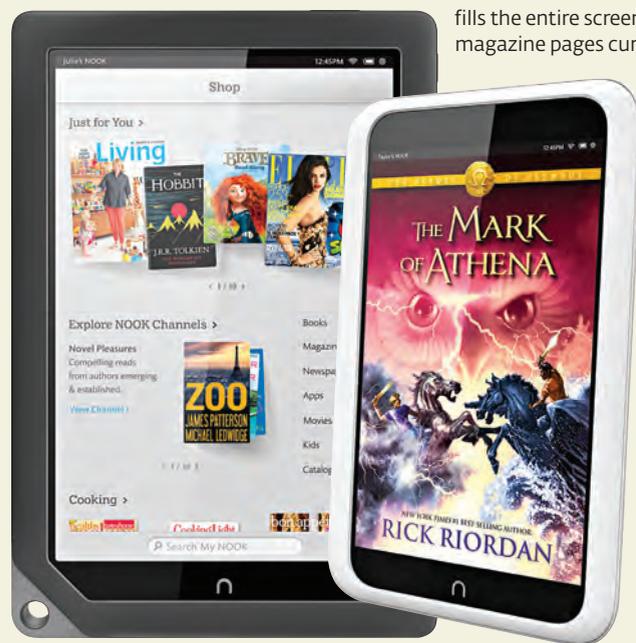
**Unique features are helpful.** Both Nooks have features that distinguish them from other tablets we've seen. For example, you can set up as many as six personalized accounts on a single device.

You select an account by dragging its icon to open up the associated user's profile, which contains that user's books, magazines, apps, and scrapbooks. With parental controls, you can set up children's accounts that restrict their ability to browse, shop, or access files in the device's library.

Scrapbooks are another useful feature. When reading a magazine or catalog, you can clip a page and add it to a scrapbook by dragging two fingers down the side of a page or by using an onscreen scissor icon that you summon with a touch.

**Bottom line.** If you're looking for a small tablet, the Nook HD is a fine choice at an excellent price. It's quite portable, even compared with other 7-inch tablets. The sharp text that the high-resolution display renders should especially please readers.

While the selection of content and "curated" apps is more limited than the iPad's, or even those in a number of other Android stores, it's enough for most people, especially given its broad selection of magazines.



**HI-RES DUO** The Nook HD and HD+ nearly match the resolution of the Apple Retina display.

## A fine iPad in a small package

If you're looking for a more portable and affordable iPad, the iPad Mini delivers, our preliminary tests found. Apple has managed to shrink most of what's good about the 9.7-inch iPad into a smaller package.

**It's mid-sized, yet thin and light.** With a 7.8-inch screen, the Mini offers more real estate than 7-inch Android tablets. But bigger doesn't mean heavier. In fact, it weighs just under 0.7 pounds, the same as the lightest 7-inch tablets and roughly half as much as a full-sized iPad. It's also the thinnest tablet we've seen.

**The screen is good enough.** Resolution is much lower than on the newest full-sized iPad or Nook HD. But the crisp text holds its own against the best 7-inch tablets and the non-Retina iPad 2. Colors and viewing angles actually match those of the Retina display.

**It's fine for media.** When you're viewing photos on the Mini, each image fills the entire screen, without the black bars around the photo that waste screen space on other tablets. The Mini's cameras—720p video in the front and 5MP in the rear—are the same as on the latest full-sized iPad. The audio is less rich than the full-sized iPad's but just as loud. The Mini even one-ups the larger iPad's mono speaker with its own pair of stereo speakers, though you must be really close to hear the stereo effect.

**It feels like an iPad.** Apple maintained the iPad experience for reading or using apps. Magazines look great, book text is fine, and with the Mini's size and weight, reading won't tire you quickly. A game that ran on a full-sized iPad worked the same on the Mini.

A 16GB, Wi-Fi Mini costs \$330; with 3G/4G capability, \$460. Models with 32GB and 64GB are also available at higher prices.

**Bottom line.** In shrinking the iPad, Apple didn't compromise much. Instead, it produced a tablet that's better suited, in important ways, for reading.

**SKINNY MINI** The iPad Mini is the thinnest tablet we've seen.



**NEW KID** Microsoft's tablet (shown with optional keyboard) is strong on design.

## Windows finds its touch in Surface tablet

Microsoft's new 10.6-inch Surface tablet with Windows RT arrived as we went to press. Here's what our testers found:

**An excellent display.** The screen rivals that of the iPad in some ways but falls short in others. Viewing angles were as good as those on the full-sized iPad. Colors also looked great. The display was as bright as those on the best tablets we've tested, making it quite readable in a brightly lit environment.

Microsoft says the technology the Surface uses produces sharp text and very detailed photos. Text did look good, but it wasn't as sharp as on the iPad and Nook. Photos had less detail than on an iPad. Videos looked good, but the speakers sounded weaker and more muffled than on an iPad. Volume controls were easy to access when the Surface was on its stand.

**It's not a PC.** Windows RT, a version of Windows 8 designed for tablets, can run apps from the Windows Store and special versions of Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote.

Even though it's Windows-based, the Surface doesn't run traditional computer applications, such as Quicken or Photoshop. To use those on a Microsoft tablet, you need the more powerful Surface with Windows 8 Pro, which can also run the apps from the Windows Store. That Surface model wasn't available at press time.

**Apps are limited.** The shelves at the Windows Store looked somewhat bare. There was no Facebook or Twitter app, for example, both of which are available for iPad and Android tablets. Microsoft says new apps are coming daily. As with other app stores, the Windows Store lets you install any app that you buy on multiple devices—five in this case. You can buy movies and music from Xbox services.

**Thin but heavy.** The Surface with

Windows RT is as thin as the thinnest 10-inch tablets. But at 1.5 pounds, it's heavy. It's also longer than the smaller, squarer iPad. Its weight and shape work against the Surface when you hold it for an extended period.

**A stand and keyboards help.** A built-in stand helps support it at a comfortable angle on a desk or table. Two optional, well-designed Microsoft keyboards—the Touch Cover and the Type Cover—help, too.

The Touch Cover is thin but full-sized. Its flat surface requires more pressure when typing than you might be used to, but its audible feedback helps. An oddity we found: When we folded it under the tablet and laid it on a metal surface, the tablet went to sleep. The Type Cover is thin, too, but more like a traditional keyboard. Both models attach to the Surface using magnets.

**A flexible interface.** Windows RT uses the same "live" tile interface that the Windows 8 computers and phones run. The Mail tile, for example, continuously displays your most recent e-mail. The Photo tile cycles through your photo library. There's also a tile on the screen for each app you install, which you tap to launch the app. The interface is customizable. You can change the size of many tiles and rearrange them.

The 32GB Wi-Fi Surface costs \$500 without the Touch Cover. You can save \$20 off the cost of buying a Touch Cover separately by bundling the pair for \$600. A 64GB version of the Surface with the Touch Cover costs \$700.

**Bottom line.** The Surface has a lot going for it, including an excellent display. But if you're a serious online user, you'll find the software selection limited, even with apps such as Word and Excel. Xbox content may keep you entertained, but Microsoft has a long way to go before its store compares with the stores for iPads and Android tablets.



# Tablet keyboards make typing a snap

If you find your tablet's onscreen keyboard awkward to use for more than a short time, consider one of these add-ons:



▣ **Apple Wireless Keyboard** \$70  
**Compatible with:** All iPads.  
**What we like.** It's small, weighs 0.7 pounds, has large keys, including some shortcuts, and can be used with Mac computers.  
**What we don't like.** Buttons aren't customized for iPad, so some serve no purpose. There's no stand, or Home or Lock button. It uses two AA cells, which you must replace.  
**Bottom line.** Its small size makes it well suited for traveling.



▣ **Logitech Tablet Keyboard for Android 3.0+** \$70  
**Compatible with:** Tablets running Android 3.0 and above.  
**What we like.** It has large keys with tablet controls and shortcuts. It doubles as a stand.  
**What we don't like.** At 1.1 pounds (with case), it's a bit heavy. It uses four AAA cells that you must replace. It lacks Screen Lock and Brightness controls.  
**Bottom line.** It's versatile and compatible with a variety of Android tablets.



▣ **Logitech Ultrathin Keyboard Cover** \$100  
**Compatible with:** iPad 2 and later.  
**What we like.** It weighs 0.7 pounds. As a stand, it's very stable. There are customized keys for important functions. The built-in battery is rechargeable.  
**What we don't like.** The keys are slightly smaller than on some other models.  
**Bottom line.** Even with the stand, it's lightweight and portable.



▣ **Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 Keyboard Dock** \$80  
**Compatible with:** 10.1-inch Galaxy Tab.  
**What we like:** The dock has controls, such as Home, Menu, and Lock Screen, plus app shortcuts. The stand is handy for long periods of typing, and the dock has an additional speaker port.  
**What we don't like.** At 1.3 pounds, it's a bit heavier than the Galaxy Tab itself. The tablet can be used only in landscape mode.  
**Bottom line.** Versatile and easier to use than typing on the screen.



▣ **Targus Bluetooth Wireless Keyboard** \$65  
**Compatible with:** iPad, Android, Windows (all versions).  
**What we like.** It's very portable and weighs 0.7 pounds. It has large keys, including a number of keys for shortcuts.  
**What we don't like.** It isn't customized for specific models. There's no stand or case. It uses two AAA cells that you have to replace periodically.  
**Bottom line.** This is a good choice if you're on a budget and travel often.



▣ **Zagg Zaggfolio Keyboard Case** \$100  
**Compatible with:** iPad 2 and later, Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 (different models).  
**What we like.** It has large keys and doubles as a protective case and stand. There are tablet-specific keys and shortcuts. The battery is rechargeable.  
**What we don't like.** It's bulky and weighs 1.2 pounds. The model for the Galaxy Tab 10.1 is a very tight fit for that tablet.  
**Bottom line.** It's a lot more versatile than other keyboards.

## Two models for the Surface



Touch Cover



Type Cover

▣ **Microsoft Touch Cover** \$120  
 ▣ **Microsoft Type Cover** \$130  
**Compatible with:** Microsoft Surface RT.  
**What we like.** Both are thin, can double as a cover, and have full-sized keys and a convenient touchpad. The Touch Cover weighs 0.4 pounds, and the Type Cover weighs 0.5 pounds.  
**What we don't like.** The tablet can be used only in landscape mode. The Touch Cover's flat surface can take some getting used to, but the Type Cover's keys move when you press them.  
**Bottom line.** Both are well suited to traveling.

## Do you need an accident-protection plan? Probably not.

In a recent survey of readers who bought a new tablet since 2010, almost one in five bought a service contract or extended warranty for the device. The figure was about one in four for those who bought iPads.

The leading reason by far for getting a plan, cited by 59 percent of buyers, was to cover accidental damage. But like most extended warranties, a protection plan for a tablet isn't really a good buy, our data suggest. For example, only 4 percent of the 7,217 tablet owners in the survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research

Center, had repaired their tablet for any reason. And the vast majority of those tablets had been repaired within their first year, when many might well have been covered by the manufacturer's warranty or the free insurance provided by some credit cards.

Though it's true that manufacturer warranties don't cover accidents, fewer than half of the repairs in the survey were made for that reason. And only 8 percent of those who bought a warranty had used it for a repair.

Plans don't come cheap, either. The median price respondents paid for AppleCare, Apple's

extended plan for iPads, was \$82 and, for non-iPad tablets, \$61. AppleCare also has a \$49 per-incident charge for repairs due to an accident. And should your iPad be damaged, you won't necessarily get a brand-new replacement. Plan terms allow for repairs to be made to your unit or for it to be replaced with a refurbished unit.

If you must buy a plan to cover accidents, try to pay as little as possible. For an iPad, consider accidental coverage that's cheaper than AppleCare, such as the \$28, two-year accidental plan sold at Walmart.

# Protecting Mom & Dad's money

What to do when you suspect financial abuse

**BREACH OF TRUST**  
Arthur Green of Brooks, Maine, fought back when he says his relatives tried to evict him from his home.

**T**HE NEW YORK POST called it the “swindle trial.” Jurors likened it to a “Shakespearean tragedy.” When New York socialite Anthony D. Marshall was convicted of defrauding and stealing from his elderly mother, philanthropist Brooke Astor, reports detailed how he conspired with lawyer Francis Morrissey to amend her will in his favor, took millions without her consent, and lifted paintings from her walls while she languished in her Park Avenue home. The trial painted a portrait of greed and filial neglect. Both men were sentenced to one to three years in prison and are currently out pending appeal.

Elsie Brooks’s lifestyle was a world apart from Astor’s, but their stories are tragically similar. When she was 72 she sold her mobile home and moved in with her daughter and granddaughter in Monterey, Calif. She decided she didn’t want to deal with her finances any longer and let the two take control. But her daughter, Lisa Karen MacAdams, and granddaughter,

Christi Schoenbachler, drained Brooks of jewelry, furniture, and an annuity worth almost \$90,000, and abandoned her at a nursing facility, according to court documents. They were convicted of grand theft and financial elder abuse, both felonies, and two counts of misdemeanor elder abuse. Last summer, a California appeals court stayed one of Schoenbachler’s misdemeanor charges.

Elder financial abuse is “the ultimate betrayal,” says Colleen Toy White, a superior court judge in Ventura County, Calif.,

who sees roughly 40 cases of such abuse each month. “It’s shocking to see how vulnerable the elder person is.”

We’ve told you about scams by strangers, among them fraudulent sweepstakes phone calls and investments, and grandparent scams (“Scamnation!,” October 2012 issue). Far more insidious are deceptions by neighbors, friends, employees, and relatives—the very people entrusted to care for and protect seniors.

Such abuse can be financially and emotionally devastating. And experts say it’s likely to increase because of a stalled economy and an aging population. Awareness is rising thanks to cases such as Astor’s. Yet because seniors might not recognize when it happens to them or are too ashamed to speak, the crime lurks largely out of sight.

In a randomized New York telephone survey released in 2011, for instance, seniors mentioned being victims of financial exploitation more frequently than any other type of abuse. Yet the study estimated that only 1 in 44 incidents of financial elder

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 1 in 44

That’s the estimated rate of financial-elder-abuse cases that are ever documented, according to a 2011 New York state elder-abuse study.



**FRONT-PAGE NEWS** Tabloid coverage of the Brooke Astor case helped raise awareness of elder financial abuse.

abuse is officially documented.

“Nearly every time I lecture on financial abuse, people will approach me with their personal stories,” says Elizabeth Loewy, a Manhattan assistant district attorney and lead prosecutor on the Marshall case. “They will talk to me about their grandmother, aunt, or neighbor, usually a senior with cognitive issues, who had ‘this problem.’ And it’s like a light will go on, and they’ll ask, ‘So this could be a crime?’”

## Unreported crimes

Financial exploitation of elders is broadly defined as the illegal or improper use of the funds, property, or assets of people 60 and older. In the New York survey, 4.2 percent of older people surveyed said that they’d been exploited by family members or others. In a national study from 2009, 5.2 percent of older Americans said they’d been victimized by family members, and 6.5 percent said they’d been exploited by others. A seminal national study by the MetLife Mature Market Institute found that the cost of such abuses is at least \$2.9 billion a year. Yet John Migliaccio, the institute’s director of research and gerontology, acknowledges that the study’s methodology—pulling from compiled news reports of abuse—underestimates the crime’s true price. “What we’re seeing is a tip of the iceberg,” he says.

Nevertheless, the study reports some startling facts: In 107 cases, seniors lost an average of more than \$145,000 from fraud committed by family, friends, caregivers, and neighbors. In 159 cases involving fraud by strangers, the average loss was more than \$95,000.

Studies of investment abuses tell similar

## Theft and fraud by loved ones is on the rise, officials say.

stories. In a survey last year of about 2,600 financial planners by the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, 56 percent said they knew older clients who had been subject to unfair, deceptive, or abusive practices. Among reported cases, the average loss estimate was \$140,500; the median was \$50,000. Only a quarter of surveyed CFPs said the crimes’ perpetrators rarely or never knew the victim.

Law-enforcement and social-services professionals see exploitation rising sharply. Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Kilmartin’s office opened 128 financial-elder-abuse cases in 2011, a 40 percent rise from 2010. Paul Greenwood, a deputy district attorney in San Diego and head of the county’s elder-abuse protection unit, says the office will prosecute about 200 cases this year. “I’ve never been busier,” he says.

Better reporting contributes to that growth, Greenwood says. So does the flat economy. “As people become more desperate from the economy, they need that extra money,” says Sally Smith, adult protective services case manager supervisor at the Franklin County (Ohio) Office on Aging.

## Caregivers and freeloaders

Experts say it’s not only the volume of cases that have swelled but also the variety. Greenwood says fraud committed by strangers such as unlicensed home contractors and phone sweepstakes scammers is bigger

than ever. So are crimes involving people in close contact with seniors. Ninety percent of abusers are family members or trusted others. Of all reported elder-abuse cases, financial exploitation is reported most frequently.

“The referrals we get run the gamut, from someone having their Social Security check being taken to an account drained of over \$200,000,” Smith says.

Professional caregivers pose particular risks because of their closeness to the victims and, perhaps, their generally low wages. We unearthed numerous cases in which health aides, either in the home or in an institution, had taken items, cash, or Social Security checks from their elderly charges, or worse. The New York study found that 12 percent of elder abuse was perpetrated by home health aides.

“I see a lot of middle-aged women, unskilled caretakers,” Toy White says. “For the first time in their lives that we know of, they start to steal. The temptation of the money is so great.”

New “friends” also can be perpetrators. Cynthia Gartman, president of Ikor, a for-profit advocacy and guardianship service based in Kennett Square, Pa., recalls an elderly woman with diminished mental capacity supporting a number of predators, including a minister. One was taking the woman shopping once a week so that she’d buy the freeloader groceries and supplies.

In a classic elder-abuse scenario, the predator isolates the older person, creating an environment of manipulation, intimidation, and fear. In 2012, Rodney Chapman of Damariscotta, Maine, was sentenced to five years in prison after pilfering the life savings—more than \$300,000—of his wid-

## Watch for these warning signs

Be suspicious if the elderly person has a new “best friend,” becomes socially isolated, never seems to be available or able to come to the phone, or is hesitant to have contact with others unless his or her caregiver is present. Also be on alert for:

- Unpaid bills when someone else has been designated to make payments.
- Missing property, large or unexplained withdrawals from bank accounts, or transfers between accounts.
- Excessively large reimbursements or “gifts” to caregivers or friends.
- New authorized signers on a person’s bank account.

- Changes in banks or attorneys.
- Bank statements and canceled checks no longer coming to the person’s home.
- Unfamiliar signatures on checks and other documents.
- Changes in spending patterns, such as purchases of items the senior doesn’t need.
- Lack of personal amenities such as clean clothes and grooming items.
- Changes in documents such as a will or power of attorney, or a change in beneficiaries that the senior can’t completely explain or comprehend.
- Excessive interest in the senior’s finances by a caregiver, friend, or relative.



**BIG CASELOAD** Judge Colleen Toy White handles about 40 financial-elder-abuse cases a month.

owed neighbor, Gwendolyn Swank, now 86. According to a court document and police reports, Chapman played on Swank's fears of reported drug trafficking in the area and encouraged her to pay phony law-enforcement agents for her protection. On several occasions, he ordered the frightened woman to hide in her house. He took away her phone, restricted visitors, coerced her into drinking whiskey, and limited when she could drive. Investigators later determined that Chapman had spent some of Swank's money to renovate his home and "blew" the rest.

"By the time we intervened, she was down to living on peanut butter and rice cakes," Lincoln County, Maine, Detective Robert McFetridge told the Bangor Daily News in June 2012. "She was really a prisoner in her own home."

