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Goofs and Gaffes

ON THE COVER
Photography by James Wojcik

Prop Styling by Linden Elstran

ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS We are the world's largest independent, non-profit, consumer-product-testing organization, based in Yonkers, N.Y. We survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We buy all of the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. We do not allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes. **HOW TO REACH US** Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, Attn: Customer Service.

TO SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR, go to ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor. **NEWS TIPS AND STORY IDEAS**: Go to ConsumerReports.org/tips. **E-MAIL SUBMISSIONS**: For Selling It send to SellingIt@cro.consumer.org or call 800-666-5261. See page 75 for more details. **SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION** Go to ConsumerReports.org/magazine or call 800-666-5261. See page 72 for more details. **RATINGS** We rate products using these symbols: ● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

READER LETTERS

Your Thoughts on the Revamped Magazine

I'm afraid I dislike many of the changes you introduced in your November 2014 issue. The diagrams were difficult to follow. The pages themselves, although readable and well-delineated, were busy and distracting, with loud colors. The vibrant yellow you're using to highlight information and set off separate lines in charts is particularly annoying.
—Elizabeth Briggs, Blacksburg, VA

Like the new format. It is very readable and has good topic flow between narrative, pictures, and charts.
—Donald Mcclearn, Virginia Beach, VA

I appreciate the design elements that you were going for [but] the lack of any pictures of product make the magazine less informative. The pictures help me find articles I want to read.
—Greg West, Macungie, PA

You said that you adjusted the type from before BUT it still needs more work. Please stick with serif type. Contents are still very good and detailed.
—Susan Loren Davidson, Longboat Key, FL

Thanks for the very easy-to-read issue this month (November). Loved it! Finally, font size and colors that are clear and bright.
—Winifred Bunch, Randolph, NJ

This new stark, black and white design scheme [is] way too overloaded with text. And it seems there is less color throughout. Look, if the cost of ink is rising, raise my subscription rate.
—Bob Sherman, Lebanon, NH

Love, love, love your new Consumer Reports November 2014 magazine layout. Now, not only is Consumer Reports the most timely, most interesting, and most useful publication I get, it's also the best looking. Kudos!
—Ruth Lehmann, Monsey, NY

I really appreciated the old CR magazine because of its in-depth format. Must everything end up getting dumbed down for people with pathetically short attention spans?
—Michael Osborne, Washington, DC

I like your new format a great deal. There is one thing I want to comment on, however, and that is the number of pages with graphics and numbers. The numbers are very

WE HEAR YOU

You Told Us ... in So Many Words

We received thousands of comments about the redesigned Consumer Reports, mostly via e-mail. Here, a look at some of the most prevalent opinions.



interesting, but it felt as though every other page was basically the same design. —Cathy Rodgers, West New York, NJ

Nice job with the new format. Looks like same great content but more interesting layout. —Thomas Rispoli, Endicott, NY

The "Selling It" section might look cleaner design-wise, but I think the whole point of the section is seeing these product mistakes in real life. Switching from photos to line-art drawings makes these unbelievable errors exactly that: unbelievable. —Mark Grady, Leominster, MA

I liked everything EXCEPT the fact that you deleted the inside back page [Selling it]. That was my favorite read. BRING IT BACK!!!!
—Robert Wilson, Accord, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE Please welcome Selling It back to its old spot (see page 75). And the photos are back, too! You are invited to submit items for publication. Send submissions to SellingIt@cro.consumer.org or by mail to Selling It, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY, 10703.

➔ **SEND your letters for publication to** ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Ellen

An Opinionated Reader—the Best Kind to Have

One of the greatest things about Consumer Reports is our readers: You are insightful and passionate. Boy, are you passionate. We asked for feedback about the revamped magazine—and you sent your opinion in droves. Your letters were detailed, specific, smart.

A lot of people liked the changes we made. A lot didn't. We're listening and preparing to address your recommendations in coming months. But I have a few requests of you, too:

1) Be aware that we are paying attention. We've made some immediate alterations, including increasing the font size on some features and running lots more photos of products.

We want to give all of your comments the thought and consideration they deserve. So you can anticipate that this magazine will continue to evolve to serve your needs.

2) Keep telling us what you think. We invite you to join our Reader Advisory Panel, which will provide ongoing input as the magazine moves forward. To join, go to CRresearch.org/feedback.

3) Take a look at page 75. We've restored Selling It to the last page, with real photos. Just like you, we missed the old format. Looking forward to our next conversation.

—Ellen Kampinsky, Editor in Chief

CROWD SIGNAL

Rate Your Cell Service

Nothing is as frustrating as cell service that doesn't deliver when you need it. That's why Consumer Reports has launched Crowd Signal (CrowdSignal.org), a simple website, now in Beta, where people can rate their cell-service provider. Crowd Signal wants to hear from you. What do you think about your carrier's coverage, data speed, price, and customer service? Let your voice be heard—loud and clear—at Crowd Signal.

CORRECTIONS

In "Frequent Flyer Secrets Revealed" in the November 2014 issue, incorrect designations were inadvertently given on part of the chart "From New York to L.A. and Back," on page 14. The row labeled "Ease of Booking Online" should have been labeled "Ease of Using Website," and the airlines should have been rated as follows: Alaska, Very Easy; American, Easy; Delta, Easy; Frontier, Difficult; JetBlue, Very Easy; Southwest, Very Easy; Spirit, Difficult; United, Easy; and US Airways, Easy.

In our November 2014 article on the high cost of health care, in the box "What Do the Swiss Know That We Don't?" on page 42, the cost of Gleevac (\$3,633 in Switzerland and \$6,214 in the U.S.) should have been per month, not per dose.



Coming in January

WIN AT WINTER WITH OUR NEXT ISSUE:



Great Snow-Removal Gear



Best Super-market Products, From Soup ...



... to Toilet Paper



The Truth About Gluten



Plus: What Happens When Your Car Is Recalled

YOUR IDEAS COUNT

"I don't like it."



"I love it!"

Give Us Your 2 Cents

We want your thoughts on the magazine: the articles, the photos, the look, anything and everything. We'd also love you to stay involved, with ongoing feedback, so we invite you to join our Reader Advisory Panel. We're listening, America.

➔ **JOIN THE PANEL** or send a letter for possible publication in the magazine by going to CRresearch.org/feedback.

READERS BEWARE

Make Sure Your Consumer Reports Subscription Isn't Fake

Readers need to be on the alert for offers of new subscriptions or renewals from companies that are not authorized to offer subscriptions on behalf of Consumer Reports. Some of those companies even inflate the price of the annual subscription. They go by several names, including Allied Publishers Services, Associated Publishers Network, Magazine Payment Services, National Magazine Services, and Publisher Billing Center.

Consumer Reports is taking action to address the problem. How do you spot those unauthorized companies? For renewal notices, the absence of an expiration date on the notice could mean that you're dealing with an unauthorized marketer. If there is an expiration date, it should match the expiration date on your magazine label. Also, check the fine print for cancellation fees, another red flag. Please note that we cannot guarantee that those unauthorized companies will send us any orders they receive.

Here's an example of an unauthorized mailing with the cancellation fee in small type on the reverse:



Your ADVOCATE

On Holiday Loath Lists



82%

Hate when packages show up at the wrong place and are taken.



77%

Hate when fragile gifts arrive broken.



Americans find clueless customer-service reps highly annoying.

For advice on how to package your gift so it gets there in one piece—and other wisdom—see our expert's tips on shipping: ConsumerReports.org/cro/delivery1214



**FOOD THAT
ARRIVES SPOILED,
MELTED,
OR INEDIBLE**



GRIFE-O-METER

Delivery Hell

We asked Americans about their experiences with shipping services like Fed Ex, UPS, DHL, and the U.S. Postal Service. Here's what we found.

INFOGRAPHIC BY RAUL AGUILA

Bad customer experiences:

65%



High shipping fees

55%



Valuable packages left outside sans signature

42%



Rude or slow service at the U.S. Post Office

55%

of people said their package wasn't delivered when promised.

Wrap and ship sounds so simple, but ...

32%



Dislike weird guidelines about what can be shipped.

40%



Are frustrated when packing rules vary from service to service.

41%



Have had a package go missing.

46%



Had a door tag left—even though they were at home.

READER TIP

Shine Your Stove Like Your SUV

‘Instead of using oily polishes on my stainless-steel appliances, I clean and apply car wax once a month. It provides a clear barrier that holds its shine, and spills need just a quick wipe with a clean cloth.’

—Nick Crosby,
Branchburg, NJ



Send Your Top Tip to:

ConsumerReports.org/cro/readertip. If we run it, we'll pay \$100!

HEROES AND WATCHDOGS

Kinder, Gentler Meat From Two Next-Generation Cowboys



WHITE OAK PASTURES has been in Will Harris' family for five generations, during which time the Georgia farmer has witnessed the agricultural industry come full circle: His dad's decision to industrialize the business was for practical and financial reasons, but Harris says, "there were unintended consequences, most felt by the animals we raised and to our land, water, and air resources." That's why he and his children have returned White Oak to the environmentally sustainable, high animal-welfare model used by his great-grandfather 150 years ago. The overhaul meant five years when the farm was "just hemorrhaging money," he says. Today, though, White Oak has hit its stride: It has zero-waste red meat and poultry processing plants, and it even powers its tractors with biodiesel from its on-farm restaurant's cooking grease.



WILL WITHERSPOON'S resume doesn't look like the typical farmer's, but the former St. Louis Rams linebacker says the inspiration for Shire Gate Farm—his 700-acre, Animal Welfare Approved cattle business—was a clause in his NFL contract. "It says that we're ultimately responsible for what we put in our bodies," he says. So he educated himself about sustainable farming techniques and hung out his shingle in 2007. "One of our big goals is to eliminate the elitist factor that comes with 'grass-fed,'" he says. "We may live in a fast-food world, but more and more, educated consumers are proving that the value of high quality is up their alley."

→ **KNOW A CONSUMER HERO?** Fill us in on the champions you admire most. Write to us at heroeswatchdogs@cr.consumer.org.

GET INVOLVED

Actions You Can Take in December

→ **PUSH FOR A NATIONAL 911 SYSTEM UPGRADE**

A cell phone seems like a good bet in an emergency, but 911 dispatchers can't always pinpoint a mobile caller's exact location indoors—especially in buildings with several floors. Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, supports the FCC's proposal to raise standards for wireless carriers and the federal emergency system. Learn more at ConsumerReports.org/cro/wireless911calls.

→ **WATCH FOR KILL-SWITCH LAWS TO DETER CELL-PHONE THEFT**

Last year more than 3 million smart phones were stolen in the U.S. But starting next summer a California law will ensure that all new devices sold in the state come with "kill switches," which let the owner of a stolen phone remotely disable it. Laws like that dissuade thieves, so we're pushing Congress to require kill switches nationwide.

→ **THE WIN: A BAN ON UNSAFE MAGNETS**

Tiny, high-powered magnet sets are hazardous to children. If ingested, those magnets can tear holes through a child's stomach or intestine. CU has long pushed to get those unsafe products off the market. Now, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has approved a national safety standard that effectively bans them. Read more about the dangers and the new standard at cpsc.gov/magnets.



PROP-STYLING, TOP: PRISCILLA JEONG

4,000,000

The number of new iPhone 6 and 6 Plus handsets that Apple says were sold during the initial 24 hours after the product's Sept. 9 launch. (The number hit eight figures after the first weekend.) Is the device worth the hype? Turn to page 45 for our expert take.

PROBLEM SOLVER

The \$4.99 Misunderstanding

Time Warner Cable's 'anywhere, anytime' promise wasn't what it seemed

AFTER UPGRADING A BASIC PHONE and TV package to a triple-play deal including broadband access, Time Warner Cable subscriber Josiah Robbins saw a promotion for the premium entertainment network Epix. For just \$4.99 per month for a year, the ad promised, Robbins would be able to view the network's mix of movies and original programming "anywhere, any time." Assuming that this included on-demand access, he signed up.

For a month he enjoyed watching movies and shows whenever he wanted; then, suddenly, his on-demand access vanished. He was still able to watch Epix's programming, but only when it aired. When TWC phone representatives didn't have an explanation, they sent a service technician to his North Carolina home to troubleshoot his setup.

The problem, said the tech, was actually related to billing: Epix On Demand came with a higher level of service than Robbins' standard cable package. Unsure of why he'd had access that first month, Robbins upgraded to TWC's Preferred TV package for an additional \$10.99 per month. Still, he felt he'd been misled.

The Problem Solver contacted TWC and confirmed that the tech was correct. Robbins had mistakenly assumed that the ad's promise of Epix "anywhere, any time" was referring to on-demand viewing. It's possible that it instead related to a cable TV initiative called TV Everywhere, which lets a customer watch live

broadcasts of channels included in their cable package on a smart phone or tablet. As for Robbins' mysterious, monthlong access? TWC explained to us that the cable box Robbins had received had been incorrectly programmed to allow that feature. When the company performed a routine software update later in the month, the box was properly reset for his tier of service, and the on-demand feature was deactivated.

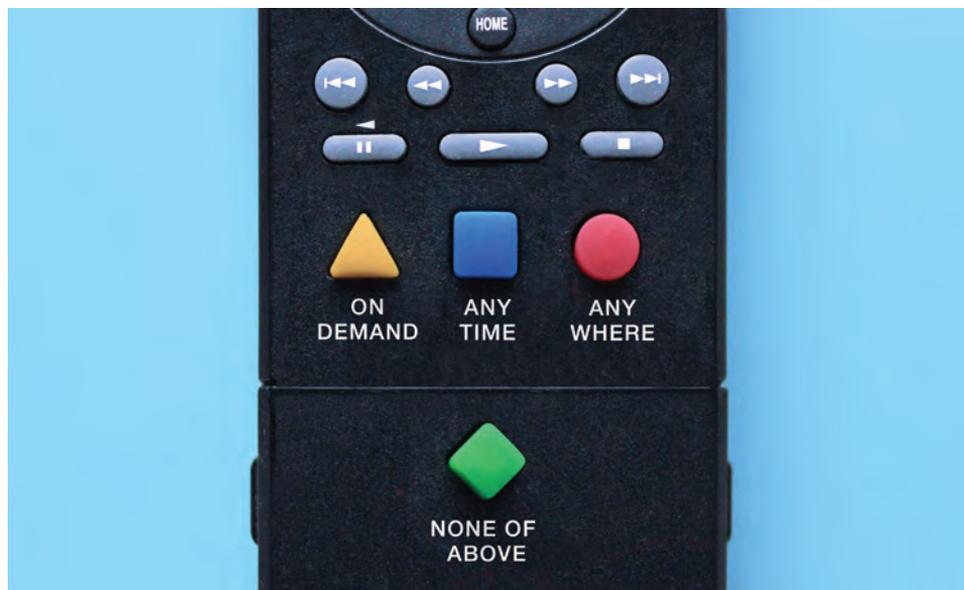
The day after we contacted TWC, a local TWC rep contacted Robbins and told him that she understood the possible confusion. She couldn't adjust the cost of his TV programming package, but she did lower his monthly Internet service bill for a year to cover the higher price. Robbins is satisfied, and we're glad we could help.

What does that mean for consumers?

Before you sign up for a new service, keep a copy of a promotion to make sure that you're getting what was promised. (If the offer is made on a TV channel, you can take a digital snapshot of it.) If you feel you've been misled, ask the company to address the concern or to allow you to revert to your original package. No luck? Ask to speak with a customer-retention specialist, who is given more latitude in satisfying customers.

→ FED UP WITH A COMPANY'S CUSTOMER SERVICE? Contact Consumer Reports'

Problem Solver at problemsolver@cr.consumer.org.



READER ROUNDTABLE

Cleaning Tips to Get You Through Party Season

Yes, food and drinks are key, but holiday entertaining also requires a stash of stain removers—and a cleaning strategy. Deputy Home Editor Celia Kuperszmid Lehrman fielded readers' questions during a recent Facebook live chat. Here is her advice:

Before. Set aside a stack of clean, white cloths and prepare our go-to "recipe for disaster," a detergent solution, in case things get messy. Mix 1 teaspoon of mild clear or white dishwashing liquid without bleach in 1 cup of water. Also keep 3 percent hydrogen peroxide on hand.

During. Clean as you party: Plates can go straight from table to dishwasher (just scrape off big pieces of food first). If white rings on your wood furniture don't disappear when you blot with a damp cloth and dry with a soft cloth, try non-gel toothpaste or a little liquid or cream car polish. Rub with the grain and wipe with a dry cloth.

After. Did someone slosh wine or drop chocolate on your rug? First, blot with a white cloth. (Don't rub!) Then try our detergent solution (test first on an inconspicuous spot to make sure it doesn't damage the fabric). Blot on the solution, working from the outside edge in. Rinse with water, blot, then place a white cloth on top, weighed down by a stack of books, for several hours. Some of the wine or chocolate still there? Try the hydrogen peroxide.

→ JOIN OUR NEXT READER ROUNDTABLE

Mark your calendars for Wed., Nov. 12, at 12:30 p.m. EST: @ConsumerReports will host a live Twitter chat with our head of Cars content, @MarkRechtin, and other experts from our Auto Test Center. Tweet @ConsumerReports, and use #crchat for questions and to follow along.

CEO Q&A

You Asked Costco's Chief: Why No Express Lanes?



TO CALL COSTCO A STORE is an understatement: While stocking up on paper products and pantry staples, the retailer's 74.5 million cardholders can also get an eye exam, book a cruise, and even buy life insurance. Its fans are fiercely loyal, and its critics (members and nonmembers alike) have strong opinions about everything from its annual membership fee to its food court's switch from Coke to Pepsi. When we announced that Costco's CEO, W. Craig Jelinek, would field reader questions, the e-mails and Facebook messages poured in. Here, a selection of his answers:

Q. Has Costco considered letting nonmembers shop there—perhaps once every few months?

—*Yuval Fleming, Kent, WA*

A. It's not a workable possibility. First, we believe it would compromise the underlying premise of the membership concept. Second, the basic \$55 annual fee covers a variety of membership, administrative, and operating costs, thereby allowing Costco to sell merchandise at ever-lower prices. Costco's average merchandise markups are in the 11 percent range, compared with other retail-format markups

ranging from 20 percent to more than 100 percent. The annual cost of membership is dwarfed by the annual savings.

Q. I enjoy products from Costco's Kirkland Signature store brand, but I feel some get dropped prematurely, before they're given a chance to click with consumers. What's the criteria for whether a Kirkland product sticks around?

—*Thomas Gruber, Seattle*

A. The basic criteria for a new Kirkland Signature item: It must be as good or better in quality than the comparable branded item, and it can be offered to our members at a price at least 20 percent lower than we would sell the branded item. We try to ensure all of our members are able to try the new item through our demo/sampling program. After nine months to a year, we measure its weekly sales generated per building. If it doesn't meet targets, we delete the item—as we would any item we sell.

Q. Costco sells everything in huge sizes—except clothes. Thirty percent of Americans are seriously overweight, yet for all the 5-pound cans of cheese sauce and 24-count packages of ice-cream bars,

there is almost no plus-size clothing in the stores. What gives?

—*Jenny Reiswig, San Diego*

A. Over the past year, we have tested apparel items in plus sizes in about 60 percent of our U.S. warehouses; moving forward, we have decided to focus on expanding plus-size assortments on Costco.com. Current women's items include Kirkland Signature active wear, Gloria Vanderbilt pants and shorts, as well as various styles of dresses, tanks, and tops. For men, the focus is also on carrying a year-round assortment of big and tall items on Costco.com, including Kirkland Signature dress shirts, wool dress pants, casual cotton pants and jeans, and soft-shell jackets.

Q. As a corporation making billions of dollars in profit each year, you are benefiting from shrimping exploitation in Thailand. Those fishermen are forced to work without pay on fishing boats, sometimes for years on end. They work 20-hour shifts and endure beatings. Will you institute a zero-tolerance policy on slavery?

—*Carole Shelton, Auburn, CA*

A. We are very aware of recent media reports concerning labor abuses in the Thai fishing industry. The agreements that Costco has with its suppliers prohibit, among other things, use of slave labor. We are committed to working with our suppliers of Thai shrimp to require them to take corrective action with respect to poor labor practices. This commitment so far has involved visits by our buying staff to Thailand and discussions with the Thai government, our suppliers, and other industry participants. We are continuing those discussions.

Q. Why, in the name of all that is holy, don't you have an express lane in your warehouses? Often I buy two items only to be stuck behind people with two overfull carts.

—*S. Culos, Toronto*

A. Costco's ability to sell merchandise at incredibly low prices is based on adhering to various operating disciplines at every turn. Instead of having an express line—that often would be open but without a member in line—we have invested millions of dollars to speed up the entire front-end process. Our policy is “no more than one (member) in line and two (members waiting) behind.” The average completed front-end transaction is just over 1 minute.

➔ WE WANT YOUR CEO SUGGESTIONS

Tell us which chief exec—or company—you want to hear from: q-and-a@cr.consumer.org.



ASK OUR EXPERTS

How Much Protein Is Too Much?

Q. In “Breakfast Matters” (October), you emphasize the importance of protein. One [8-ounce] serving of Greek yogurt provides more than twice the amount of protein in a cup of low-fat milk. Is it possible to get too much protein?

—*Andy Scott, San Francisco*

A. Most adults in the U.S. already get more than enough protein to meet their bodies’ demands. (The average man and woman should consume at least 56 and 46 grams of protein, respectively, each day.) The benefits of eating even more aren’t especially clear. A high-protein diet can worsen kidney function tests in people with kidney disease; over the long term, excessive protein intake might also cause calcium to be excreted from bones, increasing a person’s risk of osteoporosis and fractures. For protein counts in foods, go to the National Nutrient Database, at ndb.nal.usda.gov.

→ **WE HAVE MORE THAN 140 EXPERTS ON CALL**
They research, test, and compare—so you don’t have to! Share your toughest questions at ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts ... and watch this space for the answers.

Do I Have the Best Possible TV Picture?

Q. You have reported on the difference between standard-definition, high-definition, and ultra high-definition TV. I have a 70-inch 1080p smart TV. However, I subscribe to Dish network, and it transmits in 1080i. How does 1080i affect my viewing and your TV comparisons?

—*Janice Roamer, via e-mail*

A. Both 1080i and 1080p have the same resolution. The difference is in the way each successive frame of the moving image is presented: either with all lines of video at the same time (1080p), or half the number at a time—first odd lines, then even, and so on (1080i). True 1080p content is filmed at 24 or 30 frames per second (the speed of most theatrical films), and “live-type” programs such as sports or the news are usually shot at 1080i. The good news: Your 1080p TV “upconverts” 1080i content, filling in the missing odd or even lines.

What’s the Difference Between UL and CE?

Q. I am familiar with the Underwriters Laboratories symbol, but now everything I see is imprinted with the stylized CE. What does it stand for?

—*David Hand, Chula Vista, CA*

A. “CE” stands for *Conformité Européenne*, which indicates that a product meets certain European manufacturing requirements. In the U.S., we have a voluntary standards process; it’s not a government requirement. So the UL signifies that a given product has met certain U.S. standards as determined by an independent certifying agency.



Home Movies 2.0

Q. I need to convert my VCR tapes to DVDs. Can you recommend a device to do that?

—*Liss Lieberman, Bay Shore, NY*

A. The easiest way is to buy a DVD/VHS recorder such as the Toshiba DVR620, which allows you to copy with a simple push of a “record” button. You can also buy a video conversion kit that allows you to transfer video from your VCR to your computer, then burn it to a blank DVD (though that requires a little more familiarity with the PC and related accessories). By the way, copying home recordings from VHS to DVD is totally legal because copy protection applies only to commercial movies on VHS, not to recordings made for personal use.



Upgrade My Old Computer or Buy New?

Q. I am trying to decide between replacing the hard drive on my 2007 iMac for \$250 or buying a new iMac for about \$1,350. The old iMac is meeting my needs, and I’ve barely used the storage available on it. But I’m trying to avoid becoming obsolete. Any advice?

—*Roseanne Morrell, New Haven, CT*

A. We’re big proponents of upgrading before buying new. (One of our experts once upgraded several 10-year-old Windows XP PCs to Windows 7, with double the memory.) Apple is good about maintaining compatibility between its computers and its latest Mac OS version. So replace the hard drive. And while you’re at it, install enough memory to bring it up to 4GB: That will boost performance with newer, larger Mac OS versions and applications.



THE EMPOWERED CONSUMER

Buy a Toy and Save the Whales?

A donation-with-purchase might not be the best way to support a charity

“A PORTION OF PROCEEDS” of adorable wild pony Christmas ornaments by Roost go to Return to Freedom, a wild horse sanctuary.

“A percentage of the proceeds” of sales of the Cellairis Swag collection of cell-phone cases benefits Pencils of Promise.

“One hundred percent of profits” of a special Smock card supports the Pesticide Action Network.

The end of the year—which accounts for, on average, 41 percent of Americans’ charitable giving—is often a prime time for cause-related marketing: when companies push items with the promise that part of the purchase price will go to a nonprofit. Also known as cause marketing, this phenomenon has grown into a \$1.78 billion, year-round way for companies to support charities using your dollars.

But is it really the best way for you to support your favorite cause?

Cause marketing has been around since at least 1983, when American Express offered to donate a portion of a particular credit card’s revenues to the renovation of the Statue of Liberty. Today, countless other companies link up with charities. Nonprofits “are always short of cash,” says Renee Irvin, director of the Nonprofit Management Program at the University of Oregon. “The need is always outstripping their resources.”

The highly regarded Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF) has been particularly good at using cause marketing to raise funds. It works with more than 100 companies, including Ann Inc. (includes Ann Taylor and Loft), Bloomingdale’s, Estée Lauder, and Delta Airlines; 40 to 50 percent of BCRF’s revenue—\$27 million in 2014—comes from those partnerships.

“BCRF is a nonprofit and not a marketing organization,” explains Christina Rose, its Chief Partnerships Officer. “We invest 91 cents of every dollar we spend in our core mission, which is breast cancer research and awareness. In working with national and global brands, we’re able to extend the reach of our message [more] than we’d be able to do on our own.”

The fight against breast cancer has widely benefited from those campaigns. “It’s highly universal,” Rose says. “It’s hard to find someone who hasn’t been impacted personally, or through family or friends.” Other well-known health-related charities such as the Make-A-Wish foundation and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital are also popular for partnerships.

But as the number of cause-related campaigns has risen, so too has consumer skepticism. “The message of ‘think before you pink,’ has gotten out,” says Sandra Miniutti, VP of Marketing and CFO of Charity Navigator, which assesses charities.

After all, companies don’t do cause marketing solely to give, but also to get more of your business. Surveys show that almost 90 percent of consumers say that given similar price and quality, they’re

likely to switch to a brand associated with a good cause. (Case studies suggest that is actually what happens in stores.) And businesses get to bask in the warm glow of good PR. “Nonprofits are lending their good name to the business, and consumers are well aware of that,” Irvin says.

That’s why consumers get upset when campaigns are not quite as generous as they seem at first glance. One source of dismay is the common practice of a company capping its total donation, no matter how many products are sold. “They’ll say, we’ll donate \$10 per item up to \$5,000,” Minutti says. “If you’re the 501st purchase, nothing from your purchase is getting to the charity.” And you might object to your \$10 ending up in the company’s coffers instead. (Conversely, some companies agree to a minimum donation, regardless of how many products are sold.)

Charities are subject to laws that forbid false or misleading advertising. And the Better Business Bureau includes, among its 20 standards for charities, one that addresses cause marketing. It requires disclosure at the point of appeal that identifies the amount of the purchase price going to the charity; if applicable, the duration of the campaign; and any maximum or minimum that will be donated. “The purchaser should know how much he or she is helping the charity by buying this product,” explains Bennett Weiner, chief operating officer of BBB Wise Giving Alliance, which reports on charities. “The concern is, if there is no disclosure, the consumer will believe there is much more going than is usually the case.” Charities violating BBB standards don’t receive their charity accreditations.

According to the Wise Giving Alliance, the three charities at the beginning of this article fail to meet the BBB’s standards because each doesn’t specify the actual portion of the purchase price going to the organization. Others violate the BBB’s guidelines by sending consumers to a website where it is difficult to find the disclosure or use vague language such as “net proceeds” or “some

of our profits.” Asks Weiner: “How is the consumer supposed to know what ‘net proceeds’ means?”

The Best Way to Give

Even if the donation-with-purchase charity is doing everything right, you still might want to reconsider that buy—especially because all of that in-store giving might actually cut into the amount that we, as individuals, allocate to our pet causes.

A 2011 study by Aradna Krishna, a marketing professor at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business, found that people gave less money in direct donations to charities when they made cause-marketing purchases. “People may mentally assign their cause-marketing expenditure as their charitable giving,” Krishna reported. She also found that cause-buying had a tendency to decrease happiness, probably because we realize that buying, say, a \$40 necklace, is more self-serving than donating \$40 directly.