### The ne'er-do-well grandson

By far the most disturbing abuse is by family members themselves. Kin who seem reliable can turn bad from greed or desperation. They can coerce an older relative into giving up money or control of assets, threaten or intimidate, or like Astor's son, steal outright. They can ask a cognitively impaired person for repeated loans and never try to repay. Or they can abuse power of attorney or a joint account to siphon funds. "You especially want to trust family members," says Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff. "But even your loved ones could try to hurt you."

Those cases can also involve neglect or physical abuse. "Financial abuse is often the motivator for beating up Grandpa or neglecting Mom," says Kathleen Quinn, executive director of the National Adult

Protective Services Association, which represents state and local programs that investigate abuse of vulnerable adults and takes steps to protect the victims. "You're not getting her the care she needs because you want the money for yourself."

An archetypal exploiter is a ne'er-do-well son, nephew, or grandson, living on

## Financial abuse is often a prelude to physical abuse.

Grandma's couch and borrowing or stealing money. He might have emotional scars or a drug habit, or he might view his elderly relative as an easy source of cash.

Another threat is a relative acting as a caregiver who starts with good intentions but then siphons money from her charge's accounts. "Many will write themselves a check to gift money to themselves," says Steve Starnes, a certified financial planner in McLean, Va., who counsels advisers on dealing with the elderly. "They feel like, 'I'm looking after my loved one and I deserve something in return.'"

At the heart of these cases is a grievous breach of trust. Arthur Green, 74, of Brooks, Maine, signed over the deed to his lake-front home and adjoining cottage to his granddaughter, Nevin Bennoch, assuming that he could live there rent-free through retirement, according to Green's attorney, Denis Culley, of the nonprofit Legal Services for the Elderly in Augusta, Maine. Instead, Bennoch and other family members moved into Green's house, put the

### ▶ What would you do?

You've given your favorite nephew several loans. His requests are getting larger and more frequent. He can get very angry when challenged, so you're reluctant to say no.

**SOLUTION** If you have a hard time refusing his requests, get someone to assist you with your finances. Then you can tell the nephew that you are no longer handling your money and he will have to go through the other person with his requests. That takes you out of the position of having to say no and lets him know that someone else is looking over things, so he might be more likely to stop asking, suggests Sally Smith, adult protective services case manager supervisor, Franklin County (Ohio) Office on Aging.

cottage up for sale, and began a campaign of harassment, Culley said. When Green, a former construction worker, was served with an eviction notice, he contacted Culley, who fought successfully to return his properties. Without the agency's help, Green says, "I'd probably be under a bridge in a cardboard box."

Sometimes prosecutors and judges characterize such financial shenanigans as civil cases, rather than criminal ones, which could prevent or delay their resolution. Prosecutors also may be unwilling to use seniors as witnesses if their mental capacity is in question. And often the victim may not want to talk, out of shame or fear of losing their independence. Smith of the Franklin County Office on Aging recalls a client who was sitting in the dark because her son was taking her Social Security checks and not paying her utility bills. She refused to press charges.

Predators who succeed once often try again. "You don't want to admit that you were taken the first time," says Jaye Martin, executive director of Maine's Legal Services for the Elderly. "So you don't say no when they keep coming back."

As in domestic-abuse cases, victims may fear their abuser's wrath if they report them—or they might be afraid of losing them. "Most of the time the person who's exploiting her is her caregiver," Smith says. "So if they go to jail, who's going to take care of her?"

In fact, the similarity to domestic violence helps explain why elder financial abuse goes underreported. "It took people a while to wrap their heads around the idea that domestic violence was a crime," says Loewy, the Manhattan assistant district

attorney. “We’re where domestic violence was about 20 years ago.”

## What’s being done

Those problems haven’t stopped law-enforcement and other professionals from pushing to improve awareness and prevention of financial exploitation of older people. With little federal coordination and funding, most activity happens at the state level. Experts we interviewed in several states mentioned improvements in recent years in the communication among adult-protective-service workers, emergency medical personnel, police officers, prosecutors, and other workers to identify and deal with suspected crimes.

Strained state budgets challenge more progress. Some jurisdictions in California, for instance, have established dedicated courts like that of Toy White to handle the growing number of elder-abuse cases. A spokeswoman for the California Administrative Office of the Courts expressed concern about the elder courts’ survival in the face of state budget cuts. In spite of a burgeoning elderly population, Maine’s Legal Services for the Elderly has seen its funding remain flat over the past decade, Martin says.

In 25 states, financial institutions are required to report suspicious withdrawals from seniors’ accounts and other uncharacteristic activity, according to the American Bankers Association. The ABA says it supports its member banks with education, including training that focuses on teaching employees to identify behavioral and transactional indicators that could signify financial abuse.

But a recent Government Accountability Office report found examples where bank employees missed opportunities to identify elder exploitation. Banks’ misconceptions about federal privacy laws also may



**FRONT LINES** Protective-services professionals like Sally Smith, left, report an alarming rise in abuse. Smith is shown here with a colleague, Iva Hatten.

make them unwilling to release bank records to investigators, the report found.

On the federal level, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, established by the 2010 financial-reform law, houses the Office of Financial Protection for Older Americans, which works to prevent abusive and fraudulent financial practices related to seniors. Several agencies publish material on preventing and avoiding identity theft, phone scams, consumer frauds, investment cons, and other swindles for seniors and others.

But a potentially powerful federal weapon against financial elder abuse remains stuck in neutral. The Elder Justice Act, part of the 2010 health-care reform law, authorized more than \$700 million over four years for preventing and dealing with elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, mostly by funding state adult protective-services agencies. Congress, however, has failed to fund the “discretionary” expenditure despite a sharp rise in need. According to a 2012 report by the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities, almost 70 percent of state adult protective-services agencies reported a rise in caseloads of up to 20 percent in the past five years; 16 percent saw rises of 20 to 30 percent.

That lack of funding could backfire. Without timely intervention, victims stand a greater chance of becoming indigent and dependent on government support. A 2012 study by the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services, for instance, found that older financial-abuse victims in 2010 who resorted to the state’s Medicaid program for their care had lost an average of \$480,000. Such victims could cost the

program almost \$9 million, the study projected. “It costs victims, families, financial institutions, and the taxpayer,” says Quinn at the National Adult Protective Services Association.

## Protect yourself

Preventing financial exploitation by the people you know might require taking legal precautions; at the very least you’ll need to have some uncomfortable conversations with friends and family. You might need to revisit plans you’ve made before—and create new ones.

**Hire the right professionals.** Engage a CPA or certified financial planner to handle such concerns as how much money you can withdraw safely from retirement funds. Hire an estate-planning attorney with elder-law expertise to write your will and power-of-attorney documents; they can also craft trusts, which can limit relatives’ access to your money. A professional daily money manager can help you deal with bill-paying, insurance claims, phone calls to financial institutions, and troubleshooting. (See the box on the facing page for information on how to find professionals.)

**Set up your documents.** Consider carefully to whom you give power of attorney. Though legally that person is your fiduciary—charged with acting in your best interest—in practice he or she could do anything with your money, even without your knowledge. Don’t assume the person closest to you will do the best job; you might be better off giving it to someone more detached and financially secure.

Experts told us that for no extra cost, the power-of-attorney document can be drawn up with limits, such as assigning a rela-

### ► What would you do?

Several times when you’ve called your aunt’s home in another state, her caregiver tells you she’s sleeping, or too tired, or just can’t come to the phone.

**SOLUTION** Contact law enforcement to conduct a “well check.” They will make contact with your aunt and report back to you what they find. Whenever you suspect abuse, neglect, or exploitation, immediately contact your state’s abuse hotline, says Allison Bryant, statewide elder-abuse prevention coordinator for the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

tive or friend to monitor the person with power of attorney, mandating a periodic written report of financial transactions, or assigning joint powers of attorney, which requires two signatures on every check. You can also split the chores, giving one person authority over financial matters and another control of health decisions. Have your lawyer hold the physical papers granting power of attorney, to ensure that your appointee can't prematurely present it to your investment company or bank to gain unnecessary access.

**Arrange your everyday accounts.** Set up direct deposit of payments such as tax refunds, pension benefits, and Social Security. As of March 1, 2013, all Social Security benefits must be paid electronically or on a debit card. (Go to [ssa.gov/deposit](http://ssa.gov/deposit) for details.) Set up automated bill pay with your bank for your mortgage, utility bills, and other regular expenses. Have financial institutions send statements and alerts to a trusted person who has no access to any of your accounts to check for fraud.

Avoid sharing a large bank account or a credit card with another person. If you need or want someone else to pay bills for you, create a shared account and arrange to transfer only enough money each month to cover the bills. Get to know officers and tellers at your local bank or credit union. Ensure that they have an up-to-date signature card and contact information on file.

**Secure your home.** Make sure any caregiver you're considering undergoes a background check. Don't assume that a placement agency will do a thorough one.

Insist on a national, rather than a state, criminal check. To monitor in-home help, consider installing a surveillance camera if state law permits it.

Don't leave mail in an unsecured mailbox. Shred documents with identifying information. List and photograph all jewelry and valuables, so they can be traced to pawn shops if necessary. Keep small valuables in a locked drawer and photographs of them in a separate place.

## Safeguarding relatives

The most important action you can take on an older relative's behalf is to make sure he or she gets out and about. Elder abuse is correlated highly with social and physical isolation. In addition to making regular and unplanned visits yourself, arrange for outings and visits with friends, neighbors, clergy, and volunteers.

**Lay down the ground rules.** Hold a family meeting to discuss who will look

## Prevent financial problems by planning ahead.

after the older relative physically and financially. If one relative will handle the bulk of the care, have an attorney draft a "personal-care agreement" that outlines how much he or she should receive for services. "It's reasonable for a family member to be paid," says Starnes, the CFP. "That'll keep a lot of caregivers out of trouble,

## ▶ What would you do?

**You visit your father every few weeks. Recently you looked at his bank statement and saw several checks that he can't explain.**

**SOLUTION** Did your father write the checks? If he didn't and does not know who did, he should file a police report. A common tactic of abusers is to write checks to themselves from their victim's checkbook, expecting the senior to later forget or be confused about writing the check. If your father did write the checks and doesn't recall doing so, he may have a capacity problem. If that's the case, you should have him assessed by his physician, says Roger Demers, special assistant attorney general, Rhode Island Department of Attorney General.

knowing what the limits are."

**Set up a limited account.** If you're concerned about your relative's abilities to make financial decisions, set up a small account at a local bank for her. The account could, for instance, include a debit card and checks and have a spending limit of, say, \$300. Arrange with the bank to investigate checks written for more.

**Be available.** Accompany your relative to meetings with financial advisers and doctors; they can help you make plans for her protection. "Often people are nervous about having that conversation, but it doesn't have to be approached in an adversarial mind-set," Starnes says. "It can be, 'Mom, you've done such a great job, and I just want to help.'"

## Where to turn for information and help

**Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Office of Financial Protection for Older Americans** ([consumerfinance.gov/older-americans](http://consumerfinance.gov/older-americans)) receives and investigates consumer fraud complaints specifically related to mortgages, credit cards, banks, loans, and more.

**Eldercare Locator** (800-677-1116) refers and connects callers to local services in their communities, including meal and transport services, home care, support services, services for caregivers, and others.

**National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys** ([naela.org](http://naela.org) or 703-942-5711) offers a search for lawyers specializing in durable powers of attorney, conservatorship, estate planning, elder abuse, and other concerns.

**National Adult Protective Services Association** ([apsnetwork.org](http://apsnetwork.org)) provides a national map with links to abuse-reporting

hotlines by state.

**National Center on Elder Abuse** ([ncea.aopa.gov](http://ncea.aopa.gov)) has links to additional state directories of help lines, hotlines and elder-abuse prevention resources in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

**AARP Money Management Program** ([aarpmp.org](http://aarpmp.org)) pairs seniors of limited resources or people with disabilities with trained money-management volunteers. One service helps seniors who remain in control of their finances to balance their checkbooks and pay bills; the other focuses on those deemed incapable of handling their own funds. The program is offered in 21 states and the District of Columbia, though availability varies.

**American Association of Daily Money Managers** ([aadmm.com](http://aadmm.com)) has members nationwide who can assist seniors with

bill-paying, banking, insurance paperwork, and organizing records in preparation for income-tax filing, among other tasks.

**National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers** ([caremanager.org](http://caremanager.org)) includes professionals who can facilitate aspects of seniors' lives, including monitoring home-care workers, managing medical appointments, and identifying potential exploitation risks, among other services. Some geriatric-care managers can also pay bills and handle paperwork.

**AARP's Scams and Fraud page** ([aarp.org/money/scams-fraud](http://aarp.org/money/scams-fraud)) offers information on the latest frauds against older people.

**Better Business Bureau Scam Stopper** ([bbb.org/scamstopper](http://bbb.org/scamstopper)) has information on common scams and instructions on reporting a scam. You can sign up for scam alerts on the site.



Apple iPhone 5



Motorola Droid Razr M



LG Optimus G

# Smart phones, smart savings

## Inside the section

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HTC Evo 4G LTE

Samsung Galaxy S III

**H**OW IMPORTANT are our smart phones? Just consider how much we're spending on them. The average American household shelled out more than \$1,500 on phones and phone service in 2012, and the biggest spenders easily blew through twice that amount. Overall, spending on wireless services was up by 7 percent over 2011, even though many households cut just about every other expenditure they could.

Part of that spending spree came as owners of basic cell phones continued to trade up to their first smart phones, those Web-connected combinations of phone, mini-computer, and micro-compact camera. About 70 percent of CONSUMER REPORTS readers who responded to our annual survey on cell-phone service now own a smart phone, up from about 50 percent only two years ago.

Upgrading from a plain cell phone at

**BIGGER AND BETTER** Smart-phone displays have grown in size and responsiveness, increasing versatility and ease of use.

a major carrier isn't cheap. You have to buy the smart phone itself (usually \$100 to \$400 when signing a two-year contract) and fork over \$70 to \$110 a month for a plan with data service. That's a lot more than a basic phone plan, which generally costs \$40 to \$70 a month.

Even if you already own a smart phone, you might be tempted by the charms of a later model. The best of the new phones—including the Apple iPhone 5 and Samsung Galaxy S III and Note II—offer better cameras, bigger and more responsive screens, and faster processors for speedier Web access and app performance.

Cell-phone service remains among the lowest-rated of those evaluated by the Consumer Reports National Re-

## Data-hogging phone habits

It's easy to burn through the 2-gigabyte (that's 2,000 megabytes) monthly allowance of typical data plans, especially if you overdo any of the activities below when connected to the carrier's network. Use Wi-Fi instead of the data network when possible and limit these activities:

### 1 Watching video streams.

A high-quality video stream consumes almost 6MB per minute with a 4G connection. Streaming a video per day from YouTube for a month, or a single HD movie, could eat up 700MB of data—or more than a third of that 2GB budget. Use the phone's settings to reduce the resolution of videos you watch or upload.

### 2 Making video calls.

Face-to-face video calls, using the front-mounted camera found on most new smart phones, eat up a hefty 2.5 to 3MB a minute. Chat for 20 minutes once a week with your daughter at college and you would use up at least 200MB of data per month.

### 3 Uploading video.

Can't wait until a Wi-Fi network is accessible to upload that high-def video from your phone to Facebook? Think twice: Unless it's compressed, a 3-minute video clip in HD (1080p) can be about 300MB.

### 4 Streaming music.

Streaming favorite sounds to your phone from a subscription music service, a collection stored in the cloud, or an Internet radio station eats up a megabyte of data per minute. Listen for a half-hour of commuting on weekdays and during a few 20-minute workouts per week, and you've consumed more than 700MB of data in a month. Consider reducing the bit rate of streams (via settings) and storing music on the device rather than streaming.



### 5 Playing connected games online.

Shooting it out with other players in high-octane online games is way cool—and way costly. With every minute of play requiring a megabyte of data, a half-hour of play three times a week will easily burn through 360MB of data per month.

On the plus side, at least three activities you might think are data hogs usually use less than a megabyte of data per minute: surfing the Web, using maps and navigation, and sending e-mail (at least without attachments). If your phone has a data usage monitor, check it periodically to make sure you don't overdo it.

search Center. Yet the experiences of the 63,000 respondents to this year's survey offer glimmers of improvement.

As in years past, giant Verizon and smaller Consumer Cellular and U.S. Cellular stood out from the pack for satisfying customers with standard service. But there was also good news for subscribers to the other major carriers—AT&T, Sprint, and T-Mobile. Customers of all three who owned phones that connect to faster 4G networks (as does almost every phone they now sell under contract) were consistently more satisfied than subscribers with 3G who remain in the cellular slow lane.

Even the long-suffering patrons of lower-rated AT&T had something positive to report: They had the fewest problems—interrupted, downgraded, slow, or no service—with 4G service of any carrier.

Plans cost the same for 4G-capable and 3G-capable phones, but faster phones and faster connections can lead to higher bills. The two biggest carriers, AT&T and Verizon, have dropped their unlimited data plans for new customers, just as more people are buying smart phones and 4G networks allow you to tear through the megabytes. For example, in a 2011 study of 185,000 phone lines by Validas, a company that tracks cell usage and recommends plan savings, owners of the HTC Thunderbolt, an older 4G smart phone, used an average of 1GB of data per month. That's almost double the 565MB average usage by owners of iPhones, all of which accessed only 3G networks at the time of the study.

Many smart-phone owners may be unaware of all the ways their usage patterns

can run up data consumption. And it's not only data charges driving up costs. Carriers continue to swell bills with pesky charges such as a new-phone upgrade fee of \$30 at Verizon; AT&T has pushed its own upgrade fee from \$18 to \$36.

It's little wonder that for the first half of 2012, AT&T and Verizon were crowing to investors about profit margins of 41 and 50 percent, respectively. The latter isn't just a Verizon record. "It's one of the highest ever recorded for wireless carriers

## AT&T, Sprint, and T-Mobile 4G users were happier than 3G users.

around the world," says Phil Cusick, the telecom stock analyst for J.P.Morgan.

There are few signs that consumers won't pay for better phones and better service, but we offer ways to save—and be more satisfied, too—no matter what phone and plan you choose.

### ▶ Phones get smarter

Although they've achieved a high standard, smart phones vary in performance and price, even among the recommended models in the Ratings.

**Displays get better and bigger.** Within the past year, more phones have sharper displays, with 720p resolution and higher pixel counts per inch. They're also more accurate with colors and easier to read in

bright light. And typical screen size is edging up, with a norm of at least 4.3 inches for our recommended models.

Two new phones exemplify how manufacturers are making the extra real estate of the biggest screens work better for the user: the Samsung Galaxy Note II, whose 5.5-inch display is the new size champion among phones, and the LG Intuition, a 5-incher. Both let you write with a finger or stylus on top of photos, calendar appointments, e-mail messages, or other displayed content and share the content and note as an image via e-mail, messaging, or social networks. In portrait mode, phones also allow you to shrink the keyboard and slide it to either side of the screen to help smaller thumbs reach the farthest keys.

**Cameras improve.** Despite having much tinier lenses and image sensors, the best smart-phone cameras challenge subcompact cameras and compact camcorders in image quality. That said, smart-phone cameras have limits. Their performance in low light is generally worse than that of stand-alone cameras, and they have a slower maximum frame rate than camcorders (30 frames per second vs. 60 fps), resulting in less fluidity in video images. And so far no smart phone offers optical zoom-lens capability, although rising resolution (8 megapixels or more on many phones) should limit the degradation in quality as images are enlarged.

**More smart phones, fewer exclusives.** The basic cell phone isn't dead, but its smart sibling is edging it out. The major carriers now offer only a handful of basic phones, most of them sold by their prepaid subsidiaries or partners. And many basic models sold with contracts cost almost as much as an entry-level smart phone. Six of 10 basic phones from Verizon, for example, cost \$80 or more with a two-year contract.