Think before using a product as a go-between, says Krishna: “Are you buying a \$30 T-shirt from which \$2 will go to the charity? Or could you give \$30 to the

charity and do without the T-shirt?”

Another advantage to giving straight to the charity: A donation is tax-deductible, unlike a cause-marketing purchase, for which the company selling the product gets the tax deduction for charitable giving. “I have a philosophical problem with that,” Irvin says. “You’re essentially getting your customer to do your donations for you.”

“I’d encourage consumers to be passionate about their philanthropy and to keep it personal,” Irvin suggests. Though well-known charities often bring in lots of cause-marketing dollars, thousands of other, lesser-known causes—that will never see their name on a yogurt container—also need your support.

Remember, too, that all of those well-positioned yogurt containers still aren’t a charity’s bread and butter: “Despite the hyperbole, corporate giving to nonprofits is a very small portion of overall giving to nonprofits in the U.S.,” Irvin says.

So what should you do when you’re faced with a cause-marketing item at the store? “All other things being equal, buy the product that helps a cause,” Irwin says. “But all other things are not usually equal.”

Four Awful Charity Campaigns

Company/charity partnerships can make for strange, embarrassing, or just bad bedfellows. Consider these groaners:

1

In 2011, a KFC in Utah donated a dollar from every mega-jug of soda it sold to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

2

In 2013, a Walmart in Ohio held a canned food drive for its own needy employees.

3

In 2014, PornHub donated a tree for every 100 videos viewed in a certain (unprintable) category for its Gives America Wood campaign.

4

In 2014, the restaurant chain Chili’s planned a national fundraiser where 10 percent of each check would go to the National Autism Association, upon the guest’s request. Turns out the association was an anti-vaccine group, angering diners.

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CR Bottom Line	Dealer Invoice	Average Paid	MSRP
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The UPDATE

THE LABEL

Looking at the tag can provide a clue. Brooks Brothers, for instance, has used “346” to indicate outlet exclusives.

FLAT SEAMS

Turn the garment inside out and check to see that the seams are flat, not raised, which could be annoying or irritating against skin.

MATERIAL MATTERS

A bit of spandex provides some give and helps apparel retain its shape after many washings.



OUTLET BARGAIN?

Maybe. The answer is in the details like those above. To see whether outlet prices are a good deal on items like bags and belts, dinnerware and duffels, go to our guide to outlet malls on page 16.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID BRANDON GEETING



The Truth About Outlet Malls

Not everything is a bargain, but if you go with eyes wide open, you'll score some good deals

YOU'LL FIND LOTS of holiday festivities at most outlet malls—carolers, cocoa, Santa and his photo-snapping elves. And for the fifth year in a row, shoppers at the Outlets at Anthem mall in Phoenix can get a neck ache taking in the nation's tallest Christmas tree. (It was 115 feet last year, 39 feet taller than the tree at Rockefeller Center.)

But are outlets the best place to do your shopping over the holidays—or any time of year? To find out, Consumer Reports surveyed 15,789 readers who made 25,441 visits to outlet stores. The results—shown on our Ratings chart, on page 18—rank 53 of the biggest outlet chains on value, quality, selection, and help. We also hit the outlets ourselves, spending more than \$2,600 on kitchen appliances, cookware, electronics, food, luggage, and kids' clothing.

The takeaway: Some outlets offer serious bargains on well-made merchandise sold by a knowledgeable and solicitous staff; others stock so-so goods at so-so prices. And, surprise, we found a few items at retail stores that cost less than identical outlet items.

Outlet malls certainly are big business—and getting bigger, because even though the worst days of the recession are over, consumers still demand bargains. From 2006 through 2012, the amount American shoppers spent at outlet centers grew 41 percent, vs. 9 percent for traditional malls. By the end of this year, 50 new outlet centers will have been built since 2006; only three new retail malls have opened in the past eight years. The industry estimates that consumers will spend \$42 billion in outlet stores this year, up from \$24.3 billion in 2012.

Outlet shopping has also become more

convenient. In the past, centers were built far from full-price stores in big cities to avoid competing with them. But retailers have seen that outlets actually complement their retail business, so more chains are building in or close to big cities, says Linda Humphers, editor of the trade publication Value Retail News.

But for many of us, it's still a schlep. In our survey, 34 percent of outlet stores where readers shopped were more than 50 miles from their home; one in five were more than 100 miles away.

The Goods Are Mostly Good

Overall, 67 percent of our readers said that they were completely or very satisfied with their experience, up from 60 percent in 2010, the last time we did an outlet survey. That's on par with our readers' scores for general-merchandise stores such as Costco, Kohl's, and Target. And shoppers liked a range of stores. Their top-rated choices: Bon Worth, L.L.Bean, Haggar, Carter's, OshKosh B'gosh, Jockey, Bose, Coach, Vitamin World, and Bath & Body Works.

Still, surveyed shoppers had a few gripes. For example, 8 percent said they found a poor selection of styles, sizes, or colors, and 6 percent complained that the quality of the merchandise was lower than they expected.

And you might be surprised to learn that not all stores at outlet malls are actually outlets. That was our reaction when a clerk at a Harry & David store told us that although its 48 locations are mainly in outlet malls, those shops are actually retail stores. By the industry's definition, an outlet center is a shopping center in which most of the individual tenants are owner-operated outlets.

During the leasing agreement process, developers usually require tenants to maintain a certain percentage of merchandise that is sold at a discount compared with retail-store prices. Indeed, the nine items we purchased at the Harry & David store were discounted, though only by 10 percent.

Today you'll find fewer "seconds" at outlets than a few years back, and more goods made just for the outlets. Because most goods are now manufactured overseas, damaged items are weeded out before they're shipped to the U.S. In addition, retailers have become better at forecasting demand, which has led to fewer production overruns, says Karen Fluharty, a partner at Strategy & Style Marketing Group, a retail consulting firm.

Made-for-the-outlet goods are usually tweaked so that they can be offered at a lower price. In general, we've found full-price versions were a bit better because of details or materials that could bolster comfort,

THE UPDATE

appearance, or longevity. But in most cases, the outlet versions were fine. A bag we bought at a Coach outlet, for example, lacked a retail version's embossed leather, more comfortable handle, and curved zipper that allowed it to open wide for easy access. Yet our textile expert found that both bags were well-made. "Retailers may change the product slightly to reduce their cost so they can sell it for less, but they still stay true to their brand quality," Humphers says.

At Bose, we found many returned products that the company had refurbished. Some of the food at a Harry & David's store differed from its website offerings, including the fact that the store had no fruit in stock. But for some housewares and children's goods, we found identical items at retail stores: a girl's outfit, a boy's backpack, a dinnerware set, pots and pans, and a casserole dish.

Are the Discounts True Markdowns?

Most of our readers were happy with outlet deals. Sixty-four percent of store visits yielded a great value, and at 34 percent of stores prices were much lower than sale prices at regular stores. Readers' picks for superior value: Bon Worth, L.L.Bean, Hagggar, OshKosh B'gosh, and Izod.

Most of the goods we purchased were 3 to 72 percent less expensive at the outlets than similar items we bought at retail. But about 17 percent of readers said prices were higher than they expected, the top complaint we received about outlet shopping. And three items we purchased—a girl's outfit at OshKosh, and a dinnerware set and pots and pans from Kitchen Collection—cost 6 to 29 percent *less* at regular stores. The boys' backpacks we picked up at Old Navy were the same price at the retail and outlet store.

As for selection at outlets, 38 percent in our survey said it was as good as at regular stores, and 25 percent said there was a wider selection of goods. When we shopped at CorningWare Corelle, which got very good marks for selection, we found many more dish and dinnerware options than the handful available in stores that carry those brands, including Sears, Target, and Walmart.

Service received similarly good scores, with just 14 percent of respondents calling outlet service fair, poor, or very poor, down from 20 percent in 2010. And there may be more amenities to look forward to because many outlets are expanding their centers' offerings to entice families to linger. In addition to the holiday celebrations, look for new upscale restaurants and food trucks, movie theaters, and art and music festivals.

5 Outlet Items Worth Our Trip

PRODUCT	RETAIL PRICE	OUTLET PRICE	WHAT WE FOUND
Coach Hobo pocketbook	\$378	\$149.50	RETAIL Fine finishes, better construction, more comfortable handle, and embossed logo. OUTLET Good bag with less fine detailing and flat handle; saved us \$228.50.
Brooks Brothers men's leather belt	\$98	\$74	RETAIL Fine-grade leather with backing, polished brass buckle. OUTLET One piece of leather; satin brass buckle.
Bose noise-canceling headphone	\$300	\$269.95	RETAIL Very good sound quality and excellent noise reduction. OUTLET Headphone factory-renewed; in our labs, performance was identical to the retail version's.
L.L.Bean sheet set	\$123	\$69.99	RETAIL Pima percale, 280-thread-count cotton sheets. OUTLET Exact same thread count and fiber content as the retail version, but probably last year's pattern.
J.Crew ballet flats	\$150	\$41.70	RETAIL Fine leather, made in Italy, wooden heel, extra insole support. OUTLET Made in China, less support, but similar looking and 73 percent cheaper.

5 Outlet Items That Weren't Worth It

PRODUCT	RETAIL PRICE	OUTLET PRICE	WHAT WE FOUND
OshKosh B'gosh girl's top and pants	\$28	\$39.20	RETAIL Neater sewing job. OUTLET More expensive, and a pleat was mistakenly sewn into the neckline; loose threads on bow, ruffle, and pants.
L.L.Bean rolling duffel bag	\$99.95	\$94.50	RETAIL A different style and material from the outlet version's; larger and only slightly more expensive. OUTLET Clearly marked "returned"; the wheels showed wear.
Corelle dinnerware set	\$74.99	\$79.99	RETAIL A 16-piece Hanami pattern set, with plates, bowls, and mugs. OUTLET Identical Hanami pattern set for \$5 more.
Revere Ware pots and pans	\$67.99	\$69.99	RETAIL Copper-bottom lined seven-piece stainless steel set. OUTLET Identical set, but cost us \$2 more (and more drive time).
Hamilton Beach 12-cup coffeemaker	\$25	\$29.99	RETAIL Its carafe was especially easy to use, hold, pour from, and empty. OUTLET Received a lower overall score than the retail model in our tests and costs more.

How we compiled the lists We bought 32 items at 20 stores in the New York metro region. Then we compared prices and had our purchases inspected by our lab experts.

8 Ways to Save the Most Time and Money

COMPARE PRICES FIRST. Just because an item's at an outlet doesn't mean it's a bargain. Do a price check via smart phone or computer before you buy.

TIME IT RIGHT. Price slashing generally takes place on holidays and during traditional retail sales periods, including Black Friday. If you can, plan your trip for Tuesday through Thursday, when there are fewer shoppers. And shop early in the day, when merchandise hasn't been picked over.

PLAN YOUR TRIP. To avoid wasting time and missing bargains, log on to your local outlet center's website and download a map before shopping. The typical outlet mall today covers more than 400,000 square feet and has 100 or more stores.

GET THE COUPON BOOK. While you're on the website, look for printable coupons. Some centers charge a fee for a book of coupons on-site, but you can generally download it free by signing up for the rewards program. Or go to customer service to get a hard copy.

CHECK OUT REWARDS PROGRAMS. You can get exclusive, personalized coupons and sale offers. At the website for Tanger, which operates 40 malls nationwide, a one-time \$10 fee earns you free gift cards once you hit certain spending levels, free coupon books that you can access on your mobile device, exclusive Web offers, and more. At Simon, which has 68 outlet malls across the U.S., if you sign up for the free VIP Shopper Club you get a free coupon book, sales alerts, and exclusive coupons.

USE APPS. PriceGrabber and RedLaser, for example, scan bar codes and search for better deals online and in nearby stores. And see whether the outlet mall has its own app. Tanger's, for example, displays exclusive offers that pop up when you're nearby.

SEEK OTHER DISCOUNTS. Ask about any additional perks for AARP members, college students, or military members. On Tuesdays at Simon outlet malls, shoppers 50 and older get 10 percent off at participating stores.

KNOW THE RETURN POLICY. Most regular retailers won't take returns from outlets. And most outlets don't have an online presence, although J.Crew Factory and Saks Off Fifth do; outlet stores might not take returns from their websites.

Ratings: Outlet Stores

Scores in context: Of the 53 outlet stores in our Ratings, the highest scored 83; the lowest, 72. The reader score reflects overall satisfaction with the outlet store in our survey of subscribers and is not limited to the qualities listed at the top of the chart columns.

Better Worse

CHAIN	READER SCORE	SURVEY RESULTS			
		Value	Quality	Selection	Help
Bon Worth	83				
L.L.Bean	83				
Haggar	82				
Carter's	82				
OshKosh B'gosh	81				
Jockey	81				
Bose	81				
Coach/Coach Men's	81				
Vitamin World	81				
Bath & Body Works	81				
CorningWare Corelle	80				
Harry & David	80				
Brooks Brothers	80				
Chico's	80				
Izod	79				
Wilsons Leather	79				
Van Heusen	79				
Kitchen Collection	79				
Easy Spirit	78				
L'eggs/Hanes/Bali/ ¹	78				
Columbia Sportswear	78				
Bass	78				
Reebok	78				
VF Outlet	78				
Dressbarn ²	78				
Crocs	78				
Skechers USA	77				
Talbots	77				
Coldwater Creek	77				
Lands' End	77				
Clarks/Bostonian	77				
Jones New York	77				
Eddie Bauer	77				
Loft	77				
Ann Taylor	77				
The Children's Place	76				
Aéropostale	76				
Rockport	75				
Tommy Hilfiger	75				
Banana Republic	75				
Nautica	75				
Famous Footwear	74				
Adidas	74				
Polo Ralph Lauren	73				
Pottery Barn	73				
Lane Bryant	73				
J.Crew	73				
Under Armour	73				
American Eagle	72				
Old Navy	72				
Gap	72				
Nike	72				
Levi's	72				

¹ Full store name is Leggs Hanes Bali Playtex.

² Includes responses for Dressbarn and Dressbarn Women.

Guide to the Ratings: Ratings are based on responses about 25,441 outlet-store visits from 15,789 Consumer Reports subscribers who completed the Annual Questionnaire in Spring 2013. Reader Score refers to how respondents rated their overall satisfaction with their shopping experience and may be based on factors in addition to those listed under survey results. A score of 100 means all respondents were completely satisfied; 80 would mean very satisfied, on average; and 60, fairly well satisfied. Differences in reader scores of fewer than 6 points are not meaningful. Respondents also rated the outlet stores on the value they got for their money, the selection and quality of merchandise, and the store's sales help on six-point scales ranging from "very poor" to "excellent." Ratings represent the mean scores for each category, converted to our five-point better-to-worse scale. "-" indicates insufficient data.

HEALTHY YOU

The New Rules for Coffee and Wine Drinkers

Healthful? In moderation, perhaps. In vast quantities? Dream on.

DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON, meals often begin with wine and end with coffee. If you have seen the headlines touting the health benefits of both beverages—and you’re among the 61 percent of Americans who down a daily cup of java or the 31 percent of drinkers who prefer a glass of wine to other alcoholic beverages—you’ve probably been thrilled to watch former vices morph into virtues. But how good are the drinks for your health? Here’s the latest:

Some research shows that coffee and wine, when consumed in moderation, may have similar benefits, such as increasing life span, boosting blood flow, and diminishing the risk of depression. And coffee and red wine have been found to contain antioxidants, which may prevent disease.

But the beverages aren’t just bundles of antioxidants; that’s why they’re more fun to drink than a kale smoothie (for most of us, anyway). The question is how exactly coffee and alcohol can play a role in improving health. People who moderately drank any type of alcohol—red or white wine, beer, or spirits—were 30 to 35 percent less likely to have a heart attack than nondrinkers, according to Harvard University researchers who tracked more than 38,000 men over 12 years; other studies have found a similar effect in women. Drinking caffeinated coffee may help prevent Alzheimer’s disease, according to another study—which is attributed to the caffeine working in tandem with a compound in coffee to boost brain health. (If you drink only decaf, you still reap some benefit: Research has linked caf and decaf with a decreased risk of type 2 diabetes.)

Still, the news isn’t all good. In the short term, regular and decaf coffee can aggravate acid reflux. Caffeinated versions can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety disorders and insomnia, among other conditions—particularly in women, who tend to be smaller than men, as well as in people who metabolize coffee slowly. Alcohol can be dehydrating, the main culprit behind hangovers. (But moderate coffee drinking, contrary to popular belief, is not dehydrating.) Over the long run, drinking the amount of caffeine in two to three 8-ounce cups of brewed coffee per day appears to

increase bone loss that can lead to osteoporosis in postmenopausal women. And several types of cancer are more common in people who drink any amount of alcohol.

It may all come down to you. Research shows that the impacts of coffee and wine differ greatly depending on how quickly your genes tell your body to metabolize those drinks. Until genetic testing is more common and you can pinpoint your limits, moderation and common sense are key. Translation: If you have or are prone to a condition that is exacerbated by drinking either beverage, skip it. If you take a medication that either beverage can interact with, ditto.

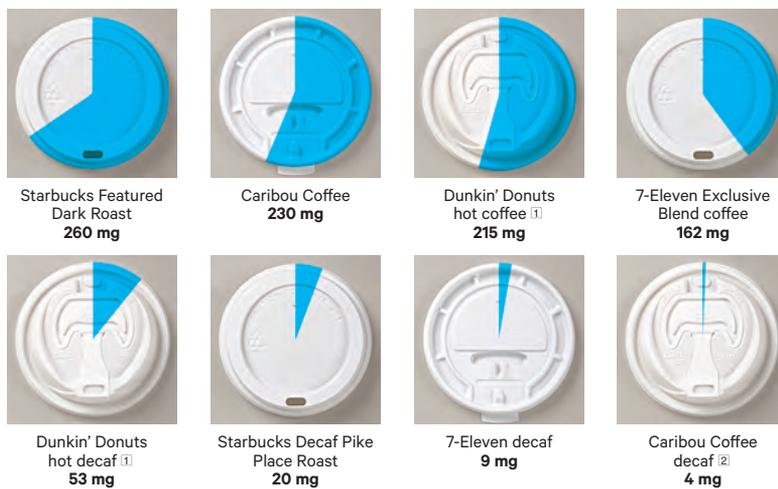
Here are some guidelines: Regarding coffee, data suggest that most healthy adults can

safely consume, daily, up to 400 milligrams of caffeine—the amount in around two to four cups of brewed coffee. (Exact amounts vary a lot, though.) Pregnant women should keep it to less than 200 milligrams; kids, no more than 45 to 85 milligrams. (A 12-ounce can of cola has roughly 35 to 40 milligrams of caffeine.)

As for wine: If you’re at a high risk for cancer, talk to your doctor about alcohol intake. If you’re generally healthy, the American Cancer Society recommends no more than one drink per day for women and two for men. “Drink”—sigh—is defined for wine as a 5-ounce serving, and the limit is per day, not a weekly average. So forget those huge goblets of red wine; instead, pour a few ounces. If that feels sparse, at least you have room for coffee.

The Jolt in Your Java

The amount of caffeine in coffee depends on brew time, grind size, and other factors. We asked some companies to estimate how much lurks in their 12-ounce cups.



Ingestion Index

What a little caffeine (or a whole lot of it) can do.^③

200 mg



Sanity restored.

300 mg



You've got a buzz on.

600 mg



You have taken off at full speed.

1,000 mg



Prepare for crash landing.

① Caffeine amount is for a 10-ounce cup. ② Information is provided by Caffeine Informer (caffeineinformer.com). ③ Up to 400 milligrams per day is fine for most healthy adults. Our pie charts reflect each percentage of that total.

How to Save Big on Rx



CHANCES ARE YOU'RE paying more than you need to for prescription drugs. But thanks to discounts offered at Costco, CVS, Target, Walgreens, Walmart, and others, hundreds of common generic drugs can be purchased for pennies per pill.

Retailers offer the discounts to draw in customers. The lower-priced pills aren't part of any health insurance, and using them won't count toward your deductible. But they can be a huge help, especially if you don't have insurance or good drug coverage. And sometimes prices could even be cheaper than if you used insurance. Here's how to get the most from the programs:

ASK FOR A 90-DAY RX

To offer such low prices, retailers often buy the medications in bulk. You should, too. A three-month supply could cost just \$10, compared with \$4 for a one month's supply.

FACTOR IN MEMBERSHIP FEES

Though Costco, Target, and Walmart offer savings without enrollment or fees, others don't: CVS charges \$15 per

person; Walgreens, \$20 for individuals or \$35 for a family.

CONSIDER YOUR PRIVACY

You may be required to sign a form or check a box giving the pharmacy or third parties such as drug manufacturers or insurance companies permission to contact you with other offers and promotions. Ask whether you can join the program or get the discounted price if

you don't check that box, says Stephen W. Schondelmeyer, Ph.D., a pharmaceutical economics professor at the University of Minnesota.

ASK FOR THE LOWEST PRICE

That's what helped our secret shoppers get the best deals when they called more than 200 pharmacies across the U.S. "Also, ask your pharmacist, 'What would this cost if I didn't use my insurance?'" Schondelmeyer says. For an independent pharmacy, see whether it will match or beat competitor prices. You might be surprised.

CHECK BACK OFTEN

Which drugs are discounted, as well as the doses and prices, are subject to change.

LOOK FOR OTHER EXTRAS

CVS, Kmart, and Walgreens offer discounts of between 5 and 20 percent on flu shots and similar services. At Target, membership in the Pharmacy Rewards program gets you a 5 percent discount on a day of shopping after the first prescription fill.

Every five fills after that earns you an additional 5 percent discount on store purchases. Walmart offers free shipping on many \$10, 90-day prescriptions.

KNOW THE RESTRICTIONS

Program discounts usually cannot be combined with other promotions or even insurance. For example, people who use Medicaid and Medicare aren't eligible for discounts at Costco. Certain discounts are offered only to those who don't have drug insurance or are for drugs not covered by insurance.

PRACTICE RX SAFETY

Getting a good deal is important, but be sure to have all of your prescriptions filled at a single pharmacy. Your pharmacist can flag any potentially dangerous drug interactions or allergies.

FOR MORE DETAILED DRUG INFORMATION Go to our Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs website, at CRBestBuyDrugs.org. Get free info on how well hundreds of medications work, how safe they are, and how much they cost.

Same Drug, Different Store, Lower Price

It pays to shop around—you could save hundreds of dollars a year

GENERIC DRUG NAME (brand name)	RETAIL PRICE 30 days	CVS 90 days	COSTCO 30/90 days	RITE AID 30/90 days	TARGET 30/90 days	WALGREENS 30/90 days	WALMART 30/90 days
Citalopram (Celexa) 20 mg, 1 pill daily, treats depression	\$29	vs. \$11.99	\$4.99/ \$6.39	\$9.99/ \$15.99	\$4/\$10	\$10/\$20	\$4/\$10
Fluoxetine (Prozac) 20 mg, 1 pill daily, treats depression	\$32	vs. \$11.99	\$5.69/ \$5.69	\$9.99/ \$15.99	\$4/\$10	\$5/\$10	N/A
Lovastatin (Mevacor) 20 mg, 1 pill daily, treats high cholesterol	\$19	vs. \$11.99	\$4.99/ \$6.39	\$9.99/ \$15.99	\$4/\$10	\$5/\$10	\$4/\$10
Metformin (Glucophage) 500 mg, 1 pill twice daily, treats type 2 diabetes	\$17	vs. \$11.99	\$4.99/ \$6.39	\$9.99/ \$15.99	\$4/\$10	\$5/\$10	\$4/\$10
Paroxetine (Paxil) 20 mg, 1 pill daily, treats depression and anxiety	\$25	vs. \$11.99	\$5.99/ \$6.99	\$9.99/ \$15.99	\$4/\$10	\$10/\$20	\$4/\$10

THE UPDATE

0

The number of inflatables allowed in one Citrus County, Fla., development.

100+

Number of inflatable Santa styles.

POLYESTER

Their primary component.

\$500

How much an animated karaoke-singing Grinch went for on eBay.

1,000

Different designs are in production each season.

90

days

Usual warranty, though they are designed to last for multiple seasons.



14°

Fahrenheit

The lowest temp at which Santa and his buddies can live outdoors.

Pennsylvania—
the state that buys the most inflatables, per capita.

10,000+

Inflatable designs created since Gemmy Industries of Coppell, Texas, started making them in 2001.

43

Watts

The power of some fans that keep them full of air. Many have internal lighting, too.

CHINA

Where they're made (natch).

TRUE CRIME
A Cape Cod, Mass., family's inflatable sock monkey, Santa, and reindeer were slashed last holiday season.

THE INFORMATION

Fill 'Em Up

Whether it's Santa, Frosty, or a herd of reindeer, inflatables take the yawn out of the lawn. Here, some facts about a trend that just keeps getting bigger.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID BRANDON GEETING

Seven Commandments of Holiday Shopping

Follow these spending rules to avoid breaking the bank this holiday season

1
THOU SHALT MANAGE RECEIPTS
You might need them for proof of purchase for warranties or to make a return. Have a designated place where you unload paper receipts after a day of shopping, such as an envelope in a kitchen drawer. For online purchases, save receipts and confirmation e-mails in a computer folder. If you give gift receipts, tell your recipients the value, so they get a fair exchange. If you give a gift card (see Commandment 7), provide the receipt. It will be needed to replace a lost or stolen card.

2
THOU SHALT USE CREDIT CARDS
Credit cards provide top fraud protection, and if your credit card is a reward card, you can get rebates and other goodies. Be strategic. Some cards offer extra points or cash back on different categories of products at different times. For instance, from October through December the Chase Freedom card offers 5 percent back on up to \$1,500 in purchases from Amazon.com, Zappos.com, and select department stores. Tip: Write the categories on a piece of paper and tape it to your card.

3
THOU SHALT KEEP TRACK OF REBATES
Plan carefully if you're counting on rebates on

anything you're giving as a gift. You'll probably need to submit the UPC symbol, which could be a problem if your gift recipient takes or destroys the packaging. If you apply for the rebate before you give the gift, you risk losing your right to return the item. Figure out what you need to do ahead of time. Make a list of rebate-eligible gifts and filing deadlines. For example, to obtain a \$30 Visa prepaid card after purchasing a KitchenAid Diamond blender, you must buy the product by Dec. 31 and send in the completed rebate form, the UPC code from the package, and a copy of the receipt by Jan. 31, 2015.

4
THOU SHALT NOT TAKE ON DEBT
Make a budget before shopping, and stick to it. Don't be enticed by retailer special offers that provide no-interest financing for a year or more. There's no guarantee you'll be able to repay everything you owe by the deadline. If you can't, you'll have to pay back the interest that has been silently accruing during the "interest free" period.

5
THOU SHALT NOT FALL VICTIM TO THE HYPE
Just because it's Black Friday or an item is 50 percent off doesn't mean it's a top deal. In a 2011 study, a price prediction website found that more than a quarter of the TVs and cameras recommended by Consumer

Reports were at least 5 percent cheaper *after* Black Friday weekend. Don't assume that you can get the best deals only by buying at a particular time or sales event.

6
THOU SHALT NOT BECOME A TARGET
Avoid theft by withdrawing cash only from ATMs in public places or inside your bank. Also avoid giving your e-mail address or phone number to walk-in stores unless you welcome their incessant marketing. Check out as a guest when shopping online. If the online retailer asks you to check a box indicating that you want them to retain your credit-card info, don't do it. Investigate retailers you're unfamiliar with by searching the Web and by looking for a Better Business Bureau report (bbb.org). Read sites' privacy policies and terms of service.

7
THOU SHALT NOT GIVE GIFT CARDS
Though federal gift-card protections have improved, gift cards remain a hassle. Store cards can be used only at the issuing retailer and might be nonrefundable if they're lost or stolen, as with Red Lobster and Olive Garden gift cards. Bank cards usually have fees. Simon Mall Visa gift cards cost \$5.95 to purchase and charge \$2.95 monthly if a balance remains after 13 months. What's wrong with cash?

RECALLS & UPDATES



SILENT ALARMS

Kidde has recalled about 1.2 million smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms because they might not work after a power interruption. The alarms are hardwired into the home's electric power and include smoke and smoke-CO combinations. The models were manufactured in 2013 and 2014. To find out the specific models, you can call Kidde toll-free at 844-553-9011 or go online at kidde.com.

TESTING UPDATE

GMOs in Your Pantry

Recent Consumer Reports tests of more than 80 processed foods made with corn or soy found that GMOs quietly lurk in many widely sold products. That's because the Food and Drug Administration doesn't mandate GMO labeling. But many food manufacturers choose to make non-GMO claims on their products.

Our tests found that the Non-GMO Project Verified seal and the Department of Agriculture organic seal, as well as other certified organic claims, were reliable. Other "non-GMO" claims were valid, too, with one exception. As we reported last month, the six samples of Xochitl Totopos de Maiz original corn chips we tested were labeled "No GMO" but contained GMOs. The company told us it was "baffled" by our results.