### ▶ DID YOU KNOW?

## Sell, trade, or recycle

You can sell your old phone privately on Craigslist or eBay or to a company such as Gazelle, which in November was offering \$160 for a 16GB iPhone 4S, for example. Some phone manufacturers have trade-in programs. You could donate it to an organization such as Recycling for Charities or give it to someone. (Make sure you delete personal data.) Or simply keep the phone in case you lose or damage a new one and don't want to replace it until your contract expires and you're eligible for a new discounted phone.

## When to get a new smart phone

**It might seem unnecessary** to replace a working smart phone at the end of the customary 24-month contract period for most plans. But two factors make it smart to consider spending \$200 or so to get a new phone when you're eligible to do so:

**You'll pay for a new one, anyway.** Unless you opt to switch to a prepaid plan once your contract obligations are fulfilled (see "Which Phone & Plan?" on page 34), your monthly bill will probably continue at the same cost as before. That bill will include the amount the carrier sets aside to repay itself the difference (usually at least \$300) between what you paid for the smart phone and what the carrier paid the manufacturer for it.

In other words, after your contract is up,

you'll essentially be paying toward a new phone whether you get one or not. So why not get something for your money?

### Your old phone will show its age.

Operating systems and apps are designed and updated for the newest smart phones, with their faster processors, expanded memory, larger and sharper displays, improved cameras, and more. Accepting over-the-air updates to your operating system and apps when prompted to do so helps stave off obsolescence, and deleting apps you no longer use helps. But within a few years, your phone could struggle to muster the processing power, memory, or features it needs to make the most of new apps or an upgraded operating system—if it can accept them at all.

## Android phone, iPhone, or Windows Phone? How they compare

You now have three flavors of smart phone to choose from: Android phones, iPhones, and Windows Phones. (BlackBerry is still around but is geared mostly toward business use, so we won't cover it here.) Here's how they compare, with examples of available phones:

### Android OS

**The phones** If you want a wide choice of phones, you've come to the right place. There are half a dozen brands offering scads of phones that run on the Android operating system. Displays are the biggest around, as large as 5.5 inches, and this platform is the only one other than BlackBerry that has phones with a physical keyboard. Android phones stand out for innovative features such as Wi-Fi Direct, facial recognition, NFC for wireless sharing and mobile payments.

**Apps and more** Google Play carries a wide selection of music, apps, e-books, and other content from phone carriers, phone manufacturers, and providers such as Amazon.com. Payments through your Google account are easy, but sometimes you have to pay the carrier or app provider.

**The interface** The Android OS is as customizable as they come, thanks to a wide variety of widgets and other built-in tools for tweaking phone controls, as well as its look and feel. You can organize apps into folders, and you don't have to clutter your home screens with every app you own. Little-used apps can remain in a separate app drawer until you need them. But the interface and features can vary significantly from phone to phone, and OS updates can radically change features.



#### Samsung Galaxy S III

**Price range** \$200 to \$330 with two-year contract, including rebates. A brilliant 4.8-inch display, clever HD cameras, and ingenious options for sharing make the Galaxy S III ideal for social networkers.



#### Apple iPhone 5

**Price range** \$200 to \$400 with two-year contract, including rebates. The innovative iPhone 5 is a major step up from earlier models, including the recommended 4S. It retains its simple, familiar interface while boosting the IQ of Siri, the savvy voice assistant, and making the top-notch iPhone camera even better.

### Windows Phone

**The phones** Windows Phone is still playing catch-up, and there's only a small selection of phones from HTC, Nokia, and Samsung. Many of them have screens 4 inches or larger, and all let you launch the camera from a locked screen, even when it's protected by a personal identification number. The newest models support NFC technology for wireless sharing and mobile payments.

**Apps and more** You'll find a fairly small selection of music, video, apps, games (including Xbox), and other content from Microsoft, phone carriers, and phone manufacturers, nothing yet to compare with Android or Apple. You can pay via a Microsoft account in many cases, though sometimes you have to pay the carrier or app provider directly.

**The interface** Windows Phone is simple yet flexible, residing on two scrollable main panels. One panel houses apps, and the other has resizable Live Tiles that can display updates from social-network feeds and other sources. Large, colorful fonts provide a clear, distinctive presentation of e-mail, calendars, and other phone content. It has a similar look and feel to Windows 8 computers and tablets. But you can't create folders to organize apps, and panels can get unmanageably long.



#### Nokia Lumia 920

**Price** \$100 from AT&T with a two-year contract. It has unique advanced features such as wireless charging based on magnetic induction. One cool feature: You can erase people from photos, say, when shooting a landscape.

Even many cell phones from prepaid carriers such as Virgin Mobile and Tracfone are now less basic, adding features such as Web browsers and app stores that require data service. And the simple smart phones that prepaid carriers mostly offer are increasingly supplemented by some marquee models.

There's also less exclusivity. Carriers still have some phones that are theirs alone—Motorola's top-of-the-line Droid Razrs are sold only by Verizon, for example—but fewer than in the past. The days when iPhones, for example, were available only from AT&T are long gone. The iPhone 5 is

now available from three of the four major carriers as well as prepaid carrier Cricket. The highly rated Samsung Galaxy S III is offered with a contract by the big four carriers as well as Credo Mobile and U.S. Cellular, smaller carriers that got high marks in our Ratings. You can also get it prepaid from MetroPCS.

### ▶ Data plans are changing

Satisfaction scores with cell-phone service may be unchanged overall, but the following developments are addressing some old gripes while creating a few new ones.

**Data plans get metered.** The shift to

selling data in measured tiers may actually have benefited some smart-phone owners. Among respondents to our survey who switched to a metered data plan, 21 percent saved up to \$20 a month and 16 percent said they saved more than \$20. Those savings may result from subscribers fine-tuning their purchases by buying as little as 300MB for their smart phone for \$20 a month at AT&T, for example, rather than the previous \$30 charge for overbuying unlimited data. On the downside, 10 percent of respondents who switched said they paid up to \$20 more per month on a metered plan, and 9 percent saw their bill rise

by more than \$20 a month. At Verizon, for one, the price of 1GB of data a month, the minimum required by most smart-phone customers, has shot up to \$50. Previously, Verizon charged \$30 for 2GB and before that \$30 for an unlimited 3G data plan.

You might still see so-called unlimited plans advertised, but of the four major carriers, only Sprint offers truly unlimited data plans. AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon all reduce the download speed under certain circumstances on grandfathered and new “unlimited” plans—when you reach a data cap, for instance, or when the network is busy—a practice known as throttling. It’s usually allowed by the fine print in your service contract.

**Data becomes shareable.** Because they’ve all but ended truly unlimited data service, AT&T and Verizon now let customers share “buckets” of metered data among multiple family members and devices. They’ve also moved more toward making voice and messaging unlimited, and seemingly free, in those shared data plans. In reality, though, you pay for both through a per-device access fee of \$40 (Verizon) or \$30 to \$45 (AT&T) per smart phone per month. You can add devices other

than phones to the plans, at access fees of \$20 per laptop and \$10 per tablet.

**Overage alerts are now in place.** When users exceed their data, voice, or texting limits, carriers impose overage charges that can result in shockingly high cellular bills. This year, after prodding by the Federal Communications Commission and Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, CTIA-The Wireless Association agreed that its member carriers

## You can now get hot new phones even from some prepaid carriers.

will warn customers via e-mail and text before and after they hit their limits.

But you should still be mindful of your limits and react by reducing usage or switching to a higher monthly bucket of voice minutes, data, or messages. Thirteen percent of our readers surveyed last September who switched from unlimited to limited data plans said they were hit

with overage fees at least once. Our 2010 survey found that more than half of those who went over their voice, text, or data limits incurred penalties of at least \$50.

### ▶ How to save

The plan you pick and the cell-phone retailer you choose are likely to affect your cost of owning a particular phone far more than the price of the phone itself.

**Haggle for the phone.** Most shoppers don’t think to negotiate for a lower cell-phone price, but 17 percent of our cell-phone-buying survey respondents took a shot. Of that group, more than one in four succeeded. The median discount won was \$54, but a handful of hagglers knocked \$100 or more off the price.

**Consider a prepaid phone plan.** A no-contract plan is now worth serious consideration. Phones are better, reader satisfaction with prepaid service is relatively high, and service costs are lower.

You can pay \$250 more to buy the same phone from a no-contract carrier vs. a major provider, because the no-contract carrier can’t be assured of recovering some of the phone’s subsidized discount price through a two-year contract term.

## Protect the data on your phone

**In a recent survey**, half of CONSUMER REPORTS readers who own a cell phone told us they use their phones in ways that put their passwords, account numbers, and other sensitive information at risk. Yet one out of three of them didn’t take any steps to protect themselves. If they were to lose their phone, strangers could pore through their data, send malicious texts or e-mail that seem to be from them, and order merchandise from accounts they’ve set up. Here’s how to minimize your risk:

### Lock your phone

▶ Consider using a personal identification number or password on your phone so that others won’t be able to browse your life history or embark on an online spending spree. That tactic requires you to balance security and convenience, because you’ll have to enter a code every time your phone screen locks. To minimize the hassle, you could set a fairly long interval before your phone times out, say, 30 minutes.

▶ Install an app that can locate a phone and



remotely lock it or even erase its data. Options include Find My iPhone (free on iTunes) and Lookout for Android-based phones (free at Google Play). The Lookout app can back up your data. Other free backup services are the iCloud for iPhones and, for Android phones, Google Cloud Storage, Verizon’s Backup Assistant, and AT&T’s Mobile Backup. For Windows Phone devices, use SkyDrive.

### Keep apps in check

Many consumers realize there are at least some inherent risks in downloading apps to a phone but don’t understand the extent to which they compromise privacy, according to a nationally representative survey

conducted recently by the Consumer Reports National Research Center.

Eighty-one percent of respondents recognized that apps—even from reputable, well-known companies—can access personal information stored on a phone and share it with others. But almost

60 percent of those surveyed believed sharing data was illegal unless the phone’s owner explicitly agreed to that. And 53 percent thought it was illegal for an app maker with a privacy policy to share the user’s personal information with other companies. In fact, there are no legal protections against sharing this information. But three-quarters of survey respondents did realize that app markets, including Apple’s App Store and Google Play, don’t prevent app developers from sharing their information.

With smart-phone apps from any source:

- ▶ See what permissions you’ve granted installed apps (under Settings/Apps for Android phones and Settings/Privacy for iPhones). Uninstall any that are too nosy.
- ▶ Before downloading an app, scrutinize the permissions it requests. Reject any that want to do something suspicious, such as tracking your location if that seems unnecessary.

### Don’t get personal

When going online, be careful about disclosing personal information. Before selling or discarding a phone, wipe out your data by resetting the phone to the factory default. And remove SIM cards and memory cards, if applicable.

But monthly bills are usually lower for prepaid service, especially from prepaid specialists such as MetroPCS, which offers low-cost unlimited-everything plans. Prefer a big national carrier? AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon also offer prepaid service. Sprint does so through its Boost and Virgin brands.

Two-thirds of our survey respondents knocked more than \$20 a month off their bill by switching to prepaid, and 17 percent saved up to \$20 a month. Over two years, you can recoup the extra cost of the phone and more. Here's a tip: If you're coming off contract with a phone you like, you can often transfer that phone to a prepaid plan with your current carrier or a new one and pay less for service comparable to what you had on contract.

**Be careful when upgrading early.** Unless you're totally fed up with your current phone, try to stick with it until the contract runs out. If you upgrade early, you'll be hit with penalties and surcharges, including paying full price for the new phone. See "Can't Wait for That Must-Have Phone?" on page 36 for details.

**Think twice about insurance or an extended warranty.** It can easily cost \$500 to \$600 to replace a popular smart phone in midcontract, as salespeople pushing protection plans will remind you. But in our survey of cell-phone buyers, we found that only 15 percent polled bought a new phone because the old one broke, and only 2 percent bought one because their phone was lost or stolen.

Based on that, the value of insurance or an extended warranty seems questionable. That's especially true when you consider what a plan costs and what you get for the money. Phone replacement coverage can cost \$5 to \$9 a month and can come with a \$50 to \$150 deductible. Yet you might be entitled only to a repaired, refurbished phone rather than a new one.

Even so, close to one in three survey respondents purchased additional protection against loss or damage to their phone. Many said they felt it necessary to protect their investment in the phone.

But here's a better idea: Keep your old phone until the new handset's contract ends. If you lose or break the new phone, reactivate the old one by contacting the carrier and then syncing to your accounts to download contacts and more to the device. Then use the old model until you qualify for a free or discounted new phone.

## Overview

We recommend all of the retailers in our Ratings because each was satisfactory to a majority of survey respondents. Stores we call out below stand out for the reasons noted.

### BEST BUYING EXPERIENCE OVERALL

**A1 Apple.com**

**B1 Apple Store**

Whether shopping online or in walk-in stores, those who bought a smart phone at an Apple Store or online had a better overall experience than shoppers at any other store.

### GREAT PRICES AND SERVICE

**B2 Costco**

With dedicated wireless kiosks in every store, the warehouse retailer delivers

pleasing service along with its customary low prices and limited selection—which doesn't include iPhones. Costco charges an annual membership fee, usually \$55.

### OTHER STANDOUT OPTIONS

**B3 U.S. Cellular**

**B5 Walmart**

**B6 Best Buy**

U.S. Cellular was the best carrier walk-in store; only Apple Stores offered a better service and checkout experience. Walmart matched Costco for pleasing prices, and Best Buy is unequalled in selection, offering a variety of phones—such as iPhones, 4G Android phones, and simple prepaid phones—from a host of carriers.



## Ratings Cell-phone stores

In order of reader score, within types.

Better ← → Worse  
 ● ● ● ○ ● ●

Order	Retailer	Reader score	Survey results					
			Service	Checkout	Price	Selection	Website quality	Shipping
		0 100						
<b>A ONLINE STORES</b>								
1	Apple.com	88	●	●	●	○	●	●
2	VerizonWireless.com	76	○	○	●	○	○	●
3	att.com (AT&T)	73	○	○	○	○	○	●
<b>B WALK-IN STORES</b>								
1	Apple Store	87	●	●	●	○	●	●
2	Costco	81	●	○	●	●	○	—
3	U.S. Cellular	80	●	●	○	●	—	—
4	RadioShack	78	○	○	○	○	—	—
5	Walmart	78	●	○	●	●	—	—
6	Best Buy	77	○	○	○	●	○	—
7	Independents	76	○	○	●	○	—	—
8	Sprint	74	○	○	●	○	●	○
9	AT&T	74	○	○	○	○	●	○
10	Verizon	73	○	○	●	○	●	○
11	T-Mobile	69	○	○	●	○	○	○
<b>C SALES BY PHONE</b>								
1	Verizon	74	—	○	●	○	○	●

## Guide to the Ratings

Results are based on 9,774 responses from CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers who bought a new cell phone in the past two years. Survey results may not reflect the U.S. population as a whole. **Reader score** represents overall satisfaction with the retail experience. If all respondents were completely satisfied with a particular retailer, the reader score would be 100; a score of 80 indicates that respondents were "very satisfied" on average; 60, "fairly well satisfied." Differences of fewer than 6 points are not meaningful. **Survey results** reflect mean scores on a scale from "very poor" to "excellent." **Service** reflects Web support for online retailers, sales help for walk-in stores.

# Which phone and plan?

## Best combination of device, carrier, and plan for you



### ▶ You're buying for a crowd

You're a couple plus at least one child who use multiple devices (perhaps including a tablet or two) in a variety of ways.

**Leading option:** An array of phones—smart and basic, new and old—used with a well-priced family plan that shares data and offers ample voice and messaging for at least three users. Two-year cost for four phones and service: about \$5,000 and up.

**Service:** Family plans from standard-service carriers are one area where cell customers get a break, and more than two-thirds of users are on such plans. Consider U.S. Cellular if you live in its service area. It was one of the top carriers in the Consumer Reports National Research Center annual survey, which covered 23 metro areas. It offers one of the lowest-priced family plans—\$190 a month for a family needing two basic and two smart phones. The plan includes 2,000 voice minutes, unlimited messages, and 4GB of data service.

Credo Mobile (which uses the Sprint network yet rates higher than Sprint on

every measure), is another good option at the same price and limits. Although Credo doesn't carry as many phones as the majors, it offers the Samsung Galaxy S II and S III among its 10 smart phones.

Verizon should be our example family's third choice. It offers a plan comparable to the one above for \$210 per month. AT&T and T-Mobile cost the same or less—\$210 and \$180, respectively—but they're lower-rated on service quality. The appropriate Sprint plan would be the most expensive of the six carriers we compared, \$230 a month.

For \$10 a month you can add a tablet to your plan with AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon. You may need to spring for more data as well. All three provide average or better 4G service.

**Phones:** The handset needs of specific family members can vary widely, so we can't recommend one model that would suit everyone. Consult our Ratings on page 38. That said, consider a mix of smart and basic phones. If you're buying more than one phone at a time, look for discounts—or

simply ask, because some readers have been successful in haggling for them.

### ▶ You want the best

You're an avid smart-phone user, perhaps the owner of an iPhone or a leading Android model who's eager to upgrade to a newer version. And you want service that makes the most of such a device.

**Leading option:** A top-scoring smart phone to use with 4G LTE service from a carrier with top scores, especially for data satisfaction. Two-year cost for phone and service: about \$2,500 and up.

**Service:** With its superior scores and wide array of marquee phones, Verizon is your best bet overall among national carriers. AT&T, though it rates lower than Verizon in most respects, is also worth considering for want-it-all types because of its top 4G network rating and lower pricing for individuals who have lighter data, voice, and messaging needs.

But although AT&T offers a 300MB per month data plan add-on at \$20, an avid user with a 4G phone will want at least 2GB, and possibly more. AT&T's voice plans for individuals offer an option with 3GB of data—ample for most people—for \$30 a

### ▶ BY THE NUMBERS

Survey respondents who used the Web on their phones went online about as often as they made calls. Here's how they used their phones:

# 26%

accessed websites  
10 or more times a day.

# 22%

made voice calls  
10 or more times a day.



month. Verizon's data-share plan, the only option for new 4G customers, charges a hefty \$60 for a 2GB plan. But voice and texting can be pricier with AT&T. That makes it more expensive to get a plan from AT&T rather than Verizon if you need 2GB of data plus unlimited voice and texting.

U.S. Cellular was top-rated almost across the board but isn't nationally available and has only two high-profile phones, the Samsung Galaxy S III and Galaxy Note II. But if that phone appeals, this carrier is worth considering if you live in one of the 24 states where it's available (in the Midwest, Pacific Coast, and parts of New England and the South). Plan pricing tends to be on par with AT&T, but readers judged U.S. Cellular to be a much better value than any of the four biggest carriers.

No prepaid carrier that has favorable data scores in our Ratings offers any of the hottest smart phones.

**Phone:** The Apple iPhone 5 and Samsung Galaxy S III are available from Verizon and AT&T starting at \$200. Any of the recommended 4G AT&T and Verizon models from our smart-phone Ratings should suit your needs as well.

### Smart but not fancy

You want what a smart phone offers, including apps, e-mail, and Web surfing. But you don't crave the cutting-edge features and jumbo screens of the hottest new models, and you can settle for OK service—especially if forgoing extras saves you money.

**Leading option:** Buy a smart phone that performs well, maybe an older model. Use it with an inexpensive unlimited voice, texting, and data plan from a no-contract carrier with standout scores for data service. Two-year cost for phone and service: about \$1,500 and up.