The majority of products without a specific claim regarding GMOs, such as Kellogg's Froot Loops and Doritos Oven Baked Nacho Cheese chips, contained substantial amounts of GMO corn or soy. The most misleading claim? "Natural." Unless it was accompanied by a non-GMO or certified-organic claim, the food almost always had considerable levels of GMOs. For more details, go to ConsumerReports.org/cro/gmo1014.

The Great Electronics Gift Guide



The question over holiday gift giving has been resolved with one word: electronics. This year they're better and more inventive than ever—and on just about everyone's wish list. That's why Consumer Reports tested hundreds of TVs, tablets, cameras ... you name it ... then picked the best ones for every budget and desire.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES WOJCIK

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Home Entertainment



Televisions, Blu-ray Players, Wireless Speakers, Streaming Media Players, Sound Bars

P. 32

Computing Devices



Tablets, E-Book Readers, Laptops, Printers

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Digital Photography



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Mobile Gear



Smart Phones, Smart Watches, Headphones

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Shopping Advice



Where to Buy Electronics

Home Entertainment

New TVs, sound bars, and media players let you binge-watch shows in style



Televisions

THE LANDSCAPE OF television technology has changed significantly. At this time last year, Ultra HD (UHD) sets, which have four times the resolution of 1080p TVs, were new to the market. And, boy, were they expensive—with big-brand models priced at \$4,000 and up. Now, most major TV manufacturers have UHD sets in their high-end lineups, and very good performing models with updated features can be had at half that cost. Some of the Ultra HD TVs look different, too, with curved, superthin screens.

Other big changes are afoot. Plasma televisions, which used to dominate the top of our

ratings because of their deep black levels and wide viewing angles, have all but disappeared from stores. Meanwhile, a relatively new and expensive screen technology called organic light-emitting diode promises even better performance than plasma. OLED sets are a hot topic, but there are still very few on the market. Nonetheless, they are creeping down the price ladder toward affordability. LG now offers a 55-inch curved 1080p set for \$3,500—its 65-inch OLED with Ultra HD resolution (an industry first) is still up in the stratosphere at \$10,000.

We're excited about the marriage of UHD and OLED technologies, but those sets will remain pricey for some time. So for the next few years, LCD TVs will be the go-to choice for most consumers. But don't get tangled up

in the confusing terminology. Most LCD televisions use an energy-efficient LED backlight, so manufacturers often tout them as "LED TVs." The two technologies overlap, so all LED televisions are actually LCDs.

Smart TVs are more common than ever. Those Internet-connected sets can run apps and stream movies, TV shows, and music from services such as Amazon, Netflix, Pandora, and Spotify. They also tap into social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. A number of smart TVs have Web browsers, though we've found that browsing the Web on a TV is a pretty poor experience. More TV brands also offer "second screen" apps that allow you to use your smart phone or tablet to access Web content and then wirelessly "mirror" that content on your TV.

One thing that still seems to be a problem is wimpy sound. The stylish, skinny designs of many TVs mean there's less room for adequate speakers. Some models buck that trend. Sony's Bravia XBR-X900B sets, for instance, have large speaker arrays flanking the screen, which provide top-notch sound quality. If the sound on your set is subpar, consider adding a sound-bar speaker; expect to pay \$200 to \$300 for a decent-sounding one. (See sound-bar speakers, on page 31.)

Bargain

► Panasonic Viera TC-50AS530U, \$600

This 50-inch 1080p LCD set has excellent picture quality. Each family member can customize a home screen with his or her favorite apps. A Swipe and Share app lets you share content with compatible mobile devices. Like all these budget picks, it has middling sound—but at these prices you can just buy a sound bar.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Sony Bravia KDL-40W600B, \$470

This 40-inch LCD TV has excellent picture quality and lifelike colors. It has four HDMI inputs, a lot for a set this size. You can turn on a scrolling Twitter feed relevant to a program you're watching, or use Skype in split-screen mode to chat while watching a favorite program. A 48-inch sibling to this set offers comparable performance for \$600.

► LG 42LB5800, \$450

This 42-inch 1080p TV has very good high-definition picture quality and color accuracy, plus a fairly wide viewing angle for an LCD set. It can run apps and stream online content, and it will recommend programs based on your viewing history.

► Samsung UN28H4000, \$200

Very good picture in a small size.

Sweet Spot

► Samsung UN55H6400, \$1,200

This nicely priced 55-inch 1080p TV has excellent picture quality and an impressive set of features. Its Clear Motion feature minimizes motion blur better than most LCD TVs we've tested. It responds to voice commands and suggests programs according to your viewing history.

ALSO CONSIDER

► LG 55LB7200, \$1,400

This 55-inch 1080p TV has excellent high-def picture quality and uses LG's webOS smart TV platform, which organizes content in tiles across the bottom of the screen. Just point the Magic Remote to move an onscreen cursor, or use voice commands to change channels or browse the Web.

► Samsung UN60H6350, \$1,300

This 60-inch LCD TV delivers excellent picture quality. Its 120Hz feature reduces motion blur during fast-moving scenes very well.

► Sony Bravia KDL-50W800B, \$1,000

This 50-inch LCD set delivers excellent high-def picture quality and offers access to online content. It also has screen mirroring, which lets you wirelessly send content from a smart phone or tablet to the TV.

Splurge

► Sony Bravia XBR-65X900B, \$3,800

There are dozens of TVs in our Ratings with excellent picture quality, but rarely do we hear great sound. The distinctive, wedge-shaped 65-inch Sony Ultra HD set wears its large, side-mounted speaker arrays proudly, delivering what may be the best TV sound we've heard. It has Sony's smart-TV platform plus a Social Viewing feature with a scrolling Twitter feed.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Samsung UN65HU9000, \$4,300

A gently curved, 65-inch screen distinguishes this top-of-the-line UHD TV, which has loads of features, including the ability to divide the screen into four panels, each with its own live TV or Web content. All of the connections are made via a separate box containing the TV's brain. You can replace it in the future to add new features and capabilities.

► LG 65UB9500, \$2,800

This 65-inch UHD TV has a wider viewing angle than most LCD sets. Like the other UHD TVs here, it has smart-TV features and, in addition, can also stream UHD (4K) videos from Netflix.

A Few More Standouts

We combed our full Ratings of 170-plus sets to find TVs that illustrate a few extremes—the biggest, cheapest, and best sounding. Our selections are limited to models we've tested; we know there are bigger TVs out there, for example. Prices were as of mid-October and may have changed by the time you read this. For up-to-the-minute TV news and recommendations, go to ConsumerReports.org.

► BIGGEST: 70-inch LG 70LB7100, \$2,400, and Sharp Aquos LC-70SQ15U, \$2,200

The LG has excellent picture quality; the Sharp model is very good. These may be too big for many living rooms but could look great in a home theater.

► CHEAPEST: 24-inch LG 24LB4510, \$150

Sure, it's small, but the picture is excellent, and the price is right. Like most sets this size, it has sound that's just OK.

► BEST SOUND: 55-inch Bose VideoWave II Entertainment System, \$5,000

Only a few TVs in our Ratings of more than 170 models offer excellent sound, including this Bose and the Sony Bravia XBR-65X900B (see Splurge, at left). The Bose has excellent picture quality but no Internet capability.

Sony Bravia
KDL-60W850B
TV, \$1,500

Google Chrome-
cast streaming
media player, \$35



Edifier E30
Spinnaker
wireless speaker,
\$280 per pair



Libratone
Zipp wireless
speaker, \$400



Klipsch KMC 3
wireless speaker,
\$400



Sonos Playbar
sound bar, \$700

SONOS



Get the Most from Your TV

Don't just take that new set out of the box and shove it in a corner. Sweat the details and you'll get a better viewing experience.

1. Get the seating distance right. How far back you push the couch depends on how big a TV you purchase. You want to be close enough to see fine detail but not so close that you can make out the pixels. For a 1080p set, your seating distance should be about three times the screen height (or about 1.5 to 2 times the screen's diagonal). So for a 50-inch set, you should sit anywhere from about 6 to 8 feet from the screen. An Ultra HD TV, with four times the number of pixels of a 1080p set, lets you cut that distance almost in half. So you can splurge on a bigger screen without having to sit farther away.

2. Tweak the settings. A TV's out-of-the-box settings rarely yield the best picture. Dig into the picture-mode settings and switch to "cinema," "movie," "pro," or "standard" (names vary by brand). As you change modes, the brightness, color, sharpness, and other attributes will adjust automatically.

If none of those presets please you, try fine-tuning the settings individually. Start with brightness and contrast. Play a DVD or DVR recording and freeze on an image with people and a mix of dark and light areas. Then adjust the two settings until shadow detail in both dark and bright areas is visible. Next, set the color temperature to "warm" or "low." After that, adjust the tint/hue and color settings until skin tones look natural.

We also recommend

turning down—or turning off—features such as sharpness (which can create halos around people and objects if set too high), power-saving controls (which can rob a TV of its brightness), and digital-noise reduction, or DNR, which can smooth out detail and texture. If you're unhappy with the changes you made, don't panic. You can always press "reset" or "default" to restore the factory settings, then start over.

3. Upgrade the sound. This one's easy. If your skinny TV's puny speakers don't fill your room with sound, get a sound bar. The long, thin speaker enclosures can be mounted on the wall or placed on a shelf above or below the TV. Many sound bars come with separate, wireless subwoofers that can be placed out of sight.

OLED TVs: The Next Big Thing?

Organic light-emitting-diode (OLED) TV screens aren't completely new. When we looked at early models, such as Sony's 11-inch XEL-1 OLED TV in 2008 and Samsung's 55-inch KN55S9C from last year, they seemed promising, but too unrealistically expensive to include in our Ratings. Recently, LG released its 55-inch 55EC9300 for \$3,500. That's still pretty pricey for a 1080p set, but it's \$6,000 less than last year's models. It is the first OLED TV to be included in our Ratings, and it's a hopeful sign of things to come.

Here are our detailed impressions:

In some ways the LG 55EC9300 has no rivals. Black levels and contrast are superb. When we analyzed clips from the movie "Gravity," we found the deep blacks of outer space striking. Contrast—the difference between the darkest and brightest images—is better than on any other TV in our Ratings. The viewing angle and energy efficiency are among the best that we've seen.

For all its strengths, the LG OLED has a few shortcomings that keep it from being the

best TV overall. Sound quality was mediocre, and even the excellent picture had a few minor issues that a picky viewer (or a trained tester) might notice. Color accuracy was visibly off; whites had a reddish-pink tinge, and we couldn't make them completely accurate using the TV's standard picture controls. Fine detail and texture were not as crisp with HD content as on some of the best 1080p TVs, perhaps because of slight noise reduction that we could not turn off. And as great as the black levels are, the transitions from dark gray to black were not as smooth a gradient as we've seen on the better sets.

However, these are nitpicks that don't outweigh the many things this TV does right. The picture is truly outstanding, especially with content that takes advantage of the set's benchmark blacks and contrast.

But even better picture quality may be on the horizon. We're anxiously awaiting new OLED TVs with a higher-resolution Ultra HD 4K screen, which should add incredible detail to this winning formula.



WHAT TO BUY FOR A MOM AND HER SON

VELICIA HILL, 44
MODELING AGENCY
DIRECTOR, ATLANTA

"My TV is from the '80s or '90s, and my 14-year-old son tells me I should join the 21st century with a flat screen. The new TV will be in our family room, for when people come over to watch the Super Bowl or Beyoncé's concerts. Anywhere between 32 and 40 inches would be good, and I'd love to spend under \$500."



Consumer Reports Says

"Our top pick for Velicia is the LG 39LB5800, a slim, 39-inch LED-backlit set that will fit in her entertainment center. It's selling for about \$430, but it could cost less during the holidays. It has excellent picture quality, and LG has been a reliable brand. This set has LG's smart-TV platform, with access to streaming shows. Finally, the audio is good, and that should make Velicia—and other Beyoncé fans—happy."
—Claudio Ciacci, TV tester

BRANDS YOU CAN DEPEND ON

TV repairs are few and far between, according to our survey, which covers more than 177,000 TV purchases. The rate of repairs averaged only 4 percent across the 18 brands that were covered in our survey. Westinghouse has been among the less reliable brands, with a repair rate of 7 percent. The other brands are: Panasonic, Hitachi, JVC, Sony, Sharp, Samsung, LG, Emerson, Phillips, Sanyo, Dynex, Magnavox, Insignia, Toshiba, Vizio, Sansui, and RCA. For TVs requiring repair, the most common problems were failure to power on and lost picture.

Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey on 177,573 TVs purchased between 2011 and the first half of 2014.

Ratings: TVs

Scores in context: Of the 170-plus TVs tested, the highest scored 74; the lowest, 30. Listed below are the top-scoring models in order of performance.

Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths. CR Best Buys blend value and performance, and are recommended.

CR Best Buy Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

A. TOP 20 LARGE TVs (60 TO 70 INCHES)

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Sony Bravia XBR-65X900B	\$3,800	75	●	◐	●	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung UN65HU8550	\$3,200	75	●	○	◐	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LG 65UB9500	\$2,800	74	●	◐	◐	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Samsung UN65H8000	\$2,800	74	●	○	○	HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	LG 60LB7100	\$1,400	74	●	◐	○	HD	60
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Samsung UN60H7150	\$1,700	74	●	○	◐	HD	60
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	LG 65UB9800	\$3,800	73	●	◐	◐	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Samsung UN65HU8500	\$3,180	73	●	○	◐	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Sony Bravia XBR-65X950B	\$7,000	73	●	○	○	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Samsung UN65HU9000	\$4,300	73	●	○	○	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Samsung UN65H7150	\$2,000	72	●	○	○	HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Sony Bravia KDL-65W950B	\$2,300	72	◐	◐	◐	HD	65

A. TOP 20 LARGE TVs (60 TO 70 INCHES) continued

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Samsung UN65HU8700	\$3,500	71	●	○	○	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	Samsung UN65H7100	\$1,980	71	●	○	○	HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Panasonic Viera TC-65AX800U	\$3,000	71	●	○	◐	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Samsung UN60HU8550	\$2,800	71	●	◐	○	Ultra HD	60
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	LG 70LB7100	\$2,400	70	●	○	○	HD	70
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18	Samsung UN60H6350	\$1,300	70	●	○	○	HD	60
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	Sony Bravia XBR-65X850B	\$3,000	69	◐	◐	○	Ultra HD	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20	Sony Bravia KDL-60W850B	\$1,500	69	●	○	○	HD	60

B. TOP 15 55- TO 59-INCH TVs

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Sony Bravia XBR-55X900B	\$2,800	74	●	○	●	Ultra HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung UN55F8000	\$2,300	74	●	○	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Samsung UN55HU8550	\$2,200	73	●	○	○	Ultra HD	55

Ratings continued on next page

Blu-ray Players

YOU MIGHT THINK a Blu-ray player is hopelessly out of date in an age when everyone wants to stream Netflix's "House of Cards." But modern Blu-ray players are arguably the most versatile devices you can add to your entertainment setup. In addition to playing all kinds of discs, most models can stream content from online video services such as Netflix and music services such as Pandora, and Blu-ray players deliver better movie quality than streaming. Some can relay music, video, and photos from other devices on your home network to your TV, or mirror the

screen of your mobile device on your TV. Wi-Fi is standard on most players, and some have Web browsers. Well-equipped models go for as little as \$75 or so, and fully loaded players are in the \$150 range. You can expect excellent Blu-ray picture quality at all price points.

Splurge

► Samsung BD-H6500, \$150

The BD-H6500 can play 3D discs, upconvert 1080p video to 4K, browse the Web, and access streaming video services. It works with a USB keyboard and mouse, and can send content from a tablet, computer, or smart phone to a TV.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Sony BDP-S6200, \$180

This 3D-capable model can upconvert 1080p video to 4K. It has a browser and a good lineup of streaming services. It can play SACD high-resolution audio discs.

Bargain

► LG BP540, \$85

This lower-priced player does a great job at all of the basics, and it offers a good selection of streaming services and built-in Wi-Fi. It has an easy-to-use menu and speedy response, and it can play 3D discs.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Panasonic DMP-BD91, \$80

This CR Best Buy provides first-rate performance, with a good selection of streaming services.

Ratings: TVs

Scores in context: Of the 76 tested, the highest scored 74; the lowest, 30. Listed below are the top-scoring LCD/LED TVs in order of performance.

Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths. CR Best Buys blend value and performance, and are recommended.

CR Best Buy Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

B. TOP 15 55- TO 59-INCH TVs continued

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Samsung UN55H6400	\$1,200	73	●	○	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	LG 55EC9300	\$3,500	73	●	●	○	HD OLED	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Samsung UN55HU9000	\$3,300	73	●	○	○	Ultra HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Samsung UN55F9000	\$1,900	72	●	○	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	LG 55LB7200	\$1,400	71	●	●	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Samsung UN55HU8700	\$2,500	71	●	○	○	Ultra HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Bose VideoWave II Entertainment System	\$5,000	69	●	○	●	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Panasonic Viera TC-55AS650U	\$1,200	69	●	●	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	LG 55UB8500	\$1,800	68	●	●	○	Ultra HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Sony Bravia KDL-55W950B	\$1,500	67	●	●	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	LG 55LB6300	\$800	67	●	●	○	HD	55
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Panasonic Viera TC-55AS530U	\$750	66	●	○	○	HD	55

C. TOP 15 46- TO 52-INCH TVs continued

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	LG 50LB6500	\$950	66	●	●	○	HD	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Sony Bravia XBR-49X850B	\$1,700	65	●	●	○	Ultra HD	49
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Samsung UN46EH5000	\$500	65	●	○	○	HD	46
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	LG 47LB6000	\$700	65	●	●	○	HD	47
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	LG 47LB6300	\$650	65	●	●	○	HD	47
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Samsung UN46F5000	\$750	65	●	○	○	HD	46

D. TOP 15 TVs 42 INCHES AND SMALLER

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung UN40H6400	\$850	71	●	○	○	HD	40
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung UN40H6350	\$700	68	●	○	○	HD	40
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LG 42LB5800	\$450	67	●	●	○	HD	42
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Samsung UN32H6350	\$600	67	●	○	○	HD	32
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung UN40H5500	\$550	66	●	○	○	HD	40
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Sony Bravia KDL-40W600B	\$470	66	●	○	○	HD	40
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Samsung UN32EH5000	\$300	66	●	○	○	HD	32
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Panasonic Viera TC-39AS530U	\$450	65	●	○	○	HD	39
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	LG 39LB5800	\$430	65	●	○	○	HD	39
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	LG 32LB5800	\$380	65	●	●	○	HD	32
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Samsung UN32H5500	\$370	65	●	○	○	HD	32
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Samsung UN28H4000	\$200	63	●	●	○	HD	28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Samsung UN29F4000	\$260	60	●	○	○	HD	29
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	Vizio E280i-B1	\$200	58	●	○	○	HD	28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Samsung UN22F5000	\$170	57	●	○	○	HD	22

C. TOP 15 46- TO 52-INCH TVs

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					HD Picture Quality	Viewing Angle	Sound Quality	Resolution	Screen Size (in.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung UN48H8000	\$1,800	73	●	○	○	HD	48
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung UN50HU8550	\$1,800	72	●	○	○	Ultra HD	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Samsung UN48H6400	\$900	72	●	○	○	HD	48
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Panasonic Viera TC-50AS530U	\$600	69	●	○	○	HD	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Samsung UN48H5500	\$750	68	●	○	○	HD	48
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Samsung UN50H6350	\$850	68	●	○	○	HD	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Panasonic Viera TC-50AS650UE	\$1,000	67	●	●	○	HD	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Sony Bravia KDL-50W800B	\$1,000	67	●	○	○	HD	50
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Sony Bravia KDL-48W600B	\$600	67	●	○	○	HD	48



Sonos Play:1, \$200

TDK Life on Record (A33), \$130

Wireless Speakers

WITH MOST MUSIC now stored on laptops, tablets, and smart phones or streamed from online sources, wireless speakers are almost a necessity. Beyond that, they've become a useful alternative to a conventional home stereo. There are two basic types. Wi-Fi speakers connect to a home network

and can stream music to multiple rooms. Bluetooth speakers, which have a shorter range, let you listen to music from a mobile device in the same room. They're easy to connect—sometimes just by tapping NFC tags—and many have rechargeable batteries, so you don't have to stay near an electrical outlet. Because the speakers come in many sizes, make sure that a model you're considering has enough power to fill your room with sound.

Bargain

► **TDK Life on Record Wireless Weatherproof Speaker A33, \$130**

With a rugged, weather-resistant exterior, this speaker thrives outdoors. It has good sound quality and is one of the better portable Bluetooth models we've tested. (You can connect non-Bluetooth devices via an analog-audio input.) A USB port lets you recharge a smart phone, and the built-in microphone enables hands-free Bluetooth chats.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Edifier Luna Eclipse, \$165**

Combining style with very good sound quality, the Bluetooth-compatible Luna Eclipse has separate left and right speakers, helping it create an effective stereo sound pattern.

► **iHome iBT44, \$180**

Expect good sound from this Bluetooth speaker with retro boombox styling. It's easy to use, and it has a built-in FM tuner and a slot for storing a portable music player.

Sweet Spot

► **Sonos Play:1, \$200**

The Play:1 Wi-Fi speaker makes the usually high-priced Sonos experience more affordable. It's a mono model that packs very good sound into a small enclosure. You can add another Play:1 to form an even better-sounding stereo pair. It can access streaming music services, such as Pandora and Spotify. There's no remote; you control the Play:1 with a mobile device using a Sonos app. Step up to the \$300 Play:3 to get stereo sound in a single speaker.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Edifier E30 Spinnaker, \$280**

This pair of horn-shaped Bluetooth speakers delivers very good sound in a distinctive package for critical music listeners and movie viewers.

► **Stelle Audio Couture Pillar, \$350**

This cylindrical Bluetooth speaker delivers good sound quality. It has an analog audio input for connecting non-Bluetooth devices.

Splurge

► **Sony SRS-X9, \$700**

This top-rated model is among the best-sounding speakers we've tested. With a piano-black finish and a glass top with touch-sensitive buttons, it has an understated, classic look. The speaker can connect to a home network via Wi-Fi or DLNA, use Bluetooth with tablets and smart phones, and work through Apple AirPlay to play music from an iPhone or iPad, or a computer running iTunes. An Ethernet jack allows wired hookups, and its USB ports support high-resolution music files.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Libratone Zipp, \$400**

The cylindrical, sweater-wearing Zipp Wi-Fi/AirPlay speaker delivers the best sound we've heard from a portable model.

► **Klipsch KMC 3, \$400**

Think Bluetooth speakers sound wimpy? This one brings the bass. It has an analog minijack for non-Bluetooth devices and a remote control.



WHAT TO BUY FOR AN APARTMENT NEWBIE

**LIANA FLIKIER, 21
COLLEGE STUDENT
BARRINGTON, R.I.**

"I'd like a good way to play music through my phone so I can listen with other people. It has to be loud enough for a get-together where people are talking and small enough to carry around my apartment or to a friend's house. I can spend about \$150."



Consumer Reports Says

"Liana has two good options. The TDK Life on Record A33, \$130, and iHome iBT44, \$180, are wireless portable speakers that will connect to her phone via Bluetooth. Both can provide good sound quality that's fine for casual listening. The TDK is more compact and has a built-in rechargeable battery. The iHome can play louder without strain. It uses six D-cell batteries, in keeping with its retro boombox styling." (More about both speakers below.)

—Maurice Wynn, audio tester

Streaming Media Players

WITH ONLINE SERVICES such as Amazon, Hulu Plus, and Netflix, you can watch an entire season of a TV series in a few days or sample a new program every night. All you need is a smart TV or an Internet-connected device that can feed video to your set.

A streaming media player is a simple, inexpensive way to transform almost any TV into a media-streaming machine. Most of the players we've tested are small set-top boxes that connect to a TV via an HDMI input and to a home network via Wi-Fi. There are a few stick-style players that slip into a TV's HDMI slot. Most media players are \$35 to \$100 or so. Apple and Roku players are by far the best sellers, though Google's \$35 Chromecast is gaining ground.

Before you buy, make sure that a player you're considering supports the video and music services you'd like to use. Most models work with Netflix, but they might not carry other streaming services, such as HBO Go and Vudu. Some models can also stream content from other devices on your home network or even mirror the display from a compatible tablet, smart phone, or computer.

Wi-Fi connectivity is handy, but wired connections tend to be more robust, so look for a player with an Ethernet jack if your TV is near your modem or router. If you have an older TV without HDMI, get a model with analog video connections.



Bargain

► **Google Chromecast, \$35**

The claim to fame for this tiny, affordable device is its ability to cast content from a computer's Chrome browser to a TV. Chromecast can also mirror content from an Android phone or tablet. It has added more content in the past year, including direct support for Google Play (Google Music, Google Video), HBO Go, Hulu Plus, Netflix, and YouTube. It still lacks Amazon, however. Chromecast plugs into a TV's HDMI input and gets power from the set's USB port or a wall outlet.

Sweet Spot

► **Roku 2, \$70**

This has a lot of what the pricier Roku 3 offers, including dual-band Wi-Fi and a remote with a headphone jack. It lacks a motion-sensing remote, a faster processor, and an Ethernet jack. Another option: the Roku Streaming Stick, \$50, which plugs into a TV's HDMI input. All three of these Rokus can cast personal media from a phone or tablet to a TV using the Roku app. The Streaming Stick and Roku 3 can also cast directly from the Netflix and YouTube apps and mirror the screen of an Android or Windows mobile device.

Splurge

► **Roku 3, \$100**

The Roku 3 is the top all-around player, with an easy-to-use interface, fast operation, and the most content of any tested player: Amazon Instant Video/Prime, HBO Go, Hulu Plus, Netflix, Vudu, and more. It has dual-band Wi-Fi for more reliable wireless connections and an Ethernet jack. It can cast personal media, Netflix and YouTube videos, and mirror the screen from a phone or tablet to a TV. Its remote has a headphone jack for private listening and a motion sensor that is used for gaming.

For Amazon Fans

► **Amazon Fire TV, \$100**

One of streaming media's newest contenders, Fire TV brings very fast operation and voice search to the party. It's the first media player that's a credible game platform, though you'll need the optional \$40 game controller. It's no surprise that Fire TV is optimized for Amazon's video services, but it also supports Netflix and several others. Voice search is nice, but in our tests of paid services it worked only with Amazon and Hulu Plus. Parents may like the parental controls and kids' area.

For Apple Devotees

► **Apple TV, \$100**

This is the must-have streaming media player for Apple fans who have lots of content on iTunes, on a Mac computer, or in Apple's iCloud. Apple TV has the company's super-friendly interface, and it integrates seamlessly with iTunes video and music libraries, as well as Apple's iCloud storage service. The device supports AirPlay mirroring, which displays whatever is on the screen of a Mac computer, iPad, iPhone, or iPod Touch on the television. The biggest drawback to Apple TV: It lacks Amazon and Vudu.

Ratings: Streaming Media Players

Scores in context: Of the 14 players tested, the highest scored 70; the lowest, 35. Listed below are the seven top-scoring models, in order of performance. All offer Wi-Fi connectivity.

CR Best Buy
 Recommended
 ● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

STREAMING MEDIA PLAYERS

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				FEATURES	
					Picture Quality	Features	First-Time Setup	Everyday Use	Web Browser	Streaming Services
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Roku 3	\$100	70	●	●	●	○		A, B, HBO, HP, N, R, SHO, V
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Roku 2	\$70	68	●	●	●	○		A, B, HBO, HP, N, R, SHO, V
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Roku Streaming Stick (HDMI version)	\$50	68	●	●	○	○		A, B, HBO, HP, N, R, SHO, V
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Roku 1	\$50	67	●	●	●	○		A, B, HBO, HP, N, R, SHO, V
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Google Chromecast	\$35	65	●	●	●	●	●	GP, HBO, HP, N
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Amazon Fire TV	\$100	62	●	●	○	○		A, HP, N, SHO
	7	Apple TV (3rd gen.)	\$100	59	●	●	○	○		HBO, HP, iT, N

A=Amazon Instant Video, B=Blockbuster, GP=Google Play, HBO=HBO Go, HP=Hulu Plus, iT=iTunes, N=Netflix, R=Redbox Instant, SHO=Showtime Anytime, V=Vudu



WHAT TO BUY FOR A CABLE CUTTER

**BLAKE WOOLSEY, 30
IT DIRECTOR, LIVE OAK, FLA.**

"I want a media streamer for our second TV. Since cutting cable and going with an antenna, we mainly watch network TV, and we stream Netflix and Hulu Plus using a PS4 gaming console. I watch whatever sports I can using the antenna, but football is critical, so I get NFL Mobile Premium on my phone, through Verizon. (I'm a 49ers fan.)"



Consumer Reports Says

"If Blake simply wanted to watch Netflix shows, almost any streaming media player would do. But he's paying to watch NFL games—and I hate to think of him in a Patrick Willis jersey on Sundays, huddled over a 5-inch screen. The solution is Google Chromecast, \$35, which can mirror a phone display or Chrome Web browser on a TV."
—Christopher Andrade, streaming media tester

Sound Bars

MANY NEW TVS are enviably sleek, but the drawback to ever-slimmer sets is mediocre sound. You could remedy that with a pricey surround-sound system or a home theater in a box, but there's a simpler solution: a sound bar speaker. Sound bars are long, narrow speaker enclosures that you can place above or below a TV on a stand or wall mount. Many have a separate wireless subwoofer for bass. Prices range from less than \$200 to more than \$1,000.

TIP Many sound bars support Bluetooth, which enables you to use them as speakers for mobile devices. The ability to easily play music from your phone or tablet extends the value of a sound bar investment.

Bargain

► **Vizio S3821W, \$160**
Recommended for 40- to 46-inch TVs, this 40-inch-long sound bar will please your ears and your wallet with its very good sound and low price. It comes with a separate wireless subwoofer and uses Bluetooth to stream music from a phone or tablet.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Sharp HT-SB602, \$400**
It provides very good sound and fits best with TVs 60 inches or larger. The piano-black enclosure and matching wireless subwoofer make an attractive pair. The speaker has built-in Bluetooth with NFC for easy pairing, and two HDMI inputs.

Sweet Spot

► **Sonos Playbar, \$700**
In addition to adding oomph to a TV's sound, this Wi-Fi sound bar can be teamed up with other Sonos speakers to form a multichannel surround-sound system in one room or become part of a multiroom system. You can stream audio from other devices or from Internet-based music services. An app turns a phone or tablet into a remote.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Atlantic Technology H-PAS PowerBar PB-235, \$600**
This 2.1-channel-ready sound bar delivers very good audio with a clean, open sound. It has an output for a subwoofer, which isn't included.

Splurge

► **Samsung HW-F850, \$1,000**
Capable of very good sound, Samsung's 2.1-channel model has glowing vacuum tubes visible in a small window. It can be placed flat on a table or mounted upright on a wall; a sensor detects its orientation and adjusts the output and display. It has Bluetooth, NFC, and one HDMI input.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Sony HT-ST7, \$1,150**
This elegant sound bar contains a 7-channel speaker array and has a wireless subwoofer. It has Bluetooth, NFC, and three HDMI inputs, so you can switch sources. It can decode 7.1-channel audio.

Computing Devices

Bigger tablets, smaller laptops ... and how about something for the kids? Here's how to choose.



Tablets

IT SEEMS there's no perfect size for a tablet. In the past year, we've seen models get smaller (Amazon just launched a 6-inch tablet) and larger (as with Samsung's 12.2-inch whopper). There's a dizzying variety of sizes between those two extremes, so there's a tablet available for almost every need. Those with large screens make great productivity devices; smaller ones slip easily into a purse or book bag.

Many larger tablets can be turned into laptops with the addition of a keyboard, and some new models are packaged with one. They have Intel Core processors that make them work more like computers (and add quite a bit to the price). Gaming fans who play more demanding apps with complex graphics should get a tablet with excellent performance.

Even more tablets will be on the way soon. At press time, rumors were circulating that Apple would release a new iPad Air and mini this fall, and Google was expected to come out with a new Nexus.

Budget

► EVGA Tegra Note 7, \$200 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)

This one is a rarity among budget tablets—a great-looking display plus speedy performance. That's a perfect combination for people who like to play games. Battery life is long at about 10 hours. The Tegra includes a stylus you can use for note-taking (but there's no handwriting recognition) and drawing.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Dell Venue 7, \$160 (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (2nd gen.)

The Dell Venue 7, lightweight and with more than 12 hours of battery life, is quite portable. The display looks great, and performance was very good. The 5-megapixel camera has higher resolution than on most tablets. You can set up multiple user profiles, a great feature for families sharing a tablet.

Sweet Spot

► Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9, \$340 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)

If you want a fairly large but still very portable tablet, this is a great choice. The display is excellent; its resolution of 339 pixels per inch is among the finest. Subscribers to Amazon Prime, \$100, have access to lots of content, including free movies. (This model will soon be replaced by the Fire HDX 8.9, priced from \$380. The smaller HD 6, starting at \$100, and HD 7 are also coming. We were testing all of them at press time. See page 34.)

ALSO CONSIDER

► Apple iPad Air, \$500 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)

A beautiful display, a great app store, and fast performance are wrapped into a thin package that's a pleasure to carry around. Battery life was also very long, at 13.5 hours. Those features combine to make it worth the price.

Splurge

► Samsung Galaxy Note Pro 12.2, \$650 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)

What's missing from Samsung's Galaxy Note? Not much. It's an outstanding performer with a stellar display and extra features that make it a workhorse and an entertainment juggernaut. Samsung built apps to work with the stylus included, and an office suite comes with the tablet. Battery life is close to 14 hours, and performance stands up to demanding games.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Microsoft Surface Pro 3, \$1,000 (Wi-Fi, 128GB)

Want a tablet and a laptop? Take a look at the 12-inch Surface Pro. With the optional keyboard, you have a very portable laptop. Performance was excellent as both laptop and tablet (though it's heavy for a tablet). It includes a generous 128GB of storage. Battery life was around 10 hours.

Tablet Jr.

Tablets designed for children generally aren't as powerful or cutting-edge as their counterparts for grown-ups. They cost less but still aren't cheap; some sell for \$250 or so. Most offer kid content such as games, art programs, e-books, music, and videos, as

well as bumper cases and parental controls.

Samsung's Galaxy Tab 3 Kids, \$200, has the longest battery life at just over 9 hours. LeapFrog's LeapPad 3, \$100, and Vtech's InnoTab 3, \$50, have terrific proprietary apps and games with an educational focus.



WHAT TO BUY FOR A GADGET DOWNSIZER

JANET THEW, 53
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER,
LOOMIS, CALIF.

"I own a first-generation iPad, Wi-Fi only, and I'm ready for something smaller and lighter with 4G capability. (I don't have a smart phone, and if I get the right tablet, I won't need one.) It has to be white. Don't ask why; it just does. I'm thinking about buying a refurbished tablet to save money. Is that wise?"



Consumer Reports Says

"Because Janet will be using her new tablet in lieu of a smart phone, I considered only 7- to 8-inch models. To save money, I went with Android instead of Apple. The Samsung Galaxy Note 8 and the LG G-Pad 8.3 come in white. Each weighs about 13 ounces. The LG performed slightly better in our tests. Both have powerful processors. We'd skip a refurbished tablet. The batteries can't be replaced, and after a couple of years, tablets are nearing the end of their useful life."

—Dean Gallea, tablet tester

BRANDS YOU CAN DEPEND ON

Apple and Samsung are among the more reliable tablet brands, with repair rates of 2 percent and 3 percent, respectively. And Asus and HP are among the more repair-prone, each with a repair rate of 11 percent. That's what we found when we asked almost 48,000 readers who purchased a new tablet between 2012 and 2014 about their experiences with more than 61,000 devices.

Among the other brands covered, Acer, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Google, and Microsoft fall between the two extremes, with repair rates of 4 to 8 percent.

Source: Data is based on the 2014 Annual Product Reliability Survey conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center on 48,000 reader responses for 61,126 tablets.

Apple iPad Mini with Retina display, \$400



Toshiba CB35-A3120 Chromebook, \$300



Lenovo Z40, \$600



Microsoft Surface Pro 3.0, \$1,000 (optional keyboard, \$120 to \$130).



Ratings: Tablets

Scores in context: Of the 138 tablets tested, the highest scored 86; the lowest, 50. Listed below are the 10 top-scoring models in two sizes, in order of performance.

CR Best Buy
 Recommended
 ● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ○ Fair ● Poor

A. TOP 10 7- TO 8-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI ONLY

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS		
					Portability	Display	Performance	Battery Life (hr.)	Operating System*	Memory-Card Reader
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$400	86	●	●	●	11.9	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 8.4 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$330	86	●	●	●	10.8	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Apple iPad Mini with Retina display (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$400	83	●	●	●	12.8	I	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Google Nexus 7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (2nd gen.)	\$230	81	●	●	○	13.5	A	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Amazon Kindle Fire HDX (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$200	78	●	●	●	9.6	A	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	HP Slate7 Extreme (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$170	78	○	○	●	9.8	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Acer Iconia W4-820-2466 (Wi-Fi, 64GB)	\$350	78	●	●	●	12.3	W	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	HP Slate8 Pro (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$300	78	○	●	●	9.6	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	EVGA Tegra Note 7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$200	78	○	●	●	10.1	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Dell Venue 7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (2nd gen.)	\$160	77	●	○	○	12.2	A	●

B. TOP 10 9- TO 12-INCH-SCREEN TABLETS, WI-FI ONLY

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS		
					Portability	Display	Performance	Battery Life (hr.)	Operating System*	Memory-Card Reader
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 10.1 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$400	87	●	●	○	13.1	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Sony Xperia Z2 Tablet (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$500	86	●	●	●	11.2	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Samsung Galaxy Tab S 10.5 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$500	86	●	●	●	11.2	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Samsung Galaxy Note Pro 12.2 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	\$650	84	●	●	●	13.9	A	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Apple iPad Air (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$500	84	●	●	●	13.5	I	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 12.2 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	\$550	83	●	●	●	13.2	A	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 2014 Edition (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$500	83	○	●	○	9	A	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$340	82	●	●	○	11.6	A	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Apple iPad with Retina display (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	\$400	79	●	●	○	12.9	I	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Microsoft Surface Pro 3 (Wi-Fi, 128GB, i5)	\$1,000	78	○	○	●	10.1	W	

*A=Android, I=iOS, W=Windows

Amazon Lights New Fires

Amazon announced a trio of new tablets as we went to press; we're testing them now. They include its cheapest tablet yet, the 6-inch Fire HD 6, \$100; the 7-inch Fire HD 7, \$140; and an update of the current Kindle Fire HDX model, the Fire HDX 8.9, \$380.

That Fire HD 6, with a 6-inch display, is the smallest tablet we've seen so far. The new Fire HDX has Dynamic Light Control, which automatically adjusts the color of the display in reaction to ambient light. The screen should look more like a piece of paper, with less of the bluish light common in tablets.

It's the sale of content that helps Amazon keep hardware prices down. It recently added a music service, more streaming video, and Kindle Unlimited, a \$10-a-month service with access to 700,000 books. Its app store has more than 300,000 choices.

E-Book Readers

THESE DEVICES aren't as popular as they were before the tablet era, but they still have their merits. They weigh less than tablets and have better visibility in bright light. And their batteries keep going, sometimes for weeks on a charge.

Two of the best choices are the **Amazon Kindle Paperwhite** and **Barnes & Noble Nook GlowLight**, both with built-in lighting. The Nook GlowLight with Wi-Fi sells for \$120. The Paperwhite starts at \$120 with special offers. For 3G connectivity (which most users don't need, in our view), the price jumps to \$190.

At press time, Amazon introduced two new readers. The **Kindle Voyage**, \$200, has a brighter screen, Amazon says, and weighs less than the original Paperwhite (which will remain available). The 3G model costs \$270. The **Kindle**, \$80, is a less costly alternative with no built-in light. Barnes & Noble has partnered with Samsung on a tablet whose interface (but not hardware) is optimized for e-reading: the **Samsung Galaxy Tab 4 Nook**, \$180.



Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display, \$2,000

Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Touch Ultrabook, \$1,250

Laptops

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, laptops have learned a lot from tablets. You can now get a computer running Windows 8.1 that has a touch screen, and some even fold back on themselves or break free from their keyboards. Apple's MacBooks run an operating system that looks and feels like the company's mobile interface, and it provides deep integration with iPhones and iPads.

Google has pursued a different path with its Chromebook platform. The search company's operating system is essentially a glorified browser that runs cloud-based software. It has spawned a generation of lightweight laptop alternatives that can cost \$300 or even less. They have been so successful, especially in schools, that Microsoft is now working with computer manufacturers on lower-cost Windows machines. Those new

laptops feature the Bing search engine.

Will a discount laptop satisfy you, or should you pay \$1,000-plus for a high-end machine? That depends on what tasks you want it to do. For video editing and gaming, it's worth paying for performance, but a competent laptop that can stand up to everyday tasks can be had for much less.

BRANDS YOU CAN DEPEND ON

According to our survey data on almost 50,000 laptops, 14 percent needed to be fixed during the first three years of ownership. But some brands are more robust than others. Apple stands out for reliability, with just 8 percent needing repairs. Asus was among the more prone to problems, with a 16 percent repair rate. Other

brands varied somewhere in between in terms of reliability, with Gateway and Toshiba requiring fewer fixes than a majority of the other seven Windows-based brands in our analysis. Extended warranties proved to be a bad deal, on average, because not all repairs were covered. Among those who didn't purchase an extended

warranty, 41 percent said that repairs were covered by the standard warranty; 55 percent paid out of pocket, at an average cost of \$134. A few fixed problems on their own.

Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey on 49,603 laptops purchased between 2011 and 2014.

Bargain

► **Asus Chromebook C300MA-DB01, \$250**

Chromebooks were built to travel and to save you money. This model does both, with a nice price and 13.5 hours of battery life, second-longest in our tests. It's not the fastest performer, but it was capable enough for word processing, Web browsing, and online gaming.

Sweet Spot

► **Lenovo Z40, \$600**

A long battery life of 8.5 hours, excellent performance, and 500GB of storage make this Lenovo a great deal. It has 6GB of memory and 2GB of video memory, which is helpful when gaming.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Toshiba Satellite L55-B5454, \$650**

This machine's 7.25 hours of battery life—just about enough for a full day's work—and light weight (less than 5 pounds) will help you travel easy. Bonus: You can use it to charge other devices while it's in sleep mode.

Splurge

► **Dell XPS 13 Ultrabook Touch, \$1,150**

This 13-inch touch-screen laptop makes a great travel companion. It's light, at just over 3 pounds, and has an impressive 12.75 hours of battery life. It resembles the MacBook Air, so if you want a stylish laptop to carry around, this could be it. The performance is excellent, and the keyboard is comfortable to use, full-sized and backlit.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display MGX72LL/A, \$2,000**

Videophiles will love this Mac's gorgeous 15-inch display, with a 2880x1800 resolution. The machine is thin, light, and powerful, with a Core i7 processor and 16GB of memory. Its tested 10.5-hour battery life is long for a laptop this big.

Ratings: Laptops

Scores in context: Of the 97 laptops tested, the highest scored 83; the lowest, 39. Listed below are the top-scoring models in several sizes, in order of performance. Chromebooks, which appear separately, use

Google's Chrome operating system and work best when you are online. Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths. CR Best Buys blend value and performance, and are recommended.

CR Best Buy Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

A. TOP 9 13-INCH

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			FEATURES			
					Ergonomics	Portability	Performance	Battery Life (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Storage (GB)	Touch Screen
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Ativ Book 9 Plus NP940X3G-K06US	\$1,100	83	●	●	●	9%	3.1	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Acer Aspire S7-392-6832 Ultrabook	\$1,000	83	◐	●	●	12	2.9	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Dell XPS 13 Ultrabook Touch	\$1,150	82	◐	●	●	12%	3.1	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Toshiba Kirabook 13-i5s	\$1,500	79	◐	●	●	10½	2.8	256	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina display MGX72LL/A	\$1,300	78	◐	●	●	12½	3.4	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina display ME864LL/A	\$1,100	77	◐	●	●	11%	3.5	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Apple MacBook Air 13-inch MD760LL/B	\$1,000	75	◐	●	●	16%	3	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Apple MacBook Air 13-inch MD760LL/A	\$900	73	◐	●	○	15	2.9	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch MD101LL/A	\$1,050	66	◐	◐	◐	8%	4.5	500	●

B. TOP 7 14-INCH

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			FEATURES			
					Ergonomics	Portability	Performance	Battery Life (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Storage (GB)	Touch Screen
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Touch Ultrabook (2nd gen.)	\$1,250	77	●	●	●	7½	3.1	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	HP Envy Touch-Smart 14-k120us Ultrabook	\$700	71	●	◐	●	8½	4.7	750	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Lenovo Z40	\$600	68	◐	◐	●	8½	4.7	500	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Dell Inspiron 14 7000 Series Touch	\$800	67	◐	●	◐	10	4.1	500	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Lenovo Flex2 14 59422149	\$700	67	●	◐	●	5%	4.2	500	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Dell Inspiron 14 5000 Touch	\$550	65	◐	●	○	10	4.6	500	●

C. TOP 10 15-INCH

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			FEATURES			
					Ergonomics	Portability	Performance	Battery Life (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Storage (GB)	Touch Screen
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Ativ Book 9 NP940X5J-K01US	\$1,500	80	◐	●	●	12	4.4	128	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Dell XPS 15 Touch	\$1,550	78	◐	◐	●	7%	4.5	500	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display MGX72LL/A	\$2,000	77	◐	●	●	10½	4.4	256	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display ME293LL/A	\$1,600	77	◐	●	●	10%	4.4	256	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Lenovo Y50 Touch- 59421810	\$1,400	74	●	◐	●	6½	5.8	1000	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Dell Inspiron 15 5000 Touch	\$1,050	74	●	◐	●	8%	5.4	1000	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Lenovo IdeaPad U530 Touch Ultrabook	\$800	72	●	◐	●	7%	5.2	500	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Dell Inspiron 15 5000 Non Touch	\$750	69	◐	●	●	9%	5	1000	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Toshiba Satellite L55-B5454	\$650	65	◐	◐	◐	7%	4.9	500	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Lenovo Flex2 15	\$700	65	●	◐	◐	7	5.6	1000	●

D. TOP 4 CHROMEBOOKS

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			WEIGHT	
					Ergonomics	Portability	Performance		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Acer Chromebook C720-3871	\$350	75	○	●	◐	12	2.6 lb.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Acer Chromebook C720-3404	\$375	75	○	●	◐	12	2.6 lb.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Asus Chromebook C300MA-DB01	\$250	72	◐	●	◐	13½	2.9 lb.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Toshiba CB35-A3120 Chromebook	\$300	70	◐	●	○	11%	3.2 lb.

Printers

ALL-IN-ONE PRINTERS have been shedding their wires. Most of them can connect to a home network via Wi-Fi, for instance, and some can print directly from mobile devices through Apple AirPrint and Android apps. With many models, you can also use a phone to print from services and sites such as Dropbox, Facebook, Flickr, and Google Cloud.

These multipurpose machines can scan and copy, and for those of you who still send faxes, a number of printers do that, too. Prices range from \$60 to \$400 or so, with many options in the \$100-to-\$150 range.

Like many electronics products that have become commodities, all-in-one printers might seem all the same, but performance, features, and efficiency vary greatly. Some models do a

better job with photos than with text; others excel with text and don't perform as well with photos. Choose a model based on what matters most to you. The same applies to features. Auto-duplexing (two-sided printing) is a feature worth looking for if you'll be printing lots of text. An automatic document feeder is handy if you need to copy long documents. If you're planning to print mostly photos, you might want features such as a memory-card reader and the option to print borderless photos.

When it comes to value, don't consider just the sticker price; check our Ratings for ink costs, which can make a cheap printer expensive over the long haul. Some models use a lot of ink to clean print heads when you turn them on and off. Additionally, printers that use just one tricolor cartridge can cause you to discard some unused ink when one color runs out.

Ratings: All-in-One Inkjet Printers

Scores in context: Of the more than 40 tested, the highest scored 74; the lowest, 50. The Ratings list the 10 top-scoring models, in order of performance.

CR Best Buy Recommended ● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

TOP 10 ALL-IN-ONE INKJETS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				
					Ink Cost/Month	Photo Quality	4x6 Photo Time	Text Quality	Text Speed (PPM)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	HP Officejet Pro 8620	\$300	74	\$4.10	○	●	●	15
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	HP Officejet Pro 8630	\$300	74	\$4.20	○	●	●	15
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Epson Expression Premium XP-810	\$130	73	\$7.50	●	●	●	10
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	HP Officejet Pro 8610	\$150	73	\$4.00	○	●	●	13
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Canon Pixma MX922	\$130	73	\$6.50	●	●	●	12
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Epson Expression Premium XP-610	\$100	73	\$7.70	●	●	●	9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	HP Envy 4500	\$100	71	\$9.20	●	●	●	8
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Canon Pixma MX472	\$70	71	\$7.30	●	●	●	9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Brother MFC-J870DW	\$150	71	\$6.40	●	●	○	9
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Brother MFC-J6720DW	\$200	71	\$4.00	●	●	○	13

Bargain

► **Canon Pixma MX472, \$70**

This budget-minded printer offers very good overall performance. It produces great-looking photos and does it quickly. But the low price means that you sacrifice some features. It lacks Ethernet connectivity for networking, and you won't find a slot for inserting a memory card from your camera. Our tests found that printing costs were about average at 6.6 cents for a typical page of text, and it doesn't use much ink to maintain the print heads, a problem with many printers.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **HP Envy 4500, \$100**

This printer produces very good text and photos, but it's light on features and ink costs are relatively high.

Sweet Spot

► **Canon Pixma MX922, \$130**

This very capable printer is on the large side, but it churns out top-notch photos in a hurry. A 4x6-inch photo takes 1 minute and an 8x10-inch photo takes just under 2 minutes. It's also a good choice for heavy text users, producing 12 pages of black text per minute with excellent print quality. Printing costs are moderate (5.3 cents per page of text in our tests), but it uses a lot of ink for maintenance.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Epson Expression Premium XP-810, \$130**

The Epson produces very good photos and text. Features include a PictBridge port for direct printing from a camera and an auto-feeder and duplexer.

Splurge

► **HP Officejet Pro 8620, \$300**

Among the fastest in its class at printing pages of black text with very good quality, this HP is a great choice for churning out piles of documents. (Photo quality isn't one of its strengths, though.) Ink costs are among the lowest we've seen—just 1.6 cents per text page in testing. But it can use quite a bit of extra ink for maintenance, so your best bet is to leave it on between print jobs.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Brother MFC-J6720DW, \$200**

This printer provides fine overall performance and has very good photo quality. It's versatile, too, scanning and copying 11x17-inch pages and incorporating two paper trays.

Digital Photography

Connected cameras and camcorders make sharing photos and videos easy



Cameras

MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY is as much about sharing your images as taking them. New cameras make posting photos to Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, and other social networks easy, with the kind of connectivity you would usually expect from smart phones. Built-in Wi-Fi makes it easy to share photos and upload them to the Web. And tap-to-share technology called near field communication (NFC) makes it easy to send photos wirelessly to a phone or tablet.

For photography enthusiasts, the hottest cameras are “mirrorless” models, which are smaller and lighter than SLRs but have many of the same attributes. They can accept interchangeable lenses and have large sensors.

Other camera categories offer improved functionality, too. Superzooms are getting even zoomier; one of our recommended models has 60x magnification. Most cameras, including SLRs, can now shoot high-definition video. And there are more rugged and water-proof models designed to withstand rough-and-tumble activities. One feature you won't find on many lower-priced basic cameras is a viewfinder. To compensate, most ship with 3-inch or larger LCDs. Some pricier models include touch-screen or swiveling displays.

Another trend that should excite shutter-bugs: More compact models include larger image sensors. That not only helps improve overall image quality but also can help you capture better-quality photos in low light without using a flash.

Budget

► Canon PowerShot SX700 HS, \$300

This wireless superzoom is slightly less than 1.5 inches thick and weighs only 9 ounces—ideal for travelers. It has a long 30x optical zoom lens and shoots very good photos and video.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Nikon Coolpix S9700, \$300

Lightweight and slim, this wireless superzoom has a 30x optical zoom lens and shoots very good photos. It also has a built-in map and compass.

► Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX50V, \$350

This wireless superzoom is thin and speedy. It has a long 30x optical zoom but is just 1.5 inches thick. It can fire off 10 frames per second.

Sweet Spot

► Nikon D3300, \$550

This very giftable SLR comes in three colors. It takes exquisite photos, even in low light, and very good video. It has a nice panorama mode.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Samsung NX30, \$850

This mirrorless model's AutoShare feature lets you send photos to Android or iOS phones or tablets automatically and wirelessly.

► Panasonic Lumix DMC-GM1K, \$750

This thin, lightweight, mirrorless camera takes very good photos and videos, and has Wi-Fi.

► Canon EOS Rebel SL1, \$600

It's one of the smallest and lightest SLRs.

Splurge

► Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH4, \$2,330

Although pricey, this mirrorless camera captures stunning stills, even in low light. It's one of the first that can take impressive videos in 4K (ultra high definition) at 30 frames per second. It has a touch-screen LCD and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Nikon D7100, \$1,350

This full-featured SLR takes very good photos and excellent-quality video. It has some nice extras, too. For example, it includes two slots for SD memory cards.

► Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX10, \$1,000

This advanced wireless point-and-shoot lets you take high-quality shots and video. It has a long 24mm-200mm zoom lens with a constant f/2.8 aperture, and a large 1-inch CMOS sensor.

Rugged and Waterproof

► Canon PowerShot D30, \$300

Waterproof to an impressive depth of 82 feet, this camera can survive a 6½-foot fall as well. It takes very good photos and HD video.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Nikon Coolpix AW120, \$300

This wireless model has one of the widest zoom lenses in its class (24mm-120mm), so it can capture a broader vista. It's waterproof to 59 feet.

► Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX30, \$300

Light, and able to shoot 10 frames per second.



WHAT TO BUY FOR A TRAVELER

ROBERT OSTERGAARD, 46 WEBSITE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, NEW YORK CITY

“I'm looking for a good point-and-shoot with some control, primarily for taking vacation snaps that can upload to Facebook or Snapfish without too much fuss. We've used our iPhones in the past, but the photo quality isn't great and the digital zoom is terrible! I'd prefer to pay under \$300.”



Consumer Reports Says

“It's going to be tough to find a \$300 camera with the connectivity, zoom, and—especially—image quality that Robert is looking for. If he can step up to \$350, I'd recommend the Nikon Coolpix P340, a lightweight, slim, sleek-looking camera with a medium-range zoom, 5x (24-120mm). The Canon PowerShot G16 is a truly advanced camera with a broad range of controls. At \$500, it's well beyond Robert's budget, but if he can find one on sale, it's the camera to own.”

—Kerry Allen, camera tester

BRANDS YOU CAN DEPEND ON

Cameras these days are very reliable, according to our survey data on more than 77,000 camera purchases. The four-year repair rate for point-and-shoot cameras and interchangeable-lens (SLRs and mirrorless) models from Canon, Fuji/Fujifilm, Olympus, Panasonic, Samsung, and Sony was 4 or 5 percent, while Nikon had a 6 percent rate of repairs.

Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey on cameras purchased between 2010 and 2014.

GoPro Hero 3+ Silver Edition, \$300



Nikon D3300, \$550



Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH4, \$2,330



Nikon Coolpix S9700, \$300



Ratings: Cameras

Scores in context: Of the 136 cameras tested, the highest scored 78; the lowest, 36. Listed below are the top-scoring models in order of performance.

CR Best Buy Recommended

A. TOP 10 SLRs

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				SPECS		
					Image Quality	Flash Photos	Video Quality	LCD Quality	Megapixels	Tested Lens	Wireless
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Canon EOS Rebel T5i	\$550	73	●	●	●	●	18	18-55mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Canon EOS 70D	\$1,150	73	●	●	●	●	20	18-55mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Nikon D7100	\$1,350	72	●	●	●	●	24	18-105mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Nikon D3300	\$550	71	●	○	●	●	24	18-55mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Canon EOS Rebel SL1	\$600	71	●	●	●	●	18	18-55mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Canon EOS Rebel T3i	\$550	70	●	●	●	●	18	18-55mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Canon EOS Rebel T5	\$500	69	●	●	●	●	18	18-55mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Canon EOS 7D	\$1,300	69	●	●	●	●	18	18-135mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Pentax K-3	\$1,200	69	●	●	○	●	24	18-55mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Nikon D5300	\$750	67	●	○	●	○	12	18-55mm	•

B. TOP 20 MIRRORLESS MODELS

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				SPECS		
					Image Quality	Flash Photos	Video Quality	LCD Quality	Megapixels	Optical Zoom	Wireless
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH4	\$2,330	77	●	●	●	●	16	14-140mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung NX30	\$850	75	●	●	●	●	20	18-55mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX7K	\$800	75	●	●	●	●	16	14-42mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Olympus OM-D E-M1	\$1,400	74	●	○	●	●	16	12-50mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Fujifilm X-T1	\$1,700	73	●	●	●	●	16	18-55mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3	\$1,100	72	●	●	●	●	16	12-35mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Fujifilm X-E2	\$1,200	71	●	●	●	●	16	18-55mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Panasonic Lumix DMC-G6K	\$700	70	●	●	●	●	16	14-42mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GM1K	\$750	70	●	●	●	●	16	12-32mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Fujifilm X-A1	\$450	70	●	●	○	●	16	16-50mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	Samsung NX300	\$580	70	●	●	●	●	20	18-55mm	•

Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths. CR Best Buys blend value and performance, and are recommended.