**Service:** A leading nationally available

option is prepaid Straight Talk, which was more satisfying overall than contract service from any major carrier. It received data scores on a par with Verizon. (Some of its phones use the Verizon network.)

Straight Talk also scored highly for value; it charges \$45 a month for unlimited data, voice, and messaging, half as much as Verizon's least expensive plan. There's also no contract. If you're unsure about whether you really need a smart phone or will like Straight Talk, you can quit the service at any time and sell your phone or switch it to another carrier without paying an early-termination penalty.

Another leading prepaid-carrier option is Virgin Mobile, which also received high marks for value and data satisfaction.

**Phone:** You might pay more for a smart phone bought without a contract, but you should recoup the price difference within a matter of months through the lower monthly service fees.

Straight Talk has the Samsung Galaxy S II, a 4G phone (an older model that costs \$100 with a two-year contract from AT&T) for \$350. Virgin has the HTC Evo V 4G for \$300 and HTC One V 3G for \$200.

You can also spend less—as little as \$99 or so—for competent smart phones from prepaid carriers. The phones usually have smaller screens and less impressive cameras than the phones mentioned above, among other differences.

### Just the basics

You're among the 29 percent of our readers who get along without mobile Web and the 59 percent who make no more than a few cellular voice calls a day. Or perhaps

you're buying a first cell phone for your tween or young teen and want to keep data costs and usage down.

**Leading option:** An inexpensive voice-and-texting arrangement from a no-contract carrier, for use with a basic flip, slider, or keyboard phone. Two-year cost for phone and service: about \$200 and up.

**Service:** Consider Consumer Cellular, a highly rated national carrier catering to simpler wireless needs that bills monthly, even though there is no contract commitment; that's less complicated than a prepaid arrangement. Consumer Cellular uses the AT&T network. The carrier has a \$15 plan with 150 voice minutes a month; you can add a second line for \$10 a month. (A \$30 plan offers 750 minutes per month.) If you need to text, Consumer Cellular is affordable for that, too. It charges as little as \$2.50 for 100 messages per month, and bigger buckets are available.

Still more than you need? TracFone, among the better rated prepaid carriers, offers 60 minutes of airtime that must be used within 90 days for \$20, or less than \$7 per month. It also has monthly plans for as little as \$10.

**Phone:** With no-contract service, you must buy the phone, but simple models are relatively affordable. For Consumer Cellular, consider the Doro PhoneEasy 410, \$60, which has large buttons and other features that the carrier says make it easier for seniors to use, or for easier texting, the Motorola EX430, \$80, which has a physical QWERTY keyboard. With TracFone, the LG 500G, \$10, offers 5 hours of talk time on a battery charge.

*Ratings on next page*



### Overview

Standard cell-phone service, involving a bill at the end of the month, offers smart phones at a lower price but usually requires a contract. Prepaid service, either pay-as-you-go or with a monthly allocation, is usually contract-free but offers a more limited, and generally pricier, selection of smart phones.

### TOP CHOICE FOR SMART PHONES

#### A4 Verizon Wireless

Among the major carriers, this was the most satisfying overall and the standout for data service, an important consideration when using a smart phone. However, most new smart phones from major carriers now connect to high-speed 4G networks, and AT&T (A7) offered the least problematic 4G service; that makes the carrier worth considering for a 4G phone, despite a worse overall track record than A4.

### CONSIDER IF AVAILABLE TO YOU

#### A2 U.S. Cellular

This carrier has a coverage map that's nationwide, but it's available only to customers in 24 mostly Midwestern states. But it is a standout in almost every respect.

### SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE OPTION

#### A3 Credo Mobile

This carrier donates to social causes and offers satisfying enough service. It has relatively high prices but got stellar customer-support scores.

### BEST CHOICES FOR BASIC NEEDS

#### A1 Consumer Cellular

#### B1 TracFone

These carriers specialize in no-frills cell phones and service. A1 is a no-contract standard carrier aimed at seniors that offers standout customer service. B1 is a prepaid carrier that offers very inexpensive plans for minimal phone users. Both had voice service that was above average.

### BUDGET SMART-PHONE STANDOUTS

#### B2 Straight Talk

#### B6 Virgin Mobile

These no-contract carriers had solid scores. You'll generally pay more up-front for the phone with them than with a standard carrier, but they offer lower-cost unlimited, voice, text, and data plans and earned high marks for data.



## Ratings Cell-phone service

Summary Ratings, reflecting all cities surveyed, in order of overall score. Differences in score of fewer than five points are not meaningful. Better ← → Worse

Provider	Reader score	Survey results					Support		
		Value	Voice	Text	Data	4G	Phone	Staff knowledge	Issue resolved
	0								
	100								

### A STANDARD

1	Consumer Cellular*	88	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
2	U.S. Cellular	85	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
3	Credo Mobile	76	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4	Verizon Wireless	72	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
5	Sprint	66	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
6	T-Mobile	64	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
7	AT&T	62	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○

### B PREPAID

1	TracFone	82	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2	Straight Talk	79	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3	T-Mobile	76	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4	Verizon Wireless	75	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5	Net10	75	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6	Virgin Mobile	75	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7	MetroPCS	71	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
8	AT&T GoPhone	68	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

\*Offers no-contract service, but bills monthly like standard carriers.

## Can't wait for that must-have phone?

Think twice about buying that new model early. Upgrading can cost you, especially if you can't wait until your two-year contract runs out. Here's what the big four cell carriers charge to upgrade to a Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) halfway through the contract and at the end of the term. Totals below are for the cost of the phone, typically with a new two-year contract, plus upgrade fees and penalties.

Provider	Upgrade after month 12	Upgrade after month 24
AT&T	\$486	\$236
Sprint	\$586	\$236
T-Mobile	\$483	\$298
Verizon	\$600	\$230



**SEE OUR SMART PHONES VIDEO**  
Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for video.

# Ratings Cell service by city

In order of reader score, within 23 metropolitan areas. Differences in reader score of fewer than six points are not meaningful.

Better ← → Worse

Provider	Reader score	Survey results		
		Voice	Text	Data
	0	100		

## ATLANTA

Verizon	74	●	●	●
Sprint	68	○	●	○
T-Mobile	64	●	●	○
AT&T	60	●	○	●

## AUSTIN, TEXAS

Verizon	71	●	●	●
T-Mobile	68	○	○	○
Sprint	67	○	○	○
AT&T	62	○	○	●

## BOSTON

Verizon	70	●	○	●
T-Mobile	67	●	○	—
Sprint	67	●	○	○
AT&T	59	●	●	●

## CHICAGO

U.S. Cellular	85	●	●	—
Verizon	73	●	●	●
T-Mobile	68	○	○	○
AT&T	61	●	●	●
Sprint	52	●	●	●

## DALLAS-FORT WORTH

Verizon	74	●	●	●
T-Mobile	67	○	○	○
Sprint	67	○	○	○
AT&T	64	○	○	○

## DENVER

Verizon	71	●	●	●
Sprint	69	○	○	○
T-Mobile	66	○	●	○
AT&T	58	●	●	●

## DETROIT

Verizon	73	●	●	●
AT&T	64	○	○	●
Sprint	61	●	●	●

Provider	Reader score	Survey results		
		Voice	Text	Data
	0	100		

## HOUSTON

Verizon	77	●	●	●
T-Mobile	66	○	○	○
Sprint	62	○	○	○
AT&T	60	●	●	●

## KANSAS CITY

Sprint	78	●	○	●
Verizon	76	●	●	●
AT&T	66	●	○	○

## LOS ANGELES

Verizon	72	●	●	●
T-Mobile	67	●	○	—
Sprint	65	●	●	○
AT&T	57	●	●	●

## MIAMI

Verizon	73	●	●	●
Sprint	69	○	●	○
T-Mobile	66	●	○	○
AT&T	64	○	○	○

## MILWAUKEE

U.S. Cellular	85	●	●	●
Verizon	71	●	●	●
AT&T	60	○	●	●
Sprint	58	●	●	●

## MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL

Verizon	71	○	●	●
T-Mobile	66	○	○	○
Sprint	64	○	○	○
AT&T	63	○	○	○

## NEW YORK

Verizon	71	●	○	●
Sprint	68	●	●	○
T-Mobile	63	●	—	—
AT&T	60	●	●	●

## PHILADELPHIA

Verizon	70	●	●	●
T-Mobile	67	●	○	○
AT&T	65	○	○	○
Sprint	63	●	●	○

Provider	Reader score	Survey results		
		Voice	Text	Data
	0	100		

## PHOENIX

Verizon	75	●	●	●
Sprint	68	○	○	○
AT&T	67	○	○	○
T-Mobile	65	○	●	●

## SALT LAKE CITY

Verizon	71	●	●	●
T-Mobile	64	○	○	○
AT&T	62	○	○	○

## SAN DIEGO

Verizon	74	●	●	●
T-Mobile	68	●	○	○
Sprint	67	○	○	○
AT&T	63	○	○	○

## SAN FRANCISCO

Verizon	72	●	●	●
T-Mobile	66	○	—	—
Sprint	66	○	○	○
AT&T	57	●	●	●

## SEATTLE

Verizon	71	●	●	●
Sprint	68	○	○	○
T-Mobile	66	○	○	○
AT&T	62	○	○	●

## ST. LOUIS

Verizon	73	●	○	●
Sprint	72	●	●	○
AT&T	65	○	○	○

## TAMPA, FLA.

Verizon	73	●	●	●
AT&T	69	○	○	○
T-Mobile	68	○	○	○
Sprint	68	○	○	○

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

Verizon	70	●	●	●
Sprint	66	●	●	○
AT&T	65	○	○	○
T-Mobile	64	○	—	—

More Ratings on next page

## Guide to the Ratings

Based on responses from ConsumerReports.org subscribers with cell-phone service surveyed in September 2012. Only providers for which we had sufficient data of the specified type are included in the table. The **Ratings by city** show providers with sufficient data there, including standard and prepaid customers; not all carriers available in a city may be rated. In both charts, “—” indicates insufficient data. **Reader score** reflects respondents' overall satisfaction with cell-phone service and is not limited to the factors listed. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80 very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. The following ratings are based on the occurrence of problems

in the previous week and are adjusted for frequency of use: **voice** (no service, static); **text** (difficulty sending/receiving messages, delays); and **4G** (service unavailable, interrupted, or downgraded to slower service). Along with **issue resolved** (the percentage who said their issue was satisfactorily resolved in a timely manner), the preceding ratings are relative, reflecting differences from the average of all providers in all areas. The following reflect mean scores on a scale of “Very poor” to “Excellent”: **value** for money, satisfaction with **data** service, ease and speed of reaching support staff through the **phone** system, and support **staff knowledge**. Findings might not reflect the general U.S. population.





B4 HTC



C3 Samsung



D1 LG

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommended

yields excellent still photos and very good video, and its Siri voice assistant now works with apps, too. But unlike other 4G Verizon and Sprint smart phones, **A5** and **B2** can't simultaneously support a phone call and an Internet-based connection over the cellular network. That makes **D3** arguably the best iPhone 5 for multitaskers. **A4** squeezed a fairly large, 4.3-inch display into a relatively small case, yet it delivers performance and convenient features close to that of its siblings, **A1** and **A2**. The thin, lightweight **C2** has an especially intuitive interface. Cameras on all these phones let you snap a still while shooting a video.

**BEST FOR LONG BATTERY LIFE**

**A1 Motorola** Droid Razr Maxx HD (Verizon) \$300

This marathon performer delivered 13 hours of talk time on a single charge in our tests. It has a 4.7-inch screen and is almost identical to the less expensive and thinner **A2**, which has a shorter battery life.

**FOR A TABLET ALTERNATIVE**

**B3 Samsung** Galaxy Note II (Sprint, 16GB) \$300

**C3 Samsung** Galaxy Note II (T-Mobile, 16GB) \$370

With its 5.5-inch screen, this second-generation Note will be too big for some pockets and hands. But the phone's large display offers top-notch performance even in bright light. And you can shrink the dial pad and keyboard in portrait mode and slide them to the side of the screen for easier one-handed operation. It comes with a stylus that allows you to jot down and share notes or sketches on the memo app and crop photos by simply tracing over them. You can preview e-mails, videos, photo albums, Web pages, and other content just by hovering over them.

**BEST CHOICES WITH A KEYBOARD**

**A7 Motorola** Droid 4 (Verizon) \$100

**A9 Samsung** Stratosphere (Verizon) \$50

**B5 Motorola** Photon Q 4G LTE (Sprint) \$200

**C6 Samsung** Galaxy S Relay 4G (T-Mobile) \$150

These are fine choices for serious typists frustrated by virtual touch-screen keyboards. Their slide-out keyboards are among the best we've seen. They're clearly labeled and logically laid out and have five rows, with dedicated buttons for numbers across the top row. Their keyboards have directional buttons for more precise Web scrolling and cursor placement. **A7** and **A9** show predictive text while using the slide-out keyboard. **A9** also has a button for inserting emoticons into text and instant messages. **C6's** keyboard has convenient e-mail and messaging buttons to launch those apps.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results										Features						
					Ease of use	Messaging	Web browsing	Display quality	Voice quality	Phoning	Battery life	Camera: image quality	Camera: video quality	Portability	Operating system*	Display size (in.)	Broadband 4G data	World phone	Memory-card slot		
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model. We also list models of some phones offered by other carriers.																			

**C T-MOBILE** Less satisfying than the top carriers, but among the more satisfying in a few cities.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) 32GB, \$330	\$280	78	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.8	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	HTC One S	150	77	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.3	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB) Also available on AT&T, \$300	370	76	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	5.5	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	LG Optimus L9	80	76	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.5	5.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung Galaxy S Blaze 4G	100	74	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.0	4.9	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Samsung Galaxy S Relay 4G	150	73	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.0	4.9	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	T-Mobile myTouch 4G	0	69	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	3.8	5.1	●	●	●

**D AT&T** Among the less satisfying in almost all of the cities in our survey, but a standout for 4G service.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	LG Optimus G	200	79	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.7	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB)	200	78	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.8	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Apple iPhone 5 (16GB) 32GB, \$300; 64GB, \$400	200	77	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	i	4.0	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	HTC One X	100	76	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.7	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung Galaxy S II Skyrocket	100	76	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	LG Escape	50	76	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.3	4.9	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Motorola Atrix HD	100	75	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	LG Nitro HD	50	75	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	HTC Vivid	50	75	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Apple iPhone 4S (16GB)	100	74	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	i	3.5	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Samsung Galaxy Exhilarate	0	73	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.0	4.9	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Pantech Flex	20	72	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.3	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Nokia Lumia 900	0	71	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	W	4.3	8.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	HTC Titan II	200	71	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	W	4.7	16.1	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Sony Xperia Ion	100	71	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	4.6	12.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Samsung Focus 2	50	70	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	W	4.0	5.0	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	Samsung Rugby Smart	50	70	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	A	3.7	4.9	●	●	●

\*A=Android, i=iOS, and W=Windows Phone.

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## Reports

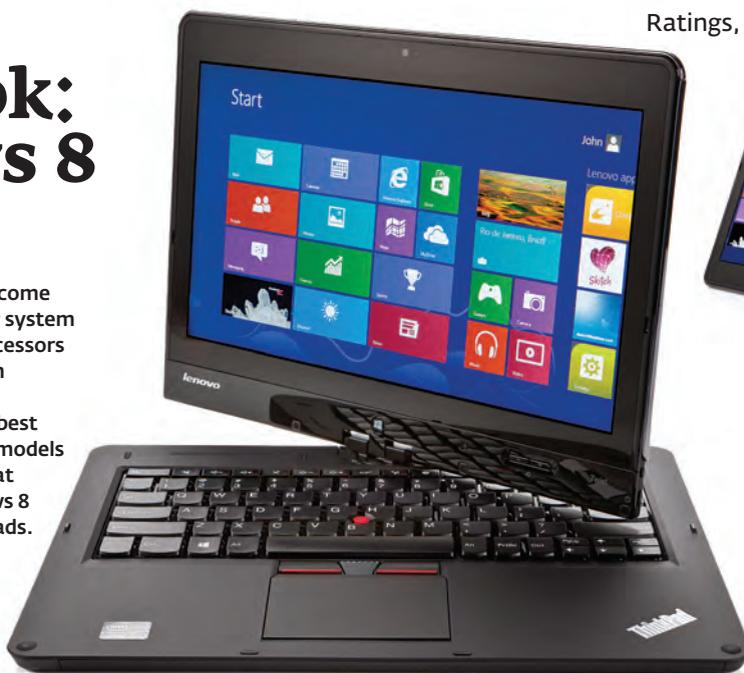
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# Lab tests

Ratings, reviews, recommendations

## First look: Windows 8 laptops

The first wave of laptops that come with the Windows 8 operating system are very similar to their predecessors in price and features. The main difference is that some have touch-screen displays to take best advantage of Windows 8. The models with conventional displays that we've seen do support Windows 8 gestures through their touchpads. They worked fine but didn't feel as intuitive and weren't as much fun to use. Here's an early look at models we're testing.



### Lenovo ThinkPad Twist \$900

The Lenovo can be used as a regular laptop, tablet, or freestanding video player/gaming device thanks to hinges that let you rotate and twist its 12.5-inch display. At 3.5 pounds, it's three times as heavy as a 10-inch tablet.

## ▶ Touch-screen models



### Samsung NP540U3C-A01UB Ultrabook \$800

With a speedy Core i5 processor, 4GB of memory, and a hybrid drive with 24GB of solid-state cache, the Samsung should be quick when waking from sleep mode and launching apps. It includes instructional videos on how to use the new Windows 8 gestures. The touchpad is generous for a 13.3-inch model, and its 3.7-pound weight is typical.



### HP Envy TouchSmart 4-1115dx Ultrabook \$850

It has a 14-inch display, a speedy Core i5 processor, 8GB of memory, and a hybrid drive with 32GB of solid-state cache. The backlit keyboard is a nice feature. It's a bit heavy for its category (4.5 pounds).

## ▶ Models without touch screens

### Dell Inspiron 14Z-1002SLV Ultrabook \$630

With a Core i3 processor, 4GB of memory, an optical drive, and a hybrid drive with 32GB of solid-state cache, the Inspiron should have extra speed in starting up. The touchpad supports Windows 8 gestures. Its 4.1-pound weight is typical for a 14-inch model.



### Acer Aspire TimelineU M5-581T-6807 Ultrabook \$600

This offers quite a bit for the money, including a speedy Core i5 processor, 6GB of memory, a generous touchpad (which supports Windows 8 gestures), and a backlit keyboard. It also includes an optical drive. At 4.6 pounds, it's light for a 15.6-inch model.



# Appliance features: Your cheat sheet

We love reading appliance ads and testing the claims. New features that promise to enhance cleaning, improve speed, increase energy efficiency, and remove guesswork are a few of those we've checked in our tests of hundreds of major appliances.

## ▶ Get it



**Hot-surface warning lights** on electric smoothtops are an important safety feature, especially since the surface of those ranges and cooktops can remain hot long after you've turned off the element. Many smoothtops have at least one warning light, but ideally each element should have its own.

**High-power elements or gas burners** let you make pasta pronto by quickly bringing a pot of water to a boil. These high heaters are also handy for warming large quantities fast, like a stock pot of stew, and for cooking that requires high heat, such as searing and stir-frying.

**Dual evaporators** on refrigerators maintain a higher humidity level in the fresh-food section, helping items last longer. They also keep food odors from migrating between the refrigerator and the freezer, so good-bye to garlicky ice.

**Auto-load sensing** on washers automatically fills the machine with the right amount of water based on how much laundry you put in. It's one less thing to think about and could save water.



**Digital temperature controls** on refrigerators display both the actual and set temperatures. That lets you see at a glance whether the main fridge section is 37° F and the freezer is 0° F, ideal temps for maintaining freshness.