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

B. TOP 20 MIRRORLESS MODELS (continued)

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				SPECS		
					Image Quality	Flash Photos	Video Quality	LCD Quality	Megapixels	Tested Lens	Wireless
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Samsung Galaxy NX	\$1,400	69	●	●	●	●	20	18-55mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Olympus OM-D E-M5	\$800	68	●	○	●	●	16	12-50mm	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6	\$450	68	○	●	●	●	16	14-42mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Sony Alpha 5000	\$450	68	●	○	●	○	20	16-50mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Samsung NX Mini	\$500	67	●	○	○	●	20	9-27mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	17	Sony NEX-5TL	\$500	66	●	●	●	●	16	16-50mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18	Fujifilm X-M1	\$600	66	●	●	○	●	16	16-50mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	Sony Alpha 6000	\$750	65	●	○	●	○	24	16-50mm	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20	Sony SLT-A77 II	\$1,400	65	○	●	●	●	24	16-50mm	•

C. TOP 5 ADVANCED POINT-AND-SHOOTS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				SPECS		
					Image Quality	Flash Photos	Video Quality	LCD Quality	Megapixels	Optical Zoom	Wireless
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Canon Power-Shot G1 X Mark II	\$800	78	●	●	●	●	13	5x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX10	\$1,000	72	●	●	●	●	20	8.3x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Nikon Coolpix A	\$1,100	71	●	●	●	●	16	1x	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100M2	\$650	71	●	●	●	●	20	3.6x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Fujifilm X100S	\$1,300	69	●	●	●	●	16	1x	

D. TOP 5 SUPERZOOMS

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				SPECS		
					Image Quality	Flash Photos	Video Quality	LCD Quality	Megapixels	Optical Zoom	Wireless
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Nikon Coolpix S9700	\$300	66	●	○	○	●	16	30x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Olympus Stylus SH-1	\$400	64	●	○	●	●	16	24x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX50V	\$350	63	●	●	●	●	20	30x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Canon Power-Shot SX700 HS	\$300	63	●	●	●	●	16	30x	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Nikon Coolpix P600	\$430	59	○	●	○	●	16	60x	•



Sony HDR-AS100V, \$300

Sony HDR-PJ810, \$1,100

Camcorders

ALTHOUGH YOU CAN SHOOT VIDEO on many devices, camcorders still offer the best combination of price, quality, and convenience. There are two main types.

Action (or sport) cams, led by the innovative GoPro models, are rugged devices that you can attach to yourself, your bike, helmet, and so on. Most are fairly basic, lacking features such as an LCD viewer. But they can be used with a smart phone that serves as the display. Prices are \$100 to \$400.

Full-sized camcorders are somewhat bigger, though many are still quite compact. They generally have more features, including a flip-out LCD, optical zoom, and image stabilization. Most cost \$250 to \$1,000. You'll pay a bit more for a model with 4K, or ultra high-definition, recording.

If video and audio quality are top priorities, go with a full-sized camcorder. They offer the best combination of ease of use, ergonomics, and quality. For portability or point-of-view-style videos, consider an action cam. They also give you the ability to capture video in rugged conditions, including underwater.

TIP When buying a full-sized camcorder, don't rely on the info on the box to determine the optical zoom. Some manufacturers tout "intelligent" or "extended" zoom. That includes digital zoom, which degrades image quality. Instead, check the specification for the model's optical zoom on the company website or in our Ratings. It often ranges from 10x to 60x.

Full-Sized Camcorders

► Sony HDR-PJ810, \$1,100

This wireless Sony takes excellent video and is very good in low light. Sound quality is very good. Battery life is longer than on most models, and the electronic viewfinder is a plus. A special feature: You can open up the LCD and project video or still images on a flat surface. But this model is larger and heavier than others.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Sony FDR-AX100, \$2,000

This 4K camcorder takes excellent HD video, even in low light, and 4K video (viewable on a UHD TV) is even sharper and more detailed.

► Panasonic HC-V550, \$340

This inexpensive HD model has a 50x optical zoom, an excellent 3-inch touch-screen LCD monitor, and decent battery life. It takes very good video and still photos.

Action Cams

► GoPro Hero3+ Black Edition, \$400

This pricey wireless sets the standard for action cams. Most capture only fair video and audio, but this one was good at both, and it can shoot 4K video. It's waterproof when used with its protective housing. But its 90-minute battery life is comparatively short.

ALSO CONSIDER

► GoPro Hero3+ Silver Edition, \$300

Unlike the Black Edition, this model has a long battery life of 135 minutes. It's also relatively easy to use. Once you download an app to your mobile device, you can connect wirelessly and use the device's LCD to compose your photos and video.

► JVC GC-XA2 Adixxion, \$300

If you don't feel like buying special enclosures to go snorkeling or skiing, this waterproof, rugged action cam should be right up your alley. It can take a dunk up to 16 feet and withstand a 6½-foot drop. Also, unlike GoPro models, it has a built-in 1.5-inch display. Battery life is decent, 110 minutes.

► Sony HDR-AS100V, \$300

Action cams aren't known for impressive image quality, but this one is an exception. It captures very good video and good still photos. That's partly because its image stabilizer does such a great job counteracting hand shake, which gives you less jittery video and sharp photos. Its body is splashproof, and a protective housing makes it waterproof to 16 feet. Battery life is long, at 130 minutes.

Mobile Gear

Headphones, smart phones, and smart watches are multiplying—here's how to find the right device



Headphones

WHEN YOU SHOP for headphones, you might find the array of types, styles, brands, and prices overwhelming. Here's how to choose:

The type of headphones that work for you depends on your lifestyle, whether you'll be using them at home or on the run, and your budget. Look for sound quality that's good or better and a firm, comfy fit, especially if you plan to wear them for extended periods. Some people buy different types for exercising and for listening to high-fidelity music.

As anyone who has walked across a college

campus or down a city street recently can tell you, the hottest headphones these days are \$100-plus premium models. That kind of money will buy you a set of cans that are fashionable and celebrity-endorsed or a pair with superior audio quality—not always the same thing.

Over-ear models, which surround the ears, are best for listening to music at home. Certain designs help block out noisy kids and keep your tunes from disturbing a sleeping spouse. But those models tend to be bulky, and the ear pads can get hot or sticky after a while. In-ear models, which are inserted into the ear canal, are widely sold on-the-go choices. The design

helps to block out external sounds, but they can be uncomfortable. You might find some difficult to keep in place, depending on the shape of your ears.

On-ear headphones, which rest on the ears, provide a nice balance of portability and comfort. Open-back models allow some outside sounds to be heard, making them a good choice if you want to be aware of what's going on around you—say, if you want to hear a car horn while crossing a city street. The downside is that they won't block out annoying sounds such as construction noise. A closed-back model will generally do a better job blocking external sounds.

Headphones with active noise canceling use battery-powered electronic circuitry to reduce noise. They're great for travelers who want to dim the roar of a jet engine. Wireless headphones, especially Bluetooth models, are a smart option for those who want to stream music or take a call without digging their phone out of a bag or pocket.

Ratings: Headphones

Scores in context: Of the 150-plus headphones tested, the highest scored 91; the lowest, 6. The Ratings list 25 top-scoring models of three types, in order of performance.

CR Best Buy Recommended ● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

A. PORTABLE STEREO

Recommended	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS		SPECS	
					Sound Quality	Sensitivity	Type	Design
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Klipsch Image X11i	\$350	80	●	High	Ear-Insert	Isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Polk Audio Nue Era	\$100	80	●	Medium-High	Ear-Insert	Isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Westone ADV Alpha	\$150	80	●	Medium-High	Ear-Insert	Isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Monster DNA	\$200	76	●	High	On-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Onkyo IE-FC300	\$100	76	●	Medium-High	Ear-Insert	Isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Beats by Dre Beats Solo HD	\$170	71	●	Medium-High	On-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Bose FreeStyle	\$130	71	●	Medium-High	Earbud	Non-isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	NAD Electronics VISO HP20	\$170	71	●	High	Ear-Insert	Isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Bose IE2	\$100	66	●	Medium-High	Earbud	Non-isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Bose MIE2	\$130	66	●	Medium-High	Earbud	Non-isolating

Portable Models

► Polk Audio Nue Era, \$100

These deliver very good audio and come in tortoiseshell or black. The in-line remote and microphone works with iPhones and other mobile devices.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Monster DNA, \$200

These distinctive-looking on-ear headphones come in a range of bold colors. More important, they offer very good sound and high sensitivity, so they'll work well with lower-powered smart phones and tablets.

► Onkyo IE-FC300, \$100

Offered in black, white, red, or violet, this model delivers very good sound quality and has a detachable cable.

Noise-Canceling Models

► Beats by Dre Beats Executive, \$300

These over-ear headphones have excellent sound and very good noise reduction.

ALSO CONSIDER

► Bose QuietComfort 20i, \$300

It's our top pick among in-ear noise-canceling headphones.

► SMS Audio Street by 50 - ANC, \$280

These over-the-ear headphones deliver very good sound quality and excellent noise reduction.

Apple iPhone 6 Plus (prices vary by carrier and plan)



LG G3



HiFiMan HE-400, \$300



Grado Prestige SR225e, \$200



HTC One (M8)



Apple iPhone 6



Motorola Moto 360, \$250



Pebble Steel, \$250



Onkyo IE-FC300, \$100



Ratings: Headphones

Scores in context: Of the 150-plus headphones tested, the highest scored 91; the lowest, 6. The Ratings list 25 top-scoring models of three types, in order of performance.

CR Best Buy Recommended

 Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

B. HOME/STUDIO STEREO

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS		SPECS	
					Sound Quality	Sensitivity	Type	Design
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Grado Prestige SR325e	\$300	91	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Open-Air
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Grado Prestige SR225e	\$200	88	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Open-Air
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Bowers & Wilkins P7	\$400	86	<input type="radio"/>	Medium	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Grado Prestige SR80e	\$100	86	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Open-Air
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Shure SRH1440	\$300	81	<input type="radio"/>	Low	Over-Ear With Headband	Open-Air
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Grado Prestige SR125e	\$150	80	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	On-Ear With Headband	Open-Air
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Grado Prestige SR60e	\$80	76	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	On-Ear With Headband	Open-Air
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Audio Technica ATH-M50x	\$240	71	<input type="radio"/>	Medium	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	NAD Electronics VISO HP50	\$300	71	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Sennheiser Momentum	\$300	71	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed

C. NOISE-CANCELING

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			SPECS	
					Sound Quality	Noise Reduction	Sensitivity	Type	Design
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Beats by Dre Beats Executive	\$300	85	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	SMS Audio Street by 50 - ANC	\$280	82	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Medium/Medium	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Bose QuietComfort 15	\$300	74	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High/Very low	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Bose QuietComfort 20i	\$300	74	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Medium-High/Medium	Ear-Insert	Isolating
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	PSB Speakers M4U 2	\$400	73	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very High/Medium-High	Over-Ear With Headband	Closed

Home/studio headphones

► **Grado Prestige SR225e, \$200**

This on-ear model is among the best headphones we've tested. It has medium-high sensitivity, so it works even with lower-powered devices. It has black polycarbonate enclosures and an adjustable headband. The even better **SR325e, \$300**, has powder-coated aluminum housings, black ear surrounds, and a leather headband.

► **HiFiMan HE-400, \$300**

This top performer is being replaced by the HE-400i but is worth looking for.

ALSO CONSIDER

► **Grado Prestige SR60e, \$80**

This old-school retro-style model offers unequalled bang for the buck.

► **Audio-Technica ATH-M50x, \$240**

These studio-style headphones have swiveling ear cups for DJ-style single-ear monitoring. They deliver very good sound and fold flat for storage. They come in black, white, and tan and blue.

► **Shure SRH1440, \$300**

Excellent sound distinguishes these larger, over-ear headphones, which have a pro-style design with black cosmetics.



WHAT TO BUY FOR A COOL DAD

GORDON NASENBENY, 50 CONTRACT NEGOTIATOR, GRAYSLAKE, ILL.

"I'm looking for headphones for my 24-year-old son and myself. He likes in-ear models—the smaller the better—and listens to techno music on his iPhone. But he tends to lose them. I want on-ear or over-ear headphones for music. My budget is \$50 for my son and \$300 for me. I'd prefer models made in the U.S."



Consumer Reports Says

"For Gordon's son, my pick is the Denon Music Maniac AH-C50MA, with very good sound and a \$50 price tag. Their high sensitivity makes them a great choice for using with a phone, and the inline mike and controls will let him take calls. If he loses them, Gordon should pull out Panasonic's \$10 RP-TCM125 earphones as a backup—they're very good for the price. For Gordon, I recommend Grado's \$300 Prestige SR325e over-ear headphones, among the best-sounding models we've tested. They're comfortable, they're classy, and they are made in Brooklyn, N.Y., where the Grado family has built headphones by hand for 25 years."—*James K. Willcox, home entertainment editor*

TIP Sound quality is obviously a major consideration when you're buying headphones, but the type matters, too. Think about the way you'll be using them most—for sports or outdoor activities, on the go with your smart phone, or at home with your tablet or stereo system. That will determine which type—in-ear, on-ear, or over-ear—will suit you best. In-ear models, for example, might be most secure if you'll be exercising. And consider whether you'll need noise cancellation or Bluetooth.



Smart Phones

THE WORLD OF SMART PHONES is exciting again. The newest models have intuitive controls, stellar screens, better cameras, longer battery life, and other useful features. Manufacturers are moving away from confusing gimmicks such as some air gestures and eyeball tracking.

The new phones are smarter in ways that count. For instance, calendars can warn you to leave early for an appointment because of a traffic jam on your route, and fitness apps use sensors on the phone or a Bluetooth-linked smart watch to monitor your activity level.

New Apple iPhone 6 and 6 Plus models have larger displays to compete with rivals from Samsung and LG, and many Android phones are being built tough enough to take a beating—or a dunking. For instance, Sony Xperia Z-series and some Samsung Galaxy S smart phones can be submerged in several feet of water for up to 30 minutes. And outdoor enthusiasts may appreciate the Samsung Galaxy S 5 Active's Activity Zone app, which includes a barometer, compass, flashlight, and stopwatch in its arsenal of apps.

All of the models listed below are available on AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon. More than ever before, phone prices vary widely by carrier and plan. (Look for comprehensive Ratings of the newest smart phones in our February 2015 issue.)



Sharp Display

► LG G3

The LG G3's 5.5-inch quad HD display is among the sharpest we've tested, presenting photos, videos, and Web pages with more than 530 pixels per inch. The slim, curved design makes it comfortable to hold, despite its slightly large width. The keyboard is well-designed, and you can easily adjust its height with your finger. A mouselike control allows the user to place the cursor precisely within text. You can even split the keyboard in two to access items behind it. The front and rear cameras take very good pictures, and the G3 is one of the few phones we've seen that can record video in Ultra HD (2160x3840 pixels of resolution). One caveat: The power and volume buttons are on the back of the phone case—not on the side, like on most models—which may take some effort to master.

The iPhone Experience

► Apple iPhone 6 and 6 Plus

The iPhone 6 and 6 Plus are Apple's comeback punch to technically advanced Android rivals from LG, Samsung, and others, starting with larger screens—4.7 inches for the iPhone 6 and 5.5 inches for the iPhone 6 Plus. Both displays are excellent. Double-touch the home button and the display slides down to make it easier to reach top-row apps and controls. In landscape mode, the keyboard expands to add more keys and rearranges itself for easier typing. Battery life, a weakness for previous iPhones, is much improved. The camera, which has the same 8 megapixels as its predecessors, remains among the best we've tested. The 6 Plus adds an optical image stabilizer, which improves low-light shots. And the design is beautiful, as we've come to expect from Apple products.

Big, Stunning Screens

► Samsung Galaxy Note 4 and Note Edge

These "phablet" models have stunning quad-high-definition touchscreen displays, each measuring about 5.7 inches. The display on the Note Edge curves off on the right side, forming a second ¼-inch-high surface for notifications, controls, and frequently used apps. We haven't tested these phones yet, but cameras on previous Notes have been among the best we've tested. Each Note includes a stylus that can act as a writing instrument, photo editor, or select tool when you need more precision than a finger can provide. The phones are designed to be hard-core multitaskers that can shrink and juggle the windows of up to 16 open apps and jump between them without switching screens. You can also drag and drop files from one app into another.

Super Sound

► HTC One (M8)

This top-notch Android smart phone has a superb 5-inch high-definition display, great-sounding speakers, and two rear-facing camera lenses that let you produce striking photographic effects, including 3D. The Windows Phone version ships with Cortana, the voice-activated assistant with abilities comparable to Apple's Siri and Android's Google Now. The phone's front-facing speakers provide sound that's loud and rich enough to enjoy music without headphones. The phone has a sleek, curved unibody design. The HTC One offers an alternate BlinkFeed home page, which is a magazinelike interface that pours calendar notifications, news, and social network feeds into a cascading blend of captioned photos and text boxes.



Mobile Gear

Smart Phones + Smart Watches



Samsung Gear 2 Neo, \$200

Pebble Steel, \$200

Smart Watches

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, smart watches have evolved from techno-curiosity to one of the most intriguing product categories in electronics. Small companies such as Martian and Pebble, which pioneered the category, have expanded their selection of high-tech timepieces. Meanwhile, big-name companies such as Samsung and Sony, are now pushing forward with third-generation devices. LG offers square and round versions of its G watch. Motorola's Moto 360 resembles a classic wristwatch. Google and Samsung have introduced their own smart-watch operating systems, and Apple unveiled its first smart watch this past September but won't deliver it until next year.

For all of the excitement, there's still no consensus on what, exactly, a smart watch should do. All of them pair with a smart phone or tablet and can alert you to incoming calls, e-mails, instant messages, and texts. Some also serve as health and fitness devices, tracking your physical activity and sleep patterns. Others attempt the full Dick Tracy, letting the user take phone calls or even shoot photos and video directly from the wrist.

Many smart watches are big and bulky, but that's slowly changing as companies realize that most people prefer something more stylish and comfortable. Before you buy a smart watch, make sure it's compatible with the mobile device you plan to use it with—some work only with Android devices or specific brands, and some require more recent OS versions than others.

Full-Featured

► Samsung Gear Collection

Samsung's smart-watch operation has been busy since launching the **Galaxy Gear** in 2013. In quick succession, the company introduced the **Gear 2**, **Gear 2 Neo**, **Gear Fit**, and **Gear Live**. And in September it announced the **Gear S** (see "New Tricks From Trendy Watches," at right). Features vary by model: The Gear 2 has a built-in camera and runs on Samsung's Tizen OS. The Gear Fit is a hybrid smart watch/activity tracker. The Gear Live is one of the first smart watches running Google's versatile Android Wear operating system. Prices for the Gear models range from \$150 to \$300.

Sleek and Simple

► Pebble and Pebble Steel

Pebble takes a streamlined approach to smart-watch design and functionality. The company's devices use buttons instead of touch screens, and they have monochrome displays, which are easy to read in bright light. Pebble watches can channel e-mails, texts, and other notifications from Apple iOS and Android devices. There's an active online user community and tons of apps available for fitness, gaming, and more. The plastic **Pebble** costs \$100; the more upscale **Pebble Steel**, with a stainless-steel watch and leather band, sells for \$200.



WHAT TO BUY FOR AN IPHONE LOYALIST

**AMY GARCIA PHILLIPS, 39
LATIN/BALLROOM DANCE
INSTRUCTOR, RAHWAY, N.J.**

"I'd like to buy a smart watch for my father and for my husband. My dad has an iPhone 4s, and my husband will be getting an iPhone 6. So I'm leaning toward an Apple product."



Consumer Reports Says

"The Apple Watch, announced in late summer, would be Amy's obvious choice, but that promising device won't be on sale until early 2015 at the soonest—not in time for the holidays. If it's not worth the wait, another excellent option is a Pebble smart watch. It doesn't have all of the features expected from the Apple Watch, but it does work with iOS devices, and it has the key functionality you'd expect from any smart watch—along with a clean, easy-to-use interface. (See more details below.) And as the upstart that helped spark the smart-watch trend, the Pebble carries some technophile cred." —Carol Mangis, wearable tech editor

New Tricks From Trendy Watches

Right now, smart watches are largely accessories to smart phones. The few that make phone calls can do so only within Bluetooth range of a paired phone. But that's changing with Samsung's new Gear S, which has built-in 3G connectivity—enabling users to make and receive calls without a phone nearby.

Some watches can do even more. The Apple Watch will measure changes in atmospheric pressure to calculate altitude, and use infrared and visible-light LEDs on the back of the case to shine into the wrist's blood vessels to determine your heart rate.

Where to Buy Electronics

Walk-in store or online retailer?
Our survey reveals the standouts.



If you're planning to buy a tablet, a TV, headphones, or another gadget, leave the car keys on the counter and jump on the Web to enjoy a great shopping experience. According to our most recent Consumer Reports survey, shoppers who bought online were a bit more satisfied overall than those who went to a retail store. Those results came from 42,000-plus electronics shopping experiences at 20 walk-in stores, 14 online retailers, independent stores, and websites.

Websites as a whole scored higher than walk-in stores for ease of

Best e-tailers

For the third time in the past four years, four online retailers earned favorable marks across the board: B&H (bhphotovideo.com), Crutchfield, Amazon.com, and Newegg. B&H was the only e-tailer to get a top score on all factors, including service, selection, and price. The Apple, Costco, and Sam's Club websites were all near the top of the Ratings, but Apple got a below-average rating for price, and Costco and Sam's were judged below average for product selection.

Best walk-in stores

Go, Navy! The Navy Exchange, available to active naval service members and their dependents, topped our list of in-store electronics retailers. It was one of only two

walk-in retailers to get high marks across the board. The other was Abt Electronics. The Army & Air Force Exchange was near the top of the list, but its scores were more mixed. Costco and Apple also were near the top, but like their online siblings, each had one below-average score—Costco for selection and Apple for price.

Bargaining pays off

Whether you're clicking around the Web or roaming through a store, it's worth asking for a lower price when you're ready to check out. Only 15 percent of in-store shoppers surveyed tried to negotiate, but the majority of those who did were successful—59 percent got a price reduction averaging \$72. Readers were especially willing to go to the mat on TVs, with

21 percent of TV buyers asking for a discount and close to 70 percent of them getting one, saving an average of \$94 on a set. Few online shoppers negotiated, but most of those who did succeeded, using phone, online chat, or e-mail.

But consumers haven't given up on brick-and-mortar retailers. More than 60 percent of electronics purchases in our survey were made at walk-in stores, and customers were very satisfied with the experience overall. The best stores scored as well as the top websites.

checkouts, product quality, selection, and price—in many cases, even within the same retail operation. Walmart.com, for example, outdid its walk-in sibling on every attribute (though both were among the lower-scoring in their groups).

You don't have to do anything crazy to get a deal. Simply asking for a lower price paid off more than half of the time for survey respondents who tried it. If that doesn't work, threaten to shop elsewhere, a tactic that proved highly effective for in-store hagglers. One piece of advice: Come armed with prices from competitors. Retailers will often match the best price you've found.

Don't get the warranty

Retailers make a lot of profit on extended warranties, so brace

yourself for a sales pitch. Almost three out of four in-store shoppers were pushed to buy an extended warranty, and 16 percent of them bought one, as did 12 percent of online buyers. Don't bite.

Our reader surveys have shown time and time again that extended warranties are not a good deal for most consumers. Many consumer products are reliable and don't break during the period covered, and the plans cost as much as you'd pay for a repair that might never be required. One exception: It's worth considering Apple's extended warranty/service plan if you want phone or online support for more than the standard 90 days. Apple consistently stands out in our surveys for offering the best computer tech support in the business.

HOW PEOPLE SHOP FOR GEAR: WHAT OUR SURVEY SHOWS

RESEARCHED PRODUCTS
ON THE INTERNET BEFORE PURCHASE

74% **VS.** 61%
of online shoppers vs. of walk-in shoppers

USED THE INTERNET
TO COMPARE RETAILER PRICES

67% **VS.** 53%
of online shoppers vs. of walk-in shoppers

4 out of 10

Amazon.com's share of online electronics purchases

1 out of 3

Proportion of Apple customers, both online and walk-in, who bought the AppleCare service plan

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PRODUCT QUALITY TRUMP PRICE
WHEN IT COMES TO SHOPPERS' OVERALL SATISFACTION.

A Beautiful Death

Paul Scheier lived a full and loving life. So when his cancer returned at age 86, he said no more hospitals, no chemo. He faced the end on his own terms—something that's not easy to do in America today. But he showed that it *can* be done.

P **AUL SCHEIER KNEW** how he wanted to die long before he did: at home, with his wife and children. And last July, that's exactly what happened. The retired dentist from Orchard Park, N.Y., a Buffalo suburb, succumbed to lung cancer in his bedroom with Lorraine, his wife of 62 years, nearby, and having spent his final days with their four grown children, Kathy, Lynn, Debbie, and Tom.

That didn't happen by accident. Always a practical and decisive man, Paul had begun sharing his end-of-life wishes with his daughters more than a decade earlier: No ventilators, he told them; no major surgeries except to alleviate pain; no brink-of-death resuscitations. They took good notes.

So in the spring of 2013 when malignant nodules appeared in Paul's right lung, where a large cancerous tumor had been removed a year earlier, he was ready. His doctors told Paul that he had between six and 12 months to live and that chemotherapy might buy him a little more time. Paul said no.

He knew how debilitating chemo could be. He had recently





NINE DECADES OF JOY

Paul Scheier, and wife Lorraine, in center, surrounded by family photos that document a life well lived.

COURT
Movir
classes
will be
1:30 p.m.
The
solo, I
Jane I
talk, b
of the
Council
The
Fertlisl
Achlev
sented
Presid
schola
award
Donald
School

weathered a terrible infection stemming from a hernia and gallbladder operation—and he didn’t want to sign on for more pain. Better, he reasoned, to spend his remaining days playing golf, having lunch with old friends, and enjoying time with his wife and children.

“At my age, I wasn’t going to go through chemo,” he said in an interview last summer. “I felt it was getting close to my time, so why not live happily for the next six months or year? We knew what the end result was going to be anyway.”

Paul was lucky: He died peacefully at home, not in the clinical, often chaotic atmosphere of a hospital. A recent Consumer Reports survey of 2,015 adults suggests that Americans would prefer to die at home: 86 percent said they would consider receiving end-of-life-care at home, but just 36 percent said the same about getting that care in a hospital.

Indeed, a good death is hard to achieve. According to a September report from the Institute of Medicine, the health arm of the National Academy of Sciences, the U.S. health care system is poorly designed to deal with end-of-life concerns, particularly when it comes to considering the wishes of terminal patients.

That’s why it’s crucial that all Americans think about end-of-life concerns long before a crisis arrives. That thinking should start with an honest talk with your family about the kind of care you want during your final months and days. It should involve creating a living will (also called an advance directive) that specifies what procedures you want and don’t want if you have a terminal condition. And you should appoint a health care proxy, someone who knows your desires well and who can make medical decisions for you if you become incapacitated.

Having such a plan in place eases the burden on family members and improves the odds that your passing will be under circumstances of your own choosing. (See “Going Your Way,” on page 52.)

The Blessing of Hospice: “Anyone Who Does This Work Is an Angel”

In September 2013, six months after he learned that his cancer had returned, Paul

entered a hospice program run by the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care in Buffalo. That development, he later told his hospice doctor, Bethany Calkins, M.D., was “one of the best things that’s happened to me in the last I don’t know how many years.”

He was also grateful to learn that his hospice expenses were covered by Medicare and that his wife, Lorraine, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, would not be left with financial burdens. “We always complain about government programs, but this one is just so wonderful,” Paul said. “The hospice workers walked into our home and became part of our family, and we know they’re going to take care of us until my last breath.”

Lorraine was even more effusive: “Anyone who does this work is an angel,” she said. “We have been very fortunate to have a wonderful team. They’re kind, they’re compassionate, they’re loving.”

“We’re all going to die,” Calkins said, “and it is my job to make sure that people do so in as calm and beautiful a manner as possible.”

The Scheiers’ experience shows hospice care at its best. It’s reserved for patients with terminal illness who have, their doctors estimate, six months or less to live (though patients who survive longer can be “recertified” for continued care).

Once a patient is “in hospice”—which can take place at home or in a hospital, a stand-alone hospice unit, an assisted-care facility, or a nursing home—he or she forgoes all therapies aimed at combatting the disease itself. The care includes visits from doctors, nurses, social workers, and, if needed, home health aides, faith counselors, and music and massage therapists. (Paul, a World War II veteran whose stoicism and good humor rarely deserted him, even in his toughest moments, chose to have his hospice care at home and mostly did without those last three services.)

Hospice always involves palliative care—the use of medication or other therapies to ease the pain and symptoms of disease but not to heal it. And it incorporates regular medical care for symptoms or conditions that don’t arise from the terminal illness itself, such as insomnia, high blood pressure, and anxiety. Palliative care is also used for patients suffering from serious but not necessarily terminal illness, such as Parkinson’s disease or advanced heart disease.

In either case, “the focus is on optimal pain and symptom management,” said Calkins, who formed a deep bond with the Scheier family and whose first pregnancy paralleled exactly Paul’s eight-and-a-half months in hospice. Within 24 hours of Paul’s death, Calkins gave birth to her son, Oliver.

Calkins considers Paul lucky to have had that time. “In my experience the average hospice stay is too short,” she said. “The patients I see generally live weeks to a couple of months before they pass away, and sometimes only days or hours.”

She also believes that Paul and his family negotiated the difficult process almost perfectly. “I don’t think I would make any different decisions from those they made—they’ve rolled with the punches and done so with grace.”

Lorraine is not certain exactly when she and her husband set down their end-of-life wishes, but she thinks it was when they

HOW
WE WANT
TO DIE
Consumer
Reports’
survey
of Americans
found that ...

86%

would want
to spend
their final days
at home.

50%

prefer pain
management
and comfort
care over other
medical treat-
ments.

61%

have never
heard of
palliative
care.

47%

of people
65-plus have
completed an
advance direc-
tive (living will).

42%

have provided
end-of-life care
for a friend or
relative.

revised their wills a few years ago. And she says that the fact they had done so was a gift to their children.

“I think it makes a tremendous difference,” said Kathy, the oldest child. “We’re a very close family and we tend to discuss things as a group. I can’t imagine the squabbles in a family who are not close and where they don’t have those directives,” she says. “When it’s written down, that’s what you have to abide by.”

The Final Days: “Sitting With Family Members, Just Talking”

But even a tight-knit family like the Scheiers, who addressed most of the big questions in advance (“our family is not very normal in this day and age,” said Paul’s son, Tom, “because we’re very close, still”), can be unnerved by some of the curveballs that get lobbed at them when a parent or spouse is near death.

Kathy and her dad stopped talking for several days after arguing about his decision to stop taking one of his medications—a turn of events that upset everyone and complicated matters for Calkins and the other hospice team members.

Lorraine Scheier confesses, with tears in her eyes, to feeling upset when her husband would say he wanted to die, which happened more and more often as his final summer progressed. And she admits that she felt hurt and left out by his insistence on meeting his friends for their regular lunches at a local restaurant—a decades-old tradition that Scheier continued until just a few days before his death.

Paul himself, while betraying little fear of death and expressing confidence that he was “good with God,” was distressed by his on-and-off hallucinations, which appeared as his illness advanced. But above all, he was troubled by the hardships he believed he was imposing on his family as they waited for him to die. He knew that they had time demands of their own—Kathy as a nuclear medicine technologist in Pennsylvania, Lynn driving a school bus in Ohio, Debbie as a nurse in Texas, and Tom running a hot dog stand from his boat in Florida.

Paul worried that his kids put their lives on hold whenever they made the trip to the family home in Orchard Park. “This has been going on for three or four years now,” he told Calkins, his voice breaking. “That’s a lot to put anybody through.”

Sitting by his side, the hospice doctor would reassure Paul that his wife and children were doing what they needed—and



FAMILY MAN

Paul Scheier died on July 26, a week after celebrating his 62nd wedding anniversary with wife Lorraine.

wanted—to do. She knew that not just from her work over the years, shepherding dozens of patients and families through the process of dying, but from her own personal experience. Fifteen years earlier, her grandfather had died in hospice.

“When else do you get to sit for days on end in a room with family members that you rarely see just talking about where you’ve been as a family and where you’re going?” Calkins said. “It was the hardest journey I’ve ever walked with my family, but it was also the most beautiful.”

Paul’s family agrees. “Dad always told us that he wanted to teach us how to die,” Paul’s daughter, Debbie, said a few weeks after his death. “And what a great teacher we had.”

Funding for the preparation of this article was provided in part by the Atlantic Philanthropies.

Going Your Way

The most effective way to enforce your end-of-life wishes is to create an advance directive or a living will and to appoint a health care proxy.

Start Now It's never too early to prepare an advance directive and designate a proxy, says Howard Krooks, past president of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys. Even children as young as 18 should complete one: Once children reach 18, you have no legal authority to make medical decisions for them unless you are their health care proxy or a court makes you their legal guardian.

You Don't Need an Attorney You can complete a living will and appoint a health care proxy on your own. Get state-specific forms at caringinfo.org. Note that the site uses the term "health care agent" instead of "health care proxy," but they mean the same thing.

Prepare the Paperwork Complete several originals of your living will and other legal papers, with original signatures. That can include a Do Not Resuscitate order, or DNR, which instructs health care providers not to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) if breathing stops or if the heart stops beating.

Keep the Documents Close and Available An advance directive locked in a safe-deposit box won't help in an emergency. Give copies to your health care proxy, your family, and your doctors to add to your medical record. The American Bar Association has an app called My Health Care Wishes (Android and iOS) that lets you store advance directives and related legal documents on your mobile device.

Discuss Your Wishes Talk with everyone in your family, not just your health care proxy. They may have different perspectives about your care, Krooks says, which can complicate matters if the advance directive is ever activated. But our survey of more than 200 caregivers found that disagreements among family members about treatment choices were not common.

Find the Right Hospice For You

Most people are referred to hospice by their doctor. Patients, family members, even friends can also make referrals. If you're looking for a program, check with the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (nhpco.org). But beware: More than half of U.S. hospice programs are for-profit, according to Medicare figures, and several recent news reports have highlighted problems at some of those programs.

Here's what to look for in a hospice:

- Not-for-profit status and 20 or more years of experience.

- Hospice-certified nurses and doctors on staff and available 24 hours per day.
- Palliative-care consultants who can begin care if you're not yet ready for hospice.
- An inpatient unit, where patients can go if symptoms can't be managed at home.
- Ability to provide care in nursing homes and assisted living facilities.
- Social workers and chaplains.
- Medicare approval. That way, Medicare will cover services, including equipment and home health aides as needed, plus counseling and grief support for the patient and the family.

When End of Life Is Messy

Paul Scheier's death represents a best-case scenario. He had his paperwork in order, a loving family that supported his wishes, and his cognitive abilities intact. As difficult as his diagnosis was, his prognosis was predictable and clear. But what happens when things don't go so smoothly? Here's what to do:

Your loved one has no end-of-life legal documents. Only about one in five adults in a Consumer Reports survey had an advance directive (living will) or a health care proxy. Even among people 65 and older, less than half had those safeguards. That presents big problems if a person suddenly becomes incapacitated, says elder law attorney Howard Krooks. Many states have laws defining who can make health care decisions in that situation.

Things can break down if the doctors and the person designated by the state disagree, or if another family member objects. Your best bet is to work things out within your family first, because health care providers are more likely to support your wishes if you all agree.

If you run into roadblocks, try these resources:

- The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (caremanager.org) can direct you to a geriatric care manager, who can help you resolve conflicts within your family or with your health care providers, and provide guidance on other legal, financial, and emotional challenges.
- The National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (naela.org) lists lawyers who specialize in end-of-life legal concerns.

Your loved one suffers from a protracted illness. The course of disease and the timing of death are rarely predictable. And that can lead to a cascade of problems for patients and caregivers alike, even if your end-of-life legal documents are in order, says Joanne Lynn, M.D., director of the Center for Elder Care and Advanced Illness at Altarum Institute.

Those problems include poorly coordinated care and multiple admissions to hospitals and nursing homes for the patient, and burnout and disrupted lives for the caregivers.

Consider these resources:

- The American Geriatrics Society's Health in Aging Foundation (healthinaging.org) can help you find a geriatrician, a physician with special training in helping frail, older people. "Look for somebody with experience with home care and nursing homes, somebody who will be kind but honest about what you're going to face," Lynn says.
- The Caregiver Action Network (caregiveraction.org) offers comprehensive, practical information for caregivers.
- The Administration on Aging (eldercare.gov) can point you to state and local services for older adults and their families.

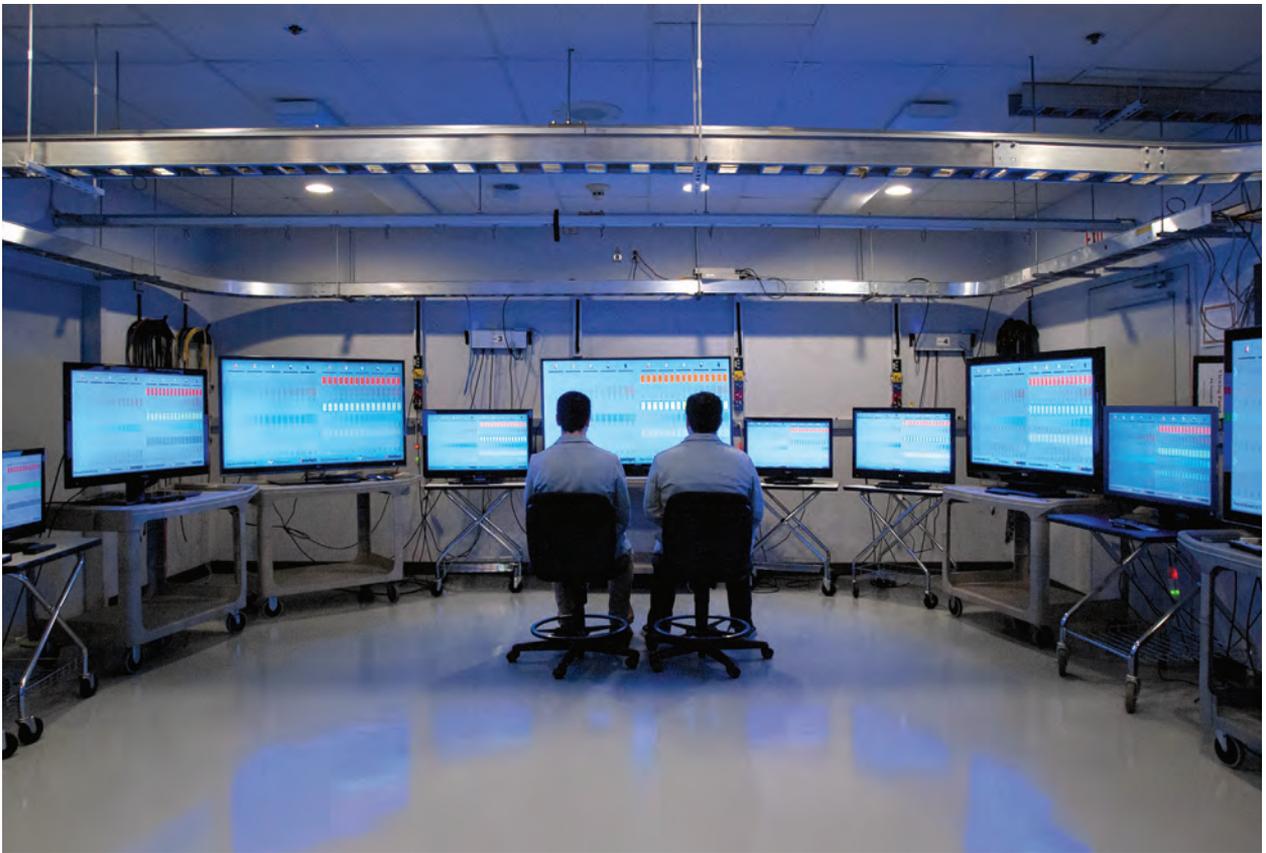
A Complete Online Guide

Comprehensive information about end-of-life issues and concerns can be found at ConsumerReports.org/endoflife. This includes:

- An 18-minute documentary chronicling Paul Scheier's final weeks.

- Resources and advice to help with the difficult medical and personal decisions patients and caregivers often face.
- A place to share memories, even painful ones, about what you learned as you helped a friend or family member at the end of life.

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Lab TESTS

STOVES THAT SIZZLE

They really turn up the heat for your holiday feasts. See our picks on page 56.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID BRANDON GEETING

SMOOTH OPERATOR

The sleekest ranges offer an unbroken cooking surface and restaurant-style features like high-power burners.



That's Entertaining

The latest on ranges, blenders, wine chillers, and other holiday necessities

TRADITION MAY BE the byword this season, but when you're shopping for appliances for holiday cooking, you'll want the latest and greatest.

Take ranges, for instance. Many of the most innovative features are borrowed from restaurant kitchens—and the best are designed to save you time. High-power burners put out fast heat, convection fans trim cooking time by circulating the oven's hot air, and induction rangetops provide the fastest heat of all (the secret: an electromagnetic field). As for looks, sleek stainless steel shows no signs of becoming the avocado green of

our time. And much larger oven windows make it easier to check on what's cooking inside without opening the door and letting heat escape.

What's selling this year? Electric smoothtops on freestanding, single-oven 30-inch ranges win the popularity contest. But if you entertain often or cook multiple dishes at once, you might step up to a 30-inch double-oven range.

For a built-in appearance, consider a slide-in range that rests on a countertop; the controls are up front, so there's no rear panel to hide your backslash—nice if you've tiled it.

We've rounded up the best cooking appliances for your needs on this page and the next. (And we tell you how to keep your old stove working and looking its best on page 58.)

Once you've got the big purchase out of the way, you can begin to think about those other indispensable items—meat thermometers, blenders and wine coolers—all on page 58.

The Best Ranges for Your Cooking Needs

These offer generous capacities and features that make cooking faster and cleanup easier.

FOR AVID ENTERTAINERS

- **A1 LG** \$800
- **A2 LG** \$1,000
- **B4 Frigidaire** \$1,400
- **C1 Samsung** \$2,000
- **D1 Samsung** \$1,700

A1 and **A2** are electric smoothtops with ovens that have a convection option. Both ranges quickly boil water and are superb at simmering; even broiling was superb. **B4** has two same-size ovens; each fit our 26-pound turkeys. **C1** is an induction range with convection and a warming drawer. Induction offers fast boiling. **D1** has convection and is a gas range.

BEST AT BAKING AND ROASTING

- **A4 LG** \$1,250
- **A5 Electrolux** \$1,600

These smoothtop ranges turned out evenly baked cookies and cakes. **A4** has seven oven rack positions; **A5** has six.

IF PRICE IS NO OBJECT

- **A3 GE** \$2,800
- **A7 GE** \$2,500
- **D2 GE** \$2,800
- **F1 KitchenAid** \$4,000
- **G1 KitchenAid** \$6,000

A3 and **A7** are stylish smoothtop ranges; the controls are up front, and there's no back panel. **D2** is a gas slide-in, but broiling isn't top-notch. **F1** is the only 30-inch pro-style to make our top picks, and **G1** was the best 36-inch pro-style.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY PICKS

- **A9 Samsung** \$550
- **A10 Frigidaire** \$600
- **D3 Frigidaire** \$775 CR Best Buy
- **D5 Kenmore** \$700

Impressive smoothtop ranges **A9** and **A10** performed similarly in most tests but were so-so at broiling. So were **D3** and **D5**, gas ranges, but better overall than ones that cost thousands more.

The Steam Convection Conundrum

THE TREND of adapting restaurant appliances for home cooks continues with built-in convection steam ovens that promise speedy, automated cooking and gourmet results. Whether they can deliver is another matter. The Thermador

PSO301M and Wolf CS024 each cost around \$4,000, but we were underwhelmed by their performance. They *were* good at steaming fish and quickly cooking tasty ribs. And the steam yielded crispier-than-usual top crusts when we

baked bread, though the improvement was more subtle than we expected. But the briskets we made in these pricey ovens turned out tough or looked unappetizing. Certainly, adapting a favorite recipe will take some trial and error.

In fact, these devices are designed to supplement your regular range or wall oven; both have a much smaller capacity. Neither steam oven is self-cleaning. You have to wipe the interiors, which get moist, dirty, and greasy.

LAB TESTS

Ratings: Ranges

Scores in context: Of the 184 ranges tested, the highest scored 89; the lowest, 25. Listed below are high-scoring models, in order of performance in each category. Recommended models offer top performance and specific

☑ CR Best Buy ☑ Recommended

A. SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	LG LRE3083SW	\$800	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	LG LRE3023S	\$1,000	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	3	GE Café CS980STSS	\$2,800	86	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
☑	4	LG LRE3025S	\$1,250	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	5	Electrolux EI30EF35JS	\$1,600	85	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
☑	6	Samsung NE58F9500WS	\$1,800	84	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	7	GE PS920SFSS	\$2,500	83	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	8	LG LSE3092ST	\$2,200	80	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	9	Samsung FE-R300SB	\$550	80	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
		Frigidaire FFEF3018LW	\$600	79	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

B. SMOOTHTOP, DOUBLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	LG LDE3037ST	\$1,300	89	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	Samsung NE58F9710WS	\$2,300	85	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	3	Maytag MET8885XS	\$1,700	83	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
☑	4	Frigidaire FGEF302TNF	\$1,400	82	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	5	Frigidaire FGEF308TNF	\$1,800	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	6	LG LDE3015ST	\$1,300	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

C. INDUCTION SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	Samsung FTQ307NWGX	\$2,000	89	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	Kenmore 95073	\$1,530	89	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	3	GE PHB920SFSS	\$2,200	86	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
☑	4	Frigidaire Gallery FGIF3061NF	\$1,800	81	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
	5	Electrolux EI30IF40LS	\$1,700	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

strengths. Ranges marked as CR Best Buys offer a combination of value and performance, and are recommended. Dual-fuel ranges are models that combine a gas cooktop with an electric oven.

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

D. GAS, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	Samsung NX58F5700WS	\$1,700	79	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	GE PGS920SEFSS	\$2,800	73	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
☑	3	Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW	\$775	71	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
☑	4	Samsung NX58F5500SS	\$1,000	71	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
☑	5	Kenmore 74132	\$700	70	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
	6	Maytag MGR8772WW	\$1,000	68	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
	7	GE PGB945SEFSS	\$2,300	68	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
	8	Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3031KW	\$700	68	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	●
	9	Maytag MGR7665WB	\$700	66	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●
	10	GE JBF750DEFSS	\$1,200	66	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

E. GAS AND DUAL-FUEL, DOUBLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	KitchenAid KDRS50XSS	\$2,000	71	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
☑	2	GE PGB950SEFSS	\$2,500	70	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

F. PRO-STYLE DUAL-FUEL (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	KitchenAid KDRS407VSS	\$4,000	72	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●

G. PRO-STYLE DUAL-FUEL (36-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS						FEATURES	
					Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	Slide-In	Convection Mode
☑	1	KitchenAid KDRU763VSS	\$6,000	74	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	GE Monogram ZDP364NDPSS	\$7,500	72	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

Guide to the Ratings: Overall Score reflects cooktop performance, oven capacity, and cleaning, baking, and broiling. Displayed scores are rounded; models are listed in order of precise overall score. Cooktop High is how quickly the highest-powered burner heated water to a near-boil. Cooktop Low is how well the lowest-powered burner provided low heat for melting items such as chocolate and how well the highest burner, set on low, held tomato sauce below a boil. Baking reflects even browning of cakes and cookies on two oven racks. Broiling is even browning of a pan of burgers as well as high-heat searing. Oven Capacity is our evaluation of usable space. Self-Cleaning is the ability to remove our baked-on mix of cheese, eggs, pie filling, and other ingredients on the self-clean setting. Price is approximate retail.

The Best Kitchen Essentials

Five Great Blenders



Ninja Master Prep Professional QB1004
\$60
CR Best Buy



Vitamix 5200
\$450



Ninja Professional NJ600
\$100



Breville Hemisphere Control BBL605XL
\$200



Vitamix Professional Series 750
\$650

Five Top Digital Meat Thermometers

INSTANT-READ



CDN ProAccurate INT626X
\$85



Thermo-Works Thermapen
\$80



Polder Stable Read THM-379
\$18



Williams-Sonoma Smart Thermometer 87072
\$200



Oregon Scientific Wireless BBQ/Oven AW131
\$50

LEAVE-IN

Four Cool Undercounter Wine Chillers



Electrolux IQ-Touch E124WC65GS
\$1,700



Haier WC200GS
\$980
CR Best Buy



Vinotemp VT-46TS-2Z
\$1,000



GE Profile PCR06WATSS
\$1,400

Is It Hot or Not? How to Keep Your Old Stove Going

Cooking season is heating up, but if your range isn't, try these tips from our experts. They can help you keep your old—or new—range cooking and even looking good.

ON THE COOKTOP

- Gently place heavy pans on electric smoothtop ranges to prevent breaking the cooktop. Lift pots, rather than sliding them, to avoid scratches.
- Clean up smoothtop spills promptly to prevent stains, but wait until the surface has cooled and is safe to touch.
- Don't cover a coil-top range's drip pans and bowls with foil; it can short-circuit the burner.
- If a gas burner's flame

is uneven, food could be clogging the burner ports. Consult your manual for cleaning advice.

IN THE OVEN

- Put away the foil. Lining the bottom of the oven to catch drips may permanently damage the interior finish and void the warranty.
- Foiled again? Covering oven racks with foil blocks airflow, so food might not cook properly or evenly.

- Check your manual for self-cleaning tips, but the usual advice you'll find says that you should remove racks from the oven before pushing the self-clean button. The process can discolor racks and make them harder to glide. Too late? Apply a coating of vegetable oil to the sides of racks to improve sliding.
- Remove loose debris coating the oven cavity before starting the self-cleaning cycle.

Disaster Plan: How to Unclog a Stuck Sink

It's no coincidence that garbage disposals often break on Thanksgiving Day—or that the day after is Roto-Rooter's busiest of the year. Poultry skin, potato peels, rice, celery, fats, and pumpkin pulp are clog culprits; it's better to toss them in the garbage or compost what you can. Liquid grease solidifies when it cools, coating and clogging pipes. Collect grease in a jar and throw it away. In most cases if the disposal is broken and clogged, the sink won't drain easily. So reach for a small hand-crank plumbing snake to push debris into the branch drain line, or try a plunger (accordion-style ones worked best in past tests). Cans of pressurized gas, sold at home centers and online, worked even better. For a double sink, put a drain cover over the drain you're not plunging to allow the pressure you're creating to work. Drain cleaner should be the last resort, and if it doesn't do the trick, let a plumber know that it's in the line so that he can protect himself against its caustic lye.

Road REPORT

PAINT AND TRIM

Cause for complaint: loose exterior trim or moldings, any paint flaws such as fading, cracking, peeling, or chalking.

INFOTAINMENT SYSTEMS

Lots can go wrong with the navigation, audio, and communications systems.

NOISES AND LEAKS

Squeaks, rattles, and wind or water leaks caused owner angst.



BODY HARDWARE

Readers had problems with the operation of locks and latches, windows, doors, hatches, tailgates, and trunk lids.

POWER EQUIPMENT

Pain points: interior and exterior lighting, tire-pressure monitors, keyless-entry systems, and warning lights.

TOP 5 CAR GRIPES

The 1 million responses to our 2014 Automotive Reliability Survey showed that these trouble areas provoked the most complaints. For more, see our annual reliability Ratings, starting on page 60.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID BRANDON GEETING

The Most—and Least—Reliable Cars You Can Buy

Want to stay out of the repair shop? We got 1 million responses to our survey—and found out which brands you can rely on ... and which are time and budget drainers.

WHEN YOU BUY a new car, the last thing you want is an unscheduled trip back to the dealership to fix some problem the automaker or dealer should have caught before the car was sold. But every year, the Consumer Reports auto-reliability survey tells us that some owners will return over and over again.

Our annual survey collects responses on more than 1 million vehicles from Consumer Reports subscribers, generating enough exclusive data to let us predict which new cars, trucks, and SUVs are likely to be reliable and which are troublesome. It also can spot major problem trends among certain carmakers and component areas.

Who's on Top, Who's Not:

- Most of the top 10 brands were Asian, with Lexus and Toyota leading the league by a comfortable margin. One of the reasons Toyota achieves this level of reliability, we believe, is because it introduces new technologies slowly and on proven platforms. By contrast, manufacturers such as Ford will sometimes launch a top-to-bottom redesign with new technology in many areas of the car; it then takes years to work the bugs out.
- The top European brand was Audi, which continued its reliability renaissance after its third-from-bottom showing in our 2011 survey. Buick was the only domestic brand to break the top 10.
- Though some all-new cars beat the odds with high marks right out of the box, such as the BMW 4 series and Kia Cadenza, many do not. Perhaps the most important new vehicle with a lousy first year was the big-selling Chevrolet Silverado/GMC Sierra 1500 series pickup truck lines. The problems were spread over several areas. Our standing advice: Wait a year or two after the introduction of a new

model before taking the plunge.

The fastest growing number of complaints by far involve infotainment systems: audio, navigation, and in-car communications. Results from previous surveys showed that problem areas most often included unresponsive touch screens or poorly functioning multifunction controllers, inability to sync smart phones with Blue-tooth or the docking port, and trouble in getting the voice-command system to recognize verbal commands.

The worst infotainment offender was the new Infiniti Q50 sedan's InTouch system, with more than one in five owners reporting a problem. Updates and changes to Ford and Lincoln's notorious MyTouch systems have made them much less troublesome each year. Honda seems to have fixed a glitch with its HondaLink. And Chrysler has ironed out reliability wrinkles with updates to its easy-to-use Uconnect system. However, Cadillac's Cue system remains a problem.



BEST	WORST
Cars	Cars
Scion xB	Fiat 500L
Lexus CT 200h	Ford Fiesta
Lexus ES 300h Hybrid	Mercedes-Benz CLA 250
SUVs	SUVs
Mitsubishi Outlander Sport	Jeep Cherokee (4-cyl.)
Toyota Highlander (V6)	Nissan Pathfinder
Lexus RX	Jeep Grand Cherokee (diesel)

Luxury Isn't What It Used to Be. (It's Better)

The saying went that high-end luxury cars were reliably unreliable. If we look back at our surveys from a decade ago, the bottom of the pool was littered with European automakers: BMW, Jaguar, Lincoln, and Mercedes, while Audi, Cadillac, and Volvo were midpack or worse.

Conventional wisdom dictated that because high-end cars have more gadgets, they have more things that can go wrong. Though that maxim was mostly true, the concept was contradicted by Lexus, which had ironclad reliability.

The picture today is quite different. More gadgets don't necessarily equate to more problems, at least when the car is new. Tesla launched its high-tech Model S with average reliability and has remained reliable. And European makers have made great strides to improve their reliability.

In fact, Audi has emerged as one of the top brands. Moreover, in addition to every Lexus and Acura, all Audis, Porsches, and Volvos are apt to have average or better reliability. BMW now has only one model that we predict will be subpar.

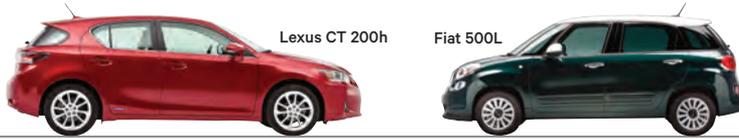
Not that every luxury brand has escalated: Infiniti fell sharply this year, for the same reason that plagued the European luxury brands—too many gadgets with faulty components.

Meanwhile, the car market itself has evolved, with luxury marques adding more small cars and invading the compact SUV market.

However, as luxury high-tech equipment—such as heated seats, rear-view cameras, and complex infotainment systems—has trickled down to mainstream brands, the overall reliability of those vehicles hasn't necessarily suffered. Reliable brands tend to stay that way, despite the addition of all of the toys.

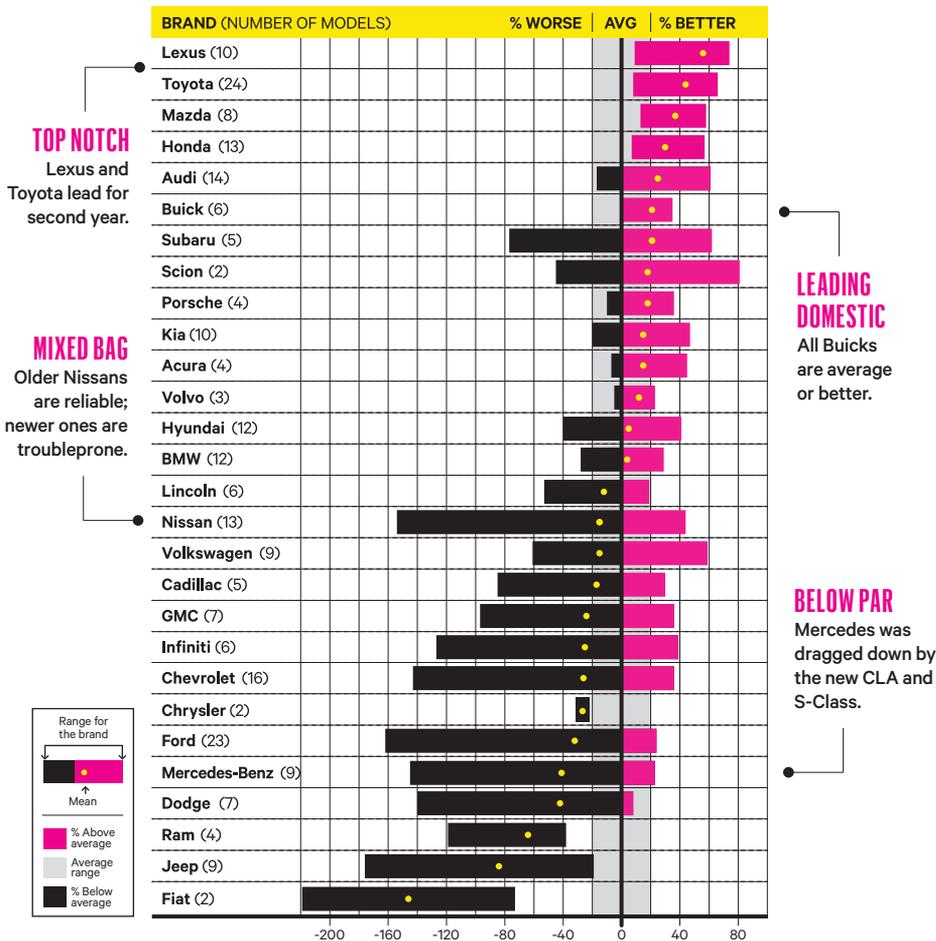
One note: Avoiding gadgets doesn't avoid problems. Many "cheap and cheerful" budget cars performed poorly in the survey.