## ▶ Skip it

**Half-load cycles** on dishwashers can use more than half the energy and water of a full load, so it's better to wait and run a full load.

**Steam options** on dryers left our shirts wrinkled, though the steam did remove more odors than a conventional dryer. Steam settings on washers only slightly improved cleaning.

**Eco-cycles** on dryers carry claims that they save energy, but our tests have found that the savings are negligible. And in most cases this cycle extends the drying time.

## Lights out for 75-watt bulbs

**Beginning in January**, these higher-powered incandescent bulbs can no longer be made or imported, though they will be sold until supplies run out. But there's no need to panic or hoard bulbs. Our tests have found impressive replacements that use about 75 percent less energy. The LEDs can save you about \$130 during their lifetime; the compact fluorescent lights, around \$60. They also last much longer. For lamps and ceiling fixtures: The **Philips AmbientLED 17W 75W A21 Soft White 418400** (shown), \$40, casts a bright, warm light right where you need it and has claims that it will last 23 years when used 3 hours a day. Also consider Energy Star-qualified CFLs, which meet high standards that are independently verified and may qualify for utility



rebates. The **GE Energy Smart 75W New Hybrid Halogen-CFL PLGA2125W20HBF 63506**, \$5.50, is a halogen and CFL bulb. The halogen shuts off when the CFL fully brightens. It didn't make our top picks because the CFL failed sooner than others in our rapid-cycle test. For accent and security lights, consider these very good choices: The **GE PAR38 20W 61927 LED**, \$60, was the brightest flood/reflector bulb and works with an electronic timer, photocell, and motion sensor. Also consider the **LG PAR38 E26 36516**, which was a high-scoring bulb in our tests. The **Sylvania 75W Indoor/Outdoor CF23EL/PAR38/BL1 29625**, \$18, is an 8,000-hour CFL that works with a motion sensor. It has the quickest payback but is the slowest to fully brighten.

## A really, really smart bulb

Ready for a Web-enabled light bulb? Philips has introduced the **Hue Connected LED** system, for \$200, which lets you control its special LED bulbs using any smart device in your home or remotely. You can turn the light on or off, and switch the color of LED bulbs from warm to bright white or to almost any color in the rainbow. The package includes three LEDs and a bridge device that plugs into your wireless router. Additional bulbs are \$59 each. Each system can control up to 50 bulbs using a free app with smart devices running on Apple iOS 4.2 or higher, or Android 2.2 or higher.

With the system you can adjust the look



and feel of the LEDs to just the right level of color or warmth—or even create your own light show. The package is available at Apple stores.

**Bottom line.** Hue takes lighting technology way past on, off, and dimmable, redefining what a lightbulb can do. In our initial tests, the LEDs provided light instantly and were easy to set up and use even though there were some trade-offs between brightness and color temperature and color accuracy.



# Single-serve coffeemakers

**STARBUCKS' VERISMO 580** is among the latest coffeemakers that trade the prep and cleanup of drip models for sealed pods that brew in as little as a minute. But if you expect this \$200 model to match what you'd get at the barista counter in one of the stores, you could be disappointed.

The fast brewing that helps give pod models their appeal also tends to yield a weaker cup. The limited options for adjusting the brew strength helped make the **5 Starbucks** an also-ran in our tests. You'll also have to rinse the machine before each use, according to the manual. And while other coffee choices are available in Europe for the K-fee pod format Starbucks uses, Americans will be bound to Starbucks' eight-variety selection.

A better bet: The **3 DeLonghi**, \$100, which matched the Starbucks model for speed and temperature consistency, and has a lever that lets you fill the cup with less water for stronger coffee—or more for a weaker brew. But as with the **1 DeLonghi** we also recommend, you'd better like Nescafé's limited beverage selection. **2 Smart Café** is convenient and can brew two cups at a time and use one or two pods.

Our latest batch of pod machines also included these offerings:

The **4 DeLonghi**, \$200, looks unusual: like a large red ant with a baseball cap. It was both simple and fast, but got dinged on inconsistent temperatures.

Quick brewing is also a high point for the **6 Bosch**, at least for the first cup. But subsequent cups took a relatively glacial 2 minutes compared with less than a minute for the fastest we tested. Brew-strength options were few. And while the barcode on each pod is designed to help the machine tailor the temperature, water, and brew time to the beverage, it also means Bosch's T-Discs are the only pods it takes.



2 Smart Café



5 Starbucks

## Ratings

All tested products in performance order.

Recommended

● Excellent  
● Very good  
○ Good  
● Fair  
● Poor

Recommended	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results						
				0	100	Convenience	Speed, first cup	Speed, repeat	Brewing range	Consistency, temperature	Consistency, size
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model. Pod format listed in parentheses.									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Circolo (Nescafé capsules)	\$150	75		●	●	●	●	○	○
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Smart Café My Invento (Senseo-like pods)	120	72		●	○	●	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Piccolo EDG200T (Nescafé capsules)	100	72		●	●	●	●	○	○
	4	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Creativa Plus (Nescafé capsules)	200	70		●	●	●	●	○	●
	5	Starbucks Verismo 580 (Verismo pods) 585 (Williams-Sonoma)	200	62		○	●	●	●	○	●
	6	Bosch Tassimo T55 (Tassimo T-discs)	170	60		●	●	○	●	●	●
	7	Cuisinart SS-300 Compact Single Serve (K-cups)	130	60		●	●	○	●	○	○
	8	CBTL Americano (CBTL capsules) Briosa	150	59		●	●	○	●	○	○
	9	Keurig Platinum B70 (K-cups)	180	59		●	●	○	●	○	●
	10	Mr. Coffee BVMC-KG5 (K-cups)	80	58		●	●	○	●	○	●
	11	Flavia Fusion Deluxe J11NMG (Flavia Fresh Packs)	150	58		●	●	○	●	○	●
	12	Keurig Mini Plus B31 (K-cups)	100	55		●	●	○	●	○	○
	13	Mr. Coffee Single Serve Brewing System BVMC-KG1 (K-cups) BVMC-KG2 *	80	55		●	●	○	●	○	●
	14	Keurig Vue V700 (Vue-cups)	250	54		●	●	○	●	○	●
	15	Bunn My Café MCP (Senseo-like pods) *	300	49		●	●	○	●	○	●
	16	Bosch Tassimo Suprema TAS4511UC (Tassimo T-Discs) LCD Premium TAS6515UC *	150	47		○	●	○	●	○	●
	17	Cuisinart SS-700 (K-cups)	200	46		●	●	○	●	○	●
	18	Keurig B40 Brewing System (K-cups)	100	45		○	●	○	●	○	●
	19	Breville BKC700XL (K-cups)	250	40		●	●	○	●	○	●
	20	Hamilton Beach Personal Cup 49970 (Senseo-like pods)	25	32		●	●	○	●	○	●
	21	TRU Eco TE-258 (Senseo-like pods)	40	25		●	●	○	●	○	●

\*Some versions of this model have been recalled by the Consumer Product Safety Commission for burn hazards. See [saferproducts.gov](http://saferproducts.gov) for details.

### If you're serving a crowd

**Brewing at least eight cups** at a time? You'll need a conventional drip machine. Here are three recommended models from our latest tests. (See December 2012 issue for the full Ratings.)

● **Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT**,

\$40 (drip model with carafe).

● **Mr. Coffee BVMC-ZH1B**, \$50 (brew-and-dispense; fills cup directly).

● **Krups Grinder & Brewer KM7000**, \$180 (has built-in grinder).



Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT



Mr. Coffee BVMC-ZH1B



Krups Grinder & Brewer KM7000



# What's in that pork?

We found antibiotic-resistant bacteria—and traces of a veterinary drug

**O**UR ANALYSIS of pork-chop and ground-pork samples from around the U.S. found that *Yersinia enterocolitica*, a bacterium that can cause fever, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, was widespread. Some

## ▶ DID YOU KNOW?

Years ago, trichinosis was the main fear about eating pork. But the risk from that parasite was largely eradicated by changes in industry practices (legislation banned the feeding of certain raw foods to hogs) and public awareness of the risks of eating undercooked meat.

samples harbored other potentially harmful bacteria, including salmonella. And there are more reasons to be concerned about “the other white meat.”

Some of the bacteria we found in 198 samples proved to be resistant to antibiotics commonly used to treat people. The frequent use of low-dose antibiotics in pork farming may be accelerating the growth of drug-resistant “superbugs” that threaten human health.

About one-fifth of the 240 pork products we analyzed in a separate test harbored low levels of the drug ractopamine, which the U.S. approved in 1999 to promote growth and leanness in pigs. It’s commonly used in pigs raised for food in the

U.S. but is banned in the European Union, China, and Taiwan. Our food-safety experts say that no drugs should be used routinely in healthy animals to promote growth. Here are details from our tests:

- *Yersinia enterocolitica* was in 69 percent of the tested pork samples. It infects about 100,000 Americans a year, especially children. We found salmonella, *Staphylococcus aureus*, or listeria monocytogenes, more common causes of food-borne illness, in 3 to 7 percent of samples. And 11 percent harbored enterococcus, which can indicate fecal contamination and can cause problems such as urinary-tract infections.
- Some of the bacteria we found were re-

sistant to multiple drugs or classes of drugs. That's worrisome, because if those bugs make you sick, your doctor may need to prescribe more powerful (and expensive) antibiotics.

- Ground pork was more likely than pork chops to harbor pathogens. That's to be expected, since grinding meat provides another opportunity for contamination.
- Some antibiotic claims you'll see on packaging are misleading. And a "no hormones added" claim might be true but is meaningless, because hormones aren't allowed in pork production.

## Bugs in pigs

All animals (humans included) have bacteria on their skin and in their gastrointestinal tract. Some are beneficial, including the probiotic kind, which help digestion. Others, such as salmonella, can be harmful to people, but affected animals might not become ill. Confining animals in less-than-clean quarters can allow bad bacteria to proliferate.

An animal's muscles (meat), blood, and brain are normally sterile. But during slaughter and processing, meat can become contaminated with bacteria from the animal's skin or gut and from workers, equipment, or the environment. Contamination is especially likely to occur if processing lines run too fast or if sanitary practices aren't followed. Once bacteria are on meat, improper storage can encourage them to multiply.

To minimize contamination, the federal government requires processors of meat, poultry, and seafood to create safety and inspection procedures collectively known as HACCP (pronounced hass-ip), which stands for Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points. Implemented for meat and poultry plants in 1997, HACCP is officially the consumer's first line of protection against contaminated pork. However, inspectors spot-test for a limited number of pathogens. *Yersinia enterocolitica*, for example, isn't among them. And the Department of Agriculture can't require a recall if HACCP plans fail to meet goals.

"Very low contamination levels in hog carcasses indicate that companies' practices are adequately controlling pathogens," a USDA spokeswoman told us. But our tests showed that some harmful bacteria can make their way into your kitchen.

Moreover, the bacteria we found often continued to multiply even in the presence of some drugs designed to kill them or stop

## Germ count

Per-capita consumption of pork in the U.S. is about 50 pounds per year, based on 2009 Department of Agriculture data.

We tested 148 samples of meat from pork chops and 50 from ground pork, and found that almost 70 percent tested positive for *yersinia enterocolitica*, which can infect people who eat raw or undercooked pork.

*Enterococcus*, *staphylococcus aureus*, *salmonella*, and *listeria monocytogenes* were less common in the samples we tested. Twenty-three percent of the samples harbored none of the tested bacteria.

The pork samples we analyzed came from many brands, but we lacked enough samples within each brand to say whether one was more or less contaminated than another.

## Levels of contamination

Bacterium	Samples testing positive
<i>Yersinia enterocolitica</i>	69%
<i>Enterococcus</i>	11
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	7
<i>Salmonella</i>	4
<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	3

**Big brands we tested:** Denmark, Farmer John, Farmer John California Natural, Farmland, Hempler's, Hormel, Hormel Natural Choice, Nature's Promise, Nature's Rancher, Northwest Finest, Roseland, Smithfield, Swift Premium, and Tender Choice.

**Store brands we tested:** Angelo Caputo's, Bashas', Bristol Farms, Butera, Dominick's, Edmar, El Toreo Market, Food 4 Less, Fred Meyer, Fresh & Easy, The Fresh Market, Giant, Meijer, PCC Natural Markets, Publix, Ralphs, Safeway, Save-a-Lot, Sprouts Farmers Market and Farmers Market Old Tyme, Ultra Foods, Viet Wah, Vons, Walmart, Wegmans, Weis, Whole Foods, and Winn Dixie.

them from reproducing. Thirteen of 14 *staphylococcus* samples we isolated from pork were resistant to one or more antibiotics. So were six of eight *salmonella* samples, 12 of 19 *enterococcus* samples, and 121 of 132 *yersinia* samples. One sample was identified as MRSA, a drug-resistant and sometimes fatal staph.

## Pigs on drugs

Some 80 percent of all antibiotics sold in the U.S. are given to animals raised for food. Often, those drugs aren't used to treat infections but are fed continuously in low doses to promote growth and pre-

## Many samples of pork harbored yersinia bacteria.

vent infections that can spread in the cramped quarters in which most farm animals live. A single barn from a large hog-production facility can hold 2,000 or more pigs, creating ideal conditions for the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

"When you give low-dose antibiotics for growth promotion or for prophylaxis of infection, you end up killing off the susceptible bacteria, whether they're *E. coli*, *salmonella*, *campylobacter*, or other bacte-

ria," says Robert S. Lawrence, M.D., director of the Center for a Livable Future at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore. "And you continue to select for those bacteria that, through spontaneous mutations or transfer of genes from other resistant bacteria, allow them to be resistant to antibiotics." Lawrence cited recent laboratory research at Boston University suggesting that the continual exposure to low doses of antibiotics causes enough stress in bacteria to increase the rate of spontaneous mutations that render the bugs resistant to drugs, a process known as mutagenesis.

Mutant bacteria in animals can cause not only foodborne illness but also other treatment-resistant problems, such as infections of the skin or urinary tract. That's because the bugs don't just end up in the meat you buy. They can also wind up in fertilizer or contaminate the environment. And they can spread from person to person.

Another drug fed to animals, ractopamine, is given to as many as 60 to 80 percent of pigs raised in the U.S., by one estimate. It was originally developed (but never approved) as an asthma treatment for humans and was later found to boost pigs' growth and lean muscle mass.

The U.S. pork industry says ractopamine is safe. "Ractopamine is ap-

proved and used in 26 other countries, including some of the Asian countries,” says Dave Warner, director of communications for the National Pork Producers Council, an industry group. “The issues with China and Taiwan have nothing to do with the safety of the product. Countries that have banned pork or meat from animals fed ractopamine are doing it to protect their domestic pork industries. This is not about food safety.”

The European Food Safety Authority, which advises the European Union on food policy, concluded that it couldn't establish a safe level for ractopamine in food after reviewing the only study of its effect on humans (involving just six men). But it noted that drugs like ractopamine can cause restlessness, anxiety, a fast heart rate, and other conditions. And FDA documents show that it increases the risk of injury and lameness in pigs.

Warner emphasized that the U.S. pork industry uses ractopamine at levels that meet FDA and international food-safety standards. Indeed, although we found the drug at detectable levels in about 20 percent of our 240 pork samples, all had less than 5 parts per billion. That's well below the FDA's limit of 50 ppb in muscle tissue and the international limit of 10 ppb adopted in July 2012 by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a program of the United Nations.

We asked three of the nation's largest pork producers—Smithfield Foods, Tyson, and JBS USA, which makes the Swift Premium and Swift Premium Natural brands—about their use of ractopamine. Keira Lombardo, vice president of investor relations and corporate communications at Smithfield, called it “a safe and effective FDA-approved feed supplement that has been widely used in the hog farming industry for many years.” Lombardo and a JBS spokeswoman, Margaret McDonald, told us their companies produce pork with and without ractopamine according to their customers' specifications.

Some food companies, including Chipotle Mexican Grill, Niman Ranch, and Whole Foods, say they don't sell any meat from pigs raised with ractopamine. Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, has pressed for a ban of the drug, citing insufficient evidence that it's safe.

## What you can do

These steps can help you minimize the risk of foodborne illness or discourage the rou-

## How resistant to antibiotics?

Some antibiotics used to treat infections in people are also fed to pigs to speed their growth or prevent illness. But bacteria may evolve to become immune to antibiotics, at which point the drugs become less effective in treating people infected by those bugs. We tested whether samples of salmonella, staphylococcus aureus,

enterococcus, and yersinia enterocolitica that we isolated from pork chops and ground pork could survive exposure to up to 13 antibiotics at levels that are usually effective against those bacteria. The antibiotics we used differed with each bug but included amoxicillin, penicillin, tetracycline, streptomycin, and others.

## Bugs immune to drugs

Bacterium	Samples tested	Samples resistant to one or more antibiotics	Details
<b>YERSINIA ENTEROCOLITICA</b>	132	121	Fifty-two of those were resistant to two or three antibiotics
<b>STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS</b>	14	13	Nine of those were resistant to two to four antibiotics
<b>ENTEROCOCCUS</b>	19	12	—
<b>SALMONELLA</b>	8	6	Three of those were resistant to five antibiotics



## Keep uncooked pork away from other foods.

tine use of antibiotics in agriculture:

- When cooking pork, use a meat thermometer to ensure that it reaches the proper internal temperature, which kills potentially harmful bacteria: at least 145° F for whole pork and 160° F for ground pork.
- As with other meats, keep raw pork and its juices separate from other foods, especially those eaten raw, such as salad.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw meat.
- Choose pork and other meat products that were raised without drugs. One way to do that is to buy certified organic pork,

from pigs raised without antibiotics or ractopamine. Another option is to buy from Whole Foods, which requires that producers not use either type of drug.

- Look for a clear statement regarding antibiotic use. “No antibiotics used” claims with a USDA Process Verified shield are more reliable than those without verification. Labels such as “Animal Welfare Approved” and “Certified Humane” indicate the prudent use of antibiotics to treat illness.

- Watch out for misleading labels. “Natural” has nothing to do with antibiotic use or how an animal was raised. We found unapproved claims, including “no antibiotics residues,” on packages of Sprouts pork sold in California and Arizona, and “no antibiotic growth promotants” on Farmland brand pork sold in several states. We reported those to the USDA in June 2012, and the agency told us it's working with those companies to take “appropriate actions.” When we checked in early November, Sprouts had removed the claim from its packages.

- If your local supermarket doesn't carry pork from pigs raised without antibiotics, consider asking the store to carry it. To find meat from animals that were raised sustainably—humanely and without drugs—go to [eatwellguide.org](http://eatwellguide.org). To learn about the new Consumers Union campaign aimed at getting stores to sell only antibiotic-free meat, go to [NotinMyFood.org](http://NotinMyFood.org).

## Reports

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# Cars

Road tests, auto products, hot topics

## Halogen headlight bulbs

### Higher-priced lights shine more brightly but not farther

**A** **WEBSITE TOUTING** the Sylvania SilverStar headlight bulb says it provides “up to 30 percent” greater visibility down the road. That sounds impressive until you read the fine print: “compared with worn standard halogen” bulbs. Still, such claims are making premium-priced halogen bulbs an alluring choice for drivers.

To see how those premium bulbs stack up against one another, we put eight of them, costing \$20 to \$80, through a range of tests in our labs and at our test track. We tested the low-beam performance of single-filament (9003) and dual-filament (H7) bulbs from GE, Hella, Philips, and Sylvania, and PIAA’s dual-filament bulb. We also compared their performance with that of two standard bulbs from GE and Helio, costing \$20 and \$10, respectively, and to the original-equipment (OE) bulbs that came in our 2012 Hyundai Accent and Volkswagen Passat test cars.