ROAD REPORT



Reliability: How the Brands Stack Up

This table shows how the brands rank based on the average of their models' predicted-reliability scores. A measure of the brand's consistency can be seen in the span of their scores, cross-referenced by how many different models they produce. The bars illustrate a brand's consistency by showing the reliability range between its most and least reliable models. The numerals indicate the number of models included. To score a brand, we need sufficient data on at least two models. That led us to exclude Jaguar, Land Rover, Mini, Mitsubishi and Tesla.



1,078,364 Number of vehicles in our survey

Most Improved Cars ... and Biggest Losers

BRANDS THAT GAINED THE MOST:

- Lincoln
- Hyundai
- Kia

This year, Lincoln moved up 12 spots, finishing in 15th place, with four models scoring average and only two below average. Hyundai moved up eight places, finishing 13th. Kia moved up to 10th place, with all models having average or better scores.

BRANDS THAT FELL THE MOST:

- Infiniti
- Mercedes-Benz
- GMC

Infiniti dropped 14 steps this year to 20th, clobbered by poor showings for its QX60 SUV and Q50 sedan. Mercedes dropped 11 places, dragged down by a dreadful CLA debut. GMC dropped 10 places, finishing 19th, largely because of the Sierra 1500 pickup.

MODELS THAT GAINED THE MOST:

- Honda Accord Coupe (V6)
- Cadillac ATS (V6)
- Ford Taurus (V6)
- Ford Explorer (V6, EcoBoost)
- Honda Accord Coupe (4-cyl)
- Lincoln MKX

The Cadillac ATS V6 graduated from below average to above average, while the others all improved from much worse than average to average or better. A big reason was revisions to the infotainment systems.

MODELS THAT FELL THE MOST:

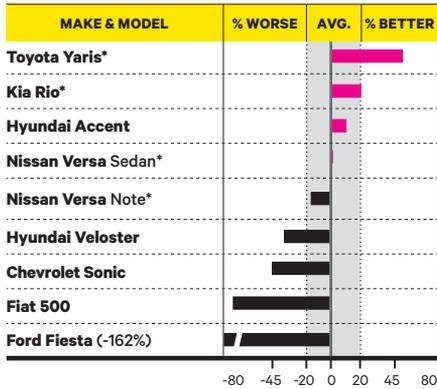
- Jeep Compass
- Ram 2500 and 3500 diesel
- Nissan Sentra
- Infiniti QX60
- Cadillac ATS (turbo)
- Mercedes-Benz GL-Class

All of these vehicles fell from average or better last year to much worse than average this year. The Compass rating went south for a number of little problems. The Cadillac ATS (turbo) did not share the success of its sibling.

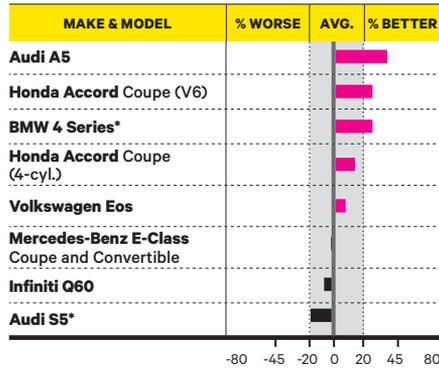
ROAD REPORT: RELIABILITY



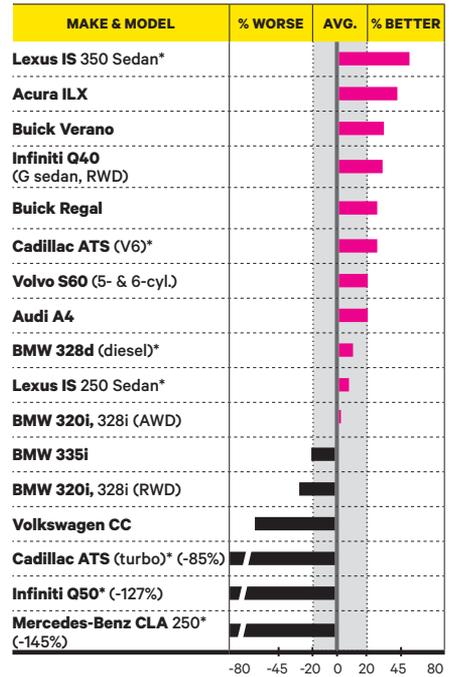
Subcompact Cars



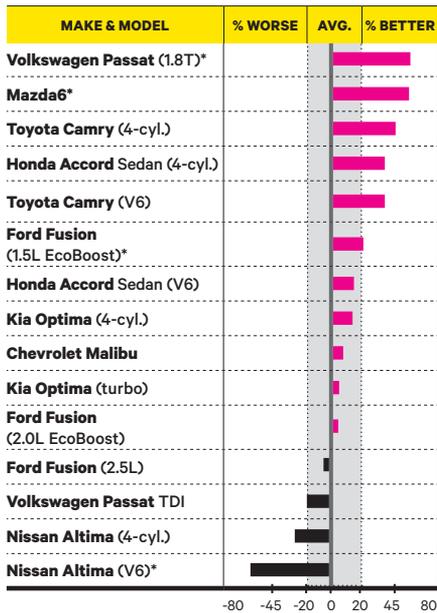
Coupes and Convertibles



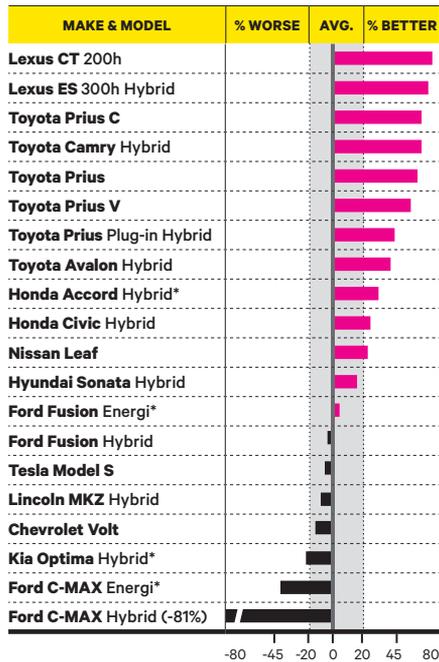
Luxury Compact Cars



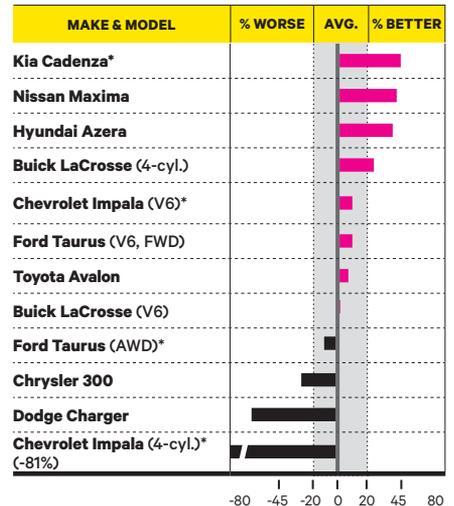
Midsized Cars



Hybrid/Electric Cars



Large Cars



How to Use the Charts

The predicted-reliability scores on these pages are derived from the results of an annual Consumer Reports survey of our magazine and online subscribers, who tell us about problems they've experienced with their own cars in the previous 12 months.

This reliability survey is the largest of its kind, spanning nearly 1.1 million vehicles and identifying 17 trouble areas covering a car's components and systems. Respondents identify problems they consider serious, by reason of safety, failure, cost, or time out of service. Even a minor issue counts as serious if it means an unscheduled visit to the dealership.

The reliability Ratings of more than 200 new cars show whether a vehicle is expected to have a trouble rate better or worse than average. The predictions are based on the frequency of problems for the past three model years, provided the vehicle hasn't changed

significantly. Predictions based on a single year's data are marked with an asterisk (*). The charts' vertical line at zero represents the average for all cars. An "average" Rating goes to cars scoring within 20 percentage points of that line. A bar with a break indicates a score that fell outside the range of the chart.

One caveat: Our reliability Ratings and the road-test scores you see elsewhere in Consumer Reports are not related. Road-test Ratings come from cars we have purchased and tested. Reliability information comes solely from our subscribers. Those scores, along with crash-test results, determine which cars we recommend.

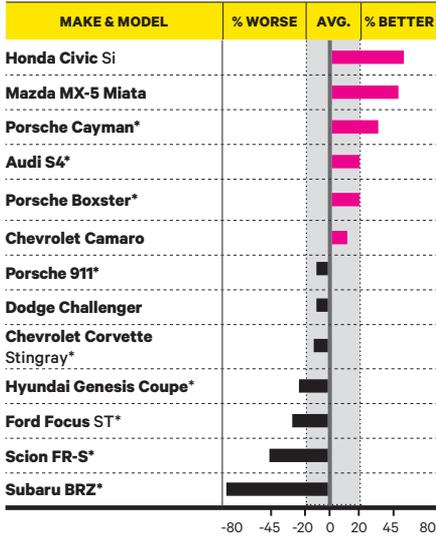
So though the Mitsubishi Outlander Sport has excellent reliability, it wasn't recommended in our road tests. Conversely, the Chevrolet Silverado and Mercedes S-Class tested well but showed subpar reliability in our survey.

ROAD REPORT: RELIABILITY



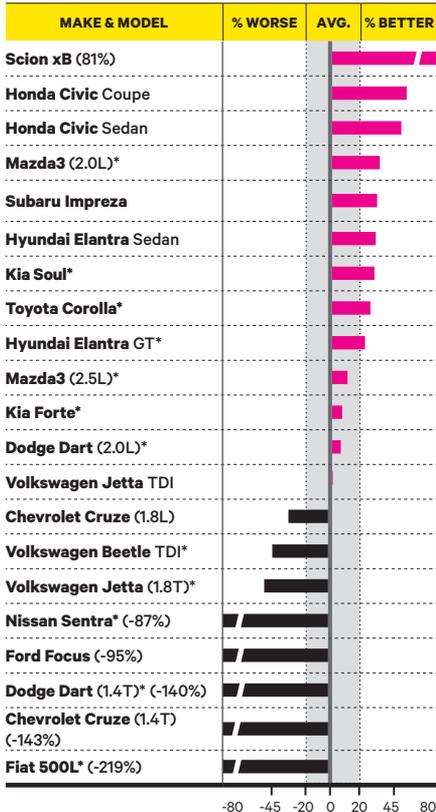
Honda Civic Si

Sporty Cars



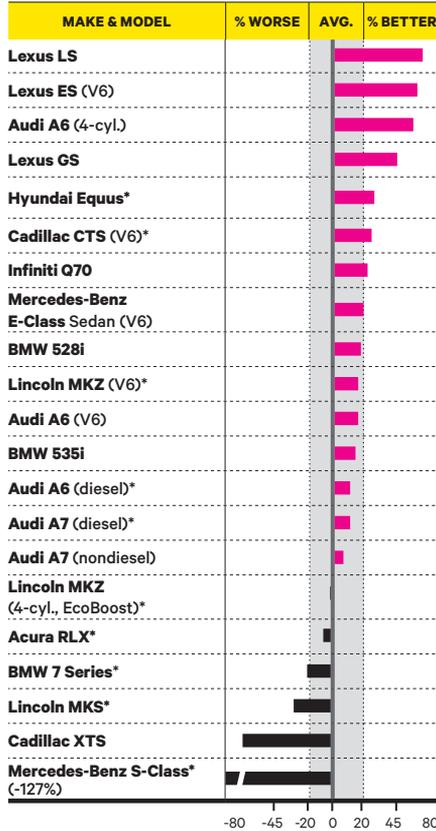
Scion xB

Compact Cars



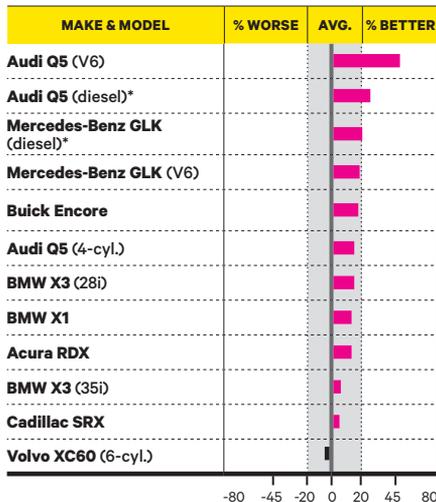
Lexus LS

Luxury Midsize/Large Cars



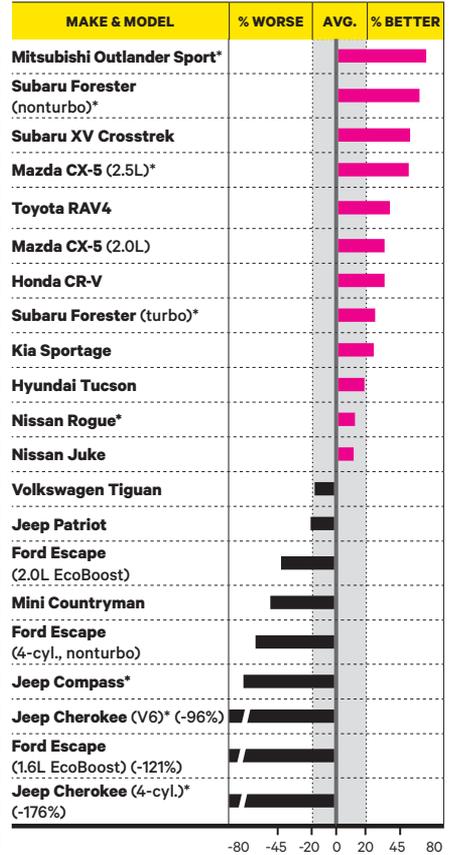
Audi Q5

Luxury Compact SUVs



Mitsubishi Outlander Sport

Small SUVs



IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED ...

10%

Complaint rate for 2011 Ford Explorer infotainment system when new

28%

Peak complaint rate for 2011 Ford Explorer since vehicle launch

3%

Complaint rate for 2014 Ford Explorer's revised system

ROAD REPORT: RELIABILITY



Toyota Highlander

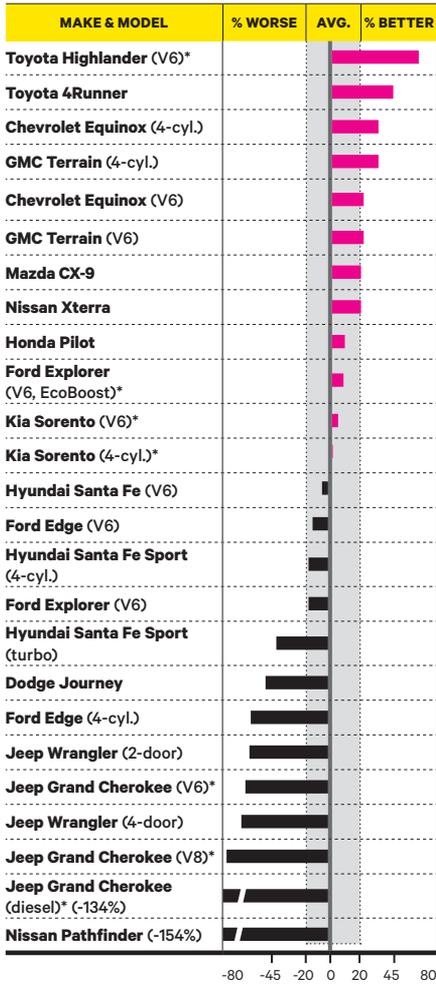


Chevrolet Traverse

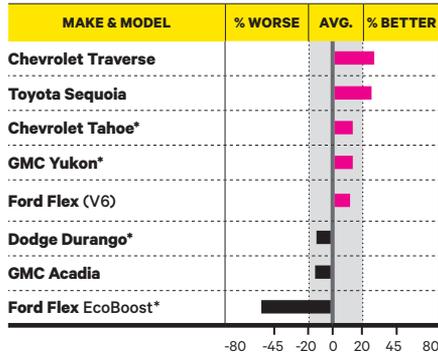


Toyota Tundra

Midsize SUVs

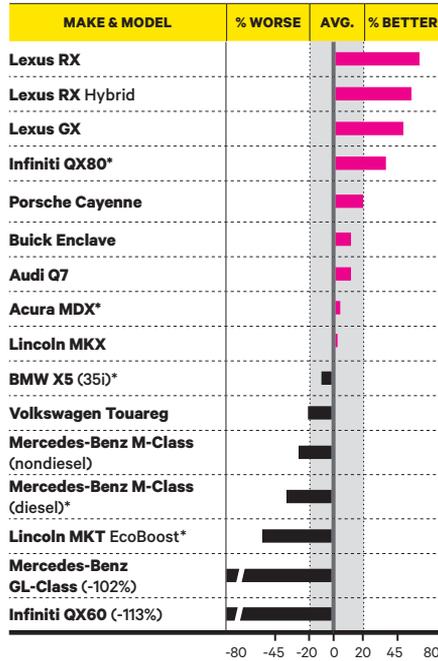


Large SUVs



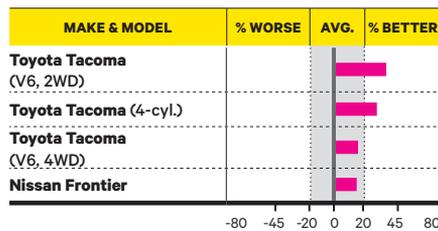
Lexus RX

Luxury Midsize/Large SUVs

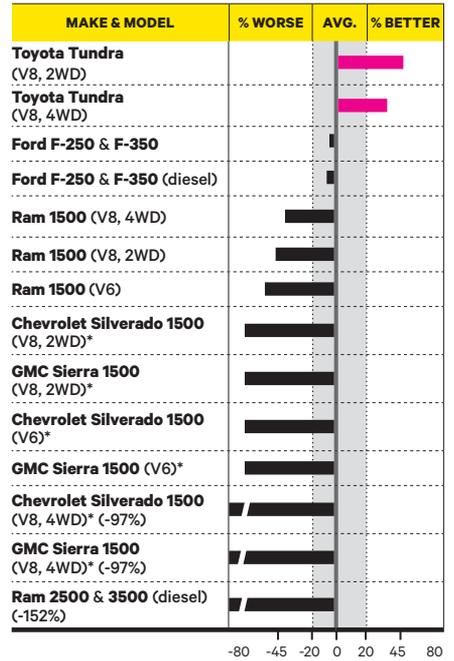


Toyota Tacoma

Compact Pickups

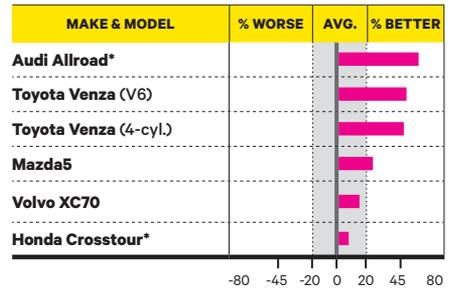


Full-Size Pickups



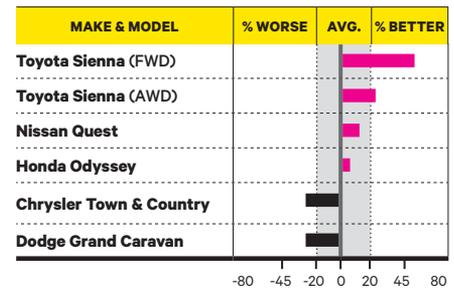
Audi Allroad

Wagons



Toyota Sienna

Minivans



TOP AND BOTTOM

248

Number of models in the Ratings

38

Number of best-scoring models

47

Number of worst-scoring models

LATEST FROM THE TRACK

Two Faves Get an Update, and a New Tire That Loves the Rain



Subaru Outback Is Back—and Better Than Ever

The Subaru brand has some of the most hard-core loyalists in the auto industry, and the 2015 redesign of the Outback wagon looks to keep that streak alive.

Subaru kept its beloved packaging intact while addressing owner complaints and some of our criticisms. The new model rides very comfortably and handles securely. The engine no longer wails whenever you want to accelerate or climb a hill. Perhaps best of all, the new Outback comes with a contemporary infotainment system that streams music and easily pairs with phones. Yet in a victory against driver distraction, the touch-screen system retains volume and station-tuning knobs.

For those who don't see themselves fitting into traditional car categories, the Outback is an intriguing alternative to the routine midsize SUV, for thousands less—at just \$28,852 for the typically equipped 2.5i Premium model we tested. The Outback provides a spacious rear seat and a generous cargo hold, yet it delivered 24 mpg overall and an impressive 34 mpg on the highway in our tests.

Along with its efficient four-cylinder engine, a big reason for the Outback's impressive mileage is its continuously variable transmission. With the update, the CVT software has been reprogrammed to feel more like a traditional geared automatic, and the racket from the stressed engine has been muted. Though the Outback feels less strained, it is also a quarter second slower than its predecessor in accelerating from 0 to 60 mph.

For those who require a more luxurious driving experience, a better-equipped, more powerful six-cylinder version is

available. A suite of active safety features, called EyeSight, is a welcome option with either powertrain.

In addition to being a standout value, the Outback also tops our Ratings among wagons and midsize five-passenger SUVs. Plus, based on past history, it promises to be reliable.



Hyundai Genesis Goes to Finishing School

Launched in the 2009 model year as a luxury car without aristocratic badging, the Hyundai Genesis sedan gave European and Japanese automotive royalty a run for their money. The Genesis boasted great features at a discount price, but it fell short on ride comfort and refinement. For its 2015 redesign, Hyundai sent the Genesis back to finishing school. The result is a refined competitor that's more comfortable and dynamic to drive.

We tested a Genesis 3.8 with all-wheel drive, an addition that should make Snow Belt denizens happy. With its 311-hp V6 engine and eight-speed automatic transmission, the Genesis delivers on its luxury promise. An available 5.0 V8 version delivers an additional 109 thunderous horses, but that power broker comes only with rear-wheel drive.

You still won't confuse the Genesis for a sports sedan, however. Its reflexes aren't quite as quick, although its steering is more responsive. And its ride is smoother than that of a BMW 5 Series.

Our Genesis, with the Signature, Tech, and Ultimate packages, included Hyundai's full suite of advanced safety aids, as is customary for the class. We found the lane-keeping assist to be hyperactive, and most of our drivers subsequently turned it off, thereby negating its benefits.

Totaling \$52,450, our Genesis was \$8,000 to \$10,000 less than luxury-branded sedans with similar features. By choosing the Genesis, about the only thing you give up is the fancy badge.

Michelin Premier Tire Doesn't Give Up Grip As It Wears

Michelin bills its new Premier A/S all-season tire for passenger cars as "Safe when new; safe when worn." Most tires lose wet grip—particularly for braking and cornering—when their tread wears down. But Michelin claims that its new EverGrip tread technology defies that convention.

To verify that claim, we ran sets of the Premier A/S (about \$140 each in our test size) through our all-weather tests, including wet and dry braking, hydroplaning, and snow and ice traction. For comparison, we tested the Premier's predecessor, the highly rated Michelin Primacy MXV4, which was among our top-rated performance all-season tires. All tested tires had H- or V-speed ratings.

First, the bad news: When new, the Premier A/S delivers just average performance for the category when stopping on dry pavement, taking about 6 feet longer to stop from 60 mph than the Primacy MXV4.

When we shaved the tires to simulate about 40 percent "wear," we found that the difference in stopping distances had grown to 10 feet. The Premier took 4 feet longer to stop on dry pavement than the Primacy.

But it's on wet pavement that the Premier proves its worth, stopping in almost the same distance as when dry, regardless of "wear." With other tires, wet-stopping distance increases as the tread wears. To combat that, the grooves on the Premier A/S widen as the tire wears, and new grooves become exposed. Further test findings: The Premier's rolling resistance is very good, and it has exceptional ride comfort and tread life.

With the Premier, you no longer have to worry how long it will take to accomplish a panic stop while driving in a downpour because of the tire's wear.

The Do-It-All Family Sedan

Four models we like—and two that are just ‘eh’



AH, the good old, dependable, midsized family sedan; it's the core of the car market, with more than 2 million sold every year. Sedans are America's do-it-all solution, with product lines that range from fuel-efficient base sedans to powerful, luxury-loaded versions that tickle the boundaries of prestige-branded models. Though the segment has been long dominated by the popular Toyota Camry and Honda Accord, we're seeing some upstarts shake up our Ratings—while one model reclaims its spot at the bottom.

89



Subaru Legacy

Classy, Not Flashy

Though Toyota sells 10 Camrys for every Subaru Legacy, the redesigned 2015 Legacy has put the segment on notice. The Legacy simply does everything well. The engine teams with a continuously variable transmission (CVT) that creates artificial shift points, minimizing the irritating drone under acceleration inherent to the technology. The base powertrain combination returns 26 mpg overall—impressive for an all-wheel-drive car. Smooth ride, responsive handling, and best-in-class braking all impress. Top-of-segment crash-test performance combines with available active safety systems and a standard camera for backing up. Factor in a well-appointed, roomy cabin with great visibility, and you have a new sedan that ought to be on more car buyers' shopping lists.

Price Range: \$22,490-\$30,390

26 mpg

175-hp,
2.5-liter 4-cyl.

84*



Toyota Camry

Smooth and Smart

Known for a pliant ride, quiet cabin, and coddling passenger accommodations, the updated Camry continues to deliver smooth, dependable transportation that skews toward comfort and convenience. The overall solidity and consistency of the Camry means the V6 and four-cylinder models follow close behind the hybrid in our rankings, making them all smart choices. The 2015 Camry reskin (pictured above) offers upgraded interior electronics, more intuitive controls, noise-reduction measures, suspension tweaks, and more dramatic style, with a side body crease and prominent grille. Because of the popularity of the sporty SE trim, Toyota has added a higher-level XSE and SE Hybrid. The hybrid powertrain is the pinnacle of the lineup, delivering an impressive 38 mpg overall.

Price Range: \$23,795-\$32,195

27 mpg

178-hp,
2.5-liter 4-cyl.

85



Honda Accord

So Sensible

The segment stalwart, the Accord has a reputation for being an easy recommendation among our staff. Its traditional dependability, versatility, efficiency, and responsiveness make it a simple one-size-fits-all package. The four-cylinder ought to satisfy most people, giving the spacious Accord fuel economy akin to smaller cars, without sacrificing performance through a well-tuned CVT transmission. The Accord brings enough verve to its handling and steering to give it some personality. Up-level versions have advanced safety features, but also a frustrating infotainment system. Stepping up to the virile 278-hp V6, which has a six-speed automatic, concedes 4 mpg overall, but it rewards with added refinement and a brisk 6.3-second 0-60 mph time.

Price Range: \$22,895-\$40,570

30 mpg

185-hp,
2.4-liter 4-cyl.

ROAD REPORT

2,269,361

Number of midsize sedans sold in 2013

\$27,116

Average MSRP of midsize sedans

\$24,841

Average transaction price of midsize sedans

28.5 mpg

Average fuel economy for tested midsize sedans

81



Chevrolet Malibu Serenity Now

The Chevrolet Malibu is among the segment leaders, thanks to its plush ride, serene cabin, and good all-around performance. Furthermore, it has straightforward controls and responsive handling. In a rather cookie-cutter segment, the Malibu styling benefits from some Camaro design cues, inside and out. Between two variations recently tested, the zippy Malibu LTZ turbo scored the highest. Both available powertrains fall short of rivals' fuel economy, but the Malibu feels more substantial than most. Wide, flat-front bucket seats may lose support on long trips, and the rear seat remains relatively snug, despite updates to carve out more knee room. But for drivers seeking Buick-grade isolation for a Chevrolet price, the Malibu is the answer.