We found that the premium bulbs, as a group, deliver a whiter light and up to 19 percent more output than the standard or OE bulbs, and that can be more pleasing

for drivers. But none of the premium bulbs allowed us to see farther on our headlight test course than the standard or OE bulbs. That’s because distance is determined more by the size and shape of the lamp’s reflector or lens than by the bulb. We also found little difference in light output among the premium bulbs; no more than the differences normally experienced from power fluctuations while driving.

**Bottom line.** Premium bulbs might be a good choice if you prefer a more intense or whiter light, but don’t expect big changes

in the distance you can see compared with standard or new OE bulbs. For the premium bulbs we tested, shop by price.

The illumination of any bulb fades with time, so we suggest replacing your bulbs every few years, not waiting until one burns out. We don’t advise mixing premium and standard bulbs. Output can also decrease if lamp lenses become hazy or dirty. Have them cleaned by a professional or do it yourself with a product such as the Sylvania Headlight Restoration Kit, which costs about \$20.

### What we tested

In alphabetical order (performance among bulbs was similar).

Product	Bulb type	Price
GE Nighthawk	9003/H7	\$25
GE Nighthawk Platinum	9003/H7	40
Hella	9003/H7	35
Philips CrystalVision Ultra	9003/H7	25
Philips VisionPlus	9003/H7	20
PIAA Xtreme White Plus	H7	80
Sylvania SilverStar	9003/H7	30
Sylvania SilverStar Ultra	9003/H7	40



GE Nighthawk

# Would you buy your car again?

## Chevy Volt repeats as the top model in owner satisfaction

**HERE'S A HOT TIP:** If you want a car that you can really get excited about, choose one that gives you great fuel economy, a fun driving experience, and/or luxurious surroundings. That's the clear message from our latest owner-satisfaction survey, in which all of the 10 highest-scoring models feature one or more of those traits.

That list includes the top-scoring Chevrolet Volt extended-range electric car, which gets the equivalent of 99 mpg when running on electric power, can go gas-free for about 35 miles, and earned the highest tally for the second straight year.

Among the 44 models that achieved our top owner-satisfaction rating, 10 were

fuel-efficient vehicles, including hybrids, diesels, and electric cars. Another 10 were purebred sports cars. And 13 were luxury or upscale models, with most of them delivering sporty handling, strong engine performance, or both.

Our annual owner-satisfaction survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, asks subscribers a single, revealing question: Considering all factors (price, performance, reliability, comfort, enjoyment, etc.), would they get their same vehicle if they had it to do all over again? This year, we received responses on about 350,000 vehicles and more than 240 models, spanning the 2010 through 2013 model years. A model's score

is based on the percentage of respondents who answered "definitely yes." And to earn our top rating, a model needs to have at least 80 percent of owners say they would definitely get it again.

The Volt's 92 score edged out the Chevrolet Corvette and Porsche 911 sports cars by 1 point. When the Volt achieved the top score last year, it had only been in showrooms for a few months and was being grabbed up by enthusiastic early adopters. So we were curious to see whether it could hold on to that high level of loyalty. Despite some bad publicity over the past year, including reports of battery fires, this year's survey shows that the Volt's high satisfaction score is no fluke.

## Owners speak out: The best and worst models

The charts below show the most and least satisfying cars in the major vehicle categories. Models are ranked by their owner-satisfaction score, which is based on responses from owners of 2010 to 2013 models. Scores are based on three years of survey data, when available; models with fewer years of data are indicated with an asterisk (\*). Worst models are shown in the tinted areas.

### SMALL CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Chevrolet Volt*	92%
Toyota Prius C*	87
Nissan Leaf*	86
Volkswagen Golf TDI	80
Audi A3 TDI	77
Subaru Impreza Hatchback*	77
Honda Fit	76
Volkswagen Jetta TDI*	74
Mazda3 (SkyActiv)*	73
Chevrolet Cruze (turbo)*	72
Subaru Impreza Sedan*	72
Toyota Matrix*	53
Volkswagen Jetta (4-cyl.)*	53
Suzuki SX4	52
Nissan Versa Sedan*	49

### FAMILY CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Toyota Camry Hybrid*	87%
Toyota Prius	85
Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid*	84
Volkswagen Passat TDI*	83
Kia Optima (turbo)*	79
Toyota Camry (V6)*	79
Toyota Camry (4-cyl.)*	77
Subaru Legacy (4-cyl.)	75
Hyundai Sonata (turbo)*	73
Hyundai Sonata (4-cyl.)*	72
Chrysler 200 Sedan*	72
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid*	62
Mazda6	58
Chevrolet Impala	53

### UPSCALE CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Dodge Charger (V8)*	88%
Chrysler 300 (V8)*	84
Chrysler 300 (V6)*	81
Lexus ES	81
Dodge Charger (V6)*	80
Hyundai Genesis Sedan (V8)	80
Buick LaCrosse (V6)	65
Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl., eAssist)*	63
Buick Regal (non-turbo)*	57

### WAGONS & MINIVANS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Toyota Prius V*	83%
Subaru Outback (4-cyl.)	80
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen TDI	80
Subaru Outback (6-cyl.)	78
Honda Odyssey*	78
Dodge Grand Caravan*	62
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen (5-cyl.)	61
Toyota Venza (4-cyl.)	60



Audi A7

### LUXURY CARS

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Audi A7*	90%
Lexus GS*	89
Audi A6 (3.0T)*	88
Mercedes-Benz S-Class	83
BMW 550i*	82
Lincoln MKS	68
Jaguar XF*	68
Volvo S80 (6-cyl.)*	65

### COUPES & CONVERTIBLES

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Fiat 500 Convertible*	83%
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Convertible*	77
BMW 335Ci	76
Audi A5	76
Volvo C70	73
Infiniti G Convertible*	69
Cadillac CTS Coupe*	68
Honda Civic Coupe	62



Toyota Camry Hybrid

Other fuel-efficient models that scored among the best were Toyota's Camry Hybrid, Prius, and Prius C, and the all-electric Nissan Leaf. Fuel-efficient models also account for the highest-scoring models in the small- and family-car categories.

The fun and luxury factors also generate a lot of enthusiasm among owners. Among the top 10 scorers, four are sports cars, including the Corvette, 911, Dodge Challenger, and Ford Mustang. Another four are luxury cars that deliver sporty handling (Audi A7, Lexus GS, and Audi A6) or have a powerful V8 engine (Dodge Charger).

SUVs and crossovers tend to score lower as a group. Only five earned our best rating: the Subaru Outback, Mazda CX-5, V8-powered Jeep Grand Cherokee, Dodge Durango, and Porsche Cayenne. Three of the five pickup models that earned the highest rating are turbodiesel-powered, three-quarter-ton models: the Chevrolet Silverado 2500, GMC Sierra 2500, and Ford F-250. The other two are the Chevrolet Avalanche and



Chevrolet Corvette

Ford F-150 with an EcoBoost engine.

Another new model to earn a top rating is the small Fiat 500 Convertible, which has an appealing, well, cute factor.

At the other extreme, the redesigned subcompact Nissan Versa Sedan came in with the lowest score in our survey, with fewer than half of its owners saying they would definitely buy it again. Other low scorers include the V6 versions of the Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra pickups, and the Nissan Armada, Suzuki SX4, and Mitsubishi Outlander SUVs.

Brand nationality doesn't seem to have a strong effect on owner satisfaction: The 44 top-rated models include 16 American, 14 Asian, and 14 European vehicles.

**Bottom line.** Of course, owner satisfaction shouldn't be the only thing you consider. Based on our road-test results and reliability-survey data, we'd suggest the following. If you want a great all-around sedan with excellent fuel economy, the 38-mpg Toyota Camry Hybrid is hard to beat. For an efficient economy car, the Honda Fit trumps all.

Among affordable fun-to-drive sports cars, the Mazda MX-5 Miata leads its class. And for a spirited luxury sedan, we suggest the Audi A6 or the less-expensive Infiniti C37. But for a car that provides the best balance of all three factors, we'd pick the BMW 328i, which is fun to drive and well finished, and gets a class-leading 28 mpg overall.

**LARGE & LUXURY SUVs**

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Dodge Durango*	81%
Porsche Cayenne*	81
Volkswagen Touareg*	79
Infiniti QX56*	79
Mercedes-Benz M-Class (V6)*	79
Lincoln MKX	61
Volvo XC90 (6-cyl.)	57
Nissan Armada*	52

**MIDSIZE SUVs**

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V8)*	81%
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V6)*	79
Toyota FJ Cruiser	77
Toyota Highlander Hybrid	75
Toyota Highlander (V6)	73
Chevrolet Equinox (4-cyl.)	61
GMC Terrain (4-cyl.)	61
Ford Explorer (V6, 4WD)*	61

**SMALL SUVs**

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Mazda CX-5*	80%
Honda CR-V*	78
BMW X3 (turbo)*	77
Audi Q5 (2.0T)*	77
Subaru Forester (turbo)	75
Jeep Compass*	57
Hyundai Tucson	57
Nissan Rogue	55
Mitsubishi Outlander*	52

**SPORTY CARS**

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Chevrolet Corvette	91%
Porsche 911	91
Dodge Challenger (V8)	90
Ford Mustang (V8)	87
Mazda MX-5 Miata	84
Audi S4	84
Chevrolet Camaro (V8)	84
Hyundai Genesis Coupe	69
BMW 128i	66
Honda CR-Z*	63

**PICKUP TRUCKS**

Make & model	Definitely buy again
Chevrolet Silverado 2500 (turbodiesel)*	81%
GMC Sierra 2500 (turbodiesel)*	81
Ford F-250 (turbodiesel)*	81
Chevrolet Avalanche (4WD)	81
Ford F-150 EcoBoost*	81
Chevrolet Silverado 2500	58
GMC Sierra 2500	58
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 (V6)	51
GMC Sierra 1500 (V6)	51



Chevrolet Volt

\*Models with fewer than three years of data.

## LUXURY CARS

# Cadillac XTS vs. Lincoln MKS

## Two big, opulent American sedans fall short of expectations

**A**FACE-OFF BETWEEN THE flagship luxury sedans from Cadillac and Lincoln used to be a center-ring event. Not anymore. With German and Asian automakers continually raising the bar in this category, the new Cadillac XTS and the updated Lincoln MKS are now little more than a sideshow among more inviting and higher-rated models.

Of the two, the XTS is a considerably better

car. But its 79 overall road-test score still places it near the bottom of this competitive class and well short of the top-rated Audi A6 and Infiniti M37. The MKS scores too low for us to recommend and sits in the cellar of our luxury-sedan ratings.

The \$57,200 XTS replaces the plush DTS and sporty STS sedans at the top of Cadillac's lineup. It is wonderfully luxurious, with a very spacious and well-appointed cabin and a roomy trunk. But the car lacks the silky ride you'd expect from a big Caddy, and although it handles well for its size, it doesn't have the finesse or brawn of the better German and Asian competitors.

The XTS is also hampered by a new high-tech infotainment system called CUE (for Cadillac User Experience). The system is so convoluted and frustrating that it detracts from the XTS's pampering environment (see "Missed CUE," on page 52). Though the XTS scored well enough, we don't recommend the model because it's too new for us to have reliability data.

At \$50,070 for our loaded test car, the MKS costs much less than the XTS and offers plenty of features. But they don't make up for the car's basic flaws, including a cramped driving position and limited visibility. Moreover, handling is ungainly, the ride is neither

isolating nor adequately composed, and the 3.7-liter V6 engine is coarse. A recent update added the MyLincoln Touch infotainment system, making the controls confusing, distracting, and frustrating.

Buyers would do much better with the roomy, well-appointed, and less expensive Chrysler 300 or Hyundai's Genesis or Equus.

### Less than supple

Though the XTS and the MKS deliver great isolation from road noise, their engines can sound gruff when pushed.

Neither car has a true luxury-car ride. The XTS is not as velvety on the road as many competitors, and its low-profile tires tend to slap a bit over road joints. A Sport mode stiffens up the shocks some but doesn't significantly ratchet up agility. The MKS's suspension allows impacts to come through harshly. It has three modes. When driving in Comfort mode, undulations on the highway can make the car feel floaty, like a boat riding over waves. The Normal mode quells the buoyancy but amplifies some of the impacts. Sport mode only makes the MKS's suspension feel jittery.

The XTS has impressive handling for a big luxury car, exhibiting little body lean. It navigated our avoidance maneuver at

### How they compare

Rec.	LUXURY SEDANS	0	100
		P	F   G   V6   E
✓	Audi A6 3.0 Premium Plus Quattro	93	
✓	Infiniti M37	93	
✓	Hyundai Genesis 3.8	92	
✓	Mercedes-Benz E350	86	
✓	Lexus GS 350	84	
✓	Chrysler 300 Limited (V6)	83	
✓	Hyundai Equus Signature	82	
✓	BMW 535i	81	
	Cadillac XTS Premium	79	
	Lincoln MKS (base, 3.7)	60	



# Cadillac XTS

ROAD-TEST SCORE  
**79**



## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Roomy interior and trunk, seat comfort, fit and finish, quietness, braking, transmission
<b>LOWS</b>	Frustrating CUE driver interface, ride not plush enough, visibility, small trunk opening
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Premium
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	304-hp, 3.6-liter V6 engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Sunroof, rear sunshades
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$57,200

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Excellent, with a responsive pedal and very short stops from Brembo front brakes.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Xenon HID lamps provide good visibility overall but have a sharp upper cutoff.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Easy, but sills are a little wide.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Thick pillars, a high and deep rear deck, and a small glass area diminish the driver's view out. Rear-camera, cross-traffic alert, and blind-zone monitoring systems all work well.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Moderate, with a hidden cubby behind center controls.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	No center-rear restraint. Front pair adjusts fore and aft for comfort.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Some rear-facing seats may be difficult to secure with safety belts. LATCH anchors are available in all rear positions but are hard to reach.

# Lincoln MKS

ROAD-TEST SCORE  
**60**



## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Quietness, rear-seat room, fit and finish
<b>LOWS</b>	Frustrating controls, uncomposed ride, transmission, narrow cockpit, visibility, turning circle, small trunk opening
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Base
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	304-hp, 3.7-liter V6 engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Navigation, rear camera, blind-spot monitoring, adaptive cruise control, forward-collision warning, moonroof, power adjustable pedals
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$50,070

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Very good, with a fairly responsive pedal.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Standard HID lamps provide very good visibility but have a sharp cutoff. Automatic high beams work well.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Easy enough, but the door sills are wide and door openings are small for a big car.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Thick pillars, small rear windows, and a high rear deck diminish the view. Rear-camera, cross-traffic alert, and blind-zone monitoring systems work well.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Modest overall.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The center-rear has no restraint and is not tall enough to provide adequate rear-crash protection for adults. The outboard restraints don't adjust.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	The lower LATCH anchors and the outer top-tether anchors can be difficult to access.



**PEEK-A-BOO-BOO** Buttons on the touch screen disappear until you reach for them, making it hard to aim for what you want.



Scan for video.



**WEAK LINK** As in other Ford vehicles, the MyLincoln Touch system doesn't offer a straightforward interface for drivers.



Scan for video.

a commendable speed. The MKS, on the other hand, felt ponderous and lumbering, with little steering feedback. Electronic stability control had to work overtime for our testers to thread the avoidance maneuver, posting a low speed.

The cars have six-speed automatic transmissions mated to their V6 engines. The XTS's is smooth and responsive. The MKS's gearbox is less refined, with lagging shifts that sometimes arrive with a thud. Both engines use regular fuel and deliver similarly strong acceleration, although at 22 mpg overall the XTS is more fuel efficient than the MKS at 20.

All-wheel drive is optional on the cars. A 365-hp turbocharged EcoBoost V6 is available in the MKS; it delivers effortless acceleration.

### From cushy to complicated

The interiors have abundant upscale materials, and the fit and finish is commendable in both cars. The XTS's interior is General Motors' best effort to date and is comparable to some of the finest interiors in this category.

Drivers have more room in the XTS. The Lincoln feels cramped, with a wide console and sill and more intrusion into left foot space. Each has a wide range of power seat and steering-wheel adjustments.

Sightlines are impaired in both cars, although the XTS has a standard backup camera. Small windows, thick pillars, and high windows make driving the MKS feel like sitting inside a tank



Cadillac XTS

turret, and a backup camera is only optional. Both of our cars also came with blind-spot monitoring, forward-collision warning, and rear cross-traffic alert. Our XTS also has lane-departure warning. Many of those safety systems sound an alert or set off a vibration in the Cadillac's driver seat. That gets your attention without alerting other occupants. But we found that it was sometimes hard to identify which system was alerting us.

The XTS's front seats are big and well padded and provide good overall support. Cushions that adjust for thigh support come on higher trim levels. Two passengers will find it comfortable in back, but the bench isn't quite wide enough to comfortably fit three.

Front seats in our MKS are supportive enough but are narrow and flat. The rear seat

is roomy enough for three, but the cushion's support lags over time.

Cadillac's CUE system is so frustrating that it almost makes us pine for our MKS's MyLincoln Touch. Both replace almost all of the physical buttons and knobs in the cabin. Inputs are made through a touch screen and by tapping flush surfaces. MyLincoln Touch is somewhat easier to navigate; CUE has bigger fonts and clearer screens. But neither system works well. The only redeeming qualities of the systems are the voice controls and the ability to easily integrate mobile electronics.

These large cars have the spacious trunks you'd expect, but each has a small opening. Rear seats fold down in 60/40 sections to create more room in the XTS. The MKS has only a small pass-through.

## Missed CUE: Cadillac's frustrating new control system

Dashboard one-upmanship has gone into overdrive lately as automakers introduce more electronically controlled infotainment systems. Most are more complicated and distracting to use than traditional controls. But Cadillac's new CUE system is the most annoying we've seen yet.

Like the similar MyFord/MyLincoln Touch system, CUE (for Cadillac User Experience) uses a center touch screen, speech recognition, steering-wheel-mounted controls, and flush capacitive switches that respond to a touch or sliding motion.

CUE looks beautifully high-tech, with a sea of piano black and chrome trim. It's easy to connect a smart phone, voice commands are comprehensive, and screen graphics are mostly easy to read. But we found that using the system can be maddening.

It's a long reach to the touch screen, a nuisance for something with which you're supposed to easily interact. The screen is prone to glare, it doesn't always respond to a touch, and it's easy to hit the wrong spot.

The touch screen and the accompanying capacitive switches are designed to provide tactile feedback so that you know you pressed them successfully, but that doesn't



**TOUCH INSENSITIVE** The XTS's flush capacitive buttons often respond slowly or incorrectly.

always work promptly, if at all. The buttons don't always respond correctly to touch either, which is very annoying when you're trying to adjust the audio volume.

In navigating the system, you often need to change to a different screen. But some onscreen buttons don't appear until your finger gets close, which increases the time it takes to perform a function.

Moving through some menus is done by swiping the screen, like with a smart phone

or tablet. It may look impressive in a showroom demonstration, but that fussy move works better for controlling handheld electronics when not driving. It also makes the screen a smudgy mess.

Many owners may resort to using voice commands, especially to work the audio. The system works well at selecting radio stations or songs from an iPod.

The XTS comes with an Apple iPad loaded with a tutorial app for CUE. But we found that even using the tutorial is awkward. We also question whether any car should be so complicated that such a primer is necessary.

We've criticized other control systems in the past—including BMW's iDrive, Audi's MMI, and some versions of Ford's MyFord/MyLincoln Touch—but we'd take them over CUE. That said, Chrysler's Uconnect touch-screen system tops them all, offering comparable capability while being easier to use.



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Lexus ES 350

Lexus ES 300h

# Lexus ES 350 & ES 300h

**ROAD-TEST SCORE**  
**82**  
ES 300h

**ROAD-TEST SCORE**  
**80**  
ES 350

The Lexus ES has always been comfortable and luxurious but far from sporty. It has been aimed at people who simply want to be pampered while driving from Point A to Point B. And it did that very well, ranking as one of our top-rated upscale sedans. But Lexus has modified that formula with the 2013 redesign. And the overall result is a less satisfying car.

The new ES still provides a comfy, quiet interior, gets good fuel economy, and is likely to be very reliable. But the car's cossetting, easygoing nature has been dialed back, with a less plush ride, cuts in interior refinement, and more complicated controls. And despite Lexus' claims of injecting more sportiness into the ES, it's no more agile or fun to drive.

We tested two versions: the ES 350, with a 3.5-liter V6 engine, and the ES 300h, the model's first hybrid. Both drivetrains perform well. The V6 is slick and powerful and returns a good 25 mpg overall. The hybrid delivers ample zip, while squeezing out an excellent 36 mpg overall and 44 on the highway.

Although the ES still rides well, it's no longer luxury-car plush, feeling instead like a generic family sedan. It has adequate room inside, but it's not particularly spacious for the class. At first glance, the cabin furnishings look really good. But a closer inspection reveals some cheaper materials than in the past and a general impression of cost-cutting. Lexus has also done away with the simple touch-screen

controls of the previous ES, instead using more complicated systems that can make it more difficult to perform common functions.

The tested cars were similarly priced—\$43,702 for our well-equipped ES 350, \$44,017 for a comparatively basic 300h. And both are several thousand dollars more than competitive six-cylinder models such as the Hyundai Genesis, Chrysler 300, and Acura TL.

Our bottom line: If you want a car with the Lexus badge or want to take advantage of the highly touted Lexus dealership experience, the ES probably won't disappoint. But you can get much of the same package for notably less

money in the Toyota Camry, which is based on the same platform. Another alternative is the Toyota Avalon, redesigned for 2013, which has more space and the same powertrains as the ES.

## Short on sport

Handling remains quite mundane in the new ES. Body lean develops quickly in turns. The steering isn't particularly quick and is short on driver feedback. When we pushed the car to its handling limits at our track, the ES was rather sloppy, understeering early. Electronic stability control kept the car secure, and it managed an OK speed in our avoidance maneuver, but it

## Ratings Upscale sedans

All tested models in performance order.

Recommended

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommended	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
					0		100
					P   F   G   V6   E		
✓	1	Hyundai Genesis 3.8	\$39,850		92	○	22
✓	2	Chrysler 300 Limited (V6)	38,335		83	○	22
✓	3	Lexus ES 300h	44,017	•	82	●	36
✓	4	Acura TL (base)	36,465		82	●	24
✓	5	Lexus ES 350	43,702	•	80	●	25
	6	Buick LaCrosse (Leather, eAssist)	34,935		78	●	26

didn't instill much confidence in our drivers while they negotiated the emergency handling tests.

The previous ES had a silky-smooth ride, but the new car lacks its isolation. The ride isn't as tied down or as cushy as we expect from a luxury sedan, especially with the optional 18-inch wheels.

Quietness is a high point, with low levels of road noise. The V6 model is more hushed than the hybrid, whose regenerative braking whines during deceleration.

The ES 350's V6 is mated to a six-speed automatic transmission that shifts smoothly and promptly. The 300h uses a smooth continuously variable transmission and can drive on electric power alone at low speeds.

### Slip-sliding luxury

More basic ES models have Toyota's NuLuxe synthetic leather, which is a pretty good imitation of the real thing. Real leather is an option. The seats and dash are well finished. But some switches and plastic panels look cheap and out of place in an upscale sedan.

Most drivers will find a decent fit behind the wheel, but head room is just adequate under the sunroof. A power tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel helps, although some drivers wanted it to extend further.

The front seats are wide and accommodating, although the cushion loses support during long trips. Rear-seat passengers will find a good deal of leg room, but head room is skimpy for 6-footers and thigh support could be better. The seat is comfortable for two people, but three will be happy only for short trips.

Instrument displays are bright, clear, and easy to read. ES models without navigation, such as our 300h, have a 7-inch dash screen and a rotary control knob on the center console, similar to BMW's iDrive system. The menus tend to be logically arranged, but operating the system can be distracting.

Versions with navigation, such as our 350, come with a larger screen and Lexus' Remote Touch controller, a mouselike pad on the center console. It's well-implemented, but using it is more complex than simply rotating a knob, increasing the potential for distraction. With Remote Touch, you can use voice commands to perform some radio and navigation functions, although the system is more limited than others we've seen.

The ES 350's trunk is roomy, nicely finished, and slightly larger than the 300h's, but neither model comes with a folding rear seat.



✓ Recommended

Tested vehicle	
<b>HIGHS</b>	Acceleration, fuel economy, drivetrain, quietness, front-seat comfort
<b>LOWS</b>	Lackluster handling, controls
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	350
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	268-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Blind-spot monitor, HID headlights, leather, heated and ventilated seats, power tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, navigation, backup camera, park assist, heated wood steering wheel.
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$43,702



✓ Recommended

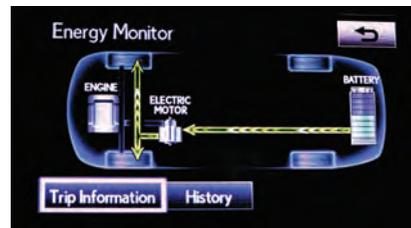
Tested vehicle	
<b>HIGHS</b>	Fuel economy, hybrid drivetrain, quietness, front-seat comfort
<b>LOWS</b>	Lackluster handling, controls, brake-pedal feel
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	300h
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	200-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cyl. engine, electric motor; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Blind-spot monitor, display audio with console controller and backup camera, HID headlights, power tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, heated wood steering wheel
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$44,017



**UNWELCOME ADDITION** The Remote Touch controller can be confusing and distracting.



**LIGHTS OUT** Daytime running lights work only in the "Auto" position, which makes it too easy to turn them off.



**BATTERY INCLUDED** The 300h's gas/electric drivetrain delivers an impressive 36 mpg overall.

More test findings	
<b>BRAKING</b>	Very good on wet and dry surfaces. The 350's pedal had good feel and was easy to modulate. With regenerative braking, the 300h's pedal feel was nonlinear, which made modulation difficult.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Optional HID low beams provide good forward visibility, very good sideward visibility, and excellent intensity. A distinct cut-off in the low-beam pattern can reduce the range of visibility as the ES moves over dips and bumps in the road.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Fairly easy to the front and rear seats, although rear passengers will need to duck their heads to avoid bumping into the sloping roofline.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	Good, despite typical sedan problems, such as thick rear roof pillars and a high trunk deck. There are decent-sized front and side windows and large side mirrors. The rear-view camera, blind-spot monitoring, and cross-traffic alert systems work well.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Moderate. The glove box doesn't have much leftover room with the super-thick owner's manual inside.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The second-row center restraint is not tall enough, even when raised, to provide adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Some rear-facing seats might be difficult to secure because of the narrow center seating position and the tendency of the child seat to tilt when installed with a safety belt. The LATCH anchors in the rear outboard seats are difficult to access.



Scan for video.



Dodge Dart Rallye



Dodge Dart SXT

# Dodge Dart

**ROAD-TEST SCORE**  
**64**  
SXT

**ROAD-TEST SCORE**  
**61**  
Rallye

As the first all-new model to emerge from the Fiat-Chrysler alliance, the Dart has been highly anticipated. It replaces the subpar Caliber, and many industry watchers have wondered whether it has what it takes to put Chrysler back in the small-car race. After testing two versions, our take is that the

Dart is the first decent compact from Dodge in decades and has some solid positives. But overall it can't measure up to the best in class. For a car that needed to be an all-star, the Dart is a position player at best.

The Dart gets a lot of things right. It has a solid, substantial feel and a relatively quiet cabin. It handles well, whether cruising on a two-lane backcountry road or being pushed to its limits at our track. The steering is well weighted, and there's minimal body lean in turns. You can also get a wide variety of optional features, including some, such as a blind-spot warning system, automatic high/low beams, and a heated steering wheel, that aren't offered in many competitors.

Where the Dart stalls out is in its powertrains and interior accommodations. The 160-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine in our \$20,680 SXT feels notably underpowered. Our Dart Rallye (\$24,490, as tested) has a thrashy-sounding 160-hp, 1.4-liter turbocharged four with an optional automated-manual transmission that shifts poorly. Inside, the lumpy front seats have uneven, uncomfortable cushioning. And despite its generous dimensions, the rear seat is somewhat tight. The Dart also gets rather expensive with

options; for the price of our Rallye, you could get a larger family sedan.

Both Darts scored too low in our tests to be recommended. We have no reliability data yet for this new model.

### A solid core in need of a drivetrain

The Dart is fairly nimble and enjoyable to drive, like a sporty European sedan. The steering is responsive and provides decent feedback. It has a nice heft to it on the road but can be too heavy when parking. When pushed to its limits at our track, the car enthusiastically darts through corners with strong grip and balanced

behavior, and it posted an impressively high speed in our avoidance maneuver.

Another of the Dart's high points is its composed, compliant ride. Occupants are well isolated from pavement imperfections and road noise. And ride motions are taut and controlled, giving the Dart a buttoned-down feel that's usually found in more upscale cars.

Those dynamic virtues are undermined by the engines. Our SXT got a decent 27 mpg overall, and the Rallye, a good 29. But neither of our cars' engines sounds refined. The lethargic response from the 2.0-liter is readily apparent when merging into highway traffic

## Ratings Small sedans

All tested models In performance order.

Recommended

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommended	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
✓	1	Subaru Impreza Premium	\$21,345		82	●	27
✓	2	Hyundai Elantra GLS	18,445		80	●	29
✓	3	Mazda3 i Touring (Skyactiv)	20,145		78	○	32
✓	4	Ford Focus SE	20,280		71	●	28
✓	5	Chevrolet Cruze 1LT (1.4T)	20,530		70	○	26
✓	6	Chevrolet Cruze LS (1.8L)	18,375		68	○	26
	7	Dodge Dart SXT (2.0L)	20,680	●	64	new	27
	8	Honda Civic LX	19,405		63	●	30
	9	Dodge Dart Rallye (1.4T)	24,490	●	61	new	29
	10	Volkswagen Jetta SE (2.5)	20,300		60	●	25

or climbing hills. The six-speed automatic transmission shifts very smoothly but can often leave the car feeling flat-footed.

The 1.4-liter turbo is definitely quicker but has notable turbo lag when you step on the gas. Chrysler's new dual-clutch automated manual transmission works well under hard acceleration, but normal stop-and-go driving brings stumbles and some clunky shifts. This combination of turbo lag and hesitant downshifts makes the car feel unresponsive and difficult to drive smoothly. The available six-speed manual is a better fit for that engine.

### Basic accommodations

The cabin is relatively roomy, with good head, leg, and foot room. But the low roofline, thick pillars, and dark trim can make it feel cave-like. A tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel helps you find a comfortable driving position. But the cloth front seats have squishy cushioning and overpronounced bolsters, resulting in uneven support. Some drivers wanted more lower-back support, but neither car has adjustable lumbar support. The optional leather seats have better support and lumbar adjustments.

The rear seat provides decent leg room. But the flat cushions lack support, and head room is tight for adults. Forcing an adult to sit in the hard, perchlike center seating position borders on cruel and unusual punishment.

Overall, the controls are simple and straightforward, especially with the super-simple basic radio. But the main gauges have a stylized font that's hard to read. The optional Uconnect 8.4 infotainment system in our Rallye, with a large, clear touch screen and buttons and knobs for common functions, is one of the best and most intuitive we've seen.

Even basic Darts provide Bluetooth voice control, but models with the touch screen let you choose songs from a portable music player or enter a destination in the navigation system by voice. Connecting a phone through Bluetooth is simple with either car. Both easily streamed music from Pandora, and the touch-screen system features apps for finding gas prices, weather reports, and more.

The interior of the Dart is neatly trimmed but not plush. Buyers can choose from a wide variety of trims and colors. But we did notice a number of sharp edges on the plastics and some dash panels with wide gaps.

The trunk is fairly roomy and can be expanded by folding the 60/40-split rear seats.



#### Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Braking, fuel economy, solid feel, handling, relatively quiet and roomy, feature content
<b>LOWS</b>	Turbo power delivery, clunky dual-clutch transmission, front-seat comfort, noise, touchy brake pedal, price
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Rallye
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	160-hp, 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed automated-manual transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	17-inch aluminum wheels, cruise control, Uconnect 8.4 with navigation, racetrack tail lamps, premium audio
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$24,490

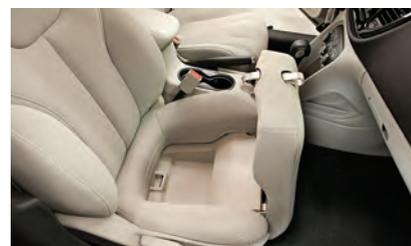


**POOR MANNERS** The new automated manual transmission stumbles and clunks in traffic.



#### Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Handling, solid feel, relatively quiet and roomy
<b>LOWS</b>	Acceleration, front-seat comfort, touchy brake pedal
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	SXT
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	160-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	Popular equipment group (cruise control, remote start), Bluetooth, 17-inch aluminum wheels
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$20,680



**HIDDEN STORAGE** The front passenger seat has a handy cubby under the cushion.



**ALL CLEAR** The Uconnect touch-screen system is sharp and easy to interact with.

#### More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stops on dry and wet surfaces. The touchy pedal takes getting used to.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Low beams provide good visibility to the front and side, but intensity is modest. High beams provide sufficient visibility, but not as good as that in many other cars. Intensity is no better than the low beams. A distinct cutoff can reduce visibility as the car moves over uneven roads.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Rear access is somewhat tight because the wheel well cuts into the door space. It's easier in front, but it takes a bit of ducking to avoid bumping your head on the sloping roof.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	So-so visibility, with thick windshield pillars and dashboard reflections compromising the forward view. Rearward visibility is restricted by small rear-side windows, large roof pillars and head restraints, and a high rear deck. Optional rear-view camera and blind-spot monitoring systems help.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Good, with a deep center console, a roomy glove box, and a handy storage compartment in the front passenger-seat cushion. With the optional touch-screen, a CD drive takes up some room in the center console.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	The second-row center restraint is not tall enough to provide adequate protection.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Some rear-facing seats might be difficult to secure. The LATCH anchors for the outboard seats are recessed and very difficult to access. The two inner LATCH anchors can be used for installing a child seat in the center position if the seat's attachments are flexible and the child-seat manufacturer allows it.



Scan for video.



**TAP DANCING**  
The touch display takes a lot of finger tapping to get things done.

# Chevrolet Spark

**ROAD-TEST SCORE**  
**34**

If you're looking for an affordable city car that's easy on gas, the new Spark may strike your fancy. The four-door subcompact, which is built in South Korea, gets excellent fuel economy of 32 mpg overall and 42 on the highway and has a surprisingly usable rear seat. It offers a relatively nice assortment of features, including aluminum wheels, a touch-screen audio system, Bluetooth, and 10 air bags.

The Spark is affordable; we paid \$15,420 for a midlevel 1LT version with an automatic transmission. And it measures a foot-and-a-half shorter than a Honda Fit, so parking is super easy.

But parking might be the most fun you have with a Chevy Spark. It has sluggish, patience-testing acceleration; a 0-to-60-mph "sprint" takes 13 seconds. The best we can say about the stiff, jittery ride is that it's better than the buckboardlike Scion iQ, another city car. Despite the Spark's commendable space utilization, the front seats are narrow enough that your shoulders and hips hang over the cushions. And then there's the cabin noise, a relentless assault from all quarters.

All of this contributed to a meager overall road-test score of only 34, one of the lowest in recent years and way too low for us to recommend the car. The Spark is too new for us to have reliability data.

## Pounding the pavement

Power comes from a dinky 84-hp, 1.2-liter four-cylinder engine mated to a four-speed automatic transmission. To save gas it clings to the highest gear available, robbing pep, and it jerks while hunting between gears. The Spark struggles to keep pace, and the engine revs loudly a lot of the time. A five-speed manual transmission is also available, which, in our brief experience with it, provided livelier performance.

With its small footprint and stiff suspension the Spark is highly maneuverable, but the steering provides almost no feedback. It posted a high speed threading our avoidance maneuver, with no unpleasant surprises. But pavement flaws deliver stiff, rubbery kicks into the cabin, especially from the rear.

The interior has bright colors and accents, although the plastics and fabrics look and feel cheap. Despite high seats and ample head room, the cockpit still feels tight and narrow. The steering wheel tilts but doesn't telescope, forcing a straight-arm reach for some drivers. The front seats are lumpy and very firm. On the positive side, the rear seats provide adequate head and leg room for two adults, unlike other minicars or even the larger Chevy Sonic.

The motorcycle-like gauge cluster looks cool but is cluttered and picks up some reflections. Dominating the center dash is a 7-inch touch screen that controls audio and some smart-phone functions. It lacks traditional buttons and knobs, even for volume, and the fussy touch-screen equivalents give no feedback. Many functions require several taps to get what you want. At least the Bluetooth connectivity sets up easily and works well, and there's Pandora and a USB port for connecting portable music players.

The space behind the rear seats can hold just one large suitcase, but with a little

## Tested vehicle

<b>HIGHS</b>	Economical, easy to park, usable rear seat
<b>LOWS</b>	Acceleration, transmission, ride, noise, front-seat comfort, driving position, controls
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	1LT
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>	84-hp, 1.2-liter four-cylinder engine; four-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
<b>MAJOR OPTIONS</b>	None
<b>TESTED PRICE</b>	\$15,420

## The Spark line

<b>OTHER TRIMS</b>	LS, 2LT
<b>OTHER DRIVETRAIN</b>	Five-speed manual transmission
<b>BASE PRICES</b>	\$12,995-\$16,720

## More test findings

<b>BRAKING</b>	Short stops.
<b>HEADLIGHTS</b>	Good intensity and distance from low beams; high beams are sufficient but don't excel.
<b>ACCESS</b>	Easy in front; the small rear has an awkward handle.
<b>VISIBILITY</b>	There are large front and side windows, but the wide roof pillars obstruct the view to the sides and rear.
<b>CABIN STORAGE</b>	Modest.
<b>HEAD RESTRAINTS</b>	All four adjust and remain sufficiently tall when lowered.
<b>CHILD SEATS</b>	Some rear-facing seats might be tough to secure. Top tether anchor is hard to find.

## How they compare

Rec.	SUBCOMPACT HATCHBACKS	0	100				
		P	F	I	G	V	E
✓	Honda Fit (base)	68					
✓	Kia Rio EX	63					
✓	Mazda2 Touring	60					
✓	Scion xD	60					
	Chevrolet Spark 1LT	34					
	Scion iQ	29					



Scan for video.

fiddling the 60/40-split rear seatbacks fold down to make substantially more cargo room. In lieu of a spare tire, the Spark supplies just a tire pump and a can of puncture sealant.