Price Range: \$23,290-\$31,305

26 mpg

196-hp,
2.5-liter 4-cyl.

78



Hyundai Sonata Well-Behaved but Ho-Hum

The redesigned 2015 Sonata sheds its swoopy, aero design for a more upright stance—but with a bland appearance as a trade-off. It's not a complete flop, because the new design means increased visibility and interior room—especially in rear-seat room. Dynamically, the Korean brand has never been about sportiness. The Sonata is well-behaved in routine driving conditions, but hard cornering and panic braking are unimpressive. The four-cylinder engine mated to a six-speed transmission provides ample acceleration and returns 28 mpg overall. Even the interior appointments are rather humdrum, despite available amenities such as heated rear seats and a hands-free trunk. Although the Sonata is an easy car to like, it's hard to love. It isn't anything special.

Price Range: \$21,960-\$30,310

28 mpg

185-hp,
2.4-liter 4-cyl.

63



Chrysler 200 It Swings ... and Misses

Despite a thorough redesign for 2015, this Chrysler continues to languish in the bottom of our midsize-sedan rankings. There have been improvements throughout, reflected in the higher score this year, but the deficiencies are still numerous. The 200 waddles like a larger car; it lacks agility, and the ride is unsettled. The base four-cylinder engine is unrefined and underpowered. The rough-shifting nine-speed transmission proves that having more gears isn't always better. At least fuel economy is good, at 30 mpg overall. The polished V6 masks some flaws with its strong power. The cabin is tight, with the driver nestled in the cockpit while passengers pine for more leg and head room, especially in the back seat. Simply put: Every other sedan in this category is better.

Price Range: \$22,695-\$31,190

30 mpg

184-hp,
2.4-liter 4-cyl.

ROAD REPORT: SEDANS

Most Reliable

VOLKSWAGEN'S peppy turbo-four Passat variant has emerged as a surprising standout with excellent predicted reliability in its first year. The sporty and fuel-efficient Mazda6 also joins the historically dependable Toyota Camry four-cylinder in receiving our highest reliability rating.

\$27,485



VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT 1.8T*
MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE

\$23,590



MAZDA6*
MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE

\$23,830



TOYOTA CAMRY 4-CYL.
MUCH BETTER THAN AVERAGE

Best Fuel Economy

STELLAR FUEL ECONOMY is readily available from several hybrid power plants. Even with generous options lists, the Accord, Fusion, and Camry hybrids all deliver fuel efficiency that surpasses much smaller cars. Among this trio, the Camry shines all around, earning the highest overall test score.

\$29,945



HONDA ACCORD HYBRID
OVERALL MPG: 40

\$28,290



FORD FUSION SE HYBRID
OVERALL MPG: 39

\$29,052



TOYOTA CAMRY HYBRID XLE
OVERALL MPG: 38

Roomiest

ELBOW AND LEG ROOM are key to keeping the family comfortable, and these models offer generous passenger space. The Passat has a limolike rear seat. The Sonata succeeds in providing comfortable quarters in a modestly sized car. The efficiently packaged Accord is very roomy.

\$27,485



VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT
REAR ROOM: 33.5 INCHES

\$23,315



HYUNDAI SONATA
REAR ROOM: 30.5 INCHES

\$23,270



HONDA ACCORD
REAR ROOM: 30.0 INCHES

Best Ride and Handling

DON'T BE SWAYED by luxury-brand advertising; "mainstream" labels can create sophisticated sedans, too. Ford's Fusion provides a civilized ride and delivers delightful handling. The Legacy has responsive handling and a premium ride. The Malibu gets points for plush comfort.

\$27,720



FORD FUSION
RIDE/HANDLING: ●/●

\$24,837



SUBARU LEGACY
RIDE/HANDLING: ●/●

\$33,865



CHEVROLET MALIBU
RIDE/HANDLING: ●/●

Safest

IN THIS FAMILY-CENTRIC segment, three sedans excel in accident avoidance and occupant protection. They top the class in emergency handling and for wet and dry braking. Each shines in Insurance Institute for Highway Safety crash tests, and in roof-strength and head-restraint evaluations.

\$24,837



SUBARU LEGACY
IIHS TOP SAFETY PICK+

\$33,865



CHEVROLET MALIBU
IIHS TOP SAFETY PICK+

\$23,270



HONDA ACCORD
IIHS TOP SAFETY PICK+

ROAD REPORT: SEDANS

Ratings: Midsize Sedans

Scores in context: The highest-rated midsize-sedan score is 89; the lowest, 63. Recommended models excel in overall road-test score and have

average or better predicted reliability. They also perform adequately, if included, in crash tests.

Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

MIDSIZE SEDANS

Rec.	Rank	MAKE & MODEL	PRICE		RELIABILITY	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				HIGHS	LOWS
			As Tested		Predicted	Road Test	Overall MPG	Ride	Seat Comfort Front/Rear	Controls		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Subaru Legacy 2.5 Premium	\$24,837		●	89	26	●	●/○	●	Ride, handling, braking, affordable AWD, visibility, IIHS crash-test results.	Clock and outside temperature display too small.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Toyota Camry Hybrid XLE	\$29,052		●	86	38	●	●/○	●	Ride, powertrain, interior room, reliability, IIHS crash-test results.	No fold-down rear seat.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Toyota Camry XLE (V6)	\$32,603		●	85	26	●	●/○	●	Ride, powertrain, interior room, acceleration, IIHS crash-test results.	Headlight switch may cancel daytime running lights.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Honda Accord LX (4-cyl.)	\$23,270		●	85	30	●	●/○	●	Powertrain, handling, roomy interior, visibility, driving position, controls.	Complicated optional radio, ride a bit choppy.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Chevrolet Malibu 2LTZ (2.0T)	\$33,865		○	85	24	●	●/○	●	Ride, quietness, controls, transmission, braking, IIHS crash-test results.	Rear seat.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Honda Accord EX-L (V6)	\$30,860		○	84	26	●	●/○	●	Powertrain, handling, roomy interior, visibility, driving position.	Complicated optional radio, ride a bit choppy.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Toyota Camry LE (4-cyl.)	\$23,830		●	84	27	●	●/○	●	Ride, powertrain, interior room, IIHS crash-test results, reliability.	Headlight switch may cancel daytime running lights.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Volkswagen Passat SE (1.8T)	\$27,485		●	82	28	●	●/○	●	Interior room, rear seat, trunk, access, agility, braking, reliability.	Slow-acting stability control, transmission refinement.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Ford Fusion SE (1.5T)	\$27,720		●	81	24	●	○/○	●	Agility, ride, quietness, fun to drive, braking, styling, IIHS crash-test results.	Visibility, slightly snug cabin, small trunk opening.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Chevrolet Malibu 1LT (2.5L)	\$26,030		○	81	26	●	●/○	●	Ride, quietness, controls, transmission, IIHS crash-test results.	Rear seat.
	11	Nissan Altima 3.5 SL	\$31,610		●	80	24	○	●/○	●	Acceleration, roomy interior, controls, IIHS crash-test results.	Subpar reliability, agility, ride.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Ford Fusion SE Hybrid	\$28,290		○	80	39	●	○/○	●	Agility, ride, quietness, fun to drive, powertrain, styling, IIHS crash-test results.	Visibility, touchy brakes, slightly snug cabin, small trunk opening.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Mazda6 Sport	\$23,590		●	79	32	○	●/○	●	Agility, transmission, IIHS crash-test results, reliability.	Noise, ride, snug interior, low dash vents, Sport trim lacks power seat.
	14	Volkswagen Passat SEL Prem. (V6)	\$33,720		NA	79	23	●	●/○	●	Ride, handling, acceleration, interior room, rear seat, access, IIHS crash-test results.	Premium fuel, slow touch-screen controls.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Ford Fusion Titanium (2.0T)	\$33,180		○	78	22	●	●/○	●	Agility, ride, quietness, fun to drive, braking, styling, IIHS crash-test results.	MyFord Touch controls, fuel economy, visibility, snug cabin.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Kia Optima SX (2.0T)	\$29,050		○	78	24	○	●/○	●	Acceleration, handling, transmission, controls, feature content, IIHS crash-test results.	Road noise, low rear seat, rear visibility.
	17	Hyundai Sonata SE (2.4L)	\$23,315		New	78	28	●	●/○	●	Spacious rear seat, ride, transmission, value, long warranty.	Braking, cornering grip.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18	Volkswagen Passat TDI SE*	\$28,665		○	77	37	●	●/○	●	Fuel economy, cruising range, ride, interior room, rear seat, access, IIHS crash-test results.	Acceleration, transmission refinement at low speeds.
	19	Nissan Altima 2.5 S	\$23,410		◐	77	31	●	●/○	●	Roomy interior, controls, IIHS crash-test results.	Subpar reliability, agility, driver's seat lumbar support, no USB port.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20	Honda Accord Hybrid	\$29,945		●	77	40	○	●/○	●	Fuel economy, roomy interior, visibility, driving position, IIHS crash-test results.	Choppy ride, infotainment system, limited trunk.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	21	Kia Optima LX (2.4L)	\$21,885		○	77	25	●	●/○	●	Secure handling, transmission, controls, IIHS crash-test results.	Road noise, low rear seat, rear visibility.
	22	Chrysler 200 C (V6)	\$33,620		New	66	25	●	●/○	●	Styling, powerful V6, infotainment, controls, IIHS crash-test results.	Visibility, access, handling, rear seat.
	23	Hyundai Sonata Hybrid	\$26,695		○	65	33	●	●/○	●	Long warranty.	Drivability, braking, on-limit agility, road noise.
	24	Chrysler 200 Limited (4-cyl.)	\$25,790		New	63	30	○	○/○	○	Fuel economy, IIHS crash-test results.	Visibility, access, handling, touchy brakes, ride, noise.

*Powertrain has changed since last test.

Why certain models are not recommended. The Chrysler 200 and Hyundai Sonata are too new for us to have reliability data. The Nissan Altima had below-average reliability, and the Volkswagen Passat V6 is unknown. Note: Toyota Camry ratings reflect the 2014 model. We plan to purchase and test the updated 2015 model.



WINTER DRIVING

Sleet Happens

Rule No. 1: When the blizzards blow, nothing is more important to your safety than your tires. Here are the best winter and all-season treads for passenger cars.

If you frequently drive on snow-covered roads, there is no substitute for winter tires. They have a more aggressive tread pattern and rubber formulated to stay pliable in freezing temperatures. That means they provide the most traction for accelerating and braking on snow and even ice. The trade-off often is reduced grip and lower handling limits on cleared roads compared

with all-season tires. Snow tires also tend to wear out faster, especially once the snow thaws.

For peace of mind when driving in winter conditions, you'll want to budget for four winter tires. Purchasing a second set of sturdy wheels—nothing fancy; after all, it's winter—on which to mount your winter tires will make it easy to change galoshes when the seasons change.

WILL THE REAL PEGASUS TIRE PLEASE STAND UP?

Consumer Reports has removed its Ratings for the Pegasus Advanta SUV tire originally reported in the November issue. Although we purchased the tire through normal retail channels, we have since been informed by API—the owner and distributor of the Pegasus brand in the U.S.—that the tire we tested was not produced nor distributed by an authorized Pegasus vendor.

BEST WINTER TIRES

(Prices reflect tested sizes.)

- **Michelin X-Ice X13, \$120**
Our top-rated winter tire, with excellent snow traction and ice braking, and a comfortable, quiet ride.
- **Hankook I^{cept} Evo, \$91**
A good all-around choice, combining good traction and handling on dry and snow-covered roads.
- **Pirelli Winter 210 Sottozero Serie II, \$116**
Excellent resistance to hydroplaning, with very good snow traction and ride comfort.
- **Uniroyal Tiger Paw Ice & Snow II, \$99**
Another high scorer for snow traction, and very good stopping grip on ice.
- **Bridgestone Blizzak WS70, \$114**
Excellent for severe weather and ride comfort.

WHEN TO CHOOSE ALL-SEASON TIRES

For occasional snow with light accumulation, all-season tires may be all you need—especially if your car has front- or all-wheel drive. But if the tires are worn, traction will be greatly reduced in snow. An easy way to check for wear is to slide a quarter into the tread, with George's head down and facing you. If you can see the top of his head, start shopping for tires.

You will notice “speed ratings” on these tires that are far faster than any law-abiding citizen drives in America—never mind in the snow. A higher speed rating means better grip and handling, but sometimes at the cost of a shorter tread life.

BEST ALL-SEASON TIRES FOR WINTER

T speed rated (118 mph)

These are common on older cars, with good all-weather grip and long tread life.

- **Michelin Defender, \$130**
- **Continental ProContact EcoPlus, \$100**

H speed rated (130 mph)

Original equipment on many newer vehicles, H- and V-speed models combine a good balance of performance in all conditions with decent tread life.

- **Michelin Primacy MXV4, \$138**
- **Continental PureContact, \$135**

V speed rated (149 mph)

Geared a bit more toward performance, but they will do fine in the slush.

- **Continental PureContact, \$145**
- **Michelin Primacy MXV4, \$158**

UHP all-season (150-plus mph)

Found on many sports cars, these tires are designed more for cornering grip and steering response than ride comfort or long tread life.

- **Michelin Pilot Sport A/S 3, \$175**
- **Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric All-Season, \$166**
- **Hankook Ventus S1 noble 2, \$165**
- **Pirelli P Zero Nero All Season, \$132**
- **Cooper Zeon RS3-A, \$153**

Driving Tips for Snow and Slush

CLEAR OFF SNOW AND ICE

Take the time to thoroughly scrape the windows and brush snow off your entire car, including the roof. It's not just a courtesy; it's the law in some states. Visibility is critical, and flying chunks of snow and ice pose a danger. Think of those driving behind you. Imagine seeing a sheet of snow coming off the car ahead.

ACCELERATE SLOWLY

When starting out on slippery roads, go easy on the gas to avoid wheel spin. Some cars have traction control or a winter mode that helps. If you have an automatic transmission that allows second-gear starts, select that gear for better traction.

GO SMOOTH AND EASY

Reduce your speed to lessen the likelihood of a skid. Avoid any sudden inputs to the steering, throttle, or brakes. Use lower gears when decelerating, to allow the engine to slow the car. Envision you are driving with an open cup of hot coffee in your lap.

GIVE YOURSELF SOME SPACE

On a dry road, allow 2 or 3 seconds of stopping distance between your car and the one ahead. In slick conditions, increase that interval to 4 seconds or more, depending on the ugliness outside.

DON'T PUMP THE BRAKES

Unless you're driving an older car without antilock brakes, in an emergency use steady pressure and let your car's antilock brakes do the work. Almost every modern car has ABS, but check your owner's manual or ask your mechanic if you're not sure. In some very icy conditions, even ABS may not help; you're along for the ride until you regain traction.

ALL-WHEEL DRIVE AND FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE DON'T MAKE YOU INVINCIBLE

All- and four-wheel-drive systems provide extra traction while accelerating, but they can't help much with stopping and turning. That's the job of the winter tires you should have bought.

3 Cold-Weather Questions

It's always the same: The thermometer plunges, and car complaints rise. Here, a trio of common problems—and their fixes.

Q. Why does my car battery keep dying?

A. Cold weather may not be the only thing killing your battery. We've received letters from several readers complaining that their car battery has been going dead for no apparent reason, even with the car sitting in a garage.

One frustrated Honda Fit owner voices a common sentiment: "It keeps depleting and needing to be recharged. This is a defect and not my problem."

Once you've ruled out the common problems such as a weak or faulty alternator, slipping drive belts, and loose or corroded battery terminals, it probably is your problem. All batteries lose strength over time, including new ones sitting on a shelf in the store. If you're an urban dweller who occasionally drives only short distances with the lights and other accessories on, or someone who doesn't regularly drive your car, that will accelerate the process.

Also, new cars use more juice just sitting still than older models did. That's because everything from antitheft systems to standby electronic features draw juice even when the car is turned off.

The best bet is to start your car every few days and go for a spin of not less than 15 minutes—not only for the sake of the battery but also for various other components. You might consider investing in a trickle charger to keep the battery charged and ready to go.

Q. How often should I replace my car's wiper blades?

A. The short answer is, more often than you might think. Our tests have found that even the best-performing wiper blades start to lose their effectiveness in as little as six months. Streaks or missed expanses of glass are sure signs that the blades are ready for retirement.

One way to stretch the life of wiper blades is to clean the rubber edge periodically with a paper towel and glass cleaner. If that doesn't do the trick, treat yourself to new blades. We recommend replacing them as often as twice per year. The good news is that most are easy to install, and some stores, such as Advance Auto Parts, will perform the replacement work free of charge.

Q. Why won't my car start when the temperature drops?

A. If your car is reluctant to start on cold

mornings, you're not alone. With the onset of winter temperatures, owners of a wide variety of vehicles find that their engine won't turn over, or that it runs roughly when first fired up. Those aren't old clunkers we're talking about; the list includes models that are practically new.

Depending on the make and model, a frozen relay or valve may be the culprit. Batteries also lose significant capacity as the temperature drops, compounded by thickening motor oil that puts a greater load on the battery. But that shouldn't be happening; manufacturers test cars to withstand conditions at the Arctic Circle. Odds are you're living well below the permafrost line.

The good news is that some manufacturers have quietly been issuing Technical Service Bulletins (TSBs) to address those non-starters, which means you may be able to get your car fixed free. If one of the vehicles listed in the chart below has left you out in the cold, it may be time for a visit to the dealer. Even if yours has been starting up fine so far, have it examined before you get stuck.

Make BMW	Make Ford
Models Various	Model F-150
Year 2012-13	Year 2011-14
Cause Fuel pump	Cause Block heater
Make Cadillac	Make Jeep
Model ELR	Models Commander, Grand Cherokee, Liberty
Year 2014	Year 2002-06
Cause High-voltage battery	Cause PCV valve
Make Chevrolet	Make Lexus
Model Volt	Models ES, RX
Year 2011-14	Year 2006-09
Cause High-voltage battery	Cause Relay
Make Dodge	Make Toyota
Models Dakota, Durango, Ram	Models Corolla, Highlander, Matrix, Prius, RAV4, Sienna
Year 2002-06	Year 2006-09
Cause PCV valve	Cause Relay

➔ **HAVE A PROBLEM WITH YOUR MECHANIC OR DEALERSHIP? SOMETHING PUZZLING YOU ABOUT YOUR CAR?** Contact CR's Car Strategist at carstrategist@cr.consumer.org.

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LOOKING BACK



JANUARY 1975

ARE THEY SHOWING 'BLAZING SADDLES'?

No, just a test in which Consumer Reports deliberately set afire a TV to demonstrate the flammability of plastics used in cabinets. The result: choking fumes and dripping gobs of burning goop. Consumer Reports then called for TV cabinets to be made of material that would stop fires, not fuel them.

Locale: Outside of Consumers Union's labs in Mount Vernon, N.Y.

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SELLING IT



Dosage Double Take
 “How many a day?” asks Myron Wojtowycz, M.D., of Madison, Wis.



Animal, Vegetable, or ...
 One skeptical reader wonders: Does meat grow on trees?

Wrong Dog
 The caption says “Golden Retriever,” but this pup looks tougher, thinks Peter Frederiksen of Monterey, Calif.



Combats Tooth Decay, Black Death
 “If only they had these in the Middle Ages,” Gregory Milligan of Olympia, Wash., says of the supposedly multitasking flossers.

Oops. And Oops Again.

Who says no one reads the fine print? Consumer Reports readers won't let companies get away with sloppy copy, unintentionally hilarious misspellings, or claims that are wrong, wrong.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BRANDON GEETING

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PE44CURVES1

*Between 04/01/13 and 04/30/13, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented to program users by participating based on user new vehicle configurations was \$2,791.

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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 38D, 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 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.

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.

TVs

Twenty-one of the top-scoring TVs are available. Report and Ratings, pages 24-28

A. TOP 20 LARGE TVs (60 TO 70 INCHES)

	Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	Sony Bravia XBR-65X900B	\$4,500	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2	Samsung UN65HU8550	\$3,700	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		3	LG 65UB9500	\$3,500	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	Samsung UN65H8000	\$2,900	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		5	LG 60LB7100	\$2,300	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		6	Samsung UN60H7150	\$2,100	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		7	LG 65UB9800	\$4,350	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		8	Samsung UN65HU8500	\$3,700	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		9	Sony Bravia XBR-65X950B	\$7,500	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		10	Samsung UN65HU9000	\$4,500	73

B. TOP 13 55- TO 59-INCH TVs

	Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	Sony Bravia XBR-55X900B	\$3,500	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		3	Samsung UN55H6400	\$1,600	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	Samsung UN55HU9000	\$3,500	73

C. TOP 15 46- TO 52-INCH TVs

	Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2	Samsung UN50HU8550	\$2,200	72

D. TOP 15 TVs 42 INCHES AND SMALLER

	Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	Samsung UN40H6400	\$1,000	71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2	Samsung UN40H6350	\$800	68
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		3	LG 42LB5800	\$500	67
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		6	Sony Bravia KDL-40W600B	\$550	66
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		7	Samsung UN32EH5000	\$350	66
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		9	LG 39LB5800	\$400	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		10	LG 32LB5800	\$350	65

Cameras

Twenty-one of the top-scoring cameras are available. Report and Ratings, pages 38-40

A. TOP 10 SLR CAMERAS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Canon EOS Rebel T5i	\$880	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Canon EOS 70D	\$1,450	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Nikon D3300	\$630	71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Canon EOS Rebel SL1	\$780	71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Canon EOS Rebel T3i	\$700	70
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Canon EOS Rebel T5	\$580	69
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Canon EOS 7D	\$1,900	69
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Pentax K-3	\$1,200	69
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Nikon D5300	\$900	67

B. TOP 20 MIRRORLESS CAMERAS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Samsung NX30	\$1,000	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GX7K	\$1,100	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Fujifilm X-E2	\$1,200	71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Panasonic Lumix DMC-G6K	\$700	70
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Panasonic Lumix DMC-GM1K	\$800	70
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	Fujifilm X-A1	\$500	70
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	Samsung Galaxy NX	\$1,500	69
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	13	Olympus OM-D E-M5	\$1,300	68
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	15	Sony Alpha 5000	\$500	68
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16	Samsung NX Mini	\$650	67
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	19	Sony Alpha 6000	\$800	65
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20	Sony SLT-A77 II	\$1,850	65

Laptops

Twenty-six of the top-scoring laptops and chromebooks are available. Report and Ratings, pages 35-36

A. TOP 9 13-INCH

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Ativ Book 9 Plus NP940X3G-K06US	\$1,200	83
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Acer Aspire S7-392- 6832 Ultrabook	\$1,000	83
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Dell XPS 13 Ultrabook Touch	\$1,200	82
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Toshiba KIRABook 13-i5s	\$1,400	79
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina Display MGX72LL/A	\$1,300	78
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina Display ME864LL/A	\$1,100	77
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Apple MacBook Air 13-inch MD760LL/B	\$1,000	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Apple MacBook Air 13-inch MD760LL/A	\$900	73
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch MD101LL/A	\$1,050	66

B. TOP 7 14-INCH

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Touch Ultrabook 2nd Gen	\$1,250	77
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	HP Envy Touch-Smart 14-k120us Ultrabook	\$850	71
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Lenovo Z40	\$600	68
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Dell Inspiron 14 7000 Series Touch	\$800	67
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Lenovo Flex2 14 59422149	\$700	67
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Dell Inspiron 14 5000 Touch	\$600	65

C. TOP 10 15-INCH

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Samsung Ativ Book 9 NP940X5J-K01US	\$1,500	80
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Dell XPS 15 Touch	\$1,550	78
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina Display MGX72LL/A	\$2,000	77
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina Display ME293LL/A	\$1,600	78
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Lenovo Y50 Touch - 59421810	\$1,150	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	Dell Inspiron 15 5000 Touch	\$1,100	74
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8	Dell Inspiron 15 5000 Non Touch	\$800	69
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9	Lenovo Flex2 15	\$700	66

D. TOP 4 CHROMEBOOKS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Acer Chromebook C720-3871	\$350	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Acer Chromebook C720-3404	\$375	75
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Asus Chromebook C300MA-DB01	\$250	75

Headphones

Sixteen of the top-scoring headphones are available. Report and Ratings, pages 42-44

A. PORTABLE STEREO HEADPHONES

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	2	Polk Audio Nue Era	\$90	80
✓	3	Westone ADV Alpha	\$180	80
✓	4	Monster DNA	\$200	76
✓	5	Onkyo IE-FC300	\$100	76
✓	6	Beats by Dre Beats Solo HD	\$180	71
✓	7	Bose FreeStyle	\$130	71
✓	8	NAD Electronics VISO HP20	\$230	71
	9	Bose MIE2	\$140	66
	10	Bose MIE2i	\$100	66

B. HOME/STUDIO STEREO HEADPHONES

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	5	Shure SRH1440	\$340	81
✓	7	Grado Prestige SR60e	\$100	76
✓	8	Audio Technica ATH-M50x	\$190	71
✓	9	NAD Electronics VISO HP50	\$390	71
	10	Sennheiser Momentum	\$200	71

C. NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	3	Bose QuietComfort 15	\$300	74
✓	4	Bose QuietComfort 20i	\$330	74

Streaming Media Players

All seven of the top-scoring streaming media players are available. Report and Ratings, pages 30-31

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	1	Roku 3	\$110	70
✓	2	Roku 2	\$70	68
✓	3	Roku Streaming Stick (HDMI version)	\$60	68
✓	4	Roku 1	\$60	67
✓	5	Google Chromecast	\$39	65
✓	6	Amazon Fire TV	\$140	62
	7	Apple TV (3rd generation)	\$109	59

Ranges

Twelve of the top-scoring ranges are available. Report and Ratings, pages 55-58

A. SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	1	LG LRE3083SW	\$800	86
✓	2	LG LRE3023S	\$1,000	86
✓	3	GE Café CBC980SNSS	\$3,000	86
	10	Frigidaire CFEF3018LW	\$600	79

C. INDUCTION SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	1	Samsung FTQ307NWXG	\$2,000	89
✓	4	Frigidaire Gallery CGIF3061NF	NA	81

D. GAS SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	1	Samsung NX58F5700WS	\$1,700	79
✓	3	Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW	\$800	71
✓	4	Samsung NX58F5500SS	\$1,000	71

E. GAS AND DUAL-FUEL, DOUBLE OVEN (30-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	1	KitchenAid KDRS505XSS	\$2,900	71

G. PRO-STYLE GAS AND DUAL-FUEL (36-INCH)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
✓	1	KitchenAid KDRU763VSS	\$6,000	74
✓	2	GE Monogram ZDP364NDPSS	\$7,000	72

Autos Report and Ratings, pages 66-69

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
MIDSIZED SEDANS								
Subaru Legacy	\$23,495-\$35,395	4.3	10.8	4.4	20.4	13.7	6.1	8.9
Hyundai Sonata	\$23,999-\$34,799	3.9	9.7	3.9	19.7	12.9	5.9	8.5
Chrysler 200 (V6)	\$26,995-\$32,495	3.2	7.3	3.6	17.5	16.2	5.6	9.6
Chrysler 200 (4-cyl.)	\$19,495-\$24,995	4.0	10.3	4.7	20.1	12.3	5.3	7.9

Contact info How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

Acer
acer.ca

Amazon
amazon.ca

Apple
800-263-3394
apple.ca

Asus
888-678-3688
asus.com/ca-en

Audio Technica
514-457-4875
audio-technica.com

Beats by Dre
800-442-4000
ca.beatsbydre.com

Bose
800-869-2114
bose.ca

Canon
905-795-2005
canon.ca

Dell
800-999-3355
dell.ca

Frigidaire
800-265-8352
frigidaire.ca

Fujifilm
800-461-0416
fujifilm.ca

GE
888-261-2008
geappliances.ca

Google
google.ca

Grado
514-683-9814
gradoheadphones.ca

HP
888-447-4636
hp.ca

KitchenAid
800-807-6777
kitchenaid.ca

Lenovo
855-253-6686
lenovo.com/ca/en

LG
888-542-2623
lg.com/ca

Monster
877-800-8989
monsterproducts.com

NAD Electronics
905-831-6555
nadelectronics.com

Nikon
905-625-9910
nikon.ca

Olympus
888-553-4448
olympuscanada.com

Onkyo
604-270-2820
onkyo.ca

Panasonic
855-806-1175
panasonic.ca

Pentax
905-669-6406
ricoh.ca

Polk Audio
410-358-3600
polkaudio.com

Roku
888-621-0891
roku.ca

Samsung
800-726-7864
samsung.ca

Sennheiser
800-463-1006
en-ca.sennheiser.com

Shure
800-363-8855
shurecanada.com

Sony
877-899-7669 (TVs)
888-289-7669 (Cameras)
store.sony.ca

Toshiba
800-867-4422
toshiba.ca

Westone
647-219-6396
westoneaudio.com