# Compare



VERSION	Cadillac XTS	Lincoln MKS	Lexus ES	Lexus ES	Dodge Dart	Chevrolet Spark
<b>TRIM LINE</b>	Premium	Base	300h	350	SXT/ Rallye	1LT
<b>PRICE: BASE/TESTED</b> <sup>①</sup>	\$53,585/\$57,200	\$42,810/\$50,070	\$38,850/\$44,017	\$36,100/\$43,702	SXT: \$17,995/\$20,680 Rallye: \$18,995/\$24,490	\$14,670/\$15,420
<b>DRIVETRAIN</b>						
Engine	3.6-liter V6 (304 hp)	3.7-liter V6 (304 hp)	2.5-liter 4-cyl. (200 hp) hybrid	3.5-liter V6 (268 hp)	SXT: 2.0-liter 4-cyl. (160 hp) Rallye: 1.4-liter 4-cyl. (160 hp) turbo	1.2-liter 4-cyl. (83 hp)
Transmission	6-speed automatic	6-speed automatic	CVT	6-speed automatic	SXT: 6-speed automatic Rallye: 6-speed sequential	4-speed automatic
Drive wheels	Front	Front	Front	Front	Front	Front
<b>TIRES TESTED</b>						
Model & size	Goodyear Eagle RS-A 2, size P245/45R19 98V	Michelin Primacy MXM4, size 255/45R19 100V	Michelin Primacy MXV4, size P215/55R17 93V	Bridgestone Turanza EL4002, size P215/55R17 93V	Continental ContiProContact, size 225/45R17 91H	Goodyear Integrity, size 185/55R15 82T
<b>RATINGS</b>						
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>						
Acceleration	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	○/⊖	⊖
0 to 60 mph, sec.	7.2	7.1	8.2	6.7	11.0/8.6	13.0
45 to 65 mph, sec.	4.5	4.9	5.2	4.3	7.3/5.8	8.0
Quarter-mile, sec.	15.7	15.5	16.4	15.0	18.2/16.8	19.5
Transmission	⊕	○	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊖	○
Routine handling	⊖	○	○	○	⊕/⊖	○
Emergency handling	⊖	○	○	○	⊕/⊖	⊕
Avoid. maneuver, speed, mph	53.0	51.5	51.0	51.5	54.0/54.5	55.5
Braking	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊖	⊕
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	128/134	137/141	140/144	139/147	SXT: 127/139; Rallye: 131/143	131/138
Headlights	○	○	○	○	○/○	○
<b>COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE</b>						
Ride	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕/⊖	⊖
Noise	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊕/○	⊖
Driving position	⊖	○	⊖	⊖	⊕/⊖	⊖
Front-seat comfort	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕	○/○	○
Rear-seat comfort	⊖	○	⊖	⊖	○/○	○
Access	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕/⊖	⊕
Controls and displays	⊖	⊖	○	○	⊕/⊖	○
Interior fit and finish	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	○/○	⊖
Trunk	⊖	⊕	○	⊖	○/○	⊖
<b>PREDICTED RELIABILITY</b>	New	○	⊖	⊖	New	New
<b>FUEL</b>						
Overall mpg	22	20	36	25	27/29	32
City/highway mpg	14/34	13/30	28/44	17/35	SXT: 18/38; Rallye: 19/41	22/42
Type	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, mi.	18.5/400	19.0/380	17.0/620	17.0/425	SXT: 15.8/425; Rallye: 15.8/450	9.0/285
Annual cost, 12K mi. at \$3.80/gal.	\$2,105	\$2,265	\$1,250	\$1,830	\$1,695/ \$1,600	\$1,445
<b>SAFETY</b>						
<b>CRASH TESTS</b>						
IIHS frontal offset	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	NA
IIHS side	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	NA
IIHS rear	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	NA
IIHS roof strength	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good	NA
NHTSA front, driver/pass.	⊕/⊕	⊕/⊕	NA/NA	NA/NA	⊕/⊕	NA/NA
NHTSA side, driver/rear	⊕/⊕	⊕/⊕	NA/NA	NA/NA	⊕/⊕	NA/NA
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	⊖/⊖	⊖/⊖	NA/NA	NA/NA	⊖/NA	NA/NA
<b>AIR BAGS</b>						
Side, front/rear	std./no	std./no	std./std.	std./std.	std./std.	std./no
Head protection	standard	std. w/rollover	standard	standard	standard	standard
<b>SPECIFICATIONS</b>						
<b>DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT</b>						
Length/width/height, in.	202/73/59	206/76/62	193/71/57	193/71/57	184/72/58	145/63/61
Wheelbase, in.	112	113	111	111	106	94
Turning circle, ft.	40	42	40	40	39	34
Ground clearance, in.	6.0	3.5	5.0	5.0	4.5	5.5
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	4,090 (59/41)	4,265 (59/41)	3,685 (59/41)	3,575 (61/39)	SXT: 3,290 (62/38) Rallye: 3,300 (61/39)	2,315 (63/37)
Maximum load, lb.	925	950	905	905	825	660
Luggage, suitcases+duffels	4+1	4+0	3+1	3+2	3+1	1+0
Towing capacity, lb.	1,000	1,000	NR	NR	1,000	NR
<b>INTERIOR ROOM</b>						
Front shoulder room, in.	56.0	58.5	57.5	57.5	57.5	50.5
Front leg room, in.	43.5	42.0	42.5	42.5	42.0	39.0
Front head room, in. <sup>②</sup>	3.5	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.5	4.0
Rear-row shoulder room, in.	54.0	57.0	54.0	54.0	54.5	48.5
Rear-row leg room, in.	32.5	29.0	30.5	30.5	27.5	26.0
Rear-row head room, in. <sup>②</sup>	3.0	3.5	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.0

<sup>①</sup> Based on sticker price at time of purchase. <sup>②</sup> Above a person 5'9" tall.



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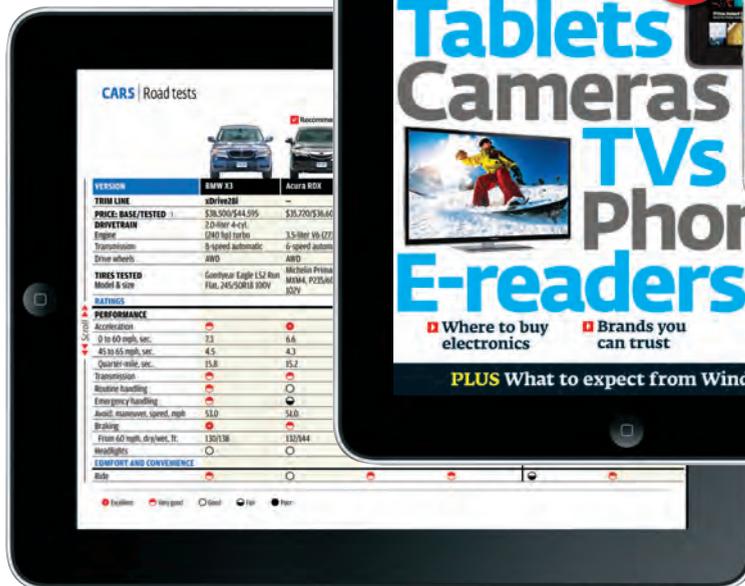
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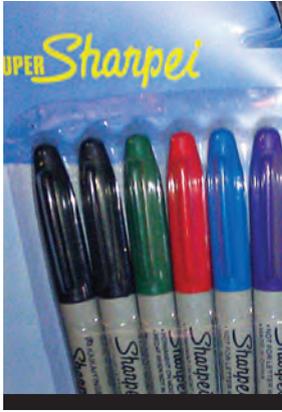
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## A new wrinkle

Selling It fans may remember our October item starring the Shoupie, a knockoff of the Sharpie pen. Here's another version, bought at a Florida flea market during the dog days of summer, a reader says.



## As easy as 1-3-2

This watch, with "a precision split second chronograph," seems to have a problem with chronology, unless 85 now comes before 80.



## Lights out!

Dynamism.com calls the Bitplay Bang!, a remote-control pistol plus lamp, "a stylish addition to any home" that's perfect "for the 007 in your life." To turn the light off, shoot at it. To turn it back on, shoot again. Maybe some people will spend \$299 to wave a fake gun around the bedroom, but that's a lot of moneypennies. We'll wait for the hand grenade toilet flusher.

## Try "how you can help"

The cover of this issue of MicroCap MarketPlace says, "With millions of people dying each year" from the water crisis, "it can no longer be ignored." That's right, clients should pay attention to human suffering—so that they can make money.

## Consider the source

"EdenPURE ranked #1," the headline says. But not by CONSUMER REPORTS. (We rated one EdenPURE room heater good overall, but it cost far more than two higher-rated models.) EdenPURE actually earned the ranking from its own pitchman—an actor from the 1990s sitcom "Home Improvement."



## And now?

Submissions: SellingIt@cro.consumer.org or Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703

## And chicken comes from ... cows

Old McDonald must be spinning in his grave.

The Consumer Reports New Car Price Report includes access to the Build & Buy Service. Purchasers have saved over \$100 million vs MSRP using this program\*.



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For service in Canada, go to: [www.ConsumerReports.org/canada27](http://www.ConsumerReports.org/canada27)

# Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

## In this special section

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## How to use the Canada Extra section

Every month, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The Ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.

You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold—and for what price—in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and overall score appear promising, and read more about them in the main report and full Ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)

In most cases, the prices we list here

are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (\*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or Recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list on page 32D, the manufacturer's phone number and Web address in Canada, so that you can call or go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

We appreciate your support but we don't take it for granted. Please write to [CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org](mailto:CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org) and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every e-mail message or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

Paul Reynolds, *Canada Extra editor*

**CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

**Recommended** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

## Single-serve coffeemakers

Report and Ratings, page 43

Fifteen of the 21 tested single-serve coffeemakers are available, including one of the recommended models.

Rec. Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
			0 100 P   F   G   V   E
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2	Smart Café My Invento (Senseo-like pods)	\$ 80	72
5	Starbucks Verismo 580 (Verismo pods)	200	62
6	Bosch Tassimo T55 (Tassimo T-discs)	180	60
7	Cuisinart SS-300 Compact Single Serve (K-cups)	140	60
8	CBTL Americano (CBTL capsules)	160	59
9	Keurig Platinum B70 (K-cups)	200	59
10	Mr. Coffee BVMC-KG5 (K-cups)	100	58
12	Keurig Mini Plus B31 (K-cups)	100	55

Rec. Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
			0 100 P   F   G   V   E
13	Mr. Coffee Single Serve Brewing System BVMC-KG1 (K-cups)	\$100	55
14	Keurig Vue V700 (K-cups)	280	54
15	Bunn My Café MCP (Senseo-like pods) *	380	49
16	Bosch Tassimo Suprema TAS4511UC (Tassimo T-Discs)	120	47
17	Cuisinart SS-700 (K-cups)	250	46
18	Keurig B40 Brewing System (K-cups)	100	45
19	Breville BKC700XL (K-cups)	300	40

\*Some versions of these models have been recalled by the Consumer Product Safety Commission for burn hazards. See [saferproducts.gov](http://saferproducts.gov) for details.

# Smart phones

Report, page 34; Ratings, pages 38-39

Here are recommended and rated phones that are available in Canada, listed by their Canadian carrier. Performance and features might vary from tested models.

## Bell Mobility

- Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$80 <sup>1</sup>
- Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>
- Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
- Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$380 <sup>1</sup>
- HTC One S, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- Motorola Atrix HD, \$50 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy Note, \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB), \$200 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy S II, \$60 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$160 <sup>1</sup>

## Fido Solutions

- Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$80 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 4S (64GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$380 <sup>1</sup>
  - HTC One S, \$50 <sup>2</sup>
  - Samsung Galaxy Nexus, \$50 <sup>2</sup>
- ## Rogers Wireless
- Apple iPhone 4S (64GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>

- Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
- Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$380 <sup>1</sup>
- HTC One X, \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- LG Optimus G, \$130 <sup>1</sup>
- Motorola Droid Razr HD, \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy Note, \$100 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB), \$200 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy S II, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$160 <sup>1</sup>
- Samsung Galaxy S III (32GB), \$210 <sup>1</sup>
- Sony Xperia ion, \$0 <sup>1</sup>

## Telus Mobility

- Apple iPhone 4S (16GB), \$0 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (16GB), \$180 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (32GB), \$280 <sup>1</sup>
  - Apple iPhone 5 (64GB), \$380 <sup>1</sup>
  - HTC One S, \$0 <sup>1</sup>
  - HTC One X, \$100 <sup>1</sup>
  - LG Optimus G, NA
  - Samsung Galaxy Note, \$150 <sup>1</sup>
  - Samsung Galaxy Note II, \$200 <sup>1</sup>
  - Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB), \$160 <sup>1</sup>
- <sup>1</sup> 3-year contract. <sup>2</sup> 2-year contract.

# Tablets

Report, pages 20-22

Here are the brands of tablets from our initial tests with phone numbers and websites where you can reach the manufacturers for information about models and prices.

BRAND	PHONE	WEBSITE
Apple	800-692-7753	<a href="http://apple.com/ca">apple.com/ca</a>
Barnes & Noble	800-843-2665	<a href="http://barnesandnoble.com">barnesandnoble.com</a>
Microsoft	855-575-5142	<a href="http://microsoft.com">microsoft.com</a>
Samsung	800-726-7864	<a href="http://samsung.com/ca">samsung.com/ca</a>

# Laptops

Report, page 41

Here are the brands of Windows 8 laptops from our early testing with phone numbers and websites where you can reach the manufacturers for information about models and prices.

BRAND	PHONE	WEBSITE
Acer	800-565-2237	<a href="http://acer.ca">acer.ca</a>
Dell	800-999-3355	<a href="http://dell.ca">dell.ca</a>
HP	877-231-4351	<a href="http://hp.com/canada">hp.com/canada</a>
Lenovo	866-968-4465	<a href="http://lenovo.com/ca/en">lenovo.com/ca/en</a>
Samsung	800-726-7864	<a href="http://samsung.com/ca">samsung.com/ca</a>

# Recalls

## 2011-2012 Nissan models

The engine oil cooler stud might fail, causing an engine oil leak. Unusual noise and engine performance could cause the engine to fail.

**Models:** 528 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer replace the engine oil cooler connector stud.

## 2010-2011 Cadillac SRX

The transmission shaft cable may have been improperly installed during vehicle assembly. Driver may not be able to shift gears properly. If the parking brake isn't applied, the vehicle may roll away.

**Models:** 849 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer inspect and, if necessary, correct the transmission shift cable regulation.

## 2012 Chevrolet Sonic

The front brake pads may have been omitted during vehicle assembly. That may prohibit the vehicle from stopping within the usual distances.

**Models:** 1,215 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer inspect the front brakes and, if necessary, install brake pads and replace the calipers and rotors.

## 2001-2002 Ford Escape

Vehicle may have been originally equipped with a brake master cylinder reservoir cap that could leak. That may cause brake fluid to leak from the cap and may affect the ABS module wiring harness connector. The vehicles were involved in a recall campaign in 2007 to address missing seals connecting to the ABS module. If the repair was not done properly, brake fluid may continue to leak.

**Models:** 17,827 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer replace the brake

master cylinder reservoir cap and modify the ABS electrical system.

## 2004-2005 Ford Freestar

The torque converter could fail. That may result in loss of vehicle propulsion.

**Models:** 36,421 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer replace the torque converter assembly.

## 2006-2008 Kia

The clockspring assembly for the driver's air bag may become damaged and fail. That may result in the air bag functioning improperly, and the panel warning light may illuminate. The air bag may not deploy when needed.

**Models:** 15,151 2006-2008 Kia Magentis and 2007-2008 Kia Rondo vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace air-bag clockspring assembly.

## 2001-2002 Mazda Tribute

Vehicles may have been originally equipped with a brake master cylinder reservoir that could leak. Brake fluid may leak and come in contact with ABS module wiring harness connector. The vehicles were previously involved in a campaign in 2007. If the repair was not done properly, leaking brake fluid may corrode the ABS module electrical connector.

**Models:** 4,921 vehicles.

**What to do:** Dealers will replace the brake master cylinder reservoir cap and modify the ABS electrical system.

## 2002-2005 Mini Cooper

The electro-hydraulic power steering pump could fail temporarily or permanently due to problems with the electronic system that

controls the pump. That may cause the driver to use the manual steering mode and would require increased driver effort.

**Models:** 9,254 2002-2005 Mini Cooper and 2005 Mini Cooper Convertible vehicles.

**What to do:** The electro-hydraulic power steering pump and the pump cooling fan will be subject to special extended warranty coverage of 12 years or 200,000 km from the first in-service date of the vehicle.

## 2012 Nissan Versa

The automatic transmission shifter knob could bind, and the shifter may be moved without depressing the brake pedal or the shift select button. That may result in unintentional movement of the vehicle.

**Models:** 2,381 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the transmission shifter knob or the entire shifter assembly.

## 2008-2009 Honda Odyssey

On vehicles equipped with a power liftgate, the gas-filled struts, which are used to raise and support the liftgate, may be prone to failure due to a manufacturing flaw. That may cause the liftgate to drop suddenly and may result in personal injury.

**Models:** 2,790 vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer replace both liftgate struts.

## 2012 Honda models

The vent shut-float valve case may have been incorrectly manufactured and could fail. That could allow fuel leakage from the tank and could cause a fire.

**Models:** 571 2012 Acura MDX and 2012 Honda Pilot vehicles.

**What to do:** Have dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the fuel tank assembly.

# Autos Report and Ratings, pages 50-59

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

Make & model	Price range	Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel economy (liters per 100 km)		
		0-50 km/h	0-100 km/h	80-100 km/h	500 meters	City driving	Highway driving	Overall
<b>LUXURY SEDANS</b>								
Cadillac XTS	\$48,995-\$64,975	3.1	7.5	3.2	17.9	17.4	7.0	10.9
Lincoln MKS	37,700-43,700	3.0	7.5	3.7	17.7	18.3	7.8	11.7
<b>UPSCALE SEDANS</b>								
Lexus ES hybrid	43,900	3.5	8.7	3.9	18.8	8.3	5.4	6.5
Lexus ES	39,500	2.9	6.9	3.0	17.2	14.1	6.7	9.5
<b>SMALL SEDANS</b>								
Dodge Dart 2.0 liter	15,995-23,245	4.1	11.7	5.4	20.8	13.1	6.1	8.7
Dodge Dart 1.4 liter	19,795-24,545	3.6	9.1	4.3	19.2	12.4	5.8	8.3
<b>SUBCOMPACT HATCHBACK</b>								
Chevrolet Spark	13,495-19,745	4.7	13.9	5.5	22.4	10.7	5.5	7.5

## Contact info How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

**Bosch Tassimo**  
877-834-7271  
tassimo.ca

**Breville**  
866-901-2739  
keurig.ca

**Bunn**  
800-263-2256  
bunn.com

**CBTL**  
888-520-2285  
cbtl.com

**Cuisinart**  
800-472-7606  
cuisinart.ca

**Keurig**  
866-901-2739  
keurig.ca

**Mr. Coffee**  
800-672-6333  
mr.coffee.com

**Smart Café**  
amazon.com

**Starbucks**  
800-235-2883  
starbucks.ca

## Canada Extra on the Web

Canada Extra information can be found on ConsumerReports.org, our website, along with the current issue of the magazine and more. The address is [www.ConsumerReports.org](http://www.ConsumerReports.org). Once there, click on the "Canada Extra" link on the opening screen. There you can see which reports have Canadian information available.

The screenshot shows the ConsumerReports.org website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'Cars', 'Appliances', 'Electronics', 'Home & Garden', and 'Babies & Kids'. Below this is a banner for 'canada extra'. A 'LISTED BY CATEGORY' section lists various car types: Canada Extra turns 10, Cars, Road tests, Budget cars, Compact pickups, Convertibles, Crew-cab pickup trucks, Family sedans, Hatchbacks, Large sedans, Luxury coupes, Luxury sedans, Luxury SUVs, Mercedes-Benz B200, and Midsize SUVs. To the right, a 'FREE HIGHLIGHTS' section lists: 'Cars & transportation' (We list government, industry, and manufacturer auto information and resources), 'Better Business Bureaus' (These non-profit organizations handle complaints, settle disputes, and more), 'Government consumer offices' (Here, federal and provincial offices that can help with a range of consumer concerns), and 'Government safety offices' (These offices handle consumer issues including product safety and bankruptcies).